

FALLEN TIGER: THE FATE OF AMERICA'S MISSING AIRMEN IN CHINA

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Daniel Jackson

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by

Daniel Jackson

APPROVED:

Jeremiah Dancy, PhD
Committee Director

Jadwiga Biskupska, PhD
Committee Member

Eric Vanden Bussche, PhD
Committee Member

Abbey Zink, PhD
Dean, College of Humanities and Social
Sciences

ABSTRACT

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During World War II, America's air forces in China reported 605 aircraft and 1,722 airmen as missing on combat missions. Fighting a savage guerrilla air war against the Japanese, the prospect of crash-landing or bailing out in a remote and dangerous land loomed ominously in the consciousness of every individual. Of the airmen reported missing, the Japanese captured less than five percent, while thirty-one percent died and twenty-two percent are still listed as missing in action. More than forty percent returned safely to American airbases. The number of dead and missing (presumed dead) corresponds closely to the statistics of Allied aircraft operating over Europe during the war. Remarkably, however, while less than twenty-five percent of those who survived the crash or bailout in occupied Europe made it back to friendly territory with the help of underground organizations, ninety percent of those who survived in China returned to friendly territory. The rescuers included Nationalists, Communists, warlords, and even alleged collaborators. Despite deep divisions throughout wartime China, helping downed American aircrews transcended politics.

The purpose of this study is to go beyond the largely partisan and anecdotal histories of World War II in China to determine its actual military and social dimensions by analyzing and aggregating every available Missing Aircrew Report (MACR) and Evasion Report filed by China-based combat air forces. These contemporary reports provide a ground truth view unfiltered by Cold War-politics or self-glorification. The result is a revealing picture of the unexpected nature of the war in China, as well as a

touching story of Chinese-American cooperation that transcended political and social boundaries.

KEY WORDS: World War II, China, Flying Tigers, 14th Army Air Force, China Air Task Force, American Volunteer Group, 20th Army Air Force, Claire Lee Chennault, Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong

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CHAPTER I

May 6, 1944, 1210 Hours

120 Miles Southwest of Wuhan,¹ China

Lieutenant Lee Gregg looked across the expanse of sky to the fighters holding station several hundred feet to his left and right. They appeared motionless, suspended in the heavy haze. Only the bobbing needle of his airspeed indicator and feedback of the air through his control yoke betrayed the formation's forward progress. His flight of four P-38s cruised at twenty thousand feet – high above the swampy, lake-strewn Chinese countryside. Behind him, Fred Scudday led another four Lightnings while just above he could see the leading element of seven “Blue Squadron” Mustangs.² Through the clouds and mist, he could barely make out fourteen B-25s flying five thousand feet below the top cover. More than two dozen “Sharks” – 14th Air Force slang for P-40 Warhawks, with their trademark predatory grins – packed in tight around the bombers as close escort. Still more than a hundred miles from the target (see Figure 1), Gregg allowed the steady thrum of his fighter's twin engines lull him into a comfortable complacency.

“Zeros!”

Blue Leader's tense voice broke through the radio static, jolting Gregg from his reverie. His pulse quickened as he scanned for enemy fighters.

“Two o'clock high!”

¹ The tri-cities of Wuchang (武昌), Hankou (汉口), and Hanyang (汉阳), lie at the confluence of the Han and Yangzi rivers and have been known collectively as Wuhan (武汉) intermittently since 1927. Most contemporary American reports reference Hankou (Wade Giles: Hankow), the principal port city.

² The three original squadrons of the 23rd Fighter Group used colors for their radio call signs: the 74th “Red,” the 75th “White,” and the 76th, “Blue.”



Figure 1. Mission to Wuhan

There: he saw them high and to his right. Radioing his flight to follow, he pushed the throttles forward. His fighter surged with nearly three thousand horsepower. The big P-38, a new “J” model with hydraulic-boosted ailerons, felt nimble in his hands as he quickly banked and hauled the yoke back into his lap. His flight stayed with him – Jones, Longueil, and Opsvig all maintained formation. They brought their gunsights to bear on the Japanese, together unleashing a torrent of .50-caliber machine gun and 20-milimeter cannon fire. Suddenly, dozens of enemy fighters swarmed from every direction out of the mist. Gregg felt the impact of machine gun rounds hitting his plane and felt a searing pain shoot through his left ankle.

“Bailing out!” he heard Jones frantically yell over the radio. Then Gregg’s fighter lurched forward. His head struck the instrument panel. His world went black.³

³ David Lee Hill and Reagan Schaupp, *“Tex” Hill: Flying Tiger* (reprint, San Antonio: Universal Bookbindery, 2004), 239; Glen Beneda, interview by Daniel Jackson, July 22, 2008; U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 4732*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1944).

Leading the last element in the last flight of P-51s, Lieutenant Glen Beneda witnessed the initial contact. Three P-38s fell from the dogfight in flames, trails of smoke diffusing into the haze.⁴ A fourth Lightning dove away on one engine. Amidst the carnage, a solitary parachute blossomed, slowly bearing its human cargo toward the ground. Reaching down with his left hand, Beneda pulled the release for his underwing fuel tanks. The right tank dropped away, but the left remained attached. His fighter slewed sideways from the sudden asymmetry. Instinctively, he stomped on the right rudder pedal to counter the drag. Then he saw the mottled green fighter in front of him; its wings, sweeping forward to meet a straight leading edge, bore the distinctive red “meatballs” of the rising sun. He pressed in to attack. Hardly had he closed with it when a hail of bullets caught him from behind. He craned his neck to look back.

“Blue Baker Four, three Zeros above us!” he radioed his wingman. “Follow me down!” As Beneda rolled to dive away, the drag from the drop tank still clinging stubbornly to his wing snapped his Mustang into an accelerated stall. Another volley of bullets riddled his plane. The fighter plummeted downward. Beneda struggled to regain control. He finally managed to pull out of the dive at eight thousand feet. He looked around to get his bearings. Apparently, he had left the enemy far behind. A sense of relief washed over him. His wingman, he noted, had also disappeared. Then, with startling abruptness, his engine quit. An eerie silence reigned; the empty whistling of wind

⁴ MACR 4730: P-38H 42-67010, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 100 miles southwest of Wuhan, 2Lt William P. Jones, O-748994, Killed in Action, Body Recovered. MACR 4731: P-38J 42-67295, 449FS, 52FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 100 miles southwest of Wuhan, 1Lt John T. Opsvig, O-730590, Missing in Action, Body Unrecovered. MACR 4732: P-38J 42-67837, 449FS, 52FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 100 miles southwest of Wuhan, 1Lt Lee O. Gregg, O-732229, Rescued.

replaced the full-throated roar of the Merlin engine. In that moment, Beneda knew he had to bail out.⁵

Meanwhile, when Lee Gregg came to, he found his fighter hurtling toward the ground. With its airspeed edging up on the critical Mach number for its thick wings, the controls resisted his efforts to recover. He quickly disconnected his oxygen tube and radio equipment and released his seat restraints. Straining forward, he grabbed hold of the emergency hatch release on top of the control panel. He pulled it back and the canopy tore away. The suction instantly ripped him from the cockpit. Still dazed from the attack and foggy in his tenuous consciousness, he had no idea of his altitude. He frantically pulled at the ripcord. With the opening shock, a new wave of intense pain shot through his back, catapulting him once more into unconsciousness.⁶

For the briefest of moments, Beneda seemed to hang in the air above his crippled fighter.⁷ Then, as it pulled away, the horizontal stabilizer collided violently with his right leg. Reeling from the hit, he grabbed for the rip cord and pulled hard. A white silk parachute unfurled above his head. Slowly, he drifted down toward the vibrant green landscape below. The landing brought with it a sharp jolt of agony. He stood painfully in the waterlogged and excrement-reeking rice paddy. A group of farmers stood some distance away, eyeing him warily. He pulled a cloth flag from his back pocket, unfolded it, and held it over his head.

⁵ Glen Beneda, interview; U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 11971*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1944).

⁶ AGAS-China, *Evader's Narrative Report: Story of Lee O. Gregg*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944); MIS-X Section, CPM Branch, *Evasion Report No. 431, Gregg, Lee O.*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁷ MACR 11971: P-51B 43-12394, 76FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 100 miles south-southwest of Wuhan, 1Lt Glen E. Beneda, O-736949, Rescued.

“Meiguo! Meiguo!”⁸ he yelled, identifying himself as an American. But the men – frightened or otherwise reticent – would not approach. Finally, one of them pointed in the direction of a pair of huts uphill from the paddy. Beneda trudged that way through the mud. His leg throbbed. A man stepped out from one of the huts as he approached. The fallen airman took a small booklet from his jacket pocket and opened it to a page of key phrases written side-by-side in English and Chinese. He pointed to the line asking to be taken to friendly guerrillas. The man seemed to understand and motioned for him to follow.

Four hours of excruciating walking brought them to a shallow lake where Beneda’s plane had crashed. It lay upside down, completely submerged. A crowd of villagers combed the water, picking up twisted bits of metal. The pilot watched for a moment, dimly aware of a gnawing sense of shame he felt for losing the fighter. Then he and his escort continued onward. At 2000 hours, they finally arrived at a guerrilla outpost. The soldiers there wore tattered cotton uniforms without insignia. Beneda eyed them nervously. They looked back, equally uneasy. One of them approached him.

“Sidalin. Mao Zedong. Balujun. Xinsijun.”⁹

The airman stared uncomprehendingly.

“What is your name?” the soldier asked in broken English.

“Beneda.”

“Ben Ni Da,” the soldier slowly repeated. The pilot wrote his name and rank on a piece of scrap paper and handed it to him. It was the soldier’s turn to stare

⁸ America (the United States): 美国, often transliterated in reports as “Mey Gwa.”

⁹ The soldier, Tian Nong (田农), tried to reassure Beneda he had been rescued by friendly communists by saying, “Stalin, Mao Zedong, 8th Route Army, New 4th Army,” but Beneda did not understand the words in Chinese.

uncomprehendingly. He left and returned a short while later, leading the airman to a crude bed made from a door laid atop two sawhorses. Beneda passed an uneasy night, still in anxious ignorance as to the identity of his hosts.

The next morning, the soldier escorted him to a local command post and presented him to the officer in charge.

“I am Tong Shiguang,”¹⁰ the officer introduced himself in passable English. “I am leader of this prefecture. You are under the protection of the communist New 4th Army.”¹¹

When Gregg regained consciousness, he found himself lying on the ground, still in his parachute harness. He attempted to stand, but the pain from a cracked vertebra and the shrapnel wound in his ankle overwhelmed him. Again, he passed out. The next time he awoke, he saw two farmers standing a short distance away.

“Meiguo!” he called weakly. But the two seemed reluctant to approach. Drifting in and out of consciousness, he soon found himself surrounded by eight men. They stared at him. Six departed, but the two remaining took everything from his pockets, took his parachute, his insignia, his jungle kit with its medicine and knife – everything but his clothing. Then they too disappeared. Gregg drifted out and awoke to find eight men around him again, this time with a wooden door, a rope, and a pole. They improvised a stretcher and carried him to a nearby sampan. The next four days blurred together in painful semi-consciousness. Sometimes he would wake to find himself rushing through the night on a stretcher. Other times he would find himself in a house or on a boat.

¹⁰ 童世光

¹¹ AGAS-China, *Evader's Narrative Report: Story of Glen Beneda*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944); Glen Beneda, interview; Xia Kui, *Saving American Pilots*, trans. Zhang Jusheng (NP: ND, 2006), 5.

Eventually, the men delivered him to the New 4th Army and a young medic began looking after his injuries.¹²

Both Lee Gregg and Glen Beneda thus began a sixty-day odyssey back to American control through war-torn China. Injured and alone, they found themselves completely dependent on the Chinese civilians and communist guerrillas who chose to rescue them. Remarkably, their experience typified that of many American airmen. During World War II, the United States Army Air Forces reported over six hundred aircraft and more than 1,700 airmen as missing on combat missions in the China Theater. The Japanese captured less than five percent of these Fallen Tigers, while thirty-one percent died and twenty-two percent are still listed as missing in action. More than forty percent returned safely to American airbases (see Figures 2 and 3). The percentage of dead and missing (presumed dead) corresponds closely to the statistics of Allied aircraft operating over occupied Europe. Astonishingly, however, while underground organizations delivered less than a quarter of the airmen in Europe back to Allied control, ninety percent of those who survived in China returned to friendly territory. Like Gregg and Beneda, each of the more than seven hundred rescued airmen depended entirely on the selfless heroism of Chinese soldiers and civilians. Incredibly, these extraordinary feats of courage remain largely unknown in the United States.¹³

¹² AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*; Lee O. Gregg, *Shot Down May 6th, 1944, Near Hankow*, (unpublished diary, 1944).

¹³ Philip D. Caine, *Aircraft Down! Evading Capture in WWII Europe* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1997), 2. Unless otherwise noted, all statistics on missing airmen in China are derived from the author's database of missing aircrew and evasion reports.

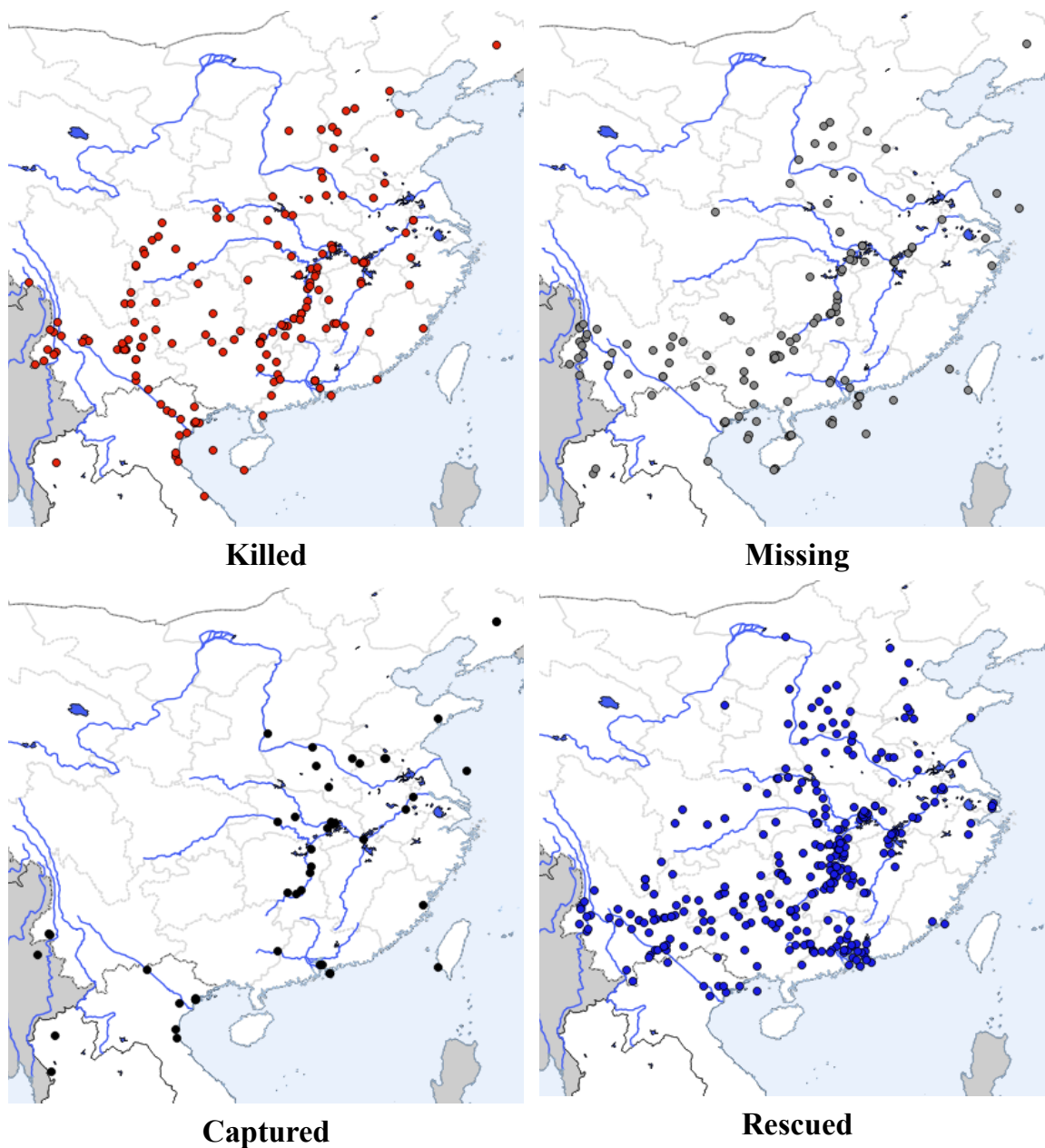


Figure 2. Fate of America's Missing Airmen

For the young pilots, navigators, bombardiers, radio operators, flight engineers, and gunners who survived the crash or bailout, a perilous journey through an embattled, alien land became a seminal experience in their lives. Even before they arrived in China, the romance of the Far East and mystique of the Orient filled their imaginations. Their service in the remotest corner of World War II meant the adventure of a lifetime. Few of

them chose to serve in China; besides the one hundred aviators who suspended their military commissions to join the American Volunteer Group, most underwent the same selection and training – and had the same lack of choice as to the location of their overseas assignment – as did their peers fighting in Europe and the Pacific.

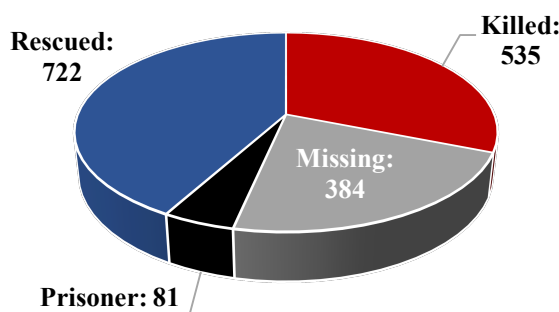


Figure 3. Fate of America's Missing Airmen

Legendary fighter pilot and grizzled veteran of the Anti-Japanese War, Claire Lee Chennault, inculcated new arrivals in the hard-won wisdom of his aerial guerrilla tactics. Chennault commanded the American Volunteer Group (AVG), China Air Task Force (CATF), and 14th Army Air Force – all of which became known colloquially in China and abroad as the Flying Tigers. He strove to embed experienced leaders in his groups and squadrons to further mentor and motivate his airmen. Several AVG veterans, including David Lee “Tex” Hill and George B. “Mac” McMillan, returned on subsequent tours to command squadrons and groups. Their practice of leading from the front added immeasurably to the combat effectiveness of Chennault's command and infused the can-do spirit of the AVG in the Army Air Force organizations that followed it.

Despite the confidence vested in Chennault's tactics and in the experience of their commanders, young airmen still faced combat with some trepidation. They fought a savage guerrilla air war in a remote and dangerous land; the prospect of having to crash-

land or bail out loomed ominously in the consciousness of every individual. They had ample cause to worry: less than half of those reported missing survived. This owed both to the perils of war and to the state of aviation technology in the 1940s. For those who managed to cross that violent threshold to become evaders, their world shrank dramatically from the grand sweep of hundreds of miles, horizon-to-horizon, to the granular view of a single rice paddy. The challenges they faced included injury, disease, malnutrition, pursuit or capture by the Japanese, and language and cultural barriers between them and their rescuers. None succeeded without the help of Chinese soldiers and civilians.

The ordeal of evasion, often spanning weeks or months and sometimes covering hundreds of miles, gave the Americans a keen appreciation for their Chinese allies. These young men arrived in China filled with racialized preconceptions and stereotypes. Close contact during evasion transformed racism to respect and replaced a vacuum of knowledge with close coordination. Upon return to American control, the airmen brought a new understanding back to their units, giving their comrades new hope and confidence should they find themselves in similar circumstances.

Chinese rescuers often underwent their own transformative journey. Many of them had never seen a white man before. Few had traveled beyond their home district. A significant number could not read or write. They helped not only at their own peril, but at the peril of their families, their neighbors, and their villages. The Imperial Japanese Army practiced swift revenge against anyone suspected of aiding American airmen. In a brutal war that began four and a half years before the United States became involved, the Chinese knew the risks they undertook by defying the occupiers. Yet defy them they did.

Unlike in Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, and even Burma, American airpower comprised the United States military's *only* combat forces in China. Anglo-American strategy prioritized defeat of the Nazis. Rather than committing ground troops to China, President Roosevelt decreed American support would consist of an airlift from India to supply a small number of military advisors and a combat air force. Aerial supply and aerial warfare therefore assumed a critical importance to the survival of China and the defeat of Japan on the Asian mainland.¹⁴ While the ground war between Chinese and Japanese troops remained a stalemate from 1939 to 1944, American airplanes ranged across the entire country. American airmen bailed out or crash-landed in twenty-three of modern China's twenty-eight provinces and autonomous regions. American warplanes and evading airmen became the most visible signs of resistance against the Japanese. They became a new hope for war-weary China.

Soldiers and civilians from all walks of life and political persuasions helped these airmen, including Nationalists, Communists, warlords, and even alleged collaborators. Despite deep divisions throughout wartime China, helping American evaders transcended politics. These grassroots interactions between individual Americans and Chinese, often without influence or oversight from their respective military commands or governments, formed the basis of deep, lasting relationships that far surpassed the effects of any official cooperation – or post-war enmity – between the United States and China. The fate of America's missing airmen reveals not only the unexpected nature of World War II in China, but also a touching story of Chinese-American cooperation that overcame racial, social, and political boundaries to echo through history to this day.

¹⁴ John D. Plating, *The Hump: America's Strategy for Keeping China in World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011), 1.

Compared to other theaters of World War II, English-language literature on China is sparse. It is an area of history dominated by anecdotal memoir and politically-charged diatribe. Its true nature is often overshadowed by comparison – or obscured by false conflation – with the war in Europe. Yet the struggle against the Nazis differed in many important respects from that against the Japanese in China. It was, in short, a different war in a different place against a different enemy. To Americans, both conflicts fall under the banner of World War II because they took place simultaneously. In truth, they bore little resemblance to each other. The Chinese differentiate their war from the global struggle by calling it simply, the “War of Resistance against Japan.”¹⁵ The different name is an important clue to a disparity of memory; if Americans remember anything about the war in China, they think of the shark-mouthed P-40s of the American Volunteer Group as a symbol of vengeance for Pearl Harbor. They do not humanize the Chinese ally and fail to recognize them as equal partners in the fight against Japan. To them, the Chinese represent an alien people in a supporting role, nameless, faceless – a damsel to be rescued. While China boasts a handful of monuments honoring American airmen who fought and died there, the United States has no such reciprocal commemoration of the Chinese who selflessly gave their lives to help downed Americans. The airmen themselves knew these people – their specific faces, their specific names. They knew them by their compassion and selflessness. But such remains a memory obscured both by the war’s distorted mythology and by a reluctance to look past bitter years of Cold War rivalry.

¹⁵ Kang Ri Zhanzheng (抗日战争)

President Roosevelt felt the United States had a clear imperative for helping China; he envisaged Chiang Kai-shek's¹⁶ Nationalist government as becoming a stabilizing, democratic influence in the Far East after the war. More immediately, though, the Imperial Japanese Army had one million troops in the country – many of which it could shift to the Pacific should China surrender. Keeping China in the war would keep those troops engaged. Toward that end, Roosevelt sent one of his most promising and energetic field commanders, Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell. The wiry, cantankerous infantryman landed in China on March 4, 1942.¹⁷ (Chapter 2, Note 6) Chiang Kai-shek gave him command of three of his best armies to help the British defend Burma. Just two months later, those armies had been eviscerated, Burma had fallen into enemy hands, and Stilwell had gone missing – incommunicado for weeks while he led his staff out through the jungles of Burma on foot to India.

China already lay at the end of a circuitous fifteen thousand-mile supply line from the United States, snaking around Japan's conquests in the Pacific and Nazi armies in North Africa. With the fall of Burma, its only remaining link to the outside world consisted of a tenuous airlift from India over the "Hump," a perilous spur of mountain ranges jutting south from the Himalayas into Burma. Stilwell wanted to immediately turn around and go back to the scene of his defeat. He believed the airlift to be an emergency expedient. To break the blockade of China, he wanted to build a road through north Burma.¹⁸ It proved to be a controversial proposal. Chennault wanted to fight an air campaign in China – not a ground war for Burma. Despite its modest beginnings, he

¹⁶ Jiang Jieshi, Wade Giles: Chiang Chieh-shih (蔣介石)

¹⁷ Joseph W. Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, ed. Theodore H. White (1948, reprint, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1975), 49.

¹⁸ Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, 108.

argued the airlift to be the best means of supply for the time being. Winston Churchill argued vehemently against any return to the fetid swamps and steaming jungles of the former British colony, claiming it would be like “eating a porcupine quill by quill.” Later, Lieutenant General Albert Wedemeyer, Stilwell’s successor, and Lieutenant General William Tunner, commander of the airlift, both disparaged Stilwell’s campaign as wasteful and unnecessary. According to Tunner, “despite all this effort and expense, the maximum amount of supply carried over the Burma Road . . . amounted to just six thousand net tons a month. Many of our thirteen [air]bases in India were topping that figure, constantly and without fail.”¹⁹ In July 1942, however, the potential of the airlift seemed much more limited, delivering only seventy-seven tons of aid.²⁰

The American war effort in China thus became a contest between the ideas of Stilwell and Chennault. Roosevelt complicated the issue by simultaneously supporting both – even though the meager resources available could not support both. Then, in April 1944, the Imperial Japanese Army launched Operation Ichi-go – the largest Japanese ground campaign of World War II. The offensive devastated the Nationalist armies in central China and ejected American airmen from their forward airfields. It upended Chennault’s plans and rendered Stilwell’s road moot. It was a decisive turning point for the war in China.

Following the surrender of Japan in September 1945, civil war erupted across the devastated land. With each Communist victory, politicians in the United States pointed fingers at their domestic political foes, accusing them of “losing China.” Stilwell’s polarizing legacy became a lightning rod for partisan bickering. The Left argued the loss

¹⁹ William Tunner, *Over the Hump* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1964), 129-130.

²⁰ Plating, *The Hump*, 94.

of China owed entirely to the corruption and ineptitude of Chiang Kai-shek. To them, Stilwell did his best, but Chiang sabotaged the Allied effort by using the Americans to fight the Japanese for him, whilst he hoarded lend-lease supplies for an ultimate showdown with the Communists. The Right argued China had been fighting the Japanese for four and a half years prior to American involvement. Despite its exhaustion, it continued to fight against a better-trained and better-equipped enemy. They maintained that Stilwell, influenced by communist sympathizers on his staff, downplayed accounts of Chinese resistance to get his way in Burma and in the process, undermined Chiang and weakened the Nationalist government.

The history of World War II in China thus became hopelessly mired in the politics of the Cold War. Published in 1948, two years after his death from stomach cancer, *The Stilwell Papers* is a collection of writings selected from the general's personal command journal, reflective essays, and letters to his wife from December 1941 until his dismissal in October 1944. The collection provides a fascinating glance into his mind. It also demonstrates the complete lack of respect and tact that marred his tenure in the Far East. To Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek is "the Peanut," and President Roosevelt, "Old Rubberlegs."²¹

Notable author and newsman Theodore White edited the collection. At first glance, White seems the perfect individual to present Stilwell's writings. As *Time's* war correspondent in China, he personally knew and interacted with all the major figures involved. While most supporters of Stilwell harbored a strong enmity toward Chennault, White had great respect for him and the Flying Tigers. "The AVG made a spectacular

²¹ Joseph W. Stilwell, *Stilwell Diaries*, (Hoover Institution), http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/library/docs/1944_stilwell_diary.pdf.

fight against odds,” he declared, “writing the finest record of any Allied unit in the [1942 Burma] campaign.”²² As the war progressed, however, he became disillusioned with the Nationalist government. He saw Chiang as an oppressive dictator who prosecuted the war against Japan with clueless ineffectualness. In his book *Thunder out of China*, he wrote “The story of the China war is the story of the tragedy of Chiang Kai-shek.”²³ He made his pro-Stilwell bias readily apparent, even hiding some of the general’s more tasteless invective. He changed the pejorative “Old Rubberlegs” to “F.D.R.,” for example.

Chennault responded with his own memoirs in 1949 – *Way of a Fighter* – written with the editing help of Robert Hotz, a former 14th Air Force intelligence officer. The book followed his testimony to Congress about the threat of world-wide communism. He did not varnish his criticism of Stilwell – or anyone else who opposed his air-centric view of how to prosecute the war in China. Critics widely dismissed the book as “narrow, self-righteous, and bitterly critical.”²⁴ He impugned the honor of a beloved American general who, deceased, could no longer defend himself. This perception lessened the impact of Chennault’s viewpoint on the historiographical debate about China – a debate that firmly swung in favor of Stilwell with Barbara Tuchman’s 1972 Pulitzer Prize winner, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China*.

Tuchman claimed the purpose of her book was to explore Sino-American relations using General Stilwell’s career as a vehicle. His involvement in China from 1911 through 1944 encompassed the critical years of the rise and fall of the Nationalist

²² Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, , xv-xvii.

²³ Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder out of China* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1980), xiii, xv.

²⁴ C.S. Blackton, “Review of Books,” review of *Way of a Fighter*, by Claire Lee Chennault, *Pacific Historical Review*, 18, no. 3 (1949): 415, accessed 18 January 2017, <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu>.

regime. And Tuchman believed Stilwell to be the ideal vehicle for such an exploration because of his “quintessentially American” personality and mannerisms; “He personified the strongest endeavor and, as it was to prove, the tragic limits, of his country’s experience in Asia,” she writes.²⁵ Not voiced are two underlying themes: first, a justification of Stilwell’s actions and attitudes, and second, an assertion he did not “lose” China to the Communists. John K. Fairbanks, an old China hand himself and professor of modern Chinese studies at Harvard University, best described Tuchman’s viewpoint in his introduction to the 1985 edition, in which he cited Stilwell as “one of America’s greatest field commanders.” He went on to write: “the American war effort in China was largely wasted” because of Chinese incompetence, but Stilwell “achieved miracles by sheer devotion to his task.”²⁶

There are several problems with a Stilwell-centric view of the war in China, the first being that Stilwell did not actually direct or participate in any of the fighting in that country. Rather, he pushed through Burma to open the Ledo-Burma Road while Chennault fought in China’s skies and Chinese generals directed Chinese armies on China’s battlefields. Consequently, Tuchman’s book follows Stilwell and ignores operations *in* China. Because Stilwell considered Chinese leaders incompetent and reluctant to fight, Tuchman justified his frequent absences from headquarters as necessary to keep his Chinese divisions moving forward in North Burma – despite any problems the theater commander’s absence may have caused on an operational or strategic level. She also refrained from mentioning any effective Chinese leadership

²⁵ Barbara W. Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* (1970, reprint, New York: Grove Press, 1985), xi.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

operating with little or no American supervision, such as General Xue Yue²⁷ at Changsha,²⁸ or Marshal Wei Lihuang²⁹ on the Salween Front. Lastly, by using Stilwell's diaries as the primary basis for her book, Tuchman failed to convey all the facts about his leadership style and personality. Rather than being brilliant, as she claimed, many thought him simple and stubborn. Colonel Philip Cochran, commander of the 1st Air Commando Group, called Stilwell "an opinionated, old-timey guy," whose "main compulsion was to take back what he had lost . . . try to take Burma back because he had been kicked out of it."³⁰ He pushed his troops beyond exhaustion, especially his lone American task force, Merrill's Marauders. The Marauders began the Burma campaign with three thousand soldiers; by the time he set them on Myitkyina, the critical keystone of north Burma, they had only one thousand sick, tired, and bedraggled men left. After that battle, they numbered fewer than three hundred. Captain Philip Piazza claimed the Marauders hated Stilwell for his self-centered stubbornness that cost them so dearly.³¹ Tuchman's book does not discuss this aspect. Instead, she characterized "Uncle Joe" as beloved by the GIs.³² Yet Tuchman's hagiography, which deified Stilwell, demonized Chiang, and caricatured Chennault, won a Pulitzer and became one of the defining pieces of literature on World War II in China.

Even newer volumes, such as *1943: China at the Crossroads*, edited by Joseph Esherick, though seeking to illuminate the Chinese perspective, still depend on Stilwell

²⁷ Wade Giles: Hsueh Yueh (薛岳)

²⁸ 长沙

²⁹ 卫立煌

³⁰ U.S. Department of the Air Force, Office of Air Force History, *Oral History Interview: Col Philip G. Cochran*, interviewed by Dr. James C. Hasdorff (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University, 1988), 225, 388-89.

³¹ Philip Piazza, interview by Daniel Jackson, January 30, 2009.

³² Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China*, 4.

and his acolytes for the military narrative. Both Jay Taylor's 2011 biography of Chiang, *The Generalissimo*, and Rana Mitter's 2014 history of the war through the persons of Chiang, Mao Zedong,³³ and Wang Jingwei,³⁴ *Forgotten Ally*, have sought to redress the distorted Stilwell-centric perspective of the war. Taylor based his work on Chiang's private diaries, which the generalissimo's family admittedly censored prior to their release. The diaries caused Taylor – no partisan of Chiang's – to reassess the man. He gives a sympathetic picture – not excusing errors in judgement, but explaining reasons for decisions and sketching the horrendously complex situation he faced. Neither *The Generalissimo* nor *Forgotten Ally* seek to explain the military situation in tactical or operational terms. They do not address the relationship of Chinese and American fighting men. However, they provide important political context by explaining the Chinese perspective.

The experience of American airmen in China is defined and distorted first and foremost by wartime memoirs. Without a doubt, the most famous of these is Robert Lee Scott's *God is my Copilot*.³⁵ Scott commanded the 23rd Fighter Group in China and dictated his reminisces in a mere three days after returning to the United States in March 1943. The book became an instant hit, selling eighty-five thousand copies by the end of the year. To his readers, Scott appeared every inch the swashbuckling hero at a time when America desperately needed heroes. His fellow pilots, however, knew him as a spinner of yarns and serial exaggerator. They resented the book for its portrayal of him as

³³ Wade Giles: Mao Tse-tung (毛泽东)

³⁴ Wade Giles: Wang Ching-wei (汪精卫)

³⁵ Robert Lee Scott, *God Is My Copilot* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1943).

a “one-man air force.”³⁶ Indeed, it serves to heroize the individual, representing patriotic wartime literature that outlasted its propagandist purpose.

Similarly, David Lee “Tex” Hill’s 2003 autobiography, *Tex Hill: Flying Tiger*, purports to be the unblemished recollections of the author’s combat in China. For years, Glen Beneda had encouraged him to write about his experiences.

“Tex, you’ve got to write a book!” he urged. Though the popular squadron and group commander had an amazing memory and knew how to tell a good story, he remained reluctant to put pen to page. The publication of the autobiography in 2003 thus came as a surprise to Beneda. The next time he saw Hill, he congratulated him:

“Tex, I’m glad you finally wrote a book!”

But Tex looked at him grimly. “I didn’t write it,” he replied. The response caught Beneda off guard. “My grandson wrote it!” he explained.³⁷ Reagan Schaupp, himself a major in the Air Force at the time, collected his grandfather’s stories and compiled them for publication. The result of his ghost writing is a beautiful paean to his heroic grandfather. But his hero worship and lack of reference to other sources introduce many problems into the narrative. Tex’s mission to bomb the Japanese 56th Division in the Salween River³⁸ gorge in May 1942, for example, becomes to his grandson, the only thing stopping the Japanese from marching to Kunming³⁹ and thence all of China. Schaupp in fact wrote about the mission for his Air Command and Staff College thesis, declaring it to be one of the most significant turning points of the war, on par with

³⁶ Robert Coram, *Double Ace: Robert Lee Scott Jr., Pilot, Hero, and Teller of Tall Tales* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 204, 206.

³⁷ Glen Beneda, interview.

³⁸ Called Nujiang (怒江), or “Angry River” in Chinese.

³⁹ 昆明

Midway and Stalingrad. This, he attributes solely to a handful of war-weary P-40s led by his grandfather. “No effective Chinese resistance remained between the Salween and the wartime capital of Chongqing,”⁴⁰ he writes. Almost single-handedly, Tex Hill prevented the collapse and surrender of all of China.⁴¹ Schaupp fails to mention that in concert with the air attacks, two divisions of the Chinese 71st Army crossed the Salween in a courageous counterattack. These thousands of troops fighting a pitched battle against a better-trained and better-equipped enemy apparently represented “no effective Chinese resistance.” Schaupp’s omission for the sake of heroizing his grandfather – whose heroic deeds, in truth, need no embellishment – eliminates the Chinese as co-agents of their own salvation.

The first attempt at a balanced historical study of the air war, Daniel Ford’s 1991 book *Flying Tigers*, explores only the combat service of the American Volunteer Group, which fought mostly in Burma from December 1941 until July 1942. Ford analyzes Japanese accounts and consequently calls into question the AVG’s record, calculating their kills at only 115 instead of their claimed 297.⁴² This generated considerable anger from veterans of the group – an anger further stoked by Ford’s simplistic characterization of the Americans as rowdy playboys “downing whisky-sodas” while the serious Japanese fought with discipline and professionalism.⁴³

To his credit, though, Ford not only challenges the hero-myth of the American fighter ace, he also humanizes the enemy. His work is limited in scope, but it reminds us

⁴⁰ Wade Giles: Chungking (重庆)

⁴¹ Reagan E. Schaupp, “The Battle of the Salween Gorge, China, May 1942: The Fourth Operational Turning Point in the Second World War and its Relevance to Effects-Based Operations,” (master’s thesis, Air Command and Staff College, 2006), 3.

⁴² Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and his American Volunteers, 1941-1942*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 333.

⁴³ Ford, *Flying Tigers*, loc. 3711 of 6878, Kindle.

of the problems with accurately reporting on the results of violent, confusing air battles. While AVG veterans angrily protested his questioning the legitimacy of their kills, most airmen acknowledged such claims could be wildly inaccurate. During the week of the second Schweinfurt raid, for example, 8th Air Force gunners claimed to have shot down 702 German fighters – more than twice as many as the Luftwaffe actually had in Germany at the time. In reality, the Germans reported losing between 80 and 125.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the ill feeling left among veterans meant Ford's work did not lead to more serious historical investigation of the air war. The state of the literature thus leaves us with a topic still dominated by political diatribe and wartime mythology.

The purpose of this study is to move beyond partisan and anecdotal histories to determine the war's true military and social dimensions through the experiences of America's missing airmen. For this, I relied predominantly on archival primary sources, scouring official records and every available missing aircrew report (MACR) and evasion report filed by the American Volunteer Group, China Air Task Force, 14th Army Air Force, and 20th Army Air Force. The result is a database of 605 aircraft and 1,722 airmen reported missing in the China Theater. The study does not encompass the entirety of the U.S. Army's China-Burma-India (CBI) command. Two weeks after Pearl Harbor, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill held the Arcadia Conference in Washington, D.C. Amongst other things, they announced the formation of the China Theater, encompassing China, Indochina (modern Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), and Thailand, with Chiang Kai-shek as its Supreme Allied Commander.⁴⁵ This Allied organization did

⁴⁴ Stephen L. McFarland and Wesley Phillips Newton, *To Command the Sky: The Battle for Air Superiority over Germany, 1942-1944* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 96, 129-130.

⁴⁵ Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Mission to China* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1953), 62.

not correspond with American theater organizations until Roosevelt recalled Stilwell in October 1944 and divided the CBI Theater into a separate China Theater, under Lieutenant General Albert Wedemeyer, and an India-Burma Theater, under Lieutenant General Dan Sultan. With this, he finally aligned the American China Theater with the Allied China Theater and the American India-Burma Theater with the Allied South East Asia Command (SEAC) under Lord Louis Mountbatten.⁴⁶

While the U.S. 10th Army Air Force fought in India and Burma, airmen who bailed out or crash-landed there faced very different circumstances and completely different social and political dynamics than existed in China. Their stories, though fascinating and no less dramatic, are not featured here. Additionally, the roughly six hundred transports lost flying the airlift between India and China encountered a different set of challenges than combat air forces in China and have previously been the subject of serious historical research. Their incredible experiences are also not recounted here. The dataset for this study consists of the combat aircraft of the AVG, CATF, 14th Air Force, and 20th Air Force reported missing on missions over China, Indochina, and Thailand. General Chennault had a reputation as a poor administrator, leaving much to be desired from his reports and paperwork. However, most MACRs and evasion reports originated at the squadron level. The Air-Ground Aid Service (AGAS), a relatively well-organized unit dedicated solely to the safe return of missing airmen, collected, processed, and preserved these reports. Far from a mere representative sample, the resulting dataset is a near-complete record of every airman who crashed or bailed out more than a day's journey from a friendly airbase.

⁴⁶ Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Time Runs out in CBI* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 6.

Aggregating and analyzing these reports provides a view of China's war across its geographic breadth free from political, ideological, or mythologizing lenses. The Army Air Forces used missing aircrew reports as a repository for all information pertaining to those crews who failed to return from missions. This information served to account for, find, and aid missing airmen. AGAS representatives or squadron intelligence officers debriefed airmen who returned and compiled their experiences into evasion reports. These reports – meant to help subsequent evaders and kept secret for decades after the war – remained free from self-glorification and Cold War politics. They are a rare honest and unfiltered witness to China at war. They are also more typical of the American experience than existing popular literature. Memoirs of fighter aces, even when historically accurate, are hardly representative. Only forty-eight pilots received credit for shooting down five or more enemy airplanes in the China Theater.⁴⁷ Several others became aces with kills scored before or after their service in China.⁴⁸ However, in May 1944 alone, the Army Air Forces counted 1,643 aircrews on hand in China, Burma, and India, including fighter pilots, reconnaissance pilots, and bomber and transport crews.⁴⁹ Most of these men – officers and enlisted; pilots, navigators, bombardiers, gunners, crew chiefs, and radio operators – did not routinely tangle with Japanese fighters in swirling dogfights. In fact, one of the interesting statistics that emerged from aggregating these reports is that Japan's armies, rather than its air force, presented the greatest threat to American aircraft in China. Ground troops of the Imperial Japanese Army succeeded

⁴⁷ Frank J. Olynk, *AVG & USAAF (China-Burma-India Theater) Credits for the Destruction of Enemy Aircraft in Air-to-Air Combat World War 2* (Self-Published, 1986).

⁴⁸ The database includes several aces, though having to crash or bailout hardly constituted their best day.

⁴⁹ Office of Statistical Control, *Army Air Forces Statistical Digest*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945), 89.

where its air force failed, evicting the Americans from their central China airbases and bringing down more of their planes with small arms and anti-aircraft fire than any other cause. None fell in greater numbers to these troops than America's wonder-fighter, the North American P-51. Mustangs accounted for more than a third of aircraft reported missing by China-based combat air forces. Over half of them fell to surface fire (see Figures 4 and 5).

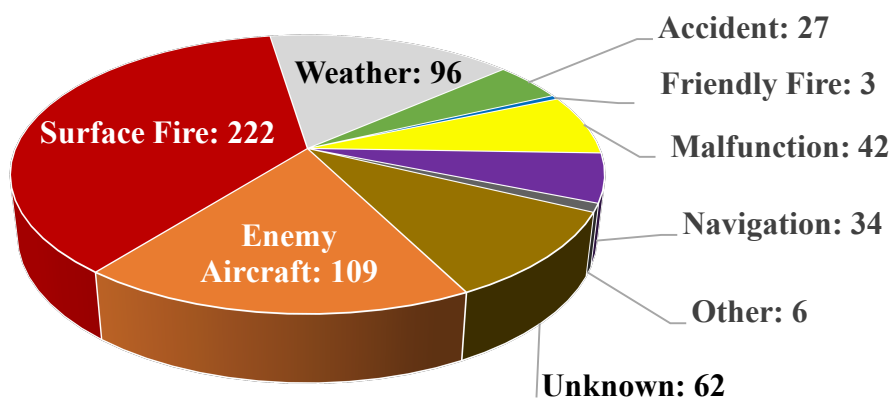


Figure 4. Missing Aircraft in China by Cause

A further utility of these reports is the ability to map political influence throughout China. The reports of fallen airmen scattered across the entire country provide a sampling of the influence, predominance, and effectiveness of the Imperial Japanese Army and various Nationalist, Communist, warlord, and collaborationist groups (see Figure 6). Amongst American and Chinese leaders, General Stilwell claimed the Nationalists did not or would not fight; General Chennault claimed they did and would effectively with the support of his planes; Mao Zedong claimed the Communists fought ferociously against the Japanese whilst the Nationalists focused on wiping out the Communists; and Chiang Kai-shek claimed his Nationalist troops held the Japanese at

bay while the Communists resisted him and undermined his leadership.⁵⁰ These competing and contradictory claims make for choppy historical waters to navigate. The reports filed by airmen and intelligence officers provide a ground-truth perspective divorced from these partisan narratives.

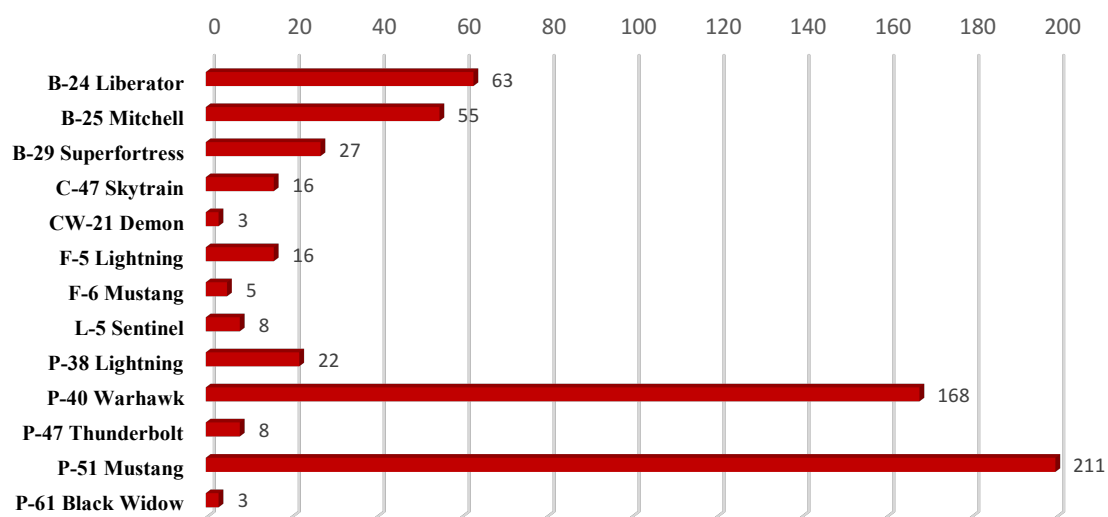


Figure 5. Missing Aircraft in China by Type

This study presents the story of America's missing airmen in China thematically. Chapter II introduces the American airmen – their backgrounds, preconceptions, motivations, and how they began to develop tools for evasion. Chapter III then introduces the Chinese, how they weathered invasion and aerial oppression, the nature of occupation and collaboration, and their motivation for helping downed Americans. Next, Chapter IV describes the buildup of Chennault's defensive fighter force into an offensive strike force, its struggles with the weather and terrain, its nascent guerrilla raids, and early evasion ratlines from Hong Kong.

⁵⁰ Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, 76-80; Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, ed. Robert Hotz (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1949), 223; Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 143, 171.

In describing the war in the air, Chapter V details the Japanese air offensive in the summer of 1943 followed by the Americans commencing operations from the forward airfield at Suichuan, in Jiangxi Province. Offensive missions from that base brought fallen airmen into contact with a surprisingly active guerrilla movement that proved adept at keeping them out of enemy hands. Success in the air preceded disaster on the ground, however. Chapter VI details Operation Ichi-go, the Imperial Japanese Army's drive to seize a rail corridor through central China and eliminate Chennault's air bases. It proved to be the largest Japanese ground offensive of World War II. Downed airmen evaded with the remnants of shattered Nationalist Army units and collateral damage from American air strikes increased as intelligence broke down.

All through the war, and particularly in the wake of Ichi-go, Chinese Communists expanded their influence throughout the country. Chapter VII addresses how as Chennault arrayed his air force to attack along the full length of Japan's new central China corridor, fallen airmen came into increasing contact with Communist troops. These proved just as willing and dependable in bringing them safely back to American control. Finally, Chapter VIII explores the breakdown of US-China relations in the aftermath of World War II and how it inhibited the search for the missing and confused the memory of the war. That relationship began to reemerge in the 1990s and 2000s, as American veterans returned to China and reconnected with the men and women who rescued them during the war.

Ultimately, the story that emerges is one of cooperation and fraternity between ordinary Americans and Chinese. Lee Gregg and Glen Beneda certainly did not anticipate or plan to bail out over Japanese-occupied China. Neither of them had previous

meaningful contact with the Chinese. Both found themselves injured and unable to fend for themselves. And both found themselves in the hands of selfless Chinese patriots who came to their aid. In the modern era of escalating rivalry and confrontation between the United States and the People's Republic of China, this story of wartime fraternity can serve as a touchstone for cooperation instead of conflict in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, America's efforts in China depended on local forces enabled by American advisors, equipment, and air support. This dynamic, much different from the United States' efforts in other theaters of the war, more closely mirrors America's present military conflicts. Understanding the successes and failures of U.S. policy in China during World War II can inform efforts today. Most importantly, the brave Chinese and Americans who joined together to fight a common enemy deserve to be remembered – especially the nearly four hundred airmen still listed as missing in action. This is for them.

