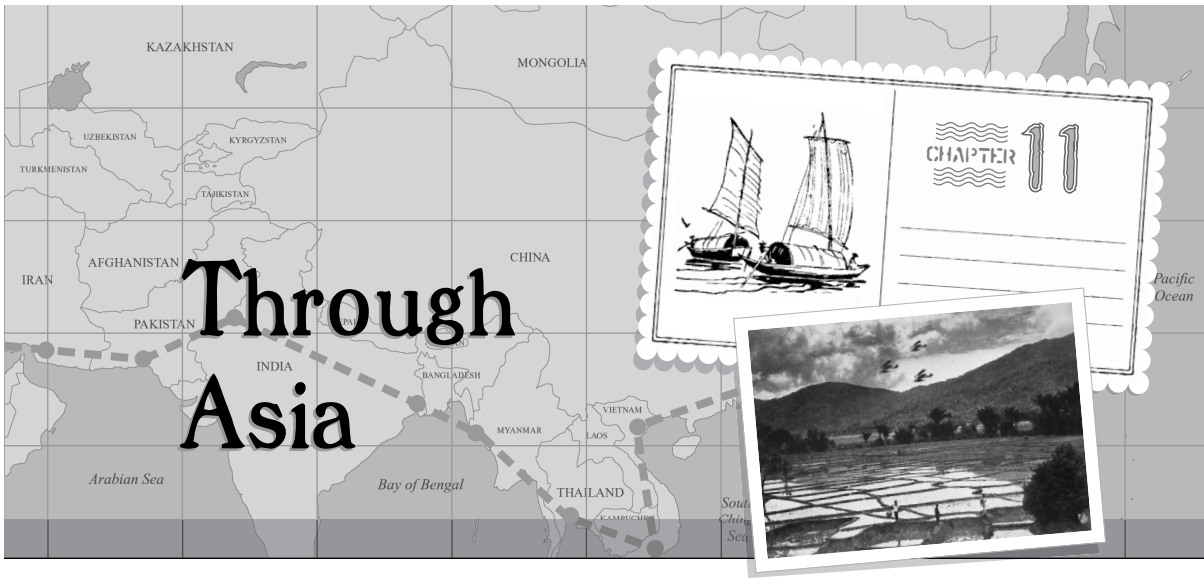

Through Asia

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 1924
2:00 P.M.
OVER INDOCHINA

So far so good. Only one more hour and they would be through the jungle and safely over the shoreline prior to landing at Tourane. There they would refuel and continue on to Saigon where a large cache of spare parts and naval assistance awaited them.

They had started out that morning just before dawn when the quiet of the Haiphong River exploded into a cacophony of sound as each of the three cruisers started their engines. The bellowing exhaust stacks split the air with the noise of a thousand horses and pushed aside the mists rising from the still waters. Again and again each cruiser's engine strained in vain to separate the pontoons from the water's surface but the flat water sucked them relentlessly down.

Wade continued one of his high-speed runs at fifty-five miles per hour, missing junks and sampans by only a few feet. Twelve miles downriver he crossed the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin. The confluence of the two currents created the ripples necessary to release the river's grip on the pontoons and the *Boston* rose into the air. Wade flew back and waved triumphantly at his hapless companions who soon followed his example with similarly gratifying results. They had lost three hours in the frustrating takeoff attempts but at last they were airborne.

To reach Saigon that day, they would need to make up time. They could do that only by taking a shortcut over the jungle where a safe landing with pontoons would be almost impossible. It would be a calculated risk.

Lowell checked his instruments. All indications were normal. The engine sounded sweet and reassuring. He pointed toward the jungle. Leigh Wade on his right wing nodded his assent. Erik Nelson on his left did the same. Lowell left the safety of the shoreline and turned westward toward the thick jungle, climbing to give himself and the others a cushion of time if disaster should befall them.

Without power, the heavily laden cruisers encumbered with the drag of pontoons, flying wires, struts, propellers, and multiple wings had a glide ratio not unlike that of a brick. To sustain the airspeed required for controlled flight without power the airplane's nose would have to be pushed steeply down toward the ground. The descent rate would vary from two thousand five hundred to three thousand feet per minute depending on the fuel load carried. The airplane would fall toward the earth half a mile within each minute.

In the heat of the noon sun their climb rate slowed and finally stopped. Just a few knots above stall speed he dared not attempt to climb any higher. The airplane could suddenly stall, fall off on one wing, and go into a spin. This was as high as he could go. Lowell lowered the nose and checked his altimeter. They were at six thousand feet. If an engine quit, they would have less than two minutes to locate a landing site, and glide to it before impact.

For the last week the trip had gone well. They had departed Shanghai on June 7 as planned and averted disaster weaving between the countless junks and sampans that seemed intent on colliding with them. They had repeated the hazardous act successfully again the next day in the harbor at Amoy with heroic efforts by the crew of the motor launch from the U.S. destroyer *Preble* which had been required to sink several intrusive sampans to give the cruisers enough room to maneuver for take-off.

They had survived the typhoon that blocked their entrance to Hong Kong harbor and, with the help of heliographs and flares fired

from the U.S. destroyer *John Paul Jones*, navigated through its blinding fog, wind, and heavy rain to locate their moorings and land safely. They had repaired the damage done to all three airplanes—replacing propellers and pontoons with the help of the good folks of Standard Oil Company.

Protected by the U.S. Navy's big guns, they had gotten through the maze of China's lawless fiefdoms whose pirates and warlords extracted tribute from all hapless travelers. Their competitors were also going full speed ahead.

