

# The Burma Banshee

COLLECTOR SERIES III



It was when China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) transports were evacuating refugees or dropping rice from the skies to the starving Chinese troops hemmed in in northern Burma during the early days of WWII.

Inside the blacked-out cabin of the CNAC DC-3, 54 haggard refugees huddled. In the cockpit Captain Sweet, a veteran CNAC Captain, pondered the possibilities of eluding the ever present Japanese night fighters. So far everything was well when suddenly the left engine gasped, coughed and finally died. With only the one engine roaring on full power, bright exhaust flames streamed behind. A landing was imminent and just across the border in Free China Sweet managed to land safely. He radioed his predicament to CNAC headquarters in Chungking. The plane was hub deep in sticky Chinese mud so that even with the 54 passengers and crew the plane could not be inched to cover. The best hope was to cover the plane with leaves, grass and branches. But as dawn came, five Mitsui fighters streaked down, guns spitting, and blasted the transport until their ammunition was exhausted. At noon more Jap fighters arrived and left only when it was evident the plane was finished for good.

When the CNAC repair crew, led by Chief of Maintenance Sigmund Soldinski arrived, they found 3,247 bullet holes, demolished instruments, dozens of snapped control cables, flat tires and among other things, two propeller blades missing. They replaced 4 of the 41 instruments, other shot-up parts, and installed the only engine available, a 950HP fighter engine in place of the standard 1150HP engine. The biggest group of bullet holes were patched with aluminum, but what about the

other 3,000 or so holes? In a Missionary's garden next to the field, Sweet remembered seeing a large canvas awning. Yes, it could be "borrowed." And for patching? Some homemade Chinese glue would do. These patches were then covered with wing dope.

By the second night, repairs were completed and by then Captain Chuck Sharp, CNAC Operations Manager, was on the scene. With Soldinski aboard, Sharp made a test run, picked up the rest of the mechanics and headed for India 1500 miles away. With a 30 mile headwind and with just enough power to keep it flying, 13 hours and 53 minutes later they landed to refuel, replace a broken control cable and make other adjustments. Sharp picked up four stranded Americans and three Britishers and headed on to India. The weather forecast was horrible, which was good, as there would be cloud cover in which to avoid Japanese detection. When within enemy range, Sharp slowly dropped down into the approaching clouds. The first rain pellets spattered against the windshield and thin aluminum skin of the transport. More and more came, sounding like bullets to the occupants. Tiny rivulets grew to streams across the cockpit windows. Suddenly the whine of the engines was broken by a high pitched shrill note. Those patches were being washed off by the rain and the wind was howling like a thousand tortured demons. With each new note louder and shriller than the one before, the noise was unbearable, but there was no choice but to fly on until the skies cleared.

Just before sunset Sharp's keen eyes picked out six tiny dots on the horizon, Jap fighters. And, yes, they had seen the transport and were roaring in. The once friendly clouds had vanished. There wasn't a hiding place to be found. Closer and closer they came until those aboard the transport could make out the Rising Sun insignia. Would they attack or force the plane to land? Wonder of wonders, they did neither. Instead, as if by a sudden frightening command, they veered off and headed home.

Whether the Japanese Air Force in Burma really did run out of gas for almost a week as some Japanese spokesman later claimed, or whether the Burma Banshee did scare them out of the skies for the week, no one can every say for sure.

Radio Tokyo, in the best possible American University diction, announced, "The enemy are moving into northern Burma in force. Spearhead of their invasion is a new aerial weapon, designed foolishly to unnerve the Emperor's conquering pilots who hold mastery of Burma's skies. This "Secret Weapon" spouts streams of flame and screeches in horrible tones as it flies. A Chinese dragon, perhaps? A product of the English-Chinese? Foolish Indeed! This white man's folly, too, will be driven from the Asiatic Heavens."



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# 1985

# JANUARY

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
DECEMBER S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	FEBRUARY S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28	<b>1</b>  New Year's Day	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
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