

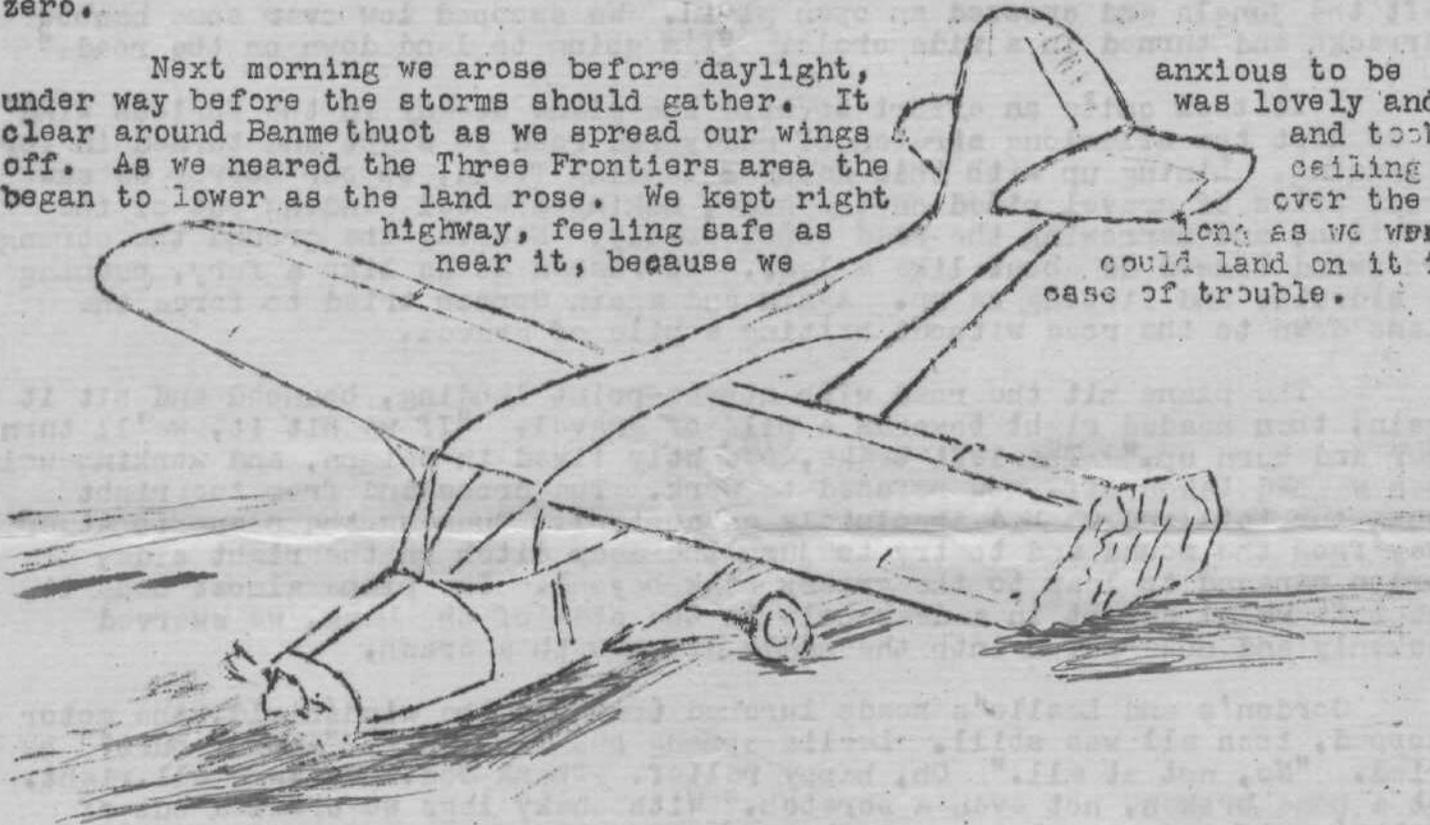
Dear Friends,

We have just come through an unfortunate experience with our plane, and the gay and gallant little ship's career might have been ended - and ours too! Leslie was due to leave for school in America on the Skymaster plane by Air France to Paris and New York on August 16th. On the 12th we started out to fly him in our Stinson the 200 miles by air to Saigon. He had to be there beforehand to look after his passport, inoculations, visas, etc.

The weather was in a surly mood with low clouds and rain. Around Banmethuot it was fairly fine, so we thought we could sneak through. The highlands at Three Frontiers are nearly always covered in with clouds and we have many times slipped either over or under them to clearer skies on the other side. This morning we had to turn back because visibility soon became zero.

Next morning we arose before daylight, under way before the storms should gather. It clear around Banmethuot as we spread our wings off. As we neared the Three Frontiers area the began to lower as the land rose. We kept right highway, feeling safe as near it, because we

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We hated to turn back, for it was imperative that Leslie reach Saigon that day otherwise he might have to forfeit his expensive ticket. We had often flown through such weather to clearer areas beyond the height of land, but today the clouds came right down to the tree tops and it poured rain as we pushed on. As long as the road was straight we had no trouble following it as it cut through the dense jungle. Trees, millions of trees, spread out below us, set so close together that they looked like a green tufted carpet. We could sink into that and never be found.

