

Lehigh Men Lead Expedition Over Burma's Fearsome 'Hump'

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Major Ingvald E. Madsen, Lieut. Musser Get Legion of Merit for Exploit

Battling every kind of danger from malaria to natives with poisoned darts, two Lehigh men, fast friends before the war, have completed one of the most perilous overland journeys in history by crossing on foot and horseback the fearsome "hump" of Burma from China to India, and, as a result, have been awarded the Legion of Merit by the Army.

They are Major Ingvald E. Madsen, of Bethlehem, in civilian life a Lehigh University research engineer for the Association of Iron and Steel Engineers, head of the expedition, and his friend, Lt. Shelton R. Musser, Lehigh '35, of Reading, whom he personally



MAJOR MADSEN

... goes over "Hump" afoot

picked to accompany him. Major Madsen and Lt. Musser came to know each other while both were studying civil engineering at Lehigh. With them on the trip was Capt. Timothy A. Callahan Jr., of Baltimore, who was also awarded the Legion of Merit.

The journey, which required eight weeks and took the men over much territory never before touched by white men's feet, was decided upon when Brig. Gen. W. E. R. Covell, head of the Services of Supply in the China-Indian-Burma theater, decided that it would be necessary to make ground reconnaissance of a little-known area between China and Burma.

Aerial maps showed the general terrain, but no camera could penetrate the snarl of the jungle undergrowth, and no photograph could determine the attitude of the inhabitants.

RATIONS LIMITED

The exploit, carried out on foot and horseback, began Sept. 4, 1943, and even before the start of the journey, difficulties began. Gathering supplies proved a problem. American rations were too heavy and had to be limited to a few emergency cans. Thus polished rice was decided on for the bulk of the diet. Experts claimed that two pounds per person a day was the minimum amount on which a man could live and thrive, which limited them to about a month's ration per man as their full load, not counting instruments and other supplies.

Fortunately Major Madsen was able to prevail upon Robert and Eugene Morse, sons of a missionary, to join the party. They had never been over the trail, but knew more about the region than any other white man.

MADSEN, INGVALD E.
The officers were riding horses when they started out from Yunan Province, although they had been warned that no horses had ever been over the trail, barely wide enough for one and dipping up and down at dizzying heights over the mountain divide.

Only a few days out, Major Madsen nearly came to grief when his horse lost its footing and tumbled down a steep slope which graduated into a sheer drop to a valley hundreds of feet below. Luckily he managed to escape with only minor injuries by bringing the horse up against a tree.

LOSE WEIGHT

The natives among whom they traveled a good part of the way had never seen a white man before, and did their hunting with poisoned darts which they fired from cross-bows.

The men began to lose weight, partly because it became obvious that their stomachs would hold only about three-quarters of a pound of rice per day, which was insufficient to maintain their strength.

Stricken by malaria and dysentery until at times they could barely retain consciousness, they still refused to yield to the temptation to turn back, and trudged on over mountains and through jungles, riding where they could and leading their horses over the worst places.

All the men, sometimes the whole party, had narrow escapes from death, but when they finally reached Burma their files were crammed with valuable military and medical data.

Major Madsen was graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology before coming to Lehigh, where he received his M. S. degree in 1936. Before becoming a Lehigh Research Engineer he was connected with the Pennsylvania Railroad. While in Bethlehem, he lived at 728 High Street.

Lt. Musser took his B. S. degree in civil engineering at Lehigh, where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Following his graduation he became associated with the A. M. Byers Company, as engineering representative.

TROPHIES SENT HOME

Both men are married and Major Madsen has two children, Per and Dorothea, who are delighted with the bows and bearskin quivers which "Daddy" sent home. They are staying in West View with their mother.

The two Lehigh men are modest. After facing illness, starvation and injuries, Major Madsen describes his daring exploit in a single sentence.

"I have learned that a man can only carry food enough to last him about a month." Yes, that's the story of the exploit he wrote to his wife.

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