

Honorable  
Mention

# My Most Terrifying Mission

War Stories

By LTC Jean L. Chase  
Portland Chapter

In 1944, I was an L-4 Cub pilot flying reconnaissance and adjusting artillery fire in the Ormoc Valley, on Leyte in the Philippines. I received a call from General Harry Roper, the X Corps artillery commander. He told me to meet him at the Carrigara airstrip, where we would rendezvous with another general officer, whom I would fly to the town of Ormoc, which was recently captured by the 77th and 7th Divisions.

The visiting general arrived at the airstrip, accompanied by an officious-looking lieutenant colonel who followed me when I went to pre-flight my Cub. When I requested the general's name for my flight log, he refused to give it to me. I was still wondering about his strange behavior when he began to give orders:

"Captain, remove those parachutes from the aircraft. If you are hit by ground fire, you are to crash land the aircraft and stay with the general. Is your .45 pistol loaded?"

"Yessir."

"How long will you be over enemy territory?"

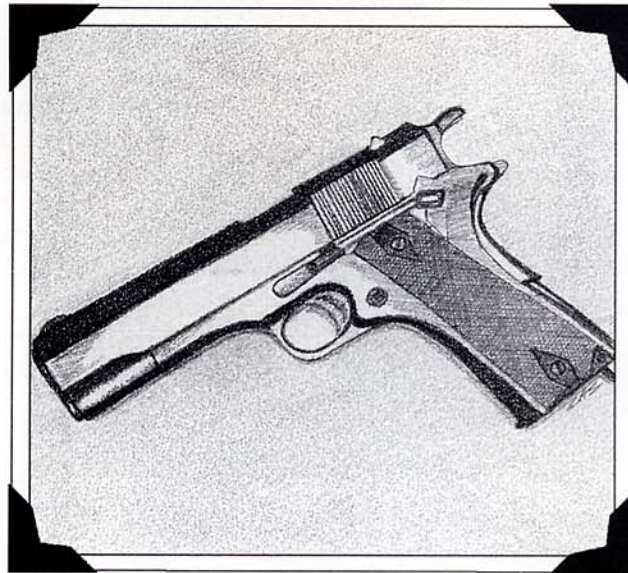
"Maybe 45 minutes. We have to cross the mountains here in the north and fly down the valley to Ormoc. The entire valley belongs to the enemy."

"Listen up. If you crash in enemy-held territory, you will shoot the general. That is an order! Do you understand?"

"But I know that country well. We would have a good chance of walking out of the valley..."

"He is an intelligence officer—General MacArthur's G-2. He knows too much. He can never be captured alive. You must kill him!"

This was like being in a bad dream. Still numb with disbelief, I helped the general into the rear seat of the Cub. As soon as we rolled down the runway and took off, he began to talk. I half expected him to say it was all a big joke on me, but he didn't. Instead, he talked with great feeling about his family and his son at West Point, which just made things worse for me. I have known a general or two that needed to be shot, but this gentleman certainly wasn't one of them. I just wished that he would stop talking.



My head was on a swivel, on the lookout for signs of danger. I stayed close to the mountains. Earlier in the Leyte campaign, just about where the general and I were flying at that very moment, five Zeros had suddenly burst out of the clouds directly above me—but fortunately they were gone before they spotted me. Just a little to the northwest, the 24th Division air officer had been shot down. As we flew down the valley, clouds forced me over territory where I had received ground fire earlier. Was I scared? You bet! It was the

most terrifying mission I ever flew.

Finally, we landed on a street in Ormoc, without receiving a single shot from the ground. The general thanked me as he got out of my Cub. I was never so glad to get anyone out of my aircraft and never so glad to be in the air again—even without a parachute.

Back in General Roper's office, I asked him if he knew what I had been asked to do.

"Yep. And it was the hardest order I ever had to give. But I knew you would follow orders."