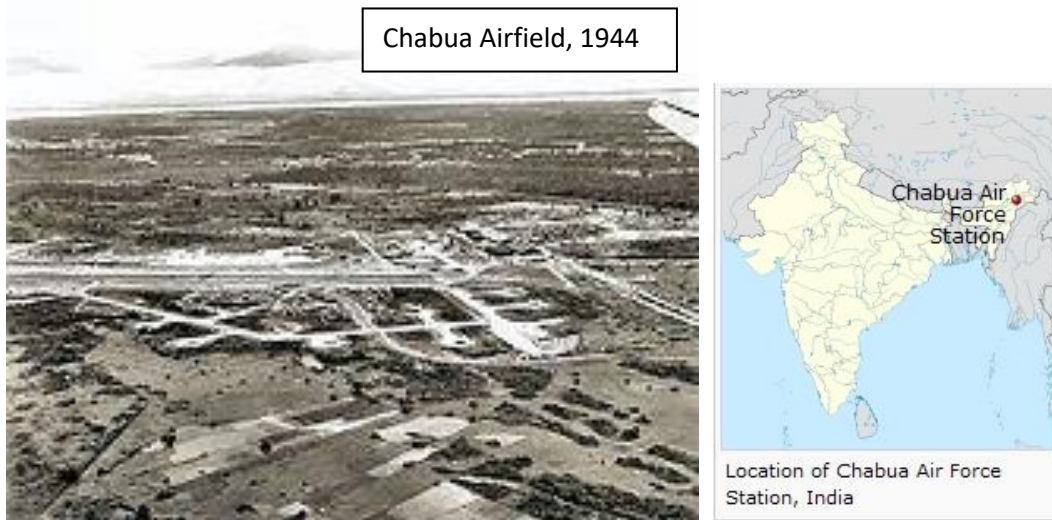


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Training and maneuvers continued through the late summer and early fall before Gibby and the McLaughlen crew shipped out for the front lines. They would be joining the Tenth Air Force 436th Squadron in the 7th Bombardment Group consisting of approximately ten flying crews (100 men) and several hundred ground personnel at the beginning of an intense year-end campaign in the China/Burma Theatre targeting Rangoon.

Air operations in India started to build in Assam, India a few years before the war. The Chabua Air Base was built in 1939. During World War II it was a major supply point for the ferrying of supplies to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's forces in and around Kunming, China.



The Japanese occupation of Burma in 1942 had cut off the Burma Road, the last land route by which the Allies could deliver aid to the Chinese Government of Chiang Kai-shek. Until the Burma Road could be retaken and the Ledo Road completed, the only supply route available was the costly and dangerous route for transport planes over the Himalayas between India's Assam Valley and Kunming, China. This route became known as the Himalayan Hump or simply The Hump over Nepal.

Operated initially by the United States Army Air Forces Ferrying Command (Later Air Transport Command - ATC) China Ferrying Command (later ATC India China Wing). The 1st Ferrying (later Transport) Group operated three squadrons of C-47 Skytrain and C-46 Commando aircraft from Chabua. The airfield was also an important layover stop of the ATC Karachi-Kunming air transport route. Flights operated west to Agra Airport, Willingdon Airfield (New Delhi), Gaya Airport, Assam (Borjhar Airport) and east into Dali Airport, and Kunming (Wujiaba Airport) in China

While the route kept the transports relatively free from enemy attack (Enemy action destroyed only seven aircraft, killing 13 men) it led over rugged terrain, through violent storms, with snow and ice at the higher altitudes the planes flew over the mountains. Flying the Himalayan Hump would turn out to be some of the most dangerous flying in the world. Over the course of action there were 460 aircraft and 792 men lost. Still, the operations were a success. There were 167,285 trips that moved 740,000 tons of material to support Chinese troops and other Allied forces.

In addition to the ATC transport units, elements of the Tenth Air Force 380th Bombardment Group, 375th Bombardment Squadron operated B-24 Liberators from the airfield, flying long range bombardment

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missions into Burma, south China, Thailand (Bangkok) and well as French Indochina (Haiphong). A total of 8 B-24s were lost. Also, the B-24s were used to ferry aircraft fuel into China.

