

RALPH ROYCE

In the Spring of 1939 I had as a passenger from Hong Kong to Chungking Colonel Ralph Royce, who was just finishing his assignment as commanding officer of the U.S. Air Force base in the Philippines. We left Hong Kong about 2:00 A.M. as usual in order to cross over Japanese occupied territory in the dark. (This was before the days of radar.) I invited Royce to occupy the copilot's seat, which he was happy to do.

A short while after reaching cruising altitude, about 15,000 feet, we ran into a quite severe thunder storm. The plane bounced around violently and a torrential rain was pounding on the windshield. It was not the worst storm I ever encountered but was definitely one of the bad ones. St. Elmo's fire was everywhere. I was fighting the controls but managed to cast a glance at the colonel and I could see that he was very tense and upset and his face mirrored apprehension to say the least. In order to put him at a little more ease, just as soon as the turbulence abated ever so slightly I turned on the auto pilot and slid down in my seat, rubbed my hands together and leaned over and said to him, "Man - this is what I like!" He looked astounded and wanted to know what the heck I liked about it. I told him, "No Japanese up here tonight."

I never thought much about it then but was reminded of it numerous times later. Royce, shortly afterwards to become a Major General, and I became very close friends in later years, even touring Europe together with our wives. On several occasions he introduced me to some of his Air Force friends, including 5-star General 'Hap' Arnold, and nearly always prefaced the introduction with the remark, "This is the man who flew me into China the night of the storm I was telling you about."

Both the U.S. and British Air Forces were sadly behind times in keeping up with the advancements in night and instrument flying. Both apparently figured that bombing missions and dog fights would be confined to the daylight hours so their night flying training consisted of a few takeoffs and landings under bright moonlight conditions.

I had quite an extended conversation with General Arnold once at a cocktail party about instrument flying and told him how important I thought it was, but apparently my discourse fell on deaf ears. The lack of proper training was responsible for hundreds of young American boys losing their lives because they were unable to cope with the adverse flying conditions they encountered later on the Hump run. I even had the Commanding officer of the British Air Force Transport Squadron in Upper Assam request permission to fly a few trips with us in order to learn how we were so successful while they were unable to operate unless the weather was just right. Naturally we were all glad to do what we could to help them.