

ROBERT HOYLE U

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XID-22596

① Item in its 9 APR 2006 Sheila Chalk & RPU  
FROM: THE NEWS & OBSERVER SUN 9 APR 2006 RALEIGH, NC  
FIN W8 Vol 22 No 1  
SUN-JUN 2006

# Family welcomes home lost pilot



The words Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch wrote to his family 63 years ago are as haunting as that faraway time. "If I am shipped across ... I figure I won't live six months after I get there," he penned from San Antonio. His plane crashed into a Chinese mountain in 1944. On Saturday, with all 10 siblings deceased, Upchurch was buried by his nieces, nephews and other kinfolk near the calming waters of the Deep River.

## For 61 years, Chinese villagers tended grave of unknown soldier

BY LISA HOPPENJANS  
STAFF WRITER

**HIGH FALLS** — In a small church cemetery near the Deep River, Hoyle Upchurch had long been remembered on a tombstone, his name engraved between those of his mother and father.

The inscription reads:  
*Lt. Robert H. Upchurch  
Their son*

*August 23, 1923  
Missing in Action in a P-40 near  
Kanchow, China  
Oct. 6, 1944*

On Saturday, Upchurch finally came home to the resting place his parents intended, more than 61 years after his plane fell from the sky over China and villagers buried with honor the body of an American whose name they never knew.

Marie Preslar, 83, remembers the boy with wavy light brown hair who dreamed of becoming a pilot. On the night she and Upchurch's class of just 18 students graduated, he left to work in a plant that manufactured bomber planes in Texas. Then, when he

turned 18, he joined the Army Air Corps, precursor of the Air Force.

Upchurch was 21 and completing his first mission as part of the famed Flying Tigers squadron when his plane ran into bad weather as it climbed over the high peaks of the Chinese countryside.

The plane crashed into a mountain in Guidong, where villagers retrieved his broken body and wrapped it in red cloth.

They held a funeral — saying prayers and drinking rice wine — then buried Upchurch near a Ming Dynasty tower.

For 60 years, people of Guidong cared for the grave site, laying wreaths and flowers upon it during an annual tomb-sweeping day and marking it with a wooden cross.

The Chinese government learned of the site through a 2003 newspaper story and notified the U.S. Embassy. DNA testing confirmed that Upchurch was the honored pilot.

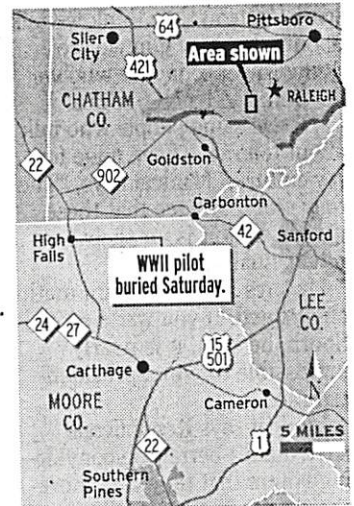
The news came too late for Upchurch's 10 brothers and sisters, who had long wondered about their brother's fate. The last of his siblings died in 2004, but nieces and nephews believe their parents helped bring their brother home.

"They've all had to have had a hand in this," said Dale Upchurch, Hoyle's great-nephew.

The funeral brought together at least three generations of Upchurches. Some of the siblings had moved to California while others stayed in North Carolina. Cousins were meeting for the first time, wearing nametags to identify them as one sibling's daughter, or another's grandson.



Jia Xiudong and Barbara Blake, wife of state Sen. Harris Blake, chat before the service.



The News & Observer

T Robert Hoyle U is son of  
Charles Kelly U, Sr, gran  
of William Henry U, Jr,  
gran of Kelly F. U,  
gran of Ruffin U & gran  
of Mose U - Head of clan.



① - CONTINUED

They packed the small High Falls United Methodist Church as a steady rain fell outside, joining in strains of "America the Beautiful" and prayers for the relative that most of them never met. Local folks peered through the crowded church's long windows from seating outside.

Jody Gollan read from letters that Hoyle sent to his sister, Elma, her grandmother.

"If I am shipped across as a pilot or gunner," he wrote from San Antonio in 1943, "I figure I won't live six months after I get there."

After the service, a small box holding Upchurch's remains was taken to the cemetery behind the church.

Jia Xiudong, counselor at the Chinese embassy in Washington, spoke next to the grave, calling Upchurch a "hero." He said China was grateful for the sacrifices of all Americans who battled Japanese invaders in China.

"It's my honor to be here," he said. "The Chinese people remember these heroes and never forget what they gave. ... They devoted their lives to the peace we now enjoy."

The Upchurches returned the thanks.

"What they gave him, we'll never forget," said niece Barbara Rowland, who came from Huntington Beach, Calif., to attend the service.

Upchurch was buried with full military honors. The clear notes of taps segued into the peal of church bells. Then, the rumble of planes began.

Four A-10 Thunderbolts shot above the trees and over the cemetery. One left the formation and raced toward the clouds — alone.

Two new lines have been added to Hoyle Upchurch's tombstone. They read:

*Home at last  
April 8, 2006*

Staff writer Lisa Hoppenjans can be reached at 932-2014 or [lisa.hoppenjans@newsobserver.com](mailto:lisa.hoppenjans@newsobserver.com).

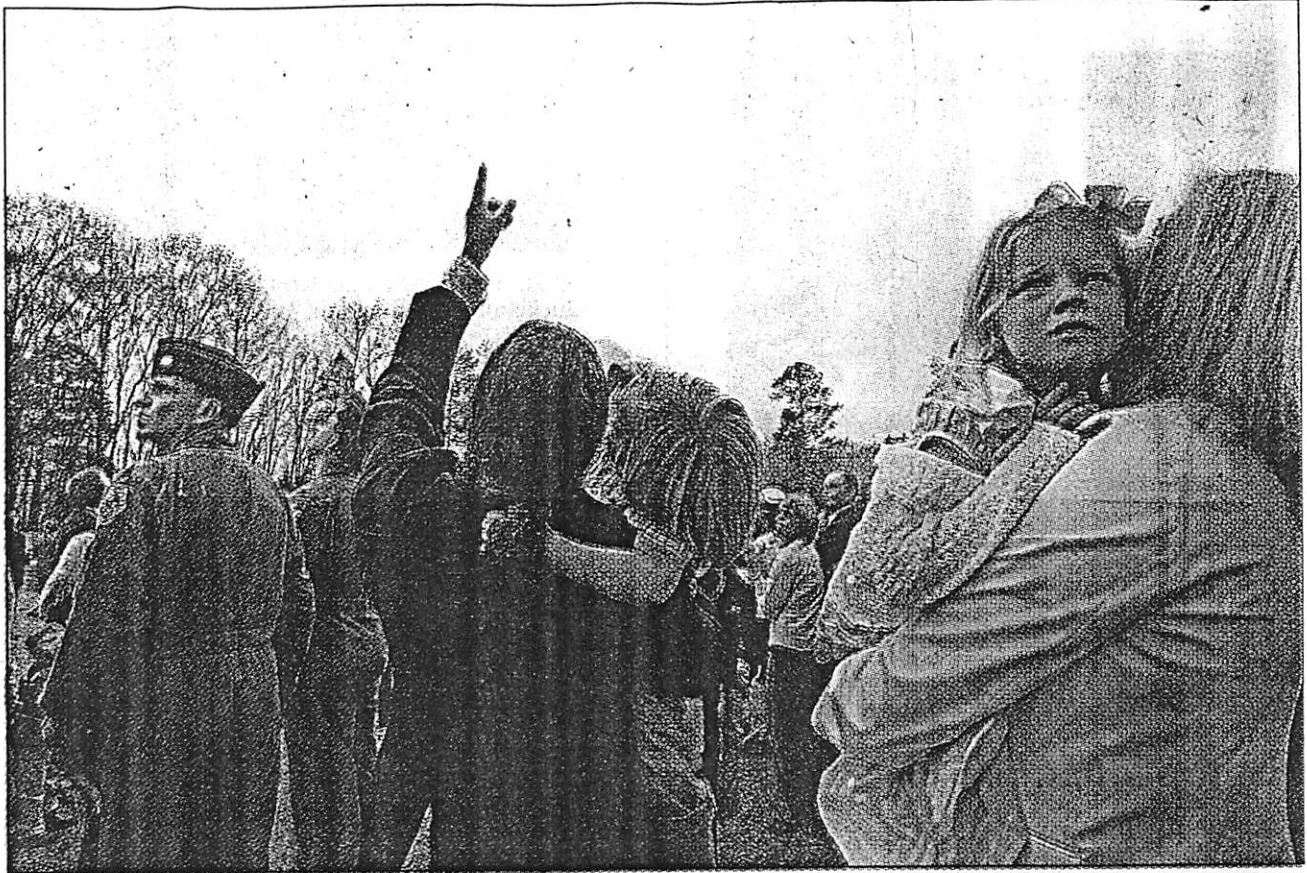
*'The Chinese people remember these heroes and never forget what they gave.  
... They devoted their lives to the peace we now enjoy.'*

JIA XIUDONG, COUNSELOR AT THE CHINESE EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON



Army Staff Sgt. Benjamin Kirkland, left, carrying an urn with Upchurch's remains, the Rev. Ken Buckingham, center, and Army Chaplain Steve Kelley, right, attend the service Saturday.

STAFF PHOTOS BY TED RICHARDSON



Family members of World War II fighter pilot Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch and others who attended the pilot's belated funeral watch a group of A-10 Thunderbolt jets pass in his honor. The remains of Upchurch, top photo, were identified and flown home from China 61 years after his plane was said to have crashed in bad weather.

STAFF PHOTOS BY TED RICHARDSON

② See Ltr 26 FEB 1983 Patricia Lane U to RPU

Robert Hoyle U was mixing in action in WWII, U.S. Air Force. He is son of Charles Kelly U (native of Chatham Co, NC) & gr of Charles Kelly U (native of Durham Co, NC). (should be William Henry U - RPU)

③ See notes of RPU 20 FEB 1984 call to Charles Kelly U Jr.

He confuses his bio Robert Hoyle U MIA WWII China - Burma - India Theater. He was a fighter pilot & Squadron Leader.

- ④ See Article Dated 9 APR 2006 in Profile of <sup>Δ</sup>Robert Hoyle Upshur whose P40 crashed in USAF operations in China - WWII on 6 OCT 1944. Was MIA until remains found in recent years and reinterred on 8 APR 2006 in High Falls Methodist Church Cemetery, High Falls, Moore Co, NC - beside his parents; Info from the article:

<sup>Δ</sup>CHARLES KELLY U, SR &  
<sup>Δ</sup>CHARITY BESSIE BRADY

I. <sup>Δ</sup>Charles Kelly U, Sr s/o William Henry U, I of the Moore U/

Ruffin U Sublan - Kelly Franklin U Jr

A. <sup>Δ</sup>Elna Lee U.

1. - - Benfield

a. <sup>Δ</sup>JODY GOLLAN - She read letters at the 2006 Ceremony that Hoyle wrote to her GHI Elms [In GOLLAN a married or maiden name? RPU]

B. - - U

1. A Daughter - <sup>Δ</sup>BARBARA ROWLAND (married or maiden name? - RPU) - came from Huntington Beach, CA for the 2006 Ceremony.

C. William Lynn U, Sr

1. Kenneth Dale U, Sr

a. <sup>Δ</sup>Kenneth Dale U, Jr 24 FEB 1984  
 - attended the 2006 Ceremony.

D, ROBERT HOYLE U

NOTE: of the 10 children of Charles Kelly U, Sr - one son and two daughters moved to California - RPU

- ⑤ See Mater of RPU 4 AUG 1984 Call to Stella Bell U  
 Robert Hoyle U b Moore Co, NC - never married.



ROBERT HOYLE U  
 Rec'd in ltr 24 APR 2006 Ann Poe to RPH

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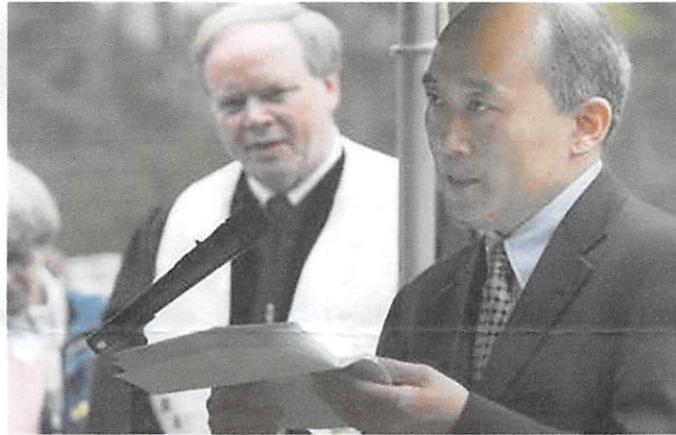
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[Pilot burial solves two mysteries](#)

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#### Pilot burial solves two mysteries

Jia Xiudong, representing the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., reads a letter from Huang Renzhun during memorial services for 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch on Saturday, April 8, 2006. Lieutenant Upchurch was a member of the famed Flying Tigers during World War II and was listed as missing in action until his remains were identified last May by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. In his letter, Mr. Huang tells how, as a young boy, he remembered the body of an American pilot being recovered and given a ceremonial burial in the village of Guidong, Hunan Province. The villagers maintained the burial site more than 60 years until Lieutenant Upchurch's remains were returned to the U.S. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Jack Braden) [Download Full Image](#) | [E-mail a friend](#)

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NOTE: These 3 pages rec'd in ltr 24 APR 2006  
 Ann Poe to RPH

Security and F

(6) - CONTINUED

ROBERT HOYLE U R-6

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XIA-22596

**Air Force Link**

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**Pilot burial solves two mysteries**by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.  
Air Force Print News

4/11/2006 - **SAN ANTONIO, (AFPN)** -- It's not every day delegates from China attend a lieutenant's funeral in North Carolina, or that four A-10 Thunderbolt IIs fly overhead in a missing-man formation, or 300 people show up without having ever met the Air Force pilot. Even a congressman made an appearance.

But 2nd Lt. Robert Upchurch wasn't just any pilot. Although his death remained a mystery for 61 years, his memory stayed alive -- in two countries -- that entire time.

Lieutenant Upchurch was a P-40 Warhawk pilot with the Flying Tigers. They protected the Chinese by fighting along its Burma border during World War II.

On Oct. 6, 1944, the lieutenant took off from Kanchow, China, on his first mission with the Flying Tigers. After completing the strafing mission, they started home. They flew into bad weather en route.

First Lt. Robert Gibeault, a fellow pilot, said in an official report that he had last seen Lieutenant Upchurch climbing through overcast skies dangerously close to some mountains.

The rest of the flight turned back and tried a different route than the one attempted by Lieutenant Gibeault and Lieutenant Upchurch. Later, Chinese officials reported a plane had crashed and burned at Shang Pau Has, and that pilot and plane identification was impossible.

Since there was no means of identification, the Army Air Force wasn't certain it was Lieutenant Upchurch and listed him as missing in action.

In 1945, eight months after the fatal crash, Flying Tigers Chaplain Albert Buckley wrote a disheartening letter to the lieutenant's parents.

"I believe it is only right to tell you that the outlook is not at all favorable or encouraging, particularly in view of the fact that your son has been missing since last October," the chaplain wrote. "It has been our experience that when a pilot lands safely in free China, even though he might be injured, we receive notification from the Chinese in a comparatively short time. Such a report has never been received on your loving son."

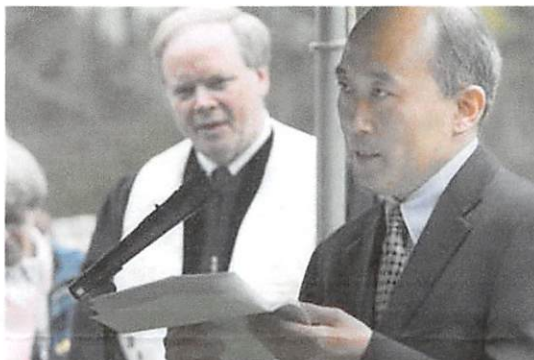
In October 1945, the Army Air Force presumed Lieutenant Upchurch dead.

**Chinese side of the story**

Meanwhile, in Guidong County of the Hunan Province in China, villagers buried the pilot in Chinese tradition, wrapping him in a red cloth and setting off firecrackers, according to a Chinese newspaper report.

Although the villagers never knew the identity of the pilot they buried, they never forgot him.

"Over the past 60 years, the people of Guidong County, have quietly watched and tended the grave of Lieutenant Upchurch, who has been a hero commanding their highest respect and a symbol in their mind for

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Jia Xiudong, representing the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., reads a letter from Huang Renzhun during memorial services for 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch on Saturday, April 8, 2006. Lieutenant Upchurch was a member of the famed Flying Tigers during World War II and was listed as missing in action until his remains were identified last May by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. In his letter, Mr. Huang tells how, as a young boy, he remembered the body of an American pilot being recovered and given a ceremonial burial in the village of Guidong, Hunan Province. The villagers maintained the burial site more than 60 years until Lieutenant Upchurch's remains were returned to the U.S. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Jack Braden)

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ROBERT HOYE U PG7

⑥ - CONTINUED

XIA-22 596

everlasting pursuit of peace," said Haung Renzhun, a representative from the Foreign Affairs Office of the Hunan Provincial Government.

✓RSS

AF News via

Mr. Renzhun said that every year during "Tomb-Sweeping Day," local students and citizens voluntarily came to pay their respects and lay wreaths and flowers at the tomb of the unknown pilot. The grave was well-maintained until May 2005, the date they discovered his identity.

#### Pilot's identity revealed

In May 2005, a task force from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii conducted investigation operations in three Chinese provinces for about 30 days.

World War II left more than 78,000 MIAs, many of those in the Pacific, and the team was investigating four of them.

At what is now Santi Park in Guidong County, team members recovered possible human remains, personal effects and life support equipment. The monument there simply read "American Pilot."

Later that year, the task force identified his remains by comparing them to DNA samples collected from the Upchurch family that remained, which were mostly second-generation nephews and nieces.

After 61 years, the Upchurch family finally learned of the whereabouts of their uncle, and the people of Hunan Province discovered the name of their hero.

"Moore County of North Carolina was where this great fighter grew up, and my hometown, Guidong County of Hunan Province, was where he rested in peace for decades," Mr. Renzhun said during Lieutenant Upchurch's funeral on April 8 in High Falls, N.C.

"Lieutenant Upchurch is one of the bravest American pilots and a hero in the worldwide war against fascism," Mr. Renzhun said. "He assisted the Chinese people in the fight against the Japanese and sacrificed his young and precious life. On behalf of the 67 million people of Hunan Province ... our government wishes to take this opportunity to pay high tribute to Lieutenant Upchurch."

North Carolina Governor Michael Easley wrote in a letter to the family: "Lieutenant Upchurch gave his life for his country and is a true hero. Without hesitation, he fought to preserve and defend the ideals for which this great nation stands."

In the end, the Chinese lost a hero, while High Falls buried one.

Contact Us

Security and F

⑦ See Ltr 28 MAR 1985 Irene Alma Schmalz & RPH  
Hoyle U was missing in action in a flight over  
China in WW II and never found

Thin Article appeared in the 31 MAR 2007 (SUN) issue of THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER and was sent in a 6 APR 2007 Ltr to RPU from John Calkoun U

6 DECADES AFTER DEATH IN WWII



Hoyle Upchurch, an N.C. native and pilot who died when his plane went down in China during World War II, wrote home that "It will just be a thing of the past in a year or so if I'm bumped off." Time would tell a much different story.

## In rural China, fallen 'American Pilot' launches a new mission

*Moore County group travels to build ties, offer family's thanks*

BY PETER ST. ONGE

pstonge@charlotteobserver.com

One by one, the family members died without knowing what happened to Hoyle.

First it was his parents, Charlie and Bessie Upchurch, buried within six months of each other – just 10 years after their son went missing in China during World War II.

Later it was Hoyle's 10 brothers and sisters, each leaving their tears and questions with sons and daughters

who'd never met their uncle, but knew his story from hundreds of tellings.

Hoyle Upchurch, from rural Moore County, had flown for the Army Air Corps, protecting China in the war with Japan. He disappeared on a mission in Hunan province.

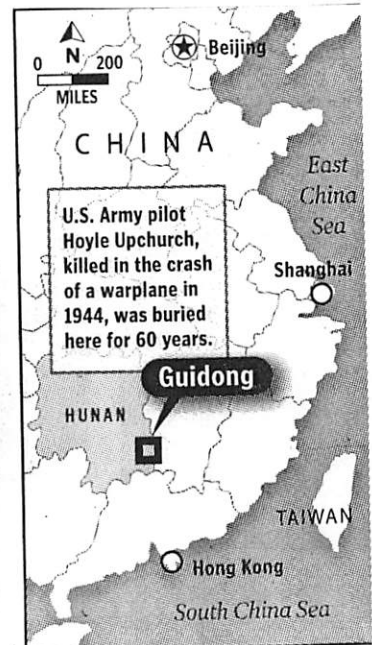
"I only knew him from a picture on the wall," says Dale Upchurch, a nephew now living in Florida. "We felt our parents' pain. It was hard for them, his death being such a mystery."

