

Virginians at War

WWII: China-Burma-India

Transcript

NARRATOR: Virginians have always stood at the crossroads of the fight for freedom. It is a battle in which we all reap the benefits.

WORLD WAR II: 1939-1945

NARRATOR: World War II was the defining event of the 20th Century. It involved 60 countries. Over 57 million people were killed. The nuclear age was launched, and the United States emerged as the world's most powerful nation.

World War II was fought in two major theaters of operation: the North African, Mid-Eastern, and European Theater, and to the Far East, the Asiatic-Pacific theater. The Asiatic-Pacific area was a tug-of-war between the United States and its allies, and Japan. There were two major fronts: the Pacific Island conflicts, and to the west, the China-Burma-India front. The objectives of the China-Burma-India, or CBI, effort were to: divert Japanese resources from the Pacific Islands conflict, keep China in the war, build supply lines to China, and open air bases for possible attack on Japan.

CHINA-BURMA-INDIA: C-B-I

NARRATOR: Often known as the forgotten war, some of World War II's most renowned lore came from the CBI: Merrill's Marauders, the Flying Tigers, the Bridge over the River Kwai, and Flying the Hump.

WADE: On December the 7th, 1941, some place called Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese. We couldn't believe it! Where's Pearl Harbor? What's this all about, you know? And then suddenly we realized that we were at war.

GOING TO WAR

WADE: Well we just felt the need to do what had to be done, that was all.

GUINN: Pearl Harbor was bombed, and then we were in the Army for the duration of the war.

HAYES: And after Pearl Harbor, everybody became chauvinistic. Very patriotic. They wanted to serve their country. And of course we, as nurses, wanted to serve the country.

JOINING UP

HAYES: So I volunteered. I was selected, and I became a Reserve officer for one week. The Army needed me so badly.

FLEMING: I was working in a defense plant, and of course, had a deferment. And if everybody had as much trouble getting in the service as I did, there would have been no war.

BOONE, J: The draft was supposed to have started October the 12th, 1940. And I knew my name might come up for the draft, and so I figured I would rather fly than walk, and so I joined the Army Air Corps.

CARTER: It was a wonderful time to be an American. It was great to be young. And we would not have wanted to be anywhere else except in uniform, at that time.

BASIC TRAINING

BOONE, H: Camp Carson was the training in the mountainous regions of the Rockies to let us know what it's all about. And that's where we got a great deal of our training for the type of warfare in Burma.

LEONARD: I took the test with the Captain who was in charge of the instructions. He said, "What do you want to do?" And I told him that I understood that a new airplane called the "B-29" was coming out, and I just wondered if I could get into that. And low and behold, when my orders were cut, I was sent to Lincoln, Nebraska for reassignment as a co-pilot in a B-29.

SHIPPING OUT

BOONE, J: I departed San Francisco on the magnificent Asiatic steam liner, the *Coolidge*. We went first class. We had liveried waiters. We had the finest food in the

world. We had only two meals a day because we had thousands of troops to feed, and so, the facilities would not allow three meals a day.

???: We went to Lincoln, Nebraska, spend the night. That was about a little over nine hour flight, and from there up to Gander. And we spent, weathered in up there for a couple of weeks. And finally, we got off and went into the Azores, and that was the first really trip we had over the water, and that was almost a 10-hour trip to hit a little island out in the Atlantic Ocean. And I found out my navigator was the best one in the world. We went down, like going across when we were in Cairo. We went out and flew one day there, and we didn't budge. We weren't allowed to budge. But we went real low, and went over the sphynx and the pyramids and got a real, close-up look at them.

OVER THERE

HAYES: Then we crossed over India, in a narrow-gauge railroad. 10 days, it took us. Then we went on the Brahmaputra River, and from there with trains, and then trucks. And finally, we got 1,000 miles above Calcutta.

CARTER: We were warned about various things, and we were warned about the krait. The krait is a little snake, part of the cobra family. It's so deadly that if you are bitten by a krait – let's say the krait strikes at your ankle, or whatever – that you will be dead before you hit the ground.

GUINN: Several months there, maybe four months in, I had hepatitis, so I had to be rushed to the hospital. Turned yellow, and couldn't eat, and all this. So I stayed in the hospital almost a month there.

WADE: It's just hard for a Richmond boy, who'd never been much further side than the state of Virginia, let alone the other side of the country, to see the conditions that prevailed in India at that time. We were there when Merrill's Marauders came back from Myitkyina, and we saw the condition of those people, my friend George Rose was one of them. They really had a rough time. Dysentery, malaria, the whole bit. But this was before we ever ran into the Jap's.

