

Riding the Sooner Range

By TED BEAIRD

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WHAT a *Range* this chap has ridden! From "down under" in a-not-so-secluded-spot comes this word masterpiece on War, and Battles, and Plans:

Burma—(And How!)

Dear Mr. Beaird:

This being my first letter to you perhaps I'd better identify myself. Hockman is the name. Charles Nedwin Hockman. Just plain Ned there at the University though. I remember the first time I came into your office back in '41. My brother was with me. We were just two more Carnegie boys coming to you for help. Having been advised to do so by JOE McBRIDE, JOE BENTON, GUY BROWN, EMIL STRATTON, and a few others from our side of the state. Yes, we were after a couple of those jobs you used to hand out—when a guy *had* to earn his meal ticket while "educatin'!" We were quite a ways down the list, but as the months went by we each landed one. After that I branched out and became one of HOMER HECK'S announcers for WNAD. With the exception of my radio work, speech and such, I wasn't much good at my studies. Wasn't settled down enough I guess. Or maybe I was too interested in those subjects alone. Well, anyway I can tell you it was sure good to have been at O.U. What I did learn there made me what I am in my work today. It'll be good to get back and pick up where I left off. Best I write, pick up where I was supposed to have started.

In the Army, I'm one of those fortunate few who are doing the work which before had been just an ambition or dream. Have done so well at it, that I'll be damned if they didn't give me a direct commission in the field. My job is that of an Official War Photographer and Correspondent. I can't express to the fullest extent how interesting the job is. It being what it is, you can just imagine. The job has taken me lots of places and I've seen a lot. Just about everything that can be seen in war. The fight for Burma has been a mixture of the European war and that of the South Pacific. On the other hand it's quite different due to its nature.

My most extraordinary experiences came while serving with WINGATE and COCHRAN in the glider invasion of Burma. That was something! Something right out of the books. As if you were sitting in front of your fireplace reading a thriller. The only difference being that you were in it risking your own neck and not that of a fictitious character. Man, it was real! We really held onto our hats! Unfortunately some had to turn theirs loose. Need I write more? For me there have been other thrilling moments, such as bombing Rangoon, Mandalay, Battle of Myitkyina and various other action. That's all behind me and I'm glad.

As you no doubt know, we're now a good ways down into Burma. As I look back to where we were when I first arrived here in 1943, I can certainly see we've come a long way. The fight has been long and hard due to conditions, terrain, and climate of this country, because of the high mountains which border India from Burma and Burma from China and other minor factors which are about, seen and unseen. Often I fear people do not clearly understand the fighting and operations here. Add mountains, jungles, swamps, the monsoons, rushing rivers, different types of natives, the tropic as a whole, and then the Jap . . . all together you have your hands full of trouble. Now we're past most of the bad parts. Past that "Valley of Death"—the Hukawng Valley. Never do I ever expect to get into a more undesirable spot! Now it's no longer a fight for a ground route to China

or the "Road to Mandalay." Our mission here has been accomplished to that degree. A job well done. All accomplished with six to eight different races working together. Here, as elsewhere in Asia, it's to eliminate the Jap when and wherever we can find him. Teaching him the lesson that's com'n' to him. Period!!!!

I could go on and on, but as the old saying goes "War is hell!" so why discuss it beyond that point. Best to talk about the more pleasant things. Although some times I realize that the gruesome things must be hashed over to keep some of the "jokers" back in the States on their toes. I don't mean to be radical on that subject, but I'm sure *you can and do understand* about the *type* of which I write. If they could only be impressed with what guys go through overseas when the going gets tough. That type's few and far between thank the Lord, but guess it's only natural to have a few existing ones.

Right outside my door there's an old Buddha that might be of interest to you. In height he stands about 25 feet. He's sitting with his legs crossed, his feet in his lap. The ornaments about him and part of his garments are painted gold. His eyes are slanted and have that mysterious Oriental look. This one is quite different from the one I first saw up Tibet way last July. That one was intact with all the trimmings, from precious stones, rugs, Tibetan priests, to the long extension horns which would bellow out across the mountains. It's a monotonous groan rumbling about from mountain side to mountain side, then hitting the "Virgin Peak," Kanchanjanga, and bouncing back to your ears. This fellow we have here has been shot up a good bit. Bullets and shell fragments have pierced him in many places. The shelter which used to cover him is now blown to bits and only he remains. Parts of the shelter still stand but in complete wreckage, as do all the other buildings about. A few natives have gotten through the Jap lines and over to us. They're certainly overjoyed with being out of Jap hands and free again. What stories they tell! My camera crew and I moved in with the Chinese troops to photograph the close air support which is a main factor in their moving forward. Of late we've been covering such all along. By now you've no doubt seen a number of pictures, both in motion and stills, covering the war in Burma. I do hope so. While covering the opening of the new "Stilwell Road" I took a beautiful aerial shot of the road as it winds up into the mountains from Burma into China. It's getting around a lot there in the States so be on the look out for it. It really has beauty and of course the subject makes it great.

The beauty spots of Burma are present now and will appear more and more as we push further south. I've seen a few of the beautiful Burmese maidens literature often speaks of. They're quite different in their beauty and I suppose as the book says, enchanting. Now don't get me wrong about them. Ha ha. It's just the matter of seeing what before you've read and heard adventures describe. You know, Kipling, etc. . . . For my part they can give it all back to him. I'm tired now and would like to get home for awhile. Should be head'n' that way in two or three months. Yes sir, back to the good ol' USA.

I'd like to say here that I've appreciated your letters from the University of Oklahoma Association which have reached me from time to time. So, until later, here's another Sooner who has just shot the "breeze" with you on paper.

All the best,

(Signed) Ned Hockman.