

RALPH ROYCE

In the Spring of 1939 I had as a passenger from Hong Kong to Chungking Colonel Ralph Royce, who was just finishing his assignment as commanding officer of the U.S. Air Force base in the Philippines. We left Hong Kong about 2:00 A.M. as usual in order to cross over Japanese occupied territory in the dark. (This was before the days of radar.) I invited Royce to occupy the copilot's seat, which he was happy to do.

A short while after reaching cruising altitude, about 15,000 feet, we ran into a quite severe thunder storm. The plane bounced around violently and a torrential rain was pounding on the windshield. It was not the worst storm I ever encountered but was definitely one of the bad ones. St. Elmo's fire was everywhere. I was fighting the controls but managed to cast a glance at the Colonel and I could see that he was very tense and upset and his face mirrored apprehension to say the least. In order to put him at a little more ease, just as soon as the turbulence abated ever so slightly I turned on the auto pilot and slid down in my seat, rubbed my hands together and leaned over and said to him, "Man - this is what I like!" He looked astounded and wanted to know what the heck I liked about it. I told him, "No Japanese up here tonight."

I never thought much about it then but was reminded of it numerous times later. Royce, shortly afterwards to become a Major General, and I became very close friends in later years, even touring Europe together with our wives. On several occasions he introduced me to some of his Air Force friends, including 5-star General 'Hap' Arnold, and nearly always prefaced the introduction with the remark, "This is the man who flew me into China the night of the storm I was telling you about."

Both the U.S. and British Air Forces were sadly behind times in keeping up with the advancements in night and instrument flying. Both apparently figured that bombing missions and dog fights would be confined to the daylight hours so their night flying training consisted of a few takeoffs and landings under bright moonlight conditions.

I had quite an extended conversation with General Arnold once at a cocktail party about instrument flying and told him how important I thought it was, but apparently my discourse fell on deaf ears. The lack of proper training was responsible for hundreds of young American boys losing their lives because they were unable to cope with the adverse flying conditions they encountered later on the Hump run. I even had the Commanding officer of the British Air Force Transport squadron in Upper Assam request permission to fly a few trips with us in order to learn how we were so successful while they were unable to operate unless the weather was just right. Naturally we were all glad to do what we could to help them.

## PILOT'S REPORT

At 8:04 a.m., August 24, 1938, CNAC Douglas Plane No. 32, piloted by myself departed from Kai Tak Airport, Hong Kong, enroute Wuchow, Liuchow, Chungking and Chengtu.

A few minutes after leaving the boundary of the Colony, at an altitude of approximately six thousand feet and still climbing, I sighted eight planes directly ahead of me which I took to be Japanese, having seen similar flights of Japanese planes in this vicinity. I turned around and came back to the edge of the Colony, to give the planes time to pass, then proceeded on my course of 297 Degrees, at an altitude of 8,000 feet.

As I reached the west end of the bay between Hong Kong territory and the mainland, at about 8:30 a.m., I looked back and sighted five pursuit planes diving in my direction. They were at that time about 3,000 or 4,000 feet above me and perhaps a half mile to the rear. I looked for some clouds into which I could take cover, and noticed a small patch at an altitude of about 3,000 feet just a short distance ahead and slightly to my left. I immediately put the plane in a steep dive and reached these clouds only to find they were covering the tops of some small mountains which projected into them.

I went into the edge of these clouds and was in there for a few seconds and emerged on the other side. Directly ahead of me all was clear, so I started to turn to re-enter the clouds and I heard machine-gun bullets striking the plane. I was conscious of what seemed to be two bullets striking inside the control room. I immediately started descending in a tight spiral. During this spiral I could see the shadow of my plane, also the shadow of another plane directly at my rear.

The terrain immediately underneath consisted of small rice paddy fields surrounded by dykes. I considered it extremely hazardous to attempt a landing on land due to these dykes, so headed for a river a short distance to my right.

I shut off the engines, cut the motor switches, and disconnected the battery, and glided into a landing on the water. During this time the plane was being struck by machine-gun bullets.

The plane was landed safely near the right-hand side of the river. By the time the water cleared from the windshield, however, the current had caught the plane and swept it into the middle of the river.

I first ascertained that everyone in the plane was unhurt. I instructed that the outside cabin door not be opened, but the steward had already opened it as the water level was approximately two feet below the lower part of the door. I instructed the radio operator to notify all concerned that everyone was safe.

As soon as the plane stopped the pursuit planes started machine gunning us. I raised the emergency hatch cover in the front of the control room and looked up in the direction from which we were being attacked. At this time I could see the attacking planes clearly and positively identified them as Japanese. They were pontoon bi-planes.

