

1337th ARMY AIR FORCES BASE UNIT

Here for your consideration this week is a original WW2 unit history type publication: Sookerating "Scoops and Sketches" Victory Edition edited by Harold Gray and published by the unit, the 1337th Army Air Force Basic Unit, stationed at Sookerating Air Base in northeast India. The 1337th AAFBU flew supply missions over the Hump into China. This soft cover book of 48 pages starts with a brief history of the 1337th in India and their role in supplying Allied forces in China. The bulk of the book is a series of cartoons, poems, and anecdotes by members of the 1337th of their time in India. Original copies of this book are scarce.

LINEAGE

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

CALL SIGN

OPERATIONS

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

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Mission of the 1337th Army Air Force Base Unit at Sookerating

The mission of the airbase at the end of the line in the upper Assam Valley of India could be stated simply as flying supplies to China over the "Hump" during WWII. However, that simplification would be an under-statement, and would hardly do justice to the military mission which has been accomplished so successfully by the pilots and men of the 1337th AAFBU.

Getting supplies and equipment over the Hump has been our primary mission. When the Japs cut the Burma Road, there was no way to get supplies and equipment to the Flying Tigers and to the Chinese who were struggling for existence. They had to have gasoline, guns, shells, ammunition, food and all kinds of materials. The only way to get it to them was to fly it over the Hump. Sometimes Chinese troops had to be moved up to the front; others had to be evacuated. That was our military mission.

Flying the Hump is a story that would take pages to tell. So far, thousands of pages have been written about that rugged stretch of terrain, and before this chapter of Asiatic warfare is closed, there will be many millions of pages written about it. Indelibly written in the hearts of their fellow-flyers and loved ones at home are the stories of those brave men who did not come back.

Explanations of the Hump have been attempted under strict censorship, but now letters, stories and books begin the real description. "The Rockpile", as the pilots call it, is a composite of rugged, towering, mountain peaks, impenetrable jungles, bottomless ravines, flooding rivers, insect-infested swamps and, worst of all, unpredictable, vicious, merciless and unequalled weather. There is not only one ridge to cross on flight from India to China, but three prominent ridges with deep valleys between them.

A trip over the Hump doesn't take long, three and one half or four hours ---five or six if you have to hold over a station until the clouds or fog rises high enough over the field for you to land. A crew may fly day in day out, night after night, without mishap; to them it is just a "milk run". Others may come home on one engine two or three trips in a row. There are those crews who find themselves with no engines, tossed relentlessly by storms, with only a few seconds to bail out or be dashed to pieces on the rocky crags below. On landing by parachute in the jungle or on the side of a mountain, the battle has just begun --- the battle for survival. From there on, it is man against the jungle; sometimes man loses this combat with mangrove swamps, head-hunters, mosquitoes, leeches, tigers, panthers, snakes, infection, disease and hunger.

Even after arriving safely in China, the crew faces a new danger: Storms over the airfields with low ceilings, restricted visibility requiring instrument let-downs. All the China fields are surrounded by peaks and hills. Making let-downs is not a matter of guesswork, but a matter of skill and precision flying by time and indicators --provided the turbulence and ice allows the pilot to fly within these limitations, not to minimize the dangers involved in coordinating by radio the instrument approaches of hundreds of airplanes into those airfields.

But this story cannot be told in black and white with no dramatization. The pilots and crew members only are capable of describing the Hump, the let-downs, the weather and the stories of life and death out there.

HISTORICAL SKETCH - by Capt. J. R. Downs

Surrounded on three sides by the imposing heights of the age-old Himalayan mountains and the dense Naga Hills, lies the Assam Valley whose tea plantations have been wrested by man from the almost impenetrable jungle, bamboo thickets and treacherous swamps breeding the dread malarial mosquitoes.