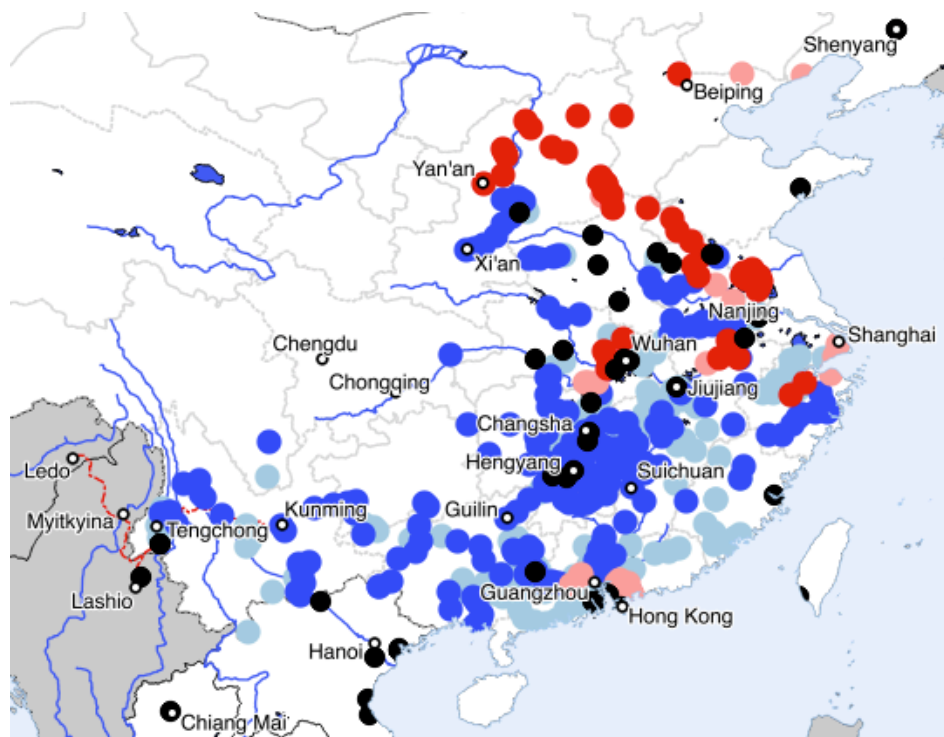


Figure 6. Political Influence

CHAPTER II

July 24, 1941

San Francisco, California

Not much of a crowd had gathered to see off the MS *Bloemfontein* – not like in the movies, anyway. As the ship put out into the harbor, George McMillan looked back to see the city of San Francisco reaching from the water's edge to the tops of distant hills. The Oakland Bridge stretched out to the east. Ahead, he saw Alcatraz and beyond that, the Pan Am Clipper lifting from the water as it winged its way toward Hawaii. How he wished he were aboard that beautiful flying boat instead! The ship passed under the Golden Gate, picking up speed until it reached its full sixteen knots. Mac suddenly found himself struck by the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. Though not prone to sea sickness, he nevertheless looked forward to putting in at Honolulu. They would only be there long enough to take on food and water, but he hoped to steal a quick swim at Waikiki Beach.¹

In addition to crew and cargo, *Bloemfontein* carried one hundred passengers – twenty-eight of them destined for Burma and the American Volunteer Group. Few had as much experience in Army fighters as he had. His logbook documented 548 hours in fighters and 794 overall.² Some of the others had spent less than six months in the service. He met one with only 350 hours total flying time – 350 hours! He flew that much in training alone!³

¹ George McMillan to Gladys Bray Hamilton, July 27, 1941, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

² George McMillan Flight Records, July 1941, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

³ George McMillan to Malcolm McMillan, September 26, 1941, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

He thought back to an incident from just before they sailed. Mr. Aldworth, of the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO), approached him and inquired about his experience flying fighters and his length of service and rank in the Air Corps. CAMCO was the front company employing the American Volunteer Group's pilots and ground crews. Mac had resigned his commission as a first lieutenant to join the group. His decision came after two years as a peacetime fighter pilot while the rest of the world erupted in war. He wanted to prove himself and test his abilities. Upon hearing his resume, Mr. Aldworth immediately upgraded his contract to Class Two, meaning a promotion to Flight Leader. Mac thought the episode a bit odd: CAMCO's New York office had all the dope on him for months. They must have been holding out, hoping to recruit more experienced men. No bother. He would enjoy the extra \$75 a month. Not that it mattered much. He instructed the company to deposit all but \$100 of his \$675-a-month paycheck in the bank anyhow. He looked forward to the responsibility of the position, though. He knew he could handle it. After two years watching the world burn without an opportunity to apply his skills, he felt ready to fight for a foreign government in a faraway war.⁴

On May 2, 1942, Lieutenant Robert Klemann readied his North American B-25C, *Texas Tornado*, to depart Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida. As he lined up on the runway, he set propeller rpm to 2,600 and then smoothly advanced the throttles to 44.3 inches of manifold pressure. Slowly, his bomber began to accelerate down the runway. As the airspeed increased, he eased back on the yoke. The warplane struggled aloft, loaded at least five hundred pounds over its max weight. As soon as the wheels left

⁴ George McMillan to Mrs. Malcolm McMillan, July 26, 1941, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

the ground, the copilot reached down to unlock the gear handle and moved it to the “UP” position. Klemann’s eyes darted to the far side of the instrument panel to check the cylinder head temperatures and oil pressure. He adjusted the cowl flaps and coolant shutters. The bomber climbed skyward. Finally, he was on his way overseas! He had been trying to get into the war since before Pearl Harbor – even going so far as to sign up for a second American Volunteer Group – all to no avail. The young lieutenant commanded a crew of six, including a copilot, navigator, bombardier, flight engineer, and radio operator. Together, they winged out over the crystal blue waters of the Caribbean. The navigator, Lieutenant Alton Peck, calculated a course for Puerto Rico.⁵

The airmen had spent the last two weeks at Morrison Field – one of six medium bombers assigned to Project 157 under the command of Major Gordon “Gordie” Leland. They finally received their orders that morning to proceed to Karachi, India.⁶ They had a long way to go; Puerto Rico represented just the first stepping stone down to South America, across the Atlantic, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East – a route never before flown by combat crews. It would take a month for Klemann and his men to complete the twelve-thousand-mile journey, logging over eighty flying hours before ever embarking on their first combat mission.⁷

⁵ Daniel Ford, “A Pilot of the 2nd AVG,” Warbird’s Forum, 2010, <http://www.warbirdforum.com/klemann.htm>; U.S. Army Air Forces, *Pilot’s Flight Operating Instructions for Army Models B-25C and D Series* (Chicago: F.J. Riley Printing Co., 1943), 23.

⁶ Now Pakistan.

⁷ Chapman Hale, interview by author, December 3, 2007; Chapman Hale, “From Columbia, SC, to China Part I,” *Newsletter of the 22nd Bomb Squadron Association* 23, no. 1 (February 2012); Chapman Hale, “From Columbia, SC, to China Part II,” *Newsletter of the 22nd Bomb Squadron Association* 23, no. 2 (May 2012); Chapman Hale, “From Columbia, SC, to China Part III,” *Newsletter of the 22nd Bomb Squadron Association* 23, no. 3 (August 2012); Robert Klemann, “That B-25 bombing raid on Lashio,” Warbird’s Forum, 2014, <http://www.warbirdforum.com/b25s.htm>; Fourteenth Air Force, 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945), 36.

Lieutenant Everett W. “Brick” Holstrom did not know his destination until shipboard on his way across the Pacific. The USS *Hornet* steamed out of San Francisco Bay on April 2, 1942, with sixteen B-25s strapped to its deck – sixteen B-25s and eighty men to fly them, all but five of whom remained ignorant as to their objective. As the west coast of the United States disappeared from view, Brick heard the ship’s loudspeakers crackle to life. “Now hear this. Now hear this,” the captain’s voice boomed, “This force is bound for Tokyo!” The cheers of two thousand men suddenly thundered from every corner of the vessel; elation swept from bow to stern. More cheers rose from across the water as the message reached the other ships of the task force via semaphore.⁸

Later that day, Lieutenant Colonel James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle called his bomber crews together in the mess hall. “We’re going to bomb Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Kobe, and Nagoya,” he told them. He let the news sink in. Alongside elation, a new anxiety filled the Army fliers. They would be the instrument of revenge against Japan. Their strike would be the first to hit the enemy homeland after the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor – talk about high stakes! “We’ve made arrangements to land at small Chinese airfields not far inland,” Doolittle continued. “We’ll gas up as quickly as we can and then fly on to Chongqing.”⁹ Listening to the briefing, Brick could not then have predicted the drama of bailing out in the dark and rain over China, of being rescued by farmers and guerrillas. Nor could he imagine he would remain there another fourteen months, given a spot promotion to major and command of a bomber squadron.¹⁰

⁸ Dennis R. Okerstrom, *Dick Cole’s War: Doolittle Raider, Hump Pilot, Air Commando* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2015), 63.

⁹ Carroll V. Glines, *The Doolittle Raid: America’s Daring First Strike against Japan* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2000), 52.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Air Force, Office of Air Force History, *Oral History Interview: Brigadier General Everett W. Holstrom*, interview by Dr. James C. Hasdorff (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University, 1988), 30.

Second Lieutenant Lee Gregg also could not have predicted the trajectory of his role in the war. He arrived in North Africa in the spring of 1943 – too late to take part in the fighting against Rommel’s Afrika Korps in Tunisia. An uneasy quiet descended on the Mediterranean for two months whilst the Allies prepared to invade Sicily. Contact with the enemy was rare. Flying from Algeria with the 1st Fighter Group, he shot down a German warplane on a long fighter sweep over the sea. Overall, his service proved anticlimactic. When he heard about Major Robert Kirtley combing the training command and three veteran P-38 groups in North Africa to form a squadron for China, he decided to volunteer. This new unit had no designation; Gregg’s orders assigned him to “Squadron X.” Twelfth Air Force transferred Kirtley to the 1st Fighter Group the day before Squadron X departed, but Captain Sam Palmer took charge in his stead.¹¹ At 0430 hours on the morning of July 6, 1943, twenty-five Lockheed Lightnings took off from Algiers into the burning red of the rising sun. The vibrant blue of the Mediterranean stretched into the distance off their left wings; the drab brown of the rugged Saharan frontier off their right. Twenty-five airmen left one war to join another – leaving the Nazis behind in the Mediterranean to join the fight against the Imperial Japanese Army in China.¹²

Every American airman arriving in China – be he civilian volunteer, Tokyo raider, or serviceman following orders – found himself motivated by a keen sense of adventure and awed at being part of something much bigger than himself. These men did not constitute a particularly diverse group; they were, with few exceptions, white and, without exception, male. Most came from middle-class upbringings. The officers had at

¹¹ Robert Kirtley, e-mail to Daniel Jackson, October 8, 2013.

¹² Thomas D. Harmon, *Pilots Also Pray* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1944), 110.

least a year of college under their belts, though the Army later waived that requirement. Many who served in the pre-war Air Corps had four-year college degrees. George McMillan joined in 1938, only six credits short of graduating from the prestigious Citadel Military College in South Carolina. Few of the men had ever before ventured far from their hometowns, let alone traveled abroad. They brought their parochial perspectives to a geographically, culturally, linguistically, and politically alien land.

Glen Beneda left small-town McCook, Nebraska, at the age of eighteen to become a fighter pilot. He hitched a ride to Omaha with family friend Ralph Egle to sign the paperwork and take the physical.¹³ Paul Crawford, the middle child in a family of seven, grew up in Americus, Georgia – a remote town sixty-five miles southwest of Macon. Both his brothers also joined the Army Air Forces. Paul went on to fly the P-51. Tim and John both flew bombers in Europe and North Africa. Paul had never left the South before he joined the Army. He had never seen an Asian, nor heard the Chinese language. Like his fellow aviators, his preconceptions rested on popular culture and racial stereotypes. Comic strips like *Terry and the Pirates* and folk tales about the diseased miasma of slums and opium dens prejudiced their perspectives. For Crawford, dozens of films featuring the exploits of Detective Charlie Chan left a deep impression. The movies painted the Chinese in a more benevolent light, with the sly Chan always outsmarting the bad guy. But the character – always played by a white actor – reinforced crude racial clichés.¹⁴ Invariably, most American intelligence reports referred to Chinese civilians who rescued airmen casually (and probably unintentionally derisively) as “coolies,” or “natives.”

¹³ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview by Daniel Jackson, November 29, 2015.

¹⁴ Paul Crawford, interview by Daniel Jackson, October 15, 2016.

Reports from Europe typically specified the occupation of civilians, rather than referring to them as “peasants.”

A powerful China lobby in New York and Washington D.C. also shaped American attitudes. Media magnate Henry Luce’s publications, including *Time* and *Life*, paternalistically advocated for the plight of Chiang and his Nationalists in their struggle against Japan. Moreover, for those airmen serving in the U.S. Army Air Forces, the much-trumpeted exploits of the AVG left an indelible impression. Many of them read Robert Scott’s 1943 memoir, *God is My Copilot*. When they arrived in China, they found themselves serving under the same legendary leader – Major General Claire Lee Chennault.

When Lee Gregg finally landed at Kunming at the end of July 1943, Doreen Davis, Chennault’s attractive secretary, ushered him and a handful of Squadron X pilots into the general’s office. Throughout his tenure in China, Chennault made every effort to meet the new fighter pilots arriving in his command, though sometimes his duties precluded it – especially later in the war. He wanted to indoctrinate them in his particular methods of aerial guerrilla warfare – methods learned the hard way through years of tough experience.¹⁵

The general greeted the men warmly and invited them to sit down. Bold and dynamic, his hard, angular jaw with its distinctive, defiant set, he seemed the embodiment of the larger-than-life character they expected. Jet black hair topped his deeply lined, weather-beaten face and dark eyes radiated the intense energy of his active mind. He spoke to them about the challenges of fighting in China: the rugged terrain, the

¹⁵ Harmon, *Pilots also Pray*, 123-124; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 228.

poor weather, the meager supplies. He talked about teamwork, about using the strong points of their equipment against the weak points of the enemy's. Teaching came naturally to him. He taught primary school in rural Louisiana before he joined the Army in 1917. Later, he taught and managed the curriculum for fighter aviation at the Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Alabama. Now he taught his fighter pilots all he knew about the Japanese – the sum of bitter lessons learned during the retreat from Shanghai to Chongqing and from the remarkable successes of the American Volunteer Group. Though he had been a teacher his whole life, he firmly believed the instruction he gave his airmen in China to be the best teaching of his career.¹⁶

“The biggest problem of modern fighters is intelligence,” he told them. “Without a continuous stream of accurate information keeping fighters posted on exactly where the bombers are, attempts at interception are like hunting needles in a limitless haystack. Defending fighters can intercept the bombers before they reach their target if furnished timely information.” This concept formed the basis of the air raid warning system he helped establish throughout China. He described it to his pilots as “a vast spider net of people, radios, telephones, and telegraph lines that covers all of Free China accessible to enemy aircraft.” The net in Yunnan Province¹⁷ had 165 radios at observation posts set in concentric rings around American airbases – some in such remote locations that even southwest China's ubiquitous mule trains could not reach them. The observers reported to a central command post, where fighter controllers plotted the raids to determine their

¹⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 112.

¹⁷ 云南

target and then marshaled fighters to intercept from an advantageous position. The net allowed Chennault to concentrate his meager forces against a numerically superior foe.¹⁸

Airfields all over China signaled the *jingbao*,¹⁹ or alarm, by raising red, ball-shaped paper lanterns up a flagpole. One ball went aloft when the warning net detected Japanese aircraft airborne. Two balls meant the fighter controllers thought that particular airfield the likely target. Three indicated enemy airplanes directly overhead. To save precious gasoline – every gallon of which had to be flown in over the “Hump” – the Americans waited to takeoff until enemy aircraft approached within twenty minutes of the field. That gave them just enough time to climb to altitude and position themselves to ambush the incoming formation.²⁰

“You will face Japanese pilots superbly trained in mechanical flying,” Chennault informed his new arrivals. “They have been drilled for hundreds of hours in flying precise formations and rehearsing set tactics for each situation they may encounter. Japanese pilots fly by the book. They have plenty of guts but lack initiative and judgement. They go into battle with a set tactical plan and follow it no matter what happens. Bombers will hold their formations until they are all shot down. Fighters always try the same tricks over and over again. God help the American pilot who tries to fight them according to their plans.”²¹

“The object of our tactics,” he explained, “is to break up their formations and make them fight according to *our* style. Once the Japanese are forced to deviate from their plan, they are in trouble. Their rigid air discipline can be used as a powerful weapon

¹⁸ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 21, 82.

¹⁹ 警报: most Americans assumed it meant “air raid,” but it meant “alarm,” or “warning.”

²⁰ Donald S. Lopez, *Into the Teeth of the Tiger* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1997), 1.

²¹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 112.

against them. You must use the strong points of your equipment against the weak points of the enemy. Each type of plane has its own strength and weakness. The pilot who can turn his advantages against the enemy's weaknesses will win every time. You can count on a higher top speed, faster dive, and superior firepower. The Jap fighters have a faster rate of climb and better maneuverability. They can turn on a dime and climb almost straight up. If they can get you into a turning combat, they are deadly."

"Fight in pairs," he emphasized, "Use your speed and diving power to make a pass, shoot, and break away. You have the edge in that kind of combat. All your advantages are brought to bear on the Japanese deficiencies. Close your range, fire, and dive away. Never stay within range of the Jap's defensive firepower any longer than you need to deliver an accurate burst. It's better to fight and run away and live to fight another day."²²

The lecture had the pilots on the edge of their seats. Never before had such a legend taken the time to mentor them in such depth. The low Cajun drawl, fatherly warmth, and charisma of the "Old Man" drew them in. He spoke with the confidence and authority of a wizened old warrior who had been fighting the Japanese longer than they could imagine.²³

Chennault had arrived in China on May 31, 1937, a retired U.S. Army Air Corps captain forced to leave the service because of his failing health and radical views on fighter aviation. His ideas formed crossways to those of the Air Corps; the brass thought of the fighter as outmoded and the bomber invulnerable. Already self-conscious about his humble upbringing in rural Louisiana, Chennault took criticism of his ideas personally.

²² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 112-113; John R. Alison, interview by Daniel Jackson, May 9, 2007.

²³ Harmon, *Pilot's also Pray*, 124.

Though his subordinates found him warm and charismatic, his superiors thought him exasperating, impatient, and combative. They gladly hastened his departure from active duty. Upon his retirement, Song Meiling,²⁴ the wife of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, hired him to make a comprehensive evaluation of the Chinese Air Force. The Chiangs believed a modern air arm essential to their project of uniting China under the *Guomindang*, or Nationalist Party,²⁵ while simultaneously keeping it from disintegrating in the face of Japanese imperialism. The job paid \$12,000 a year – far more than Chennault’s Air Corps salary and enough to take care of his wife and eight children back in Louisiana. War broke out just five weeks after his arrival.²⁶

China could only field a hodgepodge fleet of obsolete airplanes against the state-of-the-art Japanese air force. Its pilots, though brave, lacked skill and experience. Many had graduated from the Italian-run flying school at Luoyang,²⁷ which boasted a dubious one-hundred-percent completion rate. Chennault found these pilots “a menace to navigation.” He immediately offered his services to Chiang in whatever capacity the generalissimo saw fit. He knew the war would give him an opportunity to test his ideas in combat. At the end of July 1937, he organized a warning net around the Nationalist capital at Nanjing²⁸ and directed Chinese fighters to a number of successful intercepts. They claimed fifty-four bombers shot down in just three days. Then the Japanese began sending ample fighter escort, inflicting crippling losses on the defenders.²⁹

²⁴ Frequently referred to as “Madame Chiang.” Wade Giles: Soong May-ling, 宋美龄

²⁵ Often abbreviated GMD or KMT. Wade Giles: Kuomintang, 国民党

²⁶ Ford, *Flying Tigers*, loc. 148 of 6878, Kindle.

²⁷ Wade Giles: Loyang, 洛阳

²⁸ Wade Giles: Nanking, 南京

²⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 40, 49, 54.

Chennault often stood atop Nanjing's Metropolitan Hotel during these raids, smoking a Camel cigarette, watching the Japanese and studying their tactics.³⁰ But the consummate fighter pilot would not content himself to remain on the ground. He convinced Song Meiling to buy him a Curtiss Hawk 75 Special, the blunt-nosed, fixed-gear predecessor of the P-40. He soon found himself maneuvering through enemy flak and fighters over the Yangzi Valley.³¹ He never claimed to be more than an observer on these flights, but many of his men alleged he actively engaged the Japanese in combat. Some estimated he shot down as many as fifty-five enemy planes. "There can be no question. Dad flew combat against the Japs," his son Max later claimed. The Chinese apparently paid him a \$500 bounty for each plane he downed – the same terms they later offered the AVG. According to Max, "That's the money he used to put me through college."³² Chennault himself always remained mum on the issue, happy to leave his combat experience ambiguous – and happy to insinuate. "Many times I went aloft in the Hawk to umpire air battles over Nanjing, Nanchang,³³ and Wuhan and found that umpire-baiting was as popular in China as it is in Brooklyn," he told his men. "The baiters paid a price."³⁴

In November 1937, in light of the rapid disintegration of the Chinese Air Force, Chiang secured the support of the Soviet Union. The Soviets sent four "volunteer" squadrons of fighters and two of bombers to join the fight in China. Their arrival signaled

³⁰ Ibid., 47.

³¹ The Yangzi River (Wade Giles: Yangtze, 扬子江) is often referred to as "The Long River," Changjiang, 长江.

³² Max Chennault, "Flying Tigers Up Sun," in *Up Sun!* ed. Wallace Little and Charles Goodman (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, Inc., 1990), 9.

³³ 南昌

³⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 58

a wane in Chennault's influence. Chiang pulled him from combat and sent him to Kunming, where he trained Chinese pilots to fly thirty new Hawk 75s.³⁵ Soviet support had an expiration date, however. With tension rising in Europe, they signed a non-aggression pact with Japan in August 1939. The last Soviet airmen withdrew from combat by early 1940.³⁶

Meanwhile, in May 1939, the Japanese began relentless terror-bombing attacks against Chongqing, Kunming, and other population centers of Free China. The Chinese Air Force continued intercepting the raids, but in August 1940, the Japanese unleashed their new Mitsubishi A6M Type Zero Carrier Fighter. Superior to anything the Chinese could field, the "Zero" achieved complete air dominance. In a September 13, 1940, raid on Chongqing, thirteen Zeros downed thirteen Chinese fighters and seriously damaged eleven more, killing ten pilots and injuring nine without sustaining any losses. China's Aeronautical Affairs Commission³⁷ immediately ordered the remnants of the Air Force withdrawn from combat to preserve a core of experienced pilots.³⁸

Such was the reputation of the new Mitsubishi – in China and in the early stages of the Pacific war – that American pilots came to refer to all Japanese fighters informally as "Zeros." Even in official reports, pilots often referenced the same aircraft interchangeably by this generic term and by their specific type. During Lee Gregg and Glen Beneda's dogfight southwest of Wuhan on May 6, 1944, for example, the pilots referred to their ambushers as Zeros, but in their reports identified them specifically as

³⁵ Ibid., 73.

³⁶ Hakan Gustavsson, *Sino-Japanese Air War 1937-1945: The Longest Struggle* (Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2016), loc. 1689 of 4813, Kindle.

³⁷ Hangkong Weiyuanhui, 航空委员会

³⁸ Gustavsson, *Sino-Japanese Air War*, loc. 1143 and 1879 of 4813, Kindle.

Ki-43 Army Type 1 Fighters, known by their Allied codename “Oscar.” Indeed, Major Toshio Sakagawa led twenty-four Ki-43-IIs of the veteran 25th Air Regiment³⁹ from Wuhan that day to intercept the Americans. Similarly, Captain James M. Williams reported in a December 1, 1943, fight over Hong Kong:⁴⁰ “I saw Zeros coming up behind us and said so over the radio... I never saw more than five and they were all Tojos.” He thus identified the generic “Zeros” specifically as Ki-44 Army Type 2 “Tojo” Fighters.⁴¹

Japanese air supremacy ended on December 18, 1941, when thirty-four P-40s from the American Volunteer Group landed at Kunming. Each of the fighters boasted the group’s trademark shark mouth painted on the engine cowling. While training in Burma, pilots Erik Shilling, Lacy Mangleburg, and George McMillan saw the scheme in a photograph of an Australian P-40 on the cover of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*. They approached Chennault for permission to decorate their fighters similarly. He agreed, but insisted it be a group insignia.⁴² Thus adorned, the American fighters remained unchallenged at Kunming until the twentieth. That morning, at 0945 hours, Chennault received a phone call from Colonel Wang Shuming, commander of the Chinese 5th Air Force. “Ten Japanese bombers crossed the Yunnan border at Lao Cai heading northwest,” he reported. Chennault hurried to the code room and watched as the warning net continued to update progress of the raiders.

“Heavy engine noise at station X-Ray-One-Zero.”

“Unknowns overhead at station Peter-Eight.”

³⁹ The air regiment, or hiko sentai, is roughly equivalent to an American group.

⁴⁰ Xianggang, 香港

⁴¹ 76th Fighter Squadron, Historian, *Evasion Report of Capt J.M. Williams*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1943).

⁴² Jack Samson, *The Flying Tiger: The True Story of General Claire Chennault and the U.S. 14th Air Force in China* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 1987), loc. 2070 of 8428, Kindle.

“Noise of many above clouds at station Charlie-Two-Three.”

The fighter control board showed the plots slowly inching toward Kunming. Chennault stepped outside and fired off a red flare to send his “Sharks” aloft. He ordered 2nd Squadron to intercept and 1st Squadron to hold in reserve west of the city. Both engaged in the ensuing melee, shooting down four of ten attacking bombers. The Japanese refrained from striking Kunming for sixteen months after that battle and never again carried out sustained terror bombing against the cities of Free China.⁴³ Though three-quarters of its aerial combat took place over Burma, in just one action over southwest China, the American Volunteer Group made its shark-mouthed P-40s a symbol of vengeance for the United States and hope for China. The Japanese, on the other hand, found the insignia bewildering: “If these markings were found on a submarine, the significance could perhaps be understood,” a Tokyo newspaper remarked, “but on a plane?”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the presence of the fighters at Kunming, regardless of their nose art, incited enough fear for the Japanese Army Air Force to steer clear.

Given the defensive posture of his forces early in the war, Chennault put little thought into evasion and recovery of his airmen. Most of his pilots bailed out within a short distance of the airfield and returned without difficulty. Their aircraft, even if destroyed, could at least be salvaged for parts. The AVG lost seven men on its few offensive forays deep into enemy territory: two captured and one killed in Thailand, one captured and one killed in Indochina, and one captured and one killed on the remote east coast of occupied Fujian Province. These airmen went down well outside the reach of the Guomindang, though three of the four prisoners eventually escaped.

⁴³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 128-130.

⁴⁴ Ford, *Flying Tigers*, loc. 4315 of 6878, Kindle.

When Erik Shilling crashed in the mountains west of Kunming in December 1941, the local people initially thought him to be Japanese.⁴⁵ He spent the night in the cockpit of his demolished Curtiss-Wright Demon interceptor, alone, wrapped in his parachute to keep warm against the cold and drizzle. In the early hours of dawn, he saw two men and a boy approach the wreck along a dirt path. He called out to them. Startled, they turned around and ran away. Alone again, he decided to follow the path in the direction of Kunming. As he gathered his things, a crowd of thirty men arrived. Han Chinese often thought of these people, Yi tribesmen,⁴⁶ as “hillbillies” or “rednecks.” Short, stocky, and muscular, they wore loin cloths reaching down to their thighs and leather vests that left their chests exposed. One of them began questioning Shilling, though he could not understand.

“Meiguo ren!” Shilling announced, motioning to himself. But the frustrated tribesman evidently did not understand Mandarin and began screaming. Shilling had a passport written in Chinese. He pulled it out and handed it to his interrogator. Evidently the man could not read, either. He took the booklet and, holding it upside down, leafed through it. Shilling pulled it out of his hands, turned it right-side up, and handed it back. The crowd erupted in laughter.

Humor and his interrogator’s loss of face seemed to diffuse the tension, but the suspicious tribesmen nonetheless set about building a stockade around the wrecked fighter. Shilling suddenly realized they thought he might be an enemy airman! They had probably never seen a Japanese *or* white man before, though they had ample opportunity

⁴⁵ CW-21 Unknown Serial Number, 3PS, AVG, Lost due to Malfunction 60 miles west of Kunming, Flight Leader Eriksen E. Shilling, Rescued.

⁴⁶ Also known as the *Luoluo*.

to observe hostile warplanes overhead. While they built his tree branch prison, he pulled a Victrola and stack of records that miraculously survived the wreck out of his baggage compartment. The scratchy sound of music made the crowd temporarily forget their work and they gathered around, talking and pointing excitedly. They kept Shilling under guard that night and carried him down the mountain in a crudely-fashioned sedan chair the next morning. Blond-haired and blue-eyed, he became a curiosity in every village through which they passed. Eventually, they delivered him to a radio operator working at a remote station for the air raid warning net. This man did not speak English either, but he had an English-Chinese dictionary. Slowly, painstakingly, Shilling and the radioman communicated one word at a time. They arranged for him to be picked up at a nearby grass airfield the next day. He returned to the AVG feeling he had barely dodged death at the hands of fearsome mountain tribesmen.⁴⁷

Shortly thereafter, the airmen received cloth chits issued and stamped by China's Aeronautical Affairs Commission. Each seven-and-a-half- by nine-and-a-half-inch piece of silk featured the Chinese flag printed on the top half and a unique serial number and twelve Chinese characters on the bottom. On behalf of the bearer, the characters proclaimed: "This foreigner has come to China to help in the war. Soldiers and civilians, one and all, rescue and protect him."⁴⁸ Many AVG pilots had the iconic chit sewn to the back of their leather flying jackets. This later changed less conspicuously to inside the jacket, though many airmen, like Glen Beneda, folded it and carried it in a pocket instead.

⁴⁷ Erik Shilling, *Destiny: A Flying Tiger's Rendezvous with Fate* (Pomona, CA: Ben-Wal Printing, 1993), 118-127.

⁴⁸ Author's translation. Lai hua zhu zhan yangren junmin yiti jiu hu, 来华助战洋人军民一体救护, (Traditional Characters: 來華助戰洋人軍民一體救護). Later versions added "America" (美国, Traditional Characters: 美國) in parentheses after "foreigner."

Formally known as an escape chit, or blood chit, aircrews usually referred to it as their “back flag,” “identification flag,” or simply their “flag.” Significantly, the chit promised neither reward nor compensation for rescuing Americans. In fact, while the Guomindang or 14th Air Force reimbursed many rescuers for their expenses, most never received payment for their services or sacrifice.

The Army Air Forces also eventually issued a booklet called the “pointie-talkie,” which featured questions or phrases in English accompanied by Chinese translations. Airmen could point to a phrase, rescuers could read the Chinese version, and then point to a response, which the airman could then read in English. Seventy percent of evasion reports specifically mention use of the flag and pointie-talkie. According to 1st Lieutenant Walter Krywy, a P-51 pilot who fell victim to small arms fire while strafing a train near Guzhen,⁴⁹ Anhui Province,⁵⁰ in early 1945, “The pointie-talkie was the most valuable item I had. I believe it saved my life.” During the initial two weeks after he bailed out, he did not encounter a single person who spoke English. “I felt the two most important items of evasion equipment I had were my pointie-talkie and my Chinese identification flag.”⁵¹

In Shilling’s case, the utility of the flag and pointie-talkie may have seemed limited with illiterate mountain tribesmen. Indeed, nine percent of reports complained of rescuers who could not read Chinese characters. However, the chit eventually became so widely recognized even the illiterate knew its meaning by sight. Those who could not

⁴⁹ 固镇

⁵⁰ Wade Giles: Anhwei, 安徽

⁵¹ AGAS-China, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Walter Krywy*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945). MACR 11628: P-51C 43-25216, 16FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 20 miles south of Suzhou, 1Lt Walter Krywy, O-702815, Rescued.

decipher the characters understood the symbolism of the Chinese flag and the official chop of the Aeronautical Affairs Commission. Second Lieutenant George Snyder found himself in Shilling's predicament when his P-51 suffered a complete electrical failure in December 1944. Disoriented without his instruments and low on fuel, he made a wheels-up landing along the east bank of the Wuding River in Shaanxi Province.⁵² "A single Chinese was by the side of the plane when I climbed out," he reported. "I showed him my pointie-talkie but he was unable to read." A hostile crowd from the nearby village soon surrounded him. The tension escalated and he nearly panicked. He opened his jacket to show them the identification flag sewn to the inside. The villagers found one among their number literate enough to make sense of the flag and booklet. After leafing through the pointie-talkie, the man informed them they had an American on their hands. "Immediately the attitude of everyone changed," recalled Snyder. "I learned later that when I first landed, the populace was uncertain as to whether I was Jap or friendly."⁵³

While the flag and pointie-talkie played a vital role in the recovery of downed airmen, neither could help in the pivotal crisis that unfolded in east China during the spring of 1942. On the night of April 18, seventy-five airmen⁵⁴ descended on Zhejiang,⁵⁵ Jiangxi,⁵⁶ and Anhui provinces, unannounced following Doolittle's raid on Tokyo.

General Arnold, chief of the Army Air Forces, thought Chennault too close with Chiang

⁵² Wade Giles: Shensi, 陕西

⁵³ 529th Fighter Squadron, Office of the Intelligence Officer, *Report of Crash Landing and Return of 1st Lt. George F. Snyder*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945).

MACR 10631: P-51B 43-6789, 529FS, 311FG, Lost due to Malfunction 7 miles south of Mizhi, 2Lt George F. Snyder, O-692720, Rescued.

⁵⁴ One crew proceeded to the Soviet Union instead and landed safely at Vladivostok. The Russians interred them for thirteen months, but they eventually escaped into Iran.

⁵⁵ Wade Giles: Chekiang, 浙江

⁵⁶ Wade Giles: Kiangsi, 江西

to trust him with details of the raid. Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall informed Stilwell in the vaguest possible terms so he could prepare airfields near Quzhou to receive the bombers. But Stilwell – preoccupied with the disastrous campaign in Burma – gave the project little priority, assigning two officers whom he forbade to communicate with Chennault or the Chinese. This lack of trust resulted in none of the fields broadcasting on their assigned radio frequencies. Consequently, not a single one of Doolittle’s bombers landed safely in China. Three airmen died and eight fell into the hands of the enemy. Without warning or preparation, the Chinese rescued the remaining sixty-four.⁵⁷

Brick Holstrom piloted the fourth bomber off the pitching deck of the *Hornet*. A picket boat spotted the task force and alerted Japan, necessitating a launch 250 miles further east than planned. The takeoff proved much easier than his training flights at Eglin Field, but the early launch meant he would arrive over Japan in broad daylight. It also meant he might not have enough fuel to make it to China. Prior to takeoff, his crew stocked the bomber with ten extra 5-gallon cans of gasoline, but as he ran the numbers in his head, the extra distance plus a stiff headwind still brought them up short. To add to their difficulty, a hydraulic leak rendered their turret useless. As they winged low over Sagami Bay, southwest of Tokyo, a flight of Japanese fighters intercepted them and dove to attack. One by one, the enemy airmen peeled off in a crisp display of precision flying. Coolly, professionally, they lined up on the B-25 and opened fire. Brick looked out the window to see their rifle-caliber bullets raking his left wing. Without a turret, his ship had no way to defend itself. And with a full load of bombs, it had no chance of getting away.

⁵⁷ James M. Scott, *Target Tokyo: Jimmy Doolittle and the Raid that Avenged Pearl Harbor* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015), loc. 2936 of 13654, Kindle.

“The hell with this!” he exclaimed over the intercom. He ordered the bombardier to salvo their bombs into the bay while he took evasive action. They sped away for China, the only one of sixteen B-25s not to strike the Japanese homeland.⁵⁸

Brick dropped to a mere 150 feet above the East China Sea. The wind shifted to aid their progress, but visibility dropped to nearly nothing as it began to rain furiously in the deepening twilight. His crew made ready to ditch, donning life jackets and preparing the raft. Then an island appeared suddenly out of the storm. Brick jinked to avoid it. His navigator suggested they climb to eight thousand feet to avoid any terrain in case they crossed the coast.

“I think we are over land,” he offered helpfully a few minutes later.

“I hope you’re right,” Brick thought to himself. As the fuel gauges hovered on empty, he ordered the crew to prepare to bail out. “Okay,” he instructed them, “when I get up, you guys get out and I’ll be right behind you.” They removed the escape hatch as he crouched to get out of his seat. Apparently, he had not done a great job of trimming the airplane for level flight; the left wing dropped instantly. He quickly sat back down and straightened it out. By the time he looked back again, his entire crew had jumped. He scrambled back through the hatch as fast as he could manage. The parachute blossomed over his head, he swung once, and then hit the ground. In the dark and rain, he pulled out the pint of whiskey issued to him on the *Hornet* and drank it all. Then, shivering, he wrapped himself in his parachute to wait out the night.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Holstrom*, 24-26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-27. Doolittle Raider Number 4: B-25B 40-2282, Lost near Quzhou, Lt Everett W. Holstrom, Pilot, Rescued; Lt Lucian N. Youngblood, Copilot, Rescued; Lt Harry C. McCool, Navigator, Rescued; Sgt Robert J. Stephens, Bombardier, Rescued; Cpl Bert M. Jordan, Engineer-Gunner, Rescued

As dawn broke, he found himself on a remote hillside. He kept to the highlands that day, working his way westward. The next morning, he finally made contact with a group of farmers. They gathered around him, talking excitedly. More appeared as if from nowhere until it seemed as if thousands surrounded him! Aboard the *Hornet*, he learned a phrase to identify himself as an American, but they did not seem to understand. Still, the farmers did not appear to feel threatened and they allowed him to pass the night in their village whilst they sent a messenger to alert nearby guerrillas. When the irregulars arrived, Brick tried to identify himself to their leader. He drew a map with flags and a figure with a parachute and motioned to himself. Then, he drew four more parachutes. The guerrilla captain seemed confused. Brick had to admit, the sketch looked pretty terrible! The leader sent out a runner and they waited awkwardly until he returned with a magazine bearing a photo of Roosevelt on the cover. “Yes,” the pilot nodded, gesturing between himself and the photograph, “he and I.” That did the trick. The guerrillas soon delivered him to Quzhou,⁶⁰ where Doolittle put him and Davey Jones in charge of collecting stragglers.⁶¹

Quzhou boasted a small gravel airfield where many of the raiders had intended to land. Six of the bombers, including Brick’s, crashed near the town and two passed well beyond it. Had Stilwell’s men succeeded in setting up the radio beacon or had the raiders arrived over China in daylight, as originally planned, it is likely those eight could have landed safely (see Figure 7). Chennault later complained that had he known about the raid, a single AVG radioman could have talked the bombers into friendly fields with the aid of the warning net. He felt betrayed by the lack of trust exhibited by Arnold,

⁶⁰ Wade Giles: Chuchow, 衢州

⁶¹ *Holstrom*, 27-28.

Marshall, and Stilwell. That slight, along with others that followed, engendered a bitterness that came to define his relationship with those men.⁶²



Figure 7. Doolittle's Raid on Japan

For their part, the Japanese practiced terrible revenge for the violation of their homeland. They launched a punitive expedition that thoroughly destroyed the airfields near Quzhou and razed every village through which they believed the raiders passed. In the process, they slaughtered over two hundred thousand men, women, and children. The Imperial Japanese Army not only killed those suspected of helping the Americans, but annihilated their families and villages.⁶³

Brick gave his leather jacket and wrist watch as souvenirs to the farmers who helped him, not realizing the items meant death if discovered by enemy soldiers. The guerrilla captain who walked him out recognized the danger, though. He collected the items and returning them to the pilot at Quzhou. This did not prove to be the case

⁶² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 168.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 243.

elsewhere; gifts left in goodwill to willing rescuers spelled doom when discovered by Japanese troops.⁶⁴

Remarkably, despite the high price ordinary Chinese civilians paid for the raid on Japan, the rescues of over seven hundred China-based American airmen took place *after* the Imperial Army concluded this punitive campaign. In other words, the Chinese knew the cost, but they chose to help anyway. Why? What could have possibly motivated individual Chinese to aid foreigners they did not know in the face of overwhelming brutality and massive retaliation practiced by the Japanese?

⁶⁴ Holstrom, 29.

CHAPTER III

July 28, 1941

Chongqing, China

Air raid sirens wailed. A second lantern rose to the top of the jingbao pole. The warning net had detected over one hundred Japanese warplanes winging their way up the Yangzi. Soldiers, civilians, and government officials calmly filed into air raid shelters dug out of the city's steep cliffs to wait out the bombardment. Seven Chinese pilots took off in Soviet-built fighters to challenge the raiders. They sighted them east of the city, scores of bombers maintaining flawless formation in rigid "V"s. Before they could close with the twin-engine craft, enemy fighters "bounced" them in an ambush from above. Three of the Chinese monoplanes fell from the sky in flames. The Japanese reported no losses.¹

By the summer of 1941, Japanese bombing had become as much an inevitable feature of the Chongqing landscape as the seasonal shifts in weather. Deep in the interior, Nationalist China's wartime capital lay secreted behind the seemingly impenetrable mountain borders of Sichuan Province. The Yangzi River and one of its tributaries, the Jialing,² bounded the promontory on which the city perched, joining northeast of the remote metropolis before thundering through perilous gorges to the fertile plains of central China. The chill of winter wrapped the city in fog and mist – a protective shroud from which it emerged in the sweltering heat and humidity of summer. Every May through September, hundreds of Imperial Japanese Army and Naval air force bombers

¹ Gustavsson, *Sino-Japanese Air War*, loc. 2034 of 4813, Kindle.

² Wade Giles: Kia-ling, 嘉陵

swarmed from out of their bases near Wuhan to fix their bombsights upon this city on a hill. Their expert airmanship focused lethal explosive payloads on the key center of gravity for the entire Asian war – the will of the Chinese people. Yet the panic that accompanied the start of this aerial onslaught subsided within a matter of weeks. Somehow, without an effective air force and with no anti-aircraft guns to speak of, the people carried on with grim determination.³

To the Imperial Japanese Army, the bombing of Free China seemed the next logical evolution in its brutal subjugation of East Asia. In 1937, its mechanized forces overran Beiping⁴ and swept across the north China plains. Its troops defeated Chiang's best divisions in savage urban fighting around Shanghai⁵ and continued to Nanjing, where they ruthlessly punished the people for their resistance. They drove up the Yangzi to Jiujiang,⁶ Nanchang, and finally Wuhan. The death of untold thousands of Chinese soldiers and civilians attended each of these conquests: 187,000 soldiers at Shanghai, at least 260,000 soldiers and civilians at Nanjing.⁷ In slaughtering two hundred thousand men, women, and children following Doolittle's raid on Tokyo, the Imperial Army followed a long-established pattern. By the summer of 1941, Japan controlled China's skies, along with ninety-five-percent of its industry, one-fourth its area, and half its population.⁸ But its land offensive had ground to a halt – at Zhengzhou⁹ in the north,

³ White, *Thunder out of China*, loc. 289 of 4197, Kindle.

⁴ Wade Giles: Peiping, 北平, now Beijing (Peiking) 北京

⁵ 上海

⁶ Wade Giles: Kiukiang, 九江

⁷ Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), loc. 1750 of 9322, Kindle. Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 4, 6.

⁸ John M. Kelley, "Claire Lee Chennault: Theorist and Campaign Planner," (master's thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 1993), 7.

⁹ Wade Giles: Chengchou, 郑州

where Chiang ordered his generals to breach the Yellow River¹⁰ dams; at Changsha in the center, following General Xue Yue's remarkable victory; and at Kunlun Pass¹¹ in the south, after a determined counterattack by two armored divisions of China's 5th Army. Inevitably, the population of Free China swelled with refugees. Displaced by war, they found themselves with nowhere to go, trapped by crippling poverty and hyperinflation, pinned to the bullseye of Japanese bombers. Unable to progress on the ground, and in complete control of the air, Japan determined to bomb the Chinese into submission.¹²

As in much the rest of Free China, the people of Zhijiang,¹³ in western Hunan Province,¹⁴ lived under the constant threat of aerial attack. Even in the outlying villages, people refrained from wearing light colored hats or clothing for fear of coming under the guns of marauding Japanese planes. Gong Kaibing¹⁵ lived in a small village three miles outside of town. He had served with the Nationalist police force in the city before the war, but his father's ailing health compelled him to return home to work the family farm. Sometimes, he watched as upwards of two dozen bombers droned overhead on their way to pummel Zhijiang, defenseless save for a pitiful battery of four antique Russian guns. The people had no recourse except to shelter in caves or trenches. They could do little more than absorb the punishment and carry on.¹⁶

At the center of this storm stood Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, resolute and unbending. "We will fight for a hundred years, if necessary," he declared in an address to

¹⁰ Huanghe, 黄河

¹¹ 崑崙

¹² Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, loc. 2765 and 3285 of 9322, Kindle.

¹³ Wade Giles: Chihkiang, (also transliterated Chekiang), 芷江

¹⁴ 湖南

¹⁵ 龚开炳

¹⁶ Gong Kaibing, interview by Kun Shi and Daniel Jackson, August 7, 2017; Tan Guanyue, interview by Kun Shi and Daniel Jackson, August 7, 2017.

the Chinese people. “We are losing battles, but we need only to win the final battle. China will never yield!”¹⁷ Ironically, he had been reluctant to fight the Japanese at first, thinking such action would interfere with his project of uniting fractured China under his Nationalist regime. But following the Imperial Japanese Army’s brazen display of aggression at the Marco Polo Bridge in July 1937, the people made it clear they would no longer tolerate inaction. “The people” – did such a thing exist? China certainly did *not* exist as a unified political entity. Though Chiang’s suppression of the Communists and campaigns against the warlords had done much toward that end, Nationalist China remained fragile and unfinished. No matter their political inclinations, however, Communists, warlords, and Nationalists all identified as *Chinese*. In other words, though China did not exist as a unified political entity, without a doubt it existed as a cultural one – a fractured state, but a unified nation.¹⁸

Communists and warlords alike pledged their support to Chiang in the greater cause of resisting the invader. Sequestered in the remote wilderness of Shaanxi Province, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), his professed mortal enemies, insisted on a United Front. Even Long Yun,¹⁹ the one-eyed warlord of Yunnan, and Yan Xishan,²⁰ the so-called “model governor” of Shaanxi, rallied to his banner. Though none of them could agree on politics, they agreed China must remain Chinese. And even those who thought Chiang a corrupt fascist could not help but admit his stoic defiance made him a powerful

¹⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 78.

¹⁸ Taylor, *The Generalissimo*, 144.

¹⁹ Wade Giles: Lung Yun, 龙云

²⁰ Wade Giles: Yen Hsi-shan, 阎锡山

symbol of resistance. He never became the undisputed leader of a united China, but for a time, he managed to helm a fragile coalition against a common enemy.²¹

At his direction, China embarked on a construction project akin in scale and consequence to the Great Wall. A people without an air force built over one hundred airfields (see Figure 8). Gravel runways dotted the land from Yunnan and Sichuan²² provinces in the southwest, to Shaanxi in the north, Hunan and Guangxi²³ in the center, and Jiangxi, Guangdong,²⁴ and even Fujian²⁵ in the east – an area spanning over a thousand miles between Kunming and Quzhou. They built these airfields by hand, thousands of men, women, and children rising like human ant heaps, their work sites looking like medieval battlefields with banners waving and dust clouds billowing from tens of thousands of conscripts working and singing. To build airfields capable of handling the weight of four-engine heavy bombers, they had to dig as much as five feet into the ground and lay a stone foundation. They quarried the stone by hand, carried it in baskets on their backs, crushed it and laid it in the ground – all without modern machinery. They smashed more of it to fine gravel for the top layer and sealed it with mud, packing down each layer and leveling it smooth with enormous concrete rollers pulled by up to two hundred people. This enterprise harnessed China's richest resource – its people – to build what they hoped would one day serve as the springboard from which they would push back the invader.²⁶

²¹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 42.

²² Wade Giles: Szechuan, 四川

²³ Wade Giles: Kwangsi, 广西

²⁴ Wade Giles: Kwangtung, 广东

²⁵ Wade Giles: Fukien, 福建

²⁶ Ernest Hemingway, "Chinese Build Air Field," in *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades*, ed. William White (New York: Scribner Classics, 2002), loc. 5272-5338 of 7862, Kindle.

