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**A P P E N D I X**

**THE AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND IN THE PACIFIC:  
1942**


305-0-1000

Group  
Downgraded at 3 year  
intervals, declassified  
after 12 years

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Downgraded at 3 year  
intervals; declassified  
after 12 years

*Downgraded  
22 Nov 63  
Ronald D. Hinds*

Prepared by Historical Section,  
Intelligence and Security Office,  
Headquarters, West Coast Wing, PACD, ATC  
Hamilton Field, California

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Supplement VIII

The Rickenbacker Story

## INTRODUCTION

One of the great news-stories of 1942 was that which told of Colonel Eddie Rickenbacker's ill-fated survey tour of the South Pacific area during October and November of that year - of how the Colonel's plane disappeared into the sea while enroute to Canton Island from Hawaii; of how the passengers and crew took to life-rafts; and of how, after floating for twenty-two days and being given up for lost, they were finally rescued and returned to the United States. The South Pacific Wing of the Air Transport Command played a very considerable part in that story - and thereby gained more publicity than by all of its other 1942 accomplishments, many of which were actually a great deal more significant and important.

Briefly, the facts of the Rickenbacker story were as follows. Early in the fall of 1942, Colonel Rickenbacker, famed flying ace of World War I and president of Eastern Airlines, was asked by Secretary of War Stimson to carry out an official survey of morale and aerial tactics in the Pacific combat theatre. Accompanied by Colonel Hans C. Anderson, Colonel Rickenbacker thereupon proceeded to San Francisco, California, and thence to Hawaii by Pan-American Airways clipper.

At Hickam Field, Hawaii, Seventh Air Force Headquarters assigned to Colonel Rickenbacker a B-17 airplane - due to be returned to the United States after having completed a tour of duty in the Pacific

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1. The West Coast Wing, AAF, AFM: A History. an undocumented manuscript prepared by Major George E. Durno, Special Services Officer, West Coast Wing, in 1943.

area - and a veteran Pacific ferrying crew. Members of the crew were Captain William E. Cherry, Second Lieutenant James C. Whittaker, Second Lieutenant John J. DeAngelis, Staff Sergeant Alexander T. Kaczmarcyk,<sup>3</sup> Staff Sergeant James W. Reynolds, and Private John Bartek. Of this crew, Captain Cherry - the pilot, Lieutenant DeAngelis, and Sergeant Reynolds had formerly been assigned to South Pacific Wing Headquarters at Hamilton Field, but had been transferred to the 6th Ferrying Group, Long Beach, Calif., in August, 1943 - in the movement of the 28th Ferrying Squadron to the latter organization.<sup>4</sup>

On October 21st, the Rickenbacker party left Hickam Field, Hawaii<sup>5</sup> for Canton Island. They failed to hit the tiny coral atoll, however; their aircraft ran out of fuel; and they were forced to land in the sea. Taking to life-rafts the group immediately became the object of a wide-spread and widely-publicized sea and air search. For three long and harrowing weeks they drifted aimlessly in the Pacific, and were finally given up for lost. On November 13th, however, a U.S. Navy flier found Captain Cherry - half-dead from exposure and starvation - floating on a raft in the vicinity of the Ellice Islands.<sup>6</sup> Within two days, Colonel

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2 Narrative Report on Rickenbacker Trip, manuscript prepared by Captain Henry P. Luna, Headquarters, Eleventh Ferrying Group, South Pacific Wing, Air Transport Command, Hamilton Field, Calif., in December, 1942.

3 The West Coast Wing, Durno, *op. cit.*

4 Special Orders No. 60, Paragraph 2, Headquarters, Ferrying Division, Air Transport, Washington, D.C., 25 July 1942. For a discussion of this movement of the 28th Ferrying Squadron, see *supra*, Part III, pages 60 to 62.