INDIA AIR TASK FORCE (IATF)

As autumn of 1943 brought clearing weather to India and Burma, it was realized that the India Air Task Force, activated on 3 October, would face serious responsibilities. There were signs of Japanese preparations to move northward from Myitkyina toward Fort Hertz, and it was believed that the enemy would make a determined effort to bomb the vitally important but highly vulnerable air installations in Assam. [Fort Hertz was a remote British Military outpost in northeastern Burma in the district of Putao in what is now the Kachin State near the present town of Putao. It was named after William Axel Hertz. Hertz led the first expeditions into the far north of Burma in 1888, was responsible for the 1912 Gazetteer of Kachin Hills area and served as the first Deputy Commissioner of the Government in the Putao District. The military post was established in 1914 and given the name *Fort Hertz* in 1925 on the retirement of William Hertz from the Indian Civil Service].

Caleb V. Haynes (soon to be promoted to brigadier general) was given command of the new task force, which comprised all combat units then in India, with the dual mission of defending Assam and doing everything possible to check the enemy drive toward Fort Hertz.

On paper the IATF had nine squadrons, but not one was fully prepared for combat operations. Of the four heavy bombardment squadrons of the 7th Group, the 9th had not yet been returned from the Middle East, the 436th was just receiving its component of aircraft, and the other two, the 492d and 493d, were mere cadres. The recently activated 341st Bombardment Group (M) had only three squadrons in India, and two of them, the 490th and 491st, were without aircraft. The 22d Squadron was just receiving its planes and had not completed training. A detachment of the 26th Fighter Squadron had moved to Dinjan, but the other squadron of the 51st Fighter Group, the 25th, was in training at Karachi.

During the summer months the defense of Assam had consisted largely of monsoon weather. As the end of the rainy season neared, Haynes moved the remainder of the 26th Fighter Squadron to Assam and alerted the partially trained 25th Squadron, but before the defenses of Assam could be greatly bolstered, the long-expected Japanese assault took place. On 25 October flights of enemy bombers and fighters appeared over targets in Assam almost before warning of their approach was received. Fortunately, three American fighters were already airborne and six others managed to take off, but the element of surprise made it impossible for them to throw up more than a token defense. The attack obviously was planned with full knowledge of conditions at the several fields. Dinjan, Chabua, Mohanbari, and Sookerating were all hit, but only the important airdromes at Dinjan and Chabua were heavily bombed. In all, approximately one hundred Japanese planes took part in the mission, the bombers releasing their bombs at 8,000 feet to 12,000 feet and the fighters dropping down to 100 feet to strafe. Severe damage was done to runways and buildings, but the most serious loss was in parked aircraft. Five transports and seven fighters were completely destroyed, while four transports and thirteen fighters were badly damaged. Enemy losses consisted of six fighters, two reconnaissance planes, and one bomber.

On the following day a number of enemy aircraft estimated at from thirty-two to fifty made strafing sweeps over the same area, concentrating on Sookerating. Again, the interval between reception of the alarm and appearance of the attackers was too short to permit interception. On this occasion no planes were lost on the ground, but a freight depot containing food and medical supplies intended for China was burned. Two enemy planes were destroyed by ground fire. A third raid on 28 October, thought to be largely for the purpose of reconnaissance, did little damage.

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Immediately after the raids on Assam all available fighters in India were rushed there. The 26th Fighter Squadron was established at Dinjan, while the 25th Squadron arrived from Karachi on 31 October to take up its duties at Sookerating. Additional antiaircraft batteries arrived on the day after the first raid, but ground defenses were still inadequate. Moreover, the air warning net could not be improved until more equipment arrived. Because of this tenuous situation an appeal for the return from the Middle East of all Tenth Air Force personnel and aircraft.

By the end of 1943 the 10th Air Force was back in action and the B-24 heavies extended their attempted interdiction of Japanese supply lines to Burma by water approaches by beginning a series of raids on Port Blair in the Andaman Islands.

Either fearing to risk their aircraft or unable to make interceptions, the Japanese offered no aerial resistance to these heavy bomber missions. They did, however, begin a counteroffensive bombardment late in December. In the face of ineffective interception by RAF fighters, they repeatedly attacked docks and shipping at Calcutta and Chittagong and damaged airfields at Dum Dum, Alipore on the southern outskirts of Calcutta, and Fenny. As the year came to an end the exchange of bombing attacks continued with neither offensive effort meeting effective resistance.