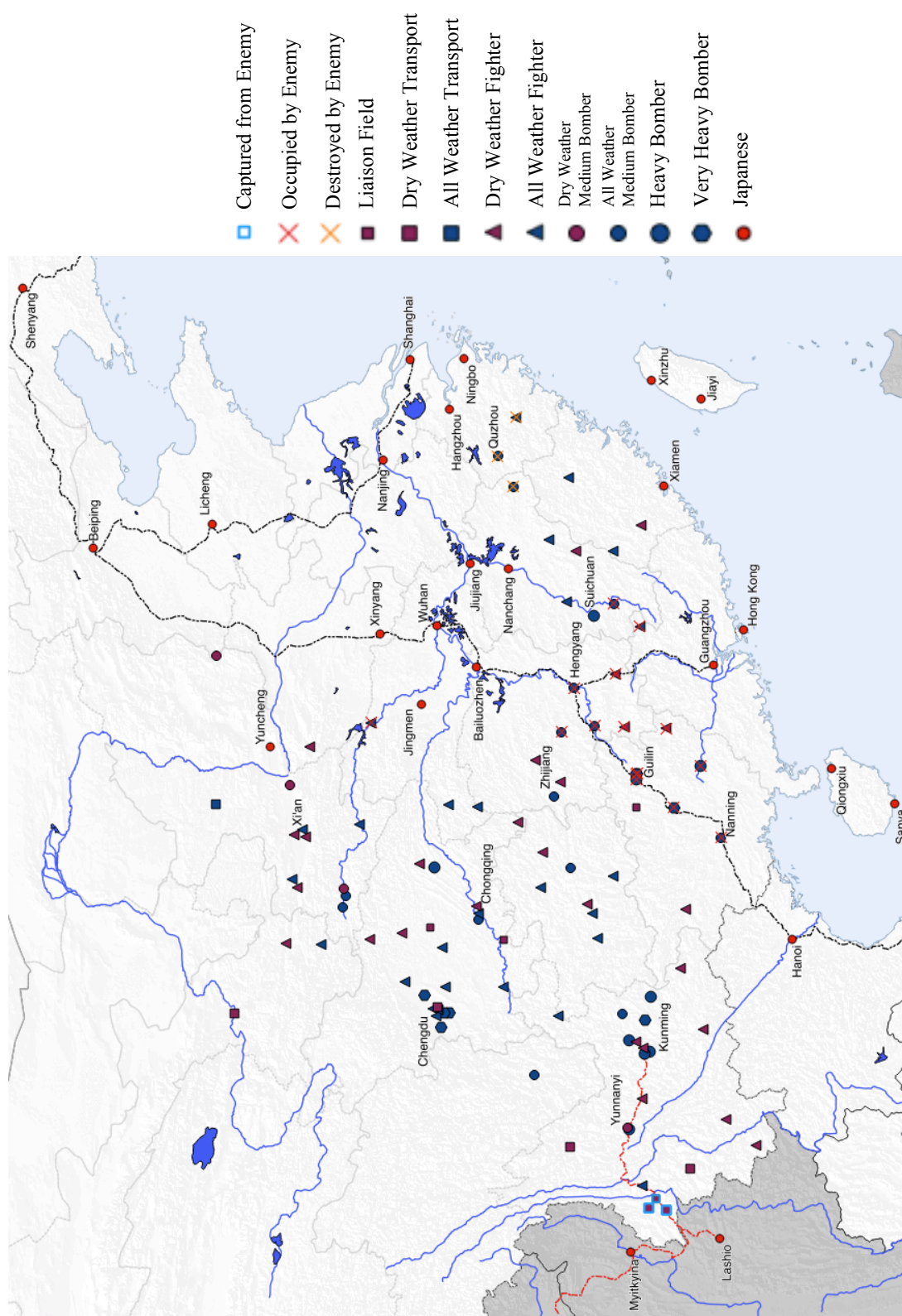


Figure 8. China's Airfields

The airfields seemed a vain hope, but what else did they have? The disciplined, professional army of the nascent Nationalist state largely perished in its fighting withdrawal up the Yangzi from 1937 to 1939. In its place, Chiang had no choice but to depend upon warlords and semi-autonomous provinces to assemble a disparate coalition of conscripts and refugees. Many of the conscripts came from the poorest strata of the peasantry, the *lao baixing*,²⁷ or “old hundred names” – common people who could not bribe their way out of servitude. Once rounded up by local magistrates, they found themselves marched away in chains to their assigned regiments, oftentimes never to see their loved ones again. Americans who witnessed the corruption of conscription and the “squeeze” of crooked bureaucrats did not always understand the limited authority of the Guomindang. They assumed the central government presided over a cohesive state; Nationalist propaganda reinforced this perception. The government’s reach, however, rarely extended beyond tenuous agreements with capricious warlords.²⁸

Chiang promised that sweeping reforms would take place after he consolidated the nation. He never seemed to realize he could not have one without the other. His reluctance to reform lost him credibility and engendered further resistance. He had limited options within the constraints of his very limited power, though. In the resulting mire of perception and propaganda, most American airmen did not see a people who resisted bravely for eight long years. They saw poverty, superstition, corruption, inflation, black-marketeering, warlordism, and political division. These iniquities seemed so ingrained in everything they witnessed, they believed them to be the result of some crucial weakness in the government, the culture – maybe even the people themselves.

²⁷ 老百姓

²⁸ Romanus and Sunderland, *Time Runs Out in CBI*, 369-370.

They did not recognize them as symptoms of a prolonged and brutal war. They mistook effect for cause.²⁹

As a deserter, Pei Haiqing³⁰ seemed to symbolize the rotten decay of Nationalist China. Conscripted from his home in Sichuan Province, he fought with the 5th Army, first in the defense of Guangxi in 1940, then as the Japanese drove through Burma into China in 1942. His unit disintegrated in the frenetic and futile fighting near Tengchong.³¹ He ran. For a poor, slight-framed boy torn from his home and thrown into a doomed battle, what choice existed but to run? Thousands like Pei deserted. Nothing so consummates hopelessness as the futility of fighting a losing battle. Over the Gaoligong Mountains³² he fled, as the summer rains gushed in torrents down the thickly wooded, steep, rugged slopes. The tide of Japanese conquest stopped at the base of the mountains, on the west bank of the narrow, rapid Salween River. The Chinese call it Nujiang, or “Angry River.” Pei stopped on the east bank. He settled in a small village south of Liuku.³³ He decided to become a fisherman. For two long years, a standoff ensued – the Japanese on west bank, the Nationalists on the east. The enemy, though only one hundred yards away, could do nothing to Pei. Neither side could cross the perilous river in sufficient strength to challenge the other. Reminders of the war remained frequent, however. Pei often saw warplanes fly by, but he could never tell if they were Japanese or American.³⁴

²⁹ White and Jacoby, *Thunder out of China*, loc. 1002, 1338, and 1739 of 4197, Kindle.

³⁰ 裴海清

³¹ Wade Giles: Teng-chung, 腾冲

³² Wade Giles: Kaolikung, 高黎贡

³³ Wade Giles: Lukou, 六库

³⁴ Pei Haiqing, interview by Kun Shi and Daniel Jackson, August 10, 2017.

On the morning of October 17, 1943, four P-40s dove into the narrow canyon of the Nujiang to attack a Japanese encampment. Each fighter dropped a set of three 30-pound fragmentation (frag) bombs, followed by a 500-pound demolition bomb, and then another three frags. As the flight leader released his final volley, the triggering mechanism on the frags malfunctioned. They went off immediately, tearing off the right wing. Engulfed in flames, the fighter spiraled out of control until it hit the ground and exploded. The frags of the last airplane in the formation likewise prematurely detonated. The leader of the second element watched in horror as his flight leader crashed and then looked back to see his wingman tumbling through the air ablaze. He reported seeing him cartwheel into the river. He did not see a parachute. "I circled target for five minutes and observed no special activity," he wrote, "other than plane burning in the river." He presumed both pilots had perished.³⁵

Standing alone on the east bank, just a mile north of the Japanese camp, Pei watched as the fighter tumbled and hit the water. It seemed he could not escape the war after all. He waded into the rapid, dangerous river and pulled 2nd Lieutenant Francis Forbes from the wreck. Miraculously, the pilot had suffered only minor injuries. The diminutive Pei dragged the big American to shore. The encounter lasted only a brief moment. Within minutes, Nationalist Army forces arrived on the scene to evacuate the pilot back to American control. In that moment, however, Pei's brave act showed the distinction between his true character and the circumstances that led to his desertion a

³⁵ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 983*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1943); U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 984*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1943). MACR 983: P-40K 42-46255, 25FS, 51FG, Lost due to Malfunction near Liuku, Capt Jack T. Irwin, O-421105, Killed. MACR 984: P-40K 41-36518, 25FS, 51FG, Lost due to Malfunction near Liuku, 2Lt Francis C. Forbes, O-792977, Rescued.

year before. Something about saving a fallen airman created hope, where before defeat after defeat caused utter hopelessness.³⁶

Only thirteen years old when the war began, Liu Zhenghua³⁷ grew up in a wealthy peasant family in Hubei Province.³⁸ His uncle, an educated man who went to school in Japan, ensured Liu attended a prominent primary school in Wuhan. When the Japanese captured the city in 1938, Liu and his classmates escaped to Changsha, under the guns of the Japanese Army Air Force the entire way. Despite his family's wealth, he decided he wanted to serve and journeyed to Hengyang³⁹ in 1941 to take the entrance exams for the Central Military Academy.⁴⁰ He passed and found himself assigned to the branch in Kunming.⁴¹ It took him and his fellow cadets three long months to walk over six hundred miles to Yunnan Province. Several starved to death traveling through the impoverished countryside *en route*. They arrived to find a Dante-esque sign hanging over the entrance which read, "Enter not this gate, you who are afraid of death." The ominous message promised further trials for young men who already escaped the advance of Japan's army, fled under the guns of its air force, and survived a perilous journey across the country. The sign, however, reflected the reality of an army hemorrhaging company grade officers in years of combat against a better-equipped foe. The Academy compressed its curriculum into an intense course of study, but even then, Liu received his commission as an infantry officer early, departing for the front lines in April 1944.⁴²

³⁶ Pei, interview.

³⁷ Wade Giles: Liu Cheng-hua, 劉正華

³⁸ Wade Giles: Hupeh, 湖北

³⁹ 衡阳

⁴⁰ Also called the Huangpu Military Academy (Wade Giles: Whampoa)

⁴¹ The branch in Kunming opened in 1935 at the site of the old Yunnan Military Academy. Alumni of the old academy included Zhu De, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army

⁴² Liu Zhenghua, interview by Samuel Hui and Pan I-jung, March 2013.

Another refugee-turned-officer, Lu Caiwen,⁴³ attended the Kunming branch of the Central Military Academy after fleeing his hometown of Tengchong. This storied old trading center, once visited by Marco Polo, lay in a valley 5,500 feet above sea level, on the far side of the massive twelve-thousand-foot-tall monolithic range of the Gaoligong Mountains. The town of twenty thousand, the largest population center west of the Salween River, featured famous jade markets and straddled historic trade routes linking it to India through Burma. Still surrounded by its imposing medieval stone wall, the town made a neat square in the valley, its four corners pointing like a compass in the cardinal directions. The wall stood over thirty feet tall and twenty feet thick, built of compacted earth encased in large blocks of volcanic stone, each face almost a mile in length.

Lu grew up near the wall and climbed it many times as a child. From it, he watched on May 10, 1942, as a column of three hundred troops approached the city. The population inside the walls had swollen with wounded soldiers and desperate civilians fleeing the Japanese conquest of Burma. Chaos reigned as the Imperial Army continued its advance across the border into southwest China. Long Chunwu, Superintendent of the Tengchong Frontier Zone and son of Long Yun, the provincial warlord, had three battalions of provincial troops at his disposal. He ordered them to retreat. They looted all the jade, silk, opium, and artwork they could carry and departed. The people felt betrayed by these “warlord soldiers,” who had bullied and taxed them, but when the enemy arrived, disappeared without firing a shot.

⁴³ 卢彩文

As he lay atop the wall, Lu could hear gunfire and shouting. He felt paralyzed, unsure of what to do or where to hide. Then he saw them: soldiers carrying long rifles tipped with gleaming bayonets, steel helmets atop their heads.

“Chinese soldiers don’t wear steel helmets,” he realized. “The Japanese are here.”⁴⁴

Lu had climbed the wall many times as a child; now he scaled it once more to escape into the mountains north of the city. Most of Tengchong’s residents fled. Japanese soldiers terrorized the countryside in their wake, plundering rural villages of rice and grain, taking chickens, cows, and pigs. They tortured and killed any they suspected as guerrillas or spies and many others besides. In Tengchong County alone, they murdered over thirteen thousand civilians, burned down more than twenty thousand homes, and stole more than sixty thousand tons of grain and over fifty thousand livestock. They conscripted the men to build fortifications. They raped the women.⁴⁵ “In some of the districts through which I passed, every woman caught by the Japanese had been raped without exception,” reported *Time* correspondent Theodore White. “The tales of rape were so sickeningly alike that they were monotonous unless they were relieved by some particular device of fiendishness.”⁴⁶

Atrocities only served to encourage further resistance. Some villagers formed guerrilla groups to protect themselves and their families. Some, like Lu, escaped east to join the Nationalist Army. The Japanese did not have the men or material to physically occupy every conquered space. Though often depicted covering vast areas, their

⁴⁴ Lu Caiwen, interview by Daniel Jackson, March 2009.

⁴⁵ Li Yongxiang, “The Ethnic Minorities in Tengchong County and the Anti-Japanese War,” *Annual Review of the Institute for Advanced Social Research* (October 2011): 6: 12.

⁴⁶ White, *Thunder out of China*, loc. 930 of 4197, Kindle.

occupation is best understood in terms of points and lines. The Imperial Army controlled strategic ports and cities and the lines of communications connecting them. By contrast, in Western Europe, the Nazis could depend upon a much more robust transportation infrastructure to facilitate their occupation of an area less than a tenth as vast. The Japanese had to depend on collaborationist “puppet” regimes to facilitate their rule in the space in between. They established a puppet government for occupied Yunnan headquartered in Longling.⁴⁷ In fact, they created lackey regimes all over occupied China, most notably that led by the former premier of the Nationalist republic, Wang Jingwei. His “Reorganized National Government of China,” headquartered in Nanjing, did not possess any authority over the multitude of puppet regimes throughout the country. The Japanese believed in divide and conquer, even when it came to their “allies.” To augment their million-man garrison in the country, they hired mercenary Chinese to police the countryside in “security brigades.”⁴⁸

Lu Caiwen graduated from the Central Military Academy as an intelligence officer and led a plain-clothes intelligence team behind the lines back to Tengchong County. In the small village of Dadong, he met with Sun Zhengbang, the leader of a security brigade working for the puppet government. Sun’s actions branded him a traitor, but Lu’s contacts indicated he might be willing to work with the Nationalists. Japanese soldiers and puppet troops surrounded Sun’s compound and Lu had to sneak in barefoot for the surreptitious meeting. His heart raced. The tension nearly paralyzed him. He came face-to-face with Sun inside. He did not mince words.

⁴⁷ Wade Giles: Lung-ling, 龙陵

⁴⁸ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, loc. 3771 of 9322, Kindle; CCTV, “Journeys in Time: The Chinese Expeditionary Force,” CCTV English Website, 2012, <http://english.cntv.cn/program/journeysintime/20121101/106987.shtml>.

“The Chinese will one day return to Tengchong,” he declared. “You’re serving the Japanese; what kind of end will you come to? Think about your family, your property, your life. You cannot protect them!” Sun probably cooperated with the Japanese to protect his family and property. But Lu spoke the truth; when the Nationalists returned, he would be tried as a traitor and probably executed. He could hedge his bet by remaining in command of the security brigade, while passing information to Lu’s intelligence team. He agreed.

Lu still had to make it out of the compound. He crept passed the guards, then stepped out into the street and walked casually away, expecting shouts or bullets to follow him at any moment. Nothing happened. None of the guards seemed to notice. Relieved, he wiped the sweat from his forehead and set out to rejoin his team.⁴⁹

As Lu discovered, collaboration proved to be anything but a black-and-white issue. Puppet regimes played an ambiguous role in the war, seeming to cooperate out of convenience, necessity, or pragmatism, rather than ideological agreement with the enemy. Motivations ranged from the purely selfish to those desperately trying to prevent another disaster like the Rape of Nanjing.⁵⁰ Either way, they found the cost of overt resistance too high. There is considerable evidence some puppet troops carried out a racket whereby they sold their Japanese-issued weapons to the Communists.⁵¹ Some claimed Wang Jingwei’s regime secretly reveled in watching the Japanese bombed and strafed at Nanjing later in the war. The Reorganized Government, they claimed, did not

⁴⁹ Lu, interview.

⁵⁰ The term “Rape of Nanjing” is anachronistic, but events of Japanese violence against civilians like it were well known.

⁵¹ Richard Bernstein, *China 1945: Mao’s Revolution and America’s Fateful Choice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 295.

intend to resist the United States or the Guomindang, rather, it served primarily to protect Chinese civilians in occupied regions. The Japanese apparently uncovered a plot by puppet troops in Nanjing to use their anti-aircraft guns to target Japanese, rather than American, aircraft. The Imperial Army promptly repossessed the weapons.⁵²

In Tengchong County, the occupation government actively undermined the occupiers. Most of the township heads also served as schoolmasters. They paid lip service to the Japanese-mandated curriculum, but secretly encouraged resistance. They developed pamphlets to aid in rescuing American airmen. Through centuries of the caravan trade and a history of British missionaries crossing into the region from Burma, a greater share of Tengchong's population had been exposed to the English language than many other parts of China. In fact, Tengchong prided itself on its worldly education and connectivity to India and the West. The pamphlets included different ways to recognize American airmen and a list of helpful phrases for those who could speak English. For those who could not, they provided Chinese words with similar pronunciation.⁵³ Second Lieutenant William Findley reported on the usefulness of the pamphlets. On February 14, 1945, he crash-landed his F-5 Lightning near Jietou,⁵⁴ thirty miles north of Tengchong.⁵⁵ He had been on a reconnaissance mission in north Burma, but got lost in poor weather. His 10th Air Force escape kit did not include a Chinese language pointie-talkie. Fortunately for the young pilot, a village official at Jietou managed to communicate with him using the pamphlets and a Chinese-English dictionary.⁵⁶

⁵² Thomas Ha, interview by Samuel Hui, September 2014.

⁵³ Li Genzhi, interview by Daniel Jackson and Kun Shi, August 10, 2017.

⁵⁴ Wade Giles: Kito, 界头

⁵⁵ MACR 12349: F-5E 43-28580, 9PRS, 8PRG, Lost due to Adverse Weather near Jietou, 2Lt William S. Findley, O-784320, Rescued.

⁵⁶ United States Forces India Burma Theater MIS-X, *Interrogation of Findley, William S.*, Reel A1323 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

Missing aircrew, evasion, and intelligence reports contain surprisingly few instances of puppet troops turning over downed American airmen to the Japanese. After the crew of the last B-25 to lift off from the *Hornet* bailed out near Nanchang, collaborationist troops reportedly captured and delivered them to the enemy.⁵⁷ Puppet troops also picked up four members of a B-29 crew who bailed out sixty-five miles northwest of Nanjing in late 1944.⁵⁸ Reportedly, the puppets had no intention of turning the men over to the enemy, but inadvertently ran into a Japanese patrol while negotiating with the Communist New 4th Army for their release. The Japanese insisted they take control of the prisoners and supposedly shot and killed one of the airmen when he resisted.⁵⁹ In early 1945, twenty-five puppet troops escorted three U.S. Navy airmen out of Hong Kong and delivered them safely to Nationalist guerrillas.⁶⁰

Dr. Herman Bodson, a former Belgian resistance fighter determined to make a scientific study of evasion, found collaboration to be a greater obstacle to Allied airmen evading capture in Western Europe than Nazi policing. Admittedly, the scope of the air

⁵⁷ Scott, *Target Tokyo*, loc. 4653 of 13654, Kindle.

Doolittle Raider Number 16: B-25B 40-2268, Lost south of Nanchang, 1Lt William G. Farrow, Pilot, Captured and Executed; Lt Robert L. Hite, Copilot, Captured; Lt George Barr, Navigator, Captured; Cpl Jacob D. DeShazer, Bombardier, Captured; Sgt Harold A. Spatz, Engineer-Gunner, Captured and Executed

⁵⁸ MACR 9663: B-29 42-6237, 25BS, 40BG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 65 miles northwest of Nanjing, 1Lt Richard L. Vickery, O-664092, Pilot, Killed, Body Recovered; 2Lt Burnard L. Page, O-809033, Copilot, Killed, Body Recovered; 1Lt Felix O. Sinicrope, Navigator, Rescued; 2Lt Edward G. Cassidy, O-686408, Bombardier, Killed, Body Recovered; 2Lt William G. Warburton, O-861396, Flight Engineer, Rescued; Sgt John A. Myers, Jr., 12081693, Radar Operator, Missing in Action; SSgt Dwight E. Collins, 14149196, Radio Operator, Rescued; Sgt Frederic S. Carlton, 19100930, Gunner, Captured; Sgt Watson R. Lankford, 34449608, Gunner, Captured; Sgt Carl B. Rieger, 37408023, Gunner, Captured; Sgt George R. Schuchardt, 32079825, Gunner, Rescued; Maj Francis B. Morgan, O-342800, Observer, Rescued.

⁵⁹ XX Bomber Command, Intelligence Section, *Walk-out Report, B-29 Aircraft #237*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁶⁰ AGAS-China, *Evasion and Walk-Out of the Following Navy Personnel: 1. Albert Basmajian, Lt. (J.G.), ASN 264307, USNR, VF 81 2. George Clark, Ensign, ASN 251438, USNR, VT 22 3. Donald E. Mize, AMA 3/C, ASN 629-33-11, USNR, VT 22 4. Charles George Myers, ARM 3/C, ASN 711-00-06, USNR, VT 22*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945). ENS George Clark, 251-438, AMA 3/C Donald E. Mize, 629-53-11, and ARM 3/C Charles G. Myers, 711-00-06, flying a TBF from VT-22 off the USS *Cowpens*

war there was enough to overwhelm resistance networks. The U.S. Army Air Forces reported twenty-six times as many aircraft lost on combat missions in Western Europe as it did over China – yet only four times as many missing airmen there returned to Allied control.⁶¹ In Western Europe, the Germans found more ideological converts than did the Japanese in China. Though few welcomed outright Nazi occupation, not everyone disagreed with their politics. In nations still struggling with the economic and political malaise of the Depression, left-wing communism and right-wing authoritarianism vied for primacy. Many supporters of the latter respected Hitler's domestic agenda. Prior to the German invasion, Holland even boasted a small but active Nazi Party of its own.⁶² "I explored ... the world of awakening against oppression, the world of rebellion that never stopped growing with occupation," wrote Bodson. "Sadly enough, I was also led to dig into the world of collaboration and treachery... And sadder to say, I discovered fifty years after the fact, that those people had been far more numerous than those fighting for freedom." Such widespread collaboration existed that after the war, more than four hundred thousand case files dealing with traitors inundated Belgium's civilian and military authorities⁶³

Ruthless self-policing at both the government and grassroots level probably helps account for the relatively few instances of betrayal in China. After returning to American control in early 1945, Lieutenant Fred McGill reported the Nationalist commander at Guhezhen,⁶⁴ a small town fifty miles west of Nanjing, ordered stern reprisals against

⁶¹ US Army Air Forces Office of Statistical Control, *Army Air Forces Statistical Digest: World War II* (Washington, DC, 1945), 220, http://www.alternatewars.com/Archives/USAF_Stats (accessed November 20, 2016).

⁶² Herman Bodson, *Downed Allied Airmen and Evasion of Capture: The Role of Local Resistance Networks in World War II* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005),

⁶³ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁴ Wade Giles: Kuho, 古河镇

anyone who failed to immediately bring him American airmen who went down in his sector.⁶⁵ “I personally saw this order and know that General Bai threatened to obliterate any village which did not comply with it,” McGill confirmed.⁶⁶

Loyal guerrillas recovered Lieutenant Warren Smedley when he bailed out of his P-40 south of Jingmen,⁶⁷ Hubei Province, in May 1944.⁶⁸ He sustained minor cuts and lacerations to his face, but escaped serious injury. The guerrillas brought him to the former mayor of Yueyang⁶⁹ to facilitate his return to American control. Seeking to ingratiate himself with the Japanese, the politician gave him over to the enemy. Photographs smuggled out of Wuhan showed the captured pilot (positively identified as Smedley, standing head and shoulders above his Japanese captors and Chinese onlookers) paraded through the streets, apparently in good health. Fourteenth Air Force intelligence received no further word on him; he perished in Japanese custody. The United States government never recovered his body. The guerrillas reported the betrayal to a U.S. Navy officer running a training camp behind the lines. He coordinated with them to assassinate the traitor.⁷⁰

It is possible some of the 397 airmen still listed as missing in action were betrayed or murdered by collaborators. However, thirteen of them are known to have already been in Japanese custody when they disappeared. Plotting the last known position of the rest

⁶⁵ MACR 10624: P-51C 44-10815, 74FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire near Quanjiao, 1Lt Frederick J. McGill, O-802053, Rescued.

⁶⁶ AGAS, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt F.G. McGill, 74th Fighter Squadron*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945).

⁶⁷ Wade Giles: Kingmen, 荆门

⁶⁸ MACR 5809: P-40N 42-105002, 75FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 5 miles south of Jingmen, 1Lt Warren R. Smedley, O-801910, Captured, Deceased, Body Unrecovered.

⁶⁹ 岳阳, called Yochow (Yuezhou) at the time.

⁷⁰ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 5809*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1944).

reveals as many as 208 lost at sea while transiting overwater or engaging in anti-shipping sweeps. Another seventy-two probably went down in the rugged terrain of mountainous Yunnan Province. Altogether, that accounts for almost three-quarters of those still listed as missing in the China Theater (see Figure 9). It seems unlikely many of the remaining survived the crash or bailout without any mention in American, Chinese, or Japanese records.

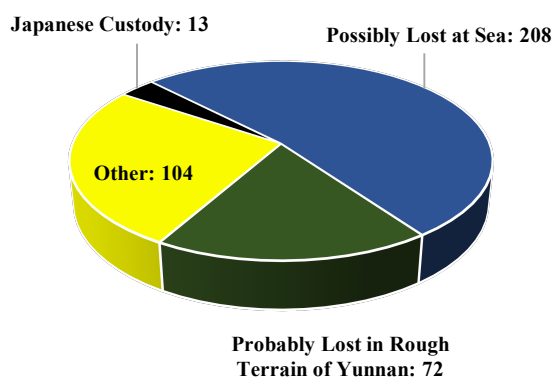


Figure 9. Airmen Still Listed as Missing in Action

If the ambivalent, or even sympathetic, attitudes of collaborators confused the nature of occupied China, agents working for the Japanese did the same in so-called “Free China.” In January 1944, an assassin stabbed an inebriated American sergeant in the crowded streets of Kunming. Chinese authorities found him bleeding out by the side of the road and rushed him to the hospital. He died shortly thereafter.⁷¹ On November 27, 1944, a 14th Air Force intelligence officer reported signal fires in the shape of an arrow pointing toward the airbase at Yunnanyi.⁷² The next night, Japanese bombers raided the field.⁷³ Similarly, Lieutenant Malcolm Rosholt, an intelligence officer in command of

⁷¹ Robert Burris, correspondence with Daniel Jackson, July 2007 to August 2009.

⁷² 云南驿

⁷³ Arthur W. Clark, *Eyes of the Tiger: China 1944-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: Published by Author, 2015), 96.

Dog Sugar Eight, a forward radio post at Changsha, reported a lantern less than one hundred yards east of his station guiding single-engine bombers onto his position. He and his men heard two of them overhead, but could not see them in the darkness. One of the Americans shot at the lantern and it flicked out. Rosholt ordered them out to the slit trenches. As they ran across open ground, a third bomber roared overhead.

“Take cover!” Rosholt yelled. Most of his men made it to the trenches, but he could not get there in time. He jumped behind a low stone wall as the bomber strafed the area. “Please God, not yet,” he prayed aloud in desperation, clutching his legs to his body to make himself as small as possible. It ended as suddenly as it began; the bomber climbed away and Rosholt’s men ran over to make sure he survived.⁷⁴

In a country devastated by war and reeling from hyperinflation and crushing poverty, the Japanese could find individuals to buy off. When a dozen Oscars ambushed two flights of P-38s on a river sweep near Jiujiang in October 1943, the Americans assumed some traitorous Chinese had leaked word of the mission.⁷⁵ Though this proved to be erroneous, it is telling the Americans’ knee-jerk reaction was to blame an imagined collaborator. The airmen found themselves in a China where Japanese agents could assassinate their servicemen deep in “free” territory and light signal fires to direct Japanese bombers to their airbases. Yet partisans could smuggle out American airmen who crashed or bailed out deep in “occupied” territory – even from the most heavily-garrisoned towns. Somehow, in China, every place was enemy territory and yet no place was enemy territory.

⁷⁴ Malcolm Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon: An Autobiography* (Rosholt, WI: Rosholt House, 2004), 150-151.

⁷⁵ Harmon, *Pilots Also Pray*, 162.

Despite the complex nature of the country, both occupied and free, the data clearly shows an overwhelming number of American airmen rescued. A few key examples may help explain why. When the air raid alert went up on December 26, 1942, the people of Xiangyun⁷⁶ piled out of their shops and homes to watch. Japanese bombers had refrained from striking Kunming since the AVG intercepted them a year prior. However, they continued to probe Chennault's outlying defenses, including the airfield 130 miles west at Yunnanyi. Xiangyun lay astride the Burma Road in the next valley west of the airfield. The villagers looked skyward in curiosity and wonder, unafraid of an enemy sent to bomb a military base ten miles distant; their small town featured nothing of interest to the Japanese airmen. They could hear the distant growl of engines as two flights of P-40s lifted off from Yunnanyi and took up station south of the field. Then, at 1500 hours, the enemy formation hove into view: nine bombers, three elements of three, flying in a "V" of "Vs" like a flock of mechanical geese. Ten blunt-nosed Oscars flew escort. As the shark-mouthed P-40s dove into the fray, a lone fighter rocketed aloft from the dusty airfield, sailing past the other Americans to plunge into the enemy formation. The people talked excitedly as the melee sprawled across the sky above them.⁷⁷

"Look!" One of the villagers pointed to a Japanese fighter low over the town, squaring off for a head-to-head pass with the lone American. They watched as flames erupted from the wings of the Shark and the nose of the Oscar. A split-second later, the crackle of machine gun fire reached their ears. Guns blazing, each pilot found his mark. The Japanese fighter exploded; the American began to smoke and sputter. They

⁷⁶ Wade Giles: Hsiang-yun, 祥云

⁷⁷ Carl Molesworth, *Sharks over China: The 23rd Fighter Group in World War II* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 1994), 83; Ma Yufu, *Col C.L. Chennault and Flying Tigers*, ed. Li Xiangping (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2003), 68.

witnessed the P-40 plummet from the sky, its engine frozen, a plume of smoke trailing behind it. They could see the pilot had rolled back the canopy, but he did not jump. Why? They watched in horror, so riveted by the scene they could hardly move – even though the fighter could drop into their midst as soon as the pilot bailed out. But he stayed with it. He kept it under control until clear of the town. The crowd saw the airplane disappear behind a hill, then a geyser of flame shot skyward as it impacted the ground. The spell suddenly broken, they ran pell-mell through fields of winter wheat toward the crash.⁷⁸

They found the pilot lying in a cemetery, his body broken, his head bleeding from a gash where it had hit a gravestone. The half-opened parachute lay limply on the ground beside him. He could not have been more than four hundred feet above the ground when he finally jumped.⁷⁹ A few of the villagers rushed off and returned with a door torn from its hinges. Gently, they lifted him aboard and carried him into town. A jeep roared up in a cloud of dust, an American enlisted man driving, a pilot riding shotgun. The aviator jumped out and joined the crowd of villagers. An elder led them, dressed in a black cotton robe, a scraggly beard reaching to his chest. The old man took them to Dong Qiyuan,⁸⁰ a local doctor who had attended a British medical school in Shanghai before the war.⁸¹

The doctor examined the injured airmen and found bruising around the gash on his head. “He has a concussion,” he told the downed airman’s comrade. He pulled a medical book from its place on the shelf. “I need to give him an injection to counteract

⁷⁸ Ma Yufu, *Col C.L. Chennault and Flying Tigers*, 69.

⁷⁹ P-40E Unknown Serial Number, 16FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Xiangyun, 1Lt Robert H. Mooney, O-421285, Killed in Action, Body Recovered.

⁸⁰ 董齐元

⁸¹ Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 83; Ma Yufu, *Col C.L. Chennault and Flying Tigers*, 69.

the effects,” he said, pointing out the applicable section of the text. “I would like your permission to give it to him.”

The pilot seemed reluctant. “Our flight surgeon went out to another crash,” he explained. “I have no idea when he’ll get here.”

“This is urgent,” the doctor pressed.

Anxiety showed in the pilot’s tortured expression. “Go ahead and give him the shot,” he finally acquiesced.

The doctor’s wife held the injured airman’s tongue to keep it from blocking his airway. She sat with him for hours, cradling his head between her arms. He died just before midnight. Ten minutes after he passed, the flight surgeon arrived. The other pilot explained what happened, distraught at having perhaps done the wrong thing in authorizing the injection.

“It was the only thing you could do,” the surgeon reassured him.⁸²

The denizens of Xiangyun felt profound sadness at the death of a man they never knew. His name, they learned, was Lieutenant Robert Mooney, an aggressive young fighter pilot from Kansas City, Missouri. The Chinese people already felt genuine gratitude for the Americans who came to their country to fight the Japanese. However, Mooney had done something different and wholly unexpected. He could have bailed out over the town. His fighter could have crashed into the watching crowd and killed dozens and they still would have hailed him a hero. But he did not. He stayed with it, valuing their lives above his own. In wartime China, the value of an individual human life did not seem to matter in the slightest. The Imperial Japanese Army certainly did not care about

⁸² Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 83.

the lives of Chinese civilians, as evidenced by the great slaughters it carried out at Nanjing and Quzhou and its campaign of terror bombing deliberately directed at the civilian population. However, even China's own leadership prized the collective over the individual. When Chiang Kai-shek ordered the Yellow River dams breached to halt the enemy advance in north China, the resulting floods killed at least half a million of his own people and displaced millions more.⁸³

The people of Xiangyun took up a collection. Five months after the tragic combat, they invited the pilots of Mooney's squadron to a ceremony. At the intersection of the Burma Road and the highway to Dali, they unveiled a monument to the deceased hero. It stood twelve feet tall, a monolith atop which sat a star, the same as which decorated the fuselage and wings of American fighters. Four panels at the base exhibited a carved portrait of the pilot and recounted his sacrifice both in English and Chinese.⁸⁴ The ceremony proved an emotional event for villagers and airmen alike. In that moment, Mooney's comrades glimpsed what their shark-mouthed fighters symbolized to the Chinese – what they themselves symbolized. American politicians and generals forged the policy that sent them to China. American industry produced the aircraft they flew. American taxpayers funded it: \$49,449 for a Curtiss P-40 Warhawk.⁸⁵ But to the Chinese people, the airmen who animated those machines epitomized America itself – values, policy, and weapon personified.

Understanding the significance of Mooney's sacrifice helps make sense of the willingness of Chinese civilians to sacrifice themselves, their families, and their villages

⁸³ Diana Lary, "Drowned Earth: The Strategic Breaching of the Yellow River Dyke, 1938," *War in History* vol. 8, no. 2 (April 2001), 206.

⁸⁴ Ma Yufu, *Col C.L. Chennault and Flying Tigers*, 70; Carl Molesworth, *Sharks over China*, 84.

⁸⁵ Office of Statistical Control, *Army Air Forces Statistical Digest*, 134.

to aid downed airmen. Across the length and breadth of China, the Americans made evident their daring with mighty proofs: staging audacious raids on such heavily defended, and seemingly inaccessible, targets as Hong Kong, Taiwan,⁸⁶ and Shanghai. The morale boost from these raids should not be underestimated. In addition to Chinese civilians and Japanese soldiers, Allied internees and prisoners of war witnessed fighters of the 14th Air Force raid Shanghai for the first time on January 17, 1945. Seventeen sleek P-51s swept down on three of the city's airfields to destroy scores of planes staging to support the Japanese defense of Luzon, the crucial northern anchor of the Philippine Islands.⁸⁷

In the internment camp adjacent to Longhua Airdrome,⁸⁸ on Shanghai's south side, American merchant sailors and Allied civilians taken from the city's International Settlement, daily endured unpredictable guards, near-starvation diets, and scant supplies and clothing. For three long years after their internment in December 1941, they saw no indication of the turning tide of war – save for the increased skittishness and spasmodic brutality of their guards. Three small radios brought news of the war clandestinely into the camp, but their operators kept the circle of trust small to protect against discovery. Most of the camp's population remained suspended in limbo, held in perpetual defeat by their captors, fantasies of food foremost on their minds. British novelist J.G. Ballard, then 14, lived with his parents and sister there. He later described his experiences in his 1984 semi-autobiographical novel, *Empire of the Sun*. He remembered vividly the Japanese airfield next door, its rows of aircraft parked in front of vast machine shops and hangars

⁸⁶ 台湾, called Formosa at the time

⁸⁷ Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 251.

⁸⁸ Wade Giles: Lunghwa, 龙华

and the seven-story-tall Buddhist temple converted into a flak tower on its north end, its octagonal balconies soaring over a hundred feet above the ground, sandbagged fighting emplacements positioned around its base.⁸⁹

That Wednesday afternoon, he stood on the first-floor balcony of the men's washroom when suddenly, a flight of American fighters roared past the camp barely twenty feet above the paddy fields, barreling toward the airdrome. They rose to clear the perimeter fence, a flash of shining aluminum, then dove, guns blazing, at the rows of parked aircraft. Ballard stared in awe as the beautiful Mustangs opened fire with their six .50-caliber machine guns, racing up and down the field, leaving a trail of fire and destruction. The guards scattered and an air raid siren belatedly began to wail. The top story of the pagoda lit up with machine gun fire as the anti-aircraft crews sprang into action. Bits of shrapnel fell on the roofs and into the courtyards of the camp. Then, as suddenly as it began, it ended. The roar of engines dissipated. The staccato of machine gun fire slackened. Smoke from burning fuel and planes filled the air. To the young British prisoner, the P-51 Mustang embodied power, speed, and destruction. "However brave the Japanese soldiers and pilots, they belonged to the past," he realized. "America, I knew, was a future that had already arrived. I spent every spare moment watching the sky."⁹⁰

Prisoners of war at the Jiangwan⁹¹ camp on Shanghai's northeast side greeted the raid with even greater enthusiasm. They too had illicit radios with which they kept abreast of the war's progress. But like the Allied internees at Longhua, and indeed, like

⁸⁹ J.G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton, an Autobiography* (New York: Liverlight Publishing Corporation, 2013), 75, 87.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

⁹¹ Wade Giles: Kiangwan, 江湾

millions of beleaguered people throughout Japan's wartime empire, the harsh reality of daily life under the thumb of enemy imprisonment or occupation made the hope of liberation seem remote. Then those beautiful Mustangs roared overhead, tangible proof of Japan's waning fortunes. The prisoners included U.S. Marines captured at Wake Island and airmen captured in China and the Pacific.⁹²

Captain Howard Allers, Lieutenant Lewis Murray, and Sergeants Paul Webb and Jim Young, captured after enemy fighters downed their B-25 over Hong Kong, watched in glee as the guards rushed about like chickens with their heads cut off. The frantic soldiers turned their swords and bayonets to prod the prisoners indoors. Allers hobbled into the barracks, slower than most. His left foot had taken a bullet when a Zero strafed his wrecked bomber back in 1942. He received almost no medical treatment during his first six weeks of imprisonment in Guangzhou.⁹³ When the Japanese transferred him to Jiangwan, American doctors in the camp did their best for him. They managed to stop the spread of infection and saved his mangled foot from amputation, but the primitive conditions of the prison prohibited a full recovery. He had only recently been able to walk without the aid of crutches or a cane.⁹⁴

The Marines edged over so he could peer out the window. Together, they cheered the low-flying planes attacking the Japanese airfield only two miles distant. The guards threatened to shoot anyone who emerged before the raid ended and snapped off a few shots in the direction of those cheering at the windows. The Americans ducked down, but quickly sprang back up to look outside again. The guards fired at the planes, too, as they

⁹² John F. Kinney, *Wake Island Pilot: A World War II Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 1995), 116.

⁹³ 广州, called Canton at the time

⁹⁴ Kinney, *Wake Island Pilot*, 131-132.

passed low overhead. The panic of the guards, the raw display of American airpower, the undeniable progress of the war – the prisoners' morale soared for the first time since their capture.⁹⁵

American warplanes initially used the airfield at Zhijiang, in western Hunan Province, as a temporary staging base. In 1944, however, the 5th Fighter Group of the Chinese-American Composite Wing (CACW) made the field its permanent home. The CACW was a novel organization; Chinese airmen attended training programs in the United States and returned to fly in joint squadrons alongside American counterparts. The composite units birthed a new, modern Chinese Air Force capable of holding its own against the Japanese.⁹⁶ Gong Kaibing worked at the airbase. Looking for employment after his father passed away in 1944, he joined the War Area Service Corps, a Chinese organization that provided all the food and lodging for every American in China at the incredible rate of just one dollar per person per day.⁹⁷ Gong worked at Hostel Number 4, home to several pilots and maintenance crews. He knew a little English and knew how to read and write, so he served as a clerk recording the names of visitors, particularly those delivering vegetables or fresh meat. Because of rampant hyperinflation, the job paid in commodities instead of cash. The Service Corps provided his meals and issued him 750 kilos of grain each month – enough to take care of his entire extended family. Additionally, some of the airmen who did not smoke gave him their cigarette rations to sell on the black market. In blockaded China, they fetched a small fortune.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 134.

⁹⁶ Carl Molesworth, *Wing to Wing: Air Combat in China, 1943-1945* (New York: Orion Books, 1990), 7, 10.

⁹⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 98.

For a young man who had watched Japanese bombers pummel his home with impunity, it felt good to see modern warplanes carrying the five-pointed star of the United States and the twelve-pointed star of the Nationalist republic roar down the runway to challenge the enemy. The Japanese no longer dared attack in daylight. Despite some carousing by a few of the less-disciplined Americans, he and his fellow townspeople felt extremely grateful.⁹⁸

In the remote interior of Japan's wartime empire, American aircraft became the irrefutable proof Japan had not won and that resistance continued. To Allied internees, prisoners of war, and the inhabitants of occupied China, the sight of American planes aggressively taking the fight to their shared enemy rekindled a hope they had barely dared to whisper during years of Japanese ascendancy. Prior to the arrival of the Americans, Japanese Army and Naval air forces maintained complete air supremacy. Millions of refugees fled in terror and lived in squalor, ever fearful of coming under the guns of enemy planes as they ranged across the country unopposed. "The Japanese had full advantage in the air. They were extremely arrogant," recalled Lu Caiwen, the refugee-turned-intelligence officer from Yunnan. "They occupied the entire sky. The sky," he reiterated, "was entirely their territory. After the Flying Tigers came, the sky was *our* territory."⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Gong, interview.

⁹⁹ Lu, interview.

CHAPTER IV

June 3, 1942

Dinjan, India

Forty-one airmen walked to the flight line through spitting rain. Six B-25s, parked wingtip-to-wingtip, waited motionless in the predawn darkness for the men who would animate them. Their flight that day signified the culmination of a fifteen-thousand-mile journey from the far side of the world; in April 1942, as the *Hornet* bore Doolittle's bombers west toward Tokyo, six B-25s departed West Palm Beach in the opposite direction – across the Atlantic, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East to India.¹ The “Hump” remained their only obstacle – a perilous series of mountain ranges jutting south from the mighty Himalayas to guard China's southwest frontier. The flight of bombers now formed the recently-reactivated 11th Bomb Squadron, with Major “Gordie” Leland in command. Theirs would be the first U.S. Army warplanes in China – the promised offensive punch to augment Chennault's volunteer fighter group. Tenth Air Force held thirty-three of the rescued Doolittle Raiders in CBI and assigned sixteen of them to the newly-reconstituted squadron. Five joined the thirty-six airmen who ferried the B-25s from America for the flight into China.²

With his crew and extra passenger, Lieutenant Robert Klemann readied *Texas Tornado* for takeoff. He had assumed they would fly directly over the Hump to Kunming.

¹ At the time of their departure, the aircraft belonged to “Project 157.” 10th Air Force assigned them to the 11th Bomb Squadron as soon as they arrived in India.

² These were 1st Lieutenant Frank A. Kappeler, Staff Sergeant William L. Birch, 1st Lieutenant Eugene F. McGurl, Staff Sergeant Omer A. Duquette, Staff Sergeant Melvin J. Gardner; Cindy Cole Chal, e-mail to Daniel Jackson, March 28, 2017; U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 15936*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1947).

Since the Japanese invasion of Burma, DC-3s from the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), a subsidiary of Pan Am, had been flying fuel and cargo over the mountains to relieve the blockade. A small contingent of U.S. Army Air Force transports had only recently joined them. After arriving at Dinjan on the evening of the second, Major Leland conferred with Colonel Haynes, the officer in charge of the airlift. Returning to his men, he informed them they would bomb the airfield at Lashio on their way to China the next morning. Japanese fighters had been using the field to harry Allied transports on their supply runs. They would get their first licks in at the Japanese on their first flight in theater.³

The crews scrambled to throw together a last-minute plan. They would make a minimum-altitude attack, each aircraft carrying six 500-pound bombs in addition to baggage and extra crew members. The diversion turned a five-hundred-mile direct course into a seven-hundred-mile dogleg, putting the overloaded bombers at the edge of their range. They used what maps they had, but much of the flight took them over literally uncharted territory. The intelligence officer at Dinjan briefed them that the terrain between Lashio and Kunming reached up to nine thousand feet above sea level. They planned to fly that leg at eleven thousand to remain well clear.⁴

The added complexity unnerved Klemann. A simple ferry flight suddenly turned into a short-notice, unescorted, low-altitude attack on an enemy fighter base in unfamiliar terrain at the edge of their range on their first mission in theater. But Gordie Leland pressed them enthusiastically. They would arrive in China as the nucleus of a new American strike force after having flown fifteen thousand miles from the United States

³ *Holstrom*, 30; David Hayward, e-mail to Daniel Jackson, October 7, 2015.

⁴ Klemann, "That B-25 bombing raid on Lashio."

and having already hit the Japanese with a surprise raid, making the airlift route safer by striking the enemy's forward airfield. The plan represented the kind of audacious thinking that, if it succeeded, Army Air Force leaders would hail as bold and inventive.⁵

As the men readied their ships that morning, the weather injected an extra layer of complexity; the spitting rain portended something far worse further east. A few of the CNAC pilots recommended they wait a day for the storm to pass. Leland ignored them. What did a bunch of broken-down old transport pilots know about tactical military aviation?⁶

The rising whine of inertial starters soon broke the morning calm, giving way to the coughing, stuttering splutter of fourteen cylinders on each of twelve Wright Cyclone engines. The surrounding tea plantations reverberated with a low rumble, gradually building to a full-throated roar as the bombers rolled down the field at 0600 hours. Within minutes, the sound faded and silence reigned over the countryside once more.

The six bombers winged southeast in two flights of three. The major led the first flight. Klemann flew in the number three position off his right wing. The second flight formed up behind and to the right of the first. They maintained strict radio silence. The weather continued to thicken; by the time they were forty-five minutes out of Dinjan, they had to fly completely on instruments.

"This is eerie, flying blind," Klemann commented to his crew. He stayed glued to the commander's wing, holding tight formation to keep from losing him in the mist. Suspended in cloud, with Leland's bomber as his only reference, he became disoriented.

⁵ Holstrom, 30; Hayward, e-mail, October 7, 2015; Arthur Veysey, "The Sky Dragons – Their Exploits Over China," *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1943, 2.

⁶ Hayward, e-mail, October 7, 2015.

