

The 2 August 1943 crash of C-46 # 41-12420 and
significant of the rescue of its crew and passengers

Although Army Air Forces search and rescue units had accomplished numerous impromptu parachute rescues of survivors of crashed aircraft in remote wilderness areas of North America since December 1940 none of these parachute rescue operations were conducted in an area inhabited by warlike indigenous peoples and visited by patrolling and raiding enemy forces. Despite this rescue operations being considered the origin of USAF Pararescue Teams and the USAF Pararescue enlisted specialty the constant informing simplistic reference to this mission is dismissing how and why this mission conclusively demonstrated if the risk is accepted a parachute rescue team can be dropped anywhere to aid and assist survivors of an aircraft crash or bailout.

Military operations in China-Burma-India (CBI) relied and depended on parachute/glider assaults and airdrop resupply capabilities immensely more than in any other combat theater. This air support mission need encouraged more acceptance of risk to develop and utilize a wide variety of solutions in the whole field of air support of ground operations. The August 2, 1943 crash of C-46 #2420 in the CBI Theater during WWII resulted in the first rescue of survivors from enemy patrolled and raided territory by use of a self-sufficient parachute-rescue team supported with airdrop resupply techniques, methods, procedures and tactics.

Not only is this mission credited in official military histories as being the first into such a populated with potentially belligerent peoples area it is also considered to be the dominant successful of the numerous parachute rescues accomplished in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater during WWII. By the time of the May 3, 1945 when a C-47 crashed at a location 47 in the dubbed Hidden (renamed Shangri-La) Valley, Dutch New Guinea such long range parachute rescues needing airdrop resupply were no longer a rarity. The lost in Shangri La Valley parachute rescue team operations is comparison mentioned as it has garnered much more public interest following at the time and a current times following as it involved a female WAC Corporal lost in the jungle with "savages".

To gain appreciation of the significance of the August 2 thru September 1, 1943 parachute rescue team activities some awareness of the geopolitics and asymmetrical combat nature of the CBI Theater is necessary.

When WWII began the China-Burma-India region was predominantly an unexplored and not an accurately mapped region. Most of the region lacked roads and established marked trading foot trails. The indigenous populations in the remote mountainous isolated areas were tribal and intratribal conflict was likely particularly in the hill country along the border of far eastern India and northwestern Burma where C-46 # 41-12420 crashed on August 2, 1943.

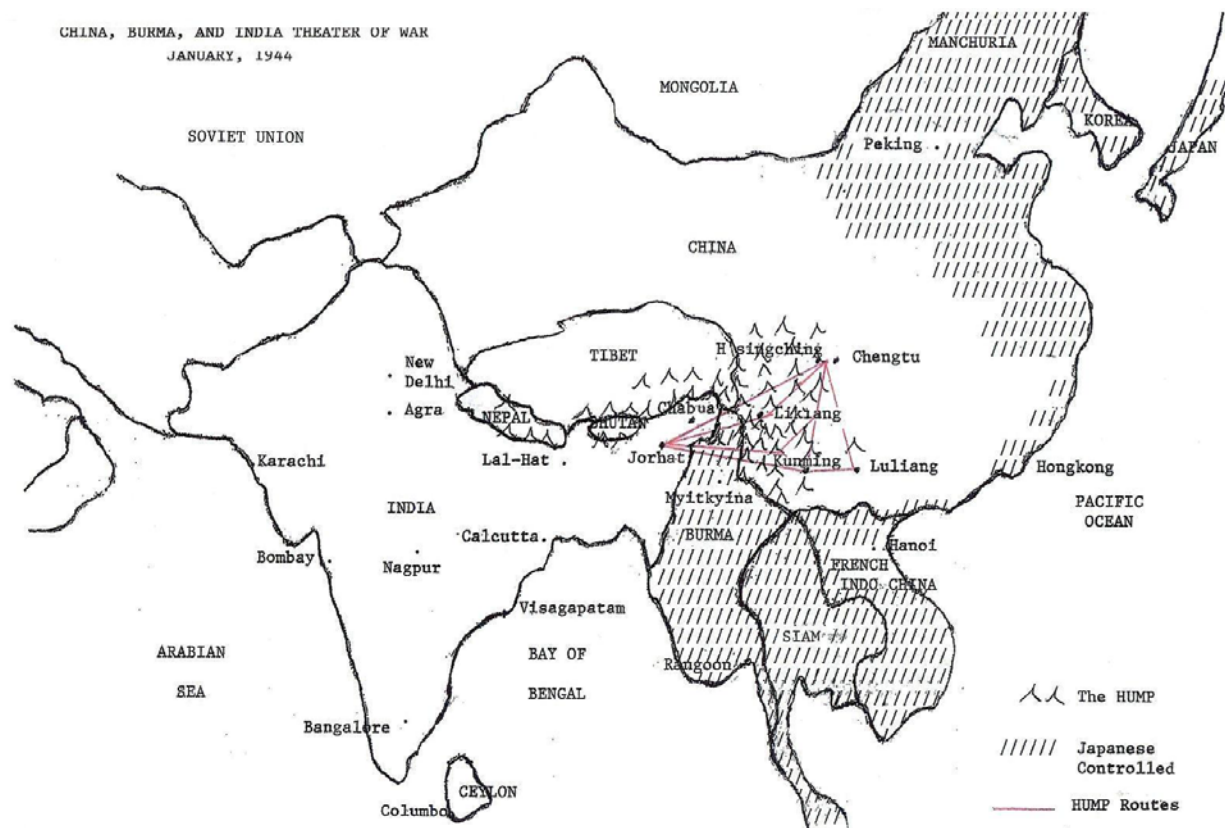
This area is known as Nagaland which is largely a mountainous region. The Naga Hills rise from the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam to about 2,000 feet (610 m) and rise further to the southeast, as high as 6,000 feet (1,800 m). Mount Saramati at an elevation of 12,552 feet (3,826 m) is the regions highest peak; this is where the Naga Hills merge with the Patkai Range in

