

This is a really excellent firsthand account by the pilot of aircraft #13 on the Doolittle Raid off the Hornet in 1942. Take the time and enjoy a bit of history.

My name is Edgar McElroy. My friends call me "Mac". I was born and raised in Ennis, Texas, the youngest of five children, son of Harry and Jennie McElroy. Folks say that I was the quiet one. We lived at 609 North Dallas Street and attended the Presbyterian Church.

My dad had an auto mechanic's shop downtown close to the main fire station. My family was a hard working bunch, and I was expected to work at dad's garage after school and on Saturdays, so I grew up in an atmosphere of machinery, oil and grease. Occasionally I would hear a lone plane fly over, and would run out in the street and strain my eyes against the sun to watch it. Someday, that would be me up there!

I really like cars, and I was always busy on some project, and it wasn't long before I decided to build my very own Model-T out of spare parts. I got an engine from over here, a frame from over there, and wheels from someplace else, using only the good parts from old cars that were otherwise shot. It wasn't very pretty, but it was all mine. I enjoyed driving on the dirt roads around town and the feeling of freedom and speed. That car of mine could really go fast, 40 miles per hour!

In high school I played football and tennis, and was good enough at football to receive an athletic scholarship from Trinity University in Waxahachie. I have to admit that sometimes I daydreamed in class, and often times I thought about flying my very own airplane and being up there in the clouds. That is when I even decided to take a correspondence course in aircraft engines.

Whenever I got the chance, I would take my girl on a date up to Love Field in Dallas. We would watch the airplanes and listen to those mighty piston engines roar. I just loved it and if she didn't, well that was just too bad.

After my schooling, I operated a filling station with my brother, then drove a bus, and later had a job as a machinist in Longview, but I never lost my love of airplanes and my dream of flying. With what was going on in Europe and in Asia, I figured that our country would be drawn into war someday, so I decided to join the Army Air Corps in November of 1940. This way I could finally follow my dream.

I reported for primary training in California. The training was rigorous and frustrating at times. We trained at airfields all over California. It was tough going, and many of the guys washed out. When I finally saw that I was going to make it, I wrote to my girl back in Longview, Texas. Her name is Agnes Gill. I asked her to come out to California for my graduation. And, oh yeah, also to marry me.

I graduated on July 11, 1941. I was now a real, honest-to-goodness Army Air Corps pilot. Two days later, I married "Aggie" in Reno, Nevada. We were starting a new life together and were very happy. I received my orders to report to Pendleton, Oregon and join the 17th Bomb Group. Neither of us had traveled much before, and the drive north through the Cascade Range of the Sierra Nevada's was interesting and beautiful.

It was an exciting time for us. My unit was the first to receive the new B-25 medium bomber. When I saw it for the first time I was in awe. It looked so huge. It was so sleek and powerful. The guys started calling it the "rocket plane", and I could hardly wait to get my hands on it. I told Aggie that it was really something! Reminded me of a big old scorpion, just ready to sting! Man, I could barely wait!

We were transferred to another airfield in Washington State, where we spent a lot of time flying practice missions and attacking imaginary targets. Then, there were other assignments in Mississippi and Georgia, for more maneuvers and more practice.

We were on our way back to California on December 7th when we got word of a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. We listened with mixed emotions to the announcements on the radio, and the next day to the declaration of war. What the President said, it just rang over and over in my head, "With confidence in our armed forces, with the un-bounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph. So help us God." By gosh, I felt as though he was talking straight to me! I didn't know what would happen to us, but we all knew that we would be going somewhere now.

The first weeks of the war, we were back in Oregon flying patrols at sea looking for possible Japanese submarines. We had to be up at 0330 hours to warm up the engines of our planes. There was 18 inches of snow on the ground, and it was so cold that our engine oil congealed overnight. We placed big tarps over the engines that reached down to the ground. Inside this tent we used plumbers blow torches to thaw out the engines. I figured that my dad would be proud of me, if he could see me inside this tent with all this machinery, oil and grease. After about an hour of this, the engines were warm enough to start.

