



ESCAPE FROM SIAM

By

Harry V. "Smithy" Smith

Cyril "Curly" Copley

W. "Timber" Woods

J. "Ramsay" Roe

W. A. "Bill" Pugh

358 SQUADRON, RAF

JESSORE, INDIA.

May 1945

Some memories thankfully fade with time and we are able to “carry on” but the terrible brutalities of war will never fade. The events of my 25th sortie are as sharply focused today as they were fifty-five years ago. I had just celebrated my 21st birthday and VE Day (Victory in Europe) was a distant 3 weeks in the past. We were however working harder than ever as the allied winter offensive of 1944/45 pushed the Japanese south out of Burma. 357 & 358 Squadrons carried out Special Duty activities throughout South East Asia Command for British SAS, American OSS, and the French SIS transporting agents and supplies into Drop Zones located in Burma, Malaya, Siam, French Indo China and the Dutch East Indies. We flew American B-24 Liberator bombers, which had the required range and carrying capacity. Takeoffs were in the afternoons to give the maximum number of hours under the cover of night while over enemy territory. This often provided spectacular sunsets outbound and colourful sunrises many hours later on the return flight. The blackness of night also enabled us to penetrate the monsoon weather fronts by flying between the lightning flashes emitting from the ever-present cumulonimbus clouds. The missions were solo, unescorted sorties that penetrated deep into enemy territory. The shortest mission was to Burma and the 8-hour duration was considered only a circuit and bump. A day earlier we completed our longest mission, which was to Singapore where four Australians were disrupting the Japanese from a hideout in the mountains. The mission covered 3000 miles and took 23 hours & 50 minutes. It was flown at 500 feet above sea level except for the actual drop at the DZ. The payload was only 4 containers as three of the four bomb bays were required for fuel cells. The next day we were being briefed for what was to be our most dangerous and costly sortie.

29 MAY 1945

The mission orders were being read: "Smith, you will be dropping three OSS agents and 14 containers into a DZ near the town of Khorat, Siam (now Nakhon Ratchasima). There will be an OSS observer along to witness the drop. Your takeoff time is 00:00 hours to place you over the DZ at dawn. Your aircraft is "P" for Peter. The I.O.(intelligence officer) will brief you on enemy activities. Good luck."

Well isn't that just peachy keen. This means we will be returning in broad daylight from 600 miles behind enemy lines with only the tail and mid upper turret. The front turret, ball turret, beam guns and armour plating had all been removed long ago to make room for heavier payloads. In addition, it was to be the first trip under the new policy of making the drops at dawn or dusk. Oh well, there are always plenty of clouds to take cover in. Sure!!

Following the briefing we drew our parachutes, weapons and rations from stores and checked out the B-24. Everybody would be fully armed. This was to be the last mission of my tour and I was looking forward to more pleasant pursuits. In fact, a plan was already in place to meet up with my best friend Jim Gibson who had remustered to Bomb-aimer and recently arrived at 356 Squadron from Boundary Bay. We had been together all through school and joined up together in May 1942. The reunion was set for July in Darjeeling. As it turned out we did meet in July '45 but not as planned.

We had a long flight of over 15 hours ahead but I was too keyed up to rest. I finished reading a Mickey Spillane novel "You only Die Once" and after dinner sat through the station movie "For Whom the Bell Tolls". What could be more prophetic?

Here is the mission as described by F/Sgt. William "Bill" Pugh, RAF Wireless Operator/Airgunner.