There are no radio beams and no weather information available, making this country one of the most difficult to fly in. The rain sluiced down as we pressed grimly on at a hundred miles an hour, and furious gusts began to knock us around. We banked steeply as the road began to wind and twist, sometimes turning back on itself as it followed the crest of a hill. The wings almost touched the trees at times, for we dared not lose the road. Sometimes we could see ahead, then rain squalls closed us in. If we could get through to Three Frontiers and the weather was still bad, we could land there on the road, for we have done so before.

Gordon couldn't see out of the front windshield now as the rain came splattering up it in torrents, so he piloted with his head partway out of the left window. Leslie helped him watch the road with his head out of the right window. The fierce wind tore at their hair and filled the little plane. Laura huddled, taut with anxiety, in the back seat, pitching and jerking about frantically. "Oh, God, keep us! Keep Gordon's nerves steady! Keep the angels flying wing to wing with our plane. Don't let us collide with those sudden hilltops and all those dangerous trees," she prayed.

We hurtled forward into the teeth of wind and rain. As we roared low over Dak Song we thought of our Miong evangelists there watching us from their chapel. We flew close over their heads. Above the roar of the motor, Gordon and Leslie kept calling out where they could see the road as their eyes strained through the blanketing rain to follow its curves. The minutes seemed like days. We might hit a hillside or a huge tree might loom up ahead—too quickly to avoid in the next seconds.

"There's the fort at Three Frontiers," Gordon called out as the road left the jungle and crossed an open plain. We swooped low over some bamboo barracks and turned in a wide circle. "I'm going to land down on the road."

It took quite an effort to hold the plane steady in the furious wind as we kept the mile-long stretch of muddy red road in sight and turned in for a landing. Lining up with this natural landing field, to our horror we saw great piles of gravel piled on the side, making a wheel landing out of the question, and narrowing the road considerably. Nearing the ground the strong crosswind tossed us about like a leaf. It rushed at us like a fury, pushing us sidewise and lifting us up. Again and again Gordon tried to force the plane down to the road without hitting a pile of gravel.

The plane hit the road with a three-point landing, bounced and hit it again, then headed right towards a pile of gravel. "If we hit it, we'll turn over and burn up." The left brake, recently fixed in Saigon, and working well when we had taken off, now refused to work. The crosswind from the right swung our tail and we had absolutely no control. Gunning the plane to steer away from the mound and to try to jump the deep ditch on the right side, Gordon managed to leap to the grassy bank beyond. The plane almost made it. The left wheel caught in a deep hole in the side of the bank, we swerved sickly and nose-dived into the muddy ditch with a crash.

Gordon's and Leslie's heads lurched towards the windshield, the motor stopped, then all was still. Leslie sprang out instantly, "Anyone hurt?" he cried. "No, not at all." Oh, happy relief. Thank God! We were all right. Not a bone broken, not even a scratch. With shaky legs we crawled out of Leslie's side of the plane, and Oh the good solid feeling to step on to the ground again.

"We won't fly our Stinson again for a while now," Gordon said, as he surveyed the damage. The nose was buried in the mud with the propeller smashed. One lovely silver wing tip was crumpled down on the road. The tail was high in the air, unhurt, and the right wing was intact. The maroon side of the plane was twisted a bit, and the left wheel was smashed and bent up underneath. The engine was unhurt.

It could have been a much worse wreck. Many things might have happened. We might have turned over, the plane might have caught fire because gasoline was streaming from the top filler plug on the slanting wing. We might have had to land in a jungle clearing far from help. The worst damage was the wheel and axle, because it broke several vital joints in the metal frame.

We walked up the road a mile to the fort, through the driving rain and sticky red mud. The three French soldiers there were in radio communication at the moment with Banmethuot, so they kindly sent word back - "Please advise Pastor Ziemer our plane down at Three Frontiers, damaged, no one hurt, and ask him to come for us in the truck."

We sat around a broken-down little stove in the miserable bamboo shack which was the kitchen for this isolated post, and tried to dry out and relax after the excitement of the last hour. The soldiers kindly shared their dinner with us - black coffee boiled in a tin can on the stove, some canned meat and vegetables.

After three hours we saw our little truck coming through the storm. It stopped by our plane wreck and Bob Ziemer got out to look at it. Then he came on for us at the fort, and silently grasped our hands with tears in his eyes.

We had to hurry. We now had to return home, get the other car and drive over the terrible jungle trail two hundred miles to Dalat, then try to get Leslie on a plane for Saigon, or, lacking one, to drive him the other two hundred miles in convoy to Saigon ourselves.

