An Accident and Then Near Panic

the next morning, we were up packing our gear for the assault on that 3000 feet separating us and the Liberator bomber's crash site.

I'll never forget that climb. It took us five minutes more than six hours. There is no trail. Packing that aqua-lung diving suit, lead diving belt, face mask, snorkel finds underwater light, tools, tape recorders, still cameras, motion picture camera and a good amount of film—we scrambled, clawed and crawled our way up. The back packs combined with the altitude sucked every bit of strength out of us in a hundred yards. We stopped, rested and fought our way another 100 yards. In one area called "the chute," we climbed straight up the rocks hand over hand for better than 400 feet.

Finally, just after noon, we clambered over a ridge of huge piled rocks—and there it was, the lake. It looked like a big rock quarry filled with water—snow and glacial ice on the rim—about 600 yards long and 250 yards wide. Later we found it to be about fifty feet deep. Bob and I threw down our packs and stretched out from sheer exhaustion.

When our strength began to return, I surveyed the scene. There was no doubt the B-24 had crashed there. The sides of the cliffs reaching down to the water of the lake were covered with small bits of wreckage, and in the clear water of the lake I could see many more pieces below the surface.

Bob Fischer with his protective diving suit slid into the icy water of the lake. Even with his special gear he could only stay under for a very few minutes of time. Within an hour, he located the main fuselage and the engines in the deepest part of the lake. He brought to the surface many articles including parachutes, gloves, boots, warning lights, instruments.

At four o'clock we repacked the gear and headed back down the mountain. Somehow—in the "chute" area—I strained my ankle. I managed to make it to the plateau below, but then my body just gave up. My legs were so tired they wouldn't support me no matter how I willed them to do so. Bob and the Ranger said they would make it back to camp and radio for a helicopter to get me off the mountain. They helped me into a clear spot, then headed on down.

The helicopter didn't come, and it didn't come. The sun dropped behind the mountain and it started to get cold. I know what fear is now. In an hour it would be dark, and the 'copter couldn't get in at all. There was nothing but wind, rocks and cold. While I waited my strength returned. I decided, I'd better try to make it down on my own power. Then panic set in again. Could I remember the way?

I remembered something they taught me in the service. "The man who thinks—lives." I started to think. "The waterfall had been on the right as we climbed up, and those smooth glacial contoured rocks had been on the left." I started the descent. Two hours later I came out within forty yards of the ranger's tent. I remembered grinning to myself wryly. "I got something out of the service besides the G.I. bill."

Early the next morning Bob and I started on horseback to the Rainbow Pack outfit. That night, back to San Francisco. As we pushed our way homeward behind the wheel of our warm car, I could not help but think of those six men who died 17 years ago on that cold and friendless mountain top. God must love them very much. He chose one of the most desolate spots in the world, as their resting place. I like to think He wanted them to Himself.

The party descending across "the chute" area where Goerner injured his foot. Elevation at this point is almost 11,000 feet.

Fred Goerner, of KCBS, San Francisco, is shown astride his horse in the ever-present rain.