At Haiphong the French had boasted of D'Oisy's arrival at Hiroshima, Japan, the day before in the plane loaned to him by the Chinese. They also learned of the Portuguese surviving their crash landing in India and continuing on to Rangoon, Burma in a new plane given to them by the British Royal Air Force. McLaren's replacement airplane would be delivered to him at Akyab by the U.S. Navy within a day or two and he too would be continuing his world flight shortly.

With competitive flights from France, England, and Portugal threatening to overtake them and new flights from Italy, Argentina, and Spain poised to start, the American crew excused themselves from the welcoming ceremonies at Haiphong in French Indo-China in favor of completing refueling and servicing chores, a good night's sleep, and an early start the next morning.

The French Governor-General had the chore of explaining to his elegantly clad guests the mystifying preference of Americans for mechanical devices over the charms of lovely ladies with open arms and their gourmet dinner waiting uneaten for them at their formal welcome reception and gala ball.

From the cockpits the hours passed slowly and the Libertys continued to sing their song of power. Only one more hour to go. They were starting to relax at last. From the rear cockpit of the *Chicago*, Les flashed a "thumbs-up" and a big grin at the others flying just behind his wings. They answered with smiles holding their thumbs high. Soon they would be over the safety of the shoreline.

Sitting in front, Lowell saw it first. It started as a few drops of moisture on the windshield. Lowell looked up. The blueness of the

sky precluded any moisture coming from the heavens. *It's just a few drops, nothing to worry about . . . yet!* thought Lowell. He checked his watch. Fifty-two minutes to go. *Surely we can make that*, he thought.

Les noticed the drops on his windshield also. He stood up and reached over the low windshield to tap Lowell's shoulder. Lowell nodded to indicate to Les that he'd already seen it. Forty-eight minutes to go. The leak increased. The water temperature started climbing. Lowell turned the wheel from side to side signaling Les to take control of the *Chicago.* Lowell stood and stretched himself over the top of the windshield to try and see where the water was coming from. He couldn't tell. He leaned all the way out the right side of the cockpit and then to the left. He still couldn't tell. The boiling water droplets stung his face and moistened his helmet.

Sitting down again, Lowell checked his watch. 2:16 P.M. Forty-four minutes to go. The water was now streaming off the windshield. The temperature gauge had pegged in the red zone. The oil pressure was falling. Dark streaks of oil stained the cowling, windshield, and fuselage. Erik and Leigh watched the drama unfolding apprehensively. They knew only too well what the oil streaks meant.

Lowell throttled the engine back and signaled the others he was slowing. Perhaps he could coax it to continue under reduced power. Erik and Leigh slowed also to match his speed. 2:20 P.M. A rhythmic vibration shook the *Chicago.* From deep within the cowling the banging of metal against metal could be clearly heard.

2:22 P.M. A loud explosion from the engine compartment, the sudden appearance of a jagged hole in the cowling, and a large reduction in power told the story. A cylinder had exploded, throwing its connecting rod through the sheet metal. The engine still ran but with gallons of oil streaming out through the hole in the crankcase, Lowell knew the *Chicago* was doomed. Desperately he scanned the tops of the trees for someplace to land. Luck was smiling at him. Four miles ahead lay a lagoon fed by a large stream. Les Arnold banked the airplane and headed for it. Lowell adjusted the throttle to maintain minimum power and took the controls.

Lowell lowered the nose to maintain sixty miles per hour flying speed accepting a sink rate of one thousand feet per minute under partial power. They might just make it. At 2:28 Lowell skimmed over the tops of the palm trees slipping to lose the last fifty feet.

Relieved, he felt one pontoon touch the surface and gingerly set the other one down, maintaining a straight path using large rudder inputs. They were down.

While the airplane coasted to a stop, Lowell cut off the fuel and ignition switches. Les jumped from the rear cockpit with his fire extinguisher and worked his way forward on the lower wing toward the large hole in the cowl. He braced his back on the wing struts and held the fire extinguisher with both hands aimed and ready to trigger it at the first sign of fire. Their luck continued. Despite the popping, hissing, and wheezing of overheated engine parts, there was no sign of fire.

Over the tops of the trees Lowell spotted the other cruisers landing in a trail behind him. They didn't dare shut off their engines on landing but taxied over. Lowell pointed to the large hole in the cowling. Above the din of the idling Libertys Lowell indicated they were to go for help. A new engine was obviously needed. Jack and Hank passed the canteens of drinking water to Les, shouted some words of encouragement, and taxied to the end of the lagoon for takeoff. Within a few minutes the *Chicago* sat alone in the lagoon with few signs of human habitation.

For the first thirty minutes crocodiles, birds, and chattering monkeys were the only signs of life but Lowell and Les felt they were being watched by unseen eyes. This was confirmed when a dugout canoe with a single native paddled silently up to the side of the airplane. They had tied a mooring line onto a bamboo post sticking up from the mud bottom and this was apparently his fish trap. Berating them nonstop in some obscure dialect, the native attempted to release their mooring line from his fish trap. Lowell checked the wind and, after satisfying himself that he would be blown into deeper water toward the center of the lagoon, he released his mooring line and gestured for the native to help them drop their own sixty-pound anchor.

Seeing their companion had not met some dire fate, other dugout canoes paddled out from their hiding places on the lagoon and within a few minutes dozens of natives, clad only in skimpy breech-cloths were climbing onto the pontoons to get a better look at the huge flying monster that had dropped from the skies. Fortunately their feet were bare so no damage was done to the thin wooden floating hulls

but the imbalance threatened to capsize the cruiser and they were summarily shooed back onto their own conveyances.

