

CHAPTER THREE

OSS China

1945



BY THE TIME Casey's people finished debriefing our team at a safe house in London, I learned that approval for Lieutenant Coriolan's Austrian Tyrol operation was running into trouble. The problem was that the Allies had already decided to partition Austria into four occupation zones, to be administered after the Nazi defeat by the Americans, British, French, and Soviets. The zone boundaries would meet in the Tyrol. So London headquarters had to get authorization from all four powers before starting an American-led resistance movement in the southern mountains. Casey told me the plan had merit and would probably be okayed—"eventually"—but admitted he didn't know how long this would take.

Back at Milton Hall, we got word that the OSS China station was looking for volunteers among combat-tested American Jeds to conduct similar operations in the Far East. I wasn't surprised that guys like Mac Austin, Lou Conein, and Aaron Bank immediately signed up. Despite their weeks of intense Maquis fighting that summer, they wanted more action. All of us who'd worked behind enemy lines in France knew the tactical value of well-organized resistance operations. And we were confident we could use our hard-won experience to good advantage against the Japanese.

But I was frustrated. Jacques and Coriolan were counting on the Austrian operation, and were in the middle of intensive planning with the SOE and the French BCRA. We were still a team, and they wanted Tony and me with them. It's hard to explain the mutual respect—indeed, mutual dependence—of men who've fought together in a guerrilla unit. One of the main reasons they were enthusiastic about going into the Tyrol was that we

each possessed skills and attributes that complemented those of our teammates. In a way, we were a very successful, highly specialized military *firm*, a partnership. I owed those men a lot, and I hated the thought of abandoning them.

On the other hand, I realized we simply might not get authorization. The way Patton was rolling east and the Soviets were pushing west, the war in Europe might well be over by Christmas, as some optimists in SHAEF were predicting. If I stooled around England, waiting, I could easily miss my chance to fight in the Far East.

My dilemma was alleviated somewhat by a quick combat mission back to occupied France, which Adrian Wise organized in early October. His Jed team had helped seal off the major Nazi garrisons on the Brittany peninsula after D-Day, and Maquis units he'd trained still laid siege to the strong German fortress cities of Lorient and St. Nazaire. As the Allied armies sped east toward the Rhine, their vulnerable "Red Ball Express" supply route (a single highway, reserved for military traffic) stretched behind them all the way to the battered Normandy ports of Cherbourg and Le Havre; we still hadn't captured France's major channel port, Brest, on the tip of Brittany.

Headquarters was worried that the well-equipped and relatively unblooded Wehrmacht garrisons in Brittany might escape to cut this supply line to the front, possibly in concert with a German counterattack. Our job was to establish an effective combat intelligence network inside the German fortresses cut off on the peninsula, which would give HQ ample warning of an attempted enemy breakout.

We landed by rubber boat near the fishing port of St. Brieuc on the north Brittany coast just before dawn on October 2. The trip across the channel on a Royal Navy torpedo boat had been rough, and landing our black, two-man dinghy loaded with arms, munitions, and radio gear in a rocky cove had not been easy. Adrian and I both appreciated the small-boat training we'd suffered through the previous winter in Scotland.

Adrian had good local contacts, and within five hours we linked up with the regional *Armée Secrète* commander in a hamlet near Lorient. The situation on the peninsula was bizarre, even by the standards of wartime France. Allied bombers regularly hit the German positions, but refrained from striking inland roads and villages. In effect, there were pockets of intense combat side by side almost idyllic pastoral enclaves of harvest-time Brittany. This situation was further confused when heavily armed German foraging parties, often led by light tanks, raided market towns when food stocks grew low in the besieged garrisons. The Maquis sniped and ambushed; the Germans conducted their brutal reprisals; the FFI tried to exert legitimate government control in an area supposedly "liberated," only to have the Wehrmacht reappear to terrorize the civilians.

We procured a fast car and a trustworthy AS driver, then conducted a quick reconnaissance of the peninsula's Atlantic coast. Within three days, we'd established our intelligence networks, giving considerable authority to local Maquis commanders. We also identified key road and rail bridges to be blown, should the Germans attempt a breakout. Finally, we surveyed special drop zones, where French SAS troops and munitions could be dropped to beef up the Maquis, should the situation require reinforcements. Our only real adventures on the operation were a couple of close encounters with large German foraging patrols. But we used the techniques we'd evolved along the Indre and Cher to evade them. This brief but demanding mission had required only a few days, an accomplishment neither of us would have believed possible during our Jedburgh training. This was my first clear understanding that there is no replacement for combat experience in building a soldier's competence.

Before leaving Brittany, we kept a promise to Jacques and called at his family's large estate near Dinan up on the Golfe de St. Malo. The fighting had been savage in this region and burnt-out tanks and trucks littered the narrow farm lanes. There were temporary German and Allied cemeteries in abandoned pastures, the rows of graves marked by simple wooden stakes. Some of the villages had been bombed into mounds of blackened rubble. But Jacques's farm had escaped major damage. We met his family and were given a real feast of roast goose and turnips. Jacques's sister, Louise, decided to come with us to Paris. Early the next morning, we crossed an old hump-backed stone bridge and were back in Normandy, the region officially liberated by Patton's Third Army. I showed my SHAEF pass and priority orders to a skeptical MP sergeant, and he reluctantly issued us a vehicle pass to drive the Red Ball Express.

For the next two days we rolled along, wedged among long convoys of olive-drab semi-trailer trucks and lumbering tank carriers, all heading east toward the front. But the narrow roads sometimes became clogged with empty convoys speeding back to the Normandy ports, so our eastbound lane was flagged down to wait out a long line of westbound vehicles. Most of the drivers were black GIs who gladly shared their rations with us as we waited out the traffic jams in shell-blasted village squares. Paris was full of staff rats, and even some of the bemedaled military bureaucrats from Washington had found their way to comfortable billets in Right Bank hotels. We didn't waste much time there swapping war stories.

Back in England that bitterly cold autumn, the Austrian Maquis operation seemed hopelessly stalled in the Allies' Byzantine negotiations. Adrian and I killed some time in additional parachute training, then I volunteered for duty in the Far East. I received orders routing me through the States—with priority transportation status and a thirty-day leave to get married thrown in.

On a frigid December morning almost exactly one year from our arrival in Gourock, I was back in the battered Clydeside port, about to board the *Ile de France* for New York. My travel orders made me a Top Secret SHAEF courier, in charge of a large shipment of classified documents, stored in dozens of locked bags weighing several tons. Since I could not be physically separated from the sacks until they were safely stored in the ship's vault, I chose to ride with them in the cargo net, which swayed precariously over the water before clanking down through a hatch.

This vantage point allowed me to survey the harbor as I had the year before from the deck of the *Queen Elizabeth*. More convoys were unloading. More fresh troops disembarked, en route to the fighting in Europe. One day after leaving the port of Glasgow, the Germans unleashed their massive counteroffensive in the Ardennes Forest, the epic bloody campaign that soon became known as the Battle of the Bulge. I felt a definite twinge of regret, and a stab of guilt, as the ship began its zigzag course through the Irish Sea, north toward the open Atlantic. While we sat down to dine on starched linen in the officers' mess, hundreds of thousands of young Americans were fighting for their lives in the frozen mud and snowdrifts of Belgium. If the Nazi advance did manage to cut the Allied armies in half, Hitler had a chance of capturing the Channel ports, and expanding the V-2 rocket bombardment of British supply ports. The European campaign had reached a critical point, yet I was sailing west. I was a Jed, and the idea of retreat did not sit well.

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MARY and I were married on January 6, 1945, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The news from Europe was still not good. Although the brunt of the Ardennes attack had been broken, the cost was horrendous. Worse, optimistic projection of a sudden German capitulation had been shattered. There were months of bloody combat ahead as the Allies advanced into Germany. In the Pacific, there was still savage fighting in the Philippines and more ahead for the Marines and Army as we prepared to capture the heavily defended inner circle of Japanese islands, including Okinawa and Iwo Jima, in preparation for the actual invasion of the Home Islands. Massive armies still faced each other on mainland China. The situation in Burma had improved greatly, and Allied armies were beginning to push, reversing the final savage Japanese offensive that had penetrated the Assam valley of India in 1944 and besieged British garrisons at Imphal and Kohina.

I was now paused halfway between the fighting in Europe and the upcoming climactic battles in Asia. Once more, I realized this was truly a global war. But America was relatively untouched. Mary and I made the

rounds of her friends and relatives, driving a comfortable borrowed car with generous gasoline rations down brightly lit streets. Although civilians griped about shortages, they had no concept of the deprivations in England or the widespread suffering in Europe. And from what I'd heard, conditions in the Far East made the ETO seem like a Scout jamboree.

In preparation for my new orders, I was given a temporary duty assignment in Washington, getting "read in" on the OSS Far East mission. Mary returned to her regular code-breaking duties in Naval Intelligence. We rented an apartment in Georgetown, but Mary was on the midnight-to-eight graveyard shift, and we would often meet on cold mornings walking toward each other on N Street, she returning from work and me just leaving. The same ground rules about secrecy applied: She couldn't discuss her Ultra work, and I could not detail the Jedburgh operation, although I now wore two French *Croix de Guerre* and had an Invasion Arrowhead on my ETO campaign ribbon. It was as if we were in some kind of isolation chamber, shielded from the cruel reality of total war, pretending to lead a normal life as a newly married couple. Then the phone would ring, and the landlady would say there was a call for "Lieutenant Singlaub." We always had to ask, "John or Mary?"

One day Mary got a call from OSS headquarters from an officer who was familiar with this telephone confusion. "There won't be any more calls for Lieutenant John Singlaub," he explained. "He just made captain."