The only sampans on the river were being rowed away by their occupants rapidly. I then noticed a sampan tied up to shore directly opposite our position. I turned to the radio operator and co-pilot and told them to instruct the passengers who could swim to jump, and that I was going to attempt to reach shore and secure the sampan. With this I jumped into the water and started swimming toward shore.

2- PILOT'S REPORT

It was not until after I started swimming that I noticed the current was quite strong. I estimated it to be four or five knots. As I was progressing toward shore several Japanese planes dived on me with machine guns firing. At first I submerged myself when they started shooting, but later became too exhausted to do this. Many bullets came extremely close, so close in fact that it left no doubt as to whether they were aiming at me or the ship. After what seemed an endless time I reached the shore in a state of complete exhaustion. I was unable to raise myself out of the water for some time.

Either at the time I reached shore or at the time I finally pulled myself completely out of the water, I saw my airplane a considerable distance down stream, half submerged, floating in a nose-down position. I believe it was at this time I looked at my watch and ascertained the time to be 8:50 a.m.

It was probably over an hour before I could stand. I was violently sick at my stomach.

As soon as I gathered sufficient strength I started walking along the bank of the river in the direction the plane had disappeared. After walking approximately a half mile I came upon a soldier and was led to where another group of soldiers were located. Both the soldiers and myself were trying to get information, but as they spoke no English and I spoke no Chinese, we were unsuccessful. Even at this time the Japanese planes were still in the vicinity.

After numerous unsuccessful attempts on the part of the soldiers and myself to communicate, I was put into a small fishing boat, accompanied by one soldier, and proceeded with the current into the interior. I understand this was a tidal current that was flowing.

We rode for more than an hour and finally landed at a small village. Then we walked for quite some time and eventually I was taken to a large soldiers' barracks. There we were still unable to communicate due to the lack of an interpreter.

After some time we entered rickshas and proceeded to the home of the district magistrate. It was from him I learned that up to that time only one passenger, who had been wounded, and the radio operator and I had survived.

I then proceeded to Macao in the magistrate's car accompanied by the wounded passenger. I saw that the passenger was placed in a hospital and then contacted Hong Kong Airport radio by means of the Pan American radio at Macao.

I proceeded to Hong Kong aboard the USS "Mindanao", arriving at 1:00 a.m., August 25.

The attack, I feel certain, was not only unprovoked, but prearranged. Having sighted these planes on several occasions enroute from their base south of Hong Kong to objectives north at about this same position, I had noticed they were always in a climb and at an altitude of between 6,000 and 7,000 feet, which would be about normal, considering the distance from their base. On this particular trip, however, when I first noticed them, they were around 11,000 or 12,000 feet, and from their speed it was evident that they had dived from considerable distance even then. Also, I was attacked

3- PILOT'S REPORT

from such a direction as to make it impossible to attempt turning around and reaching Hong Kong Colony. This, in my opinion, the most conclusive evidence that shooting down my ship was their definite objective was the fact that after I had been forced to land, and the plane had been sunk, they continued to stay in that vicinity instead of continuing as they would have done had they started out on any other mission. I understand Dr. Sun Fo had announced that he intended to take my plane that morning, and it is very probable that the Japanese War Office thought they were eliminating him when they forced my plane down.

## UPPER ASSAM

The pilots we assembled for the Hump operation were a mixed group. Without exact figures available I estimate that we had around 200 at the end of 1945 and probably another 200 had been on the payroll at some previous time during the period. Naturally there were some who failed to adjust or qualify. Some moved on to greener pastures and crashes cost us some of the finest specimens of American manhood who ever lived. The flying was exceptionally hazardous, more from weather, inadequate equipment and lack of radio facilities than from enemy action. To my knowledge, only one loss of life was caused by being intercepted and shot down - that was the death of Sam Anglin over North Burma in 1943.

In order to get an impression of the group it must be remembered that the draft had been in effect before we started recruiting. We were fortunate in getting so many of the Flying Tigers. The rest of our pilots were sorted out from the applications of adventurers, draft dodgers, and soldiers of fortune. Some of our boys qualified in all three categories. On the whole, though, they were happy-go-lucky youngsters who liked to work hard and play hard. They could do their month's flying time in from twelve to fifteen days and had the rest of the month off in Calcutta. Their monthly pay averaged about US\$2,000 tax free. Many of them went broke between pay days and IOU's circulated freely.