Burma. Rivers such as the Doyang and Diphu to the north, the Barak river in the southwest and the Chindwin river of Burma in the southeast, dissect the entire region. The terrain is rich in flora and fauna with areas of wooded evergreen tropical and subtropical forest.

The indigenous population had a headhunting reputation and such savagery is known to have happened in Naga Hills during November 1943 when a combined force from Chingmei, Nokluk, Pangsha, Tsaplaw, Tswalaw and possibly some other small villages had attacked and destroyed Law Nawkum taking between 250 and 300 heads. American and British forces took no action as the headhunting intratribal conflict did not threaten the Ledo Road or its construction. Naga tribesmen were normally shy and smiling but they were ferocious when provoked and these peoples built secure and self-sufficient villages on hilltops to protect the village from surprise attack from other villages.

The Japanese Army was active in the area too.

The Japanese occupation of Burma began during the spring 1942 with the included the military objective to gain control of the Burma Road (completed in 1938) to cut resupply links from the port of Rangoon with the Chinese province of Yunnan. By 1943 the Japanese Army controlled the territory of Burma to the Border with India and China and with the British lacking the resources and organization to recapture Burma. Although the Japanese Army's March 1944 invasion of India failed, Allied transport aircraft flying air routes between India and China along the Brumes India China border were subject to attack from where Japanese fighter aircraft