His body played tricks on him, making him unsure whether he flew level or in a turn. He glanced at his instruments to recalibrate himself. They must be close to the target; he noticed his altimeter unwinding through five thousand feet as they descended. He also noted his fuel gauges dropping at an alarming rate. All this throttle-jockeying to stay in close formation used a lot of gas. The glance inside lasted only a moment and his eyes returned to their vigil out the left window. Major Leland's bomber remained fixed there, slightly indistinct in the soupy whiteness. Then the lush green of the hilly Burmese jungle, first in spasmodic glimpses, then in totality, emerged from beneath the ragged clouds. Only five bombers appeared; Lieutenant Bill Gross, flying the last airplane in the second element, must have lost them in the weather.⁷

"There!" the copilot tapped Klemann on the shoulder, motioning to the airfield off their right wing. Leland must have seen it too, for he banked hard to line up on the target. Inside the major's turn, Klemann dove and banked tight, throwing the throttles forward to keep from stalling out and spinning in. Their wings practically overlapped as they lined up for the bomb run. On cue from the commander, five B-25s opened bomb bay doors, overflying the airfield at fifteen hundred feet and laying their 500-pound bombs along its length. Two fixed-gear fighters scrambled from the field and gave chase. Major Leland turned eastbound and climbed. Just before the five ships reentered the weather, Gross' crew in the missing sixth bomber appeared far behind them to make its attack alone. The Japanese turned to intercept this new intruder.⁸

⁷ Klemann, "That B-25 bombing raid on Lashio."

⁸ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 15936*; Klemann, "That B-25 bombing raid on Lashio;" Hayward, e-mail, October 7, 2015.

Meanwhile, the five continued up to eleven thousand feet in and out of broken clouds. Worried about his fuel consumption, and remembering the near-disaster of being too close inside Leland's turn on the approach to Lashio, Klemann edged out to the right to give himself more room to maneuver. As they plunged once more into the thick white veil, he found he could barely see the major's airplane to his left – a shadow in the mist.

The flight became tedious: cruising at eleven thousand feet, in the weather, maintaining formation off the indistinct impression of his commander's bomber. Then, in an instant, the shadow turned to a flash of orange light, followed quickly by another. Something like distant thunder buffeted his airplane with turbulence. In the same instant, the copilot punched his shoulder and he saw a blur of trees and scrub and rock whizzing by underneath his wing. He pulled back violently on the yoke, clearing the mountain by mere feet. Then nothing again. Whiteness. His heart pounded. Continuing the climb, he broke out into blue, sunlit skies.⁹

It took him a moment to fully register what had happened. Leland, his crew, the men flying in the bomber on the major's left wing – all gone. Unbeknownst to him at the time, the leader of the second element had also crashed – twenty-one airmen lost in a split second.¹⁰ Their charts and briefing had it all wrong. Several mountain ranges between

⁹ Klemann, "That B-25 bombing raid on Lashio." Hayward, e-mail, October 7, 2015; Arthur Veysey, "The Sky Dragons – Their Exploits Over China," *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1943, 2.

¹⁰ MACR 15936A: B-25C Unknown Serial Number, 11BS, 7BG, Lost due to Adverse Weather between Lashio and Kunming, Maj Gordon C. Leland, O-20846, Pilot, Missing in Action; 1Lt Jack W. Kincheloe, O-440067, Copilot, Missing in Action; 1Lt Roy H. Mink, O-418957, Navigator, Missing in Action; Sgt Charles R. Hedge, 14072366, Bombardier, Missing in Action; MSgt Anthony J. Dominiak, 6731885, Engineer, Missing in Action; Sgt Charles R. Thorp, 6936623, Radio Operator, Missing in Action; SSgt Melvin J. Gardner, 6296448, Gunner, Missing in Action. MACR 15936B: B-25C Unknown Serial Number, 11BS, 7BG, Lost due to Adverse Weather between Lashio and Kunming, 1Lt Langdon D. Long, O-401191, Pilot, Missing in Action; 1Lt Robert W.N. Martin, O-397570, Copilot, Missing in Action; 2Lt Fred S. Olson, O-440126, Navigator, Missing in Action; 1Lt Eugene F. McGurl, O-431648, Bombardier, Missing in Action; Sgt Lee E. Allen, 16004900, Engineer, Missing in Action; Sgt Harris W. Elson, 14003980, Gunner, Missing in Action; Sgt Fitchew D. Sims, 6971095, Gunner, Missing in Action. MACR 15936C: B-25C Unknown Serial Number, 11BS, 7BG, Lost due to Adverse Weather between Lashio and

Lashio and Kunming rose above ten thousand feet, and in fact a direct route threaded the needle between two massive peaks over eleven thousand feet tall. Twelve miles north of course stood Great Snow Mountain (*Daxue Shan*),¹¹ at 11,482 feet while only three miles to the south, *Hunhua Shan* rose to 11,220 (see Figure 10). Three miles is no great distance considering the bombers flew in the weather, without navigation aids, on a dead-reckoning course for Kunming. At the time, much of China's remote interior remained unmapped. Crude aeronautical charts often depicted a river or lake where airmen found none – or several. Terrain elevation could be missing or misrepresented by thousands of feet.¹²

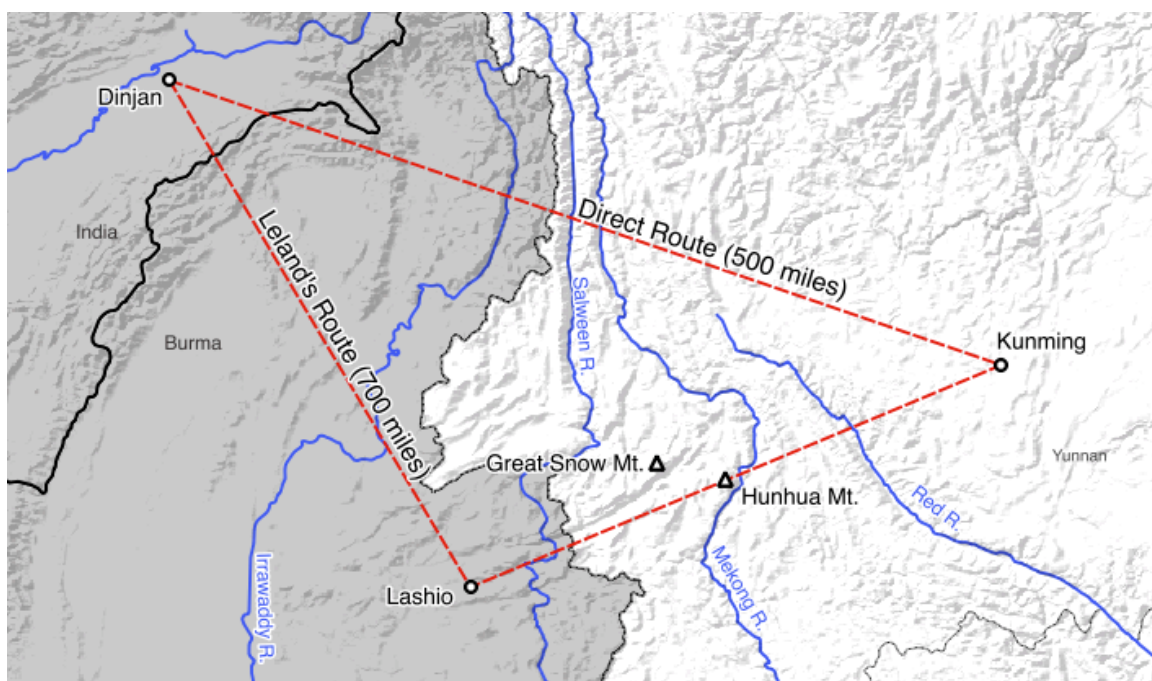


Figure 10. Leland's Raid on Lashio

Kunming, 1Lt James F. Holbrook, O-399526, Pilot, Missing in Action; 2Lt John H. Herzog, O-442149, Copilot, Missing in Action; 2Lt James M. Chandler, O-789454, Navigator, Missing in Action; SSgt Omer A. Duquette, 6143447, Bombardier, Missing in Action; Sgt Frank J. Fasanella, 12036627, Engineer, Missing in Action; Sgt Edgar P. Loomis, 19015745, Radio Operator, Missing in Action; Sgt Marlowe W. Kaufmann, 16018655, Gunner, Missing in Action

¹¹ 大雪山

¹² *Holstrom*, 21.

Weather and terrain made for a deadly combination. The stereotypical Chinese landscape painting portrays precipitous mountains enshrouded in clouds and mist – an image that engenders awe to the casual observer, but from a knowing airman elicits a sharp draw of breath through the teeth. Weather-related incidents accounted for at least ninety-six combat aircraft reported missing in the China Theater, only thirteen fewer than fell to enemy planes. After surface-to-air fire and enemy aircraft, weather represented the third most deadly adversary – accounting for nearly sixteen percent of all aircraft types and over a quarter of B-25s.

Texas Tornado flew alone in the burning blue, an unbroken field of white stretching to the horizon in every direction. Silhouetted against the clouds out ahead, Klemann caught sight of *Yokohama Express*, the only other survivor of their encounter with the mountain. He made to follow, but after a few minutes, the navigator, Lieutenant Peck, climbed into the cockpit.

“Do you want to go with them, or do you want to go to Kunming?” Peck asked sardonically.

“Well Peck,” Klemann replied, “you got us this far from the States; just tell me where to go.” The navigator gave him a new heading and they soon lost sight of the other plane as they plunged into a new bank of clouds.

Before long, the sky grew ominously dark and the fuel gauges hovered on empty. Peck climbed back into the cockpit.

“We should be over Kunming,” he informed the pilots. “Find a hole in the clouds.”

“What if we’re not?” Klemann shot back.

“Then it’s up to you,” the navigator retorted grimly.

Klemann found a hole and let through to find the city of Kunming directly beneath them. Ignoring any other traffic, he made a straight-in approach to the single runway. As he taxied clear, the engines coughed and died, starved of fuel. The seven of them climbed out through the fore and aft crew hatches to find another B-25 landing and taxiing toward them. It turned out to be Bill Gross, whose bomber made its run on Lashio alone after losing the rest of the formation *en route* from Dinjan.¹³ The two Japanese fighters that scrambled from the field had filled it full of holes. One broke away after Staff Sergeant James Burge hit it with a burst of fire from the top turret. The other persisted, making attack after attack and hitting and killing Sergeant Wilmer Zeuske, lying in the tail to operate the finicky, remote-controlled ventral guns.¹⁴

They saw no sign of *Yokohama Express*. The pilot, Lieutenant Johnny Ruse, ordered his crew to abandon ship when they ran out of gas fifty miles north of Kunming. They walked in with the help of Chinese rescuers twelve days later.¹⁵

General Chennault grilled Klemann on all the details of the mission, understandably upset only one bomber out of six arrived at Kunming unscathed; Gross’ ship required extensive repairs due to the damage inflicted by Japanese fighters. In retrospect, Leland’s last-minute raid turned out to be a very foolish endeavor. Over the

¹³ 1Lt William T. “Bill” Gross, O-406681, transferred to the 75th Fighter Squadron. Surface fire brought down his P-40K on February 11, 1943 near the Nan Sang Bridge, in Yunnan Province. He was killed in action, body recovered.

¹⁴ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 15936*. Klemann; “That B-25 bombing raid on Lashio,” Hayward, e-mail, October 7, 2015.

¹⁵ B-25C Unknown Serial Number, 11BS, 7BG, Lost due to Adverse Weather 50 miles north of Kunming, 1Lt John C. Ruse, Pilot, Rescued; Lt James C. Crysler, Copilot, Rescued; Lt Arvis R. Kirkland, Navigator, Rescued; Sgt Delbert E. Coulter, Bombardier, Rescued; Cpl William P. La Plant, Bombardier, Rescued; Sgt Ralph J. McCann, Crew Chief, Rescued. U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 15936*; Arthur Veysey, “The Sky Dragons – Their Exploits Over China,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1943, 2.

next two weeks, six more B-25s arrived, all flying direct from Dinjan. But Chennault's bomber force remained pitifully small. It was further diminished when, in poor visibility, AVG pilot Freeman Ricketts mistook *Texas Tornado* for a Japanese bomber and shot it down thirty miles north of Lingling.¹⁶ Fortunately, Captain Joe Skeldon and crew managed to bail out safely.¹⁷

Chennault found himself a brigadier general in charge of barely more than a couple squadrons' worth of airplanes. His China Air Task Force (CATF) boasted only forty-two worn out and abused old P-40s and seven B-25s – forty-nine planes arrayed against as many as 250 Japanese. The task force reported to Major General Clayton Bissell's 10th Air Force, headquartered over fifteen hundred miles away in New Delhi, India. Bissell and Chennault knew each other before the war and had an antagonistic relationship, constantly clashing over priorities and tactics. Chennault's new boss did not like the idea of a mercenary fighter group defending China and pressed to have the American Volunteer Group inducted into the U.S. Army Air Forces.¹⁸

The AVG ceased to exist on July 4, 1942, replaced by the inexperienced and untested 23rd Fighter Group and one squadron of the 51st Fighter Group. Only five AVG pilots accepted immediate induction into the Army Air Forces. Chennault appointed three

¹⁶ 零陵

¹⁷ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 15936*; Klemann, "That B-25 bombing raid on Lashio." Hayward, e-mail, October 7, 2015; Arthur Veysey, "The Sky Dragons – Their Exploits Over China," *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1943, 2; *Holstrom*, 30; U.S. Department of the Air Force, Office of Air Force History, *Oral History Interview: Lieutenant Colonel Horace E. Crouch*, interview by Dr. James C. Hasdorff (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University, 1989), 84-85. B-25C Unknown Serial Number, 11BS, 7BG, Lost to Friendly Fire between Hengyang and Lingling, Capt Joseph L. Skeldon, Pilot, Rescued; 1Lt Stewart W. Sewell, Copilot, Rescued; 2Lt Robert D. Hippert, Navigator, Rescued; 1Lt George A. Stout, Bombardier, Rescued; TSgt Norton G. Stubblefield, Engineer-Gunner, Rescued; Sgt Joseph L. Soikowski, Radio Operator-Gunner, Rescued.

¹⁸ Bissell took command of 10th Air Force on August 18, 1942. Prior to that, he served on Stilwell's staff as air officer, ranking Chennault by precisely one day. Hayward, e-mail, October 7, 2015.

of them to command the squadrons of the 23rd: Frank Schiel, to the 74th Fighter Squadron, Tex Hill the 75th, and Ed Rector the 76th. Colonel Robert Lee Scott, Jr., the colorful author of *God is My Copilot*, took charge of the group. Experienced prewar P-40 pilot Major John Alison commanded the 16th Fighter Squadron of the 51st Group.¹⁹

Not a single pilot from the AVG's 3rd Squadron accepted induction. Exhausted after six months in combat, they wanted to return home on leave before getting back to the war. They also took offense to the Army only offering reserve commissions. When one pilot stood and told General Bissell he wanted a regular commission, the slight-framed, shifty-eyed, sallow-faced general exploded in rage! Why did these damn civilians think they deserved special treatment? He rejected their demands outright. "For any of you who don't want to join the Army," he remarked acidly, "I can guarantee to have your draft boards waiting for you when you step down a gangplank onto U.S. soil." That did it. Not one elected to stay.²⁰

George McMillan hated to abandon Chennault, but, weary like his comrades, emaciated at only 130 pounds, and still aching from a wound to his shoulder, went home. He wanted to see his four siblings, especially his brother Malcolm, soon to ship off to Maxwell Field for training, and his little sister, Sarah Elizabeth, whom he affectionately referred to as "Sissy." Now fifteen, he reckoned she had "graduated from cotton to silk" in his absence. "Only wish it were possible for me to take a few days off and come home!" he penned in a hand-written note to his mother. "I've seen enough of this old

¹⁹ Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 15-16.

²⁰ Ford, *Flying Tigers*, loc. 4552 and 5059 of 6878, Kindle.

world to last me quite a spell.” He left China that July, a vice squadron leader with four-and-a-half kills to his credit.²¹

The passing of the AVG made room for a new cast of characters around Chennault. Colonel Scott (Chennault called him “Scotty”) originally arrived in CBI in April 1942 with a strike force of eight heavy bombers and nine transport aircraft under the command of Colonel Caleb V. Haynes. Hardly had they landed at Karachi, when they learned the Army Air Forces had reassigned the bombers elsewhere. Left with only their nine Douglas C-47s, Haynes and Scotty aided the Allied evacuation of Burma and, alongside CNAC, pioneered the airlift over the Hump. Both men longed for combat assignments. Scotty finagled his way into command of the 23rd Fighter Group. Haynes took charge of 10th Air Force’s nascent armada of medium and heavy bombers. In October 1942, Bissell made him commander of the India Air Task Force – Chennault’s counterpart on the other side of the Hump.²²

Haynes’ deputy, Colonel Merian C. Cooper, had to fend for himself. For weeks, he sat idly by in Chongqing until it became clear he would have to do some finagling of his own to get involved in something interesting. Cooper had a talent for finagling, though, and a lifetime full of interesting adventures. Expelled from the Naval Academy during his senior year in 1914, he nevertheless learned to fly and served as a bomber pilot with the Army Air Service in World War I. Shot down over enemy territory, he spent the last month-and-a-half of the conflict as a prisoner of war. A year later, he returned to action, founding a squadron of American volunteers to fly for the Polish Air Force in its

²¹ George McMillan to Mrs. Malcolm McMillan, March 13, 1942, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation; George McMillan to his grandmother, May 21, 1942, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

²² Hugh Crumpler, “How’s your CBI IQ?” *Ex-CBI Roundup*, July 1989, 28.

war against the Soviets. Again, he went down behind enemy lines, but this time, after spending nearly nine months in a Soviet prison camp, he managed to escape.²³

He spent the interwar years first, as a traveling correspondent, then as a documentary filmmaker. His greatest claim to fame, however, came from his time in Hollywood. Cooper conceived of, co-wrote, co-produced, and directed the 1933 blockbuster, *King Kong*, which shattered barriers in special effects. During the film's climactic scene, as the enormous ape clings to the top of the Empire State Building, Cooper himself is at the controls of the biplane that delivers the lethal burst of machine gun fire. A close friend and confidant of the Chief of the Army Air Forces, General "Hap" Arnold, and Director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan, he returned to military service in June 1941.²⁴

Cooper arrived at Chennault's office in Chongqing at the beginning of August 1942, a bedroll under his arm, his untucked shirt stained with pipe ashes, and unkempt hair ringing the bald spot on his head.

"I want a job with an outfit that's fighting," he announced. Amused, Chennault made him his chief of staff, sensing in the forty-eight-year-old colonel the boundless energy and imaginative creativity that could make his badly-outnumbered task force a formidable offensive instrument.²⁵

²³ Zbigniew Chichocki, "Merian C. Cooper – Forgotten hero of two nations!" American Polish Cooperation Society, 2016, <http://www.americanpolishcooperationsociety.com/2016/01/merian-c-cooper-forgotten-hero-of-two-nations>; Hugh Crumpler, "How's your CBI IQ?" *Ex-CBI Roundup*, January 1990, 26-29.

²⁴ Hugh Crumpler, "How's your CBI IQ?" *Ex-CBI Roundup*, January 1990, 26-29. Mark Cotta Vaz, *Living Dangerously: The Adventures of Merian C. Cooper, Creator of King Kong* (New York: Villard Books, 2005), 283.

²⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 181-182.

As evidenced by his prewar writings and remarkable successes with the Chinese warning net and American Volunteer Group, Chennault's expertise lay in defensive operations. Like any good fighter pilot, though, his heart yearned to go on the offensive. His task force did not possess enough equipment, quantitatively or qualitatively, however, to carry out a conventional air campaign. The mission to Wuhan that saw Glen Beneda and Lee Gregg shot down on May 6, 1944, involved fifty-four airplanes – one of the largest aerial armadas ever assembled by the Americans in China. On that same day over Western Europe, 336 heavy bombers and 185 fighters of the 8th and 9th air forces hit multiple targets across France.²⁶ In land warfare, the weak can often offset the advantages of a more powerful adversary by resorting to guerrilla tactics. As unlikely as aerial guerrilla warfare sounds, airpower has many characteristics that are inherently guerrilla, such as tactical mobility in three dimensions and the employment of lightning raids on enemy positions.

Cooper helped Chennault refine a four-phase approach to this innovative mode of warfare: first, preparation; second, a strategic defensive to secure base areas; third, tentative expansion with offensive guerrilla raids, and finally, a conventional air campaign to annihilate the enemy. Chennault largely accomplished the first phase before the United States entered the war, with the creation of the warning net and construction of airfields throughout China. The AVG carried out the second phase over southwest China from December 1941 through the first half of 1942, rendering the airfields there free from sustained Japanese bombing. By the time Cooper arrived in China, Chennault had set his

²⁶ U.S. Air Force, *U.S. Army Air Forces in World War II Combat Chronology: 1941-1945*, ed. Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller (Maxwell Field, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1991).

task force to making pinprick raids on Wuhan, Nanchang, Haiphong, Guangzhou, and targets in North Burma.²⁷

Strategically, his air force lay at the end of the world's longest supply line. However, operationally, his airfields in China worked along interior lines of communication. This meant that while the Japanese operated on a broad arc from Manchuria to Indochina, the China Air Task Force could easily move its planes from one base to another in an aerial shell game that kept the enemy guessing. It could strike out from its string of fields at Hengyang, Lingling, and Guilin²⁸ in central China and then fall back to the relative safety of the interior when the enemy retaliated.²⁹ Owing to the subsequent lack of American planes at the forward fields, retaliatory attacks accomplished little more than blowing craters in gravel runways. After each attack, Chinese workers quickly repaired the damage. China's advantage in manpower negated any damage the Japanese inflicted on its airfield infrastructure.³⁰

Unlike ground-based guerrilla warfare, Chennault did not have to restrict himself to soft targets on the periphery of Japan's East Asian domains. "No line of trenches, no geographical barrier, and no type of fixed fortifications can bar the operations of aircraft moving in the three dimensions of space," he wrote.³¹ Rather than attack the fringe, he used surprise and mobility to attack the center, and therefore reached a level of efficiency – in terms of damage caused to the enemy versus the meager size of his forces – impossible to attain in traditional guerrilla warfare.

²⁷ 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 38-40.

²⁸ Wade Giles: Kweilin, 桂林

²⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 185-186.

³⁰ Kelley, "Claire Lee Chennault," 23.

³¹ Claire Lee Chennault, "The Role of Defensive Pursuit: The Next Great War," *Coast Artillery Journal* 76, no. 6 (November-December 1933): 413.

In October 1942, Cooper set about planning the raid that would become the template for the 14th Air Force's greatest missions: the first attack on occupied Hong Kong. Japanese warships and transports used Victoria Harbor as an important way-station *en route* to Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. Intelligence predicted it would be packed with shipping.³² It promised to be a mission as cinematic and full of drama as any of Cooper's movies: Hong Kong, instead of King Kong. This time, Merian C. Cooper would be the guerrilla. Just like in the movie, it would be airplanes delivering the *coup de grâce*.³³

Cooper worked around the clock to perfect every detail. First, he built up a stockpile of ammunition, bombs, and gasoline at Guilin, in Guangxi Province, 470 miles east of Kunming. Supplies flown in over the Hump had to travel east by truck, train, and oxcart – a journey that often took weeks. To maintain the element of surprise, he planned for the strike force to fly a dogleg course that passed west of Guangzhou, avoiding Tian He Airdrome and other Japanese airfields in and around the city. The P-40s needed external fuel tanks to make the long round trip. He maintained strict operational security, only providing details to a few key leaders, and spreading misleading rumors through Guilin's bars and brothels. The fleet of nineteen warplanes staged through Guilin on the morning of the raid: Sunday, October 25, 1942. Only then did Colonel Cooper and Brigadier General Haynes brief the airmen on their mission.³⁴

Captain Howard C. Allers piloted the last of twelve B-25s. Each flight of four maintained a tight diamond, with the three diamonds stacked up and back in a "javelin"

³² Tenth Air Force, *History* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945), 115.

³³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 182.

³⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 196; Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 64.

formation. General Haynes led the vanguard. Allers tucked in behind his flight leader, Brick Holstrom, as the low man at the tail end of the last diamond. His crew and one other, that of Wilmer McDowell, hailed from the 22nd Bomb Squadron, then based in India. They flew over the Hump to augment their sister squadron for this “maximum effort” mission.³⁵

Cruising at seventeen thousand feet, the formation reached its initial point seven miles north of Hong Kong. Allers kept in close as they turned toward the target. His crew functioned as a team: each man trusting the others to do their jobs (see Figure 11). The copilot, Lieutenant Nick Marich, glanced over the engine instruments and then looked out the cockpit window; not a single cloud marred the afternoon sky. No flak or fighters greeted them. Meanwhile, standing in the electrically-powered upper turret, Sergeant Paul Webb watched as two flights of P-40s carved gentle arcs through the air three thousand feet above them. He tracked the “Sharks” for a moment in his optical sight, then resumed his scan for enemy fighters. As his ship’s engineer, he had a thorough knowledge of its systems, engines, and armament. Normally, he helped the copilot monitor the engines and fuel consumption and troubleshoot mechanical issues. But when it came time to go into action, he manned the twin .50-cals in the Bendix turret. Similarly, Sergeant Jim Young, the radio operator, left his compartment to man the .30-caliber gun mounted through a hole in the floor. Since arriving in CBI, squadron armament crews had removed the clunky and unreliable remote-controlled bottom turrets. In the navigator’s compartment, 2nd Lieutenant Murray Lewis monitored their position in case they became separated from the formation. In the greenhouse nose of the bomber, Lieutenant Joe

³⁵ Wilmer E. McDowell, “The Hong Kong Raid,” *Newsletter of the 22nd Bomb Squadron Association*, vol. 19, no. 2, May 2008, 5; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 40-41.

Cunningham waited to drop the bombs. This would be a formation drop; all twelve bombers would release with the lead aircraft.³⁶

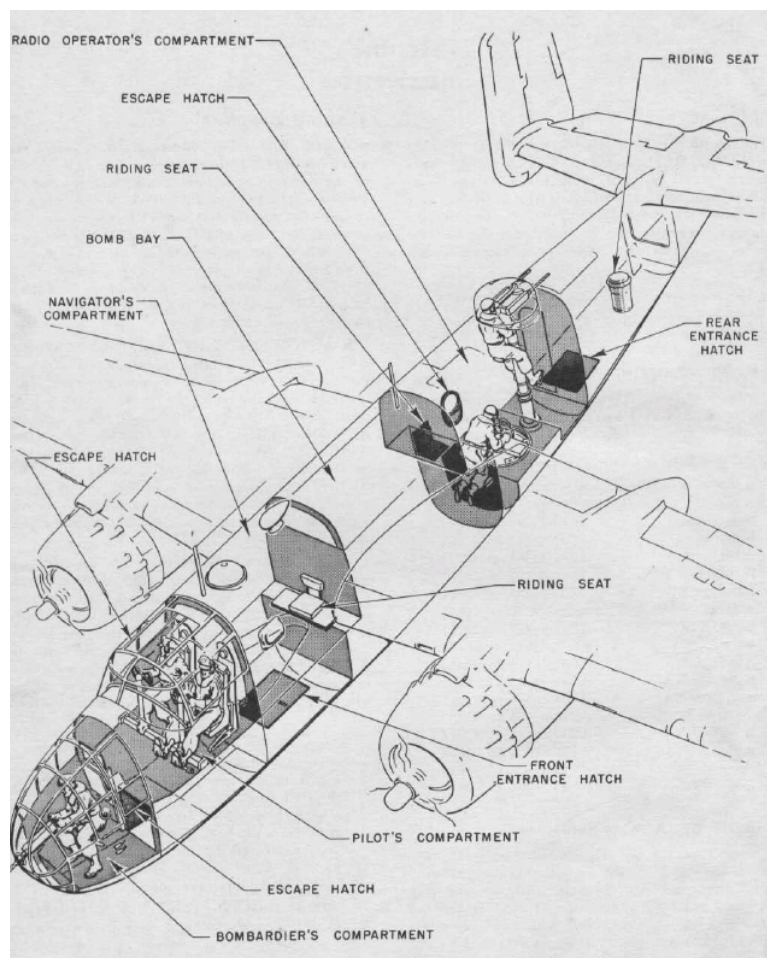


Figure 11. B-25C crew positions and exit hatches from U.S. Army, *Pilot's Flight Operating Instructions for Army Models B-25C and D Series* (Chicago: F.J. Riley Printing Co., 1943), 2.

The greenhouse gave Cunningham an excellent view as they approached Hong Kong. He did not see the promised convoy in the harbor, though. In fact, it looked completely empty. General Haynes' ship adjusted course ever-so-slightly toward the docks at Jiulong.³⁷ Anti-aircraft fire belatedly began to burst around them. Then

³⁶ Paul G. Webb, "Shot Down Over Hong Kong," *EX-CBI Roundup*, February 1982, 12; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 41.

³⁷ 九龙, also transliterated as "Kowloon."

Cunningham saw the lead bomber open its bomb bay doors. He reached down to the handle on his left and opened theirs. He quickly inspected the bomb control panel once again to make sure their six 500-pounders would salvo all at once. Then, he moved his thumb over the release switch, just left of the Norden bombsight. There! He jammed down the button as the first bombs fell clear of the lead B-25. He felt the ship lift perceptibly and watched as the formation's thirty thousand pounds of demolition and nearly two thousand pounds of fragmentation bombs slammed into the docks and warehouses below.³⁸

Haynes began a left-hand, diving turn to break away from the anti-aircraft fire.

"Bandits ahead – Zeros! Eleven o'clock!" the radio erupted.³⁹ Allers looked to his left, but Haynes abruptly reversed his turn into a steep bank to the right. At the end of the whip, Allers reacted quickly to maintain his position.

Marich, the copilot, saw at least a dozen Oscars in front of them now – the general had turned into them to spoil their attack.⁴⁰ The enemy fighters began shooting at the lead flight and continued through the formation, firing as they passed. Two of them dove between Allers' ship and Brick Holstrom's in front of them, barely missing a collision. The air exploded with tracers as the bombers returned fire. Three groups of Japanese fighters – at least twenty-one in total – engaged the Americans, quickly overwhelming

³⁸ Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 65; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 41; Assistant Chief of Air Staff Intelligence Historical Division, *The Tenth Air Force: 1942*, Army Air Forces Historical Studies, No. 12 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944), 115.

³⁹ Scott, *God is My Copilot*, 228.

⁴⁰ These were Ki-43-I Oscars of the 24th and 33rd air regiments.

their small fighter escort. Marich watched as the disciplined enemy reformed on their sun side and began making methodical, diving passes.⁴¹

“I’ve got six planes climbing and closing on us fast from about two o’clock,” Webb announced over the intercom. He kept up a steady fire with his .50-cals, trying to track one of the fighters high and to his right. The turret could not track fast enough and the enemy ship riddled them with bullets from engine to tail.⁴²

Young fired with the .30-cal as the fighter passed underneath. A flickering glow caught the corner of his eye and he stood from his gun to look out the side window.

“The right engine is on fire!” he told the crew, the alarm in his voice carrying through on the intercom.

Marich looked at the engine instruments; they had been hit in the oil line.

“The emergency system is working,” he told Allers. “The engine is still working, but it’s throwing oil. Pressure is zero.”

Allers grimly watched as they began to fall behind the rest of the formation. A swarm of fighters singled out their wounded bomber.

Seven “Zeros” attacked them now. In the nose, Cunningham fired his single .50-cal at one making a head-on pass. He could see his tracers pouring into it. Webb’s from the top turret soon joined in. Shot and shrapnel from the fighter hit all around him, bouncing off the armor plate. The enemy dove out to sea, smoking. Cunningham changed ammunition belts.

⁴¹ McDowell, “The Hong Kong Raid,” 5; Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 65; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 41; Air Staff Intelligence Historical Division, *The Tenth Air Force: 1942*, 115.

⁴² Webb, “Shot Down Over Hong Kong,” 12.

“Three enemy pursuits directly behind us!” Young’s voice came over the intercom again. Webb slewed his turret aft and opened fire. Three P-40s dove in to help, but more Oscars piled into the dogfight and one of the Sharks fell away in smoke and flames.

The next attack hit their left engine. It quit immediately. The right engine continued sputtering for a time, but it soon gave out as well. Allers glided for land and told the crew to prepare to bailout. Three fighters followed them down, continuing to pelt the bomber with machine gun fire.⁴³

With both engines out, Webb no longer had power for the turret. He climbed down to find Young’s .30-cal had jammed. The intercom went dead.

“What do you think about bailing out?” Young asked him. Webb glanced forward. They had no way to communicate with the four officers up front and the bomber continued losing altitude fast.

“Let’s jump,” he confirmed.

The two sergeants helped each other into their parachutes and opened the rear hatch. The green-brown waters of the Pearl River raced beneath them. Young went first. Webb jumped after him and pulled the ripcord barely a thousand feet above the ground.⁴⁴

As soon as Allers instructed them to prepare to bailout, Cunningham crawled back from the greenhouse into the navigator’s compartment. Marich helped him don his parachute. Lewis, the young navigator, managed to pull on his own pack, but could not seem to fasten the leg straps. Cunningham tried to lend him a hand. Marich looked back

⁴³ Webb, “Shot Down Over Hong Kong,” 12; Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 66; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 41.

⁴⁴ Webb, “Shot Down Over Hong Kong,” 12.

to the flight deck and saw they had less than two thousand feet of altitude. He noticed Allers lining up on a dry rice paddy.

“It’s too late to bail!” he told the others. “Allers is going to crash land!”

They braced for impact. Allers set it down as gently as possibly, but they bounced around the compartment as the airplane skidded to a halt. The four of them scrambled out through the escape hatch above the cockpit.

“We have to burn the plane,” Allers insisted immediately. He walked to the nose, drew his .45-caliber pistol, and fired seven bullets into the Norden bombsight. Then shots began raining down from the sky and a blunt-nosed fighter roared overhead. All four airmen hit the deck. Bullets pinged off the aluminum skin of the airplane as two more Oscars strafed the wreck. Allers, Marich, Cunningham, and Lewis ran for some brush near the edge of the rice paddy, but the Japanese followed them with their guns, continuing to strafe for another fifteen minutes. Marich lost his pistol in the mad scramble. Allers took a bullet to his left foot.⁴⁵

Then the fighters disappeared. Cunningham ran back to the bomber and retrieved the first aid kit. He also grabbed the bombing tables and threw them into a muddy ditch nearby. He returned to his comrades and the three of them helped Allers hobble to a small village about four hundred yards distant. A crowd gathered around them. The crew did not see any Japanese, so they paused to dress Allers’ foot. Marich asked some of the villagers if they had a doctor, but none seemed to understand. With the foot bandaged, they set out for the hills. Before long, a few villagers who knew a little English caught up

⁴⁵ AGAS-China, *Evader’s Narrative Report: Lieutenant Cunningham*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1942); McDowell, “The Hong Kong Raid,” 6; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 41.

to them and offered to help – for a price. Later, this would have been a clear warning sign to an evader. Very few Chinese rescuers ever accepted money from American airmen. A third of evasion reports specifically mention Chinese refusing any sort of payment. Only one in five describe rescuers accepting money and many of those instances proved troublesome. The four officers had no idea, however, being the first to have gone down so far from a friendly airbase. Later aircrews received extensive briefings from squadron intelligence officers and participated in late-night bull sessions in which they discussed what they would do if they went down. Allers, Marich, Cunningham, and Lewis had none of that. Theirs would be the first test case.⁴⁶

Marich gave each of the men \$1,000CN (Chinese National currency). The locals guided the four of them to an old temple, where they exchanged jackets and flight suits for traditional Chinese garb. The villagers promised to take them upriver by boat later. While they waited, Cunningham purchased food and tea for another \$1,600CN. A doctor arrived to look at Allers' foot.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the two sergeants landed in an irrigation ditch. Extricating themselves from the water and mud, they walked to a nearby village. A man there told them he would try to get them to Macao, still in the hands of neutral Portugal on the opposite bank of the Pearl River. In the meantime, he needed them to hide in the brush along the water's edge. They huddled there until dusk, when a young boy arrived and motioned for them to follow. He led them away from the bay up a dirt path into the countryside.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ AGAS-China, *Lieutenant Cunningham*; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 41.

⁴⁷ AGAS-China, *Lieutenant Cunningham*.

⁴⁸ Webb, "Shot Down Over Hong Kong," 12.

Back at the temple, Cunningham became suspicious. One of their pistols had gone missing. He caught a villager trying to steal his wallet. Then a woman arrived, dressed in a fine silk gown. The locals showed her deference.

“You will await the coming of Japanese authorities,” she announced in clear English. “We intend to hold you here.”

Not all the villagers were in accord, for the moment she stepped out, an old man discretely drew a picture of a Japanese flag and motioned to indicate enemy soldiers nearby. Cunningham drew his .45 – the only one they had left. He brandished it as they exited the temple, threatening to shoot anyone who tried to stop them.

They started for the mountains to the northeast. Allers’ injured foot slowed them down. The pilot became progressively more delirious from exhaustion and loss of blood. Before long, shots and yelling rang out from the village and they saw torches and flashlights moving toward them through the gathering night. They took cover in some long grass on a steep ledge. One of the collaborators found them there and ran back for the main body of pursuers. Cunningham and Marich scrambled over the ledge and shouted for Allers and Lewis to follow. Receiving no reply, they ran. Shots rang out from those in chase. Cunningham returned fire on the move, and the two of them escaped into the night.⁴⁹

Webb and Young continued to follow the young boy up the path. Suddenly, four Japanese soldiers sprang from the underbrush and surrounded them. They disarmed the sergeants and marched them with bayonets at their backs to a nearby village. They discovered Allers and Lewis there, already in enemy custody. The four of them boarded a

⁴⁹ AGAS-China, *Lieutenant Cunningham*.

truck to begin their six-week stay in Guangzhou's city jail. Japanese intelligence officers interrogated them there before finally sending them on to the Jiangwan prisoner of war camp in Shanghai.⁵⁰

Marich and Cunningham continued into the interior for two days, dodging Japanese patrols, until finally they met a band of friendly guerrillas. These refused their money. Their commander sent a squad to look for the other four crew members, but could find no trace of them. The guerrillas escorted the two airmen to Waizhou, delivering them to Major Clague of the British Army Aid Group (BAAG), an organization established to help British soldiers and civilians escape Hong Kong after the Japanese conquest in December 1941. The organization proved a boon for Chennault's airmen, running stations at Waizhou, Qujiang, and Wuzhou that became collecting points for nascent ratlines out of occupied Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Every evasion report in the archives for airmen who went down in this area mentions use of these lines (see Figure 12). From Waizhou, Marich and Cunningham traveled by boat up the East River and thence by truck and train to Guilin, where they rejoined the American air force.⁵¹

The success of BAAG influenced Chennault to create his own evasion organization, the Air-Ground Aid Service (AGAS). Working with the myriad intelligence and military organizations throughout China, including BAAG, the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO), the Nationalist Army, various warlords and guerrilla groups, the Communist New 4th and 8th Route armies, 14th Air Force Intelligence, and later, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), AGAS dedicated itself solely to returning downed airmen to friendly custody. In other theaters, Military Intelligence Service-X

⁵⁰ Webb, "Shot Down Over Hong Kong," 12-13.

⁵¹ AGAS-China, *Lieutenant Cunningham*.

(MIS-X), modeled after Britain's MI9, performed this role. Chennault, in forming his own organization, created something unique and highly specialized.⁵²



Figure 12. Evasion Lines from Hong Kong

Besides rescuing Cunningham and Marich, BAAG provided an intelligence assessment on damage caused by the raid. The strike force lost two aircraft on the day's mission: Allers' bomber and a P-40 flown by Lieutenant Morton Sher.⁵³ Like Marich and Cunningham, Sher successfully returned to friendly territory. The eleven remaining B-25s landed at Guilin and immediately loaded up for two night missions; six bombers returned to Hong Kong to bomb the North Point power plant in CATF's first night raid of

⁵² Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 218.

⁵³ B-25C Unknown Serial Number, 22BS, 341BG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 42 miles northwest of Hong Kong, Capt Howard C. Allers, O-397410, Pilot, Captured; 1Lt Nicholas Marich, Copilot, Rescued; 1Lt Joseph W. Cunningham, Bombardier, Rescued; 2Lt Murray L. Lewis, O-789254, Navigator, Captured; Sgt Paul G. Webb, 6922646, Engineer-Gunner, Captured; Sgt James N. Young, 19015840, Radio Operator-Gunner, Captured. P-40E Unknown Serial Number, 76FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft north of Hong Kong, 2Lt Morton Sher, O-433593, Rescued. Sher died on August 20, 1943, when enemy aircraft shot down his P-40 near Shitanxiang.

the war. Three more targeted gasoline storage tanks at Tian He airdrome in nearby Guangzhou. All nine returned without incident and the strike force departed Guilin for the safety of Yunnan the next morning.⁵⁴

The BAAG station at Waizhou reported that the Japanese issued no air raid warnings in advance of the attacks, nor did they enforce blackouts. “The raids could not be regarded as successful from the military point of view,” the report continued, “of the main targets of the docks, power stations, gas works, as well as Whitfield Barracks; only Whitfield Barracks received successful hits.” Over the next several days, Japanese newspapers claimed the Americans “dropped a few bombs haphazardly when chased by Nipponese fighters.” In response to American pronouncements of damage inflicted, the papers bragged: “As can be seen by the public themselves, all these stories are absolutely false. It can be seen that all the shipyards are continuing work as usual and that the electric system is still functioning.” The raids, “caused only slight damage to property but great suffering to the Chinese.” The BAAG report, however, found the Chinese “took it that only military installations were targeted, except for strays.”⁵⁵

In Chennault’s estimation, the series of raids had its desired effect, demonstrating the increased reach and audacity of his small task force. Indeed, the Japanese Army Air Force wasted a good deal of effort maintaining standing fighter patrols over Hong Kong and bombing the empty airfield at Guilin. The mission prompted Chennault to address the issue of evasion, as recovery of downed aircrews would become more of an issue as he

⁵⁴ McDowell, “The Hong Kong Raid,” 6-7; Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 67; 11th Bombardment Squadron, *Squadron History*, 41-42; Air Staff Intelligence Historical Division, *The Tenth Air Force: 1942*, 116.

⁵⁵ “October 1942 Air Raids over Hong Kong,” Gwulo: Old Hong Kong, 2014, <https://gwulo.com/node/18944>.

set his forces increasingly on the offensive. It also provided a template for the 14th Air Force's greatest raids later in the war: on November 25, 1943, fourteen B-25s and fifteen long-range fighters staged through Suichuan, 250 miles east of Guilin, for a Thanksgiving Day raid on Taiwan. The strike force claimed forty-six Japanese aircraft destroyed. On January 17, 1945, seventeen P-51 Mustangs staged through Nancheng, a further 150 miles east of Suichuan, for an attack on Shanghai, claiming seventy-three Japanese aircraft destroyed (see Figure 13). Neither of these spectacular raids resulted in any American losses.⁵⁶



Figure 13. Famous Raids

⁵⁶ Molesworth, *Sharks Over China*, 163-164, 252.

As it happened, General Stilwell objected to Chennault's increasingly offensive posture. He wanted the air force in China to remain on the defensive, protecting the Hump airlift and supporting his return to Burma. His plan called for flying one hundred thousand Chinese troops to India, where, unhindered by the blockade, he would provide them lend-lease equipment and mold them the core of a new Chinese Army. This "X-Ray Force" would then invade North Burma from India while twenty divisions of a "Yoke Force" would invade from Yunnan. Joining in the middle, they would reopen a ground supply line to China and then march across the Guizhou Plateau and Hunan in an attack on Wuhan (see Figure 14). The plan, though logical and linear, would mean years without most of occupied China seeing any evidence of Allied aid. They had already been at war for five years. Stilwell's methodical approach addressed the military situation, but not the socio-political crisis of China's sagging morale.⁵⁷

Chennault's phased plan did not make sense to the traditional old foot soldier. The airman never intended his phases to be strictly linear, and, in fact, several could be in progress simultaneously. For example, his fighters could be conducting a strategic defensive to secure bases from enemy air attack in central China, while fighters and bombers used airfields in east China to carry out offensive guerrilla raids, and fighters, bombers, and transports supported the Chinese Army with a conventional air campaign in

⁵⁷ Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Mission to China* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1953), 179, 225-226, 241.

southwest China, all while he continued to expand the warning net and build new runways even farther afield.



Figure 14. Stilwell's Plan

Chennault chafed under Stilwell, whom he saw as obsessed with returning to Burma. The ever-active Cooper felt the same way and sent a bitterly critical letter to “Wild Bill” Donovan. The OSS director circulated it around Washington, much to the horror of General George Marshall, Stilwell’s old friend and most stalwart supporter. The Army chief quickly arranged for Cooper’s recall. The brilliant planner, legendary pilot, and fearless adventurer returned to the United States in November 1942.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Vaz, *Living Dangerously*, 312-313.

CHAPTER V

April 24 to 28, 1943

Karachi, India, to Washington, D.C.

The big, four-engine transport droned west across the drab brown landscape of the Middle East and North Africa. Inside, Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell and Major General Claire Chennault sat at opposite ends of the cabin, an air of icy indifference between them. Neither man – either in personal diaries or later biographies – mentioned speaking a word to the other on the long flight to America. Their professional relationship had long since lost any pretense of cordiality.¹

The two made for an interesting study in contrasts; Stilwell possessed the pedigree of a West Point graduate from an upper-middle-class family in Upstate New York. He looked almost professorial, with close-cropped gray hair, wire-rimmed spectacles, and a long cigarette holder clutched between his fingers. The largely self-taught Chennault chain-smoked his way through a pack of Camels, his dark eyes narrowed in a perpetual squint. He spent his youth in the backwoods of rural Louisiana and had the deeply-lined, tanned features of a frontiersman. Now the two of them traveled home to present their competing visions for the war in China to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Using his briefcase as a desk, Chennault refined his plan *en route*.²

¹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 218; Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, 203.

² Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China*, 9-10, 15; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, loc. 335-343 of 8428, Kindle; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 218-219.

Reluctant to commit more troops to another Stilwell-led misadventure in Burma, Chiang Kai-shek had advocated for Chennault's vision and asked for an American air force in China free from the interference of 10th Air Force in New Delhi. Chennault's recent promotion signaled some level of agreement or accommodation on the part of the Roosevelt administration. On March 10, 1943, the U.S. 14th Army Air Force took the place of the old China Air Task Force. Though Chennault no longer answered to Bissell, his new command remained under Stilwell's jurisdiction. The same basic disagreement remained: Stilwell wanted to focus on a ground offensive to retake Burma. Chennault wanted to fight an air campaign in China.³

Not long after arriving in Washington D.C., the newly-minted major general stood in the Oval Office for a private audience with the President of the United States.

"The Japs don't want to fight in China, particularly in the air, and therefore should be made to do so," he began. "China is the only place from which the Allies can gnaw at Japan's vitals. We've already been hitting the Yangzi River ports, as well as Hong Kong, Wuhan, Guangzhou, and French Indochina. The Japanese life line through the Taiwan Straits and South China Sea is within range of medium bombers based at Guilin. The Japanese industrial cities of Kobe, Tokyo, Nagoya, Nagasaki, Osaka, and Yokohama are all within range of heavy bombers at new, far-eastern fields." He had the president's attention.⁴

"My timetable," he continued, "calls for a two-month operation against the Japanese Air Force in China beginning in July. The Japanese don't want to expend a major air effort in China, but if strongly challenged, they will be forced to, or else face a

³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 216; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, 317.

⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 221; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, 321.

crippling blow to their war economy. During the final month of counter-air-force operations, B-25s will begin pounding the China coast ports, Hainan Island, and the Gulf of Tonkin. The second phase, beginning in September, will extend their range to cover the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea. Heavy bombers will move into east China fields and begin bombing Taiwan and the Shanghai-Nanjing area. By the end of November, at the earliest, it will be possible to bomb Japanese shipping from Korea to Cam Ranh Bay and to begin operations against the industrial cities of Japan” (see Figure 15).⁵

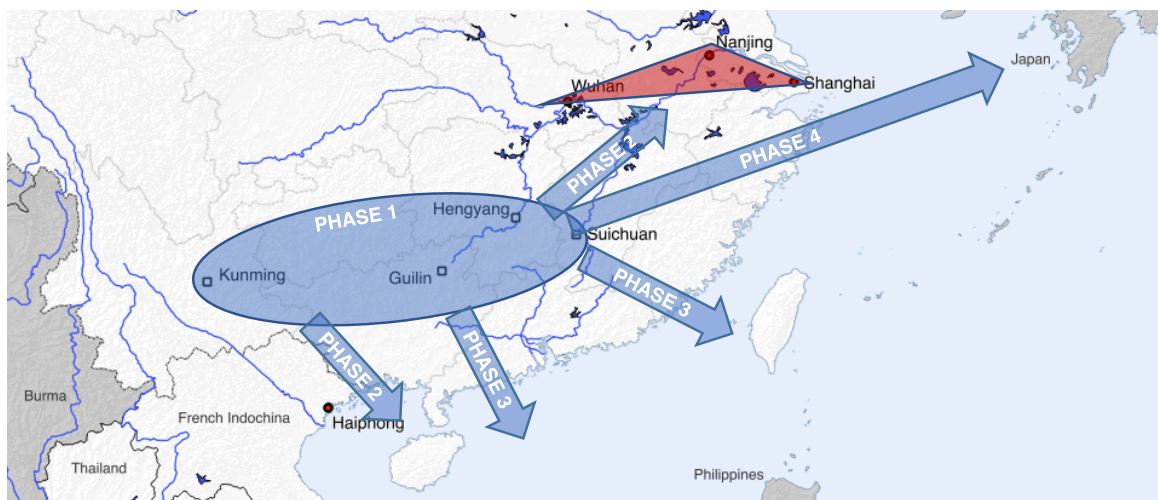


Figure 15. Chennault's Plan

Chennault seemed to be promising a shortcut to the war in the Pacific – a shortcut that would allow Roosevelt to pursue the defeat of Japan while still maintaining his Europe first policy.

