

He's 99 and she's 100

Peter Goutiere is reunited with the DC-3 he flew over the Himalayas in WWII

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MUKILTEO — Even at 99 years old, he walked quickly across the tarmac to the parked DC-3. The sun glinted off the bare aluminum skin.

He climbed aboard the vintage airplane, parked outside the Historic Flight Foundation at Paine Field. He walked through the passenger cabin and sat down in the cockpit, the left seat.

"This was my seat," Peter Goutiere said.

It is where he sat during World War II while flying hundreds of missions to ferry supplies over the Hump, the name Allied flyers gave the Himalayan mountain range. The air route was the main supply line for Allied forces fighting the Japanese in China.

The planes, heavily loaded with supplies, took off from northern India. They had to contend with weather, enemy fighters and the tallest mountains in the world.

Goutiere flew this Douglas DC-3, an icon of aviation history, for the China National Aviation Co. (CNAC). The Chinese government was the majority owner and had pressed the airline into flying for the war effort.

He had tried to join the U.S. Army Air Corps after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. But at 27, he was a few months too old.

He finally found a way to join the war effort in 1943, when he got a job flying for CNAC.

Goutiere traveled back to the U.S. the next year to pick up a new DC-3 for the airline. It was number 100 in CNAC's registry. He picked it up on Aug. 15, 1944, in Miami and flew to Puerto Rico, eventually making his way to India and rejoining the stream of airplanes flying over the Hump.

He had plenty of close calls in the airplane. Looking out his cockpit window, he saw too many friends' planes crash.

Sometimes enemy fighter planes would pounce on the unarmed cargo planes. Other days, mountain winds topping 100 mph would bat planes out of the sky.

"The wind in the mountains was like rushing water in a rocky stream," Goutiere said. The winds would swirl, eddy, pool and shoot around the peaks.

On one mission, in March 1943, he watched a friend, Jim Fox, fly through a high pass they often used.

"The winds caught him and sucked him into the mountain."

He looked for him on the return trip the next day, but snow had buried his plane, he said.

The hump missions ended



DAN BATES / THE HERALD

Peter Goutiere gives a thumb up from the cockpit of Historic Flight Foundation's restored DC-3, the same plane he flew for China National Aviation Co. during World War II.



Goutiere uses a flight manual to figure out what has been changed in the cockpit of Historic Flight Foundation's restored DC-3.

with the war, and Goutiere left CNAC in 1947. He flew for other airlines and worked as an inspector for decades for the Federal Aviation Administration, a job that took him around the world.

He eventually wrote a book about his Himalayan adventures. Today, he lives about an hour north of New York City.

His old DC-3 passed through many owners over the years, including Pan American Airways and Johnson & Johnson. The Historic Flight Foundation in Mukilteo bought the plane

in 2006. It spent six years in restoration.

The museum only had its logbooks since 1953. Staff knew the plane was built in 1944, but its first nine years were a mystery. After countless Internet searches, Liz Matzelle connected the airplane to CNAC.

She contacted the CNAC Association, a veterans group, which contacted Goutiere. His plane had been located.

Last week, Goutiere reconnected with his DC-3, CNAC No. 100.

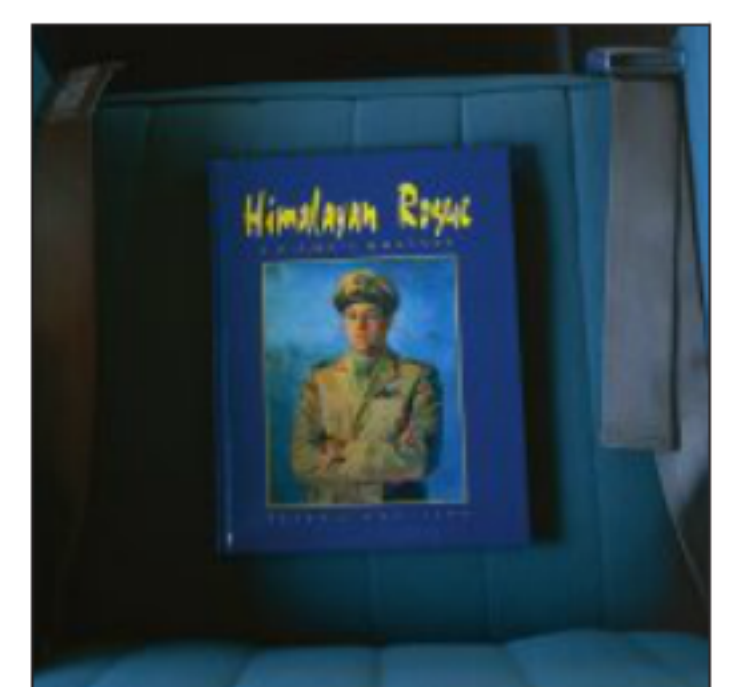


With pilot John Sessions at the helm, the DC-3 takes off from Paine Field on Friday morning, headed for San Francisco.

He spent Thursday familiarizing himself with the cockpit, which was slightly different from how it looked in the mid-1940s.

Then Friday, he, Matzelle, HFF founder John Sessions and a handful of others boarded the airplane and took off for San Francisco International Airport. Goutiere and Sessions piloted the plane for the four hour trip.

On Saturday, they participated in an event at the airport's museum, which just opened an exhibition called "The Legend of CNAC."



A book about Goutiere sits in the restored DC-3.