But in 2005, Chinese officials discovered Hoyle Upchurch's grave in a rural community in Hunan. Villagers had cared for the site for 60 years.



THE (SOUTHERN PINES) PILOT PHOTO

Jia Xiudong speaks at the gravesite of Hoyle Upchurch, an N.C. native and pilot whose fighter plane went down on a Guidong hillside in China.



WM PITZER - bpitzer@charlotteobserver.com

Note that 2 Nephews of RPU are among the 18 Person Delegations going to China. one of them is Kenneth Dale U, Sr



# Pilot launches new mission

The body was identified by DNA and his remains returned to North Carolina, where the surviving nieces and nephews came from around the country to meet their Uncle Hoyle, who was buried, finally, between his parents.

"I thought it was all over then," Dale Upchurch says.

Now he has one more task, on behalf of his family.

## Found by villagers

On Oct. 6, 1944, members of the U.S. Army Air Corps, 23rd Fighter Group, set to the skies over China in their P-40 Warhawks. The group was dubbed the Flying Tigers by the Chinese, who were grateful for the fighters' support against Japan.

Among the pilots was 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, just 21, but old enough to know he wanted to fly planes the rest of his life. This was his first mission with the Flying Tigers. He was the only pilot not to return.

In rural Guidong County, villagers organized a search party for a plane they had seen crash near the mountains. After a 40-mile trek, they found the wreckage and, though they didn't know it, Hoyle Upchurch. They placed his burned body in a coffin, and in accordance with local customs, covered his head with a red cloth.



D. Upchurch

Back at the village, they buried the body on sacred Santaishan mountain, respectfully singing hymns and setting off firecrackers. Each year, for six decades, the villagers returned to tend to the grave. It was marked with a simple sign telling all they knew: "American Pilot," it said.

In North Carolina, Hoyle Upchurch became a mythical figure to his young nephew Dale. Uncle Hoyle's picture was on the wall of family homes, and he was a frequent part of conversation

whenever family would get together.

"You could see the sorrow in their eyes whenever the subject would come up," says Upchurch, who grew up in Greensboro. "They were just as heartbroken years later as they were a year after he disappeared."

In May 2005, one year after Hoyle Upchurch's last sibling died, the discovery of a pilot's grave was reported to U.S. officials. Suspecting the remains were Upchurch but finding no remaining family in High Falls, they sent a fax to High Falls United Methodist Church.

The new pastor, Kenneth Buckingham, had never heard the name, so he took the fax to an elder, Helen Maness, who led him down a hallway to a picture on the wall. It was Hoyle Upchurch.

## Cultural programs

The body was cremated and flown home in April 2006. More than 50 family members received it at the church in High Falls, about 100 miles east of Charlotte, where Hoyle was buried in a ceremony that included members of today's Flying Tigers.

Also at the funeral were members of the Chinese Embassy,

who spoke of wanting to establish a sister county relationship with Moore County. In July 2006, Guidong's Mayor He Luchun wrote N.C. Sen. Harris Blake about a planned monument to Hoyle Upchurch on Santaishan. Would Moore County want to visit and start a relationship with Guidong?

That trip begins today. Dale Upchurch is one of two nephews making the journey. He has, since his uncle's body was rediscovered, become the family representative and historian. He's learned about his uncle from men who served with him. He's discovered letters his uncle wrote to friends in 1944.

Said one, in April 1944: "It will just be a thing of the past in a year or so if I'm bumped off."

Next week, the 18 members of the Moore County delegation will travel to Hunan for ceremonies honoring a sister county agreement and sister school agreement. "You never know what the impact can be," says Sen. Blake, "but this is a great opportunity for it to be bigger than any one person."

Between the ceremonies and business discussions, Dale Upchurch will travel to Guidong County, to the village and the people who cared for his uncle's grave.

He will bring them the gift of a simple thank-you.

It is, he says, what his family would have done if they were alive.

And now: "I've completed what I'm supposed to do."

ROBERT H

U

③

○ OBITUARY DOWNLOADED BY JENNA LANE U FOR RPU

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**Paper: News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)**

**Deceased: ROBERT H. UPCHURCH**

**Date: April 2, 2006**

**ROBERT H. UPCHURCH, March 31. Memorial 2 p.m., today, High Falls United Methodist Church. Burial, Church Cemetery. Arrangements by Powell Funeral Home, Southern Pines.**

**LOUISBURG**

*Section: Obit*

*Page: B7*

*Copyright (c) 2006 The News and Observer*



○ 24 JUN 2006 - RPA United Methodist Church Cemetery  
- High Falls, Moore Co, NC (with SSA, Mary Craig & Lin Penny)

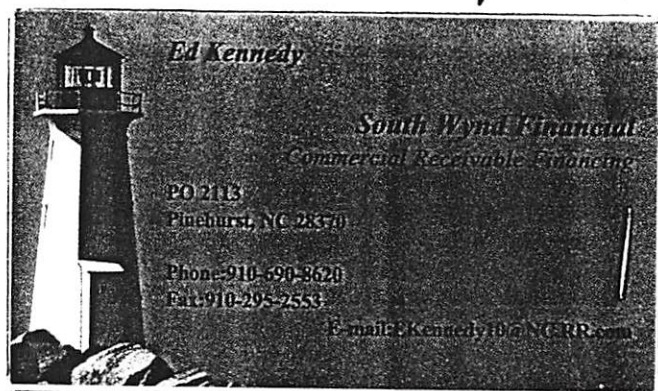
Travelled on to HIGH FALLS in Moore Co NC  
& found High Falls Methodist Church where the  
reburial of Robert Hoyle U recently took place.  
It so happened the Church members were there  
and beginning to prepare for an evening meal/  
fund raiser. The first  
person to speak to  
me was TOMMY M. U

He is about 35 years  
old and was very  
accomodating. I

explained a little of  
Upchurch history. He  
gave me his address

and encouraged me to contact him and to  
come back for a visit. [ BOX 2, HIGH FALLS, NC  
27259 (919) 464-3295 ] The second person

to surfer was ED KENNEDY. He has an  
Upchurch female ancestor. We also met the  
minister who told us about the ceremony  
for Hoyle. Ed's wife showed me pictures of  
several Upchurch brothers and will send me  
a copy with names. We also saw pictures inside  
the church. I left a \$20 contribution. While I  
talked SSA & Tommy recorded Upchurch names  
from the Cemetery. See Cemetery



# BOOK: THE UPCHURCH FAMILY OF HIGH FALLS, NC (MOORE CO, NC) - PG 25

1. ROBERT HOYLE<sup>10</sup> UPCHURCH (CHARLES KELLY<sup>9</sup>, WILLIAM HENRY WILLIE<sup>8</sup>, KELLY FRANKLIN<sup>7</sup>, RUFFIN<sup>6</sup>, MOSES<sup>5</sup>, RICHARD<sup>4</sup>, JAMES<sup>3</sup>, RICHARD<sup>2</sup>, MICHAEL<sup>1</sup>) was born 23 Aug 1923 in High Falls, Moore County, North Carolina, and died 06 Oct 1944 in China.

Notes for ROBERT HOYLE UPCHURCH:  
Flying Tiger (P-52)—World War II—Killed in action Dissappeared over Mt.Range

U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946 Record  
about Robert H Upchurch  
Name: Robert H Upchurch  
Birth Year: 1923  
Race: White, citizen  
Nativity State or Country: North Carolina  
State: North Carolina

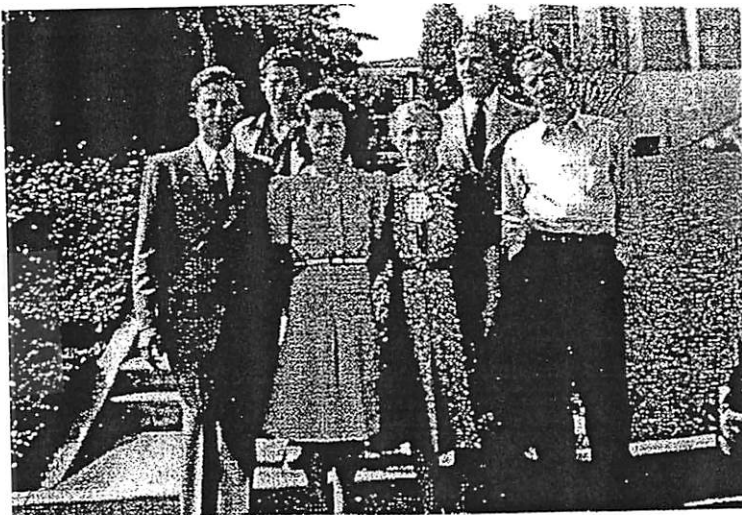
Enlistment Date: 18 Nov 1942  
Enlistment State: North Carolina  
Enlistment City: Fort Bragg  
Branch: Air Corps  
Branch Code: Air Corps  
Grade: Private  
Grade Code: Private  
Term of Enlistment: Enlistment for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President or otherwise according to law  
Component: Army of the United States - includes the following: Voluntary enlistments effective December 8, 1941 and thereafter; One year enlistments of National Guardsman whose State enlistment expires while in the Federal Service; Officers appointed in the Army of  
Source: Civil Life

Education: 4 years of high school  
Marital Status: Single, without dependents  
Height: 65  
Weight: 122

More About ROBERT HOYLE UPCHURCH:  
Military: 18 Nov 1942, Fort Bragg, North Carolina  
Residence: North Carolina  
Social Security Number: 21 Feb 1940, 239-22-7083

PG 62

PG 26 →



John, Hoyle, Marie, Bessie, Wint, and Carl Upchurch



Robert Hoyle Upchurch



ROBERT HOYLE 4

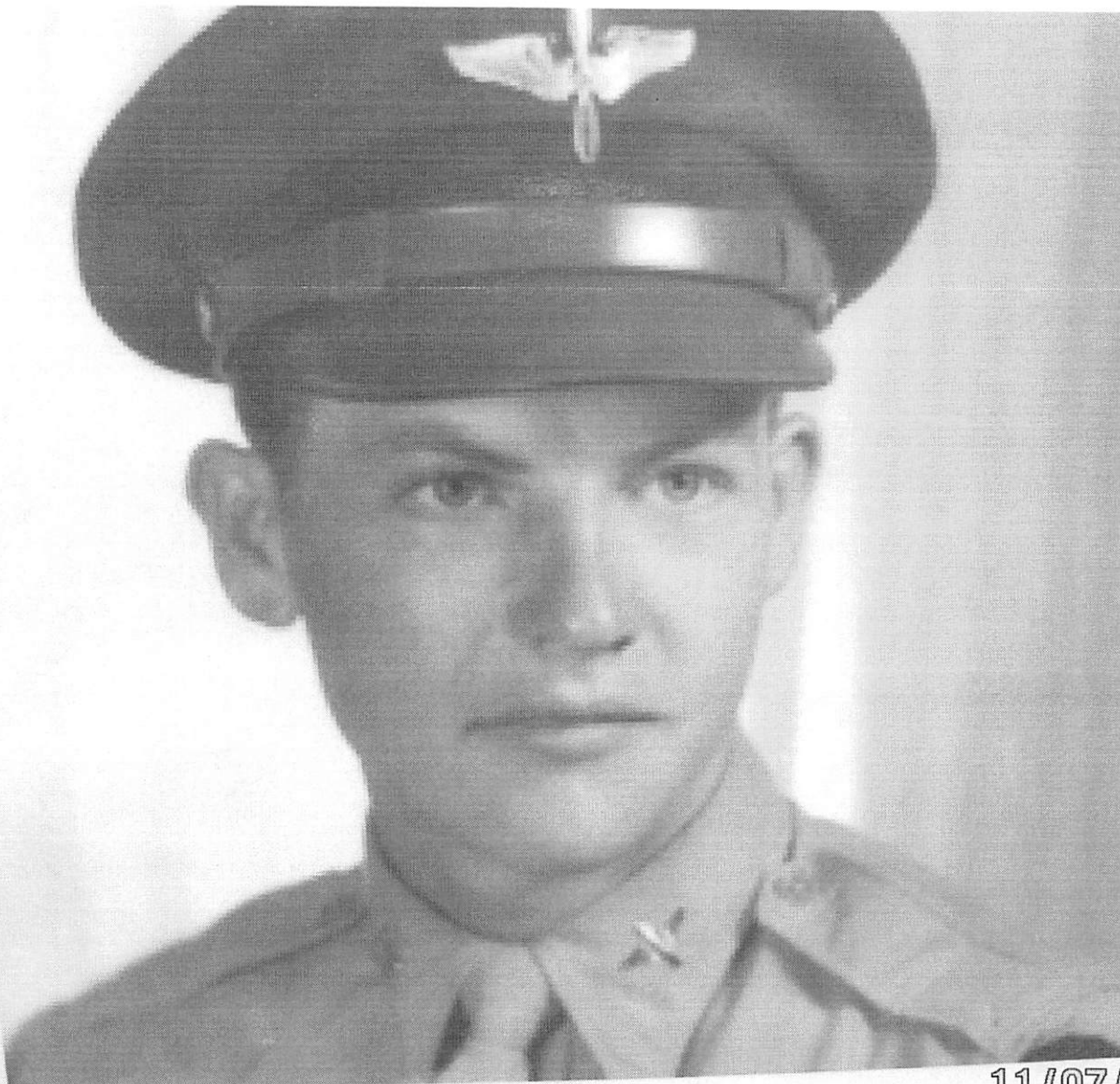
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○ Photos from Danny Calver Burns & RPA 8 NOV 2011



6-2



11/07/2011

6-3

WAR DEPARTMENT AAF Form No. 121 (As revised Nov. 45)		<b>INDIVIDUAL ISSUE RECORD</b>	
NAME	UPCHURCH, ROBERT	GRADE	2d Lt
RATING	Pilot	ASN	0-708349
<p>1. This form will be retained in permanent possession of above-described individual.</p> <p>2. Loss of this form will be immediately reported to the Commanding Officer.</p> <p>3. See AAF Regulation 65-23 for items to be entered on this form.</p>			

62-480275 Watch A-11	1	7/4	10
83-290400 Glasses, sun	"	"	"
83-163000 Cylinder B-3	2	"	"
83-978200 Vest, B-4	1	"	"
83-483000 Jacket A-2	"	"	"
ISSUED ON 29 AUGUST 1945 RI RTTU APO 882			
1 ea. BAG., AVIATOR'S KIT	-3		
1 ea. HELMET FLYING TYPE			LARGE.
1 ea. GLASSES FLYING SUN			BLE
ISSUED ON 30 AUGUST 44 C.B. F. TU.			
APO 82			

TYPE, PART, OR STOCK No.	QUANTITY	DATE ISSUED	STATION No.	VOUCHER No.
KIT, FLYERS CLOTHING (T.O. 00-30-41) ISSUE				
Bag, B-4	1	6/29	as per Inv.	
Mask, Oxygen A-14	1	6/29	as per Inv.	
Gloves, B-3	1	6/29	44-1092	
Gloves, R. I.	2	6/29	"	
Goggles, B-8	1	6/29	"	
Helmet, AN-M-15	1	6/29	"	

83-541020 JACKE FLYING WINTER B-6 36R				
83-722000 SHOES FLYING WINTER A-6 Med.				
83-069220 CAP FLYING WINTER B-2 SIZE 7				

Suit, AN-S-31	1	6/29	"	"
KIT, NAVIGATION, PILOT (T.O. 00-30-63) ISSUE				
Computer	1	6/29	"	"
Protractor	1	6/29	"	"


If additional entries are required use another copy and keep as a continuation of first page. 11/07/20



Chippewa  
Feb 7-45

Dear Mrs Upchurch,

You have been informed  
of your son's death by  
this time. I am sorry.

It gives me great  
pleasure in showing my  
deepest sympathies with  
you at this time. Your  
son was well liked  
& loved by all who knew  
him. I can speak for all  
to him a great personality.

It Upchurch was a personal  
friend of mine & therefore  
being together the day  
before his death we had  
his picture taken the  
day before. I am sorry  
deeply regret that

I have not sent the  
picture before. I promise  
that you will greatly  
appreciate the picture.  
I believe you can have  
the signature & cut the  
picture out, as  
much effort as possible,  
it is enlarged to  
a beautiful photograph.  
The reason the picture  
was not sent before is  
due to circumstances which  
I could not alter.

Yours With Sympathy  
Lt Ernest F. Hanna

11/07/2011



FROM: THE PILOT WED 22 FEB 2006 SOUTHERN PINES, N.C.

# DNA Identifies Flier's Body in China

## Hero Returning — Finally

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

**H**oyle Upchurch is coming home. It took a long time. Upchurch was lost in World War II when his P-40 crashed in China. A monument stands beside the United Methodist Church in High Falls, where he grew up.

It bears his name, but he is not buried there.

His remains, now identified through DNA tests, long lay buried under a simple cross in the mountains of China. His family back here, like many such families, was officially notified that Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch had

been reported Missing in Action near Kanchow Airbase, on Oct. 6, 1944.

Charles and Bessie Upchurch mourned without ever being able to bury their lost son. Their family mourned with them.

"We grew up witnessing firsthand the anguish, pain, and loss our parents endured from 1944 until their deaths for their brother and hero," wrote Dale Upchurch, one of a dozen nieces and nephews, in a letter to state Sen. Harris Blake of Pinehurst. "We sincerely appreciate all your efforts to recognize Uncle Hoyle

as a native Tar Heel who paid the ultimate price for our freedom ..."

An empty place waited in the family plot.

Half a world away, a boy in China grew to manhood, and then to old age, visiting and tending the grave of an unknown American pilot.

Then, 60 years later, a second message came to High Falls, this time from Hawaii.

"My name is Robert Maves, and I am a Senior Analyst at the Joint POW/MIA Accounting command at Hickam Air Force Base," it said. "Recently one of our teams recovered remains in China possibly associated with Robert H. Upchurch."

The letter brought hope and tears to the family of a young man who'd fallen in love with airplanes and gone off to war, joining the famed Flying Tigers, never to return. He had last been seen climbing through cloudy skies dangerously close to mountains 90 miles west of Kanchow.

"Chinese say the pilot burned and plane totally destroyed with no identification possible," said the official report.

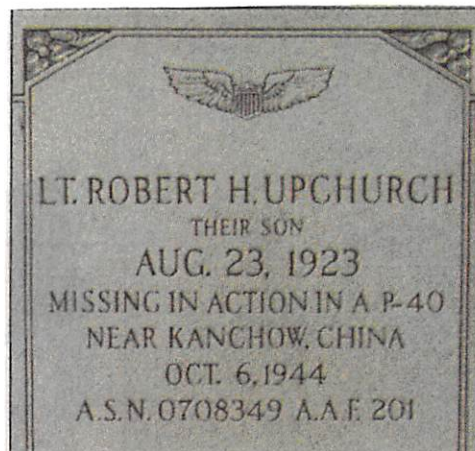
Long ago the Army closed the file, marked Upchurch as dead. A 1947 investigating team visited one crash site, but decided it had been a Japanese plane. Villagers in the area they visited said they knew of no American war dead in the vicinity.

Case closed — until last summer.

In late May, a search and recovery team excavated a burial site on a mountaintop in China.

They found it under a cross in a park near an ancient Ming Dynasty Tower. In 1944, the people of Guidong traveled a long distance to bring back the body of a pilot from the "Flying Tigers" that crashed near Ch'en Hsien.

"They brought the body back to Santi Mountain — a sacred place — and conducted a burial there with a large funeral service," says the team report. "Local people visited and continued to visit the site. In the



Robert Hoyle Upchurch and his gravestone at High Falls United Methodist.



early 1990s, the area was made into a park."

The team found a burial mound with wooden cross and funerary wreath. It had been carefully tended for 60 years.

They spoke with a local man, a Mr. Huang. Then a schoolboy, now 79 years old, Huang described the day he saw Upchurch laid to rest.

Adults from Guidong had gone to get the body of the pilot. It was a long way, but they'd gone because they knew he was from the locally based "Flying Tigers" Huang told the search and recovery team in May.

He had seen Upchurch's body, badly damaged, reverently wrapped in a red cloth and placed in a grave. The grave was then filled with rocks and soil. There was a funeral ceremony. Prayers were offered, and rice wine drunk.

Huang said he had come regularly to the grave to remember this young pilot who'd given his life helping to free China from the Japanese invasion.

### Off to War, Fly

Upchurch left his home on the Deep River to go to work in a bomber plant in California. Planes were magic to him. As soon as he turned 18, he joined the Army Air Corps.

"I came into the army, and found just how much I loved my people," he wrote home. "It's funny how a guy thinks of things like that, but a guy thinks of everything in the Army."

Training at Eagle Pass, Texas, made him a pilot.

"I have got about four and a half more weeks here," he wrote from Texas during flight training, then, later, from Florida: "I left Eagle Pass March 24 and was sent to Barksdale Field, La., to fly B-26s — but the third day we were there the orders were changed and we were sent down here: ... please don't say anything to Mom, but it won't be very long before I will be overseas."