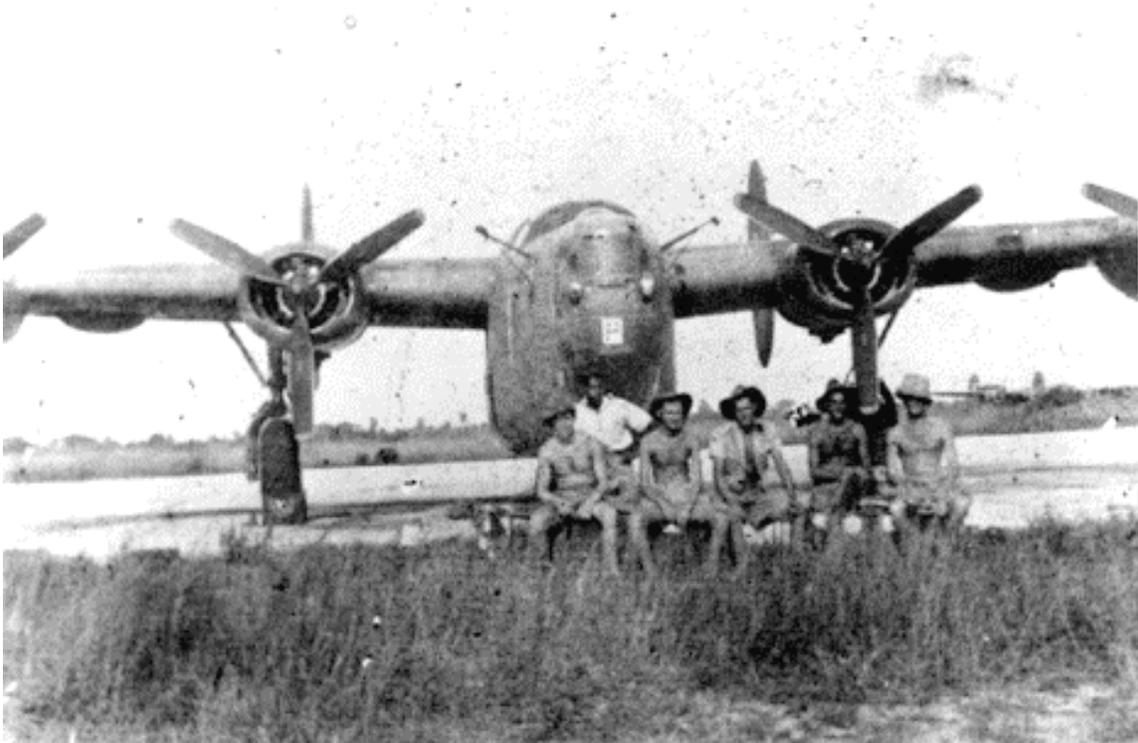
Quite a peaceful day, sweated almost continuously. We were briefed about a very special job that night to carry four American OSS underground agents, three to be dropped at the DZ (Drop Zone), the other to observe. Take-off was scheduled for midnight.

We all went for supper, not much as usual, but no point in complaining. The Gharries picked us up about 22:30 hours and off we went to dispersal. We were flying in "P" that night, not a bad kite, done a tour for 159 squadron and had new engines, straight from the Maintenance Unit. Timber and I climbed in and did our check over, set-up the Auxiliary Power Unit (APU), everything in order, parachutes, rations all in position, then went for a smoke on the other side of the dispersal. When the Americans arrived our Dispatchers for the trip F/Sgt. 'Taffy' Parsons and Jim 'Ramsay' Roe helped them do a dry run by putting on and adjusting their parachutes and equipment. The gear these fellows carried was amazing! Bob Poole, our 2nd pilot, kept saying to me, "I hope these guys don't get jammed in the hatch with all that gear on!" Believe me it was a job fixing them up, however it all had to come off again until we were 30 minutes or so from the DZ.

At 22:30 hrs. Smithy, Bob and Taffy were running up the engines. "Okay, pile in boys," signalled Smithy. It was more pleasant taking off at night, no sweating, just cool and refreshing.

At the end of the runway we could see the moon coming up, the weather looked pretty bad down south. We called up Control for permission to take-off, nobody else out the same time as us, so there was no delay. No sooner had the Control RT said, "you may" than Smithy let go of the brakes and we lurched down the runway, with those four great engines roaring as if they wanted to break away from us. We were taking off into the wooded area of the airfield and, with an all up weight of 64,000 lbs. (This was the maximum weight limit although many flights were over weight by as much as 9,000 lbs). Nearly everyone was a bit wary of takeoffs in this direction at night. We were well airborne and on the

Intercom I heard 'Lofty' Brenchley our Navigator and Jack Draper our Bomb-Aimer (who also assisted with navigation on these long flights), report from their position as did Cyril 'Curly' Copley who was now in his rear turret. Lofty called up on the intercom and confirmed with Smithy that we were on course for 'George'. Everybody settled down. It was quite bumpy and raining heavily as well. Out over the Bay of Bengal Smithy decided to come down to 500 ft. in order to miss the heavy clouds above and ahead of us. The radio was crackling like heck and I could barely hear Control Broadcasts. Everybody seemed unusually quiet that night, maybe because we were all feeling a bit tired. The poor weather and being knocked about in the sky did not make any of us feel like singing although we usually did. At about 04:15 hrs we crossed the Coast and altered course for Nakhon Sawan Province, Siam.



