

I MET GOD

On a Raft



By Sergeant Johnny Bartek
(One of Captain Rickenbacker's crew)

*M*ayn't don't folks believe in God? I can't understand it. They seem to be afraid to believe in Him. Maybe it's because they've never met God, or recognized His working. That used to be the way with me, but when I met God in that raft out there on the Pacific I promised Him I'd tell everyone about Him.

My mother and dad are both Christians—the kind that believe the Bible

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... believe God and trust Him. They used to say, "Johnny, you must be born again!" Over and over again I heard that phrase . . . it didn't make sense to me then.

But soon I was in the Army . . . and I wasn't ready to meet God. Most everyone knows what happened when our plane carrying Captain Rickenbacker crashed, and the events that followed in the next few days. Then's when I really turned my thoughts to God. Time after time out there on the raft I could hear my father saying, "Johnny, you must be born again."

My church at home had given me a New Testament. I had it in my pocket. That Book gave us something. Every time we read it, it seemed to give us courage and faith to go on.

As soon as we were in the rafts and at the mercy of God we realized that we were not in any condition to expect

help from Him. That's why we spent so many hours of each day confessing our sins to one another and to God. I never realized what a sinner I was, until I was thrown at the mercy of God.

We found in the Bible where it said, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us" (1 John 1: 9), and "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6: 23).

Then we prayed—and God answered. . . . It was real. We needed water. We prayed for water and we got water—all we needed. Then we asked for fish, and we got fish. And we got meat when we prayed. . . . Sea gulls don't go around sitting on people's heads waiting to be caught.

On that 21st day, when those planes flew by we all cried like babies. It was then that I prayed again to God and said, "If You'll send that one plane back for us, I promise to always believe in You and to tell everyone else."

That plane came back, and the others flew on. It just happened? *It did not!* God sent that plane back!

Then I said with all my heart . . . after thanking Him . . . "*I believe God—I've met Him.*" I realized that He loved *me*, and I knew that the Testament was His Word . . . His message to *me*. That's why I know now that Christ, His Son, died on the cross for me, in that way paying for all those sins I'd been confessing out on the raft. . . . And not for those only. When I sin now God gets after me . . . but when I come to Him, sorry like I am, He is faithful and forgives me.



Since that experience, life has been different. The pressure seems gone. I know that I haven't anything to worry about. . . . Since I got right with God I've been happier than at any time in my life.

I don't know much about the Bible. But I do know God, because I've met Him. I'm just finding out how to live. People ask me if I'm going to be a minister. I don't know. I'm spending all my spare time reading the Bible. . . . I want to do what God wants me to do.

When I walk down the streets on Sunday on my way to church I see so many young people who don't seem to care about God. They'd rather spend their time in a movie or at a baseball game. How can that be? Let them spend 21 days on a raft at sea and they'll really believe and appreciate the privilege we have of worshipping God. It must be they haven't met Him. I'd like to talk with them and tell them what I *know* about Him. Why won't they listen?

—As told to Albert Salter.

This episode is narrated in Capt. Rickenbacker's world-stirring story, "Seven Came Through."

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