



GOD IS MY CO-PILOT

By Col. Robert L. Scoff

WNU RELEASE



The story thus far: Robert Scoff, a West Point graduate, wins his wings at Kelly Field, Texas. From Mitchell Field, N. Y., he is sent to Panama where his real pursuit training is begun in a P-12S. He begins to train other pilots, but as the war edges closer he wants to get into combat service. He writes many letters to Generals pleading for a chance to fight and at last it comes in the form of a phone call from Washington asking if he can fly a four-engine bomber. He says he can—a white lie. When he leaves his wife and child he realizes that they meant America for him. He picks up his Fort in Florida, asks one of his former students how to fly it, and they are off for Brazil.

CHAPTER VII

Maybe the meal was feally good—I've forgotten. But later we were to have some meals which were definitely on the rugged side. Some time just try a breakfast at three a. m. composed of warmed-over, mouldy, then re-warmed toast, with slightly sour canned tomatoes. After this year and more, I can close my eyes and see Col. C. V. Haynes sitting there looking at that delicacy—thinking, no doubt, about Carolina country ham, with brown gravy making a little puddle in the grits.

Well fed but on the tired side, we left the base at 13:35, for our next destination farther down the coast. For more than two hundred miles we were over friendly territory as we hugged the beaches, but later, along the Ivory Coast, we had to fly out to sea to avoid the prying eyes that were Vichy French. I must have sworn deeply that afternoon, for in my diary I note now that I wrote this line: "Damn, we have to dodge those b—— all the time."

We passed a fighter base at 17:00 G.M.T., and one hour later we landed at another West Coast base. The sun was setting back to the West in the Atlantic—towards home. Easter Sunday was fast coming to a close. I remembered then, from "hearsay evidence," that I had been born exactly thirty-four years before. From personal experience I would be able to recall this Easter as a memorable one.

Next day, while the crew worked on the tired airplane, some of us drove into the bush country. With a guide we made about a ten-hour trip into the interior, to Togoland. Entering a typical dirty village we heard jazz music and picked our way towards the source. I imagine all of us were expecting to find a radio or a victrola; instead we found that we were really in the land that had "birthed" jazz. Grouped about an earthen crock of palm wine was the population of the village, and the more they dipped the gourd cups into the stagnant-looking liquor, the hotter the music became and the more the sweating black bodies swayed to the beat of the drums. Their bare feet were moving to the rhythm in the dust, and their naturally musical voices, added to the syncopated rumble that came from black hands thumping many kinds of drums, made us wonder whether some orchestra like Cab Calloway's hadn't come to Africa with us on a USO project.

On April 7 we left the Gold Coast for Kano, in Nigeria. Off at 08:00 G.M.T., we flew a course of 90 degrees to miss more of Vichy France. Over Lagos, in the clammy heat of the equatorial jungle, we turned into the continent to a course of 58 degrees and continued over very thick country until we crossed the Niger. From there on East, the land that was Africa seemed to dry up, and my boyhood conception of how the Dark Continent should look faded away. Instead of constant jungle we now saw dry desert, like the lower hump of Brazil near Natal, or places in our own West.

We landed at the old walled city of Kano that afternoon. Our next take-off, for Khartoum, would best be made at nightfall, in order that we might land in the Sudan early in the morning before the dust storms had impaired the visibility. To waste time we walked into town to see the ancient city of Biblical days. Soon we found ourselves dodging camels, lepers, and Ali Baba—with his more than forty thieves.

General Chennault's AVG was composed of three squadrons, functioning under the supreme command of China's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. About seventy pilots and three hundred ground crew personnel made up this organization, which for nearly four months had been in combat against the Japanese Air Force from Rangoon up to Lashio, Burma. These American boys had come from the air services of the American Army, Navy and Marine Corps.

The General was an old pilot, and through many years of single-seater flying in the noise of open cockpits had become moderately deaf, a circumstance that had helped to bring about his retirement. Knowing that war with Japan was more than probable, after his retirement he had gone to China, and there he had not only persuaded the Generalissimo to build the air-warning net within China, but had worked to train China's Air Force as well. Growing out of this, when the brave Chinese Air Force was virtually destroyed by the overwhelming odds of the Japanese juggernaut, Chennault had long cher-

ished a volunteer force of American airmen, flying American equipment in China against the Jap.

The purpose was fourfold: to test American equipment, to train a nucleus of American pilots in actual combat, to furnish air support for the Chinese land forces, and to fight a delaying action against the Japanese until the Chinese armies could be equipped with modern sinews of war for offensive action against the stranglehold of Japan.

