

Ex-CBI Roundup

CHINA—BURMA—INDIA

APRIL
1955



Jinx Falkenburg in CBI

HOWARD
SCOTT



By JINX FALKENBURG

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"We couldn't have done as much for their morale as they did for ours."

THIS STORY is a slight condensation of Chapter 8 of "Jinx—The Story of Jinx Falkenburg," published by Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1951. Copyright 1951, reprinted in Ex-CBI Roundup by special permission.

THEY TOLD US that CBI would be hot.

They briefed us and prepared us and told us what to wear.

I believed them. So here I was flying over the Hump into China in bright red-to-the-knee socks, two turtle-neck sweaters, a borrowed flight jacket, a pair of khaki shorts, and an oxygen mask. It was freezing and this was the extent of my warm clothing. We all sat huddled on the floor, there were no seats on the plane, and four of the group, using parachutes as seats, played cards. I could feel myself off in my little corner getting dozier and dozier. This, I was sure, was the first sign of freezing to death, but it was such a wonderfully gentle sensation, I didn't have the strength to resist. We were flying 19,000 feet in the air somewhere between Chabua, India, and Kunming, China. We had already given a few shows in India and were now flying on to China "over the hump" of the Himalayas, the graveyard of thousands of planes. You either flew at a freezing altitude in bad weather, as we were doing, or if the weather was good, flew just above the treetops. It wasn't much of a choice either way. Somebody was shaking me so vigorously my teeth shook.

I had forgotten to turn on my oxygen mask.

I wasn't tired or freezing. I had merely stopped breathing air!

Everybody thought it was very funny, or at least they laughed to release the tension.

But it really wasn't funny. It was a terribly rough trip.

Three hours of it.

"Oh, we're going to . . ." I didn't finish as we dove into an air pocket and a large mountain came looming up at us. Suddenly, out of nowhere, in the mid-

dle of mountain peaks, in the middle of nothing at all, there sat a tiny toylike shrine right on the top of one of the peaks. This, the pilot informed us, was a Japanese prison camp! It was a perfect day and I wondered how pretty it looked to the American boys down below.

This air route was used for everything. Everything from plane engines to beer cans had to come through here. I was astonished to think of the courage the boys had to have to make this flight day after day, but I supposed even that could become routine.

Suddenly, out from under a mountain, the Kunming field appeared. Our plane circled down in a tight spin, tighter and tighter, as I got sicker and sicker—and hotter and hotter. As we descended the temperature rose, rose, up and over my turtle-neck sweater, until I was sure I was close to death by suffocation. We could hear the pilot of another plane calling on the inter-com and the inter-com answering back:

"Four stars, coming in, four stars, coming in. . ."

"I've got six stars in my ship," our pilot said.

"And I've got General Stilwell on my level."

The plane finally embraced the ground and out came a little jeep to meet Stilwell and his plane. Nobody expected us.

CBI had had notoriously bad luck with scheduled shows that didn't arrive, and, although we weren't aware of this, the Army newspapers and magazines were full of bitter GI comments about the attitude of show people in CBI. We hadn't expected a picnic, but we were also unprepared for the hostility of a lot of the brass toward camp shows. *CBI Roundup* had run a headline that day, coincidental with our arrival: "No thanks, Hollywood. We don't want any more!" Major John Nixon, who had been assigned to us, knew and explained that we should not be too surprised at anything. We were so lucky to have him with us. He even dreamed up the idea of the Ping-pong matches we played

with the men in every camp, a very successfully received stunt.

The Kunming GI's had seen so few American girls since they'd been stationed there, it wouldn't have made any difference if we three girls had six heads between us. Colonel George Hartman, husband of Elain Shepherd, one of my friends from Hollywood, drove up on a motorcycle and took things under control. We were all nervous as a result of the plane ride and not being expected. And here I was, in shorts, and a stomach that refused to stay grounded—it was still flying 19,000 feet up. The colonel gallantly offered me a ride on the back of his motorcycle. I jumped at the chance of getting all that fresh air.

I hopped on behind him and then wondered if that was the right way to behave my first day in China!