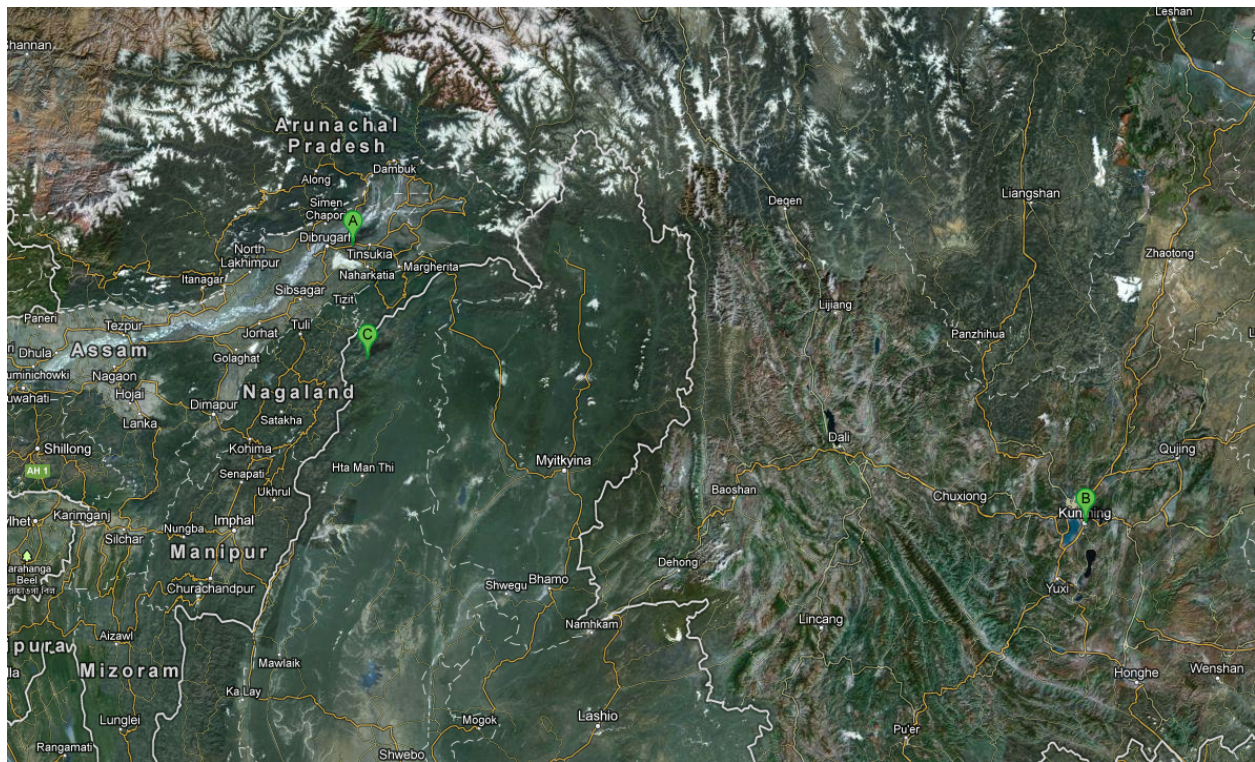


operating out of the Burmese city of Myitkyina. However the aircraft loss risks came less from enemy air action than from a combination of rugged terrain, extreme altitude, unpredictable weather and severe shortages of spare parts and experienced, properly trained crews.

Thus during 1943 the inhospitality of the remote isolated wilderness, the warlike character of the Naga tribes and potential presence of the Japanese army patrols made traveling alone or even in small groups a venture little a short of suicide.

During 1943, the transport aircraft flying hump routes were crashing at rate of nearly one a day. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) realized that Naga aid could prove critical in rescuing downed aircrew and passengers who would otherwise perish before trekking out of the jungle. To get this help OSS Detachment 101 sent agents to several Naga villages, to inform tribesmen that any and all help would be handsomely rewarded with trinkets, coin, and opium. This outreach effort is credited with the well-armed tribesmen finding the 23 survivors of August 2nd crash being predisposed to be friendly.

This rescue event begins with C-46 tail number 41-12420 taking off at about 8 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 2, 1943 to fly a route from Chabua, India (A) to Kunming, China (B). Crash location (C).



Onboard were four crewmembers (Pilot Flight Office Harry Neveu, co-pilot 2nd Lieutenant Charles Felix, Radio Operator Sgt Walter K. Oswalt, and fight engineer Staff Sergeant Ned C. Miller), seventeen passengers and roughly seven thousand pounds of cargo and baggage.

The seventeen passengers: Mr. William T. Stanton, Board of Economic Warfare; Mr. John Davies, State Department-General Stillwell's office; Mr. Eric Sevaried, War Correspondent-CBS; Col Wong Pae Chae, Chinese Army; S/Sgt Joseph Giguere, HQ ATC; Cpl Edward Holland, HQ ATC; Joseph Clay, HQ ATC; Sgt Francis Signer, JHQ ATC; Cpl Basil Lemon, HQ ATC; Sgt Glen Kittleson, HQ ATC; Cpl Lloyd Sherrill, HQ ATC; Cpl S. M. Waterbury; HQ ATC; Pvt William Schrendt, HQ Delhi SOS; T/Sgt E. Wilder, HQ 12th AF; 2ndLt Roland K. Lee, HQ ATC; Captain D. C. Lee, War Department, Adjutant General Department.

About an hour and thirty minutes into the flight, approximately 200 miles flown, while the plane was over the Patkai Mountains, the left engine lost oil pressure and was shut down and aircraft is turned around and headed back to Chabua. Although jettisoning cargo reduced weight and bought some time the overworked right engine caught fire and emergency bailout became the only option.

Point C is the Burma crash/bailout location in relation to Chabua, India (point A). The crash site was in close proximity of the village Pangsha (point C above) and the survivor and the parachute rescue team stayed there until August 18. Severeid gives the location as 26°25'N, 95°20'E.



All crew and passengers bailout but it took a few hours before they all met up in a Naga village to discover the copilot, 2Lt Felix and a passenger, Cpl Lemmon, were unaccounted for.