“To begin,” the general explained, “I need three more fighter squadrons and three more B-25 squadrons than I have in China right now. And I need the immediate flow of

⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 221-222; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, 321.

4,700 tons over the Hump each month. After three months, I will need just 150 fighters, seventy medium bombers, thirty-five heavy bombers, and 7,129 tons over the Hump.”⁶

His shortcut seemed to come at a minuscule cost.

“Merchant shipping is the key to the enemy war effort,” Roosevelt mused.

“Could a China-based air force sink a million tons of Japanese shipping a year?”

“Sir,” Chennault answered, “if we receive ten thousand tons of supplies a month, my planes will sink a million tons.”

The president banged a fist on his desk. “If you can sink a million tons, we’ll break their backs!” he exclaimed.⁷

Stilwell had his own audience with the president. But in contrast to Chennault’s passionate evangelism, he remained reserved, lamely mumbling his Burma plan while sitting hunched over in a chair.

“Is he sick?” Roosevelt asked General Marshall.⁸

“The Chinese show an increasing tendency to neglect their obligation of furnishing the manpower we are to equip and train,” Stilwell grouched to the president. He explained he wanted to withhold lend-lease supplies to coerce Chiang into sending troops to Burma. He thought Chennault’s plan dangerous; “As we found out last spring,” he asserted, referencing the aftermath of the Doolittle Raid, “any attempt to bomb Japan is going to bring a prompt and violent reaction on the ground.” Stilwell’s acerbic aloofness and penchant for understatement fell flat against Chennault’s dramatic exaggeration. His idea of withholding lend-lease supplies to strong-arm the generalissimo disturbed the

⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 221; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China*, 321.

⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 225-226.

⁸ Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China*, 323; Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China*, 367.

president. And to his point about Japanese retaliation for air action, Chiang had already promised his troops could hold the eastern airfields.⁹

“My first thought is that Stilwell has exactly the wrong approach in dealing with Generalissimo Chiang,” Roosevelt commented to Marshall. “All of us must remember that the Generalissimo came up the hard way to become the undisputed leader of four hundred million people – an enormously difficult job... one cannot speak sternly to a man like that or exact commitments from him the way we might do from the Sultan of Morocco.” The president instructed Stilwell to limit his operations in North Burma and give priority in China to Chennault’s air force. By all appearances, Chennault had won; his ideas would govern the conduct of American operations in China.¹⁰

Unbeknownst to Roosevelt, Chiang, Stilwell, or Chennault, the Japanese Army Air Force had its own plans for China. Lieutenant General Moritaka Nakazono, commander of the 3rd Air Division, resolved to wipe out the American air force before it built up enough strength to raid the Home Islands. His three-phase offensive would focus first on the airfields in central China from the end of July until mid-August 1943, then shift to the Nationalist capital at Chongqing for two weeks, before finally aiming to wipe out the bases in Yunnan Province in September (see Figure 16).¹¹ He had two new arrows in his quiver to challenge the American fighters: an upgraded Ki-43-II Oscar, with a new engine, rudimentary self-sealing fuel tanks, and strengthened wings – and an entirely new menace, the Nakajima Ki-44 Army Type 2 Fighter, known by its Allied codename,

⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 222; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China*, 320.

¹⁰ Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China*, 279, 322.

¹¹ Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, *Air Operations in the China Area: July 1937 to August 1945*, by Major Takejiro Shiba, Japanese Monograph No. 76 (Tokyo, 1956), 75; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China*, 337-338.

“Tojo.” It looked more like a P-47 Thunderbolt than a Zero, with a large radial engine, short, tapered, cigar-shaped fuselage, and elliptical wings. It had a tighter turning radius, faster level speed, and higher ceiling than a P-40. It could out-dive it, too, and had better armament and armor than an Oscar. Its only notable weakness seemed to be its limited range.¹²



Figure 16. Nakazono's Plan

Coincidentally, Nakazono's offensive kicked off the same time as Chennault's air superiority campaign. The two sides parried inconclusively for nearly a month, often disrupted by long bouts of terrible weather. American pilots caught fleeting glimpses of the Tojo, but on August 20, 1943, the new fighter attacked in force, with new tactics suited to its strengths. Fourteen Sharks took off from Guilin that morning when the

¹² Fourteenth Air Force, Historical Office, *Backbone of the 14th*, Reel A8296 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944), 3.

warning net reported unknowns inbound. At 0915 hours, the enemy formation appeared overhead: at least twenty Ki-44s from the 85th Air Regiment. Captain Yuki Yoshi Wakamatsu led them in between thirty and thirty-five thousand feet – high above the waiting P-40s. Rather than lure the Americans into dogfights, they turned Chennault's own tactics against them, abandoning their usual three-plane elements in favor of fighting in pairs, and diving out of the sun to make hit-and-run attacks before zooming back to altitude. The outmatched Americans could only fly along line abreast and try to turn into the attacks before the enemy closed into range. Two P-40s went down in short order, both pilots killed in action.¹³ Captain Wakamatsu's fighters reported no losses. The Japanese appeared to have a decisive technological advantage.¹⁴

Fourteenth Air Force received a handful of new fighter types itself – a squadron of P-38s at the end of July and fifteen P-51As in October. All of them arrived in China second-hand. The P-38s of Squadron X – re-designated the 449th Fighter Squadron – had flown in the harsh environment of the North African desert. The P-51s had each accumulated at least a hundred hours of “city miles” at an operational training unit in Florida. These small numbers of pre-worn replacements meant the P-40 remained the backbone of the 14th's fighter fleet until well into 1944. But the Tojo proved troublesome even for the early-model Mustangs. On December 1, 1943, Tex Hill led six P-51As on a mission to Hong Kong. He had arrived on his second combat tour in October, taking command of the now-veteran 23rd Fighter Group just as it received its first Mustangs. A

¹³ MACR 460: P-40K 42-9752, 74FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Guilin, 2Lt Mao Yu Kwei (Chinese Air Force), Killed in Action, Body Recovered. P-40K Unknown Serial Number, 74FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Guilin, Capt Truman O. Jeffreys, O-429419, Killed in Action, Body Recovered.

¹⁴ Orlando Air Base, Adjutant General's Section, Historical Branch, *Fourteenth Air Force Chronology*, Reel A8303 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1947), 6; Fourteenth Air Force, *Backbone of the 14th*, 4; Nick Millman, email to Daniel Jackson, December 19, 2007.

squadron of Tojos bounced Tex and his flight over the target, quickly shooting down Captain James M. Williams, leading the second element, and his wingman, Lieutenant Robert T. Colbert.¹⁵ Tex fought for his life, twisting and rolling and diving for the ground. The Tojos filled his fighter full of holes, but he managed to escape and limp home. He immediately reported to Chennault in Kunming.

“Sir, they’ve got a new fighter down there,” he told the Old Man. “It whipped our P-51s pretty good. I don’t know if we’re going to be able to beat them in the air!”¹⁶

Both Williams and Colbert evaded with the help of friendly Chinese and returned to American control – Williams through Wuzhou and Colbert through Huizhou and Qujiang. Both noted odd behavior on the part of Colonel Hill leading up to the disastrous dogfight. For starters, he did not climb above ten thousand feet until just before the target. Then, he did not respond when Williams called out “Zeros” on the radio. “I waited,” reported Williams, “thinking that Col. Hill was waiting until they got almost there but he did nothing and then it was too late.”¹⁷ Perhaps Tex’s fighter suffered some sort of radio malfunction. Or perhaps he overestimated the capabilities of the P-51 – or underestimated the Tojo. Either way, he found his narrow escape a sobering experience.

Subsequent combat showed the Tojo and Mustang relatively evenly matched, with pilot skill and tactical advantage often proving the critical factors. The P-51 could fly faster than the Tojo and turn with it at indicated speeds greater than three hundred miles per hour. The Tojo, however, still had a greater service ceiling than the early-model

¹⁵ P-51A Unknown Serial Number, 76FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft north of Macau, Capt James M. Williams, O-43228, Rescued.

MACR 12260: P-51A 43-6277, 76FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft between Guangzhou and Hong Kong, 1Lt Robert T. Colbert, O-736998, Rescued.

¹⁶ Hill and Schaupp, “*Tex*” Hill, 239.

¹⁷ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Evasion Report of Capt J.M. Williams*.

Mustang and could easily out-climb it. Compared to four .50-caliber guns mounted in the P-51's wings, the Tojo had two in the wings and two on the cowling. Firing through the prop arc restricted the cowling guns to a slower rate of fire, giving the Mustang an edge in firepower. However, the Mustang's guns had to be mounted diagonally in its slim, efficient wings. This frequently caused the feeding mechanisms to jam when fired under the high g-forces of a typical dogfight.¹⁸

When Hill reported on the disastrous fight over Hong Kong, Chennault told him the same thing he told his Forward Echelon commander, Colonel Clinton D. "Casey" Vincent, after the Tojos first appeared that summer: "Get them on the ground. Then you don't have to fight them in the air."¹⁹ To secure his bases in central China, his strategic defensive turned to an offensive. Vincent sent his fighters and bombers to hit airfields at Wuhan and Guangzhou to force the enemy to engage on his terms.

Nakazono had to admit failure at Phase One of his plan; he did not drive the Americans out of central China. Poor weather and attacks on his airbases also caused Phase Two to flounder; his warplanes only managed to mount one raid on Chongqing. He decided to initiate Phase Three and wipe out the American bases in Yunnan. This time, he would direct the effort personally. On the early afternoon of September 9, 1943, he and his staff boarded two Mitsubishi twin-engine transports to move his headquarters from Jiayi, Taiwan,²⁰ to Guangzhou. At 1405 hours that day, four P-38s took off from Lingling to bomb the Huangpu docks south of the city. First Air Brigade issued a warning

¹⁸ Glen Beneda, interview; Fourteenth Air Force, *Backbone of the 14th*.

¹⁹ Hill and Schaupp, "*Tex*" Hill, 233-234.

²⁰ Wade Giles: Chiayi, 嘉义

for all Japanese aircraft to remain clear of the area because of enemy action. Nakazono's transport either did not receive the warning, or failed to abide by it.²¹

Climbing away from his dive-bombing run, Lieutenant Billie Beardsley spotted the transport six miles southeast of Guangzhou. He and his wingman gave chase. At 1530 hours, he dove from behind and let loose with guns and cannon, sending the transport crashing down on an island in the Pearl River. Medical personnel later examined the wreckage and determined Nakazono died from gunfire prior to the crash. The general's timely demise occurred less than five months after Rex Barber shot down Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto over Bougainville. Third Air Division feared the United States had broken its codes and knew all its plans. Division headquarters cancelled Phase Three after only one attack on Kunming. Initiative passed decisively to the Americans. Ironically, Beardsley had no inkling as to the strategic consequences of his actions and did not find out until forty years later. Nakazono's "accidental" death owed entirely to happenstance. This time, the fog and friction of war played to the advantage of the Americans.²²

Nakazono's air offensive represented the fiercest fighting yet in the air war for China. The summer of 1943 saw the opposing forces closest to parity, in terms of number of aircraft, technology, and experience. It proved to be a tipping point that swung the air fighting in favor of the 14th Air Force. It could easily have gone the other way.

Enemy aircraft accounted for eighteen percent of American warplanes reported missing on combat missions in the China Theater. This included twenty-three P-51s –

²¹ Hiroshi Ichimura, e-mail to the author, August 19, 2008; Milton Miller, "Still More on General Moritaka Nakazone," *Jing Bao Journal*, August-September 1984, 16; Richard Maddox, correspondence with Daniel Jackson, 2007.

²² Hiroshi Ichimura, e-mail to the author, August 19, 2008; Miller, "Still More on General Moritaka Nakazone." Maddox, correspondence.

slightly over ten percent of the total number of missing Mustangs. Predictably, P-40s suffered worse – a total of forty-seven aircraft, or twenty-eight percent of the total number of missing Sharks. Surprisingly, P-38s, known as Zero-killers in the Pacific, suffered the greatest percentage lost: eleven out of twenty-two reported missing – an astounding fifty percent (see Figure 17)! Perhaps even more surprising is that none of them fell to Ki-44s.²³ Rather, in each case, Oscars from the 25th Air Regiment ambushed them from greater altitude, shooting down multiple P-38s in each of four engagements. Such was the case when Lee Gregg, John Opsvig, and William Jones went down southwest of Wuhan on May 6, 1944.

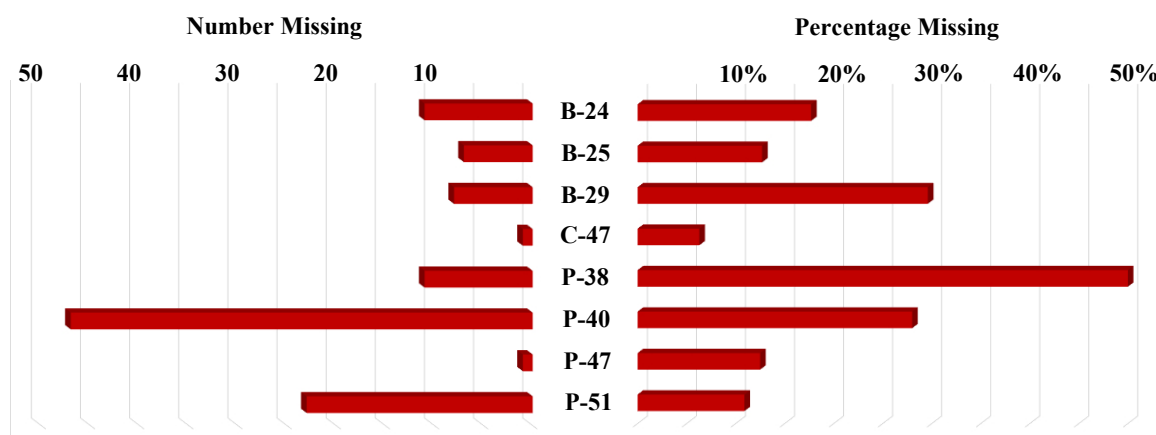


Figure 17. Aircraft Missing Due to Enemy Aircraft

This trend greatly frustrated Chennault. The P-38 had a clear advantage over the Oscar in terms of speed, rate of climb, ceiling, and firepower. It lacked only in maneuverability. “They arrived from North Africa with a fondness for dogfighting and without spare parts,” the general grumbled. “These pilots refused to believe a P-38

²³ Ki-44s might have shot down two P-38s, that of Lt Walter Smith at Guilin on July 24, 1943, and Lieutenant Art Masterson at Suichuan on February 12, 1944. It remains unknown whether their assailants were Ki-43s or Ki-44s. Both aircraft went down near friendly airfields and the pilots walked back without having to evade through occupied territory.

couldn't turn with an Oscar, Zero, or Tojo. As a result, the 449th became the only American fighter squadron in China against which the Japs approached an even break.”²⁴

October 30, 1943, marked a low point for the troubled squadron. The 25th Air Regiment caught two flights of P-38s at low altitude while dive-bombing shipping at the Yangzi River port of Jiujiang. Four Lightnings went down in short order, including that of Captain Lewden Enslen, the squadron commander. Two pilots managed to return to friendly territory. One remains listed as missing in action. Enslen, though rescued by the Chinese, died from his wounds ten days later in the small village of Huangmei.²⁵ His loss devastated the squadron. Chennault realized he needed someone he could count on to fix both the unit's tactical deficiencies and their low morale. He had just such a person in mind.²⁶

When George McMillan returned home in July 1942, the small citrus town of Winter Garden, Florida, gave him a hero's welcome. The Orlando Sentinel dedicated the entire front page to him. The mayor pulled him on stage in the local theater to tell the assembled crowd about his adventures with the AVG. He hated this part; though confident in his abilities as a fighter pilot, he did not like being the center of attention. He wanted to spend time with his family. He needed to decompress. The jubilation of the crowd and his success at shooting down four and a half enemy planes clashed with his feelings over the death of his friends, his injury in combat, the loss of Burma, and the job

²⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 251.

²⁵ MACR 1052: P-38G 42-13031, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Jiujiang, 1Lt Tommy J. Taylor, O-667118, Captured, Deceased, Body Unrecovered. MACR 1053: P-38G 42-13253, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Jiujiang, Capt Lewden M. Enslen, O-431406, Killed in Action, Body Recovered. MACR 1054: P-38G 42-13415, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Jiujiang, Capt Thomas D. Harmon, O-732545, Rescued.

MACR 1055: P-38G 42-13248, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Jiujiang, 2Lt Jordan B. Robins, O-746180, Rescued.

²⁶ Major General J.A. Ullo to Mrs. Alleen C. Enslen, February 3, 1945.

left unfinished in China. He knew he had more of a part to play in what promised to be a long and bloody war.²⁷

Shortly after coming home, Mac rejoined the Army Air Forces as a first lieutenant. He promptly received a promotion to captain and departed on a brief trip to the Southwest Pacific, where he educated American fighter squadrons there on the tactics that made the AVG so effective. Promoted to major upon his return, he reported to the Army Air Forces Proving Ground at Eglin Field, Florida. Between December 1942 and September 1943, he tested new equipment, weapons, and tactics. He flew attack aircraft, bombers, transports, observation planes, and trainers. He piloted every frontline fighter in the Army Air Force inventory, as well as U.S. Navy Hellcats and Corsairs and even a British Spitfire. In just ten months, he added another 272 flying hours to his resume. His assignment at Eglin overlapped with that of his brother, Charles, a technical sergeant with a crash boat company. He also made a handful of flights to Orlando to visit his family. But his stateside interlude could only last so long. Chennault wrote him personally asking that he return to China. He left the States in October, promoted to lieutenant colonel just before his departure.²⁸

In Lieutenant Colonel McMillan, Chennault knew he had the commander he needed to turn around the 449th. Ironically, of all the frontline Army fighters at the Proving Ground, Mac flew the least number of hours in P-38s – only seventeen, as compared to thirty-six in P-51s, forty-three in P-40s, and seventy-six in P-39s. Still, his time with the AVG meant he had more combat experience than the rest of the squadron

²⁷ George McMillan Timeline, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation; Janet Alford, e-mail to Daniel Jackson, July 15, 2017.

²⁸ McMillan Flight Records, September 1943.

combined. Certainly, he had more flying time: a whopping 1,221 hours. Most young fighter pilots in China had barely a third as much.²⁹

Mac could have stepped into the 449th and immediately shaken things up; taken charge, led from the front, and inundated them with lessons learned from his time with the AVG. But he chose a different approach. For several weeks, he flew as wingman to the interim operations officer – even for the 14th Air Force’s big raid on Taiwan on November 25. He did not care that someone else got credit for leading the mission. He listened and he learned. He observed the squadron carefully until he knew it from top to bottom, every intimate detail of maintenance, armament, intelligence, and operations. He washed floors, dug gun emplacements, and did everything he asked his lieutenants and captains to do. His changes came quietly and collaboratively. The men respected his humility. They appreciated his careful handling of their raw nerves.³⁰

He particularly concerned himself with building his pilots’ skill and confidence. With every ounce of gasoline having to be airlifted over the Hump, he did not have fuel for training. He frequently discussed the situation with his new operations officer, Major Rex Barber, the man who shot down Yamamoto. They decided to give novice pilots time to build their experience by assigning them less hazardous missions. Only battle-tested veterans would visit tough targets like Wuhan and Jiujiang. Mac always led the most dangerous missions; he would never ask his men to go on one he would not fly himself.³¹

Second Lieutenant Keith Mahon, a young, inexperienced pilot in the squadron, flew an escort mission with McMillan on February 10, 1944. Rex Barber took up station

²⁹ McMillan Flight Records, September 1943.

³⁰ Joseph Cosgrove, *Pursued by Drunks* (unpublished memoirs, 1945), 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

on Mac's wing. Captain Earl Helms, a North Africa veteran, led the second element and Mahon flew tail-end Charlie – the last fighter in the formation. Half an hour into the mission, they sighted a flight of three Ki-48 “Lily” light bombers headed in the opposite direction, slightly above them and to their right.³² McMillan led them in to attack, firing a short burst that sent one of the bombers down in flames. A second bomber escaped up sun, but the third continued onward.

Rather than any of the veterans running up their personal scores, Mac held them off to the side and gave Mahon a crack at it. The young aviator, his mouth dry and fingers fumbling with switches, closed on the twin-engine craft until he felt the buffet of its prop wash. He opened fire, tracers flying wildly, bullets hitting all over the airplane. Nothing seemed to happen. He focused, trying to tighten his aim, and finally noticed a spray of oil jetting back. Then the bomber slowed and yawed sideways. He had to break hard to keep from ramming it! When he rolled out, he saw it plummeting toward the earth in flames. Mac's choice to develop his new pilots rather than add to his own list of victories set the young lieutenant on a path to eventually become an ace himself.³³

The squadron chaplain, Father Joseph Cosgrove, could not help but admire how Mac handled his new command. Cosgrove had been a Catholic priest in China prior to the war, running a mission just south of the 449th's base at Lingling. Chennault frequently leveraged the experience of old China hands and missionaries; Paul Frillmann had been a Lutheran preacher in Wuhan before joining the AVG as chaplain and later returning to China as an intelligence officer. Malcolm Rosholt, a newspaper reporter in

³² They reported encountering twin-engine Ki-45 Type Two Two-seat Fighters, codename “Nick.” However, since the Japanese Army Air Force had no Ki-45s stationed in China at the time, it is far more likely they encountered Ki-48 Lilys, a similar-looking aircraft designed by the same engineer.

³³ Keith Mahon, e-mail to Daniel Jackson, May 17, 2014.

Shanghai, and John Birch, a Baptist missionary in Hangzhou who helped Jimmy Doolittle reach friendly hands, also joined 14th Air Force intelligence. These men brought with them a rare familiarity with the country, the people, and the language that proved invaluable to the American air force in China.³⁴

Father Cosgrove valued Mac's ability to show unselfish care for his men without coddling them. The priest marveled at his utter fearlessness in combat. "McMillan was first to roar down the runway and first to turn into enemy fighters when sighted," he wrote. "I never saw a pilot who so relished combat with the enemy." One day, the chaplain kidded him about his aggressive flying.

"George, you must be Irish!" he joked.

"Irish be damned, Padre," McMillan retorted. "I'm Scotch, and a Scotsman will lick a Harp any day!"³⁵

The 449th's improving performance and morale gave Colonel "Casey" Vincent confidence to move them forward in the 14th Air Force's next step eastward. While American fighters secured the central China bases in the summer of 1943, Chinese workers completed a new airfield at Suichuan,³⁶ in Jiangxi Province, 250 miles east of Guilin. Vincent used the new field to stage the Thanksgiving Day raid on Taiwan in November. He moved the 76th Fighter Squadron there on December 26 to begin the strategic defensive with its mix of P-40s and P-51As. A Japanese bombing raid the next

³⁴ Paul Frillman and Graham Peck, *China: The Remembered Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 4, 174; Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon*, 73, 114, 117; Terry Lautz, *John Birch: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), loc. 1243 and 1525 of 6419, Kindle; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 258-259.

³⁵ Joseph Cosgrove to Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm McMillan, July 26, 1944, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation; Cosgrove, *Pursued by Drunks*, 103.

³⁶ Wade Giles: Suichuan, 遂川

day hit the alert shack, burning up everything inside – including all of Glen Beneda's clothes!³⁷

Vincent's Forward Echelon became the 68th Composite Wing at the end of December, responsible for operations in central and east China. Colonel John Kennedy's 69th Composite Wing covered operations in the south and west. Vincent moved a detachment of P-38s to Suichuan in January. Chennault visited the field in early February and ordered the rest of the squadron forward. Not only could the newer Mustangs and Lightnings better handle marauding Japanese fighters than old P-40s, but the eastern base would further amplify their greater range.³⁸

The Japanese Army Air Force attacked in strength on February 12, 1944. Major Tougo Saito led eleven Ki-44 Tojos from his 85th Air Regiment, along with fourteen Oscars from the 11th Air Regiment, toward Suichuan at twenty thousand feet. The Americans launched everything they had: Captain John Stewart with a total of ten P-40s and P-51s, and Lieutenant Colonel McMillan with fourteen P-38s. They met the enemy south of the field. Captain Wakamatsu, the ace who participated in the attack on Guilin on August 20, led the top cover element. He dove in and immediately shot down a P-51, killing the pilot.³⁹ Other Americans hit his fighter in turn, and he had to leave the fight, nursing his damaged Tojo back to Guangzhou. He waited there for the other ten planes from his regiment. Only two returned. They told him of American pilots so aggressive, the Japanese could not escape the combat even when low on fuel. Two of their number, including the wounded regimental commander, Major Saito, ran out of gas and crash-

³⁷ Molesworth, *Sharks over China*, 178.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

³⁹ P-51A Unknown Serial Number, 76FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Suichuan, 2Lt William A. Butler, O-803334, Killed in Action, Body Recovered.

landed on the way back to Guangzhou. The remaining six all fell in combat with the P-38s.⁴⁰

Mac's Lightnings claimed six enemy fighters destroyed for the loss of only one of their own: Lieutenant Art Masterson bailed out south of the field. The squadron never reported him missing; he walked into Suichuan just two days later. The decisive combat showed just how complete a transformation Mac had brought about in the 449th. For their part, the Japanese did not make any major daylight raids against the base for three months.⁴¹

The airfield at Suichuan was vitally important to Chennault's expanding operations. Two hundred and fifty miles east of Guilin, it gave his aircraft access to targets deep within Japanese-controlled territory. The field put American aircraft within easy range of Jiujiang, a port on the Yangzi River only 250 miles to the northeast that served as an important way station for shipping into Wuhan. The Japanese captured the port in November 1938 and pressed south along the railroad to take Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province, in May 1939. They had since heavily fortified both cities with flak and fighters. Inevitably, contact with the enemy over its strongholds meant more missing American planes. The China Air Task Force and 14th Air Force reported nineteen aircraft and thirty-three airmen missing in the corridor between Jiujiang and Nanchang. Of these, the Japanese captured only three, twelve died in the crash or bailout, one is still listed as missing, and seventeen evaded with the help of the Chinese (see Figure 18). These evaders not only found a sympathetic civilian population, they also stumbled upon a

⁴⁰ Hiroshi Ichimura, e-mail to Daniel Jackson, August 19, 2008.

⁴¹ 1Lt Lee O. Gregg received credit for his fourth enemy aircraft destroyed in this combat.

surprisingly active guerrilla movement operating deep within supposedly enemy-held territory.

By all accounts, civilians near Jiujiang took immediate action to remove American pilots from harm's way. Second Lieutenant Robert Campbell bailed out between Jiujiang and Nanchang after Oscars ambushed his flight of Lightnings over the river on April 29, 1944.⁴² He called to a farmer in a nearby rice paddy and showed him his pointie-talkie. The farmer quickly led him to a village and hid him in a small hut. He returned a few minutes later with a small man dressed in black; a button on his tunic had Chinese writing and a number. Using the pointie-talkie, he identified himself as a guerrilla and made it clear they had to hurry to stay ahead of the Japanese.⁴³

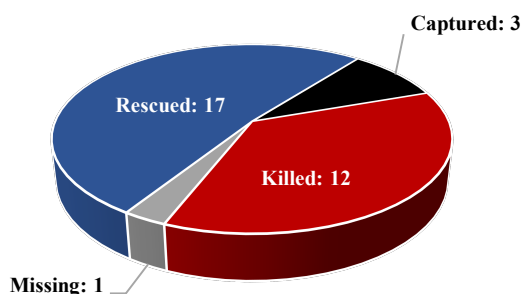


Figure 18. Fate of Airmen Missing in the Jiujiang-Nanchang Corridor

Captain Kenneth George crash-landed when ground fire crippled his P-51 on February 7.⁴⁴ After seeing his identification flag and pointie-talkie, villagers sent a runner to alert nearby guerrillas. Two arrived, indistinguishable from the civilians save for their

⁴² MACR 4510: P-38H 42-66985, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 2 miles south of Tianzhu, 2Lt Robert W. Campbell, O-748906, Rescued.

⁴³ 449th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Second Lieutenant Robert W. Campbell*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁴⁴ P-51A Unknown Serial Number, 76FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire southwest of Aicheng, Capt Kenneth E. George, Rescued.

rifles. They hired a sedan chair and carried the pilot into the hills.⁴⁵ When 1st Lieutenant Jack Blanco bailed out of his P-40 on March 18, the Oscars that shot him down came around for a strafing pass.⁴⁶ Machine gun fire came within ten feet of him as he jumped into the underbrush. He remained hidden for several minutes after the enemy fighters departed. Hearing murmurs from the other side of the scrub, he emerged with his identification flag in hand. Several civilians had gathered around his parachute. They motioned him to hurry over. One took off his overcoat and exchanged it for Blanco's flying coveralls. Another gave him pants, a third a hat and pair of rope sandals. Then they hurried him into the hills.⁴⁷

Rex Barber went down in the same ambush as Lieutenant Campbell on April 29.⁴⁸ He bailed out only four hundred feet above the ground and hit hard, breaking his arm in two places and injuring his leg. He landed on a small, wooded hill. Too hurt to move, two civilians dragged him several miles to safer ground. As soon as they left the main trail, a squad of Japanese soldiers hurried by. The enemy troops remained quiet and grim. Barber later learned guerrillas liquidated any small groups of Japanese that ventured into the hills. A few irregulars arrived soon after the enemy troops passed. They constructed a crude sedan chair from bamboo and enlisted the help of some nearby farmers to carry

⁴⁵ 76th Fighter Squadron, Office of the Intelligence Officer, *Report of Capt George*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁴⁶ MACR 4114: P-40N 42-105155, 75FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 4 miles southeast of Jiujiang, 1Lt Jack A. Blanco, O-736975, Rescued.

⁴⁷ 76th Fighter Squadron, Office of the Intelligence Officer, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Jack A. Blanco*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁴⁸ MACR 4799: P-38H 42-67007, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Lanqiao, Maj Rex T. Barber, O-429902, Rescued.

him. They sent a runner ahead to prepare relays of fresh carriers for the journey into the mountains.⁴⁹

According to evasion reports, these local fighters professed allegiance to the Guomindang in Jiujiang District and resented being labeled “guerrillas.” Many had been businessmen or government officials who fled when the Japanese took the city. Still others had been farmers, chased out of the towns along the railroad between Jiujiang and Nanchang. They wore tattered gray uniforms with ammunition belts around their waists and across their shoulders. Most carried old German pistols. Some had ancient bolt-action rifles, many French made, but some German, Belgian, American, and even Japanese. They had also captured a few light machine guns, grenades, and other equipment.⁵⁰

The guerrilla bands not only challenged Japanese patrols in the countryside, they often infiltrated occupied towns and villages to create chaos for the occupiers. One fighter claimed to sneak into town concealing an automatic pistol under his clothing. At an opportune moment, he would pull it out, kill a Japanese soldier, then disappear into the crowd. Another claimed they would carry dynamite with two- or three-minute fuses, inconspicuously drop it into concentrations of Japanese, and then walk on. One pilot reported meeting “a good looking Chinese boy who claimed his hobby was to dress and act as a woman and entice the not unwilling Japanese soldier to some secluded location and then slit his throat. She (he) claimed quite a number of successful conquests.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ AGAS-China, *Major Rex Barber's Evasion Story from Jap Held Territory*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁵⁰ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Capt George*.

⁵¹ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Capt George*; 76th Fighter Squadron, Office of the Intelligence Officer, *Evader's Narrative Report: Homer D. Worthington*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

The guerrillas brought Captain George to a small hut in a remote valley. Just twenty minutes after he crash-landed, a company of 150 Japanese troops arrived at the wreck and began questioning locals as to his whereabouts. Their inquiries met with stony silence. They offered a cash reward for any information – to no effect. They threatened to behead the reticent townsfolk and set fire to their homes. None said a word, even when the soldiers made good on their threats. Many died to protect a foreigner they had only glimpsed in passing. Japanese soldiers nevertheless tracked George to the valley and one hundred troops established blocking positions across the two trails leading in and out. The guerrillas gathered what forces they could – three hundred, eventually – and for three days attacked the enemy positions until they withdrew.⁵²

Mr. Yiu, the guerrilla captain who took charge of Jack Blanco's rescue, told the American about Japanese agents, dressed as civilians, who spread out through the countryside to determine his whereabouts. They offered a \$35,000CN reward for information leading to his capture. Yiu claimed to have personally shot a Chinese traitor trying to gather information for the enemy. After learning of Japanese troops shooting several civilians whom they suspected of helping Blanco, the guerrilla captain decided to publicize his rescue of the airman in several local newspapers. The accounts included his name and the names of several of his key lieutenants. The breach of security perplexed Blanco, but Yiu explained he wanted the Japanese to focus their efforts on his resistance fighters, rather than innocent civilians.⁵³

For airmen rescued along the Jiujiang-Nanchang corridor, guerrillas immediately moved them away from zones of Japanese influence – west, into the mountains, or east,

⁵² 76th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Capt George*.

⁵³ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Jack A. Blanco*.

across the swampy lowlands surrounding Poyang Lake. The exiles from Japanese-occupied territory had organized their own communities in these areas, including setting up their own schools. They experienced frequent reprisals for harboring guerrillas. As he progressed west into the mountains, Lieutenant Campbell reported every town through which he passed had been thoroughly destroyed. Syphilis sores covered many of the people he saw. Some Japanese commanders made efforts to ingratiate themselves to the locals. They continued to plunder the countryside for food and supplies, but issued receipts for future payment. These efforts, far too little, far too late, did nothing to change the attitudes of the occupied.⁵⁴

The Chinese gave the very best of their meager food and accommodations to their American guests, usually meals of rice and chicken, sometimes fruit. Campbell reported eating 173 eggs before returning to Suichuan. In the small foothills town of Jing'an he met Mr. Chen, the exiled magistrate of Anyi County. Mr. Chen spoke a little English and when Campbell told him all the details of his bail-out, he dispatched three hundred troops to find and, if possible, destroy the aircraft. He offered Campbell use of a bed in his office. It consisted of little more than boards covered by a quilt, and, as the pilot discovered, was infested with bedbugs. The magistrate had decorated the office walls with paper banners proclaiming in English, "Long Life of American," "Long Life of China," and "We Will Bring the Japanese Imperialists to Their Knees." The next day, the town held a parade in his honor and Chen gave a speech.

"Yesterday you came to here," the magistrate began, addressing Campbell.

⁵⁴ 449th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Second Lieutenant Robert W. Campbell*.

It is very celebrated, for we became acquainted with you at this place. You are an officer in the Fourteenth Air Service of USA. But you came to our country seven months ago, having no regard for your very life. You are fighting life and death against the Japanese for a real and lasting peace and for achieving the goal of the final victory. We rejoice to see you here and we must learn your good and gallant spirit.

Today in devout gratitude we are celebrating that you are safely coming back, but we apologize, for we have no good things to greet you, because this place is at the front. We are allies, your country gives us effective and immediate aid, but we will wage this war while there is strength in our bodies and blood in our veins! Your President Roosevelt said, “We are making sure, absolutely and irrevocably sure, that this time the lesson will be driven home to them once and for all.” We are actually going to be rid of the outlaws this time. Every one of the United Nations believes in a real and lasting peace, and justifies the sacrifices we are making, and our humanity is as confident in seeking that goal.

We must fight! We repeat it sir, we must fight! We alike again worked with the wise, and good and gallant gentlemen, the brave officers of Fourteenth Air Service of USA. Now on behalf of the eight hundred thousand Chinese of Anyi, I simply want to say to you that we love you. At last, I deliver a prayer for your arriving at the destination safe and sound and please accept my best wishes for your happiness on the way back.

God be with you.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ 449th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Second Lieutenant Robert W. Campbell*.

The heartfelt speech touched Campbell deeply. He owed his life to these people and yet they celebrated him as some sort of hero – he who had been shot down by the enemy! He mumbled a few words of thanks. He rested in Jing'an for two days before continuing his journey.

From the relative safety of the mountains, guerrillas in the western corridor brought their charges south to Zhangshu, on the Gan River. There, the airmen boarded river steamers south to Ji'an or Taihe. Evaders in the eastern corridor usually travelled by sampan along the periphery of Poyang Lake to Yingtan and thence by bus to either Ganzhou or Taihe (see Figure 19). The irregulars typically worked in relays. Only one man, a guerrilla by the name of Chang, accompanied Captain George the entire way. He had a grisly old wound from a past run-in with the Japanese; a rifle bullet had passed completely through his neck. He served as accountant. Though the guerrillas would not accept any money or gifts from the American, they kept meticulous records of all expenses. George signed each receipt and Chang presented them to the Central Government offices in Taihe for reimbursement.⁵⁶

The young men who dragged Rex Barber from the wooded hill did not belong to a guerrilla band, but remained with the major as the irregulars relayed him south. They had both escaped Shanghai and wished to leave occupied Jiujiang at the earliest opportunity. An American pilot landing in their backyard provided just such a chance. When they arrived at Ji'an on June 7, they found Lieutenant Colonel McMillan waiting for them. They drove back to Suichuan in his Jeep. Barber made sure the young men both got jobs at the 14th Air Force hostel there.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Capt George*.

⁵⁷ AGAS-China, *Major Rex Barber's Evasion Story*.

The journey back to American control gave evading airmen a rare opportunity to coordinate with Chinese forces in the field. Barber's rescuers informed him they no longer operated east of the railway between Nanchang and Jiujiang. The Japanese had made it too difficult for them. They asked him to tell other airmen, if possible, to head west of the tracks before bailing out or crash-landing. Passing through the headquarters of the New 3rd Army in Zaofang, Captain George saw a multitude of troops – apparently well trained and well equipped – moving into defensive positions in the hills. Their commander, General Yi, seemed to think the Japanese would make a move soon. He asked if the Americans would be able to help.

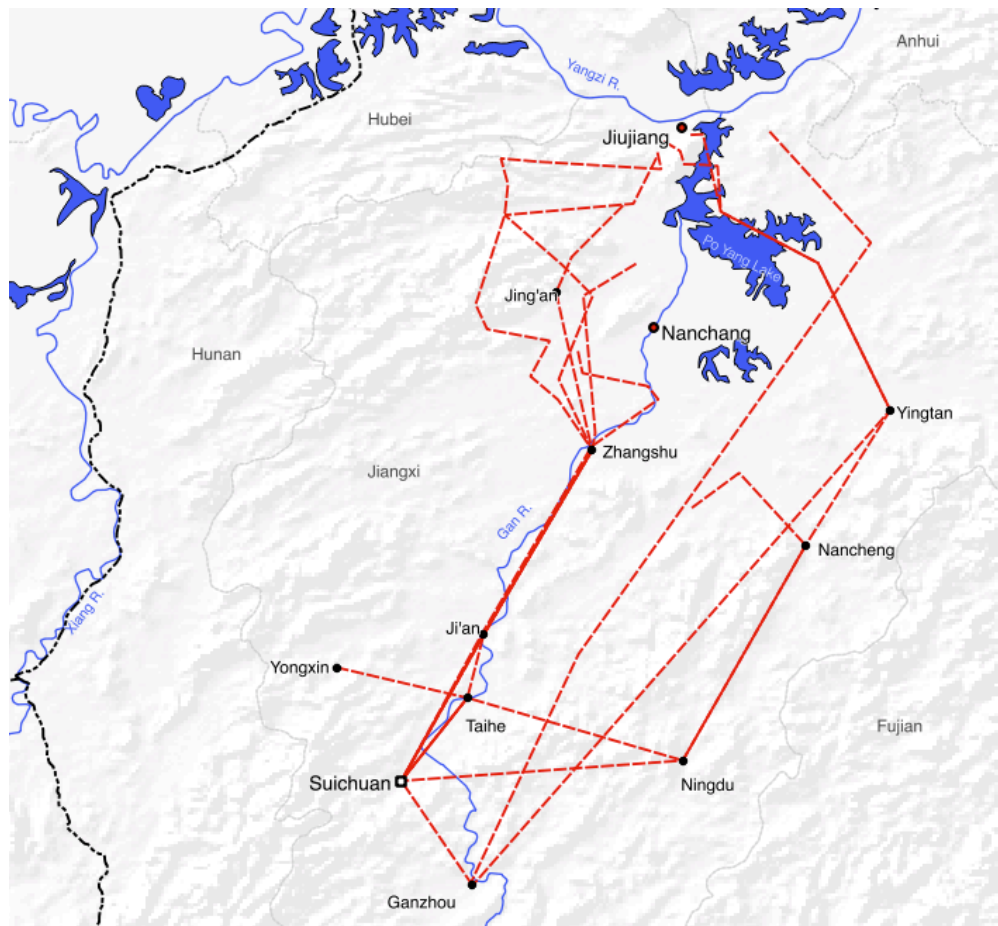


Figure 19. Evasion Lines from Jiangxi

“Yes,” George told him, “if at all possible. But you’ll have to use markers of some sort to designate areas to be hit. Mark the flanks of any area to be attacked with large, light-colored panels with an arrowhead pointing in the direction to attack.”⁵⁸

Returning evaders also brought back a bevy of valuable intelligence from their time behind the lines. AGAS officers or squadron intelligence officers debriefing them learned that Japanese influence extended little beyond points of occupation; outside their blockhouses and garrisons, their influence melted away with the passing of their patrols. They also learned crucial information about enemy air defenses. Jack Blanco reported that the 25th Air Regiment maintained standing patrols over the docks and city of Jiujiang. When they judged the weather favorable, they launched a flight very early in the morning, increasing their strength aloft until at least eighteen Oscars patrolled during peak hours of American attacks, between 1030 and 1400 hours. Then, they gradually decreased the patrols until the last flight landed at dusk. Rex Barber reported enemy fighter patrols taking off regularly each day at 0630, 0830, 1030, 1430, and 1630. According to the guerrilla captain, Mr. Yiu, the Japanese also constructed a crude imitation of Chennault’s warning net, giving them twenty minutes’ notice of planes approaching down the river.⁵⁹

Suddenly, the ambushes over Jiujiang made sense. After losing four P-38s on October 30, 1943, the demoralized 449th assumed traitorous Chinese had leaked word of the mission. In reality, the Japanese warning system probably detected the Lightnings as they approached down the Yangzi and alerted patrolling Oscars. The same thing probably

⁵⁸ AGAS-China, *Major Rex Barber’s Evasion Story*; 76th Fighter Squadron, *Report of Capt George*.

⁵⁹ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Jack A. Blanco*; AGAS-China, *Major Rex Barber’s Evasion Story*.

happened to Major Lee Manbeck on February 10, 1944,⁶⁰ Jack Blanco on March 18, and Barber and Campbell on April 29.

In addition to intelligence about the enemy, evaders also brought back information gleaned from Chinese sources on the fate of their fellow airmen. Guerrillas told Rex Barber what happened to Lieutenant Tommy Taylor, still missing since the ambush on October 30. His squadron mates heard “the epitome of a fightin’ Texan” had crash-landed and “shot it out with the Japs on the ground.”⁶¹ According to the guerrillas, however, when civilians appeared on the scene to rescue him, he mistook them for the enemy and shot several. They withdrew and shortly thereafter, a Japanese patrol arrived and captured him. The troops beat him severely and then dragged him away. The guerrillas claimed the enemy gave him the “sun treatment” and he died in captivity.⁶²

Captain Maxwell Becker, the AGAS officer debriefing Barber, believed this to be just one in a rash of incidents of airmen becoming too trigger happy. “Our airmen must learn to recognize their friends, the Chinese,” he concluded. “In some cases, there may be a question but I should venture to say in 999 cases out of a thousand the Chinese may be instantly recognized by their actions and by their clothing.”⁶³

The question of whether to carry a firearm on combat missions proved surprisingly contentious amongst the Americans in China. Jack Blanco did not have a gun with him, believing it would have done him little good. Captain James Williams, shot down by Tojos near Hong Kong on December 1, 1943, had a similar opinion. When

⁶⁰ P-51A Unknown Serial Number, 76FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Jiujiang, Maj Lee P. Manbeck, O-421272, Captured, Deceased, Body Unrecovered.

⁶¹ Harmon, *Missing*, 40; Robert Schultz to Taylor family, 15 May 1945.

⁶² AGAS-China, *Major Rex Barber’s Evasion Story*.

⁶³ Ibid.

asked by the debriefing officer if he had a gun, he replied: “No sir, I didn’t. I feel like this about carrying a gun: I think if I met a small group of people, they would be Chinese because any small band of Japs would be wiped out or quickly gotten rid of. A large number of Japs would probably get me anyway. To shoot Chinese would be equally serious. If I had a gun and they wanted it, I would give it to them.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, Lieutenant Cunningham, the bombardier from Howard Allers’ B-25, swore by his sidearm. “If it hadn’t been for my pistol,” he asserted, “the Chinese villagers would have taken me ... and later in the pursuit they would have been far bolder if I had been unarmed.”⁶⁵

Some airmen posited another reason for carrying a sidearm. One fighter pilot recalled when he reported to his squadron in China, the commander handed him a pistol. “You count the number of bullets in that gun,” he told him. “If they shoot you down, you kill as many of them as you can. But save one for yourself.”⁶⁶ This shocking advice reflected a considerable anxiety many felt at the prospect of being captured by the Japanese. The Americans knew all too well the enemy’s brutality, whether in strafing airmen when they crashed or bailed out, or mistreating or murdering prisoners. Indeed, though less than five percent of missing airmen in the China Theater became prisoners of war, a startling twenty-seven percent of those did not survive the experience (see Figure 20). While with the guerrillas, Jack Blanco learned Major Manbeck, missing in action since February 10, had been captured by the Japanese and paraded through the streets of

⁶⁴ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Evasion Report of Capt J.M. Williams*.

⁶⁵ AGAS-China, *Lieutenant Cunningham*.

⁶⁶ James Reese, interview by Daniel Jackson, September 19, 2015.

Jiujiang. Either because of injuries suffered in the crash or at the hands of his captors, he died two days later.⁶⁷

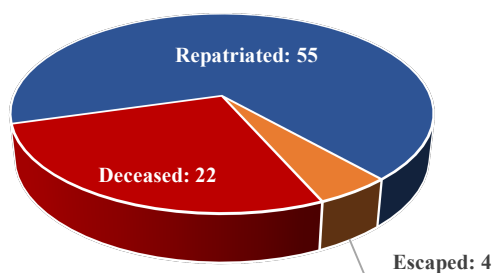


Figure 20. Fate of Captured Airmen

The case of Sergeant Carl K. Cannon became infamous in the 14th Air Force, with new details and rumors emerging in successive evasion reports. Cannon served as aerial photographer on a B-25 lost over Jiujiang on January 10, 1944. Witnesses reported the bomber took fire from a river gunboat, dropped its bombs on the docks, circled twice around the city – apparently out of control – and then crashed three miles to the southwest.⁶⁸ “I believe that it is very improbable that any members of the crew survived the crash and explosion,” reported 2nd Lieutenant Albert Vavrick, navigator for another B-25 on the mission. Lieutenant Robert Thompson agreed: “I would say it would have been impossible for anyone to have gotten out.”⁶⁹ But one crew member did get out; guerrillas told a bomber crew walking out in September 1944 that Sergeant Cannon bailed out and landed in a pond, surviving despite his parachute failing to fully deploy.

⁶⁷ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Jack A. Blanco*.

⁶⁸ MACR 1644: B-25D 41-30438, 11BS, 341BG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire near Jiujiang, 2Lt Thomas L. Skelton, O-738272, Pilot, Killed in Action, Body Recovered; 2Lt John T. Schmidt, O-740118, Copilot, Killed in Action, Body Recovered; 2Lt Stanley A. Szczepanik, O-800286, Navigator, Killed in Action, Body Recovered; SSgt Franklin G. Miller, 37250166, Engineer, Killed in Action, Body Recovered; Sgt Carl K. Cannon, 13097820, Photographer (16CCU), Captured.

⁶⁹ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 1644*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1944).