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I SHIPPED out for the Far East aboard a crowded Navy transport from Long Beach, en route to India in early April. For the passage, I'd been made officer-in-charge of a large, eclectic group of OSS personnel—officers, enlisted ranks, and civilians—all bound for the Far East via Calcutta. I was happy to see that Tony Denneau, now a first sergeant, was with us. Although I didn't have specific orders, it was probable I'd be forming a Jedburgh-type resistance team in southern China, and I certainly intended to have Tony as my radio operator. The transport sped along at about fifteen knots, easily breasting the endless blue Pacific swells, cutting a wide arc south and west, away from the war zone. Our relatively good speed made convoy travel unnecessary, and our zigzag course supposedly made us invulnerable to Japanese submarines. But after witnessing the Keystone Kops gun drills of the merchant crew, I increased my prayers for a safe crossing.

Several of the OSS men on board were Yugoslav-Americans who'd fought in the Balkans. Some had served with Tito's Communist partisans and others with General Draza Mihailovich's Chetnik guerrillas. They had hair-raising

stories to tell of the desperate, three-way conflict in the mountains of Serbia. During the long and boring passage, one of these officers, Eli Popovich, came close to "killing" a colleague, George Wuchanich, an open Communist sympathizer with the somewhat nebulous assignment as an intelligence officer. Prior to World War II, he had been a radical "labor organizer," and he continued this after the war.

I was shocked to see that these men truly hated each other; moreover, I was beginning to realize that the Office of War Information's simplistic "Four Freedoms" rationale for America's involvement in the war did not encompass the harsh political realities that lay beneath the surface of military operations. As in France where the Communist FTP was more interested in the political struggle after liberation, and as in Yugoslavia where a similar hidden conflict raged, I came to realize that my guerrilla warfare assignment in China would be anything but straightforward. In China there was a situation analogous to the FTP-AS French conflict, but on an infinitely vaster scale. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces maintained an uneasy (and clearly temporary) truce with Mao Tse-tung's Communist Red Army. As in Europe, both factions were eager for Allied war matériel, so they kept up pressure on the Japanese occupation forces. But, again mirroring the situation in Europe, the Communist and anti-Communist forces in China seemed to be preparing for another struggle once the Japanese were defeated.

To exacerbate this complexity, the future of Indochina might also be at stake. The Japanese had occupied the French colonies with the cooperation of the Vichy government in 1940. Although these forces had recently come under air attack from American bases in the Philippines, a large, well-equipped enemy army group was still in the field. A few Free French guerrilla outfits harassed them, but the major opposition to the Japanese in Indochina came from guerrilla troops loyal to a fiery Communist leader whose nom de guerre was Ho Chi Minh, "He Who Leads." Like Mao, Ho viewed fighting the Japanese as a necessary precursor to the inevitable battle against French colonial power. In my Washington briefings I'd learned that American policy under Roosevelt had been to aid the Communist guerrillas in their effort to pin down the Japanese; in exchange for this alliance, America was to help establish decolonized "protectorates" following the Japanese defeat, which, it was hoped, would somehow evolve into independent democratic nations. But Roosevelt was dead now, and President Truman had reversed this policy, throwing American support behind France's efforts to regain its overseas colonies. Naturally, this muddled political and military situation would make my eventual combat assignment "*très intéressant*," as we used to say in Corrèze.¹

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CALCUTTA was a stifling ant heap of humanity. The premonsoon heat shimmered in glaring waves across the dusty plain of the Ganges delta. Luckily, we moved through the ramshackle metropolis quickly, and the unit I was in charge of (now shed of various exotic civilians) was sent north to the cooler Assam valley. As the narrow, varnished teak passenger cars of the train rattled across the dry rice paddies and climbed the terraced watershed of the Brahmaputra River, the ancient stench of India—a mixture of human and animal excrement, dust, and charcoal smoke—was washed away by the cool breezes from the white bastion of the Himalayas.

We got off the train at Chabua air base, near Dinjan in the upper Assam valley, where Colonel Ray Peers had established the headquarters of OSS Detachment 101 for his operations in Burma two years before. Chabua was one of the termini of the air bridge “over the Hump” to China. A few miles away, the town of Ledo was the land bridge terminus. All day and most of the night, dusty American transport planes—workhorse C-47s and C-46s, as well as converted Liberators—landed and took off, hauling supplies to Kunming in China and returning for more.

I learned that OSS Special Operations personnel with orders for China duty might have to wait as long as two weeks for air transportation across the Hump to Kunming. The men in my unit were used to action, and they’d been cooped up aboard ship for a month, so I was afraid they might get into trouble in this comfortable backwater, where the virtue of the local tea planters’ wives and daughters might indeed be in jeopardy. As Colonel Peers was about to move his headquarters down the Ledo Road to a forward position at Bhamo in Burma, I volunteered my unit to assist. Packing up Detachment 101’s well-stocked supply huts provided unexpected bounty. A couple of the ex-Jed NCOs “liberated” a good selection of jungle knives, survival equipment, and light automatic weapons, all of which we’d heard were hard to find in China.

Jolting south down the Ledo Road in our convoy of deuce-and-a-half trucks was an interesting experience. Six months before I’d helped organize Maquis ambushes of German truck convoys south of the Loire. Now I was in charge of a similar convoy, albeit on a much more primitive “road.” These cool green foothills with jungle-clad ridges and long grassy streambeds had ostensibly been cleared of Japanese the year before. But enemy straggler units regularly ambushed the road to replenish their food and ammunition. The area had also been a bastion of Chinese bandits for several decades. So I didn’t get much of a chance to enjoy the splendid scenery of the tropical highlands because I was too busy scanning likely ambush sites

with my glasses, and searching for easily defended bivouac spots each night.

In Bhamo I found a scene straight out of Kipling. The officers' club was in a *basha* stilt house with a thick roof of palm thatch, the home to foot-long lizards and fruit bats with amazing wing spans. Many of the troops staging through the town were veterans of irregular units that had distinguished themselves in Burma: British officers from Wingate's Raiders and American guys from Merrill's Marauders. You could spot them immediately—their faces, hands, and forearms were burnt ocher from months in the sun, but their chests and backs were yellow from months of taking the malaria-suppressant Atabrine. The true field soldiers were laced with leech welts and fungus. Even in this camp they moved quietly on rubber-soled boots and instinctively scanned the tree lines of the surrounding jungle. Over rusty cans of warm Schlitz we swapped tales of guerrilla warfare in central France and the jungles of Burma.

For me, this was invaluable training because you can learn a lot more about your enemy from men who have actually fought him in the field than you ever could in a formal intelligence briefing. What I learned in Bhamo about the Japanese was that they were tenacious, brave in combat, cruel in occupation, and potentially vulnerable in their overly rigid military hierarchy. One captain from Merrill's Marauders recounted a Japanese banzai charge in the Mangin Mountains the year before, in which an entire enemy company had been "stacked up like railroad ties" as they attacked a small American unit in wave after wave, not attempting to outflank two well-placed machine guns. I remembered the stubborn and resourceful SS defenders at Eggletons, and realized I was now facing a much different enemy.

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THE OSS China Special Operations compound was in a pleasantly green rice paddy camp two miles west of Kunming. As in India, there was a definite, all-pervasive stench to southern China, which here was heavy on the human manure used to fertilize the paddies. The surrounding area, however, was strikingly beautiful, with turquoise lakes and dramatic, freestanding limestone towers crowned by stands of bamboo and hardwood. On early summer mornings, the mist rose slowly from the paddies and swirled around these white stone towers. Peasants in conical coolie hats padded along the dikes. Ducks and geese cackled in the paddies, and water buffalo chewed dripping fodder. If you ignored the drone of aircraft and truck engines, you felt you were in the mysterious Cathay of Marco Polo.

But we weren't tourists in China. We had a war to finish, and it looked as if the final battles against Japan might prove the bloodiest of the entire

Second World War. Japanese resistance on Iwo Jima and Okinawa had shocked the War Department, which was already drawing up staff plans for the invasion of the Home Islands. If the enemy fought so hard for these outlying possessions—and was willing to squander the lives of thousands of young pilots in kamikaze attacks—it was feared that the actual invasion of Japan might cost the lives of several hundred thousand Americans. Therefore, Allied strategists were determined to use every ploy and deception available to reduce casualties.

In our area of operations, the main concern was the large, unblooded Japanese occupation army in French Indochina, particularly the 21st Infantry Division stationed around Hanoi in Tonkin, as North Vietnam was then known. Although we weren't made privy to strategic details, it was generally accepted that there would be an American amphibious landing in southern China in the fall, which would serve two functions: a diversion that would hopefully draw Japanese forces from the Home Islands (to be subject to air and submarine attack en route to China), and establishment of advance American bomber bases closer to Tokyo than our B-29 fields in the Mariannas and western China. This China diversion could be threatened by a counterattack from the Japanese forces in Indochina. So our job was to keep them bottled up in the former French colony.

My assignment was to equip and train a thirty-man Operational Group guerrilla unit composed of "Annamites"—young Vietnamese volunteers from Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh forces—led by American officers and NCOs, with the help of several Vietnamese veterans of the French Foreign Legion. Once I got this unit into fighting shape we were to parachute into the rugged highlands north of the Red River delta, northwest of Hanoi and Haiphong. There were only three passable military lines of communication north from Tonkin to China proper. One was a French-built road connecting Hanoi and Ningming and passing through the Tonkin border town of Lang Son. The second was a railroad, which paralleled the road and threaded through a steep limestone gorge south of Lang Son, crossing numerous bridges and culverts. Our job would be to blow the bridges on these two routes, then to harass the Japanese, preventing repairs. That would close two routes out of Tonkin. Other Operational Groups would conduct similar attacks on the other roads and railroads connecting Vietnam with southern China.

After my initial intelligence briefings and first contacts among the French and Annamite volunteers, I decided not to use any French officers in order to prevent possible friction between them and the intensely nationalist Viet Minh. I should add here that Ho Chi Minh and his close colleagues disguised their Communist affiliation to better recruit volunteers among the heavily Roman Catholic Tonkinese. Also, careful scrutiny of the map showed that my operation was going to be dicey; the Japanese would not be pleased to

have their road and railroad blown and their engineers ambushed. They would no doubt beat the bush searching for us. So it was better to keep the number of Caucasians in the team to a minimum. In those jungle mountains, we just couldn't throw on a French peasant's blue smock and black beret and fade into the background.