"Where are we going, Colonel?" I asked, stalling for time.

"Hostel Number One," he answered quickly.

So off we went down the Burma Road. The Burma Road is *not* a road. It's a series of rocks thrown down at random, none of them really put together and certainly not cemented. And we drove very fast over it—it was the only main road. So fast that we overtook General Stilwell. It scared me so that I just waved, as though this, a girl in shorts on the back of a motorcycle, were the most natural sight to find speeding down the Burma Road. And it scared my queasiness right out of me. Suddenly, I felt fine.

Hostel Number One proved to be a really wonderful setup, one of the very few elegant accommodations we had. It turned out to be the General's bungalow, with two bedrooms and three Chinese servants who were addressed appropriately as the Number One Boy,

Number Two Boy, and Number Three Boy. One of the bedrooms was for the General and staff, and the other one Pat (O'Brien) turned over to the girls. Pat never asked for anything for himself and was always seeing to it that the girls got the very best of everything, no matter how it inconvenienced him. It was about five in the afternoon when we got around to unpacking our duffles. We learned from one of the officers, via Nixon, that no one on the base really expected to see a show. Those who knew we were there couldn't believe that someone, anyone, any troupe had come to their forsaken neck of the woods, and there were many guys on the base who didn't know we were there at all. Most of the men had been there for thirty-four months, almost three years, and on countless combat missions. We used to talk about how it would be to be confined to your own house, among the things you loved best, and were closest to for almost three years. Then of how it must be to be here, without anything or anybody you loved, and constantly within the shadow of death.

Frankly, we were scared to death. We were scared that we'd be a flop. We were scared because it was our first big show and our first big show in China. We were scared because of General Stilwell, who had never even allowed Waes in CBI—and we knew was not keen about any girl in CBI. Oh, it had to be very special, that show!

Some of the enlisted men fixed up a dressing room for us in a hangar right next door to the stage. The guys by this time had found out there was going to be a show for sure and they were yelling and screaming all over the base. There never was such an audience. From the minute we stepped out on that bare stage everything we did seemed to be all right. And it really was a bare setting. When you stepped out over the improvised footlights, you just walked from one board in the floor to another. There was no curtain, and no real dividing line between audience and actors, so that you were right out there in the audience from the minute you stepped out of the hangar, and you just started talking there and you finished there.

It turned out to be a two-hour show, because the boys didn't want it to stop, and we were too happy and gratified to want it to stop. Pat m-ceed, sang, and danced and told sports stories and gave a get-in-there-and-pitch talk, his wonderful Knute Rockne pep talk, and it never sounded better. Pat and I did a skit and sang "Jinxie Lives Over in Brooklyn" and I batted out autographed



JINX POSES for GI cameras outside Hostel 1 at Kunming during her tour of the CBI Theater. U.S. Army photo.

tennis balls. Betty danced. Ruth and Jimmie did their acts, and Harry kept the music and the spirit going full swing. As a finale we all sang "It's Great to Meet a Pal from Your Home Town," then walked over the footlights to shake hands with all the men. We knew that, after all, the show had been a success.

Major Nixon then appeared, whispering, "General Stilwell would like to see you."

And the boys screamed some more.

"You can't hold up the General!" Nixon said, when he saw that we weren't moving.

"Oh, we don't want to, but we have to talk to the boys." Quite spontaneously, the boys here had started something which became a regular part of the show. Pat would go down into the audience, or, as in this case, just walk a few steps forward "over the footlights," and talk to them or bring them on stage. This "talking to the boys" became as important as anything any of us had to offer during the whole rehearsed part of the show.

One of the boys shouted, "Hey, this is great. Glad I ain't that poor radio operator!"

That poor radio operator was the only man at Hostel No. 1 on duty. The only one. Even if Stilwell was furious about the show, wanted to reprimand us as a group, we knew we had to do something for that guy and we all moved up to the radio tower. The first thing I noticed was that he had my picture on the wall. My picture! And we stood in the little tower and did the whole show for him. It was ten-thirty when we left the stage to go up to the tower and we didn't get to Stilwell until twelve-thirty. There in the hut sat General Stilwell and General Merrill of Merrill's Marauder fame, and—tea and cookies.

