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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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Thursday, May 13, 2010

**Welcome to the May session of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II Roundtable.** Tonight's speaker is author and historian Al Lathrop, who is joined by veterans of the China-Burma-India Theater.

World War II began for the Chinese in 1937 with Japan's invasion of the mainland. By 1942 Japanese forces controlled China's Pacific coast and large parts of the interior. The Chinese Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-Shek (Jiǎng Jièshi) kept the Japanese army engaged even as they fell back further into the interior. The United States and the Allies deemed it important to re-supply and maintain the Chinese Nationalist Forces because they kept over a million Japanese forces occupied. If the Chinese could hold on it would give the Allies time to build up their forces to defeat the Japanese.

Supplying the Chinese forces had to be done through India and Burma over the Himalayas and through the jungles. In the spring of 1942, the Japanese overran Burma cutting off the Burma Road, the last significant land route that supplied the Chinese. The loss of Burma precipitated a crisis, and these forces would then have to be supplied by air.

In the 1930's the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) pioneered air routes over the Himalayas. The Himalayas formidable terrain provided a challenge for all pilots who gave the mountain range the nickname "the Hump." Much like in the European Theater, the United States helped China defend itself in April 1941 when Lend Lease Aid began. In June the American volunteer group, the Flying

Tigers were sent to aid CNAC and fly missions against the Japanese. During the early part of the war, CNAC became the contractor for air cargo services between India and China but more cargo tonnage capacity was needed. In April 1942 the Tenth Air Force based in India stepped in to fill the cargo needs and began flying over the Hump. In October 1942, General H.H. "Hap" Arnold combined all air transport operations under one Air Transport Command (ATC). The ATC handled all airlift requirements in the CBI Theater.

Flying over the Hump proved treacherous to pilots and planes; over 1600 flight personnel never made it back from the Hump and over 500 aircraft crashed during wartime operations. The flights would take off from the hot muggy jungle airfields in India, where monsoon rains lasted for six months. Then they would struggle to make altitude over the highest mountain range in the world. Often the transports would thread their way through the snowy mountain passages dealing with the unpredictable weather patterns and dodging Japanese fighter planes. Once again on the other side of the mountains were more jungles. CBI veteran pilots often explained to newcomers: "If you can see the end of the runway through the rain and mist, then takeoff is expected."

As the war progressed and pilots became more experienced the amount of cargo tonnage grew. By the end of 1943, ten thousand tons of cargo a month was transported, and by the end of 1944 the tonnage amount reached thirty-four thousand. Flying the Hump proved the usefulness of air power capabilities in supply for modern warfare. Between 1942 and 1945 eighty-one percent of the supplies to the Chinese forces came by air. These well-supplied Chinese forces meant the Japanese Army had fewer

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men to fight against the Allies in the Pacific.

### Further Readings:

Flint Whitlock, *The Rock of Anzio: From Sicily to Dachau, A History Of The 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* (New York: Westview Press, 1998)

Gerald Astor, *The Jungle War: Mavericks, Marauders, and Madmen in the China-Burma-India Theater in World War II* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2004)

Carl F. Constein, *Born to Fly...the Hump: A WWII Memoir* (Bloomington, IN: 1<sup>st</sup> Books Library, 2000).

W.F. Craven & J.L. Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948-1951) (Volumes 1,4,5 deal with the CBI and the Hump)

Leo J. Daugherty III, *The Allied Re-supply Effort in the China-Burma-India Theater During World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2008)

Chris Davey, *C-47/R4D Skytrain Units of the Pacific and CBI* (Oxfordshire, UK: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2007)

Jeff Ethell, *Flying the Hump: In Original World War II Color* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004)

Steven King, *Flying the Hump to China* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004)

William C. King, *Building for Victory: World War II in China, Burma, and India and the 1875<sup>th</sup> Engineer Aviation Battalion* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004)

Carl Moesly, *A Pilot's History* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007)

Miriam Murcutt & Richard Starks, *Lost in Tibet: The Untold Story of Five American Airmen, a Doomed Plane, and the Will to Survive* (Guilford, DE: Lyons Press, 2005)

William Boyd Sinclair, *Confusion Beyond Imagination: Book 2, Those Wild Blue*

*Characters* (Coeur D'Alene, ID: Joe F. Whitley, 1989)

Otha C. Spencer, *Flying the Hump: Memories of an Air War* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1994)

Donovan Webster, *The Burma Road: The Epic Story of the China-Burma-India Theater in World War II* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2003)

Edwin Lee White, *Ten Thousand Tons by Christmas: A Comprehensive Story of Flying the Hump in World War II by an Officer Who Was There* (St. Petersburg, FL: Valkyrie Publishing House, 1975)

### Round Table Schedule 2010-2011

Sept. 9, Guadalcanal Veterans Reunion  
 Oct. 14, Rhone Valley Campaign  
 Oct. 28, TBA  
 Nov. 11, HCD Lecture: Yalta Conference  
 Dec. 12, Pearl Harbor  
 Jan. 13, 2011 Eastern Front Tank Battles  
 Feb. 10, Relief of the Philippines  
 Mar. 10, Coast Guard Role In Naval Ops  
 Apr. 14, Battle of Cassino  
 May 12, Bombers Over Germany



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