"They are getting us straight on everything here. Then, we will ship out to a group, and we will get 60 hours of flying time in the ship we will fly overseas, which will take a month or two

months. Remember, don't tell Mom anything about it. ... I will write Mom after I get across."

Upchurch was well aware of the chances he was taking, and said he was glad he was not married.

"It won't be bad for me, because there is no one depending on me," he wrote. "It will be just a thing of the past in a year or so if I am bumped off. I think Mom believed me when I wrote and said I might get married. Tell her not to get too scared, because my job is big enough now, flying a hot pursuit ship. The Major told us yesterday that we were God-chosen boys ..."

By September, overseas was just where he was. Upchurch had gone first to India, then, on The Burma Front, over the hump to southwestern China.

"I fooled you again," Upchurch wrote. "I'll bet you thought I was still in India. Nope. I am in China. Things were getting too hot up here, so they sent me up. They knew I could handle it."

### Fabled Flying Tigers

By then, Upchurch was piloting one of the fabled P-40s built for Gen. Claire Chenault and his American Volunteer Group, the "Flying Tigers" who fought as Chinese army until July 4, 1942, when they were decommissioned and accepted Army Air Corps comparable ranks, remaining in China.

The P-40 was a plane small enough to fly in and out quickly, agile enough to go up against the deadly Japanese Zeros.

Walt Disney, a pilot himself, loved that aircraft. He created a design to be painted on the nose of the plane: huge teeth. Disney said that toothy smile was sexy, made women swoon, and men would sign up so women would swoon for them, according to a story attributed to Mary Lee Blue, whose uncle lived in Carthage.

In the spring of 1944, the Japanese Ichigo campaign severed China, and the 74th was directed to move and "commence operations behind enemy lines" from Kanchow. Upchurch earned his flying officer's license and was sent first to India, then on to Kunming Air Base deep in

southwest China, 175 miles north of French Indochina (Vietnam) and 200 miles northeast of Burma.

Kunming was the largest airfield there. Pilots loved its 6,000-foot runway. So did the Japanese, for they bombed it often.

"I don't know who is getting the most hell kicked out of them, us or the Japs,"

Upchurch wrote that September. "I guarantee you those bastards aren't living a life of Riley. If we had Patton and his army over here ... we could run every damn Jap out of China in nine months or a year."

It was a rough war, but Upchurch was very happy to be part of a noble group of fighters: the 23rd Fighter Group commanded by former AVG officer Col. Tex Hill.

"It is the best outfit over here," Upchurch wrote. "It was the one I was hoping for all the time and was lucky enough to get in. I was never happier in all my life. Letters from home, and shooting Japs by hundreds. Goodnight, all. Hoyle."

Ten days later, on Oct. 6, 1944, Upchurch took off for what Tiger pilots called "hunt and be hunted." His flying group split, with the right wing peeling off in that direction and the left wing opposite with four left in the middle for protection in case of a fight.

He did not return.

A diary kept by Capt. Charlie Cook noted his loss.

"Upchurch, a new pilot, killed on first mission," Cook recorded the following day. "Got in some bad weather with Gib (Lt. Robert Gibeault) and he crashed into a mountain."

### It Was a Match

Last summer, the news from Hawaii spread from family to family. Faxes flew to Hawaii. The military came to find female relatives, take samples so mitochondrial DNA could be compared with that of the pilot who'd lain buried with honor so far away for so long.

Waiting was awful. Tension was high.

Then came the news: it was a match. The unknown Flying Tiger was Hoyle Upchurch.

Work began on paperwork and procedures necessary to

bring him back, back to High Falls, back to the church where his picture hangs, back to the little hillside graveyard by the riverside where his monument waits.

Blake called sheriffs in counties between Moore County and Greensboro Triad Airport to arrange an escort for the family. A service is planned for early April.

"Family will go to Greensboro the night before and stay at a hotel near the airport," Blake said. "The next morning, when his body arrives, they will bring him home. They will have deputies escorting them all the way, changing as they cross county lines."

Upchurch will be buried once more, this time with full military honors, a salute, a flag furled and folded.

Representatives of the Chinese government may be in attendance. U.S. Military officers of high rank may be there. There will be high officials of state, county and nation.

But there will also be men and women of a family that has waited year in and year out for word of one loved and lost.

Upchurch was not just a thing of the past, forgotten after a year or so. He was wrong about that.

*John Chappell can be reached at 783-5841 or by e-mail at [jchappell@thepilot.com](mailto:jchappell@thepilot.com).*



FROM: THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER  
THUR 23 FEB 2006 FAYETTEVILLE, NC

# Downed pilot's remains found

■ A U.S. team discovers a Moore County World War II flier's grave in a Chinese village.

By Andrew C. Martel  
Staff writer

**CARTHAGE** — Robert Hoyle Upchurch's body lay for 60 years beneath a wooden cross inscribed with the Chinese characters for "American Pilot."

That was all the Chinese villagers knew about the World War II flier who crashed into a nearby mountain.

All the Upchurch family

knew was that Hoyle disappeared in bad weather Oct. 6, 1944. It was his first mission with the 74th Fighter Squadron, which was battling the Japanese over the Chinese mainland.

Last May, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command solved the mystery of what happened to the 21-year-old from High Falls.

A team from the command dug up his remains and identified Upchurch through DNA samples

obtained through his family. The remains are being transported back to High Falls, a small community near Carthage in Moore County.

Family members say Upchurch's homecoming is a wonderful relief. The flier — the second-youngest of 10 children — had been mourned at every family gathering and every holiday since he disappeared.

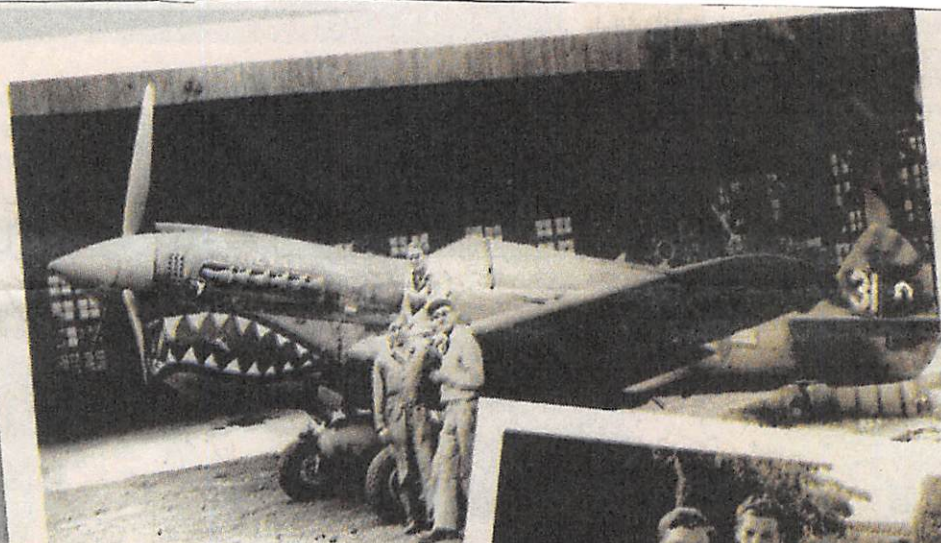
The pain of his loss was magnified because they did not know what happened to him.

Some family members refused



Contributed photo

Robert Hoyle Upchurch disappeared in 1944.



Robert Hoyle Upchurch was flying the plane at left when it crashed in 1944. Below, Upchurch, second from left, poses with siblings and their mother, Bessie, fourth from left. He wrote letters home telling of his experiences during the war.

Contributed photos



Dear sis & family.  
I guess I  
ashame of my self  
before now, but  
letters behind.  
write too.

Chris, if  
mama crying  
down to see  
I have writ

April 30, 1943

day in  
discussing how  
like to fly on  
he if me (and  
is here for  
will be as soon  
of Germans gets on my tail as  
I were when I used to talk about  
it in civilian clothes. You n



## Pilot: Funeral is scheduled for early April in Moore County.

to believe that he died.

"The family kept thinking he was alive somewhere. Maybe he has amnesia. Maybe he was in a prison camp," said niece Barbara Rowland.

She is probably the last surviving Upchurch family member who knew Hoyle.

Rowland remembers her uncle as a joker. She looked up to him, even though he would lovingly tease her.

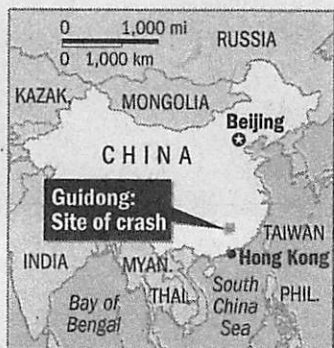
Upchurch wanted to fly even before he joined the Army. He was excited to be a fighter pilot, but he was also frank about the risks in his letters home.

"I wonder if I will be as brave when a couple of Germans gets (sic) on my tail," he wrote to his sister Elma.

He wrote that life at Kanchow Air Base in China was miserable.

"When you have to make as high as six raids a day, a guy is pretty ... tired, nervous, worried, and hungry," he wrote.

The villagers in Guidong in southeast China admired the 74th Squadron, known as the Flying Tigers. So when they



Source: ESRI

AP graphic

heard that a plane had crashed on a nearby mountain, a large group of them walked to the site, according to the Accounting Command's report.

The villagers wrapped Upchurch's body in a red cloth and buried him under a mound on the side of a hill they considered sacred. A 79-year-old man identified as Mr. Huang told members of the Accounting Command that he remembered the funeral. People prayed over the grave, drank rice wine and wrapped the cross in a paper wreath.

The villagers took care of the grave in the decades since. Huang reported that he visited the site several times.



Upchurch's niece, Barbara Rowland, remembers him as a joker.

When the Accounting Command told the Upchurch family they thought they found Hoyle's remains, the relatives tried to keep from getting too excited. There are 78,000 other Americans missing in action from World War II, according to the Department of Defense.

Nephew Dale Upchurch, though, said he had a gut feeling that his uncle had been found.

Since the remains were positively matched to the DNA

samples late last year, Dale Upchurch has marveled at how perfectly the investigation came together.

He wonders what would have happened if the letter from the Accounting Command — which was sent to High Falls United Methodist Church — had never reached the family.

The Upchurch family is scattered to many states now. But members plan to gather from all over in High Falls for Hoyle's funeral, which is scheduled for early April. Relatives say they are expecting some high-ranking military officials, and perhaps some Chinese dignitaries. They also would like to see Huang there, though they don't know whether that will be possible.

Aside from Rowland, no one at the funeral will have known him personally, but that doesn't matter, Dale Upchurch said.

"For us, the nieces and nephews, he was larger than life," he said.

"We could see he was a hero to the family."

Staff writer Andrew C. Martel can be reached at [martela@fayettevillenc.com](mailto:martela@fayettevillenc.com) or 323-4848, ext. 372.

FROM: THE PILOT FRI 31 MAR 2006 SOUTHERN PINES, NC

# Lost WWII Pilot's Long Journey to End

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

A long-lost American pilot will finally be laid to rest Saturday, April 8, in High Falls.

Second Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, flying his P40 -N-20 on his first mission with the famed "Flying Tigers" of the 23rd Fighter Group, 74th Squadron, disappeared into the mists of China on Oct. 6, 1944.

As his cremated remains are interred in the little cemetery outside High Falls United Methodist Church, jets from Pope Air Force Base — now home to the Flying

Tigers — will streak overhead in a "missing man" formation to honor one of their own.

Some time later, the haunting drone of one of the last of the World War II P-40 fighters will echo down the banks of Deep River, as Jerry Yeagan pilots his restored aircraft overhead in a final tribute to the lost airman.

For years, the family knew only that Upchurch had been lost, like many, in the midst of furious fighting against Japanese invaders of China over the mountainous terrain on The Burma Front.



UPCHURCH

Six months after he went missing, his mother had written seeking to find out whatever she could about her son and what hope there might be for his survival. Chaplain Albert Buckley answered, in sad detail.

"I am going to recount the mission of Oct. 6, and thus give you all the information we have," he wrote. "Your son, with a number of other pilots, took off from their base on a strafing mission to the Hengyang, Lingling area. They completed the mission and landed at Linchow to refuel. They then departed from there to their home base."

Members of the group had to thread their way through rough country, and the weather closed in.

"En route, they encountered bad weather, and your son was last sighted about 100 miles west of Kanchow, China, climbing through the overcast but dangerously close to the mountains," Buckley wrote.

The rest of the flight turned back and sought a different route, according to the

## April 8 Hoyle Upchurch's Burial Set for April 8

### official search report

"Sometime later we received a report from the Chinese net that a plane crashed and burned at Shangpaow (90 miles west of Kanchow)," Buckley wrote, saying that he could not encourage any reasonable hope that Hoyle Upchurch survived — though nothing was certain.

"No identification of the pilot or plane was possible," he wrote. "Since there was no means of identification, we cannot be absolutely sure it was Bob and thus his status remains 'missing in action.' It is a difficult task for me to write this, because I realize it just about reduces to a minimum any hope you have for your son's return, but I cannot bear to see you enduring the future months, yes, and even years in constant expectation of some favorable report."

The chaplain did his best to offer words of comfort to a mother in High Falls.

"Be assured that Bob was ready to meet his Divine Master if Almighty God saw fit to take him from this vale of tears," he wrote. "If I can be of any further service, please feel free to write to me."

Some 60 years later, last May, remains of an American pilot were discovered in a Chinese cemetery. The unknown pilot had been buried with full honors beneath a cross whose Chinese characters identified him only as "American pilot."

Villagers, hearing of the crash, had trekked over mountain paths to bring back the body for a funeral and burial. One 79-year-old man remembered it all, though he had been a boy at the time.

They revered the grave, which was at the foot of a Ming dynasty

tower. They tended it and visited it. In May, a team of scientists excavated that grave to take the remains to Hawaii for identification. DNA tests using samples contributed by three Upchurch relatives confirmed Upchurch's identity.

It brought to a close the long wait — one shared by family who never even met Upchurch.

"As one of the youngest Upchurch nieces and nephews, I never knew Uncle Hoyle but loved him and missed him just the same," Dale Upchurch said. "I never thought the mystery of his disappearance would ever be solved."

His own son and son-in-law are in wartime military service.

"My wife, Sue, and I have a son-in-law, Heath, who has been in Baghdad, Afghanistan, and South Korea over the past four years," he said. "Our Son, Dale Jr., has been stationed on the Kitty Hawk in Japan for two years patrolling countries like China, Korea, and Russia."

The family legend of the missing pilot intensifies his normal concern as a father.

"When we don't hear from our kids by e-mail or phone, after a couple of weeks we get antsy and apprehensive," he said. "As a nephew to this hero and a father to my other hero, I want to help provide a network for all family members to reunite, bond, and honor our parents, family, and Uncle Hoyle."

On Wednesday, April 5, Upchurch family members will be waiting at the Raleigh Durham International Airport for the return of Hoyle Upchurch. A military officer will deliver his urn to representatives from Powell Funeral Home.

And the following Saturday, his long journey will end.

John Chappell can be reached at 783-5841 or by e-mail at [jchappell@thepilot.com](mailto:jchappell@thepilot.com).



ROBERT HOYLE U

9-2

FROM: THE PILOT SUN 2 APR 2006 SOUTHERN PINES, NC

### Robert H. Upchurch

Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, of High Falls, will be buried Saturday, April 8, 2006, with full military honors at High Falls United Methodist Church Cemetery after a memorial service at 2 p.m. at High Falls United Methodist Church.

His brothers and sisters who are now deceased are: Elma Benfield and her husband, Boyd, Stella Kennedy and her husband, James, Winton Upchurch, Carl



UPCHURCH



Upchurch, Clinton Upchurch, Mollie Butler and her husband, Edgar, Elsie Tew, Marie Anthony and her husband, Bob, Lynn "John" Upchurch, and Charles K. Upchurch Jr.

Lt. Upchurch is survived by his sisters-in-law, Mrs.

Carl Upchurch, Mrs. Clinton Upchurch, Mrs. Tinky Upchurch Lowe, and Mrs. Charles K. Upchurch Jr.; and numerous nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews.

Memorials may be made to High Falls United Methodist Church, High Falls or to a charity of the donor's choice.

Powell Funeral Home and Crematory in Southern Pines is handling the arrangements.



FROM: THE PILOT FRI 7 APR 2006 SOUTHERN PINES, N.C.

# Upchurch Will Be Buried With Full Military Honors Missing WWII Pilot Is Finally Home

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

Hoyle Upchurch is home at last. His family waited 62 years for his return.

Missing in action and presumed dead, 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch was last sighted Oct. 6, 1944. Weather closed in around his P-40N fighter flying over mountainous terrain in China during World War II. Nobody knew for certain what happened to him.

His mother never gave up hope for his return. They carved his name on his parents' gravestone in the family plot outside High Falls

United Methodist Church, but he was not there.

His body lay thousands of miles away, marked by a simple cross with Chinese characters saying only "American Pilot" — buried there by Guidong villagers who brought him back over mountain trails, wrapped him in red silk, prayed and sang and laid him to rest in an honored spot near the foot of a Ming Dynasty



UPCHURCH

tower.

Last summer, DNA analysis identified the remains as those of

Upchurch. On Wednesday, the Army brought him back to North Carolina.

He will be buried with full military honors at 2 p.m. Saturday, and the gravestone will be changed to read, "Home at last."

At Raleigh-Durham International Airport, family members stood silently as a tall lieutenant marched off American Airlines flight 300. He carried a folded U.S. flag and a black cloth bag containing a small bronze box.

Lt. Justin Cathcart strode briskly through the terminal, followed by family, USO volunteers, television crews and other media. Outside, he handed the folded triangle of the American flag to Kelly Upchurch with the ritual words expressing "the thanks of a grateful nation."

Kelly Upchurch was visibly moved.

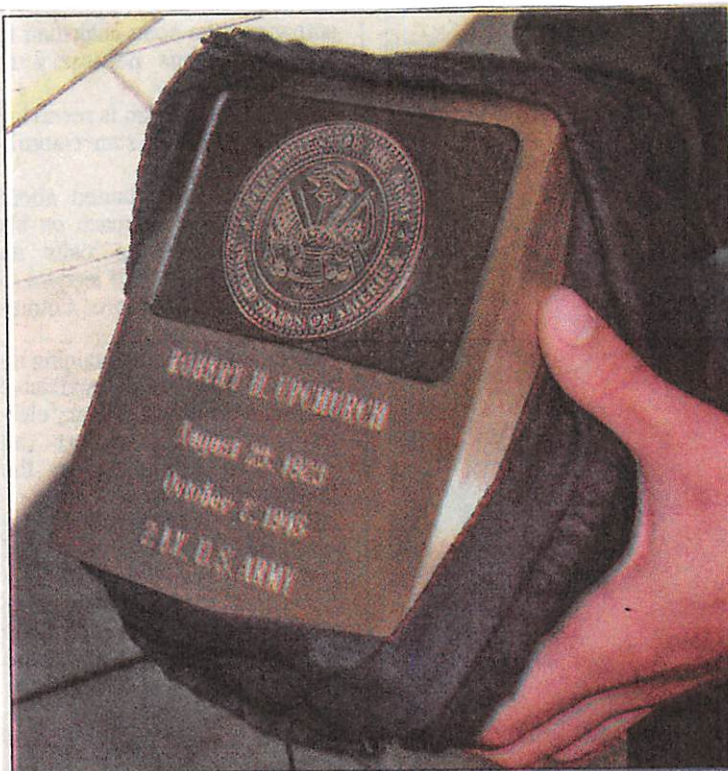
"I carried a flag to present to the Upchurch family," he said. "It is an honor to bring somebody home after 62 years. It is definitely an honor, but bitter-sweet. Words cannot really say enough."

Born in Indianapolis, Cathcart entered the military through an ROTC scholarship. Someday he may wear the Green Beret.

"If I stay in, I will go out for Special Forces selection," he said. "I'll be back in North Carolina at Camp Mackall."

The story of Hoyle Upchurch spread through the barracks on Oahu after a company commander told Cathcart he would make this trip, and gave him a thick folder of background information.

"It is pretty amazing that, 62 years later, someone is being flown home," he said. "I guess everybody knew that on the island there is a recovery unit that deals with Vietnam specifically. But the fact that someone



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

Cathcart holds a bronze box containing Upchurch's remains.



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

Lt. Justin Cathcart presents an American flag to Kelly Upchurch.



"It is an amazing story that the Chinese went out and searched for him, and found him," he said. "They gave him a proper burial, and 60 years later he was found and through the magic of science tied back to our family."

As family members gathered back in the USO for a light lunch, the room filled with Marines. Some were just back from Iraq, others were outbound.

For a moment after hearing the story of Hoyle Upchurch, the room grew quiet, silent. You could hear soldiers breathing.

Cathcart flew straight from Hawaii, leaving Schofield Army Barracks in Honolulu Tuesday afternoon with the cremated remains of Hoyle Upchurch and a gift.

was being brought back from World War II kinda shocked a lot of guys. A lot of guys were impressed that 'bring everyone back' still applies 62 years later. I didn't know he had so much family until recently."