We flew patrols over the coasts of Oregon and Washington from dawn until dusk. Once I thought I spotted a sub, and started my bomb run, even had my bomb doors open, but I pulled out of it when I realized that it was just a big whale.

Lucky for me, I would have never heard the end of that! Actually it was lucky for us that the Japanese didn't attack the west coast, because we just didn't have a strong enough force to beat them off. Our country was in a real fix now, and overall things looked pretty bleak to most folks. In early February, we were ordered to report to Columbus, South Carolina. Man, this Air Corps sure moves a fellow around a lot! Little did I know what was coming next!

After we got settled in Columbus, my squadron commander called us all together. He told us that an awfully hazardous mission was being planned, and then he asked for volunteers. There were some of the guys that did not step forward, but I was one of the ones that did. My co-pilot was shocked. He said "You can't volunteer, Mac! You're married, and you and Aggie are expecting a baby soon. Don't do it!" I told him that "I got into the Air Force to do what I can, and Aggie understands how I feel. The war won't be easy for any of us."

We that volunteered were transferred to Eglin Field near Valparaiso, Florida in late February. When we all got together, there were about 140 of us volunteers, and we were told that we were now part of the "Special B-25 Project." We set about our training, but none of us knew what it was all about. We were ordered not to talk about it, not even to our wives.

In early March, we were all called in for a briefing, and gathered together in a big building there on the base. Somebody said that the fellow who head of this thing is coming to talk to us, and in walks Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle. He was already an aviation legend, and there he stood right in front of us. I was truly amazed just to meet him.

Colonel Doolittle explained that this mission would be extremely dangerous, and that only volunteers could take part. He said that he could not tell us where we were going, but he could say that some of us would not be coming back.

There was a silent pause; you could have heard a pin drop. Then Doolittle said that anyone of us could withdraw now, and that no one would criticize us for this decision. No one backed out! From the outset, all volunteers worked from the early morning hours until well after sunset. All excess weight was stripped from the planes and extra gas tanks were added. The lower gun turret was removed, the heavy liaison radio was removed, and then the tail guns were taken out and more gas tanks were put aboard. We extended the range of that plane from 1000 miles out to 2500 miles.

Then I was assigned my crew. There was Richard Knobloch the co-pilot, Clayton Campbell the navigator, Robert Bourgeois the bombardier, Adam Williams the flight engineer and gunner, and me, Mac McElroy the pilot. Over the coming days, I came to respect them a lot. They were a swell bunch of guys, just regular All-American boys.

We got a few ideas from the training as to what type of mission that we had signed on for. A Navy pilot had joined our group to coach us at short takeoffs and also in shipboard etiquette. We began our short takeoff practice. Taking off with first a light load, then a normal load, and finally overloaded up to 31,000 lbs. The shortest possible take-off was obtained with flaps full down, stabilizer set three-fourths, tail heavy, full power against the brakes and releasing the brakes simultaneously as the engine revved up to max power. We pulled back gradually on the stick and the airplane left the ground with the tail skid about one foot from the runway. It was a very unnatural and scary way to get airborne! I could hardly believe it myself, the first time as I took off with a full gas load and dummy bombs within just 700 feet of runway in a near stall condition. We were, for all practical purposes, a slow flying gasoline bomb!

In addition to take-off practice, we refined our skills in day and night navigation, gunnery, bombing, and low level flying. We made cross country flights at tree-top level, night flights and navigational flights over the Gulf of Mexico without the use of a radio. After we started that short-field takeoff routine, we had some pretty fancy competition between the crews. I think that one crew got it down to about 300 feet on a hot day. We were told that only the best crews would actually go on the mission, and the rest would be held in reserve. One crew did stall on takeoff, slipped back to the ground, busting up their landing gear. They were eliminated from the mission. Doolittle emphasized again and again the extreme danger of this operation, and made it clear that anyone of us who so desired could drop out with no questions asked. No one did.