Naga tribesmen found Corporal Lemmon three days later after he spent those three days hiding from them, thinking they were Japanese soldiers. He was found in real bad shape suffering from insect and leech bites from head to foot that practically consumed much of his blood, he was hypothermic from lack of shelter and warmth, his shoeless feet (lost shoes during bailout) were cut up and bleeding and he was half-hysterical.

The only fatality, co-pilot 2nd Lieutenant Charles Felix, was found a few more days later under the tail of the C-46 with his chute fouled up in the tail assembly. Most likely, the C-46 was in a roll and he prematurely deployed his parachute as he was exiting causing his canopy hit and entangle on the stabilizer as it was deploying.

Fortuitously the radio operator had been transmitting distress calls before bailing out which resulted in a search and rescue C-47 arriving overhead within an hour or two that airdropped them weapons and other supplies that included signal panels.

The survivors used signal panels to communicate they had injured personnel and later that afternoon Lt. Col. Don S. Flickinger, Sgt. Richard S. Passey and Cpl. William MacKenzie parachuted into the jungle, met up with the survivors and began treating the wounded.

After seeing to the needs of the injured survivors, Flickinger and the two enlisted medics set up a clinic for the villagers, earning the gratitude and cementing friendly relations with the villagers. Flickinger also thought the survivors and the parachute rescue team might be safer from attack should the villagers become hostile, so he paid some of them to construct three huts, one for the civilians and Chinese passengers, one for the officers, and one for the enlisted men.

The survivors and parachute rescue team remained at Pangsha as they were advised by dropped note a ground team is on its way to escort them out. There was concern other tribes might be hostile and ambush them as they trekked out. The survivors and parachute rescue team left Pangsha on August 18, escorted by a party of armed natives led by the British deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills, Philip Adams. The survivors and rescue party struggled through a brutal six-day trek that taxed everyone to the limit.

Although this rescue is credited as the origin heritage for USAF Pararescue, there is much collateral mission implications emerging from this first in a combat area parachute rescue team operations.

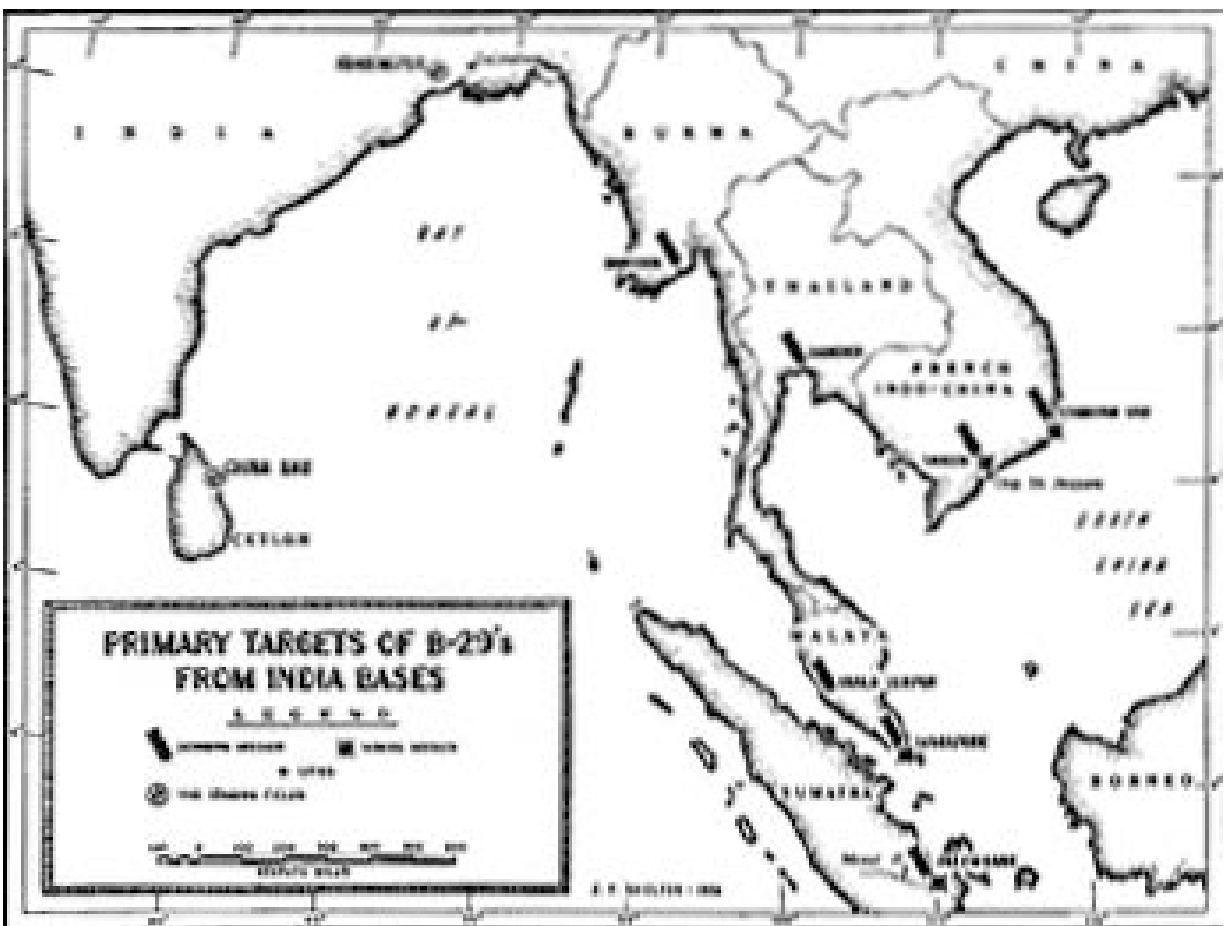
Perhaps the significance of establishing a medical clinic to provide healthcare of indigenous population by Lt. Col. Don S. Flickinger, Sgt. Richard S. Passey and Cpl. William MacKenzie in the immediate bailout/crash location to gain safety by establishing goodwill relations the most overlooked detail of this mission. The Commander of the Air Rescue Service clearly and concisely reflects upon this importance to his subordinate commanders in June 1951.

