

John Guiher
John Guiher's Rafting Experience after a B-26
Crash and Survival at Sea with Cletus Wray

John Guiher's rescue at sea.



Left to right: Pvt. Harry C. August, Radioman; Lt. John R. Stokes, Copilot; P. A. Gamach, C.A.P.. USN; Captain Cletus Wray, Pilot; and John J. Guiher, Navigator-Bombardier.

Most of the flight crews of the 344th Bomb Group departed as replacement crews for the North African Campaign using the southern route in May of 1943. This route would take them from West Palm Beach, Morrison Field, Florida, south to Borinquen Field Puerto Rico, to Atkinson Field, British Guiana and down across the Amazon River to Belem, Brazil, and then on to Natal, Brazil - the Jumping off point for the Ascension Island.

Captain Cletus Wray was leading our flight of planes. His crew consisted of:

- Pilot - Captain Cletus Wray, #436551
- Copilot - 2nd Lt. John R. Stokes, #0731692
- Navigator/Bombardier - 1st Lt. John J. Guiher, #0729748
- Radioman - Pvt. Harry C. August, #11066288
- The Plane - B-26, #118290

We had been in Natal, Brazil several days, one of which was used to test fly our airplane for slo-timing the engine and making sure the repairs that had been done were satisfactory and functioning properly. Our next flight was to the Ascension Island, a small 7-mile long island covering 48 square

miles in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean - halfway between South America and the Gold Coast of Africa. The morning of our departure was May 4, 1943 and we had arisen between 4:00 AM and 4:30 AM so that we could eat and have our final weather briefing before our departure time of 7:00 AM. As we took off from the field, the sun was rising and we could see the small scattered clouds drifting lazily over the ocean at about 5,000 ft. while we continued our climb to the flight altitude of 9000 ft. This was well above the cloud layer.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly until we were about halfway there (the point of no return) when the pilot (Capt. Wray) advised that we were losing oil pressure in our right engine. Not long after that the engine temperature went up and the oil pressure went down and he had to feather the propeller and shut the engine down. This called for more power from our good engine, but he could not get enough power to maintain our altitude without exceeding the red line guides of the aircraft. About this time he advised me to drop the bomb bay tanks to lighten the load. I did this and after they were dropped the bomb bay doors would not close and we still were unable to maintain our altitude because the bomb bay were creating excess drag on the flight characteristics of the plane.

After I had gone up in the nose and salvaged the gas tanks and returned to the cockpit, Lt. Stokes said they needed someone to go back in the tail and throw out all the excess baggage and weight. The radioman didn't want to try walking the cat walk with both bomb bay doors open because one little slip would be a long way down. I said I would go back and do it, but they were to advise me ahead if we were going to ditch, as I wanted to be up in the front with them. They agreed as I said to keep it smooth and level. The view was great looking down through the open doors to the ocean below. Really, it was about like the view you get front the nose of the plane where I rode all the time, or like the view you get taking pictures out the open hatches during bombardier training. It was an uphill climb on a 12" catwalk and with both doors open it was an exhilarating experience. I was ever mindful of the consequences if I should miss a step. It was a long way down from 9,000 feet. I prayed he would keep the plane on a smooth descent until I made it back there and also returned to the front.

Once in the rear, I began throwing bags, boxes, spare parts or whatever out the bomb bay. Sometimes I would have to throw the same item out several times as the air stream would blow it back to me in the plane. There was a large wooden box filled with replacement parts that I couldn't throw out, but I did throw the individual pieces out. When this was completed I worked my way back to the front of the airplane - ever mindful of not missing that step. I also noticed we were down much closer to the ocean. Once back in the front I learned that we had lost radio contact with our other planes because our antenna had been broken off at an untuneable length. This happened as the tanks were dropped and our long wire antenna was still extended and dangling along like a fishing line beneath the airplane.

The pilot then advised us to try and get the bomb bay doors closed. They were stuck in the open position because a hydraulic valve in the door system would not release its pressure. The copilot, Lt. John Stokes, was reading tech, orders trying to figure out how to get the doors closed, but to no avail. Later, we learned that had we ruptured the doors' hydraulic line the pressure would have been released and the doors would have closed. The pilot wanted to get the doors closed so he could maintain flight with less power, but they wouldn't close. When we first got down to the water he said we were going to ditch and that we should throw the dingy radio out so that it would be floating with us. After I threw the radio out as he requested, he gave the engine more power and we flew along about 200 ft. above the water for over 2 hours.

