



Date of event: 19 June, 1944 and following months

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Written by: Jay Woodruff, Paul Hunter, Henry Pisterzi from
the crew of B-29 #42-6326

Art Reibe and George Lundquist of the salvage crew
plus notes by Ira Matthews

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: This episode in the history of the 40th called upon the resources of the Group in many unusual ways and yet, because it involved a relatively small number of men, it has not been fully recognized for the skills and effort that were employed from the beginning to the end. This is the account of a forced landing at Hsichang, China and the effort to salvage the plane.

FORCED LANDING AT THE TURNING POINT

The Terrain: The Chinese village of Hsichang about 200 miles north of Kunming as the crow flies (some crow), was the turning point of the last leg of the flight from Chakulia to Hsinching (A-1). It was the most hazardous leg of the flight. Mountain tops ranged from 19,000 feet near Likiang to 25,000 feet west of Loshan. The only airstrip on this leg was Hsichang, a 4,700 ft. dirt strip located in a valley 6,000 ft. high.

The Flight (By Jay Woodruff, A/C and Paul Hunter, F/E): On a gasoline ferry flight to Hsinching (A-1), we took off from Chakulia at 0650, 19 June, 1944. Only a few minutes into the flight an oil leak was discovered in #4 engine and we returned. The reason for the leak was an overfilled tank. After fixing that, we reserviced the fuel tanks and took off a second time an hour later. A little over 2½ hours into the flight, we leveled off at 23,000 ft. Number 2 engine began losing power and then oil. The prop was feathered but continued to windmill. An attempt to run the engine at low power failed and the prop had to be left to windmill.

The plane began to lose altitude at the rate of 100 fpm, then at 200 fpm, this over the highest part of the Hump. Bombardier Joe Buckowitz salvoed the lower bomb bay tanks. There was difficulty in getting the bomb bay doors closed. When they were finally closed, the plane had lost altitude to 18,000 ft.

The radio compass was inoperative. We called "Sugar Queen" ground station for a heading and were given one which would have taken us into the overcast. Tom Brennan, our navigator, was able to see the ground and made a visual identification of our position as being over Hsichang. We began to consider making a forced landing at the emergency field while staying in the clear over the river valley. Shortly, passing over Hsichang, our right gunner reported #3 engine losing oil and smoking. We decided to return to land at Hsichang. We flew over the field at 7,500 ft. (2,600 feet above the field), and decided an approach from the south would be safest due to the surrounding terrain. We had to make our landing pattern to the west of the field because of the high mountains to the east that were very close to the field. The chart indicated the field as having 4,700 ft. rubble paved runway, 165 ft. wide.

Co-pilot Bill Clay instructed the crew where to position themselves for the landing. Only Clay, Paul Hunter and I remained forward. A passenger, Alan Ferguson, an operations clerk, was on board. He, He, radar operator, and navigator moved to the radar compartment. Right, left and CFC gunners and the radio operator were in the gunner's compartment. Henry Pisterzi, tail gunner, remained in the tail.

Trees and buildings just off the end of the runway necessitated considerable altitude at the point of approach. When we made contact with the ground, the field remaining was so obviously short that I applied full brakes. The main wheels locked and we skidded on the soft turf until we reached the pavement at the end. The pavement turned out to be just the foundation of a runway, composed only of very large stones.

Chinese workers were laboring at the end of the runway and they made no effort to get out of the way as the plane came at them. Tragically, nine were killed instantly by our propellers.

When our nose-gear struck the slight ditch and the rough stones beyond, it folded and we skidded only a few feet farther on main gear and nose. The nose was "ground off." The engineer and pilot's compartments were completely wrecked. Bill Clay and I got out of the pilot's compartment with considerable difficulty, extracting ourselves from the wreckage of controls, seats, etc. We were uninjured except for scratches and bruises. The rest of the crew likewise was uninjured. The plane from the rear of the radio compartment to the tail looked to be intact. The props were ruined and there was some damage to flaps from flying stones. Landing time was 1300. (Consideration was given to bailing out but was rejected due, perhaps in part, to Hank Pisterzi's condition. Hank had a hernia since enlisting in January 1942. When it came time to ship out from Pratt and final physicals were scheduled, with the help of Bill Clay and Doc Hall, Hank maneuvered through the examination and stayed with the crew. He worried at the time of the landing, when bail out was discussed, because the only chute available to him was adjusted for someone twice his size. After being flown out of Hsichang he turned himself in to the dispensary for surgical attention. On December 14, 1944, he flew as tail gunner on Bob Shanks' crew on the mission to Rangoon where they were lost due to the accident and he was held prisoner for five months.)