### Tending Stranger's Grave

The Upchurch family is profoundly grateful that villagers so far away would reverently tend the grave of a stranger who had come to fight for them.

"We certainly appreciate everything done for us," he said. "He was my uncle. I think about our current relationship with China. To think that, 60 years ago, we were over there fighting to liberate them. All this time, they kept up his grave. We are hoping we are going to have some Chinese representatives Saturday at the service. I believe we will. We are very excited about that."

One Upchurch there was Scott Davis Upchurch, son of Kelly Upchurch, and great nephew of Hoyle Upchurch. He is 10 years old.

"I never knew him," he said. "But knowing that he died for our country actually to save other people is kind of cool."

He will join a sea of people Saturday as family members, friends and neighbors, military, state and federal officials, representatives of China, and others honor him. There will be a memorial service inside the church, then a formal burial in the little cemetery outside.

Carthcart delivered the bronze container to representatives of Powell Funeral Home in Southern Pines. At the High Falls service, a general officer will formally present the flag to the family.

Overhead, Flying Tiger jets will streak in the missing man formation.

Then, weather permitting, something particularly special will follow: a restored fighter like the one Upchurch flew is to pass overhead as well.

Hoyle Upchurch had been flying his first mission for the 23rd Fighter Group in a Curtiss-Wright P-40 Warhawk, one of thousands of such airplanes, the only American fighter available in quantity to confront the Japanese advance during the early years of the Pacific War.

### A Rare Bird

A total of 13,739 Curtiss P-40s

were built, which included the Tomahawks and Kittyhawks built for export as well as the P-40s built for the U.S. Army Air Force.

This was a plane made for young men like 21-year-old Upchurch, says Don Anklin, who will be flying one of the very few remaining P-40s in existence Saturday.

"It will get your attention, flying it," he said. "A young kid could handle one very well, all full of testosterone. But it will get your attention — mostly trying to keep it straight on take-offs and landing."

Upchurch's plane was called "The Cub" after its regular pilot, whose name was Bear. It was one of the later models with a more powerful GM Allison engine than the Rolls Royce design Merlins of early models. Anklin will be flying a rare bird.

"I think there are maybe 30, but no more than 10 in this condition," Anklin said. "It is an E model, exactly the same as the ones sent to Chenault. Our airplane is exactly like the one Tex Hill flew."

Not many remain.

"There are probably, in this kind of shape, maybe 10," he said. "The British designated them as Warhawks, or Kittyhawks. We just call them all 'hawks' from the P-36 all the way through the P-40."

P-40s were considered fast planes for their time, but not as maneuverable as Japanese opponents, *Najima Hayabusas*. Fighter groups like the 23rd learned to go out in numbers using their greater speed to advantage.

Honoring Upchurch and other heroes is why they keep these old planes in flying condition according to Anklin.

"That's the main reason we keep these old airplanes going," he said. "Bear in mind, this one is 64 years old, made in 1941. We don't fly them in high winds, bad weather."

High wind, or stormy conditions this weekend will ground his aircraft.

Predictions are not good for Friday, so he will remain at home base in Suffolk, Va., rather than coming down a day early as previously planned.

"This is all dependent on weather," Anklin said. "But I expect to fly down to the Moore County airport some time Saturday. I'll just fly down there Saturday morning, come back that afternoon. The military fly-over is set for — as they say — 1515 to 1530; and I am to circle 10 miles out, then come in at about 1535. I speak civilian, so that's 3:35 Saturday afternoon. I'll probably make a few passes."

A P-40 has a top speed of more than 350 mph. Anklin won't push his antique plane that hard.

"I'll probably keep it to about 200," he said. "It is not very stable platform in rough weather. It demands your attention."

### 'Rocks Win'

P-40s were designed for low altitude, close-support fighters — the kind the Army thought it would need in the 1930s as plans were being drawn.

High-altitude interception was not what designers had in mind, nor was flying in mountains like those in China or on The Burma Front. Upchurch had been on a strafing mission, his first with the 23rd, and was heading back to base when weather closed in.

"He was last sighted at 1700 hours (5 p.m.) flying through rain and clouds over mountainous terrain," the casualty report said. "Lt. Gibeault last sighted Lt. Upchurch climbing through overcast dangerously close to the mountains. Rest of flight turned back and attempted a different route ... Chinese net reports a plane crashed and burned at Shangpaosu, the exact location last sighted by Lt. Gibeault, which is 90 miles west of Kanchow. Chinese say the pilot and plane (were) totally destroyed with no identification possible."

That report, it is now known, was not totally accurate. Guidong villagers went to the

crash and retrieved bits of the wreckage along with the body of the young pilot, Upchurch.

Flying Tigers had flown P-40s from the beginning, when the American Volunteer Group (AVG) fought under Chinese colors. While U.S. law at the time allowed only for cash-and-carry sales of arms, a China-based corporation known as the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (or CAMCO) was formed to buy aircraft.

American aircraft production at that time was dedicated to American and British production.

However, the British agreed to divert 100 P-40s to China.

By the time Upchurch arrived at Kanchow, more modern versions were on hand. His "Cub" was a P-40N. It had a more powerful engine, and was redesigned for high altitude combat with a ceiling of 31,000 feet, a top speed of 350 mph, and six .50-inch machine guns mounted on the wings.

It could reach 14,000 feet altitude in 7.3 minutes, and had a range of 340 miles when fully loaded with a 500-pound bomb underneath the fuselage.

But it was not good in rough weather.

"In bad weather, the rocks win," Anklin said. "The rocks always seem to win."

John Chappell can be reached at 783-5841 or by e-mail at [jchappell@thepilot.com](mailto:jchappell@thepilot.com).



FROM: THE PILOT SUN 9 APR 2006 SOUTHERN PINES, NC

# WWII Hero Buried With Full Honors

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

In a hillside cemetery behind High Falls United Methodist Church on Sunday, soldiers of Alpha Battery, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Field Artillery, from Fort Bragg, carefully folded and tucked an American flag.

With slow salutes, they surrendered it to their commanding officer, who presented it to Barbara Rowland, accepting it for the family on behalf of Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch. He had crashed his P-40 as bad weather closed in over him while returning from his first combat mission as a member of the famed Flying Tigers. Upchurch was last seen dangerously close to mountainous terrain Oct. 6, 1944.

It would be 62 years before combined efforts of China and the United States brought him back to be buried with his mother and father behind his home church on the banks of Deep River.

The bronze cube containing the ashes stood on a small table flanked by a model of his P-40, a photo of Upchurch, and a photo of the whole family, with 11 brothers and sisters.

Long ago, hearing of a downed American, villagers in Quidong province had brought the body of an unknown pilot back to bury in another sacred hillside. They tended the grave for decades, until he was identified by DNA analysis as Upchurch.

One of them, a Mr. Huang, was then a boy. Now 79, Huang still vividly remembers the day they wrapped the body in red silk to bury it beneath a Ming dynasty tower. Every year, with other villagers, he came to tend the grave, bringing fresh flowers in wreaths to set behind the simple white cross bearing only the words "American Pilot" in Chinese characters.

On Sunday, the People's Republic of China sent a delegation to attend services and offer grateful thanks to

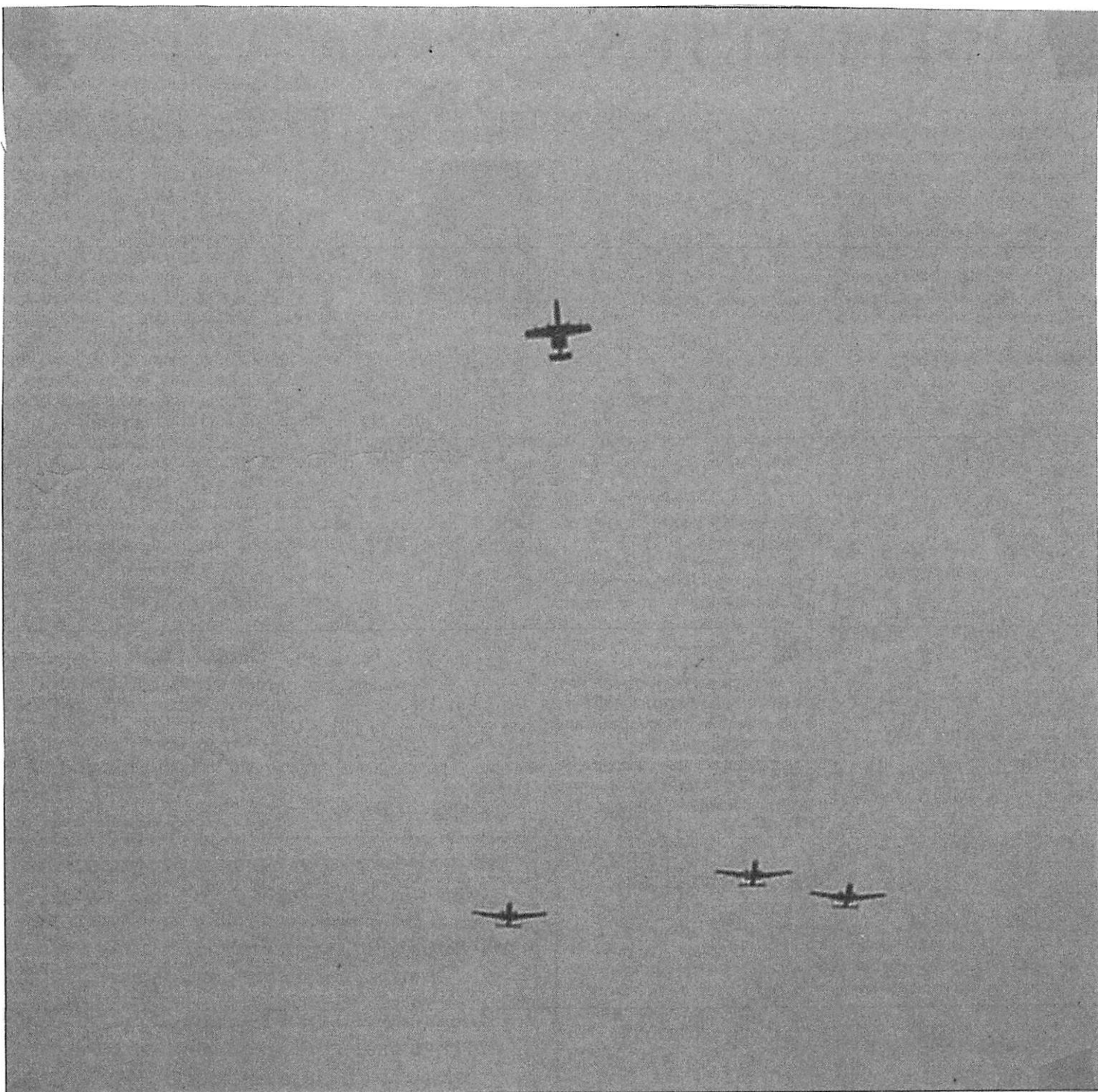


GLENN M. SIDES/The Pilot

Top: Soldiers carry the remains of Lt. Hoyle Upchurch from the church to the cemetery, led by Chaplain Steve Kelley. Left: An honor fires a volley. Right: Jia Xiudong speaks at the graveside.



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GLENN M. SIDES/The Pilot

Military planes fly over site of burial service in "missing-man" formation.

# Taps at Last

## Upchurch Laid to Rest in Native Soil

From Front Page

the family of a young man who lost his life helping to free China.

Jia Xiudong, counselor to the Chinese ambassador, brought with him a letter from Huang, whose age did not permit him to accept an Upchurch family invitation to be present for the services.

"Lt. Upchurch is one of the bravest heroes in the worldwide war against fascism," Huang had written — in Chinese translated and read by Xiudong. "He gave his life so that the peace and friendship between our people will grow. Lt. Upchurch will forever live in our memories."

He invited the family to come to Guidong, and said he and his family would welcome them as guests.

### Symbol of Sacrifice

The village is in a remote area of Hunan province, and provincial authorities, too, wrote to the Upchurch family, telling of last year's 60-year memorial to that war.

"Over the past 60 years, the people of Guidong have quietly tended his grave as a symbol in their memories of his sacrifice," he read.

April 5 in Chinese tradition is known as "Tomb Sweeping Day," Xiudong said. On that day every year, local students and citizens came to pay their respect and lay flowers there.

"It was, appropriately, on that same day, that Lt. Upchurch was brought back to his home in Moore County," Xiudong said. "Today, I bring you the good wishes not only of the 67 million people of Hunan, but the 1.3 billion people of China."

Hunan and Guidong will keep

the original look of that first Upchurch grave, he said. They have collected the original crash relics that had been in his tomb and buried them again in a blue-and-white porcelain pot.

"The plan is to build a commemorative pavilion on the site, to a hope of maintaining world peace," he said. "The war has ended. The peace he saved is to be doubly treasured."

The president of China comes to Washington later this month on a state visit. He has asked that surviving veterans of the Doolittle raids and the Flying Tigers be invited to a reception.

About 1,600 pilots lost their lives in that war, he said.

"In some mountain there were so many crashed planes that other pilots, flying over, came to call it 'A valley of aluminum' and followed that gleaming path on their way in," Xiudong said. "We fought shoulder to shoulder then against fascism. Today, we fight other common enemies: terrorists, poverty, environmental degradation. Lt. Upchurch devoted his life to the peace we all enjoy."

Rifles fired in salute, and again, and again. As the last strains of a bugle sounded "Taps," four Flying Tiger jets roared overhead. Just as they passed, one lifted up and away alone in what is called the missing-man formation, honoring that other Flying Tiger pilot from a war long ago and far away.

The first Flying Tigers worked as civilians on business contracts: \$500 a month, and \$500 for each downed Japanese plane. With Chinese support, they pushed back against an invading Japanese army that had swept all other resistance before it.

Chinese workers surrendered precious rice paddies that had grown their food for a thousand

years, spading and shoveling to level the ground for airfields.

They brought stones from creek bottoms in wheelbarrows, pounding the rocks into the earth with their bare hands to lay a foundation for runways and landing fields. Using age-old tools, they build barracks. They manned hidden outposts in the famed "Chinese web" to watch for enemy aircraft.

It was said that no sooner had a Japanese plane started warming up than word of it would come by telephone and radio to scramble Flying Tiger fighters. Red balls, pulleyed up, signaled the air raid warning and American pilots — supported by mixed Chinese and American ground crews — took to the air.

### 'I Want to Go'

Back home, Upchurch would have read of the exploits of those Flying Tigers. When he finally made the grade (he wrote that only one of every three could pass the tough training course), he was happy.

A family member, Jody Gollan, read some of his letters during a memorial service prior to the burial.

"Let me do the worrying," Upchurch had written. "I am the one they are shooting at."

When he found out he would be leaving his post in India to join the Flying Tigers, Upchurch was thrilled.

"I want to go," he wrote. "Tell Mom not to get too scared: The major told us yesterday we were 'God's chosen boys.'"

About going to China, he wrote: "Things were getting too hot up there, so they sent me. I flew a P-40 'over the hump,' and I was lucky I got here."

"Some of my buddies weren't so lucky. Things are tough. I asked for it, and I can take it until they find my number. I am

a man, now."

### 'Welcome Home'

At the service, Lt. Col. Jeffrey Cowan, commander of the 74th Squadron, told a packed congregation he felt privileged to lead such men.

"Like Lt. Upchurch, they are adventurous, understood courage, and responded," Cowan said. "God speed, Lt. Upchurch — and welcome home."

So many came that the church was full two hours before the 2 p.m. service. Cars lined the roads in every direction. Congressman Howard Coble came. Kathy McLellan in his office had arranged for medals: Hoyle Upchurch had earned, but did not live to receive, to be presented to Lola Upchurch for the family.

Gov. Mike Easley sent the state flag that flew over the Capitol in Raleigh and a proclamation in his honor, calling Upchurch "a true hero, who fought oppression and defended the ideals for which this great country was founded."

State Sen. Harris Blake of Pinehurst spent so much time working with family members that he said he and they had forged a bond as strong as blood. He attended the service. Lian Xie led a delegation from the China Center of North Carolina, expressing their gratitude and respect.

The words of the opening hymn acquired new meaning, as the congregation sang of an America "beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife, who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life."

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THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER SUN 9 APR 2006

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C.

# World War II soldier buried

■ The remains of 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, missing since 1944, were found last year in China.

By Andrew C. Martel

Staff writer

**HIGH FALLS** — Donna Moore only knew her uncle, Robert Hoyle Upchurch, from a photograph in the hallway of her parents' home.

After his plane went missing somewhere over China on Oct. 6, 1944, "Uncle Hoyle" was mentioned

only at the occasional family reunion or holiday gathering. He was a mystery to the younger generations, Moore said.

On Saturday, Moore watched as 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, the family legend, was laid to rest beside his parents in the cemetery behind High Falls United Methodist Church.

Through the service and her family, Moore finally got to meet Uncle Hoyle the prankster, the doting older brother and the selfless soldier.

"It's made him so much more real to us," Moore said. "He's not just a picture anymore."

About 300 people packed the sanctuary or sat outside listening to the service over a speaker system. The mourners included dozens of relatives who never knew Upchurch personally, delegates from the Chi-

nese Embassy, fellow World War II veterans and members of the 23rd Fighting Group, the Flying Tigers, Upchurch's unit.

The Flying Tigers later saluted Upchurch with a four-plane flyover, screeching across the gray sky in a missing man formation. The copper and bronze urn containing his remains stood on a table before a tombstone that read "Home at Last."

Upchurch's body was found last year in a grave in a Chinese park. The tombstone there simply read "American Pilot." A POW-MIA task force identified his remains by comparing them to DNA samples collected from Upchurch family members.

When the match was made, nephew Dale Upchurch said, he started contacting the family to plan a homecoming for a hero they had missed for 61 years.

Hoyle had 10 brothers and sisters, all of whom are deceased. Over the years, family members have moved all over the country, and many had never met each other.

But Dale Upchurch knew that a funeral could provide closure that his grandparents, Charity Bessie and Charles Upchurch, had desperately wanted. Long after Hoyle disappeared, his mother wrote letters to Army officials seeking some reassurance that her son might be alive. Both parents died within four months of each other in 1954 and 1955.

Dale knows what that feels like. Nine years ago last week, he and his



Family and friends listen during a graveside service for Upchurch, a member of the Flying Tigers who died in China during World War II.



Family and friends gather at High Falls United Methodist Church to pay their respects to 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, pictured left, who was killed when his plane crashed into a mountain in China on Oct. 6, 1944.

Staff photo  
by Stephanie Bruce



(12-2)



Staff photos by Stephanie Bruce

Lola Upchurch, right, a relative of Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, watches as Staff Sgt. Benjamin Kirkland, center left, of the 327th Field Artillery, and other Fort Bragg soldiers fold an American flag at the graveside service for Upchurch.



wife lost a daughter.

Last week, members of the Upchurch family flew in from California, Michigan and Florida. They wore name tags at the funeral to recognize each other.

"I'm just so proud," Dale Upchurch said later. "There probably never would have been the likelihood of us all being able to get together again."

A few rows behind the family, members of the Flying Tigers sat wearing their olive green uniforms. As fellow fighter pilots, they felt a bond with Upchurch, said Col. Warren Henderson, the group commander.

Upchurch's funeral reminded today's Flying Tigers that their unit's history and legacy is greater than

any single war or career, Henderson said. The group followed the same principles when it was in Afghanistan earlier this year as it did when Upchurch was in China, Henderson said.

Upchurch loved the rush of flying, but he was also realistic about the dangers. His great-niece, Jody Gollan, read a selection of his letters home, in which he often worried about upsetting his mother with bad news. He wouldn't spare his younger sister, Elma, though.

"Elma ... if I'm shipped overseas as a pilot or a gunner, I'm going to live six months," he wrote in 1943. He added that the typical unit of 25 or 30 pilots saw a complete turnover within a year, with almost all the original men either wounded, cap-

tured or killed.

The sentiments were familiar to Max Noftsgger, who sat a row behind Henderson and the rest of the Flying Tigers. Noftsgger, 86, was a fighter pilot in China during World War II, though he didn't know Upchurch. He was shot down once over China and still has a scar on his head to remind him of the day.

Though the Upchurch family has little more than a tombstone and some pictures to remind them of Uncle Hoyle, Moore said she can see many of his characteristics in her relatives.

Ashley Upchurch agreed. The 16-year-old plays soccer, and her great-uncle's descriptions of the exhilaration of flight is just how she feels in the heat of competition.



Mittie Seawell, a friend of Upchurch's sister, looks on during the funeral service for Upchurch on Saturday afternoon at High Falls United Methodist Church in High Falls in Moore County.

## ON THE WEB

■ To see more photos from the service, visit the Observer's Web site at [www.fayettevillenc.com](http://www.fayettevillenc.com)

Ashley said she didn't realize how important the news was that her uncle had been rediscovered.

"I didn't grasp how big a situation it was," she said.

She looked around at the crowds, the young soldiers chatting with the old veterans, and the relatives she had never met.

"Today has made me understand how awesome it is."

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FROM: THE PILOT WED 12 APR 2006 SOUTHERN PINES, NC

# Upchurch Saga Sparks Friendship

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

Upchurch family members were deeply moved by the decades of care Chinese villagers gave their long-lost uncle and cousin, Hoyle Upchurch, after he disappeared in World War II.

Many say Moore County and Guidong County should enter the county-to-county relationship proposed by a 79-year-old man in China.

Huang Renzhun was a boy when his family and their neighbors buried the body of an unknown man who had died fighting for their nation's liberation. He was at the funeral when 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch was laid to

rest at the foot of Wenfeng Pagoda — an ancient, 115-foot umbrella-shaped tower from the Ming Dynasty.

The Upchurch family invited him as an honored guest to attend the services last Saturday as those remains, now identified and flown with military escort back to his High Falls home, were reburied.

It was not to be. Age and health made the trip impossible.

"My family and I thank you for the invitation,"

Huang wrote. "I would want very much to join you at the funeral to remember Second Lieutenant Upchurch and express my condolences in person. However, due to

*"It is an honor for our green hills to provide a resting place for the hero."*

Huang Renzhun  
Guidong County, China

my age and mobility problems, I am not able to come and hope to have your understanding."

Huang put into his own words the reverent gratitude his community had long felt for a man whose name they had not known.

"Lieutenant Upchurch is one of the bravest American pilots and a hero in the Worldwide War Against

Fascism," he wrote, using the Chinese name for World War II. "He assisted the Chinese people in the fight against the Japanese fascists and sacrificed his young and precious life. My family and I admired him. He is an outstanding son of the American people and a pride of all peace-loving people."

Then he made a proposal. This old man had spent much of his life thinking about an American stranger, wrapped in red cloth as prayers were offered and rice wine ceremonially shared, then buried in sacred soil in the shadow of that Ming Dynasty tower.

Every year, he had gone with others to tend the tomb and bring

fresh flowers. He had wondered where that young man grew up, who his people were.

## 'Binds Us Closely'

Last May, Huang led MIA investigators to that grave, where they marked off an archaeological grid and excavated the site, spoonful by spoonful, unearthing a casket containing bone fragments, buttons, coins and other small parachute pieces.

Huang thinks a link has been wrought in blood and love between his county and ours.

"Moore County of North Carolina was where this great fighter grew up, and my hometown, Guidong County of Hunan Province, was where he rested in peace for decades," Huang wrote. "Despite the time and space that stand between us, the peace and friendship across the vast Pacific bind us closely together. It is an honor for our green hills to provide a resting place for the hero."

Huang proposes that connection — kept without knowledge,

but in gratitude and hope for over a half century between a family in Moore County with a lost son and families in China caring for an unknown hero in their eyes — will continue.

"It is the hope of the people from my hometown, Guidong, to enter into a friendly county relationship with Moore County so that the peace and friendship between our peoples will continue to grow," Huang wrote. "My family and I myself sincerely want this beautiful hope to come true and look forward to welcoming you to Guidong and be my guest. Finally, please accept the heartfelt condolences from my family and me. Lieutenant Upchurch will forever live in our memories."

## 'Quietly Tended Grave'

The tenderness and appreciation shown by the people of Guidong moved Upchurch's old commanding officer, legendary Flying Tiger CO David Lee "Tex" Hill.

Now 94, he, too, was unable to accept an invitation to attend the recent services.

"I did not know him well, but I do recall when his airplane went down in very bad weather," Hill wrote. "I didn't know about the

Chinese villagers recovering his body and honoring his grave all these years. I am so glad he is finally coming home after all this time."

Officials of the Foreign Affairs Office of Hunan Province, where Guidong County is located, also wrote the Upchurch family.

"Over the past 60 years, the people of Guidong County, Hunan Province have quietly watched and tended the grave of Lieutenant Upchurch who has been a hero commanding their highest respect and a symbol in their mind for the everlasting pursuit of peace," they wrote. "At the Tomb-sweeping Day every year, local students and citizens voluntarily came to pay their respect and lay wreaths and flower."

"The grave was well maintained when it was identified in May, 2005, 61 years after the search for MIA pilots started in September, 1944. Today, we are gratified from the bottom of our heart that the remains of the hero are finally back home on the other side of the Pacific."

Guidong County kept the original look of the grave and buried the original burial case and remaining relics kept in a blue-and-white porcelain pot there.

The letter said they plan to build a commemorative pavilion on the site of the grave in eternal memory of their hero.

"Sixty years ago, filled with ardor and enthusiasm for maintaining world peace and stopping the evil war, Lt. Upchurch and his young American volunteers who formed the American Volunteers Group came to China to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Chinese people against the aggression of the Japanese fascists," the Hunan government wrote. "Their action of justice commands the respect and admiration of the people of the whole world. Let us join hands and work hard for the lasting peace, universal prosperity, global harmony and a better tomorrow for all mankind."

Family members who were at the service Saturday say they think it entirely appropriate that two counties on opposite sides of the globe continue a bond forged in gratitude: gratitude of Chinese people for a hero who gave his life in their defense, and gratitude of a family here for the way people far away cared for the body of a stranger.

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UPCHURCH



FROM: THE PILOT FRI  
5 JAN 2007 SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE

# Far Pilgrimage

## A Visit to Upchurch's Grave Site in China

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

**F**or 60 years, an unknown American Flying Tiger lay buried in China at the foot of a Ming Dynasty tower.

His grave was marked only as "American Pilot" — but tenderly cared for year by year by villagers who'd laid him to rest.

One of them, a boy at the time, grew up to become a teacher and pass on to students his memories of the way they had honored a stranger who died fighting to free their country from invaders.

Last year, DNA testing determined that the remains were those of Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch of High Falls.

They were returned last April to be buried in the cemetery at his home

church, High Falls Methodist.

China sent representatives to the service, and a sister relationship in his honor has been proposed between Guidong County in China and Moore County, in North Carolina.

A similar relationship between Hunan Province

*"Most of all,  
we stood for a  
few minutes  
just to take  
in the scene."*

William Kitchin

and this state is also proposed.

Last summer, a representative of the Upchurch family flew to China. William "Buck" Kitchin visited the gravesite and thanked the people of Guidong for the way they had honored his uncle.

His work takes him to many countries. He is currently traveling back and forth between offices in London and New York, but took his vacation to make that trip of gratitude.

"I decided that it would be time well spent if I could make it to Guidong and visit Hoyle's gravesite and Mr. Huang — one of the villagers from Guidong that was alive at the time of the plane crash and subsequent burial," Kitchin said.

The idea was easier than its execution, but Kitchin persisted. He said a number of people helped him organize the trip.

"I would especially like to mention Mr. Lee from Guidong and all of his colleagues and Mr. John Wei, the vice chairman of the North Carolina/China Center,



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

The original burial site in Guidong, China, is now marked with Upchurch's name.



Kitchin with Mr. Huang



Guidong as seen from the mountain



who tirelessly worked as an intermediary and organizer during the last few days," he said. "Coincidentally, John's father, a native of Hunan, was fighting the Japanese on the ground during the same time that the Flying Tigers were fighting in the air."

Wei had come to High Falls for the services, and has been working with state Sen. Harris Blake on the sister county/state idea.

## Eager to Meet Huang

Finally, all details arranged, Kitchin arrived in Hong Kong on the first leg of his long journey. He then flew to Changsha, the provincial capital of the Hunan Province where Guidong is located.

Kitchin was met at the airport by Wen Fang, a representative of the local government.

Over dinner, details were discussed of what would be an intricate trip through China to the mountainous province where his uncle was last seen disappearing into clouds during World War II.

"The basic details were that I would wake up at 4 a.m. — then ride in a police vehicle for roughly seven hours," he said. "I was very excited about all of this news and even more so, the prospect of meeting Mr. Huang and actually managed to wake up and meet them on time."

Huang had written the family to invite them to visit. A trip to China next April is currently in the planning stages. Kitchin's trip may serve as a model.

"The car trip was interesting, to say the very least," he said.

When they reached the mountains of Hunan, "everything changed," Kitchin said. "We somehow managed to avoid all the cars, tractors, trailers, goats, sheep, dogs, kids and sections of the mountain road that had simply washed away."

After eight hours over highways, roads and a mountain trail, Kitchin and his hosts reached Guidong safely around noon.

Kitchin said he was so eager to meet the elderly man who'd cared for that unknown American pilot for so many years.

"I was still very excited to meet Mr. Huang and managed to get out of bed in time," he said. "I was actually pretty nervous about going over to Mr. Huang's house, but somehow managed to pull myself together in order to meet him. I had a letter to Mr. Huang that a friend of mine, Amy Yau from London, helped

him a message from the family explaining exactly how we all felt and how much it meant to us to know that someone had buried Uncle Hoyle in honor and had been looking after him all of these years."

The old teacher quietly guided his visitor through his home.

"Mr. Huang was a very nice and quiet man," Kitchin said. "He took the time to show me some Chinese calligraphy art he had made himself and decorated his house with. We shared a cup of tea and a few cigarettes — I quit smoking since — and chatted for a while about his family and his life."

Huang has a granddaughter working on a graduate degree in London. Kitchin hopes she will soon visit him there.

"It turns out he was a school teacher and that his granddaughter was due to start her master's degree in England," he said. "She has started and we have had some communication since she arrived in England."

## A Simple Cross

Later, Huang went with Kitchin up the mountain to the place where, long ago, he and other Guidong villagers said prayers and buried a stranger.

"After a good while, the entire entourage loaded up in a few vehicles with a camera-man/reporter in tow and made our way up to the grave site," Kitchin said. "As we progressed up the newly paved mountain road I thought about how difficult this must have been on foot and without the concrete, like the way Mr. Huang had done it for so long."

They went as far as they could before having to leave vehicles behind to make the rest of the journey by foot.

"We reached the top, filed out of the trucks and then up a fairly steep and muddy path," he said. "I started to struggle with my footing and turned to help Mr. Huang, as (I thought) he was probably too old to manage such slippery terrain."

"Just as I did, he came tearing past by me at top speed, leaving the rest of us in his dust. I stopped worrying about him and focused all of my energy on not humiliating myself by falling into the mud."

Huang had made that trek every year on tomb-washing day for most of his life, Kitchin realized.

"As we reached the halfway point on the hill, there was a small clearing," he said. "This was the site of the funeral service — all these years back."

ago in the wreckage of that fighter had been reburied after Upchurch's remains were removed. Guidong will continue to honor him there. Now, they have a name to put on the marker.

"The grave was marked with a simple cross that displayed the name Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch in both English and Chinese," Kitchin said. "Behind the marker was what looked like a paper wreath that had flowers on it at one point and a banner in the background that noted the collaboration and friendship between America and China both before and during the United States involvement in World War II."

Kitchin and the man who'd helped bury his uncle, joined together to honor him once more.

"We all laid flowers on the grave site and stayed a while looking around, taking a few pictures and answering questions for the reporter," he said. "Most of all, we stood for a few minutes just to take in the scene, the surroundings and the thoughts of the person that brought us all there."

The park there has stood for nearly a millennium as a special place of honor.

"We continued to walk around the rest of the gardens on this holy mountain," Kitchin said. "Mr. Wenfa continued to translate as others told me stories of other great people that were buried on this mountain. The mountain was reserved for only the most important historical figures from the region, and this is how they thought of Hoyle as well."

"We walked past the 900-year-old temple that we have all heard described in various newspaper articles and through a beautiful garden that covered the top of the mountain where the village school used to be."

## Seeing Guidong

Once back in Guidong, Kitchin joined town official, Huang, and others for a dinner in Upchurch's memory.

"We enjoyed the finest local cuisine and beer while toasting one another, our respective countries and of course Lt. Robert Upchurch," he said. "The meal was pleasant, as was my time with the town officials and Mr. Huang."

The next day, Kitchin decided it was time to get out and see the Guidong of today.

"The town was very lively, even though it was slightly rain-

do traditional Chinese dances in the town square, which was lit up like it was Christmas. As we walked through the streets, it became obvious that I was (a real stranger). The people of the town all stared, and used their best English to greet me — usually, 'Hello,' 'Hi,' or 'How are you?' Some even approached me and asked me to take photos with them, which of course, I did. We walked around for about an hour, then made our way back to the hotel where there was a surprise waiting for me."

He found a group of Chinese teenagers waiting.

"While we had been strolling around town, Mr. Wenfa had arranged for his English class to come down to the hotel and ask me questions in English," he said. "This was a fairly nerve-wracking experience — have a bunch of 17-year-olds stare at you and ask you questions. However, no matter how nervous I was, I think it was worse for them."

Things soon warmed, and nerves aside, conversation flowed between the man from Moore and the kids from Guidong.

"At the beginning, many struggled to find the right words to form their questions, but soon they all relaxed and the questions came," he said. "They wanted to know all sorts of things about the United States and Europe — which basketball team I like, what my favorite thing about China was — such a great experience for me. I really enjoyed sitting and talking to these kids about whatever they wanted to know. Since I have returned to London, a few have sent me e-mail. I have tried to respond as best I could."

His last morning in Guidong, Kitchin found breakfast with local officials and the head of the regional government to be fully as entertaining as all the other dinners and lunches before.

He is encouraging others to visit China in April — most especially to meet the people of one small mountain town who are still grateful to an American from Moore County who gave his life for them.

"The people of China were warm, curious and always wanting to find out more about me and where I was from and what I was doing there," he said. "Of all the people I met in China, though, the people of Guidong were the best."

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ROBERT HOYLE U  
FROM: THE PILOT 4 FEB 2007 SUN SOUTHERN PINES, NC

15-1

## HONORING A HERO



CONTRIBUTED

A design of the Hoyle Upchurch memorial in China. It is to be placed on the same hillside in Guidong where villagers honored the fallen Flying Tiger pilot for 60 years before his remains were identified and returned to High Falls last year.

# Upchurch Memorial Dedication Set

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

China considers an April visit by North Carolinians an important occasion.

Members of the Upchurch family and others from Moore County will travel to China as a North Carolina-Hunan Friendship Delegation.

There, they will attend the dedication of a memorial to 1st Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch. He was a Flying Tiger pilot whose fighter plane went down during a World War II combat mission.

Villagers in Guidong County retrieved the pilot's remains from the wreckage, and buried him with full honors near a Ming



UPCHURCH

Dynasty tower. Every year, they paid tribute to this unknown man who had sacrificed his life fighting to free China from invaders. His grave was marked only as "American Pilot."

After DNA identified him, Upchurch was returned to his High Falls home and reburied last year in the family plot at High Falls Methodist Church. China sent a diplomatic delegation to the services. Flying Tigers flew overhead in the "missing man" formation.

At Upchurch's graveside, China proposed a sister county relationship be established in

his honor between Moore County and Guidong County, and a sister state/province relationship between North Carolina and Hunan Province in China.

State Sen. Harris Blake of Pinehurst — at the request of the Upchurch family — has been shepherding the coming visit. In this, he has had the assistance of Lian Xie, who is a professor at N.C. State University and also executive director of the North Carolina China Center.

"Our delegation and the dedication of the Hoyle Upchurch Memorial in Guidong County will receive nationwide TV coverage



(to 1.3 billion people in China through Hunan Satellite TV Station) and major national newspapers," Xie said Thursday. "This will be unprecedented for any one from North Carolina. Hunan Province will treat our visit to Hunan Province as one of THE most important foreign affairs events this year."

Xie received a letter sent Thursday from an official of Hunan Province. Hunan has long honored Americans for their help.

"Hunan Province is the primary region where the United States Flying Tigers and the 14th Air Force Units resided during WWII," wrote Liping Pang, Hunan's vice chairman for foreign affairs. "The dormitories used to house the Flying Tigers are well preserved in Zhijiang City of Hunan Province. We have also constructed a Flying Tigers Museum and preserved the place where the Japanese surrendered at the end of WWII."

The story of the unknown hero Upchurch, his long-honored grave, and his ultimate identification and return to his hometown in Moore County has been dramatic news in China, Pang said.

"The stories of Hoyle Upchurch and the people in Guidong County make a unique and strong case for a long-lasting friendship between Hunan and North Carolina," he wrote. "Because of this historical reason that is so unique and touching, our government is strongly in favor of a sister State/Province relationship between Hunan and North Carolina. We hope your state government will feel the same way."

Leaders from other parts of the state are already committed to take part in the visit. Among them will be the director of Harnett County Economic Development, Lee Anne Nance.

Blake is hosting a meeting this afternoon at CCNC for leaders from Moore County and the state and for prospective members of the North Carolina-Hunan Friendship Delegation.

The delegation will be greeted by distinguished Chinese leaders. At least a vice governor of Hunan will meet with the North Carolina delegation, along with

heads of relevant branches of the Hunan provincial government.

"The provincial Foreign Affairs Department has already been in communication with the local governments in Guidong County and Changsha City to make arrangements for the arrival of the North Carolina delegation," Pang wrote in his letter. "We have discussed with Guidong government on several occasions regarding the construction of the Hoyle Upchurch memorial, establishing sister county relationship and sister school relationships."

First High School in Guidong and Liuyang First High School in Changsha (provincial capital of Hunan) both want sister relationships with counterparts in Moore County and North Carolina, respectively.

Visits to economic development parks, industries and various companies may also be part of the visit, Pang said. Discussions on two-way trade and investment are expected to be part of the delegation's visit.

The North Carolina-Hunan Friendship Delegation will be composed of relatives of Hoyle Upchurch, elected officials, economic developers and business leaders, as well as representatives of the North Carolina China Center.

"It is the most comprehensive friendship and business delegation from North Carolina to visit Hunan," Xie said. "Sixty-two years ago, a young pilot, Hoyle Upchurch, from Moore County, North Carolina, sacrificed his life in Hunan Province while fighting for the Chinese against the Japanese aggressors. For 62 years, the people in Guidong County, Hunan Province voluntarily took care of the grave of the fallen American pilot."

This trip will be a way for people from Moore County and the state to thank them.

"Sixty-two years later, the people in North Carolina want to express their gratitude to the people in Hunan Province for taking care of one of their best sons," Xie said. "This mutual friendship originates from the hearts of the people in both Hunan and North Carolina. The main purpose of the visit is to build on this long history of friendship and continue the spirit of cooperation between Hunan and North Carolina."

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FROM: THE PILOT WED 21 FEB 2007 SOUTHERN PINES, NC.

# China Trip To Forge An Important Bond

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

The dramatic story of a long-lost fighter pilot from Moore County, Chinese villagers who found, buried and honored the body of a stranger, and his eventual return to his High Falls home forged a tie.

That is how Lian Xie views it. He is executive director of the North Carolina China Center and a professor at N.C. State whose

field is atmospheric science. He spoke recently to a gathering of state and county leaders who are preparing a friendship delegation that will visit China in April.

They are going to honor 2nd Lt. Robert Upchurch of High Falls and to dedicate a monument to him.

The trip is turning into a state visit of some significance and will include many state and local leaders as well as representatives of the Upchurch Family. State Sen. Harris Blake of Pinehurst will lead the delegation, which is to depart for China April 2.

Xie plans to fly there a week ahead to make arrangements. A group of "Early Birds" — including Sandhills Community College President John Dempsey and Ray Ogden of Moore County Partners in Progress — will leave March 31. The whole delegation will assemble April 4 in Changsha, capital of Hunan Province, then travel by land to Guidong.

The dedication of the Upchurch memorial in Guidong is set for April 5. At that time, sister relationship signing ceremonies are also to take place. Moore County Schools has asked Blake to represent them to connect schools here with sister-schools in China.

It is a story that began in cloudy skies over war-torn China when Upchurch, a P-40 Warhawk pilot with the Flying Tigers, vanished into fog-shrouded mountains on Oct. 6, 1944. Others returning from the same mission turned back and tried a different route. Later, Chinese officials reported a plane crashed and burned, but that identification of plane and pilot was impossible.

Villagers from Guidong County, however, had retrieved the remains. They buried the pilot in traditional fashion, wrapping him in red cloth and setting off firecrackers. They did not know the name of the man they buried, but they never forgot him.

Every year, volunteers cleaned and decorated the grave of a man only known as "American Pilot."

Back home in Moore County, the Upchurch family were remembering him, too — though they did not know what had happened to him until DNA matches showed Robert Hoyle Upchurch was the pilot who lay buried on a hill in Guidong. Last summer, his remains were brought home and reburied in the family plot at High Falls Methodist Church.

At the graveside below, a representative from the Foreign Affairs Office of the Hunan Provincial Government, told of the long years when local students and citizens had laid wreaths and flowers at the tomb of an unknown pilot.

"Over the past 60 years, the people of Guidong County have quietly watched and tended the grave of Lieutenant Upchurch," said Huang Renzhun, describing Upchurch as "a hero commanding their highest respect and a symbol in their mind for everlasting pursuit of peace."

He read a letter proposing a sister-county relationship between Moore and Guidong, and a sister-state relationship between Hunan and North Carolina. An invitation was extended for this year's April visit.

Flying Tiger pilots fought along China's border with Burma, protecting Chinese. That war became known as "the Burma Front" — a long struggle with supplies and fuel having to be flown "over the hump" after Japan closed the Burma Road, the only land route up into China from Burma and India.

