

The fall
at the History Center

"Falling



into a hole of some sort”

Charles Goldblum's 1944 Grand Canyon Adventure



by Norm Tessman, with assistance from Charlotte Wolkin

LIKE SO MANY young men of his generation, Pittsburgher Charles Goldblum left college in 1943 to join the military. Before seeing combat action, however, Goldblum survived an adventure that shared front page newspaper coverage with the invasion of Normandy and left him with a small measure of immortality.¹

As a result, Goldblum today holds a place among adventurers remembered in the history of the Grand Canyon of Arizona. Sagas of individual survival are prominent in the literature and lore of “the canyon,” as its devotees call it. One of these tales, told to generations of customers by Colorado River boatmen, is of three World War II aviators who parachuted into the canyon: one of that trio was 2nd

Norm Tessman lives in Prescott, Ariz., where he works as Senior Curator at Sharlot Hall Museum. In September 1990, he hiked into the Grand Canyon's Tuna Creek, found and photographed the airmen's 1944 camp site, and followed their exit route back to Grama Point. Charlotte Wolkin is Charles Goldblum's sister. She preserved his scrapbook, photographs, and clippings of the 1944 incident. Mrs. Wolkin, who still mourns her brother's death, lives in Pittsburgh with her husband, Samuel.



Goldblum family in their confectionery store, 1404 Carson Street, Pittsburgh, about 1935. Left to right: Harold, Joseph, Charlotte, Lillian, and — above right in the circular photo, minus dramatic effects — Charles Goldblum.



Charles Goldblum (white uniform middle of photo) sinks a shot as center for the Westminster College Titans, 1943.

Lt. Charles Goldblum. Some people in the Pittsburgh area may in fact recall the media coverage of Goldblum's ordeal, but the story appears to have not been retold in detail since shortly after his rescue.

"Goldie" Goldblum had been an honor student and basketball star at South Side High School in Pittsburgh, and at Westminster College in New Wilmington, north of Pittsburgh near New Castle. Shortly after World War II broke out, his father Joseph went to work at a South Side munitions plant, leaving Charles' mother, Lillian, to run the family's confectionery store. Older brother Harold took a commission with the medical corps and served on the front lines in France and Germany.

In June 1943, 20-year-old Charles enlisted in the Army Air Corps. After bombardier training at Deming, N.M., he was commissioned a second lieutenant. By June 1944, Lt. Goldblum was in B-24 Bomber training with the 422nd Base Group, Tonopah Army Air Field, Tonopah, Nev. Tonopah was a training field where the human components of a B-24 crew (pilot, copilot, bombardier, gunners, navigator, flight engineer, and radioman) were brought together. The teams flew together for approximately 100 hours before being assigned as a replacement crew.

Charles Goldblum's Grand Canyon adventure began just before midnight, June 20, 1944. He was one of six crew members on a high altitude navigation training mission to Tucson, Ariz., aboard #107, a B-24 D "Liberator" heavy bomber. Full combat crew on a B-24 was usually 10 men, but for this mission, #107's four gunners had been left behind.

Two weeks earlier, in Europe, the Normandy invasion had caught the Germans off guard. Mass raids of Allied bombers pounded the Nazis toward submission. The skies of Arizona and other southwestern states were filled with airplanes as training airfields turned out bomber crews and fighter pilots to man the aircraft pouring from the nation's assembly lines.

Unfortunately, this aerial training was not without cost. Student fliers, like beginners in any complex and dangerous endeavor, paid a high price for their inexperience. Also, by 1944, many of the combat aircraft used in advanced training had been rotated back after service in Europe and Asia. Inexperienced crews, combined with heavily used "trainer" aircraft, led to many crashes and a high mortality rate.

Tonopah Army Air Field, where Charles Goldblum trained, was a particularly egregious example. From 1942 through 1945, nine P-39 fighter planes and 17 B-24 heavy bombers crashed, killing all nine of the P-39 pilots, 13 entire 10-man B-24 crews, and portions of four other B-24 crews.²

Goldblum's bomber, #107, was at 23,000 feet over northern Arizona when its No. 3 engine began streaming flames. As the pilot and flight engineer worked to extinguish the fire, all four engines "conked out." Several explanations were later given for this failure.³

Because of their relatively small wing area in relation to total mass, B-24s would not glide for long without power. As #107 rapidly lost altitude, the pilot ordered the crew to bail out. The navigator, flight engineer, and Bombardier Goldblum dropped through the bomb bay into a moonless night.

