

An Adventure in Borneo

By John H. Foster

Waldoboro, Maine



**Concerning An Incident
Of
Missing Personnel**



Following is a list of the name, rank, serial number and name and address of the next of kin of each member (10 in all) of a crew of a B-24 Bomber which left Kornasoren Airdrome on the Island of Noemfoor on a single plane shipping strike off the coast of North Borneo and failed to return.

The plane was last heard from by radio at 6:35 A.M. on Sunday, October 22, 1944 when its location was presumed to be off the coast of North Borneo in the vicinity of Tarakan, approximately 1000 miles from its base.

There was no indication of distress in the last radio report and in the opinion of the War Department, whatever happened to this plane and its occupants was sudden and without sufficient warning to enable the crew to issue a distress signal.

CREW MEMBERS Name and Serial No.	Rank	NEXT OF KIN Name and Address
Lester Kornblum, 0684117	First Lieut.	Mrs. Sara Kornblum, Wife 2114 Mapes Ave., New York, N. Y.
Gayle W. Kizer, Pilot 0700404	Second Lieut.	Mr. Martin Kizer, Father Apache, Oklahoma.
Beryl Pritzker, 01686392	Second Lieut.	Mrs. Dorothy Pritzker, Mother 700 West Ayres Ave., Peoria, Illinois.
David G. Pfeiffer, 0707981	Second Lieut.	Mrs. Vera K. Pfeiffer, Mother Lee's Summit, Missouri.
Donald Vernon Foster, Tech. Sgt. 31261163	Tech. Sgt.	Mrs. Florence E. Foster, Mother 52 Edgell St., Gardner, Massachusetts Now: RFD 4, Waldoboro, Maine.
Peter Curletti, 32822110	Tech. Sgt.	Mr. Frank Curletti, Father 2269 27th St., Astoria, N. Y.

Raymond C. Dolenga, 16148312	Staff Sgt.	Mrs. Anna Dolenga, Mother 19152 Revere Detroit 12, Michigan.
William J. Reynolds, 35236425	Staff Sgt.	Mrs. Elizabeth S. Colcher, Grandmother 2104 Scottwood Ave., Toledo, Ohio.
Durward R. Flood, 18176270	Staff Sgt.	Mrs. Hattie E. Flood, Mother Route No. 2, Daingerfield, Texas.
Seymour Kahn, 12083769	Sergeant	Mrs. Sophie Kahn, Mother 676 E. 93rd St., Brooklyn 12, N. Y.

Members of 371st Bomb Squadron
 307th Bomb Group (H)
 13th Air Force
 Plane No. B-24-L-44--41422
 Type-Model--Engine Series No. R-1830-65A
 Engine Nos.
 (a) BP 444269
 (b) BP 444730
 (c) BP 444410
 (d) BP 444392

My trip took me around-the-world by plane. I travelled about 35,000 miles in all and approximately 33,000 miles of it by air. Total elapsed time was six months. Stops were made in the following countries or islands after flying across the United States to California: Hawaii (Honolulu), Phoenix (Canton), Fiji (Nandi), New Caledonia (Noumea), Australia, Java, Borneo, Banka (Pangkalpinang), Malaya, Singapore, Siam, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Egypt, Italy, Holland, England, Ireland and Newfoundland. As I retraced my "steps" on several occasions, I was in Java three times, Singapore twice and crossed the equator six times in all.

The reason for my trip was the incident described above. Being deeply disappointed over the feeble information furnished by the War Department concerning our case, I started preparing for the trip in July 1946. Nineteen months were spent laying plans: securing passport, visas; arranging transportation and studying currency regulations; meeting vaccination and inoculation requirements; contacting missionaries, civil authorities, government agencies, business men and private citizens in foreign lands (mostly in the Netherlands East Indies).

I set out on January 15, 1948 with a certain goal in mind. It was to find a plane believed to be that of the crew of which our son was a member. It was by mere chance that I had made an inquiry in Australia about twenty months before. I was surprised to find that the Australian Air Forces had a record of our son. It was secured from an American captain. The information in itself was not helpful, but something else was. A Flight Lt. Belcher of the R.A.A.F. had picked up this information in Balikpapan, Borneo and then proceeded to interview Japanese prisoners being held at that point. A Japanese prisoner, Lt. Kazuo Namiki, testified that he knew of a plane that had come down in the water, about two hundred meters from shore, near a place called Domaring Dajak on the east coast of Borneo and northwest of Cape Mangkalihat. When Lt. Belcher discussed this information with an American searcher, they agreed that there was a strong probability that this was the plane of Pilot Kizer and his crew.