The Pararescue teams have, inherent with their design, the facility of establishing communication with the native populace of remote wilderness areas. Should such areas be-present within your area of responsibility, then you are well aware of the complete disregard such natives usually have of aircraft incidents. Oftentimes this is due to superstitions of the natives while in other cases the only interest the natives may have is in sacking the wreckage. Proper coordination with the natives in the past has resulted in the saving of many aircrew lives. Such operations could well prove valuable again when maximum rescue effort is taxed by a war time workload. However, now is the time to establish this native

coordination, not after the balloon goes up. The training the team member receive in native psychology and rescue operations permit them to do this mission for you. The establishment of advanced teams and assistance in maintaining them when all base facilities are nonexistent is another faculty a Pararescue team member provides you, if called upon to do so. In summation, a well trained Pararescue team can be a very valuable asset to your command if exploited to the maximum.

This mission this mission that contribute to the developing of putting small team capability working in isolation in far forward positions it prompted much rethinking on incorporating parachuting and unconventional efforts to rescue prisoners of war from Japanese prison camps in Southeast Asia, the Philippines and other Japanese occupied areas in the Pacific Theater.

This mission also prompted the availability of (no mission jump utilization evidence found) parachute rescue teams to support rescue of bomber crews based in India that were bombing Japanese war effort targets in Burma, Thailand, French Indo-China (Vietnam) and Malaya.



Direct traceable linkage or influences of this mission to military operations in other combat theaters is lacking other than the common OSS involvement presence with doing aircrew rescue, evacuating downed aircrew from contested areas and attempts to rescue of prisoners of war from prison camps.

Techniques, methods and procedures used in CBI to insert the parachute rescue teams and then recovery evacuate the rescue team and survivors likely influenced the July 1944 establishing of OSS/15th Air Force's Aircrew Rescue Unit 1 (known to the OSS as the Halyard Mission).

This unit was specifically devoted to rescue and evacuation in the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Serbia, Croatia). During the night of August 2/3, 1944 in a mission typical of many flown until war's end, the unit dropped a field party fifty-five miles south of Belgrade, where roughly one hundred airmen had assembled. The rescuers immediately set to work on a landing strip. Six days later, C-47s evacuated nearly three hundred men there.

OSS influence persisted after WWII with many officer having WWII OSS service history were involved in establishing both the Air Rescue Service and USAF Pararescue teams and the USAF Pararescue specialty training programs and requirements.

Although the WWII CBI Theater is considered minor and unimportant in comparison to the other WWII combat theaters and major combat campaigns the capabilities, methods, procedures and tactics developed in this theater contributed to significantly to future force structure being ready and available to accomplish isolated personnel recovery, and ensured future operational capability was adequately trained, equipped and organized. More importantly this mission allows U.S. military planners to incorporate this capability into operational objectives and regional plans.