As the others climbed down to jump, an engine coughed. The pilot, 2nd Lt. Donald Simpson of Pueblo, Colo., got back into his seat and tried to restart the engines. At about 10,000 feet his persistence paid off; three of the engines roared to life and #107 limped to an eventual safe landing at Kingman Army Air Field, Kingman, Ariz.

Floating below his parachute, Lt. Goldblum watched the lights of a distant town, which he later learned was Williams, Ariz. "I watched those lights hoping they would help me in my directions when I landed. Suddenly they blinked out completely as if someone had drawn a blind over them." He knew then that he was "falling into a hole of some sort."⁴

After several minutes, Goldblum was jerked violently as his chute caught on something he couldn't see, and he crashed along a rough stone wall. Feeling about in the blackness, he found a ledge and crawled up onto it, leaving his parachute harness buckled around him.

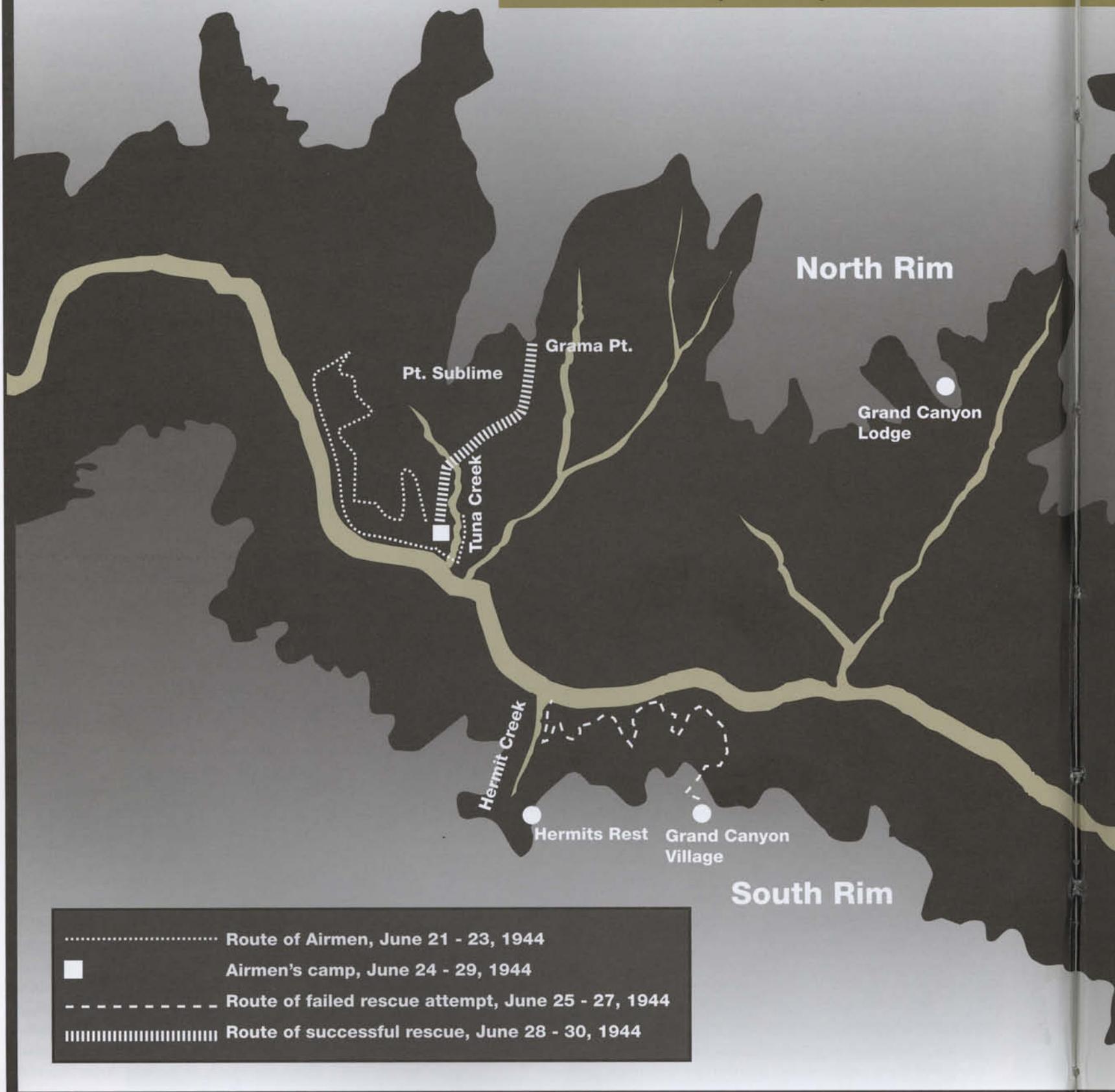
When dawn arrived, he could see that his chute had snagged the edge of the "jagged top of a cliff formation some 1,200 feet above the river."⁵ Had he unbuckled his harness during the night, the released tension might have pitched him off balance and over the edge. Prior to joining the military, Charles Goldblum had left Western Pennsylvania only once, to play in a basketball tournament in New York City,⁶ and now, as the morning brightened on a summer day in the Grand Canyon, Lt. Goldblum climbed up his parachute shroud lines to the top of the cliff. Although he had trained in the high desert of Nevada and flown over parts of the Southwest, his military experience could not have prepared him for the landscape which greeted him; it must have seemed as alien to an urban Easterner as the surface of the moon.

