

# Behind Japanese Lines in Burma

## *The Stuff of Intelligence Legend*

**Edited by Troy J. Sacquety**

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*Historical Note: On April 14, 1942, William Donovan, as Coordinator of Information (forerunner of the Office of Strategic Services), activated Detachment 101 for action behind enemy lines in Burma. The first unit of its kind, the Detachment was charged with gathering intelligence, harassing the Japanese through guerrilla actions, identifying targets for the Army Air Force to bomb, and rescuing downed Allied airmen. Because Detachment 101 was never larger than a few hundred Americans, it relied on support from various tribal groups in Burma. In particular, the vigorously anti-Japanese Kachin people were vital to the unit's success. By the time of its deactivation on July 12, 1945, Detachment 101 had scored impressive results. According to official statistics, with a loss of some 22 Americans, Detachment 101 killed 5,428 Japanese and rescued 574 Allied personnel.[1] The unit's accomplishments garnered a Presidential Unit Citation and helped to prove to the United States military the worth of clandestine and special operations units.*



Eifler, in 1921 at age 15, in the Philippines with an Army aerial photography unit. He was discharged two years later when his true age was discovered.

*Detachment 101's first chief, Carl F. Eifler, was the stuff of intelligence legend. Later dubbed the "most dangerous colonel," Eifler was a burly, athletic man who used his brains as nimbly as his brawn. He was a former Los Angeles policeman, customs agent in Mexico, and Army Reserve officer, who had known the commander of the American military liaison mission in China, General Joseph Stilwell.*

*Donovan recruited him to run Detachment 101 when Stilwell insisted on having an officer he trusted in that position. Eifler, in turn, assembled the original members of the Detachment for a mystery assignment, and soon they were all on board ships bound for India. Detachment 101 began working with the Kachins behind enemy lines in Burma in December 1942.*

*Late in 1943, Eifler needed to re-establish contact with one of the Detachment's isolated bases—Mission Forward—headed by Maj. William C. Wilkinson. The following letter, found in the National Archives, is a trip report by Colonel Eifler to Carl Hoffman, head of OSS activities in the China-Burma-India theater. It describes Eifler's journey to Mission Forward and the fate of the first aircraft owned by Detachment 101.[2] The letter bears witness to the extreme difficulty of clandestine operations in Burma during World War II and illustrates how much the OSS had to rely upon local allies.*

*In italics are insertions by the editor for clarification or spelling corrections, leaving largely intact the letter as it was hand typed by Col. Eifler in 1943.*

November 4, 1943

Dear Carl,

The following will give you some idea of my little excursion into Burma. As you know, there was some doubt for a while as to whether I would get the Piper Cubs or not. One of the planes was finally delivered to me in Calcutta, but prior to the time that it was assembled, the Navy put a stop order on it being assembled. A few wires back and forth between you and me, and this problem was another that could be placed in the file marked "solved." I then ordered the plane assembled.

I arrived in Calcutta the latter part of September, and made arrangements with the C.N.A.C. [*China National Aviation Corporation*] to furnish me a pilot to check me out on the plane. I was overdue in Burma to meet Major Wilkinson, and was anxious to get going. On the other hand, I knew that I had not flown for a number of years, and there was too much at stake for me to take chances with the plane. A young pilot [*David Majors*] who had every known license or certificate in Aviation to fly any land or sea plane, who was a former instructor in the Army and in civilian life, was assigned to check me out, and fly the plane to Assam [*in India*].

I did not want to waste time in Calcutta, so after one flight of half an hour merely to get the feel of the plane, we checked out for Assam. We checked weather prior to the time that we left Calcutta, and there was a low-pressure area through which we had to pass. However, we felt that we could skirt around the side of it, and make Assam okay. Not having any radio equipment in the plane, we were not aware that the area moved faster than we contemplated until we got into it. It was one of the toughest bits of flying that I have had in my life. The plane, being light, was tossed about at the will of the elements. At one time we found ourselves blind flying 400 feet from the ground with no blind flying instruments. But Majors was equal to the task, and brought us through okay, although he states that he never cares to go through a similar bit of flying again. We were the only plane in five days to come through that storm from Calcutta to Assam, and that, Mister, is saying something, because all planes out here are equipped for instrument flying. Majors worked with me for a couple of days, and checked me out on the plane. However, in the meantime, he became quite interested in my mission, and I became quite interested in him. Though to this day he does not know exactly what the mission was, he knew that I intended to fly into the mountains of Burma and land the plane. I could see that it was to my advantage to have a pilot more experienced than myself in this initial flight, and finally propositioned him to go with me. He accepted so quickly that I had no chance to

back out, even had I desired to.