Bandits immediately began firing at the airman, attracting the attention of nearby Japanese troops. The enemy rolled him up before friendly guerrillas could get to him.⁷⁰

Jack Blanco's rescuers told him the Japanese troops paraded Cannon through the streets of Jiujiang and even offered money to a group of schoolboys to beat him. The boys apparently took the money and tore it up, outraging the soldiers. The occupiers decided to seize on the propaganda value of Cannon's capture by compelling the city's civilian population to attend a mass rally. A Japanese official railed against the British and Americans and extolled the virtues of Japan's East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere and its vision of "Asia for the Asians." The audience listened without enthusiasm. After his speech, the official condescendingly offered Cannon a cigarette. The battered airman tore it to bits and threw it away. Enraged, the official ordered the guards to beat him.⁷¹

In another story, the sergeant's captors made him stand for three days in river water up to his waist, not permitting him to sit down or rest. Yet another tale held that Cannon's father had been a missionary in Jiujiang before the war. When the Japanese paraded him through the streets, he came face-to-face with the old woman who had been his nurse.⁷² A final story had that the Japanese walked him through Jiujiang for three days with a rope around his neck. He continually cursed the enemy in Chinese for the townspeople to hear. Then the soldiers pulled out his teeth, cut off his legs, and dragged his torso through the streets. The sergeant still lived, so they cut off his arms and left him to die.⁷³ There is no telling whether any of these stories are true. The last certainly proved

⁷⁰ AGAS-China, *Evasion Story of Lt. Carl E. Kostol*, O-749004, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁷¹ 76th Fighter Squadron, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Jack A. Blanco*.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ AGAS-China, *Evasion Story of Lt. Carl E. Kostol*.

to be false – or else was conflated with that of another captive. The Japanese informed the International Red Cross of Cannon's capture on October 30, 1944, and American forces repatriated him from the Shinjuku prison camp near Tokyo on October 15, 1945. Still, the rumors added to the anxiety many airmen harbored at the prospect of being captured by the Japanese.⁷⁴

War Department policy limited the influence of returning evaders by prohibiting them from flying over enemy territory and directing that personnel who could not be useful in noncombat posts be returned to the United States. An airman could divulge information harmful to friendly underground organizations if shot down a second time and captured. This policy irked Chennault, who struggled to keep his small command adequately manned with experienced aviators. In fact, he subverted the directive when he allowed Rex Barber to fly in China in the first place. Barber knew about American code-breaking activities after his mission to shoot down Admiral Yamamoto in April 1943. Chennault's gamble came close to disaster when the major had his close call at Jiujiang.⁷⁵ If he had been captured, the consequences could have been catastrophic for American intelligence operations. Jack Blanco, Kenneth George, Rex Barber, and Robert Campbell thus all departed for the United States soon after their return to American control. Their evasion experiences uncovered a dedicated and surprisingly active guerrilla movement deep in enemy territory that fought out of all proportion to its meager equipment, manning, and training. The presence of American airmen in occupied China gave a needed boost to the long-suffering Chinese and created a rare opportunity for

⁷⁴ "Carl K. Cannon," World War 2 POW Archive, <http://www.ww2pow.info>

⁷⁵ Fourteenth Air Force, *1st Lieutenant Eugene McGuire Evasion*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1943).

coordination. Their return brought critical intelligence information to the American command.

CHAPTER VI

June 1, 1944

Changsha, China

Colonel “Casey” Vincent ducked into the old schoolhouse serving as headquarters for the 9th War Area. The husky, even-tempered, twenty-nine-year-old travelled incognito, without staff or entourage, to meet with General Xue Yue, the war area commander. Since January, intelligence had reported enemy troops and supplies massing at Wuhan for a major offensive. The Japanese dubbed it Operation Ichi-go, or “Operation Number 1.” Their anxiety over the prospect of American warplanes bombing the Home Islands had only increased since the summer of 1943, when 3rd Air Division failed to dislodge Chennault from his central China bases. The situation became truly alarming with 14th Air Force’s expansion east to Suichuan that fall and the arrival of the first B-29s in India at the beginning of April 1944.¹

But wiping out the American airbases was only part of it; Japan estimated it would lose 1.8 million tons of shipping in the first two years of war with the United States. By the end of 1943, the Allies had destroyed 3.8 million tons, reducing its merchant fleet to seventy-seven percent of its prewar capacity. U.S. Navy submarines accounted for over half these losses, while aircraft operating from the South Pacific and China accounted for a quarter. A massive ground offensive through central China would not only eliminate the American airbases there, it would complete the old railway

¹ Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon*, 144; Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, *Army Operations in China, January 1944 to August 1945*, Japanese Monograph, No. 72 (Tokyo: 1956), 13.

corridor from Beiping to Indochina, establishing an inland line of communications safe from submarine attack.²

Phase One of the offensive took place between April 17 and May 25; 140,000 troops advanced south from the Yellow River bend near Kaifeng³ and north from Wuhan to secure the Pinghan Railway. Phase Two began on May 27. The 11th Army marched south from Wuhan toward Changsha while the 23rd advanced north from Guangzhou toward Qujiang (see Figure 21). With nearly half-a-million troops moving into central China, Ichi-go represented the largest Japanese ground offensive of World War II.⁴

Though Vincent did not yet know the full extent of Japanese ambitions, what he did know troubled him greatly. He believed his central China bases fell firmly within the enemy's crosshairs. His maximum effort mission to Wuhan on May 6 aimed to disrupt the Japanese buildup. He led the close escort personally in his P-40K *Peggy*. One bombing raid by only fourteen medium bombers meant little against such a massive undertaking, however, and the weather made further raids difficult. The enemy timed Ichi-go to take advantage of the summer rainy season as a screen against airpower. Vincent could neither adequately track their movements nor respond in force.⁵

Inside the schoolhouse, the young wing commander found General Xue bent double over a large table covered in maps. A single kerosene lamp provided the only illumination in the dim, humid space. The general stood erect to greet his guest. His slight

² Ch'i Hsi-sheng, *Nationalist China at War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1982), 71-72; *Army Operations in China*, 14.

³ 开封

⁴ Glenn E. McClure, *Fire and Fall Back: Casey Vincent's Story of Three Years in the China-Burma-India Theater, Including the Fighting Withdrawal of the Flying Tigers from Eastern China* (San Antonio: Barnes Press, 1975), 164; *Army Operations in China*, 19.

⁵ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 160-161, 164;

frame seemed to vibrate with an impatient energy. He wore an immaculately-pressed uniform, complete with Sam Brown belt and polished, knee-high riding boots.

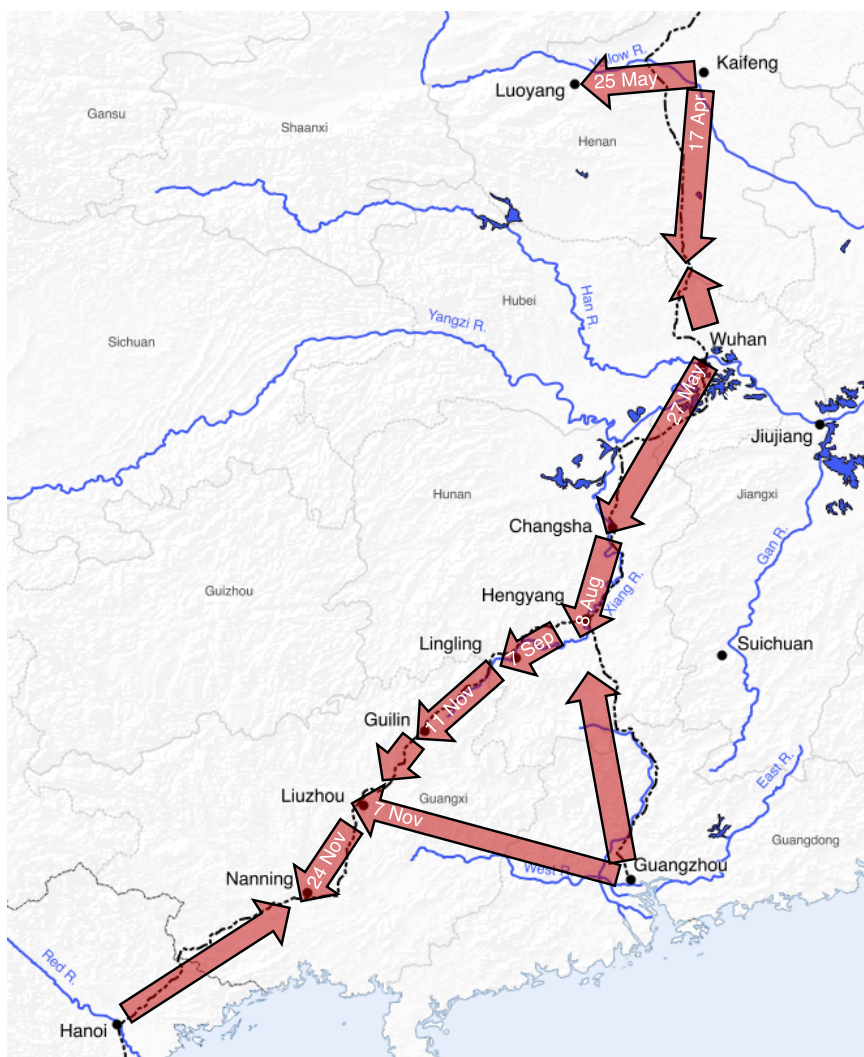


Figure 21. Operation Ichi-go

Diminutive, articulate, and soft-spoken, the forty-seven-year-old seemed the very model of courtesy and decorum – hardly the image of a great warrior. Vincent knew, however, that he had proven himself time and again in combat. Xue Yue attended the first class of the Central Military Academy in 1924, during Chiang Kai-shek's tenure as commandant. He fought to great effect during the Northern Expedition, rising to command the 4th Army. His operations in Jiangxi from 1933 to 1934 helped propel the

Communists onto their Long March. He fought in Shanghai in 1937 and throughout the withdrawal up the Yangzi. But Xue Yue cemented his reputation as Nationalist China's most effective battlefield commander by thrice defending the city of Changsha against Japanese attack, earning himself the nickname, "Tiger of Changsha." Chennault depended on him to block the Japanese from his airfields in central China.⁶

Now, in the late spring of 1944, five columns of enemy troops stretched south from Wuhan in a fourth attempt on the city. Xue's armies lacked any sort of armored vehicles or heavy weapons, possessing only a handful of mortars and just fifty light artillery pieces. These he positioned in the hills around Yuelu Mountain,⁷ on the west bank of the Xiang River.⁸

"It is our intention to draw the enemy into our city where we can use our small arms fire more effectively," he explained to Vincent through an interpreter. "Over here," his finger jabbed down on the map, "across the river, our artillery batteries will open up as soon as the enemy reaches the outskirts of the city and we will cut them to pieces just the way we did it three years ago."⁹

"General, I'm afraid the Japanese are going to bypass Changsha and I will have to evacuate Hengyang," Vincent cautioned. He doubted the Japanese would fall for the same trap as before. He thought the general's confidence unwarranted, that he underestimated Japanese intentions and capabilities.¹⁰

⁶ Malcolm Rosholt, *Dog Sugar 8: A Novel of the 14th Air Force Flying Tigers in China in World War II* (Rosholt, WI: Rosholt House, 1977), 134-135; Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon*, 144; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 261.

⁷ Wade Giles: Yolushan, 岳麓山

⁸ Wade Giles: Hsiangkiang, 湘江

⁹ Rosholt, *Dog Sugar 8*, 134-135; Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon*, 144.

¹⁰ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 165, 168.

The sputtering of an old motorcycle outside interrupted their conversation. A moment later, Lieutenant Rosholt walked in.

“I’m sorry sir,” the intelligence officer mumbled to Vincent. “I was totally unaware you were coming.” With Rosholt’s arrival, the meeting began to wind down. Xue explained he would count on American warplanes to cut the enemy supply lines from Wuhan. He asked who would represent his armies to the American air force. Vincent nodded his head in the direction of the young lieutenant. Rosholt would pass whatever information his planes required to operate in direct support of the Chinese ground troops.¹¹

The meeting concluded, Vincent accompanied the lieutenant three miles south to the old Buddhist temple housing Dog Sugar Eight, the 14th Air Force’s forward radio post in Changsha. They drove through a ghost town; Xue had ordered the civilian population evacuated two days earlier. The colonel looked around as Rosholt led him into the U-shaped courtyard of the temple. Chennault had not only intended these posts to serve as a liaison with the Chinese ally, but also as a node for collecting intelligence. Stilwell officially forbade him from building his own intelligence organization, but information from the Chinese War Ministry took up to six weeks to reach his airmen. Dai Li, the chief of Chiang’s secret police, offered a helpful alliance, but he rebuffed him, knowing a deal with Dai would limit his ability to work with anyone outside the Guomindang. So he got around Stilwell’s order on a technicality; he organized 14th Air Force intelligence teams within the framework of the warning net – something over which he did have authority. Rosholt led a team of three radio operators and two code

¹¹ Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon*, 144-146; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 296.

clerks. Plugged into the warning net, they could alert American aircraft in the area to any plots of enemy planes. They also encoded intelligence reports for transmission to Kunming and to Colonel Vincent's headquarters in Guilin. In addition to passing information from General Xue's 9th War Area Headquarters, they trained Chinese agents to carry hand-cranked V-100 radios behind the lines to report on enemy movements. These agents, reporting to 14th Air Force intelligence teams at forward radio posts, had provided the first warning of the Japanese buildup at Wuhan.¹²

After conferring with Rosholt, Vincent boarded a launch to travel back to Xiangtan, thirty miles to the south. Thousands of refugee boats crowded the river, most pulled by laborers walking along the bank. The Chinese had long since destroyed Changsha's airfield and the road and railroad south. Xiangtan had a small field, pockmarked by bomb craters, without a control tower or even a windsock. Its exposed, forward position left it vulnerable to enemy attack. Aircrews spent as little time on the ground there as possible.¹³

The launch took seven-and-a-half hours to make the journey, leaving Vincent plenty of time between dozing to mull over what had taken place. He did not share General Xue's confidence. Nor did he think Chennault understood the gravity of the situation. The Old Man believed the Japanese could not beat a combination of American warplanes and Chinese ground troops. He pointed to successes at the Salween River in May 1942 and at Changde in December 1943. But both those instances involved a limited number of enemy troops pursuing limited goals. In the case of the former, only three

¹² Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon*, 145-146; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 257, 259; McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 164.

¹³ Rosholt, *Dog Sugar* 8, 26-27.

regiments advanced to the river, with no clear imperative to cross. In the case of the latter, the enemy planned to take Changde only to seize the rice harvest and then fall back in a preplanned withdrawal. Neither case involved a determined attempt by the Imperial Army to advance in force and hold ground.¹⁴

“Headquarters doesn’t seem to realize that we are about to lose eastern China and all the beautiful bases we’ve been building for so long,” Vincent mused. His fuel reserves had already dwindled to a minimum, requiring him to pull his B-25s from Suichuan and limit operations elsewhere. The plan for B-29s to bomb Japan from airfields in China – codenamed Operation Matterhorn – as well as the recently-begun offensive on the Salween Front, diverted supplies from his forces. After cajoling Chiang and President Roosevelt for over a year, Stilwell had finally secured a commitment for his two-pronged attack on North Burma. Forty thousand troops of the Chinese Expeditionary Force crossed the Salween River at midnight on the early morning of May 11, 1944, advancing over the Gaoligong Mountains toward Tengchong and Longling. Stilwell required Chennault to support this offensive with fighters, bombers, transports, and reconnaissance aircraft. “While I can’t get what I need, General Stilwell is using twelve-and-a-half divisions across the Salween River against a couple of Japanese battalions!” Vincent fumed. “Everybody is crazy out here! I haven’t received much I’ve asked for lately – so we’ll fight with what we’ve got – and then fall back.”¹⁵

The launch finally arrived at Xiangtan in the predawn darkness of June 2. The colonel climbed aboard the UC-64, a single-engine utility plane small enough to take off

¹⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 256.

¹⁵ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 164.

and land from the bombed-out field. The pilot had waited anxiously through the night and was eager to go. They took off, lights out, into the darkness.¹⁶

Just as Vincent feared, everything fell to pieces. The Japanese bypassed Changsha, outflanking Xue and forcing him to retreat. Lieutenant Rosholt packed up his radio station and moved across the river to Yuelu Mountain on June 4.¹⁷ Four days later, Xue evacuated his headquarters and decamped for Zhuzhou, thirty miles to the southeast. American fighters and medium bombers swept north along the Xiang River to attack the advancing Japanese and interdict their supply lines, but the critical fuel situation and terrible weather conspired against them. Vincent's airmen contended with ceilings as low as one hundred feet. "Even the birds are walking!" he complained. The Japanese moved at night and in poor weather, bypassing Chinese defenses and dispersing to minimize damage from air attack. "If only the Chinese would put up a decent fight – even a half decent one – we could hold them," Vincent vented. "The Chinese ground forces won't fight worth a damn!"¹⁸

The Nationalist armies did fight, but against one of the most lethal, well-trained, battle-hardened armies in the world they could respond with little more than ragtag conscripts armed with ancient, bolt-action rifles. They did not have heavy weapons, tanks, or artillery. They did not have modern communications or logistics. They were outmatched. The Chinese armies in central China did fight – and upwards of 750,000 of them died, disappeared, or suffered serious injury.¹⁹

¹⁶ Rosholt, *Dog Sugar* 8, 134-135.

¹⁷ Rosholt, *Dog Sugar* 8, 136.

¹⁸ McClure, 159, 164, 166, 168; Rosholt, *Dog Sugar* 8, 151-152.

¹⁹ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, loc. 6164 of 9322, Kindle.

A sense of unreality pervaded the entire situation. Stilwell tied up Nationalist China's best-trained and best-equipped armies in Burma and on the Salween Front. The vast majority of American advisors, training, and supplies went to them. He responded to any suggestion of drawing from these troops to reinforce central China with frantic threats to end all lend-lease aid. Vincent told Chennault unless they implemented emergency measures, all would be lost. "My recommended emergency measure is to put the B-29s on Wuhan – with P-47s flying cover – and clean out that rat's nest," he penned in his journal.²⁰ In the 20th Air Force's inaugural mission to the Japanese Home Islands on June 15, 1944, seventy-five Superfortresses took off from airfields near Chengdu,²¹ in Sichuan Province, to attack the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at Yawata, in northern Kyushu. The huge bombers could level Wuhan in a single mission and yet Chennault had no influence over their operations. The B-29s remained under the control of General Arnold and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington D.C. Stilwell half-heartedly forwarded the suggestion to target Wuhan, but refused to declare the situation an emergency. As far as he was concerned, Chennault and Chiang brought it upon themselves. Their air campaign provoked the response he predicted in 1943 – and he gloated. The Joint Chiefs refused to release the airplanes or their stockpiled supplies from the strategic mission to bomb the Japanese homeland. "Instructions understood and exactly what I hoped for," Stilwell wrote in reply to General Marshall. "As you know, I have few illusions about power of air against ground troops."²²

²⁰ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 165.

²¹ Wade Giles: Chengtu, 成都

²² Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956), 369.

Early in June, Lieutenant Colonel McMillan assembled his squadron in the ready room at Suichuan. “Boys, you’ve always known I’ve never held anything back from you,” he began. “The Japs are getting closer. They are pressing down on Changsha and now they’re starting a squeeze play by moving on us from the south. The jig is up. Our stay here now depends entirely on the Jap movement. Maybe it will be a day longer, maybe a week or more, but it’s pretty sure sooner or later we shall have to move and move quickly.”²³ Later for Suichuan, as it turned out. Colonel Vincent ordered the airfield at Hengyang evacuated, though, on June 16. Japanese troops reached the gates of the city on the twentieth and Vincent ordered the airfield demolished the next day. He warned Lieutenant Colonel McMillan that Suichuan would be next. The first truck convoy of parts and maintenance equipment departed the base on the twenty-second.²⁴

The fighter squadrons at Suichuan, Lingling, and Guilin flew mission after mission against the enemy’s armies and supply lines. Between May 26 and August 1, the 68th Composite Wing reported flying an astonishing 5,287 sorties – over 4,000 of them flown by fighters. Many planes and pilots averaged a blistering three to four sorties per day.²⁵ But it became increasingly difficult to pinpoint the forward elements of the enemy advance. The warning net disintegrated. General Xue lost contact with many of his forces in the field and asked for American aircraft to reconnoiter the front. Even when weather permitted aerial reconnaissance, however, it proved of limited value. The Japanese advance soon merged with the flood of fleeing refugees.²⁶

²³ Cosgrove, *Pursued by Drunks*, 93-94.

²⁴ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 170.

²⁵ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki June 1944 to August 1945*, Vol. 5 of *The Army Air Force in World War II* (1953, Reprint, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 222-223.

²⁶ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 157; Rosholt, *Dog Sugar* 8, 147.

The enemy continued south and the American air force had less and less information. “We are out of touch with our liaison teams in the field – no information for the last twelve hours,” Vincent journaled on June 20. “I’m not getting any information from the field – no telling where the Japanese are,” he wrote the next day. “The warning net has gone to hell.” The young colonel felt a growing alienation between his forces in central China and headquarters in Kunming. “I can’t get any support from the people at 14th Air Force Headquarters,” he complained. “Either they don’t know how serious the situation is – or they don’t care.”²⁷

Despite his very vocal frustration with Stilwell’s lack of support, Chennault projected an obnoxious sense of confidence, believing unto the end in the messianic power of air to pull victory from the jaws of defeat. “I take a rather broad view on the use of air,” he told *Yank* magazine. “I’ve found that air can be used as infantry, as machine guns, and as artillery.”²⁸ Vincent disagreed. He hated using his fighters and bombers as front line troops. Instead, he advocated for cutting Japanese supply lines. But until serious Chinese resistance developed, the Japanese did not have to use much in the way of supplies, making interdiction efforts largely ineffective. Vincent had no choice but to keep sending his airmen into the breach. Headquarters, meanwhile, kept sending him “nasty wires.” He felt unable to convince Chennault of the seriousness of the situation. “He hasn’t admitted that an Air Force cannot by itself hold back a determined ground drive,” he griped. “I think my people have done more than expected – without support, without supplies, and without replacements.”²⁹

²⁷ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 170.

²⁸ Lou Stoumen, “Chennault and the Fourteenth” *Yank*, October 20, 1944.

²⁹ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 168, 170.

The young colonel became increasingly pessimistic and overwhelmed. “It’s too damn bad we have to sacrifice American youngsters for a cause as hopeless as this one,” he lamented. “I feel deep down that no matter what we do – no matter how many Japanese we kill – how many trucks we destroy or boats we sink – the end will be the same! But we won’t quit.” As the enemy advance continued unabated, Chennault grew cantankerous. He and Vincent clashed frequently. “General Chennault and his staff are ‘Sunday morning quarterbacking’ again,” Vincent protested. “I am concerned about General Chennault – he’s becoming very irritable,” he commented later. “Damn this Theater!” he penned shortly after that. “The flight surgeons are shirking their duty in not recommending General Chennault for rotation. He’s definitely ‘war weary.’”³⁰

Vincent worked tirelessly to fight a battle he could not win. Despite the growing tension with headquarters, Chennault recognized his efforts and recommended him for promotion to brigadier general. Congress confirmed the grade, making him the second-youngest general in the history of the Air Force. “Became a brigadier general. Broke out the bourbon,” he journaled on June 23.³¹ The next morning, suffering from the worst hangover of his life, he flew to Suichuan in “stinko” weather and found Mac getting ready to lead a bombing mission against Japanese supply lines. He told him to cancel it. Chinese intelligence reported ten thousand enemy troops thirty kilometers north of Pingxiang,³² a small town in the mountains seventy miles southeast of Changsha. He wanted Mac’s Lightnings to check it out. If they could find the column, he wanted them to strafe it and hit it with fragmentation bombs.

³⁰ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 177, 202-203, 209.

³¹ McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 171.

³² Wade Giles: Ping-hsiang, 萍乡

Mac refused. He thought the idea asinine and told Vincent as much. It would be a damned awkward mission; the low ceiling meant the fighters would meet a murderous reception from enemy small arms fire. The newly-minted brigadier flew into a rage! He, least of all, believed in the value of sending his airplanes out as infantry scouts on these hopeless sorties, but what choice did he have? He had his orders and he expected his subordinates to follow the orders he gave in turn! The two men had it out on the flight line in full view of the squadron, venting on each other their mutual frustration at fighting a losing battle.

“If you don’t fly the mission,” Vincent finally blurted out, “I’ll court-martial you!”

“Fine!” Mac shouted back. “I’ll fly the damn thing. But this isn’t over!”³³

Squadron armament crews quickly unloaded the 500-pound bombs slung under the P-38s’ wings and replaced them with fragmentation clusters. Before long, eleven of the twin-engine fighters winged their way to the north-northwest, scud running under the clouds, low over hilly terrain. Mac led the formation. If there was to be a damned awkward mission, he would lead it. He never asked his men to go on one he would not fly himself.³⁴

The Lightnings arrived over Pingxiang to find the town bursting with thousands of troops.

“Are those Chinese or Japs?” someone asked over the radio. Nobody knew. The report from Chinese intelligence had the enemy column thirty kilometers to the north. Mac faced a dilemma: if he attacked straightaway, he risked killing friendly troops. If he

³³ Robert Burris, interview by Daniel Jackson, 2009.

³⁴ Burris, interview, 2009.

decided to take a closer look, he sacrificed his tactical advantage, risking himself and his men by putting them at the mercy of enemy small arms fire. There was no decision. Not really. Lieutenant Colonel George B. McMillan earned the respect of his officers and enlisted men by always playing it straight. He believed in doing the right thing and expected the same of his subordinates. He would protect them until hell froze over as long as they were straight with him. “You could rob a bank,” they would joke, “and if you told him you did it, he’d probably try to get you out of it – just so long as you didn’t lie to him about it!”³⁵

“Hell, let’s get it done,” Mac whispered under his breath. He led his flight in for a closer look.

They circled the town three times at less than two hundred miles per hour. The troops below them did not break ranks. They still could not identify them as Japanese or friendly. On the fourth pass, all hell broke loose. Instead of diving for cover, ten thousand Japanese soldiers stood their ground, shouldered their 9-millimeter rifles, and fired *en masse*. Mac turned and dropped his frags. As each canister left its rack, a small parachute deployed. The bombs dropped straight down, exploding on contact with the ground, ripping through the crowd of men.³⁶

Mac’s right engine began smoking badly.³⁷

“Those little slant-eyed bastards got me,” he announced coolly over the radio. “I’m going to have to bail out.” He turned east. “I’m going to get out of the target area as

³⁵ Robert Burris, interview by Daniel Jackson, 2007.

³⁶ Jerry Doughty, interview by Daniel Jackson, May 2007.

³⁷ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 6145*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1944).

far as I can first.” His wingman stayed with him, shutting down his own damaged right engine.³⁸

“All of the coolant in my right engine is leaking out,” Mac told him. “Left engine oil pressure is dropping fast.” Ten miles east of Pingxiang, they crossed the Yuanshui River. Still flying low beneath the weather – dangerously low for bailing out – he suddenly had an idea.

“How do these things land on water?” he asked his flight.

“Climb out of your parachute,” one of them advised. As he removed his shoulder straps, his left engine froze and he began losing altitude rapidly.

“My left engine’s gone,” he told them. “... and there goes my right,” he added a moment later. “Well boys, we’ll see how these crates land in the water.” He never made it to the river. His wingman saw a fireball erupt as the fighter crashed two hundred yards to the south (see Figure 22).³⁹

“Dear Mr. and Mrs. McMillan and family,” wrote Father Cosgrove two days later, “I do not know of a more difficult task I have had to perform than to write to you expressing my sentiments upon the loss of your boy. My sincerest and deepest sympathy to you all! Your keen bereavement is also felt by each and every boy of the 449th Fighter Squadron.

³⁸ Burris, interview, 2009.

³⁹ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 6145*. MACR 6145: P-38J 42-67633, 449FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 10 miles east of Pingxiang, Lt Col George B. McMillan, O-366348, Killed in Action, Body Recovered.



Figure 22. McMillan's Final Mission

“You gave back to God your splendid son. We lost a friend, the best this squadron ever had, a great and competent fighter pilot and commanding officer whose coolness and leadership were evidenced even in the last minute of his life.” The priest went on to describe Mac’s qualities of leadership, of how he captured the respect and admiration of every man in the squadron. Then he singled out Sissy. “To Colonel George’s younger sister, [Sarah] Elizabeth, I offer my sincere condolence. He was mighty proud of her. Early in June I went with Colonel Mac to a certain Chinese city where I helped him buy silk cloth. ‘My kid sister is going to college, Padre,’ he said, ‘and I’ve got to pick out the finest silk there is for her.’”

“Great leaders like Colonel George come only once in a blue moon,” Cosgrove continued. “The news of his regrettable death shocked us all and those in his flight that day were stunned beyond words. The boys lost a pilot’s pilot and every one of us an idol. ‘It’ll never be the same squadron again without the “Old Man,”’ I heard one enlisted man say.”

“Indeed it will not,” the priest concluded. “Colonel George was a superb pilot and fighter and commanding officer. Be assured that there are many, many others who share your grief and the burden which Almighty God has seen fit to bring into your lives.”⁴⁰

Chennault followed up with his own letter to Mac’s father three days later. “Dear Mr. McMillan,” he began,

You have no doubt been advised officially of Mac’s death. I realize and understand how much you must feel the loss of a son like Mac. We over here know that Mac, both as a leader and a man, is irreplaceable.

I personally feel Mac’s loss – he was one of my best squadron commanders – his understanding, aggressiveness, and fine spirit made him tops where his officers and men were concerned and I was always confident that whatever Mac did for his squadron would be right; his judgment and final decisions at times when it was necessary for a level-headed judgment were invaluable and I know I speak for his officers and men when I say that they would have followed Mac anywhere he told them to.

Mac was shot down in combat – he was on a strafing mission and ground fire was encountered – his engine was hit and he attempted to make a forced landing; unfortunately, his engine blew up on landing and Mac was killed instantly.

His personal effects have been collected and will be shipped to the Quartermaster Depot, Kansas City, Missouri, for forwarding to you. You realize that this may take considerable time. Should you consider it desirable to make

⁴⁰ Cosgrove to McMillan, July 26, 1944.

inquiry, your letter should be addressed to the Quartermaster General,
Washington, D.C.

Please convey my sincere sympathy to Mac's family. If ever there is
anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to let me know.

With kindest personal regards, I am, most sincerely yours,
C.L. Chennault.⁴¹

For his part, Vincent wrote no letter, nor did he mention Mac's death in his
journal – odd for such a faithful and detailed diarist, especially considering he wrote of
him a number of times before. Besides mention of his own promotion, the entry for June
24 makes only the quixotic (and erroneous) record, “The weather here was ‘stinko’ all
day and I couldn’t get a plane off the ground. Lucky Japanese!”⁴²

The governor of Jiangxi Province informed 14th Air Force that an American pilot
perished in attempting to crash-land near the village of Linjiafang.⁴³ Policemen from the
nearby town of Luxi⁴⁴ buried him close to the wreckage and posted a guard to look after
his tomb. They would be unable to return the body to American control; the large number
of Japanese troops in the area made that far too dangerous.⁴⁵ For their part, his squadron
had little time to mourn his loss. Just two days after the crash, with Japanese troops less
than forty miles from the field, they evacuated Suichuan.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Claire Chennault to Malcolm McMillan, June 29, 1944, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

⁴² McClure, *Fire and Fall Back*, 171.

⁴³ Wade Giles: Ling-chia Fang, 林家坊

⁴⁴ Wade Giles: Lu Tsi, 芦溪

⁴⁵ The Adjutant General to Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm McMillan, October 3, 1946, Winter Garden
Heritage Foundation.

⁴⁶ Jim Hyde, interview by Daniel Jackson, May 2007.

Japan's armies succeeded where its air forces failed, plucking plane after plane from the sky and smashing them to the ground. Surface-to-air fire accounted for more than thirty-six percent of American warplanes reported missing on combat missions in the China Theater – more than any other single cause. The massive Ichi-go offensive left the corridor between Wuhan and Guilin a veritable graveyard of American planes – over one hundred in all, eighty-five percent of which were fighters. Mac's P-38 actually represented the only Lightning lost to ground fire during the campaign.⁴⁷ The big fighter had several advantages over its peers; the second engine meant it could often limp home after suffering significant damage. It also made little noise coming in low and fast – its long exhaust pipes muffled engine noise and directed it upward, away from the ground. Enemy troops often did not hear the distinctive, high-pitched whine of a P-38 until it arrived right on top of them.⁴⁸

Throughout the war, 14th Air Force lost only five Lightnings to surface fire, less than a quarter of the total reported missing. Predictably, P-40s suffered worse – thirty-six percent of those reported missing, or about sixty-one planes. Perhaps surprisingly, more P-51 Mustangs fell to surface fire than any other aircraft. Actually, America's wonder-fighter fell in greater numbers than all others combined! Of the 222 warplanes reported missing due to surface fire in the China Theater, 115 of them were P-51s (see Figure 23)!⁴⁹ The Mustang proved to be incredibly vulnerable to ground fire. When it came

⁴⁷ The 449th lost two P-38s to ground fire in central China during the summer of 1943 and two in Indochina in May and July of 1945.

⁴⁸ Timothy Jung, e-mail to Daniel Jackson, October 6, 2008.

⁴⁹ The comparison to the P-40 here is key; part of the reason 14th Air Force lost so many Mustangs is because beginning in the second half of 1944, the P-51 served in such volume, eventually becoming the staple fighter in China. Prior to that, the P-40 served as the backbone of the 14th Air Force's fighter fleet. It also went toe-to-toe with the Imperial Japanese Army. And yet the 14th lost far fewer of them. Of the 211 P-51s reported missing in the China Theater, more than fifty-four percent fell to surface fire. Of the 168 P-40s lost, only a little over thirty-six percent fell to surface fire. Not enough P-38s served in China to make a

down to it, any liquid-cooled engine was vulnerable, whether on a P-38, P-40, or P-51. The P-38 packed a spare, though. The Mustang's particular weakness had to do with the placement of its radiator; the P-40's was located in its distinctive "jaw." To shoot a Warhawk in the radiator, enemy troops had to fire at it head-on, staring it down while it came at them with its six .50-caliber machine guns blazing (see Figure 24). The P-51, on the other hand, housed its radiator in the underside scoop below the cockpit. Enemy troops could shoot at it from any angle. A hit to the radiator, or just one bullet in an oil or coolant line, and the mighty Mustang had about two more minutes of flying time (see Figure 25).⁵⁰

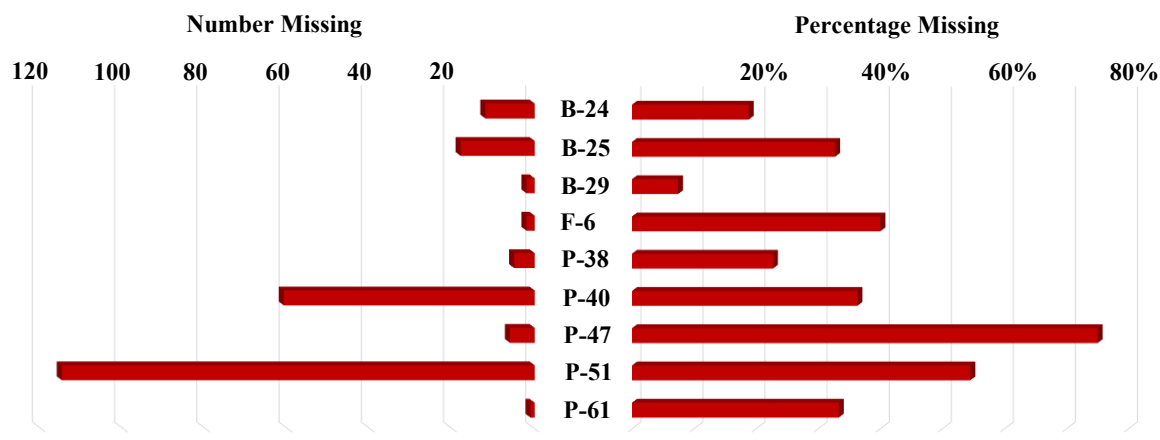


Figure 23. Aircraft Missing Due to Enemy Surface Fire

meaningful statistical comparison, though the Lightning clearly fared better in the ground attack regime. P-47s served in China in such small numbers as to be statistically insignificant.

⁵⁰ Molesworth, *Sharks over China*, 206-207.

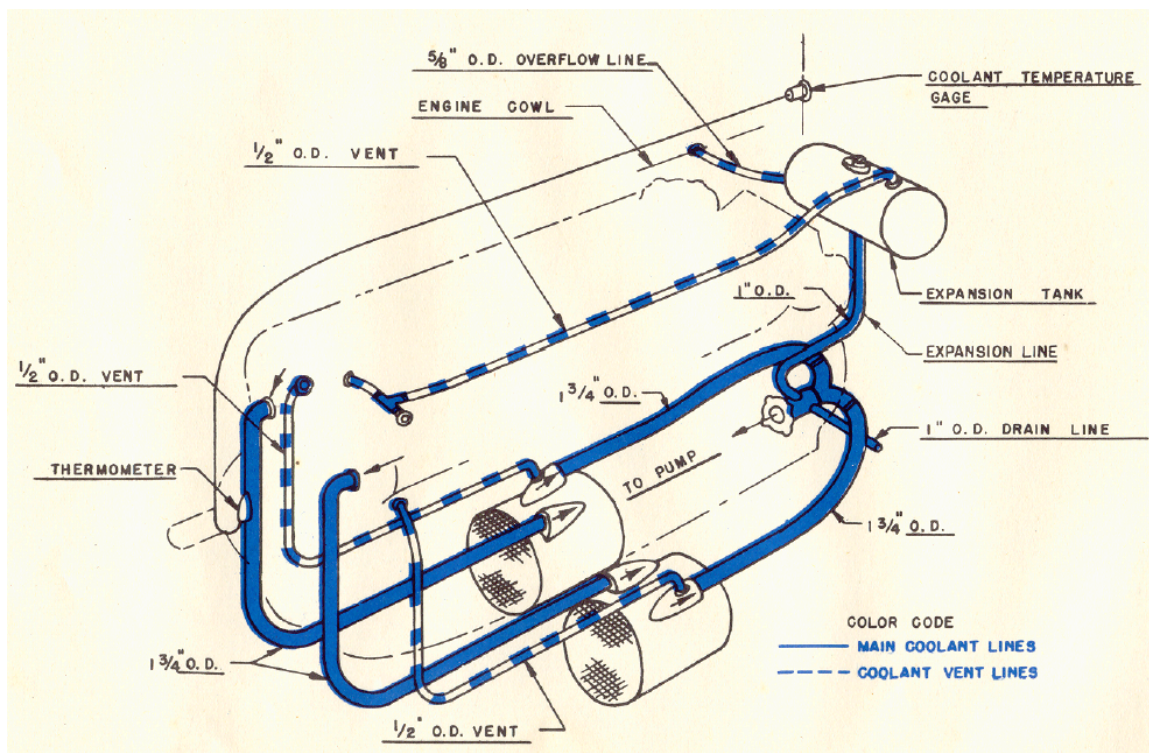


Figure 24. P-40 cooling system; much more compact than that of the P-51. From U.S. Army, *Pilot's Handbook of Preliminary Flight Operating Instructions for the P-40N Fighter Airplane* (Buffalo, NY: Curtiss-Wright Corporation, Airplane Division, 1943), 11.

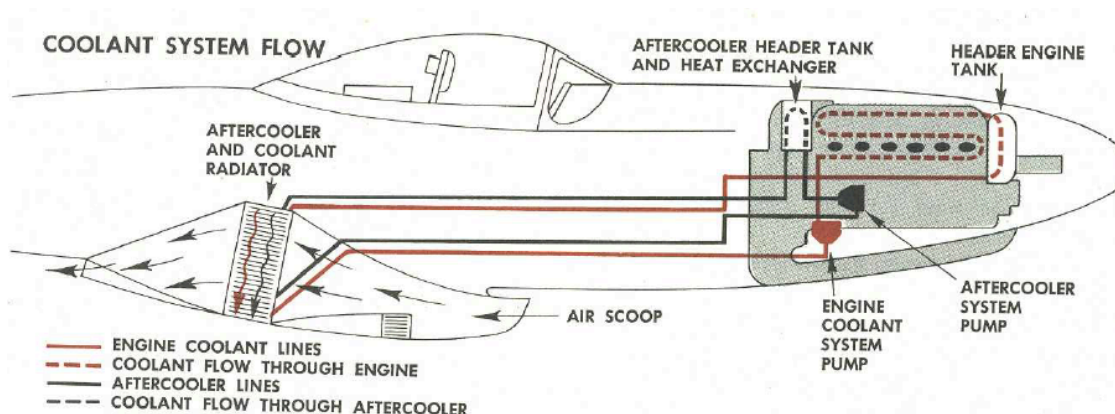


Figure 25. P-51 cooling system, with vulnerable coolant and oil lines stretching the length of the fuselage. From Headquarters, Army Air Forces, *Pilot Training Manual for the Mustang: P-51* (Winston-Salem, NC: Office of Flying Safety, Safety Education Division, 1945), 24.

“My plane was hit while swinging around a mountain by a single rifle bullet in the oil line,” reported 1st Lieutenant Harold Miller, a pilot from the 26th Fighter

Squadron who bailed out of his P-51 eighty miles west of Guangzhou in November 1944.⁵¹

“I ran into difficulty, in the form of enemy ground-fire, 20-mm cannon fire,” stated Lieutenant Edgar Headley, another 26th Fighter Squadron pilot on a mission fifty miles south of Changsha. “It made a direct hit on the motor, hitting the coolant jacket, and evidently damaging the cylinders. I was just clearing the trees at 25 feet. I pulled up, as the engine was running badly, and barely got 400 or 800 feet, when the engine absolutely quit. In the meantime, I had jettisoned the canopy, and bailed from not more than 500 feet up. The chute popped just before I hit the ground, fortunately.”⁵²

Despite the fighter’s vulnerability, most P-51 pilots claimed they trusted the greater speed of the sleek Mustang as better protection than the old P-40’s rugged construction. The 25th Fighter Squadron proved a notable exception to this mode of thinking. Providing close air support to the Chinese Expeditionary Force on the Salween Front, the 25th elected to keep its Sharks as long as possible. They made a wise choice; an analysis of mission reports shows the 25th lost one P-40 for every 258 ground attack sorties. A P-51 squadron flying similar missions in north China lost one Mustang for every 95 ground attack sorties.⁵³

⁵¹ AGAS-China, *Story of Harold E. Miller’s Evasion*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945). MACR 10056: P-51C 43-25207, 26FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 10 miles south of Deqing, 1Lt Harold E. Miller, O-693224, Rescued.

⁵² AGAS-China, *Notes of Evasion from Enemy Territory by Lt. Edgar W. Headley*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944). P-51 Unknown Serial Number, 26FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 22 miles southwest of Xiangtan, Lt Edgar W. Headley, O-668580, Rescued.

⁵³ Fourteenth Air Force, 25th Fighter Squadron, *Squadron History*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945); Fourteenth Air Force, 528th Fighter Squadron, *Squadron History*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945).

The Chinese finally made the kind of stand for which Vincent had been begging at Hengyang. General Fang Xianjue determined to hold the walled city with the sixteen thousand men of his 10th Army. For forty-seven days, they held out against more than a hundred thousand Japanese. Vincent sent everything he had – fighters, bombers, transports – to attack the enemy and resupply the besieged. The 14th Air Force thus found itself supporting two very different sieges simultaneously, each of which proved a turning point of sorts for the war in China. While Vincent's 68th Composite Wing supported the 10th Army in its defense of Hengyang, Colonel John Kennedy's 69th Wing supported the Chinese Expeditionary Force on the Salween Front as it laid siege to the walled city of Tengchong.

The five divisions of Major General Huo Kuizhang's XXth Army Group faced off against 1,850 experienced, well-entrenched, highly-determined, but vastly outnumbered Japanese defenders at Tengchong. Huo's troops had American training, equipment, and advisors. They finally captured the city on September 14, 1944. After fifty-one days of siege, only fifty of the defenders remained. It represented the first time a Chinese army had gone on the offensive and successfully removed the Japanese from conquered territory. It proved that properly trained, supplied, and led, Chinese soldiers could defeat a modern enemy.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the defenders of Hengyang held out heroically, but in vain. They had no American training. They had no advisors. And they only received what meager supplies Vincent could deliver by air. The city fell on August 8. After forty-seven days of siege, only 1,200 defenders remained. General Fang's men inflicted an estimated sixty thousand casualties on the enemy – almost half the Japanese casualty count for the

⁵⁴ U.S. Army Chinese Combat Command, *Report on the Salween Campaign*, (Kunming, China: 1945).

entire Ichi-go campaign. But having captured Hengyang, the enemy continued south. They took Lingling on September 7 and Guilin on November 11. The central China bases from which Chennault's airmen had so daringly attacked the enemy in 1942 and 1943 had fallen.⁵⁵

The chaotic, fluid front in advance of Ichi-go imposed new challenges on evading airmen. No longer could they depend on ratlines organized by Chinese guerrillas. Oftentimes, they bailed out or crash-landed in close proximity to Japanese troops they had just been strafing, and who, in many cases, had just shot them down. Flying a P-40 on a strafing run near Zhuzhou,⁵⁶ thirty miles south-southeast of Changsha, on June 15, Major Arthur Cruikshank took a bullet to his engine's accessory compartment and another to his radiator. He turned west. Two miles from the target, his cockpit filled with smoke; he bailed out only three hundred feet above the ground, landing in no-man's land.⁵⁷ A farmer quickly arrived on the scene and led him to his home. Thirty minutes later, a Nationalist patrol arrived. The platoon leader, an officer by the name of Ming Zhongyi,⁵⁸ spoke some English.

"It is not safe here," he told the American. "We must start at once for the south."

As they left the small village, a flight of five Sharks roared overhead on another mission to Zhuzhou. Cruikshank climbed a small hill to watch them bomb and strafe the Japanese positions.

⁵⁵ Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 405.

⁵⁶ Wade Giles: Chuchow, 株洲

⁵⁷ P-40N 42-105152, 74FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 2 miles west of Zhuzhou, Maj Arthur W. Cruikshank Jr., Rescued.

⁵⁸ Wade Giles: Ming Chung-yee

“I could see the Jap ground fire and it seemed rather heavy, either 20- or 37-millimeter,” he related in his evasion report. “I believe this was the same fire that scored hits on my plane.”⁵⁹

Cruikshank commanded the 74th Fighter Squadron, then flying out of Hengyang. He rejoined the squadron and fell to enemy ground fire again on June 25.⁶⁰ This time, the opening shock of the parachute sprained his neck and pulled the ligaments holding his kidneys. He landed in a rice paddy ten miles south of Hengshan,⁶¹ the incredible pain leaving him barely able to move.⁶² Two men dressed in peasant garb grabbed him, confiscated his pistol, and began carrying him north. The major found their appearance and behavior a bit odd. As they hauled him toward Japanese lines, he realized they must be plain-clothes scouts, such as the enemy often sent ahead of its main body to collect intelligence and sow chaos. He fumbled through his jungle kit as they dragged him along. In a flash, he drew his machete and brought it crashing down on one man’s head, killing him instantly. The other fled, leaving the injured airman to hobble off by himself.

He walked west, toward the mountains. After several hours of dodging Japanese patrols, he came across a wounded Chinese soldier. The man lay dying from a bayonet wound to his chest. Feebly, he raised a hand with his waning strength, pointing first to the pilot, then south – to safety. Cruikshank nodded his thanks and started in that direction. Any doubt about the intentions of the plain-clothes men vanished from his thoughts. A

⁵⁹ 74th Fighter Squadron, *Maj Cruikshank Evasion Report*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁶⁰ Though Cruikshank made it back to friendly territory, his injuries necessitated an immediate return to the United States. Between his bailout on June 25, the death of George McMillan on June 24, and the capture of Major Donald Quigley, commander, of the 75th Fighter Squadron, on August 10, the 14th Air Force lost three experienced squadron commanders to Ichi-go in just a month and a half.

⁶¹ 衡山

⁶² P-40N 43-22876, 74FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 10 miles south of Hengshan, Maj Arthur W. Cruikshank Jr., Rescued.

short time later, he found a group of three more wounded soldiers and joined them – the four allies limping along as best they could until they reached a Nationalist army post two days later. As the general there bundled him off to Lingling in a sedan chair, Cruikshank bid farewell to his injured companions, giving each \$1,000CN with which to buy food and medicine.⁶³

Like Cruikshank, most downed airmen on the central China front fell in with small bands of Nationalist troops. These soldiers, seeking to make their way out from enemy territory after their units had been destroyed, proved only too willing to take on an extra charge. Instead of forming ratlines then, evasion routes radiated in every direction away from the Japanese advance. To the east, evaders journeyed through the mountains to the Gan River in Jiangxi Province. To the west, they went to Shaoyang⁶⁴ and then south to Guilin, or later, one hundred miles further west to Zhijiang. To the southeast, they went to Chenzhou,⁶⁵ where Xue Yue reconstituted his headquarters and Malcolm Rosholt stood up a new radio post, “Love Zebra Five.” The lieutenant often hosted evading airmen there as they waited for a UC-64 to fly them out of the town’s small airfield (see Figure 26).⁶⁶

A surge of friendly fire and collateral damage incidents accompanied Ichi-go. The confusion sown by the enemy’s rapid advance meant many American airmen faced Mac’s dilemma; intelligence simply could not keep up with the pace of battle. Even if airmen could pinpoint the forward line of troops, the leading Japanese elements merged

⁶³ 74th Fighter Squadron, S-2 Officer, *Second Walkout Story of Major Cruikshank*, Arthur W., by 1Lt Luther C. Kissick, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁶⁴ Usually referred to as Paoching (Pinyin: Baojing) at the time, 邵阳

⁶⁵ Referred to as Chenhsien (Pinyin: Chenxian) at the time, 郴州

⁶⁶ Rosholt, *Rainbow Around the Moon*, 127.

with crowds of fleeing soldiers and civilians. Additionally, the enemy bypassed many Chinese positions and left numerous fragments of defeated units in their wake. When Lieutenant Oswin “Moose” Elker bailed out of his stricken P-40 north of Xiangtan on July 29, he found the civilian population there incredibly frustrated with the American air force.⁶⁷ “In this area including the river, the road, and the railroad, the Chinese were pretty well riled up against the Americans for the strafing,” he reported, “claiming that it was mostly Chinese killed in that district.” On the evening of the thirtieth, he and his escort of fifteen Nationalist soldiers stopped for dinner along the Lianshui River, a tributary of the Xiang. One of the soldiers got in a fight with a civilian there.

