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INTRODUCTION

In March, 1944, Louis Jones and Bill Spivey took off in an L-5 from Chakulia on an administrative flight to make a delivery to one of the other groups at Dum Dum airfield, just a short distance from Chakulia. Almost no one (except John Bailey) knew Lou and Bill were missing and--even worse--no one seemed to care. This is the story of that flight and the accident they had on the way. It is typical of the adventures that involved a very small number of members of the Group and thus is little known to most of us.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE L-5 CRACKUP

John Bailey Starts the Story: The Air Transport Command had written off and abandoned an L-5 aircraft at the Chakulia base because the engine tachometer was inoperative, and the tail wheel assembly, tire and tube had been damaged beyond repair in a hard landing.

Bill Spivey and I looked it over and together with Chet Lamb, thought if parts were secured for repairs, it could be made flyable. I made a list of parts and requested permission to fly it if repaired. Colonel Blanchard said I would be responsible for it. I was to sign off for it using my secondary MOS as an engineering officer. We completely checked over the plane.

We got lucky about that time. Bill Spivey, Jim DeCoster and I were assigned to fly the B-25 to New Delhi to take Dick Laneer there to arrange for a liquor ration. (Dick had been in higher management with National Distilleries prior to his army service.) We landed at Delhi and stayed at the Imperial Hotel. I went to the air depot and found the officer in charge, Hank Bauer, who was a fellow classmate and roommate from Engineering Cadets at Yale University. He assembled the parts I needed and issued them to me. We returned to Chakulia and repaired the plane.

We flew it several days, and Blanchard even flew it once. The engine took 80-octane gas, and we had one fuel tank that contained that gas. It was about half full and seemed to collect condensation in the fuel. We got a lot of water when we would bleed the sumps in the morning before flying.

The weekend was coming up, and I asked Blanchard if we could have a three-day pass and fly the plane to Dum Dum. He okayed the passes, and Bill Spivey went to the barracks to get clothes and shower. I gassed up the plane and headed to take a shower and get clothes. Spivey came back to the plane which was parked just down from the P-40 fighters at operations.

Lou Jones came out of operations and told Spivey that Blanchard wanted Spivey to fly Lou to deliver some E&E vests and money belts to one of the other bases about 25 minutes away. Spivey told the fire crew to tell me where he had gone and that he would be right back. He pre-flighted the plane and bled the sumps. I believe the plane had not set long enough for all the water to settle out of the gas into the sumps. The wobble pump that was used to start the plane bypassed the sump, pumping gas from higher up the tank.

Louis Jones Tells What Happened: I had just arrived in Chakulia in late March, 1944 after having spent several days of orientation at A-2 headquarters in Karagphur. I was directed to go to Dum Dum. I met Lt. Bill Spivey at Operations. He was to fly me there. We hopped into the L-5 and after the usual pre-flight check-out procedures, we took off for our destination.

The flight was going smoothly until the engine began to miss. Bill worked the wobble pump a few times, and the engine revolutions were normal again. About five minutes later, however, the motor began to miss again. In fact, we had a momentary loss of power, but Bill worked the wobble pump vigorously, and the power returned. I guess we lost maybe 300 feet of altitude.

This last scenario was repeated several times, and we continued to lose altitude. Bill believed we could make it to our destination so long as he kept working the pump. Bill's arm was tiring from pumping; besides, we had lost so much altitude that we could no longer get over the top of the sandy hills which were about 800 to 1,000 feet high, but had to go around the peaks. As directed, I leaned over the rear seat and worked the pump while Bill was busy dodging the hills.

The terrain below was anything but level. It was inevitable that we were going to have to "sit down" somewhere. The best spot we could locate was a field of rice paddies which were partially in a valley and echeloned up the side of a hill. It was segmented into diked areas about 100 by 50 feet running from the valley up the side of the hill.

In preparation for our landing, which we hoped would be uneventful, we took all metal objects from our person such as belt buckles, keys, etc. I distinctly remember unscrewing the metal officer's insignia which was attached to the front of the pith helmet I was wearing.

We touched down in the first paddy very smoothly and when we came to the retaining dyke at the end of the first paddy, we had enough power left to lift the plane to the next higher level. However, there was not enough engine thrust to carry us to the third level when we came to the retaining dike at the end of the second paddy. We plowed into the dyke going about 30 mph.

Bill screamed in pain as the engine was driven back into his lap. A few seconds later, he began to groan. I remember telling him I was "O.K." and that I would get him out. As I crawled out of the plane and tried to stand up, I fell flat on my face. There was nothing wrong with me other than a few bruises and a bad case of nerves.

