

Personal Account

**Col. Richard T. King, Jr.
Commanding Officer, 500th Bomb Group**

A Prisoner Remembers

King Richard T., Jr. (M) Col., 0-12232. Hq Det. B-29, 1093. B. 1908. Legion of Merit, Silver Star, MIA, 12-3-44. BS, GO 25-IV (500th); [Amends GO 25-IV ASN]. BS, GO 30-IV (500th); BS, GO 33-1 (500th); BS GO 33-IV (500th); PH, GO 35 (500th). POW. Survived . Crew, Z Square 1, Rosalia Rocket, Goldsworthy. Add. '46: Apt L Mirasol Hotel, Tampa, FL. Died 12-29-95. For further info, go to <http://www.powmiaff.org/20thAAF/500thBG/881stSg/RosaliaRocket/brugge.html>

Account from 883rd Scrapbook.

Now that six months have passed since my release from the Japanese prison camps, my outstanding thought about that experience is that the human body has wonderful recuperative ability. Although I lost 69 pounds – from 195 to 126 pounds – my body is now so thoroughly recovered that I feel almost no ill effects. Time has dimmed both the mental anguish and the physical suffering from lack of food, privation and the few beatings I received.

To go back to the beginning – it was on 3 December 1944 that I was flying as Flight Commander of a 12-ship formation with Maj. R Goldsworthy, one of the flight leaders in the 500th Bomb Group which I then commanded. Our mission was an aircraft engine plant in the Tokyo area and we had dropped our bombs from approximately 32,000 feet, when we were attacked by fighters. Although we shot down some of the fighters, they hit our left inboard gasoline tank so seriously that it sprayed gasoline all over the aircraft and the entire ship began to burn. Slugs from the fighters had apparently also destroyed the electrical system, making the intercom inoperative and damaging the nose wheel support so that it came down. By the time the ship had lost altitude to 29,000 feet I bailed out. At that time I did not realize that I was injured in any way. Immediately after bailing out I counted at least eight and possibly nine chutes as I floated earthward myself.

Landing in an open field, I immediately cut my shroud lines and found that I have been burned on one leg and my face. Since Japanese fighters were diving down directly over the field and it seemed they might be looking for me, I walked over under the trees at one side of the field and waited there a few moments. Meanwhile, I looked myself over a little more thoroughly and found that I had landed unarmed since my 45 had been lost on the way down. I was wearing only suntan shirt and trousers and regular GI shoes, socks and underwear, with no other equipment.

Shortly, some Japanese civilians found me and not only handcuffed but also bound me with my own shroud lines. They delivered me to the local police station where I waited over two hours until two Japanese soldiers came to pick me up. As I started down the road in their custody, I met Colonel Byron Brugge, from Wing Headquarters, and asked him how he was. He was able to say “Okay” before the guard ordered “No speak.” After being blindfolded the soldiers loaded us into a truck that carried us into Tokyo where we arrived about 2 a.m. From the speed of the truck and the time consumed I would guess that I had landed about 40 miles out of the city.

Immediately Japanese intelligence officers interrogated us as to our name, rank and serial number. Although this was all the Geneva Convention allows, they went on to request our home addresses and other information. When I asked why they wanted this information, they said they needed it so they could notify our families. This, of course, was never done. Then they asked me

to sign a paper which was written in Japanese. I signed as it was obvious that I did not know what it said. Next they stripped me and returned to me my shirt, trousers, shoes and socks. Except for shoes and socks this was to be my entire clothing twenty-four hours a day for the next four months. Only when we were taken out for interrogation were we allowed to put on our shoes and socks. Before daylight I was subjected to a further severe interrogation about everything on Saipan. When I answered many of their questions (truthfully) that I did not know, they attempted to force me to answer by slapping my face and other minor abuse.

I was put in solitary confinement at the Kempei Tai (MP headquarters) in a block of six cells with four other men from the crew occupying the other cells. The only furniture was four dirty blankets. Our food consisted of three meals a day of rice and barley mixed, with an occasional small fish and infrequent watery soup for breakfast. I stayed in this solitary cell without ever going out for exercise or any other purpose except almost daily interrogation until the nineteenth of February, on which date Colonel Brugge and I were transferred to a local police station where we were put in different cell blocks. I stayed in this second prison until the 3rd of April. There was one period from the fourth to the fourteenth of March when I was placed in a Japanese military hospital where I had slightly more of the same type of food and a little exercise. This hospitalization was the result of my being so weak that I could not do even the little that was required of me in solitary.

The next move was to the Omori prison camp. This was the headquarters camp for some 30 prisoner of war camps in the Tokyo-Yokohama area and was located halfway between the two cities on a sand spit projecting into Tokyo Bay. At this camp we were listed as prisoners of war (special) and 36 of us were segregated into two-thirds of a barracks with a separate compound. All but four of the group were B-29 crewman. The other third of our barracks contained eighteen other "special" prisoners under charge of lieutenant Colonel Boyinton, Marine ace.

We were kept inside our special compound until fifteenth of August and then for the next two weeks were allowed an increasing amount of food and medical supplies including blood plasma and the privilege of mixing with the other 600 prisoners in our camp. On the 29th Commander Stassen took a group of us in LC's to a hospital ship. After eight days I was allowed to go out to Atsugi airfield when I 'bummed' a ride to Okinawa and then to Guam and back to Saipan, where I arrived on the eighth of September. On the twelfth of September I was in San Francisco and on the fourteenth in Tampa, Florida with my family.

There are two other noteworthy items of my experience. On the seventh of May we were allowed to start a small garden at Omori. This gave us something to do and some slight exercise. Perhaps the most exciting moment of my entire captivity was on 9 March when I was able to see the first night incendiary attack of the B-29s on Tokyo. The light from the burning city made it as light as the day and gave us all confidence that our liberation was not far off.