On one of our cross country flights, we landed at Barksdale Field in Shreveport, and I was able to catch a bus over to Longview to see Aggie. We had a few hours together, and then we had to say our goodbyes. I told her I hoped to be back in time for the baby's birth, but I couldn't tell her where I was going. As I walked away, I turned and walked backwards for a ways, taking one last look at my beautiful pregnant Aggie.

Within a few days of returning to our base in Florida we were abruptly told to pack our things. After just three weeks of practice, we were on our way. This was it. It was time to go. It was the middle of March 1942, and I was 30 years old. Our orders were to fly to McClelland Air Base in Sacramento, California on our own, at the lowest possible level. So here we went on our way west, scraping the tree tops at 160 miles per hour, and skimming along just 50 feet above plowed fields. We crossed North Texas and then the panhandle, scaring the dickens out of livestock, buzzing farm houses and a many a barn along the way. Over the Rocky Mountains and across the Mojave Desert dodging thunderstorms, we enjoyed the flight immensely and although tempted, I didn't do too much dare-devil stuff. We didn't know it at the time, but it was good practice for what lay ahead of us. It proved to be our last fling. Once we arrived in Sacramento, the mechanics went over our plane with a fine-toothed comb. Of the twenty-two planes that made it, only those whose pilots reported no mechanical problems were allowed to go on. The others were shunted aside.

After having our plane serviced, we flew on to Alameda Naval Air Station in Oakland. As I came in for final approach, we saw it! I excitedly called the rest of the crew to take a look. There below us was a huge aircraft carrier. It was the USS Hornet, and it looked so gigantic! Man, I had never even seen a carrier until this moment. There were already two B-25s parked on the flight deck. Now we knew! My heart was racing, and I thought about how puny my plane would look on board this mighty ship. As soon as we landed and taxied off the runway, a jeep pulled in front of me with a big "Follow Me" sign on the back. We followed it straight up to the wharf, alongside the towering Hornet. All five of us were looking up and just in awe, scarcely believing the size of this thing.

As we left the plane, there was already a Navy work crew swarming around attaching cables to the lifting rings on top of the wings and the fuselage. As we walked towards our quarters, I looked back and saw them lifting my plane up into the air and swing it over the ship's deck. It looked so small and lonely.

Later that afternoon, all crews met with Colonel Doolittle and he gave last minute assignments. He told me to go to the Presidio and pick up two hundred extra "C" rations. I saluted, turned, and left, not having any idea where the Presidio was, and not exactly sure what a "C" ration was. I commandeered a Navy staff car and told the driver to take me to the Presidio, and he did. On the way over, I realized that I had no written signed orders and that this might get a little sticky. So in I walked into the Army supply depot and made my request, trying to look poised and confident. The supply officer asked "What is your authorization for this request, sir?" I told him that I could not give him one.

"And what is the destination?" he asked. I answered, "The aircraft carrier, Hornet, docked at Alameda." He said, "Can you tell me who ordered the rations, sir?" And I replied with a smile, "No, I cannot." The supply officers huddled together, talking and glanced back over towards me. Then he walked back over and assured me that the rations would be delivered that afternoon. Guess they figured that something big was up. They were right. The next morning we all boarded the ship.

Trying to remember my naval etiquette, I saluted the Officer of the Deck and said "Lt. McElroy, requesting permission to come aboard." The officer returned the salute and said "Permission granted." Then I turned aft and saluted the flag. I made it, without messing up. It was April 2, and in full sunlight, we left San Francisco Bay. The whole task force of ships, two cruises, four destroyers, and a fleet oiler, moved slowly with us under the Golden Gate Bridge. Thousands of people looked on. Many stopped their cars on the bridge, and waved to us as we passed underneath. I thought to myself, I hope there aren't any spies up there waving.