"Well, it's nice to see you," said General Stilwell. We weren't sure if we detected a note of sarcasm. "I know where you've been and I think that's the best thing I ever heard." And he broke into a huge smile. "I want you to see every man, go to every base in CBI," he said. And we darn near did. We were originally scheduled to do fifty-four shows and ended up doing eighty-four, all as exciting, as much fun as that memorable first.

Back in our room in Stilwell's bungalow, where we were quartered, we couldn't go to sleep. We started talking like a pack of bobby-soxers on a pajama party.

"This is just like school," sighed Ruth. "Here I am, a grown woman, and a

full-grown married woman, at that, and I can't even discuss this wonderful evening with my husband."

During the whole tour the girls, of course, had separate quarters so that even the married couple had to be separated.

"Wasn't he the nicest general you ever saw?" At 5:30 a.m. we all heard a car drive off. Little did we know that it was Stilwell. It was five days later that we heard that he had been recalled by Roosevelt — we had had his last night in China with him!

And we talked until two a.m., in between putting up our hair, which we did every night, and going through various and sundry other beauty preparations. When we finally got to bed we were so tired we might never have awakened if we hadn't heard what sounded like every rooster in the state of New Hampshire, all in one back yard.

I opened one eye, saw them, let out a shriek, and pulled the covers over my head. We looked like three little mummies all in a row. We were surrounded. There were GI's at every window, hundreds of them, all hooting and screaming.

"C'mon, girls, up and at 'em."

"It's James with your Sunday breakfast, ladies."

"We're all set for a sitting, ladies. C'mon out and sit, huh, please?"

And they were all set. We didn't count them but I'm sure there were over a hundred cameras. We jumped into our shorts and CBI patches and we must have posed for a million pictures that morning.

We were based in Kunming for about five days, flying out from there to nearby camps for shows, taking hospital trips—

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I even played an exhibition tennis match against a Chinese team. In front of thousands of GI spectators, I managed to play my way to glorious—defeat. Pat played baseball against Chennault's team and almost broke his leg. When it came time to go, the boys bade us a sad farewell and presented us all with enormous coolie hats as going-away presents.

We saw Stilwell on his last night in CBI and had dinner in Chungking with General Wedemeyer on his first night in the theatre. Chungking was another dandy airport. The landing strip was a short path of cement plunked right down between the Yangtze River and a mountain. To land on the strip the pilot had to circle very tight to the mountain and very low, so low that we could look into the windows of the little houses dotting the side of the mountain. It was really spooky—and soaking wet. The weather in Chungking was wet the whole time we were there. That part of China was always mist-enshrouded and rain-soaked; "the forgotten theatre," as Dick Watts, the *Herald-Tribune* theatre critic on leave, who was with the OWI at the time, used to call it. All the other war theatres were highly popularized in the States — this theatre never worked its way into the lyrics of a popular song.

We checked into Red Cross headquarters to unpack and scrape the mud off our boots. Gladys Chang's father, who had returned to China and was by this time the fifth most desirable Chinese on the Jap extermination list, came over to pay me his respects. I had no idea how he knew I was there—but an hour later he walked in with a perfectly lovely bouquet of flowers and an invitation to a dinner that night which was to be attended by T. V. Soong, in addition to other Chinese and American dignitaries. So that we could go to the dinner we did the show that day in two shifts, one before the dinner and one after. It was a miserably hot, soggy night and hundreds of people — correspondents, top brass, and enlisted men were all jammed into a huge Kuomintang meeting hall. Mr. Soong told us Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's birthday was the following day and would we do him the honor of coming to the dinner for him? Would we do *him* the honor? We almost fell out of our chairs. We seldom mixed with the top brass, but this seemed like such a rare opportunity. We, of course, accepted. After the second show we went back to our Red Cross quarters and were jumped on in a dark alley by three enormous rats. After our wonderful little *amah* calmed us down, she served us egg sandwiches. Ruth looked at them and stalked off to bed.