Finally, in the late summer of 1941, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps permitted a few reserve officer pilots to resign their commissions and accept jobs as instructors with Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company, or Camco, as it was called. These seventy-odd pilots and some three hundred ground-crewmen proceeded in small numbers on ships of various nations—Dutch, British, Indian, American, and some unregistered—West from San Francisco to Java, then Singapore, and thence to Rangoon, Burma.

These "instructors" for Camco were carried on the passenger lists as acrobats, doctors, lawyers, and probably even Indian chiefs. I imagine that after they made their great record—with never more than fifty-



General Chennault's AVG was composed of three squadrons, functioning under the supreme command of China's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, shown above. About seventy pilots and three hundred ground crew personnel made up this organization, which for nearly four months had been in combat against the Japanese Air Force from Rangoon up to Lashio, Burma.

five airplanes they shot down two hundred and eighty-six Japanese planes, losing only eight in combat—the complaining Japanese would have been disposed to add the remainder of the nursery rhyme, "Rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief."

Many times I had heard Radio Tokyo complain of the "cruelty" of these American guerrilla pilots. Under General Chennault's clever leadership and tactical genius they had virtually driven the Imperial Japanese Air Force from the skies of Burma, and held the Burma Road for months after it should have fallen. Against odds of more than twenty to one, they had "saved face" for America and the white race, in this battle against a much-bellied enemy.

When one considers that the AVG fought in what the British called obsolete tactical combat aircraft—the P-40B's and P-40C's—their deeds and scores become truly legendary. Throughout China today, General Chennault's AVG are regarded as "Saviors of Free China Skies." The Chinese gentry on the gate to the "Fijichan" or airfield may shake his head when you show him your pass; he may not understand your hard-won Chinese; but when you smile and call, "A-V-G," his face lights up in turn, and he calls, "Ding-hao—you are 'number one.'" He holds his thumb up in the old familiar signal, and you enter. Then, to show his high regard for Americans and his vivid memory of General Chennault's Flying Tigers, he calls after you, "A-V-G mean American Very Good—ding-hao, ding-hao."

We caught up with three more of our thirteen bombers at Kano, and all our crew had begun to feel confident that we could not be called back from the mission against Tokyo. To insure this to a greater degree, we were trying hard, without appearing to be too anxious, to be the first to reach our initial point—Karachi, India. So long as we were the first of the B-17's, we could claim a moral victory. For after all, Colonel Haynes was boss, and in a ship with longer range than the Fortress and we wanted him ahead.

With full service aboard, and the temperature hot and stifling, even after nightfall, we threaded our way through the dust for the take-off. I remember that the heavy ship used the entire runway and some of the sagebrush prairie land too, for there seemed to be no lift whatever to the hot, dead air. Finally reaching a comfortable cruising altitude at twelve thousand, Doug and I breathed the old familiar sigh of relief at having once again gotten a loaded bomber in the air, and the sigh echoed around the ship.

Down in the dust haze not a light showed as we crossed equatorial Africa where Sergeant Aaltonen and

Cobb wanted so much to land for a look at the big-lipped Ubangi women. Then Lake Chad and Fort Lamy went by. Just before dawn we crossed North of the mountain of El-Fasher. At six o'clock the White Nile appeared—we had crossed the western part of the Sudan. Our landing was made at Khartoum, where the Blue Nile and the White Nile meet.

On April 8, we left Khartoum for an easy run to Aden, on a course which was almost due East over the mountains of Eritrea. We went on over Gura and Massaua to the Red Sea. On our left we could see Yemen, and farther South and to our right, Somaliland. Reaching the South end of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the well-known landmarks, the Rocks of Aden, appeared about noon. Next day we'd make the run on to India.

The British garrison commander took care of us that night. But around the dinner table there suddenly dropped a blanket of despair. The London radio announced that Bataan had fallen. After the first comment we settled down to worry. Part of our mission was to bomb Jap concentrations around Bataan and Corregidor. Would this development cause that part of the attack to be called off? Again the fear of being frustrated in our effort to take the offensive clutched my heart. It seemed that once again help had been started too late.

We had caught the last of the B-17's at Aden, and next morning we got up an extra hour early for the take-off. Our Fortress was straining to get to the initial point just behind the B-24. Success was in sight.

At 5:50 we were climbing over the beach of southern Arabia, and as the light improved we all agreed that Arabia was a rugged-looking land. After the terrible stories about the mutilation of forced-down flyers at the hands of the tribesmen, we all were glad that we had the little cards written in Arabic, promising high payment to the Arabs if we were delivered unharmed to the nearest British outpost.

We followed the Arabian coast over the blue waters of the Arabian sea to the Gulf of Oman, and then crossed to Karachi.

Colonel Haynes, with the B-24, had gone to Delhi. Our orders were to wait at Karachi. And now for two weeks we anxiously waited, while the rumors flew.