I was about twelve to fifteen years older than the average pilot and had already spent eight and a half years in the Orient by the outbreak of World War II. That, together with my more than 10,000 flying hours, qualified me as the 'Old Man', which I certainly was by their standards. I used to implore them to save some of their salary and to try to impress upon them that money would not always flow so freely. Perhaps some of them took heed, but most paid about as much attention to my admonitions as I would have to the same advice at twenty.

When I joined Pan American Airways in 1932 I had 1,800 flying hours. I flew co-pilot for two years and nine months before checking out as Captain. I'll never forget one incident that occurred shortly after the Flying Tiger group joined us. Most had been checked out as Captains. Robert 'Catfish' Raines had just returned from probably his second solo round trip over the Hump. As he was entering his time in his log book I asked him casually how many hours he had. He asked if I meant his total flying time, including his cadet flying in Pensacola and his time in the American Volunteer Group. I answered affirmatively. He thumbed back through a few pages, did some adding, and nonchalantly announced that, including that day's trip, his total flying time came to 277 hours. I don't think I ever quite recovered.

Even though some of the boys began flying Captain with a minimum of logged hours, I don't believe we ever suffered losses due to lack of training in handling the aircraft. All the pilots were thoroughly indoctrinated in instrument flying and all had to meet the demands of some very exacting check pilots before they were turned loose on their own.

Most of our losses were directly attributable to adverse weather. We had absolutely no forecasting and very spotty reporting of actual weather conditions en route. Polar air masses would sweep down across the Gobi Desert and over the Himalayas without warning. One day, two or three flights came in to Dinjan from Kunming and reported clear and unlimited weather with winds of 15 to 20 miles per hour. A few minutes later a couple of our planes left Dinjan for Kunming on the same route and, within two or three hours, encountered a violent blizzard with crosswinds estimated at up to 125 MPH. It was no wonder that the Hump took its toll!

In any group our size there are bound to be occasional misfits, but 99 percent of them were 'Ding How.' I am proud to have quite a few of them as personal friends now that a quarter of a century has elapsed since we worked together. While there was the normal amount of bitching, every last one of them knew that he was a lot better off than the boys in England flying bombing missions over Germany. One of our Flying Tigers, Robert 'Moose' Moss from Doerun, Georgia, expressed the situation succinctly when he said, "Every day with CNAC is just like Sunday on the farm." He knew a good thing when he saw it.

For the first couple of years our Chinese ground staff and crew members were quartered in a bungalow on the Limbiguri Tea Estate located about six miles east of Dinjan. I had reports that cobras had been seen in the immediate vicinity and I asked the manager of the Estate, Bob Grayburn, what could be done about it. He said that on previous occasions he had called in a local Indian snake charmer to do the job. I told him to go ahead. The snake charmer appeared and went to work. I don't know whether anyone watched him, but a few hours later he showed up with one large and nine baby cobras in his basket. He must have done his work well for we had no more complaints. I don't recall just how I showed his compensation on our books, but I do recall that I had to resort to subterfuge, as I didn't want to have to explain the presence of a snake charmer on the payroll.

Later on we had to move the Chinese to a different location as each Fall a herd of about 200 wild elephants would move into the area along the road leading to the airport. While they were not particularly vicious, some of the young females would stand in the middle of the road and refuse to budge. Any car which tried to get around or past them would inevitably be shoved and battered around for a while. This never happened to us, but it did to some of the local tea planters. Hence we avoided getting too close to them.

The Monsoon season started in the latter part of June. We could see it building up in the South and moving further North each day. When the rains broke loose we seldom had more than an hour or two without at least a light shower. We had about 120 inches of rainfall annually, all of it falling during the Monsoon season which ended around late September. About three-fourths of the rain fell at night. Unless one has experienced a Monsoon rain, it is hard for him to conceive of it. How in the name of heaven so much rain can be held in the atmosphere is beyond me. Lying in bed at night and listening to the downpour, one would think that it couldn't possibly rain any harder and a moment later, with a great roar, the rate of rainfall would about double. Roads became impassible except for six-by-six trucks with high axles and enough driving wheels to make it.

About October, with the Monsoon season over, Upper Assam enjoys the most beautiful weather one could imagine. Not a cloud in the sky until the next Monsoon. Temperatures at mid-winter would get down into the low 60s at night and stay in the upper 70s during the day. On the China side, the weather was almost exactly opposite. Winters were cold and overcast and the summers, at the 6,200 foot altitude of Kunming, were delightful. If all the trouble-makers and politicians were taken out and shot and the world settled down to a peaceful existence, I can't think of a better life weatherwise than to winter in Upper Assam and summer on the beautiful clear lake about 25 miles south of Kunming. (Not the first lake south of Kunming; that one is yellow and muddy.)

