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COMMAND FILE - WWII

**AIR NOTES
FROM
CHINA**

COMMAND FILE
WORLD WAR II



MAY 1945

**HEADQUARTERS
U.S. NAVAL GROUP, CHINA
NAVY 169, F.P.O., N.Y.**

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EVASION FROM AMOY AREA

PB4Y-2 Crashes in AMOY Harbor:

On 22 March 1945, a PB4Y-2 "Privateer" crashed in AMOY harbor on the China Coast. The plane, from Fleet Air Wing 17, was flying its regular patrol from LUZON and had just flown over AMOY harbor at 500 feet in quest of shipping targets when it sustained a direct A/A hit in the fuselage and was sent crashing down to the water below. A passenger in this plane was Mr. Don Bell, War Correspondent for the Mutual Broadcasting System. His story of the crash and subsequent rescue and walkout is given below and affords a good example of typical walk-outs in the China coastal area.

It might be noted that this plane crashed in one of the worst spots on the entire coast, not over a mile from the island of AMOY, the most heavily fortified Japanese stronghold between SHANGHAI and HONGKONG. The entire mainland surrounding AMOY harbor is unoccupied and is inhabited by friendly Chinese who have been briefed by American service personnel on the handling of downed American pilots. Also, there are U.S. Navy and AGAS-China stations very nearby. However, the three islands in AMOY harbor, AMOY, QUEMOY and KULANGSEU are Jap fortresses and are definitely unsafe. Similarly the harbor is considered unsafe and ditching there is certainly not advisable. A crash landing on the mainland is practicable and is entirely safe.

Don Bell:

A word about Mr. Don Bell is in order before we hear his story of this experience. Before December 8, 1941, Mr. Bell was a radio commentator in MANILA, P.I., and was well-known, both by Americans and Japanese, for his predictions of Japanese intentions in the Far East. He was captured by the Japanese when they took MANILA on December 8th, and was immediately interned with his wife and two young boys in Santo Tomas prison in Manila. There they existed until 3 February 1945 --- three long years --- when they were liberated by the spectacular action of the Second Battalion of the United States First Cavalry. After over three years' internment, subjection to Jap indignities and atrocities, and endurance of the "slow starvation" diet which the Japanese designed for these prisoners, when Bell was liberated from prison he sent his wife and two boys home and immediately set out "to learn about modern warfare." Feeling he had "a lot to catch up on in a short time," he requested assignment to the most dangerous missions possible. And so it was that he happened to be aboard Lieutenant Jim Evans' "Privateer" on that fatal day. And now -- Mr. Bell's own story:

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So, we dropped in unexpectedly for a visit in China.

When I say "unexpectedly," I mean we had about three seconds' warning and no chance to change our minds. And, when I say "dropped," I mean just that: we dropped from about 500 feet at the rate of about 160 knots - and without benefit of parachute or time for prayer.

After the excitement was all over and we were in friendly hands, I remember thinking, "This is a hell of a place for a War Correspondent to be."

It sounded exciting:

My part in this story began down in MANILA when Lieutenant Dick Lundgren, Navy PRO Officer, casually mentioned that the patrol flights out of Luzon might make a good eye-witness story for the folks back home to listen to, if any War Correspondent felt like taking a fourteen-hour trip along the China Coast in a "Privateer." It sounded exciting. Now that I look back on it; it was.

It took about five minutes to get my "orders." A twenty-minute Jeep ride, a thirty-five-minute hop in a Piper Cub, and I presented my orders to Captain Jones, C.O. of the 17th Naval Air Wing.

"Want something hot?"

"The hotter it is, the better the story, Captain."

So, early the next morning I listened in on the "briefing," met Lieut. (jg) Jim Evans and his crew, all of whom started telling and showing me why the PB4Y-2 was the finest plane that ever did a patrol job: seven feet longer than the old PB4Y, faster, more fire power, the plane that Tokyo Rose called the "four-engine fighter" - and so on until time to check out.

The Patrol:

My first impression of the interior of the plane was that it would be easier on War Correspondents if the gun turret were a little higher or a little smaller, or not so much in the middle of things. Later the Plane Captain, John Pearce, AMMFl/c, asked me if I'd like to climb into that same turret and have a look at the sky; Gunner Maurice Walker, ARM3/c, helped me climb in - and I began feeling a little more friendly toward that turret. But it must have resented having a rookie fooling around with it, because a couple of hours later I'm sure it kicked me in the back and knocked me out - but that's all hearsay.

