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Written by: Norman Larson, G.M. "Bud" Etherington, Don Lund, Harry Changnon

Editor's Introduction: This is the second segment of the story of the C-109 Project which had to be one of the biggest goof-ups ever to be inflicted on the B-29s. The mission which was to transport gasoline from India to the forward area in China was formidable. The planes were badly maintained, the men were driven beyond endurance, and the CO of it all, a West Point colonel, was an idiot. In Issue #33, Bud Etherington told us a good bit of the mechanical and logistics side of the effort. This issue attempts to tell the story in terms of how the men coped with the situation.

The C-109 Fiasco Part II

Norman Larsen's Story: Around the end of August, five of our crew--pilot, co-pilot, navigator engineer and radio operator received orders to report on September 1 to Kalaikunda, India, to join the C-109 Provisional Tanker Unit. All squadrons of the 58th Wing had to send crews. Naturally, the squadron commanders sent pilots of either of two categories: people they wanted to get rid of because they were causing problems or, as in our case, new untried crews especially ones in which the pilot had had some B-24 experience.

We were among the first five or six crews to arrive at Kalaikunda. We found a largely deserted former British fighter base. For living quarters we were assigned to an open bay barracks and issued canvas cots. There was no electricity in the barracks. The base had no PX, no Officer or NCO club, no flight surgeon or medical department of any kind, and no chaplain. We received no mail during the time we were stationed there. The next day, we, the crews, had our first meeting with our new CO. It didn't take us long to realize that in this outfit, we were going to have to be on our own without the benefit of any kind of leadership. Even at his first meeting, the CO came through with this phony "I'm just one of the boys" attitude. One of the guys brought up the problem of not having electricity in the barracks that we were assigned to. The Colonel's response to this was: "I am sure you have enough engineers among you to remedy a situation like that." (A couple of engineers did precisely that and in no time had tapped off the line going to the operations shack which appeared to be the only building with electric power. As more and more crews arrived and tapped off this line, the lighting situation at operations began to become a bit on the dim side.)

The Colonel informed us that crews with B-24 experience would start flying missions the next day. Since there didn't seem to be any squadron or group navigators around, I brought up the subject of what route were we supposed to fly? The Colonel asked me if I had ever been to China, and I said, "Yes sir, one trip." He said, "Fine; then you set up the routes." I simply drew straight lines between Kalaikunda and the four bases in China. The route came rather perilously close to those peaks called the Twin Sisters which towered above our flight altitude. But this was the route that we flew for the next two months.

After the meeting we went up to the flight line to have our first look at the aircraft which was very quickly christened the "109 Boom." It was nothing short of a flying gas bomb ready to explode. We were only on the plane for about ten minutes when Doc and Bert decided to go back to Operations.

They could not find any means of salvaging the two gas tanks which were hanging in the bomb bays. At Operations they were informed that indeed there was no way to salvo them. The plane took off in a vastly overloaded condition and could not take off on three engines. We could not even salvo the gas tanks in an emergency. The whole operation was beginning to look more and more unappetizing. And we were to fly this monstrosity night and day, back and forth across the hump, in the worst weather in the world. But the Colonel couldn't care less, and we quickly found out that he just didn't give a damn about the lives of the crews. All he passionately cared about was dumping the maximum amount of gas at A-1, A-3, A-5 and A-7.

Early the next morning we were the first crew to take off on a mission to China. We made it up and back safely, but I must admit it was largely a matter of luck. However, after one more round trip our crew learned many of the little things that helped us survive.

Since we flew most of the time on instruments in terrible weather, navigation was a problem. A lot of it was simply by-guess-and-by-God navigation. However, on the way up, after we broke out over China, I would work backwards and figure out what winds we had encountered for us to end up at that particular spot, and I did the same thing on the way back again after we broke out, usually over northern Burma. On the way up in daylight, there was also one place which was usually free of weather and where I could see the ground for a few minutes. It was a place between two rivers and with the use of the drift meter and stopwatch, I could get a drift reading and a ground speed. On the way back, at night, just before we got into the weather, I could often get a shot at a star off the left wing which gave me some idea what kind of drift we were up against. I relied on this to help me miss the Twin Sister peaks.

