

# John Earl Baker Tells of Dodging Japs' Bombs

U. W. Grad, Now Burma  
Road Official, at  
Chungking

[The following letter was received Aug. 1 by Mrs. C. W. Jarvis, 437 N. Frances street, Madison, from her nephew, John Earl Baker, an official connected with the Yunnan-Burma Highway Supervisory Commission (transport and engineering division), which is charged with getting supplies through the Burma road to the Chinese. Baker, a resident of Eagle, Wis., was graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1906, and was awarded the honorary degree of doctor of laws in 1936. He spent several months in the United States in 1940 in connection with the effort to expedite the purchase and shipment of supplies needed by the Chinese in their struggle against Japanese conquest. —EDITOR'S NOTE.]

Chungking, China, July 7, 1941  
Dear Folks:

I've had letters from you all within the past month—letters that crossed one of mine, I believe. So please pass this around.

I flew up here on Friday afternoon, July 4, to meet three experts that the U. S. government is sending out to help me. But they are not here and I am putting in the time sleeping and dodging air raids. Today is the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the war, and so, although we have had one raid this morning, we expect more before the day is over.

Saturday they (the Japanese flyers) got the last hospital but one left in the city. Yesterday they started in on the publicity department, and this morning they finished it. They are not coming with so many planes as last year, but they are getting to be more accurate. They are flying lower, perhaps. Anyhow, anti-aircraft are said to have gotten two of them this morning.

## Is In Bomb Shelter

I never see any of it, for I am well under ground when the planes are overhead. Last night I was in a dugout which was only a few hundred yards distant from the place bombed. The



John Earl Baker

detonations from the 24 planes were as rapid as from machine-gun fire.

I suppose they all let go at once and the descending shells encountered detonating obstacles at slightly different intervals.

I am staying at the Chialing guest house. If they had built the windows low enough to see out of, one would have a beautiful view up the river. If one has the time and energy to stand up and look out the road, up the hill, there stood formerly a roundhouse, built by Sun Fo, son of Sun Yat-Sen, and minister of railways when I was in Nanking in 1930. . . . About a month ago the Japs scored a hit on this house in the center; it completely collapsed and there is nothing there now but a heap of plaster.

Alice\* knows how hot Chungking is. It is hotter now than I ever knew it to be in 1937. I feel it especially, for Kunming is so comparatively cool. I slept under two blankets the night of the 3rd, and Kunming was having a warm spell during the day. In spite of all the perspiration, the

change is doing me good, I believe. The high altitude at Kunming is somewhat taxing, and down here I sleep like I used to sleep the first few days at Peitaiho.

## Highway Progress Slow

Just now I am not making much perceptible progress on the highway. The red rock here disintegrates very rapidly once it is exposed to the air. Then it absorbs water rapidly, and soon becomes a layer of mud. The weight of superimposed strata then "squashes" this out and we have slides. Rains have been unusually heavy this year, and several small bridges have been washed out.

The Japs have made their little contribution too, but theirs has not been 5 per cent of the total. We shall soon have more approaches built, with ferries at every approach, so that no matter how often the bridges are bombed we'll have trucks crossing the river within half an hour after the planes have left. For some reason, they have been putting the ferries close to the bridge; but I have pointed out that a bridge site is the worst possible site for a pontoon or a ferry. A bridge is always located at the narrowest place; hence, where the current is most rapid. A pontoon or a ferry should be at the widest place, where the current is slowest.

## Troubles Over Police

I'm having troubles getting my policing of the road started. There are seven military and police outfits who claim jurisdiction. I've been out a couple of times and broken up jams myself. But I can't be everywhere. And while I've gotten away with it so far, sooner or later some young fellow will call my bluff, come down out of his cab and give me a licking.

I've lost considerable weight. That French breakfast I get at the hotel is too often followed by no tiffin, for we have air alarms every few days and the servants go into hiding, even if I do not go to the country. I'm getting quite a straight front.

Must quit and get to what I "humorously" refer to as my "work."

Love to all,

Earl.

\*Alice Baker, sister of the writer, a Wisconsin teacher, U. of W. '11.