

CNAC ASSOCIATION



CANNON BALL

No 6

Nov 1, 1976

Reg Farmer, Editor

Top Side Ricksha by Harold M. Bixby was printed privately in 1938 by Harold Bixby. Only a few copies were printed. It consisted of 392 pages of double spaced text printed on one side. We have condensed this to approximately 100 pages. This volume is generally unavailable and probably will not be reproduced again.

Your editor proposes to excerpt from it on a regular basis. It deals with aviation in China from 1933 to 1936 and the author's experiences in China during that period. Harold Bixby was Vice-President of Pan American and was sent out after CNAC was acquired by Pan American in April 1933. He includes some of his observations and conclusions as well as his experiences with CNAC. The first installment deals with the beginnings of commercial aviation. I hope you like it.

WAR MEMORIAL MEDAL

The medals are under way I have sent the list to Washington and expect them soon. If you have not already requested one let me know, it is not too late. There is a second list to go in soon. Send me the dates of your service with CNAC. While you are writing why don't you write a little note about yourself so I can put a little item in the Cannonball.

HUMP PILOTS ASSOCIATION

This is a group of people (mostly G I) who flew over the Hump. It seems to include passengers as well as pilots. At any rate the distinction is less important now. They all have similar interests. Primarily it is to make friends and renew old acquaintances. There are a few CNAC members in it already. The Association has a news letter and have reunions every year to which many of our members attend. You would surely meet friends and a large number of men with whom you have a lot in common. Their dues are \$12.00. If you are interested contact: HUMP PILOTS ASSOCIATION, 917 Pine Blvd Poplar Bluff, Missouri, 63901.

THE DRAGON'S WINGS

The Dragon's Wings by William Leary Jr., is still in print. Order while you can. It is the one and only that tells what happened there. I enjoyed it very much.

PREFACE

This book is written about China in general and aviation in particular, both subjects of popular interest because of their undetermined importance, but vast potentialities, in this age of world upheaval. It is not the intent of the author to attempt to "expert" either of these subjects, but rather to skim over the kaleidoscopic picture of the last five years, with the hope of showing the effect of aviation on the transition from the old to what may be the new China.

Many economic and political chiropractors are busy on the body politic in China as elsewhere, making adjustments which horrify the old family economic doctor, who, dismissed, sits with his horse and buggy beside the road of current events, and wonders how it will all turn out.

Nowhere else in the world is the struggle between new and old forces so keen as in China. It was the author's privilege to be associated with one of these new forces-- commercial aviation-- during a period of unprecedented change. His duties carried him to distant parts of China not visited by the average businessman, and he had opportunities to meet and deal with the highest national, provincial and municipal officials as well as with bankers, merchants, men of business, pilots, mechanics, and coolies.

It is hoped that the story of this experience may bring to the reader something new and worthwhile as an addition to the already sagging shelves marked "Books on China."

(1938)

H. M. B.

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF COMMERCIAL AVIATION.

Commercial aviation had its birth in the United States shortly after World War I when a number of ex-Army pilots scattered throughout the country essayed to earn a precarious living, barnstorming with surplus war planes. The living was precarious first, because of starvation, and second, because the haywire, which held these planes together, just would get rusty. All over the United States these pilots were operating old planes of the "Jennie" type, "Standards" and other equipment in which a forced landing was not an unusual event. These barn storming pilots were full of ideas and high sounding plans, ever alert to promote some angel to finance a new plane which they had designed, but their bread and butter came from hauling passengers, first at \$20.00 per head and later as low as \$3.00 and \$4.00 per "joy hop." As the public became more wary, and more and more people had made their first flight, these pilots began to work the small towns, especially in hilly or rolling country where level pasture-airports were rare. Here the pilot who could side slip for a landing and get in and out of a small field reaped a harvest because that particular section had not been worked before. Later these barn stormers opened flying schools and also gave so-called ground courses for the training of mechanics. Most of the boys who were paying money for ground courses found themselves 100% employed doing maintenance work on the planes flown by the proprietors. It was a case of paid apprenticeship, or as the Chinese would say, a "learn pidgin," paying for the privilege of working.