## Off to Burma

On the second of October, we left our headquarters for Fort Hertz [*last Allied bastion remaining in Burma*]. The weather was not too good, but by flying between, around, under, and over the clouds—we could not take a chance on entering any of them for they might have had a rock center—we finally found a pass and cleared it at an altitude of 10,400 feet. If anyone had been standing on the side of the mountain as we passed by, I'm quite sure I could have reached out and shook hands with him, so steep were the mountains that rose on either side of the plane. But by playing tag with the clouds and winding about the peaks, we finally saw the plains of Patao beneath us. We landed just before dark, and walked the two miles to our headquarters. The [*Kachin*] Levies furnished a guard for the plane, and we spent a comfortable night in Fort Hertz with Major Aitken. The following morning the weather was not too good. We wired headquarters to wire Wilkinson to build a fire on either end of the field, and to give us hourly weather reports. Our radio communication, I am sorry to say, was not the best. By 10 o'clock in the morning we had had no contact with Wilkinson, and the weather was closing in. Finally at 12 o'clock I decided to make a try without establishing contact, telling the boys in a laughing manner that if we weren't back before dark they would know that we were down someplace.

We took off. I was navigating and Majors was flying. We were on the beam all the way, and passed to the side of the temporary field built by Wilkinson by approximately half a mile. It was so situated that it could not be seen from where we were, and we missed it. However, after traveling some ten miles beyond, realizing that we were too far south, we turned about and started searching the area. In a short time we located the field. I assure you that it didn't look too good. Neither Wilkinson nor any of the natives that had been working with him had any idea about building a field, but they had done their best. The field was built in a box canyon. There was only one approach, and that was not a straight one, either in landing or taking off. One would have to bank just a few feet above the ground and make a turn in taking off, then almost immediately after the bank go into figure "i's" and attempt to gain altitude. Of course losing altitude could be done by slipping [*sic*]. I hesitated a couple of minutes. It was necessary that I talk to Wilkinson. I asked Majors what he thought of it. He said, "Not too good, Colonel. We can get down, and I think we can get off, but it's gonna be close." Well, to make a long story short, it had to be done, so I said put her down.



On customs duty with the Army in Hawaii, 1937. Eifler is second from left.

We got in okay, but we found the field in even worse condition than it appeared from the air. There had been rain, and the field was soft, and instead of being flat, one half of it sloped downward and the other half sloped upward. There was a knoll a few hundred yards just beyond the end of the field from which the tall trees had been cut, but brush still six to eight feet high was standing. While I discussed plans with Wilkinson, Majors carefully looked over the area, and twice flew the plane off the field. He then suggested that we clear the knoll upon the end of the field, which would give us an additional six to eight feet clearance [*needed for liftoff with a second person on board*]. This we did. We had been on the ground four hours. My business with Wilkinson was completed. The knoll was cleared. The time arrived to leave.

Then came the takeoff. We knew it was going to be close, but did not think it would be as close as it was. We started from the far end of the field, with two men on either side of the plane pushing to help get a quick start. We used the entire 1500 feet of the runway, and then pulled it into the air, but my additional weight was just too much. I cannot describe the feeling that I had when I realized we were going to crash, and Majors said to his dying day he would not get over his surprise. But we didn't have long to wait. The wheels struck a marshy spot, and I assumed the landing gear was wiped off at that time. However, I am sure I would not be able to swear to this. The next moment the plane dove head-on into the knoll. We came to a sudden and violent stop. Both of us sat there for approximately twenty seconds without moving. I am sure I don't know whether I was stunned or just surprised that I was not hurt. After approximately 20 seconds [*when*] neither of us had moved an eyelash, Majors, with a very quick motion reached up and snapped off the switch, and I started to laugh, for if the plane was going to catch fire it would have been on fire by then. That broke the tension, and we asked each other if we were hurt. In both cases the answer was in the negative, although an hour or so later I noticed my leg was cut, and my mouth was swollen where evidently I had struck it against the back of Majors' seat.

