

"A true account, supplemented by 40 photographs, of a pilot's life while he was helping to deliver bombs, gasoline and other vital supplies from India to China - over the dangerous Himalayan Mountains - during WWII.

The Diary of a Pilot

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*The Diary of a Pilot*

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The information presented in this book is accurate to the best knowledge of the author. Any errors are solely unintentional.

All photographs were taken by the author. It is unfortunate that the older pictures included were developed in small rural towns (Jorhat, India, Pengshan, China) that had but crude facilities for processing photographs. The quality of the pictures suffered accordingly!

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*The Diary of a Pilot*

*Arch Doty, Jr.*



## *India*

In India we made our first trips over the Himalayas on the India - China “Hump” route as copilots of twin-engine C-46 cargo planes . We had never seen, or been in this type plane before, and had no training in twin engine planes.

Within a month it was decided that there were too many pilots at our field, so I was transferred to Jorhat, another base in the Assam Valley.

Jorhat was a small town on the banks of the Brahmaputra River in eastern India. It is in the Assam Valley, which is bordered on the north by Tibet, on the west by Bhutan and on the east by Burma, and is primarily an agricultural area, with extensive tea plantations (our field occupied one) and rice fields which were commonly plowed with the help of Water Buffalos.



### **Objective**

When I arrived in India all land and sea routes to the unoccupied portion of China had been cut by the Japanese advances in Asia. The Chinese troops under General Chiang Kai-Shek had been forced into the western part of the country, and were in urgent need of supplies.

Our flying route across the Himalayan mountains was the only remaining lifeline for transporting vital military supplies to China. We originally flew from the Assam Valley in eastern India to a series

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of airfields in the Kunming area of China - which later was the eastern terminus of the "Ledo Road" from India.

A later objective was to provide supplies, including bombs and gasoline, to airfields in the Chengtu region of China which were built to allow the new B-29 bombers to mount raids directly on Japan.

### **Terrain**

The terrain under all of our routes was all bad. There was NO place to land if you got in trouble, and NO emergency fields. On the Northern route to Chengtu we flew over the main part of the Hump, and turned left at 19,800 foot Mt. Tali (which we seldom saw). If we flew too far South we were over Japanese occupied territory, and we had enough problems with Jap fighters without having to fool around down there.



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## **Loads**

Going to China we carried a lot of things. The basic load consisted of rows of 55 gallon drums of 100 octane gasoline, with 250# bombs strapped on top. A VERY narrow space was left on one side, just wide enough for the crew members to walk from the rear door to the front cabin. However, the space was not wide enough to let the crew wear parachutes. No problem getting IN, as we carried our chutes, but impossible to get OUT in an emergency with your chute on! (Alternative was to go out a ceiling hatch in the pilot's compartment. However, if you went out that way the chances of hitting one of the two tail sections was pretty good.)

We also carried a lot of other items. One time we carried a complete load of nothing but cases of Chinese bank notes (printed by the American Bank Note Company).



Going back to India we were usually empty. However, sometimes we carried tin or tungsten - mined in China, badly needed in the US for hi-test steel. Occasionally we carried 100 or so Chinese soldiers, who were going to India for training. And, let me tell you, that was a really stinking load, as NONE of them had ever been in a plane before, and most tended to get airsick. We finally solved that problem by flying them back at about 16 or 18 thousand feet. The majority regained consciousness when we landed. Had a small problem one day when some of our passengers got cold, and started a fire. (The Chinese troops carried EVERYTHING they needed with them, including food, cooking implements and wood.)

The supplies that we carried over the Hump were originally shipped from the United States to Calcutta. There they were loaded onto trains which carried them north to Assam Province. The rail line

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ended at the Brahmaputra River. As there was no railroad bridge across that river the supplies had to be barged across it and then loaded on smaller rail cars that ran on the narrow gauge Bengal and Assam Railroad, which carried them to Jorhat.

High priority cargo, as medical supplies or parts needed to keep planes flying, was carried by air from Miami to India by the "Red Ball Express". This took three days.

We did have one kind of load that caused us a bit of concern. These were new bombs that contained "Compound B".

When we began to carry these bombs we were cautioned that they could be unstable, and it was suggested that we land as softly as possible.

We were told that, when these bombs were exposed to the fierce Indian sun, the nitroglycerine which they contained tended to separate from the other material, and to pool in the bottom of the casing. Thus they would explode if subjected to excessive shock.

We were very careful when flying these bombs, but the Chinese who unloaded our planes apparently did not get the message about their sensitivity.

