War Stories (Cont.)

Milton calibrated his compass for deviation and variation, corrected magnetic north to true north, and synchronized his chronometer to radio pulses from Greenwich, England.
All was normal as they left Natal at 9:05 GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) and climbed to cruising altitude.

When the captain leveled out he set the autopilot to a heading of 60 degrees.
Milton realized the captain intended to bypass Ascension Island and fly directly into Accra, a distance beyond this plane's fuel range.

Milton took drift readings; sun shot and estimated their ground speed.

Then at 09:16 he called the pilot on the intercom. "Lieutenant, navigator here. This is not the direction to Ascension Island. Change course to 100 or turn around now. Do you copy?"

The pilot did not reply.

Milt's heart began to pound. By his estimate- and his estimates had been near perfect on the previous seven flights-this pilot was going to crash the B-25 and its crew into the South Atlantic somewhere well short of Accra.

Milton double checked his calculations then once again pulled on his headset. "Lieutenant, navigator here. The direction you're heading is not to Ascension. Where do you think you're going?"

This time the pilot replied. "I'm heading directly to Accra. Save us a whole day. Who needs Ascension?"

Now Milton was stuck. He was certain the pilot would cost them their lives yet he abhorred the idea of crossing a superior. He pushed TALK again. "Look, you know we can't make it that far. Where'd you ever get that idea? At this rate we'll go down for sure. Please change to course 105."

"I know what I'm doing, so shut up," was the pilot's response.

At this point, Milton recalled, "I knew I had to do something to stop him. Something conclusive."

Over the next several minutes Milton made a series of cold calculations. First he determined that the current speed, wind and heading the B-25 would crash in the shark infested Atlantic Ocean about 145 miles southwest of Monrovia, Liberia. Second he marked a spot on the map he called "Point of No Return," the last possible point where they could turn and hope to reach Ascension. Third, he calculated when, soon, he would enlist the help of the copilot. Finally, terribly, he began to plan how to force the pilot to change course.

At 10:15 Milton changed his tone to speak to the pilot on the intercom. "Turn this thing around or change course to 110," he ordered the pilot. "Do it now."

In a steady calm voice the pilot replied, "I don't know what those guys taught you in navigation school but you are not flying this jobbie."

"At this point," Milton says, "I looked at our position, then compared it to my point-of-no-return spot I'd calculated. We were getting close. I truly did not want to subvert a superior's authority but I had to do something."

At 11:05, Milton Golin got on the intercom again. "Lieutenant, you are flying us to our deaths. There's no way we're going to make it to Accra. You must-must-either turn back now or turn to a heading of 115. You've got to do this now or else."

"Don't threaten me, a superior officer, you bastard. Just do your job."

Neither of the other crewmen stirred although they had heard all the exchanges in their headphones. Milt reached for his octant in its cherry-wood case, on which he had carved his wife's name Irene, to take another position fix. He wondered if he'd ever see her again.

At 11:45 with the bomber hurtling toward his point-of-no-return Milton pleaded with the pilot again. "Do you want to die like this, in the drink with the sharks? Can't you understand what's happening? Lieutenant, for God's sake, bank to a 120 heading or turn around. We can still land in one piece." The pilot remained stoic. Milt poked the copilot and motioned him out of the cockpit.

The copilot tugged at his pant's zipper indicating a need to use the head (navy term for latrine). He closed the cockpit curtain.

"Are you getting all this?" Milt asked him. The copilot nodded. "Then stand by to take over, any minute now." The copilot nodded, unsure what Milt had in mind.