For my team NCOs, I chose Tony Denneau as my radio man, Corporal Jim Healy, a young Boston Irishman, as medic, and another Irishman, Sergeant Bill Cavanaugh, as weapons and demolition instructor. We moved south to the small mountain town of Poseh, where the OSS maintained an advance training camp. Conditions here were relatively primitive—you reached our camp by crossing a river on a crude, hand-hauled ferry—but the climate was not bad.² This ferry, by the way, caused an interesting incident later that summer. The local peasants knew we had explosives and begged us incessantly to explode charges in the water to stun fish for them. One day, Sergeant Cavanaugh and I were crossing on the ferry when he got tired of the peasants' singsong harangue. He grabbed a one-kilo block of C-4, primed it, lit the fuse, and then tossed it in the river. Unfortunately, he threw it *upstream*. To my horror, the block of plastic explosive, its fuse smoking like a toy steamer, floated back down under the planks of the ferry and detonated with a thunderclap and a geyser of muddy water. The raft-like ferry immediately began to sink. But the peasants on the banks jumped with glee as they scooped up basketloads of dead and stunned fish. We barely made it to the wet clay bank before the ferry settled to the bottom.

There was a decent steel-mat-runway airstrip at Poseh, so our supply and reconnaissance capabilities were quite good. While Sergeant Cavanaugh trained our volunteers in the mysteries of the M-1 carbine, hand grenades, land mines, and C-4 plastic explosives, I made my first aerial reconnaissance of the territory south of Lang Son.

I flew on C-47 supply drops to OSS teams already in the field, some with Ho Chi Minh's headquarters group in the mountains above the Red River. Either coming or going, I'd convince the pilots to drop low enough for me to snap pictures out the open cargo door. This was real seat-of-the-pants flying, and the young 14th Air Force crews obviously took their Terry and the Pirates role seriously. There were no navigational aids, of course, and our charts and maps were badly out of date, so we'd often get lost. Sometimes we'd be barreling up a steep gorge of limestone cliffs and scrub jungle only to have monsoon clouds spill over the ridges like an avalanche of cotton, eradicating visibility. The only recourse was to firewall the throttles and climb, sweating blood until you broke through on top. On other trips I'd argue with the pilot and co-pilot about our position, as we descended south from the mountains onto the delta, only to have our discussion interrupted

by a string of tracers from a Japanese ack-ack site. That was *one* sure way of pinpointing enemy positions.

As our training advanced that summer, the Japanese forces learned through their spies that American-led guerrilla units were forming in the region. The enemy began aggressive forays by company- and battalion-size units, which raided along the roads north of the Chinese border. Although the larger towns like Nanning were held by strong Nationalist Chinese garrisons, the countryside was a no-man's-land. We never knew as we hiked the hillsides of scrub jungle, or drove our jeeps along the muddy lanes between bamboo groves, if we would encounter a Japanese ambush or roadblock. But this confused tactical situation made for excellent training. By July, I had my people worked up to peak combat efficiency. We could hike twenty miles up and down the ridges with heavy loads, skirt heavily defended Japanese bivouacs undetected, and even infiltrate their supply dumps to steal ammunition and provisions.

My fellow Jed, Captain Lucien Conein, had a larger composite Operational Group. His job was to move south from the Chinese border town of Ninming and occupy Lang Son just across the Indochina frontier. It was hoped he could defend the town by arming local volunteers to supplement his own troops, and protect the highway bridge there. His outfit was already en route when I took off on a recon flight after four days of thick overcast. We flew southwest to a place called Tuyen Quang and dropped a heavy load of rice and munitions into a jungle clearing. As we passed low overhead, I saw a couple of American guys in sweat-soaked fatigues talking to a thin, elderly Annamite in a pith helmet. The plane banked steeply above the clearing, and the native guerrilla leader waved his thin hand languidly, as if to dismiss a loyal subordinate.

"Who's that guy?" I shouted to the young crew chief as we clung to the static line anchor cable like straphangers in a crazy subway.

"That's old Ho, sir," the kid shouted back. "Ho Chi Minh, the honcho himself."³

Flying back to Poseh, I again prevailed on the crew to drop low above the Hanoi-Lang Son highway. As we climbed to breast the ridge above Lang Son, I was shocked to see the unmistakable signs of fresh fortifications—bunkers, mortar pits, and machine-gun posts—cut in the red laterite soil. We flew a low orbit of the town and I spotted fresh field telephone lines and a camouflaged truck park. Without doubt, the Japanese had occupied the town with at least a battalion and were now well dug in. Lou Conein's group was probably only a day's hike away, and they were marching into a trap. As soon as we landed, I told the Poseh tower to alert our headquarters in Kunming to stand by for an emergency operational message.

Tony and I sweated through the hot afternoon encoding a detailed report

on the unexpected enemy occupation of Lang Son and requesting a thorough aerial photo reconnaissance of the region. Further, I suggested that the photos themselves be airdropped to Conein and he be given discretion whether to continue the advance or to pull back.

As often happens in the field, a compromise was reached. Lou's outfit was ordered back, but he wasn't told the reason for the withdrawal.

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I GOT back to our small compound in Poseh one rainy night in August after a tough patrol, dodging truck-borne enemy raiding parties. One of my Annamite NCOs was quite excited. He'd heard a radio report of "*une bombe très puissante*"—a very powerful bomb—that had been dropped on Japan. Within a week we got news of the second atomic bomb, and then, a few days later, word reached us that Emperor Hirohito had spoken to the Japanese people, urging them to accept the inevitability of defeat. Our local combat intelligence nets, however, reported no stand-down by the Japanese troops in the area. Until I heard better, I kept my outfit on combat readiness.

Then I got priority orders to report to Kunming with my American teammates for a special operation. We landed on the morning of August 25, in the middle of a monsoon downpour that had been going on for a week. As I dashed through the rain to the Ops hut, a driver from Colonel Paul Helliwell, our intelligence officer, saluted and told me to hop in his jeep. The Colonel, he said, had urgent business with me.

Helliwell didn't waste time with small talk. He had several map easels of southern China and northern Indochina arrayed in his office. As I shook the rain off my poncho, he handed me a Secret Theater Directive dated August 15, concerning "Prisoner of War Humanitarian Teams."⁴

"As you can see from that document, OSS has the mission of rescuing Allied POWs in this theater. There's a prison camp on the west coast of Hainan Island." He went to the map. "We would like you to volunteer to lead the mission to Hainan, Captain," Helliwell said, tapping the south China map with his pointer to indicate the large oval island that hung like a pear from the Canton coast southwest of Hong Kong. "We think the camp's near an ore-loading wharf here." Again, he tapped the map. "That's Bakli Bay."

"How do I get there, sir?"

"You jump in." Helliwell stared at me for a moment. "Tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow, sir?" I couldn't help shaking my head. "How many men?"

Helliwell said that was up to me, but I had to consider that the plane would be heavily laden with medical supplies and food. "I'll need a good medic and a good commo man," I said, then began ticking off the other

positions on my fingers. "Japanese interpreter, Chinese interpreter . . ."

"That's up to you, Captain," Helliwell said, handing me another Secret document. "The Japs have been executing Allied prisoners for several months now, supposedly in retaliation for our air raids. We have good reason to believe they'll try to massacre the POWs in remote areas to prevent them from being witnesses to earlier atrocities."

I studied the intelligence report. Agents in Singapore, Thailand, Formosa (now Taiwan), and Japan proper had noted increased atrocities against Allied POWs, including public executions.⁵

"In some parts of China," Helliwell continued, "the Japanese forces have apparently received no news on the surrender. Or at least the local commanders haven't told their subordinates. It's a tricky situation, kind of a limbo. Once their troops find out the Emperor has called for surrender, there's no telling how they'll react."

I looked at the map again. Hainan certainly was remote, a good five-hour plane ride from Kunming. "Any indication the Japs on the island want to surrender?"

Helliwell shook his head. "Well, they shot at our recon plane yesterday, if that's any indication." He rose and reached across the desk to shake my hand. "My staff will brief you. Better get going. Good luck."

"Thanks, sir." I knew I was going to need it.

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THE next forty hours were probably the busiest I've ever spent, outside of an actual combat zone. In my first briefing from Helliwell's staff, it became clear that I wouldn't be leaving for Hainan the next day. There were a total of eight OSS Mercy Mission POW rescue groups being formed to jump into known Japanese prison camps. They bore the code names of birds: Magpie (Peking), Sparrow (Shanghai), Quail (Hanoi), etc. I would lead Mission Pigeon to Hainan.⁶ Our orders were to make contact with Allied POWs in our respective areas, take the prisoners under our protection, and render all possible medical and humanitarian assistance to them. Next, we were to secure a suitable nearby airfield for their evacuation, and if that was impossible, to prepare a large drop zone for additional personnel and medical supplies. We were also charged with intelligence responsibilities, including locating any downed Allied airmen who had escaped or evaded capture. In the process, we were to draw up a detailed order of battle of the Japanese forces we encountered. Headquarters was worried some regional Japanese commanders might simply continue the fight of their own volition. Therefore, it was vital we learn as much as possible about enemy strength on Hainan, as quickly as possible.

The military situation on Hainan, I learned from Helliwell's intel briefers, was dangerously confused. According to Nationalist agents on the island, there were at least five hostile groups fighting one another in various combinations. The Japanese forces included naval defense garrisons, the naval air wing, and a large contingent of so-called Hokaido Marines, crack Japanese troops who had fought in the Pacific campaign. There were also Communist and Nationalist guerrillas in the central mountain jungles, as well as Chinese bandits loyal to local outlaw leaders, and fierce indigenous tribesmen known as the Li.

Allied POWs were known to include Australian army troops and Dutch army and naval forces plus some civilians captured in the Netherland East Indies in 1942, as well as Sikhs from the Hong Kong-Singapore Royal Artillery, and an unknown number of American airmen shot down on the island in the past eight months, the period during which Hainan came in range of our Philippine-based bombers. The intelligence reports also noted a large number of Chinese civilian prisoners from Hong Kong, whom the Japanese had enslaved to work the island's rich iron and copper deposits near Bakli Bay.