## Taking Disaster in Stride

Well, there is no use crying over spilt milk. The natives immediately began throwing brush over the plane to camouflage it from the air. Majors and I walked back to the native shack where Wilkinson had his temporary headquarters, and prepared to spend the night.

Majors took the crack-up very hard. It was the first time that he had crashed a plane, and a plane to him is like the first-born to the average newly-wed bride. He swore that if it was the last thing he ever did he would make up for it some way. Wilkinson managed to serve a very delightful dinner, and Majors sat through the meal marveling, saying he knew damn well that if he ever got back to the States and told of cracking up behind the Jap lines, no one was going to believe that the first night he had a five-course dinner with everything that can be purchased at the Waldorf-Astoria, including soup, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, peas, coffee and dessert. Majors' shoes, while being in much better condition than mine, were not too good, and he had an additional pleasant surprise when Wilkinson furnished him with a pair of G.I. shoes that were exactly his size. He went into fits of laughter and marveled that though he had been out in this area for quite some time, and was making sufficient money to purchase anything that he wanted, he had been unable to purchase a pair of shoes like the ones Wilkinson had just given him, and he had tried in every city in India and China to purchase just such a pair. Later on in the evening he grew thoughtful, and after being quiet for some time, he said to me, "Colonel, how are we gonna get through the Jap lines?" I told him we weren't, that we were going to go around them. "You know where they are then?" he asked. I said, "I do," and he replied, "Thank God for that."

We spent a comfortable night with Wilkinson. Of course there was no bedding, or beds. We kept our shoes on to keep the mosquitoes from biting our feet. I wrapped my head in a silk map that I carried, put one hand in my pocket, the other one in my shirt and under my arm, and I was not too badly eaten by mosquitoes. This, by the way, was how I slept each night on my way out. Majors managed to get his head wrapped in something after a while when the mosquitoes proved too bad. Wilkinson, of course, being an old hand in the jungle, was not bothered any more than I. The next morning, after a breakfast of fried eggs and coffee, with some dehydrated potato chips on the side; after having given final instructions to fix up the field, get the plane away from where it was lying, build a hanger for it on one side of the field, and prop it up on logs, so that we could ascertain the damage and repair it when we came back in [*ultimately, the plane proved beyond repair*]; and after a final check that everything was as it should be or as near as we could make it, we took to the heel and toes, and trekked 10 miles to Wilkinson's headquarters at Ngumla.

Dave [*Majors*] stated shortly after we started our march that the farthest that he had walked in the past few years was up the stairs in a hotel, and he never walked if there was an elevator handy. He decided that he would wear his new shoes. I suggested that the mountain trail wasn't a good place to break in new shoes, and after a while after we were on our way he decided I was right. By then he had a nice blister on his heel. I taped his feet for him the following morning, but for the balance of that day he was uncomfortable. The trip was a breeze for Wilkinson. I had not hit the trail in a couple of months, so the first 10 miles were not a breeze for me. They were damn near agony for Dave. On arriving at Wilkinson's shack, Dave went to bed promptly. Wilkinson and I, along with Father MacAlindon [*Wilkinson's assistant*], shot the breeze. We discussed local conditions and debated as to the probable plans of the

Japanese in that area.

