

Recovering pieces of China-US WWII ties

Over 10 grueling days, a group of volunteers salvage war-era plane, **LI YANG** and **LI YU** in Chengdu report.

A solemn ceremony held in Sichuan province on Oct 22 honored the return of the remains of American pilots who fought in World War II.

Fan Jianchuan, founder and director of the Jianchuan Museum in Dayi county, Sichuan province, delivered a wooden box containing the remains to James Darby, senior policy adviser to the US Defense Personnel Accounting Agency, at the ceremony.

Raymond Greene, consul general at the US Consulate in Chengdu, covered the box with the US national flag. Afterward, Jing Quan, an official at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Greene signed documentation to hand over the remains.

"Chinese people will never forget the US people's selfless assistance and friendship during WWII, when the two peoples fought fearlessly together for justice, freedom and peace," Jing said.

Greene said the US government appreciates China's cooperation with the US in searching for the remains of US soldiers who fought in WWII. He said the US government will identify the remains and inform their families.

On Aug 16, a team of 60 volunteers delivered to Jianchuan Museum about 50 pieces of a US transport plane deployed in WWII that was discovered on the 4,100-meter high Ruoguo Glacier in Nyingchi prefecture, Tibetan autonomous region.

The WWII-era plane was found along with the remains of three of its crew members in September 1993 by a Tibetan. Investigators from China and the United States confirmed that it was a US air force plane, with the serial number 4124688, that crashed in the winter of 1943 during a transport mission on the Hump course.

The remains are believed to be of three men who served on the plane. There are 28 bones in all and an airman's boot.

Although the remains of the airman recovered from the crash site were handed over to the US after the recovery, most of the plane was left at the scene because the site was difficult to reach.

The Hump course was one of the most important air routes connecting China with allied forces in South Asia. During WWII, about 850,000 metric tons of supplies reached China through the route, though about 1,500 US planes crashed along the route that is above formidable mountain ridges of the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau and is known for its fickle and nasty weather conditions. Pilots said the huge ridges looked like humps, thus the moniker.

Difficult mission

Nearly 60 Chinese volunteers, many from the museum, participated in the salvage project named "Memory and Salute" with several local guides. It took them 10 days, from Aug 5 to Aug 14, to find the wreckage and take the plane parts back to Chengdu.

Tibetan Tsering Tsuzu, the head of security of the Jianchuan Museum and one of the volunteers, said difficult transport conditions and limited manpower left them little choice but to choose the most valuable pieces from the wreckage. Parts of the plane printed with letters and logos as well as the main parts of the plane, such as the instrument panel, the engine and wings, were carried down the mountain.

"When I saw the wreckage, I thought that all the hardships and difficulties in carrying the plane parts down the mountain would be worth it," said Hu Zhiyang, a volunteer who said he was almost struck by a falling boulder during the ascent. "Although we had detailed search plans, the difficulties we encountered were much more than we expected."

Yang Jianchao, vice-director of the museum and commander of the search team, said the most difficult part was climbing up the glacier.

"There was no path or bridge. We could only build the path and the bridge on our way to the mountain-top. We carried the plane piece by piece on our backs."

Fan said he had heard about the wreckage in 2009 from one of his friends in Nyingchi.

"Six years ago, I told myself that I will salvage the wreckage and bring



Nearly 60 Chinese volunteers, many from Jianchuan Museum in Chengdu, Sichuan province, brave treacherous mountain conditions to salvage a US transport plane used in World War II. They recovered parts of the plane in August and took them back to Chengdu. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Jianchuan Museum covers nearly 100,000 square meters and has 8 million relics on exhibit, 1,400 of which are related to the Flying Tigers, the group of US pilots who defended China against Japanese forces in WWII.



Nell Calloway (second right), granddaughter of US aviator Claire Lee Chennault, who led the Flying Tigers, visits the Chengdu Xinjin Airport with her family on Aug 25 and poses in front of a stoneroller, which Chinese laborers used to build airport runways for the US air force during WWII. CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Children from Sichuan province participated in building the airport runways for the US air force from 1937 to 1943.