It is interesting to speculate on the emotions which the young airman felt. Most Grand Canyon hikers and river runners would agree that he must have been awed by the beauty and immensity of what he was seeing. One never forgets his first sunrise inside the canyon. The eastern sky gradually reddens until the sun climbs over the horizon. At first, only the highest east-facing cliffs have full light; then, the sun slowly angles down into the depths, causing a terrific dichotomy of sunshine and shadows. The young airman was experiencing the world's most awe-inspiring canyon at its most photogenic and impressive time of day.

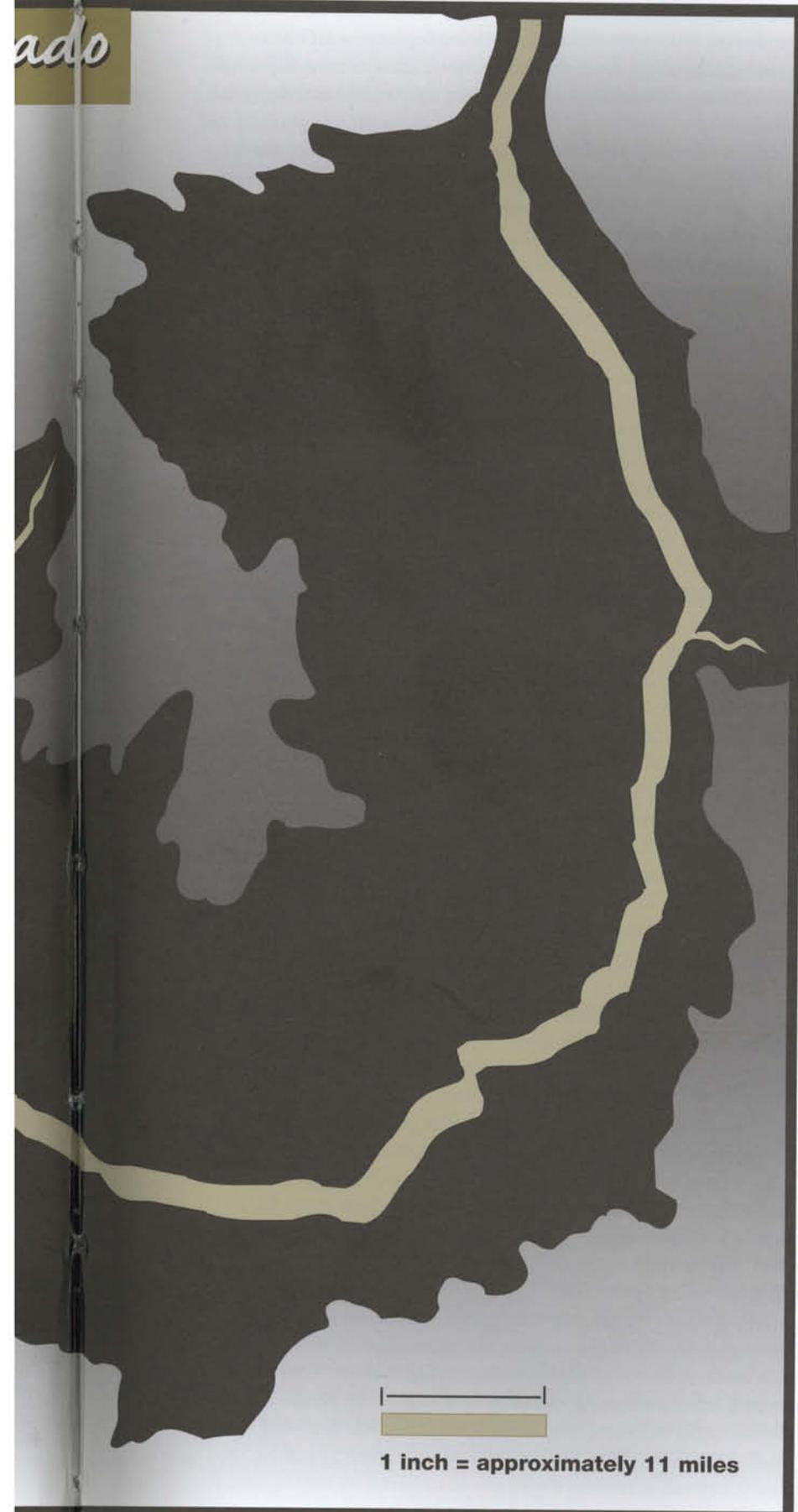
Goldblum stood on a relatively flat cactus-covered plateau which continued into the distance both before and behind him. To the north, beyond this platform, were great multicolored and conspicuously layered cliffs, the most distant gray-white toward the top and capped with trees. Southward, behind Goldblum, yawned the drop to the river that he had so nearly drifted over. Nearby, a side canyon split the plateau as it descended toward the river. In all directions were fantastically shaped cliffs, buttes, and peaks, their faces blazing with early morning sun.

