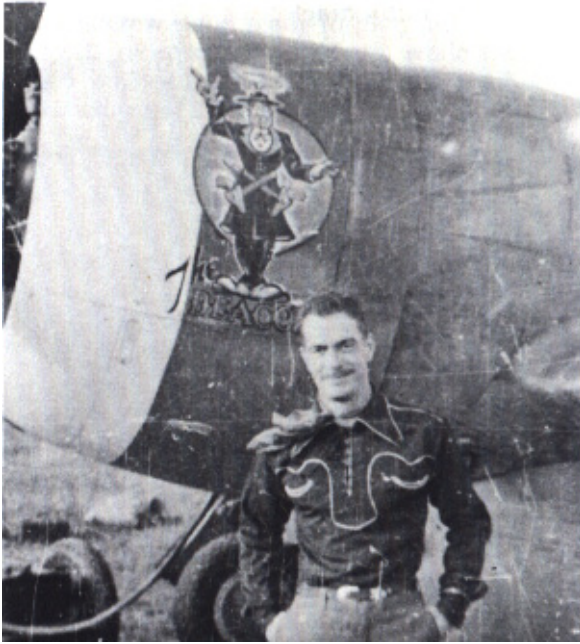


## P-47 Bailout

Howard D. “Deacon” Hively, from Norman OK, was one of the genuine “characters” of the 71 Eagle Squadron and later the 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group. With exception of a two and one-half month leave, Hively flew with the Group until 1945. The following is from “The Hively Accounts” in “Escort to Berlin: The 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in World War II” by Garry L. Fry and Jeffrey L. Ethell



### 15 June 1943 Mission Almost Impossible

In the summer of 1943 the 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group was often assigned advanced base missions. We had been recently equipped [the previous March] with the America’s answer to the Hot War, P-47s, or as the British called them Thunderbolts. Fighter pilots were then and always will be a breed of their own, and in their own language this over-sized short-range, cumbersome fighter plane was most often referred to as the “jug.” No doubt the most dominant question in the minds of all those who flew them was, “Do you think the airplane is here to stay or will the P-47 take its place?”

Anyway, on the occasion of 15 June 1943 we had been ordered to an advanced base, Tangmere, on the south coast of England to cover an air strike against the submarine pens at St. Nazaire. The only question in our minds [concerning the order] was that part stating, “Class A uniforms will be worn!” There was no question about the advanced base – we had to shorten the range in order to reach St. Nazaire – but can you imagine wearing that dress uniform in the closed confines of a fighter cockpit? Just picture yourself all dressed up in a tuxedo sitting in an outdoor john with tight straps across your lap and shoulders, then hang on your person 80 pounds of

equipment, including Mae West, back pack chute, oxygen tube, mask, bail-out bottle, dinghy, escape kit, a large knife, Colt .45 and God knows what sundries that each fighter pilot personally believed necessary to complete his mission. Needless to say a fighter pilot's liver is no bed of roses at any time, but the narrow, greasy confines of a fighter cockpit do not lend themselves to Class A uniforms. Where do you put your hat, let alone your bottle of rum?

When we arrived at Tangmere in our dress pinks, sponged of grease with 100 octane gas, our British allies were completely impressed. Their oft amazed question of, "Do you always wear those uniforms on a mission?" were answered with, "What else?" Sooo, before first light we had completed our briefing, climbed into our "jugs" and set off to do battle with the wily Hun.

The facts of that particular day have never been quite clear, or perhaps they have only been forgotten in the aftermath of a long war and what followed on that day. We did go round and round – I do believe the submarine pens were clobbered by the bombers, though I never established this. But the leader's long awaited order of "Let's get the hell out of here" rang across the airs, all 48 intrepid fighter pilots turned as one and headed home. After all that's where rum came from.

It didn't take long, however, to ascertain that something was just not quite right. First thing I noticed were two small streams of blue smoke jutting forward over my shoulders and somewhat of an increased cockpit temperature. Everything else was all right though...all my buddies were close by, the sky was beautiful, clear and blue. We hadn't really had a tough "Do"; the opposition had been less than meager, and after all, we were headed home.

Then, all of a sudden, the fit hit the Shan! When my boots got too hot to be comfortable, I spied all at once a fire beyond the firewall on the cockpit floor. Gauges went haywire, temperatures out of the green into the red, and the rudder pedals became so hot my feet were burning up. All fighter pilots are quick of mind, along with righteous, able and loveable, so with all my inherent perspicacity, it only took five or ten minutes to come to the complete realization that this cockpit was no longer tenable.