An unnamed US military official in charge of building of Xinjin Airport during WWII speaks with Chinese laborers.



Sculptures of a Chinese and US soldier symbolize the friendship between China and the United States at Jianchuan Museum.



Exhibits in Jianchuan Museum in Chengdu.



Approximately 900,000 farmers in Sichuan province mobilized to build 18 airports for the US air force from 1937 to 1943, according to Chinese historians.

it to Chengdu. The project involved a lot of professional preparation, from the search for the plane to the cultural preservation of the parts. We did this with the help of volunteers sharing the same dream over the past six years."

The Jianchuan Museum covers nearly 100,000 square meters, and has 8 million relics on exhibit, with about 1,400 related to the Flying Tigers, the group of US pilots who defended China against Japanese forces in WWII. The heaviest relic in the museum is a stoneroller, which Chinese laborers used to build airport runways during the war.

Sacrifices by Chinese workers

In November 1943, then US President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked the Chinese government to help build four airports and support facilities near Chengdu for the US air force's B-29 bombers to prepare for the bombing of Japan.

"All the construction work was done by manpower. The runway for the B-29s had to be at least a meter thick and the stonerollers weighed five to 16 metric tons. Chinese farmers pulled the rollers with their hands and shoulders," said Ye Dunxu, vice-dean of the Sichuan Basu Anti-Japanese War History Research Institute.

Xinjin Airport, the largest airport for bombers at the time in Asia, was finished near Chengdu in just five months. In June 1944, 68 B-29 bombers left Xinjin for Japan's Kyushu Island, setting off the bombing of Japanese territory.

"I still remember my grandfather told me how hard the Chinese people worked to build the runway," said Nell Calloway, granddaughter of US aviator Claire Lee Chennault, who led the Flying Tigers.

During her Aug 25 visit to the former Xinjin Airport, which is now an aviation school, she said she hoped more Americans could learn that many Chinese died to create the airport. The success of the US air force's counterattack against Japan would not be possible without the sacrifice of the Chinese people, she said.

Duan Yu, a historian at the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, said about 900,000 farmers in Sichuan province mobilized to build 18 airports for the US air force from 1937 to 1943. Throughout the war, 33 busy military airports in Sichuan served as the backbone of Chinese and allied forces after 1943.

Among the museum's famous relics is a special frame with the photo of a young woman. "It is from a Flying Tiger pilot named Robert Glauber," said Fan.

Fan said Glauber told him on a visit to the museum in 2005 at the age of 84 that the former pilot had made the frame from parts of a Japanese fighter jet's wreckage during WWII and was planning to give it to his girlfriend in the US (the woman in the photo) but lost contact with the woman during the war. He remained single after his return to the US.

Glauber brought some items he used in the war to Fan in 2005 and said he hoped to "find a home for them".

"Robert thought he spent the most beautiful time of his life in China, and he did not want to see the people forget that period of history," Fan said. "He asked me 'Everything in your big house is all stuff used by the US army?' I said yes. He cried, and gave me a military salute in his wheelchair."

Fan is especially proud of a painting of two winged tigers by Zhang Shanzi (1882-1940), the elder brother of painter Zhang Daqian (1899-1983). Fan bought the painting in the 1990s. Based in New York during the war, Zhang Shanzi sold his paintings and donated the earnings to the Chinese army fighting against Japan.

He made the painting in 1940 when he heard that Chennault was organizing volunteer pilots to help China fight the war against Japan. Zhang Shanzi gifted the artwork to Chennault, who then reportedly used the painting of the winged tigers as a logo for the fighter jets.

In the museum is another prized relic: A notice printed by the US Department of War on June 1, 1945, that asks for asylum for US pilots who were shot down or forced to land in North China.

There are portraits of 248 of the Flying Tigers' pilots on a wall in the museum. In recent years, groups of US veterans and descendants of the pilots have visited the museum, many of whom reportedly broke down in tears when they saw the portraits, photos and plane wreckages.

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Jing Quan, an official at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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