During this two hours of flight many things were happening; the pilot was experiencing a phenomena of his feet being knocked off the controls and he was worrying as to its cause. Well, we were tossing the radio transmitters out the top hatch (excess wt.) and they would hit the tail and bounce his feet off the control, so he was quite relieved when we figured out the cause. This could have mined his control of the airplane. From then on, everything else was thrown out through the bomb bay. We could have knocked the rudder off the tail and lost control of the airplane.

In the meantime, we had been scanning the sea for any type of ship that we might land near for an easy rescue, but none appeared. The pilot again advised us to prepare for ditching as our gas supply

dwindled closer toward the empty peg. During this time the radioman and I had arranged all our emergency gear for deplaning which I had envisioned us climbing out on the wing and inflating our extra raft, and after awhile when all was set we would shove off before the plane sank to the bottom. We had heard about Eddie Rickenbacher's experience while we were in Natal and I thought ours would be the same type landing — "smooth."

Now, since we had thrown out the dingy radio (the automatic radio that would transmit a signal that could be used to home in on our position) it was now 2 hours behind. While we were flying along I threw out some gold marker canisters that would let the contents spray anyone searching the sea to spot it and possibly us more easily. Since I didn't know if they would emit the gold and I wanted to make sure it marked the water without just sinking to the bottom of the sea, I released one and let it spew out the bomb bay doors to make sure it was working. As I did this, I could see the gold spraying out, but it was also being blown back into the bomb bay, and when it blew back in, it just covered me entirely. Since I had been sweating considerably the gold dust stuck on me like glue and covered me completely. The only thing that was not gold when you looked at me was my eyes and teeth. Everyone in the crew got a good laugh when they looked at me. It stayed on until we crashed and was washed off by the ocean water.

The radioman and I placed the extra raft on end just beneath the navigator's opening so that we could quickly push it out after landing. I stuffed several cartons of cigarettes inside my shirt so that we would have plenty to smoke. I also had my gun strapped on, my binoculars around my neck and several times I checked the hatch opening to make sure I could get through it without getting stuck. We thought we had everything planned.

Again the pilot said to prepare for ditching. The pilots opened their windows that were just above their heads so that all they would need to do would be to unbuckle their seat belts, grab their ration bags and swim out. The radioman was strapped in his seat and he had it swung toward the aisle so he could help me push the extra raft through the opening of the navigator's hatch as soon as possible after the crash. I didn't use the navigator's seat as I took a sitting position in the aisle between the pilot

and copilot and the bulkhead doorway where I could keep one hand on the raft release handle. (That would release the door and the main raft in the compartment outside and above our heads). The first pull on this handle would release the door, and as you pulled a little further the raft was released on a tether cord that kept the raft from drifting away until you were ready to go. I thought that if I didn't have a grip on this handle, I might not find it in the confusion after the crash. I also didn't want to launch the raft too quickly or it would be too far away for us to reach. This turned out to be good thinking, too.

The pilot (Wray) said, "Here we go!" so I pulled the handle release to spring the raft door free (while I held on to a hand grip with the other hand). When I heard the plane beginning to hit the water and the water rushing in I pulled the raft release handle all the way to release the raft. The moment the plane began hitting the water I could hear the crashing and the water beginning to rush in - seconds passed, I never knew how many - that was it - sitting with my back toward the instrument panel and pedestal I was probably thrown forward toward the pedestal, hitting my head and shoulder and tearing my shirt because my one handed grip was not strong enough to withstand the force created by the crash. (I thought this would be a smooth belly landing. This was NOT good thinking).

From the impact of the crash I must have been temporarily knocked out. Finally, when I was aware of what was going on, I found myself in this dark hole or compartment and knowing I was under water, I knew I would have to get to the surface pretty soon or I would drown. I didn't panic, but I started getting my wits together. First, I was alone in this dark chamber and it was filled with water and I wasn't sure how many fathoms deep. Then I spotted this round hole where the light could be seen on the outside. I thought this to be the navigator's hatch and I started moving toward it. However, something had me blocked and I couldn't get to the opening, but I kept my eye glued to the opening as I ducked under the debris trying to get there.