The situation at Kalaikunda never got very good. There were constant meetings, which were actually pep talks from the CO. At those meetings invariably the problem of the gas tanks hanging on shackles in the bomb bay would come up. But the Colonel adamantly refused to even consider taking the planes out of service for modification so that the tanks could be salvaged. By now we were starting to lose crews and when this was pointed out to the Colonel he simply said, "We're in a war, gentlemen." At one point with his deplorable sense of humor he suggested that the engineers should carry wire cutters with them to cut the shackles.

At another memorable meeting a young second lieutenant got up to complain about the food situation on the base. At the time it seemed to me that all we had to eat was chili con carne and Vienna sausages. (I mostly lived on "C" rations.) The lieutenant said that even though he was from Texas, he didn't particularly enjoy chili for breakfast. The Colonel with his weird sense of humor said, "There are plenty of cows wandering around the base, Lieutenant. So I suggest you borrow the carbine from my office and go out and shoot one. That should give you plenty of hamburgers."

A few days later this is precisely what the lieutenant did and after shooting the cow, he tied a rope around a leg and dragged it to the mess hall behind a jeep. The result was that every horrified Indian worker on the base walked off his job. Naturally no hamburgers resulted, but we were delighted, thinking of the explanations that the Colonel would have to make on up the line. We knew there was nothing he could do to the lieutenant because there were at least ten or twelve people in the room who heard him make this suggestion about his carbine. It was little things like this that made life bearable at Kalaikunda.

At another meeting someone complained about the uncomfortable canvas cots that we were forced to sleep on. To this the Colonel replied that there were lots of GIs sleeping in the muck and filth of the jungle not too far away and that we should be quite happy to have a canvas cot. To which the guy who complained replied, "You are right, Colonel, but those guys don't have to fly the Hump."

A few days later I got the chance of a lifetime. The Colonel lived in a small house not too far from our barracks, and I was passing it one day when I saw that his bearer had put his rope spring bed and his mattress out, presumably for airing. The temptation was too great, and I managed to get the mattress on my head and the bed on top of that, Indian style, and staggered back to the barracks. I was sorely tempted to bring my cot back and leave it in place of the bed, but I thought I'd best leave well enough alone. We heard from our spy in Operations that a furious commanding officer had said that when he found the guy who had taken his bed he wasn't going to court marshal him, he was going to have him shot. Like the incident with the cow, this was a major morale booster. The Colonel was constantly on our backs about dropping off more and more gas in China.

One night we accidentally stumbled on a way in which we could safely increase the number of gallons of gasoline that we could drop off. We were coming back to India and had broken out of the usual weather over northern Burma. Off to the south we saw what appeared to be the exhaust flames from three fighter planes. They were heading in our direction and did not respond to our IFF signal so we assumed they were enemy fighters. North of us we saw massive lightning indicating a huge storm. We headed for the storm to try to hide in it. We did make it into the storm which was a rough one, and we got knocked around quite severely. When we finally broke out we were running dangerously low on gas since we had gone quite a bit out of our way. We landed at the ATC base at Dacca. The people there were quite cordial to us, and we had no trouble getting a hundred or so gallons of gasoline and, in addition, we went to the mess hall and had a decent meal. From then on whenever we came back to India at night (which was most of the time), we made a point of stopping off at the Dacca air base. In addition to getting a decent meal it helped get the Colonel off our backs.

The missions continued to exact a terrible toll of men and machines. We had started out with 18 aircraft and within five weeks had lost 15 of them. We continued to get replacement crews and machines, but it did not change the fact that the losses were almost unbearable. Of the 15 planes lost, one crew was saved.

Our losses were such that we did not particularly want to become friendly with any of the other crews. However, one day I saw a replacement crew come in and the navigator was someone that I had known slightly back in the States. I took him aside and spent some time with him giving him all the information I could think of that might be useful to him in flying his first few missions. Unfortunately the crew was lost on their very first mission.

