

Indelible memories



english.yunnan.cn

the relic around the clock for more than 540 days and eventually moved the plane out of the forest in five months. Qu Tiancheng, a young man of the Nu ethnic group, lost his life during the watch-

over.

According to Li Jianquan, a local who also joined the salvage efforts, Qu and a middle-aged man were assigned to watch the wreckage after its discovery. Before heavy snows sealed the mountain in the winter of 1998, the mid-aged left the mountain to fetch some food. Days later, he returned, only to find the pass blocked by heavy snow. Two months later, the snow melted, but Qu had died because of severe cold and lack of food. He had lost his life at the age of 24, the same age as that of the American captain Jimmy Fox.

"During the rescue, because no vehicle could be driven in, what the villagers had to do was to cut down trees all the way to the site, pave a temporary path with the wood, and move the plane out with timber rollers," remembered Li. "Inch by inch, step by step, the wreckage was eventually pulled out of the thick forest."

The plane wreckage was finally transported to Pianma where the Hump Memorial Hall, through efforts by concerned parties, was established.



Himalayas and the Gaoligong and Hengduan mountain ranges. Flying conditions were extremely perilous. During its three years of operation from 1942 to 1945, more than 600 aircrafts crashed and 1,500 pilots were killed or went missing.

On July 3, 2015, our reporters visited the Hump Memorial Hall in Nujiang Lisu Prefecture to collect any historic traces of the Hump still remaining and to pay tribute to heroic martyrs involved in establishing the Hump route.

The Hump Memorial Hall is China's only exhibition hall displaying the wreckage of a Hump aircraft. As soon as we entered the Hall, a dark green C-53 transport plane instantly caught our eyes. It occupies a large portion of the room and is well-kept in relative terms. "The Hump airlift then was jointly carried out by the India-China Wing of the Air Transport Command (ICWATC) and China National Aviation Corporation CNAC," explains Ma Yingzhong, curator of the memorial.

In 1943, the C-53 transport plane took off from Kunming Wujiaaba Airport (KMWIP) and headed for India. When it flew over Fengxueyakou – known as 'Wind and Snow Pass' – near Pianma Town, Nujiang Prefecture, the plane crashed into the boundless primeval forest. All three crewmembers were never found. The American captain, Jimmy Fox, was only 24 years old at the time of the crash.

China and the US made joint efforts in search of the missing cabin crew. But no result had been yielded until one day in June 1996, when a Myanmar hunter discovered the wreckage in the no-man's land in the thick forest. It was later confirmed that the plane crashed 137 meters away from the No. 9 and No. 10 boundary markers on the Chinese side of the Sino-Myanmar border.

The salvage turned out to be a long-term endeavor by the local people. They watched over

Editor's Note: On July 7, 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China. As one of the three major battlefields as well as the great rear area of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, Yunnan, especially its western part, made great sacrifices and contributions toward the final victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance. In this edition of "Yunnan", we publish a series of reports themed "A War of Resistance by the Whole Nation - Yunnan Memory". These stories will provide multiple perspectives for us to view the War and help us remember history and the martyrs, while cherishing peace and building a better future.

The Hump, an air route guarded with lives

In May 1942, the Japanese army invaded Yunnan from Myanmar, occupying the west bank of the Nujiang River. They cut off the Burma Road, the final overland lifeline in China's defensive efforts, rendering China completely isolated from its international allies.

At that critical moment, China and the US blazed an air route— The Hump from Assam in India to Kunming, Yunnan, China, ensuring China of continuous access to international supplies.

With a total length of 800 kilometers, the Hump stretched over 'no-fly zones' including the towering



Wartime memories of an elder

Located in Xiangyun County, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan province, Yunnanyi Town got its name in the West Han Dynasty (202 BC to 8 AD) and is the first place to carry the name of "Yunnan". Historically, Yunnanyi had been a trading hub in west Yunnan. Day and night, caravans carrying goods like tea, silk and Chinese wood oil came to and left Yunnanyi, bringing the town into prosperity.