Once at sea, Doolittle called us together. "Only a few of you know our destination, and you others have guessed about various targets. Gentlemen, your target is Japan!" A sudden cheer exploded among the men. "Specifically, Yokohama, Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe, Nagasaki and Osaka. The Navy task force will get us as close as possible and we'll launch our planes. We will hit our targets and proceed to airfields in China." After the cheering stopped, he asked again, if any of us desired to back out, no questions asked. Not on did, not one. Then the ship's Captain then went over the intercom to the whole ship's company. The loudspeaker blared, "The destination is Tokyo!" A tremendous cheer broke out from everyone on board. I could hear metal banging together and wild screams from down below decks. It was quite a rush! I felt relieved actually. We finally knew where we were going.

I set up quarters with two Navy pilots, putting my cot between their two bunks. They couldn't get out of bed without stepping on me. It was just fairly cozy in there, yes it was. Those guys were part of the Torpedo Squadron Eight and were just swell fellows. The rest of the guys bedded down in similar fashion to me, some had to sleep on bedrolls in the Admiral's chartroom. As big as this ship was, there wasn't any extra room anywhere. Every square foot had a purpose... A few days later we discovered where they had an ice cream machine!

There were sixteen B-25s tied down on the flight deck, and I was flying number 13. All the carrier's fighter planes were stored away helplessly in the hangar deck. They couldn't move until we were gone. Our Army mechanics were all on board, as well as our munitions loaders and several back up crews, in case any of us got sick or backed out. We settled into a daily routine of checking our planes. The aircraft were grouped so closely together on deck that it wouldn't take much for them to get damaged. Knowing that my life depended on this plane, I kept a close eye on her.

Day after day, we met with the intelligence officer and studied our mission plan. Our targets were assigned, and maps and objective folders were furnished for study. We went over approach routes and our

escape route towards China. I never studied this hard back at Trinity. Every day at dawn and at dusk the ship was called to general quarters and we practiced finding the quickest way to our planes. If at any point along the way, we were discovered by the enemy fleet, we were to launch our bombers immediately so the Hornet could bring up its fighter planes. We would then be on our own, and try to make it to the nearest land, either Hawaii or Midway Island.

Dr. Thomas White, a volunteer member of plane number 15, went over our medical records and gave us inoculations for a whole bunch of diseases that hopefully I wouldn't catch. He gave us training sessions in emergency first aid, and lectured us at length about water purification and such. Tom, a medical doctor, had learned how to be a gunner just so he could go on this mission. We put some new tail guns in place of the ones that had been taken out to save weight. Not exactly functional, they were two broom handles, painted black. The thinking was they might help scare any Jap fighter planes. Maybe, maybe not.

On Sunday, April 14, we met up with Admiral Bull Halsey's task force just out of Hawaii and joined into one big force. The carrier Enterprise was now with us, another two heavy cruisers, four more destroyers and another oiler. We were designated as Task Force 16. It was quite an impressive sight to see, and represented the bulk of what was left of the U.S. Navy after the devastation of Pearl Harbor. There were over 10,000 Navy personnel sailing into harm's way, just to deliver us sixteen Army planes to the Japs, orders of the President.

As we steamed further west, tension was rising as we drew nearer and nearer to Japan. Someone thought of arming us with some old ...45 pistols that they had on board. I went through that box of 1911 pistols, they were in such bad condition that I took several of them apart, using the good parts from several useless guns until I built a serviceable weapon. Several of the other pilots did the same. Admiring my "new" pistol, I held it up, and thought about my old Model-T.

Colonel Doolittle called us together on the flight deck. We all gathered round, as well as many Navy personnel. He pulled out some medals and told us how these friendship medals from the Japanese government had been given to some of our Navy officers several years back. And now the Secretary of the Navy had requested us to return them. Doolittle wired them to a bomb while we all posed for pictures. Something to cheer up the folks back home!