We faced many enemies on our missions to China not the least of which was the extreme fatigue we usually felt. We were flying night and day and seldom were able to get a decent night's rest. At one point we made two round trips to China with no more rest than catching a few hours sleep lying on the hard stand under the wing of the plane in China while our flight engineer supervised the unloading of the gas.

We were returning from the second trip and somehow managed to find Kalaikunda. But we were so completely exhausted that we were having difficulty picking out our own field from among the three in the area. We knew the area better than we knew our own backyards, but such was our mental state that between the pilot, co-pilot and myself, we couldn't decide which field was ours. Normally on landing I went back to the tail of the plane to act as ballast in trying to keep the tail down. However, this night I stayed up in front. We finally decided which was our field, and Doc Treimer made a fine approach except that he leveled off about 35 feet high, and we probably would have crashed had he not realized what he was doing at the last second and went around. On the second approach we were about 50 feet up when I hallucinated completely. I screamed, "Doc, there is a brick building in the middle of the runway. Go around!" Doc never questioned it, but dropped the nose, gunned the engines and around we went. The tower operator wanted to know what the problem was, and Doc mumbled something about a brick building in the runway. The operator was sure we were all crazy and evidently reported the incident to the Operations Officer. It did get us grounded, and we were given a three-day pass to Calcutta for rest.

One morning, on a flight to China, our worst nightmare was realized. We were just about at the foothills of the Himalayas when we saw a wisp of smoke coming into the cockpit. The nearest base was a fighter strip at Myitkyina, Burma, so we turned south and headed for it, at the same time letting down. We talked of bailing out, but the jungle below looked so dense and formidable we decided to sweat it out. Doc Triemer made a straight-in approach and landing, scattering P-51s all over the place. We touched down at the very end of the steel mat runway. In spite of the wonderful efforts made by Doc and our co-pilot, we went a little past the end of the runway into soft dirt and ended up on our nose.

We went tumbling out the hatch over my desk and started running. We stopped about 1,000 feet from the plane, lighted up cigarettes and were congratulating ourselves on being alive when a jeep carrying a General in a boy scout hat, two Colonels and a Major pulled up. The General kindly asked if anyone was hurt. Assured by Doc that nobody was, he glared at Doc and said, "Don't you salute a General when you see one?" Doc, taken a bit aback, took a last drag on his cigarette, ground it out under his foot, came to a sort of attention, gave him what passed in the Air Corps for a salute, and said, "Yeh, I guess so, General." The General then said for us to get that Goddamn airplane off the field and to stop interfering with "my" war.

None of the crew was hurt, the plane didn't blow up, and the generator fire was quickly put out. In a few days after getting some new props, we were ready to be airborne again. We threw everything out of the plane that wasn't nailed down and gave all but a few tablespoons of gas to the 14th Air Force. With this very light load we were just able to clear the trees at the end of the runway and get back to Kalaikunda. When we landed our CO chewed us out incredibly for giving our gas to the 14th Air Force.

One day in early October we had an unforgettable experience. It was the first and only time we flew in perfect sun-drenched weather almost halfway across the Hump. Our old deadly enemy turned out to be magnificently beautiful. It was a huge jumble of rocks capped with virgin snow. There was no sign of life except way up the side of one of the mountains we saw a tiny little cabin. There were sheer canyon walls thousands of feet high and at the bottoms of many of these canyons, clear mountain streams went rushing by. I remember seeing one deep, clear, sparkling clean pool of water and thinking it would sure be great to drop a trout fly in there. I probably would have been the first human being ever to do so. We acted like real tourists for an hour or so and the awesome beauty of the mountains almost made me forgive them for all the cruelties inflicted on our flying crews.

At the end of October, we returned from China and were given great news. The Unit was being disbanded at once, and we were ordered to return to the 40th Bomb Group. We were ordered to proceed there by truck. We had earned the dubious honor of flying the first mission and now the last one of the C-109 Provisional Tanker Unit. When we returned to the barracks we found a very happy bunch of guys busily packing and getting ready to leave. We were told not to take any items which belonged to the base. During our two-month stay many of us had accumulated furniture from some of the empty buildings on the base. Bert, our flight engineer, had fashioned a primitive beer cooler out of a couple of oil drums with wet sawdust packed in between. Since we occasionally got ice, it was more than adequate.