"One more egg and we'll all be

cackling."

Crack of dawn the next morning we accosted Major Nixon.

"Major, isn't it wonderful?"

"Sure, it's all wonderful. What?"

"Why, our being invited to the Generalissimo's birthday dinner."

"But you can't go."

"Oh, *John*. No! We already told Mr. Chang that we'd be there. Can't we even go between shows or after the last show?"

"No. I can't say why but you'll be out of Chungking. I can't say where. If you'll all come with me the officers here will brief you. I can't and besides, I don't know."

And so we were briefed, and it was certainly the strangest briefing I'd ever heard before or since. We were told that we were to take a short trip to do a show at some undesignated and very top secret base. The base was commanded by a man known only as Commodore Mary Miles. We were not to know any more about it, we weren't to write our families until after the war. And that was that!

It was very dark that evening when we left Chungking. Everything and everybody seemed unusually quiet. The Army had set up an elaborate communications system and only the most necessary messages could be conveyed between any of us. We drove in jeeps to a tiny path leading into a mountain valley. Each of us was assigned to a sedan chair, with one coolie in front and one behind, probably the same kind of chairs they used centuries ago in the days of Genghis Khan. No one spoke as we got in our chairs and proceeded to make the most fantastic, slow, tortuous way up a series of desolate mountain paths. The chairs lurched back and forth around the hairpin turns and perilously close to the sheer drops on either side of the path. By eight p.m. we reached the top of the hill. This was the fabulous "Happy Valley," the outpost of the Office of Strategic Services, the secret branch of the armed forces. We discovered later that it was a great honor that was being conferred on us. No civilians had ever been permitted here before.

The personnel and inhabitants of this strange mountain retreat were American and Chinese guerillas and saboteurs. The leader, commander "Mary Miles," was a Navy man, but wore no uniform, and the other dominant figure seemed to be an evil-looking, tiny Chinese, a man

named General Tai Li, the top Chinese guerilla, later killed, who spoke no English, but who, through interpreters, was most gracious to us. Immediately after formal introductions to all the handsome, sparkling, bright boys, we were ushered into a huge dining hall and the most fabulous Chinese dinner and endless *Gapai* (pronounced Gombay) or Bottoms Up! After the last toast had been drunk we put on our show. A group of little barefooted deaf and dumb children had put flowers in our makeshift dressing room. They were entranced by red nail polish which they had never seen before. After our show another group of small Chinese children sang for us and then an entire full-length Chinese opera was performed for our amusement. Anyone who is not familiar with Oriental theatre is in for a big surprise when he has his very first experience with it. To the uninitiated, as we were, it's a weird and endless performance, with an actor taking as long as half an hour to cross from one side of the stage to the other. This slow motion, in addition to the peculiar harmonies sung, thoroughly mystified all of us. By the time the opera was over it was three a.m., at which time we had another enormous dinner, and then "to bed" for an hour or two on the top of a hill in a *senry box* and then crawled back into our sedan chairs, like the Dalai Lama, and disappeared into the dawn back to Chungking.

With hardly any sleep at all we had to make the hop to Paishihyi (pronounced Baishee) that day to do a show. It was either nine hours by jeep or nine minutes of a hazardous plane ride. After our nightmarish sedan-chair ride, needless to say, even with all the risks, we chose the plane. And it was *really* a bad ride, even though it lasted only fifteen minutes. We had completely socked-in weather. Ordinarily, no matter how hazardous the route, the pilot can follow the river to his destination, but this day the ceiling was so low that we were forced to go thousands of feet up and ended up flying on instruments. There were five horrible minutes when, in the middle of nowhere, we started circling for a landing. The pilot had no idea where we were — he was taking the word of the radio engineer on the ground who really didn't know where we were either. We were all scared to death but nobody dared say a word. All of a sudden, Pat said, "Relax, kids, I'm praying for the whole d—n bunch of us."

And I saw then that he had his rosary out. This was the first time that Pat had made any reference to being nerv-

ous or saying prayers—we were glad that he was praying for us.