5 The West Coast Wing, Durno, *op. cit.*

6 TWX, Headquarters, South Pacific Wing, Air Transport Command, Hamilton Field, Calif., to Commanding General, Air Transport Command, Washington, D.C., 13 November 1942.

Rickenbacker and the remainder of the survivors - Sergeant Kaczmarczyk had died of salt water poisoning and starvation - were picked up in the same area.

After being hospitalized at Tutuila, Samoa, for a two-week period,<sup>7</sup> Colonel Rickenbacker insisted upon completing his inspection tour. Headquarters, South Pacific Wing was called upon to furnish another airplane for his use. On November 28th, Wing Headquarters at Hamilton Field thereupon dispatched to Samoa one of its veteran crews, headed by Captain Henry P. Luna, in a United Airlines C-87.<sup>8</sup> At Samoa, the Hamilton Field crew was to pick up Colonel Rickenbacker, assist him in completing his round-trip inspection tour, and then fly him back to the United States. Members of Captain Luna's crew - all of them assigned to the 11th Ferrying Group of the South Pacific Wing at Hamilton Field, were:<sup>9</sup> Captain J.L. Templeton, co-pilot; Second Lieutenant Casimir Krauser, assistant co-pilot; Captain Alfred C. Hall, navigator; Technical Sergeant John E. Tommaney,<sup>10</sup> radio Operator; and Technical Sergeant Raymond C. Schaer, engineer.

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7 The West Coast Wing, Durno, *op. cit.*

8 TWX, Headquarters, South Pacific Wing, Air Transport Command, Hamilton Field, Calif., to Commanding General, Air Transport Command, Washington, D.C., 1 December 1942.

9 Operations Orders No. 14, Paragraph 1, Headquarters, 11th Ferrying Group, South Pacific Wing, Air Transport Command, Hamilton Field, Calif., 26 November 1942. Captain Templeton's rank appeared on this order as "First Lieutenant", but formal approval of his promotion to Captain came through while he was enroute to Samoa. (Personal Interview, Major Kenneth S. Walker, Contract-Carrier Supervisor, Headquarters, Pacific Division, Air Transport Command, November, 1945.)

10 The West Coast Wing, Durno, *op. cit.*

Captain Luna and his crew arrived at Samoa on November 29th. Picking up Colonel Rickenbacker, they flew him to Australia via the Fiji Islands and New Caledonia, and then visited Port Moresby, New Guinea, where the Colonel conferred with General MacArthur and General Kenney. Returning eastward, they stopped at the New Hebrides and Solomons Islands, paused at Samoa long enough to pick up Colonel Adamson and Sergeant Reynolds - both of whom were recovering slowly from their ordeal at sea - and then flew directly back to Hickam Field, Hawaii. At Hickam Field, Colonel R.C.W. Blessley, Commanding Officer of the South Pacific Wing, and Captain Kenneth S. Walker, also of South Pacific Wing Headquarters, met the Rickenbacker party, and accompanied them on the last leg of their trip back to the United States.<sup>11</sup>

The Rickenbacker plane arrived at Hamilton Field, California, on December 17th, and was there met by a host of official and unofficial welcomers and representatives of the press. On the following day, Captain Luna flew the Colonel to Burbank, California, and thence directly to Washington, D.C. to report back to Secretary Stimson.<sup>12</sup>

The entire affair brought a great deal of publicity to the South Pacific Wing. In addition, and of considerably greater importance, it taught Wing Headquarters a great many valuable lessons about the proper procedures of airplane ditching, the emergency equipment that overwater aircraft should carry, and the all-around technique of survival at sea.

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11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

Captain Cherry and other members of the original Rickenbacker crew, as well as Captain Luna, drew up complete reports of their experiences, observations and recommendations. From their reports, South Pacific Wing Headquarters gained a great deal of information that was to prove very valuable in the immediate future.

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Immediately following are an excerpt from Captain Luna's report and the complete report compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Allan A. Barrie, Operations Officer for the South Pacific Wing, from information furnished by Captain Cherry, Lieutenant DeAngalis, Lieutenant Whittaker, and Private Bartek.