This information was relayed by me to the U. S. War Department; it was gratefully acknowledged and I was told that a radio-gram would immediately be sent to the Pacific Headquarters for a complete investigation and report. Up to the time I left on my trip, there was no report on the incident. In the meantime, my plans were completed and I advised the Adjutant General's Office that I intended to take this trip on my own responsibility. I was advised

by the War Department not to take the trip as I would only be duplicating their efforts although they offered no objections. However, I was told that I would receive no transportation or subsistence and that any information given me while abroad would be confined to that concerning my own son and not to any area in general. Of course, I had asked for nothing more than cooperation and had hoped especially to meet with an American search team for a close-up view of their activities and whatever help I might get in our own case. It was quite evident that the War Department wanted no one to interest himself too deeply in what had gone on in the way of searches - or what had *not* gone on.

Information came from the War Department to me as follows: "The Office of the Quartermaster General has organized the American Graves Registration Service to search for and recover the remains of our deceased soldiers who have sacrificed their lives on the foreign fields of battle. The teams of this service are composed of specially trained personnel who have been thoroughly indoctrinated to perform this arduous task of searching these remote regions of the world." Later, in Borneo, these words haunted me as I seemed to find myself in a country *beyond* the remote regions of the world - for I was the *lone* American searcher in all of Borneo at that time.

When I reached Australia, I went from Sydney, where I made my headquarters, to Melbourne and visited the Royal Australian Air Force Hdqrs., by previous appointment. There I was warmly received and given free access to their search records. I talked with the officer who solved the case in which Hilkey Robinson's son was involved and I learned of the Vetter case. Lt. Belcher was not there but the officer in charge tried to reach him by phone 3000 miles away. Later on, after I had returned to Sydney, the R.A.A.F. sent Lt. Belcher to see me. His advice regarding travel in the islands of the East Indies was valuable and several of his suggestions turned out to be very helpful. I was delighted with my visit with him and even more so when I found he was being demobilized by the Australian Air Forces and was to be hired on a civilian basis as a searcher for the United States Search Forces.

I went from Australia to Singapore (by previous arrangement) and there I changed my plans considerably, acting principally on the advice of Lt. Belcher. When I entered Batavia, Java (having previously advised the American Consul there when I expected to arrive), I found there had been some question as to whether I could stay there, as there seemed to be no accommodations for me. This

was quickly settled when Capt. Ostmeier of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army volunteered to take me into his home for a short time. This was a most fortunate circumstance; Capt. Ostmeier was Lt. Col. Doup's adjutant and Lt. Belcher had strongly recommended that I call upon Col. Doup of the Dutch War Graves Service in Batavia. This chance arrangement, through Lt. Belcher's suggestion, made at a time when the American Consul might have liked *not* to find a place for me to stay, made possible everything that followed in Java and Borneo.

The Dutch War Graves Service took an immediate interest in my case. Through them, I was introduced to various military departments, civil authorities, the Attorney General, the Commissioner of War Crimes, the Commissioner of Police in charge of Tjipinang prison where Japanese prisoners were kept in Batavia, and others. I had letters of introduction from American friends to the top executives of the Bataafsche Petroleum Maatschappij (Batavia Petroleum Company). All of these people are Dutch. The one and only attitude of the Dutch was "what can we do for this man?" And you can believe me when I say they did everything that could be done for me. I spent two weeks investigating in Batavia and taking advantage of all the contacts that were provided. A car and chauffeur were provided when I needed them. Officials left their desks and went with me to make my contacts easier. The Commissioner of War Crimes, through the approval of the Attorney General, took me to Tjipinang prison where I had the opportunity to interview prisoners who might know something of the Borneo area and the incidents that took place there. I had the dubious privilege of interviewing General Yamamoto Moichero, former Chief of Staff of the 16th Japanese Army and Governor General of Java during the Japanese occupation, now ranking prisoner in Tjipinang. I also interviewed Sato Kateo, who had beheaded an American flier, and several others.