My final OSS briefing officer was a specialist on Japanese military operations. He stressed that the Emperor's "surrender" speech of the previous week had been enigmatic at best, delivered in obscure and highly indirect court phrasing that served to avoid the dishonor of defeat. Therefore, he said, local commanders on Hainan might still consider themselves bound by their oaths of loyalty to resist the enemy at all costs.

"You're just going to have to take charge," he said. "But they might not want to listen to a captain."

He explained that a field-grade officer—major and above—in the Japanese Imperial Army literally had power of life and death over his men. It was unlikely that the commandant of the POW guards would be a field-grade officer, so we agreed I would have the temporary rank of major for this operation.

When my briefing was completed, I knew I'd need a highly skilled and resourceful team to carry out the mission. The POWs themselves were thought to be suffering badly from malnutrition, disease, and the systematic cruelty of their guards. Therefore, I'd need a good medic. Jim Healy had shown himself to be well qualified, resourceful, and damned near fearless on the Indochina border. Tony Denneau, of course, would be my commo man. We'd been through a lot together, and each felt good to have the other on the team.

I'd also need a brave, intelligent Japanese interpreter. Our first minutes on the ground would be crucial. If the Japanese had not gotten word of the pending surrender, I would be the first to bring them the news. It might be

hard for them to resist the old habit of executing the bearer of bad tidings. So I would have to psychologically dominate the enemy, cowing them into cooperation. We certainly couldn't physically subdue them. Given weight restrictions and fuel requirements, I'd be limited to a team of fewer than ten.

That afternoon, I met Captain Leonard Woods of the Air Ground Aid Service (AGAS), the outfit responsible for preparing our air crews for escape and evasion (E&E), and eventual rescue if they were downed behind enemy lines. AGAS was also preparing for POW evacuation, so Woods had stockpiled medical supplies in his compound. I was impressed by Woods's enthusiasm. Even though he'd never jumped before, he was eager to parachute into Hainan. I named him my executive officer. Helliwell suggested I take a well-trained intelligence officer, and recommended First Lieutenant Charles Walker, whom I had not known previously. This was a key position because of our requirements to locate Allied airmen evaders among the guerrillas. Lieutenant Arnold Breakey would be the supply officer to coordinate the supply drops and take care of other logistic functions. Marine First Lieutenant John C. Bradley had been with me on the Indochina border. I knew him to be a damn good weapons man. I hoped I wouldn't need his skills on this mission, but he was anxious to go with us, so I made him the team adjutant to take care of team and POW administration.

Late that night, our chief OSS interpreter, Harrison Hsia, finally located a parachute-qualified Chinese Nationalist officer, Lieutenant Peter Fong, who spoke Mandarin as well as several of the island dialects. That still left the problem of a Japanese interpreter. In addition, Breakey and Woods had not yet been able to round up adequate quantities of medical supplies, particularly the B vitamins needed to combat acute beriberi and Atabrine for malaria treatment.

All these problems, however, were minor irritants compared to the local weather. The rain had not yet stopped, and the streams and rivers had burst their banks. Our compound was soon flooded by several feet of evil-smelling muddy water. Later that night, as I tried to steal a couple hours of sleep, the mud-baked walls of our team house collapsed and the room was flooded waist deep. The next morning I actually used an Air Force rubber raft to move equipment from the warehouse. Still the rain fell from a thick low overcast the consistency of wet cement. No planes were flying that afternoon.

By dark that night, I got word that Helliwell's office had finally found a qualified Japanese interpreter, Army First Lieutenant Ralph Yempuku, a wiry young Nisei from Honolulu, who'd fought with OSS Detachment 101 in Burma. Ralph joined us at the Kunming airfield around midnight. Like Woods, he'd never jumped before, but did not hesitate to volunteer.

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At dawn on August 27, the overcast at Kunming lifted enough for our C-47 to take off. It was crowded in the rattling, drafty fuselage, the nine of us grouped around several tons of bundled parachute cargo. We all wore jump boots and jungle fatigues, with each officer's jacket bearing a large American flag on the left sleeve. I'd decided that each man would carry a .45 automatic pistol and two extra magazines, but no shoulder weapons. As with the Jed Team, we had one Thompson submachine gun for the whole group. Obviously, nine men didn't stand much chance of shooting it out with a Japanese marine division, should the enemy oppose us. If we were going to survive the next few hours, it would be thanks to our wits, not physical bravery.

After takeoff, I pinned major's oak leaves to my green jungle fatigues, to which I'd already sewn a large American flag. I felt something like a kid going to a masquerade party, but I was willing to try anything that would improve the success of the operation and ensure my team's survival.

To an outsider we would have appeared to be a crack parachute outfit. But in reality, only four of us had jumped before, and only Tony and I in actual combat. As the plane droned southeast into the hot eye of the morning sun, I delivered a shouted, highly abbreviated refresher course of the parachute instruction I had given in the hour before takeoff. We were using new static-line main parachutes with a circular quick-release buckle that connected the harness in the center of the chest. I showed the men how to hook up, exit the door, and check to make sure their main canopy had deployed properly. I also went through the motions of explaining the reserve chute. But I had already decided to jump from below 800 feet, to increase the element of surprise and minimize the chance of being shot at in our chutes. Probably only Tony and I realized that the reserves were mere ornaments when you jump from that low an altitude.

We crossed over the South China Sea above the myriad limestone islands near Haiphong. I went up to the cockpit and convinced the young pilot to keep the plane just above the wave tops as we crossed the Gulf of Tonkin. Despite his age, he was a veteran Carpetbagger—the 14th Air Force special ops squadron that supported the OSS behind enemy lines. He knew the advantage of coming in under enemy radar. There was nothing more for me to do, so I lay down on the deck with my head on a cargo chute and managed to snatch almost an hour's sleep, the first I'd had in thirty hours.

The monsoon cloud deck boiled away as we neared Hainan, and the inland mountains shimmered in the mid-morning heat mirage. We made landfall north of Bakli Bay, and banked right, roaring along only a hundred feet

above the arid coastal plain of brown scrub brush and prickly pear. Each summer the prevailing southeast monsoon was absorbed by the mountains, making this side of the island a bleak semi-desert, reminiscent of Baja California. We crossed the red scar of a railroad embankment leading from the foothills to the coast. Ahead a large wooden trestle wharf jutted out into the warm blue sea. I leaned over the pilot's shoulders and squinted through the cockpit windows, trying to identify landmarks on my map. A jumble of low buildings connected by dirt tracks appeared on the sun-blasted flatlands. Inland about a mile from these structures I saw larger, more substantial buildings surrounded by power lines and telephone poles.

"That's it," I yelled to the pilot, pointing over his shoulder harness at the first clump of buildings.

He banked sharply right again and took us down to wave-top level. Our plan was to circle out of sight, a few miles out to sea, then head straight in and climb just before reaching the drop zone on the empty plain between the camp and the Japanese garrison.

"Get ready!" I yelled, swinging back into the fuselage.

The team got to their feet and hooked their static-line snaps to the overhead anchor cable. I was jumping number one and hooked up last. I swung back along the stick, checking each man's static line and patting his shoulder for encouragement. Ralph Yempuku stood near the windy maw of the door, an expression of determined resignation on his face, his short, wiry frame bent beneath the weight of the chute. I heard the engine tone change as we climbed. A line of white foam and a rocky beach swept by the door. The red standby light blinked. I hooked up and double-checked my static line. Tin-roofed sheds flashed by 500 feet below. We were still climbing.

The green light came on, indicating that the pilot considered conditions safe to jump. When we reached the open field I had selected from the aerial photos, I shouted "Go!" and was out the door. Suddenly I was aware the pilot had not throttled back the engines. The chute opened unusually hard, and I swung violently in the hot sunlight. But I didn't have time to worry about my canopy. The next swing drove me into the gravel and stubbly grass. We'd probably jumped at between 500 to 600 feet. I hit my quick release and dragged off the harness, just as Ralph Yempuku thudded down twenty yards away. There were gouts of crimson blood streaming from his face. My first reaction was that he had been hit. He struggled to his feet cursing and I helped him with his harness.

"Damn thing's too big," he said, pointing to the quick-release buckle. Ralph was only five foot three and, even at its tightest setting, the parachute harness was too loose. Jumping fast and low as we had, the buckle had split his chin on opening shock. Luckily, he wasn't badly hurt, but the blood was certainly impressive.

The rest of the team landed close by. A couple were shaken up, but there were apparently no life-threatening injuries. Len Woods, however, got up slowly, his head wobbling on his shoulders, his eyes almost blank. He'd been hit across the jaw and temple by the metal riser links when his chute opened, giving him a concussion. So Jim Healy had two casualties to worry about even before we found the prisoners. He worked quickly, putting a butterfly bandage to Ralph's chin and convincing Len Woods to sit down and rest.

I had other worries. The C-47 made a lazy orbit of the field, then banked toward us, losing altitude as it approached. The crew were obviously worried about Japanese ack-ack and they weren't about to make an easy target of themselves. By the time they crossed the field again on the cargo run they weren't much higher than 200 feet. The colored cargo chutes snapped open just as the bundles hit the ground. The medical supplies were fairly well padded, but our tommy gun and Tony's radio equipment were not so well packed. When Tony found his set, the bundle had burst open, spreading the equipment through a stand of prickly pear.

I was about to take stock of the loss when Charlie Walker pointed inland across the barren field. Two Japanese army trucks barreled toward us, raising a plume of orange dust. From down the coast a mob of Chinese civilians in black pajamas and coolie hats trotted in our direction. We stood in the blazing midday sun among our shattered cargo watching both groups approach.

"Everybody just take it easy," I said. "Keep your hands off your weapons." Ralph Yempuku was right beside me, watching the Japanese troops.

The trucks stopped about 500 yards away, and I heard the shrill commands of the Japanese officer forming his men into a skirmish line. They advanced toward us at a fast walk, their bayonets leveled in our direction.

"Okay," I told Ralph. "You just translate."

