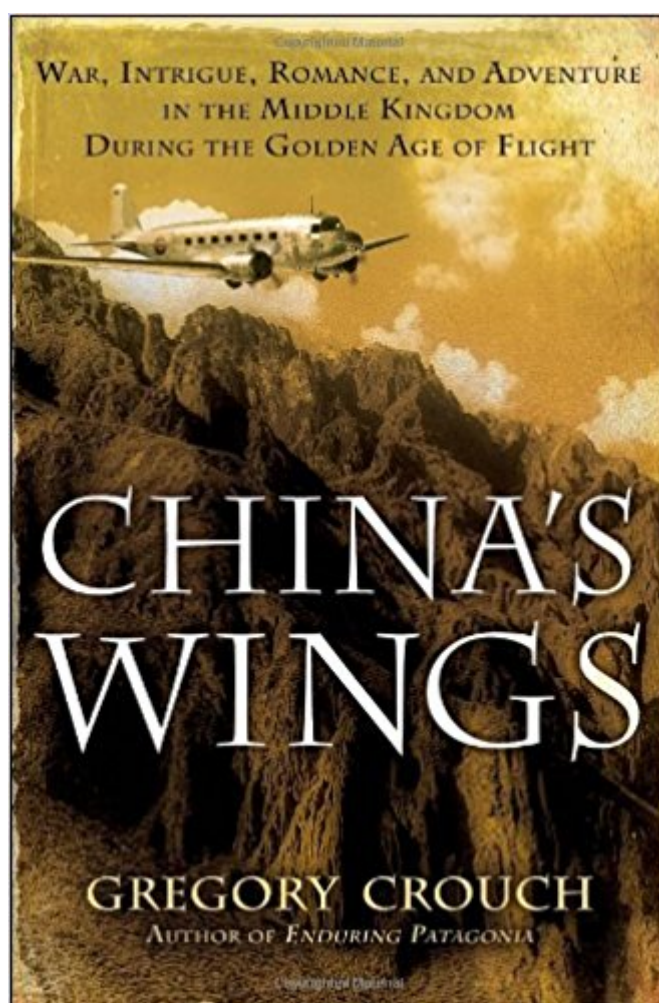


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# China's Wings: War, Intrigue, Romance, And Adventure In The Middle Kingdom During The Golden Age Of Flight



## Synopsis

From the acclaimed author of *Enduring Patagonia* comes a dazzling tale of aerial adventure set against the roiling backdrop of war in Asia. The incredible real-life saga of the flying band of brothers who opened the skies over China in the years leading up to World War II—and boldly safeguarded them during that conflict—China’s Wings is one of the most exhilarating untold chapters in the annals of flight. At the center of the maelstrom is the book’s courtly, laconic protagonist, American aviation executive William Langhorne Bond. In search of adventure, he arrives in Nationalist China in 1931, charged with turning around the turbulent nation’s flagging airline business, the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC). The mission will take him to the wild and lawless frontiers of commercial aviation: into cockpits with daredevil pilots flying—sometimes literally—on a wing and a prayer; into the dangerous maze of Chinese politics, where scheming warlords and volatile military officers jockey for advantage; and into the boardrooms, backrooms, and corridors of power inhabited by such outsized figures as Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek; President Franklin Delano Roosevelt; foreign minister T. V. Soong; Generals Arnold, Stilwell, and Marshall; and legendary Pan American Airways founder Juan Trippe. With the outbreak of full-scale war in 1941, Bond and CNAC are transformed from uneasy spectators to active participants in the struggle against Axis imperialism. Drawing on meticulous research, primary sources, and extensive personal interviews with participants, Gregory Crouch offers harrowing accounts of brutal bombing runs and heroic evacuations, as the fight to keep one airline flying becomes part of the larger struggle for China’s survival. He plunges us into a world of perilous night flights, emergency water landings, and the constant threat of predatory Japanese warplanes. When Japanese forces capture Burma and blockade China’s only overland supply route, Bond and his pilots must battle shortages of airplanes, personnel, and spare parts to airlift supplies over an untried five-hundred-mile-long aerial gauntlet high above the Himalayas—the infamous “Hump”—pioneering one of the most celebrated endeavors in aviation history. A hero’s-eye view of history in the grand tradition of Lynne Olson’s *Citizens of London*, *China’s Wings* takes readers on a mesmerizing journey to a time and place that reshaped the modern world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gregory Crouch on China's Wings The seed that became China's Wings was planted by Charlie Fowler, one of my climbing partners in Enduring Patagonia, the book I'd written about my mountain adventures in that extreme land. Charlie's other adventuring obsession was unclimbed peaks in Central Asia, and back from explorations along the Tibet/China frontier in early 2002, Charlie sent me an email: "Greg, I keep hearing stories of these old World War II American plane wrecks in the Eastern Himalaya. You're a military history guy and a mountaineer; you should spark up a story on that." I recognized the genesis of a good idea, and as a lifetime WWII history buff, I guessed those wrecks were probably relics of the airlift from India to China the United States prosecuted over the mountains dropping down the border between Burma and China's Yunnan province--the infamous "Hump." However, I was in Oman on a National Geographic assignment at the time. I didn't get around to pursuing Charlie's lead until months later. When I did, "flying the Hump" web searches quickly ran across the cnac.org website--an enthusiast's collection of stories, events, and people related to the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), a civil airline partnership between Pan American Airways and the Nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai-shek that flew and fought in China from 1929-1949. I knew many of the tales orbiting CNAC's story--among them Pan Am's pioneering transpacific flights, the Flying Tigers, and the Hump airlift--but I'd never heard of the airline that seemed to have played such a pivotal role in those events. I stumbled across the website's reunions page and noticed that CNAC had a reunion scheduled only three weeks later, and that it was in San Francisco, less than twenty miles from my desk. Tentatively, I picked up the telephone and called CNAC Association President Bill Maher, one of the airline's Hump pilots. I introduced myself, explained that I wanted to explore the possibility of writing a book about his airline, and asked if I