I informed the American Consul that I should like to meet an American search team and get acquainted with its members. I was told that there was none in Java. Upon inquiring about the same possibility in Borneo, I was told that there was none there. The same was true of the Celebes. When I inquired as to where I would have to go to meet a search team, the American Vice Consul said he thought there was a team at Morotai. I kept the American Consul's office advised as to what I was doing all the time, describing Dutch cooperation, etc., but received no direct help or other advice from that source. To give my visit some publicity in

the hope of smoking out information that might possibly come from unknown sources regarding incidents in Borneo, the Dutch Military Publicity Department wrote a long article which was published on page 1 of the April 28th, 1948 issue of HET DAGBLAD, the principal Batavia daily newspaper.

Arriving in Balikpapan, Borneo from Batavia, I was met by the General Manager of B.P.M. and immediately taken to their own tropical "hotel," where I was given a room and the privilege of eating in the company restaurant. Practically nothing else was available in Balikpapan in the way of lodging and food. I was introduced to other company officials and each did his utmost to see that I was comfortable and well taken care of. Through them, I met the Harbormaster, the Assistant Resident, the military officers and the Auditeur Militaire at the Santosa prison camp, where untried Japanese prisoners were being held. At this prison I found Lt. Kazuo Namiki, who verified the statements previously made to Lt. Belcher. Furthermore, I met Lt. Shoji of the Japanese Navy who knew more than Namiki. I also interviewed Captain Tadah, Lt. Hattori and a few others, all of whom were Japanese prisoners. I was interested in Hattori because it was he who was responsible for the execution of three American fliers at Samarinda, all from the Island of Noemfoor, from which our crew flew to Borneo on this uncompleted mission. To those who know of and are interested in a plane that went down at Sanga Sanga in November 1944, I believe these fliers were members of the crew of that plane. I believe they escaped and three months later were recaptured and executed at Samarinda..

At this point, it was my further good fortune to be joined by the Dutch Capt. Ostmeier of the Netherlands East Indies Army and his Adjutant Warrant Officer Alphonse Jans, an Indonesian by birth. A military assignment to Borneo permitted them to travel the same route I had chosen and it was arranged that we travel together. After Capt. Ostmeier and Jans had further interviewed the prisoners, we proceeded by boat to Samarinda; from there we expected to find a means of going directly to the plane wreckage at Domaring Dajak. Shoji told us that this particular plane was a B-24, that it circled the Kampong of Talisajan and then attacked a convoy of four Japanese ships in a single plane strike, that the plane succeeded in sinking one ship and then was shot down by Mine Sweeper No. 36. He could tell us nothing of survivors or what had happened to the crew.

At Samarinda we met the military authorities; the Resident,

Dr. van der Zwall; the Resident Secretary, Mr. J. P. de Jong and other officials. We missed Rev. Harry Post, a missionary, who was up river on a mission, but we did see Mrs. Post and two of the children. The oldest child, aged 7, was in school near Makassar in the Celebes Islands, as English is not taught in the Samarinda schools.

At this point, in preparation for our trip up the coast, the military authorities furnished three military police. This made a military escort of five and I needed no more interpreters as Capt. Ostmeier, in addition to speaking Dutch and several other European tongues, spoke the various native tongues fluently. Jans was also proficient in several tongues. We inquired about possible transportation and succeeded in "hiring" the IDA, a small steamer about 80 feet in length. The price for rental was approximately \$400 per day in American money, but again good fortune came my way. The Resident and the Resident Secretary thought that inasmuch as this boat would have to make a couple of stops relating to civil affairs the next time out, there seemed to be no reason why they would charge me for the use of the ship while performing these duties. This sort of thing was typical of the Dutch; they helped me because they wanted to, and they wanted no compensation in return. When I wrote to thank Dr. van der Zwall, he said, "You know, Mr. Foster, we have not forgotten what the American forces in various parts of the world have done to bring about our liberation; this is the least we can do for you."