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It happened right after.....:

It happened right after we came out of AMOY. I remember hearing Pilot Evans telling Co-Pilot Ensign Kirby Lindsley how funny it was that we hadn't drawn any fire from the island, and I walked out of the cockpit, thinking all the fun was over for a few minutes, started to sit down on the little box which housed the First Aid Emergency Gear and which also acted as my "seat of honor" during the ride. Just then the Navigating Officer (Ensign Frank Greene - he went down with the ship) smiled over in my direction, indicated by sign language that they were beginning to pop at us; the radionan (James Warr) began to double up his fist - I suppose he was going to shake it at the Japs; but that gesture was never finished. Suddenly the lights went out for me.

I found out afterwards that the Pilot had started evasive maneuvering, was at the top of a 500-foot leap-frog and going down, when we were hit. It probably knocked the tail off our plane, but we kept right on gliding down at the rate of 160 knots. At about 200 feet the Pilot discovered he had lost elevator control and couldn't pull out. He did have time to straighten out the wings - and then we hit.

The bounce probably broke the plane in two at the waist (because we never saw that part of the plane again), but the bounce must have saved some of our lives.

The next time we hit, the nose dug right in and stayed down. What was left of our PB4Y-2 burst into flames immediately.

"Out" - in the water:

All this was told to me by the other survivors, of course, I knew nothing about it at all. That gun turret - at least I think it must have been the turret, because nothing else could have smacked me quite so hard on the "tail-bone" - took its revenge and I was "out" for some little time.

How I ever got to the surface through a burning plane, I'll never know. My first conscious moment was when I heard the pilot saying, "Now, just relax."

Co-Pilot Lindsley told me later that I bounced up a few feet away from the burning fuselage, Lieut. Evans yelled at me to get away from the plane (we were still carrying plenty of bombs). But it hadn't registered - I was still just bouncing there a few feet away from the plane. Then Jim Evans swam over, grabbed me by what was left of my flight coveralls, dragged me away from the plane, told me to relax.

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And then things began registering on my very clouded brain. I was still helpless, however; my life belt wouldn't inflate (wouldn't have made any difference because there was a big hole in it anyway), and I would have been content just to settle down and forget the cares of the world.

Evans returns to burning plane:

I remember Evans yelling at Lindsley to come over and take care of me for a few minutes; so I dutifully put my arm over the Co-Pilot's shoulder while the Pilot swam away - went back toward that burning plane, looking for a life-raft.

Miracles still happen. He found one under a lot of debris, dragged it out, inflated it; they got me into it somehow - and then they went looking for survivors.

Thirteen of us had started out on that patrol job. Six of them, I never saw again. In a drop of that kind, it seemed impossible that any of us could have survived. But, finally there were seven of us in that little, half-inflated life-raft; with one jungle-pack and two and a half paddles. So, we got ourselves organized as well as the circumstances permitted, and started paddling.

....and started paddling:

Where to paddle was a problem - which was soon answered for us by the Japs.

During all this rescue work, we were hidden from the Japs by what was left of the burning plane. But once we paddled out from behind the plane and got into view of the Jap's gun positions, they began firing at us. That told us which way not to go.

A few minutes before we had noted a couple of boats paddling out our way from the opposite shore. As soon as the Japs began firing, those boats beat it right back to the shore - and that told us the whole story. Those were friendly Chinese, trying to come out and rescue us; but they could never have made it in the face of that Japanese shelling. So they went back to the shore, waited, hoping that we could make it to them.

That was the toughest job seven men ever had. How we paddled for that shore. The two men who seemed in the best condition took the two whole paddles, a third man used the half paddle; the rest of us used our hands. We went around in circles for a while, finally got the raft straightened out, and put every ounce of energy into getting to that shore in the fastest possible time. We simply couldn't have moved faster.

Then we saw three motor boats coming out toward us from the Jap side of the shoreline - and we moved faster, anyway.

Chinese Fishermen help:

By the time we got to the friendly shore, we were really "pooped." Chinese fishermen were yelling at us to hurry, waded out into the water to help us; grabbed us by the arms and almost dragged us ashore.

But we found we were not ashore at all. We were simply on a mud shoal that had been formed by the low tide. The Chinese had carried their boats across that shoal to open water - about half a mile away - and we had to make it to those boats.