The Assam Valley has, over a period of years, become an important province of the Indian empire. This importance has been brought about by its many natural commercial products, namely: mineral oils from the Digboi district; silk, rubber and coal from Niak___(?) in the Lakhimpur district. Today, when most of the pre-war sources of these items are in Japanese-held territory, the Assam Valley assumes new importance in supplying these vital products to the United Nations.

When the Japanese hordes overran Burma and closed the famous Burma Road, lifeline to the Chinese armies, there was but one trail over which tens of thousands of refugees died attempting to escape into India. This refugee trail, through the combined efforts of the American and British armies, became the Ledo Road, the overland answer to China's pleas. However, pending completion of this momentous project, the survival of China depended on immediate delivery of supplies of every conceivable type. Air traffic was the only answer to this problem. The closest possible air route was from upper Assam, over the world's highest mountains -the Himalayan range, the Mishmi and Naga Hills, and vast desolate mountains of China. This route, better know as "The Hump of the World", was later called "The Hump", and the course flown as "The Aluminum Trail". It was first paved with C-47's and P-40's---later with the giant C-46's, C-87's and C-109's.

Under General E. H. Alexander, the Ferry Command, without benefit of any previous experience, began the stupendous task of building air bases in Assam.

Through the efforts of Mr. Caseborne, superintendent of the Dum Dum Tea Company, the Sookerating tea estate was selected as a site for one of these bases. The location of the runway was formerly the tea planters' golf course and race track. Work started on July 7, 1942, and soon bulldozers, trucks and men cleared the surrounding tea bushes and trees, and had leveled the ground. Buildings were constructed for Operations, Line Shacks and living quarters.

At first the mission of this field was the movement of Chinese troops. These soldiers were transported from China to Assam to be trained and equipped for operations against the Japanese in Burma. Four and one-half acres were selected, near a bamboo thicket approximately one-half mile from the runway, as the Chinese Transient Camp.

On the ___th of October, during a tour of inspection by General Stilwell and General Wavell, the Japanese pulled their first air raid on this base. Slit trenches became the most popular spots in the vicinity. One officer and enlisted man were awaiting completion of the loading of their plane when the alert sounded. Under such conditions the crew was not expected to take-off, but they elected to save their plane and cargo from destruction and, without regard for the danger involved, took off at once. Upon clearing the airdrome they were attacked by three Zeroes. Displaying extreme coolness and presence of mind, the airplane was so maneuvered that the fighters were unable to bring accurate fire on the transport. One of the fifteen drums of 100-octane gasoline, which comprised their load, and one of their auxiliary fuel tanks were punctured but they continued to their destination more than three hours away. Their action not only saved the airplane but undoubtedly withdrew attention from three DC-3 type transports which remained on the ground. For this heroic action, the officer and enlisted man were awarded the Silver Star.

On October 26th, at 0900, the alert was again sounded and three Japanese fighters and seventeen bombers appeared. The runway was blocked with gasoline drums to prevent the possibility of a landing. About 45 minutes later they departed, but some damage was done to the field.

On the 28th of October, at 1330, the Japanese were once again over the field. This time they dropped about 10 bombs and managed to kill one native. The bombs landed on the surrounding tea estates; no military installations were hit. The absence of air and ground defenses allowed the raiders absolute freedom but fortunately they were not accurate bombardiers.

During the month of October the operation of the field had grown to an amazing size. Planes were landing and taking off raising a cloud of dust from the runway that could be seen for miles. The number of Chinese soldiers had swelled the ranks of General Stilwell's army and eventually helped to stop, and later defeat, the Japanese at Myitkyina, Burma.

On November 1, 1942 the first fighter squadron arrived at the field, bringing in P-40's; and anti-aircraft guns arrived with the 484th AA Company. With the knowledge that they were to have fighter protection, the pilots became more enthusiastic. The results became more and more evident, and the Hump traffic soon gained world renown.

On December 1st the Headquarters Squadron, First Ferrying Group, was relieved from assignment to the Headquarters, U.S. Army Air Forces in India and China, Tenth U.S. Air Forces, Delhi, India and reassigned to the India-China Wing, Air Transport Command. In that manner Squadron 13 of the Air Transport Command was born.

