

[PDF] China's Wings: War, Intrigue, Romance, And Adventure In The Middle Kingdom During The Golden Age Of Flight

Gregory Crouch - pdf download free book



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Description:

Gregory Crouch on China's Wings

The seed that became China's Wings was planted by Charlie Fowler, one of my climbing partners in ,

the book I'd written about my mountain adventures in that extreme land. Charlie's other adventuring obsession was unclimbed peaks in Central Asia, and back from explorations along the Tibet/China frontier in early 2002, Charlie sent me an email: "Greg, I keep hearing stories of these old World War II American plane wrecks in the Eastern Himalaya. You're a military history guy and a mountaineer; you should spark up a story on that."

I recognized the genesis of a good idea, and as a lifetime WWII history buff, I guessed those wrecks were probably relics of the airlift from India to China the United States prosecuted over the mountains dropping down the border between Burma and China's Yunnan province--the infamous "Hump." However, I was in Oman on a National Geographic assignment at the time. I didn't get around to pursuing Charlie's lead until months later.

When I did, "flying the Hump" web searches quickly ran across the cnac.org website--an enthusiast's collection of stories, events, and people related to the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), a civil airline partnership between Pan American Airways and the Nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai-shek that flew and fought in China from 1929-1949. I knew many of the tales orbiting CNAC's story--among them Pan Am's pioneering transpacific flights, the Flying Tigers, and the Hump airlift--but I'd never heard of the airline that seemed to have played such a pivotal role in those events.

I stumbled across the website's reunions page and noticed that CNAC had a reunion scheduled only three weeks later, and that it was in San Francisco, less than twenty miles from my desk. Tentatively, I picked up the telephone and called CNAC Association President Bill Maher, one of the airline's Hump pilots. I introduced myself, explained that I wanted to explore the possibility of writing a book about his airline, and asked if I could attend the reunion. "Hell yes!" Bill thundered. "Come on over. We've got great stories."

I attended, and Bill was right. He and his flying band of brothers oozed fascinating stories and outrageous adventures played out against the desperate background of the war in Asia. I was hooked. Driving away from the reunion three days later, I was physically shaking, convinced I'd discovered an untold, compelling, and significant story--one I was meant to tell.

I never did succeed in mounting an expedition to visit a World War II plane wreck in the remote mountains of Asia--although I still hold out hope that someday I might--but the years of research that followed proved the story of the China National Aviation Corporation to be richer, deeper, and more historically significant than I'd dared hope; and in William Langhorne Bond, the steady, mannerly, but sharp-elbowed Virginian whose endeavors did so much to propel the airline through two trying decades, I'd discovered the perfect protagonist to carry the story. I spent dozens of hours with Moon Fun Chin, a remarkable man born in an obscure South China village in 1913 who began flying for CNAC in the early 1930s, piloted the last evacuation flights from Hankow in 1938 and Hong Kong in December, 1941, amassed many thousands of flying hours with the company through its years on the Hump (including taking Tokyo raider Jimmy Doolittle out of China in 1942), and ended up owning his own airline after the war. Through contemporary letters, books, articles, and interviews, China's Wings took me through the breathtaking, deadly Yangtze Gorges in the early 1930s, provided an inside account of the development of Pan American's groundbreaking transpacific route, bore witness to the utter destruction of Shanghai in a colossal--and largely forgotten--battle fought after the Japanese invaded China in 1937, and to mind-boggling mechanical improvisations, the mass evacuations of cities like Hankow and Hong Kong as they fell to the invaders, pivotal meetings in the boardrooms of Pan American Airways and the corridors of power in Washington, DC, and tense, fear-choked moments in cockpits over the Hump. The story of William Bond and the China National Aviation Corporation proved the perfect lens through which to experience the U.S. relationship with China during the crux decades of the Twentieth Century.

Sadly, neither Bill Maher nor Charlie Fowler can enjoy the fruits of their assistance; Bill Maher passed away in the summer of 2011, and Charlie was killed by an avalanche in China in 2006. I will always be grateful to them for their friendship and for this story.

Review

Advance praise for *China's Wings*

"Too many people think the war in the Pacific began with Japan's sudden strike on Hawaii, launched seemingly out of nowhere. Crouch's vividly written book explains how America's business interests in 1930s China set it on the path to Pearl Harbor. This is the rousing story of the enterprising Pan Am pilots who built a frontier airline and went on to become aviation heroes, flying over the Himalayas, helping save China, and thereby transforming the world."—James D. Hornfischer, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors* and *Neptune's Inferno*

"Dramatically rendered."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"In *China's Wings*, Gregory Crouch recalls the remarkable encounter between an ancient civilization and the most modern technology in the world, as intrepid Americans and their Chinese partners struggled to establish a sophisticated air network over a vast land that barely knew electricity. This gripping book will transport you to a fascinating lost time."—James Bradley, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Flags of Our Fathers* and *The Imperial Cruise*

"West Point grad Crouch brings us a story that's part adventure, part unearthed history [and] not just for history buffs."—*Library Journal*

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