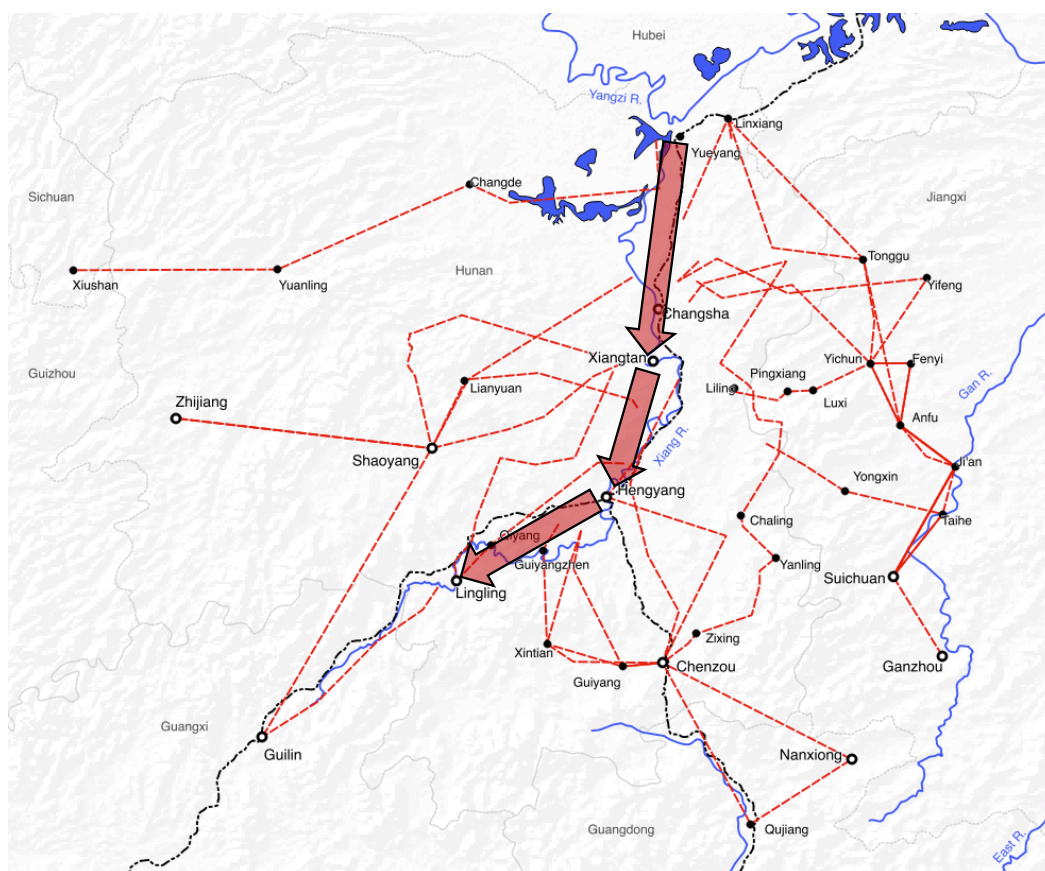


Figure 26. Evasion Lines from Ichi-go

⁶⁷ MACR 7116: P-40N 43-24184, 75FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 8 miles west-northwest of Xiangtan, 1Lt Oswin H. Elker, O-802273, Rescued.

“What was that about?” Elker asked his interpreter.

“He is one of the people who suffered from your strafing,” the interpreter replied.

“He wanted to turn you in.”

A few days later, while staying the night in the small village of Jieling, he learned of an errant bombing raid that accidentally killed seven of the villagers.⁶⁸

Second Lieutenant George Denton bailed out of his P-40 fifteen miles south of Pingxiang. Landing on the side of a mountain, he injured his foot and lost consciousness for a short while.⁶⁹ “When I came to, I saw that the plane had crashed into a house and completely destroyed it,” he reported. “The women and men who owned the house were crying and wailing about the loss of their home. One man was badly burned, so I gave these people \$3,000CN to help them.”⁷⁰

After bailing out northeast of Qiyang⁷¹ on September 5, Lieutenant Gordon Berven joined a battalion of six hundred Nationalist troops trying to make their way south to Guilin.⁷² They holed up outside the town of Guiyangzhen,⁷³ awaiting nightfall so they could cross the Xiang River under cover of darkness. While they waited, two flights of P-40s roared overhead – four fighters low to strafe, four high as top cover. The Sharks thoroughly worked the area over, concentrating their fire on any boats in the river and on

⁶⁸ 75th Fighter Squadron, *Return Story of Lieutenant Oswin Elker*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁶⁹ MACR 6449: P-40N 43-24158, 118TRS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 15 miles south of Pingxiang, 2Lt George W. Denton, O-689749, Rescued.

⁷⁰ AGAS-China, *The Story of George W. Denton*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁷¹ Wade Giles: Kiyang, 祁阳

⁷² MACR 8720: P-40N 43-23259, 75FS, 23FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 30 miles northeast of Qiyang, 2Lt Gordon C. Berven, O-668391, Rescued.

⁷³ Wade Giles: Kweiyang, 归阳

a compound across from the town. Fortunately, the village had been evacuated, but the strafing killed a Chinese soldier.⁷⁴

The sad fact of the matter was that in the frenzy of retreat and hopelessness of defeat, American warplanes frantically struck at anything that appeared to be a target. Liu Zhenghua, the infantry officer from Hubei who attended the Central Military Academy in Yunnan, led a platoon in the attack on Tengchong, on the Salween Front. Several of his men drowned crossing a river north of the city. Bullets and shells streaked out from the Japanese defenses, hitting all around him. Some of his men got caught in the crossfire as American planes strafed enemy positions. “Well, this is war,” he said simply, “and shit happens in war. For this reason, we don’t blame the Americans. Whenever we saw American planes fly over, we were still very happy about it.” Only seven of Liu’s men survived the assault. He never made it into the walled city himself. An enemy mortar shell hit nearby, sending shrapnel into his back and head. He spent the next several weeks convalescing in a military hospital near Baoshan.⁷⁵

The war claimed the lives of so many millions of Chinese soldiers and civilians, it became increasingly abstract for those higher and higher up both the Chinese and American the chain of command. The human cost, especially to civilian life, no longer seemed to enter into the strategic calculus. The tragic destruction caused by collateral damage and friendly fire reached a climax during the bombing of Wuhan on December 18, 1944. Roosevelt had finally recalled General Stilwell on October 18. Lieutenant General Albert Wedemeyer took command of the China Theater and immediately set

⁷⁴ AGAS-China, *Statement of Gordon C. Berven*, Reel A1322 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1944).

⁷⁵ Liu, interview. Wade Giles: Paoshan, 保山

about doing everything possible to staunch the as-yet unstoppable Ichi-go offensive. He began airlifting Chinese troops in from Burma and he finally secured use of the B-29s for an attack on Wuhan.⁷⁶

Chennault had long advocated the value of incendiary attacks on the wood and paper cities of Japan. High-altitude bombing of its steel industry had proven ineffective – making only a two-percent dent in six months of operations. Chennault and Major General Curtis LeMay decided to experiment with low-altitude firebombing on Wuhan as a proof-of-concept. To Chiang, the attack represented another necessary sacrifice, just like his order to breach the Yellow River dams in 1938. On December 18, seventy-seven Superfortresses joined two hundred 14th Air Force fighters and bombers in the largest aerial armada ever to darken China's skies. The B-29s dropped more than five hundred tons of incendiary bombs; Wuhan burned for three days. The smoldering ruin of the once great city pleased LeMay and provided a template for his systematic destruction of Japan. No one remarked on the civilian toll. As many as forty thousand died. The raid may have wiped out an important Japanese supply hub, but too late to save central China. The devastating attack seemed a cynical act of wanton destruction for destruction's sake.⁷⁷

Collateral damage and apparent insensitivity to civilian casualties is the obvious counterpoint to the gratitude most Chinese felt for American air support. As Liu Zhenghua pointed out, they understood mistakes happen in war. For the most part, they appreciated American air support despite suffering from friendly fire and collateral damage. Yet it is difficult to ignore the emotional response of individual Chinese who

⁷⁶ Romanus and Sunderland, *Time Runs Out in CBI*, 147, 161.

⁷⁷ Peter Harmsen, "The U.S. Firebombing of Wuhan," *China in WWII*, 2015, www.chinaww2.com. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 328-329.

suffered from American strafing, or who endured injury or lost their homes to airplanes falling from the sky. The Americans arrived in 1941 as humanitarians, bringing an end to Japanese terror bombing. Robert Mooney's selfless sacrifice over Xiangyun exemplified their idealism. With Ichi-go, things began to come unglued. Chinese civilians and soldiers got caught in the crossfire as American warplanes frantically lashed out against an enemy their intelligence could not adequately target. But it is the bombing of Wuhan, and with it, the seeming disregard for civilian casualties there, that is the hardest to reconcile with the idealistic early days of 1941 and 1942. China would never be the same.

CHAPTER VII

June 4, 1944

Dawu Mountain,¹ China

The two fighter pilots greeted each other with heartfelt relief. It had been nearly a month since they bailed out a hundred miles southwest of Wuhan. Neither had seen another American since then.

“I thought you would have left already,” remarked Lee Gregg. “They told me you were two days ahead of me.”

“I heard that they had you and that you were following behind me,” Glen Beneda replied. “They decided to stop somewhere safe and wait for you so we can get out together.” Beneda had spent the last seven days awaiting Gregg’s arrival at the mountain headquarters of the 5th Division, New 4th Army. It had been his first reprieve after three weeks on the run. Both of them had been on the run and both looked a sorry sight indeed – wearing a hodge-podge of American, Chinese, and captured Japanese clothing, with long hair, scraggly beards, and ankles swollen from the long journey and relentless mosquitos. Both still suffered from serious injuries sustained in the bailout and beyond.²

“I had been riding a horse and he threw me and kicked me,” explained Beneda. “They fixed a stretcher and carried me ever since.”³

“Either it’s my imagination, or my back bone is crooked as hell,” complained Gregg. “I’ll be glad to get an X-ray of it!” In addition to his fractured vertebra, the P-38

¹ 大悟

² Gregg, *Shot Down*; MIS-X, *Evasion Report No. 431*, Gregg, *Lee O.*; AGAS-China, *Story of Glen Beneda*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

³ AGAS-China, *Story of Glen Beneda*.

pilot still limped from his wounded ankle, had significant bruising on his back and hips, a blood clot in his eye, and chills, fever, and a cough that made him think he might have malaria.⁴

They talked late into the night.

“I never saw so many Zeros in the air at one time,” Beneda remarked. He did not make much mention of the ambush beyond that. The young Mustang pilot had been flying and fighting in China ever since the desperate days of the Japanese air offensive in the summer of 1943, though he had not personally seen much aerial combat – only three or four dogfights. He claimed a probable once; he did not see it hit the ground, but he saw his tracers knocking pieces off of it. It never did blow up. He lost sight of it. He still felt very young in a lot of ways; he had earned his wings only a year and a half before – just after his nineteenth birthday – and reported to China after flying just thirty hours in P-40s at an operational training unit in Florida. The young Nebraskan looked up to Gregg, five and a half years his senior and a fighter ace with six victories scored in two theaters of war. He figured Gregg would not want to talk about getting shot down any more than he did. “Did anyone else make it?” he asked instead.⁵

“About ten days after I bailed out, they showed me a parachute, pointie-talkie, some morphine, sulfa powder, and an AGO card belonging to Jones,” Gregg replied.

“They told me he drowned. They didn’t see any blood stains on his parachute.” Beneda had watched three P-38s fall from the dogfight in flames. But neither of them had heard

⁴ Gregg, *Shot Down*.

⁵ Glen Beneda, interview.

anything more about other survivors. Their conversation turned to the action they had seen since bailing out.⁶

“I had forty or fifty soldiers with me and we were traveling at night,” Beneda related. “It was really dark, it was a moonless night with an overcast. They carried me in a stretcher and we walked along this trail and the Chinese took turns carrying me. It took four guys to carry me in that stretcher. We had just stopped to rest – they had just laid me down – when someone opened up with a machine gun. I heard that ‘tat-tat-tat-tat-tat.’ I looked over my left shoulder and I could see the muzzle flash. Like I said, I wasn’t able to walk, but my legs worked a little better then! I got off of that stretcher and I started running in the opposite direction. We got kind of scattered. I ran for about an hour and when I stopped there were only three soldiers with me. We traveled in circles all night long and stopped at a small farm house at daylight. Later in the day, the rest of the escort showed up there. I don’t think we lost anybody!”⁷

Gregg had a few similar experiences, like when he and his escort of seven soldiers ran into a Japanese patrol six days after he bailed out. The soldiers picked up his stretcher and ran, but he slowed them down too much. They ducked behind a house and, finding a haystack there, hid him underneath. The Japanese started shooting and for about three hours, the two sides fired back and forth and lobbed grenades at each other over the haystack. Finally, the Chinese feigned retreat. The Japanese followed and the Chinese shot two of them, forcing them to withdraw.⁸

⁶ MIS-X, *Evasion Report No. 431, Gregg, Lee O.*

⁷ Glen Beneda, interview; AGAS-China, *Story of Glen Beneda.*

⁸ MIS-X, *Evasion Report No. 431, Gregg, Lee O.*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg.*

He had another run-in with the enemy about two weeks later. This time, he traveled with a battalion of four hundred troops equipped with six light and two heavy machine guns. As they prepared to cross a road under cover of darkness, they met an enemy patrol. The first shot barely missed Gregg. He bailed off his horse and landed knee-deep in a water-filled rice paddy. A few more rounds passed close by. The Chinese troops charged the enemy head-on, using hand grenades and rifle mortars. Gregg mounted his horse and galloped across the road into a wheat field. After an hour, the enemy withdrew and he and his escort continued onward.⁹

Beneda asked how he managed to ride a horse with his injured back.

“I rigged up a kind-of brace on the saddle,” he answered. “I fixed up a Rube Goldberg arrangement with the rubber part of my jungle kit for a back rest. It helped some, but not too much.”¹⁰

The two got to talking about the events immediately preceding their meeting at 5th Division headquarters. While Beneda had no trouble crossing the Beiping-Wuhan railway, Gregg had a much more dramatic time. He had an escort of two hundred troops, “one hundred soldiers in front, one hundred in the rear,” he narrated. “As we started crossing the railroad, about half the escort got across when here comes a train hell bent for election. It had two engines, one in front and one in the rear, with four cars, loaded with Japs. Our men had time to setup their machine guns and station riflemen beside the railway. When it got in range, they really let them have it! The Japs in the train were firing back. The engines put full steam ahead and it was a hot short battle. When the train passed we ran like hell while the soldiers stayed to cover us. We got about a mile from

⁹ Gregg, *Shot Down*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

¹⁰ Gregg, *Shot Down*.

the railroad when I heard what I thought was a flight of geese. Just as I looked up, there was a hell of an explosion about a hundred yards ahead and to the right of our column. The bastards had come back and set up a heavy mortar! The second one hit even with me and fifty yards to the right. We were going east and had a strong north wind and I think that wind saved us. We traveled fast for half an hour. They continued to lob them at us but we were out of range with no casualties.”¹¹

“Have you been keeping notes?” Beneda queried. Gregg handed him his journal and he leafed through it. “You have been writing a lot more than me,” he commented. “I’m just going to get a copy of your diary and I’m going to quit.”

“Ok,” Gregg agreed.¹²

The next morning, the two airmen met with General Li Xiannian,¹³ commander of the 5th Division. He gave them each a captured Nambu pistol, with two magazines and forty rounds of ammunition.

“Really ding hao!” exclaimed Gregg, giving a thumbs-up and a big grin.¹⁴

The general explained he would send them on their way again in a few days. First, he wanted the two airmen to visit his division’s military academy and officer’s school. He asked them to speak to his troops about their common cause against Japan. Though official American policy supported Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government, de facto cooperation with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rested on little more than the age-old principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” The CCP wanted more official recognition. The Americans knew little about them, save for rampant rumors and official

¹¹ AGAS-China, *Story of Glen Beneda*; Gregg, *Shot Down*.

¹² Glen Beneda, interview.

¹³ 李先念

¹⁴ Gregg, *Shot Down*.

propaganda put out by the Guomindang. Nobody knew quite how they would receive Americans prior to Gregg and Beneda's serendipitous arrival. Chiang had actually ordered the New 4th Army disbanded in early 1941. A dispute over jurisdiction between them and the Nationalists devolved into open combat. Chiang branded them as "insubordinate," while they protested his "treachery." The incident contributed to a significant chilling in relations, engendering a mutual suspicion that put a damper on the United Front against Japan. By sending two American airmen deeper into New 4th Army territory, General Li not only sought to boost the motivation and morale of his fighting men, he also wanted to gain exposure and enhance his legitimacy with the United States military.¹⁵

On the morning of June 6, 1944, the same day the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy, Lieutenants Gregg and Beneda trekked deeper into the mountains with Mr. Huang, a political commissar for the New 4th Army. He spoke a little English and wore an officer's uniform bare of any rank or insignia. After a grueling journey up precipitous, twisting trails – Gregg in a sedan chair, Beneda on horseback – they arrived at a pine bough arch under which hung a sign that read, "Welcome to our alliance Lt. Gregg and Lt. Beneda." A bugle corps of twenty boys presented the colors and two hundred soldiers and students snapped to attention and saluted. After an introductory speech, their hosts asked them to address the assembled crowd. Beneda stepped forward. Commissar Huang interpreted for him:

¹⁵ Taylor, *The Generalissimo*, 175-177; David D. Barrett, *Dixie Mission: The United States Army Observer Group in Yenan, 1944*, China Research Monographs (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, 1970), 20-21.

“From the Nationalist government in Chongqing, we heard the Communist Party of China doesn’t resist the Japanese. They said the New 4th Army is actually a bunch of rebels and had fooled a lot of foreigners, including myself. But through our own observations over these last few weeks, we witnessed the New 4th Army standing strong against the Japanese. They are not traitors to China. Their officers and men stand united. They work closely with the local people and have good relations with them. I have seen that every officer and soldier has a pen and that all are being educated. This shows me you are an army striving to act with wisdom. Everyone knows why they must fight against Japan and how they can do their best to win the war.”¹⁶

The audience applauded warmly.

“The Americans are also fighting the war in China,” Gregg added, “a fact which I know you doubt as you seldom see an American soldier.” Seldom might have been too generous. Thus far, Gregg and Beneda had been the first and only American airmen they had encountered. These two battered, scruffy-looking young men gave the first tangible proof the Chinese Communists had an international ally in their war against the invader. “We are going to bomb Japan proper from Chinese bases!” Gregg concluded enthusiastically. The crowd clapped and cheered their approval.¹⁷

The two airmen gave several speeches over the next two days, and endured hours of questions.

“What does the Guomindang think of the Chinese Communists?”

“What do the Americans think of the Chinese Communists?”

¹⁶ Gregg, *Shot Down*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

¹⁷ MIS-X, *Evasion Report No. 431*, Gregg, Lee O.

Neither pilot documented their answers to any of these questions, though Gregg made a cryptic entry in his diary:

“We are now Gregg and Beneda, ‘Foreign Diplomats,’” he wrote. “These people can sure ask embarrassing questions and if any of the answers go beyond here, it’s going to be our necks!”¹⁸

They visited thousands of troops – all appearing better trained and equipped than any Nationalists they had seen, with higher morale and superior discipline. During their visit to the academy, they also encountered a fascinating organization called the Japanese People’s Anti-War League. Twenty Japanese soldiers, all wearing the same khaki uniforms as the rest of the New 4th Army, saluted smartly and greeted them. They learned a number of prominent communists from Japan had journeyed to the interior of China. These men worked to convert captured soldiers and helped the CCP fight the Imperial Army, particularly with propaganda aimed at their countrymen.

“What does the United States think of Japan?” one of them asked through an interpreter. “Do the Americans hate all Japanese? The Japanese people – the farmers and the ordinary people of Japan – do not want war,” he stressed. “It’s just the militarists causing the war.”¹⁹

The whirlwind speech-making tour of the 5th Division’s mountain redoubt exhausted the two fighter pilots. “I was really tired out,” Gregg journaled. “Both of us were.” They wanted to get moving again. They wanted to go home.²⁰

¹⁸ Gregg, *Shot Down*.

¹⁹ Gregg, *Shot Down*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

²⁰ Gregg, *Shot Down*.

On the morning of June 8, Commissar Huang and several other of General Li's representatives met with them and gave them each \$5,000CN for expenses, as well as a Japanese flag and saber. For General Chennault, they entrusted them with a letter from General Li, a map, a secret document on enemy air defenses, and a beautiful, two-handed Samurai sword that had belonged to a Japanese major general slain in battle. The two departed 5th Division's headquarters with five Japanese prisoners and an escort of one hundred troops. A bugle corps led the procession. Soldiers lined the trail for miles cheering and clapping, wishing them well on their journey.²¹

They crossed the railroad that night. For four days, they trekked northwest toward Nationalist lines, through ostensibly Japanese-occupied territory (see Figure 27). Beneda came down with a cold. Gregg's cough grew worse. They both took quinine and Gregg put hot packs on his back. The ace also developed a bad toothache and had to have it pulled by a rural dentist. They waited while the communists sent messenger after messenger to the Nationalist 69th Army. None ever returned. They waited.²²

They remained in limbo on June 15, spending the night in a prosperous-looking village. Early the next morning, a strange sound disturbed the predawn quiet. Gregg's eyes snapped open. His mind slowly swam back to wakeful consciousness. He looked around. Darkness. Then he became aware of a low rumble – a pulsating, rich reverberation that woke him. It sounded like an airplane passing overhead – a big one. He rolled over and tried to go back to sleep, but the sound returned again and again. He stepped outside as dawn broke. An enormous, silvery four-engine battleplane roared overhead – a B-29 Superfortress. As he stood there, six of them flew by, one by one.

²¹ Gregg, *Shot Down*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

²² Gregg, *Shot Down*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

“Many of them passed in the night,” the interpreter told him and Beneda at breakfast.



Figure 27. Gregg and Beneda's Walkout

“Maybe they bombed Tokyo...” Gregg uttered almost in disbelief. His prediction to the Communist troops at the academy came true within ten days. The planes he watched cruising overhead had bombed the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at Yawata, on the southern island of Kyushu. Seventy-five of the gargantuan aircraft took part in the raid. Their flight path to and from Japan took them across the length of China, over the territory most heavily influenced by the Communists. A new phase of the war had begun.²³

For Gregg and Beneda, however, the immediate concern of returning to American control still occupied their minds. After sending four messengers to Nationalist lines and

²³ Gregg, *Shot Down*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

hearing nothing in return, their escorts informed them they had decided to use an intermediary, an ex-bandit by the name of Mr. Yen.

“He used to be a robber,” they told them, “but is now very rich – a gentleman. He will turn you over to the Nationalist troops.” The New 4th Army paid him \$13,000CN to make the transfer. When Gregg and Beneda arrived at his compound on the morning of June 17, they found he had a small army of his own, armed with swords, knives, spears, and a handful of firearms that appeared to be at least a hundred years old. Mr. Yen was the sort of robber baron who thrived in the contested space between Nationalists, Communists, and Japanese. His ambiguous status made him a useful go-between.²⁴

The two airmen set out with the bandit army at 1400 hours. Their escorts handed them over to another group of soldiers at 2030 – these not wearing uniforms, but well equipped with machine guns, rifles, grenades, and bandoliers of ammunition over each shoulder.

“These guys are pretty rugged looking,” Beneda mumbled. “I wonder whether we’ll make it to the other side.”

“Yeah,” Gregg agreed. “They are a motley-looking crew, but well gunned.” An hour later, they met a squad of troops dressed in blue cotton uniforms. They marched a short distance further with these and then stopped for the night.²⁵

As they set out across the rice paddies again early the next morning, lookouts stationed in the surrounding hills alerted them to the approach of Japanese troops. Gregg and Beneda looked back to see a platoon of twenty enemy soldiers advancing down a

²⁴ Gregg, *Shot Down*; MIS-X, *Evasion Report No. 431, Gregg, Lee O.*; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

²⁵ Gregg, *Shot Down*.

hillside just half a mile away. The Japanese started shooting. The airmen started running. Six of their escort stayed with them while fourteen peeled off to delay the enemy. The airmen crested a hill and heard the sporadic gunfire erupt into a fierce firefight. They never learned what happened to the troops who stayed behind to cover them – they never even found out who they were. Now, with only a half-dozen fighters left to escort them, they continued on. Five hours of walking brought them to a hilltop sentry post. Their escort argued with the sentries for some time. Without an interpreter, Gregg and Beneda had no idea what they discussed. After a while, the sentries let them pass. An hour after that, they came to a river. Machine gun positions lining the opposite bank barred their way. Again, their escorts negotiated with the troops there for half an hour before they finally allowed them to cross. On the other side, they learned they had reached a forward command post of the Nationalist 28th Division, 69th Army.²⁶

Over the next four days, various units of the 69th relayed Gregg and Beneda to the airfield at Laohekou.²⁷ They arrived on June 22, the day after Gregg's twenty-sixth birthday. Two days later, they jumped aboard a B-25 making a reconnaissance run to Yichang,²⁸ a Japanese-occupied city near the mouth of the Yangzi River gorges. After making its photo passes, the bomber winged west over the epic chasms to Liangshan,²⁹ an airbase in Sichuan Province 120 miles northeast of Chongqing. There, the two of them caught a transport that eventually delivered them to Kunming. Gregg went to the hospital.

²⁶ Gregg, *Shot Down*; MIS-X, *Evasion Report No. 431*, Gregg, Lee O.; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

²⁷ Wade Giles: Lahokow, 老河口

²⁸ Wade Giles: Ichang, 宜昌

²⁹ 梁山, now Liangping (梁平)

Beneda reported to Chennault, delivering the sword, intelligence, and letter from General Li.³⁰

The sudden appearance of the two missing fighter pilots at a remote American airbase came as a great surprise – everyone assumed they had been killed. Two months had passed since the ambush southwest of Wuhan. A month after the battle, the adjutant general's office sent a telegram to Glen Beneda's mother:

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP
REGRETS THAT YOUR SON FIRST LIEUTENANT GLEN E BENEDA HAS
BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE SIX MAY OVER CHINA
PERIOD IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE
RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED

General Chennault followed up with a letter of his own, telling her: "Every effort has been made to locate your son and our efforts will continue. However, there is very little hope for his safe return." After meeting with the Old Man, Beneda finally sent a telegram of his own on July 1:

AM WELL AND SAFE PLEASE NOTIFY FRIENDS AND RELATIONS
LETTERS WILL FOLLOW ALL MY LOVE GLEN BENEDA³¹

Mrs. Beneda received the telegram with unimaginable relief. Her friends, the Egles, had received a similar notification from the War Department when their son Ralph went missing. He flew as copilot for one of the 177 B-24 heavy bombers that attacked the oil refineries at Ploiesti, Romania, on August 1, 1943. Fifty-three bombers and 660 airmen did not return. Unlike Glen's case, as the months wore on, no good news

³⁰ Glen Beneda, interview; MIS-X, *Evasion Report No. 431*, Gregg, Lee O.; AGAS-China, *Story of Lee O. Gregg*.

³¹ *Touching the Tigers: 60-Day Fraternity, 60-Year Friendship*, directed by Li Xiaolin (Beijing: The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, 2011), DVD.

followed. Ralph's loss devastated his family. The Benedas thanked God for Glen's miraculous return from behind the lines.³²

The unexpected resurrection of Gregg and Beneda not only proved a relief for their families, but also for their fellow airmen. General Chennault did not miss the fact that the New 4th Army brought them safely through territory "conquered" by the Japanese during Phase One of the Ichi-go offensive. Since the defeat of the Nationalist armies there, it had become *terra incognita* for the Americans. But the Communists thrived in the vacuum left by Chiang's defeated forces. The Japanese could not deny them freedom of movement, despite their frequent patrols. It had been the goal of the Imperial Army to establish a rail corridor from Beiping to Indochina. Chennault sought to deny them that corridor by arraying his warplanes to attack along its entire length. This meant the 14th Air Force had to operate with increasing frequency over territory lacking any Nationalist presence. Though Chennault did not agree with their political philosophy and remained devoted to Chiang, he saw no alternative to working with the New 4th Army. Without them, he had no effective way to gather intelligence or recover his fallen airmen.³³

"I dealt with Chinese of all political shades including Communists, independent guerrillas, and anti-Guomindang dissidents" he later wrote. "This was done with full permission of the Generalissimo, who trusted me to confine my efforts to prosecution of the war and abstain from local political manipulations."³⁴ His efforts at cooperation proved worthwhile; the 5th Division alone rescued five more of his men, including

³² Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview.

³³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 243-244.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

Captain Armit W. Lewis, whose P-40 quit on him sixty miles southwest of Wuhan, on October 27.³⁵ “Guess I’m following the same route Gregg and Beneda used five months ago,” he journaled during his forty-three-day walkout.³⁶

The New 4th Army’s rescue operations also proved a boon for the 20th Air Force. On August 20, Communist troops picked up five airmen from a B-29 that went down in coastal Jiangsu Province,³⁷ 180 miles north of Shanghai. Seven of the crew ended up captured or missing, but the return of Lieutenant Colonel Savoie and four others from his bomber demonstrated the impressive reach and expanding influence of the New 4th Army.³⁸

Unlike Chennault, who sought approval from Chiang to work with the New 4th Army and did so purely to aid in the fight against Japan, Stilwell used the threat of American support for the Communists as a way to bludgeon the generalissimo into acquiescing to his plans. During the spring and summer of 1944, he increasingly insisted on establishing an American mission to Mao Zedong’s headquarters at Yan’an,³⁹ deep in remote Shaanxi Province. When Chiang demurred, the general delayed the departure of thirty Chinese airmen destined for pilot training programs in the United States. President

³⁵ MACR 9689: P-40N 43-23610, 7FS(P), 3FG(P), Lost due to Malfunction 65 miles southwest of Wuhan, Capt Armit W. Lewis, O-441848, Rescued.

³⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 241; Armit W. Lewis, “My Ship Quit on Me,” in *Up Sun!* ed. Wallace Little and Charles Goodman (Memphis: Castle Books, 1990), 118.

³⁷ Wade Giles: Kiangsu, 江苏

³⁸ MACR 11297: B-29 42-6264, 792BS, 468BG, Lost due to Malfunction near Jianhu, Lt Col William F. Savoie, O-24115, Pilot, Rescued; 1Lt Raymond K. Lutz, O-464590, Copilot, Rescued; Capt Donald G. O’Brien, O-426919, Navigator, Rescued; Capt Louis K. Wedel, O-726095, Bombardier, Missing, Body Not Recovered; 1Lt Casimer F. Stelmach, O-738739, Flight Engineer, Rescued; SSgt Ernest J. Brundage, 31258095, Gunner, Rescued; TSgt Walter W. Alspaugh, 35402887, Radio Operator, Missing, Body Not Recovered; TSgt William A. Beckham, 20403054, Gunner, Missing, Body Not Recovered; SSgt James P. Meehan, 35309815, Gunner, Captured; SSgt Granville L. Adams, 33522614, Gunner, Missing, Body Not Recovered; TSgt Rollin B. Heffernan, 6999780, Gunner, Missing, Body Not Recovered; 1Lt Robert C. Geyer, O-855161, Radar Operator, Missing, Body Not Recovered.

³⁹ Wade Giles: Yenan, 延安

Roosevelt added weight to the issue when he sent Vice President Henry Wallace to China in June 1944. While Roosevelt appreciated China's sacrifices, he thought the Allied cause would benefit from Chiang directing all his resources against Japan, instead of devoting a good deal of it to containing (and sometimes fighting) the Communists. Between Stilwell's aggressive coercion and some convincing by the vice president, Chiang finally gave in.⁴⁰

A C-47 landed at Yan'an with the first nine members of the United States Army Observer Group on July 22, 1944. They called themselves the "Dixie Mission," because they operated deep in "rebel" territory. Colonel David D. Barrett commanded them. An intelligence officer by trade and training, the fifty-two-year-old Coloradan had spent much of his twenty-seven-year Army career in China. He spoke and read Mandarin fluently. Previously, he had served a short time as military attaché to the U.S. embassy in Chongqing and most recently, as the chief intelligence officer for the American advisory mission to the Nationalist armies at Guilin. When he took over the Dixie Mission, his instructions from headquarters directed him to solicit information on the order of battle for the Japanese and their puppets; the strength, composition, disposition, equipment, training, and combat efficiency of Communist forces; the nature of Communist intelligence in occupied territory; a "who's who" of Communist officials; target intelligence, bomb damage assessment, and weather information for American air operations; and to determine the extent of Communist control of Chinese territory, along with an evaluation of their current and potential contributions to the war effort.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, 22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

Though Chennault disagreed with Stilwell's strong-arm political tactics, he made sure an AGAS officer accompanied the mission. Captain Henry C. Whittlesey⁴² debarked the C-47 on July 22 and immediately set about coordinating with the 8th Route Army to rescue downed American airmen. While the New 4th Army generally operated in the area north of the Yangzi River in central China, the 8th Route Army operated in the area north of the Yellow River. Cooperation with them would prove vital as Chennault's warplanes began operating from Xi'an,⁴³ the ancient former capital of China located in southern Shaanxi. The airfield there allowed P-51 fighter-bombers to range out and relentlessly attack Japan's robust rail network in north China. Additionally, 20th Air Force Superfortresses frequently overflew the 8th Route Army's area of influence on their way to and from targets in Japan and Manchuria.⁴⁴

Captain Whittlesey crisscrossed north China to set up evasion lines for downed airmen. He even worked with 8th Route Army engineers to construct an emergency airfield perilously close to enemy lines in the mountains of southeast Shanxi Province,⁴⁵ near the Henan⁴⁶-Hebei⁴⁷ border. Local workers expanded a road through a narrow valley, oriented southwest to northeast, into a five-thousand-foot-long, hard-packed dirt airfield. On December 30, 1944, Whittlesey met eleven evaders in a tiny village eighteen miles north of the secret airfield. Captain George Varoff and his crew had taken part in a twelve-plane raid against an aircraft modification center in Shenyang⁴⁸ on December 7.

⁴² Whittlesey arrived in Yan'an as a 1st lieutenant, but promoted to captain shortly thereafter.

⁴³ Wade Giles: Sian, 西安

⁴⁴ Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, 13; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 326.

⁴⁵ Wade Giles: Shansi, 山西

⁴⁶ Wade Giles: Honan, 河南

⁴⁷ Wade Giles: Hopeh, 河北

⁴⁸ 沈阳, known then as Mukden

Though in some respects a marvel of American engineering, the B-29 Superfortress earned a reputation as a mechanical nightmare. Varoff's aircraft proved no exception. Shortly after takeoff, the tail gunner discovered his guns did not work. Then, as they approached Shenyang, the windows began icing over. The crew had to don oxygen masks and depressurize so they could see. Over the target, enemy fighters hit their number one engine. Varoff headed for Xi'an to make an emergency landing. The engine caught fire as they crossed the Beiping-Wuhan railway and Varoff ordered the crew to bail out.⁴⁹

Only a week prior to the mission, Lieutenant Colonel Savoie had lectured their squadron on his rescue by the New 4th Army, giving them confidence in the competence and dependability of Communist forces. Twentieth Bomber Command MIS-X officers also briefed them on the 8th Route Army specifically. The downed airmen not only knew how to identify themselves as American, "Meiguo," they knew how to ask for the 8th Route Army, "Balujun."⁵⁰ Staff Sergeant Frank Broussard, the radio operator, even remembered the hand sign for the number eight, his thumb and forefinger spread and pointed downward. Communists troops collected all eleven of the airmen within hours of their bailout and had them reunited by December 13.⁵¹

⁴⁹ MACR 10024: B-29 42-63363, 44BS, 40BG, Lost to Enemy Aircraft 15 miles southeast of Lucheng, Capt George D. Varoff, O-427056, Pilot, Rescued; 1Lt Lewis V. Hamil, Jr., O-748180, Copilot, Rescued; 2Lt George Szafranski, O-743865, Navigator, Rescued; 1Lt Curtis A. Bush, O-686407, Bombardier, Rescued; 2Lt John S. Ingham, O-864939, Flight Engineer, Rescued; SSgt Frank L. Broussard, 38414124, Radio Operator-Gunner, Rescued; Sgt William W. Wood, 18162419, Radar Operator, Rescued; Sgt Mitchell Ziembra (25BS), 16135356, SSgt Charles N. Graham, 15382360, Gunner, Rescued; SSgt Roy L. Teter, 17087966, Gunner, Rescued; TSgt John P. Quinlan, 12036479, Gunner, Rescued.

⁵⁰ 八路军

⁵¹ XXth Bomber Command, Escape and Evasion Section, *Walk-Out Report Eleven Crewmembers of B-29 Aircraft Number 42-63363*, Reel A1323 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945).

Whittlesey wanted to evacuate them from the nearby airfield, rather than travel another 220 miles west through Japanese-occupied territory to Yan'an (see Figure 28). It had never been done before, though, and communication with the American airbase at Xi'an proved difficult from such a remote location. While Whittlesey worked to arrange a pickup, Varoff and his crew stayed about eight miles away at the home of Minister Zhang Gewei.⁵² The minister's gated compound appeared as an oasis amongst the stark, arid mountains of north China. Tall stalks of corn and ripe watermelons grew in the yard. A small herd of Holsteins grazed nearby.⁵³

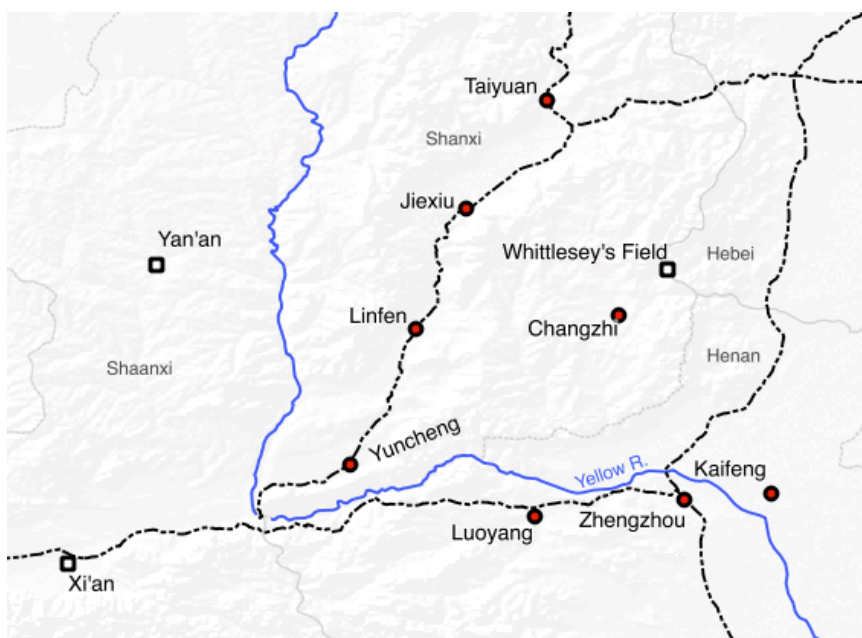


Figure 28. North China

Zhang greeted the airmen enthusiastically in perfect English. In conversations with him, they learned he had studied at the University of Chicago in the 1930s and earned a master's degree in agriculture at the University of Minnesota. He married an American from St. Paul – Eleanor Ingalls. They moved to Beiping and had three children

⁵² Wade Giles: Chang Ko-wei

⁵³ Crawford, interview.

together. Zhang had been away from home when the Japanese took the city in 1937. The last news he had of his family, the enemy had interned them with other civilians in Beiping. His efforts to rescue them came to naught and he had heard nothing new since 1937. Traveling through north China one day, communists captured the train in which he rode and detained him. He ended up staying with them and putting his agricultural expertise to good use. Now, he served as minister of production for the district. The Americans enjoyed chatting with him and very much appreciated the fresh milk and butter from his cows.⁵⁴

As the weeks passed without any word on arrangements to fly the crew out, Whittlesey decided not to wait with them any longer. He had learned from Communist intelligence sources the Japanese planned a campaign to capture Xi'an in the spring. He urgently needed to pass the information to American authorities and so he set out on horseback for Yan'an. He traveled fast, arriving at a small village near a railroad junction ten miles southeast of Taiyuan⁵⁵ on the evening of January 19. That night, one thousand Japanese troops converged on the town from seven directions, apparently looking for an officer of theirs who had been captured. They attacked just before dawn and took Whittlesey unawares, still in his bed. The 8th Route Army promptly counterattacked with a brigade of 4,500 troops. Forced to withdraw, the Japanese executed Whittlesey with a bullet to the head and bayonet to the back. They took the secret documents he had been carrying, leaving only his journal and mangled corpse.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ XXth Bomber Command, *Walk-Out Report Eleven Crewmembers of B-29 Aircraft Number 42-63363*.

⁵⁵ 太原

⁵⁶ XXth Bomber Command, *Walk-Out Report Eleven Crewmembers of B-29 Aircraft Number 42-63363*.

Varoff and his crew learned of his death about a week later. An officer from the 8th Route Army told them the captain had only been captive for a matter of hours. There appeared to be no indication the Japanese had been looking for him specifically. The whole thing had been an unhappy accident. As the Dixie Mission's only casualty of the war, the death of Whittlesey hit Colonel Barrett hard. "He was one of the finest young officers I ever knew and I not only esteemed him for his professional qualities, but held him in the highest personal regard," the colonel later wrote. Quixotically, Barrett erroneously wrote that the Communists sacrificed almost an entire battalion to recover his body, but proved unable to do so. In fact, they retrieved the body and transported it south for eventual evacuation from the secret airfield.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, on January 26, Varoff and his crew saw two P-51 Mustangs overfly Minister Zhang's house at about 1400 hours. They tried signaling the fighters with pocket mirrors, but to no avail. As it turned out, the Mustangs flew escort for a stripped-down B-25 from C Flight of the 2nd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. The flight had been working out of Xinjin Airfield⁵⁸ near Chengdu since November 1944, gathering meteorological data to help forecasters make weather reports for the B-29s. When the flight commander, Captain Robert C. Kunz, heard about Varoff's crew waiting to be evacuated from a secret airfield, he volunteered to fly them out. A few minutes after seeing the Mustangs, the B-29 crew received a phone call; Kunz had landed at the field. He waited for a time, but eventually had to depart when they did not show. He left them a

⁵⁷ Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, 81-82; XXth Bomber Command, *Walk-Out Report Eleven Crewmembers of B-29 Aircraft Number 42-63363*; XX Bomber Command, *Walk-out Report, B-29 Aircraft #237*.

⁵⁸ Wade Giles: Hsinchin, 新津

few containers of D rations, medical supplies, bed rolls, and winter jackets and promised to return the same time the next day.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate. Every day for the next ten days, the airmen walked eight miles to the airfield to await Kunz's arrival, but low clouds and haze prevented his return. Searching for the field in soupy weather on February 6, he had to send his fighter escort back to Xi'an, low on fuel. He almost turned back himself when he happened to catch sight of the field through the mist. He buzzed it several times, taking photos. The flag north of midfield showed the wind out of the southwest, straight down the runway. He landed. Though appearing to be 150 feet wide, only the runway's middle twenty feet had been tamped down enough for the bomber. Kunz almost got stuck turning around on the soft shoulder, but he goosed the throttles and pulled through. He picked up the eleven airmen and carried them out to Xi'an. For flying an unarmed medium bomber alone, deep into enemy territory, without fighter escort and opposed by adverse weather, Kunz earned the Distinguished Flying Cross.⁶⁰

He returned less than a month later, on March 3, to pick up another nine airmen awaiting rescue: five from a B-29, three from a C-46, and one from a P-51. The Superfortress crew had been detailed to bomb an aircraft plant on Kyushu on November 11, 1944. Major Francis Morgan, visiting from XXth Bomber Command Headquarters, accompanied the crew as an observer. They missed their rendezvous, but the pilot, 1st Lieutenant Richard Vickery, decided to proceed to the target with just one other B-29

⁵⁹ XXth Bomber Command, *Walk-Out Report Eleven Crewmembers of B-29 Aircraft Number 42-63363*.

⁶⁰ XXth Bomber Command, *Walk-Out Report Eleven Crewmembers of B-29 Aircraft Number 42-63363*; John F. Fuller, *Thor's Legions: Weather Support to the U.S. Air Force and Army, 1937-1987* (Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1991), 113, 118.

anyway. En route, the radio operator received a message that weather over Kyushu prohibited an attack and that they should divert to the tertiary target at Nanjing. They saw a formation of fourteen other bombers heading that way, but rather than join them, Vickery decided to circumnavigate Shanghai out over the water before turning west. He made his bomb run alone at twenty-two thousand feet. Anti-aircraft fire hit them as they dropped their ordnance. One of the gunners reported a fire burning in the aft bomb bay. It soon grew out of control and he could not enter the bay to put it out. Another announced the number four engine had caught fire. The flames extended out beyond the tail. They began losing altitude rapidly. The plane lurched to the right.⁶¹

“Bail out!” the flight engineer ordered. The crew scrambled to abandon ship; Major Morgan watched as the navigator and flight engineer jumped through the forward wheel well. He lined up behind the bombardier, pilot, copilot, and radio operator, but before they could jump, another lurch sent him and the radio operator sprawling into the engineer’s compartment. He pushed the other man off of him and stood to find himself on the flight engineer’s window, looking up at the nose wheel as the big plane dropped sideways out of the sky. Then the bomber rolled and exploded in mid-air. Morgan regained consciousness free-falling just 2,500 feet above the ground. He quickly pulled at his ripcord. It took several yanks before the parachute finally deployed. He floated to the ground not far from two large sections of burning wreckage. Bits of aluminum and burning debris fell all around him. He soon met up with the engineer, radio operator, and one of the gunners. They took stock. Morgan had several cuts across his face, some

⁶¹ Francis Morgan, Carl Rieger, Watson Lankford, Dwight Collins, Thomas Carroll, and Harry Changnon, “Richard Vickery’s Crew and the Nanking Mission,” *Memories*, no. 43 (April 1992), 2-3; XX Bomber Command, *Walk-out Report, B-29 Aircraft #237*.

broken teeth, and a ragged gash on his right wrist. The radio operator appeared to be suffering from shock. The gunner limped. Only the engineer appeared uninjured. Before they had a chance to tend to each other's wounds, one hundred Chinese guerrillas appeared over a nearby ridge and took them into custody. They soon found out they had been rescued by the New 4th Army.⁶²

The Communist troops also picked up the navigator. They reported three bodies found in the wreck – those of the pilot, copilot, and bombardier. These they buried at the New 4th Army Memorial Cemetery. The other three gunners and the radar operator fell into the hands of puppet troops. Unfortunately, while negotiating with the New 4th Army for their release, the puppets inadvertently ran into a Japanese patrol. The enemy insisted they take control of the prisoners and supposedly shot and killed the radar operator when he resisted. The three gunners ended up at the Jiangwan prison camp in Shanghai.⁶³

The New 4th Army transmitted the names and serial numbers of the five airmen they rescued to Yan'an and arranged to take them out via the same route Lieutenant Colonel Savoie's crew had been traversing since August. On December 12, however, they received a message from XXth Bomber Command by way of the Dixie Mission: Savoie's crew had returned safely, but the Nationalists refused to accept any more American airmen from the New 4th Army. Chiang Kai-shek would no longer cooperate

⁶² Morgan, Rieger, Lankford, Collins, Carroll, and Changnon, "Richard Vickery's Crew and the Nanking Mission," 3-4.