Finally, I reached the opening and worked my way through. Once outside, I pulled one of my Mae West cylinders to inflate V, of it and the other I would save for an emergency. Then I started swimming

for the bright surface above. Between the Mae West pulling me upward and my swimming, it felt like I was really zooming up a ladder toward the sky.

I remember breaking the water and popping up in the air above my knees. Everyone cheered. Ft. Stokes has told me that before I surfaced they had been crying because they didn't think I had survived the crash landing. Capt. Wray was on the raft and Ft. Stokes had swum away from the plane about 30 yards thinking there might be an undertow from the plane as it sank. The radioman, Pvt. Harry C. August, was swimming and floating nearby.

When we finally got everyone on the raft, checked to see if there were any injuries. Except for a few scratches, all appeared to be in good shape. I really must have been temporarily knocked out because I remained under the water much longer than the other three. (Without breathing, I didn't get my lungs filled with water, and thus I believe it enabled me to stay beneath the water a longer time).

Once on the raft, water drained from my head for a day, flushing it and my sinuses completely. I was cussing the fact that the water kept running from my head and nose. Hold it! Watch what you are saying. I guess I used the Ford's name in vain and they really became concerned. So, from then on everyone had to watch what they said. That was the first time words were ever restricted. Capt. Wray's pant leg had become entangled with the long wire radio antenna that was mounted above the plane and it caused him some anxious moments until he freed himself and swam to the surface.

I had bags of supplies for the Captain and the copilot sitting in the aisle between them which they were to take when they released their safety belts and went up through their escape hatches. The radioman and I were to push the extra raft out the Navigator's hatch. Well, when we crashed, it was really a rough crash and not a gliding smooth crash as I had envisioned. We landed into the wind and the swells and as we hit the water the swell rose and we plowed into the bottom of the next swell, smashing the plexiglass and knocking the engines loose. As far as I know, the airplane was never again above the water. I know we were all on the raft and drifting about, observing the debris that had floated out of the airplane (parachutes - the large wooden box that had been in the tail that I

couldn't lift or throw out) all floated out after the tail snapped off. The tail of the airplane snapped off at the top turret when we hit the water. (This is the weakest part of the plane's fuselage and the reason I didn't want to be in the rear when we crashed).

Through all of the debris we saw the airplane come floating to just beneath the surface before it rolled to one side and a wing tip surfaced, expelling the trapped air before sinking out of sight.

We waved good-bye to Lt. Johnson and his crew that had slowed down and kept with us until we had all climbed aboard the raft before they departed for their destination - the Ascension Island. They had to get along as their fuel supply would be getting low if they had any unforeseen trouble.

At that moment we thought that we would be picked up that afternoon - no sweat! - so we took a few moments and examined the contents of the bag of emergency rations that were stored in a rubber bag under the seat of the raft. Everything looked in good shape and we decided not to eat any of the rations that first day (Just in case we had a prolonged stay). So we put the food back in the bag and attached the air pump to the raft to make sure it would be ready in case we had an emergency use for it. (This was good thinking.) We kept the flare gun out and tied it to the raft so we could send up our signal very quickly if search planes were close enough for us to use it. Now that we had everything all set and the rations again stored in the bag, we settled back and began our vigil.

Soon it was getting dark and we said it was probably too late for them to get us that day, but, we felt sure that as soon as the other planes had arrived on the Ascension Island and reported our position exactly they would be out looking for us in the morning. Our spirits were high. We were sure that they would be there in the morning.

As the night came, it appeared that clouds were building up for a rain and the wind also became much stronger. The swells became higher and the sea was much choppier with many more white caps visible.

This first night the continuous water spray along with the rain kept us wet and cold and we had little experience (NONE!) in riding a raft,- especially on a rough sea. We tried our best but it was not good enough for these hard breaking waves that threw

us out, capsized or swamped the raft. We upset five times this first night and spent more time trying to get back into the raft than we had time riding in it. We were learning fast though, especially how to keep the raft right side up until we could get back inside.

Our first thought was to get back in that raft as quick as we could after we managed to get it turned right side up. Again, this was not as easy as it sounds since we had to battle with the waves while we were head high in the water and the swells kept crashing in over our heads and making it very difficult to do anything with the raft. After we finally righted the raft, everyone tried to get in at the same time and this caused the raft to tumble end over end so fast that none of us were able to get aboard. We were almost at a panic stage until we realized that all of us were trying to get in at the same time and also from the same side. From then on we would space ourselves around the raft and one person at a time would climb aboard until all were recovered. This first capsizing was the worst because we were so very inexperienced in how best to get back into the raft. The other capsizing and getting back in were much easier. We realized that patience and teamwork and less panic would be the solution to our problem.

