

Story of St. Sgt. Grady S. Gaston-Frisco City Alabama,  
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It was about nine o'clock in the evening, December 1st, 1942 after having completed a bombing mission somewhere in the Southwest Pacific that we were returning to our home base in a B\*24 Liberator when we ran into a terrific storm. Shortly after entering the storm our radio and many other instruments were rendered useless and but for the exceptional ability of our Pilot, Lst. Lieut, Norman R. Grosson Cincinnati, Ohio, we would probable have crashed long before we did, In trying to avoid the ferocity of the storm Lt. Grosson tried to circle it but after that failed he then went to about 20,000 feet in order to try to fly over it. All these manoeuvres seemed to no avail when suddenly we were out of the storm but since our instruments were of no avail there was not much could be done except to come to a lower altitude and try to ascertain our position. After coming quite low we dropped our flares but could not determine our locality. During these tactics our gasoline was growing continually lower and finally when only about 300 gallons remained in our tanks, Lt. Grosson gave the order for everyone to put on their life vests and parachutes in preparation for a jump and at the same time he started to climb higher in order to gain enough altitude for everyone to have a chance to jump clear of the airplane. At 9,000 feet the order was given and after looking around I felt sure that there were no other people in the airplane other then Lt. Grosson and myself at which time I jumped. At the time of jumping we did not know whether we were over land or water but upon landing with a considerable jolt I found that my parachute had caught in several trees and that I had landed in the center of the cluster. After resting for a few moments I climbed one of the trees from where I could see the airplane burning and could hear ammunition exploding. Just about that time I heard someone calling "Hello"- "Hello", after which I kept up an answer until Lt. Grimes, our bombardier joined me. In the meantime Lt. Speltz, our Co-Pilot heard our voices and soon he joined us.

Being about three o'clock in the morning of December 4th, we decided it would be of no use to try to locate the airplane, therefore, we used our parachutes as beds-we slept until sunrise, at which time we decided to try to find the coast.

After travelling for sometime we ran into Lt. Dyer, Our Bombardier and after taking inventory, we found that he had the emergency rations from his parachute and I had the emergency rations from mine, which amounted to four bars of chocolate candy, one jungle knife, one fish hook and line and a few matches in a water-proof container.

With four of us accounted for and together we walked the rest of that day and until about ten o'clock the next morning before reaching the coast. We had not found any water until this time and finally when night fell, we were in quite a bad condition for want of a drink. After settling for the night, Lt. Grimes finally found a stagnant water hole with alligators and other types of strange things swimming around in it, but we were so glad to see water that anything else did not matter.

After resting for the night I cut the top part of my life vest off which enabled us to fill it with water. We then travelled on, but after about one and one half days, we were again out of water.

We continued to follow the beach north to north-west during which time we sucked leaves and chewed on green bark in order to quench our thirst. We

had two .45 calibre pistols with us and finally after trying several times on the fourth day we managed to kill a young bullock. We cut off as much meat as we could carry and after finding a suitable place we built a fire, cooking the meat on the end of sticks. That was our first meal and, of course, we ate all that we could hold. By this time we were only thinking of lessening the weight we had to carry, therefore, we did not carry any meat with us, in fact we discarded everything possible in order to lighten our load and after another day we had to throw away our pistols as they had rusted to a point where we could not use them. During our travel down the beach we ran into several rivers. We tried to get around one or two of them but they didn't seem to be narrow enough for us to walk across we decided to swim. They were all infested with alligators and crocodiles but luckily we did not get hit by any of them. Many times we waded through mud and slush almost waist deep and at times had to crawl through the dense jungle growth.

We had been fishing every night and at times had quite a bit of luck but soon we found ourselves with only one fish hook left. We were growing weaker all the time and after deciding to make camp for the night we threw out our fishing line, but this time an extra large fish took hold of it carrying away our last chance of fish for food. From then on we tried using one "Safety-pin-hook", but had no luck as they would always get off before getting them out of the water.

After travelling for a considerable distance we finally came upon a large fish, apparently a sword-fish, lying on the beach. Lt. Dyer came upon it quietly and after jumping on his long bill I took my jungle knife and killed him. We had only about two matches left so we ate him raw but at that stage anything tasted good to us.

During this time we had found a few patches of "Passion fruit" and a few "cockkerells", but after awhile we soon tired of them. They tasted good to us but contained very little nourishment.

On December 13th a flight of 3 B-24's came directly over us and after using everything possible of signals they went on their way without seeing us. They were about 1,000 feet high at the time, that was about the most discouraging moment we had, since we could see men looking out of the windows yet they could not see our signals.

On December 24th, we sighted a small paper bark shack and at once made a dash for it, hoping we would find someone but to our dismay it was empty, and had been for a long time. After looking around we found a water melon vine with a few small melons on it. That was our meal for that night. It being Christmas Eve we gathered around singing carols and making our Christmas prayers.