Although Goldblum did not know it at the time, he was on the Tonto Plateau near Tuna Creek in Grand Canyon National Park. This relatively narrow platform extends for some 75 miles east-to-west, parallel to the inner gorge in the eastern part of the Grand Canyon, and is about two-thirds of the way down from the rim to the Colorado River. Lt. Goldblum was about 4,000 feet

Grand Canyon of the Colorado



ado



1 inch = approximately 11 miles

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They suffered through a gloomy and thirsty night. Cruickshank recalls those 24 hours as "one of the worst days I have ever spent." The next morning, Goldblum later recounted for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, "We sat there from 7:30 to 9:30... and not a word was spoken. The only sound was Cruickshank humming. [I]t turned out that we had all been praying."

below the North Rim and 1,200 feet above the Colorado River. The distant tree-capped cliffs were Point Sublime and Grama Point, which jut out from the North Rim. Then as now, the north Tonto Plateau is among the least visited and wildest terrain in the park.⁷

About noon, Goldblum spotted the parachute of the navigator, Flight Officer Maurice "Moe" Cruickshank. The Lawrence, Mass., native had landed hard and was in pain from a badly broken foot. The two men agreed that Goldblum would set out to find help, and then return for his injured comrade.

Cruickshank lay under his fleece-lined winter flying suit. He recalls that "it was better than just lying there and frying." Daytime highs in the Grand Canyon in June average near 100° F. About noon, he was "getting used to the pain but was getting very thirsty." Using a century plant stalk for a cane, he struggled into the dry creek bed of Tuna Creek, and limped toward the Colorado River.⁸

In mid-afternoon, Moe Cruickshank heard a noise in the canyon below him. He earlier had passed a cave with animal tracks around its mouth and wasn't eager to meet some wild beast that he "didn't feel well enough to cope with..."⁹ But the source of the noise turned out to be Goldblum. He had gone to the river and was climbing back up to help the injured navigator.

After spending the night, Goldblum and Cruickshank reached the Colorado River.¹⁰ Moe drank for the first time in some 30 hours. The river was in flood stage, the water brown with suspended silt. Cruickshank recalls filling his shoe with water and using it as a "goblet" to drink from.¹¹

On June 22, their second full day in the canyon, Cruickshank and Goldblum slowly worked their way downstream along the river. Moe looked up and saw a man in a dark green sweater on a ridge above them: "...I knew it was a ranger!" In fact, it was Flight Engineer Corp. Royce Embanks, the third man who had parachuted from the disabled B-24. Until he was close enough to recognize the other two airmen, Embanks also thought he had found a rescue party.¹²

Royce Embanks came from Kalispel, Mont., and was a flight engineer instructor at Tonopah. He had joined the mission at the last minute to replace a student flight engineer who was ill.¹³

Embanks had landed in a bush on a relatively gentle slope below the Tonto Plateau. He bundled his chute and carried it up to the plateau, where he spread it out and weighed it down with rocks — per Army Air Corps regulation for attracting air searchers. Realizing that the river might provide the best route of escape, but that swimming and crossing it might prove treacherous, Embanks had cut some of the parachute's shroud lines to use as rope.

