

## **Buster Hart's Photographic Album**

Floyd "Buster" Hart, a Colebrook man who served in the US Army in India and China during WWII, kept a photographic diary while building the Ledo Road. This road carried supplies from India to the beleaguered Chinese in south China who had been cut off by the invading Japanese forces. It is considered to be one of the most difficult engineering undertakings ever attempted; not only did the men wrestle with the terrain of the southeastern Himalayas, they fought almost constant skirmishes with the Japanese forces.

Louis Jasmin, one of Buster's nephews, had been given several items that the Jasmin and Hart families did not want to see leave Colebrook, so they were held back from the auction after Buster's death. One such item was his photo album. This really and truly falls under the heading of "a historic treasure", not only are the photos clear and well focused, the subject matter covers not only the daily life of the soldiers, but the natives as well. There are typewritten explanations and asides on many pages, and all of the important scenes and individuals are identified. The following are Buster's comments, which make for interesting reading without their accompanying photos:

"These three pictures of Temples are not a good example of Indian architecture. The temples in the big cities are beautiful buildings, exquisitely carved and painted. They contain some fine sculptured images. Occidentals are permitted to enter, but must remove their shoes instead of their hats. Sometimes there are gems imbedded in the images, but there's no chance, Bud, they're guarded!"

### **Religions**

"Of the multitudes of religions practiced in India, the most common are Buddhist (Hinduism) and Mohammedan. Under the heading of Buddhism there are to be found many separate sects, each with its own peculiar customs and strange beliefs. Some require the devotee to submit to physical pain, others to allow their hair never to be cut. These practices are often to be observed, for instance; a Hindu can usually be identified by his queue. In former times their hair couldn't be cut because it is the handle by which they were to be lifted into heaven. Now-a-days however, the hair is cut, except for a few hairs at the crown of the head, so they still have the handle, but the breeding place of the plague-carrying lice is gone."

"A true Hindu will eat no flesh, other than fish, under no conditions. It is a teaching of theirs that when a person dies, he is reincarnated into some other form of animal life, and it is for this reason cows and other creatures are sacred and may not be killed. Water also is sacred, and although an Indian will walk about without clothing unabashed, he will never indulge in his daily bath without his "longi" about his loins. Except for the lower caste, married Hindu women are not given the privilege to appear in public as American women are. They seldom have a profession as a nurse or a chorus girl or other trades because they are frowned on as a form of prostitution. They do not wear a perdah as the Mohammedan women, but they seldom leave the home except on holidays or to occasionally do a little marketing. Polygamy is permitted and practiced, limited only to the ability of the man to provide. It is the custom for the parents of the children to make the contracts for their marriage when the girl is ten or twelve years old,

often as young as six. The man or his parents must pay the girl's parents a dowry for her, and a family's property is often figured by the number of eligible good looking daughters it has. Love does not enter into the deal. I am unfamiliar with the actual ceremony, except that it is an occasion for singing and dancing accompanied by the beating of the native drum. (I have been kept awake a number of times by this super silly noise.)

I cannot say too much about the Mohammedan religion, of which there are eighty million followers in India. The average Moslem considers himself far above any Hindu. He will eat any flesh but pork, but prefers goat meat to any other. He also practices polygamy, but his wives cannot appear in public except with her vail, or perdu on, the theory being that no other man shall look upon her face, and thereby fall in love with her. There are no Mohammedan coolies or laborers, as they consider themselves above that level. They are mostly merchants or businessmen."

[Note: The Indian subcontinent broke apart politically along religious lines in 1947. Initially there were three parts: West Pakistan, East Pakistan (both Moslem) and India. The separation of the two Pakistans proved to be too great an obstacle, and East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971.]

"There are other religions that still do not cut their hair or beard; some that thrust skewers through their tongues and place sharp hooks in the backs of the faithful. By which they are suspended from a sort of maypole, and swung around by the frenzied crowd of spectators.

There are the Sikhs: tall, fierce looking fellows, who follow the teachings of their ten great teachers. Almost all the taxi drivers in Calcutta belong to this sect. There are also the Parsees, Gurkhas and myriads of others, even the headhunting Nagas, the numbers of which are small, and their customs are little known to the outside world, and likewise by me."