If somebody tells you it's impossible to run through mud that's knee-deep, tell them they don't know what they're talking about. Because we did it. Those Jap motor boats were getting too damned close for comfort. We'd run a few steps, fall down exhausted; the Chinese would help us to our feet and we'd run a few steps more, fall face-downward into the mud, the fishermen would pick us up again.

God knows how we ever got to those boats, but we don't.

The fishermen didn't have to tell us to hide in the bottom of those sampans; we simply fell in, completely exhausted. The fishermen got us loaded in, two to a boat, piled fishing baskets over us to hide us, and they started paddling and punting like no one ever paddled or punted before.

Then a couple of Jap planes came up looking for us. So the fishermen paddled their sampans into some caves, waited until the Adams had passed over; then, one by one, the sampans took off across that lonely, exposed stretch of water.

We had to make the shore, Japs or no Japs. So we crouched under clam-baskets while our Chinese friends outdid any Harvard crew getting across that open bay.

Chinese Fishing Village:

Lindsley and I were together in one sampan. So we hit the shore together - and not a soul was in sight except ourselves - and were we a sight! My coveralls were just hanging on me by the grace of one shoulder and a zipper. Ensign Lindsley had got into some oil somewhere along the line and looked like a night-fighter - even the fishermen took time out to laugh at us. Then they hustled us along and into a little Chinese fishing village which probably appears on no map of China, but bears the name of Chan Tou Sik (at least that was as close as our

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Chinese friend could come to putting it into English for us).

We went through the village to a stone house, were asked to step in. There we met the rest of our party. They had arrived first and were waiting for us.

"They knew we were friends".....:

Up to this time, not a word or a gesture had passed between any of us and the Chinese fishermen who had rescued us. They knew we were Americans. They know we were friends and allies. They risked their lives in saving us. No questions asked, no reward wanted. But, after they knew we were safe; after tea and cakes had been served; then the whole village crowded into that room to stare at us. Eye-witnesses began broadcasting, in very loud Chinese, and with plenty of gestures, their version of how we had been shot down by Jap ack-ack, how funny we looked trying to run across that mud-flat, how we had been smothered under several layers of fishing baskets. Then the story tellers began disagreeing on the details; it must have been about the noisiest rescue party that ever happened.

Then suddenly all the noise and the talking stopped, as if by magic. We couldn't hear it, but they did. Those Jap Adams were overhead again. Somewhere, a couple of bombs were dropped, but not in our vicinity. The Adams flew away finally, and we all breathed easier again.

Then Mr. Huang appeared on the scene. He spoke enough English so that he could tell us all about it. But he never did tell us who he was. He was just a "Chinese business man." He just happened to be visiting in the village. It was very fortunate that he was there, because he knew exactly where to go and what to do.

"Rice Paddy Navy":

Imagine our gasps of amazed delight when he told us that there was a United States Naval Station just 80 li (about 27 miles) away. It would be tough going, considering our conditions, but he would take us there within less than two days.

That was the happiest news we ever heard. Here we had been shot down less than a mile from a Jap garrison, we had been shelled (and some of those shells came very close), we had been chased by motor boats and searched for by Jap planes less than two hours ago - and here was a man telling us that we were within a few hours of safety.

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Huang told us we'd better be moving out of that village, however. The Japs might have spotted us and they might decide to start bombing the village. So, we'd better get ourselves ready for some forced marching.

Chinese hospitality:

The first hour was easy, but worrying. We climbed into small junks, sailed along within a mile of that Jap-held coastline, got out about an hour later, walked about four miles, were received as heroes by the town army, bedded down for the night after a swell Chinese Banquet. From somewhere a Chinese doctor appeared, dressed the wounds of Radioman Warr, who had a bad shoulder wound. We resolved then and there that if anyone ever said anything derogatory about a Chinaman within our hearing, there'd be one helluva fight then and there. Our own parents couldn't have taken better care of us, than did those Chinese people who met us, fed us, clothed us, stayed up all night so that we could have their beds. They couldn't do enough for us - and we were humble with gratitude.

