

Guam Air Depot
Tues. Feb. 12, 46

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Toeppe:

Having received your nice letter, I'll have to admit that I am deeply embarrassed that I hadn't written you sooner. I thought surely some of the fellows that have returned to the States would have seen you by now and would have given you the complete terrible story of one most unfortunate experience. The complete and true story can come only from one of us "lucky ones" that survived. Knowing that you as well as the other boys parents want the true details of all of it, I'll take this time to give them to you as well as I can. This is hard to write and very unpleasant to read. I'll be frank as that is the best way to say what has to be said.

Our experience was terrible, dreadful, horrible and one that we try to think very little about. That part we all hope will be forgotten someday, but the memory of these fine fellows we lost and now nice all were, will never be forgotten.

Not knowing how much of the story you already know, I'll start at the beginning and tell it all. We were on our ninth bombing mission on the 29th of May 1945 against Yokohama, Japan. Over the target we were hit and hit hard by enemy flak. The plane was pretty well full of holes and two engines on the right wing were knocked out, but luckily only one man was injured due to the flak. Sgt. Schutzman, our radio operator received a piece of flak through his foot. He was very well taken care of and was in high spirits all through our experience. Because we had two engines out, we were unable to maintain altitude and knew at once we had to ditch.

(Ditching is what we call landing in the water.) The spirit of the crew was always fine, no one seeming scared or loosing his head. We talked and joked until we hit the water.

Under the circumstances, we did a fine job of ditching the plane. Due to the large waves and the roughness of the sea, our plane broke into four parts when we hit. Now each man has his own experience during the ditching, mine of little importance to you, so I'll try and tell you exactly what happened to Larry. He, with three others, was braced in his respective ditching position. Their positions were near the tail end of the plane. When we hit, a large swell caught the tail of the plane and snapped it off immediately. Those four men really took a terrible shock from which only one survived. The one man saved from the tail of the plane swam a couple hundred yards with one arm as he had a broken collar bone. One man went down immediately, no one seeing him or knowing how badly he was hurt. Larry and Sgt. Markowitz came out of the wreckage but looked as if they were semi-conscious and pretty badly injured. We remember seeing Larry in the water and apparently trying to hold on to the wreckage of the plane. As the wreckage of the plane sank, Larry went down with it. No one can say how badly he was injured, but he must have been. Upon hitting the water the front of the plane continued on about one hundred yards. The men in front were as busy as we could be getting the life rafts out and inflated. As soon as we could we all started paddling toward the tail section, which at that time was just sinking. On the way we picked up Lt. Hayenga. When we got to where the tail section was, no one else could be found. We searched until dark all over the place and two planes above us were doing their best trying to find more men still afloat. Yes,

Larry undoubtedly was injured upon ditching and not being completely conscious was unable to swim or float. Certainly all help that was possible at the time was given him.

Two others drowned that were in the tail section and one from the front of the plane.

I know this is very unpleasant to read but its how it happened and I thought you would like to know the exact details.

The story goes on to say that the ones of us that got into the rafts were just beginning our trouble. With one man with a broken collar bone and one with a flak hole through his foot we were in a bad spot to survive during the night. Waves, and big ones too, kept turning us over all during the night, but by some miracle of God we won the battle and near sundown the next day we were picked up by a submarine.

I intend when I return to the States to visit each family and tell the story more completely and answer each question they have. This is close to being the complete story but I know all will have some questions to be asked. But Mr. & Mrs. Toeppe you asked in your letter if there is any hope. As much as I hate to say it there is none.

Larry as well as all the boys on the crew were fine men. We had a job to do when we came over. Some had to go down dying to complete this job. The job is over now and I know if Larry and the thousands of others where alive to-day they would be happy to know that there lives had much to do to help bring about this World Peace once again. It's terrible for the families back home and things like this hurt us deeply out here. We didn't go into all this blind folded. We knew the Stakes and were ready to give our lives to accomplish what we did. I know Larry felt this way too.

We had the best crew in our Group and it was a great shock to everyone when we didn't return. But the ones of us that returned stayed on helping

to finish the jobs we knew the boys that we lost would want us to and since then we personally had more to fight for.

All the other fellows are now back home. I hope to be back by Summer. My job now is flying cargo instead of bombs to Japan. I see Yokohama on every trip and can't help to think of our mission there. We did a fine job that day and you know the city was completely destroyed in one raid. That raid is going down in history on the best single raid in this war. Under the circumstances I'm sorry that I was on it, but since I was I'll have to admit that I am proud of what we did to Yokohama that day.

It was a pleasure to receive your letter and if there is any further information or help I can give you feel free to write me. I'll also be glad to hear from you. With my deepest regrets for everything.

I remain,

Howard L. Howes
Lt. HOWARD L. HOWES