

D-Day Plus One – Chiodo

An echelon of three planes of the 32nd Squadron was ahead of the 50th Squadron in the larger formation on the mission. As one of those planes was struggling to make its way back to the English Channel, Lieutenant Maurice R. Perreault's plane of the 50th Squadron found itself about 75 yards off the right wing of that aircraft and somewhat to the rear. Captain Vincent R. "Jack" Chiodo (pronounced SHY-DOH), co-pilot aboard 32nd Squadron aircraft, with a seriously wounded pilot, carried out one of the most remarkable feats of flying ever recorded. He submitted the following account to this writer and describes his experience as follows:

"As a member of the 32nd Troop Carrier Squadron of the 314th Troop Carrier Group, we were ordered on D-Day Plus One, June 7, to re-supply airborne troops we had dropped into the Cherbourg Peninsula after midnight the preceding night, D-Day. The mission was briefed as a routine supply drop in a zone described as 'held by Allied Forces.' We were fully loaded with parabundles inside the aircraft, and six large bundles in the pararacks beneath the cabin.

"On this mission I was assigned a Captain Winford D. Taylor, a staff officer for the 314th Troop Carrier Group Headquarters. Since Captain Taylor was a qualified pilot, as a matter of courtesy on my part he occupied the left seat in the cockpit as pilot. I was in the right seat as co-pilot. Since this was considered a routine mission, the crew was made up of various members of the squadron. It was not my regular crew. Lieutenant Isadore Caplan was the navigator and Sergeant Harry Ray was the crew chief.

"We departed the Saltby air field very early in the morning in darkness. Before we could assemble our formation after takeoff, we encountered inclement weather. Some of the planes returned to base, including my two wingmen. I was in radio communication with Lieutenant Colonel George E. Faulkner, who was to lead the 32nd Squadron, and Captain Robert Bennett, another flight commander. We decided to continue on IFR (instrument flight) and eventually we broke out to better weather. We formed a flight of three planes with Captain Taylor and me leading, Colonel Faulkner on our left wing and Captain Bennett and Lieutenant King on our right wing.

"Over the drop zone Captain Bennett, flying the aircraft on our right, was taking intense fire from the ground. It was so severe that his aircraft went out of control and into a left barrel roll while we were not more than 300 feet above the ground. His right wing came up and over in the roll. As it continued to roll over, his right wing came down and struck the right wing of our aircraft. Captain Bennett's plane was over on its back when this occurred. The ground fire was so intense that we could not sort out all that was happening at the time. We were unaware of Captain Bennett's barrel roll. Nor did we know why our aircraft was suddenly thrown into what appeared to be a barrel roll to the right.

"Miraculously, both planes were thrown apart from the collision and pilots of both aircraft did their best to take whatever measures seemed appropriate at the time. Captain Bennett's plane leveled out

after the roll and he belly landed it in German occupied territory. He and his crew were taken prisoners of war.

"We had been briefed to make a 180-degree turn to the left after the drop and to follow a course back to the Channel. At this point I was in a steep right turn, almost out of control, and saw one of our planes crashing below. The small arms fire was still intense. My instinct was to regain control of the aircraft. This was accomplished by using emergency power (50 inches of mercury) on the right engine, throttling back on the left engine, and holding full left rudder and full left aileron. The aircraft slowly began to recover and I began a very slow turn to the left by using my left engine to maneuver. Needless to say, we were trying to accomplish a 270-degree turn back to the left. That turn took us into more ground fire. At this time we were 50 feet off the ground and headed back to the Channel.

"To maintain control, I was using both feet on the left rudder and had locked the aileron control full left with my arm. I knew that I needed help. I throttled back on the left engine and with the help of Caplan and Ray, I quickly moved into the left seat and ordered Sergeant Ray into the right seat. Ray and I had both of our feet on the left rudder while holding full left aileron with our hands and arms. At this point I did not know the damage to the plane.

"Caplan was told to go back into the cabin and look for damage. When he returned, he told me about six feet of the right-wing tip was broken and the aileron was heavily damaged. Looking ahead, I saw other aircraft ditched in the water near the naval ships off shore. My first thought was to ditch the aircraft. However, with Taylor severely wounded, and due to the lack of control I had, I decided not to ditch the plane. By that time a flight of P-47s had begun to escort us.