Someone pulled alongside. I think it was Pierce Winningham McKennon, God rest his soul. He said, "I think you'd better get out of there, Deac." "I'm thinking about it Mac, but it looks awful wet down there; maybe I can hold on a little while longer." "We'll follow you down, don't worry," said Mac. "O.K." said I, "but I'm gonna wait for awhile, if I can. That's one helluva step!"

At that time, we were at about 27,000 feet. I know I had not yet even considered the possibility I would have to leave the securities of that small cockpit for isn't it true that God takes care of fools, drunks and fighter pilots? Nevertheless, it wasn't long

before that possibility became more than apparent to this God-fearing fighter pilot...all of a sudden the propeller stopped, frozen in a four-bladed apparition. The fire grew hotter and hotter, 'til I had to tuck my feet up under the seat. My boots were burning and it became damned uncomfortable in there.

Decisions, decisions, decisions! How to get out? Should I merely climb out, step off the wing and hope or should I just roll it over and fall out or should I "pop out"? All of these methods had been discussed over and over amongst us fighter drivers. Next to women, hanger flying was the most valued of all conversational subjects. To "pop out" meant to wind all nose trim forward 'til one had to exert a great deal of back pressure on the stick in order to keep the plane level. Then, much like pulling a tooth, count three, shove the stick forward and virtually "pop out." Actually, all one had to do is push the plane away, but appearance was as if the pilot popped out.

I decided I'd take the easiest of the three methods and just roll the '47 over and fall out. Meanwhile, back in the cockpit, I had switched the radio to our emergency channel [D for dinghy]. I had all the Mayday going I could muster in my best devil-may-care manner, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, Heyday, Payday," which it was. Control kept calling for a fix and a long count. I started off in the proper manner, like "1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10," but it was getting shorter and shorter as my house got hotter and hotter. Finally, at about 7,000 feet, I figured the time had finally come so I unhooked all the straps, laid my hat down on the floor and started to roll it over. "Damn it!" I just couldn't do it. Every time I'd get halfway over I'd let loose the controls and grab the sides to hold on. It wasn't easy to let myself go, in any way, let alone to just give up and fall upside down out of an airplane. Besides, I came to the conclusion right then and there, "It ain't fittin' or proper for a fighter pilot to leave in such a manner." Something had to be done! About that time control called once again for a long count. I hurriedly rolled all the trim forward, gave the count, "12345678," said goodbye, popped the stick forward and left.

Never before or since have I had such a feeling. I certainly didn't pop out, but seemed to float up and over my airplane and just hang there. I could look down and see all the straps hanging straight up...there was my hat [helmet] hanging straight up from its cord. I could see the fire and count seven bullet holes in the left wing. I remember being quite concerned about those for I hadn't even known any Hun had gotten close. 'Course, as the old adage goes, "It's always the one you don't see that gets you!" I just seemed to hang there, then--W H I S H—I was free, falling! The feeling was one of freedom, total unattachment, softly suspended, free of machines and ties of any sort. It was wonderful. I've always meant to jump on purpose someday—never have. "Bout the only feeling I've had that came close was with a nurse I once knew—she made me float for a night or two!

"Wake up Deac!" I found myself yelling. "Wake up Deac!" Frantically I reached for the D-ring and couldn't find it. It was supposed to be just over my heart but it wasn't.

It was clear around in the middle of back. I could hardly reach it. Wouldn't you know I had borrowed the chute while mine was being repacked. I got two fingers around it and jerked as hard as I could. It came loose but slipped through my fingers and went sailing off into space. "Damn!" And then I watched the chute coming out. Surprisingly, it came out sideways, not up; and what's more it looked old and dirty. I kept thinking, "I hope it opens." I don't know what I would have done if it hadn't, but as it kept coming out, I kept thinking, "I hope it opens." It did...Whoomp!! I looked up and it was beautiful. I look down and there right before me and just out of my reach was my D-ring. "Damn!" I thought again, "there goes a pound." In those days that was \$4.04. Looking down again. I found my airplane some distance away, heading straight down. I watched fascinated, then Boob! It exploded, sending the tail section sailing end over end, off to the left, as the nose went straight down and kersplashed into the water! There was a helluva rush of hot air that almost seemed to stop me in mid-air. I came down again with a small Whoomp, looking up at my chute and found that it had collapsed on one side.