The Salvage Effort. Paul Hunter reports: After landing, the crew was surprised to be greeted by an American sergeant. He headed a four man detachment running a weather station at Hsichang. About 30 minutes after landing a black 1940 Buick rolled up and Nationalist General Chang du Lon emerged. He heard our version of the landing through his interpreter, Daniel Dong, an American-educated Chinese. When he was convinced that our landing and the death of the workers could hardly have been avoided, his attitude improved. When Woodruff told him this airplane had bombed Japan four days before, he invited all of us to his home for dinner about three evenings later. His home had been built as summer home for Madame Chaing Kai-shek. They served a wide variety of Chinese foods including pig stomachs, chicken stomachs and year-old eggs along with a variety of locally produced rice and grape wines. This occasion was a major event. At the dinner at least twelve food courses and three wine cups were placed in front of each guest. Twenty-five or more guests were present. A dozen waiters kept the food coming and the wine cups filled.

A night or two later, we were entertained by the provincial general. He ranked far below Gen. Chang. His home was quite modest and the food and wine were also much more modest.

After about a week a C-46 arrived. A terribly overbearing major got out and immediately started ordering everyone around. It took quite some time to convince him the Chinese were in charge and he had better keep hands off and his mouth shut. The C-46 took us to Kunming. A couple of days later we returned to India on an ATC flight.

Hank Pisterzi writes: Only men ate at the main table, women ate in another room. Food included sweet and sour pork, rice and pickled boiled eggs.

Not to be outdone by the Chinese (or anyone else), our crew told the Chinese we would cook the next evening meal for them. What do you prepare? Hell, we had our survival kit out at the B-29, so out came the "C" rations, etc. We took what there was and American ingenuity came to the front. The Chinese seemed to enjoy what we put together. It was our turn to observe, as they had the previous nights, how they would handle knife, fork and spoon (we didn't handle the chopsticks any better). Evenings after the meals, the Chinese surprised us with "liquid refreshments." What was it? Who cared? Probably saki (rice wine). I recall Ed Hornyai would fill his mouth with rice (arms outstretched as wings) and yelling, "I'm a P-38 shooting Japs," and spitting out rice "bullets" as he flew. (Hornyai was gunned down by the Japs as he parachuted from a disabled B-29 returning from a mission to Japan.)

When the plane came to rest in the ditch at the end of the runway, the nose was crushed but the tail was undamaged and up in the air and I was in it. The tail gunner's position is normally about two stories in the air. When the plane ended up I had to extricate myself from the tail gunner's position which was then about three stories above ground.

The Salvage Effort: It was decided in Chakulia to attempt to salvage the plane. The job was to remove the replace all four engines and propellers, repair the minor damage to wings and flaps and remove the entire nose section forward of the front bomb bay. Care would need to be taken to label each wire, tube and cable so they could be connected when a new nose section was brought in.

A ground crew of 17 specialists was flown to Hsichang to effect the salvage. The cadre consisted of specialists from the 28th Air Service Group, 39th Air Engineering Squadron and three men from the 45th Squadron. First Lt. George Lundquist, M/Sgt. Mark "Murphy" Mavrofrides and Art Reibe came up from the 45th. Sgt. Leon Shapiro of the medics and a corporal cook and an assistant were a part of the cadre. T/Sgt. Alex Davis was NCO in charge.

Salvage Efforts Launched as Art Reibe Tells It: Prior to leaving Chakulia, we were briefed on the Lolos who frequented the area of the field. They were known to raid villages and take prisoners who were held as slaves. (The Lolos were, indeed, present in this area but they were prevented from attacking the Hsichang area by the provincial soldiers and the presence of Gen. Chang and his forces.)

In addition to our duty to attempt to salvage the plane, we were to be on the lookout for any other downed airmen. On two occasions, we were awakened in the night. We were loaded onto a Chinese truck. The truck had no fuel tank, just a 55 gallon drum on its rear bed. A dipper full of some sort of alcohol was passed forward to a Chinese soldier riding the front fender. In turn, he slowly metered it into the exposed carburetor. Much of the alcohol never made it to the engine being shortstopped by the troops. Soon we were all drunk. The hairpin curves of this road were a first class nightmare. While the Chinese intelligence notified us twice, only one crew came in while we were in Hsichang. This crew had lost several members and most were badly hurt. Within a day they were flown out.

A mule train arrived one day from Kunming led by Col. M. B. DePass, who was a military attache there. They stayed with us for several days collecting information on what we knew about downed airmen in our general area and checking on black market operations.