"At this point I discovered my navigation instruments were malfunctioning and, due to the plane listing to the right side, the magnetic compass was erratic. I called our assigned emergency base and the message was relayed to fighter aircraft nearby to steer me back to England. They did so by flying above and below us on a course that would take us back to an emergency base.

"My next problem was gaining enough altitude to clear the cliffs along the southern coast of England. Slowly we gained sufficient altitude to clear the cliffs. Our emergency base was Warmwell, a RAF fighter base located three miles east of Dorchester. The landing field was just beyond the cliffs. I called the emergency base to inform them that I needed a straight-in landing approach. I explained that I had no ability to go around because the right engine was overheating, and I had no control to turn.

"Since Ray and I were fully engaged with the controls, I told Caplan to lower the gear at my signal, which would be at the time I crossed the end of the runway. I intended to land with or without the gear down. Because of the damage to the plane, I was not at all certain the landing gear would come down. By steering with my left engine, fortunately we touched down with the gear down. Captain Taylor was taken to the hospital and survived.

"On inspection of the aircraft after landing, we counted 46 holes in it. The right wing was broken; the right aileron was broken and partially missing. The right engine was totaled out because it ran out of

oil. Also, we discovered the anti-aircraft fire damaged the release mechanism for the parapacks. The parapacks had not released. They were still in their racks on the underside of the plane. They were loaded with land mines.

"At one of our squadron reunions about 30 years later, I met with Captain Bennett and Lieutenant King. They told me they were hit with gunfire at the same time we were. When their plane rolled over, its right wing struck our aircraft, hitting the trailing edge of our right wing. They told me about their plane crash, their survival, and subsequently being taken as prisoners of war."

--Vincent R. "Jack" Chiodo Dilly, Texas

D-Day Plus One – Caplan

"Captain Taylor was hit after we pushed the last heavy box out of the open door of the cabin and after the collision with Captain Bennett's plane with our plane. I was the person who bound up Captain Taylor's wounds. The bullet entered at the upper point of his left hip bone. I used the GI first aid kit nearest the bulkhead in the cabin and gave him a shot of morphine.

"What is so amazing is how Captain Chiodo got control of the C-47 while occupying the right seat. He called for help as I finished assisting Taylor. I helped Chiodo to shift over to the left seat by lying down on my back between the two pilots' seats, bracing myself, and placing both feet hard against the left rudder on the co-pilot's side to hold it as Chiodo made the switch to the left seat. Chiodo stepped on my stomach as he moved from the right seat to the left. For a time, I got in the right seat to help Chiodo hold full left rudder and full left aileron. From the right cockpit window, it appeared that 10 feet of the right wing had been chopped off.

"We came out over the Vire River between Omaha and Utah beaches, flying over the battleship Nevada, engaged at that time in shelling Omaha Beach. I have never seen so much wreckage in my life. I gave Chiodo a heading of 330 degrees to Warmwell, the emergency base. Chiodo found the compass erratic and called the emergency base for help. The compass was unreliable because of the low right wing and having to hold hard left rudder and aileron. That resulted in the plane flying somewhat off line.

"The pilot of a P-47 guided us to Warmwell even though we could not successfully communicate with him. We called the emergency base and the base contacted the P-47 pilot by radio. We had to deal with the P-47's prop wash while trying to gain enough altitude to clear the cliffs along the south coast of England.

"When the Isle of Wight came into view, Chiodo wanted Sergeant Ray in the right seat for the good reason that the crew chief knew the hydraulic and electrical systems better than I did. Chiodo did a remarkable job of getting us back on the ground and overcoming the low right-wing condition.

7 Jun 1944
Saltby, Leicestershire, England

"Afterward I learned from Captain Robert L. Flory, our 32nd squadron engineering officer (now deceased), that a bullet had struck one of the 14 cylinders of the right engine, pierced the piston wall but did no damage to either the piston or the push rod. But at every stroke of the push rod, the cylinder lost a small amount of oil. Under such conditions it is amazing that the right engine ran so sweetly and performed so well all the way to Warmwell, even though losing oil slowly.

"Captain Chiodo was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroic performance."

--Isadore Caplan, Mesa, Arizona

(In the words of the well-known song, Chiodo's plane was all too literally coming in "On a Wing and a Prayer!" Chiodo's plane experienced the loss of almost 10 feet of its right wing. The plane was so badly damaged that it never flew again.)

This document was taken from Robert Callahan's book ON THE WINGS OF TROOP CARRIERS, and modified as a stand-alone for inclusion here