

# **10 Minutes**

By

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**Nantucket WLV-534**

Fall 1967– Spring 1968

**D**ream flying opens a dimension into our senses that is incomprehensible.

The ability to soar within wind currents far above the earth, diving at will through swollen soft white clouds without the threat of danger, is a wondrous journey.

Being separated by some two feet over a mattress in the early morning without any understanding of why is also incomprehensible. The inability to control an ensuing flight path somewhat removes the wonderment of it all.

The air bound situation of my body with no apparent power source aiding in my flight implied at least to me, something was very wrong. Instantly the contemplation of my next move began to form. Just as quickly, my mind related to the fact that there was nothing to contemplate. Being in control was a figment of my imagination; a light went off, "Maybe this is all a fantasy of my imagination? It must be a dream." In the next instant the reality of not having a mattress under me became an unmistakable truth as the steel wall of my six foot wide cabin collided against my body with great force.

My bunk now to my right, my body embracing the deck, stunned and in pain left me gazing up at the overhead. I reached for some understanding of the upheaval. Within seconds a new event occurred, my body again leaving the security of a solid steel base rose off the deck as if a magician were performing a levitation illusion. I was now completely mindful of my circumstance. I was just unable to control my movements. The powers of the elements surrounding me were so much greater than mine. The speed of direction change throwing me downward left my body vulnerable to another crushing blow.

Once again, left lying on the cabin deck dazed, stunned and in even more pain than the first collision, I knew I needed to collect myself and make a break.

I was trapped in a room made of steel being bounced around like a rubber ball. Again, I felt the change in direction, this time I would be ready. As I began to rise for the third time I grabbed onto the safety rail attached to the bunk with both hands. When reaching a parallel position with the bunk I pulled myself over the rail landing with my back on the mattress. I quickly grabbed both rail guards as well as tucking my feet under the guards at the foot of the bunk. I was now secured in a spread eagle position just as the next downward dive began. The extreme G-Force roller-coaster ride took every bit of strength I could muster to keep from being ejected from my bunk and hurled about the cabin one more time.

When the movement ceased I was anxious to make a break for the door, but I hesitated. I knew I needed to time my move; one more ride would give me a better sense of how long I had during the calm and the upward motion before the crushing speed of the downward dive. I began to count as the sense of moving upward began; it was the longest twenty- five seconds of my life up to that point in time. Then instantly as if falling off the edge of a cliff six seconds at most is what I believed was the time of the dive. Counting the five or so seconds of the lull I gave myself about thirty- two seconds to get from the bunk and out the door before the deadly fall ensued.

Being young, my senses returned rapidly and the recent pain subsided quickly. I made my move losing the five second lull untangling my feet; I had to fight gravity sooner than I wanted. I passed through the doorway fairly swiftly, making up the five seconds. But, I never thought out what I would do once I made it through the doorway. There was no one in the area, I was all alone. Time was running out, I needed to put myself somewhere safe and it had to be fast. The ladder leading up to the next deck gave me an idea. I stepped on the bottom rung, turned placing my

back up against the stairwell as a brace, I then put both my arms through and around the hand rails crossing my chest and interlocking my fingers. I placed my feet in the bend where the hand rails protruded out from the bottom of the stair well and with every muscle available I exerted all the force I had to hold on just in time for another heart pounding death dive.

This time the ride would be a completely different experience. When setting myself up on the ladder, I wasn't thinking about body direction; living was my big concern. Reversing my body direction from in my bunk would turn me upside down once the downward dive began. Hindsight is 20/20 changing my position was not an option; the upward climb finished pretty much in the prescribed time, enter the plunge. The quick change in my body position and acceleration pushed all my blood directly to my brain. So there I was, dizzy, hanging upside down, backwards onto a ladder on a ship serving in the Coast Guard protecting my country. Now that is an oxymoron!

The six second devil's dive took every bit of my strength to hold on. I knew if I made it through the oncoming collision between ship and millions of gallons of ocean water, I had a chance to make it to the bridge. The sudden halt of the ship created a great force on my arms and legs. The back of my head unwillingly banged against a steel step, adding pain to my already dizzy state. I was still able to hold on long enough through the crash that my body's meeting with the deck was tolerable.

With a new found swiftness, I rose to my feet and made an Olympic break up the stairwell. Beating the end of the calm, I found myself standing on the deck of the wheel house staring over the shoulder of the captain through the center port hole. My mind was completely subdued watching one of nature's greatest forces bearing down. I was looking directly into the face of a massive mountain of water. The colossal wave the ship was climbing measured upwards of sixty feet. This great

power moved a ship that was 150 ft. in length with a 32 ft. beam and a 16 ft. draft weighing 1,000 tons bounced it around, as if it was a bobber on a fishing line. The sense of danger turned to awe and the fear subsided. The majesty and the power of the sea in turmoil lent itself to a beauty that is breathtaking and exhilarating. In the next instant a bellowing rang out, "Hold On!" The dive was again at hand.

The main storm raged for three days; the sea gradually receded in size with the lessening of the wind. By the fourth day the wind had completely diminished and the sea turned into a mass of twelve to fifteen foot ground swells. With no wind to turn the ship into the oncoming waves the ship slipped into what is called an ocean trough. Instead of the ship moving bow to stern it rolled sixty or so degrees port to starboard (left to right) for twelve more days. All physical work was halted on the "Nantucket Light Ship" a (Navigational Aid) anchored 53 miles SSE of Nantucket Island throughout the fifteen day Nor' easter period.

The "Nantucket Light Ship" was the first of four assigned duty stations in my four year tour of service in the U.S. Coast Guard. It was also the only place and time I ever encountered giant waves that glorious and magnificent. I did encounter rough seas many times after, but that first "10 Minutes" is what I will always remember best. The sight of that giant wall of water during that encounter on that unforgettable day will always remain imprinted on my mind. That day left me with a humbling effect; the awareness that humans are simply short time visitors and that nature can at any time in a simple breath sweep us away, became a reality. From my very youngest memories the ocean has always been my favorite place, this feeling has never left me. After that encounter I learned to always observe caution and respect for that great amazing wonder we refer to as the sea.