

Indian Elephants Used to Carry Plane Wreckage Out of Dense Jungle Country

Indian elephants as crash trucks for the Air Service command is the story brought out of the Assam valley jungle by Alfred Cellier of Los Angeles, now a civilian employe of the San Bernardino Air Service command.

Mr. Cellier now is technical inspector in the office of the air inspector, San Bernardino Air Service command, but at the time of the story he tells he was a major with the Army Air Forces.

NG FAMILY



He was sent to India in December, 1942, to join the 10th Air Force. Later, due to his aeronautical engineering experience, he was assigned to the Air Service command, charged with responsibility for the repair and maintenance of fighting planes, which at that time were pitifully few.

Mr. Cellier's most important task with the Air Service command was the salvaging of planes grounded by crash landings. His assignments kept him shuttling back and forth over the widespread fighting theater. It was while on such a mission that his use of elephants saved the day.

Faced with the problem of reaching a crashed plane through 100 miles of impenetrable jungle, and no large plane available to fly in with a repair crew, he thought of elephants.

"I had once before used elephants to restore a warning tower on a mountainside which the Jap patrols had knocked out," said Mr. Cellier. "The thought hit me. Why not use elephants for crash trucks? I detailed an officer and a number of enlisted men, who were expert aircraft mechanics, to round up a couple of big elephants and their Naga hillsmen mahouts.

HOISTED ABOARD

"By the way, these Naga hillsmen are head-hunters in their spare-time. Nice fellows to have around. Well, the salvage crew was hoisted aboard and off they went, crashing through the jungle. What the elephants couldn't go around they knocked down in their path."

In addition to danger from jungle beasts and serpents there was the ever-present fear that wild elephants would stampede the tame ones and leave the party stranded on foot in the deep wilderness.

"Then began the most unique job of plane salvage in the history of the Air Service command," Mr. Cellier continued. "The elephants cleared a space around the wreck-

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ed plane by snaking out trees with their trunks. The boys went to work removing the wings from the plane so it could be handled more easily.

"That damaged P-40 weighed about four tons, but I'll be hanged if those two peanut-eaters didn't pick up that fuselage, one wrapping his trunk around the nose of the plane and the other around the tail of it, and carried it miles to the nearest river."

NATIVES HIRED

From there on the job was comparatively simple. Natives were hired to build a bamboo raft on which to float the damaged plane to where a crash truck could pick it up and the Air Service command had delivered again in a pinch.

"If the Good Lord had only put wings on elephants," concluded Mr. Cellier, "Boy! What flying cargo-carriers they'd make."

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