### 3- UPPER ASSAM

Monkeys were prevalent throughout the area. No one ever bothered them and they became quite inured to the presence of humans. A group of several dozen would come into the staff house compound and their chattering would make quite a racket.

Also, sacred cows would pay us a visit, particularly if the gates had been inadvertently left open. The best method of control we discovered was to pepper them with a BB gun when they came in and started messing up the yard.

Oddly enough, we also had trouble with mockingbirds. During the mating season they seemed unanimous in their choice of the carburetor airscoop as the ideal nesting place. The number of nests we would find was unbelievable. Even during a short refueling operation the energetic birds would manage to put down a few leaves and straws.

Once one of the pilots woke in the middle of the night and saw what he thought were two gleaming tiger eyes a few feet from his cot. A few screams and one or two pistol shots later, he discovered that what he had seen was two wrist watches, each belonging to a different person. The room was crowded and had double-decked bunks. It was easy to see how the two watches came within such close proximity to each other, but harder to understand how the pilot had missed shooting somebody.

### THE MILITARY SALUTE

Quite a few stories may have become somewhat shop-worn but may be worth repeating. I like the one about the guards.

A big shot Chinese General arranged for a flight from Nanking to Chengtu and return. While waiting at Chengtu the Chinese military assigned a guard for the plane consisting of six regular soldiers armed with rifles and bayonets and their officer in charge.

The General finally completed his mission in the city and returned to the airport. The guards in the meantime had been standing in the shade under the wing of the plane, a 6-place Stinson, as it was a very hot sultry day. As the General approached, the soldiers lined up and stood at attention. Their officer then gave them some sort of a command, apparently resembling our "Present Arms." Six bayonets were immediately plunged through the wing of the plane.

## POLICE and CUSTOMS

The CNAC freight operation in Upper Assam quite often created some new problems for both the U.S. Military and the local Civil authorities. When some sort of assistance was requested from one, they would insist we secure it from the other. I quickly realized that it would take tact and diplomacy on my part rather than any belligerency or even too much servility.

During the first year and a half we were outperforming the U.S. Military airlift in cargo delivered to China. This rankled them considerably. Their headquarters constantly goaded them trying to get them to better their performance. We needed their help in securing spare parts, transportation units, telephone lines and instruments, and numerous other items of equipment, so I made it a point to cultivate the friendship of the commanding officers of the various departments by entertaining them and sometimes carrying their pidgin cargo.

With the civil authorities it was something else. We were subject to the jurisdiction of both the Indian Customs and the Police. The local Superintendent of Police, Mr. Rutledge, was actually quite a capable officer but he took the responsibilities of his office very seriously and expected that same respect from all civilians in his area. One regulation he tried conscientiously to enforce was to demand an entry and exit permit for all non-flight personnel moving in and out of India. We were very slack in our adherence to this matter and when he would discover one of our breaches of the law he would jump all over me and threaten fines or deportation. I tried to comply but didn't always succeed.

During one of my conversations with him and after I had made my explanations and my apologies for some infraction, and his severe mien had relaxed a bit, he mentioned that his wife had been having a terrible time with her false teeth which had been made by a local dentist. Of course, there was absolutely no possibility of her getting back to England at that time and it looked as though she would have to suffer the agony and discomfort for an indefinite length of time.

I had heard that the U.S. Military Medical Branch had very recently installed a dental office with all the latest equipment and staffed with dentists newly drafted into service. I telephoned their highest ranking officer and introduced myself as Captain and stated that one of my assignments was to try to establish better relations between the U.S. forces and the local civilian authorities and I thought that if they could handle the local Constable's wife's dental problems, it might be a step in the right direction. "Yes, sir, Captain, have her come right in," was the prompt response. My using the title 'Captain' naturally led them to believe I was a member of the Armed Forces.

I contacted Mr. Rutledge right away and informed him that I had arranged for his wife to get proper attention. Those dentists must have done a beautiful job. The lady got a new set of teeth which fit perfectly and she was exceedingly well pleased. I'm sure it made Rutledge's home life a lot more pleasant, and I might add that never again did I hear a word from him about illegal entries and exits.