After an hour of broiling in the hot sun, they saw another dugout being rowed toward them by a hollow-cheeked light-skinned man clad in white robes, sandals, and a soiled sun helmet. Their spirits soared with thoughts of rescue, water, a good meal, and a comfortable bed waiting for them somewhere in the wilderness of the jungle. They sat on the lower wing eagerly awaiting their benefactor, anticipating the many questions he would ask.

Closing within a few feet of the *Chicago* the man asked them a question in French which Lowell did not understand. Looking toward Les for an interpretation, Lowell was startled by the answer. "He wants to know how many cartons of cigarettes we have brought and says he'll only pay two cents for each carton." Les advised the man in his best pigeon French that they were not aerial tobacco salesmen. The man indicated his disgust at their uselessness, turned his boat, and paddled away in the direction from which he had come, leaving them both amazed and speechless.

The first native who had assisted them in anchoring returned with a bunch of bananas and split coconuts from which they drank the milk. Les offered some of his cigarettes for his kindness and the use of his dugout. The native eagerly accepted, offering one of the precious cigarettes to a fellow tribesman in another dugout in exchange for a ride back home.

Lowell was left to guard the *Chicago* while Les paddled the dugout in pursuit of their recent white-robed visitor. Spotting the man's dugout a mile upriver, Les came ashore and followed a narrow path which led to a tiny church beside a small stream. Les knelt to fill the small bottle he carried with water from the stream when the white robed figure reappeared, identified himself as the missionary and owner of that church and the stream, and demanded Les leave immediately, launching a most irreverent tirade of French curses.

Les concluded that this man had been out in the sun for too many years. He rose from his knees and lifted him off the ground by his white robe, then hung him harmlessly onto the branch of a tree while he continued filling his water bottle. Returning to the *Chicago*, Les and Lowell finished their dinner of coconuts and bananas, wash-

ing it down with the bottled water before stretching out on the lower wing to get some needed sleep.

While Smith and Arnold sat marooned in their lagoon, the *New Orleans* and *Boston* arrived at Tourane landing next to the American destroyer sent to assist them. Lt. Lawton had arranged for M. Chevalier, Standard Oil's local agent, to assist the flight and he was aboard the destroyer when they landed. They arranged for Jack and Hank to service the two cruisers. With Chevalier's assistance, Erik would return with help for Smith and Arnold. Leigh would pursue getting a new engine to them from Saigon.

At that time, Indo-China was larger than France itself and populated by 17 million people. Poring over maps aided by Nelson's description, Chevalier concluded the only roads which existed anywhere close to the lagoon holding the *Chicago* was the city of Hue. Together they started out immediately for Hue.

After three hours of driving over gravel roads through mountain passes, over high peaks, low valleys, dense tamarind forests, and numerous ferry crossings, Erik and Chevalier reached the city of Hue. The French officials confirmed that from Hue few roads existed and those went only a few miles into the jungle. From there on they must travel by sampan or dugout canoes. A friend of Chevalier's owned a rice plantation on a river which ran into the lagoon holding the *Chicago.* They would make that their first stop.

It was now 11:00 P.M. Banging on the door of a nearby hotel to wake the sleeping innkeeper, they bought milk, sandwiches, soda, and drinking water to carry with them to Smith and Arnold. They then drove toward the plantation. Two miles from the plantation the road ended. It was now well past midnight. The night was devoid of moon and stars, pitch black and foreboding. The sampan owners were not happy being wakened and even less enthusiastic about navigating the treacherous river with its rocks and rapids in the dark, the favorite hunting times for the abundant crocodiles and tigers.

After much arguing and an exorbitant cash settlement, one sampan driver finally accepted the challenge. Concluding a ceremony offering prayers and sacrifices of rice to protect them from the dangers of the night, they boarded and the journey continued.

Their arrival was heralded by the loud barking of the plantation's dogs. Chevalier shouted to his friend who had been awakened by the

barking and was standing guard at the river's edge holding a large shotgun and a hand torch. Pleasantries were exchanged and they soon sat in the large plantation kitchen poring over regional maps while the coffee pot simmered.

The plantation owner had heard nothing of an aircraft but suggested they visit the home of a native priest who lived several miles into the jungle and toward the direction of the lagoon. If anyone knew of the landing, it would be the priest. He wakened five of his native help and again lengthy negotiations ensued with considerable bargaining to agree on suitable compensation for carrying the supplies and leading everyone safely through the dangers of the jungle at night.

They hiked single file for what seemed like hours. On both sides of the narrow trail was thick jungle with small shrines every five minutes for prayers and offerings which would protect the traveler from "Master Stripes" and his friends. Occasionally they would pass a good-sized temple, quiet and foreboding in the darkness. Eventually they arrived at the thatched house of the priest.

He was of good spirits, considering his slumber had been disturbed, and invited us in while our five native companions remained outside. Unfortunately he had not seen or heard of any aircraft but agreed to send for several natives who were fishing that day. Those natives confirmed they had seen two monsters flying overhead but knew nothing of any in a lagoon. The priest then suggested that the mandarin of that area, who lived about a mile away, be spoken with.

Again they had to reopen negotiations with the five bearers from the plantation to extend their mission to the home of the mandarin, and again an exorbitant fee was extracted from them.

