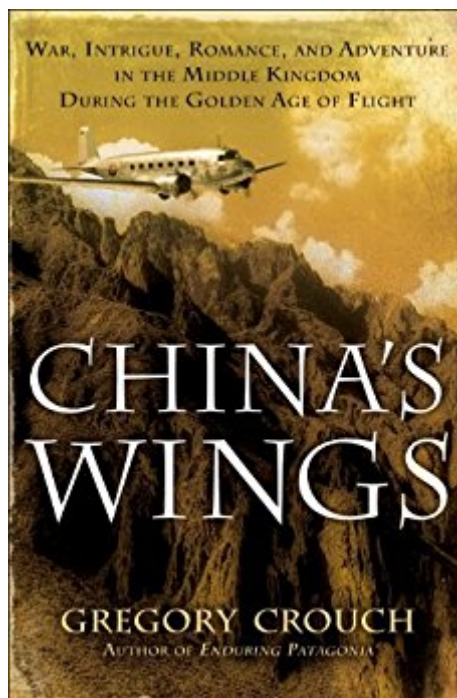


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# China's Wings: War, Intrigue, Romance, And Adventure In The Middle Kingdom During The Golden Age Of Flight



## 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

I would not call myself a scholar of WWII, nor do I have a super keen interest in aviation history or this particular time period in China, but I can say that Crouch's superb storytelling abilities transported me right into the heart of the story. With fascinating characters, like William Langhorn Bond, who is an increasingly rare breed of a man that we need more of today, the daring and out right bravery of pilots like Moon Chin, and a country striving for unity in the face of Japanese aggression, this book is one great read. It will more than satisfy the scholar as Crouch's research is impeccable and extensive, but for the average reader, you will not get bogged down in a zillion facts and figures. From the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai in the 30's to the dangerous airlift known as "the Hump", this is history told in its finest, as a captivating story with events that you just can't make up.

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.

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.

I'm an airplane fanatic, but not a reader of war history. This book straddles the divide between history buffs and those who like stories that happen to be true. Incredibly well researched, *China's Wings* reads like a very erudite novel, thanks to the focus on characters and wild tales (like Elmer the bear who rode in the cockpit across the Himalayas to get a break from the hot temperatures on the ground, or the photos and description of a plane that had to be equipped with one too-short wing) as well as dates and facts. The story of William Bond and his friends, foes and colleagues is an amazing piece of history, as well as an inspiration: this is someone who lived his life according to his principles without compromise and created bridges between individuals and cultures. I read it through without stopping, and immediately ordered a second copy to send to my dad.

*China's Wings* is one of the finest books I've read in my 60+ years of reading. For academicians, Crouch has produced a well-researched, strongly-supported reference work. For lovers of adventure, he has provided many hours of excellent entertainment. I'm an ex-airlifter who flew in East Asia (mostly South Vietnam) in 1968, 1969 and 1970, including 15 months of operations out of Taiwan, when Chiang's son reportedly held a lot of power. Upon arrival in Taiwan in 1969, we

received an orientation in which we were cautioned about ill feelings on the island between the Taiwanese and the Nationalists and by both for the Japanese. This book has filled in gaps in my knowledge of the history of East Asia and provided context around stories I heard from older pilots in my squadron who had flown the Hump as young copilots.

Greg Crouch spent more than 5 years researching and writing this book, and the results reflect that enormous effort. It is an excellent history of China for anyone interested in the period leading up to and during WWII, and an outstanding history of the amazing role played by a small Chinese airline in the affairs of the world. I use the word outstanding partly because the incredible depth of detail initially made me feel that it must be an historical novel. The author assured me, however, that he was not aware of any non-factual details in the book, and after exploring some of the resources on which he relied, I am confident of his veracity. The rest of the reason for the use of the word outstanding is that despite the amazing depth of detail, Mr. Crouch tells the story in a way that makes it a page turner - I could not put the book down. It is a compelling tale of both individual's and national strategies, tied together with impressive journalist's skill. A must-read for both aviation and WWII buffs.

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