After their reunion, the trio followed the river downstream. Through this area of the canyon, the river often cuts through cliffs, with no beach or passible bank along its edge. They tested the possibility of floating to safety on a log raft by pushing a tree trunk into the flood-swollen river. It thrashed end over end in a rapid, convincing them there would be no escape by raft on the river.¹⁴ Instead, Embanks swam ahead tethered on his rope, and

crawled onto a sandbar or rock. Then, tethered to him, the other men would move along the rope, and Embanks would pull them out of the current as they swung by. It was slow going, but they thought it was better than climbing up and down the precipitous banks along the river.

About dusk on June 23, the sound of heavy bomber engines echoed high above. The three men decided their chances of being spotted were better up on the plateau where they had landed, enough so to justify the risk of abandoning the river, even though they had no way to carry water. The next morning they began the long torturous ascent up a side canyon.¹⁵

Except for eating a few hard berries, they had gone four days without food and the rough haul back to the Tonto Plateau was almost too much.¹⁶ Struggling up onto the plateau, they again heard heavy bomber engines, and saw smoke to the east, where Embanks had spread his parachute. Energy dwindling, they labored back to where a plane had dropped a smoke bomb to mark the lost fliers' location — Embanks' parachute had been seen by searchers from the air. All that remained was a blackened circle.

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The trio's prayers were answered by a B-24 passing at low altitude; soon a second plane dropped K-rations and canteens wrapped in G.I. blankets. There were also orders: “Greetings! You are in the Grand Canyon. Do not leave your position until notified by message dropped from an Army airplane.”¹⁹

The pilot of that B-24 was Capt. Fred Milam, commanding officer of Training Section 4, 785th Squadron of the 466th Bomb Group at Tonopah. Milam had flown to Kingman to take part in the search, and became alarmed that so little was being done to find the missing men. Back at Tonopah, he asked the base commander for permission to mount a search mission.

Capt. Milam's request was granted with the stipulation that his three B-24s return to Tonopah every night. Milam says that he “put several 12 hour days in his flight log book,” before one of his search crews spotted the parachute down on the plateau.²⁰

The supplies that were dropped included a flare pistol with red, yellow, and green flares and a list of questions for the airmen to answer. A green flare was to signify “yes,” a red flare “no,” with a yellow flare to separate the answers. The questions, in the order to be answered were:

1. “Are all three men together?”
2. “Are all three men capable of walking?”
3. “Does any man have a broken bone?”
4. “Are you getting enough water?”
5. “Does any man need immediate medical attention?”

(Although Cruickshank was hurt, his broken foot was not life-threatening, so the men answered “no.”)²¹

On subsequent drops, the men received a two-way radio; food including 10 pounds of steak, clothing, and two bottles of whiskey; and the men's own G.I. shoes.²² The airmen had parachuted wearing high altitude sheepskin flight suits and heavy rubber-soled flight boots. The drop containing Cruickshank's shoes drifted into the river, but replacement 9-B brogans were safely delivered. He cut the shoe's side out to accommodate his swollen foot.²³

The air drops supplied more than adequate amounts of food, but there was never quite enough water. Charles Goldblum discovered a small spring in the bed of Tuna Creek about a mile north of their Tonto Plateau camp. He carried canteens to the spring and slowly filled them from the shallow water using a canteen cup.²⁴

That same day, June 25, a rescue party mounted on Fred Harvey Company mules set out from the South Rim (then as now, the Fred Harvey Company owned sole concession rights for Grand Canyon National Park). It carried a Coast Guard petty officer (Chief Boatswain Mate Dan E. Clark), a 200-pound line-throwing cannon, and a two-piece 16-foot rescue boat. At the river, they planned to assemble the boat and, using a rope fired over by the cannon, ferry across. They brought three extra mules for Goldblum, Cruickshank, and Embanks.²⁵

John Bradley, chief mule wrangler and guide for Harvey in 1944, recalls that the mule train descended the Bright Angel Trail, then followed the Tonto Plateau west to Hermit Creek. Below Hermit Rapids, they calculated the speed of the raging Colorado and questioned the cannon's ability to lodge its 4-inch iron ball in the granite of the opposite bank. The next morning, after considerable disagreement, they abandoned the boat and started back up to the South Rim.²⁶

The June 29 newspapers reported the failure of the South Rim rescue and speculated on bringing a helicopter or blimp from Wright Field, Ohio.²⁷ The papers also mentioned that a new rescue party was starting from the North Rim. This was Grand Canyon National Park Ranger Ed Laws and Alan MacRae.

