

FLETCHER HANKS

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TOM

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PREFACE

This is an historical novel about the life of China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), pronounced C-knack, pilots during WW II, and particularly about the one who flew more combat time than any pilot during WW II anywhere in the war.

CNAC, a Chinese, company started in 1933, with small amphibious and land planes flown predominately by adventurous American pilots. The original planes accommodated four passengers and bags of mail. As the planes crashed, they were replaced with DC-2s, which were much larger, eventually flying to all major Chinese cities. As the Japanese Army progressed south from Manchuria the CNAC pilots had to acquire skills in avoiding the Japanese fighter pilots. The Japanese conquest captured Hong Kong, Christmas Day 1941, left no Chinese port to receive imports from the rest of the world. Rangoon was the only port where the Chinese Army could receive imports to continue its war against Japan. The freight moved by train from Rangoon to the south end of the Burma Road and from there over that road by trucks to Kunming and Chungking, China, the two principal cities not held by Japan.

Colonel Chennault's American Volunteer Group of P-40 fighter planes protected the route from Japanese bombers and fighter planes. CNAC passenger planes provided the only passenger service and priority freight from Chungking and Kunming to Calcutta, India. In spite of an heroic effort by the A.V.G. the Japanese captured Rangoon, February 3, 1942 which left only the CNAC freight planes to supply the necessary gasoline and supplies to keep the A.V.G. (Flying Tigers) defending the two Chinese cities from the Japanese bombers. As the Japanese quickly

overran Burma, the CNAC air route had to be moved to the most further northeast point in India, Dinjan. This route, started regular flights April 7, 1942, crossed the northern part of Burma where the Himalaya Mountains reached twenty thousand feet. No air transport was designed to fly that high. Their supplies prevented China from capitulating to the Japanese. As long as the Flying Tigers could fly to protect CNAC transports and protect Chungking, the wartime capital of China, and Kunming, China was still in the war.

Pan American World Airways purchased forty-five percent of the CNAC stock in 1933 because it fitted in with Pan American's plan to offer round-the-world service. Before the war, it flew the Baltimore Clippers from San Francisco to Hong Kong. Pan American's job was to supply civilian pilots to fly transports for CNAC. The pilots were of five nationalities but ninety-five percent were American. Flying over the Hump from northeast India to China, gained them the reputation of being among the best instrument and dead-reckoning pilots of the world since seventy-five percent of their flights required some or all flying by instruments instead of contact flying when a pilot can see the ground. The CNAC pilots considered they were safer flying in the clouds than being exposed to the Japanese Zero fighters that flew from airfields in Burma.

Why was it important for the two groups, Flying Tigers and CNAC to keep China in the war? It kept over a million seasoned Japanese soldiers busy fighting the Chinese instead of fighting the Allies in the islands of the Pacific. Second, it was important to establish airports close enough to Japan so the Allies' bombers could regularly strike the industrial heart land of Japan. Third, it provided bases for the bombers to interrupt the coastal shipping that supported Japan's new empire.

The Japanese expected that when the last supply line to China, the Burma Road, was severed by them, victory over China was only a few months away. China had no oil, among other essential items of modern warfare. CNAC pilots wrecked the Japanese plan for a quick victory over China. by flying the most hostile environment imaginable. When the U.S. Army tried flying the route they declared it could not be done, while CNAC was doing it.

The CNAC pilots came primarily for adventure, to meet the challenge of the most difficult and dangerous flying in the war while enjoying the exceptional high pay and excellent living conditions while on leave in Calcutta.. Although the Army referred to them as “the mercenaries,” as if they had less loyalty because they were the highest paid group of pilots of the world – higher pay than any general in the CBI (China-Burma-India Theater). They came to fight a war until it was won not to be rotated home after a year. CNAC pilots were volunteers. The Army pilots were there because someone sent them there without their choice. Naturally, the CNAC pilots were enjoying their work, whereas the Army pilots performed the disagreeable job and looked forward to being rotated after one hundred trips over the Hump. For every pilot, CNAC or Army, experienced or inexperienced, who arrived on the Hump, it was “on the job training” because there was no weather, nor mountains in the world comparable to those on the Hump, on which to gain experience.

All stories in this novel that tell about flying the Hump are true. This book describes the experiences of their twenty-eight crashes where there were fatalities and the eighteen major crashes where the pilots walked away to fly another day. All of the events, on the Hump, in this

novel are in the same chronological order as actually happened. The description of these events were taken from CNAC official reports and the pilot's logbooks that were recorded the day it happened.

The pilot's social life, while on leave in Calcutta, was never written in logs but many of the men of CNAC found the attractive women of all nationalities and combinations thereof in Calcutta an enjoyable fringe benefit of the airline.

WW II was the age when flying was dangerous and sex was safe. The CNAC pilots enjoyed their job. Jimmy Scoff, one of the most illustrious said, "This has to be the best war of all time." He probably died smiling when on his "swan dive" he went straight down so only the bottom of his shoes could be seen. He was unique to the end.

This novel is written by one of the CNAC pilots who flew 347 round trips over the Hump during 1943, 1944 and 1945. Like most people who fought WW II, he didn't think at the time that he was doing something so extraordinary. He was there and he would do his job the best he could. Perhaps he wouldn't live through it but no one could ever say he shirked his job. As in all volunteer operations there was a hard core of pilots who thought that it more appealing as the risk increased. They came to stay on the Hump until they were killed or the war was won. On the average there were thirty-two planes available in Dinjan ready to fly the Hump. There were that number of captains available to fly them daily while there was a like number in Calcutta on leave. They were expected to fly fifteen trips a month. Approximately one hundred pilots came and left during WW II. This small group of talented and dedicated pilots accounted for

approximately one-seventh of the total freight delivered in China.

The American Army Air Transport Command (ATC) and the British Empire RAF accounted for the rest with approximately eighteen hundred-first-pilots flying approximately every third day the six-hundred transports from eight airports. They were brave men who left approximately eighteen-hundred first-pilots and copilots and more than that number of other crew members on the Hump in crashes that became known as the Aluminum Trail.

The story of the seventy-five CNAC pilots flying the Hump who flew more combat missions and more combat time than any allied pilot anywhere in WW II is told in this book.

Perhaps the statement by Chiang Kai-shek's American Chief of Staff, General Albert C. Wedemeyer sums it up best when he said, "Flying the Hump was the foremost and by far the most dangerous, difficult and historic achievement of the entire war."

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Italicized sections are the opinions written by Tex in his diary. He was the CNAC pilot with the most trips over the Hump during forty-five months.