I began to pack my things for the flight, scheduled for the 19th. I packed some extra clothes and a little brown bag that Aggie had given me, inside were some toilet items and a few candy bars. No letters or identity cards were allowed, only our dog-tags. I went down to the wardroom to have some ice cream and settle up my mess bill. It only amounted to \$5 a day and with my per diem of \$6 per day, I came out a little ahead. By now, my Navy pilot roommates were about ready to get rid of me, but I enjoyed my time with them. They were alright. Later on, I learned that both of them were killed at the Battle of Midway. They were good men. Yes, very good men.

Colonel Doolittle let each crew pick our own target. We chose the Yokosuka Naval Base about twenty miles from Tokyo. We loaded 1450 rounds of ammo and four 500-pound bombs... A little payback, direct from Ellis County, Texas! We checked and re-checked our plane several times. Everything was now ready. I felt relaxed, yet tensed up at the same time. Day after tomorrow, we will launch when we are 400 miles out. I lay in my cot that night, and rehearsed the mission over and over in my head. It was hard to sleep as I listened to sounds of the ship.

Early the next morning, I was enjoying a leisurely breakfast, expecting another full day on board, and I noticed that the ship was pitching and rolling quite a bit this morning, more than normal. I was reading through the April 18th day plan of the Hornet, and there was a message in it which said, "From the Hornet to the Army - Good luck, good hunting, and God bless you." I still had a large lump in my throat from reading this, when all of a sudden, the intercom blared, "General Quarters, General Quarters, All hands

man your battle stations! Army pilots, man your planes!!!" There was instant reaction from everyone in the room and food trays went crashing to the floor. I ran down to my room jumping through the hatches along the way, grabbed my bag, and ran as fast as I could go to the flight deck. I met with my crew at the plane, my heart was pounding. Someone said, "What's going on?" The word was that the Enterprise had spotted an enemy trawler. It had been sunk, but it had transmitted radio messages. We had been found out!

The weather was crummy, the seas were running heavy, and the ship was pitching up and down like I had never seen before. Great waves were crashing against the bow and washing over the front of the deck. This wasn't going to be easy! Last minute instructions were given. We were reminded to avoid non-military targets, especially the Emperor's Palace. Do not fly to Russia, but fly as far west as possible, land on the water and launch our rubber raft. This was going to be a one-way trip! We were still much too far out and we all knew that our chances of making land were somewhere between slim and none. Then at the last minute, each plane loaded an extra ten 5-gallon gas cans to give us a fighting chance of reaching China.

We all climbed aboard, started our engines and warmed them up, just feet away from the plane in front of us and the plane behind us. Knobby, Campbell, Bourgeois and me in the front, Williams, the gunner was in the back, separated from us by a big rubber gas tank. I called back to Williams on the intercom and told him to look sharp and don't take a nap! He answered dryly, "Don't worry about me, Lieutenant. If they jump us, I'll just use my little black broomsticks to keep the Japs off our tail."

The ship headed into the wind and picked up speed. There was now a near gale force wind and water spray coming straight over the deck. I looked down at my instruments as my engines revved up. My mind was racing. I went over my mental checklist, and said a prayer? God please, help us! Past the twelve planes in front of us, I strained to see the flight deck officer as he leaned into the wind and signaled with his arms for Colonel Doolittle to come to full power. I looked over at Knobby and we looked each other in the eye. He just nodded to me and we both understood.

With the deck heaving up and down, the deck officer had to time this just right. Then I saw him wave Doolittle to go, and we watched breathlessly to see what happened. When his plane pulled up above the deck, Knobby just let out with, "Yes! Yes!" The second plane, piloted by Lt. Hoover, appeared to stall with its nose up and began falling toward the waves. We groaned and called out, "Up! Up! Pull it up!" Finally, he pulled out of it, staggering back up into the air, much to our relief! One by one, the planes in front of us took off. The deck pitched wildly, 60 feet or more, it looked like. One plane seemed to drop down into the drink and disappeared for a moment, then pulled back up into sight. There was sense of relief with each one that made it. We gunned our engines and started to roll forward. Off to the right, I saw the men on deck cheering and waving their covers! We continued inching forward, careful to keep my left main wheel and my nose wheel on the white guidelines that had been painted on the deck for us. Get off a little bit too far left and we go off the edge of the deck. A little too far to the right and our wing-tip will smack the island of the ship. With the best seat on the ship, we watched Lt.

Bower take off in plane number 12, and I taxied up to the starting line, put on my the brakes and looked down to my left. My main wheel was right on the line. Applied more power to the engines, and I turned my complete attention to the deck officer on my left, who was circling his paddles. Now my adrenaline was really pumping! We went to full power, and the noise and vibration inside the plane went way up. He circled the paddles furiously while watching forward for the pitch of the deck. Then he dropped them, and I said, "Here We Go!" I released the brakes and we started rolling forward, and as I looked down the flight-deck you could see straight down into the angry churning water. As we slowly gained speed, the deck gradually began to pitch back up. I pulled up and our plane slowly strained up and away from the ship. There was a big cheer and whoops from the crew, but I just felt relieved and muttered to myself, "Boy, that was short!"

We made a wide circle above our fleet to check our compass headings and get our bearings. I looked down as we passed low over one of our cruisers and could see the men on deck waving to us. I dropped down to low level, so low we could see the whitecap waves breaking. It was just after 0900, there were broken clouds at 5,000 feet and visibility of about thirty miles due to haze or something. Up ahead and barely in sight, I could see Captain Greening, our flight leader, and Bower on his right wing. Flying at 170 mph, I was able to catch up to them in about 30 minutes. We were to stay in this formation until reaching landfall, and then break on our separate ways. Now we settled in for the five hour flight. Tokyo, here we come!

Williams was in the back emptying the extra gas cans into the gas tank as fast as we had burned off enough fuel. He then punched holes in the tins and pushed them out the hatch against the wind. Some of the fellows ate sandwiches and other goodies that the Navy had put aboard for us... I wasn't hungry. I held onto the controls with a firm grip as we raced along westward just fifty feet above the cold rolling ocean, as low as I dared to fly. Being so close to the choppy waves gave you a true sense of speed. Occasionally our windshield was even sprayed with a little saltwater. It was an exhilarating feeling, and I felt as though the will and spirit of our whole country was pushing us along. I didn't feel too scared, just anxious. There was a lot riding on this thing, and on me.

As we began to near land, we saw an occasional ship here and there. None of them close enough to be threatening, but just the same, we were feeling more edgy. Then at 1330 we sighted land, the Eastern shore of Honshu. With Williams now on his guns in the top turret and Campbell on the nose gun, we came ashore still flying low as possible, and were surprised to see people on the ground waving to us as we flew in over the farmland. It was beautiful countryside.

Campbell, our navigator, said, "Mac, I think we're going to be about sixty miles too far north. I'm not positive, but pretty sure." I decided that he was absolutely right and turned left ninety degrees, went back just offshore and followed the coast line south. When I thought we had gone far enough, I climbed up to two thousand feet to find out where we were. We started getting fire from anti-aircraft guns. Then we spotted Tokyo Bay, turned west and put our nose down diving toward the water. Once over the bay, I could see our target, Yokosuka Naval Base. Off to the right there was already smoke visible over Tokyo. Coming in low over the water, I increased speed to 200 mph and told everyone, "Get Ready!"