could attend the reunion. "Hell yes!" Bill thundered. "Come on over. We've got great stories." I attended, and Bill was right. He and his flying band of brothers oozed fascinating stories and outrageous adventures played out against the desperate background of the war in Asia. I was hooked. Driving away from the reunion three days later, I was physically shaking, convinced I'd discovered an untold, compelling, and significant story--one I was meant to tell. I never did succeed in mounting an expedition to visit a World War II plane wreck in the remote mountains of Asia--although I still hold out hope that someday I might--but the years of research that followed proved the story of the China National Aviation Corporation to be richer, deeper, and more historically significant than I'd dared hope; and in William Langhorne Bond, the steady, mannerly, but sharp-elbowed Virginian whose endeavors did so much to propel the airline through two trying decades, I'd discovered the perfect protagonist to carry the story. I spent dozens of hours with Moon Fun Chin, a remarkable man born in an obscure South China village in 1913 who began flying for CNAC in the early 1930s, piloted the last evacuation flights from Hankow in 1938 and Hong Kong in December, 1941, amassed many thousands of flying hours with the company through its years on the Hump (including taking Tokyo raider Jimmy Doolittle out of China in 1942), and ended up owning his own airline after the war. Through contemporary letters, books, articles, and interviews, China's Wings took me through the breathtaking, deadly Yangtze Gorges in the early 1930s, provided an inside account of the development of Pan American's groundbreaking transpacific route, bore witness to the utter destruction of Shanghai in a colossal--and largely forgotten--battle fought after the Japanese invaded China in 1937, and to mind-boggling mechanical improvisations, the mass evacuations of cities like Hankow and Hong Kong as they fell to the invaders, pivotal meetings in the boardrooms of Pan American Airways and the corridors of power in Washington, DC, and tense, fear-choked moments in cockpits over the Hump. The story of William Bond and the China National Aviation Corporation proved the perfect lens through which to experience the U.S. relationship with China during the crux decades of the Twentieth Century. Sadly, neither Bill Maher nor Charlie Fowler can enjoy the fruits of their assistance; Bill Maher passed away in the summer of 2011, and Charlie was killed by an avalanche in China in 2006. I will always be grateful to them for their friendship and for this story.

Advance praise for China's Wings "Too many people think the war in the Pacific began with Japan's sudden strike on Hawaii, launched seemingly out of nowhere. Crouch's vividly written book explains how America's business interests in 1930s China set it on the path to Pearl Harbor. This is the rousing story of the enterprising Pan Am pilots

who built a frontier airline and went on to become aviation heroes, flying over the Himalayas, helping save China, and thereby transforming the world. —James D. Hornfischer, New York Times bestselling author of *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors* and *Neptune's Inferno* —“Dramatically rendered.” —Kirkus Reviews —“In China’s *Wings*, Gregory Crouch recalls the remarkable encounter between an ancient civilization and the most modern technology in the world, as intrepid Americans and their Chinese partners struggled to establish a sophisticated air network over a vast land that barely knew electricity. This gripping book will transport you to a fascinating lost time.” —James Bradley, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Flags of Our Fathers* and *The Imperial Cruise* —“West Point grad Crouch brings us a story that’s part adventure, part unearthed history [and] not just for history buffs.” —Library Journal

Recommend for those who are interested in the history of aviation as well as for anyone who wishes to learn more about world history. This book encompasses both. The reader will learn about the people who participated in this endeavor, their desires and the politics which affected every turn. The World War II years provide a fascinating glimpse on how the war affected a country, a company, and the individual characters. Mr. Crouch does an excellent job in turning what could have been a mundane account into an exciting read, at times a page-turner when the events compel the reader to finish out the chapter in order to discover what happened. Excellent, excellent book, one I am very glad to have stumbled across and taken the time to read.