Gen. Lee Chennault of Flying Tigers and his pilots were based in a headquarters at Zhijiang, in Hunan. Allied Forces built their second largest airport in the Far East there. It served as a base for the Flying Tigers. It was at Zhijiang that a representative of Japan handed in the surrender letter, which led to the end of the war. In 2003, China opened a museum in Zhijiang to commemorate the Flying Tigers. More than 20,000 people from China, the United States and other countries attended its opening ceremonies.

The Flying Tigers are now based at Pope Air Force Base. There is a natural bond, says Xie, between Hunan — the historic home of the Flying Tigers — and North Carolina, their present home.

China, Xie said, will never forget the Flying Tigers.

"For 62 years, people in Hunan Province expressed their appreciation to and friendship with the people in North Carolina," Xie said. "Sixty-two years later, the people in North Carolina want to express their gratitude to the people in Hunan Province for taking care of one of their best sons."

"This mutual friendship originates from hearts of the people in both Hunan and North Carolina. The main purpose of the visit is to build on this long-lasting friendship and continue the spirit of cooperation between Hunan and North Carolina and create a

win-win for both. We believe this is the best way to remember the sacrifice of Hoyle Upchurch and the Hunan people who took care of Hoyle for over 60 years."

Moore County and Guidong County in China can do business

with each other, Xie said. North Carolina and Hunan Province can do business as well, since Hunan was the home of the Flying Tigers then, and North Carolina is home to them today.

"The North Carolina-Hunan Friendship Delegation is composed of the relatives of Hoyle Upchurch, elected officials, economic developers and business leaders, as well as representatives of the North Carolina China Center," Xie says. "It is the most

comprehensive friendship and business delegation from North Carolina to visit Hunan."

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FROM: THE PILOT FRI 16 MAR 2007 SANFORD, NC

# Moore County Pots Traveling to

## Soils of 2 Lands To Be Mingled

BY JOHN CHAPPELL  
Staff Writer

A master potter of Moore will carry to China a bit of earth from the banks of the Deep River in two hand-made pots.

He is part of a delegation invited to honor a fallen Flying Tiger pilot from High Falls and solemnize a special relationship between people here and in a province of China.

"I am very honored to be part of this wonderful relationship that has

been established with Guidong County," said Ben Owen III, who learned the art from his father, Wade, and his grandfather, Ben, the renowned master potter. "I hope this relationship that is evolving will influence not only Moore County, but our state of North Carolina as well."

A week or so before, Owen and state Sen. Harris Blake had stood for a time beside the grave of Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch on a high bank above Deep River. Upchurch vanished in clouded mountains over China while returning from a strafing mission during World War II and was listed as missing in action for

more than 60 years. His parents and family never gave up hope of finding out what happened to him. All the while, Chinese villagers were tending a grave, paying honor to an unknown American pilot who lost his life fighting their country's invaders.

After DNA identified that pilot as Upchurch, his ashes were brought back to be buried at long last in the family plot at High Falls Methodist Church. The mayor of Guidong County in China wrote to propose a sister county relationship in his honor. Hunan Province proposed a sister-state relationship with North Carolina.

A large memorial to Upchurch is under construction at his former grave site in China and will be dedicated April 5. At the invitation of China, Blake will lead a friendship delegation of family members, civic, education, cul-

tural, and business leaders from Moore and Harnett counties to that ceremony. Owen is going, and he is bringing part of Moore County with him.

He and Blake had climbed down the Deep River bank from

the place where the remains of Upchurch now lie, seeking clay from the hillside to use in firing two special pots. The potter will put earth from here in two covered jars. In China, it will be mixed with ground from the place where Upchurch lay for 61 years.

"I am working on the soil permits to be able to take some raw soil from High Falls in the two jars and be able to unite this soil with the Chinese soil that will be dug by the Chinese delegates during the ceremony," Owen said. "The two soils will be mixed during the ceremony and placed into both covered jars to represent this union between America and China. The second jar will return home to reside in High Falls at the Methodist church where Robert Hoyle Upchurch rests. I may have to heat-treat the soil to make it through customs."

He tested the clay from each of the two buckets dug from the river bank, one of red clay and one of yellow/gray. Red clay is higher in iron and has to be fired at a lower temperature.

"When Senator Blake and I traveled to High Falls that

Saturday to go clay hunting, I had no idea what we would find," Owen said. "Our trip has proven to be promising. (There are) two

types of clay that I can put to use. One is a common red clay indigenous to the area, and the other a more yellow clay that has the potential to be used for more high temperature firing in the pottery kiln."

### 'A Significant Symbol'

The two jars will be about 10 inches tall after shrinkage. Their lid openings will be about 2.5 to 3 inches wide.

"I chose this shape for the covered jars with the idea of keeping the form more lifelike or relating to nature," Owen said. "The design of the pottery vessel evolved in conversation around my studio. With help from my assistant, Susan Chriscoe, and my wife, LoriAnn Owen, we have created a form in concept that I believe will begin to take part of this memorial ceremony. The form I am suggesting is a 'Covered Jar.' The covered jar has been one form that has been a significant symbol in my life. We have used the covered jar for many different occasions with clients and for our family."

Their basic shape goes back to ancient cremation urns of Han Dynasty. From ceremonial use to kitchen food storage, this form in clay can be used in many ways.

## China



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

These pots, shown as they awaited firing, will soon travel to China.



He will make other little pots as gifts for the delegation's trip that will be easy to carry. They can be made similar to the covered jars, but in a vase form without a lid.

"We would make two of them, then go back over to High Falls to Hoyle Upchurch's home place and dig a small amount of soil to put into the two jars," he said. "When the two jars arrive in Guidong County, China, for the ceremony, we (the Americans) could empty the soil from High Falls into another container — a large bowl that I can make or if they can provide one in China — and if the delegates in China would be willing to dig a small amount of soil and place it into the bowl, we could make a special act of unity during the ceremony."

The mixed soil will then be dispersed into the two covered jars for a final resting place. One jar can remain there at the memorial site and the other travel back to High Falls to its final destination at the church or other designated spot of choice.

Owen did research on the Internet about symbols and traditional meaning of different colors in China.

"I found that red can be good luck, celebration, summoning," he said. "I make a red glaze that we call Chinese Red."

*"My work  
has been  
influenced by  
Chinese  
pottery for  
most of  
my career  
as a potter."*

Ben Owen III

Chinese pottery for most of my career as a potter," Owen says. "My Grandfather (Ben Owen Sr.) began looking at Chinese pottery when he was a young potter working for the Busbees at Jugtown pottery here in Westmoore in the early 1920s. Westmoore is about 9 miles from High Falls. He would go with Jacque Busbee to museums in Washington and New York to see the pots from China on display.

The colors I do are still influenced from the Chinese style, and I name them after certain influences from their culture."

He could place words on the side of these jars written from the top down in Chinese characters — words such as love, alliance, honor, friendship or unity.

"I could divide half of the jar for Chinese characters and the other half in English," he said. "The spacing and design of the quotes could be done in an ornamental way. I can leave the jars plain as well, and let the symbolism of the color red be the main significance."

Since being asked to go to China, Owen asked for guidance on his decision to go with the delegation. He came to see it as a historic event.

"I have prayed, as has my family, over this decision," he said. "With three young children, it is something I had to think over. We have had family members to volunteer to help my wife during this time to make my involvement possible. I appreciate this one-of-a-kind opportunity to be part of history in the making. I will do my best to help in any way."

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FROM: THE PILOT FRI 30 MAR 2007 SOUTHERN PINES, N.C.

# Friendship Delegation

## Heads to China

### WWII Airman's Legacy Grows

Staff Writer John Chappell will travel with the delegation to China.

**BY JOHN CHAPPELL**

Staff Writer

More than 60 years ago, Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch of High Falls vanished into misty Chinese mountains, last seen piloting his P-41 fighter returning from his first combat mission with the Flying Tigers.

Now his relatives and county and state leaders will pay a visit to offer

respects and gratitude to villagers who buried Upchurch as a hero and faithfully tended the grave of a man they knew only as an American pilot.

The North Carolina-Hunan Friendship Delegation is composed of the relatives of Hoyle Upchurch, elected officials, economic developers and business leaders, as well as representatives of the North Carolina China Center. The group leaves Saturday for a 10-day trip.

At a monument to Upchurch in Guidong County where he lay buried for so long, and in ceremonies in Changsha, capital of Hunan Province, they will sign and seal documents establishing Moore and Guidong as sister counties, Hunan



**UPCHURCH**

and North Carolina as sister states, and Robbins and the little village at the foot of the mountains, Zhaiqian, as sister cities.

Upchurch grew up in High Falls, where his remains were returned last summer to be buried again in the family plot alongside his parents at High Falls Methodist Church. China sent official representatives to the ceremony. Overhead, cloudy skies finally cleared for Upchurch just in time for Flying Tigers from Pope Air Force Base to pass over in the "missing man" formation.

Gifts of challenge coins, patches, and scarves from today's Flying Tigers are going with delegates. Last week, state Sen. Harris Blake of Pinehurst visited headquarters at Pope Air Force Base to collect the gifts they are sending to thank people of a distant land for the way they honored one of their own.

Blake, who is in the delegation, was recognized by the Senate on Thursday. He was given an opportunity to talk about the trip. Local potter Ben Owen III, who has made ceremonial pots that will hold earth from both places, was in the gallery. Blake had one of the pots.

The delegation includes Dr. John Dempsey, president of Sandhills Community College. He will visit a college campus in Hunan to prepare a sister campus connection that will mean opportunities for study abroad for both.

Patrick Coughlin, president and CEO of the Moore County Chamber of Commerce of Moore County, is going. He has experience with sister relationships such as this from his days in Virginia, and found them very productive.

"I love China," Coughlin says. "I can't wait to go back."

It will be a sales call, he says, not a shopping trip. Moore County has a lot of opportunities to offer.

Those opportunities will also be on the mind of Ray Ogden, executive director of Partners in Progress. He will look for possibilities for economic development. Two representatives from Harnett County will take part, pursuing the same economic goals.

### Locals Pay Respect

The tie of blood, of being comrades in arms battling fascism, has already bound this part of the world and that, the Chinese say.

"When the Pacific war broke out, the Sino-American allied forces shared a bitter hatred of the Japanese and fought side by side against the invaders," Guidong County said in a letter to Blake and Professor Lian Xie of N.C. State University. "Among them were the Flying Tigers — the 14th Brigade of the American Air Forces, who flew across the Pacific Ocean in support of the Chinese Anti-Japanese War."

Xie heads the N.C. China Center in Raleigh, and has been helping Blake coordinate the myriad details of the mission. The memory of the day Upchurch went down, and what people there did, is related in the letter from Guidong.

"On Oct. 6, 1944, a troop of Japanese battle planes flew into the south of Hunan," the letter says. "In response, the Flying Tigers took off with high speed

and fought back against them. Unfortunately, one of the P-41N battle planes was shot and fell down at Dagang, Taoliao of Xijing, which has now been renamed Sidu. The instant the county government learnt the news, authorities organized a rescue team to rush to the spot."

As always during that war, Chinese on the ground hurried to see whether they could save the American pilot. They found his plane completely destroyed.

"The battle plane had been torn into pieces, and the aircrew was dead," the letter says. "Some local people were then sent to cover the dead body with a red cloth and then carried it to the county township. After the mourning ceremony to commemorate the hero, his body was buried and a gravestone was erected for the locals to pay respect to the hero on Tomb-Sweeping Days."

A boy by the name of Huang was there. He grew up to become a teacher, and returned every year to the grave of that American pilot he'd helped bury. Last summer a member of Upchurch's family, William Kitchen, came to his home to thank him. Together, they climbed the slope to the hillside beneath a Ming Dynasty tower and stood for a time by the old grave site.

### Hero Comes Home

On April 5, other relatives will be there to dedicate a memorial in his honor erected through a contribution of a Chinese company.

"It never fails to sadden us tremendously to think of the U.S. soldiers fighting in the vast sky and sacrificing their lives to be buried in a foreign country," Guidong says in the letter. "The locals had been trying hard to find out the hero's name and address to comfort his relations far away at home."

"Contacts with American friends were finally made in 2005. On May 25, 2005, the American work group to search for pilots who disappeared in China in World War II was warmly welcomed and helped by the local people."

"After three days' work, the remains of the hero and the plane were uncovered and carried to Hawaii on May 30. The remains were later identified by

DNA to be of Mr. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, Second Lieutenant of North Carolina, USA. The remains of the hero were transported to Moore, North Carolina, where a grand burial ceremony was held to present his family and relations a national flag and a state flag to show due respect to them. Hence the soul of the hero can finally rest in peace and his spirit will always be a great influence to all."

Those efforts, that sacrifice and that care, have brought a friendship that should continue, they say. People here agree. The Friendship Delegation has been endorsed all over the state — the governor, county commissions, town boards, the college, economic agencies and others.

### Profound Friendship

Leon Zhang of the Peking Wok chain is going along to help wherever he can with communication. Xie is already there. He flew out earlier this week.

A delegation from the U.S. State Department will take part. The whole thing is a big event in China, Xie says.

"In the middle of the 20th century, the Chinese and American peoples fought shoulder to shoulder against fascism for world justice," Guidong says in the letter. "In the course of it, profound friendship was developed. Robert Hoyle Upchurch gave his life for the cause of the liberation of the Chinese people and died for the Ou River and the high mountains of Guidong."

Upchurch thought at the time he didn't matter very much, and that if he were to die in that war it would be no great loss, as he wrote at the time. He could not have imagined the profound meaning one man's life could come to have for two peoples.

"His loyalty and noble spirit will remain in the world forever," according to Guidong. "The locals have long been admiring the martyr."

"They buried part of his body in Santaishan Mountain for people to remember the historical moment and develop further friendship with American people. Herewith the cemetery was established. May the hero live in peace."

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FROM: THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER  
FRI 30 MAR 2001 FAYETTEVILLE, NC

# An enduring connection



**Second Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch** was part of the 23rd Fighter Group — the Flying Tigers. He was 21 when his plane crashed in south-central China on Oct. 6, 1944. Villagers traveled 40 miles to recover his body and buried him on a mountain reserved for dignitaries. They tended his grave until he was identified in 2005. Last year, he was interred next to his parents near Robbins.

■ People from two nations will join next week to honor a young Moore County aviator who lost his life six decades ago.

**By Sarah A. Reid**  
Staff writer

**CARTHAGE** — In one of the last letters that 2nd Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch sent home, he wrote about how it wouldn't be a

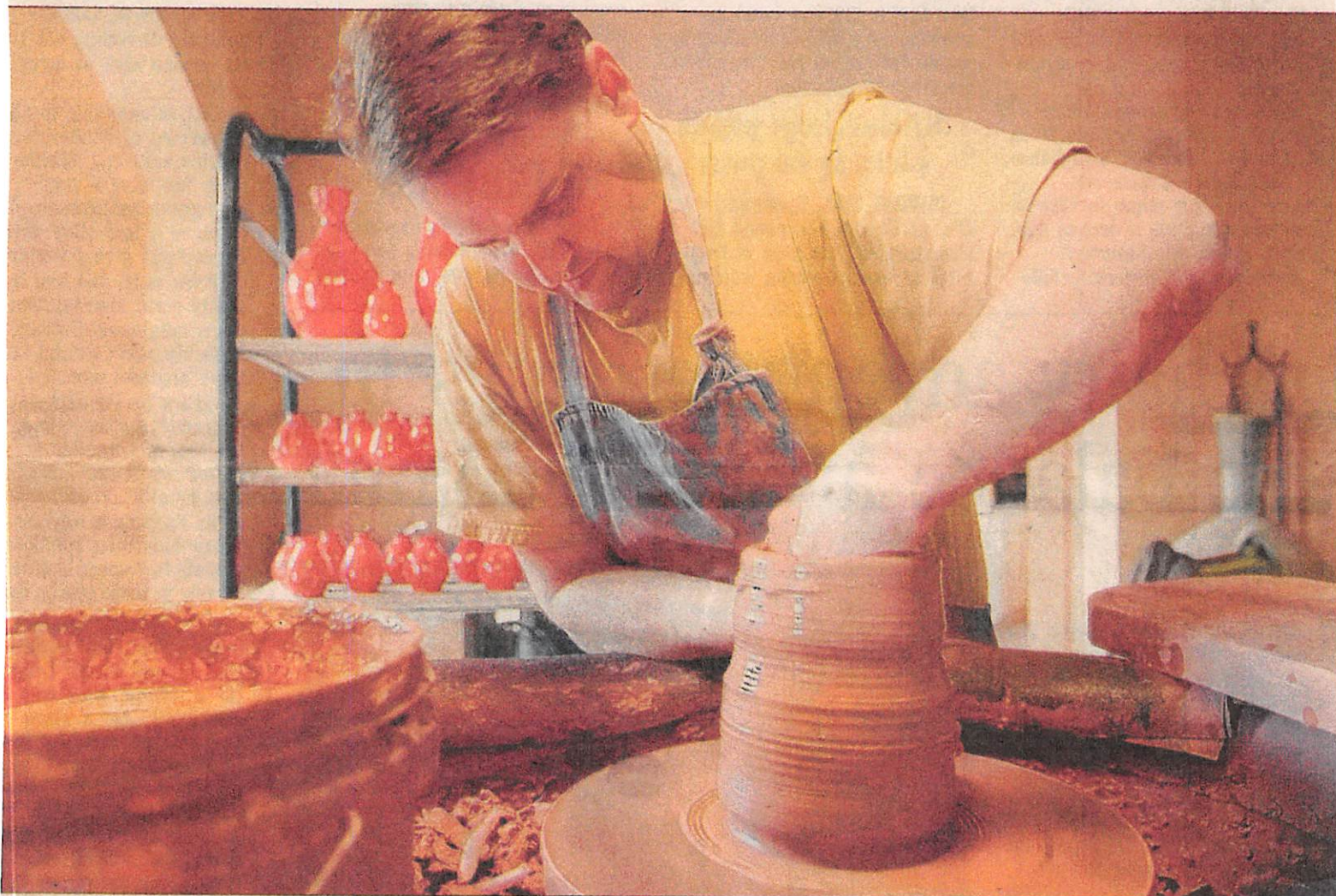
great loss if he died.

"It won't be hard for me because there's no one depending on me and it will be just a thing of the past in a year or so if I'm bumped off," he wrote.

Upchurch, a World War II fighter pilot, never imagined that 62 years after his plane crashed in China that he would be remembered with a shrine. Or that his death would forge new relationships between two countries.

**China:** A potter's gift will symbolize friendship between countries

## WORLD WAR II PILOT



Staff photo by Marc Hall

Ben Owen III made jars out of red clay found near the grave of Robert Hoyle Upchurch near Robbins. A Moore County delegation will take the pottery to China for the dedication of a shrine to honor Upchurch, who was killed in China during World War II.





Staff photos by Marc Hall

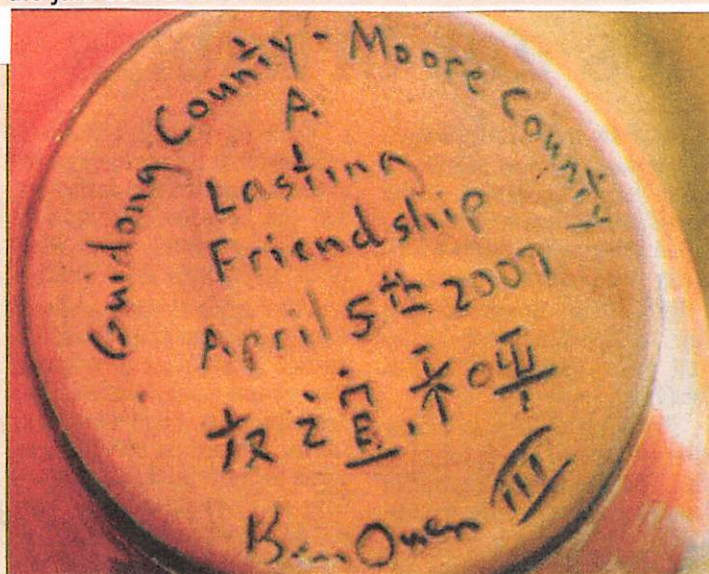
Ben Owen III examines one of the jars bound for China that he created at his studio in Moore County.

On Saturday, family members, academics, business people and politicians will fly from Raleigh to Beijing to take part in the April 5 dedication ceremony. But that's not their only mission. During the eight-day trip, the group will work to build relationships with schools, businesses, governments and the people who tended to Upchurch's grave for more than half a century.

"Maybe ... 62 years later, because of his death, we will be able to engineer something positive for our country," said state Sen. Harris Blake, a Republican who represents Moore and Harnett counties.

Upchurch was part of the 23rd Fighter Group, the Flying Tigers. He was 21 when his plane smashed into the side of a mountain in south-central China on Oct. 6, 1944. Villagers heard the crash and traveled 40 miles to recover his body. They buried him near an ancient temple, on a mountain reserved for dignitaries, and tended to his grave until he was identified in 2005. He was interred almost a year ago, next to his parents in the cemetery behind High Falls United Methodist Church in Moore County.