On a page containing five photos, one with two young women standing in front of an ornate building, one with a family of three with the father holding a little boy, one of an elderly man with a white mustache and goatee, and two showing women in sarongs posing with GI's. Buster's comments are:

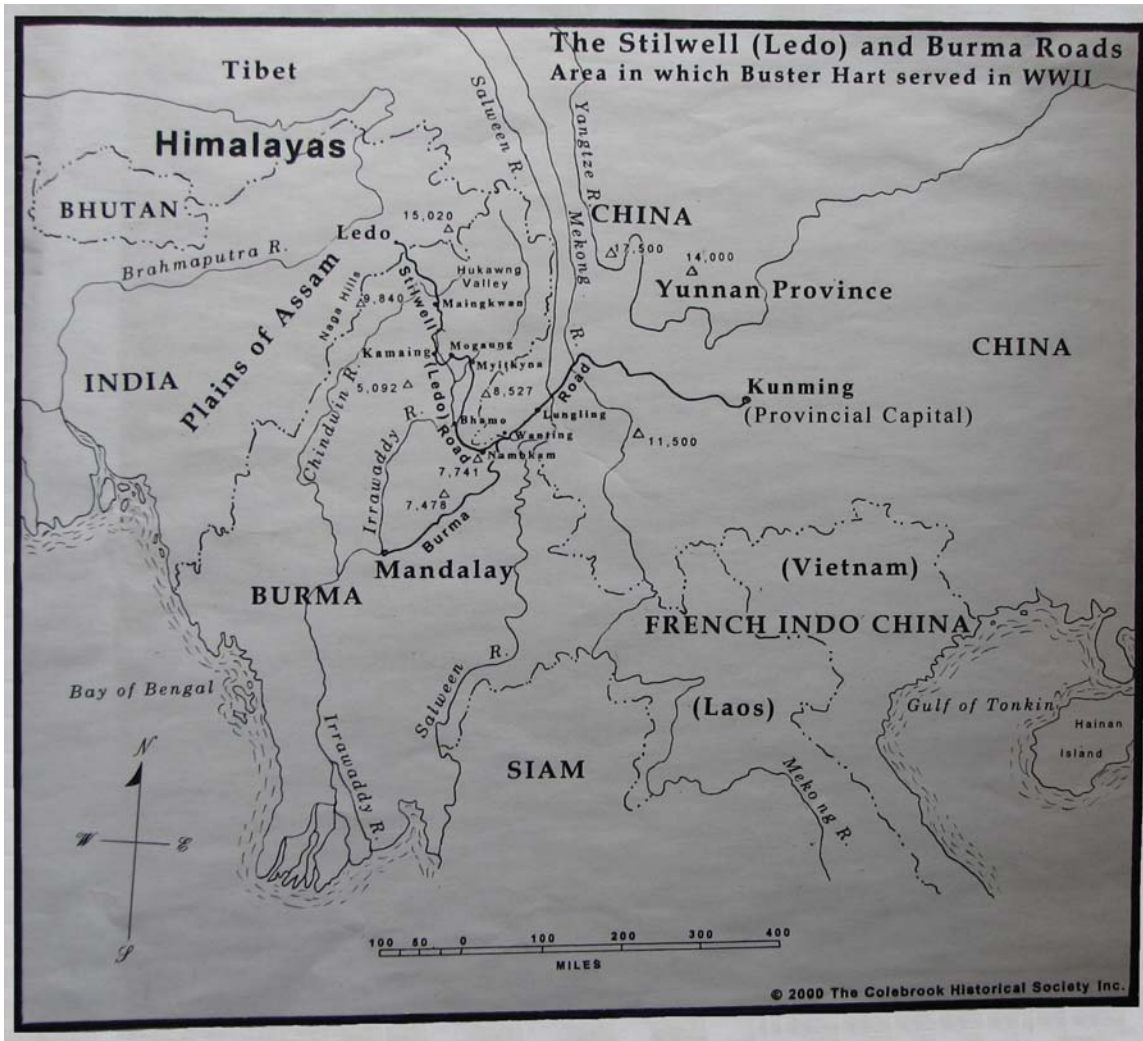
"Here we have a few pictures of the people. First a couple of the village beauties, ain't they cute? Then in the center there is Sahib, Memsahib and little chiecho. (Husband, wife and child to you.) I don't know the distinguished gentleman in the corner. Then these two on either side; well, I'll leave you to guess about them, because it isn't ladylike to pose with a stranger, and it wouldn't be gentlemanly for me to tell you.

This article will conclude next week, but the album can be seen at the Colebrook Historical Soc. Saturdays and Sundays from 2:00 – 4:00 PM.

**Historic Bytes**  
Bob Grigg

## The Ledo Road Photo Album, Conclusion

Last week we were perusing a photographic album compiled by Colebrook resident Floyd “Buster” Hart during WWII as he helped build the Ledo Road through the foothills of the Himalayas. The black and white photos are of excellent quality and content. His words are well written and reveal the inner nature of this witty and observant man.



Captions for the photos show an understanding of the people and the times, sprinkled with a liberal amount of humor. American military personnel have always been known for their sense of humor, regardless of the seriousness of the situation. It has been postulated that many of our successes are due to this trait.

