

## War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: The Family of Charles E. Boone

Current home town: Fredericktown, Ohio

Age: Not given

We are submitting Charles E. Boone's WWII story. For a high school senior government class project, his granddaughter Hannah Boone Plemons interviewed him and compiled the story. It is several pages long, so we condensed it for submission. She completed the project in May of 1997, Charles died in November of 2000. When she interviewed him, it was the first time that he had related these details to his children. Needless to say, we were surprised to hear the details of his being shot down in Japanese territory and being rescued by the Chinese guerrillas. Thank you for undertaking this project.

Charles E. Boone family (Chuck Boone, Mark Boone and Barb Cherosky)

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Lt. Charles E. Boone was a member of the 374<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron based in Kuming, China during WWII. The squadron flew B-24s and, because Japan controlled all sea ports and the Burma Road, they were forced to fly missions to supply themselves for their strategic bombing missions.

On December 24, 1943, after several months in China, Boone and his fellow crewmen were sent on a mission to bomb an auxiliary airport in Canton. Approaching the target, the plane was hit. Red fluid from the hydraulic system ran down under the navigators table and caught fire, while the plane continued falling rapidly. Boone quickly jerked the handles on the nose wheel door and dove out head first. The plane dropped suddenly, going into a nose dive. It is believed that everyone left on the plane was either already dead or killed at the time of the crash.

On the way down, Lt. Boone observed five Japanese Zeroes circling him, one so close that it almost touched the parachute. Putting on his best act, he closed his eyes, sagged his head and arms and played dead. The imposing doom before him triggered memories from his childhood and he heard the clear, resonate sounds of the Fredericktown Church bells. The ploy worked and Boone landed with a jolt in a valley just over a hill from Canton, spraining his ankle in the process. He also received a flesh wound on the right leg with burns on his face and ears.

Jumping into a small stream, he placed the chute under an overhanging ledge and sat on it, very well hidden from view. He heard natives close by and was afraid to make contact. He intended to remain hidden until dark, but after an hour, a native in coolie dress was walking up the stream and discovered him. Boone immediately shouted, "Mayay-gwaw," which meant "American." Three natives approached and began taking off Boone's outer clothing and pointed in the direction of Canton. To disguise Boone from the Japanese, they dressed him in native clothing: straw hat, dark shirt and pants and overshoes. The four coolie-guerrillas hurried him away in a northwesterly direction out of the valley and up and

over the mountain. The coolie-guerrillas were underground Chinese people whose purpose during the war was to aid the Americans serving there.

Boone and the guerrillas tried to stay out of sight and hide in the brush when Zeros flew over. At dusk, they stopped for food; his pistol was returned and he was instructed to carry it in his hand constantly, and to use it whenever necessary. The guerrillas could not speak English but used pointee-talkee, a kind of sign language. They told him that they were about a mile from the Japanese. A chair was lashed to bamboo poles and the four guerrillas carried Boone for the rest of the night. They followed the trails in and around rice paddies and, at about 10 o'clock, they crossed a wide, well-traveled gravel road. Several more guerrillas joined the group and on the second day they reached a single building, high up in the mountains. Later he learned that this was the guerrilla headquarters for that area. When they reached the guerrilla headquarters, they rested, ate and stayed there the rest of the day and the next. There were about 20 guerillas at the headquarters and all were heavily armed. Boone and the guerrillas had traveled fifteen miles and passed through Japanese lines. (U.S. Army)

On the morning of the fourth day, with ten guerrillas accompanying him, they headed northwest. Traveling the back trails, they avoided highways and villages. By late afternoon, they had reached a good-sized village where they stopped, and word was brought by guerrillas that Sgt. Lee, the waist gunner from Boone's plane, was waiting. The two stayed the night in a wealthy Chinese man's home and got some much needed rest.

On December 28, Boone and Lee, together, started their march on foot through well-traveled trails and mountains in a northerly direction. At noon, they reached the 65<sup>th</sup> Chinese Army Headquarter, where they met high ranking Chinese officials, had lunch and were furnished horses. That evening, after making further distance, they stayed with Brig. General Leung Choy Lung and staff at a rest camp in the mountains. They were treated with excellent care. (U.S. Army)

They left on horseback on December 29, accompanied by two guerrillas and five Chinese soldiers. They spent the night in a large village. The next day, they again were escorted and rode on horseback. This day, they received news that three other American airmen, Swanson, Culps and Geibel were safe and walking out. They reached the 65<sup>th</sup> Chinese Army Headquarters and were met by General Wong Kok Leung and treated magnificently. They rested there several days, and on January 1, a stage show was given for the Chinese Army at which Boone made a short speech to the gathering. The following day, they were escorted as they rode on horseback and spent the night in a school house. The next day, they did the same and stayed the night in a hotel in Chen Yen. On January 4, they traveled by automobile and were graciously treated by a Chinese general to Kunkong. In the evening they left by railroad to Kunming, from whence by motor vehicle they drove to Chenkung. (U.S. Army)