The mandarin's home was impressive and their knock on the large door brought a gaggle of lovely female servants. They were ushered into a large exquisitely decorated room with elaborately cast bronze figures, ivory carvings, and hunting trophies. Eventually a smiling man emerged in gorgeous hand-embroidered silk robes. He also had heard nothing of our lost companions or any flying monsters but would be pleased to help in whatever way he could. He suggested we take three of his sampans and the requisite native crew members, proceed down the river, and inquire in each village as we pass through it of the fate of the *Chicago*. We agreed instantly to his kind offer.

They set off down the river again. Every half hour or so they shone their flashlights on the huts of each new village. Voices from the shore hailed our party and our paddlers inquired as to any flying monsters that might have been seen that day. Again and again the responses were not encouraging. Erik fell into an exhausted sleep on the floor of the sampan.

It was just before three in the morning when Erik was awakened. The last village indicated there was a flying monster floating in the next lagoon. With a loud "Yippee," Erik awakened and threw some water on his face to break the bonds of sleep. Around the very next bend in the river, in the faint beam of their hand torches, was the unmistakable profile of the *Chicago.*

It was the "Yippee" that Lowell heard first. He knew that voice. Even before he saw the two yellow lights pointing at him, he knew the cavalry had arrived to rescue them. He checked his watch. Just after 3:00 A.M. To find them in just over twelve hours was a sensational job. He was deeply grateful as the dugout circled carefully to avoid damaging the airplane.

Smith and Arnold climbed aboard one of the other canoes and followed Erik's boat over to the shore. Lowell put his arms gratefully around Erik and said quietly, "Happy Birthday, Erik." With the events of the day, Erik had totally forgotten. This was June 12th. It was his birthday. "Thank you. Let's celebrate."

Erik opened the box of food. The ice he had packed the drinks in had still not totally melted. Les and Lowell devoured the sandwiches and the cold drinks. "Boy, does this taste good," Les said. After the brief party they went to the nearest village to arrange for native canoes to tow the *Chicago* twenty-five miles upriver to Hue where a new engine could be fitted.

Erik and Chevalier picked up their car and arrived at Hue to warn the local river traffic of the coming of the *Chicago* and to arrange guards for the airplane. Few inhabitants had ever seen an airplane before and had no idea what to expect. The word spread quickly to the entire town and soon thousands lined the sides of the river expectantly awaiting its arrival.

The arrival of the *Chicago* was heard before it was seen. The trip had taken over ten straight hours. Three large sampans, each holding ten native paddlers were tied to the *Chicago* like tugboats. A fleet of

other sampans followed containing the wives of the paddlers who periodically fed their husbands food and drink. The patriarch of the village sat on his throne on the leading royal sampan being attended by his harem of attractive young females. His junior wives paddled while others fanned him with large feathered fans and chased mosquitoes. Still others offered him drinks, fruit, and exotic native dishes.

His favorite concubine sat beside him rolling his cigarettes and cigars before lighting them and offering them to him. In the rear of the royal sampan, a muscular native drummed cadence for the oarsmen, striking a large wooden club onto an animal skin stretched over the open end of a huge log. The rhythmic *BOOM BOOM BOOM* could be heard for miles.

Les Arnold and Lowell Smith sat comfortably in the shade between the wings of the biplane on the cushions they had removed from the cockpits, and waved self-consciously at the crowds lining the riverbank. Each bend in the river presented another scene of beauty and their only regret was that they had no camera to record it with. Small children ran along for miles on either side to keep sight of the airplane. This would be a day none would ever forget.

Lowell directed the sampans to tow the *Chicago* under a bridge near the center of Hue. The plan was to use the structure of the bridge. As soon as the ship had been moored securely under the bridge and guards placed around it, Erik, Lowell, and Les went to work disconnecting fuel and oil lines, control linkages, and removing its propeller. The exhausted trio continued working until darkness fell.

The next morning Nelson and Chevalier left to return to Tourane leaving Smith and Arnold to complete the removal of the defective engine. By 11:00 A.M. the heat became unbearable. Tools became too hot to hold and both men grew dizzy. The work stopped and an invitation to lunch at a local French professor's house was accepted.

Nelson and Chevalier returned to Tourane just in time for the arrival of the American destroyer from Saigon carrying the precious spare Liberty-12 engine. Arrangements with a local truck driver were made immediately to transport the engine, Hank Ogden as its guardian, and four American sailors as additional manpower to Hue. Leigh Wade would stay behind to guard the *Boston* and *New Orleans*, while Nelson, Harding, and Chevalier would return to Hue to assist in the exchange.

While loading the heavy engine crate and tools on the truck, Ogden circled it warily. Its condition was not encouraging. The body was extensively rusted and damage from numerous collisions with objects unknown were evident. The engine sounded as if it were on its last legs and it leaked copious fluids from numerous places. The brakes squealed in protest after the most minute of efforts and the windshield was caked in grime.

The driver seemed totally nonchalant and reluctant to even go through the effort of tying down the heavy cargo. The sailors brought lines from the ship, cleaned the cargo floor of years of accumulated refuse, and secured the crate and tool boxes. Hank cleaned the windshield, refilled the engine's oil and water radiators, and adjusted the mechanical brakes. The driver observed the unusual proceedings contemptuously complaining of the delay such unnecessary precautions were causing and its huge negative impact upon his livelihood.

The truck left Tourane after dark. Ogden sat next to the driver trying in vain to discern the narrow jungle road illuminated only by a single weak and yellowed headlamp. The truck bounced along from rut to rut at what Ogden estimated was over thirty miles per hour. The sailors in back struggled to keep their rear ends in contact with the truck's bed as the suspension creaked and groaned, bucking, bouncing, and bobbing up and down violently. Each attempt by Hank to slow the driver succeeded for only a minute or two before his maniacal pace resumed.