God stayed with us and gave us strength while guiding us along during this long, treacherous, and frightful night.

We learned how to keep the raft right side up, but in the meantime we lost all of the rations that we had in the emergency bag when we kept overturning. Ironically, we didn't eat anything that first afternoon because we thought we might need it more later if this were to be a prolonged experience. We managed to save one eleven ounce can of water, a flare gun with three flare shells, and a couple of repair plugs. Also the two oars that we had attached to the raft. Only God knows why we had attached the pump to the valve on the raft. Had we not done this at the time, it would have been lost too. All of our emergency supplies were packed in the rubber bag and the bag was tied about a foot from each end. When we upset, the weight of the bag caused the center of the flap to bulge open and our rations drifted away, unbeknownst to us at the time.

The next morning (Day 2) we spotted a plane

that appeared to be searching for us although it was quite a distance away and flying at about 10,000 ft. We were very elated and we tried to get their attention by yelling our lungs out, waving anything we had in our hands and firing the flare gun. We only had the three flares and the first one I fired at an angle towards the plane. This I found out very quickly was the wrong way to point and fire the flare. The gun should have been pointed straight up and the flare fired thusly so as to give it the maximum hang time for them to see it. The first flare fell back into the ocean very quickly.

In my shirt pocket I had a stainless steel flat fifty cigarette case that would have been perfect for reflecting the sun like a mirror, neither I nor the others thought to use it. (Perhaps a good opportunity missed.) A raft in the ocean is like a pea in a tub. As the swells roll (and they do roll at times) we could be on top of a swell and they could be looking the other way or we could be down in the trough as they looked our way and they wouldn't see us. You really have to scrutinize the ocean's surface and be very lucky. Later on Chief Aviation Pilot Philip A. Gamache said that the only reason that he spotted us was for the fact that the search pattern turned right directly overhead of us." Lt. Harvey A. Johnson later told us that he had returned the next morning in B-24 and searched most of the day for us but did not see anything. We believe that this was the plane we saw searching early the 2nd day.

Ironically, the day following Lt. Johnson's search mission to locate us, he lost an engine on takeoff from the Ascension Island and his entire crew was killed in the crash. Lt. Johnson was the sole survivor. His crew consisted of: Lt. Pearce M Pritchitt, Copilot; Lt. Dennis W. McElgunn, Navigator; and S/ Sgt. O'Steen, Radio-Gunner. Later on I was flying with Lt. Johnson when we were shot down over France and interned for over a year at Stalag III Germany (West Compound).

Riding the Raft

This raft was manufactured with two oar locks cured on the raft to secure the oars - and this is where they should be kept. They are needed to help keep the raft heading into the swells. Don't bother rowing, as you are not going anyplace and you will drift where the current and swells dictate in the rough ocean - so save your strength. Capt.

Morris said, "At best we probably have drifted 5 miles per day." Slow, slow as you go.

We took the oars out of the locks to use them at each end like a canoe, but I fell asleep and the one I had just drifted away in the night. The best means of controlling the raft is the use of the rope that is mounted all around the top of the raft.

When these large swells roll at you from different directions at the same time it will really keep you working to stay afloat and keeping in the raft. As the swells approach the raft, you must pull up on the rope on that side and let them crash underneath instead of letting them crash on top of you and the raft. This is what causes you to capsize as well as be thrown out. Again, when the swell comes at you and you have the raft rising with it, you must break the raft down over the first swell as soon as possible and this will permit the swell to crash beneath the raft. Our inexperience and this rough sea was the reason we upset so many times the first night. We were just swamped by the swells that were rolling from several directions. During something like this, many things go through your mind and you just automatically get yourself under control because you must if you want to survive.

We all sat on the edge of the raft holding on to the safety rope that was secured to the raft which we used to manipulate the raft when the swells were crashing around us. We would be sitting on the raft holding this same rope when someone would doze off or begin to fall overboard backwards. Someone would happen to see them and call out, but this was very upsetting to that person and they would become irritated. To eliminate this sudden yell or call it was decided that a whistle would be used to alert everyone that trouble was near. WAKE UP! This method worked much better and was less irritating to everyone. Even when a large swell was about to crash we would always whistle and when you heard it you knew trouble of some description was near. The only cross words that were spoken came from this or when someone's sunburn was brushed. Other than this, we endured the harrowing experience together without any trouble or animosities.

