INDIA UNIT

Summary of the location of operations in the India Unit

Camp Frank Knox was located at Ballygunge [22-32 88-22] on the south side of Calcutta, India.

The India Unit consisted of buildings, equipment, services, supplies, and staging areas throughout Calcutta, India. Almost everything and everyone went through Calcutta on the way to SACO in China. The facilities included the Calcutta DF (direction finder) and Radio Calcutta with antenna farm,

> [In the early part of 1943] SACO had, on permanent station in India, only three officers and nineteen men, and there were about fifty transients a month. But by the summer of 1944 those totals had grown to twenty-six officers, more than a hundred men, and many hundreds of transients. We had progressed to four houses but even with this additional space we sometimes had as many as six officers in double-tiered bunks per tropically overheated room. Our expanding and ever-changing services included a printing office, photographic laboratories, a hydrographic office, motor pools, and a motor repair unit. But despite all this, nobody with any rank ever stayed in our India offices long enough to exert any authority, though we who were in China were forever passing back various official and personal chores that we couldn't attend to for ourselves.
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> Late in 1943 Hal Williams, in his spare time, tried to organize the whole complicated business as a unit, but he soon found it beyond him.
>
> "You can't harness this octopus," he wrote. (Miles, 1967, p 270)

> We required the talents of a tycoon to run our sprawling plant, but we also needed the ingratiating manner of a hotel keeper. So we requisitioned Lieutenant Commander Francis H. Smith from the Office of Naval Liaison, Karachi, where most of his work had been for SACO.
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> "Smitty" didn't fluster. He had lived for years in India, working for Firestone. He spoke Hindustani and knew all the angles about the local employees as well as the tea habits of the Governor General. We certainly needed his fearless red-tape snipping, his good humor, and his local know-how. After all, the daily crises were growing bigger. During my spring visit, for example, he heard that four hundred men had left the West Coast of the United States in one draft, and that they would reach Calcutta in five weeks. We were already overcrowded and were borrowing space from the Army Base at Kancharapara. But with more personnel arriving Smitty knew that because of Hump delays he would have the better part of five hundred men to feed, quarter, keep healthy, active, and out of trouble. And it was also important that their affairs be kept reasonably secret.

We had an empty space on Regent Road in a suburb of Calcutta, behind Hostel No. 2 and near our printing plant, photo shops, and radio unit. Our plans had long been calling for some new construction there, but the plans had already been five months passing through the theater commander's rulings and we still had not obtained permission to build.

"We're badly outranked here," wrote Smitty, "and if you don't think that makes a difference you're pretty woefully mistaken."

So, about five weeks before the expected deluge of new arrivals, Smitty gave up trying to go through channels. Instead, he robbed his own storehouses, gathered skilled labor from SACO transients, and merely on his own authority prepared a minimum of sanitary facilities, tents, and Quonset huts in time for the arrival of the big group. Knowing that it was a waste of time and tonnage to send any man farther if he was a chronic grumbler or had osteomyelitis, he tried to weed out any medical or other misfits. He also knew that it was a waste of time to transport a man who couldn't shoot, so India Unit set up a gunnery school. (Miles, 1967, p 271)

Our portable radio spy sets were useless without batteries, but the "shelf life" of batteries was only about nine months and it took six months to get them out to China. So we decided to make our own batteries in India, shipping out only the sheet lead we needed and purchasing the other material locally. We saved money doing it, and more important, saved tonnage on freight. And we were also able to deliver batteries within a few weeks of the time they were manufactured, thus giving them much longer useful life.

But our troubles were not invariably matters of shortage. In one instance, at least, we had a bit more than we needed and ultimately had to dispose of a veritable mountain of excess material.

