

To the children and grandchildren of Carrol Faist:

September 15, 1993

Your mother (or grandmother) Estelle and I were cleaning a closet this morning when we ran across this Japanese machine gun bullet...a memento of my experiences during World War II. Before putting it away in storage, we decided to write a brief story of explanation.

During WWII I was a four-engine bomber pilot stationed in the South Pacific. I was assigned to the 307th Bomb Group (Heavy) in the 13th Army Air Force (now called the U.S. Air Force). The B-24 Liberator was being used in the Pacific Theater of Operations, and this is the airplane in which I flew the required 40 missions, between October 1, 1944 and March 31, 1945. Those 40 missions covered a total of 400 hours flying time, most of which were flown from a base on the island of Morotai, in the Halmahera chain of islands just south of the Philippines. The missions were long and far ranging; true to our logo..."LR" (Long Rangers), painted on the tail of each airplane. Our targets were all the way from New Guinea west to Borneo, and north throughout the Philippines. A single mission covered from 2,000 to 3,000 miles, and would usually include 24-26 airplanes.

However, on December 31, 1944 our plane, with its 10-man crew, was sent out singly on a shipping search along the northeast coast of Borneo. This search turned out to be one of our most memorable missions! During the morning we located three good sized enemy vessels, which we successfully bombed and strafed, until they either burned or sank.

Around midday--just about the time we had used up our fuel allotment--we were jumped by four Japanese Zero fighters. They immediately began an attack. We managed to climb into a bank of clouds just offshore and headed toward home base. Unfortunately, the clouds did not last long and gave way to clear skies, thus giving the four fighters further opportunity to make firing passes at us. One of the Zeros dropped two air-to-air phosphorous bombs right in front of us. We couldn't have been more surprised! Phosphorous bombs against a B-24 Bomber? We were able to dodge one of the bombs, but the other one put over 200 holes in our plane. Miracle of miracles! none of these holes disabled us or set us on fire. All four Zeros continued to make fighter passes at us. They scored a total of eight hits from their wing-mounted machine guns. One of the eight bullets lodged in a cylinder wall of our No. 3 engine\*.

When the bullet hit the cylinder wall, the engine froze. If our situation was serious up to now, I can't even describe it after that bullet took the engine out. Not only were we more than 700 miles from home base with nothing but ocean between, but the smoke from our disabled engine gave us away. The Zero pilots knew we were hit, and they really pressed their attack. Since we couldn't fool them any longer, we feathered our No. 3 engine to reduce drag and chances of a wing fire. Our best chance now, was to depend on our gunners, and head home!

Our own gunners did a great job of protecting us. They had a number of burned out barrels on the .50 caliber machine guns, due to all the firing at enemy shipping earlier that morning. However, the gunners managed to get some of those barrels changed, and they really gave the Zeros "what-for". In fact, within 30 minutes two of the fighters had disappeared. Whether we shot them down or they turned back for other reasons, we will never know.

Our next strategy was to hit the deck; that is to drop to within a couple of hundred feet of the water. We stayed just high enough so they couldn't see their bullets strike in the water, but low enough so they couldn't get below us. You see, we had not had enough time to change the barrels in the belly turret guns. By keeping the fighters above us we could defend ourselves with the six guns still working...two in the nose turret, two in the top turret, and two in the tail turret.

We thank God to this day that our lumbering old B-24, on three engines, trailing a light stream of smoke, and with our speed reduced to a mere 145 miles per hour, could successfully evade four enemy fighters. We all agreed later that we would not have been nearly so fortunate had we been under attack by four of our own fighter pilots flying aircraft such as a P-38, a P-47

or a P-51. Of course, you must remember that we weren't just flying straight and level all this time. We were doing our utmost to be a difficult target...turning into or away from them on each and every fighter pass that they made. After about an hour, but what seemed more like an eternity, the last two fighters turned back.

Now that we were apparently safe from enemy fire, we had to turn our attention to covering the hundreds of miles of open ocean on only three engines and with 400 gallons less fuel than we had originally planned on having. We were probably burning more fuel per mile of progress with three engines running than we would with all four engines operating normally. That's because of the extra load put on the remaining three to do the job of four, and because of the drag produced by the yawed attitude of the aircraft while moving through the air with two engines on one side and only one engine on the other side. But to add even more to our problem was the fact that on our way west to Borneo that morning we had suffered the failure of one of our two bomb-bay fuel tanks to transfer fuel to the main tanks. We tried for a number of hours to figure a way to get at that fuel but all to no avail. Finally, to get rid of the 2400 pounds of unusable weight contained in that tank, we had "salvoed" it in an attempt to hit one of the ships which we had attacked.

Knowing there was little chance now, over the miles of ocean ahead, that we would be attacked again, we elected to continue to purge the airplane of all possible weight....that meant all flack suits, machine guns and unexpended ammunition, the belly (ball) turret and even the two large aerial cameras that helped make our crew special. We threw overboard absolutely everything that was loose or could be removed to lighten the plane. We were careful to keep aboard our liferafts and parachutes. At this point, we were convinced we could not make it back to a safe landing at a friendly air base; the closest actually being our own home base on Morotai.

We gradually inched the airplane back up to a better cruising altitude. This also gave us our best chance to navigate the best course, and to better send and receive radio signals. Our radio operator, using CW, was able to establish contact a few hundred miles out, and this way we were able to advise our command of our difficulties. Since we were convinced we were going to get wet, whether by ditching the airplane in the open ocean, or by parachuting from it, we requested the assistance of a PBY flying boat. The Navy, by way of these flying boats, had saved a number of our 13th Air Force crews in recent months. We were advised, however, that no PBY was in a position to give assistance, nor was there even a Navy PT Patrol boat that could give us assistance at the time. They did manage to put a Navy fighter airplane into the air. He was to fly out and intercept us and to escort us until we ran out of fuel. He would then orbit our position in the water until they could get further help out to us.

As it turned out, we did make it all the way back to home base. Our engineer was very knowledgeable about the B-24 fuel system, and very skillful in transferring all available fuel to keep the three engines running. The last half hour was quite a guessing game as the small amount of remaining fuel dropped out of sight behind the metal mounting base of the glass sight gauges. As we landed and rolled off the runway, we lost another engine due to fuel starvation.

However, we did manage to park the airplane in its proper space.

The next day, the crew-chief gave me the bullet. He told me that they had drained the remaining fuel from the tanks into just a few small galvanized buckets!

So that is the story behind the bullet with part of our No. 3 engine cylinder wall still sticking to it. It brings back many memories.