The Bird

On the second day a gull came flying by and after circling the raft area for a bit, it flew up and landed on Lt. Stoke's head - no one moved - then

if flew off and circled some more. It probably decided that was a pretty safe place to land and take a little rest...not knowing that I had decided if it lit on my head I was going to catch it. Anyway, it flew back and lit on my head and after a few seconds I snatched it off. The gull was really squawking, but not for long. Stokes got out his rusty pocket knife and hacked off its head. (I say hacked because it wasn't a clean cut). John tried the blood from his neck first and then passed the bird to Wray and around until we all had a taste (share and share alike).

We knew we needed something to replace the water we needed. Our eleven ounce can of water provided one sip at the end of each day and the can was almost empty. (There was water everywhere but not a drop to drink). After skinning the feathers off we ate the meat; what little meat there was on this small gull. Every ounce of nourishment that we could find was very important to our bodies for survival. The blood tasted hot and dry and almost made us gag, but we had to stomach it for our own good. It could have been our only chance for survival. The meat was not that offensive. We survived.

Hallucinations were beginning to show up (like the oasis on the desert). The clouds would begin to look like airplanes or anything else we were looking for. Many times we could see the shoreline, the trees, streets and cars with their lights (we had to ask each other, are we seeing the same things?). These sightings would come and go and the white caps with their phosphorescent glow added another dimension to the imaginary sightings of which we longed to see. Any day now we were going to drift ashore and rent us a house on the coast while we ate and drank and sunned on the beach. After all, Lt. Stokes was still carrying our \$1,500.00 that was to be used to purchase airplane fuel in case we had to land anywhere that fuel was not provided. Unfortunately, we never made it to shore - we were still 1,000 miles from land. John Stokes took time out on the raft and went swimming for a few minutes to break the monotony of the trip. I think we all got in one at a time and swam around a little to limber up our cramped legs.

The 3rd day - we were spotted by 10 ATC planes (DC-3s) searching for us. They were spaced

about one mile apart and it appeared they were flying at about 2,000 ft. The plane on the very end of the line spotted us and swooped down and gave us a buzz and that was followed by all the other planes giving us a buzz too. One plane threw out a lunch and later another plane threw out a dingy radio. I immediately jumped in and swam toward the lunch bag that was floating and finally got it. However, the return to the raft was very difficult as the raft seemed to drift much faster than I swam. It took awhile for us to get back together. They had to get out of the raft and try pulling it toward me. Everyvt one was quite exhausted by the time they got me back to the raft.

Now the radio was a little further away, so we decided to forget it. Really, we should have gone for it first, and had we been successful we would have had a signal generator to crank out our position for the searchers to home in on.

The sandwiches were water-soaked, but we squeezed the salt water out of them and ate, if not the bread, at least the meat. Since these planes now knew our position, we thought we would be picked up that afternoon, but again, that was not the case. It was another day and a half for us to be relocated by Chief Aviation Pilot Gamache who was on a search mission for us while flying an OSU from the light cruiser U.S.S. Marblehead. Even before C.A.P. Gamache spotted us, we saw another plane go down on one side of us and keep going. They we saw another go by on the other side, but neither seemed to spot us until Gamache came along. (This was one and the same plane).

In the morning that we were picked up, something punctured an L-shaped hole in the bottom of the raft. This caused the bulkhead on one half of the raft to go flat. So, with our repair plug that happened to fit, we inserted it into the hole and pumped the raft back up. (Luckily it helped to contain the air in the bulkhead). We did, however, have to keep pumping every so often to keep it inflated properly as it did leak. You might say it was a continuous pumping operation. It would be hard to describe the feeling one might have while sitting there looking at the four of us sitting on one half a raft and looking at the other side of the raft laying as flat as the ocean and the waves lapping at your feet. It was a very sickening sight to say the least and there was no help at the time. It did make you wonder if

you would be able to survive much longer under these conditions. None of us uttered a word except how to get it pumped up.

GOD KNEW THAT WE WERE IN TROT BL about one o'clock that afternoon he brought C.A.P. Gamache to our aid.