"P" for Peter Ground crew

Smith picks up the story:

At 06:30 with the coastal mountains far behind, we began a descent to reach 500 ft. at the DZ in Siam. This was when, one by one, things started to go wrong. The sun was rising earlier than expected and for the first time in 1 1/2 years the sky was completely clear. Wall to wall CAVU (ceiling and visibility unlimited). No hiding place today! Just then the intercom came alive when Bomb-aimer Jack Draper called "enemy fighters at 2 o'clock." Nine Oscar type fighter planes were closing in fast. Three set up a racetrack for head-on attacks; three did the same on the starboard quarter and three strafed from below and above. Mostly they stayed away from the tail turret. I began violent evasive manoeuvres and dove for the deck. The frontal attacks were devastating. We were systematically being shot to pieces. "Lofty" Brenchley, navigator, was killed in one of the first attacks. Bill Pinckney, mid-upper gunner fired steady bursts at the fighters coming in head-on until he too was hit. Soon the flight deck was in a shambles with the cannon shells and bullets slamming about everywhere. The noise was deafening. I couldn't raise the Bomb-aimer on the intercom so I gave Bob Poole, my co-pilot, the order to jettison the

containers. The jettison toggle is located between the pilots seats and just as Bob began to pull the toggle up he was mortally hit full in the chest which caused him to straighten and pull the toggle right through without the pause needed to let the bomb bay doors to open. Five containers dropped free but the rest were hung up inside the bomb bay. The fighters kept up their attacks destroying the starboard elevator, radios, generator panel, engine controls, instruments, and what was left of the engines. The last of our airspeed was bleeding off as I gave the "Crash Landing" order. We had rehearsed this drill many times and I prayed the crew in the aft section would hear it and act quickly. We were too low to parachute even if we had wanted to. The only hope of survival was to try the treetop landing technique used by Canadian Bush Pilots. At the last minute I lowered the flaps to reduce the airspeed and dropped the undercarriage to absorb some of the energy of the impact. When the sound of the trees began scraping along the belly of the aircraft I braced both feet against the instrument panel and hauled back on the control column with all my might. Even with the co-pilots inert body draped over the controls, the strength born of necessity helped me put the B-24 into a full stall. There was a colossal rendering of metal as the plane crashed through the trees. The wings, with their load of fuel, sheared off right away: good riddance I thought. The fuselage careened on hitting more trees before coming to rest deep in the forest.

The impact knocked the wind out of me and when I recovered I was folded up around the control column. There was a small hole in the side of the fuselage, which I soon made large enough to crawl out and was quickly followed by Bill Pugh the 2nd Wireless operator. His foot caught in some jagged metal and he ended hanging upside down. A bullet through his hand made it quite useless but with my newfound strength I just picked him up and lowered him to the ground. I made my way to where the aft section of the B-24 had come to rest. Most of the bomb bay had been destroyed when the wings sheared off. What was left was in flames with ammunition from the containers that had hung up exploding in all directions. More chaos was added as the fighters kept strafing the crash site. To my great relief I found the OSS agents and the rest of the crew in the wreckage of the aft section of the aircraft where they were struggling to escape with the wounded. Just then "Curly" Copley the tail gunner approached from the remains of the tail section. We made two trips into the wreck to bring all the survivors out. The list of injuries was daunting. Cpl. Naparolski had a gaping hole in his abdomen and would not survive the day. Major Gildee had a broken collarbone. Sgt. McCarthy had a fractured back and other injuries. Lt. Reid Moore had burns to his left thigh but he was able to hobble about. Bill "Taffy" Parsons had a bullet through his foot but was mobile. Ramsey Roe the "Screen" Dispatcher and Curly Copley were relatively unscathed. Flight Sergeants Poole, Brenchely, Draper and Bill Pinckney sadly all perished. In all nine had survived the action. It was small consolation to realize that we were probably the first to ever live through a crash landing in a B-24. We began taking stock and tending to injuries. I had just started to cut some small trees to make a litter when voices were heard. They may belong to Japanese soldiers so it was decided to leave the site and find a place to hide. McCarthy would have to be carried but we couldn't carry Naparolski as well and because of his grim condition I decided to send the group away under Major Gildee, as he was the senior and most experienced man on the ground. I elected to stay behind with Cpl. Naparolski and give the rest a chance to escape. Not an easy decision but who ever said war was easy. I gave Major Gilder my S&W revolver, a compass and a map showing our present location and told him to head south, as there were some 300,000 Japanese troops north of us who were on the run from Burma.