When our truck arrived the first thing we put on was the beer cooler loaded with beer. Then we put on a wicker chair for each of the four of us to sit in during the ride. Then I couldn't resist taking the neat little desk and lamp that I had acquired. And the last thing we loaded was the Colonel's bed, securely lashed to the roof of the cab. It was a happy, albeit somewhat tipsy crew, that arrived back at Chakulia.

Don Lund Remembers: (Don recalls his C-109 experience as taking place later than the period reported on by Norm Larsen.) At the end of October, 1944, the 395th was disbanded. My crew and I were transferred to the 45th. Of course, I was low man on the totem pole so I was shunted to the C-109s. Chuck Thornsberry was my co-pilot, Gabe Sena was flight engineer (right gunner on B-29). P.D. Shepard was radio operator--a crew of four. We did not have a navigator. It was duck soup for me as I had been an instructor in B-24s at Liberal, Kansas before coming to Pratt. Our station was Kurmitola-Tezgeon near Dacca. My form 5 shows 11 trips across the Hump during November and 16 in December, 1944. Nighttime and early morning takeoffs were SOP due to air temperature and overloaded conditions.

On one trip strong headwinds forced us to land at Myitkyina. The field was super busy with P-47s loading bombs and going to battle at Bhamo, a short distance south. When we were ready to leave, we were directed to turn sharp right after takeoff as there were Jap holdouts nearby.

Once, when I was grounded for several days, Chuck (Thornsberry) was assigned to fly with another crew, and they had to bail out. After that I told ATC operations that we would fly as a crew or not at all. There were some words, but we flew as a crew after that.

I am of the opinion that we were scheduled more than the ATC crews. From the 4th to the 20th of December, we flew 16 trips over the Hump, and I was grounded for five days during that time. That was almost a round trip each day. Too much! We dropped about 16-18,000 gallons of gas. To this day I have a high regard for this B-24. I would be blessed to fly one again.

Bud Etherington Remembers: After all these years I have very little recollection of the details of our daily life at Kalaikunda. We lived in a rather large open barracks and when there was free time during the day there was most frequently a card game of some kind of other going on. Hearts was a very popular game. A cutthroat variety was played with a vengeance.

The manner in which our flights were scheduled frequently seemed to leave us wondering if we were being selected for some sort of special abuse. One night we had come back from one of the China bases and arrived quite late. A typical trip over the Hump took over seven hours. When we checked into Operations upon our arrival we were surprised to learn that we were scheduled to be the fourth crew to leave. With a little luck this might give us three or four hours of sleep. How this could be with over forty crews assigned, we couldn't understand, but then we were not allowed to question anything under threat of court-martial.

After being at B-2 for a while and knowing that a long hazardous flight might lie ahead, sleep became less restful. It got to the point where we almost dreaded the thought of another of those overweight missions. Between three and four in the morning we would hear the orderly's jeep stop outside the barracks. Everyone had to have his name at the end of this bed so that the orderly could find the right people. We would lie there pretending to still be asleep, hoping that perhaps our flight had been canceled. Or if we had not been scheduled perhaps praying that we had not unknowingly been chosen to fill in for someone who might have become sick or for some other reason had been canceled out. If the orderly did not awaken you to fly, once he left the barracks we probably got our soundest sleep of the night.

One of the problems that we encountered with some regularity and which I have not mentioned before was the matter of the sometimes terrible weather over the Hump. It was not uncommon to encounter winds of well over 100 knots. Thunderheads would frequently build up to thousands of feet above the mountains and sometimes, particularly in some of the clouds, you might encounter sudden violent turbulence. Nor was it uncommon to encounter icing in some of those clouds. Along with the already overloaded condition of the aircraft the additional weight of ice which could form on the plane almost instantaneously could create a condition which the overstressed engines of the aircraft could hardly overcome.