⁷By January 1943, headquarters of the IATF had been established at Barrackpore near Calcutta, and the following deployment of combat units was completed: the 25th and 26th Fighter Squadrons were at Sookerating and Dinjan, in Assam; the 436th and 492d Bombardment Squadrons (H) were at Gaya; the 9th and 493d Bombardment Squadrons (H) at Pandaveswar; the 22d and 491st Bombardment Squadrons (M) at Chakulia; and the 490th Bombardment Squadron (M) at Ondal. The newly activated



squadrons, though not yet at full strength, were ready to participate in combat, and it appeared that for the first time the Tenth Air Force was in position to challenge Japanese air supremacy in Burma. Although deployment and training had advanced to a stage permitting combat operations, other fundamental problems had to be worked out before the IATF could hope to achieve success comparable to that of the CATF. The Tenth Air Force as a whole was a fairly well-balanced organization, with one heavy group, one medium group, and two fighter groups. Yet requirements of the task force in China, where many fighters were necessary and only a few bombers could be supported, had left a badly balanced task force in India. Responsibility for carrying out the major phase of the Tenth's mission, protection of the Hump operation, was divided between the two task forces, but enemy deployment and the geography of the theater made it inevitable that the IATF should bear the greater part of this burden.

⁷ This might have contributed to the appalling results of Mike Iriarte's mission on April 15, 1944.

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HISTORY OF THE 436TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON – TENTH AIR FORCE – SEVENTH BOMBER GROUP

After the Pearl Harbor Attack, the surviving aircraft operated from Hawaii until February 1942, becoming part of the 88th air defense forces of the Territory. On 10 February 1942 the 88th and its B-17s flew to Nandi Airport, Fiji Islands and set up operations. The squadron left Fiji on 18 February arriving at Townsville, Australia on 20 February 1942. The 7th Bomb Group joined up with the 88th at Townsville where the squadron reformed in northern Queensland in late February and became part of the new Fifth Air Force. The next move was to Java in the Dutch East Indies in an attempt to stop the Japanese advance. However, the small force of B-17s could do very little to stem the tide of the Japanese advance, launching valiant but futile attacks against the masses of Japanese shipping and, thus, returned to RAAF Townsville in early March.

The next move was to Karachi, India on 12 March 1942. At Karachi the 88th established a camp in a dirigible hanger east of the city. From this point the first mission against the Japanese was flown in Burma on 12 April 1942.

The unit was redesignated as the 436th Bombardment Squadron in April 1942 and left its B-17Es in Australia, being reassigned to the new Tenth Air Force in India where it was re-equipped with long-range Consolidated B-24D Liberators. Then on 1 June 1942, the 436th moved to Allahabad, India. Outstanding missions during this time consisted of bomber raids on Akyab, Rangoon and various points in Burma. The squadron then moved to Gaya, India on 14 November 1942 and set up operations.

As the second year of World War II progressed, the 436th was still engaged in moving while continuing to strike the enemy from various bases in India. On 25 February 1943 the squadron relocated with its B-17s to Bishnupur, India. During the ensuing months, the 436th bomber crews distinguished themselves by undertaking every possible type of mission, practical or not. Missions deep into Thailand, Burma and the Andaman Islands over shark infested waters, jungles notorious for headhunters, and through skies filled with enemy fighters. They attacked Japanese targets in Southeastern China attacking airfields, fuel and

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supply dumps, locomotive works, railways, bridges, docks, warehouses, shipping, and troop concentrations in Burma and struck oil refineries in Thailand, power plants in China and enemy shipping in the Andaman Sea.

THE CHINA/BURMA THEATRE

Japanese forces had occupied much of Southeast Asia since late 1941. The Philippines were bombed by the Japanese right after the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941 and sixteen days later Japan laid waste to Rangoon, Burma as it began its expansion to the east. This is an actual Japanese reconnaissance photo, a rare original official Japanese photograph and may be a one-of-a-kind photo. The bombing was similar to the way they bombed Manila. They bombed both military and civilian targets believing the civilian targets would put the people into submission through fear. Ironically two years to the month later this was the scene of Gibby's last mission.