Thankfully, after almost an hour of misery, the road climbed steeply, the engine strained but could not sustain its speed, the driver shifted down a gear and soon a second one. Hank estimated they had slowed to perhaps twenty miles per hour. For the next thirty minutes the road became a narrow switchback climbing steeply over a mountain, one hairpin turn after the next. Hank noted the complete lack of any guard rails. The edges of the road dropped precipitously first hundreds and then thousands of feet straight down to rocks below. Hank was grateful the engine wasn't any stronger since even at that slow speed it was a terrifying drive.

Eventually the summit was reached and the switchbacks continued down the other side. Much to Hank's displeasure, the driver changed gears and sped up in the descent. The truck tilted from side to side, lifting two wheels off the ground, careening around each

hair-pin turn. The tires slid on the small rocks, gravel, and mud within inches of the yawning precipice. All attempts to slow the driver by restraining his arms were futile. Hank braced himself and hung on, convinced they would all be launched over the side at the next turn. He regretted he had inadvertently sacrificed the four sailors' lives as well.

After what seemed like hours of sheer terror, the road leveled and the switchbacks disappeared. Hank couldn't believe they had made it down the mountain alive and seriously considered smashing the driver in the face and taking over the truck. Realizing he had no idea where to go or how to get there, he contented himself with urging him in his most authoritarian voice to, "SLOW DOWN!"

Just as the words came out of his mouth, the bouncing stopped. They were airborne, having missed a sharp turn in the feeble glow of the single headlight. Their flight ended abruptly with the nose of the truck burying itself into the mud with a sickening crunch. Hank's head hit the windshield post leaving a small cut. He wondered if the sailors in the back were as fortunate.

Other than some bumps, bruises, and minor cuts they had all averted serious injury. The sailors extricated themselves from the lines crisscrossing the cargo bed and, with the help of several cigarette lighters and a flashlight from the tool kit, surveyed the damage. The radiator had been pushed into the fan but was apparently still holding water and the fenders had been pushed against the tires. With the six of them and an hour of pulling, hauling, pushing, and twisting, they had the damage repaired and the truck back on the road. One of the sailors holding a large pipe wrench squeezed into the front seat next to the driver. Under the threat of imminent bodily harm and the loss of his truck if not his life, the driver finally slowed down.

This was most fortuitous. A second mountain pass lay ahead and a brake band failed in the descent. The driver panicked. Only our slow speed and urging him into a lower gear saved us, although not before another time consuming off-road excursion.

Several miles past the second mountain range, the road ended at a large lagoon. Ferry barges waited for travelers and cautiously the truck drove onto one of the barges. The crossing normally takes thirty minutes if all goes well. This one did not. As they approached the halfway point, Hank noticed the barge was leaking and they were

sinking. He alerted one of the natives poling the raft who promptly grew wide-eyed with fright. He said something to the other six natives and all seven started poling the barge frantically back to the starting point. Hank, the sailors, and the truck driver grabbed some extra poles and all of them poled back with all their strength. When the barge finally reached shore, its decks were solidly awash. Another minute and the Liberty-12 would have been residing at the bottom of the lagoon.

A larger barge came to their rescue and made the crossing safely. They reached Hue at dawn. Although exhausted, after completing a brief breakfast, they joined with the others working on the *Chicago*. Within four hours, a new record, they had the old engine out and the new one hoisted into place, installed, and ready for testing. It fired up immediately and after some brief high-speed taxi runs, Lowell and Les were winging their way on the forty-minute flight to Tourane where they refueled and moored next to the other cruisers that night.

Only seventy-one hours had passed since their forced jungle landing. In this short time they gotten the new engine shipped five hundred miles, towed eight thousand pounds of airplane twenty-five miles upstream, transported a thousand pounds of engine, tools, and helpers sixty miles through two mountain ranges, a lagoon, and thick jungle at night, installed the new engine, and had the *Chicago* flying again.

Tuesday, June 17, 1924
Saigon, Indo-China

Dear Diary:

Yesterday we hopped off from Tourane for Saigon just after 5 A.M. and arrived at the mouth of the Mekong River at 1:30 P.M. We moored in front of the city which everyone calls "The Paris of the Orient." We spent the afternoon and most of last night servicing the ships and replacing some worn parts with the spares carried by the U.S. destroyer Noah.

Today we borrowed clean white shirts and trousers from our sailor friends and went out to see the sights of this beautiful city. We sat down at a table in an outdoor cafe which reminded us of our days in Paris dur-

ing the war. We waited over an hour for service but the waiter seemed intent on taking care of everybody but us. We called him over a few times but he just gave us dirty looks and turned away. Finally I called the headwaiter over. He ambled over to us with a scowl on his face. When I started giving him our order he stopped me and told us he couldn't serve us and we would have to leave.

Now we know the French can be a little strange sometimes but we had no idea what we had done that had those people so riled up at us. I asked him why the cold shoulder? He lifted his chin up to the sky as if we were the most stupid morons he had ever met. As if explaining to a child he said, "Monsieur, you are not wearing jackets."

We all stared at each other in disbelief. I asked him if he knew who we were. He replied he certainly did. I explained that flying around the world didn't leave much room for formal clothing and we even had to borrow the neatly pressed white dress shirts and trousers we were wearing. He replied, "Then you should have borrowed jackets as well."