When we saw his plane we kept looking up watching it circle us and every time it came to this one position he would dive down and pull up and then go around again. We thought that he was saying that it was too rough to land. We found out that he was signaling the U.S.S. Marblehead that we were directly under him at that time. The ship then fixed their course on that position. We had been so intent on looking up and watching the plane that we didn't notice the ship approaching.

All of a sudden we looked around and we were looking down the barrels of the ship's guns. At this point we didn't know whose ship it was and we just wanted to get aboard. The destroyer Davis was along and guarding the Marblehead as it prepared to take us aboard.

The whale boat was launched from the Marblehead with a crew to pick us up, and it had enough strong men aboard that they could actually pick us up in case we could not make it on our own. However, the adrenaline was really flowing and we responded to the occasion. We sipped some water that they gave us as we returned to the ship and climbed the ladder on the fantail to get aboard. When all were aboard they immediately took us to sick bay for an examination by the doctor. He was concerned as to the condition of our feet and if we had any open sores where gangrene might have started due to us being in the water for so long. Luckily we were all OK. While boarding and climbing the ladder, they had the sides of the ladder lined with good strong personnel to make sure we didn't slip and fall or hurt ourselves from the lack of strength. They guarded us very closely.

When we got up from sitting to go to sick bay we had relaxed somewhat and then we couldn't even walk - we were so weak. I guess that once we knew we were safe our adrenaline drive subsided. In sick bay we took a short rest or nap and then had a light meal of stewed chicken (and more water). They didn't want us to overeat at first. We rested awhile and talked with the doctors. Capt. Wray bunked in the ship Captain's quarters while I was

given the doctor's cabin along with John Stokes, and our radioman stayed with a Chief Petty Officer. Later on we ate in the officer's mess room where they still had the Chinese mess boys serving the food. The Marblehead had lost a rudder over in Java and returned to the USA steering with the engines.

The ship's log dated May 9, 1943 states that we were picked up at 1552 hours on a position of Latitude 06 Deg. -47 Min.S and Longitude 21 Deg. -29 Min.W "for transportation."

We patrolled the south Atlantic for one week while riding on board the U.S.S. Marblehead. One night they were firing their big guns over the bow of an unidentified ship that was passing so that they would return the correct colors of the day. I guess they responded, otherwise they would probably have sunk it. Needless to say, we were about ready to relaunch our raft.

Since we had lost about 25 pounds each while riding the raft we were permitted to eat any time we felt hungry. The Chinese mess boys got used to us coming for extra food. They first brought out a sandwich apiece on one plate but then they would have to make several trips before our appetites were satisfied. It wasn't long before they would bring a plate of about 12 sandwiches on the first trip; they got a chuckle out of that. We did enjoy the stay aboard the Marblehead and after a week they dropped us off in Recife, Brazil where we spent another week before getting a Navy flying boat back to Natal, Brazil, our jumping off point for the Ascension Island. Here in Natal we stayed another week waiting to catch an ATC flight back to the United States. While here, we spent a few days sunning on the beach and ordering a pair of handmade boots which took a day or two after they measured your foot.

The time to return to the United States had finally arrived and we were to have a night flight on the astroship "The Apache." We took off and climbed and climbed until I thought we would never get up through the clouds and the overcast. I kept looking out the window to see how we were doing and lo and behold, it looked like smoke was trailing the right engine. Now if that wasn't something? The attendant said we had lost one engine because of a runaway propeller and they were dropping 500 gallons of gas so they could return and land in Natal without all that extra weight and have less danger of fire in case we had a crashed landing.

However, we did land without incident.

After spending another day in Natal getting the airplane repaired, we finally took off again on another night flight for the US. We flew all night and the next morning we landed at Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico. After we had taxied to the end of the runway upon landing, we were met by a service car that had someone come inside the plane and spray it front to back. Then as we taxied along to the terminal the bug spray had enough time to kill any unwanted bugs and we were able to get out when the plane taxied to a halt at the terminal.

After refueling and getting something to eat, we continued our flight to Homestead, Florida, where we passed through Customs and then were free to go our way to our final destination, Headquarters 3rd Air Force, Tampa, Florida. Then we were reassigned to our 344th Bomb Group which had returned from Lake Charles, LA to Drane Field in Lakeland, Florida. Colonel John A. Hilger, second in command of the Tokyo raid, was our Group Commander.

We were then given a 10-day leave before returning and instructing new crews to re-form the 344th Bomb Group.

John J. Guiher
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