(Left) Colonel Eddie Down Rickenbacker steps Field on to the Hamilton the debarking ramp on 17, night of December, South 1942, leaving the which Pacific Wing C-80 at had picked him up and him Samoa and returns. to the United States (Below) The Coldth poses with the few Ferrying Group chack: that brought him an- (left to right) Tuna aney, Templeton, Laken- (pilot), Schaer, Ric- backer, Krauser, Ball.

(G 1039 7-314 AF) (12 17 42)



(G 1039 5-314 AF) (12-17-42)





(G 1039-7-31H AF) (12-17-42)

(Left) Colonel Eddie Rickenbacker steps down on to the Hamilton Field debarking ramp on the night of December 17, 1942, leaving the South Pacific Wing C-87 which had picked him up at Samoa and returned him to the United States. (Below) The Colonel poses with the 11th Ferrying Group crew that brought him back: (left to right) Tomm-aney, Templeton, Luna (pilot), Schaer, Ricken-acker, Krauser, Ball.



(G 1039-5-31H AF) (12-17-42)

HEADQUARTERS, ELEVENTH FERRYING GROUP  
ARMY AIR FORCES, AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND  
Hamilton Field, California

HPL/jr

December 29, 1942

SUBJECT: Narrative Report on Rickenbacker Trip

TO: -Commanding Officer, West Coast Wing, Air Transport Command  
-Commanding Officer, 11th Ferrying Group, Air Transport Command  
-Lt. Col. A.A. Barrie, Office of A-3, West Coast Wing, A.T.C.  
-Office of S-3, 11th Ferrying Group, Air Transport Command

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Take-off was attempted by Captain Cherry on the night previous to the crash, and it was found during acceleration for the take-off run that the brakes were defective. Power was cut off, and the airplane brought to a halt by resorting to ground-looping. Another airplane was provided so that the flight might proceed most expeditiously. This airplane was a B-17D which was being returned to the States to be used for transition flying because it was obsolete as a combat aircraft.

The compass had been swung for easterly headings only. The radio direction finder or radio compass on board was of the old left-right pointer type. There was no pelorus or astro-compass installed. I did not determine accurately how long the crew had been awake before the take-off, but I gathered that they were short on sleep. The second attempt to take off was successful, and their flight proceeded uneventfully.

The E.T.A. was about 1000 local time. When the E.T.A. ran out, Canton Island, their objective, was still not in sight. The crew then instituted a search pattern and called for MO's. They were unable to get an indication of Canton Island's direction on the radio compass and asked for DF bearings from Canton; however, Canton was unequipped to render this aid due to earlier decommissioning of this equipment. Palmyra answered this call with a bearing that placed the airplane directly on a line through Canton and Palmyra, but there was no other bearing available to resolve the airplane's position from a line of Position into a fix. Contact was maintained with AACCS and Navy stations at all times on liaison radio equipment, but this was of no material aid since no other radio bearing could be taken.

Captain Cherry feathered his two outboard propellers in an attempt to conserve fuel. When only a few minutes gasoline remained, Captain Cherry made a power-on stall landing. The occupants of the airplane immediately abandoned ship. The only passengers injured were Colonel Hans Adamson, and the enlisted man who subsequently died. Colonel Adamson suffered a sprained back; the enlisted man fell into the water and swallowed salt water. It was also reported that this enlisted man had started this trip while still showing evidence of being jaundiced. It is said that he insisted that he was well enough to make the trip.

The rafts were successfully launched from the still floating airplanes; however, everybody left the airplane in such haste that all emergency equipment and rations, except for four oranges, were left behind. The airplane did not sink for a period of ten or fifteen minutes. All stated that they thought the airplane would sink much faster than it did, and so did not return to it for supplies because they thought the vortex of the sinking plane might overturn the rafts.