It started raining that night and kept it up for several days, during which time, Lt. Speltz, whose feet were in such bad condition, decided that he would stay there while the rest of us tried to find our way out of the jungle. We started out but upon reaching the Robinson River we found that it had risen so high from the heavy rains that it was impossible to swim across. We then tore our shirts into strips and tied a few logs together for a make shift raft. Folding to this we managed to get across the river. We soon spread out in the woods to hunt for food and after while Lt. Dyer called to me and told me to cross another river we had found. While waiting for Lt. Dyer to come up Lt. Grimes started to wade and swim across with all his clothes on.

When I reached shore I could see that he was in trouble, "just about to drown". I went in after him but the current was so swift that when I got within about 20 yards I found that I was just about helpless and at that time Lt. Dyer called for me to come back to shore where we just had to sit and watch Lt. Grimes be carried out to sea. After this we went on about 25 to 30 miles at which point the beach ran out entirely. There was nothing in sight for miles but long stretches of "Flats" and upon trying to walk through we went up to our waists in mud and marsh which meant sure death if we tried to go further. After sitting down for awhile we decided to go back to the shack where we had left Lt. Speltz and all die together. On the way back we found Lt. Grimes' body where it had washed ashore. Lt. Grimes had been drowned on December 27th and we arrived back at the shack on December 29th. While returning we had come across some little cockerells and carried all we could to Lt. Speltz. While eating them he stated that they tasted better than the steak we had eaten about two weeks before.

Lt. Dyer and I kept up our search for food in the vicinity of the shack and soon Lt. Speltz picked up and got to feeling pretty good. We had located a water hole about 4 miles from the shack but by this time what little food we could find was running very low so we decided to go back and cross the Robinson River and see what we could find on the other side. On crossing the river we all got caught in the current and were rapidly being carried out to sea when suddenly our feet touched a sand bar which we were able to cling to and fight our way back to shore. That was about the worst fright we had and from then on decided that we would stay near the shack and just wait until the final day or until someone might come along. We made regular daily trips through the jungle bringing back anything we could find from dead fish to any snakes we saw and could kill. One day while going to the water hole we found a dead Wallaby which we brought back to camp and cooked with our last match. At the time we thought that was just about the best meal we had ever eaten. From then on it was just a series of raw foods and what few berries we could find.

Early in January we sighted a flight of B-25's going over and tried to signal them but with no success. From then on our lives remained just about the same. We had taken care of the little melon patch we had found and by now there were quite a few melons which were small but we shared one between us each evening while they lasted and while we were sitting around talking about the delicious meals and desserts we had enjoyed during our lives. Talking about most anything that would help pass the time because at night the mosquitoes and bugs were almost unbearable; many times we had to bury ourselves in the sand to try to keep them off.

Each day we became weaker and weaker and on February 10th, as we were preparing to go to the water hole, Lt. Dyer collapsed completely. Lt. Speltz and myself went on to the water hole, and found what few cockerells we could find (they were getting scarce by now) and on our return Lt. Dyer was dead. We had all made notes as we went along and he had scratched on a small piece of paper "I lasted until February 10th."

Many times we had discussed what we wanted done if anything happened to us separately, so we immediately put him on the sand with his face down. We had decided not to bury any bodies because some day someone might come along and find them if they were above ground.

This incident just left Lt. Speltz and myself. We kept up our

search for something to eat but by this time there was very little left to be found. On February 20th, Lt. Snelitz went across the river to find some passion fruit. When he left on these trips he always said that I should not worry if he did not return because it would be due to the rising tide. He did not return that night but I did not worry much about it but when he did not come in by about 10 o'clock the next morning I started down to the river to see if I could find him. It was raining extra hard that day and I was forced to return to the cabin. By 2 o'clock that afternoon the rain had let up some and I returned to the river where I found him lying on the beach. He was so weak from crossing the river and lying so long in the rain that when he tried to stand up the wind would blow him down again. I also was very weak and knew I could not carry him so I tried dragging. It took me quite a long time but I finally got him back to the cabin. I gave him water and fed him what few passion fruit we had on hand and also a melon or two and a few cockerells. During the night he seemed to improve and by morning he was able to sit up. After a couple of days he began to pick up quite a bit but his legs and ankles had swollen to twice their normal size. We did not know the cause of this but made the best of it and on February 24th on my return from the water hole I asked him how he was feeling. He said "Feeling O.K." and we talked for a good long while. During the night I felt him grab me by the wrist and thinking he might be dreaming I laid his hand away and as usual before daylight I started on my way to find food for us. On returning to the shack I called to him as usual but received no reply so I hurried to our hut but it was too late, he had passed away. I finally got him down to where I had put Lt. Dyer but just about collapsed in the attempt from weakness. "That left me alone", for how long no one would ever know.

Long before this we had lost our jungle knives but there was only one thing to do from then on and that was try to find food and try to hold out until someone came to the cabin because there were rivers all around the area and several hills which I was too weak to try to climb. One day in roaming around the area I came upon a tree with an old spear and file in a sack hanging from it. I was glad to see the spear as it meant that if I did find anything I could at least cut it but the handle was gone and every time I tried to use it my hands would get cut so badly I could hardly stand the pain. I came across a few sand crabs and found that I had to use part of the sack to protect my hands as when I would reach in the hole for them they would bite my hands badly. These did not last very long.