## Lessons in Local Culture

I might tell you a bit about Father MacAlindon. I have two Catholic priests in the organization, Father MacAlindon and Father Stuart. When the Japanese forces pushed up into Northern Burma, both of these priests stayed in the hills. Father MacAlindon was the unofficial headman of the Triangle, and his headquarters were one day's march from where we were sitting that afternoon. Father Stuart, on the other hand, had been in the vicinity of Sumprabum when the Japanese moved forward and occupied that portion of Burma. In order to tell you about Father MacAlindon, I will first have to tell you a bit about Father Stuart, and before I can tell you about Father Stuart, I will have to tell you a bit about the customs of the hills. Now this particular section of the hills did not bow to the rule of the British until approximately 1935, at which time the last of the Kings, or Headmen as we call them, agreed to give up human slavery, and pay taxes to the Crown. Of course, the fact that the tax collector came through with a body of soldiers might have had a bit to do with his decision to pay the taxes, I'm not quite sure about that. However, law and order did come to the hills in 1935.



American and Burmese recruits training for behind-the-lines service with Detachment 101.

However, prior to the time that the white man attempted to regulate the lives of the natives, a popular pastime in these particular hills was a blood feud. Some years before the Japanese invasion, a native policeman in the execution of his duties shot and killed a Kachin of another family. Families in the hills, by the way, often occupy large areas, and become almost tribes. Due to the British influence in the hills at the time this policeman shot the Kachin mentioned, no action was taken by his family. However, immediately that the Government, as it is usually referred to in the hills, was driven out by the Japanese, these old blood feuds broke out. In the case of the above-mentioned policeman, he had died leaving no son. His wife passed on her way. The closest relative was a cousin some eighth or ninth removed. Two of the relatives of the Kachin killed by the policeman visited the policeman's eighth or ninth cousin, and went to work for him. One day while working in the rice paddy, one of the two asked the cousin of the policeman for his *daw* (a *daw* being the type of knife used by the natives in these hills). Upon receiving the *daw*, the cousin then being unarmed, the two Kachins jumped him and slashed his stomach open. The cousin, fighting back, succeeded in driving off his attackers and making

his way to his hut, where Father Stuart was called to take care of him.

Now a bit about Father Stuart. When the British retreated in Northern Burma, Father Stuart decided to stay with his flock. The fact that he had been unable at that time to convert any of the Kachins to Catholicism had not in any way dampened his enthusiasm for his mission in life. After the British had left and he heard the Japs were advancing, he decided that perhaps a bold move on his part would be the best, so he walked down the highway until he met the advancing troops. Picking the most imposing figure upon the best horse, and rightly surmising that this was the leader of the Japanese troops, he walked up to him, took the bridle of the horse in his hand and stopped it, and demanded of the rider, "Are you Chinese?" The Japanese officer looked at him, and thoroughly disgusted, turned his head and spat over his shoulder, and said, "Are you English?" The Father, mimicking the Jap, looked at him in utter disgust, turned his head, spat over his shoulder, and said nothing. When the question was repeated, he denied being English, and stated that he was an Irishman, of which "begorra" he is, but from Northern Ireland. The Jap got off his horse, drew two half moons on the ground, and, pointing to one, he said, "this is England," and to the other, "this is Ireland. Where is your home?" Father Stuart unhesitatingly placed his finger in the southernmost part of the half moon representing Ireland. The Major was not completely satisfied, and wanted to shoot the Father. However, there was a young lieutenant with the troop who was a Christian, the Father learned afterwards, and he spoke up in the Father's behalf, and the Major withheld his decision at that time, although later on he did order the Father shot. The Lieutenant, however, sent warning to the Father, and prior to the time that he could be arrested, he escaped into the jungle.

But I'm getting ahead of my story, and I had better revert back again to the Kachin who had his stomach cut open. Prior to the time that the Father arrived to nurse him, someone poured a bottle of iodine into his intestines. His death was lingering, not very nice, although it was hurried a bit by his enemies, which again forces me to divert to the Kachin custom. Now, in a blood feud, when a member of one family has killed the member of another, it is the right of the victor's family to sack the household of the loser, and so in due course of time, while Father Stuart was nursing the cousin of the policeman, the family of the two attackers arrived to claim their own from the granaries of the vanquished. There were some 30 of them, and discovering Father Stuart nursing their victim, and the supposed dead victim still alive, they proceeded to drive the Father into the jungles and finish off the victim. Father Stuart was some miles from the cabin when he ran into Father MacAlindon. Now in my opinion, Father MacAlindon would have chosen a much better profession had he chosen the profession of a pugilist instead of the priesthood. He surely loves a fight. On hearing Father Stuart's story, he, being senior to Father Stuart, proceeded to admonish Father Stuart rather severely in the fact that he, a Catholic priest, would run from 30 armed natives, and, picking up a shotgun, he went to the cabin and drove the 30 natives into the hills.