I explained that we were all Army Air Corps pilots and are forbidden by regulation to wear full naval uniforms since that was not our branch. He said these were our problems and not his. We would have to leave immediately or he would call the police and have us thrown out. To make the matter even more unpleasant, as we were leaving, the Frenchmen at the adjoining tables applauded their approval of the headwaiter's actions. Seems to me we got a much warmer welcome in France when we came over there and saved their country from being overrun by Germany.

We've been sleeping at the home of the manager of Standard Oil Company and are planning to depart at first light for the 585 mile flight to Bangkok in Siam.

Signed, Les Arnold

BANGKOK, SIAM, JUNE 18, 1924 VIA CABLE AND ASSOCIATED PRESS:

The United States Army aviators engaged in a flight around the world, arriving here at 3:15 P.M. from Saigon, French Indo-China. They made one refueling stop on the way assisted by the U.S. destroyer *Hulbert* before continuing their flight over the thick jungles of the kingdom of Cambodia. They expect to make some minor

repairs to their aircraft and depart for Rangoon, Burma on Friday, June 20th headed by Lieutenant Lowell Smith.

AKYAB, BURMA, JUNE 19, 1924 VIA CABLE AND EXCLUSIVE DISPATCH:

Stuart MacLaren, the British round-the-world flyer, has received his replacement aircraft delivered to him by the U.S. Navy. He has given the following statement to the press: "Hats off to the Stars and Stripes. The Americans, the Air Branch and the U.S. Navy have, as we say in England, played excellent cricket." Captain MacLaren plans to depart Akyab for Rangoon tomorrow.

HONG KONG, JUNE 20, 1924 VIA CABLE AND ASSOCIATED PRESS:

The Portuguese Aviators, Lieuts. Beiros and Paes, virtually completed their Lisbon to Macao flight this afternoon when they left Hanoi at 9:00 A.M. and passed over Macao at 12:50 P.M. and landed at Shamshun at 3 P.M. The landing was a forced one, Lieut. Paes being bruised and their machine slightly damaged. The aviators, finding a landing at Macao impractical because of bad weather, had intended to continue on to Canton, following the line of the Kowloon-Canton Railway. Ignition trouble required a sudden landing at Shamshun. The airmen caught a train for Kowloon arriving at 7:15 P.M. this evening. They were showered with congratulations by representatives of Portuguese officials and their ladies.

RANGOON, BRITISH INDIA, JUNE 21, 1924 VIA CABLE AND ASSOCIATED PRESS:

A cargo boat last night collided with one of the United States Army's round-the-world airplanes, badly damaging the bottom left wing of the *New Orleans*. Needed repairs will take at least five days after which the fliers will depart for Calcutta. Their leader, Lieutenant Lowell Smith, has been suffering from dysentery contracted by drinking contaminated water during a forced landing in a jungle lagoon near Hue, French Indo-China. He has been confined to bed but is expected to recover fully before repairs have been completed.

HONG KONG, JUNE 21, 1924 VIA CABLE AND ASSOCIATED PRESS:

The Portuguese aviators Lieuts. Beiros and Paes have returned to their airplane which was damaged in a forced landing at Shamchun. They have concluded the damage caused in the landing and the handiwork of local Chinese vandals and souvenir hunters have made repairs necessary before it can be flown again. The Portuguese government has dispatched their gunboats *Patria* and *Macao* to support the efforts of the local Chinese district commandant and the fifty armed Chinese soldiers he has assigned to guard the aircraft.

Lisbon celebrated their flyer's achievements in completing the route which flew from Lisbon over Vienna, Bucharest, Aleppo, Baghdad, Karachi, Allahabad, Calcutta, Akyab, Rangoon, Bangkok, Saigon, Haiphong, Hong Kong, and Macao.

SUNDAY, JUNE 22, 1924
10:15 A.M. NAGASAKI, JAPAN

Betty Mitchell fidgeted nervously with the locks on her packed steamer trunks, waiting for them to be picked up. Billy sat calmly reading the English language newspaper thoughtfully placed under his door. Betty couldn't help worrying if their spying had been observed. This would be the most logical time to apprehend them. In a few hours they would be safely aboard a steamer sailing for San Francisco.

It had been a long trip. After weeks of negotiating passage for their world flight in Kobe, they had returned to the Philippines and Billy had completed his inspection of its defenses. He had even taken his old adversary Aguinaldo up for his first airplane flight and watched him delightedly dropping hundreds of his calling cards to his earthbound friends while flying over his home village.

While in Manila, Billy had sent a cable to General Patrick requesting permission to visit Korea and return to Japan for the gathering of additional intelligence. Betty had seen the reply before they boarded.

STATE DEPARTMENT ADVISES YOUR PRESENCE AT THIS TIME IN JAPAN OR KOREA LIABLE TO MISCONSTRUCTION BY JAPANESE STOP DO NOT ATTEMPT TO VISIT EITHER JAPAN OR KOREA UNTIL WAR DEPARTMENT ADVISES SAME.

Fuming, Billy had torn it into pieces and thrown it away. "We're just tourists now and no one tells American tourists where they can and cannot go," he replied angrily to Betty.

They joined an innocuous group of tourists taking a world cruise on the liner *Franconia*. Betty liked the ship and its interesting passengers, among which were the famous Spanish novelist Blasco Ibanez. Ibanez marveled at the perfection of Billy Mitchell's Spanish and his incredible predictions of aircraft that would change the face of warfare forever and circle the globe within days flying faster than the speed of sound and never being overtaken by night.

The Mitchells visited Java, Singapore, and India. They were guests of the king of Siam and hunted with him, killing a dozen tigers. Billy inspected his air force of 260 planes noting ruefully that even tiny Siam had an air force larger than America's.

