

## Flying The Hump, Part II

Last week we left Lt. Smith hanging by his parachute from a tree in the foothills of the Himalayas. His narrative resumes:

“The way my ‘chute was tangled and me being a bit weak and shaky, I couldn’t budge, and a leg and arm were asleep and hurting a little just for good measure. Maybe a half hour later I got strength enough to extricate myself, and climb up atop the chute, and stand between the riser straps, feeling thankful I was still alive and relatively unharmed.

Sometime the next century dawn broke, and it was my turn to jump out of my skin, for I was hanging 100 feet above the ground, a good 30 feet from the tree trunk, with nothing but thin rotten branches between me and it – the tallest tree for miles around! And on the side of the steepest mountain I’d ever seen, covered, of course, with that blasted jungle.

Needless to say, about that time I was about the saddest character I’d ever met, and none too sure I was so lucky at still being alive at that. As it had been a night flight, I hadn’t slept the day before, I had no smokes, no water – nothing but a rotten chocolate bar from my ‘chute’s jungle-pack – and I was tired, thirsty, scared and sleepy, unable to sit down the way my ‘chute was tangled. I did have my pistol and belt, so I tied myself to the riser straps I was standing between, to keep me from tumbling 100 feet to the jungle ledge beneath, when I inevitably nodded off to sleep every few minutes. I rolled up some paper to have something – anything – to smoke, though I was already so dry I could hardly smack my lips, and rough and raw as the smoke was, it tasted good, but I really kicked myself for leaving my cigarettes in the plane, and not carrying a spare pack in another pocket. Perhaps it wouldn’t have mattered, for I dropped the only I had anyway, to make, along with thirst and exhaustion, things complete!

I waited a decade, shifting mechanically from one foot to the other, for the rescue planes I knew would eventually be out to spot the missing plane and crew – they hoped. And I hoped too, believe you me! About 9 that morning they did, and about 1 that afternoon a group of the most beautiful natives I shall ever see (actually they’d scare Boris Karloff) got to me, and set to work on a task that appeared absolutely hopeless, the position I was in. For four hours I watched them build a bamboo lattice work up the tree trunk, and when reaching my level, became as much at a loss as I was as to how to span the 30 feet of space between us, there being nothing but rotten, punky branches above and around me, and 100 feet of empty space below us! At just about the same time, I guess, we had the wild idea we followed, the only possible answer to the predicament.

Up the tree they snaked a 40 foot green bamboo pole, about three-quarters inches through, strong as steel, and with a hook made with small sticks of bamboo lashed together with bamboo strips, in the strong way only they can do. Try tying knots that won’t slip with thin strips of bamboo, and you’ll know what I mean. It’s nearly impossible. Well, somehow, from the precarious spot he was standing on, one man reached that heavy, green 40 foot bamboo pole to me, hook first, and I grabbed it with one hand, hanging on for dear life to my swinging ‘chute with the other, hooked it to my ‘chute’s harness and pack, and lashed it as fast as I could with bamboo strips and vines they slid down the pole to me. They made their end fast to their bamboo work up the tree trunk, and I waited and rested out there, shaking and out of breath, until they cut another one and got it up the tree, and I lashed my end to the largest of the rotten branches just

above me to my right. This was my hand rail for the bamboo bridge from my 'chute to the tree itself! I took off my shoes and socks, and cat-walked over the swaying one rail bridge, balancing myself with my right hand with the hand rail above me, and somehow made it over that awful drop below me, for about 30 feet, slightly uphill, to the tree trunk. The natives and I breathed not a bit for that interval, and there was an awfully big sigh of relief when I finally got to where I could sit safely down and stop shaking just a little.

It was my first seat in 15 hours of plain misery. Eventually, I climbed down their bamboo work to good old terra firma, flopped flat on my back and rested. One native rounded up my shoes for me, and along with a clean pair of heavy wool socks from my jungle pack, I pulled them on, getting ready for the long, tough hike to somewhere, I knew not where.

While up in the tree, I'd filled all my pockets with everything in the 'chute's jungle kit I possibly could. What little I wouldn't need I gave to the natives to play with, keeping only a pair of gloves, a cap and first-aid stuff I knew I needed. With two natives with long jungle knives ahead of me, they cut our way straight up the mountain, the jungle floor wet and slippery with rotten leaves, mud and vines. Staggering to the top, we hit a trail they knew was there, and started for their village. It was a decent trail, but was a nightmare of straight and slippery ups and downs, and I'd exhaustedly stagger 100 yards, sit and rest, then start again. I still had had no water, and it was getting rough to breath, but I stumbled upon a big, bowl-shaped jungle leaf, full of fresh rain water – the sweetest water I know I'll ever taste – and I even licked the leaf! That went on and on for two and a half hours before we finally reached their village, and I never expected to make the last 100 yards under my own power – neither did they, I guess, but I made the porch of their largest bamboo hut, and spread-eagled on the floor, completely done in. They boiled me a pot – a dirty pot! – of the strongest tea imaginable, and down the grateful hatch it went, and after a native cigarette, I rolled over and died until the army rescue party woke me there the next morning. Just before they got there, the natives had put on another pot of that rugged tea, and placed a little pile of cigarettes by my head, ready and waiting for me soon's I woke up. I gratefully used them all, too! I gave them everything I had, after painting my little cuts and scratches with iodine, and swallowing salt tablets, atabrine (malaria) pills. They swallowed the remaining ones! We talked by signs and grunts, as I explained the stuff I'd given them. I kept the .45 automatic, for I had to. I'd used it for signaling and to keep away a couple of skunk-like looking animals that had wandered about the tree I was hanging in. They wouldn't have gotten to me, however, for they couldn't walk on air either. The natives also enjoyed the fireworks of the little flair I had when I set it off for their benefit, on the little square of hard dirt – their “stove” – in the center of the floor of the room I'd slept in! My bed was a bamboo mat with a half-log for a pillow, but it'd seemed like a feather bed to me.”

We will finish with Lt. Winter Smith's story next week.