Zoom! Suddenly we were rushing headlong down into the clouds. Centuries later, when we landed, I looked at our pilot—he was wringing wet. And after we'd done the show, we went through exactly the same thing flying back to Chungking, late that afternoon, rushing to arrive in time for a dinner General Hurley was giving in honor of General Wedemeyer, Roosevelt's replacement for Stilwell. During that week in Chungking, there were two or three state-occasion dinners, the only ones we attended during the whole nine weeks in CBI.

LIUCHOW WAS probably the worst and most dangerous spot we had been in. We arrived at eight p.m. by the light of a full moon with the Japs only eighteen miles away. Wherever you went, you couldn't escape the excruciating wails of the women and children as they were stacked, one on top of the other on freight cars to be evacuated to the South. When we left the next day, we were the last civilians out before the Japs arrived. Young General Casey Vincent, the commander, was wonderful to us; and we worked twice as hard to cheer the boys up during the brief time we had. The only good thing the boys had had in Liuchow was food. They had bread *that* thick, and butter and jam, coffee and peanut butter, all unheard of at any of the other bases. After a marvelous dinner they drew all the blackout curtains in the mess hall and there, by eerie candlelight, we put on the show. It had to be very informal and was, therefore, one of the only times we didn't give our usual rehearsed show. All the guys sat on the floor and Pat walked among them in the audience so that they really all got into the act. A couple of the guys could *really* sing. I think they had a wonderful time, although groups of them were constantly being called out on missions.

After the show we sat around on the floor with the men and laughed together, and then General Vincent asked us back to his quarters at three a.m. for imported cheese and crackers. He said if the weather was good in the morning we'd fly out. If it was bad . . . well, we'd go by truck convoy.

We went to bed at night with the wails of the native women in our ears, women being torn from their homes to go God knows where — piled on one train after another—and the trains were pulling out all night long. The Japs were less than fifteen miles away now

and the firing, even at that distance, was deafening in our ears. And then, too, there was the racket of our men trying to break up the runway. The mosquito netting shut us in, but it didn't shut the sounds out of our hut, a mud floor with a roof on it. In the middle of the night, it must have been very late because we didn't get to bed before four or five, above the wailing and the shooting, right in our room we heard an inhuman squealing and scream, and an enormous rat, as large as a dog, raced across the room. Betty and I shrieked as it ran over our beds — I honestly think that was the only time during the tour, that I was completely terrified, but Annalee calmed us all. She was a veteran of many campaigns.

Long before daybreak the entire base was dressed and alerted. You couldn't really be frightened because the activity and commotion were so intense. I looked around and found Pat again saying his beads.

"Hey, count us in," yelled Jimmie Dodd.

"Don't worry, I've got enough here for all of us," Pat laughed. It was foggy and rainy — no flying. With the Japs practically on the field we still laughed to ease the strain of waiting. We could hear one truck convoy after another moving out while we waited. Finally, hours later, the fog lifted, we were given orders to get into a jeep that would take us to a C-47. In the middle of all the worry and fear and commotion, General Vincent, who happened to be near us on the field, found time to pop over to the jeep to say good-by and thanks. I knew his attitude and outward calm were indispensable to all his men.

The C-47 took us farther south into the boot of China to Nanning. Annalee had stayed behind and we didn't find out until later that the Americans lost the field immediately after our departure. She was there almost to the very end, burdened down, I suppose, with the magnanimous gifts of Kleenex and kid gloves we had left her. She wrote later—"Eight of our air bases are missing," and also about ours being the first show put on during an evacuation and named us all. It was strange to be writ-



PAT O'BRIEN tells an Irish joke at a China B-29 base while Jinx Falkenburg sits in the audience. Lack of stage facilities in the China Theater often caused the entertainers to become part of the audience while waiting to do their bit. U.S. Army photo, Nov. 10, 1944.

ten up in *Time* under "Battlefront." Liuchow was only one that met defeat in a few short weeks. There was a miserable slow drizzle and rain when we landed in Nanning. Two rather stern officers told us that we might be landing on enemy territory and, in the smog and rain, we weren't sure until we alighted from the plane. But, it was our boys, not Japs, who hastily put up a makeshift stage for us. We did the whole show with no idea of the seriousness of the situation there. I was signing Ping-pong balls for the boys after the show when we got word that Chennault had landed to reconnoiter. One of his aides presented us with a box of lovely chiffon scarfs, with his compliments, and orders for us to leave immediately. Chennault was furious to find us so far south and told us Liuchow had been taken, and Nanning would be next. It was—a day later.