"It was just dumbfounding to us that people so far away on



The bottom of each jar is inscribed with a message of friendship between the U.S. and China.

the other side of the world would give such respect and honor to one 21-year-old pilot," said Dale Upchurch, the pilot's nephew.

Dale Upchurch and three other family members are traveling with the group to China. They will undoubtedly take center stage during the shrine dedication, which occurs on Tomb Sweeping Day, a day the Chinese tend to graves to honor their ancestors.

China Everbright, a holding company, is paying about \$20,000 to build the shrine.

Even though the memorial will bear Upchurch's name and his biography, his family says this is more than just a memorial to one downed pilot.

"As far as our family is concerned, we feel like this is something he would like to share with all his comrades who fought over there," Dale Upchurch said.

Ben Owen III, a Moore County potter, will be taking his wares to China. He has made covered jars out of red clay found near Upchurch's High Falls grave site. Some of that



Source: ESRI

AP graphic

dirt will go into the jars and be mixed with dirt from the Chinese grave site during the ceremony, symbolizing the friendship between the two cultures, he said. Some of the jars may come back to North Carolina, if the dirt can pass through customs.

"It's just been overwhelming and has become so much bigger than all of us," Owen said.

Blake is hoping the trip will help establish ties between North Carolina and China.

Sister agreements between Guidong County and Moore County and North Carolina and the Hunan Province are pending.

"My interest is for this trip to eventually increase the Chinese doing business with us, and they know that," Blake said.

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FROM: THE PILOT WED 4 APR 2007 SOUTHERN PINES, NC

# At the Great Wall



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

Dr. John Dempsey, president of Sandhills Community College, stands at the Great Wall of China.

**BY JOHN CHAPPELL**

Staff Writer

series of unfortunate events plagued state Sen. Harris Blake and the North Carolina Friendship

Delegation's trip to China, causing him to miss out on a visit to the Great Wall.

**Our Man In China**

"Our flight leaving Raleigh was three hours late, and we missed our connection to China," said Blake when he called to tell the others he wouldn't be getting to Beijing as expected. "The next available plane out of Detroit would not have put us in until the follow-

ing night at 6:30. So they sent us out through Germany. Can you believe that? We had to go through Frankfurt."

The North Carolina-Hunan Friendship Delegation is composed of the relatives of Lt. Hoyle Upchurch of High Falls, elected officials, economic developers and business leaders, as well as representatives of the North Carolina China Center. The group left Saturday for a 10-day trip.

## Local Delegation Arrives in China

One of the main purposes of the trip is to offer respect and gratitude to residents of Guidong County who buried Upchurch when his P-41 fighter crashed in the misty Chinese mountains nearly 60 years ago during World War II. He was returning from his first combat mission with the Flying Tigers.

At a monument to Upchurch in Guidong County where he lay buried for so long, and in ceremonies in Changsha, capi-

tal of Hunan Province, they will sign and seal documents establishing Moore and Guidong as sister counties, Hunan and North Carolina as sister states, and Robbins and the little village at the foot of the mountains, Zhaiqian, as sister cities.

Other members of the delegation enjoyed seeing the Great Wall of China, a Ming Dynasty wonder of the world that stretched thousands of miles across the land to protect China from Mongol invasions.

While they were trying to get some rest and hoping their suitcases would show up, others in the group were excitedly climbing one of the most familiar



sites in this ancient land, enjoying themselves snapping pictures and teasing and joking.

Dr. John Dempsey, president of Sandhills Community College, was close to tears of laughter at Pinehurst Resort's Steven Boyd's deadpan, wry, "It's such a nice wall. Why do you think President Reagan said 'Tear down this wall?'"

Blake and his daughter, Joy Blake, and Bruce Donaldson knew they would be getting into China early on Monday morning instead of Sunday night. They could not have known all their luggage would be lost.

Some of the luggage had showed up in time for the whole party to enjoy Peking duck at the same restaurant where Henry Kissinger and Mao Zedong had dined in earlier times. Only Donaldson was missing his suitcase on their last morning as the delegation

trekked across the vast open reaches of Tianamen Square to enter the nested courts of the Forbidden City.

Time was fleeting as they hastened to catch their plane to Changsha, capital of Hunan.

During the trip, Dempsey will visit a college campus in Hunan to prepare a sister campus connection that will mean opportunities for study abroad for both.

Patrick Coughlin, president and CEO of the Moore County Chamber of Commerce of Moore County, is taking part in the trip. He has experience with sister relationships such as this from his days in Virginia, and found them very productive. Coughlin is writing a daily blog about the trip, which is on The Pilot's Web site at [www.thepilot.com](http://www.thepilot.com).

Economic development opportunities will be on the mind of Ray Ogden, executive director of Partners in Progress, who is also a part of the delegation.

Blake is bringing a gift from the 23rd Fighter Wing at Pope Air Force Base, the modern day Flying Tigers, to the villagers of

Guidong County in Hunan Province. They did not know Upchurch's name. They knew only he died fighting with China against the invaders from Japan.

For 61 years, a Mr. Wang and others who had helped wrap his body in red silk, honored his grave and buried him, come every year to put flowers there and to remember him and his sacrifice, wondered who he was.

DNA showed him to be Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch from High Falls. When he was finally home, finally laid to rest beside his parents last April, in the family plot at High Falls United Methodist Church, the mayor of Guidong invited the people of Moore County to join with the people of Guidong County in a sister county relationship. Likewise, Hunan Province invited North Carolina to join in a sister state relationship.

The town of Robbins and the town in Hunan will be sister towns following ceremonies in Guidong on the morning of April 5 — which is still April 4 in the United States.

But there was another glitch for the delegation. The case containing all the official documents to be signed during the ceremonies and the letter from Gov. Michael Easley to the governor of Hunan had inadvertently been left on the tour bus.

Phone call after phone call by Leon Zhang of the Peking Wok restaurant chain in Moore County who is in the delegation finally reached one of the tour guides who located the case. She was to fly to Changsha the next morning, bringing the essential papers, and Hunan government aides will see they make it to Guidong.

Blake and the others will have already been on their way to thank the now elderly Mr. Wang and the people of Guidong, and to mix the earth of their home with the earth of the part of China where one American pilot had lain unknown for so long.

*John Chappell is traveling with the delegation in China. He can be e-mailed at [jchappell@thepilot.com](mailto:jchappell@thepilot.com).*



FROM: THE PILOT FRI 13 APR 2009 SOUTHERN PINES, NC

# New Beginnings

## N.C. Friendship Delegation Returns From China

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

A journey that began 64 years ago in High Falls ended last week in China with a new beginning.

Family of Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch of High Falls — a Flying Tiger pilot whose remains were returned last summer to the family plot — visited the place where Chinese villagers buried and honored him. They came to thank the people of Guidong, Hunan, Peoples' Republic of China.

At the invitation of that town and county, sister relationships now exist between Moore and Guidong counties, and between Robbins and a village in China. Letters of Intent were signed that are expected to lead to a sister relationship

### COMING SUNDAY

### Road to Guidong

Learn more about the N.C. Friendship Delegation's recent trip to China.

between the state of North Carolina and the Province of Hunan.

State Sen. Harris Blake led a delegation to China on a 10-day visit. It included Upchurch

family members as well as representatives from Moore and Harnett counties, Robbins, Pinehurst Resort, and other civic and cultural leaders from North Carolina. He had the help of Lian Xie, president of the N.C. China Center and a professor at N.C. State.

Master Potter Ben Owen III and Blake dug red clay from the bank of Deep River just below the cemetery at High Falls Methodist Church where Upchurch was reburied in the family plot last April. His funeral was attended by representatives of China as well as the China Center in Raleigh. Letters were read praising Upchurch as a hero, and calling for steps to be



Hoyle Upchurch monument in China

taken to establish ties between his county and state in his honor.

Town Commissioners of Robbins — the closest municipality to his High Falls home — passed a resolution asking for a sister town in China.

Owen crafted that clay into a number of vases glazed in Chinese red. For 90 years, Owen potters had followed the influence of China. Most of these vases were small, destined as gifts to their hosts. One, however, was different. It was a large lidded pot.

In Guidong last Tuesday — April 5, tomb-sweeping day in China — Moore County clay was mixed with earth from the place where Upchurch died and was so long buried. Half the mixture remains in China, in that red pot.

The rest is on its way here, to be kept in a blue and white China vase from Guidong.

### Monument Dedication

Much took place in a short week.

The N.C. Friendship Delegation arrived in Chang Sha, capital city of Hunan Province, on April 3. The following day they began their eight-hour trip to Guidong. As the delegation bus drew up to the hotel in Guidong, television crews, photographers, reporters from Chinese media, townspeople and children in red scarves cheered their arrival. A banquet in their honor welcomed them to Guidong, hosted by the main leaders of Chenshou Municipal Government and Guidong County Government.

The following morning, April 5, is the day people all over China honor departed friends, family and heroes. Cars carried delegation members to Santaishan Park, where Upchurch had been buried long ago on a steep hillside below a Ming Dynasty Tower.

The path to the tower was lined with schoolchildren in red, white and blue uniforms.

"Welcome to Guidong," they said, in near-perfect English. "Nice to meet you."

They lined a flight of stone stairs leading to the monument site. A donation from China Everbright Corp. had paid the cost of a memorial to Upchurch. The ground there has been leveled, and an imposing monument erected.

There was a tablet displaying the story of Upchurch in Chinese and English. A polished flat stone marked the place where his grave had been for such a long time. It bore a likeness of the young pilot and information about him and about the Flying Tigers.



A large stone cross bore pilot's wings and Upchurch's name vertically in Chinese and in English. Flowers and floral wreaths were placed about. A band from the local school played. Other music came from speakers. In the distance, the rattle of firecrackers punctuated solemn speeches.

The service paused for a minute of silence. Delegates and family members placed bouquets of flowers at the foot of the cross. They climbed to the tower above and passed through the park back to the cars that brought them. People shook their hands

and smiled greetings.

"Nihau," they said. (Hello.)

"Xie, xie," the Americans replied. (Thank you.)

Following the service, they called on Huang Rhenzhun, the 81-year-old man who, as a boy, had attended the first Upchurch funeral in 1944. He had come to the tower every year since to honor the man from Moore County his town thought of as their hero, even though they did not know his name.

Upchurch lifted off in his P-40 Warhawk from the Flying Tiger base at Kanchow, China, on Oct. 6, 1944. He disappeared into the

misty Chinese mountains. His parents never knew what really became of their son, but others in his family say they now know he did not die in vain.

### Sister Relationships Sealed

Later that afternoon, at Guidong No. 1 Middle School, representatives signed papers formally making it a sister school to North Moore High School. Students played music, sang, and danced.

At a meeting with Guidong government officials later, an agreement was signed making

Moore and Guidong sister counties. A Friendship Agreement linking Zhaiqian Town with Robbins as sister cities was signed as well.

In every case, the stated purpose of these sister relationships is fourfold:

- Economic exchange — seeking out ways to bring the business communities together.

- Educational exchange — discovering learning opportunities for students and citizens of all ages.

- Social exchange — sharing innovative solutions to social issues.

- Cultural exchange — discovering a deeper appreciation for each's respective traditions and heritage.

Another banquet that night, hosted by the county government, sealed the relationships. The delegation departed for Chang Sha and visits to a high-tech industrial zone, colleges, and historic sights in Hunan Province.

At a meeting with the leaders of Hunan Province, Blake signed a Letter of Intent to establish Sister-province/state Relationship between Hunan and North Carolina. Another banquet

followed.

Dr. John Dempsey, president of Sandhills Community College, made agreements with Hunan Women's Vocational University that may bring faculty and student study abroad for students and teachers at both schools.

Harnett County leaders signed a sister school agreement with Liuyang No. 1 High School.

At each stop, gifts and toasts were exchanged.

*John Chappell, who traveled with the delegation to China, can be reached at 783-7841 or by e-mail at [chappell@thepilot.com](mailto:chappell@thepilot.com)*



○ THE PILOT SUN 15 APR 2002 SOUTHERN PINES, NC

# China Trip Marks Start of Long Friendship

## Hands Across The Ocean ....



Chinese students salute after the unveiling of a monument for Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch near Guidong.



# China Trip Marks Start Of a Lasting Friendship

BY JOHN CHAPPELL  
Staff Writer

It was an astounding, transforming trip.

For the 18 Tar Heels who flew over the pole to the far side of Earth, nothing will be the same.

"It was an awesome trip," said state Sen. Harris Blake of Pinehurst, who led the N.C. Friendship delegation on a 10-day trip to China.

Hunan Province, in the Peoples' Republic of China, is about as distant from North Carolina as one can go and stay in the same latitude. Chang Sha and Raleigh are 12 hours apart

on the clock, and China is a day ahead. Afternoon here is morning of the following day there. China may be ahead in other ways as well.

Growth was obvious in Beijing and Chang Sha. In every direction, skyscrapers were rising rapidly. At one industrial park, delegation members toured a plant that builds the world's largest concrete pumps. Unfolding from flat bed trucks, their long pipes can deliver concrete mix to the top of tall buildings.

A biomedical company



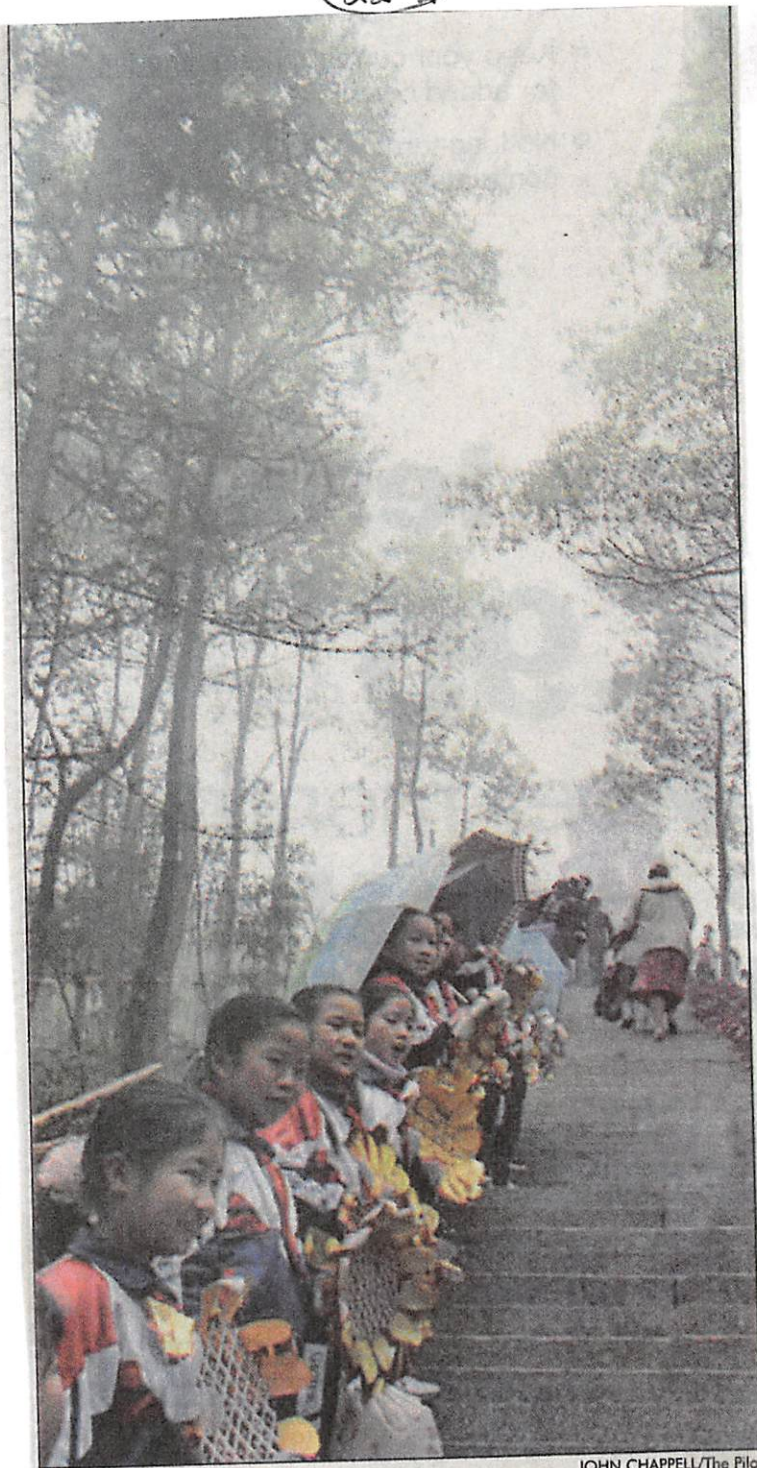
JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

A band of Chinese children performed at the ceremony.

displayed the model of their planned university campus, to be built over the next five to eight years. About 20,000 students will study free of charge, then go to jobs with the company.

At the other end of China's economic scale is Moore's sister county, Guidong. That is where Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch of High Falls — his name then unknown — lay buried at the foot of a Ming Dynasty tower for 61 years after his plane crashed in combat during World War II.

The road to Guidong rises from the plains south of Chang Sha, where Upchurch and other Flying Tiger pilots once strafed Japanese installations along the river north of the city. It passes out of Chang Sha's grassy riverside plains and industrial sites by rice paddies, water buffalo and farm workers who still wear what used to be called a coolie hat.



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

Chinese children line steps leading to the Upchurch memorial.



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

State Senator Harris Blake (center, holding umbrella), and members of the N.C. Friendship Delegation attend the dedication ceremony for the Upchurch memorial in Guidong.



A winding road climbs deep into mountains that begin to look more and more like the Great Smokies. There is a white kaolin deposit on one side, and the ground changes to a red clay much like Robbins. Rushing water pours over rocky stream beds.

Guidong sits at the south foot of Jinggangshan Mountain in southeast Hunan Province. It has a population of 180,000. The climate there is described as "subtropical monsoon" — but it seems about the same as the weather the Moore County group left far behind at home.

### 'Come Full Circle'

Hoyle Upchurch's nephew, Wayne Anthony, and wife Paula; and nephew Dale Upchurch and his wife, Sue, were with the delegation.

"Wow! What a wonderful once-in-a-lifetime experience we all shared last week," Dale Upchurch wrote in a letter to family and friends returning home last week. "Whether Chinese or American, we embraced each other with immediate friendship, compassion, and fellowship. All of the Chinese people were humble, gracious, respectful, and very welcoming to the Americans.

"Our preconceived attitudes and concerns quickly melted away. What a wonderful people the Chinese are. Every person's life has been impacted for the good because of a young man named Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch, who made the ultimate sacrifice for the Chinese people in October 1944. How ironic it is that two nations of



WAYNE ANTHONY/Special to The Pilot

Dale Upchurch, Huang Renzhun, and Wayne Anthony mix soil from Moore and Guidong.



WAYNE ANTHONY/Special to The Pilot

Huang Renzhun and Ben Owen III combine the soil from their native lands in a ceremony at Renzhun's home near Guidong.



people could feel so equally sad for a young man's loss of life and so happy for the goodwill this same young man is responsible for today in April 2007."

China Everbright International donated about \$15,000 to pay for the memorial that was dedicated to the memory of Upchurch.

"The memorial includes a stunning large engraved cross in front of an above-ground tomb structure with Hoyle's picture and biography," Dale Upchurch wrote. "At the rear of the memorial stands a tablet wall describing the history of events relating to Hoyle's death and return to the U.S in both Chinese and English. Materials used were a higher grade of stone with gold lettering and two lions (male and female) that symbolize protection in Chinese mythology. Beautiful wreaths lined the walkways as children and adults lay flowers at the foot of the cross."



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

Chamber President Pat Coughlin (left) in sister city exchange



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

Chinese children hold paper sunflowers.



JOHN CHAPPELL/The Pilot

Dale Upchurch reads a letter during the ceremony.



The ceremonies touched the family deeply. They said they were surprised by the gracious pomp and circumstance provided by the entire Guidong community, and stunned by such a beautiful grand structure below an ancient Pagoda tower, and humbled by the martyr status the Chinese people had given their uncle.

"We were all very emotional," Upchurch wrote. "We felt sad for our parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents who waited many years for word of Hoyle's fate. We were very proud to be a family member of this hero. We also longed for all of our family to be by our side to witness the six-decade story come full circle.

"We just could not leave the site, and when we did we turned around and came back again. What a wonderful gift to the Upchurch family and the United States of America!"

### 'Long-Lasting Friendship'

Hunan Province is the primary region where the U.S. Flying Tigers and the 14th Air Force Units resided during World War II.

The dormitories used to house the Flying Tigers are well-preserved in Zhijiang City of Hunan Province. The provincial government has constructed a Flying Tigers Museum, and preserved the place where the Japanese surrendered at the end of that war.

"The stories of Hoyle Upchurch and the people in Guidong County make a unique and strong case for a long-lasting friendship between Hunan and North Carolina," said Liping Pang, vice chairman for Foreign Affairs of Hunan. "Because of this historical reason that is so unique and touching, our government is strongly in favor of a sister State/Province relationship between Hunan and North Carolina."

At a banquet that night, the two nephews presented a framed picture of Hoyle Upchurch and the Upchurch family (taken at the time of the memorial service last year in High Falls). They also delivered a framed picture donated by the Flying Tigers currently based at

Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina.

