

Dream

12-23-2013 by Harry Zirkelbach

When he told this story to friends after WWII, they told him he had dreamed the incidents. Friends so convincing, he believed he had not lived these impossible moments. Only recently, with successful AA years, did he have the courage to revisit these hours as a Naval Aviator in Guadalcanal, late 1943.

The Squadron VP-60, mostly young Reservists trained in PBY's in Corpus Christi. There were fewer than 260 men, 20 percent pilots, average age slightly high, for the Squadron had been assigned men who had been enlisted pilots prewar.

We Black Cats flew Missions every third night. Eight hours of Patrol.

On completion, the ordinary debriefing by Intelligence.

Then the Medical Officer would offer Pilots whiskey, one or more 2 oz bottles.

The following two days given to possible sleep, leisure, food, and gambling.

That favored game Rats Ass, a wild invention. Anyone sober with a reasonable IQ could remember the preceding play, always win.

As it was thought no one should win much, every time he won, stuffed a twenty in his shoe. Managed to save several times his monthly Ensign wage many nights.

In addition to the insults, shouting, name-calling, general rowdiness, there was the tension caused by the reminder that they'd be flying soon with men they were just getting to know well, in a plane of questionable reliability.

Plus all that Medical booze.

On one particular night he became especially drunk, belligerent.

Didn't recall saving any money. Just went to the tent, slips into the bunk, falls asleep at once. It was still dark when he awoke to a pee call. Groggily, he began to put his feet on the floor. There's this grotesque animal, all mouth and teeth, eyeing him. He recoils back into the sack. When carefully trying to exit the other side, the Monster was already waiting to devour legs and all.

This continued, peering over either side until he fell asleep. Peed in the bunk.

At first light he sought out the Squadron medic, Doc Robbins, related his tale.

Together they checked the tent, found no sign of his recall.

Doc was assuring. “Don’t worry, you had the D.T.s. Cut back on the whiskey.

You’ll get a regular good nights sleep.”

Mentally restored, he returned to his usual self assured self.

Scheduled flights were concluded, later drinking moderately.

Then one night, at a particularly large, noisy, gathering for Rats-Ass, fighting to keep inside the players ring, he happened to look up toward the sky, through the tent roof opening. There was this large animal staring at each around the gambling horde. This animal differed. Showed no hostility, or teeth, just prominent wide-set eyes darting around the table.

Doc Robbins was in the game too, so he got Doc’s attention.

Upon understanding the scene, Doc Robbins asked everyone to stop play for the moment, suggested all slowly look up through the hole in the tent roof. All did.

The animal continued to stare back. Then almost painfully, the animal climbed higher into his tree roost, turning to see if we were still looking at him, disappeared into the leaves. Apparently he assumed we were not a threatening specie.

Boy was he wrong.

The game continued but not before Dr Robbins told those who would listen, we might be the first whites to see this giant lemur of Guadalcanal, long thought to be extinct.

Even so, Doc even reduced booze gifts the remaining months of this adventure.