

## WOULD YOU BELIEVE

By Manny Lawton (PNC Calvin Graef tells of his survival from the Japanese Prison Hell Ship, Arisan Maru. Calvin is one of the 8 survivors out of 1,800 American PWs.)

Late one afternoon in October 1944, in a typhoon-agitated sea 100 miles off the China Coast, 1800 prisoners of war, crammed into the cargo holds of an unidentified Japanese Prison Ship, were terrified as the first of three torpedoes hit the forward part of the ship. The second changed terror into panic as the aft section was blasted. The third, a bull's eye at center, brought mass carnage and destruction as it split the ship into two halves, which drifted 150 yards apart before sinking. Less than 100 came out alive. Those few saw to it that no Japanese guards survived.

Before slipping into the wind churned fifteen foot waves, Graef filled two canteens with fresh water. Seeing no life, no boats, no land, he thought at least the fresh water would give him one weapon as he set out alone to conquer the sea.

After staying afloat for about a half hour, Graef finally bumped into a bamboo pole about ten feet in length and four inches in diameter. This was a help. Later he caught on to a similar piece of debris and with his G-string-his only thread of clothing-he tied the two together.

Sometime during the night something bumped into him. It turned out to be Don Myers. Graef pulled him over and invited him to hang on. Myers said, "No, let me go, I'm finished." To this Graef sternly replied, "No siree, you're not leaving me alone!" So together they hung on, not knowing where, why, or how, except that they resolved to try to see another day.

Later during the night, through a brief ray of moonlight, they thought they saw a lifeboat. But then, on second thought, they decided it was a mirage.

Next morning, WOULD YOU BELIEVE, bobbing on the waves nearby, was a white, shiny lifeboat? With renewed hope, after being in the lonesome angry China Sea for 14 hours, they mustered up enough extra strength to work their way over to the boat. At last they had a life-saving boat at hand, but not enough strength to climb over its three-foot sides. Just then three heads popped up from inside and their buddies, the other survivors, pulled them in.

Once aboard, the next thought was a drink of water. Screwing the cap from the first canteen he passed it to the man next to him. The first gulp brought on gasping, grimacing and spitting, which indicated salt water had fouled the precious modest supply of drink. So it turned out with the other canteen. Now, thirsty and exhausted, the five flopped over and fell asleep.

Some time later they were awakened by a bumping against the side of the boat. Peering over someone discovered a 5 gallon wooden keg being tossed by the waves. They hauled it in and found it half full of water. WOULD YOU BELIEVE that in spite of the fact that the round drain hole had no stopper on it, the water was FRESH? Feeling better and more hopeful after a rationed drink around, they began to assess their situation. They had a boat and fresh water, but no mast, no sail and the rudder was broken. As they pondered these deficiencies, someone noticed a pole floating along-side. With their combined limited energies they worked it aboard, thinking there might be use for a pole. Again, exhausted, now some 16 hours after shipwreck, the 5 spunky survivors stretched out for a rest.

Before they fell asleep, a Japanese destroyer was spotted approaching their direction. It was quickly decided that the only chance lay in playing dead. With bodies criss-crossed, motionless and each facing a different direction. The 5 awaited their doom--and yet with some glimmer of hope. The destroyer came with 100 yards and, at that distance made a giant circle. As she swung around, the men could see Jap officers on deck inspecting them with field glasses. The second time around they noticed 2 machine guns zeroed in on them. Thinking "this is it", they tensely awaited the blast that would end it all. Just as someone said the last amen, the destroyer mysteriously turned and steamed away. Shortly thereafter there was another bumping against the side. This time it turned out to be a box 2 feet square and 1 foot deep, the top of which was securely screwed on. Thinking a fellow could always find some use for the wooden box they hauled it aboard.

Another brief period of rest and thanksgiving, as late afternoon approached, they began to explore the items of debris which had drifted their way. The pole turned out to be not just a pole, but a mast. Not just any old mast, but WOULD YOU BELIEVE, the very one which had been made for their boat? When the box was opened it proved to house a sail and pulleys and rigging--not just any old sail, but, WOULD YOU BELIEVE, the very sail that fit the mast that fit their boat? It was fortunate too, that they were too weak to rif the sail before the destroyer came on the scene.

The next project was to repair the broken rudder. One of the boys started pounding on the wall of the little compartment under the front deck, thinking to use a board from it for the mending job. Upon getting it open he found a tightly sealed tin box. WOULD YOU BELIEVE, it was filled with "hard tack" (biscuits)? Now there was a boat, a mast, and sail, fresh water and food. Now there was hope where 24 hours earlier there was nothing but despair as they tossed about in an angry sea--their newest enemy.

So equipped, and with some knowledge of astronomy, they set sail by the stars for the coast of China. Later information from Navy men revealed that only novices or fools would have rigged a sail in a typhoon. But they did and it worked, for within 3 days, the strong winds pushed them over 300 miles.

Now, at this particular time in history, with the exception of one 200 mile area, all of the thousands of miles of China coast were occupied by the Japanese. WOULD YOU BELIEVE, their navigator landed this motley crew right in the middle of the friendly area? Disembarking, these 5 physical wrecks from a shipwreck walked down the main street of a city of 150,000 people just like they came into this world--naked, hungry and weak.