Before leaving Balikpapan, I had met an American lieutenant in charge of a topographical photographic team of eleven men. He was very friendly but obviously had no authority to help me, even in using his B-17 for taking pictures of the wreckage that I was later to find. I was a lone searcher of the American species in all of Borneo; there were no Americans there to my knowledge, except two buyers of scrap iron from a large American company and two men whose ventures in foreign trade had landed them in the brig at Tarakan, for a temporary stay, at least. With no help from Americans and everything being done by the Dutch, I secretly began to wonder about all the fine things I had always believed about the land of my birth.

The IDA had a crew of fourteen and was skippered by Hassanoelmoerad, an Indonesian, as were all the crew members. Leaving Samarinda, we went down the great Mahakam river to its delta in the Makassar Straits and proceeded northward to the little island of Sangkoelirang, where we put up for a few hours. From

there we followed the coast line to Cape Mangkalihat, where the ship was to discharge some supplies to the lighthouse. Capt. Ostmeier and Jans were in the habit of questioning natives wherever they met them and had information that one of the lighthouse attendants knew a native at the Kampong of Bedo-Bedo (phonetic spelling) who knew the location of this plane, borne out as described below. We rounded the large Cape, the easternmost point of Borneo, just less than 1 degree north of the equator and proceeded northwesterly up the coast about 15 miles to Bedo-Bedo, just east of 118 degrees East Longitude. We anchored and the skipper blew a long blast on the whistle to get attention from the shore. After waiting a few minutes, we saw three natives carrying a small prahu on their shoulders to the water's edge. One man came out to our boat - and either by accident or because the news of our coming was "wirelessed" through the jungle from Cape Mangkalihat, the man in the small boat was Noeroedin, the very native we wanted to see. He frankly admitted knowing the location of the plane and, at our request, he returned to the shore and brought out the Kapela (Tribal Chief). When the Kapela gave his permission for Noeroedin to go with us, the latter also promptly agreed and we proceeded towards Domaring Dajak.

Darkness fell upon us and we passed the coveted spot without recognizing it and continued on to the Kampong of Talisajan, where, by telegraphic arrangement with the Controleur at Tandjoeng Redeb, we were to meet him or one of his officers the following morning. Anchoring a mile off shore, we sent Jans and Simon Patiatta, an Ambonesian (one of our military police) ashore to spend the evening and bring back any information that might be secured from the natives. They returned about midnight. They had a great deal of information that had to be pieced together and we learned that we were to receive a visit in the morning from an officer delegated by the Controleur. He was the Kiai Kapela of the Talisajan District (head Kapela of several Kampongs) named Hassan Basrie Galar Raden Djaja Perwira.

At daybreak he appeared in a motor launch with six natives. He placed his launch at our disposal and accompanied us on the trip back along the coast in search of the wrecked plane. There were twelve of us, including Capt. Ostmeier, Jans, two military police, H.B.G.R.D. Perwira, Noeroedin, five natives and myself. Low tide, at which the wreckage would be visible, was due at 11:30 A.M. so we set out at 7 A.M. while the tide was still high. About 9 o'clock, Noeroedin informed us that we had reached the spot,

although there were no signs that would indicate it. As the tide moved out, parts of the plane gradually appeared above the surface of the water. Noeroedin had marked this spot in some manner that seemed uncanny.

It had been necessary for us to abandon the motor launch quite a distance from shore and call upon a fisherman for the use of his prahu to take us further ashore. We finally had to wade in shallow water for the last 50 yards or so. Our inspection of the wreckage began just before the tide reached dead low. The plane, which had fallen "out of control" as reported by the natives, was smashed into tiny bits for the most part. We found the four engines about 50 feet apart, the four propellers standing like crosses as though they had been placed that way, the landing gear fairly well intact except for one missing tire reported to have been taken with any other usable parts by the Japanese, and hundreds of small parts and bits of aluminum. In the few hours afforded by low tide, we examined parts and took numbers that might aid in identification. Most of these, maybe all of them, were Common Part Numbers and were not useful. The plane number B-24-L-44 -41422 was not to be found anywhere. The tail, wings and fuselage were either reduced to small bits or had been taken by natives and melted down for the making of pots and pans. The engines were firmly imbedded in the sand and tangled with projecting parts of a coral reef on which the plane had fallen. We had no equipment with which to hoist an engine for proper inspection of engine numbers. We suspected the numbers may have been chiseled out, as we had found the serial numbers of the tires cut out. The incoming tide gave us due notice that we were through for the day and it was concluded that we could do nothing more without equipment that would enable us to get at least one of the engines ashore. On the return trip to the IDA, rough water was too much for the heavy laden launch and seven of us decided to go ashore and wait for the IDA to pick us up. It was a relief, after several hours of waiting in jungle territory, to see the steamer approaching.