After the group left I tried to comfort Naparolski but he was in a desperate condition and died without waking. I checked the crewmembers who had perished and destroyed maps etc. I had lost a lot of blood from a head wound and rested against a tree for a while trying not to think of the consequences if the voices were from Japanese soldiers. The treatment of captured aircrew by the Japanese was brutal and final. A crew from 159 Squadron, which crashed in Burma in 1945, was systematically tortured and then beheaded. The three Japanese officers and three NCOs were later tried and executed for this

atrocities. There were other similar reports. I had kept a Sten gun just in case. I came fully alert when I heard voices but happily they belonged to natives and not military uniforms. They were local natives from a nearby village who had found the main party and had been sent back for Nap and I. So far so good. I stopped for a rest during the walk to the village and woke when I felt a tugging on my arm. It was a native who took a fancy to my wristwatch. The last I saw he was making off with it on a white horse. Well I thought, he's welcome. I was given a bowl of hot rice broth, which helped revive me. A mirror was produced and I soon realised the extent of my head wound. I got the flap of scalp more or less in place and wrapped it with a bandage. By evening we had all been reunited at a village, which was just like something out of National Geographic. The small huts were bamboo and thatch structures supported off the ground on spindly legs. We were very happy to have this shelter.

Next morning we were startled awake when a group rode up on horseback. The leader was a Thai police lieutenant who had come to help us. He warned that a Japanese patrol was coming and we had to leave the village immediately. We went by bullock cart to a hiding place by a nearby stream. The last "K" ration was produced and we shared four Camel cigarettes and chuckled at the incredible message inside the book of matches, which read: "JOLLY GOOD LUCK TO YOU WHEREVER YOU ARE FROM DROMEDARY FOODS, Chicago, Ill. USA." We traveled for two days with bullock carts carrying the wounded and eventually came to a river where a boat was waiting to take us south to Bangkok. The first night on the river we stopped at a house located on an island where a Chinese couple fed us a hot meal, rice and something. Using two chopsticks, the wife rolled some cigarettes that looked as big as cigars. The tobacco was rolled up in a large leaf and tasted just fine.



**Back Row: Bob Poole, Les Ladds, "Lofty" Brenchly, Jack Draper, "Timber" Woods
Front Row: "Curly" Copley, Bill Pinkney, Taffy Parsons, Bill Pugh, "Smithy" Smith**

Ditching Drill at Kolar Yacht Club, Kolar, India

I don't know what the ingredients were but it hit the spot and we slept like logs despite the hoards of mosquitoes. Next morning Lt. Reid Moore related a dream he had where, he said, we were taken to a BOAC building, fed ice cream, weighed our baggage then boarded a flying boat for home. All this after only one smoke!! The next day we arrived at the house of Captain Rian Pacheetool, police captain for the province of Nakhon-Sawan. After some food and first aid we next had to cross a rail line, which was constantly guarded by Japanese patrols. One by one we sneaked across. Copley and Roe carried the helpless McCarthy who never once uttered a sound although he must have been in serious pain. The next two days were spent on an old motor launch crouched down most of the time to avoid being seen by Japanese patrol boats. We arrived in Bangkok where some 15,000 Japanese soldiers manned the local garrison. They seemed to be everywhere. An ancient bus arrived and we piled on board for the next leg of our journey. Straw mats covered the windows, which concealed us until a breeze would blow them open. The soldiers were so close we could have touched them and several stared at us for uncomfortably long periods. It was broad daylight and our disguises were not really very good being mostly those conical rain hats seen in the Orient. We were taken to the Thai Police headquarters and that night went to bed in a cell-like dorm on straw mats laid on solid boards. Before sleep we were led outside to a rain filled mud hole for a much-needed bath. I was reminded of the water holes seen on many prairie farms. Even though we were standing ankle deep in mud, it was a welcome dip, at least until I lost what was apparently the last bar of soap in the entire army. One guard was very upset. Earlier a RAF bombing raid had knocked out the electric and water services so maybe he didn't think too kindly of British airmen. I learned months later that 356 Squadron had made the raid on Bangkok and my best friend (and Bomb-aimer) Jim Gibson carried the movie camera in his aircraft. Fortunately no one was injured.

I was awakened in the early hours of the morning by Gildee and two Americans I had never seen before. They were Major Dick Greenlee and Captain Howard Palmer who were operating a secret OSS post in Bangkok. Our presence in the country placed the whole underground movement in serious jeopardy. Although the Japanese occupied Siam, all of their army, navy, air force and police made up the Free Thai underground with the Regent of Siam in command. The General of the army was second in command. We had been instructed that if we were ever shot down in Siam to surrender to the Siam forces who would protect us from the Japanese. Well, this certainly applied in our case. A similar underground had been operating in French Indo China until it was discovered by the Japanese with disastrous results. The police patrol that found us had been sent out with orders to prevent, at all costs, our capture by the Japanese. A Jap patrol had in fact searched the village half an hour after we left. The patrol was later ambushed by the Thai police and the bodies buried.