One day we had taken off with the usual full load of gasoline in a C-109 which had had a very special addition. An airline type seat had been installed back by the right waist window so that some VIP could be ferried to China to go pheasant hunting. The Flight Engineer had no regular seat in the C-109 and normally stood between the pilot and co-pilot for most of the flight watching the instruments and making whatever adjustments that might be necessary. On this particular flight, things were going along well, and the pilot agreed that as we were about to climb to altitude there was no reason why I shouldn't go back and ride that passenger seat for a change. I thought that this would give me a rare opportunity to admire the rugged and awesome beauty of the Hump as my normal position did not give nearly this good a view. Just before I left to go back there I instructed the co-pilot to be sure to watch the carburetor temperatures to make sure we didn't get any carburetor icing. I had settled into the airline seat and for a brief time was enjoying a view of the Hump. I was not there very long before we entered a cloud bank. Suddenly the plane began a series of wild lurches. We had apparently hit a pocket of severe turbulence and iced-up as well although I guess I didn't know exactly what was happening at the time. All I knew was that the back end of the plane was moving around so violently that I couldn't get out of the seat. I didn't have an interphone so I could not talk to the guys up front and try to find out what was happening. I don't know how much altitude we had lost, but it seemed like a lot. I tried to reach the rear hatch so I could bail out before we crashed, but because of the violent motion of the plane I couldn't get there. As suddenly as this had begun it stopped, and we were again cruising through the clouds as straight and smoothly as you could wish. I quickly crawled through the bomb-bay and finished the flight at my usual station.

Most of the planes that had turbo superchargers on the engines had a little control knob that controlled all superchargers with a single setting. This dial was marked with numbers from one to ten and was set to give full takeoff power when set to #8 and at full throttle. Number ten, which gave higher engine manifold pressures, was known as War Emergency Power and was used only in emergencies. This high a setting gave extra power, but could do potential damage to an engine. The regulations stated that any engine which had been run at this excessive pressure (or at "Turbo 10" as we called it) for five or ten minutes (I don't remember which) must be changed. One morning one of the C-109s, #716, took off for China with the usual maximum overload. The engine performance was not up to par, and the crew, having encountered some problems and struggling to stay airborne, had used "Turbo 10" for nearly four hours before getting back to base. Of course the engines had been overstressed by this procedure, but we thought the crew had done a good job of getting the plane back to base.

In accordance with the regulations, these engines should have been changed. However, the Commanding Officer, in keeping with his usual concern for the crews, refused to let the plane be taken out of service to change the engines. Instead he insisted that this plane be flown with the usual full overload under his usual threat of court-martial. This created a new record low in the already seriously depressed morale of the flight crews. A day or two later Lt. Pugmire was "Arrested in Quarters" for refusing to fly that plane. A day or so later it was our turn. As I recall it, our crew discussed refusing to fly this plane, but I do not recall us having reached a decision. Nevertheless I know that I had no interest in flying that plane and during a very thorough pre-flight inspection, I managed to find a gas leak which allowed me to ground the plane until this defect was corrected. We were then assigned another plane (#826). Unfortunately, the Commanding Officer still refused to have the engines changed and the next crew who flew this aircraft (#716) were killed when they crashed because of engine failure. After this the charges against Lt. Pugmire were dropped.

It seems that we were called to several meetings with our Commanding Officer--more than we had ever had at our regular B-29 Base at Chakulia. This may have been his way of letting us know how concerned he was for our welfare, but if so, he messed it up every time. When questions or complaints were raised about the overloaded planes, the non-salvoable bomb-bay tanks, the lack of adequate maintenance, etc., the meeting usually wound up with him really losing his cool, chewing out the flight crews and offering additional threats of court-martial.

But by far my best remembered incident of the C-109 experience concerns our last trip in aircraft #826. This was the plane we were assigned after I had found the gas leak and managed to ground #716, the plane with the overstressed engines. We had taken off rather late after the change in assigned aircraft and had had a rather uneventful flight to our advance base, A-1 (Hsinching) in China. We arrived late in the afternoon. The rest of the crew left for the barracks area (chow time was near) while I stayed with the plane to get the gasoline off-loaded. Eventually, about dusk, I got the plane moved to near one of the large gasoline storage tanks.

