

watched as the seats of our plane were removed to make way for radio apparatuses and additional cargo that took up all available space even the platform the auxiliary gasoline drums had occupied. Two army specialists bound for Guadalcanal and two officials of the Australian Government increased the number of passengers to 15, and aboard we had the choice of sitting on the cargo, lying on the floor or standing up.

The plane rose sluggishly and Slim prodded us closer to the front. As we strove for altitude, we gazed interestedly at the destroyers and other ships huddling in the docks, at the building activity on Hickam Field and in Honolulu. My farewell view was of a submarine putting out to sea.

A dozen or more life-jackets were in the tail of the plane but no one suggested putting them on and eventually they were lost under a clutter of mail bags where they remained until we reached Australia. I smiled to myself as I recalled the first part of our flight when we had been warned to wear our Mae Wests all the time. One of the crew told me afterwards that had we been forced down with such a heavy load we wouldn't have stayed afloat more than 30 seconds.

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Short Snorters

WE flew at 8,000 feet, bound for Canton Island of the Phoenix group 1,898 miles to the south-west. Scattered below, as far as the eye could see, were neat balls of cottony clouds standing out in bold relief against the blue waters of the ocean upon which the new-born sun sowed handfuls of sparkling diamonds and tinted the clouds a pastel pink. As we neared the equator we sighted a combat plane to our right. It cruised around looking us over. Our presence had probably been detected by radar and the fighter had been sent up to reconnoitre. At first we thought it was the enemy. We were not far from the Jap-controlled Gilbert and Ellice

Islands, so the possibility of seeing a "rising sun" insignia in that area was by no means remote.

We skimmed on through space over a wearisome expanse of water. Tin hats, strung out in a row from hooks on the fuselage above, swung back and forth like Chinese lanterns in humdrum rhythm. To break the monotony I repaired to the tail gunner's glass dome and watched the sea unroll. After a time this too began to pall.

The floor seemed to get harder and gradually mail sacks and other pieces of cargo came into use as cushions. I drew a small brown canvas bag which must have been filled with bricks, and I'm sure that for weeks I carried the imprint "U.S. Mail No. 84" where it couldn't be seen.

We crossed the equator without observing the time-honoured ceremony usual to ship life on such an occasion, but the crew enrolled us as "short snorters" in that well-known mystical organization whose membership, open to anyone making an ocean flight, includes the names of such notables as Churchill, Roosevelt and Willkie. We each paid \$5 and my certificate, a prized memento, now bears the autographs of several high-ranking navy and army officers, war correspondents and Australian, New Zealand and U.S.A. government officials.

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Canton

FROM the air Canton a coral atoll built up through the ages resembles a big dinner plate, its lagoon centre of tranquil blue rimmed by a shadowy border that seems too narrow for a landing field. The thought struck me that for all the charts and instruments available only skill and experience were capable of finding such a tiny speck in so illimitable an expanse of water. Bob Bergin, our navigator, undoubtedly had these.

We landed smoothly amid kaleidoscopic activity. Steam shovels and trucks snorted and chugged. The lagoon had