On August 9, 1943 the personnel of the 13th Ferrying Squadron were transferred to the 29th Transport Group, with Lt. Col. J. W. Gurr as the first commanding officer. Lt. Col. Gurr remained in command until December 9, 1943 when he was replaced by Major R. M. Wilson.

The situation in China and North Burma was critical. In China the "Flying Tigers" were keeping the Japanese at bay, but their continued effectiveness was questionable. In order to get more supplies over the Hump the Air Transport Command was reorganized. General Earl S. Head replaced General E. H. Alexander as Commanding General of the India-China Wing, Air Transport Command, and a period of intense expansion was under way.

On December 10th orders were received reorganizing the Command. Sookerating was once again

changed --- this time from the 29th Transport Group to Station No. 7.

On the 12th of February 1944, Lt. Col. Silas Morehouse became the Commanding Officer, and with Lt. Col. Byron Enyart as his Executive Officer, set out to improve and raise the tonnage over the "Hump". The transportation of cargo tonnage reached a new high. Return trips brought back thousands of Chinese soldiers. Incidentally, only one Chinese life was lost.

When the Japanese invaded India, through Imphal, the ATC rendered valuable service to the Allied Armies. The call for air droppings, food and supplies of war was answered immediately. Pilots and planes were loaned to the Troop Carrier Group. Even with the temporary loss of men and planes, the daily tonnage quota to China was maintained.

Daily the situation became more and more critical on the Imphal-Kohima front while conflicting stories as to the Japanese advance flew through the air. At one time small Japanese patrols of the 31st Division, advanced to within a few miles of Dimapur, the main allied supply base and Headquarters of the British 4th Corps. Had they been able to breach the Assam Railroad, the situation in Upper Assam would have indeed become critical. The Japanese Army, consisting of the 15th, 30th, and 31st Divisions, 45,000 strong, were out to eliminate all ATC bases in the Valley. Fortunately the greater part of these forces were tied up at Imphal and Kohima and never were able to advance in strength into the Assam Valley, but were held and finally driven out. The aerial lifeline was paying dividends and the Japanese were feeling the sting.

In view of the critical situation, the Air Transport Command began to fly in more and more Chinese troops. Sookerating, or Station No. 7, was playing an important part in driving out the Japanese, however, never forgetting its primary function of maintaining "Hump" operations and tonnage to China.

Due to the willingness of the station personnel, to work and sweat, the quota set by Wing was met. This could only have been brought about by men capable of leading and directing the over-all effort. China in appreciation of this tremendous task awarded a citation to the Air Transport Command.

On August 1, 1944, Station #7 was changed to 1337th Army Air Force Base Unit. This has become the permanent identification of the base.

Colonel George S. Cassady assumed command on December 2, 1944. His friendly and undemanding manner has kept Sookerating in the lead over most of the other valley stations. And in spite of the pressure of duty under the adverse conditions of heat and weather, the morale of the men has been high, their spirit commendable.

By hard work and cooperation the field has changed and grown; today it is one of the leading fields, not only in the valley but in the India-China Division.

The over-all history of the field is but the total sum of its various officers and men. Like a smooth running engine, it must have the best parts available, working as one. The history of Operations, Engineering, Weather, Administration and all the others are in themselves a separate history.

Total victory over our enemies is testimony of the spirit of the men of 1337th AAF Base Unit, and all of the fighting men of the United States Armed Forces.

