

2-2-46

Dear Helen,

I can't tell this story and be easy on you. I'd like so much to but- well I'll start at the beginning.

On this particular mission, (the one that some didn't come back from) we had a very heavy take-off. At ten minutes 'till three on the morning of the twenty-ninth, we got all seventy ton of her in the air and we all relaxed. Bill came up front & we drank coffee as we climbed on course. We talked quite awhile & the crew joked back and forth on the inter-phone.

This was to be a daylight formation, so the crew all stretched out & went to sleep. We had a sandwich & coffee about 9:00 that morning & picked up our formation. We were deputy lead that day & were flying on the right wing of the lead ship which was crew 41. The boys cleared their guns (fired a few rounds) & started looking for japs. At about eleven thirty we turned in toward the target (Yokohama) & it looked pretty hot. I called up the fellows & told them how it looked. They all made wise remarks about the japs being poor shots. They were calm & shot at a couple fighters as we tightened up & opened the bomb bays.

Bombs were away at eleven forty, and before Chris could close the doors we took a direct hit under number three engine. Flak went all thru the ship & Sparks took a hit in the foot. Our doors were shot off the hinges & wouldn't close. A second later we were hit again on number four engine. That put two engines out. We feathered number four with hardly any oil in it, with the hopes we could use it a few minutes if and when we ditched.

We had to drop out of formation & a fighter started in. Our fighter cover took care of him & we staggered off toward Iwo Jima eight hundred miles out over the water. We had given Sparks a shot of morphine & he was stretched out on the flight deck.

With bomb bay doors open & two engines out we couldn't hold altitude. We had bombed at around 20,000 & now we were coming down 300 ft. a minute & nothing we could do about it. Our two good engines were wide open. The crew was very calm. I was talking to them, getting ready to ditch & Ed was on the other radio talking to another ship, that had dropped back to stay with us. We contacted a B-17 carrying a boat and we homed in on him, at a 1000 ft. off the water Bill, Chris, Pop, & Toeppe were working in the open bomb bay without chutes to drop our gas tank. It finally let go & they went back & got in the tunnel, & and back behind the rear bulkhead door the rest of them were fixed up. They had all there parachutes in back of them for cushions, we brought number four engine back in so we could control the ship better & then headed her into the wind.

Looking back from the nose of the ship. Bill sat on the left facing the tail to his right was Marky with his head on Hyenga's shoulder & to fly's right was Toepepe.

Bill was the only one back there on the inter-phone and just a few seconds before we touched in I told him to hold on, it was going to be very rough. He said, "we're O.K. Willy, set her down". Well Helen we touched in exactly at ninety miles an hour with full flaps. The ship broke just back of where the men were sitting & again at the tail. The entire nose broke out & I came out as soon as possible, in fact the ship was still sliding in the water, I opened my eyes & everything was gone back of the front bomb bays. No one ever saw Bill again from the second we hit the water. He must have been knocked out, so Helen he never knew what happened.

Hyenga says he came to under the water & felt two men, he pushed one up & dragged the other. The first was Toepepe & the second was Marky. Toepepe was full of water & went right down. Marky climbed up on Hy. Hy tried to take him with but couldn't because Marky had broken Hy's shoulder when they hit, so Marky went down.

Up front everyone got out, but Clare was out of his head, he must have hit it in the ship as he had to cut the master switch when we landed. By the time we got organized, Clare had gone under. We had seven left & not a thing was floating except one oxygen bottle.

We were in the same area for two days & rode a violent storm. They couldn't possibly be alive. The only reason the Army doesn't say they are is because they don't have the boy's dog tags.

I know this is a brutal story & I put it badly but Helen YOU have every right to be proud of Bill. He was like a hero.

I won't try -to preach to you but Helen I missed him very much. I believe Bill & I were as close as any two in the crew & I sort of favored him. Bill talked to me about things he wouldn't mention to anyone else.

I'll close now Helen, I don't write very often but I will do my best to answer any questions you may still have.

God Bless You.

Dick