A bit more about Father MacAlindon. When it was reported that the Japanese were marching upon the town which he had made his headquarters, he acquired some hand grenades that had been left back by the British, placed a shotgun in each window of his home, slept with an open box of hand grenades alongside his bed, and succeeded in keeping the natives closely enough united that no Japanese to this day has managed to reach the town of Kajitu, which was his headquarters. He was afterwards ordered out of the hills and back into the British lines by the British Government. Eventually, he and Father Stuart were sent into India, and it was here that I got my hands on them. After being indoctrinated to my perverted ideas of warfare, Father MacAlindon returned to the hills and has since been Major Wilkinson's assistant, while Father Stuart stayed with me at my headquarters and became an instructor in the arts that I teach.

Now to continue. We are back again in the shack on the side of the mountain at Ngumla. Headmen from various parts of the surrounding country, learning that I arrived, came forward. Through Father MacAlindon, they told me how glad they were that the Americans were looking after them, and they were sure that if the Japanese ever came that they would be forced, as their brothers who had been over-run by the Japanese had been forced before, to give food and men, and instead of being paid for it, they would be abused. Sitting on the floor with my legs crossed the same as they, I had the feeling that I was in some other place, and surely during some other age than the present one, for the guns they carried were muzzle loaders, and it was so unreal that I find a hard time properly describing the scene in words. I tried to play my part, however, and assured them that regardless of what happened, they would find men of my organization throughout the hills who would advise and help them.

Later on in the afternoon, one headman who had been run out of his village by the Japanese, he having killed the men who were sent to arrest him, came into the hut. Wilkinson and Father MacAlindon said that his story had not been checked, but apparently he was all right. I questioned him and Father MacAlindon gave me a notebook that apparently had been taken off the body of the policeman that had been killed by this headman at the time of his supposed arrest. This notebook had been translated by one of my boys, and notes in it indicated that this headman was to be arrested for helping a party of Americans. The party was described and was very similar to the group that originally went in on the railway line. Questioning him, it did not take me long to determine that he had helped Barnard and his group and is mentioned in my report of June first as one of the headmen who was given a Burma Government Certificate of Award and 200 chips by Major Barnard.[3] He, of course, was immediately accepted as a full-fledged member, placed on our payroll, and at the present time is operating on our behalf.

Wilkinson had a group of recruits learning the first principles of instinctive firing, so, during the course of the afternoon, I gave a demonstration. Unthinkingly, I used a U.D.M. instead of a tommy gun.[4] The popularity of the U.D.M. immediately rose and everyone wanted a U.D.M. The problem was settled by making it a leader's weapon. So now the rank and file have something else to work for.

## **Trials of the Trail**

Father MacAlindon sent a runner to the next day's stop, where there was a Chinese Major, requesting that I be loaned the Major's mule for the trip out. He also sent word to nearby headmen for two horses. The following morning three horses arrived. Kit was packed on one of them, *[with]* food for 11 days' march. Majors and I, riding the other two, started on our journey out. Wilkinson had a roll of film and took pictures which I have since developed, and I swear that I'm bigger than the horse. I'm quite sure that you'll get quite a kick out of the pictures and wonder how anyone of my size ever got on a horse that small or, for that matter, where a horse that small ever came from. I assure you, however, that it was a large horse for the hills.