MacRae taught Old Testament history at a seminary in Wilmington, Del. He had hiked the Grand Canyon 14 times since 1922, and on this trip to the canyon, he was on his honeymoon. While his wife rested at the South Rim Village, he had decided to backpack solo to Clear Creek.²⁸

During his hike, MacRae encountered Grand Canyon National Park Superintendent Harold C. Bryant and an *Arizona Highways* photographer. They were riding horses to Clear Creek and told MacRae of the stranded flyers. He immediately hurried on to the North Rim to volunteer to attempt a rescue.²⁹

MacRae was told that the North Rim rangers had no authority to authorize a rescue attempt. He then began to hike back across to the South Rim with an aviator who was convalescing at Grand Canyon. At the Ribbon Falls telephone, the aviator had tried to call the North Rim, and was told to put MacRae on the phone, as he was needed for a rescue attempt. The next day, MacRae returned to the North Rim, where he met Ranger R. E. Laws, who was to join him on the undertaking.³⁰

At 56, Ranger Ed Laws was a 20-year Park Service veteran. Newspaper articles claimed he had delivered mail on horseback from Kanab, Utah, to Lees Ferry, Ariz., at the age of 9.³¹ Ed Laws was a good man in the back country. Moe Cruickshank recalls that Laws said he had undergone an appendectomy just 10 days before the rescue.³²

On the morning of June 28, Laws and MacRae left Grama Point (immediately east of Point Sublime) and scrambled down the east side of Tuna Creek's eastern arm. From the air, Capt. Fred Milam had laid out a rescue route and marked it with paint bombs. Most critically, he had reported a rock slide route through the Redwall formation, usually the toughest vertical barrier from rim to river.

However, in late afternoon, when Laws and MacRae reached Milam's Redwall route, they found a 150-foot drop, far beyond the reach of their ropes. Seeing a bright green spot level with them on the opposite side, they back-tracked and reached this spring just before dark. They camped there for the night and at first light found a fine break through the Redwall.³³

That morning, the two rescuers strode into the airmen's well-supplied camp. Breaking the tension of that first moment, Laws quipped, "You boys sure are suffering in comfort."³⁴

Goldblum radioed news of the rescuers' arrival. Since no one wanted to carry the 50-pound radio, it was their last transmission.³⁵

The climb up the East Fork of Tuna Creek is difficult; boulders and other obstructions choke the stream bed so that a hiker is continually scrambling up, around, and over obstructions. Moe Cruickshank recalls that the desire to escape was so strong that he scarcely noticed the pain in his broken foot.³⁶

At the Redwall base, they climbed the break which Laws and MacRae had descended. Several years later, veteran Grand Canyon hiker Harvey Butchart reported finding old ropes on this section; other climbers had seen the same ropes, a rotted sneaker, and a canteen full of water on the Redwall break, probably left by the 1944 rescue party.³⁷ Moe Cruickshank tells of losing a canteen when a belt loop on his pants gave way.³⁸

The next day, June 30, at 12:45 p.m., the five scrambled up onto Grama Point to a waiting crowd of journalists, radio reporters, military brass, and Park Service officials. Someone exclaimed, "My God, it's them." The three airmen had been below the rim for 10 days. Cruickshank recalls that they were badly sunburned, and that he'd lost 38 pounds during his canyon stay.

Goldie Goldblum, Moe Cruickshank, and Roy Embanks gave nationwide radio interviews on NBC,³⁹ appeared in the July 10, 1944, *Time* magazine, and were wined and dined at the Grand Canyon South Rim's El Tovar Hotel. Goldblum and Embanks took 17-day furloughs. Cruickshank went back to the hospital at Tonopah, where bones in his foot were rebroken and set, and then also went home on leave. In August, all three were back on active duty at Tonopah Army Air Field.

