

The capture of the Burma Road by the Japanese during World War II forced U.S. airmen to fly hundreds of missions a day into China in an airlift of epic proportions. Having to fly over the towering Himalayan Mountains, the pilots came to know this route as 'flying the hump.' The Hump was a pioneering aviation operation that had just about everything working against it: the forbidding mountains, the worst flying weather in the world, deadly Japanese fighters, the crudest of navigational aids, unproven aircraft, and inexperienced flight and maintenance crews. Military commanders considered a flight over the Hump to be more hazardous than a bombing mission over Europe. More than 1,300 pilots and crew members were lost and more than 500 transport planes crashed trying to make it.

William C. Wentz was a flight mechanic crew member of the U.S. Army Air Force's Air Transport Command, that flew from bases in northeast India's Assam Valley to Kunming, China in the southwestern Yunnan Province, about 500 miles east.

They supplied Chinese and American troops from 1942 -- when Japan took control of Burma and its land route -- until 1945. They transported trucks, weapons and Chinese soldiers. The thousand-mile roundtrip was full of high winds, sub-zero temperatures, thunderstorms and mountain peaks up to 18,000 feet. They flew it without cabin pressure or cabin heat in the transport planes of the day, twin-engine C-46s and C-47 "gooneybirds." Navigation was by radio and dead reckoning.

Sgt. William C. Wentz earned a Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroism and extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight.