

SSGT William R Shaver—Airplane Electrical Mechanic—Gunner

I enlisted while living in Rochester, TX. After being eliminated from pilot training at Sheppard Field, Wichita, Texas, I promptly volunteered for gunnery school, but was sent to Scott Field in Illinois to train as a Radio Operator. By the end of World War II, Scott's Radio School—becoming something of a "Communications University of the Army Air Forces"—had graduated 77,370 radio operator/mechanics. (Snith, Frederick. *Scott Air Force Base History*. <http://www.scott.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=260>). Two weeks before graduation from radio school, they accepted me for gunnery school, and I was sent to Fort Myers, FL where I received my gunnery training. Then to Lincoln, NE where I was assigned to a B-29 combat crew. We transferred to Peyote, TX for further training. I flew in B-17s and B-24s in Gunnery school; the B-29 seemed comparatively spacious. We were one of the first few replacement crews to arrive on Guam in the 330th Bomb Group. Some of my duties, aside from the left gun site, was to keep checking the engines for smoke/oil, to be on alert for other planes

Our first mission was on 10-MAY-1945 to Kyushu, the Otake Oil Refinery. My blister was cracked. During the mission we saw a Jap Battleship refueling, but since our assignment was the refinery we continued to fly over and on to target.

During our second mission to north Nagoya on 14-MAY-1945, we encountered a Jap Zero; I fired at it - I was firing so much I burned out the two barrels - and an Army officer chewed me out over that.

Our third mission was on 16/17-MAY-1945 to south Nagoya. Between Japan and Iwo, the No. 2 engine failed and an engine fire broke out and was extinguished. It was impossible to feather the propeller and it began to windmill; the windmilling prop ran away three times. The engine lost all its oil and became excessively hot. The crew had plenty of time to prepare for emergency as MAJ Vick told the crew they might have to bailout if they did not make it back to Iwo Jima. The RO sent out a distress call and contacted a surface vessel, but the surface vessel could not understand them. The RO contacted Guam and relayed their position. When the bailout order was given, ALL five men in the rear went out: the CFC, RG, LG, Rad Ob and the TG. Harvey Delles (TG) went out last and saw four chutes open before he bailed out. Delles tumbled four or five times before pulling the rip cord and the cord and chute hit him in the face as it unfolded. Upon hitting the water, he took most of the impact in his face and chest and went under four or five feet before he was able to press the quick release and came to the surface entangled in the shroud lines. He pulled the cord on the Mae West's CO 2 cylinders but only one side inflated. He then proceeded to cut himself out of the shroud lines and open the one-man dinghy, but it sank before he could inflate it. He had previously released the snap on the D-ring on his harness as the dinghy was pulling him under. A buddy B-29 dropped a five-man life raft and Delles swam to it but, when he pulled the CO 2 cord, none of the gas went into the life raft, as the hose connection had broken loose, presumably on impact. Another B-29 dropped a Gibson girl and another raft. He could not reach the second raft but reached the Gibson Girl, which helped to keep him afloat. A few sharks kept the TG company but did not bother him although they added to his anxiety. For CFC gunner Walter Pride, everything worked perfectly. He hit the water, released the chute, inflated his Mae West, opened and inflated the one-man dinghy and climbed in, all within five minutes. He was able to attract several B-29s with his signal mirror. The Right Gunner, Dane Miller, and I, became entangled in the shroud lines but we were able to cut ourselves loose in the water. We were also able to inflate our Mae West's and dinghies but swallowed sea water in the effort and became seasick. 2LT Cohen, the Rad Obs, was the fourth man out but was seen by the RG to hit the water ahead of him so he must have made a delayed free fall jump. None of us saw whether he got out of his chute or saw any signs of him later. It was known that 2LT Cohen could not swim. Over three hours later, all were picked up except 2LT Cohen. The destroyer searched the area for the rest of the day and into the night. A Dumbo took up the search the following day. 2LT Cohen was never found and was presumed to have drowned.

Back in the plane, after the bail-out order was given and the five men in the rear had gone out, an attempt was made to put the nose wheel down but it would not go down. Vick decided to try for Iwo Jima where he landed safely.

Our next mission was to Tokyo on 25-MAY-1945, just eight days after we had bailed out; we were all somewhat shaky. Tokyo was burning from the raid the day before; we were caught in 13 search lights. Whenever I felt stressed over target I would say the Lord's Prayer, on this occasion, I could only remember "Our Father who art in Heaven".

We flew a total of 18 missions before the war ended. Back at base we would occupy our time by writing letters, watching movies (on logs); or, when available, watch the USO troops. One humorous event I recall...I was shaving and saw lizards scurrying up a tree - I thought it was a snake!

When it came time to leave Guam, I took a boat from the Marianas. From California I took a train to Fort Smith, AK and was discharged there, I then took a bus from Arkansas to Texas. I enrolled in Southern Methodist University and obtained a Law degree. I married and served 3 years as Assistant District attorney; 15 years in Private practice; and 35 years as a judge.