Lt. Charles Goldblum was assigned to a B-24 unit in the Philippines. Five months later, in December 1944, he was listed as

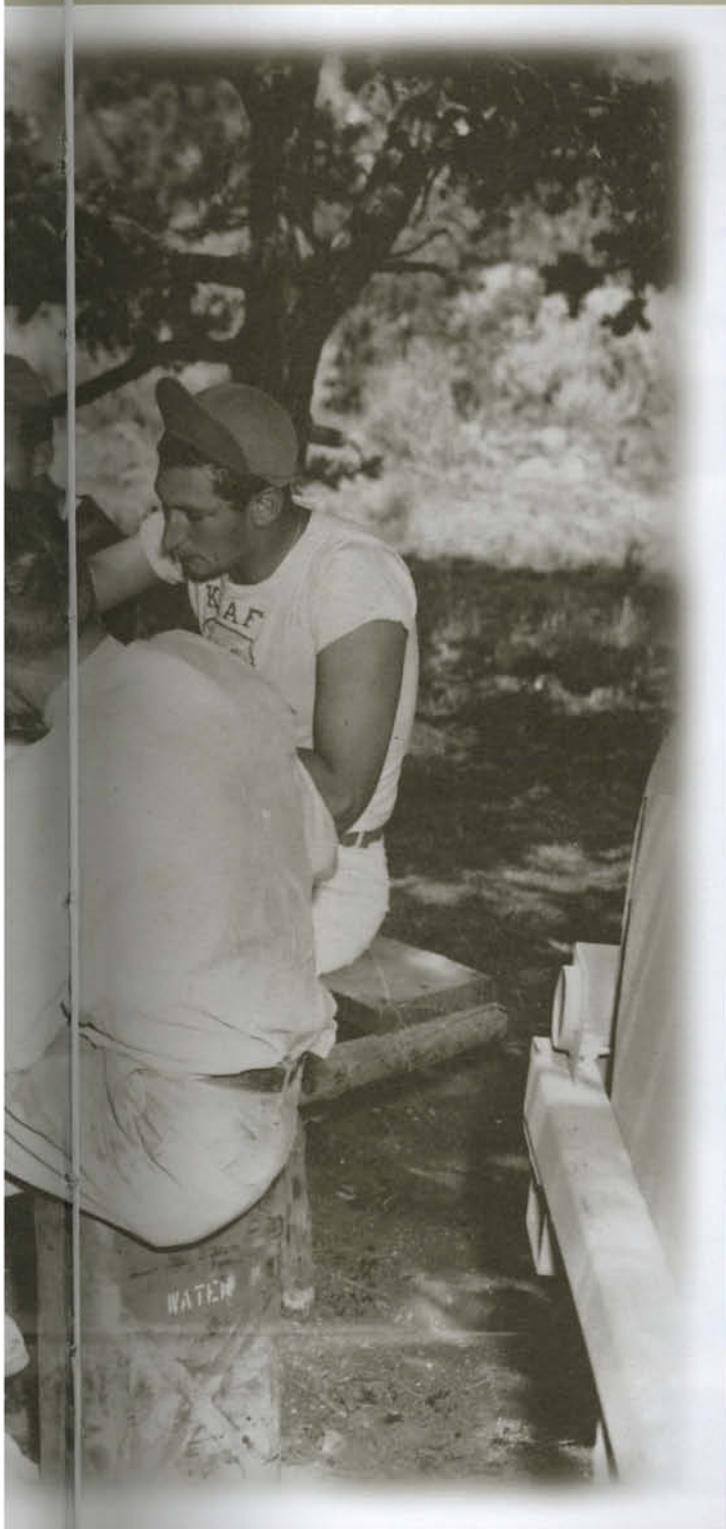




Airmen and rescuers are congratulated by Col. Donald Phillips, Commander of Kingman Army Air Field, June 30, 1944. From left in the foreground are Phillips, Ranger Ed Laws, rescuer Alan MacRae, and the airmen who had been stranded — Corp. Royce Embanks, 2nd Lt. Charles Goldblum, and Flight Officer Maurice Cruickshank.

Airmen and rescuers eat at a picnic table after reaching Point Sublime, June 30, 1944. From left, Alan MacRae and his wife, Maurice Cruickshank, Royce Embanks, Charles Goldblum, and Ranger Ed Laws (back to camera).





“Missing in Action” following a bombing mission. His body was never recovered.

The other two airmen survived the war; Roy Embanks died in 1990. Maurice Cruickshank lives in Alaska, and returned to Arizona in 1991 to look down into Tuna Creek from Point Sublime.

Cruickshank says that Park Superintendent Harold Bryant had long ago promised that the point on the Tonto where they camped would be named EMOGO Point (EMbanks -MOE Cruickshank -GOldblum).⁴⁰ In 1997, a group of Grand Canyon history enthusiasts submitted a formal nomination to the Society for Geographic Names. EMOGO Point would be a fitting commemoration of the three airmen’s adventure, and a memorial to Charles Goldblum and other young men of his generation who did not return from World War II. ❁

Notes

¹ For example, front page coverage occurred in the *Arizona Republic*, June 30 - July 2, 1944, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (hereafter *P-G*), June 27 - July 1, 1944.