Our next job was to question natives about this particular plane and crew. There was much information. Some seemed plausible, some fantastic, some dependable, some worthless. Out of it came a picture clear enough to justify our belief that this was the plane of Lt. Kizer. Shoji's story was substantiated and four other facts were made clear, viz., (a) it was a B-24; (b) it was a single plane shipping strike; (c) it happened late in October 1944; (d) it happened about 9 A.M. These were likewise the facts about Lt.

Kizer's plane. The natives were very wary in our first interrogations and it took some time to establish their confidence. Then bit by bit, came information from a number of natives, interviewed separately, that five of the crew had bailed out successfully and escaped. We secured information to the effect that a Soendanesian school teacher named Raden Soekarna had killed two of these boys and caused the death of the other three. Many inquiries about Soekarna developed the fact that he was known to be in prison at Balikpapan. It was reported and verified that Soekarna worked under the Japanese Chief of Police, named Takahashi, at Tandjoeng Redeb. Like many other cases of aid to the Japanese along the Borneo coast, this was one of enforced aid. By landing a comparatively small number of troops in each coastal kampong, it was easy for the Japanese to take over and enforce cooperation of the natives under penalty of death.

Inquiries about graves and the remains of bodies were fruitless. Only two natives, one of them a son of a Sultan, would admit to having seen or having heard of a body being seen. Our inquiries took us up the coast to Tandjoeng Redeb, located about 35 miles inland on the Berau River, where we met the Dutch Controleur, Mr. Kooijmans, and his wife. An interesting sidelight at this point was that Mr. Kooijmans took me in his jeep to Taloeck Bajoer where I received minor medical attention from an Indonesian doctor named Abdoerrivai, whose notebook contained the names of many Americans with whom he had served in the medical corps in the New Guinea sector. The distance between these points was 8 miles and the road was not more than ten feet wide, and it was the only road in this section of Borneo.

While I was with Mr. Kooijmans, Capt. Ostmeier visited the Sultan of Sambalyoeng for verification of some of our testimony, particularly that concerning the boys who were reported to have bailed out safely. It seems important at this point to relate a certain fact, viz., any inquiry made of a Dutch officer, either military or civil, a Sultan, an American missionary or practically any European in all of Borneo will bring this stock answer: "there isn't a chance that a white man could be alive in Borneo without the knowledge of the officials"; that the presence of a white man or the "downing" of an airplane is great "news" and the news travels like wild-fire through the jungle; furthermore, that the natives are incapable of keeping secrets. I was willing to agree that it all sounded logical enough, but when the Capt. Ostmeier asked the Sultan if he knew of the plane we had found, he answered in the negative.

This exception could, of course, repeat itself many times and proves my contention that until the territory is thoroughly searched, we will not know. My feelings are also borne out in the finding only last June, of 81 Jakun natives near Kota Tinggi in Southern Malaya. These natives, in hiding from the Japanese, had been there since 1942 and did not know the war was over until found by a forest ranger. All of them were in good health.

From Tandjoeng Redeb, I sent a cablegram, containing full details of our findings, to the American Graves Registration Service at Manila. This was followed by six other cables and two letters at later dates which brought no answer. I also cabled the Auditeur Militaire at Balikpapan prison, requesting that he interview Raden Soekarna further. At Tarakan, to which point we proceeded from Tandjoeng Redeb, a cable from Balikpapan stated: that the Auditeur Militaire had just completed a further interrogation of Raden Soekarna on a boat as it was preparing to leave with a load of prisoners for Tjipinang prison in Batavia, Java; that Soekarna stated that "five men bailed out from the plane in question and escaped to the north." I am pointing out this incident in regard to Soekarna's testimony for a reason that will be made clear later. I also wish to record the fact that Soekarna gave this information voluntarily and was not asked any leading questions. At Tarakan, we gave up the IDA, having completed our journey. There we spent a week as guests of the Batavia Petroleum Company, in the meantime, interviewing natives who had been in the Tandjoeng Redeb area at an earlier date. No boats were available out of Tarakan and we departed at the end of the week by plane for Balikpapan.