A plan had been hastily devised to smuggle the OSS agents out of the country. The OSS agents were being spirited away to keep their presence secret from the Japanese. They also wanted me as Captain of the aircraft out of the reach of the Japanese. There was room for one more British airman and Curly Copley was chosen because of his long service overseas. The rest of the crew would be safe in a Thai internment camp. With the skipper gone and the Navigator and Bomb-aimer both dead, the AG's, WOP's and Dispatchers would tell the Japanese interrogators that all they knew about their mission were routine duties. The idea was that with five graves at the crash site and with four interned crewmembers, the Japanese could be persuaded to believe that the complete nine-man crew had been accounted for. I woke Timber Woods and told him of the plan and instructed him to tell the Japs that the Lib had been on a meteorological flight. The OSS officers would keep tabs on them and get them out as soon as possible. The five of us were taken by auto to the OSS headquarters located in the palace of the Regent of Siam. The Regents' elegant dining room table served as an operating table for the two Thai doctors who worked for hours repairing our injuries. One had received his training in England and the other in New York. We were obviously in very good hands however there was not much in the way of

first aid or medical equipment. The laceration in my scalp was stitched together using a curved shoemakers needle and a pair of electrical lineman' pliers. A car battery tester was used to flush out the wound. I found out quickly just how tough the scalp really is and I remember wishing I had one of the cigarettes the Chinese lady had made. Major Gildee was a huge man more than six feet tall and over 250 pounds. It took the combined strength of four of us to set his broken collarbone. However during the night his arm came loose from our makeshift bandage and the break needed to be reset. The decision was then made to risk a trip to a hospital and have plaster casts put on Gildee's and Mac's fractures. Gildee related later how a Jap patrol had come while they had left the car and before reaching the hospital doors. He said he was so scared that he hid behind a tiny nurse. We had a chuckle at that image.

The food at the palace was remarkable. It was prepared at a five star hotel about four miles away and brought on foot by servants using shoulder yokes. We even had ice cream once! After a few days the Regent, whose code name was "Ruth", announced that he had arranged a few days of R & R for everyone. A few months back an OSS agent stationed in Bangkok for several months had gone off his rocker and there were tremendous difficulties getting him out of the country. After some half dozen rendezvous with Catalina flying boats and submarines in the Bay of Siam, he was finally evacuated to India. The Regent didn't want a repeat of this harrowing incident. He believed that the reason for the agent's difficulty was the confinement and stress of the job and the lack of female companionship. He was probably right but his idea of R & R was incredible. He had apparently bought a house and stocked it with food, wine and of course female companions. He also cordoned off the area with soldiers for a mile on all four sides. However Greenlee and Palmer considered the plan too dangerous. Anyway, it was clearly "above and beyond the call of duty." The Regent's last plea was "but Dick, even I can't afford these women". The matter was resolved as some Chinese had moved in across the street and began spying on the palace. The poverty in the country made it easy to find people willing to spy. A speedboat was kept moored by the rivers edge at the back of the property and some vehicles were kept inside the palace grounds in case a hurried escape became necessary. There was also a company of soldiers next door. Anyway, the decision was made to move out and we began another leg of the journey to freedom.

At midnight of the next day we piled into a battered old bus and headed out. An Australian who had escaped from a prisoner of war camp on the Jap railway came with us. He was just skin and bones and crouched in a corner all the time without ever speaking. The plan was to proceed to a rendezvous about 150 miles north of Bangkok. We hadn't traveled very far however when trouble started. Half way up a hill in heart of the city the bus began backfiring. There was a curfew in force and it wasn't very long before a Jap patrol arrived. The clicking of breach blocks inside the bus announced that we all intended to fight if necessary. The straw curtains on the windows were held closed while the driver explained to the patrol that he was transporting prisoners to jail. All the time he kept the starter engaged and the bus slowly crested the hill and coasted down the other side. We turned into an old racetrack and hid in the abandoned horse stalls. Luckily the Japs had decided to let us pass. Our Thai police driver and escort showed incredible ingenuity, courage and control in saving the situation. A runner was sent back and soon two British-type cars arrived to take us back to the Palace. There was no problem fitting our bulk into these small cars. The next night we left Bangkok with a tow truck and a spare bus following along and travelled several hours north to a small airfield in the village of Ban-Pe. Lt. Moore, Major Gildee and I were passengers in an antique Fairchild piloted by no less than the head of the entire Thai air force. The mag drop on run up was a whopping 400 RPM but we took off anyway. There was a tense moment in route until we crested a hill along the flight path. Curly was in a Taylorcraft that became lost and had to make an emergency landing but another plane arrived to take him to the rendezvous site. A small twin engine Beechcraft-11A twin-engine aircraft carried rest of the group. We were all relieved when we landed and were back together.