The trek between Ngumla and Kajitu was more or less uninteresting; however, I felt sorry for the horse and walked a greater part of the way. About half way, Majors, riding ahead of me, pulled his horse to the edge of the trail to get around a mud puddle. The bank gave way and the horse fell down the side of the mountain, throwing Majors and wrenching his leg. I made him walk for about a half mile so that the leg wouldn't stiffen up on him. Arriving at Kajitu, we met the

Chinese Major and borrowed his mule. He asked me how far I wanted to use it and I told him to the British outpost at Laawnga. He visualized his mule being gone for two or three weeks, and I could see that he didn't like it; however, he was sufficiently in debt to Wilkinson so that he could not very well refuse me the mule.



Two Kachin guerrillas supporting Detachment 101 in Burma.

We continued, and just before dark, made camp about four miles north of Kajitu. It was on the side of a mountain near a native village. The bamboo shack in which we decided to spend the night had been built some years earlier by the Burma Public Works Department. I'm quite sure no one had stayed in it for quite some time. I stepped on the porch. The mountain fell away at a steep angle and it was a beautiful view. One could see the Mali Hka some miles away. The spot of the Mali Hka that could be seen from the porch was known to be occupied by Japanese troops. I leaned against the railing, and as I did so, heard a crack. I attempted to jump back but it was too late. The porch gave way beneath my weight and a few minutes later, I picked myself up from some thorn bushes on the side of the mountain. I was a bloody sight as I climbed back up to the cabin, though I wasn't hurt at all. My face was cut sufficiently so that it was bleeding quite profusely and both my hands were also cut. Majors was laughing like a fool and told me that he was now even with me for laughing at him when he had fallen off the trail that morning.

After washing the blood off my face and hands, we went into the shack and lay down for a bit of rest. Majors stated that he was feeling a bit sick, and in the next few hours, he was down with quite a heavy fever and I was afraid he had malaria. Sometime during the night, I was awakened from a sound sleep with the cry, "Eifler, there is somebody in the room, I've got him covered." I reached for my flashlight and also my gun, then realized how careless a man can become in this racket, for I had gone to sleep with my gun hanging on the wall and it was some feet from me. Neither could I find my flashlight; however, after a few moments, I located some matches and upon lighting a match, found both doors closed and no one in the room but Majors and I. He was sitting in the middle of the floor with a carbine clutched in his hands. I located my flashlight and went over and felt his head. It was quite hot and I naturally thought he had been having a delirious dream. He sensed my thoughts and angrily proclaimed that he had not been asleep and it was not his fever, but someone had come up on the porch and

started to push the door open. As they did so, he had grabbed the rifle and hollered for me. Undoubtedly, whoever it was had jumped off the porch and run, but Majors was sure someone had tried to get in. Seeing that I was still skeptical, he said, "Well, Colonel, somebody might have been trying to collect the price on your head." Though I admitted that that was possible, I still doubted it.

He was unable to sleep, he stated, because the mule that was tied at the corner of the building had been pounding the ground with his hoofs all night long. I went out, untied the mule from where it was tied, moved it about twenty yards, and retied it. While I was doing this, our guide came out. We were unable to speak to each other, but through sign language he indicated to me that the mule would break away unless it was properly tied. I assured him in same language that the mule was tied tightly; nevertheless, he checked my knots after I left. Regardless of this, the next morning the mule was gone. The guide and I held a conversation in our medium of sign language again and he informed me that the mule had pulled loose during the night. I couldn't see it, but surely the mule was gone. I instructed him to send a boy to Kajitu to return the mule.

Majors still had a fever, and stayed in bed, or what might be termed bed. At least he lay on the floor. There was nothing that I could do for him. I spent my time wandering about the place, practicing knife throwing, attempting to teach my Kachin guide to say "American airplane" and recognize the American, British, and Jap insignias on the planes. Numerous planes were passing overhead, but they were all ours. Around 10 o'clock in the morning I got tired of waiting, and taking Majors' horse, I started out for Kajitu. I hadn't traveled very far when my Kachin guide overtook me. Again we held our peculiar conversation, and it ended up by him saying that he would go *[instead]*. As I felt sorry for the horse, I let him go, although at the time that I did, I knew it was a mistake. Around 12:30 he returned along with the lad that he had sent to Kajitu early in the morning, along with a quart of Kachin beer in a bamboo container, but no mule. After some minutes, I determined that the Chinese Major had sent someone to the camp during the night *[and]* had stolen the mule. In order to get it again, another "chit" (a note) would have to be sent to the Chinese Major. In disgust, I hoisted Dave up on our remaining horse and took to the trail. I began wondering whether, after all, Dave wasn't right, and someone had tried to break in the night before. I was certain now that we had had a visitor, and I determined that when I got to the next radio, Wilkinson would be given orders to wipe that Chinese Major off his cooperation list.