The C-46 from our engineering squadron piloted by Lt. Wilkes Elley and Lt. Harry Fiseler would come in maybe once a month and bring in hand tools and such other equipment as an A-frame which we used to pull the engines for transport up to Hsinching (A-1). It was difficult to pull the engines with

an A-frame designed only for pulling props. In addition, the ground under the plane was part of the runway made up of rocks as large as basketballs. None were smaller than softball size. The A-frame was overloaded at least 10 times its rated capacity by the R-3350 engines. Luckily, none were dropped and no one was injured removing the engines or loading them into the transport. We initially removed the bombsight/stabilizer and guns before removing the engines. Then came the nose section. We propped the fuselage on some drums and shipped out all useable parts. Everything that could be removed to lighten the plane was taken out, especially when we measured the runway and weighed the possibility of getting the plane off even if we could install a new nose and four new engines.

Our supply plane would also bring in our PX supply of cigarettes, toddy and, of course, our "C" rations. Our cook blended the "C" rations in with locally bought corn on the cob and "eggesees." The cooks did marvelous things with what was available.

Sgt. Shapiro earned the gratitude of the general when he supplied him with some penicillin. The general was suffering with a severe case of "social disease."

Gen. Chang and his family were exceedingly kind to us. The general lived in his villa with his wife, his son Louis and two daughters. One time when George (Lundquist) and I visited them, they found some old American photograph records by Rudy Valee. They put the records on an old wind-up phonograph and the two of us danced with the two young ladies.

The Chinese hostel that we shared with our Chinese allies was infested with fleas. The same with the theater in Hsichang. We were often invited to the theater in Hsichang by the local Chinese. The entertainment there was Chinese opera. Once we watched a Chinese silent movie. Much hot green tea and "Jing bao juice" or "Air raid" drink was served on these occasions. The Chinese people could not have been more friendly and helpful. They provided manpower whenever needed for our repair and salvage work. We helped them celebrate a real live Chinese New Year that fall.

One time some wing tanks were stolen despite the fact that we had Chinese guards on the plane around the clock. They were returned but not before some threats were made that caused someone to change their mind. On another occasion at our hostel, which was about a mile from the runway on a hill, a Chinese soldier reached through the papered over window of one of the rooms and made off with a pack of cigarettes. The man whose cigarettes were being stolen saw the arm withdrawing with the pack and screamed bloody murder. Before we could intervene, the Chinese soldier was shot. We all felt extremely sorry about this event.

Early in our stay, M/Sgt. Ray Dillard (sheet metal specialist) developed acute appendicitis. The radio of #326 was still in the plane and we had been briefed that in an emergency, we were to wait until a flight of planes came over and then turn to their frequency and deliver our message. Sgt. Shapiro was in favor of operating on Dillard right away but we held off hoping we'd get an answer from the over-flying planes and they would have a transport come in and take him to the hospital. Finally, after much worry and no answer from the overhead planes, a CNAC (China National Air Corps) C-47 landed and took Dillard out. Dillard survived despite the fact that his appendix burst on the operating table in the hospital to which he had been evacuated. Sometime later when I was at Hsinching, I was asked by Operations if I was the guy who broke radio silence and was hollering so much.

Once our supply plane was late arriving. Our men were out of cigarettes. George Lundquist and I caught a CNAC C-47 and flew across the Hump in it to Chabua, a base in the upper Assam valley. The plane had seen better days. It was full of holes. It was wired up Toonerville Trolley style. It had no parachutes and only one walk-around oxygen bottle which was traded off between the pilot and

radio operator. George and I were turning blue from the cold and lack of oxygen by the time we got to India. The next day the Chinese went back over the Hump to Kunming where the Red Cross let us sign out for two cartons of cigarettes.

Getting to Haichang from Kunming took some doing. We were assigned to another CNAC plane but missed it. It crashed shortly after take-off. We caught another plane which took us to Kweilin in eastern China. With the base surrounded by the Japanese on three sides, we nevertheless touched down long enough to unload and load cargo and refuel. Then it was off to Chungking and then to Hsinching (A-1). Neither George nor I know how we eventually got back to Hsichang but it was at least a week later. All for two cases of cigarettes.

Back in Hsichang, during conversations with Gen. Chang, George was offered a chance to come back after the war and serve as a consultant for an agricultural river-water diversion project. Louis Chang, son of the general, had a degree in chemistry from the University of Nanking. My father was superintendent of an oil refinery back in the States. Chang asked me if I would get my father to write a letter which would make it possible for Chang to emigrate to the United States. My father wrote the letter and lined up a job for Chang at a refinery in Arkansas. Chang came to the U.S. but never took the job. I lost track of Chang in the early 1950s when he was living in New York state. He became quite successful. His father, General Chang was executed in the late 1940s during the revolution, I was told.