One day while across the river looking for passion fruit two dingoes (they are a wild dog similar to our wolf or coyote) came up to me. I grabbed a stick but knowing that if I hit one of them the other might attack me I took a chance and just scared them away. They followed me for sometime but finally disappeared.

The next day while going down the beach I found six of them eating from a calf that they had apparently just killed. By that time the only thing that mattered to me was food, and here was plenty of it so I scared them off with a stick I was carrying and proceeded to eat where they had left off. When I had finished I cut a leg from the calf and took it back to the cabin. This lasted for a couple of days. Several times on my walk down the beach I had come across small bunches of minnows that had been washed ashore which I also ate.

Things went on just about the same for me from then except that each day I knew I was getting weaker until about the middle of April, I

had made a make shift calendar on the wall of the cabin with the dates on it of Lt. Grimes, Lt. Dyer's and Lt. Speltz's deaths and before going in hunt for food I had written that if anyone came and I was not there, they would know I was nearby because by now I had grown so weak I did not feel that I could last but a few days longer. It was such a hard job for me to move to try to find food, every few feet I would have to stop and rest for a long time. On April 21st, I had been searching the beach for fish and when I could not find any more I went into the woods in search of berries. While returning to the cabin I saw a black boy riding a horse down the beach and at first I imagined I was seeing things. I could not understand his language but he turned and I followed him as best I could. He finally got back to the cabin where I found a white man and several more black boys. My heart just about jumped out of me with joy at seeing a human being. They had come to round up stray cattle. The only food they had with them was some bread and cold beef but after a light meal of this I felt that nothing in the world could have tasted better. It went down so fast I did not realize it, but had to be careful I did not eat too much. I was so excited at finally finding someone that I did not rest or sleep at all that night. In the morning the man fixed some "Johnnie Cakes" which were very good. After eating he put me on one of his horses and started back to his house. It was 27 miles away and the ride was very hard for me but by taking it easy we arrived at his place late in the afternoon. He killed a young goat that day and even though I had always heard that goat meat was not very good, it sure tasted good to me. He fixed a good meal of it and gave me lots of milk. The next morning he killed a young bullock. I guess I ate too much too soon because I got very sick. At the time of the crash I weighed 168 lbs. but by now I was down to about 100 lbs. During this sick spell he was very good to me and in three or four days I was able to start getting around a little bit. My old tattered clothes were stiff as a board but he took them off of me and gave me some civilian clothes that were about two sizes too big. I stayed with him for two weeks during which time I gradually began to pick up weight and feel as though I could go on again. He sent one of his boys to a police out post located a place called Boorolola, 75 miles away. It was the first case the police had handled in seven years. At the time there were about 15 to 20 Australian Soldiers on patrol duty in that section. With the aid of the black boy as a guide they blazed a trail through country where no vehicle had ever travelled and after two and one half days of hard work they reached the place where I was. They then went on to the cabin I had used and picked up the bodies of Lt. Dyer and Lt. Speltz after which we went to the town of Boorolola which consisted of just eight men, mostly natives. This was May 4th, I stayed with the Policeman for a day or two while he arranged to have a small airplane pick me up at a place called Anthony's Lagoon. The soldiers put me in their truck and drove 185 miles to the small field where the airplane would land. The plane arrived the next day. We flew to a place called Camowael where we spent the night and the next day he took me on to Cloncurry. Everyone there was very nice to me. I had intended to keep my long beard and hair until I could join some of my former friends but the barber insisted that I let him cut it off which I did. The whole town was very good to me, giving me money, clothing or anything that I might need and taking me to their homes for meals.

I had been in Cloncurry a couple of days when on May 11th, some American Officers stopped at the Hotel and asked for me. They gave me a bundle of clothing and told me that Capt. M.J. Foster of San Antonio Texas, (member of my organization) had sent them and made arrangements for their airplane to pick me up on its return trip the next day. That day and night seemed like a very long time to me but at noon the following day

they returned for me. I don't believe I was any happier at seeing anyone in my life as I was that group of American Officers and Enlisted men.

Their names were F.O. Roy Schultz Pilot of San Antonio, Texas; F.O. Henry C. Ellis, CO-Pilot, New Boston, Texas; Lt. James R. Laughlin, Navigator, Covinth, Mississippi; Lt. Jakobson, Intelligence Officer Boston Mass; S.Sgt. Warren Fuhrman, Engineer St. Paul, Minn; Cpl. Leroy Nolan, Radio Operator Long Island, New York.

We took off from Cloncurry at about 1:30 P.M. May 12th and arrived in Townsville at about 5:30 P.M. where Capt. Foster met me and brought me to the Hospital where I now am slowly recovering. I have since seen my former Pilot Lt. Grosson who told me there was Sgt. Roy L. Wilson Columbus, Ohio, one of our gunners who had been picked up with him on December 18th. I was very happy to know that at least some of our crew had been saved.