An interesting note at this juncture was when the local Village Chief produced from nowhere a "Pointie-Talkie." With this little miracle to improve Sino-American conversation and mutual understanding, we succeeded very well in exchanging thoughts and planning our departure. (We later learned, upon reaching KUNMING, that these "Pointie-Talkies" had been distributed several months before by a U.S. Navy Lieutenant who had travelled through this area in the interests of arranging the escape and evasion of downed Allied pilots.)

"....we couldn't have got away from those Americans....":

Huang was better than his promise. He told us that we would be with the Navy within 48 hours. Actually, we met the Navy within 24 hours. Bos'n's Mate Tucker was out looking for us. The Navy station at LUNGKI had already heard about our unexpected visit, men were already out over every possible route looking for us. AGAS men were doing the same thing, combing roads and rivers - we got away from the Japs all right, but we couldn't have got away from those Americans who were out looking for us if we had tried. Not that we tried.

When we saw Tucker, swinging along with a Tommy-gun over one shoulder and a bag of iron rations over the other - well, you can talk about a sailor's welcome, but you haven't seen anything.

That night we slept in real sacks, ate American food, smoked American cigarettes, listened to American service men

swapping their experiences for ours - boy, it was heaven.

We did a lot of walking and bitching, jeep and plane riding after that before we got back to KUNMING where we could really rest, and draw a complete outfit of new GI clothes. But, now that it's all over, I think we ought to get something on the record for the benefit of the rest of you who may be dropping in on China unexpectedly.

Trust the Chinese:

And the first and most important thing we want to say is this: trust the Chinese. He's your friend and he'll take care of you. He's your ally in this war and you never had a more loyal one. He'll hide you, he'll feed you, clothe you, care for you, get you back to your own people. You may have a hard time understanding him at first - but keep your sense of humor and use the sign language and overlook his queer little ways. Remember that you're a pretty queer-looking duck to him, too.

And as a War Correspondent, who has no business at all going through an experience which can't be talked about or written about except in secret journals, I want to express my personal admiration for lots of things: for the way the survivors of Lieut. Evans' crew handled themselves in a time of real danger; the way the Navy has organized its share of a China Coast Rescue Service that makes it 99 chances out of 100 that, if you drop in on China unexpectedly, you'll be taken care of, brought back to civilization:- why, they make a drop that looks like "curtains" turn out to be one of the finest vacations you've ever had.

"Thanks, Navy.":

Personally, I owe plenty to the Navy. Jim Evans saved my life (and I hope he gets the proper citation for what may have just been a job to him but meant considerably more to me than that). Those men at LUNGKI made me able to appreciate the fact that my life was worth saving (to me, at least). And, all along the line, all the way up to KUNMING, the Navy and its men have done a job that no other outfit in the world could have done.

Yes, I owe a lot - including my life - to the Navy. And if there's any way I can repay it - well the Japs have missed me twice and I guess I'll be around for a while longer, waiting to repay favors.

Well Done - Jim Evans:

And may we -- the reporting officers from China -- add a

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note here. In interrogating the crew of this PB4Y-2, in talking over the details of the crash, of "coming to" in the water, and of getting safely into Chinese hands, one fact is common to all the stories. Co-pilot, crew members and Passenger Bell join in saying, in the words of one of them, "I'd like to say, Lieutenant, that our pilot, Jim Evans, was '4.0' during the whole damned thing. He 'took over' from the moment we hit the water until we met the Navy and he really took care of the lot of us. I guess you'd call his actions that day 'heroic'; whatever they were, it's darned sure that we all owe our lives pretty much to his quick-thinking and cool-headedness."

Lieut. (jg) James Evans showed himself to be all man that day in March, 1945, and his conduct was truly a credit to the United States Naval Service.

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805 KIDDER BREESE STREET SE
WASHINGTON NAVY YARD DC 20374-5060

IN REPLY REFER TO

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November 21, 2005

Mr. David Deatherage
1707 Rob Roy Lane
San Antonio, TX 78251

Dear Mr. Deatherage:

This replies to your telephone request for duplication of the May 1945 "Air Notes From China."

As requested, I am enclosing copies of the document that is located in the World War II Command File in this Archives. If you have access to the Internet, you may want to view the website of the Naval Historical Center (<http://www.history.navy.mil>) for more information about naval history. The *Frequently Asked Questions* section may be of particular interest to you.

Your interest in naval history is appreciated and I hope that this information will prove helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen M. Lloyd".

KATHLEEN M. LLOYD
Head, Operational Archives Branch

Enclosures