



## SOMEWHERE IN INDIA – MAY 1944

By Sgt. William J. McCarthy

I was a passenger on plane Aircraft (A/C) 42-6255 going on a mission to APO #210 (Chengtou, China). We left Kharagpur at 0700 on May 1, 1944. Due to the heavy load the takeoff was a long one, which required most of the runway. I was seated in the Radar section of the plane, along with S/Sgt. Frank J. Lewis, the Crew Chief, Radar Officer Lt. Robert M. Pottol and one other passenger, Cpl. Armando J. Maceyra. After about 4 hours in flight, we were at an altitude of 23,000 feet and had flown over the first ridge of the "Hump", when I was told by Cpl. Maceyra, who had a headset on, that we were feathering #1 engine and the Pilot had decided to turn back. The Pilot had contacted an airfield to make an emergency landing, but was told the airfield was closed. Shortly after this, #2 engine began to smoke and we were fast losing altitude. Soon after this, the bell sounded from the Pilot's seat warning us to prepare to bail out. Sgt. Lewis disconnected his headphone and told Cpl. Maceyra and myself to bail out. We were flying at an altitude of 11,000 feet at this time. After Sgt. Lewis had knocked open the pressure valve we gained altitude quickly and bailed out at 18,000 feet.

How did I feel when told to bail out? Well, I wasn't scared. I didn't hesitate, none of us did. To me it was just an order and I took it in the same way I might any order given me in the Army. Cpl. Maceyra and I began to tighten our leg straps and I followed Lt. Pottol out of the Radar section to the door from which I bailed out. On bailing out I had a little difficulty getting clear of the door as the force of the wind from the speed on the plane was pushing me back. I finally got loose and jumped out. While hanging in mid-air I had no sensation whatever. I counted to 15 slowly and pulled the ripcord. The snap of the chute was terrific, and as it snapped open my web belt, with canteen, knife, ammunition pouch and medical kit pulled loose and dropped away.

After that everything was very quiet and on the way down I hit a cloud heavy with moisture which tossed me back and forth quite a bit and I became air sick. I floated down through one cloud after another and as the air became clearer I saw about 7 chutes floating down below me with our plane flying in a straight line in the other direction. I later found out that the Pilot and Co-Pilot were still in the plane and bailed out at 4,000 feet. I took notice of the ground below as I approached it and tried to guide my chute to land nearer the others. The ground as I neared it appeared like a meadow, which I was soon to find out was far from a meadow. The wind tossed me about a few times, which confused my sense of direction as to where the river was that I had passed.

I landed very hard on my back in elephant grass and bamboo growth, which was about 15 to 20 feet in height. I was dazed for a few seconds, but detached the chest and leg straps of my parachute at once. I reached for the jungle kit on the bottom of my chute and took out the machete and leather gloves and began to make a clearing in which to lay out my chute. After this was completed, I returned to the tree, which I had missed by a few feet, and after making a clearing opened my ration kit and ate some malted milk



tablets. I climbed the tree and looked for a clearing or a river, but the outlook was discouraging. While up in the tree, I began to yell and call out as loudly as I could; after about 10 minutes, I got down on the ground and began to hack a path, first to the east about a hundred yards, then to the west, north and south. It began to rain and since the brush and growth was full of thorns and hard to cut being wet, the task became harder and after an hour of hacking, I got tired and returned to the tree and began to shout.

After what seemed a long time of shouting and yelling I finally heard someone answer my shouts. He continued to shout back to me until he was about 100 yards away. Since he couldn't get through to me I told him to keep calling to me and I would cut my way through the jungle in the direction of his voice. I reached him at 2:15 pm and it was Lt. Ken Bloes, our Bombardier. I remember the time because it was then that I set my watch with his. Lt. Bloes removed the map from his money belt, and after looking it over we carefully decided that our best bet was to walk to the south. After a short distance we found a short stream and followed it until it ended. We climbed a tree nearby and after about a half an hour of looking over the landscape for an open field or river, we came down and since it was raining very hard, decided to spend the night under the shelter of the tree.

Lt. Bloes and I had just one bar of K ration between us for supper and since I had no canteen, I shared his canteen just taking a few sips of water. Neither of us had much sleep that night between the rain and the mosquitoes. At 0600 Tuesday morning we started out in pouring rain toward the south following animal tracks. At noon Tuesday we came to a small clearing and shortly afterwards heard the sound of an airplane motor. Looking up we saw a C-67. Lt. Bloes began to wave the orange colored poncho, which was in his jungle kit while I lighted a fuse and held it high.