About that time an air raid alert was sounded. The Forward Echelon Detachment History describes the actual raid as follows: "On 26 October 1944, this field and A-3 and A-7 were bombed. Here we were under attack from South to North from 1500 - 2000 feet and one run from the West on the deck. Bombs dropped were of the 1/3 kilo anti-material and the 50 kilo HE types. At this field one C-46, one P-47, one C-109, one C-87 and one C-67 were destroyed and one C-109 and one C-87 damaged. One enlisted man from the Air Transport Command was slightly injured together with a Chinese soldier. Small holes were caused in the East taxiway and South end of the runway and a small ammunition dump was destroyed."

Being isolated down on the field area, I had a front row seat to this whole performance. There as a ditch perhaps 50 to 100 yards from the aircraft and during the first pass when they bombed the runway area, this seemed like a reasonable position from which to observe the proceedings. After the second pass, with fires now burning, and the large gasoline storage tank very close by, this position didn't seem to be quite as appealing. We had a number of Chinese guards on the base, and one of them was nearby. I decided to try and make friends with him, and he took me to their "Command Post" for the rest of the raid. This was a rather small but substantial shelter that had earthen walls two to three feet thick. It was crowded with Chinese soldiers. It was perhaps another hundred yards from the plane but fairly close to the gasoline storage tank. With fires burning at both ends of the runway there was enough light to allow the Japs a good shot at their final target--particularly since there was no airfield defense. And on the final bomb run their target was the gasoline storage tank. On this bomb run they came across the runway at a very low altitude crossing over our plane and the gasoline storage tank. They released both fragmentation and high explosive bombs (probably about 300 pounders). The fragmentation bombs exploded all around the area, but the high explosive bomb or bombs fell short of the gasoline storage tank. However, there was a good-sized crater between our plane and the gas tank. I was glad for the relative safety of the thick-walled "Command Post" because at least one of the 300 pounders had hit very close by. This third bomb run marked the end of the air raid and an all-clear sounded soon thereafter.

By now the Chinese and I were good old long-time friends. Leaving them with many "Ding Hao's" I went back to the plane. As I approached it I heard something dripping. Fortunately it was deicing fluid and not something flammable. In the dark and with only a small flashlight I could not really assess the rest of the damage. I found some K-rations on the plane and ate them for supper, now feeling very much abandoned by my crew. As it was getting late and I was a long way from other people, I just decided to sleep there in the plane that night.

When I awoke shortly after dawn the next morning, I was surprised to see daylight streaming in at me from all directions. The back end of the plane had been riddled by the fragmentation bombs. I got out the back hatch of the plane and was surrounded by many of these small bombs which had not gone off along with thousands of fragments from those that had exploded. I counted 611 holes in the fuselage from the waist windows back. In addition the tail surfaces had been very heavily damaged and would have to be replaced. The damage to the forward part of the plane was less severe.

Within an hour or so some of the armament people came by to collect and defuse these little fragmentation bombs. Eventually the rest of the crew showed up and were surprised to see what had happened and to learn that I had spent the night in the plane. It was certain that we were not going to go back to India that day.

In fact we stayed in China about ten days. The repairs to the plane required much more equipment and parts than we had available so we did not accomplish much. However, while we were there we got the good news that we had been transferred out of the C-109 Provisional Unit and back to our B-29 Combat Squadron. We rode back to Chakulia as passengers on a B-29. Most of our belongings were returned to us later. We never had any desire to return to Kalaikunda.

From Harry Changnon's Diaries: At KK we thought that their price of 50¢ per meal was way too high even though it was better food than we had at Chakulia. Our morale is low. We are upset and nervous about being assigned to the Tanker Group. Are we going to be here until we are killed? Are we out of the main B-29 program? When will we ever get into actual combat? We hear the 40th and other Groups in the Wing are shuffling men around in a new reorganization.

Kalaikunda is a mess! Tent City, with big open barracks and hangar areas. Dust! Heat! The enlisted men are working on the line in "production line maintenance," a big departure from our normal crew chief/mechanics assignments. We want to know and trust the individuals who are looking after each plane as though it is theirs. Our lives are on them.