Paul Hunter reports: When George Lundquist and his crew were ready, personnel at the overhaul depot in India split a B-29 nose section in half for transport to Hsichang. They wheeled it out to C-46 for loading. Whoops. Someone had miscalculated. There was no way that half-a-nose section would go through the cargo doors. Another nose section was split into thirds. These were wheeled out to a C-46. Another miscalculation. Neither would a third of a nose section go through the C-46 cargo doors.

Again, Art Reibe reports: After it was determined that the salvage effort was to be abandoned, we tied ropes to what was left of the #326. At least 50 Chinese soldiers helped us pull the remains to the side of the field where she was, no doubt, cannibalized by one and all. The five to eight thousand gallons of fuel in the main fuel tanks was given to the Chinese army for use in their few rickety trucks.

Thus ended the heroic effort to salvage B-29 #42-6326.

Epilogue: In the 45th Squadron history for November, 1943, there is this reference: "Capt. Woodruff holds the DFC with Oak Leaf Cluster. He may truly be called a 'hard luck' man. Assigned to a pursuit squadron at Wheeler Field, Hawaii, he was unable to get off the ground when Pearl Harbor was attacked and Wheeler Field hit by the Japs, December 7th. Next on the list of tough breaks came 26 January, 1943 when, on a flight back to Espiritu Santo Island, New Hebrides, from Guadalcanal, his plane was forced down. To add to his misfortune, he had Maj. Gen. Nathan Twining, Commanding General of the 13th Air Force, aboard. The crew and six passengers were adrift for five days before being picked up. Sent to New Zealand to recover, Woodruff successively caught Malaria and Yellow Jaundice before finally being discharged from the hospital and sent back to the U.S."

In 1987 when this was quoted to him, Jay Woodruff responded that he did not regard himself as a "hard luck" man but rather a lucky guy. He noted that at Wheeler field, if he had got off, he probably would have been shot down by our own anti-aircraft fire. This happened to one of the three mates in his squadron that did get off. In the ditching of the B-17 in the Coral Sea, the ditching was made at night in the eye of a typhoon. Had he not had a general aboard, he says, it is doubtful if the search for them would have gone on for the five days it did.

General Twining's brother was the one that found them.

Upon being discharged from the service at the end of the war, Jay signed on with TWA, where he served for the next 30 years. After 35 years of flying and nearly 23,000 hours, Jay decided to retire. He now lives in Lafayette, CA.

The crew of #42-6326 was made up of the following members:

Pilot - Jay Woodruff
Co-Pilot - Bill Clay (deceased)
Navigator - Tom Brennan
Bombardier - Joe Buchowicz
Flight Engineer - Paul Hunter
Radio Operator - William Treanor (deceased)
CFC Gunner - Keith Hooker
Gunner - Vincent Paolini
Gunner - Ed Hornyai (deceased)
Tail Gunner - Henry Pisterzi
Passenger - Allan Ferguson

Bill Clay returned to the States in March 1945. Eventually he returned to law enforcement work in Miami, Florida. Later he moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he died in 1965. Ed Hornyai was killed while parachuting from a plane as noted earlier. Tom Brennan, Allan Ferguson and Vincent Paolini are unlocated members.

Of the seventeen ground crew members who took on the tough duty of salvaging the plane, only those who are mentioned in this narrative are known.

Editor's Postscript: William A. Rooney and Robert L. Hall, 517½ Ridge Road, Wilmette, IL 60091 are editors of MEMORIES. They would like to hear any story you think is worth telling. Right now they are interested in your experiences on "The Rock" and on flying patrols to and from the island. They would also like to learn about your experiences getting from Kansas to India in 1944 and anything about POW supply missions flown from Tinian after hostilities ended in 1945. A future issue is also planned to be made up of the funny things that happened to us. Write the editors about those experiences as well.

"Red" Carmichael is Treasurer. He would welcome contributions to defray the cost of printing and mailing MEMORIES. If you want to help, send a check to: 40th Bomb Group Association, c/o M.E. Carmichael, 2514 Oregon Avenue., Alamogordo, NM 88310. Harry Changnon is 40th Group Historian. He would welcome any of your military records, files and memorabilia. He will add these to his extensive archives on the 40th. Send any such material to him at: 10455 Westacres Drive, Cupertino, CA 95014.



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