At first, all rafts were lashed together. It seems that seats in the rafts, and even occupancy of the rafts, shifted considerably throughout days afloat. There was no water on board any raft, and the emergency rations which are supposed to be included in the equipment installed in all rafts were missing in every case.

Suffering seemed most acute because of the water shortage and the intensity of the sun's rays. This latter inconvenience became so pronounced that some members of the party jumped overboard to swim even though many large sharks were sighted. In attempting to slash one shark, Captain Cherry ripped the bottom of his raft, and it was found that the repair kit was not in suitable condition to mend this slit. The material in the kit seemingly had deteriorated from age and improper storage. The sharks were so numerous and bold that Captain Cherry, who was sleeping with his head on the side of the raft, was struck by the tail of a shark with such force that they thought his nose was broken.

An oilsilk sheet, if provided as part of the raft's equipment, could be rigged up to act as a sunshade during sunny weather and as a rain-catcher during rainy hours. Storage of rain water was a problem. The bailing bucket could be used for this, but then it could not be used for bailing, unless the rain water was disposed of. An extra bucket or water container would help considerably. The party stored water by filling their mounths with rain water and then expectorating it into their rubber life vests.

The story of the sufferings they endured was told in Sicken-  
backer's newspaper account and will not be repeated here; however,  
the men were all suffering from innumerable salt water and sunburn  
sores, especially on their legs and buttocks. This was particularly  
true of the men in Cherry's raft because of the constant presence of water  
in the bottom of the raft due to the unrepaired slit.

Some fish were caught on hooks and lines provided in the rafts,  
but the line was criticized as being too light and the hooks too small  
for the prevailing size of fish. Some small fish actually leapt into  
the rafts, and these were devoured alive and whole in the best Harvard  
manner. The story of the rescue is history.

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/s/ Henry P. Luna  
/t/ HENRY P. LUNA,  
Captain, Air Corps

A TRUE EXTRACT COPY:

*Arthur E. Swanson*  
Arthur E. Swanson,  
1st Lieut., Air Corps

HEADQUARTERS, SOUTH PACIFIC WING  
ARMY AIR FORCES, AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND  
Hamilton Field, California

December 9, 1942

CRASH LANDING AT SEA

The following information has been received through conversation with Captain Bill Cherry, Lt. J. DeAngelis, Lt. Whittaker, and Pvt. Johnny Bartek, members of the crew on the ill-fated B-17 which landed Eddie Rickenbacker on the seas south of Canton Island.

Captain Bill Cherry, soon after deciding they had missed Canton Island, in order to conserve gasoline and fly the airplane as long as possible, slowed the engines and the plane to the minimum speed. He continued the course given by Radar Station at Canton, and after an hour or so it became apparent that a crash landing at sea would be necessary. The crew were instructed of this decision and preparations were made for the landing. When the inboard engines began to sputter, Captain Cherry pumped the remaining gasoline to the outboard engines and prepared to land with the inboard engines dead. Using outboard engines for assistance, he descended as slowly as possible with the flaps holding the airplane off until it crossed a high wave and cut the engines, dropping the airplane into the valley. The plane landed tail first and then the wing tips hit the edges of the valley. The landing was made with very little jar, the airplane did not break up, and no passengers were injured.

All crew members were at their stations with the engineer in the companionway ready to release the life rafts. The passengers were placed in the rear on mattresses. Upon landing, the engineer released the two life rafts, installed in the B-17, and the co-pilot took the two-man raft out through the top. All members of the party seemed calm and collected, but several things were done which Captain Cherry feels could have been improved upon and would like to pass on these experiences for the aid of others in the event of a crash landing at sea.