During World War II, Yunnanyi witnessed a glorious history in fighting against the Japanese aggressors. Yunnanyi Airfield was one of the most important frontline airports in the China-Burma-India battle field. The American Volunteer Group (AVG), i.e. the 'Flying Tigers', were stationed at the airport. They built up dedicated military facilities such as the New York Villages, which stretched for dozens of kilometers. Every day, fighter and transport planes took off and landed frequently. In its prime time, hundreds of planes were stationed at the Airfield.

On July 8, our reporters came to Yunnanyi to collect the historical relics still remaining in the town during the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and to pay tribute to the heroes and martyrs who had lost their lives in the War.

As a transfer station of the Hump, the Yunnanyi Airfield played a crucial role in guaranteeing smooth airlift operations across the west section of the Hump route. It also served as a base where the China Air Force School trained its military personnel. When the Japanese launched a fierce attack after the Huitong Bridge on the Burma Road was bombed

out, it was from Yunnanyi Airport that 'Flying Tigers' flew 8 fighter planes to aid the front.

Now, the fighter plane hangars still remain in the old site of Yunnanyi Airfield. With a height of 6 or 7 meters,



the hangars were built up from the earth in a U shape. The big hangars were for storage of transport planes, while small ones housed the fighters.

On the sides of Yunnanyi section of the Burma Road, we found heavy stone rollers of different sizes. They were used in building Yunnanyi Airfield, which occupied an area of more than 66 hectares. During war time, the military airport was expanded to several air strips largely by hand, because there were no modern machines available.

Tragic events happened during construction and operation of the airport.

On December 26th, 1942, 24 Japanese bombers, covered by 8 Zero fighters, launched a sudden attack on Yunnanyi Airfield. In fighting against the aggressors, Lieutenant Robert H. Mooney with other pilots, fought hard in shooting down the enemy fighters and he was the first to shoot down an enemy Zero fighter. When withdrawing the action and ready to join the formation, Mooney found another enemy Zero fighter ferociously heading straight for him. Fearlessly, He darted at the enemy plane head-on, crashed its left wing, and sent it stumbling to the ground. Unfortunately, Mooney's fighter was on fire. However, in order to protect the safety of Xiangyun Town and Yunnanyi airbase, he drove the fighter away from the Town. Because



of the fatal delay, Mooney lost the necessary altitude for bailing out. After he jumped out of the plane, the parachute failed to completely open and he was seriously injured when landing. When he was rushed to the operating table, the doctor did his best and used the best medicine he could. However, Mooney died on the night of the same day. At that time, he was only 22 years old.

On April 26, 1943, the Japanese launched another airstrike, resulting in more than 2,000 deaths. The runways were reddened with blood, and it remains a 'collective nightmare' of the local people. Li Maonan, then 7 years old, recalled the event during our interview. "That night, workers from across the country were pulling stone rollers to press the air strips and roads. Several Japanese fighter planes suddenly appeared from the direction of Tengchong, followed by an indiscriminate burst of bombs. The Tigers' planes were hidden in the hangars, and thus remained intact. However, workers on the spot suffered heavy casualties..."

This tragedy had a great influence on Li, and he decided then and there to become a soldier to safeguard the country. Growing up, he realized his dream by joining the People's Liberation Army (PLA). After demobilization, Li returned home to be a farmer.

Now Li is 79 years old. Every dawn and sunset, he often strolls around the old site of Yunnanyi Airfield, recalling the scenes during the Chinese People's war of resistance against Japanese aggression. He remembers the hard days when the Allies joined hands to fight against Japanese fascism.

In the new era, the memories of the 'Flying Tigers' and the 'Hump' will never fade away from the minds of people in Yunnan. In memory of these heroes, a Traffic Museum was established in Yunnanyi, where photos and relics are displayed, still telling stories of the Flying Tigers, the building of the airfield and China-Burma Road.

(By Zu Hongbing)



english.yunnan.cn



YUNNAN DAILY PRESS GROUP