On June 14th a DC-3 from 357 Squadron piloted by F/L Lewis arrived to fly us back to India. A replacement OSS group was on board as well as a few cases of American beer in cans and cigarettes. This was my first taste of the famous Budweiser beer and I order it today just to relish the memory of that first taste.

The DC-3 had suffered a tear in the fabric of one elevator during the landing in the rough field and there was a moment of panic until a piece of cloth and some glue were produced. The beer and smokes were heaven sent and our spirits rose. Within the hour we were airborne and headed for home. A refuelling stop was made at Rangoon, which had just been captured, from the Japanese. Seven hours later we landed at the Alipore airport in Calcutta. It was difficult to believe that the entire episode had taken only three weeks.



F/O Smith

F/S Copley

“LEAVING SIAM”

Curly and I and the Aussie spent two weeks at Escape and Evasion HQ in Calcutta operated by Squadron Leader Huxley. A period of hiding was necessary for the safety the Siamese villagers and others who helped in the escape and until the crew were secure in the internment camp. It was here I learned that some Japanese fighter squadrons had moved in the same day that we had left on our mission and our flight path took us right near their base. The Aussie stayed with us and after awhile started to converse a bit. However, one evening when we were taken to a movie for a bit of relaxation, he freaked right out when Pathe News showed film of the allies entering the German concentration camps. We were greatly troubled and spent as much time as possible helping him to recover. We made a clandestine visit to the Calcutta General Hospital for checkups and returned to the squadron at the end of June 1945. The rest of the crew were brought out about two months later for a grand celebration. The four crewmembers who died have been buried at the KANCHANABURI WAR CEMETERY in

Malay. This is a picturesque, beautifully kept and very large cemetery located by the Khwai Noi River. It also contains the remains of the many allied prisoners of war that perished while building the infamous Japanese railway in Malay.

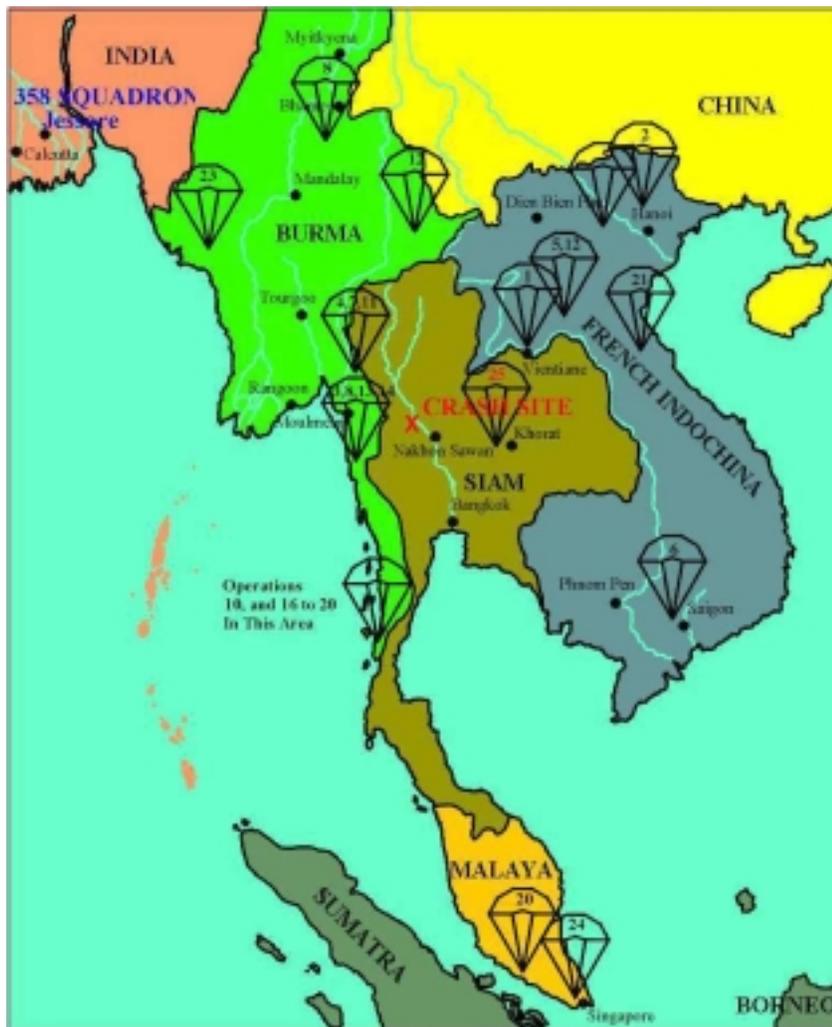
The following week I traveled to Darjeeling for some R & R and the reunion with Jim Gibson that we had planned earlier in the year. It was here that I made my second escape but that is another story.