Topically, China’s *Wings* is the story of China National Air Corporation, and the role it played in the development of China immediately prior to and during WWII. But that is not really what the book is about. The book is about ordinary people who found themselves in an extraordinary situation, and became extraordinary people. Crouch’s narration is so vivid, his characterizations so skillfully drafted, the real life plot so compelling, that at times it is hard to remember that what you’re reading is non-fiction. Given how impeccable Crouch’s research is and how well documented the book is, the fact that it never reads like a scholarly treatise is, in itself, worth noting. China’s *Wings* will be of interest not just to aviation history buffs, WWII buffs, or history majors, it’s a book that anybody who likes an adventure story will enjoy.

I applaud Crouch’s book, this is the kind of gem we get when an author has spent

time researching their topic, but edited their manuscript without mercy. To pull off a non-fiction book that reads like a fiction novel is stunning and not easily done. This is not something I would typically say, but filmmakers should pursue this book. *China's Wings* follows the real life events of an American aviation executive William Langhorne Bond. Crouch's protagonist demonstrates how some of the best characters remain in the realm of non-fiction, stories of real people who did remarkable things. Thank you Gregory Crouch for pointing out (repeatedly), the isolationist policy the US held going into WWII. Way to kick pacifist idiots in the head by discussing the inhumane acts our nation could have potentially hindered or stopped if the US had stepped up earlier. Even if to only marginally cut off supplies and petroleum. While I don't discredit the value works exploring the mentality of the Third Reich, I find it irritating there is not an equal amassing of exploratory literature covering the mentality of a nation of people (Japan) who celebrated the mass killing of civilians during their invasion of China. *China's Wings* does such an effective job of illustrating the destruction Japan wrought against China in WWII. Crouch made me cringe and ponder the deviation of an entire culture/continent/country of people. How did they wittingly and collectively throw their moral compasses away, because there was no trickery or veiled propaganda about the civilian death toll in China? Any of the battles, destroyed cities and provinces affected could be extrapolated on. But Crouch delivers the necessary details to capture the horror of war and war crimes without losing readers who might not enjoy long expositions about battles and tragic civilian death. This is a must read for anyone who missed checking *China's Wings* as one of the United States allies during WWII on a high school history exam. Aviation buffs, and military history fans should add this to their read list for sure. Those interested in the tactics that evolved America's strategic airlift capability will enjoy this book. Incidents portrayed in this book provide clear examples of why modern civilized nations conduct military operations with formal rules of engagement. Crouch has a knack for describing both environment and action. We are given enough detail to understand the difficult circumstances particular aircraft faced, but not so much to bore us into oblivion. All the details given are useful and help heighten the drama the pilots faced in unusual circumstances told in the book. And to all of my squeamish friends this is a book that involves a challenged airline during WWII—a war. Don't yell at me later if you read this book not understanding what kind of graphic content is usually associated with war.

As the granddaughter of a World War II Hump pilot, *China's Wings* was a fascinating read. I grew up

admiring my grandfather's adventures, flying men and cargo over the Himalayas from India to China during the war. Gregory Crouch brings these stories of risk and bravery to life, along with the full history of the commercial airline that managed the airlift. China National Aviation Corporation, a joint venture between Pan American and the Chinese government, proved more efficient and competent at flying over the treacherous mountains in monsoons and snowstorms and dense fog than the Army Air Corps. The visionary behind CNAC was William Langhorne Bond, a Virginian who escaped the Great Depression by shepherding the airline into a profitable business for Pan Am through the turbulent, war-torn 30s and 40s in China, while Japanese soldiers and bombers attacked relentlessly. Bond endured a dozen years in China, mostly separated from his wife and two sons, to keep the airline on a steady course through the war, as he was singularly suited to diplomatically work with Chinese government and business officials. This book will remind you of the "Aviator," but it will also illuminate a little known part of history leading up to Pearl Harbor and the action in the China-Burma-India theater. A compelling story that has finally been told.

Just experienced the true joy of re-reading China Wings while riding sections of the old Burma Road in Yunnan, China. Mr. Crouch's colorful prose and first-rate storytelling is well-suited to the task of laying out the adventures of CNAC - the China-American civilian aviation joint venture and its role in WWII. Such adventures unfold in China Wings -- way too thrilling for fiction. While our Chinese host rider was well-versed in the history of the amazing AVG aka "Flying Tigers" he - an perhaps others - may have miscredited AVG with some the heroics that were actually accomplished by William Bond's CNAC. The CNAC story literally leaps off the book's pages. I absorbed even more on the second read - example I'd previously overlooked GEN Stilwell's important role in the ground battle and was delighted to find his likeness honored at Songchan's "Battle of Mount Song" monument. Wish neither ride nor book had to end. Hope the author has more such historic yarn's up his sleeve!

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