From Nanning we flew four hours by plane to Chengtu, one of the longest stretches of flight between shows since the Cairo to India pull. We were tired and hungry and, since we had no food, we took turns sleeping in the bucket seats, using mailbags for pillows. A sergeant who was with us shared his few K rations and Nescafe with us and when we couldn't sleep we devoured what little he had. It was very late and pitch-black when our pilot thought he sighted the Chengtu strip. He had had to deviate from his regular route because of enemy action along the main route and been given specific instructions detailing the height to fly and under no circumstances was he to go over that height. When he said he had sighted the strip we couldn't see a thing. Chengtu housed three of the biggest B-29 bases, and several fighter bases where fliers took off to bomb Tokyo. The base was divided into four parts, A-1, A-2, -3, and -4. We were to land on A-1, going to the other areas later. We had been told that there was a "nice little shack" with running water. The girls were ecstatic.

"Yippee, we can wash our hair." None of us remembered when we had done that last.

We taxied in to a blacked out field — absolutely no light — and the plane stopped. We sat for what seemed an eternity in the dark and quiet. Nothing happened.

The pilot opened the cargo door, and was met in the face by a rifle and bayonet.

"Oh, my God, we've landed with the Japs," Pat whispered.

"Who you go there now?" said the gutteral voice from the blackness.

"I have the USO troupe on board."

"What is troop?" The bayonet didn't know us from Adam.

It was finally established that we had landed on the wrong strip—and beyond the bayonet was a Chinese.

"Well, what difference does it make? Let's stay here," said Pat.

"You leave now," said the bayonet. There was a regular assembly line of planes flying in and out that couldn't be held up even for a moment. After rechecking at the tower, and playing Ping-pong until ready to go, we took off again and finally landed on the right strip, which was fine, except that the Japs had bombed the runway. It was just a little bumpy taxiing in.

On landing, at A-1 they took the girls to a hut that was situated about three feet off the field. It was freezing. From the muggy, soggy weather in Nanning, suddenly we were in Iceland. There were no showers, no fire, no mosquito netting, and — an outside privy. I got into my ermine coat and never took it off. But underneath it I had on woolen pajamas and a woolen coat and we used duffle bags for blankets. The men, without their ermine, told us later that they had broken up the furniture in their hut for firewood. Nobody knew we were there — a few of the men who came by to investigate made startling remarks about movie stars. We had no provisions and food was miles away. There was nothing to do but go to bed. All our dreams of hair-washing fled into the night, along with our morale.

We slept till nine because nobody woke us. By then it was too late for mess, even if we'd known where the mess hall was. Ruth had some teabags in her K rations, so we made tea with the rusty water for Sunday breakfast. We didn't know what to do next.

We were beginning to feel terribly sorry for ourselves, in addition to being confused, when Major Nixon appeared and told us General Randall had heard that we were there, and had arranged to move us to a nice little bungalow with a fireplace, the first and only time on the whole trip that we had had warm water. It was wonderful, the best place we ever stayed in, and we washed our hair. Later that morning we flew to another field, had lunch, gave the show, and played Ping-pong. Six p.m. to still another base, dinner, the show, and Ping-pong. Then back to the shack and warm water. This went on every day for two weeks. Three times a day we'd pile into the plane the way you'd get into your Ford, and go off to an-

other show. During our stay there Jimmie and Ruth celebrated their anniversary and were allowed to stay together for the only time on the trip. Betty and I dug up a silver disk to give them and General Randall gave them a dinner.