The same hospitality was again available at Balikpapan and while there, I located Takahashi in prison and interviewed him through Fujita, a non-prisoner. Takahashi would admit nothing and after interviewing Shoji again, I departed for Batavia, Java, to which point Capt. Ostmeier and Jans had preceded me from Balikpapan.

At Batavia, in Tjipinang prison, we interviewed Raden Soekarna several times. He was smart and difficult. He firmly denied having anything to do with the murder of the soldiers from the plane, but did admit killing an Indonesian man and woman under orders from Takahashi, for providing food for the escaped boys, presumably three months after the crash and at a place called Tandjoeng Prapat. Soekarna volunteered to help solve the case by confronting Takahashi in Balikpapan prison in the hope that he might have his sentence of twelve years reduced, and he was cer-

tain he could make Takahashi talk. Unfortunately, while we were in favor of this meeting, it couldn't be arranged at that particular time.

About a week after returning to Batavia, I was told by a Dutch officer that the A.G.R.S. at Manila was sending the former Australian officer Lt. Belcher to Batavia to discuss this case. Mr. Belcher did arrive several days later and although he had other business in Batavia, he devoted himself to a full discussion of the facts and made many notes from my records; I also gave him much written information. I recommended to Mr. Belcher that an immediate follow-up be made of my findings and suggested that some of the same people be used again, if possible. I also offered to accompany the party back to the scene of the plane for further investigation. Mr. Belcher was not able to give me an immediate reply but did agree to make a recommendation to A.G.R.S. in accordance with my suggestions. It was agreed that I would wait in Batavia until hearing what, if anything, the American search forces were prepared to do. Failing to hear from him after a full month spent in Batavia and Bandoeng, I proceeded to Singapore on my return journey.

Two days after arrival there, I received a cable from the Dutch War Graves Service in Batavia that Mr. Belcher had arrived. It was unfortunate that he had not announced his coming, as I would have stayed in such case. In the circumstances, I cabled back agreeing to return to complete the Borneo trip with his party if it seemed advisable to do so; otherwise I would proceed, as planned, across Asia and Europe on my homeward journey. Receiving no reply, I went on to Bangkok, Siam. Several days after arriving in England, I received another cable from the Dutch War Graves Service that Mr. Belcher, with a B-17, had proceeded from Batavia to Balikpapan, Borneo on July 3, to work on this case.

Within the last few weeks, I have received information from various sources. Officially, Mr. Belcher and his party of eighteen were unable to identify this plane, although they did move all parts. An investigation is being made now in British North Borneo to locate a native said to possess certain identification discs reported to have been taken from bodies in the wreckage near Domaring Dajak. Mr. Belcher, it is reported, is of the firm opinion that all ten men were killed in this crash and that none escaped. This is hard to reconcile with our own findings. I am not commenting further on the merits of the respective findings at this time, but am trying to bring about a meeting of Mr. Belcher and the officers

who accompanied me to determine where the discrepancy lies. Mr. Belcher has interviewed Soekarna as we did, and is entitled to his opinion that Soekarna is not telling the truth.

I have also heard from two missionaries who have told me that they have seen American searchers in Borneo since my departure; for this, I am truly grateful. I do not wish to discredit the efforts of the American searchers, but I do know that they would not be there now except for my search which brought about their follow-up. I am still carrying on a great deal of overseas correspondence and have every intention of following this case to its conclusion, even to returning to Borneo if that seems like the thing to do.

Although this is a very short story, and so intended to be, I cannot end it before making certain comments. For example, I was the recipient, in the Far East, of a signed copy of a list of American searchers working in the Pacific. It contained the names of a few Americans, a few Australians and about ninety Philipino scouts, or about one hundred in all. I learned, too, that they were all working in New Guinea. Because the majority were Philipino scouts, I made inquiries as to their ability as searchers. The answers were not complimentary. I learned, on good authority, while still overseas, that the files of A.G.R.S. in Manila of missing personnel in the Pacific are far from complete. This seems inconceivable, of course; but, unfortunately, it is probably true.