When we were close enough, I pulled up to 1300 feet and opened the bomb doors. There were furious black bursts of anti-aircraft fire all around us, but I flew straight on through them, spotting our target, the torpedo works and the dry-docks. I saw a big ship in the dry-dock just as we flew over it. Those flak bursts were really getting close and bouncing us around, when I heard Bourgeois shouting, "Bombs Away!" I couldn't see it, but Williams had a bird's eye view from the back and he shouted jubilantly, "We got an aircraft carrier! The whole dock is burning!" I started turning to the south and strained my neck to look back and at that moment saw a large crane blow up and start falling over!... Take that! There was loud yelling and clapping each other on the back. We were all just ecstatic, and still alive! But there wasn't much time to celebrate. We had to get out of here and fast! When we were some thirty miles out to sea, we took one last look back at our target, and could still see huge billows of black smoke. Up until now, we had been flying for Uncle Sam, but now we were flying for ourselves.

We flew south over open ocean, parallel to the Japanese coast all afternoon. We saw a large submarine apparently at rest, and then in another fifteen miles, we spotted three large enemy cruisers headed for Japan. There were no more bombs, so we just let them be and kept on going. By late afternoon, Campbell calculated that it was time to turn and make for China. Across the East China Sea, the weather out ahead of us looked bad and overcast. Up until now we had not had time to think much about our gasoline supply, but the math did not look good. We just didn't have enough fuel to make it!

Each man took turns cranking the little hand radio to see if we could pick up the promised radio beacon. There was no signal. This is not good. The weather turned bad and it was getting dark, so we climbed up. I was now flying on instruments, through a dark misty rain. Just when it really looked hopeless of reaching land, we suddenly picked up a strong tailwind. It was an answer to a prayer. Maybe just maybe, we can make it!

In total darkness at 2100 hours, we figured that we must be crossing the coastline, so I began a slow, slow climb to be sure of not hitting any high ground or anything. I conserved as much fuel as I could, getting real low on gas now. The guys were still cranking on the radio, but after five hours of hand cranking with aching hands and backs, there was utter silence. No radio beacon!

Then the red light started blinking, indicating twenty minutes of fuel left. We started getting ready to bail out. I turned the controls over to Knobby and crawled to the back of the plane, past the now collapsed rubber gas tank. I dumped everything out of my bag and repacked just what I really needed, my .45 pistol, ammunition, flashlight, compass, medical kit, fishing tackle, chocolate bars, peanut butter and crackers. I told Williams to come forward with me so we could all be together for this. There was no other choice. I had to get us as far west as possible, and then we had to jump.

At 2230 we were up to sixty-five hundred feet. We were over land but still above the Japanese Army in China. We couldn't see the stars, so Campbell couldn't get a good fix on our position. We were flying on fumes now and I didn't want to run out of gas before we were ready to go. Each man filled his canteen, put on his Mae West life jacket and parachute, and filled his bag with rations, those "C" rations from the Presidio. I put her on auto-pilot and we all gathered in the navigator's compartment around the hatch in the floor. We checked each other's parachute harness. Everyone was scared, without a doubt. None of us had ever done this before! I said, "Williams first, Bourgeois second, Campbell third, Knobloch fourth, and I'll follow you guys! Go fast, two seconds apart! Then count three seconds off and pull your rip-cord!"

We kicked open the hatch and gathered around the hole looking down into the blackness. It did not look very inviting! Then I looked up at Williams and gave the order, "JUMP!!!" Within seconds they were all gone. I turned and reached back for the auto-pilot, but could not reach it, so I pulled the throttles back, then turned and jumped. Counting quickly, thousand one, thousand two, thousand three, I pulled my rip-cord and jerked back up with a terrific shock. At first I thought that I was hung on the plane, but after a few agonizing seconds that seemed like hours, realized that I was free and drifting down. Being in the total dark, I was disoriented at first but figured my feet must be pointed toward the ground. I looked down through the black mist to see what was coming up. I was in a thick mist or fog, and the silence was so eerie after nearly thirteen hours inside that noisy plane. I could only hear the whoosh, whoosh sound of the wind blowing through my shroud lines, and then I heard a loud crash and explosion. My plane!