When we did shows after dark, of course, we always flew in complete blackout. One night, flying back to our base, we had a new pilot on the C-47. He made *five* approaches, and *five* unsuccessful passes at the field, and then off again into the pitch-dark. On the sixth try, he finally found the field, and we climbed, shaking, out of the plane. A jeep was driving frantically toward the plane. It was General Randall.

"What was the name of your pilot?" he bellowed.

We were all terrified. We knew what an awful moment it was for the guy, who was completely unnerved.

After that rather shattering flight, we were assigned our own pilot, who flew with us on all our trips.

To try and describe that B-29 base all I can say is—I've never met a bunch of guys like that in my whole life. For our last day's show in China, we were driven out to the B-29 base and, as we piled

out of the side-curtain trucks, a horde of sensational crewmen, all in tilted khaki hats, came down on us yelling, screaming, and jumping all over the trucks! Every man on the base was on hand grabbing for souvenirs. We all gave away everything, including half the hair on our heads. There were men from ninety planes getting briefing for special missions to Tokyo. Multiply that by the number of men in a bomber, add extreme good looks, eagerness, and just plain friendliness, and it still wouldn't add up to a true picture of those men. They were special.

The boys went in for their briefing, and when they were through we put on an informal show in the briefing room. All the wall maps had been rolled up and locked in place. There were smudges on the blackboard where all the briefing information had been erased. One very young boy had the top of a map sticking out of the rolled pants leg and the map was wrapped around a box of Nabiscos. Flying over Tokyo munching Nabiscos! Pat felt the mood so strongly that he was better that day than he *ever* was before. He just killed *us*, with the Knute Rockne routine—"go down that field and fight, fight, fight"—and brought tears to the eyes of the boys, even as they laughed. We were all tearful—we knew what the boys had in store for them. This particular crew left right after the show, screaming good-bys and yelping their thanks, as did three later crews. We did four shows that day. Pat yelled after them, "Don't get lost, baby," to the nine hundred men of the group.

It was Pat's forty-fifth birthday the next day, Saturday, November 11. We all sat outside of the hut and celebrated with rice birthday cake. We walked around the town, I in my ermine coat—which all the boys thought was rabbit, bought each other presents, and took advantage of this, our first and only day off. A nice-looking young man with dark hair sat down next to me when we got back to the base and we started to talk.

"What do you think of these guys?"

"I don't think I've ever seen any like them," I answered.

"Yes, they're pretty exceptional. They ought to come out all right," he said half questioningly, leading me on.

"Oh, I can't wait to hear how the mission went. When do you think we'll hear?"

"I don't know, Jinx. You people may have left by then," he added carefully.

"What do you do?" I asked him. He was dressed just like the other guys, in an ordinary flight jacket.

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"I'm Curtis LeMay," he said. "And those are my boys." There was nothing I could say. General Curtis LeMay — and he was so young.

A few days later, before going into a hospital building a nurse said, "Skip the first six beds in the ward. They've just come in. Their plane exploded in midair and they're in very bad shape. Don't try to talk to those boys."

I didn't look to either side as I walked through the row of beds. The odor of blood and burned skin, and the quiet were nightmarish. I had practically walked out of the forbidden area and turned to talk to the fourth boy on my right.

"Hey, Jinx, talk to me. I don't want to bother you, but—have you forgotten me already?" I turned to follow the voice and saw one of the first boys the nurse had mentioned. He was completely enveloped in bandages, except for two tiny slits for his eyes.

I walked over to him. "Gee I didn't think you could see me." His own mother wouldn't have recognized him.

"Gee, this is swell. I only saw you a few days ago—at the briefing—and I was afraid you'd forgotten me already. You wore that bright yellow dress with the bullfighters on it." A boy in unbearable agony who didn't want to bother us. And that's the way all the men were in CBI. We couldn't do one little thing without getting some wonderful show of appreciation from them. We couldn't have done as much for their morale as they did for ours.

We left China for Burma at dawn the next morning.