AT THE FRONT

RECORDING: Stilwell said the last word on the campaign.

STILWELL, RECORDING: We got run out of Burma, and it's humiliating as hell. I think we ought to find out what caused it, go back, and re-take the place.

PARRISH: I was sent over to India to Fly the Hump between India and China. So I spent the next year over there doing that job. We were supplying the first Flying Tigers, because the only way they had of getting all their needs and ammunition and bombs, gasoline, food, was to fly it in, because the Japanese had surrounded China. And they were able to get it in my truck, but the Japanese then cut the Ledo Road and Burma Road. So the only thing left was to fly it in. And we lost an average of three airplanes every day.

HAYES: We were at the beginning of the Ledo Road. And the Ledo Road, as you may well know, was the road that was being built by General Stilwell and his troops from India through Burma to China, so that would make a road for us to get to the Japanese.

ROSE: And what we'd do, we'd harass them as much as we could – ambush them, and just keep... stir it up! Hit them and then disappear. Hit 'em, and ambush 'em again, see. And that's what they done all the way down the road. Well I said, I made up my mind, "They may kill me, but I'm gonna be the most expensive damn G.I. they ever killed, 'cause I'm gonna take as many of 'em with me as I could!" And I did, too!

????: So we made the third run, and we got about two thirds of the way down the bomb run, and things got real rough because the planes started bouncing and the flak was heavy, and they were right at our level and they had us zeroed in. I just looked out, and my number two man was sitting in there, right where he was supposed to be, and we felt this concussion and the shaking of the airplane, and I glanced over, leaned up and glanced over in the front of my co-pilot and there was nothing but a big, black cloud of smoke where my number two man had been. I don't know whether they got him right directly in the bomb bay or what. We were on the bomb run and they took him out completely. Lost the whole crew, airplane and everything. But, this was life. This is the way you lived. And, as I told my wife years later, I said, other than being married to her – and I said, no offense meant – but the greatest time of my life was when I was flying combat. I enjoyed it.

CONOLY: You know, you always have one wise guy that says, "I wanna see some action. I've been getting ready for it." 'Cause then, the crewman says, "The bomber's at six minutes away, six inches right out there. Go get in one, fast! Six minutes," they said to us. 65 bombers and 200 fighters.

CARTER: I was on duty the night we decoded a message which told us about the dropping of the atomic bomb.

END OF THE WAR

LEONARD: One of the fellas at the table says, "Did you hear about what happened today?" I said, "No. What are you talking about?" He said, "We dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. But it's supposed to have killed 100,000 people." I said, "Well, in that case, this war's gonna be over in less than 30 days, I believe." And it was.

???: But I went into service when I was 18 years old. I was commissioned when I was 19, I saw on a B-24 when I was 19. And I was flying combat, leading, squadron of the group at the age of 20. War was over before I reached 22 years old, and I was home.

BOONE, J: But, you know, when something happens like that and you anticipate it so long, you really don't know how to take it. It's like one part of your life has quit. And then you say, "Well, now what?"

GOING HOME

PARRISH: We came into Miami, Florida. That's where we were supposed to deliver the airplane, and the first thing we wanted was milk. We hadn't seen milk in over a year, and I think we almost made ourselves sick drinking milk.

BOONE, H: Well, I got home on the ninth day of January of '45. The family had left all of the decorations for Christmas and the Christmas trees, and it was great.

FLEMING: I called my fiancée here in Richmond, and she was at a friend's house. Of course, it was wintertime then, and her friend told me, "After you called, we had to put her on the porch to cool off!" Ah, we had a wonderful life together, though.

WHY WE FOUGHT

GUINN: This country was saved, you know, from the Nazis and the Japanese. We wouldn't be what we are today. A lot of people gave their lives and suffered, lots of them, so we can enjoy what we're enjoying today: prosperity, good food, a home to live in. And we should never, never forget that.

BOONE, J: Really, that's what it's all about. Being reasonable, sensible, and not listen to some fanatic. Take it with a grain of salt, use your own judgement. Don't follow them, follow your own heart.

???? This voice came up, and he says, "Gentlemen, I don't mean to interrupt you." He says, "I have really learned a whole lot about World War II." And went on and he was very nice, and he says, "I don't know how to thank you." He says, "I really don't." He says, "I don't know how to thank you." And I just said, I grabbed him and I said, "Young fella, you just did. It's the greatest thanks we could have. You said thank you."

*Between 1942 and 1945 thousands of Americans died in the China-Burma-India Theater.
They will always be remembered.*

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