This story was made more complete by details related in "Escape From Siam" as told by Curly Copley, Tailgunner and Timber Woods, 1st Wireless Operator/Airgunner back in 1954.

Over and Out.

**F/O Harry V. Smith, RCAF, Retired
DFC; Croix de Guerre avec Etoile d' Argent**

**29 May 1995
Revised November 2000**



H. V. SMITH CREW OPERATIONAL MISSIONS

No.	Date	Take-off Time	Total Hrs	Drop Zone
1	Jan. 27	17:10	12:30	Vientiane, FIC
2	Feb. 21	17:05	17:05	Hanoi, FIC
3	Feb. 23	15:55	8:35	Burma
4	Feb. 25	19:00	8:00	Burma
5	Feb. 28	19:40	12:25	FIC
6	Mar. 3	17:10	17:10	Saigon, FIC
7	Mar. 20	17:15	8:05	Burma
8	Mar. 22	18:10	8:15	Burma
9	Mar. 24	18:20	7:50	Burma
10	Mar. 26	10:35	11:15	Burma
11	Mar. 28	18:15	7:55	Burma
12	Mar. 30	10:00	12:25	Burma, FIC
13	Apr. 1	13:35	8:15	Burma
14	Apr. 3	14:05	8:20	Burma
15	Apr. 6	10:50	12:40	FIC
16	Apr. 9	13:25	11:15	Burma
17	Apr. 15	14:15	11:15	Burma
18	Apr. 18	11:40	11:55	Burma, FIC
19	Apr. 23	11:30	11:15	Burma
	May 8	VE Day		
20	May. 15	07:15	21:25	Malaya
21	May. 18	06:40	13:45	FIC
22	May. 20	10:25	12:30	Burma
23	May. 22	07:00	4:25	FIC, A/C U/S
24	May. 26	11:55	24:20	Singapore
25	May. 28	23:59	6:45	Khorat, Siam
	June. 14	10:00	2:50	Fairchild Local
	June 14	13:00	7:20	DC3 to India

POST SCRIPT 1

In December 1993 my wife and I spent a holiday in the United States. We stayed for three days at the Holiday Inn, in White River Junction in Vermont. The hotel had arranged a full programme of outings, movies and other forms of entertainment for our amusement. While studying the program for Christmas Day and deciding what we would do, we noticed that there would be a video presentation under the title “Glimpses of the Christmas Season in a Vermont Village” to be narrated by Chubb



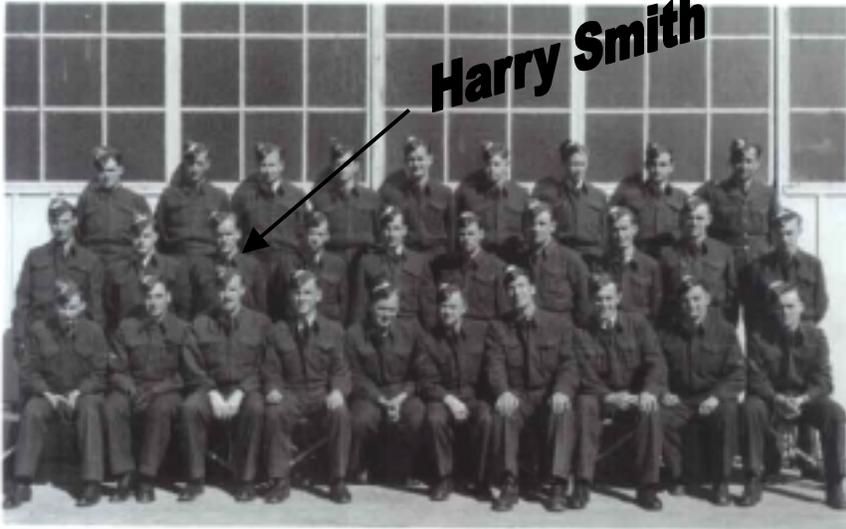
Condict. It then said if there were any Burma veterans staying in the hotel, Mr Condict would enjoy meeting them. So we decided to go. We arrived shortly before the show so that I could have a few words. We chatted about what had been happening in Burma and he was interested that I had been at Jessore when a Liberator had made a crash landing after being attacked by Japanese fighters. When I told him that I had been a member of the crew, he became very excited. Chubb Condict had been an OSS Officer attached to the 15th Indian (British) Corps during the final Burma Campaign. I think he said his mother was Burmese or part Burmese and he spent a lot of time in Burma prior to the war and spoke the language fluently. Anyway he told us that it had been he who had organised Harry Smith and the OSS agents escape although he hadn't actually participated in it. He knew all about it and what had happened to Harry afterwards. I think the meeting really made Chubb Condict's Christmas that year. He was

