

War Stories (cont.)

can occur anywhere between 12,000 and twenty thousand feet.” “Actually, bad weather exists in all of our territory located between Nepal on the west and the Yangtze River on the east.” “Windstorms, over a hundred miles per hour, are common and can blow you off course. The C-47 Pratt-Whitney engines do not function well if you get too high. Updrafts and down-drafts are to be expected and they are dangerous. The only navigational help that we have is by radio direction-finding stations. Never-the-less, if good visibility permits, you can follow the Aluminum Highway through the more dangerous parts of your flight.”

“To answer your question, Hudson, we’ve lost many planes on those mountain peaks and in those valleys. You pilots can just look down and follow crashed aircraft along the way and never get lost.” “As you know, the Japanese and the Headhunters control the mountains, valleys and the jungles below. Above, the weather and the Japanese Zeros try to control the airspace in which we operate.” “Our planes are not pressurized, are unarmed, and radar in this part of the world is unavailable. We try to stay a hundred miles away from the Japanese base at Myitykina, Burma, but sometimes the Zeros will come after us. At 20,000 feet they can stay in the area only seven minutes. In the event you are attacked you are to fly into the nearest cloud and circle around until he (the Jap) leaves.”

“Of course we wear our oxygen masks at and above 12,000 feet. Since some peaks exceed 20,000 feet you must fly between the peaks. Strong winds may blow you off course into Nepal, China or Tibet. Mt. Everest is 29,108 feet” “You will haul gasoline, explosives, ammunition, engine parts, canned goods, bombs, jeeps and other war materiel. Today you are loaded with explosives.” “On your return trip you will bring back some Chinese troops for training. When you return you may visit the Taj Mahal.” “I see your flight jackets have the obligatory message in Chinese promising a reward for your safe return. The Japanese also have a reward for your capture.”

Hudson Downing flew 15 missions over the HUMP and participated in other operations on the ground and in the air before he was wounded in action. According to his story “he met with headhunters and other indigenous jungle people who

helped our airmen when they parachuted or survived crash landings in the jungle.” Hudson says his main headhunter contact was “Chief Fizzle-Dozzle. Mickey Mouse watches and lipstick were always good bargaining chips or rewards.

Pilots were warned to stay away from Tibet. “If you survive a crash bands of robbers will chase you and we don’t know what could happen to you.” “One bad weather day Hudson’s C-47 was blown off course and ran out of gas over Tibet. He made a good landing in a field and they quickly refueled from two barrels of gas from their cargo. He escaped with a quick take-off to avoid a fruitless confrontation with a bunch of natives on ponies rapidly approaching ahead of a dust cloud.” “The take-off was directly toward and over the angry mob and they made their delivery to Kunming, again on almost empty gas tanks.”

On a mission to rescue three American airmen, Hudson with a British officer, an American intelligence officer and a guide, all in Japanese uniforms, went 100 miles into Japanese territory in Burma. “The wrecked plane and three airmen were found in a rice paddy where Hudson had seen their crashed aircraft. The day before they started this rescue mission Hudson had seen the crashed plane and was able to help the guide during the search for them.” “Two of the men were in good condition but the pilot lay on the ground with a broken neck. When they attempted to place him on an improvised bamboo stretcher the pilot died in Hudson’s arms.”

“Returning with the two survivors, the men would hide and try to sleep during the day and then travel at night. The trip took twelve days.”

“On another mission, with bullets flying all around the rescue plane started down the runway. Hudson noticed a man hanging onto the door. Hudson locked his feet behind the bucket seats and pulled the man inside the plane... just as the plane became airborne. The man was one of Merrill’s Marauders.”

“On a rescue mission in the Battle of Myitkyina, Burma, Hudson suffered small arms wounds to his neck, shoulder and foot. Though badly shattered his foot was saved.” “Hudson spent five months in Burma and India hospitals before returning to Stateside hospitals for possible foot or leg amputation. His weight plummeted to 87 pounds. His leg and foot