War Stories

SPANNING THE SOUTH ATLANTIC IN A C-47

by Jack Worthington

It was early in the morning of 02 June 1945 when Jack Worthington, navigator, and the rest of the crew prepared to take-off from Natal, Brazil for the British owned upper south Atlantic four by five mile rock known as Ascension Island. If everything went right they would fly the 1,400 hundred miles in approximately eight hours...

It would be the first crossing for each of them: pilot Verne Gibb from Kansas, a 25 year old newlywed, was the serious type; unmarried 20 year old Dick Mulkern from Minnesota was co-pilot. As one might expect from someone that age and fancy-free, he would rather be flying fighters.

It would be up to Worthington, 23 and married, to keep them on course to the leveled volcano with an east-west runway. They would relish the release from tension in an overnight rest at this refueling station. There was still another 1,000 miles to go to the west coast of Africa the next day.

Staff Sergeant John Zajfor was crew chief and Sergeant Joe Grabowski was the radio operator. Because of a perceived German U-boat threat there was no radio home beacon or radio signal. Says Verne Gibb, it was good navigating and fuel rationing that got you to the island. Once at the island pilots must be aware of a probable downdraft at either or both ends of the landing strip which begins and ends at cliff edge.

It was late afternoon with cotton ball fluffy clouds below when Worthington stood between the pilots and prayed one of the dark spots on the ocean below was a large rock.

"Keep your eye on that spot with the white ring around it," he instructed the pilots. They had made only one course correction in the entire flight since leaving Natal. Pilot skill in maintaining the heading, favorable following winds and good navigation soon rewarded them. The white line surrounding the dark spot soon became breaking waves and the runway and buildings are recognizable. A high, steep approach and pancake landing and they are on the ground per his ETA

The next day they head north for Robert's Field in Monrovia, on the coast of Liberia. Part way

and ahead of his calculations Worthington was lured by two similar landmarks to disregard his plot plan and lose some time searching for the field which was further north.

Worthington was kidded for being able to find Ascension Island but missing the continent of Africa.

NETHAWAY'S 17th HUMP FLIGHT

by Richard C. Nethaway, Class 42-I (Continued from the Summer Newsletter, p. 12/13)

Editor's Note: This is the conclusion to this three-part story. See page 12/13 of the 2004 Summer Newsletter for the second installment. The title used is a misnomer. His 17th trip was actually his bailout trip. This has been a verbatim reproduction of his diary as submitted to us.

Monday, 3 January 1944. Up at 06:30. Helped C. O. and Shreve Wood again with their packing. Had a tuna fish supper last night at midnight. Wood and I drove from Ops to Sector HQ where Wood received his Air Medal from Col. Kilgore. They got off the ground at 10:30. Sure hated to see them leave. Shaved, showered and made out schedule. Butler and I bought a victrola and a hundred records for 250 Rupees. Got a lot of canned goods, sheets and towels from C.D.Williams. To bed at 21:00.

Tuesday, 4 January 44. Up at 02:00. Ate and got Heller over to be my new assistant I think he'll be pretty good. Played some of the records, made a schedule and went to a S.O.S show this evening. The first show in weeks. "China Girl" with Gene Tierney and Robert Montgomery. Pitcher and Britt are on the Hospital Run tomorrow.

Wednesday, January 5. Up at 06:30 and to work. Bretta and Pitch took the hospital ship this morning. Worked 'till noon and back at 3:00 (15:00) to help Heller again to learn scheduling, etc. Am going to Chanyi tomorrow if I can make it out.

Thursday, Jan 6. Up at 7:00, sweated out #643 to take to Chanyi with Brigida. Left at 11:30 and flew to Tali. Had two hours of snow storms, instruments, and found Chanyi and Kunming were closed in. So we let down on Yunnanyi. A B-24