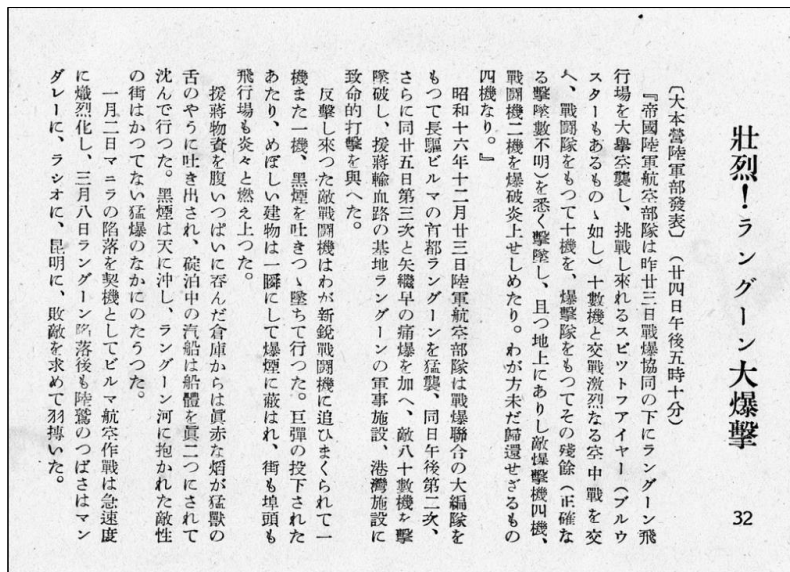


Imperial Army Headquarters News Flash / Dec. 24, 1941, 5:10 PM Severe Bombing of Rangoon!

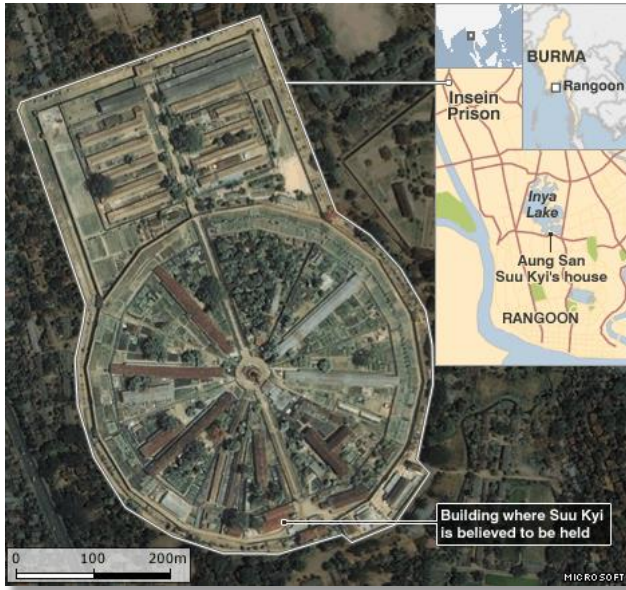
"Yesterday, on December 23rd, the combined Imperial Army Air Force heavily bombed the Rangoon Airport; Spitfire fighters (along with possible Buffalos) engaged the bombers in violent aerial battle. Ten fighters were shot down with others (an accurate count could not be determined); also, four fighter planes on the ground plus two bombers were hit and burned. Four of our planes did not return." December 23, 1941, after navigating long distances, our combined army air force bomb wing severely bombed the Rangoon, the capital of Burma. On the same day, a second wave continued the attack in the afternoon. Then on the 25th, a third wave pressed on the attack, destroying 80 enemy planes. This severed the military's bloodline (meaning system), the bombing giving their harbor/bay group a fatal blow."

The circular building resembling a wheel with spokes had at one time been misidentified as the infamous Insein prison. It is, however, Rangoon Central Jail which can be found on old maps at this location. This site is now a hospital and the jail buildings have disappeared.

The back of the photo had this inscription in Japanese.



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Insein Prison (pronounced like "inn-sane") is located further north in Yangon Division, near Yangon (Rangoon), the old capital of Myanmar. It is run by the military junta of Myanmar, the State Peace and Development Council, and used largely to repress political dissidents. Its distinct shape made it a good reference point during bombing missions.

The prison is notorious worldwide for its inhumane and dirty conditions, abusive techniques, and uses of mental and physical torture.

