

**A WHALE OF A TALE**  
By **JIM SAMPLE**

**THE TUNDRA WAS ABUNDANT WITH ITS GREEN GRASSES AND ABLAZE WITH BRIGHTLY COLORED FLOWERS IN LATE JUNE OF 1945. EVERYWHERE THE ENVIRONMENT WAS UNTOUCHED BY MAN OR MACHINE. NATURE WAS WORKING ITS WONDERS. THE FLOWERS WERE LIKE DESERT BLOSSOMS, SMALL AND SO TINY AS NOT TO BE READILY SEEN, EXCEPT IN LARGE NUMBERS. SPRING IN THE ALEUTIANS CAN BE A TOTAL SURPRISE AFTER THE DRABNESS OF WINTER'S DARK SIDE.**

**WE WERE IN BETWEEN MISSIONS THIS PARTICULAR DAY AND AS USUAL IF WE HAD NO SCHEDULED TRAINING WE WERE ON OUR OWN. IT WAS CALM WITH ONLY A FEW SCATTERED COTTON BALL CLOUDS AND THE SUN WAS SHINING BRIGHTLY. A RARE DAY FOR THE ALEUTIANS, WHICH HAPPENED ONLY A FEW TIMES A YEAR SO OUR CREW DECIDED TO TAKE A STROLL AROUND THE ISLAND ALONG THE OCEAN'S EDGE. WE LOOKED FOR ANYTHING UNUSUAL SUCH AS SHELLS, TOOTH IVORY, ETC. AND WE TOOK PICTURES WITH US SITTING ON A WHALE VERTEBRA THAT WAS ALONG THE BEACH. WHEN WE CAME TO THE DOCK THERE WAS A CRASH BOAT TIED UP WITH ITS CREW ON BOARD SO WE BEGAN TALKING TO THEM. THEY WERE GOING OUT TO SEA FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS AND ASKED IF WE WOULD LIKE TO GO ALONG. WE JUMPED AT THE CHANCE! THE BOAT CAPTAIN TOOK US ON TOUR OF THE GALLEY, QUARTERS, WHEELHOUSE AND THE ENGINE ROOM. THE BOAT WAS POWERED BY TWO PACKARD V-16 ENGINES WHICH COULD REALLY PACK A PUNCH. THE ARMAMENT CONSISTED OF TWIN "FIFTIES" FORE AND AFT AND ON EACH SIDE OF THE CABIN.**

**WE CAST OFF AND BEFORE LONG COULD SEE THE MOUNTAINS OF ATTU CLEAR AS A BELL. AFTER MEANDERING AROUND FOR A LITTLE WHILE WE FOUND OURSELVES IN THE MIDDLE OF A SCHOOL OF WHALES. THERE WERE ABOUT A DOZEN OF THEM RISING AND "BLOWING" ALL AROUND US. I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND THEY WERE BUT THEY WERE HUGE. WE FOLLOWED THEM FOR ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE WE LOST THEM. WE RETURNED TO THE DOCK AFTER ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF AND TO THIS DAY IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST DELIGHTFUL ADVENTURES I HAVE EVER HAD. WE THANKED THE CREW AND PROMISED THE NEXT TIME WE HAD A SUPPLY "RUN" WE WOULD INVITE THEM ALONG. JUST A FEW WEEKS LATER WE WERE TO GO TO ATTU SO WE INVITED THE BOAT CAPTAIN AND HIS CREW ALONG. ON THE WAY BACK OUR PILOT, O. J. WATKINS, DROPPED THE B-24 VERY CLOSE TO THE WATER. WE OPENED THE BOMB BAY DOORS AND COULD SEE THE CHOPPY WAVES WITH SMALL WHITECAPS. OUR ENGINEER ASKED ONE OF THEIR CREW TO WALK ACROSS THE CATWALK WITH HIM TO THE WAIST. WHEN THEY WENT THROUGH THE BOMB BAYS, THE PROP WASH WAS PICKING UP A SPRAY FROM THE WHITECAPS AND BLOWING WATER ON THEM. THE CRASH CREW MATE**

**SAID "HE PREFERRED TO GET HIS FEET WET ON A BOAT DECK AND NOT FROM THE BELLY OF A B-24!"**

**IF BY CHANCE A READER OF THIS ACCOUNT WAS A MEMBER OF THAT CRASH BOAT CREW PLEASE WRITE TO ME. I WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM THEM.**

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