As my assistance was requested in doing whatever I might be able to do in bringing the Manila files up to date, I strongly urge every family with a loved one missing in the Pacific area - no matter how much correspondence has gone on before or how many records have already been supplied to the Government offices - to send a further record to Manila, addressed to: "HEADQUARTERS, A.G.R.S., PHILCOM ZONE, A.P.O. 900, Manila, P. I." (Correspondence contains confusion of addresses - try A.P.O. 707, San Francisco, if P.O. does not accept first address.) Send it air mail - and be sure it contains the usual personal information: name, rank, serial number, scars, small photo (if available), etc., and a statement of the last information you received from the War Department regarding subject soldier's known or unknown status or fate or whereabouts.

While I was in Balikpapan, I learned of an American searcher, spoken of by Europeans there in the highest terms; they said he had been in Balikpapan for a period of eight months, during which period he worked under the handicap of having no plane, no ship,

no equipment of any kind and furthermore, alone without assistants. In the eight months, they said, a plane came twice from Calcutta headquarters to note his progress. This searcher finally had to give up, I was told, because of ill health. The same people told me of a B-24 plane (American) shot down on the shore of Balikpapan Bay some three years before. It nosed into the soft mud on the shore and became almost completely submerged, only a small piece of the tail remaining visible. Although this was known to the American searcher, he was compelled to abandon it through lack of facilities, and it is still there in the mud today, the plane and crew unidentified. These same people told me that if American searchers were available to carry out searches properly in Borneo, they would find 100 or more planes that have not been investigated yet.

I was told in the Netherlands East Indies, by the Dutch, that neither they themselves, nor representatives of any other nation, have yet picked up their dead in the great island of Sumatra. This, presumably, is because of the existing political situation.

With regard to the news article in the Batavia Dagblad, previously referred to, the agency which produced it with the full approval of the Dutch Military asked me for another story of my adventure in Borneo. They wanted it for its news value and wished to release it overseas through regular channels. I gave them the story with the understanding that it be first checked and approved by the Dutch War Graves Service, whose officers had cooperated with me. I inquired some time later as to when the story would appear in print and was told that it would not. It had been suppressed. When I insisted on knowing who had suppressed the story, I found out, but promised I wouldn't tell!

What was my greatest thrill? Finding a plane that the American Search Forces could not find or, should I say, did not look for?

What was my greatest satisfaction? Getting the splendid cooperation and assistance of those fine Dutch people, whose every effort was a genuine indication of friendship, kindness and sincerity. (Incidentally, I neglected to mention that the Dutch authorities offered a reward of five hundred guilders to the person finding the airplane we were searching for; it was paid to an Indonesian.) What other big moment? Talking with my wife and daughter three times by phone from Batavia, Java.

What was my greatest disappointment? Lack of American cooperation and the failure to search for the missing plane in spite of the War Department's claims that we were so wonderfully well

prepared to do so.

I have told many families with sons missing in the Pacific that I could offer them no encouragement regarding the possible survival of their loved ones. Inquiries have been made and disappointment registered as to the meaning of this statement. I know now that it is difficult to put it into words, but maybe this is the best way to say it: I just cannot bring myself to the point of denying these families that last ray of hope so deeply cherished, but on the other hand, I am very much afraid that whatever chance these missing boys had of being found alive has been thoroughly and completely dissipated through the failure to provide proper searches at the proper time. I know that no one likes to make a statement like this latter one, but we must believe some of the things we hear and most of the things we see. In my own case, I still meditate deeply over the things I did not see in Borneo, but which I had a right to believe I would see - if the statements of the War Department were to be relied upon.

As time permits me from time to time to check through my files and records, I run across bits of information of interest to some of you. In such case, I send it along to the interested party. Much of what I have, you probably already know through regular channels. Finding anything new after such a long interval of time was like looking for a needle in a haystack, and particularly so because there were few or no records to check. I must express myself understandably with regard to my feelings towards those engaged in and responsible for search of missing military personnel. It is the toughest job in the world; those actively engaged in the process of searching and seeking information through personal contact with the natives of these foreign lands deserve all the credit that it is possible to bestow upon them. So far as the top management is concerned, I have found little to applaud and much to disappoint me, and I suppose I must say that I mean by top management the War Department, the President and the Congress.