At five a.m., by day's earliest gray light a chaplain, an old friend of Pat's, came out on the field and blessed the plane that was to fly us back over the Hump—and every guy on our base came out with him. Each man had a message he wanted to send home. Call my wife. Call my girl. Tell my mom I'm okay. Tell Sis I'm sorry I can't make the wedding. And when we got home we made all the calls. I think Betty with her big heart took the most numbers. It must have kept her busy for weeks after she got back to the States.

The chaplain's blessing must have taken—our plane landed us safely in "Mishinaw." One of the men on the field handed me a pair of silver bracelets with the letters M-Y-I-T-K-Y-I-N-A engraved on them.

"Myitkyina, what does *this* mean?" I wanted to know. I certainly couldn't pronounce it, whatever it was.

They all roared.



IN MESSHALL of a China P-38 outfit, Pat O'Brien appears weary as he eats lunch. Beside him is Ruth Dodd, part of the troupe. Jinx, of course, is fourth from right. U.S. Army photo.

"That's where you are, Jinx, Mi-shin-aw, Myitkyina."

Nothing sounds the way it looks in the Orient and this was no exception. I thought it was some kind of a greeting. I felt so silly not knowing. They loaded us from the plane onto a weapons carrier, a big high thing with a canvas over it. It's like riding on the back of a full-grown elephant under a tent. We were all handed motorcycle belts which the drivers told us to wear to hold in our kidneys — weapons carriers are very tough hombres, and so are the rocky roads. Since I only had one kidney I was really worried. There I was, sitting on this high chair holding on to my kidney with one hand and waving the other in very animated conversation with the driver. It was an hour's drive to the hut where we were to be quartered so we raved on and on while I answered all his questions about the States.

FROM LEDO itself, we drove by command car up the Ledo Road to Tagap. I thought, after getting the Stratemyer wire, that nothing would matter except getting to Cairo. But each new group of guys, each new experience, was more important than the last. On one spot in the Ledo Road you could stand and see *three* countries at once, the whole CBI theatre. This view of the road was a distance of 19 miles. All I remember is that we were absolutely pitch-black when we got to Tagap. Everything but our eyeballs were matted with mud and dust. Our hair was hopeless—we just put more brilliantine on it and stuck some flowers in it. The flowers looked as if they were growing right out of the hair. Tagap was an all-

Negro camp, the nicest, cleanest camp we were in on the whole trip. The nurses were so sweet they insisted on giving up their quarters to us. When we got inside and put down our duffles we saw that they had even opened new boxes of Kleenex for us and unwrapped fresh bars of soap. Not only did they give us things we hadn't seen for weeks, but after we did our show they put on a show for us.

The men had built a little stage for us and over two thousand of their personnel sat in a bowl-shaped arrangement around us. All through the show we could hear trucks, only a few hundred feet away, moving up and down, up and down the Ledo Road in the eerie blackness.

The next day an army was passing through from Myitkyina in groups, all traveling with mule packs. We all got out on the road and passed out endless quantities of cake and lemonade to these exhausted guys, and put on a show for them that night on the same homemade platform, for ten thousand of them, all in a state of wild, wild hysteria. They rushed us after the show to sign autographs, on everything from draft cards to helmets, and to give away

souvenirs. I chopped off so many locks of hair with field knives I had to cut bangs to hide all my bald spots. Suddenly, in the midst of the stampede, the flimsy electrical connections blew out and we were thrown into pitch darkness. Colonel Leo Hoffman, one of the officers in charge, was terribly afraid that something uncontrollable would happen. Men who have been in combat for as long as three years without respite cannot be expected to account for their actions and many of them, he feared, were trigger happy.

"Never worry about those guys," Pat said. "They're all right."

And they were. I will never forget the restraint of those thousands of American men that night in a god-forsaken wilderness of Burma.

We left Burma a day or so later, full of love and affection for each and every man we'd met, and back in Chabua did our seventieth show in six weeks. From Chabua we went on to Calcutta and my shoes finally gave away — the best I could locate was a pair of Indian satin mules. That was the way I went clapping over to meet General Stratemeyer.

—THE END



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