When the enemy soldiers were less than a hundred yards away, I gave their officer what I hoped was an aloof, scornful glare, folded my hands behind my back, and turned on my heel to gaze away in the opposite direction. Their officer was a first lieutenant in pressed khaki with a polished Sam Browne belt, pistol, and long samurai sword. He was shouting something now, but I resisted the urge to look at him.

"He wants to know who we are," Ralph whispered. "He's asking why we're here."

Still not facing the Japanese officer, I took a deep breath and shouted. "Stop right there."

Ralph translated, fortunately (I learned that night), prefacing the order with the formal Japanese military edict, "the Major commands . . ."

Again the enemy lieutenant screamed his query. Again I gave my order

and Ralph translated, this time matching my own outraged tone. When I turned to face the Japanese soldiers, they were standing motionless thirty yards away. "Turn those troops around," I yelled. "Face the Chinese civilians. You will protect these supplies from them."

Once more Ralph relayed the order, again with the edict "the Major commands."

This was the crucial test. If the Japanese officer obeyed a sequence of orders, we had him in our pocket. The sun beat down. There was silence. Finally, the enemy lieutenant growled an order, which a burly sergeant echoed. The troops turned away from us and swung into a protective arc, now leveling their bayonets at the advancing throng of Chinese. The lieutenant approached warily. I glared at him. "We are here to help the Allied prisoners," I said. "The war is over. Send your soldiers across the field and establish a perimeter. Then bring your trucks here to load our supplies."

The officer spoke again, a quieter tone, but still angry.

"He's asking about your authority," Ralph said, his voice grave.

"I'll discuss all this with his commander, once these supplies are loaded."

I turned away the instant I had spoken, the essence of the haughty, conquering officer. Sweat rolled down inside my shirt. My heart was pumping in my throat.

Once more, Ralph relayed my words with suitable invective. The Japanese trotted their skirmish line back across the field now, forcing the civilians to retreat. The sun was like a jackhammer. I licked my cracked lips, gazing at the sea. After a long while, I heard the trucks approach to load our supplies. We had won our first engagement of this strange campaign.

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THE Japanese were garrisoned in the more substantive group of buildings I'd seen from the air, about two miles inland. We were escorted to their company headquarters in a long, brick building with an overhanging tiled roof and introduced to a tall naval infantry captain named Yamasaki. I waited until he bowed before offering a perfunctory salute. Our orders prohibited "fraternization with the enemy" and called for all contacts with the Japanese to be "official, courteous, and impersonal." So I avoided niceties and stood silently waiting for the captain to explain the local situation. He said he was number two in command of the Hashio naval fortifications which had control of the prisoner compound. His superior, Colonel Aoyama, was absent, but the captain would contact him at once.

We were escorted to the officers' dayroom beside the headquarters office and offered green tea from a thermos. There was a sink and a bar of soap, so I had the men wash off the sweaty dust from the drop zone and brush

their uniforms. I stood close to the office door, eavesdropping on the captain's phone call while Ralph whispered a running translation.

"Colonel," Yamasaki shouted into the phone, "the American major jumped near the camp in broad daylight. He says the war is over . . ." I could hear a tinny harangue on the other end of the phone line. "But, sir . . . the Americans landed in the middle of the day . . . the Major insists the war has ended . . ."

The Captain returned. Again, I waited for his bow. "The Colonel will arrive in early morning," he said. The Colonel, he added, was seeking permission from General Goga for us to visit the prison compound. "Until then, you must wait."

He led us to a nearby building, which was the unused hospital of the Mitsui Corporation, the contractor for the nearby iron and copper mines. There were a latrine and shower and a row of short cots. Outside, the troops who'd carried our cargo bundles inside had now taken up positions around the building. They still had fixed bayonets. I decided not to argue.

By now, it was almost sunset and none of us had had much sleep in the past two days, what with the flood in Kunming and the frantic preparations. A shy Chinese cook brought several aluminum pots of food—soup and a spicy stirfry of prawns and vegetables. A porcelain basin was heaped with steaming rice.

When he'd gone, Len Woods stuck a fingertip into each pot to taste. "You think they'd try to poison us?"

I looked out the open shutters. The guard had been reinforced by three burly NCOs with stubby submachine guns. Obviously, if they wanted to kill us, they had plenty of firepower for the job. Poison seemed unlikely.

"Hell," Tony said. "I'm hungry." He grabbed a rice bowl and dug in with his GI spoon.

The food was delicious. With darkness, I assigned a guard roster, then rolled out a blanket on a cot and lay down to sleep. I was almost as exhausted as I'd been in the haystack in Corrèze. Just before slipping into sleep, I heard the quiet murmur of the guards outside. Maybe, I thought, this operation won't be so tough after all.

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At exactly 0900, Colonel Aoyama and his staff arrived in a polished Ford sedan with a right-hand steering wheel. I'd already staked claim to the small headquarters office and had taken chairs on the far side of the conference table with Ralph, Len Woods, and my other staff officers, John Bradley and Charlie Walker. I knew that this side of the table, which faced the door, was the place of authority and honor in Oriental protocol. I wanted to make it clear that we, not the Japanese, were running this meeting.

The Colonel bristled and actually hissed when he saw the arrangements. Again, I was slow in returning the enemy salute. Then I began firing a series of quick practical questions at Aoyama, cutting through their attempts at polite chitchat. I wanted to know about transportation and medical capabilities, food supplies, and the condition of the local airstrip. He tried to deflect my questions by claiming he had "just received word" of the pending surrender—which he called the "unexpected end of the war." He also claimed that his headquarters in Haikou on the north coast had advised him the *we*, the Allies, would provide medical supplies for any "unfortunately ill" prisoners.

After a frustrating hour, I called a halt and demanded to speak directly with the POWs' senior officers. This delegation arrived in the same Ford sedan twenty minutes later. Len and I went to the porch to greet them. We had trouble containing our emotions.

The men who tottered up the three brick steps were little more than skeletons. Lieutenant Colonel W. J. R. Scott, the senior Australian, was a tall, balding man in a ragged, mildewed uniform. When I shook his hand, I felt the tendons roll over bone. There was simply no flesh, no muscle tone to his limbs. Commander Jager and Lieutenant Colonel Kapitz, the Dutch officers, were even more skeletal. Jager's face was a scarred skull, his milky blue eyes wide and unfocused. The Dutch colonel's neck and arms were ripply with old overlapping scar tissue, an indication that he'd been repeatedly beaten with a whip or wooden baton. As they entered the office, I became aware of a faint, sweet-sour odor, something like fermentation, which I soon recognized as the stench of starvation.⁸

I brusquely ordered Aoyama and his staff to a row of chairs and gave the table to the Allied officers. Again, Aoyama hissed, but didn't voice his outrage. Ignoring the Japanese, I turned my attention to Scott and the Dutch officers.

They had come prepared. Scott presented a detailed troop roster, printed with pencil on a scrap from a paper cement sack. There were, he said, a total of 260 Australian prisoners, of whom 80 were in the camp hospital, plus 267 Dutch, of whom 91 were hospitalized. Sixty-seven Australian soldiers and over 100 Dutch had died in captivity since their group arrived on Hainan from the Netherlands East Indies in November 1942, he said. Most had died in the previous nine months from malnutrition and beriberi. Nine had been killed when their work party was ambushed by Chinese bandits, and ten had escaped and were thought to be held by guerrillas in the mountains.

The gaunt Australian officer spoke slowly, with exaggerated clarity, as he relished an American cigarette. "We observed your parachute drop," he said. "Fine show. Three days ago, the Japs told us to prepare for the arrival of an Allied medical team. They neglected to mention Japan had surren-

dered." He cast a disdainful glance toward Colonel Aoyama. "We waited for you last night . . ."

Aoyama started to speak, but Ralph ordered him silent.

"This morning," Scott continued, "they ripped down the electric fence around the prison cage. I expect that's why you were detained here."

"What electric fence?" I was having trouble containing my mounting rage.

"Four-forty volts," Scott said. "Quite deadly. They put it up in March. That's when they stopped the work parties and cut our rice ration to four ounces a day."

Charlie Walker was jotting notes. "Four ounces cooked or dry, sir?" he asked.

Again, Colonel Scott gazed at his Japanese counterpart before answering. "Cooked, if you can call it that. We were given the sweepings from their gristmill. Not the hulls themselves, mind you, but the broken polished kernels. The hulls would have had some nutrition at least. As it is . . ." His voice trailed off in midsentence. Over the days that followed I recognized this speech pattern among many prisoners, a natural survival mechanism that prevented them from detailing everyday horrible experiences.

"What were the work parties?" I asked.

Scott smiled, a death's-head grimace. He lit another cigarette and tried to compose himself. "Major," he began, "you have to realize we were brought here from Ambon Island as *convalescent* patients. Most of the men already had malaria and dysentery. The work details were heavy labor, seven days a week, dawn to sunset . . . forest clearing, road construction, building the coastal artillery batteries. When the men didn't work fast enough, they were beaten." All three Allied officers stared at the row of Japanese now. "They were beaten with pick handles, bamboo clubs, and steel pipes. The majority of my blokes have broken limbs. It's worse among the Dutch."

Charlie Walker was writing fast. Scott noticed this and withdrew a packet of stained paper scraps from his tunic pocket. "We've tried to keep a record of the brutality," he said, handing across the papers. "We'd like those back, of course."

"What are your immediate needs?" I was unable to even look at the Japanese now for fear of attacking them.

"Two of our lads died last night." Scott shook his head. "The beriberi cases are quite far gone. And some of the lads' dysentery is severe . . ."

I had heard enough. Standing up, I faced Colonel Aoyama squarely and pointed my finger at his face, a gross insult in Japanese etiquette. Ralph translated as I issued my orders. "Lieutenant Walker and our medical corpsman will return to the camp immediately with Colonel Scott. They will carry food and medical supplies from our present quarters. By 1400 hours, the Japanese will have delivered additional food and medical supplies for three

days." Aoyama showed signs of protesting, but I waved him silent. "The Japanese guards at the camp will leave the gates. From now on, no prisoner will bow or salute to a guard." I turned away from the Japanese. "That's it." Charlie and John Bradley were already on their feet. "Let's get moving."