The plane saw our signals and tilted its wings letting us know that we had been spotted. After circling a few times, one of the men in the plane threw down a shoe. Lt. Bloes picked it up and found in the toe a message stating that one of the Crew was hurt and was about 300 yards northeast of us. As the plane continued to fly over us the pilot and other men in the plane would point out the direction we were to go. We started out in the direction but the jungle was most difficult to get through. At about four o'clock it looked as if we were getting nowhere since we had to change our direction so many times in order to find a place that could be hacked through. Finally we hit an animal trail that brought us out of the jungle to a place that was much easier to get through.

Soon we had overcome the most difficult places and came out to a meadow. It was just about 1700 when we heard the sound of a C-67 and after lighting a fuse, we soon had the plane circling over us. The pilot dropped a note saying the injured man was now about 500 yards west of our position and threw down two boxes of K rations and two canteens of water. Since we were now in an open field with the underbrush only four feet high, the going was much easier. Running most of the way, we kept yelling to the injured man and by 1800 were shaking hands with Sgt. Lewis, the Crew Chief who had hurt his knee when

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landing. The members of the C-67 had furnished him with cigarettes, water and K rations. Shortly after landing, Sgt. Lewis had made a half tent shelter with his parachute to protect himself from the rain. We spent the night with Sgt. Lewis for the pilot of the plane had told him to stay put as a rescue party was on the way.

Wednesday morning at about 1030 we saw two natives coming our way with Cpl. Maceyra, Sgt. Ernie Dunlevy and Lt. Bob Harden. They had met with the natives the day before and had spent the night with them. The natives were taking them to Lakhimpur where a fighter squadron was stationed. They had come upon us unexpectedly as they were not looking for us.



We joined the other members of the Crew and with the help of the natives were soon out of the jungle. We rode across the river in their dugout canoes. We walked about 12 miles in the pouring rain and in mud over our ankles. Although the walk must have been very painful to Sgt. Lewis he refused to let us carry him. We entered the town of Lakhimpur at 5 pm. We were then taken by bus to the airfield about 3 ½ miles from town. We were taken to the dispensary of the 88<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, after seeing the natives who had brought us out of the jungle receive a reward of 50 rupees each. The Enlisted Men and Officers of this Squadron were more than kind and did their utmost to give us comfort and medical attention. On Thursday May 5<sup>th</sup> after lunch, we left Lakhimpur Camp and were taken by plane to Jorhat. At Jorhat we were taken to the station hospital and remained there until Friday at 1300. After being discharged from the hospital we were taken to the Jorhat airfield. Due to lack of transportation we stayed at Jorhat until noon Saturday when we took off in a C-46 for Kharagpur. We arrived at Kharagpur at 1600.

I sustained only badly torn legs due to the thorns encountered in every part of the jungle. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the people who have given so much time