Looking for my flashlight, I groped through my bag with my right hand, finally pulled it out and shined it down toward the ground, which I still could not see. Finally I picked up a glimmer of water and thought I was landing in a lake. We're too far inland for this to be ocean. I hope! I relaxed my legs a little, thinking I was about to splash into water and would have to swim out, and then bang. I jolted suddenly and crashed over onto my side. Lying there in just a few inches of water, I raised my head and put my hands down into thick mud. It was rice paddy! There was a burning pain, as if someone had stuck a knife in my stomach. I must have torn a muscle or broke something.

I laid there dazed for a few minutes, and after a while struggled up to my feet. I dug a hole and buried my parachute in the mud. Then started trying to walk, holding my stomach, but every direction I moved the water got deeper. Then, I saw some lights off in the distance. I fished around for my flashlight and signaled one time. Sensing something wrong, I got out my compass and to my horror saw that those lights were off to my west. That must be a Jap patrol! How dumb could I be! Knobby had to be back to my east, so I sat still and quiet and did not move.

It was a cold dark lonely night. At 0100 hours I saw a single light off to the east. I flashed my light in that direction, one time. It had to be Knobby! I waited a while, and then called out softly, "Knobby?" And a voice replied "Mac, is that you?" Thank goodness, what a relief! Separated by a wide stream, we sat on opposite banks of the water communicating in low voices. After daybreak Knobby found a small rowboat and came across to get me. We started walking east toward the rest of the crew and away from that Japanese patrol. Knobby had cut his hip when he went through the hatch, but it wasn't too awful bad.

We walked together toward a small village and several Chinese came out to meet us, they seemed friendly enough. I said, "Luchu hoo megwa fugi! Luchu hoo megwa fugi!" meaning, "I am an American! I am an American!" Later that morning we found the others. Williams had wrenched his knee when he landed in a tree, but he was limping along just fine. There were hugs all around. I have never been so happy to see four guys in all my life!

Well, the five of us eventually made it out of China with the help of the local Chinese people and the Catholic missions along the way. They were all very good to us, and later they were made to pay terribly for it, so we found out afterwards. For a couple of weeks we traveled across country. Strafed a couple of times by enemy planes, we kept on moving, by foot, by pony, by car, by train, and by airplane. But we finally made it to India.

I did not make it home for the baby's birth. I stayed on their flying a DC-3 "Gooney Bird" in the China-Burma-India Theatre for the next several months. I flew supplies over the Himalaya Mountains, or as we called it, over "The Hump" into China. When B-25s finally arrived in India, I flew combat missions over Burma, and then later in the war, flew a B-29 out of the Marianna Islands to bomb Japan again and again.

After the war, I remained in the Air Force until 1962, when I retired from the service as a Lt. Colonel, and then came back to Texas, my beautiful Texas. First moving to Abilene and then we settled in Lubbock, where Aggie taught school at MacKenzie Junior High. I worked at the S & R Auto Supply, once again in an atmosphere of machinery, oil and grease.

I lived a good life and raised two wonderful sons that I am very proud of. I feel blessed in many ways. We have a great country, better than most folks know. It is worth fighting for. Some people call me a hero, but I have never thought of myself that way, no. But I did serve in the company of heroes. What we did will never leave me. It will always be there in my fondest memories. I will always think of the fine and brave men that I was privileged to serve with.

Remember us, for we were soldiers once and young. With the loss of all aircraft, Doolittle believed that the raid had been a failure, and that he would be court-martialed upon returning to the states. Quite to the contrary, the raid proved to be a tremendous boost to American morale, which had plunged following the Pearl Harbor attack. It also caused serious doubts in the minds of Japanese war planners. They in turn recalled many seasoned fighter plane units back to defend the home islands, which resulted in Japan's weakened air capabilities at the upcoming Battle of Midway and other South Pacific campaigns.

Edgar "Mac" Mc Elroy, Lt. Col., U.S.A.F. (Ret.) passed away at his residence in Lubbock, Texas, early on the morning of Friday, April 4, 2003.