



The most dangerous flight (plus audio)

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To hear Les tell about the only time he fired a gun in the war, click on the Web Extras link to the right.

Flying the "hump" was arguably the most dangerous flight World War II veterans could take, and Les Trowbridge did it only once.

The "hump" was the flight over the Himalayan Mountains that Trowbridge and many other soldiers took from bases in India to get to China after the Japanese cut off the supply road the allies were using to get to China through Burma.

Trowbridge, who was a first lieutenant, said the flight was dangerous with the winds over the mountains sometimes blowing aircraft, C-46s, over on their backs.

"I flew the hump, forecasting our flight," said Trowbridge, now 86. "I did that once; that's all I wanted."

Trowbridge recounted that flight while looking off into the distance as if he could still see it today.

"It was a good day. We were lucky," he said. "Sometimes there were terrific thunderstorms, thunderstorms 12 miles high."

Everyone on his flight feared that if they crashed into the jungles below they would be kidnapped by headhunters who handed over U.S. military personnel to the Japanese.

But they were the lucky ones, and Trowbridge began running his own weather stations at several Chinese sites including Cheng Kung and Yankai.

Trowbridge was deployed in China for a total of 29 months, and he looks back fondly at that time.

"My war experience was educational," said Trowbridge, who knows something about education because he was a teacher before he went into the military. "I carried a .45, but I never fired it."

After the war, Trowbridge taught in Wisconsin for a while before he moved to Greeley in 1962 to take a faculty position at the University of Northern Colorado.

Trowbridge has written 17 books on teaching secondary science for teachers, and he still maintains an office at UNC, where he works on activity books for teachers three days a week.

"I feel good and what more can you ask?" said Trowbridge, who focuses his teaching books on teaching by inquiry and experiment. He also teaches occasionally at the Center for Urban Education in Denver.

"I fell into teaching by accident anyway," Trowbridge said. "I lived in Wisconsin on a farm. I think I was the only one in that community that even thought about going to college. But it was something I loved."

Les Trowbridge
Age: 86
Current city of residence: Greeley
Current Job: Maintains office at UNC for research
Military branch: United States Army Air Force
Division and title: 14th Air Force, First Lieutenant
Places served during WWII: China, India
Medals: Unit Citation

That love is what keeps him coming back to teaching though he could have retired long ago, and it's what made him enjoy his time overseas in World War II.

"It's a challenge and a lot of exciting things happen," he said.

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