Some of Buster's captions: Three little boys, about three; one naked, two with shorts. In the background a thatched house and a squatting man. "Here are three little Indians, or is there? Papa is in the back doing what white ladies sit down to do. Humm". A woman is standing before a doorway giving a very obvious "come hither" look. Caption: "Tee hee, bet you don't say that to all the girls; drop in and see me." Two GI's surrounded by twelve boys – "No, they aren't theirs, just some of the local kids." A

thatched roof held up by poles – “Home sweet home in the country, a real basha hut.” A line of metal roofs with assorted items suspended from poles – “Ledo, Assam. The bazaar, or local super market.”

A rickshaw rigged up to a bicycle – “The very latest in modern transportation.” A street scene showing a young man with a King Cobra - the snake is holding his head erect about sixteen inches above the dust and dirt, poised to strike – “A lesson in how to earn an easy living and die young; this baby means business!”

Eight pictures on a page with text in the center: “These are some pictures that show the methods the Indians use in earning their living.” “Some Indian laborers digging dirt and scraping it into baskets, with the native grub hoe, which they carry on their heads, to make a railroad fill. Notice the neat excavation, dug so the amount of earth, removed, can be easily measured”. Two pictures of a sawmill show a large log held about five feet off the ground by a wooden frame being sawn by two men; one on the ground, the other standing atop the log. “The Indian lumberman pull these saws ten or twelve hours a day for about thirty cents of our money, and this is cheap enough to effectively compete with modern methods. This was taken in Bengal.” [This setup, used around here during colonial times, was called a “pit saw”]

A scene along a river: “Much commerce is carried on with boats like these, which the Indian propels with a pole, close to the bank. Bengal.” [They look somewhat like long, sharp-pointed canoes.] “This is a herd of water buffalo, the local beast of burden, Bengal.”

A photo of a dirt road lined with palm trees and thatched houses has this caption: “Scene along the famous cross country parkway that runs between Calcutta and Khulna, one hundred miles away, on another mouth of the Ganges River, in Bengal. This is a very old road.”

A picture with the lower half showing thick jungle, the top half is white. “This was supposed to be a view of the Naga Hills, but instead it is a picture that gives one a good idea of the Assamese jungle. The hills are hidden behind a monsoon cloud. Mile 25, Ledo Road.” “This is a snapshot of three Kachins. These people live in north Burma, and although they furnished the famous Kachin Rangers for [Gen.] Wingate, that raised hell behind the Japanese in Burma, they are none the less a primitive race, that still worships insects and hold bloody animal sacrifices each year. Taken at Myitkynia, Burma.” Three elephants with boys sitting on their necks, walking along the railroad tracks has this caption: “Nope, they are not part of a circus. These are work elephants returning from work, along a railroad in Assam. They have probably been hauling logs to the siding and piling them up. In the monsoon mud, one of these critters will often pull a larger log than a caterpillar tractor can.”

A page containing 15 photos has this caption: “Winsted men in the Ledo area Sept. 1945: Tommy O’Mera, Joe Bardino, Joe Perlack, Red Navin, Aldo Godenzi, Frankie Thomas and Yours Truly [Floyd “Buster” Hart]”

Surrounded by pictures of GI’s and two showing their mascot, a little brown monkey named “Jig” is this explanation:

### **The Ten-O-Seventh Engineers**

The 1007<sup>th</sup> special service battalion was activated at Camp Claiborne Louisiana in February 1943, as the 393 S. S. Regiment, this battalion being the first battalion of that regiment. It was shipped to India, leaving Norfolk Virginia on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944, and

arrived at Bombay on April 28<sup>th</sup>, still a part of the 393<sup>rd</sup>. It was at Ledo, Assam when it was reactivated as the 1007<sup>th</sup>, and was known as such until it was demobilized at Camp Kilmer, N.J. January 10, 1946. The 1007<sup>th</sup> was stationed at Camp Claiborne throughout its training period, and first saw service in flood areas along the Arkansas River during the summer of 1943.

Most of the men in company "B" arrived at Claiborne about March 12<sup>th</sup>, and came mainly from New England, Florida and the Gulf States. During the time of its service, many of these men were replaced, and at the time it was demobilized, there were men from almost every state. Most of the men in these snapshots were with the outfit the whole period of service, and were of the "motor pool crowd".

All told, there are 33½ pages of photos and commentary documenting the construction of the Ledo Road, also known as "Stillwell Road", after their commanding general, "Vinegar Joe" Stillwell. It is a very valuable historical document, not just for our corner of the world, but as a record of one of the most dramatic events of the war against Japan.

The album will be displayed at the Colebrook Historical Society, along with Buster's uniform and maps showing the area of operations.

**Historic Bytes**  
Bob Grigg