We filed past the Japanese and onto the shady porch. In the distance, the corrugated iron roofs of the prison compound rippled in the heat. I waited for Aoyama to issue his first order. Finally, I heard his voice behind me, subdued, almost stricken. The war was over, and he had lost.

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WHILE my advance party went to the prison cage, Ralph and I consulted a map of the island with Colonel Aoyama, trying to locate the most practical evacuation point. He said the naval air station at Sanya, near the southern port of Yulin, had suitable "rest facilities" for the prisoners, as well as an airfield which could be made operational with minimum repairs. The port also had a passenger wharf. The train between Bakli Bay and Sanya was the safest means of transport, he said, the roads being subject to guerrilla attack. I ordered him to send word to Sanya to prepare the facilities and to arrange for the prisoners' rail transport there.

Then I took the rest of the team to the Hashio prison camp. A hot, sandy wind blew across the barren plain as we approached. We parked the truck near the crude pine-plank guardhouse and dragged open the barbed-wire gate. Despite the Japanese efforts to conceal their electric fence, they'd neglected to fill the post holes or remove the white porcelain insulators. Len Woods photographed this evidence. Just inside the gate we encountered an elaborate log-frame punishment rack, one of the few well-made structures in the entire camp. Here prisoners had been hung from a cross member and beaten to provide entertainment for the guards. Again, Len documented this evidence of brutality with his camera. The prison barracks were in three long, low sheds of rough, unpainted pine planks roofed with uneven sheets of rusty corrugated iron, riddled with holes. There were no windows or screens, but crude plank shutters could be raised for ventilation.

As we approached the huts, a cloying sweet stench met us. Flies rose in lazy clots. Colonel Scott had mustered his Australian officers near their shed, and several dozen enlisted men stood wavering in the shade waiting for us. None of them weighed more than a hundred pounds. All had deeply sunken eyes. Most had festering sores on their limbs and torsos. As I shook their hands, I was again aware of the brittle bones just beneath the skin. I walked the length of their hut, greeting men too weak to muster outside. They lay on stained jute sacking piled on a crude plank sleeping platform. In the flyblown shadows they stared up at me with streaming, luminous eyes. Charlie had distributed cigarettes and K-rations, but most of the men inside

were too stunned to eat or smoke. Away from the Japanese, Scott confirmed the earlier fears of the OSS: that the Japanese had originally planned to massacre the prisoners in the event of an American amphibious landing on Hainan.⁹

Colonel Scott led me to the hospital shed. Here the stench of dysentery and festering wounds was nearly overpowering. The patients lay on primitive bunks fashioned from crates and scraps of plywood, segregated by their affliction—the beriberi cases to one side, the men with dysentery isolated at the far end. Jim Healy and Tony Denneau were here, cleansing wounds and administering vitamin B₁ injections. The worst of the beriberi cases were grotesque. The men's bellies and limbs were swollen to elephantine proportions, their scrotums distended like terrible orange melons.

Outside, Colonel Scott gave me another folded scrap-paper document, this containing the evidence against the local Japanese "chief surgeon," Captain Ichiro Kikuchi, the prison's medical officer. He had systematically withheld treatment from the prisoners, diverting the vitamin B tablets he received for his own uses. Further, he saw himself as a nutritional expert who could calculate the absolute *minimum* amount of food necessary to prevent complete starvation, while maintaining enough strength in the prisoners to keep them working. On several occasions he visited the camp with colleagues and toured the barracks, jabbing their distended, fluid-heavy limbs and noting that Caucasians were more prone to malnutrition than their Chinese counterparts in the slave labor camp up the coast. Kikuchi took pleasure in taunting the sick prisoners who were too weak to join the forced labor parties. "*Shigoto nai, taberu nai*," he told them (no work, no eat).

In July 1943, Scott told me, Captain Doctor Kikuchi took part in a massacre of over 120 hapless Chinese laborers, who were bayoneted and beheaded to provide a diversion for the Japanese officers.

I had been en route to Burma when the Allied armies overran the German concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe. But the newsreels of these hellish places caught up to us in Kunming. Now I stood on the hard-packed mud of a camp every bit as cruel as Buchenwald or Dachau. The flies whined incessantly. Inside the huts, men moaned and babbled. Outside the wire, Japanese soldiers stared at us with fear and distaste. I swore that I would do my best to get these men out of this hellhole alive. I also vowed that I would do my best to see the Japanese responsible for this atrocity brought to justice.

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THE next morning, we had fifty Dutch prisoners strong enough to be moved, fifteen unconscious on makeshift litters, loaded aboard the three-car narrow-

gauge train for Sanya. I had Ralph Yempuku, John Bradley, and Tony Denneau with me. Len Woods would be in charge of the rest of the team in my absence. The little potbellied steam engine chugged out of the Bakli siding at 10:30 that morning. Half an hour later we had climbed from the dusty coastal plain to a cooler spur of jungled hills. As the train swayed along, I printed out a message for Kunming, which I hoped Tony could transmit from a radio in the Japanese naval headquarters at Sanya.

I was rereading the message when the engine's brakes shrieked and the train jumped from the tracks, lurching savagely to the right in a shower of gravel and steam. The sick prisoners moaned as they fell across the floor. We clambered from the cars to find a curved section of track detached at the lip of a small rise. I had ambushed enough trains in France to recognize the procedure. The Japanese engine crew pointed fearfully to the surrounding palm groves.

"Guerrillas," Ralph translated. "They're afraid of an attack."

We were easy targets, if there was an ambush team in the surrounding brush. And the only thing I could do to prevent an attack was to make it obvious we were Europeans. So I led several Dutch prisoners around the train, as if inspecting for damage. No shots came from the scrub jungle above the tracks.

It took hours for the repair engine to reach us, and we didn't arrive in Sanya until well after dark. But the Japanese were waiting for us with ambulances. The hospital facility on the naval base was crude by Western standards, but a paradise compared to the Hashio camp. Once we gave our orders to the Japanese medics, we met with the island's senior medical officer, a colonel named Miyao. He was eager to sit us down to a formal dinner, replete with gin and scotch—booty from Hong Kong. But I insisted my men eat at their own table and that the discussion be limited to official business.

At this point, a Major Arai, who served on General Goga's staff, came forward and bowed deeply. When, he asked, would I be able to discuss with the General arrangements for the formal surrender of Japanese forces on Hainan? When would American naval units arrive in Yulin?

I stared at this stocky marine major, carefully considering my response. There were only nine armed Americans on the island, and our security depended on the Japanese assumption that Allied forces were en route. It would have been wise to give the impression that a larger American unit would soon arrive to take charge. But I was still disgusted and furious at the Japanese treatment of their prisoners, particularly the reported massacres of interned Chinese civilian slaves.

"Representatives of the Chinese First Army," I said slowly, "will be here soon to take command. They will accept your surrender." I probably should

have kept this information to myself. The prospect of surrendering to the Chinese might have driven the Japanese to further resistance.

It was as if I had hit the man with a club. He bowed once more and hurried away to make his report. After five years of brutal occupation of Hainan, the Japanese had much to answer for to the Chinese authorities. Maybe, I thought, the prospect of surrendering to the Chinese might alleviate the condition of those poor civilians still in custody.

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THE next morning, the second trainload of sick Dutch POWs arrived with Jim Healy in attendance. While John Bradley worked with Healy getting them settled in the makeshift hospital, Tony and I sweated in the Japanese radio room, trying to use our crystal in their equipment. Around noon, Tony finally managed to jury-rig a set and contact Kunming on our emergency frequency. The Japanese equipment was so powerful, however, that the operators in Kunming refused to believe it was us. We had to go through our elaborate challenge-and-response procedure before they would agree to copy our coded message.

That afternoon we were taken to the Japanese naval hospital near the port to interview three American airmen who had been prisoners since March: Captain Merritt Lawlis, Lieutenant Jim McGuire, and Sergeant Ben Muller. The Japanese had them in a clean, comfortable ward with new mosquito nets and a thermos of tea at each bedside. There were even flowers in the room. A brief interview, however, revealed that this treatment was a sham. They'd each been injured badly when their planes were shot down, and the Japanese had refused to treat their wounds and burns. They had also been subjected to systematic beatings with clubs and pipes, "punishment" for Allied air attacks on Japan.¹⁰ After being moved to the naval compound at Sanya, they had been subjected to the same systematic starvation as the prisoners at Hashio. Two of the men downed with them had died of this treatment.¹¹ After satisfying myself they were now receiving decent medical care, I left to inspect the improvised POW hospital across the base.

Corporal Healy had taken charge of everyone, and even had Japanese NCOs sweeping the floors and emptying bedpans. He took me aside on a delicate matter. The senior Dutch doctor, Major Peiffer, had hoarded the medical supplies Healy had given him to administer to the sick Dutch patients. Apparently, the doctor couldn't believe they'd actually been freed. When I confronted him, he was incoherent. Obviously, the strain of captivity had driven him to irrational behavior. I had Healy give him a morphine shot and ordered that the doctor be relieved of his responsibilities. That

night a full trainload of Australians arrived. Unfortunately, I got word that things were not going as planned up at Hashio. Two more prisoners had died of malnutrition. The guerrillas were still sabotaging the train tracks, and the Japanese quartermaster, a Lieutenant Hirata, was blocking Len Woods's efforts in providing adequate food to the remainder of the prisoners, who were now housed in the Mitsui Corporation barracks.

I knew that I would have to return there soon. But I had problems here. Our radio schedule with Kunming the next morning was jammed. Tony suspected the jammer was in the Japanese radar installation in the building next door. Clearly, the enemy was beginning to chafe at the realities of defeat. A little after noon a Carpetbagger C-46 buzzed the airfield, flying a prearranged query pattern. We were supposed to reply with signal panels on the ground if the field was usable. But our Japanese liaison officer, Lieutenant Matsuoko, couldn't "locate" our car. By the time we got to the airfield, an American Army doctor, Lieutenant Tom Mitchell, had parachuted from the plane. Unfortunately, he was no jumper and dislocated his shoulder on landing. Almost as bad, two huge cargo nets of canned rations and shoes for the prisoners burst open in midair and the contents were splattered across the runway. Tony and I quickly signaled the pilot and he made a steep, fast approach and landed. Now we had another injured American on our hands. But Dr. Mitchell was tough. After Healy helped him pop his shoulder back in place, Mitchell refused a painkiller and got to work with the sick prisoners.