With the Customs it was an entirely different matter. The officer in charge was a Mr. Smith. We quickly dubbed him 'Customs Smitty' when referring to him out of his hearing but, by golly, it was always 'Mr. Smith' to his face! He really took himself and his job seriously. It would be hard to figure



2- POLICE and CUSTOMS

out where he got the name Smith. He was an erect, well built man, but black as the ace of spades although he had no negroid features. He spoke of going home to England, but I'm sure he never set foot outside of India. He had too many native habits and manners of living, but his bearing prohibited anyone from inquiring into his heritage.

Smitty waged a never-ending battle with our staff, particularly the flight crews. Nearly every day he would call me into his office on the field and show me stuff he had found concealed either on their person or secreted in the plane. All sorts of toilet articles, cosmetics, tools, and just about everything else brought a high price in China if it could just be gotten in. I was very much opposed to the illicit operation as I'm still fully convinced that at least one or two of our fatal accidents was caused by the pilot being overly anxious to complete the trip in the face of adverse weather conditions rather than return and be subjected to reinspection.

I always made it a point to commend Smitty when he showed me the latest batch of loot he had confiscated and told him how fortunate I thought we were to have a man of his caliber on the job with us.

It wasn't long before he developed complete confidence in me, even to the extent that if I oked a parcel or suitcase he would pass it without inspection.

There was one unforgettable incident. I arrived at the field one morning after most of the planes had departed and was immediately greeted by Customs Smitty. He was in ecstasy! He had as near a smile on his face as I ever saw. He took me inside his small office and produced a few gold bars that he had found in one of our planes in a most inaccessible place. It was on a small shelf in the tail section up above the control cable pullies. It was not visible from the inspection holes, and could only be reached by extending one arm at full length through the inspection vent. Smitty had learned to grope in there in the dark and feel around, and it eventually paid off with his gold haul. Naturally I congratulated him on his acumen and good fortune. He got a small percentage of the value of illicit cargo he confiscated.

The very next morning the situation was completely reversed. When I reached the field Smitty met me with his eyes blazing. In fact, he was furious. It seemed that while inspecting one of the planes he had reached back in to his recently discovered hiding place and found something round and soft. Upon bringing it out for inspection he discovered he had hold of a piece of human excrement about six inches long. I take great pride in the fact that I was able to offer what appeared to be my sincere abhorrence at such an act rather than explode with laughter, which, of course, I did as soon as I left his presence.

## MY ARMY

The dispersal strip we built on Baliyan North Tea Estate was where our radio station and homing tower were located. We built a small brick building there to house the equipment and provide sleeping quarters for a radio maintenance man so he would be readily available in case of any communication troubles. Our Communications Engineer, Earl 'Red' Knight, and his wife Alice actually lived there for over a year, taking their meals at the foreign staff house. One day when Alice was cleaning out a corner which was being used for clothes storage she discovered an extremely poisonous snake, a Banded Krait, also occupied the cottage with them. Warren Lovejoy, one of our Operations Clerks, found a similar snake on top of the dresser in his room in the staff house one afternoon. The whole area was snake infested and its a wonder we had no casualties from them.

Shortly after we moved back to China we received a report that a tiger had killed two natives on our former landing strip right near the radio tower. Also, one of our pilots, 'Fuzzy' Ball shot and killed a tiger within half a mile of the staff house before we left India.

It was wild country.

We feared sabotage from some of the radical natives who were suspected of being Japanese sympathizers and Mr. Rutledge, the Police Chief, insisted we have some sort of armed guards around our strip. I agreed to pay all costs if he would recruit, equip and generally supervise them.

Before long I had a regular army comprised of about 50 Gurkhas and Sepoys who had formerly served under the British in the Indian Army. They wore military uniforms and were equipped with rifles, and under the command of a former top sergeant called a jemadar.

Each morning my 'army' would drill and parade around in military fashion just as though they were in the regular service.

Mr. Rutledge told me that I should make an inspection tour regularly as they would expect it. I had never had any military experience but carried out Rutledge's request. I would stroll along in front of them very self-consciously while they stood stiffly at attention and looked them over as I had seen it done in the movies. I had not the slightest idea of what the hell I was looking for, and I was undoubtedly more relieved when it was over than they were.

The first air raid came without warning soon after we started keeping our grounded planes on the strip. Every plane sitting on the regular Dinjan field was destroyed, but we suffered no losses although we had several planes grounded.

The Vice President of the company who represented PAA's interest had criticized me for what he called "wasting" so much money on the dispersal strip. The raid occurred a few days after his criticism. A couple of days later I received a very congratulatory letter from the Managing Director, the Chinese who was the big boss of the airline, for having the foresight to provide for protecting the personnel and the planes. He sent the Vice President a copy of the message.

I never heard another chirp out of the Vice President about my strip.