Later still, along toward 1925, many of the barn stormers who had survived the hazards of starvation and crackups, built up small organizations and operated service stations for private pilots as well as for their school, and occasional charter flight operations, did on mail contracts, opened offices, employed stenographic assistance and for the first time took on an air of respectability. Now-a-days we are familiar with the spectacle of an airmail pilot arriving at a brilliantly lighted airport, taxiing up on a concrete apron in front of a canopied walk leading to a busy passenger terminal, alighting from his plane, stepping into his roadster and driving home. In the old days the pilot arrived at an unlighted airport, taxied up to a small shack, if any structure at all, discharged his mail, taxied his airplane to the hangar, when there was one, or more frequently tied it down on the field. As likely as not he then did some mechanical work on the airplane or helped with the servicing, then sloshed through the mud in the dark to a nearby farmhouse which was "home."

The early mail planes were mostly D. H.'s (DeHavilands) with Liberty motors. Col. Lindbergh loves to tell the story of his experiences as an airmail pilot when after he had jumped from two of these D. H.'s, his employer made a speech to the pilots who operated the line. The employer's remarks were, "Never land between stops, unless you run out of gas or the engine quits-- in either of these events you are permitted to land but you must

immediately report to me, at anytime of the day or night, three things--first, how is the airplane, second, how is the mail, third, how is the pilot?"

Following a series of successful flights in 1927, a highly gullible public forced capital onto these barn storming pilots in such profusion and with such utter lack of discretion that the pilots began to wonder whether their fondest dreams of the future for commercial aviation had not been in fact unfairly conservative. Associated with this clamour were a number of Wall streeters who had ridden in an airplane or possibly been connected in some way with the infant industry. These unproved financiers aided and abetted by a public whose appetite was apparently insatiable proceeded to organize every conceivable kind of aviation corporation the shares of which sold at two or three times the offering price no matter how bizarre or how conservatively launched. Even the stock of the Seaboard Air Line railroad, with no aviation affiliations, came in for a big rise due to its name and the fact that an aviation-hungry public jumped at anything with the name "air" tached on to it without examination, investigation or questions. When every available aviation enterprise the wily financial wizards could conjure had been financed and ballyhooed, the promoters turned to the foreign field and, among others, there was organized Aviation Exploration Company to promote airlines in China. In true keeping with the soundness of most of these early projects, an expedition was organized and sent out to China. Included in the party was an interpreter picked up in New York City. Of course the interpreter was from Canton where the dialect is different from the Mandarin spoken in Nanking. A lawyer also was sent along although able Americans, skilled in Chinese law, were available in Shanghai at the time. The rest of the delegation was made up of pilots, mechanics and an airplane or two of no practical use whatever in China. This delegation made an airmail contract which promised to be a veritable gold mine. The only difficulty was that the airmail contract was made with the Ministry of Railways, which had nothing to do with the mail, and there was promptly set up another aviation corporation by the Ministry of Communications to which Company there was awarded an airmail contract.

Out of the situation which folowed this deplorable development there grew a competition between the two companies with the result that neither made money and they were finally thrown together, all debts cancelled and the present China National Aviation Corporation was formed. The shares were issued 45% to the American interest and 55% to the Ministry of Communications of the National Government of the Republic of China. This company struggled along for several years with insufficient capital, depleted yearly by staggering losses until, in April 1933, the American minority shares were purchased by Pan American Airways.

I arrived in Shanghai on the 13th of February, 1933. My mission was two-fold: to represent Pan American Airways' ownership of the minority interest in the China National Aviation Corporation, the acquisition of which interest was then under negotiation, and to do "missionary work" in the furtherance of Pan American's ambitious and seemingly visionary project of flying the Pacific. The