I think I shall always associate India with my first impression on getting out of my ship. No one seemed to know anything. Behind us lay twelve thousand miles, which we had made in eight days—for what? No one stood there with orders to expedite our departure. Instead they appeared to think we had ferried this ship for them to use in training. Training, mind you—here, halfway round the world and in a country that faced attack any moment! When we explained as much as we could about our secret orders, smiles came to the officers' faces. Bets were laid that we would never leave Karachi with those ships. But we were volunteers, and our combat spirit was still there. I remember that all my crew took the bets, as fast as they were offered. But we lost.

Once again we had been frustrated in our effort to go to war on the offensive. Now, four months after Pearl Harbor, the stencilled word on a B-17 in our flight, SNAFU—meaning roughly, in Air Corps slang, "Snarled-up"—seemed to fit the situation. We learned the worst when Haynes came back from Delhi with a face a yard long. Sadly he told us the truth. Due to the fall of Bataan and the loss of other fields in eastern China—our secret bases—coupled with other factors beyond his control, our "dream mission" had come to the end of the line.

During the fourteen days in Karachi, when we had been waiting for Colonel Haynes, it had been a difficult job of finesse to hang on to the ships. All twelve of the B-17's were lined up to be turned over to Base Units on the field. But the personnel responsible for the conflicting orders had reckoned without the extreme loyalty of the volunteer crewmen to the flight commander and the pilot of each ship. The men stood guard twenty-four hours a day in and around the bombers. This was logical, too, because each ship contained not only the secret bomb-sight but full complements of loaded fifty-calibre guns, as well as the personal effects of the bomber crews. At first the crews appeared bewildered; but then their attitude seemed to imply stubbornly that they had been ordered to attack Japanese territory, and no matter if Bataan and all of eastern China fell, that's what they were going to do.

One day the General in charge of the Air Base sent a crew down to my ship with orders for them to take over and search out a Japanese Task Force far out in the Arabian Sea. They were met with the ready Tommy guns of my men and roughly told that no one except members of the crew could get aboard. A Major in the new crew showed his orders. My crew chief replied: "I'm sorry, Sir, but I have mine, too; we are on our way to bomb an enemy objective. No one gets aboard this ship except the regular crew."

(TO-BE CONTINUED)

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Household Hints

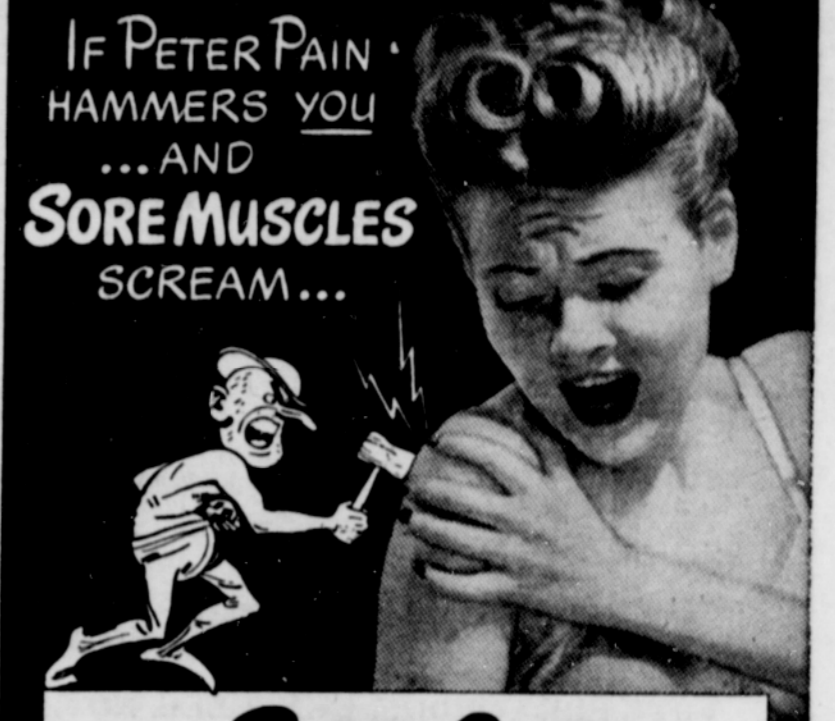
When painting the ceiling of a room, cut a rubber ball in half, then cut a hole in the one half and slip over the paint brush handle. This will catch paint drippings.

Cotton corduroys look best if after laundering they are not ironed, but merely brushed along the direction of the ribs while still slightly damp.

In laundering, remember the temperature of the water is important. The hotter the water, the whiter the clothes.

Wrap a metallic frock in black paper or material to prevent it from tarnishing.

The next time you make a laundry bag, put a draw string on both ends. This will facilitate emptying it.



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