In my last message from Len Woods, I'd learned that the Japanese at Hashio were now openly defying his orders, refusing to allow the team access to the nearby compound for Chinese prisoners. At one meeting, Aoyama claimed the Chinese were well-paid "volunteers," with whom the Japanese mixed well. Colonel Scott confronted him on this point, demanding he account for the Chinese slave laborers whom Scott had personally seen the Japanese massacre. Aoyama refused to answer. More ominous, the Japanese refused Woods's repeated demands to inspect their supply dumps. The enemy was still armed and our control up there was tenuous at best.

I waited for the last POW train from Hashio all next morning, only to be informed that it had been derailed once more by guerrillas and forced to return to Bakli Bay. That afternoon, two C-47s landed at the airstrip and unloaded a Recovery Team of nineteen Americans, led by a Service of Supply lieutenant colonel named Charles Andrus. He was an elderly, gray-ing, rear-echelon type with the prissy manner common to his organization. My first meeting with him didn't go well. Why, he demanded, hadn't I had vehicles waiting for them at the strip? He wouldn't accept my explanation that Kunming had never announced their arrival.

While Andrus and his staff wasted hours setting up their personal quarters,

I toured the naval port to determine the kinds of vessels it could handle for the eventual POW evacuation. When I got back to the hospital I discovered Andrus was further annoyed because I had been operating on my own without his authorization. I saw that it was going to be hard working with this officious noncombatant.

Another C-47 arrived with supplies from Kunming, and we convinced the crew to remain overnight due to the late hour. If the train track to Bakli Bay was not repaired by morning, I was determined to bum a lift on the returning plane and jump into Hashio alone to confront Aoyama. Ralph Yempuku asked if he would have to parachute with me, brave as ever, but clearly not thrilled with the prospect. He mentioned that one of Colonel Aoyama's Formosan aides spoke enough English to translate simple orders, so I told Ralph to stay at Sanya and work with Colonel Andrus, who had neglected to include an interpreter in his entourage.

The next morning, the track was still blocked, so I jury-rigged a parachute, using an Air Force seat pack worn over my original static-line chute harness, to which I attached my reserve. We reached Bakli Bay around 0800 and I had the pilot throttle back about 1,500 feet above Japanese headquarters. I jumped in a tucked-up position, counted one-thousand, two-thousand, then jerked the ripcord. The chute opened hard and I managed to steer the canopy to the edge of the enemy headquarters compound.

Len Woods was there to meet me. An hour later, we had Colonel Aoyama's full attention. I simply told him we would shoot any Japanese soldier or officer who blocked our passage in any way whatsoever. He tried to imply that Len Woods had made "impossible" demands and had conducted himself improperly, drunkenly consorting with local Chinese women. This was absolute slander. I told him as much. End of discussion.

Two more Australian prisoners had died in the night, despite the treatment Healy had arranged. It was imperative to get the remaining survivors down to Sanya.

But first, Peter Fong suggested we tour the Chinese prisoners' compound, so that I could see their conditions with my own eyes. If the makeshift hospital at the Hashio camp had been some kind of purgatory, the Chinese "hospital" was absolute hell. Dead and dying patients lay on platforms, covered with flies and excrement. There was no running water and little food, yet several emaciated nurses did what they could. But the night before, three drunken Japanese soldiers had broken in, severely beating prisoners with clubs and rifle butts, and torturing one dying man with lit cigarettes held to the soles of his feet.¹²

When I returned to Hashio, I left a written order for Aoyama stating he would be held personally responsible by Allied headquarters for any additional outrage. I didn't add that his name was already high on the list of

war criminals to be indicted as soon as possible. Of the 100,000 civilian internees from Hong Kong who had been enslaved on the Hainan mining project, fewer than 20,000 were still alive. I was confident the Chinese authorities would find a suitable punishment for him.

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WE made it back by train to Sanya late that night. John Bradley took me aside to report that Colonel Andrus had ordered all American officers to attend a formal dinner given by the senior Japanese staff the night before, an affair that clearly transcended the bounds of "fraternization" as outlined in our orders. During this banquet, Andrus—who had never heard a shot fired in anger—toasted the enemy and announced that the Japanese had proved to be "a worthy foe," and that the Americans were "deeply grateful for the cooperation" we'd received on Hainan, which was better, he added, than that he'd received from the Chinese, who were supposed to be our allies. He also announced that Colonel Miyao would remain in charge of the hospital, even if other American medical personnel arrived. Finally, Andrus brought a bottle of whiskey from his own comfortable quarters and personally served drinks to the Japanese officers. As the liquor flowed, Andrus told the enemy that, had they followed their attack on Pearl Harbor with an invasion of California, it would be the Japanese, not the Americans, who had won the war.

I was outraged.¹³ I demanded an immediate meeting with Andrus and the senior Japanese staff. When we were assembled I detailed the atrocities I had seen at Hashio and told Colonel Sato, the Japanese adjutant, that Aoyama should be removed from his command. Andrus was furious, but kept silent. After the meeting, he wanted to know my date of rank and I admitted that my major's commission was a temporary operational expedient. He grinned like a shark, obviously hatching some plan.

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OVER the next few days we got definite word of several Allied evaders in the mountains. With Peter Fong's help, I drew up some handbills in English and Chinese, requesting contact with Allied personnel still in hiding. We tied these handbills to bottles of Atabrine, and each bottle was attached to a twelve-inch pilot parachute. Then we took a C-47 ride around the island, dropping the messages into the village markets in the highlands, where we knew the guerrillas were located.

When I got back from this mission, Andrus dropped his own bombshell. He'd issued written instructions to the Japanese to no longer obey orders

from me or my officers. Further, he said he was taking control of all OSS supplies and equipment. When he explained this, he made a point of addressing me as "Captain."

I got my men together and suggested we prepare to leave whenever there was room on a plane out. The next afternoon, however, Andrus had to backpedal. We received word that a large group of Indian, Dutch, and Australian prisoners, as well as one American airman, had been located in a mountain camp of Chinese Nationalist guerrillas. The guerrillas did not trust the Japs and would release the evaders only to an American officer. Andrus came to ask my advice on this matter, noting that the Japanese would not provide an armed escort along the booby-trapped trails through the bandit country. I suggested Andrus take a car and a truck and go up there himself, the map references being easy enough to read. Andrus fussed, then turned to me. "I really don't have sufficient personnel on hand to do the job," he said lamely.

Sufficient personnel! His staff had swollen with each C-47 from the mainland. But if I was going to pull his chestnuts out of the fire, I'd do it in style. Andrus's personal jeep had arrived by plane the day before. I told him I'd need that vehicle for the trip. He had no choice but to comply.

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THE trip up to the guerrilla camp proved tense but uneventful. When we got there, the well-armed Nationalist guerrillas expressed surprise that we'd made it through the Chinese Communist-held territory without ambush. That night we attended a banquet with appropriate military fanfare in a thatched-roof longhouse. Outside, squat Li tribesmen beat on hollow logs and danced beside a bonfire. The guerrilla leader, General Wong Yee, insisted we toast all twenty-odd Allied powers with coconut-shell cups of some kind of moonshine. The next day, there were very hungover Allied personnel jolting down the mountainside toward Sanya.

When I got back, the British destroyer *Queenborough* stood off Yulin harbor. The first contingent of Dutch and Australian POWs were loaded aboard for evacuation to Hong Kong. I told Len Woods to get the team ready to move out. But I still had business in the hills. We'd gotten a note from another downed American pilot, Lieutenant Walter Wyatt, who was holed up with the Communist guerrillas on this side of the island. They'd seen our passage the day before and wanted an escort for the American. After several hours of palaver in the Chinese market, it was agreed Peter Fong would fetch Wyatt back with a car.

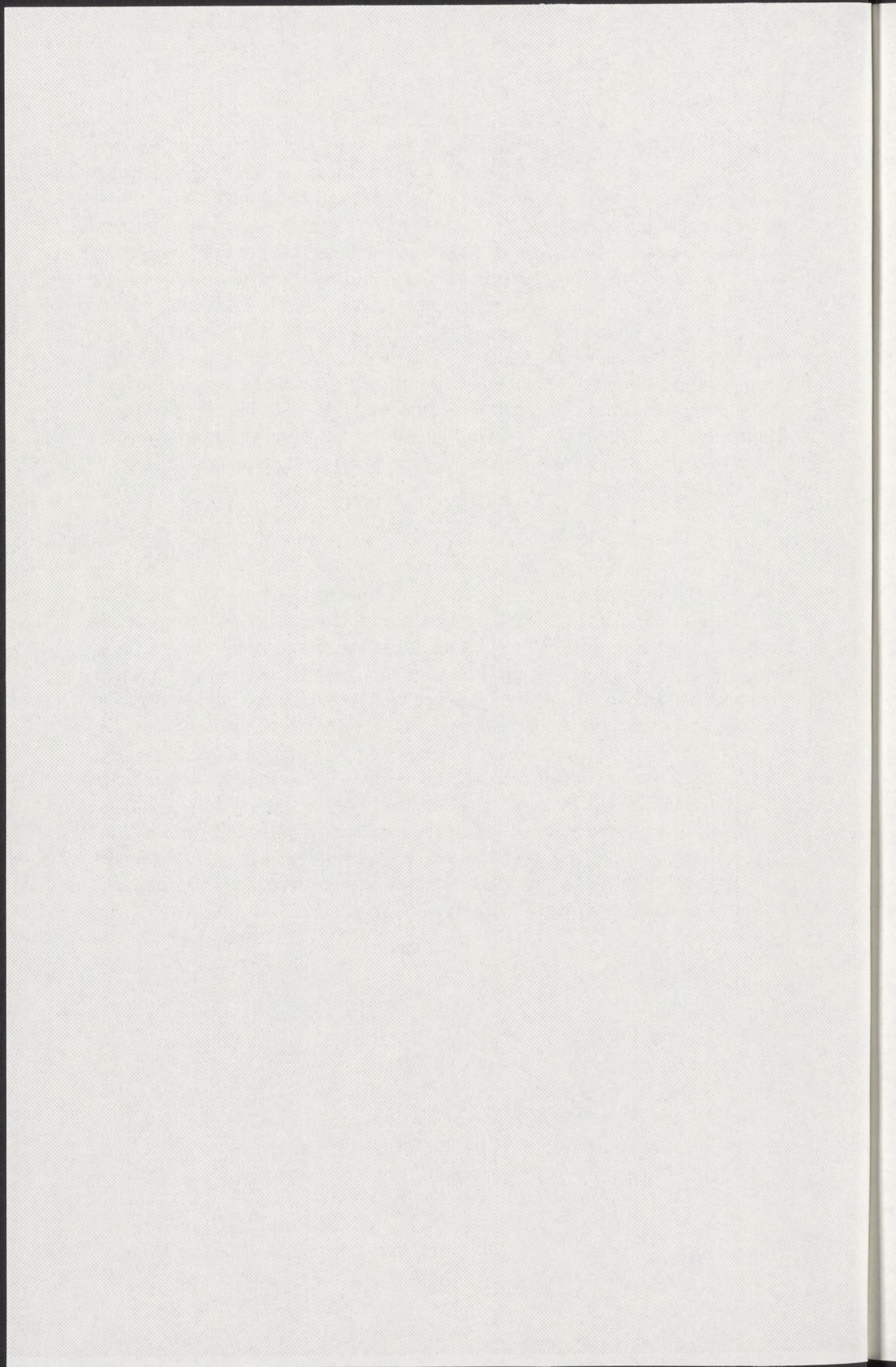
My final business on the island involved Lieutenant Jim McGuire, the B-25 pilot recuperating from his brutal treatment in Sanya naval hospital.