I pulled Bill out and away from the plane. He continued to groan and complain of back pain as I stretched him out on the ground. In a short while, approximately ten Indians dressed in their flowing white native garb and carrying their little hoes arrived on the scene. My effort to communicate with them was hopeless, but soon another small group of peasants appeared, and one of them could speak English.

Bill had a fresh pack of cigarettes in his shirt pocket, and I distributed them to the natives while I told them who we were and that I wanted a litter to carry Bill to the nearest American outpost. Shortly, two of them returned with what looked like a door. We carried Bill on this litter to their village which was approximately two miles away.

By the time we arrived at their village of thatched huts, it was late in the afternoon. There were approximately 20 huts assembled around a center courtyard. We put Bill down on his litter about 30 feet from a fire that was used for light and cooking. Bill occasionally groaned, but for his back pain, he was fairly stable. The natives offered us a drink of water, but we politely refused and asked them to boil it first, which they did. The water was in a bronze metal container about the size of a cereal bowl. Bill took a couple of swallows, and I did the same, but that was it.

Now that it was dark, I stretched out next to Bill hoping to get a little sleep. We used our parachutes as pillows. I was too tired and sore to attempt any further efforts to get help. Sleep, however, was not to be. The natives brought us food on a large leaf, like a palmetto, which was hot and had been cooked over the nearby fire. Though we were not very hungry, we decided that we had better eat something to satisfy our hosts. We used our fingers to pick up the meat and vegetables.

Several of the small children in the crowd of natives around us began to giggle and laugh at me. I also noticed that some of the men were smiling. I continued to eat, wondering what was the cause of the hilarity. I later learned from my English-speaking friend that I was eating with my left hand and that in his country, the male only eats with his right hand and uses his left hand to attend to body functions.

During a night of fitful sleep, I would occasionally awaken to find several of the native children squatting down next to me gazing into my face with their heads no more than a foot to eighteen inches away. I was so physically sore and nervously exhausted that I soon was able to sleep despite their proximity.

At the first break of day, I was anxious to get started on my way to the nearest American base. My interpreter informed me that the only logical procedure was to wait two days until a bus came by close to the village. We could then load Bill and his stretcher onto the top of the bus and take him to the nearest town where there was a telephone. I was disappointed, however realized I really had no choice but to follow his advice.

During the day, about every hour, a plane would pass overhead at an altitude of not over 5,000 feet. I knew we were fairly close to Dum Dum. I opened up one of the chutes and spread it out over the top of the grass huts with the assistance of the natives. I had hopes that it would be spotted, and Chakulia would know what happened to us and would send help. No such luck.

Those two days really dragged. At times I entertained the thought of taking off on my own to locate help since there was so much air activity, but I thought better of it. I decided I had better stay with Spivey.

When departure time arrived the natives carried Bill on his litter for approximately two miles until we came to a road. There we waited for a couple of hours until the bus came into view. The natives stretched out across the road to signal the bus to stop. We loaded Bill and his litter on top. I jumped on, waved a thank you to my English-speaking friend, and we were on our way.

What a bus ride! The bus was no "Greyhound." It had no sides. It was an open-air affair that resembled a Toonerville Trolley. It was coal fired--not gasoline powered. When I boarded, all the seats were taken, and each side was jammed with straphangers. I shared a strap with one of the natives. The first three or four miles were uneventful until we neared the top of a steep grade. The bus practically came to a halt. The driver yelled to the straphangers, and we all dismounted and begin to push the bus. Once we crested the hill and started down, we had to really run and jump aboard for an exciting downhill ride.

When we arrived at our destination, I used the phone to call the Dum Dum base. In spite of the fact that I told them I had Spivey on a litter with a bad back and to send an ambulance, help arrived in a command car. We were so happy to see another "G.I.," we made no complaints. We got Spivey aboard and took him to the base hospital.

I think this was the last time I saw Bill Spivey. I flew back to Chakulia aboard a C-46 with those unreliable Curtis-Wright electrical props. Once airborne we began to have engine problems. I was stretched out resting and so muscular sore and bruised, I made no effort to put on a chute as the others had done.

When I got back to Chakulia no one in our organization was aware that we had been gone for about four days. Operations had our flight plan, and we were "P-Xed" out properly, but no one bothered to investigate to find out if we had arrived at our destination or why we had not returned as scheduled.

Bill Spivey was placed in a cast for his broken back and shipped back to the States. I understand he recuperated without any ill effects.

John Bailey Concludes the Story: I waited at Operations until dark and returned to the barracks figuring that Bill and Lou were staying the night. The next morning we heard from the British that the plane had gone down, and the natives had the men and were bringing them to the British base. Chet Lamb assisted me with the considerable paperwork in writing off the L-5 for the second time. This time it was for good.

My wife and I go to Kansas occasionally and when we do, we see Bill at his restaurant in Hays, Kansas (the Golden Ox just off I-70).



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