² Personal communication, Tonopah A.F.B. researcher Allen Metscher to author, Jan. 5, 1996.

³ Fred Milam, the B-24 pilot who led the search for Goldblum, recalls that the problem was officially listed as a high altitude failure of electrical power: personal communication, Fred Milam to author, Aug. 1994. Former Tonopah student and B-24 pilot William K. Lee says the “scuttlebutt” at the time was that a protective flap over the master switch box next to the co-pilot was missing on #107. Presumably, the co-pilot’s knee bumped the unprotected switches, shutting off all four engines: personal communication, William K. Lee to author, Sept. 1995. A National Park Service report (July 2, 1944) cites “failure of the mechanism controlling the pitch of the propeller,” but this seems unlikely. Kyle Clay, former B-24 flight engineer, suggests that fuel to all engines may have been cut off in the course of shutting down the defective engine: personal communication, Kyle Clay to author, Aug. 1994.

⁴ *Arizona Republic*, July 2, 1944.

⁵ *Ibid.* Also *The Cactus*, Kingman Army Air Field, July 6, 1944. Although 1,200 feet is the approximate elevation change from the Tonto Plateau to the river, there is no single 1,200-foot cliff descending directly to the river in this area. Probably, Lt. Goldblum determined that figure from later looking at a map. A 500-foot drop certainly would have seemed much higher when he was hanging over it.

⁶ Personal communication, Charlotte Wolkin to author, July 1990.

⁷ Goldblum’s estimated location is based upon the finding of a parachute by Scott Thybony (personal communication, Scott Thybony to author) on the east side of Tuna Creek. The other two airmen’s parachutes are accounted for in other locations.

⁸ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Descending the 60-foot “pour over” in the bed of Tuna Creek just above the river would have been extremely difficult without ropes. The airmen probably retreated from the impasse, and then walked down a series of ledges leading to the river west of the mouth of Tuna Creek.

¹¹ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *The Cactus*, Kingman Army Air Field, July 6, 1944.

¹⁴ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.

¹⁵ Probably Menadonock Canyon or the next drainage to the west.

¹⁶ The gamble of climbing back to the Tonto without water could well have been a fatal mistake. In the heat of June, water quickly becomes the most crucial element for Grand Canyon survival, and the chance they took probably would not have been considered by experienced Grand Canyon hikers.

¹⁷ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.

¹⁸ *P-G*, July 8, 1944.

¹⁹ Undated typed instructions signed by Fred W. Milam, in the possession of Charlotte Wolkin.

²⁰ Personal communication, Fred W. Milam to author, April 1994.

²¹ Undated typed instructions signed by Fred W. Milam, in the possession of Charlotte Wolkin.

²² List of supplies from copy of original document recovered July 21, 1949, by P.T. Reilly, Northern Arizona University Special Collections Library.

²³ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.

²⁴ *Ibid.* This is probably the spring in Tuna Creek's west fork just above its junction with the east branch. It supplies a dozen shallow pools on the polished stream bed with mineral-laden water. Tree frog tadpoles and tiny worms populate the pools.

²⁵ *P-G*, June 28, 1944.

²⁶ Personal communication, John Bradley to author, Nov. 24, 1990.

²⁷ *P-G*, June 29, 1944.

²⁸ Letter, Allan MacRae to Harvey Butchart, Jan. 13, 1977. Original is in the papers of Butchart.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *P-G*, June 29, 1944.

³² Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.

³³ Correspondence of Allan MacRae to Harvey Butchart, Jan. 13, 1977. Original in papers of Butchart.

³⁴ *Arizona Republic*, July 2, 1944.

³⁵ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991. It is believed that the canyon's first commercial boatman, Norm Nevills, later appropriated the radio.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Personal communication, Harvey Butchart to author, Sept. 30, 1989.

³⁸ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.

³⁹ Original glass records of an interview by KTAR Program Director (later Arizona Governor) Howard Pyle in the collections of Sharlot Hall Museum Archives, Prescott, Ariz.

⁴⁰ Personal communication, Maurice Cruickshank to author, March 30, 1991.



Charles Goldblum (in uniform), back in Pittsburgh on furlough in July 1944 at Don Metz Casino, 3802 Forbes Street.

Quilts

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