We took Leslie's baggage for America out of the plane and put it into the truck, and left our maroon and silver bird lying broken by the roadside. Our hearts were heavy, but thankful that we were safe. It was eight o'clock that night when we began the long trip through the rain and mud to Dalat. Gordon rested while Leslie took the wheel of the Dodge for the first hour. As we rushed along we passed a leopard sitting on a bank in the rain. When we left the highway at Dak Song to turn into the long mountain trail, Gordon took over. The road was narrow and slippery like butter. Soon we had to put on chains, otherwise it would have been impossible to climb the countless steep hills. Creeping along narrow shelves with only inches to spare above deep gorges, we made our way through the night.

A Big tiger walked off the road ahead, but we missed shooting him. Leslie wanted so badly to get a tiger skin to take home with him to school. We inched our way down muddy hills and climbed interminably, hour after hour. We roused the ten coolies who helped ferry us across a swift river in a large wooden barge, and kept on. We came across a tree on the road, which someone had cut through, but had left too narrow a space for our car to pass. Since we had forgotten to bring an axe we tried to get by by going up on the side of the road. It was too slippery, the car slipped back against the tree branch which pushed it into the shallow ditch. A deep dent along the side of the car showed where the tree had caught us.

We carried an old grass carpet just in case of trouble, and with this we got out of the ditch. At eight in the morning we drove up to the Dalat Mission Compound, tired and very muddy, and soaked with rain.

To complicate matters, there would be no plane or convoy until Tuesday, the day Leslie was to have left Saigon. Air France kindly changed the date to three days later, and we obtained a permit to drive to Saigon in the next convoy.

We were happy to be with our boy Stanley at the Dalat school for a day or two. He had almost cut his hand off two weeks before, and we had flown up to see him at the time. In a brief forty minutes flying over the mountains we had made the trip and returned home the next day after seeing that his hand had been successfully operated upon - a lot different from the 12 hours we had just driven by road. He had cut an artery, two tendons and two nerves, a very serious accident, and it will be some months before he will use his hand again. He will have to give up his piano lessons, for he will never be a musician, for his fingers will never be the same again.

The trip to Saigon over the two-hundred mile road was uneventful. There was no attack, and we were not shot at by the rebels in the jungle. Spaced half a mile apart, the eighty to a hundred trucks slowly crawled down the road, in many places almost impassable with deep holes filled with water. It is a funny feeling to know that bullets might whizz by one's nose at any moment. On convoy day the road is guarded by many hundreds of soldiers, tanks and machine guns, and there are forts every ten or fifteen miles in this enemy territory.

Early Friday morning we took Leslie and Donald Taylor, who was returning to America for medical treatment, to the airport to board the big Sky-master for Paris. The three-day flight would take him to Calcutta, Karachi, Cairo, Rome and Paris. Then another plane would take him to New York.

Our hearts were heavy to see our dear boy going so far away from us but America is the right place for him at this time. He will be 21 when we see him again in three years' time. Donald and Leslie were the first of the 33 passengers to walk up the ramp into the plane, for they were eager to sit near the door, handy to the plane's pantry.

The sky was a beautiful pastel pink as the big <sup>silver</sup> plane lifted off. We waved and waved to the boys looking out of their window. Then the pinpoints of wing lights drifted off into the delicate fragile color. Three days later we received a cable saying the boys had arrived safely. They had a day in Paris, where our missionaries, the Funes, kindly took them sightseeing. Now Leslie is at Hampden DuBose Academy, Zellwood, Florida.

We returned home from Saigon by another road, in convoy, and Gordon immediately set out for Three Frontiers to dismantle the plane. It took him a day and a half to take off the wings, wheels and tail assembly, with the help of three Dayak tribesmen, and hoist it all on to our light truck. Although it projected away out the back of the truck, it was tied securely, and stood the long three hundred miles of jungle road very well. Through enemy territory in convoy again, the plane was driven to the workshops of Air France in Saigon, where they are going to fix it and make it like new again. It is going to take several hundreds of dollars.

Why do we want this plane for our work? Because flying is BIG - big as the sky. It gives new light and meaning to all our activities. It is direct and fast and useful and convenient. It is splendid for exploring and pioneering. For three years we have made hundreds of successful flights, making important trips over our areas. We need it to open the two new stations in great new tribal areas this year, where the Smalleys and Barneys are to be located. It is important to have the plane during this time of war, when road travel is so dangerous. When the war is over our plane will be more important still as we can go farther afield and open up the vast untouched areas to the north of us. Flying is truly fascinating. Mistakes are made, but lessons are learned through them. We share this experience with you and ask for your prayers.

Very sincerely yours,

*Leslie A. Smith*

*Gordon H. Smith*

P.S. Gifts sent for the work will be gratefully acknowledged. They may be sent to our Headquarters - "The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 260 West 44th St., New York, 18, N.Y.," They should be marked - "For tribes work, leper work, plane, etc., care of Gordon H. Smith." In Canada - 145 Evelyn Ave., Toronto, 9, Canada.