⁶³ MACR 9663: B-29 42-6237, 25BS, 40BG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 65 miles northwest of Nanjing, 1Lt Richard L. Vickery, O-664092, Pilot, Killed, Body Recovered; 2Lt Burnard L. Page, O-809033, Copilot, Killed, Body Recovered; 1Lt Felix O. Sinicrope, Navigator, Rescued; 2Lt Edward G. Cassidy, O-686408, Bombardier, Killed, Body Recovered; 2Lt William G. Warburton, O-861396, Flight Engineer, Rescued; Sgt John A. Myers, Jr., 12081693, Radar Operator, Missing in Action; SSgt Dwight E. Collins, 14149196, Radio Operator, Rescued; Sgt Frederic S. Carlton, 19100930, Gunner, Captured; Sgt Watson R. Lankford, 34449608, Gunner, Captured; Sgt Carl B. Rieger, 37408023, Gunner, Captured; Sgt George R. Schuchardt, 32079825, Gunner, Rescued; Maj Francis B. Morgan, O-342800, Observer, Rescued.

with his political rivals to aid his American allies. The last vestige of the United Front seemed to be crumbling away. The Communist soldiers expressed frustration at Chiang's intransigence. They decided to head north and hand the airmen over to the 8th Route Army for evacuation from Whittlesey's secret airfield instead.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, 1st Lieutenant Walter Krywy's P-51 took a bullet to a coolant line while strafing a train near Guzhen,⁶⁵ Anhui Province, on January 1, 1945. He bailed out only seven hundred feet above the ground. The airplane hit a short distance away, exploding in flames.⁶⁶ The pilot quickly gathered what he needed from his jungle kit, buried his parachute, and set out toward a cluster of three villages a short distance to the west. Throughout their areas of influence, the New 4th and 8th Route armies organized local villages into People's Militias. Sometimes, these augmented military operations, but usually they gathered intelligence and alerted communist forces to enemy movements. People's Militias controlled two of the villages in the cluster Krywy approached, while Japanese-aligned puppet troops controlled the third. As he approached, fifty puppet troops formed up outside their town, while a pair of militiamen stood outside theirs. Both sides watched Krywy silently as he passed, neither making a move. Suddenly, the two militiamen hurried forward, waving their guns and calling for him to halt. They grabbed him before he could get too close to the puppets. These watched as the two disarmed the airman and confiscated his watch, pen, and money and then took him to their village. The entire population turned out to see what they had caught. They read his pointie-talkie and

⁶⁴ Morgan, Rieger, Lankford, Collins, Carroll, and Changnon, "Richard Vickery's Crew and the Nanking Mission," 8-9; XX Bomber Command, *Walk-out Report, B-29 Aircraft #237*.

⁶⁵ Wade Giles: Ku-chen, 固镇

⁶⁶ MACR 11628: P-51C 43-25216, 16FS, 51FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 10 miles south of Guzhen, 1Lt Walter Krywy, O-702815, Rescued.

inspected his identification flag. The village head returned all his personal possessions besides the cash. The next day, they turned him over to the New 4th Army.⁶⁷

Major Morgan heard about the Mustang pilot and sent him a telegram on January 5, asking that he wait for the B-29 crew to catch up with him. He erroneously addressed it to “Major Waters.” Apparently Krywy’s name had been garbled in transmission:

TO MAJOR WATERS DO NOT LEAVE YOUR BAG TILL YOU GET THE
SIGNAL BECAUSE THE SQUEEZE PLAY IS ON AND WE ALL WANT TO
STEAL MORGAN

Krywy stayed put and the major’s group joined him nine days later. Together, they rode northwest, crossing the Longhai Railway into 8th Route Army territory on the seventeenth. “Our mounts from now on were of poorer quality,” journaled Krywy, “as the 8th Route Army area is generally much poorer than that of the New 4th. We usually had to walk the horses for three or four miles each day to rest them.”⁶⁸

On the twenty-fourth, the group of evaders grew one last time when 2nd Lieutenant Al Fisher, Staff Sergeant Peter Kouzes, and Sergeant Elon Patterson from Air Transport Command joined them. Krywy found the transport crew ill-prepared for evasion: “The briefing the ATC had had was feeble,” he reported. “They knew nothing about the safe areas, proper procedure, or anything.” Flying a C-46 full of gasoline barrels from Luliang to Laohekou on December 10, Fisher had become hopelessly lost in poor weather and somehow ended up overshooting his destination by 220 miles. They broke out of the weather near Kaifeng. A Japanese fighter attacked them, setting fire to their right engine. Fisher ordered the copilot, crew chief, and radio operator to bail out. As they ran for the cargo door, the fighter made two more passes. The bullets sounded

⁶⁷ AGAS-China, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Walter Krywy*.

⁶⁸ AGAS-China, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Walter Krywy*.

like hail on a tin roof as they tore the fuselage to shreds. Fuel covered the cabin floor. The copilot did not make it. The other three parachuted safely to the ground and took cover in the woods until the fighter departed.⁶⁹ A patrol of Nationalist soldiers under the command of General Wang Dagong picked them up later in the day and took them to a small village near the border of Henan and Hebei provinces, north of the Yellow River.⁷⁰

They had been there for a week when, on the night of December 20, Communist troops attacked. The battle lasted for thirty-two hours. The airmen sheltered in the attic of a mud building through the night while the Communists fired with machine guns, mortars, and light artillery. Around 1100 hours on the twenty-first, soldiers climbed atop the building and tore a hole in the slate roof, dropping grenades into the room. Fisher led his crew running out the front door into the middle of the firefight. One of the Communist officers recognized them as Americans immediately.

“Meiguo!” he yelled. His troops stopped firing long enough to bring them safely behind their lines. The battle resumed and lasted until 0400 hours the next morning. The Communist troops wiped out the entire Nationalist garrison, including General Wang himself. The Dixie Mission reported speaking to an 8th Route Army general about the incident. Bizarrely, he told them his forces had attacked the town to rescue the Americans. He alleged that General Wang had connections to a traitor and the Communist troops liberated the airmen before they could be handed over to the Japanese. In his evasion report, however, Fisher related that the Communist force was surprised to

⁶⁹ MACR 10380: C-46A 42-96779, 2ATS, Lost to Enemy Aircraft near Kaifeng, 2Lt Albert J. Fisher, O-675492, Pilot, Rescued; 1Lt George E. McGuire, O-515304, Copilot, Killed, Body Recovered; SSgt Peter M. Kouzes, 36633081, Radio Operator, Rescued; Sgt Elon W. Patterson, 38318636, Crew Chief, Rescued.

⁷⁰ AGAS-China, *Interrogation of Lt. Fisher, Co-pilot of C-46 #779*, Reel A1323 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 1945); AGAS-China, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Walter Krywy*.

find them in the village and did not attack to rescue them. Perhaps the general concocted the story to obscure the fact his forces had attacked a Nationalist garrison. By that point in the war, however, the Americans knew full well the Nationalists and Communists engaged in open combat against each other.⁷¹

Over the next month, the 8th Route Army relayed the nine airmen to Minister Zhang's house. Captain Kunz landed at the secret airfield on March 3. The airmen climbed aboard while Chinese troops loaded Whittlesey's body into the bomb bay. Kunz took off again just nine minutes after he landed. The fighter escort peeled off to land at Xi'an while the bomber continued to Xinjin. They touched down to find a senior member of the Guomindang secret service waiting to debrief them on their experiences with the Communists. Major Morgan was shocked to learn that during his 113 days behind the lines, XXth Bomber Command had ceased operations in China. After six months, the Superfortresses had only made a two percent dent in the Japanese steel industry. General LeMay moved most of the aircraft to the Marianas and, following the grisly demonstration at Wuhan in December 1944, switched from high-altitude daylight precision bombing to low-altitude night incendiary attacks. For his part, Robert Kunz kept flying special operations between his weather reconnaissance duties. On June 19, 1945, he took off from Xinjin with a bomb bay full of material for the OSS. He and the four others of his crew never returned. They are still listed as missing in action.⁷²

⁷¹ Carole J. Carter, *Mission to Yen-an: American Liaison with the Chinese Communists, 1944-1947* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), loc. 1096 of 3673, Kindle; AGAS-China, *Interrogation of Lt. Fisher*.

⁷² Morgan, Rieger, Lankford, Collins, Carroll, and Changnon, "Richard Vickery's Crew and the Nanking Mission," 10; XX Bomber Command, *Walk-out Report, B-29 Aircraft #237*; AGAS-China, *Evasion Story of 1st Lt. Walter Krywy*; AGAS-China, *Interrogation of Lt. Fisher*; U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 14725*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1945). MACR 14725: B-25D 43-3663, 2WXRS, Lost to Unknown Cause between Guangyuan and Hanzhong, Maj Robert C. Kunz, O-436779, Pilot, Missing, Body Not Recovered; FO James M. Pyka, T-137530, Copilot, Missing,

Until the end of the war, the secret airfield in southeast Shanxi proved useful for evacuating P-51 pilots who went down on their frequent missions from Xi'an. With bombs and napalm, they supported Nationalist troops pushing back against the Japanese offensive Captain Whittlesey had learned about in January. They also ranged throughout north China, attacking trains from the Gobi Desert to the Yellow Sea. On July 14, 1945, 1st Lieutenant Paul Crawford and his wingman strafed a railroad yard outside the town of Jiexiu.⁷³ They came across the target low and fast to limit their exposure to small arms fire. Nevertheless, Crawford heard a loud bang and felt his airplane shudder. Smoke filled his cockpit. He looked over his engine instruments – everything appeared to be working normally. Soon he could not see much at all. Ground fire must have hit something electrical. He pulled up into a steep climb and bailed out at four thousand feet.⁷⁴ His wingman circled overhead until he landed safely four miles south of Jiexiu. The 8th Route Army picked him up almost immediately and began relaying him east to the secret airfield.⁷⁵

During his walkout, Crawford met an old man who lived in Jiexiu. Tom Hill, another lieutenant in his squadron, had gone down in the same area the day before.⁷⁶ The old man saw the fighter crash and reported that the pilot's left arm and right leg had been torn off. The Japanese recovered the body, decapitated it, and hung the severed head over

Body Not Recovered; 1Lt Stanley Z. Abrams, O-675977, Navigator, Missing, Body Not Recovered; SSgt Billy R. Isham, 39296231, Flight Engineer, Missing, Body Not Recovered; SSgt Alvin C. Schaefer, 37477372, Radio Operator-Gunner, Missing, Body Not Recovered.

⁷³ Wade Giles: Kiehsiu, 介休

⁷⁴ MACR 14759: P-51K 44-11477, 529FS, 311FG, Lost to Enemy Surface Fire 2 miles south of Jiexiu, 1Lt Paul M. Crawford, O-827394, Rescued.

⁷⁵ Crawford, interview; U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 14756*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1945).

⁷⁶ MACR 14756: P-51B 42-106506, 529FS, 311FG, Missing due to Enemy Surface-to-Air Fire, 1Lt Thomas J. Hill, O-824491, Killed, Body Recovered.

the south gate of the city as a warning against helping Americans. According to the old man, Chinese villagers buried what remained. It sounded to Crawford like Hill had died in the crash, but the story of his decapitation and exhibition served as a grisly reminder of the enemy's brutality. He did not want to be captured.⁷⁷

A twin-engine Beechcraft UC-45 picked him up from the airfield and flew him to Yan'an in early August. Whether at the request of Mao, who wished to have stricter control over Americans coming and going from his territory, or at the behest of the Americans with the Dixie Mission, who desired to debrief pilots that evaded with the help of the Communists, airmen evacuated from the secret airfield no longer flew directly back to American airbases. Everyone had to funnel through Yan'an. While there, Crawford attended a reception where he met Mao Zedong. The young lieutenant knew the man led the Chinese Communist Party and that he opposed Chiang Kai-shek, but when he met him face-to-face in 1945, he had no idea how consequential he would become in the history of China and the world. The young lieutenant returned to his unit at Xi'an on August 7, 1945, just a week before the Japanese surrender.⁷⁸

The CCP claimed to have lost approximately five hundred men while rescuing eighty American airmen. Of ninety-seven evasion reports on file at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, twelve percent detail the experiences of airmen rescued by Communists. If the evasion reports are a representative sample, eighty is a good estimate. Even though the CCP and Guomindang fought each other while fighting the Japanese – and even though Mao Zedong may have had fundamentally irreconcilable political

⁷⁷ Crawford, interview; U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 14756*.

⁷⁸ U.S. Army Air Forces, *Missing Air Crew Report 14759*, M1380 (National Archives and Research Administration, 1945). Crawford, interview.

differences with the United States – the rescue of scores of American airmen by the New 4th and 8th Route armies underpinned the ad hoc “enemy of my enemy” alliance with real feelings of gratitude and friendship between individual Americans and Chinese.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Carter, *Mission to Yenan*, loc. 1121 of 3673, Kindle.

CHAPTER VIII

November 1945,

McCook, Nebraska

“Do you know who that is?” Elinor Egle asked her friends excitedly. “That’s Glen Beneda!” Elinor liked to frequent the USO hall in McCook. All the big bands played in the large auditorium there when they stopped through town overnight. She and her friends enjoyed dancing with the GIs from the nearby B-29 base. “Should I go up and say ‘hi’ to him?” she asked. “Or should I be coy?” Beneda had been back in the United States since September 1944, but Elinor had not seen him since he and her brother Ralph left to join the Army Air Forces in 1942. Ralph never came back from the war, but standing there now she saw Glen, looking fit and handsome and serious in his dress uniform, with a stack of ribbons and a pair of silver wings over his left breast pocket. She went to the restroom with one of her friends wondering if he had noticed her too – wondering if she should say something. When she came out, she found him waiting for her.

“Hello, Elinor.” That was it: the start of a whirlwind romance that saw them married just four months later. The war had ended; their new lives had just begun. Glen got out of the service. They moved to Southern California and he went to work as a fireman. They had twins, Ed and Henry. Glen never talked about the war. Though curious, Elinor never asked him about it. It remained in the past.¹

World War II ended none too soon for the American servicemen fighting it. In China, though, one war quickly gave way to another. Japan’s formal surrender on

¹ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview.

Saturday, September 2, 1945, saw Communists and Nationalists racing each other to occupy the country's major population centers. For Chiang Kai-shek's regime, the conflict ended either far too early or far too late. At the time of Japan's capitulation, his diminished forces had only just begun moving back into areas lost during the Ichi-go offensive. Mao's, meanwhile, had expanded exponentially; in 1937, the CCP controlled only 35,000 square miles of territory with a population of one and a half million. By 1945, they boasted 225,000 square miles and sixty-five million people. The generalissimo took advantage of American ships and American planes to move his armies to urban and industrial centers like Shanghai, Nanjing, and Shenyang. But a speedy occupation did little to repair his government's diminished legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Frankly, he had not done enough, politically or militarily, to protect them – either from the Japanese invader or from corrupt, abusive warlords and politicians.²

In many ways, the Ichi-go offensive proved to be the decisive turning point of the war – a political and military disaster from which the Nationalist government and its armies never recovered. The ease with which the Imperial Army cut through central China showed the Guomindang to be completely impotent. Nationalist troops suffered a staggering 750,000 casualties – killed, injured, and missing. While Allied leaders had previously featured China prominently in their strategies to defeat Japan, Ichi-go caused them to write it off as a lost cause. It seemed little could be salvaged from the epic catastrophe that took place.³

The offensive also demonstrated the limits of American leadership in the theater – laying bare the failings of General Joseph W. Stilwell and Major General Claire Lee

² Tsou Tang, *America's Failure in China: 1941-50* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 51.

³ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, loc. 6164 of 9322, Kindle.

Chennault. The former's myopic focus on Burma and the latter's provocative air attacks intensified the disaster. Their inability to cooperate made things exponentially worse. Stilwell may have been an able battlefield commander, but he proved to be a terrible choice to lead a coalition. While Eisenhower built alliances in Europe, Stilwell systematically alienated everyone around him and imperiled crucial efforts with his caustic personality. Chiang made a wise decision when he insisted on his recall in October 1944. He should have demanded it much sooner. As for Chennault, he had a talent for working with the Chinese and certainly demonstrated his abilities as an effective tactical and operational leader of air forces. However, He failed to foresee the strategic failure brought about by his overly ambitious operational plans.

To the Imperial Japanese Army, Ichi-go represented a last, desperate gamble in a war increasingly turning against it on every battlefield. The enormous investment of men and material in China took place as the United States military drew ever closer to the Home Islands through the Pacific. Japanese troops succeeded in ejecting American warplanes from their bases in central China and capturing a rail corridor across the Asian continent. Incessant air attacks robbed that corridor of much of its utility though, and anyway, it connected Japan to an empire under steady erosion by an unstoppable Allied advance. Ichi-go may have been a stunning operational success, but as a gross misallocation of resources, it proved an utter strategic failure.⁴

After the capitulation of Japan, tens of thousands of American troops landed unopposed to begin their occupation of the Home Islands. Their commander, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, made repatriation of Allied prisoners a top priority. On

⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 326; Hsi-cheng Ch'I, *Nationalist China at War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1982), 80.

September 11, 1945, the 1st Cavalry Division liberated the prisoner of war camp at Ashibetsu, on the northern island of Hokkaido. The fifty-one Americans imprisoned there included Captain Howard Allers and seventeen other China-based airmen – nearly a quarter of those captured!⁵ Throughout the war, eighty-two aviators from the AVG, CATF, and 14th and 20th air forces became prisoners of the Japanese. Twenty-two did not survive. Of those, the United States never recovered the bodies of thirteen. They remain missing in action. Only four prisoners successfully escaped.⁶

Allers and three others of his crew had been captured in 1942 after enemy fighters shot down their B-25 over Hong Kong. They spent most of the war at the Jiangwan camp in Shanghai, but as the Japanese empire began to contract, the Imperial Army decided to consolidate Allied prisoners to the Home Islands. In early May 1945, they began loading the 1,200 captives at Jiangwan into rickety old boxcars with barbed wire nailed over the windows. Archaic steam engines pulled the trains northwest to Nanjing and then to Beiping, traveling at night to avoid American air attacks. AVG pilot Lewis Bishop jumped from the train and escaped, along with four Marines. The New 4th Army picked them up and returned them to American control. Allers, though, could not contemplate escape. His left foot had taken a bullet when a Zero strafed his wrecked bomber back in

⁵ Capt Howard C. Allers, O-397410, 22BS, 341BG; Capt Donald J. Burch, O-667034, 7FS(P), 3FG(P); 2Lt Samuel E. Chambliss, Jr., O-827385, 529FS, 311FG; 1Lt Walter A. Ferris, O-702524, 16FS, 51FG; 1Lt Lauren A. Howard, O-800542, 8FS(P), 3FG(P); 1Lt Harold J. Klotz, O-756616, 28FS(P), 3FG(P); 2Lt Murray L. Lewis, O-789254, 22BS, 341BG; 1Lt Freeland K. Mathews, O-795603, 8FS(P), 3FG(P); 2Lt Samuel McMillan, Jr., O-815739, 26FS, 51FG; Maj Donald L. Quigley, O-432207, 75FS, 23FG; 1Lt Richard R. Rouse, O-735669, 11BS, 341BG; 1Lt Vernon D. Schaefer, O-750858, 770BS, 462BG; 1Lt Benjamin A. Stahl, O-727572, 25FS, 51FG; 2Lt James E. Thomas, O-812174, 118TRS, 23FG; 2Lt Alton L. Townsend, O-672253, 11BS, 341BG; 1Lt James E. Wall, O-422740, 530FS, 311FG; 2Lt George T. Walsh, O-741817, 11BS, 341BG; 1Lt Henry I. Wood, O-789035, 75FS, 23FG.

⁶ Roger Mansell, "Hakodate #4," Center for Research: Allied POWs Under the Japanese, (accessed July 4, 2017) www.mansell.com.

1942. He could barely walk without the aid of crutches or a cane. He remained a prisoner, enduring beatings by the guards and suffering from a lack of food and medical care.⁷

It took five days to reach Beiping. Guards herded the prisoners into small warehouses where they spent the next month living and sleeping on bare concrete floors. Another journey by rail brought them to the port of Busan, in Korea, where they boarded a ship across the straits to Honshu and travelled thence by ferry to Hokkaido. By early July, they had arrived in what the prisoners irreverently dubbed, “the land of the flying red asshole” (see Figure 29).⁸



Figure 29. Movement of Prisoners

In addition to the fallen airmen, the prisoner population at Ashibetsu included twenty-four Marines captured at Wake Island and north China. Every day, they trudged out of the camp to work ten-hour shifts in a nearby coal mine. The atomic bombs

⁷ Lewis Sherman Bishop and Shiela Bishop Irwin, *Escape from Hell: An AVG Flying Tiger's Journey* (Bloomington, IL: Tiger Eye Press, 2005), loc. 1044 of 3681, Kindle; James D. McBrayer, Jr., *Escape! Memoir of a World War II Marine Who Broke Out of a Japanese POW Camp and Linked Up with Chinese Communist Guerrillas* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 10.

⁸ McBrayer, *Escape*, 54; James Taylor, “The Diddled Dozen,” in *Up Sun!* ed. Wallace Little and Charles Goodman (Memphis: Castle Books, 1990), 112.

immediately changed all that. The guards left. The prisoners took charge of the camp. They posted their own guards and spelled out “US POW” in big letters on the roof of one of the buildings. In late August, U.S. Navy warplanes noticed the signal and dropped barrels full of food, medicine, and clothing. Years of harsh imprisonment under the thumb of a proud and ruthless enemy had finally come to an end. The prisoners’ spirits soared. But nothing could compare to their feeling of elation when, on September 11, soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division arrived at the front gate. They were going home!⁹

Meanwhile, the United States military began the grim and tedious task of collecting its dead. In China, Stilwell’s replacement, Lieutenant General Albert Wedemeyer, entrusted this task to Colonel David Barrett. The former Dixie Mission commander’s language skills, cultural knowledge, and rapport with both Nationalists and Communists alike made him the ideal man to coordinate such an effort. His teams soon crisscrossed the length and breadth of the country, following up on missing aircrew reports and information passed on by local officials. Investigators in Jiangxi Province interviewed Lin Zengxun, the mayor of Luxi, about the death of George McMillan.

“I was there when the plane crashed,” he told them. “Six planes came over and suddenly one of them caught fire and crashed in a rice field. The pilot was killed instantly and was buried by the local people behind the temple.” He showed them the grave and the crash site near the town of Linjiafang. The serial number on the wreckage matched

⁹ Taylor, “The Diddled Dozen,” 112; Mansell, “Hakodate #4.” Leo Aime LaBrie, *A Double Dose of Hard Luck: The Extraordinary True Story of a Two-time Prisoner of War Lt. Col. Charles Lee Harrison* (New York: Page Publishing, Inc., 2016).

McMillan's P-38. They recovered his body and moved it to the United States military section of the Hongqiao Road Cemetery in Shanghai.¹⁰

For more than two years after the crash, McMillan's family remained ignorant as to the disposition of his remains. A group of officers who had known him visited on January 31, 1945, to present them his posthumous awards: the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, the Air Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, and the Purple Heart. Finally, on September 24, 1946, the Quartermaster General, Major General T.B. Larkin, wrote advising them of the body's location and that the War Department would comply with their wishes for final interment at the government's expense. They buried him at Arlington National Cemetery on March 12, 1948. His mother could not attend the funeral; her health had declined rapidly since learning of her son's death. The family extended an invitation to General Chennault, then in Washington D.C., having testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs just two days before. He also declined.¹¹

"I've been to too many of these," he wrote apologetically. His decision not to attend the funeral of a man he once told them, "was one of my best squadron commanders," added a layer of bitterness to their sorrow.¹²

As civil war spread across China, it became increasingly difficult for American authorities to locate and recover their fallen airmen. In December 1945, President Truman sent his new secretary of state, former Chief of Staff of the Army George Marshall, to broker a truce. He proved unequal to the task. Stilwell's old friend and

¹⁰ Edward Witsell to Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm Y. McMillan, October 2, 1946, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

¹¹ J.H. Pollock, Jr., to Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm Y. McMillan, January 30, 1945, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation; T.B. Larkin to Malcolm Y. McMillan, September 24, 1946, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation.

¹² Chennault to McMillan, June 29, 1944.

stalwart proponent carried his protégé's prejudices with him to China. A little over a year later, he threw up his hands in disgust and left. Marshall epitomized the hubris of the United States government in believing it understood the dynamics of China's civil war – or in believing it could impose a solution. While the West feared the specter of worldwide communist domination, the Chinese saw things much differently; what other credo besides communism so effectively agitated against colonialism? For all its talk of self-determination after World War I, the United States failed to join the League of Nations. In its absence, the League's mandates became a front for imperialism. Where the West saw the threat of Soviet domination, local revolutionaries finally saw the promise of real self-determination. In their eyes, the West failed to produce a suitable substitute.¹³

Late in 1949, the search for as-yet unrecovered airmen came to a definitive halt. On October 1, Mao Zedong stood atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace and proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China. The battered remnants of Chiang Kai-shek's regime retreated to Taiwan. In the United States, Republicans and Democrats bickered over who "lost" the country – as if the United States controlled China's destiny. The charge that leftists in the American government had somehow colluded in the communist takeover led to red scares and the rise of McCarthyism. The United States maintained no diplomatic ties whatsoever with the new People's Republic. The complete lack of contact led the two nations into conflict during the Korean War. While Truman sought to limit the conflict, General Douglas MacArthur and the Republicans continually sounded the mantra, "Unleash Chiang!" They seemed to believe the only thing holding the Nationalists back from retaking the mainland was a simple decision by the United States.

¹³ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, loc. 6542 of 9322, Kindle.

Their refrain discounted the fact that Chiang had lost the mainland in the first place and discounted the opposition or ambivalence the Chinese people felt toward him. His fate had already been sealed – both by his own actions and by those of the Japanese.¹⁴

During the war, competing narratives explaining China's place in World War II emerged from the major personalities involved, principally Stilwell, Chennault, Chiang, and Mao. The toxic postwar political climate solidified these contradictory accounts. The ground-truth perspective of American airmen, as described in their contemporary missing aircrew and evasion reports, demonstrate that each of the competing narratives contain both truth and fiction. General Stilwell claimed the Nationalists did not or would not fight. Certainly, he experienced great difficulty convincing them to fight on his terms. And reports did circulate of some corrupt commanders who negotiated battlefield truces with the enemy. But to say they did not or would not fight at all ignored the guerrillas who risked much and lost much to bring American airmen out of occupied Hong Kong, for example, or from the corridor between Jiujiang and Nanchang. It ignored the fact that almost as many Nationalist soldiers died opposing the Ichi-go offensive as the United States lost during the entirety of the war. It ignored the fact that Stilwell's myopic focus on Burma cost China dearly.¹⁵

General Chennault claimed the Nationalists did fight and would have more effectively had Stilwell given him free reign to support them. As he learned in central China, however, airpower could only do so much against an overwhelming enemy ground offensive. When collateral damage increased in the absence of effective

¹⁴ Michael D. Pearlman, *Truman and MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 258.

¹⁵ Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, 76-80; Frillman, *China: The Remembered Life*, 228; Taylor, *The Generalissimo*, 297.

intelligence, he risked losing the hearts and minds of the very people he sought to protect. He needed to balance his agitation for airpower with careful intelligence and advocacy for meaningful reform and effective training of the Nationalist Army.¹⁶

Mao Zedong claimed the Communists fought ferociously against the Japanese whilst the Nationalists focused on wiping out the Communists. Chiang claimed the Communists undermined his leadership while his forces fought the Japanese. As Gregg and Beneda discovered, the Nationalist 69th Division did spend most of its energy facing down the New 4th Army in Hubei Province, rather than the Imperial Army. And apart from other anti-Japanese activities, scores of American airmen owed their lives to Communist troops fighting fearlessly to bring them out from behind enemy lines. However, as Al Fisher discovered north of the Yellow River, they also fought against Nationalists when they perceived an opportunity. They took full advantage of the power vacuum left in the wake of Japanese conquests to expand their influence throughout China.¹⁷

All of these competing and seemingly contradictory narratives thus contain some element of truth and partisans of each have evidence to back up their claims. As the Cold War ground on and America plunged headlong into Korea and Vietnam, the truth mattered less than political alignment and opinions became increasingly distorted. It particularly confounded the men who served in China during the war. Where most saw these caricatures, they saw complexity. In their contact with individual Chinese, whether Nationalist or Communist, they witnessed courage, humanity, and selflessness. The numbers speak for themselves; of those airmen who survived the crash or bailout, over

¹⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 223.

¹⁷ AGAS-China, *Interrogation of Lt. Fisher*; Tang, *America's Failure in China*, 51.

ninety percent returned to American control with the help of friendly Chinese – at least 722 in all. When it came down to it, an airman parachuting from his burning plane over an alien landscape did not care about the political beliefs of his rescuers. Chinese of all persuasions saved American aviators from the Japanese and gave them the best treatment possible on their way back to American control.¹⁸

Many Chinese felt the same way. Those who after years of defeat finally saw American planes push back against the invader experienced new hope. Those who came face-to-face with young American airmen found inspiration in their idealism, gratitude, and bravery. Those who witnessed acts of selfless sacrifice, like that of Robert Mooney, felt a profound gratitude. Cold War rivalry suppressed the history of the United States and China's wartime cooperation in both countries. Veterans on both sides did not know how to process or express their experiences. They did not know what meaning to ascribe to their wartime alliance.

In Xiangyun, the monument to Robert Mooney stood until the Cultural Revolution. Amidst the spasmodic violence against all things foreign and traditional, the townspeople disassembled it and buried the pieces. Such proved to be the case across the length and breadth of China, with scores of monuments dedicated to fallen airmen hidden or torn down. Grave stones of those yet-unrecovered suffered the same fate, potentially obscuring their place of rest permanently.¹⁹ At least 397 American airmen remain missing in action in the China Theater. Thirteen are known to have been in Japanese custody when they perished. As many as 208 may have been lost at sea while transiting overwater or engaging in anti-shipping sweeps. However, seventy-three probably went

¹⁸ Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, 37.

¹⁹ Ma, *Col C.L. Chennault and Flying Tigers*, 73.

down in the rugged terrain of mountainous Yunnan Province and the remaining 111 are scattered about the rest of China. Dozens of them probably lie forgotten in unmarked graves.

Occasionally, one turns up. In 2006, the U.S. and Chinese governments collaborated to recover the remains of 2nd Lieutenant Robert Hoyle Upchurch, who went missing in bad weather on his first combat mission in October 1944.²⁰ His parents carved his name on the family funeral plot in High Falls, North Carolina, but his body lay buried near the village of Guidong for more than sixty years. During the war, villagers found the wreck in the mountainous border area between Hunan and Jiangxi. They carried his body back over mountain trails, wrapped him in silk, prayed and sang, and buried him at the foot of a Ming Dynasty pagoda. They marked the grave with a cross identifying him simply as “Meiguo Feiji,” – “American airplane.” First Ichi-go, then the civil war, prevented his recovery. The villagers kept up the grave, but after the Cultural Revolution, it attracted little attention until a visiting American noticed it in 2003. He reported it to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Subsequent DNA analysis confirmed Upchurch’s identity. The U.S. Army buried his remains in North Carolina with full military honors. The family changed the gravestone to read “Home at last.”²¹

The thawing of relations that allowed this to happen began with President Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. For the first time since its founding, the United States opened a dialogue with Mao’s government. Both sides began to reexamine their history. The People’s Republic came to realize that resistance to Japan and alliance with the United

²⁰ MACR 9726: P-40N 43-22786, 74FS, 23FG, Lost to Adverse Weather near Guidong, 2Lt Robert H. Upchurch, O-708349, Killed, Body Recovered.

²¹ John Chappell, “Missing WWII Pilot is Finally Home,” accessed September 16, 2015, thepilot.com.

States did not belong to the Guomindang, or to the warlords, or to any political group for that matter – it belonged to the Chinese people.

For their part, the people of Xiangyun did not forget Robert Mooney. The thawing of relations and reexamination of history inspired them to resurrect his monument. In 1992, fifty years after the young fighter pilot's death, they reassembled the monolith. Mooney's sister, Ena L. Davis, visited to pay homage to her long-dead brother and to thank the people of Xiangyun for keeping the memory of his sacrifice alive.²²

Memory is a funny thing, though. Try as he might to leave the war in the past, Glen Beneda could not forget about it. When he moved to California, he decided to track down Lee Gregg and get a copy of his walkout diary. The two never saw each other after they arrived in Kunming and he did not have the chance to get a copy of the journal like they had agreed. He knew Gregg's family lived in the San Marino area, so he went there looking for him. He found his mother.

"Lee got married," she told him. "He bought a boat and he and his wife are sailing the South Seas." Everyone had their own way of exorcising the war's demons, it seemed. Glen asked if she had his walkout diary. She did. She typed up a copy for him.²³

He did not mention the visit to his family. In fact, he barely mentioned the war at all for nearly twenty years. He wanted to wipe it from his mind. Getting shot down had been pretty traumatic. It weighed on him. He had always been good at everything he tried, especially as an athlete. In high school he played football, he played basketball, he played ping pong, he shot pool. And he had been good at all of them. He even ran track – on a whim. He had been walking home from school that day, carrying his books, wearing

²² Ma, *Col C.L. Chennault and Flying Tigers*, 73.

²³ Glen Beneda, interview.

a button-down shirt and khakis. As he passed the track, some of the boys on the team taunted him.

“Hey Beneda!” they yelled, “you can’t run! Why don’t you go out for track?”

They were about to run a 440-yard sprint. He put down his books and lined up with the rest of them, still wearing his school clothes. He beat them all.

“Ok Beneda,” said the coach, “you’re on the track team.”

He never projected a big ego about his athletic prowess. But it certainly came as a blow to train as a fighter pilot only to fall in combat with the enemy. As far as he was concerned, he did his job – just like everyone else who served in the war. They won and he came home. That about summed it up. He did not feel special. He thought about it, but he did not want to talk about it. War is an ugly thing. It had no place alongside his beautiful family. Then “Tex” Hill formed a veterans group for everyone who served in the 23rd Fighter Group. He went to the meetings. They shared stories.

“Hey Glen, remember this?” his old war buddies asked him as they spun their tales. He began to open up to his family. He talked about the good things, the funny things. He still avoided sharing his trauma.²⁴

When Nixon visited China in 1972, Glen received a call from Armit Lewis, the pilot who followed his same route out from behind enemy lines in the fall of 1944.

“Glen, I want to go back to China,” he told him. “Do you want to go with me?”

“No,” Glen replied. “I don’t think I want to go back.”

Armit tried to go, but the State Department told him “not yet.” Sadly, he suffered a stroke. When Glen Beneda finally decided to return in 2001, Armit could not go with

²⁴ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview.

him. Instead, Glen's son Ed accompanied him. The trip proved to be a big disappointment – they went on a lot of guided tours that pushed them into silk factories and furniture shops. He felt like they just wanted his pocketbook. He did not want to go back.²⁵

In 2005, a Vietnam-era Marine Corps veteran named Jeff Greene called him. He had formed a non-profit organization called the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation and wanted to put together a group of veterans to visit China for the sixtieth anniversary of World War II. They would tour the country and speak about their experiences. The Chinese government would pay airfare and expenses. So far, the group included AVG veteran Dick Rossi and Jimmy Doolittle's copilot on the Tokyo Raid, Dick Cole. Glen declined.

"I've been there," he said. "I don't want to go back."

Both Jeff Greene and the Chinese government kept after him, though. They called him incessantly. They filled up his answering machine. Finally, a representative from the Chinese government gave him a new tidbit of information.

"You must come!" he told him. "We found your airplane!"

"I never lost my airplane!" Glen replied. "I know where it is. I crashed it. It's just a piece of junk! I don't need to see it." He sounded indignant, but his curiosity got the better of him. He decided to go. This time, his wife, son Ed, and grandson Brian went with him. It proved to be a completely different experience than his trip in 2001. He enjoyed reminiscing with the other veterans. He enjoyed the royal treatment.

²⁵ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview.

During one of the events, a retired general who served with the New 4th Army recounted how his unit rescued several American pilots during the war. He began listing their names: Armit Lewis, Lee Gregg, Glen Beneda... Jeff Greene pointed out Glen sitting across the room.

“That’s Glen Beneda right there.”

The retired general proved to be Xia Kui,²⁶ a veteran of the 5th Division, New 4th Army, who met Beneda at the local command post near the scene of his bailout in 1944. Li Xiaolin, vice chairman of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, watched with great interest. Her father, Li Xiannian, had commanded the 5th Division. After the war, he went on to a successful career in politics, becoming the third president of the People’s Republic from 1983 to 1988. He passed away in 1992. She invited Glen and his family to her hotel room.

“I have arranged for you to go to Jianli to see where they’re excavating your airplane out of the lake,” she told him.

“I don’t want to leave the group,” Glen protested.

She leaned close, her nose poking in his face. “Glen,” she said sternly, “you *will* go.”

On September 9, they loaded into a big SUV and left Changsha with a police escort, setting out over the boggy country north of the Yangzi. The roads turned to mere dirt paths between rice paddies. As they neared the village of Luojia, they began to hear the sound of drums and cymbals, first faintly, then louder. A procession of cheering townspeople joined behind the SUV. They thronged around him when he got out. Some

²⁶夏夔

shook his hand, others hugged him. A college student who spoke English thanked him for his service.

“I didn’t do anything special!” Glen rebutted.

“Sir,” the student replied, “If it weren’t for you, I would be speaking Japanese.”

“Well, if we helped your people, that’s wonderful,” he conceded, “but your people helped me too. The real heroes were the farmers and civilians and soldiers who carried me. They saved my life!”²⁷

The people loaded Glen into a bamboo chair reminiscent of the stretcher on which they carried him in 1944. They took him to the excavation site for his airplane. He looked out across the muddy lakebed silently, thoughtfully. For so long, he had buried the traumatic events of that day. Now, over sixty years after the fact, he felt overwhelmed – remembering everything – experiencing the fear, pain, and relief all over again. The visit changed his life. Never in his wildest dreams did he imagine the respect and admiration the Chinese people had for him. He had not understood what his service meant to them. Staring across the rice paddies on that September day in 2005, he had an epiphany. After decades of avoiding the topic of his escape from behind enemy lines – of thinking the memories of an ugly war had no place alongside his beautiful family – he realized without the help of these people at this village, he would not have had a family.²⁸

“I owe a debt to the Chinese people,” he told them. “There’s no way I can pay it back. They saved my life.”²⁹

²⁷ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview.

²⁸ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview.

²⁹ *Touching the Tigers*, 2011.

He made two more trips to China, the last, in October 2010, against his doctor's orders. By then he had a pacemaker and nine heart stints. But he had to go back. He wanted to visit Li Xiannian's presidential library and museum to pay his respects to the man whose division brought him to safety. He carried with him the Nambu pistol the general gave him in 1944 to donate to the museum's collection. The day after he returned to the United States, he suffered a massive heart attack. Three days later, on October 23, 2010, he passed away.³⁰

In accordance with his wishes, on May 11, 2011, Elinor Beneda and her two sons returned to China with a container of his ashes. Li Xiaolin built a beautiful memorial on the grounds of her father's library and there they interred some of Glen's remains. His final wishes made a powerful statement about the relationship between American airmen and the Chinese people who fought alongside them and rescued them when they crashed or bailed-out. He made a choice to memorialize and humanize his rescuers. Though nameless and faceless to most Americans, their names and faces had lived in his heart.³¹

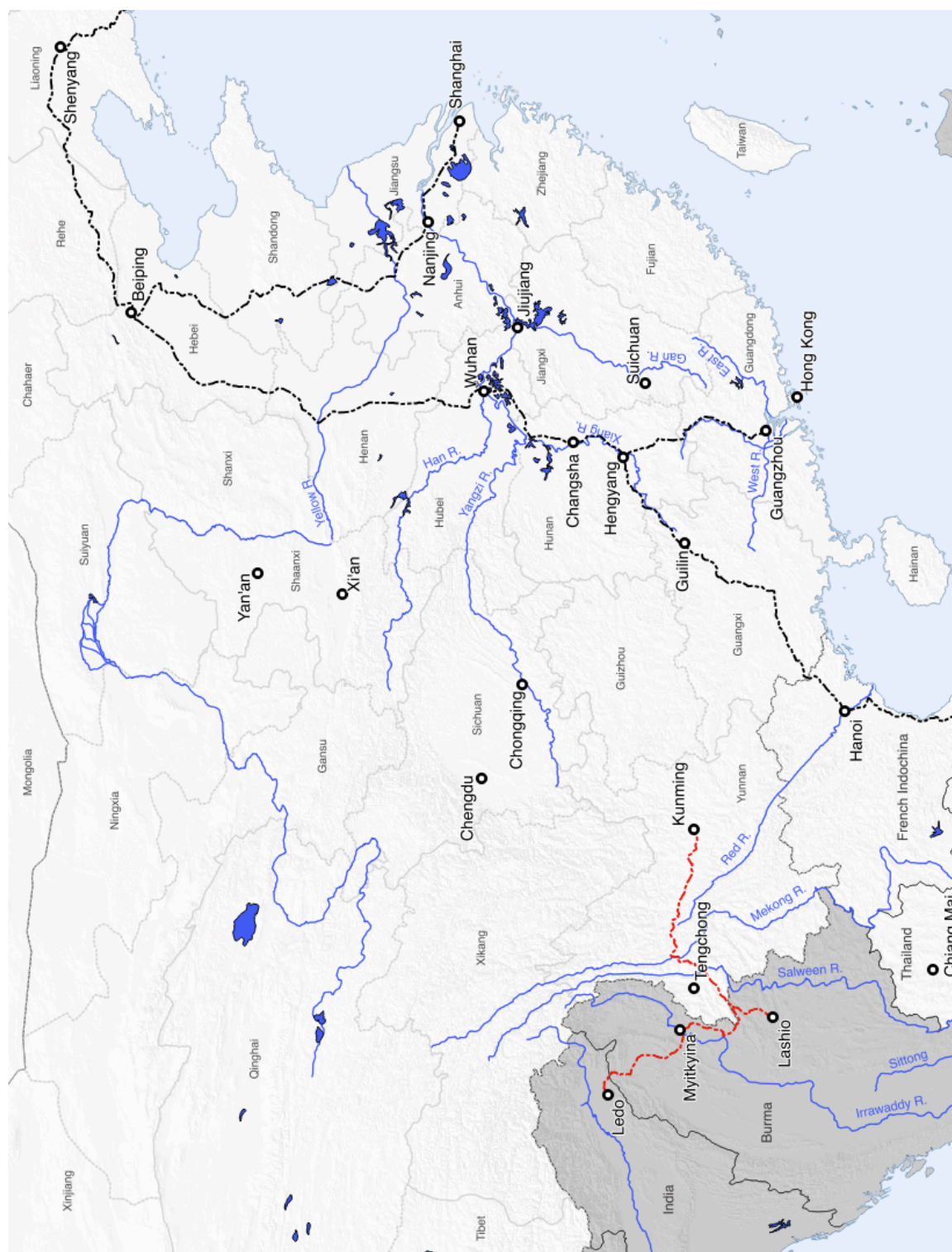
Prominently displayed at the memorial is a statue of a shark-mouthed P-40. To most Americans, its grinning visage represents vengeance for Pearl Harbor. At Li Xiannian's presidential library, though, it occupies a place of honor next to Glen Beneda's ashes, alongside his story etched in marble. Visitors can readily see the symbol means much more to the Chinese people. Robert Mooney's comrades learned this at the unveiling of his monument outside Xiangyun in 1943. Glen realized it looking out over the excavation site of his airplane in 2005. Ultimately, it represents something that transcends governments or politics. It is the symbol of cooperation and fraternity between

³⁰ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview; *Touching the Tigers*, 2011.

³¹ Ed and Elinor Beneda, interview; *Touching the Tigers*, 2011.

ordinary Americans and Chinese. Both sides sacrificed – not for anything political or partisan, but for the liberation of an oppressed people. This, more than anything, is the lesson we learn from the fate of America's missing airmen in China during World War II. Two very different people came together to fight inhumanity and injustice. They left behind a powerful legacy, largely unknown, but potent with meaning for both the United States and the People's Republic of China.

APPENDIX A: MAP OF CHINA



APPENDIX B: PHOTOS



Blood Chit, also known as the “back flag,” “identification flag,” or simply the “flag.” Stamped by China’s Aeronautical Affairs Commission, the chit identified its bearer as fighting on behalf of China and asked soldiers and civilians to give them aid. *Author’s Photo*



Maj Gen Claire Lee Chennault, commander of the American Volunteer Group, China Air Task Force, and 14th Army Air Force. As a fighter pilot himself, he tried to meet and educate all the new fighter pilots in his command. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



Gen Joseph W. Stilwell, commander of U.S. forces in the China-Burma-India Theater. He led his staff to safety in India after the disastrous defeat in Burma. *U.S. Army Photo* (National Archives)



Lt Glen E. Beneda arrived in China in May 1943 and flew with the 76th Fighter Squadron through some of its toughest months of combat. Japanese fighters shot him down southwest of Wuhan on May 6, 1944, but the Communist New 4th Army carried him to safety, along with Lt Lee Gregg. *Courtesy of Ed Beneda*



George B. McMillan finished his tour with the American Volunteer Group as a vice squadron leader with 4.5 kills to his credit. He returned to China in October 1943 to command the 449th Fighter Squadron. *Courtesy of the George B. McMillan Collection, Winter Garden Heritage Foundation, Florida*



Capt Everett W. "Brick" Holstrom (right) piloted the fourth B-25 to take off from the USS Hornet for Doolittle's Raid on Japan. He remained in China for fourteen months, eventually commanding the 11th Bomb Squadron. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



The Japanese captured Lt Billy Farrow and his crew after they bailed out near Nanchang. They executed Farrow and two other airmen following a sham trial. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



Chinese guerrillas carrying several of the Tokyo raiders after they bailed out or crash-landed in east China. Despite having no warning or preparation, the Chinese rescued sixty-four of seventy-five raiders that made it to China. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



Lt Paul Crawford with his P-51 *Little Rebel*. Crawford bailed out when surface fire hit his Mustang on July 14, 1945. The Communist 8th Route Army rescued him and evacuated him via a secret airfield behind enemy lines. *Courtesy of Paul Crawford*



Lt Gen Moritaka Nakazono, commander of the Japanese Army Air Force's 3rd Air Division. Lt Billy Beardsly shot down his transport on September 9, 1943, though he did not know it carried the enemy general. *Courtesy of Richard Maddox*



Soldiers of the 71st Army fight on the Salween Front. Chinese ground troops and American fighters together stopped the Japanese from crossing the river as they advanced from Burma in May 1942. *U.S. Army Photo* (National Archives)



The Chinese people built every airfield in China by hand, quarrying the stone, breaking it up, carrying it, placing it, and rolling it level all without the aid of machinery. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



Liu Zhenghua fled from Wuhan as a young student and joined the Nationalist Army, attending the Central Military Academy branch in Kunming. He served as an infantry officer in the Chinese Expeditionary Force. *Courtesy of Samuel Hui*



B-25s of the 11th Bomb Squadron attack Japanese-occupied Hong Kong. Throughout the war, American airmen made daring attacks on well-defended and seemingly inaccessible Japanese strongholds, giving hope to the Chinese. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



Left to right: 2Lt Joe Cunningham, Col Merian Cooper, Lt Herbert Morgan, Jr., 2Lt Nick Marich, and Maj Ed Rector. Cooper planned the first raid on occupied Hong Kong. Marich and Cunningham were the only members of Capt Howard Allers' downed B-25 – the only one lost on the mission – to evade successfully. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



After witnessing his heroic sacrifice in December 1942, the people of Xiangyun constructed a monument honoring Lt Robert Mooney on the Burma Road. *U.S. Army Air Force Photo* (National Archives)



The U.S. Army recovered George McMillan's body from a grave near Linjiafang and moved it to the Hongqiao Road Cemetery in Shanghai. On March 12, 1948, his family reinterred him at Arlington National Cemetery. *Author's Photo*



The people of Luoia enthusiastically greet Glen Beneda and his family, September 9, 2005. *Courtesy of Jeff Greene*



Glen Beneda carried in a bamboo chair to the excavation site for his airplane. *Courtesy of Jeff Greene*

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 Beijing: The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries,
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VITA

EDUCATION

BS, Military History, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO, 2009
Distinguished Graduate with Academic Distinction. Minored in Mandarin Chinese.
Overseas Study Programs: Summer Language Immersion at Nanjing University;
Academy Exchange Visit to the People's Liberation Army Air Force Academy;
Olmstead Trip to Yunnan. Received the Lieutenant General Frank M. Andrews Award
for The Outstanding Cadet in History. Received the Air Force Historical Foundation
United States Air Force Academy Award for Best Academic Paper.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Instructor Pilot, United States Air Force Special Operations Command. Commands a
combat crew of 3 officers and 1 enlisted executing special operations air missions in the
Pilatus U-28A. More than 2,700 flying hours (including more than 1,000 combat hours)
on six combat and combat support deployments. Instructs approximately 100 pilots on
mission events conducted during day, night, and adverse weather operations.

PUBLICATIONS

The Forgotten Squadron: The 449th Fighter Squadron in World War II, Schiffer
Publishing, Atglen, PA, 2010

Famine, Sword, and Fire: The Liberation of Southwest China in World War II, Schiffer
Publishing, Atglen, PA, 2015

MEMBERSHIPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Board Member and Historian, Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation