

didn't see the kite—only the blokes on the raft and the sea all round and bad weather coming.

We were finishing on Huddys then, flying from one of the South Island stations. Near the end of the course it happened, and of anything that has happened to me that affair is the one I remember most. There we were, hanging round and doing nothing, and there they were below us, and the sea and the night coming and we couldn't do anything for them.

We were out on a cross-country on a day when there probably weren't more than three aircraft up at the same time. We were heading for home with the light failing and not long to go before sunset. I was flying the kite and Steve was navigating, and Lin Morrey, from Matamata, was playing with the radio when the station called us and gave us the story. One of the Huddys was down in the drink and we were the nearest kite to her. We had been following the coast keeping low. Steve had relations with a farm right on the shore and we were going to beat the place up on the way home. But we got the position and went out to sea. The wind was hard on us and there was dirty weather ahead. Steve got busy working drift and things like that to pick the boys up, though we didn't really know whether they got clear of the kite or not. It turned out that they had, so we were right. The Huddy was gone when we found the spot, and a couple of minutes later we saw the raft drifting off to the south and in towards the shore, though the coastline was out of sight. Visibility wasn't good and I had to take the kite down. There was a heavy swell and the sea was chopping and every so often the water swept over them. And there wasn't anything round but the sea. It was lonely and harsh then. I used to be mad on the sea and sailing, but since then, I've hated it.

One of the crew was missing. We counted the boys on the raft, and one of them waved to us as we went over. One hand gone already. He may have gone off the raft or he may not have got to it when the kite went down. It doesn't make any difference, but knowing that didn't make us feel any



too good. Lin called up the station and gave them the position of the raft, and then they recalled us. Our gas was getting low and we couldn't have stayed round any longer.

That was the first time I saw anything like that, the few boys and all round that damnably big and empty sea. On the way back I must have been flying without thinking of what I was doing. The only thing I thought about was the way the raft drifted and the chap on it waving to us and wondering how long he would be waving before the last sea got them.

Going back, I seemed to think they were done already and that whatever any one did would be useless. I went over all the things that could be done, and they didn't add up. The reasons were good. But I still knew that those boys were as good as gone, sent down with a firing party even, and that is pretty final. I don't know if it was hysteria. It didn't seem like it then. I was just thinking as we flew back. We knew where they were and the station knew, and all the business was on the way to bring them back and put them in the air, but I could have walked into the offices of the heads that were arranging things and said, "Look, don't bother, because they won't be there again and you can't do anything about it." I knew it. At the same time, I was all set to go back and have a shot at it. Any one would have done the same.

We got in and reported. They asked us questions and we gave them answers, and somehow I sensed that Steve and Lin felt just as I did. When we stepped outside, the hangars were all under that calm light you get before a storm, a light