Aside from shipping, all strategic targets worthy of attack by, and in range of, the B-24's lay in the vicinity of Rangoon, and the weightiest effort of the 7th Group was directed at objectives in that region. The distance flown by American aircraft on these missions was greater than that required for planes based in Britain to strike Berlin, but it had long been a "milk-run" for India-based Liberators. Moreover, the Japanese had built up their AA defenses at Rangoon until that city became one of the most heavily fortified areas in all southeast Asia. Heavy antiaircraft and batteries of searchlights were concentrated at vital points, while the larger part of enemy fighter strength in Burma was based at Mingaladon and other nearby airdromes. A majority of missions to Rangoon therefore met resistance, and as the Tenth had no long-range fighters until arrival of P-38's and P-51's late in 1943, all missions were flown without escort. Once the enemy discovered that the current-model B-24 lacked adequate defense against frontal attack, he exacted an alarming toll.

The intense 1943 bombing of air fields, marshalling yards, harbors and industrial installations in Burma, a major supply line for the Japanese forces in the China/Burma theatre, was interrupted by the monsoon season that arrived in May and lasted through October when regular missions resumed. Just before the combined effort of the Tenth and Fourteenth Air Forces and the RAF to give Rangoon a knockout blow in late November and early December 1943, Liberators visited the most important fields where interceptors might be based, dropping heavy loads of bombs.

Some of the earlier 1943 missions, however, foreshadowed the growing resolve of the Japanese defenders as described in this recounting of a remarkable mission in March of 1943:

*On **March 31st, 1943** four aircraft of 9th Bomb Squadron of the 7th Bomb Group were sent on a mission to destroy a railroad bridge at Pyinmana, Burma. The squadron were in B-24's, and as they approached Magwe they had the bad luck to stumble across a flight of Japanese fighters.*

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Ki-43-II

The thirteen Ki-43-II's (nearly all allied accounts claim Zero's) were from the 64th Sentai (Squadron), and were flying on a transport mission to Chittagong. Leading the flight was the Japanese ace Captain Yasuhiko Kuroe. Cpt Kuroe and another plane targeted one of the B-24's and pressed home their attack, despite the ferocious defensive fire put up by the bombers. The bomber they targeted began to drop out of formation, while on fire. Inside that B-24 the co-pilot, Lieutenant Owen J. Baggett, manned the dorsal gun while the rest of the crew struggled to put the flames out. However, it was obvious they were doomed. The pilot Lt. Lloyd Jensen ordered the crew to bail out.



Lt Baggett



Capt. Kuroe

As they hung in their parachutes Cpt Kuroe and his wingman began to strafe the helpless bomber crew. [Clearly there was no battle chivalry in the Japanese Air Force.] Lt Baggett was wounded in the arm by the attack. With no other choice he palmed his Colt M1911 pistol and hung limp in his harness, acting dead. Cpt Kuroe brought his fighter round, and throttled back. As he passed the group he opened his canopy, and was flying at almost stall speed.