so thrilled that when the rest of the audience came in, he introduced me to them and told them all about the incidents. It was some time before the video got underway. I still marvel at the remarkable coincidence that one of three remaining survivors of that crash should be at the same hotel out of all in the United States at the same time as one of the men engaged in the underground operations.

Warrant Officer J. “Ramsay” Roe, (Ret'd)

POST SCRIPT 2

Another remarkable coincidence relates to Harry V. Smith and a reunion of a different sort. After retiring from a career as an engineer with Atomic Energy of Canada, Harry joined Canadian Warplane Heritage in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. One cold winter morning in the early 80's he



4 SPTS, Course 76 'A' Flight
June 1943 Saskatoon, Sask.

wandered into the hangar and noted that a group of us were in the process of restoring a Cessna Crane. At that point the aircraft was devoid of fabric and was undergoing major woodwork restoration. Harry asked if he could get involved with the restoration as he had gotten his wings on a Cessna Crane. At any rate Harry became the spark plug behind the project and as we neared the final stages of the restoration Harry enquired as to what we had in mind for markings on the Crane. Some of us on the crew knew the details of the aircraft's history and when we told

Harry she was 7862 from No.4 Service Flying Training School, Saskatoon, he realised for the first time that the aircraft was from the training base where he got his wings. Alas, there was no trace of 7862 in either Harry's logbook or his snapshots of the time so we figured that was where serendipity ended. However, the Almighty works in strange ways! The attached picture of B Flight of Harry's graduating class was taken in front of 7862 so a major event in Harry's life came full-circle after many years when he helped breath new life into the old girl. Harry does not know the wartime survival statistics for his fellow classmates but he noted to me that his 358 Squadron lost 24 of 28 of the original flight crews during 6 months of operations from November 1944 to June 1945.



4 SPTS, Course 76 'B' Flight
June 1943 Saskatoon, Sask.

Post Script 2 by Peter George who has been rewarded by having Harry as a friend for the past 20 years; was one of the Crane restoration crew; and ultimately flew Harry's Crane for Canadian Warplane Heritage.

Crest of the Government
of
CANADA

MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE FOR AIR

OTTAWA
September 12, 1945

Mr. And Mrs. R. H. Smith,
26 Furby Street, Suite 6,
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Smith:

I am writing to say that all ranks of the Royal Canadian Air Force join me in warmly congratulating you and the members of your family on the honour and distinction which have come to your son, Flying Officer Harry Vincent Smith DFC, through the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross for gallantry in the performance of his duty while serving with No. 358 Squadron of the Royal Air Force.

The citation on which this award was made reads as follows:

“Flying Officer Smith completed much operational flying. He has displayed a high degree of skill and courage qualities which were well illustrated on one occasion in May 1945, when during a sortie his aircraft was attacked by nine enemy fighters. Although the aircraft was severely damaged and one engine put out of action in the first attack this captain and his crew fought with great resolution. The enemy pressed home further attacks with great persistence and Flying Officer Smith’s aircraft sustained further damage. Two more engines were put out of action and three members of his crew were killed. Even so Flying Officer Smith though wounded, successfully crash landed the crippled aircraft thus saving the lives of the remaining members of his crew. In the face of great odds this officer set a fine example of coolness and bravery.”

The personnel of the Force are proud of your son’s fine Service record.

With kindest personal regards

Yours sincerely,

Original Signed by
Colin Gibson

Minister of National Defense for Air



Photo taken May 16, 1946
Lt. Governor R.F. McWilliams presents DFC to H.V. Smith
No. 2 Air Command Headquarters, Stevenson Field, Winnipeg

Campagnes pour la libération de la France
(1944 – 1945)

Décision N° 1278.

*Le Général de Gaulle,
Président du Gouvernement Provisoire de la
République Française,*

Cite à la Ordre DE LA DIVISION _____.

F/O SMITH 358 Squadron Opération "MOUCHE"

*"Pour services exceptionnels de Guerre rendus au
cours des opérations de libération de la France."*

Cette Citation comporte l'attribution de la Croix de
Guerre avec Etoile d'Argent.

PARIS, le 2 Novembre 1945.