Ben Williams of the 468th was flying with Bob Braley's crew on September 20th. They were out on the end of the runway at 05:00 behind Captain Willard "Willie" Gerkin's plane. They watched Gerkin go down the runway and take off in the darkness ahead and over the trees at the end of the runway. They saw his running lights fall off to the right and then flames come from the crash of the C-109. Later they learned that two men were rescued although badly burned. Three men were killed because one of the engines had faltered.

It took courage to push on down the runway knowing that they, too, weighed over 67,000 pounds in a plane that should have grossed at 50,000 pounds. Ben said that he stood between Braley and the copilot who was calling off the numbers on the airspeed indicator. When the copilot yelled, "End of runway," Braley called "Wheels up," and Williams pulled the gear lever. Almost at the same time they felt a jolt, but they were flying. Engines were running, and the instruments were reading satisfactorily.

As they climbed out on course towards China and over the lower ranges of the hills, they felt cool breezes coming in to relieve the Indian heat. Shortly after 06:00, daylight began to appear. The copilot looked over at the #3 engine and said, "Hey, I got branches on the nacelle over here." Braley said, "I got limbs over here on #2, too. Ben, go check the rest of the plane."

Williams soon found it was so breezy because air was rushing through a hole in the bottom front of the fuselage. The bomb bay doors had been stripped back as the metal had been ripped open. When he got to the rear, he could see that the stabilizers were damaged. When he reported this to Braley, they had a discussion about whether to go on to China with the much-needed gasoline or return to Kalaikunda. They knew there were no repairs available in China, so they came back to KK. Braley did not know how the plane might fly in making the landing so they came in "hot" at 160 mph with their still-heavy load. As they went down the runway, the tires all blew as brakes were applied, further damaging the ship.

Upon getting down from the plane, they found that five minutes after they had taken off, another C-109 could not gain air speed and ran off the end of the runway wiping out the landing gear when they crossed a ditch. Thus, in a few minutes that morning, three planes were lost.

Most crews know that the maps are not correct. Most Hump fliers get religion at times when they are in the clouds. When we do hit a nice day, we chart elevations of peaks and report this information in our log books and to the briefing officers. This day, after we left Ipin, we were on instruments, but we broke out into the clear at 5,000 feet over Pengshan. I almost had vertigo in the letdown in the soup. It was a weird feeling to be letting down on instruments, watching the needle, ball and airspeed, and keeping the simulator on the crosshairs when you don't really believe them. Your fanny tells you that you may be wrong. You even lean more and more into the turn or spiral. As a matter of fact, Pugmire, our pilot, and I got into quite an argument during the letdown. Our rate of climb showed we were dropping faster than wanted. Macer and the rest of the crew could only sweat it out, and their white knuckles show how tense they were.

At supper time, September 26, we had a 1-ball alert and then a 3-ball one just at dusk. We didn't have any bombs dropped on us at Pengshan. They flew right over us on their way to hit the 40th at A-1. By chance I had jumped into the same foxhole with Colonel Alfred Kalberer, CO of the 462nd. He gave us the straight poop about the C-109 project which cheered us up. He said that we will be returned to our original groups after we get a lot more gas put into storage in China for upcoming missions.

Friday, November 3, Jim DeCoster came up to China with Hank Lanzoni so he gave us lots of poop. We just found out that we had been transferred back into flying B-29s again. Chuck Thornsberry and Dave Clendenen gave us more information about new squadron activity. We can fly home as passengers in a B-29. We hated to fly over the Hump with no credit or not being in one of the pilot seats. We had to ride in the back which I hadn't done much. The tail gunner scared the devil out of me by firing his guns to clear them. I thought we were under attack as I glanced out the blister and saw oil all over the wing from the #2 engine. Then, the rest of the trip I worried that we were going to lose an engine, but those leaks were common. I just didn't usually see them.

We pulled into Chakulia on Sunday. Not much mail was waiting for us. Art Macer, Earl Rishell and I are now on Bob Winter's crew along with the enlisted men from Bob Moss' old crew. We spent the rest of the afternoon moving into our rooms and getting organized again.

Such was the end of the C-109 Project.



40th Bomb Group Association
517½ Ridge Road, Wilmette, IL 60091