Then I started to swing. I'd go sailing way up, almost horizontal, and then the other side of the chute would collapse before I'd start down in the other direction. Way up, then the other side would collapse, and down I'd go again. What a ride! It was, to say the least, a bit breezy. I tried to pull on the risers but that only made it worse. I must have been pulling on the wrong side—anyway, I quit that. I looked down again and my dinghy was hanging on a strap attached to my Mae West about six or eight feet below. With the water getting close, I knew I was going to have to swim. "One last cigarette" popped into my mind. Though the chute straps were tight I could hardly get at the case, I somehow got one out and got it lit. I knew it would be the last for a while.

Since I didn't want to be weighed down with anything unnecessary if I was going into those cold waters, I started to unload. I pulled out my knife and threw it away—hated to see it go—dumped my cigarette lighter and case, reached in and pulled out my .38 revolver. It was a beauty—pearl handles and everything. My father had given it to me to take to the wars and I'd carried it for years. I started to throw it away and then I thought, "Hell, I've never fired it." So I let loose with all six shots and gave her the old heave-ho. "Damn!!" I hated to see that go too.

I turned the release dial on the chute harness, ready to drop out just above the water. I was close, but it was real hard to tell exactly 'cause I was still swinging in a pretty good arc. Then—swish—across the top of one wave, through the next and S P L A S H into the next.

Man! I hit the release dial so hard it almost knocked me out. I hadn't realized how hard the wind was blowing. The waves were enormous and I hit in almost a horizontal position with the chute directly behind me. As I felt the harness leave, I

reached over my shoulder to grab it, but that thing was traveling straight across the water like a speedboat. There wasn't a chance and that was the last I ever saw of it.

Down I went. I don't know how deep the Channel is at that point, but I've sworn over and over again I couldn't have been far from the bottom. Paddle—paddle—paddle. I paddled and kicked 'till I reached the top, took a big breath, and down I went again. That uninflated dinghy was worse than a 180 pound anchor. I couldn't get my Mae West inflated as the pull strings were stuck behind the CO2 bottles. They had gotten wet and swelled up. I was frantic! The third time I surfaced I said to myself, "Deac, you got to do something!" As I went down for the fourth time, I deliberately opened my eyes, took a careful look at the CO2 bottles, held my breath 'till I thought I would bust and managed to free one. When I came up that time, I found that I could stay up. What a relief! I took my time and got the other one undone...then it was great.

I don't know how long I laid there just floating and breathing, but I could think of how high the waves were. They sure look different when you're in them than they do when you're above them. Anyway, I finally hauled the dinghy up and started to open it. I got the canvas cover off real easy [all I had to do was unsnap it], but then came the fun. All of us had sat on those damn things for years. Never had I ever looked one over before. The only thing that any of us had ever done was cuss and complain about the position of the CO2 bottle in them, for that was always placed in the most uncomfortable spot anyone could pick, especially after sitting on it for hours at a time in a cramped cockpit. Nevertheless, I found I knew exactly where it was and I knew how to open it...just twist the knob. But twist as hard as I could, I couldn't get it open. Then I had the bright idea—"If all else fails, read the instructions." Sure enough, it said, "Remove safety pin, twist cap," I did! The dinghy went W-h-o-o-f and almost exploded.

It filled up—but my hand had froze to the bottle! Damn it was cold...not only my hand, but all of me. They say the Channel is colder in June than in December due to the water cooling more slowly and consequently heating more slowly than the land. This I will assure you, it's damned cold in June! I thought to myself, "Don't pull your hand off the bottle." I remembered touching my tongue to my sled runner when I was a kid and the disastrous results. I just lay there 'till the bottle came loose on its own accord.

"Now get in that dinghy." Boy, that was a problem, especially in rough water. I have no idea how many times I tried. If that thing hadn't been attached to me, I would have lost it many times over. Finally, I think I just reached out and pulled it under me—I think—but once in, I felt the battle was over. It was dryer than the Channel, not much, but it was dryer and what's more, it was a real treasure trove.

The first thing I found was a little package of six red flares. All my buddies were buzzing around, every once in a while coming straight over the dinghy at less than zero feet. I was positive they saw me, but I knew that I should let them know I was all right, so out came a flare. It was about as big around as my thumb and say, eight inches long. There were directions all over the case. They read, “Two red flares—unscrew cap—lift tab—hold at arm’s length.” I did and nothing! I couldn’t read the rest at arm’s length so I brought it back and it said, “Pull tab sharply toward you.” I did and quickly stuck my hand out to its fullest extension. The thing went *bzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz* and all of a sudden BOOM!