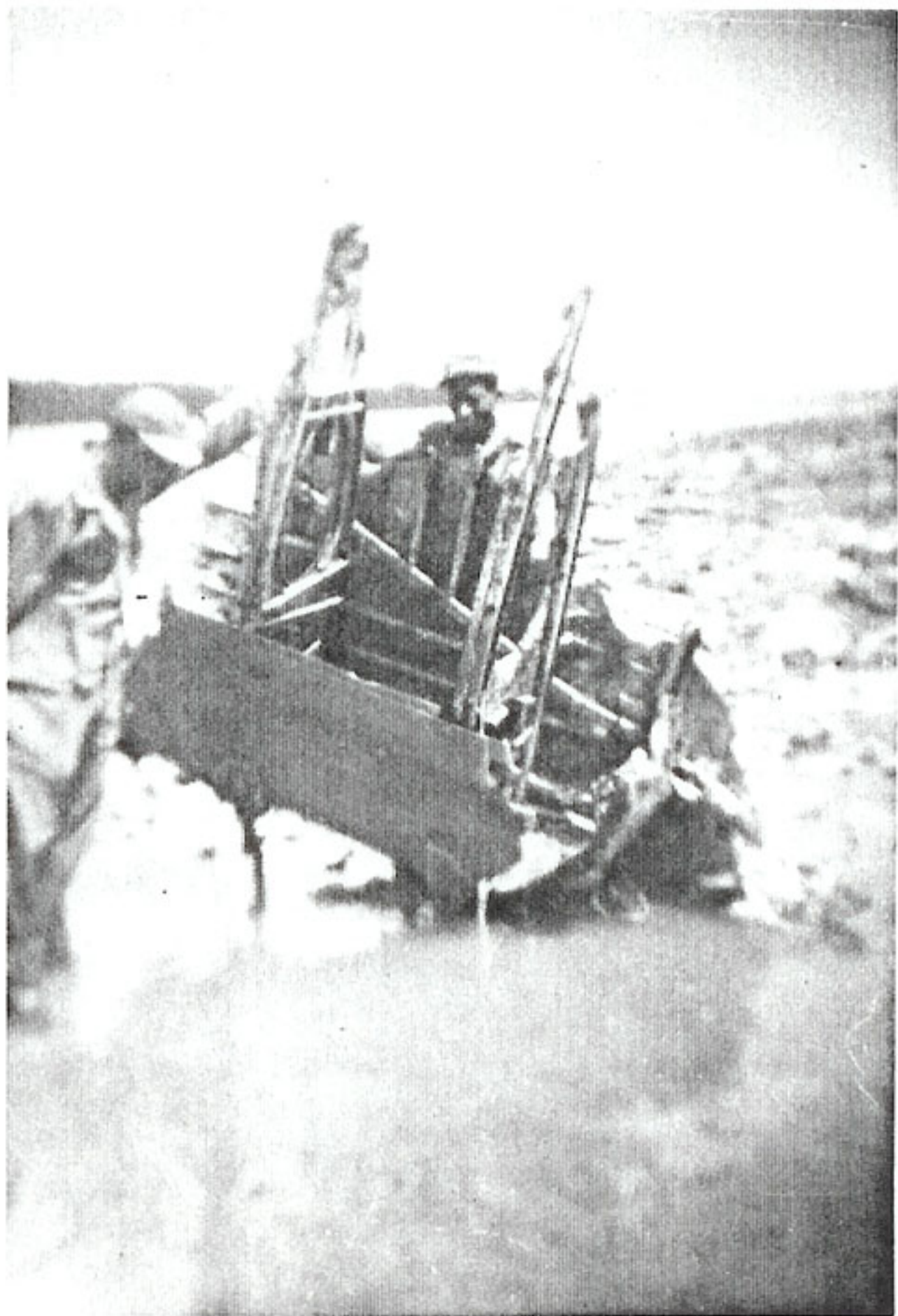


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