

## Flying The Hump, Conclusion

For the past two weeks we have been reproducing a letter sent from India in 1945, written by Colebrook native Wyllys W. Smith in which he recounts an adventure he had when his plane went down over the foothills of the Himalayas, and his subsequent rescue by native tribesmen. Here is the conclusion:

“These mountain natives are called Nagas, and appear to be a mixture of Indian and Chinese, looking more Oriental, but speaking a language more Indian than Chinese, as near as I could tell. They’re very friendly to the lost Hump pilots – as you’ve seen – give you the best they have to offer – not much, but a godsend, all the same. Their bamboo homes are above ground; their cows, pigs, chickens etc., living beneath, and house more women, children and men than you’d think possible. Yet one of their three rooms was donated entirely to me, and they all crowded into the other two – the chief’s house, by the way. They’re pretty dirty, though, as well as they are dirty, and wear a tattered shirt, a loin cloth, and usually a rag wound about the top of their heads. The women wear an old cloth for a skirt, nothing else, and the little fellas wear their smartest birthday suits! They’re as interested as interesting, paying close attention to your movements and actions and habits, and to everything you attempt to explain to them. I’ll never forget them, nor forget how much I appreciate them, for they’re really life savers.

When the army party got there, rescue planes came and dropped food and supplies – enough for an army – and talking to one via the walkie-talkie, I learned with much relief that the rest of the crew was okay, their positions spotted and quite a distance from mine. I never saw either of them until getting back to my home base, a couple of days later, after trudging some 20 vertical, jungly miles back to civilization. I was very happy to be alive and okay – and so lucky – and after a few days rest, I was back to normal, a sadder but wiser fellow, and also one lighter by about 10 pounds!

That seems to just about cover it, in a rough sort of way, except for the few things I learned. One, important here, is that there’s little to really fear of the jungle itself, for, reasonably equipped, you’re okay with the natives so friendly, partially due to a generous reward from the government and the rest to their natural decency. Another thing is that, contrary to what you hear, you don’t relive your life, and suddenly changes from atheist to devout believer in what you figure are your last few seconds on earth. You’re too concerned with your immediate present and future for the former, and as to the latter, well, I never swore so long and so completely in my life. I cussed the whole way, as mad as I was scared, with what breath I had left.

‘Hump-happy Smith’

P.S. My best to you and all the folks, and you’ve proof now that I still can’t write.”

Well, Winter, I beg to differ with you; you expressed yourself admirably, and this would be a richer culture if more accounts could be written by servicemen and travelers such as Winter Smith wrote from the jungles of South Asia during WWII.

Lt. Smith survived the war and returned home, but tragically he was not able to shake the demons of war. We have a name for this sort of disability now, but in the days after the Second World War, this war-inflicted illness was not recognized, and the returnees were on their own to cope with the return to civilian life while still living and reliving the horrors that war had burdened them with. About one year after his return, Wyllys Winter Smith went into his kitchen, turned on the gas to the oven and breathed his last.