I watched it go sailing up. A big, bright, red ball of fire made a high, beautiful arc. But, damn it, all I got was one red ball when there should have been two. My hands were wet and the recoil shot it right out of my hand into the water. “I’ll fix that,” I thought to myself. “This time I’ll get two.” I held my hand at arm’s length all right, but rested it firmly on my knee, unscrewed the cap, lifted the tab and pulled it sharply toward me. Again it went *bzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz* and, BOOM! The recoil was tremendous...it damn near busted my knee. Honest, I limped for weeks afterward, and that undoubtedly was the worst injury I received in the whole mission.

Then it became a game. I had four left so I tried to hit the guys as they came thundering over me. I never did, but I came real close. I missed Jim Clark by a foot or less. Afterwards, when we talked about it, none of the guys ever saw a flare. Fact is, they didn’t even see me in the dinghy, but I didn’t know that then and was as happy as a bug in a rug, thinking all the while that everybody saw me and that a boat would soon be there. Little did I know.

The flares were fun, but pretty soon they were all gone and so were all the guys. They just disappeared, as if by magic, and there I was all alone. It was a lonesome old feeling. The dinghy seemed to get smaller and smaller, the waves bigger and bigger as I got colder and colder. I paddled and paddled. That kept me a little warmer, so I paddled and paddled some more. Then I got brave—when I reached the top of a wave I would stand up to see how far I had gotten. In the distance I could see the coast of England but right behind me, and even closer, was France. I just wasn’t making any headway. Every once in awhile, as I would stand up on top of a wave, I would fall in.

That little dinghy acted more like a cork than a boat. Each dunking brought a lot of water with it, both into the boat and into me. Eventually I found that it was warmer with the water in the dinghy than it was to bail it out, so I stopped bailing. My body temperature heated up the water.

I got sort of adept at standing on that thing without falling in. I could ride it like a surfboard but I was tired, bored and I was getting sleepy. I knew this was a bad sign. I had to stay awake or freeze. I looked through the dinghy for something to keep me

awake and that's when it became a treasure trove. First, I found a sea anchor. How it was suppose to work was beyond me. At the time that little funnel didn't look as though it would anchor anything, but I threw it out anyway.

I found a sail with directions all over it. Finally I got it all rigged up with the aid of the detailed directions and had a ball sailing for over an hour. It was bright red and gave quite a feeling of security with all its color. Then I found a fishing line and hooks—no bait. A nice little waterproof package contained malted milk tablets, a chocolate bar, dry matches [no cigarettes], halazone tablets, two compasses, a sawblade, first-aid kit...and, what's more, 2,000 francs in French money. More rummaging produced plugs [two sizes] a band pump, a bailer and scads and scads of things I can't recall. It was a genuine treasure trove but I began to feel sad that I had used up all my flares because I was wondering when someone was going to come and get me.

I heard an airplane! Could it be the Nazis coming to strafe? They did that, you know! Was it one of ours? And there it was, coming right towards me...a Walrus! Not one of the animals, but a Walrus airplane, a British seaplane. Round and round it went just above me. I thought, "I know it's rough, but couldn't they even attempt a landing?" Really at heart I knew they couldn't but all of a sudden it leveled off and came right at me. There was a bomb hanging under each wing—one of them let loose and came sailing right at me! I hit the drink! When I came up, there it was six feet away and smoking like a fiend. Down I went again! The next time I came up for air, I realized it was a marker, a smoke bomb. And smoke it did, a thick, voluminous, greenish-yellow cloud.

I crawled back in the dinghy and watched the Walrus disappear behind the waves. It was gone. "Must be a boat around here some place," but I couldn't find one. I stood up again on the dinghy and looked around—but no boat. Damn, it was cold. I knew I couldn't last much longer. All I wanted to do was lie down and sleep. I paddled some more, but that didn't last long either. I was too tired. I stood up again—a BOAT!?! Yes, by God, a boat! But it was going in the wrong direction! I yelled! I yelled at the top of my lungs. I yelled louder than anybody had ever yelled before. I stood up and waved the little flag I had found in the dinghy as hard as I could. I was that little flag so hard that it went sailing off its little stick like a newly launched bolo. I waved frantically, forgot where I was, jumped up and down, and fell in once again. I was back in that dinghy and up again before you could say Eisenhower...and behold! It was coming to me.