They visited China where Mitchell noted that they possessed all of the attributes necessary to become a world power—with the ability to dominate all of Asia in the future. After taking the Blue Express from Shanghai to Peking, Mitchell held news conferences and delighted reporters with his visions of the future might of air power on the conduct of war. A former officer of Mitchell's was the chief instructor for the Chinese Air Force and let him fly a British bomber on an air tour of China's defenses and its Great Wall. In Mukden, Manchuria, the warlord, Marshal Chang Tso-lin, loaned him a French Nieuport biplane for aerial photography.

At their last meeting a decade ago, Marshall Chang had asked Mitchell to prove his wisdom by advising him how he could prevent flies and mosquitoes from attacking the top of his bald head. Without hesitating, Mitchell replied, "That's easy. Simply tattoo a spider's web on the top." Marshall Chang showed Mitchell he had taken his advice and had no further problems.

From Manchuria the Mitchells traveled to Korea. Then, shipping all of his uniforms and indications of military rank home, Mitchell assumed the guise of naturalist that had served him so well on previous spying missions decades ago and returned to Japan. For the next three weeks, the Mitchells toured Japan. Close to military installations and aircraft factories, Betty posed for pictures. To the casual Japanese observer, another foreign tourist was simply taking his wife's picture. Just before the shutter clicked, however Billy

swung the camera around and in a fleeting moment recorded the significant military details in the background.

Billy Mitchell spent most of the day on June 17 observing a Japanese naval fleet in the harbor. The battleships *Nagato* and *Mutsu* with the battle cruisers *Kongo* and *Kirishima*, eighteen destroyers, eight submarines, supply ships, and tenders were preparing to leave for maneuvers. Mitchell watched admiringly as the operation proceeded smoothly and with the highest degree of precision and skill. Starting with the arrival of several squadrons of Sopwith pursuit planes and two-seater observation aircraft, each ship took up its exact position at precisely the correct time. Mitchell noted that each sailor knew his job and performed it flawlessly with no wasted effort or mistakes.

Using information given him by British aeronautical engineers and airmen, formerly with the R.A.F. now instructing the Japanese in the manufacturing of airframes, engines, and flying skills, and personal observations made in their travels, the Mitchells were returning with hundreds of pages of notes. To the casual customs inspector, they were the notes of a naturalist, describing the flora and fauna of Japan but in the coded entries each species represented a different aircraft and engine, each "bird count" a production rate, each "bird sighting location" a manufacturing or training facility. Mitchell had read and committed to memory U.S. intelligence estimates of the military potential of Japan. Through his extensive Pacific observations he realized these intelligence reports totally underestimated Japan's military resources. These resources, as with the training and discipline of Japanese soldiers, sailors, and airmen, casually dismissed as inferior to their Western counterparts, were, in Mitchell's opinion, equal or superior to any in the world.

The knock on the door startled Betty. Would this be the feared Japanese police coming to arrest them? She looked over at Billy. He calmly put down his newspaper, rose, and opened the door. Relieved, she saw two bellhops who had come for their luggage. After a short taxi ride they arrived at the pier. The American steamship, *Thomas* had just completed loading its supply of coal under the protection of armed guards. Anti-American actions had been spawned throughout Japan after the passage of the Japanese Exclusion Act.

Shortly the *Thomas* would be sailing. Billy Mitchell requested several hundred sheets of writing paper from the ship's purser. During the voyage to San Francisco he would complete his report which would alert the general staff to the simmering military eruption in the Pacific. He was certain his report and the actions that he recommended could avert any future conflict with Japan. Betty resigned herself to a very lonely trip.

BANGKOK (SIAM) JUNE 23, 1924 BY CABLE—EXCLUSIVE DISPATCH

BRITISH FLYERS ARRIVE AT BANGKOK

After a terrific two hour battle with the worst storms of the present season, Squadron Leader A. Stuart MacLaren of the British round-the-world flight arrived here from Tavoy.

The crossing of the Malay Peninsula, with its treacherous mountain peaks obscured in masses of low hanging clouds, nearly spelled disaster for the expedition.

The fliers expect to leave tomorrow for Haiphong by way of Vinh, although reports received here today state that treacherous weather conditions are certain along the entire east coast of Indo-China.

CALCUTTA, INDIA, JUNE 24, 1924 BY CABLE—EXCLUSIVE DISPATCH BY A. ELLINGS

AMERICAN FLYERS AT CALCUTTA

The American Army round-the-world flyers headed by Lieut. Lowell M. Smith alighted on the sacred river Ganges at a beautiful rural spot sixteen miles from Calcutta at 3:00 P.M. today after their flight from Akyab.

The flight caused enormous interest among the Indians who lined the picturesque banks of the river at an early hour in the sweltering heat. The scene was like that of a regatta, except a long stretch was kept clear for their landing.

The American airmen departed Rangoon for what was supposed to be a brief refueling stop at Akyab. Their flight passed directly over Major MacLaren and the British world flight which had landed in a small bay waiting for the weather to improve. Due to difficulty making mooring arrangements at Chittagong, the Americans were forced

to remain overnight in Akyab risking infection with cholera and malaria epidemics rampaging this unfortunate city.

They left early in the morning flying ten miles to the east to avoid a storm. They reached picturesque Chittagong (also known as Islamabad) in two hours halting for breakfast and refueling. They flew 170 miles over the world's most forbidding jungle swamps, the Ganges delta. Their total flying time to Calcutta was more than five hours. The Americans flew at an altitude of fifteen hundred feet and avoided the monsoon rains.

THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 1924
CALCUTTA, BRITISH INDIA

After landing for refueling at Chittagong, the Americans continued on to Calcutta, arriving late that afternoon and mooring fifteen miles upriver from the city. British river police were given the assignment of guarding the cruisers while the crew boarded the launch of the governor of Bengal for the trip downriver to the center of the city.

The original plans were for the world cruisers to be dismantled and trucked overland to the British airfield at Dum Dum, some twenty miles from the center of Calcutta. There they would be totally overhauled, given new engines, and changed from pontoons over to wheels for the flight over the Middle East and on to Europe.

Basking in the luxury of the bridal suite at the Great Eastern Hotel, Lowell Smith estimated that dismantling and reassembly of the cruisers would cost them at least one month if everything went perfectly and possibly as many as six months if it did not. Discussing alternatives with the rest of the crew, and British and Indian officials, a new plan was developed. They flew the cruisers downriver to the center of the city and adjacent to Maidan Park. Here a crane lifted each airplane from the water and onto the park's lawn where the crew could inspect each ship, install new engines, repair or replace any parts necessary, and change from pontoons to wheels.

Working in sweltering heat from early dawn to well past midnight amid frequent visits from wandering "holy" cows and numerous ash-covered fakirs smeared head to toe with "sacred cow dung" and with

withered arms and legs, the crew raced to complete the servicing. In the darkness of night, returning to his hotel on June 29th, Smith fell into a deep hole breaking his rib on timbers which were below ground.

Seeing him in great pain, Les Arnold insisted on calling a doctor. The doctor confirmed that Lowell Smith had at least one broken rib. Refusing to stay in bed more than a single day, Smith had his ribcage taped and despite the pain rejoined his companions to put the last finishing touches on servicing the cruisers.

Caught up in the decade's rush to conquer new frontiers was a very attractive sixteen-year-old girl from England. Aloha Baker was attempting to be the first to drive an automobile around the world. Prevailing over the lack of roads, service stations, innumerable mechanical and tire failures, she had been eagerly rushing to rendezvous with the American world flight and its handsome leader, Lowell Smith in Calcutta. Brandishing the revolver she carried holstered on her belt, she had survived numerous encounters with bandits and threatening natives.

Pushing hard through long days and endless nights, Aloha reached Calcutta the day before the American flight was scheduled to leave. Finding Lowell every bit as handsome as he was depicted in newspaper and newsreel accounts, Aloha embraced a surprised Lowell Smith and kissed him warmly. The strong muscles she developed through months of driving and pushing her automobile through mud, sand, dirt, and heavy jungle made for a very painful embrace. Lowell winced and explained his injuries. Aloha apologized profusely for the pain she had caused and Lowell let her sit in his cockpit before spending some time alone with her.

Sixty years later, during a television interview, Aloha revealed the moments with Lowell were among the most memorable of her life and she remained infatuated for many years with the handsome aviator.

Tuesday, July 1, 1924
6:00 a.m.
Maidan Park, Calcutta, India

The three world cruisers squatted on the wet grass of Maidan Park, silhouetted against the first rays of the emerging sun. With wheels in place of pontoons, the ships were lower and

seemed to have grown smaller, slightly less imposing, less clumsy. Their pre-flight inspection would be completed shortly and they would soon accelerate down the improvised grass runway protected from intruders by uniformed Indian policemen.

Several reporters and photographers had arrived shortly after they did and busied themselves making notes and taking pictures, the popping flashlamps momentarily illuminating the area with a ghastly white light. Lowell Smith looked around for Linton Wells but he was nowhere to be seen. The previous evening Wells, on the verge of tears, had shown them the cable from his chief at Associated Press ordering him back home immediately.

The crew liked Wells. He had almost become one of them, suffered with them through the frozen north, hopping rides on one boat after another to keep up with them. He had begged, pleaded, cajoled, bartered, and even paid for passage on ships ranging from derelict freighters to sleek naval warships. He had often gone without sleeping, eating, or bathing for days, hurrying to keep up with his heroes and his story. He passed through the same icy cold blizzards and sweltering jungle heat they did. Just when they thought they had finally outdistanced him, arriving at some obscure remote place, Wells would appear. He had paid his dues and become part of their family, part of the adventure they shared.

They all knew Wells was on borrowed time. The sixty days he had been given to cover their flight had come and gone, all used up—and over half the trip still lay ahead. Each of the crew had become fond of Linton Wells, his clowning around, his encouragement when all seemed bleak, his help and willingness to do the most menial task, his gratitude at just being allowed to play a tiny part of their great adventure. They would miss him.

Lowell Smith, always the pragmatist, felt that perhaps it was all for the best. With wheels, more numerous airports over land and shorter distances between fuel stops, their ships would be much lighter and faster. They would make much more rapid progress. From here on it would be almost impossible for Wells to catch up with them anyway. Still, it would have been nice to see him just one more time, to say good-bye, to wish him well and deliver to him the "honorary aviator commission" they had all signed for him on the back of a postcard. But Wells was nowhere to be seen. With a

shrug, Lowell turned to completing the last few tasks before take-off time came.

As the sun rose, glowing gold against a pale blue sky, and the air filled with the pungent smells and smoke of untold millions of cooking stoves being lighted, the call to morning prayer echoed over the city's mosques. The roar of first one, then a second, and finally a third Liberty V-12 engine bellowed and rumbled into life. Slowly the three world cruisers taxied, nose to tail, to the end of the improvised grass runway. Within the space of a few minutes, each rose majestically and headed north over the Hoogli River before turning westward toward Allahabad, 450 miles in the distance.