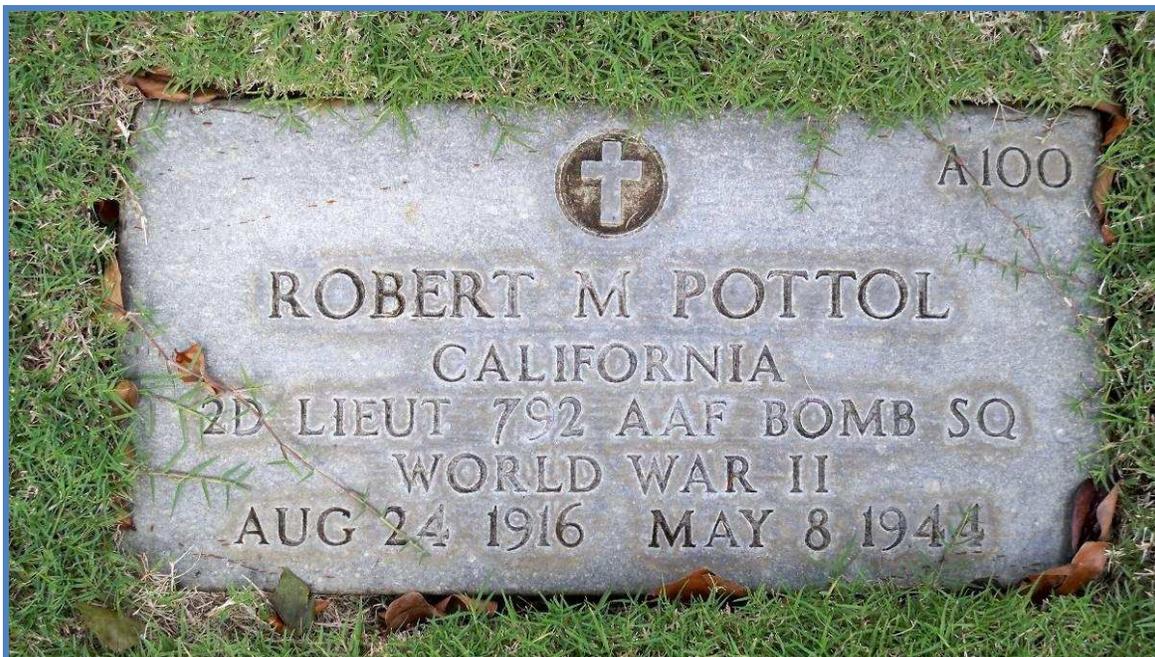


and good sense to get the jungle kit together. I make only two suggestions: that a short pair of leggings and a whistle be added to the jungle kit.

Adding to Sgt. McCarthy's comments some forty five years later, Lt. Dick (Smitty) Smith, Co-Pilot on this Crew, adds some personal experiences: After assuring all Crew members were out, he bailed out, leaving the Pilot, Sims, as the only one left to step out. After his chute opened he broke through a layer of clouds, and saw the plane, in flames heading for him. In his words "it was the biggest and ugliest B-29 I ever saw." Smitty took the Lord's name in vain. But the Lord overlooked it so the plane passed below Smitty as he dropped. Sims, who was still with the plane, remarked later "I could count the nails in your shoes."

Breaking through the last layer of clouds Smitty saw the plane crash directly under him. He landed within 100 yards of the wreckage on the other bank of a nearby river. Because of his nearness to the wreckage he was spotted by an American plane from a Base nearby and a native soon showed up to guide him to a spot where he could be picked up. He rejoined Sims very soon afterwards and both were, after a day or so, on their way back to Kharagpur.

*Editor's note: One crewmember, Robert M Pottol, was killed, apparently drowning in a river nearby.*



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"GO WITH FRIENDLY NATIVES---SIMS--SMITH SAFE". That is the message of reassurance painted on the underwing of this Stearman PT-17, which cruised the bail-out area and led to the rescue of the Boeing B-29 crew which bailed out in jungle country. The Air Service Command search mission was headed by Colonel William S. Pocock Jr., commander of the "Burma Peacocks".

National Archives photo

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(L to R)

SIMS, SMITH, BLOES, ARGUELLO, ROBERTS, PIPKIN, DUNLEVIE, SIMMONS,  
 JOHN W. RICHARD M. KEN N. DARRELL L. RALPH M. JOHN L. ERNEST G. RAYMOND L.  
 A/C PILOT BOMB (DIO) NAV (DEC) F/E RADIO (CDB) SR. GUN. R. GUN (DFG)

ON 1 MAY '44 SIMS AND GOOD LEFT KHARAGPUR WITH SUPPLIES, TO BE 1ST 468TH PLANE OVER THA THUMP. (COPT) HOLLINGWORTH, SHEA,  
 SIMS DIDN'T MAKE IT. THEY LOST 2 ENGINES & BAILED OUT ROBERT L. ROBERT T.  
 OVER NORTHEAST ASIAM FROM 10,000 FEET AND WERE SCATTERED INTO L. GUN (DEC) TAILGUN (DEC)  
 SEVERAL GROUPS FOR 1-2 NIGHTS. ONE GROUP BURIED UP AT A BRITISH TEA PLANTATION AIDED  
 BY A US SEARCH & RESCUE BI-PLANE. THEY WERE TAKEN TO AN AMERICAN BASE AT JORHAT  
 AND FLOWN BACK TO KHARAGPUR. THE RADAR OPERATOR, LT. R.M. POTTOL, WAS KILLED  
 - APPARENTLY DROWNED.

- THIS WAS THE 468<sup>th</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> PLANE LOST SINCE WE ARRIVED IN INDIA, AND POTTOL WAS OUR 1<sup>st</sup> CASUALTY.
- BOB HARDEN HAD SUBSTITUTED FOR ARGUELLO, BAILED OUT SAFELY, HIS 1<sup>st</sup> OF 2 JUMPS.
- SIMS WENT BACK TO STATES SHORTLY AFTER THE BAIL-OUT; FRANK M. MARTIN TOOK OVER THE CREW.
- THE BAIL-OUT WAS WITNESSED BY USAF PERSONNEL AT LILLYBERRY AIRFIELD IN ASSAM (J. BLANKENSHIP, EX-CBI ROUNDUP, MAR 95)

Photo courtesy of the New England Air Museum, Bob Becker collection