"They are not close enough. They ought to get closer." They stood off what looked to be a mile, but maybe it was only 50 yards or so, still in the water. There were a whole bunch of guys standing up on the deck looking at me. One of them had a rope in his hands and started swinging it like a cowboy. "What are they going to do, lasso me?" The guy let loose and that rope—it came sailing across the water like a shot out of a cannon. I watched come on and on until I had to duck. It would have hit right in

the head. What a toss! I'll never forget that one. I bet the guy would have had a great future with the Cincinnati Reds. When I got ahold of that rope, it was all she wrote. I cut a swath through that water like a Gar Wood speedboat. They pulled so hard and fast I had a hard time holding on.

Then another problem arose. How did one get aboard one of these boats? They were well over 80 feet long [87 I think] but the closer I got the bigger it got and the waves were bigger still. I let loose of that rope in a hurry, for all of a sudden the boat went up on one wave and I went down. The boat started down and I started up. I thought the boat would crash into me. I paddled backward as fast as I could as the boat went rushing past. Up, up, up I went 'till I looked down and saw the white faces of the guys on board looking up at me. Down I went and up they came. This continued several times. Finally they lowered some sort of net over the side, and as the boat went by for the ninth time, I reached out and caught hold of the net. Just to give some idea how high those waves were...I'm almost six feet, must be eight feet with my arms outstretched. The dinghy was four feet long and attached to me by a strap eight feet long, so eight and four and eight is 20. As I hung onto the net, I looked down and we were all out of the water. I swear, at that time the waves seemed not 20 but more like 50 feet high.

That was it, however. Those guys took over completely. As my head came over the gunnel, hands reached from somewhere above and grabbed me by the hair, shoulders, arms, back of the neck, anywhere they could get hold, and up I came to have a cigarette stuffed in my mouth. When my feet hit the deck, out came the cigarette and someone threw a shot of rum down my throat. I promptly threw up all over the guy in front of me. I was just too full of saltwater to accommodate anything else, let alone 180 proof Navy rum. It didn't seem to bother them, though, as I was whisked down below and stripped of all my clothes. I tried to help, like unbuttoning my shirt, but I was so cold and shaking so hard that I finally just tore them off and relaxed.

They came at me with towels and 44 hands, rubbing and rubbing 'till I was raw on both sides. I kept screaming and finally they stopped. Then came long underwear, a pair of soft, flannel grey trousers and a beautiful white turtleneck wool sweater, tennis shoes and blanket after blanket. I just lay there getting warmer and warmer. The feeling was incredible. The warmth started in with a speck clear down in the middle of my bones and then slowly started out millimeter by silly millimeter. I could feel it reach the outer edge of my bones and start into my flesh 'till finally it permeated my whole being. That nurse I mentioned could never compete, and I mean never!

I looked up and saw there were six happy, smiling faces looking down. "How do you feel? Would you like some medicine?" The medicine was a whole gallon of what I knew to be that Navy rum, but I remembered my experience with that on the deck a few minutes before. I wasn't about to be caught again. "No thanks," I said and every



face fell. I got the message. It was medicine, medicinal rum, and could only be broken out if there were a patient aboard. "O.K.," I said, "I'll try it once more." A GI water glass appeared and was filled to the brim. I tasted it very carefully. It was good, real sweet, heavy and didn't burn at all. I took another sip, every move followed by those quizzical fallen faces. I smiled, "Would you guys care for one?" UP when all the faces, round went that glass in a flash and came back empty. "Could I have another?" I ventured. The smiles grew bigger and every face beamed. We were buddies! Several sips later it came to me all of a sudden, "Who's driving the boat?" "The Captain." They said. "Could I?" said the fighter pilot. "Sure!" said the crew, in one voice like a cappella choir.

What a ball! What a ride! What a piece of machinery! That thing had three big Rolls Royce engines. It could do a mile a minute and that's how we completed the crossing all the way to Portsmouth, through hell and high water, spurred on by a fighter pilot's enthusiasm and sever sips of good ole Navy rum.

We were greeted in Portsmouth with everything but a Navy band. I felt like a prize sail fish or something. They even had a flag flying to show that they had captured me. There were three ambulances on the dock plus a great crowd of people, all with the same question, "Where's the patient?" I was helping them dock, all dressed up in the turtleneck and grey flannel pants, and three sheets to the wind—one flapping due to the Navy rum no doubt—after having swum most of the English Channel and in Class "A" uniform at that.

That 'bout winds up the story, except you could have guessed, the cigarettes and chocolate bars and respect and admiration and comradeship that passed from one fighter pilot to that crew and the whole RAF rescue service.