"Our hosts were equally stunned by the reality of seeing their hero and the beauty of the Flying Tigers aircraft of past and present soaring over the Chinese mountains as protectors of their nation," Dale Upchurch said. "The two framed pictures were placed side by side to provide all with the opportunity to take pictures with family and friends for keepsakes. Guidong County leaders were asked to place both pictures in a location of their choice that all the community could enjoy."

He thought, as did everyone in the delegation, that the day of the dedication was a day that would live in memory.

### 'Newfound Unity'

Lian Xie, president of the N.C. China Center (who had coordinated the trip with Blake), asked if they would like to visit 81-year-old Huang Rheznun for another short ceremony.

"Mr. Huang remembered seeing Uncle Hoyle's body and assisted researchers with identifying a piece of parachute equipment he remembered seeing on the body that was verified when the remains were unearthed in spring 2005," Upchurch said. "Mr. Huang also had played basketball near the grave site as a boy and visited the grave every year on this same Tomb Sweeping Day for 62 years. Mr. Huang's granddaughter made arrangements for our unscheduled visit with the family."

"At the Huang home, Ben Owen III, removed the lid from a Chinese Red pot. He opened a package of heat-treated soil taken from the grave site in High Falls.

"The soil was to be mixed with soil from the burial site at Guidong County to symbolize our newfound unity of friendship, peace and prosperity for future generations to come," Upchurch said. "Ben poured the two soils together in a bowl. Mr. Huang, my cousin Wayne

Anthony, and I put our hands into the bowl together and blended the earth."

The red clay of Moore and the red earth of China blended as their hands kneaded the two earths into one. Huang then placed two handfuls of soil into the red pot, then Wayne Anthony and Dale Upchurch did as well. Huang then produced a pot he had purchased for a gift to send with the other half of the mixed soils to be returned to North Carolina.

"We all then posed proudly with both pots as if both governments had just signed an important peace accord," Upchurch said. "At least as far as we were concerned, that is what we had just done at a grassroots level. We said our final goodbyes and hugged each other, then departed with our new pot and half of Uncle Hoyle's two resting places half a world apart."

### 'Everlasting Mark'

The journey would return everyone back to the industrial hum of Chang Sha, to days of visits with leaders of its burgeoning industry, and to pledges of friendship and hopes of economic partnership cemented by the strong ties of blood and history.

"God bless you Uncle Hoyle for

providing your family and the Chinese people the opportunity to make a difference in each other's lives," Dale Upchurch said. "For a humble young man from High Falls, N.C., who knew he could be killed and thought 'it wouldn't be so bad if he were bumped off,' he sure has left an everlasting mark on an entire country of people who likewise feel they can never fully repay their debt for his personal sacrifice just as we do."

The red pot of blended earth now rests in an honored spot in Guidong. Soon, presentation will be made in Moore County of the other half of that blended ground.

The delegation came home with many gifts: tiny books of Chinese poetry, packages of rare mushrooms that cannot be

cultivated but that grow only wild in the mountain forests of Guidong, carved bamboo vases specially made to honor their visit.

They brought booklets and pamphlets and documents of industrial possibilities in abundance.

But all agreed they returned with something intangible: a connection to newly made friends on the far side of the earth and a profound realization of kinship and connection to people and a place that is now part of a new international family.

This is, all said, only the barest beginning — though it is rooted in the kindness and respect shown for so long by a people they had only just come to know, but who are already to be counted as lifelong friends.

Perhaps nobody could put that thought, and their gratefulness, better than the legendary Brig. Gen. Tex Hill, one of the most famous Flying Tigers. He sent a letter with the delegation to be delivered to the people of Guidong.

"Throughout my service in China during the Second World War, and to this day, I have always held the Chinese people in the highest regard for their values, customs and traditions," Hill said. "The villagers of Guidong are no exception. I cannot express my gratitude enough to the villagers, and their descendants, who buried Lieutenant Upchurch and cleaned and decorated his grave all of these years without knowing the name of this young American pilot until his remains were identified by DNA this past year."

"I want to thank the villagers of Guidong from the bottom of my heart for all of the years that they honored a fallen member of my wartime Fighter Group. Your humanitarian actions over the past 60-some years in tending the grave of an unknown American only reinforce my continued belief in the goodness and human kindness of the Chinese people. May God bless you all for years to come."

*John Chappell, who traveled with the delegation to China, can be reached at 783-5841 or by e-mail at jchappell@thepilot.com.*

*"We were  
very proud  
to be a  
family member  
of this hero."*

Dale Upchurch



ROBERT HOYLE U

(23-1)

FROM: THE PILOT SUN 15 APR 2007 SOUTHERN PINES, NC



Photo by BRUCE DONALDSON

Dr. John Dempsey presents a handwoven basket to a representative of Hunan Women's University to mark the beginning of the relationship between the university and Sandhills Community College. The basket, woven of longleaf pine needles, was made by Carolyn C. Register as a gift from the Moore County Extension and Community Association. From left: Chen Xiaomin, China Everbright International; Dempsey; Patrick Coughlin, president of the Moore County Chamber of Commerce; Teddy Byrd, chairman of the Harnett County Board of Commissioners; and Fay Terry, an artist who represented Moore County Schools.

# 'Wel-uh-come'

## Chinese Reception Touched Visitors Deeply

BY DR. JOHN DEMPSEY

Special to The Pilot

Welcome to the Hotel California. Many stories will be told about the trip that state Sen. Harris Blake led to China to dedicate a memorial to Hoyle Upchurch, the Flying Tiger from Moore County who lost his life in Hunan Province in 1944.

*The people of Guidong have almost never seen Westerners, and their welcome for our group is overwhelming.*

Some of these stories have already been told in the pages of The Pilot. Others will soon be shared in the homes and work places of those who made the trip, passed on to friends and children.

All will tell of the Upchurch family and their friends from North Carolina who traveled nearly 20,000 miles to honor the memory of Hoyle Upchurch, and to thank the Chinese people who lovingly tended his grave for more than 60 years.

This is one of those stories — a very simple one that involves some remarkable Chinese people and a rock 'n' roll song that's about 30 years old.



The Chinese people are from Guidong, near where Hoyle Upchurch's plane went down in 1944. People from Guidong saw the crash, hiked in to recover the airman's body, and buried it in a place of honor where it was revered for more than half a century.

The rock 'n' roll song is one recorded and made famous by the Eagles in 1976.

Guidong is a small city in Hunan Province, located in southeastern China about halfway between Beijing in the north and Hong Kong in the south. It is a poor area, far removed from the explosion of prosperity that has recently come to China's urban centers.

Guidong is at the end of a journey that begins in the Sandhills of North Carolina, passes through Minneapolis, Tokyo, Beijing and Changsha, then proceeds on a sometimes harrowing, eight-hour bus ride high into the Chinese mountains.

The journey takes three days. It ends in a place that is as remote as anywhere I've ever been.

The people of Guidong have almost never seen Westerners, and their welcome for our group is overwhelming. Though they are very shy, they want to touch us, to shake our

hands, even to have us autograph the red bandannas the children wear as members of the Communist Youth Brigade. Most of all, they want us to feel welcome.

"Well-uh-come, well-uh-come." Again and again we hear repeated the word the people of Guidong have made the mantra of our visit — "well-uh-come."

Each of us is moved by the warmth of their greeting and by the obvious pains they have taken to make their humble home ready for the family and friends of the heroic Lt. Upchurch.

The dedication of the monument takes place on the second day of our visit to Guidong.

A light rain is falling as our five-car cortege leaves the hotel. Led by a police escort, we climb a twisting road that takes us up above the town to the site of the Upchurch memorial.

The monument stands in a natural amphitheater near the very top of the mountain.

The amphitheater is a terraced clearing in the forest at the foot of a Ming Dynasty tower. This beautiful tower, a massive stone pagoda, has loomed over this spot and the

city of Guidong for nearly 400 years. Today the pagoda is shrouded in a fog that creates an almost eerie feeling. It creates a perfect atmosphere for honoring Lt. Upchurch and the cause in which he and the Chinese people were once united.

The monument itself is large and stately, a black granite cross about 15 feet tall. Inscribed vertically on the cross's upright, both in English and in Chinese characters, is the name Robert Hoyle Upchurch.

Our trip to the monument site takes longer than we expect, slowed as it is by the Chinese people who line our route, hoping even on this rainy morning for a handshake, an exchange of smiles, or the chance once again to wish us "well-uh-come."

Finally, at the top of the hill, we emerge from our cars to be greeted by more children, dressed in school uniforms, offering us flowers, extending their hands again in incredibly warm gestures of "well-uh-come."

We make our way through these children, up several sets of rain-slick stone steps, through a canopy of forest to the clearing where the monument stands.

The fog is now even thicker, but through it we see the faces of hundreds more Chinese who line the amphitheater's rim above us. Dozens more children stand on either side of the monument, holding the floral arrangements they will place at its base when it is unveiled.

It is a beautiful, almost surreal scene — fog, mist, hundreds of strange faces, a Ming tower, a black granite cross, all atop a mountain in rural China.

And a loudspeaker playing "Welcome to the Hotel California."

Wait a minute. What is this? I am taken aback by this odd intrusion of a rock song into the middle of a solemn service. The magic spell is broken, the spiritual moment spoiled by a singularly inappropriate choice of memorial music. One simply

doesn't play Eagles at a memorial service. It just isn't done.

It takes me about two minutes to realize my mistake. Playing the Eagles at a memorial service makes no sense at all — unless the Eagles song in question is the only American song these folks have heard with the word "welcome" in the title.

It isn't inappropriate after all. In fact, this enigmatic song tells us exactly what the people of Guidong want us to know — that they love Americans and things American, and that as friends and family of Hoyle Upchurch we are, most assuredly, "well-uh-come."

The lovely people of Guidong have welcomed the visiting Americans the same way they have revered the man whose memory and sacrifice we have come to honor.

They have done it with smiles and hugs, with waves and applause, and they have done it with a musical tribute that seems odd at first, but that turns out to be just like the rest of our Guidong visit — perfect.

We are down off the mountain now, nice and cozy in a plush hotel with CNN, room service, and lots of things Guidong doesn't have.

In a day or so, we will pack our bags and go back to our lives, far from China and the magical mountaintop above Guidong.

I wonder, though, if we haven't left a bit of ourselves up on that mountain with the spirit of Hoyle Upchurch and his Chinese friends.

Surely we have been touched deeply by our experience. Oddly, this trip to China — which should have tired us out — has refreshed and renewed us in ways we did not anticipate.

It is far too early — and the experience too close — to talk about the impact it will have on our lives.

My suspicion, though, is that the impact will be profound and it will last a long, long time.

After all, that's the odd thing about the Hotel California: You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave.

*Dr. John Dempsey is president of Sandhills Community College.*



# 'We Should Remember Him'



PHOTOS BY LEON ZHANG/Special to The Pilot

Huang Renzhun welcomes Patrick Coughlin (left), Upchurch family, and other delegation members to his home.

## 'Witness' Recalls Upchurch Burial

BY JOHN CHAPPELL

Staff Writer

In High Falls, Bessie and Charlie Upchurch waited for word of their son, Robert Hoyle Upchurch, reported missing in action over China during World War II.

The only word that ever came was a letter saying he'd last been sighted in cloudy skies near a mountain.

"Bessie always hoped he was a POW somewhere, and that he would be released and come home someday," says Catherine Graham, who grew up in High Falls. "They told his story to their children.

### ONLINE:

For more on China trip, visit [thepilot.com](http://thepilot.com)



Huang Renzhun, State Senator Harris Blake of Pinehurst and Lian Xie, executive director of the N.C. China Center, talk at Huang's home.



# Huang Helped Honor Fallen American Pilot

We all heard the story about Bessie's boy who was lost in the war."

As that story passed down from generation to generation in the little Moore County community, another story was being told far away in China. It was the story of the Flying Tiger of Guidong, an American fighter pilot shot down in battle and buried by villagers who would come every year bringing rice and wine to the grave of their own hero.

One of the storytellers knew firsthand what happened.

Huang Renzhun was 15 — still in school even as war raged around, about, and sometimes through his village. He became a teacher and taught Chinese and mathematics a half century there in his mountain hometown. What he saw as a teenager, and what he did for years afterward, could alter the future of North Carolina and Hunan, his home province.

Earlier this month, state Sen. Harris Blake of Pinehurst led a delegation of North Carolinians to Guidong in southeastern Hunan Province. They came to dedicate a memorial to Upchurch. Two of Upchurch's nephews came with Blake and other leaders at the invitation of the Peoples' Republic of China. They were there to dedicate a stone cross celebrating Upchurch as a hero who died fighting for others.

Huang himself had witnessed the recovery and burial of that then-unidentified American pilot in 1944. Every year afterward, he and others from Guidong celebrated and honored their hero.

This time Huang is not up to the trip to the grave on a rainy chill morning. Instead, he waited for visitors from America to come to his home. He told relatives of that young pilot what he has remembered all these years.

Now in his 80s, Huang is a slim man with sharp eyes and a love of nature. Roses bloom in the little garden he tends in the courtyard between gate and door of the home he shares with wife, son, daughter-in-law and two granddaughters. One of them, Huang Huan, has been away at college in Liverpool, England. She will be a civil engineer some day.

She was back in Guidong. School is out for spring holidays, and Huang Huan has come home. She fills her grandfather's seat at banquets for the North Carolina Delegation and helps her parents and grandparents welcome streams of foreign visitors, television news crews, journalists and officials here for the dedication.

## 'The Witness'

A few came early to listen to a story her grandfather, Huang Renzhun, had tried to get people to hear for years. Stephen Boyd, external relations manager for Pinehurst Resort, and Leon Zhang, who owns The Peking Wok in Southern Pines, sit with others on small chairs around a low table bearing a bowl of oranges. Steaming cups of green

tea are set before them. Zhang and Huang Huan translate as the old man speaks.

The legend of the Flying Tiger of Guidong had been thought little more than folklore: an American pilot shot down in combat, whose lonely grave was honored every year by villagers who buried him long ago.

Huang knew the story was true. He had been there. He had seen the body, seen the wooden coffin they had made for what was left of a stranger that died for them. With others, he had trudged up the mountain on Tomb Sweeping Day every April 5 with wreaths of flowers and strings of firecrackers whose sharp cracks traditionally frighten evil away.

He knew things. As the story came out, as investigators followed his memories to pinpoint the lost grave in an area as big as two football fields and fragments of DNA were matched to the Upchurch family of High Falls in rural Moore County, Huang acquired a new name for himself.

They call him "the Witness." Forces of the Empire of Japan swept over China in a bloody eight-year struggle China variously calls "The War of Japanese Aggression," or "The International War against Fascism," or simply the Anti-Japanese War.

Japan closed the Burma Road, only link into China from the south. Planes bringing defenders and supplies had to fly "over the hump" — a treacherous high altitude route through mountains. Those who fought this war called it "The Burma Front."

Even before Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, volunteer fighter pilots in P-41s had been doing battle with Mitsubishi Zeros. They called themselves Flying Tigers, and painted a snarling shark's mouth on the cowl.

Later, as the 23rd Fighter Wing of the U.S. Army Air Corps, they stayed Flying Tigers. Today, they fly A-10 jets and are currently based at Fort Bragg; though BRAC will move them soon.

## Flying Tiger Down

In Guidong, as in the rest of Hunan where they were based, Flying Tigers were famous. They were heroes, come to fight in a strange land for others. Everybody knew about the Flying Tigers. Anything about them was important news.

"My teacher said a plane had gone down in the mountains," Huang says.

The local government sent a search and rescue party to the crash site. They found a plane ripped apart, its wing riddled by bullets. They brought the remains of its pilot and pieces of the wreckage down to a smaller village.

"There was no government there, so they brought him here," Huang says. "The men who brought the body — there were four of them — at the request of the (municipal) government, brought the body here (to Guidong). They made a box to put the body in."

Huang remembers seeing the American pilot lying in his homemade coffin.

"One half of the face was gone," he says, moving his hand in a curving gesture as if scooping away the right upper side of his head. "We didn't see either one of his feet. He wore a belt, with a white hook — a hook for the parachute — so we know he is a pilot, because of the hook. There was a telegraph station in Guidong. They reported to the place where the Flying Tiger base is.

"They sent people to it. Eight to nine people from the American base came to the funeral — plus the telegraph operators. 11 people from the American base total. They don't know who he is, don't know the name."

There were no dog tags or other identification found in the wreck. Letters copied from the wing of the plane confirmed it to be a Flying Tiger fighter, though nothing else — no dog tags, no ID papers — survived the crash to tell them who the pilot was.

"From the wing, they saw letters identifying the plane as American," he says. "The Americans also confirmed the plane was of the Flying Tigers. The wing had been hit, by fire. People around here say the plane crashed into the mountain, but one of the wings had been hit by fire. Some people said they saw the plane going around."

He indicates with one hand a plane going left, then right, erratically.

"The county government, including the students, had a huge memorial service," he says. "This ceremony was directed by the then county government."





CONTRIBUTED

Huang Renzhun and his granddaughter, Huang Huan.

### Burying a Hero

In the midst of war, they gave their unknown hero a proper burial.

"He was in his uniform," he says. "We just put his body, in his uniform, in the coffin and buried him. His uniform was all torn. The motor may have crashed into his face. The translator for the Americans who came from the base was my teacher. I was too young to go to the crash."

They laid their Flying Tiger to rest below the old Ming tower on Santaishan Mountain.

"They chose that spot so they would know where he was," he says. "Over time, they thought it

might be hard to find the grave, so they put him near the tower. For so many years, nobody came to ask about it or do anything more."

Why not take the body back to base? Boyd asked.

The face of Huang changed, his mouth twisting, his eyes blazing with fear and wrath. He spoke sharply, leaning forward and gripped by emotion and memory.

"The fighting in this area was fierce," Zhang translated.

"There was no time. There was so much fighting, and the Japanese were so close. There was no time to take the body with them, just pieces of wreckage of the plane."

There was time for a funeral, however. They took time to bury a hero.

"There were over 250 people came," he says. "Students, and people from the town."

Huang, of all of them, had the best memory of the exact grave site. Above it was a basketball court where he used to shoot hoops. Every time the ball missed, it would bounce down the hill to land at the place he remembered the American pilot had been buried.

"I knew best the grave site, because there was a basketball goal nearby," he says. "When I was shooting, sometimes the

basketball falls onto the grave. I remember very clearly, I was sitting at the tower. I could see where the grave site is, and remember it. I remember very clearly. I was sitting at the top, and could see."

### Finding the Gravesite

In 2001, Huang heard about a search for a lost American pilot named Upchurch. He thought the Upchurch man might turn out to be the unknown Flying Tiger of Guidong. His memory could make the difference, he thought.

"I was involved in moving the body to the government, putting it in the coffin, and the memorial with over 250 people," Huang says. "In Hong Kong there is a TV station that is watched in the United States by the Chinese community. They had a news story about searching for Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch. I had some friends that also know about this, and sent them a letter asking about it. My friend sent me a letter to the TV station in Hong Kong telling them that in 1944 there was an American pilot that crashed and was buried in Guidong, not somewhere else as they said."

His letter sparked a whirlwind of response.

"The Department of State, of foreign affairs from China — Beijing — and also the TV stations from Hunan and Beijing all came to interview me," Huang says. "They want me to identify that grave site."

It was not so easy. Time had passed, and the ground had changed.

"During so many years, the grave site became hard to identify because so many people want to level the ground, grow crops and everything," Huang says. "Every year we came — we all know it is in that area — the grave is getting harder and harder to place."

Two intense days of piece by piece excavation, washing away bits of earth with water that had to be pumped to the site, finally brought to the surface pieces of bone, and something more, something Huang had seen long

ago.

It was a little white hook, once part of a Flying Tiger pilot's parachute harness. Huang identified it as the one he had seen on that pilot's belt in 1944. DNA tests on the remains identified the Flying Tiger of Guidong as Lt. Robert Hoyle Upchurch of High Falls.

### 'Should Remember Him'

At long last, some of his family could come to the place where he'd been buried and honored in yearly ceremonies on China's traditional Tomb Sweeping Day. At long last, they would hear firsthand what happened to him. They would finally know he had lost his life in aerial combat, and that his sacrifice had been remembered, respected, and honored by others.

At first, those ceremonies were sponsored by local government in Guidong. After 1949, it remained to volunteers to continue the homage.

"The custom in China, when you pay respect to the dead, is to bring some rice and also some wine — to make sure the one that sacrificed has something to eat and drink," Zhang says, explaining. "We pour it on the ground. We bow, we pay respects."

Villagers took turns paying for wreaths, for rice, for wine. One by one, those who had been there in the beginning passed away. Of those present at the burial, Huang — almost alone — remains. He paid for the flowers himself in recent years, keeping a promise made as a boy.

"I have been bringing the wreath every year since 1991," Huang says. "The reason I have been decorating the grave all those years is because, at the ceremony, the leader said, 'This American soldier — unidentified — died fighting for the Chinese. We should remember him.' So, that is why; because of what he said."

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