Action After Landing: The B-17 did not break up, it was still afloat and the tail visible when the party floated away out of sight some twenty minutes later. It is Captain Cherry's opinion (if time permits), that the rafts should remain tied to the airplane as long as possible. It is his feeling that people who go down at sea should not leave their airplane until it is absolutely necessary to do so. This gives an opportunity to take all the emergency equipment from the plane and any other parts and pieces that may make life more comfortable in the life raft thereafter. He recommends taking all emergency food supplies, water jugs out of the cabin, all seat cushions, and all

emergency equipment found remaining in jungle kits in the parachutes on board. This applies especially to knives and any canvas material which can be used as a cover and protection from the sun in the day time and as a cover to keep warm at night. Also the radio transmitter and any other signalling device that can be used in an emergency life raft.

Use of the Life Raft: Captain Cherry found the five-man life raft large enough for about three people and very stable when passengers were sitting on the bottom of the boat. If the seats which are provided were used, it placed the center of gravity so high that waves would turn the boat over. It was found that the small two-man life raft was in reality too small for even one man. The seats on the two-man raft were cut loose and the canvas used for the purpose of catching water. He found that the rubber patching material, for patching holes in the raft, should be of more substantial material as water on the sandpaper moistens the glue and makes it useless. The rubber cement material also evaporates and will not stick to the raft because of salt from sea water. The first-aid kit was also found to be unsatisfactory because the adhesive material had become wet and lost its adhesive properties. The method of fastening first-aid kits to the floor caused sores on their bodies from chafing when trying to sleep on the bottom of the boat. The bottom of the raft should be smooth without unnecessary obstructions. He found the fishline and hooks retrieved from the jungle kits had been made for stream fishing and the hooks large enough for trout but not of sufficient size for fishing at sea. The fishlines were rotten and no sinkers or lures provided for this type of fishing.

Flares: The flares available on the boat were about 40% duds, and it is felt that the flares for such purpose be constructed of material that will stand continual drenching in sea water, as the boats turned over and sea spray continually washed over the edge, keeping the equipment constantly wet. The Very pistol should be made of brass to keep it from rusting. The flares when fired should be aimed back away from the boat or at least down-wind in such a way that the flares will not land on or near the rubber boats as they are very hot and the magnesium material will burn under water.

Instructions in the Use of Emergency Equipment: All Stations should have an active exhibit of all emergency equipment in the airplane. A short lecture on the use of this equipment should be required. This lecture should include the method of inflating rafts, collecting water, which in this case was done by allowing the rain to soak into their clothing and then squeezing it into a canvas cover. From the canvas cover it was poured into an empty flare cartridge case, thence taken into the mouth and squirted into the small air opening in the Mae West life vest as no other water container was available. At one time Captain Cherry had as much as a quart of water stored in this manner in the life vest. He feels that if a larger plug were vulcanized into the life vest it

would be much easier to carry water in this manner. Definite instructions should be given all ferry crews in the method of abandoning ship so that the location of all emergency equipment will be known, making it easier to get all this equipment aboard the life raft. The greatest requirement for this party was water. They never at any time had enough water to drink. The normal ration of water was one ounce in the morning and one ounce in the evening; this ration being measured from empty flare shells which were used for drinking cups, for bailing the boat, and for other purposes. Captain Cherry feels that one of the most important additions to the life raft equipment would be an 8 x 8 rubberized material to be used for the purpose of catching rain. It should be constructed in such a way that it could be used as a sail attached to the oar handle and as a protection from the sun in the day time and cover from the cold at night. In this instance, a sail was used by taking a shirt and cutting it out for sail purposes. This doubled the speed of the raft.

Lt. DeAngelis complains that the parachutes were not completely equipped. Knowing that a landing at sea was necessary, he planned to take all the emergency equipment possible. However, upon examining all the jungle kits in parachutes on board he found that knives had been stolen from every kit. Captain Cherry had the only knife on board and these other knives alone would have saved a great deal of suffering. He feels that anyone caught rifling a jungle kit in a parachute should be severely punished. The engineer, Johnny Bartek says that every bit of clothing available should be taken aboard the life raft, such as leather coats, shirts, sweaters, extra pairs of pants, etc., as they serve as a protection from the sun in the day time and make it possible to keep warm at night. He also feels that people should wear their shoes and keep them on as long as possible even in the life raft, taking them off a few hours each day until their feet become accustomed to the sun and are covered with a good tan.