McGuire told us one of his captors, Major Arai, had threatened him with execution earlier that year, adding that McGuire was to be publicly beheaded, the same fate meted out to five of his squadron mates who'd been among nine airmen captured that winter. Ralph, Peter Fong, and I found several Chinese who confirmed that Americans had been publicly executed after being paraded through the streets of bombed-out towns. When we confronted Major Arai with this evidence, he at first denied all knowledge of any such incident, then claimed any talk of execution was a lie and that mention of "nine American airmen" had simply been propaganda printed in a local newspaper. We demanded copies of the newspaper, which he reluctantly produced. They contained no mention of American prisoners. Arai then changed his story, claiming he'd been away from the island when the incident occurred. We turned his name over to the officer in charge of war crimes investigations.

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ON the evening of September 16, Ralph Yempuku, Len Woods, John Bradley, Arnold Breakey, Charlie Walker, and I sat on wicker chairs on the terrace of the Peninsula Hotel, overlooking the broad, twilight panorama of Hong Kong harbor. For the first time in almost five years, all the city's lights were lit. The British Pacific Fleet had gathered to celebrate victory. As far as we could see, aircraft carriers, battle wagons, cruisers, and destroyers stood in gray ranks against the green hills of Hong Kong island. At 9 P.M. the fireworks display began. For an hour illumination rounds, star shells, and parachute flares lit the night sky. We sat sipping our icy drinks, not flinching at the explosions, as we had at so many other, less benevolent pyrotechnics for so many years. The long war was finally over. I gazed past the candy-pink glare of the flares into the somber darkness of the South China Sea, wondering what road lay ahead.





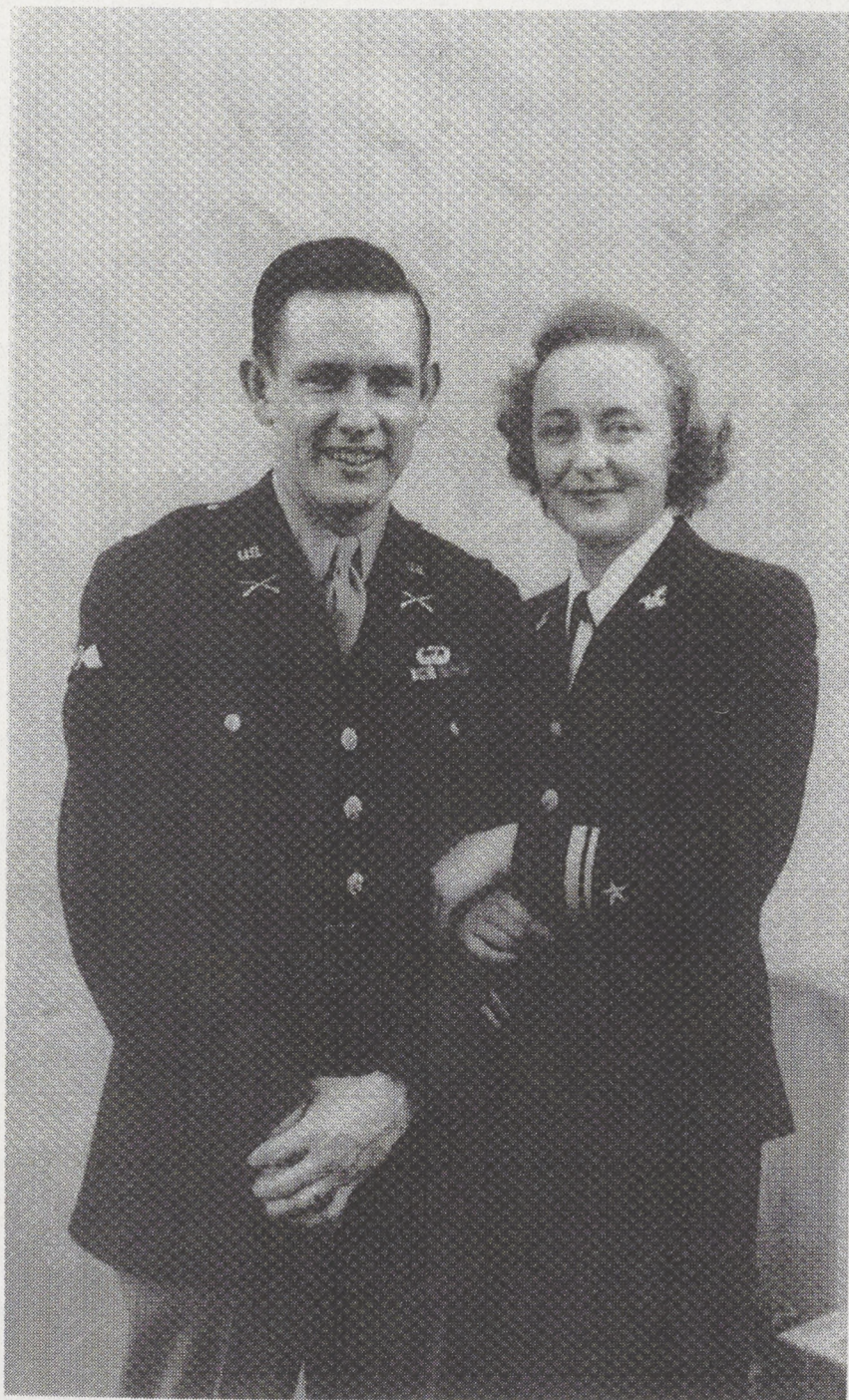
1943. Lt. Singlaub, static line hooked up, becoming airborne qualified at Fort Benning, Ga.



1944. Jedburgh team is briefed before being parachuted into France. This "team," typical in its international makeup, was a composite of members of other teams and was being photographed for a documentary. Lt. Singlaub is second from right.

1944. OSS Jedburgh team in France. Lt. Singlaub (left, with hand on hip) is interrogating a German captured by his Maquis troops.



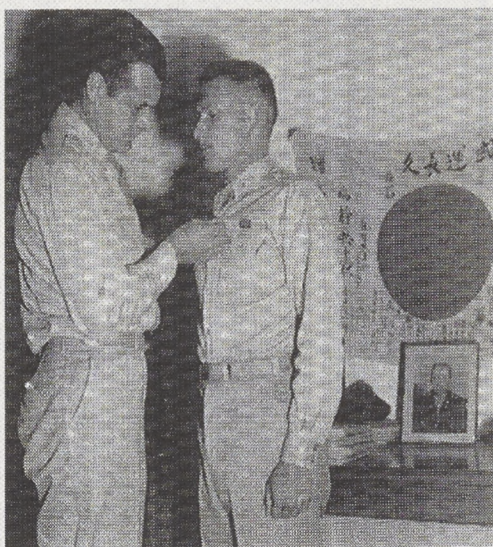


1945. With wife Mary, in her Wave uniform.



5 1945. On the DZ on Hainan Island. OSS POW rescue team has just landed and is collecting supplies. Singlaub (on right) refused to negotiate with Japanese lieutenant sent out to capture the team.

1945. OSS headquarters, Kunming, China. Col. Hefner decorating Capt. Singlaub. Note the picture of Gen. Wedemeyer on the table.





OSS, Kunming. Singlaub observes Nationalist forces during aborted rebellion.

CIA, Manchuria. Capt. Singlaub with the trusty L-5 spotter plane, flown by Sgt. Clayton Pond. Note the improvised extra fuel tank on the strut.





CIA, Manchuria. Singlaub in village with German residents of the area.

Korea, 1953. Maj. Singlaub at his battalion command post, using a handy tree branch as a cane while his broken ankle is in a cast.





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Outpost Harry, 1953. Maj. Singlaub (left), Gen. Dunkleberg (center), and Lt. Dan Foldberg (right).



Korea, 1953. Maj. Singlaub receives the Silver Star from Gen. George Smythe for leading the counter-attack on Outpost Harry.

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Korea, Feb. 1953, Main Line of Resistance. Maj. Singlaub (left), Col. Richard Stilwell (center), Lt. Dillard, Lt. Foldberg, Sgt. Arney discuss the artillery support for Outpost Harry.