It was customary for our ships to be unloaded in China by crews who unloaded the bombs that we carried and placed them on flat bed trucks. The trucks were then driven to the field's Bomb Dump, where they were unloaded. The usual procedure was to roll bombs off the trucks, and let them drop the three feet or so to the ground. This caused no problems for normal bombs, as they are quite inert.

The Compound B bombs, however, were another story. We were told that there were several incidents where Compound B bombs were kicked off trucks with results that reduced the number of bombs and personnel at that bomb dump!



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*December 24, 1943*

*Flew from Jorhat to Chabua last night- had a runaway propeller on takeoff. Left Chabua just after midnight and got to Chengkung at 3 AM. Sat until 7, and then were caught in a two ball air raid alert. We were driven up to an air raid cave, and found it full of goats!*

*Finally cleared to leave. I took off, navigated, did most of the flying and landed (a good one). Very clear over the Hump, so we went 'way north, just in case. No more getting chased by Zeros for us!*

*Got home to Jorhat about 3 PM, and went to sleep immediately, having been up for two days and one night.*

*December 25, 1943 - Christmas*

*Woke up at 1:40 AM, opened the map that family sent me, went over and had some scrambled eggs. Listened to the radio for a few minutes, and back to bed.*

*Woke at 6:45 AM, and heard Christmas songs from Chungking on the radio.*

*Opened most of my presents this morning, and found everything that I could possibly want - books, this pen and diary, food, a flashlight (lost my old one yesterday in Chabua!), candy, etc.*

*More carols after lunch- wish that I were home.*

*Went down to visit Jim Wigg, and picked up the two quarts of VO that he and Sprow owed me. Dinner with McCarty in his Mess Hall office-- turkey & cranberry. We had one of the plum puddings that family sent me- very good!*

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*Tonight we lost two more ships-Jack Armstrong crashed 302 at Yunnanyi and Berube bailed out of 141 about 180 miles north of here - mighty rugged country up there!*

*Come to think, of it, we have lost 11 planes since November 11th.*

*Jan 7 & 8, 1944*

*Got up late and spent the morning billeting.*

*After lunch took my Babu (note: the head man of my 120 Indians - T. Burati) down to a meeting of Billeting Officers, where we set up a standard wage scale for all of the Indians on the field.*

*After this Paul Silverstine and I borrowed a Jeep and went out into the sticks to arrange about getting charcoal for the new fireplace (it costs 5 Rupees/ maund)*

*Spam for supper. Saw "Jane Eyre" & then came back to the basha to sit around the fire and talk.*

*I was just starting to bed when I was called for a flight with Cannon. Had scrambled eggs at the Mess Hall and went down to Operations. Watched the fog begin to roll in for a while as we waited for a ship to be assigned to us. I finally caught a half hour's sleep, lying on top of a table.*

*We were finally given 701- a B-24, but it wasn't gassed, so we didn't get off until after 2 A.M.. We took a cargo of gas and 500# bombs to Chengkung. Got some eggs and slept for an hour in a straight back chair while the plane was unloaded.*

*Very clear on the way back. Got the devil scared out of us when we sighted a flight of B-24's over Fort Hetz, right where Siderides and I were chased by two Zeros last month.*

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*I've been noticing lately that a lot of pilots here are getting gray hair- I'm just losing mine! I've also noticed that all of us in the basha are getting critical and argumentative including me! Eight months of Assam is plenty for me, but according to a new bulletin I may have to be here for another ten months - a total of eighteen months. That's for flying personnel- ground types would need two years. Hope that they don't change it again.*

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## **MEDICAL**

Of course we all had a few medical problems. Most of us had colds and sinus problems. These might have resulted from our having (in the steamy, hot, humid Indian summers) to start trips wearing underwear shorts and a parachute, and then keep adding clothing as we got up to cruising altitude. Finally we had on winter uniforms, fleece lined jackets, fleece lined boots and heavy gloves. Coming back from China we did a reverse strip-tease!

We all took regular doses of Atabrine to ward off malaria. After a couple of years of this a person's skin becomes an interesting shade of yellow!

We usually flew at 18,000' to 25,000'. This meant that on a round trip we were on oxygen for about six hours - with no cabin heat. If you wanted to have a cigarette you held it in one hand while holding your oxygen mask in the other - and alternated between the two.

When we returned to India from a round trip to China the flight medics gave each crew member a shot of whiskey - to calm us down, I guess - as we were often a bit of a mess.

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## *China*

My first assignment upon arrival in China was at the B-29 field known as "A 1" - a few miles from Chengtu.

On August 16, 1944 I moved to Pengshang China (about 15 miles from A-1) to start the duties (which I thoroughly enjoyed) as Commanding Officer of the ATC Detachment there, and as Base Operations Officer of A-7, as that B-29 bomber base was designated.

The Operations building, with its bamboo walls and tile roof, was rather primitive.



Chuck Koester was assigned the identical positions at the Air Force Detachment at field A-5, another of the B-29 bases.

My dog Dingle was flown over to me (wearing an oxygen mask, I was told) a few weeks later. Unfortunately, the Chinese think that plump dogs are delicious, so Dingle did not survive too long.

### **WHAT DID WE DO IN CHINA ?**

My basic job was to supervise the personnel who insured that arriving planes were met and logged in, that arrangements were made for their

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unloading and refueling (if necessary), that the crews were fed and that they were provided with take off clearances and weather information.

This work was done by a small, but excellent group of enlisted men. My Master Sergeant was a full blooded American Indian, and he was wonderful to work with.

This is the front door of Operations.  
Obviously I wasn't too busy!



## **EXACTLY WHERE WERE WE ?**

The main B-29 field, A-1, was at Hsinching, just outside of Chengtu, in Western China, on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River.

Three other B-29 fields were in the area, including A-3 at Kwanghan, A-5 at Kiunglai (where Chuck Koester was stationed), and A-7 at Pengshan, where I was - about 20 miles South of A-1. The fields were all generally similar in layout. This is A-5 at Hsinching.



## **LIVING CONDITIONS**

Our quarters were tents heated by wood fires in a central stove. In the winter we would sleep with up to six blankets to keep warm. A tent on a snowy night is not really comfortable! Showers were 100 feet away, and consisted of a 55 gallon drum filled with warm water and a shower head welded to its bottom. An incredibly old Chinese man kept a charcoal fire going under the drum to warm the water. No one wasted much time getting to or from the shower on a cold winter morn!

Incidentally, when we were flying the Hump we did not usually wear insignia of rank, as that could make life uncomfortable if we happened to end up in occupied territory. That made a problem in China as, at one point in time, we got a notice that the Inspector General was coming in from India to inspect our fields. Problem was that many of us had been promoted, but didn't have new insignia for our new rank. (The I.G. apparently chickened out when it came to flying the Hump, and never arrived). On the flight line, however, we DID wear insignia so that visiting crews knew who we were.

One of the real delights in living in China was food. We had real (not powdered) eggs, and real (not canned) vegetables. Also, the Chinese are superb cooks, so I did not miss the Buffalo meat, Spam and weevil filled bread of India. When Chuck and I went home from India for our leave, I weighed 137 pounds!. A few months in China and I was back up to 150+ pounds.

## **FLYING**

To keep on flying status we had a couple of C-47s ( the military version of the DC-3), and ran a sort of passenger/courier airline to a number of fields around China. This was the last leg of the military cargo route from the U.S. I made numerous trips as pilot or copilot on this "Airline" (which, being staffed by survivors from the Hump

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route, flew only in the daytime, and only when the weather was acceptable to us!). These included trips to

Hsian	Kwanghan
Ankang	Liangshan
Hanchung	Suining
Chungking	

After a couple of trips as copilot, I was given a C-47, a load of passengers, and told to take them to a field a few hundred miles away (Hsian). And NO, I had never been in a C- 47 before I got to China, and NO, I had no flight training in this ship! However, I was rated as a "First Pilot" in C-47s, in spite of never having been officially checked out in them! Actually, after flying the lumbering 4 engine transports for many hundreds of hours, the C-47 (which is a very forgiving plane) was a delightful experience.

Incidentally, we got battle stars for flying to Hsian (where they have since found thousands of buried statues of 2,000-year-old soldiers), because the approach to the field was over occupied territory.

At Hsian there were wonderful watermelons for sale. So, when we had unloaded our load of passengers we then loaded up with several hundred pounds of watermelons, flew them back to our base (about a 2 hour flight) at 15,000 feet (to chill them ) and let the home base tower know that they could be had at a reasonable price by meeting our plane. We always had a large welcoming committee when we landed!

## **Recreational Flying**

We also had a number of small training planes at A-1, the main B-29 base, and we were free to fly them whenever we were there. Very often several of us - on a clear day - would be sightseeing, or playing "Hide and Seek" in small clouds over the field.

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