Recommendations for Improvement: It is recommended that:

- a. A 4-inch flange of rubberized material be vulcanized to the outside of the raft at a 45 degree angle to the water to prevent the sea spray from coming over the edge and into the bottom of the boat.
- b. The seats which are too high be eliminated.
- c. First-aid kits should be on board and in water-tight containers.

- d. Metal patches with rubber in between be supplied with screws to be used in such a way that the patches can be applied to both sides and screwed down, similar to the method of patching a single tube bicycle.
- e. A canned heat water distilling unit be made a part of the emergency equipment. It will make a quart of water every 20 minutes.
- f. All this equipment be waterproof, as they were wet  $23\frac{1}{2}$  hours out of 24.
- g. The handle of the bucket should have more cork than it now contains.
- h. A great deal of cord should be supplied as all loose articles must be kept tied to the boat.
- i. Rings of sufficient strength should be attached to all loose articles such as knives, oars, water bottles, and other equipment or they will be lost in heavy seas and from over-turned boats.
- j. Rubberized canteens should be added for the purpose of holding water.
- k. Mae West life vests have two larger plugs vulcanized in such a way that they can be used as water containers should it become necessary.
- l. The addition of smoke bombs as a signal device for day use and Fuzees to be used as night signals.
- m. A fishing net is absolutely essential and should be fastened by a patent arrangement to the oar.
- n. A spear should also be added as fish were available near the boat at all times and could be caught with a spear.
- o. All metal material should be of brass or bronze as the knives and guns were rusted within one half hour after the trip had started in the life raft.



Comments:

Several things happened on this trip of such a miraculous nature that Captain Cherry feels they should be recorded for the general interest of all.

"A man may start as an Atheist passenger in a rubber boat but if he returns he will return a Christian." Several evidences of Divine aid brought out this feeling.

During one period, after four or five days of storm at sea, in which the boat was capsized by twenty-foot waves, it seemed impossible to live another night under such circumstances. Captain Cherry and party earnestly prayed for calm weather. Morning found the storm had cleared and they were floating on a calm, peaceful sea. This condition lasted for five or six days, in which the boat was becalmed and the water supply had disappeared. The situation was becoming desperate for food and water; the question of water being the most serious as they did not feel hunger possibly due to lack of exercise. But water was an absolute necessity and for six days no rain had fallen. Captain Cherry and others again began earnestly praying for subsistence and rain, and in the afternoon a cloud formed out of nowhere over the boat and down came enough water to keep them going again for several more days. The same thing happened with food; there were fish all around the boat but fish hooks had been snapped off, fish lines were rotten, and the hooks in the first place were made for trout and stream fishing and not for deep sea fishing. After earnest prayer for food, two barracuda jumped in the boat and a bird landed on Eddie Rickenbacker's head and was easily caught by him.

These strange happenings, he feels, should be recorded as a part of their experience.

Subsistence: Several fish were caught by hand but got away. Captain Cherry says that if he had a small spear he would have been able to catch fish all day long at any time. He found the livers and lungs of these fish were good to eat. He later learned that the natives practically live on this part of the fish. Also, that sharks, although easy to catch and not vicious in that area, are inedible even for a starving man. The meat is leathery, has a very disagreeable odor and the taste is particularly putrid. They were unable to eat any part of the shark except the liver and the eyes. Here again he found that the natives on the islands only eat the eyes and the liver of the shark. The eyes are considered a delicacy.

A TRUE COPY:

*Arthur E. Swanson*  
ARTHUR E. SWANSON  
1st Lieut., Air Corps

/s/ ALLAN A. BARRIE  
/t/ Allan A. Barrie  
Lt. Col., Air Corps  
Operations Officer