What happened was this: We had a few men who chewed tobacco regularly, and who were very unhappy without a "chaw." So we sent in a requisition for a modest amount—for one case, in fact, which amounts to 144 plugs. But someone in the Navy supply office must have decided that that picayune order had been placed in error and, looking out for the welfare of the men for whom the chewing tobacco was intended, he increased the amount. That, at least, is what I suppose occurred, for when the tobacco arrived, the shipment consisted not of one case, but of one thousand cases, each containing 144 plugs! Naturally, space had to be found for the unwanted 999 cases, and then Smitty looked about for some use for the stuff. He tried the Army but had no luck. He tried the Air Force and was equally unsuccessful. "By that time he had reached the conclusion that he was going to have to write the whole shipment off but, as luck would have it, the Indian Army heard about it and, to his relief, took the whole enormous shipment off his hands. (Miles, 1967, p 271-72)

> Our printing shop had been set up in India because the equipment was too heavy for our Hump allowance, and it soon was accepted as unique in the Far East for the type and variety of service it gave. In spite of the difficulty of getting paper, and regardless of the humidity that made the paper curl up when the printers wanted it to lie flat on the presses, they turned put an endless stream of invaluable aids—of "red-tape forms," weather maps for the whole of China, code books for outlying stations, and thousands of small, easy-to-carry charts of portions of hydro-graphic charts. Our best seller was a reprint of a rare copy of a Chinese atlas by V. K. Ting, which was well known among Chinese scholars for its accuracy. (Miles, 1967, p 272)

The printing unit was headed by LT V. H. Ellis and CWO Frank J Dennis. The equipment included large-format copy cameras and multicolor multilith printers.

> A complete list of the many chores of our India Unit would surely appear incredible. Still, we in China, where our troubles were even worse, took their activities for granted and I believe that Smitty did, too. I know that before he left he was actually building a dry dock! (Miles, 1967, p 273)

At Ballygunge, on the south side of Calcutta, was a facility for personnel awaiting transport over the Hump. It was first called Hostel No. 2 and then Camp Regent; located on Regent Road. It was expanded and in April, 1945 commissioned as Camp Frank Knox. Lieutenant Commander Francis H. "Smitty" Smith was the commander and LTJG William P. Owens, the exec. While there, the men were informally instructed on Chinese customs and living conditions behind Japanese lines.

> The Indian cooks, tutored by "Sahibs" Clark of Mississippi and Alpha Omega Ponder of California produced meals that included fresh green vegetables, salads and ice tea — and then Firpo's and the Great Eastern Hotel were never far away if you were really hungry! Of course many or us experienced our first bout with dysentery from eating Indian ice cream but who cared? It was cold! The Army boys called it "Six Trip Runs". (Stratton, 1950, p 36)

Many of the buildings were adobe with thatched or tin roofs on which the monsoon rains would loudly beat. The camp was designed for 450 transients but space was difficult to acquire, By June 1945, there were twice that number.

> In India our Camp Knox was bulging with almost a thousand men who had been carefully selected, expensively trained, and started on their way to SACO. They had been trained at Roger Amphibious School at Fort Pierce, Florida, and in October 1944 the first 150 of an authorized force of 750 had begun a course that included scouting, raiding, and demolitions. These men were to work specifically with our coast groups. The idea was that they would capture and clear ports and harbors, and would also lend a hand in operating with junks. They were experienced in small boat handling, outboard

> motors, close unarmed combat, booby traps, demolition, underwater demolitions, beach jumping, and more besides. (Miles, 1967, p 469)

It was at Camp Knox that the newcomers learned to sing *Every Man a tiger* to the tune of the old Navy song, *The Armored Cruiser Squadron*. Three of the ten verses recorded by CDR Stratton (1950, p 38) are

> The lieutenant whispered in our ear
> We want some men to volunteer
> We want some men that have no fear
> That is how we got into SACO
>
> We subsist on rice and eggs
> And climb up hills to shape our legs
> We've thrown away the Navy Regs
> They don't apply to SACO
>
> Our water supply is full of gunk
> It must be boiled before it's drunk
> Until the day a well is sunk
> Hwan Jo is the drink of SACO
>
> CHORUS (Repeat after each verse)
> Well, who am I, Sir?
> A SACO man am I, Sir
> Will be 'til I die, Sir
> Every man a Tiger . . . grruh . . . grruh!

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Charles H. Miles, Ph.D.
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