AAF BASE UNITS BY COMMAND ON 1 May 1945

1300th (Hq, India-China Division, ATC) Calcutta, India (192 NY)
1301st (India-China Division, ATC) Calcutta, India (671 NY)
1302nd (India-China Division, ATC) New Delhi, India (885 NY)
1303rd (India-China Division, ATC) Agra, India (884 NY)
1304th (India-China Division, ATC) Barrackpore, India (492 NY)
1305th (India-China Division, ATC) Calcutta, India (465 NY)
1306th (India-China Division, ATC) Karachi, India (882 NY)
1307th (India-China Division, ATC) New Delhi, India (885 NY)
1308th (India-China Division, ATC) Bombay, India (881 NY)
1309th (India-China Division, ATC) Bangalore, India (491 NY)
1310th (India-China Division, ATC) Colombo, Ceylon (432 NY)
1311th (India-China Division, ATC) Gaya, India (630 NY)
1325th (India-China Division, ATC) Chabua, India (629 NY)
1326th (India-China Division, ATC) Lalmanir Hat, India (431 NY)
1327th (India-China Division, ATC) Tezpur, India (429 NY)
1328th (India-China Division, ATC) Missmari, India (429 NY)
1329th (India-China Division, ATC) Dergaon, India (466 NY)
1330th (India-China Division, ATC) Jorhat, India (466 NY)
1332nd (India-China Division, ATC) Mohanbari, India (490 NY)
1333rd (India-China Division, ATC) Chabua, India (629 NY)
1337th (India-China Division, ATC) Sookerating, India (467 NY)
1338th (India-China Division, ATC) Yannanyi, China (488 NY)
1339th (India-China Division, ATC) Chengking, China (211 NY)
1340th (India-China Division, ATC) Kunming, China (627 NY)

1305th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station) at Dum Dum Apt
1306th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station) at Karachi Apt
1307th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station) at Wellington Apt
1311th AAFBU At Gaya Apt
1327th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station?) at Tezpur Apt
1337th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station?) at Sookerating Apt
1340th AAFBU (4 Air Transport Squadron, Mobile) at Kunming Apt
1341st AAFBU (Foreign Service Station) at Yankai Apt
1342nd AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station) at Chanyi Apt
1348th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station?) at Myitkyina South Afld
1353rd AAFBU (Foreign Service Station) I have location at Chuinglungp'o
1354th AAFBU (Foreign Service Station) I have location at Ch'angan
1355th AAFBU (Foreign Service Station) at Kalaikunda Apt
1377th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station - Port of Aerial Embarkation)
1382nd AAFBU (Search & Rescue) at Mingan Apt
1387th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station) at Gander Apt
1390th AAFBU at Lagens Fld (now Lajes -- this was the spelling at the time)
1403rd AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station?) at Prestwick Apt
1404th (Foreign Transport Station?) at Nutts Corner Adme
1408th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station) I have location at Orly Fld

1409th AAFBU I have at RAF Leuchars or Metfield Adme (date of move unknown)
1410th AAFBU (Foreign Transport Station?) at Evere Afld
1411th (Foreign Transport Station?) at Istres Apt
1412th AAFBU discontinued when 1402 AAFBU moved from RAF Hendon (exact date in 1945 unknown)

1327th AAFBU Foreign Service Station Tezpur 1 Aug 44-26 Jun 45

1329th AAFBU Foreign Service Station Dergaon 1 Aug 44-18 Jul 45

1331st AAFBU Foreign Service Station Moran 1 Aug 44-7 Mar 45

1332nd AAFBU Foreign Service Station Mohanbari 1 Aug 44-5 Dec 45

1333d AAFBU Foreign Service Station Chabua 1 Aug 44-25 Dec 45

1334th AAFBU Foreign Service Station Golaghat 1 Aug 44-7 Mar 45

1335th AAFBU Foreign Service Station Nagpur 1 Aug 44-7 Feb 45

1336th AAFBU Foreign Service Station Tadepellegundum 1 Aug 44-7 Feb 45

1337th Army Air Force Base Unit Foreign Service Station Sookerating 1 Aug 44-25 Nov 45

1338th AAFBU Foreign Service Station Yunnanyi 1 Aug 44-10 Oct 45

1339th AAFBU Foreign Service Station Chengkung 1 Aug 44-20 Oct 45