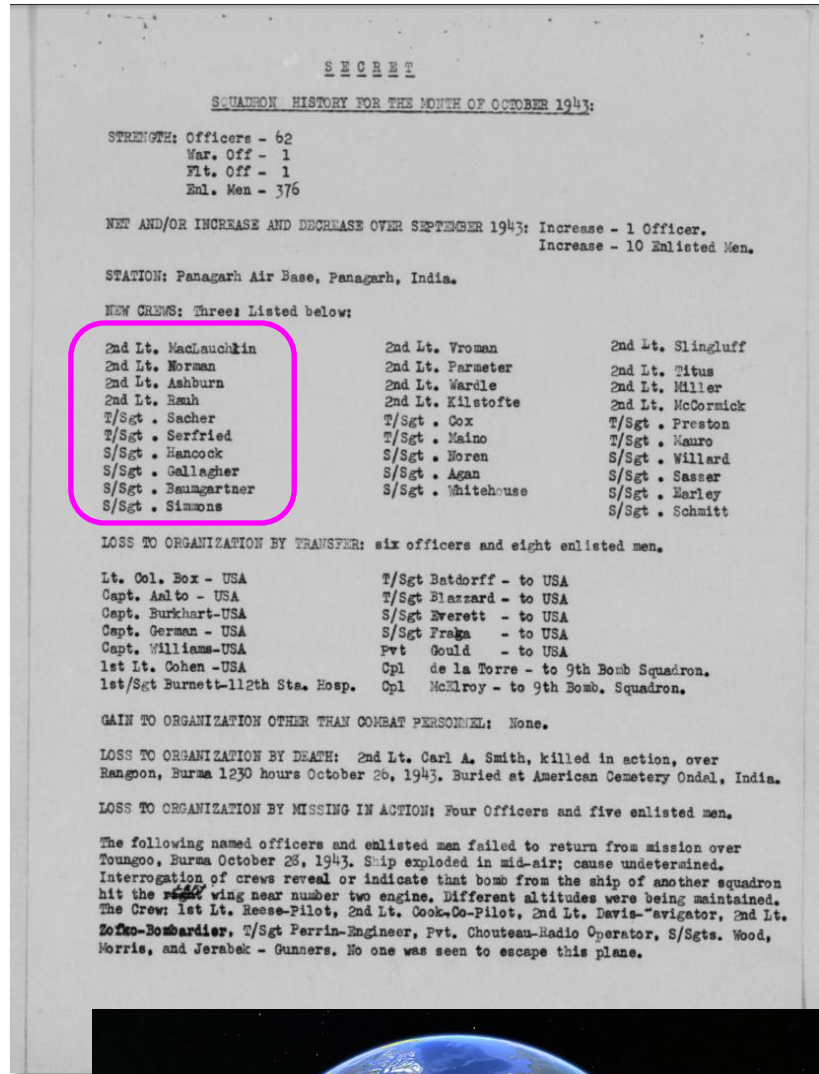
As he passed Lt. Baggett, the American raised his pistol and fired four times. The Japanese fighter peeled away. After landing, Lt Baggett and Lt Jensen were both captured. At the time they were the first B-24 pilots captured by the Japanese, and were of special interest. Eventually they were released from solitary confinement and put in with the general population of POW's.

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During September and October 1943 new crews and new B-24J's with better frontal firepower arrived to replace the older D-models. However, opinions on the new aircraft were mixed, for while appreciating the heavier armament in the nose and belly turrets, pilots found the J-model to be slower, heavier and less maneuverable than the D. Over Rangoon in early December, they suffered heavy losses from frontal attacks. Inexperience in handling the new turrets was given as a possible explanation of the losses. But in spite of serious handicaps, the Liberators flew many successful daylight missions and brought damage to Rangoon.

On 25 September, 1943, the 436th with its new Consolidated B 24J Liberator bombers moved once again to Panagarh, India. Three crews, McLauchlen, Vroman, and Slingluff, and their aircraft arrived in Panagarh in mid-October, 1943. The officers were assigned to their quarters and the eighteen enlisted men (six from each crew) were billeted in a single barracks.

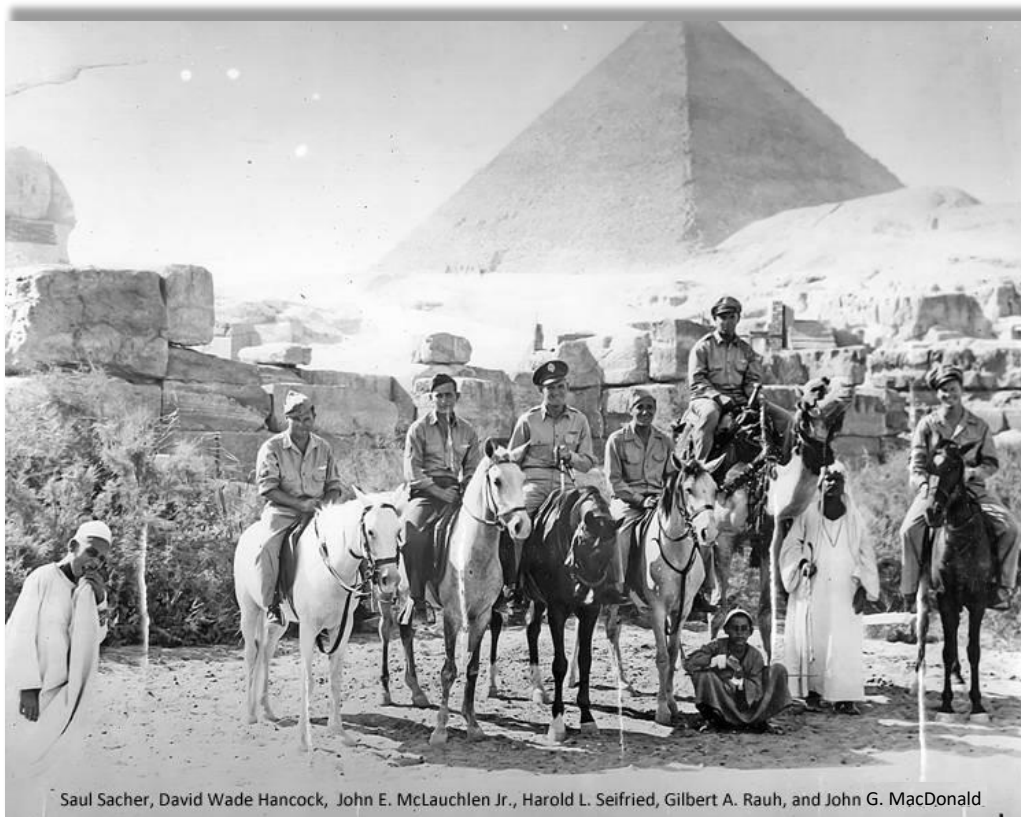
The route to India was circuitous changing frequently as occupied territory shifted between the Allied and Axis powers. The journey for these crews took them from their home bases to Bangor, Maine, Newfoundland, Great Britain (England, Ireland or Scotland), Marrakesh (near Casablanca), Cairo, Persia (now Iran) and on to India – 80 to 100 flying hours. While the McLauchlen and Vroman crews made it in less than one week, the Slingluff crew took two months having to undergo a major overhaul to their B-24 which lost



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the nose wheel and crashed while landing in Marracech. Temporary repairs in Marracech got them to a nerve-racking landing in Tripoli then on to Cairo for lengthy repairs.

Since North Africa had been taken from the Germans in Operation Torch, Cairo was a common stop for the crews heading for the Asia Pacific Theatre and many of the men took the time to visit the sites. The locals had a pretty good tourist business going and took photographs of the crews on horse and camels under the shadows of the pyramids for a modest fee. These photo shoots were repeated many times as evidenced by the number of similar photographs found in the collections of the veterans.



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Scenes from Panagarh:



Ammunition Dump



Junk Yard



C-76929A.C.



76929A.C.



B-76929A.C.



A-76929A.C.

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Headquarters

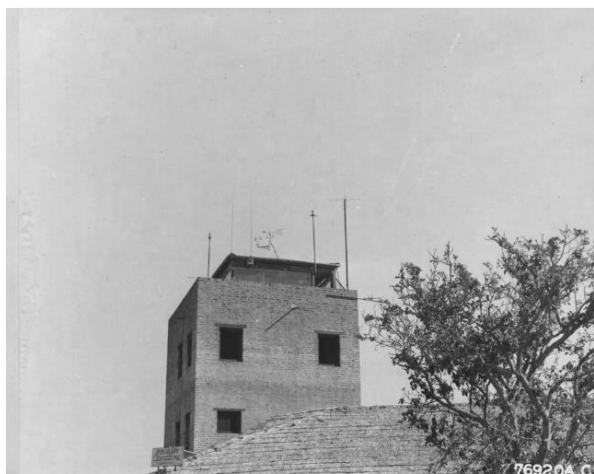


Mess Hall

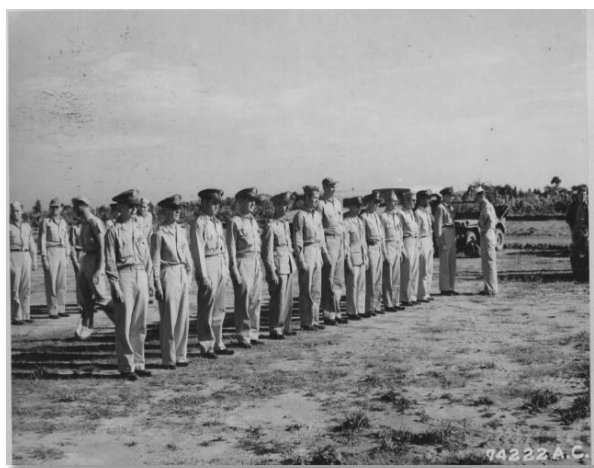


Control Tower

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Enlisted Men's Center



November 1943



December 1943



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