About three p.m. we came to a large stream. We rested here for about half an hour, and then the natives ferried us across on a bamboo raft. One of the natives swam across with the horse. Picking up the journey from there, I continued walking, and by 5 p.m. had covered 14 miles of the journey. Dave stated that he was feeling better, and as I was tired, I rode the horse while Dave walked. An hour and twenty minutes later, Dave was making good time. The trail was sloping downward slightly. He hit a patch of wet earth, slipped, and re-hurt his leg, so I hoisted him back up on the horse and struck out. We reached our destination a little after 7 p.m. We had covered slightly better than 20 miles. We were staying the night in a Headman's house. It would be impossible for me to really describe a headman's house, but I'll try.

## **Hill Tribe Hospitality**

To begin with, *[headmen's houses are]* about 75 feet long by 30 feet wide. They are built off the

ground and stand anywhere from 5 to 15 feet off the ground, according to the contour of the terrain under them. They are divided into different compartments, each compartment being a complete house of its own. The Kachins are great spirit worshippers. In the old days, humans were sacrificed, I understand, but now buffalo, chickens, pigs, and other animals are used for sacrifices. The head of a sacrificed buffalo is kept inside the house as a permanent reminder to the spirits. This headman was evidently a wealthy headman, and his house was covered with buffalo heads. The walls were covered with spears, bow guns, with the traditional muzzleloader in a prominent spot. The floor was of bamboo. The walls at the side are but about four feet high. The roof in the center perhaps 20 feet, sloping with long overhanging eaves, so that from the outside, the house appears to have no walls at all. From the inside, the roof forms the walls more than the walls themselves. Fire is built directly on the floor of the hut. By building a box out of bamboo approximately four feet by four feet and six inches high, and filling this box with dirt, the fire then is built on the dirt, smoke sifting up through the ceiling, which is of course of thatch.

At one end of this headman's house there was a separate little compartment, which was assigned to us. There was rather a large doorway in it, about 10 feet wide, which I could look through to the main interior of the house. Shortly after arriving, about 15 of the elders of the village came in and sat down on the floor facing me. No one said a word. Within a few minutes dinner was served, and it was a lovely dinner, fried chicken, fried eggs, potatoes, some type of a turnover with meat inside, (I have not to this day determined what it was, but it surely was good), a cross between a pancake and a tortilla which served as bread, a couple jungle vegetables, and hot coffee. While I was eating, a Kachin brought in approximately two quarts of Kachin beer, which was given to me as a present. I handed one of the quarts back to the Kachin, and indicated that they were to drink. They made quite a ceremony out of drinking. Cups of course were made of bamboo, and each man drank individually, each pouring a few drops of his drink on the ground alongside the fire prior to drinking. When it came my turn to drink, I also poured a bit on the ground before drinking. This evidently pleased them. I then indicated to my guide to divide some opium among my guests.[5] The opium having been divided, I broke some chocolate "D" rations into squares, and passed them out to the kiddies, who, like kiddies throughout the world, were hanging back in the nooks and corners, and gaping at us with great round eyes. I then called one of the kiddies to me and gave him the tinfoil which the chocolate was wrapped in. I had a good deal of pleasure the rest of the evening watching the awe with which this child contemplated tin foil, and the loving care that he took of it.

About an hour after the opium had been distributed, one by one the old gentlemen got up and silently excused themselves. Finally only Dave and I and a couple of kids were left in the room, so I lay down on the floor, made a pillow out of my knapsack, and prepared to get some rest. The position in which I was lying allowed me to look into the main room, and directly in line with my gaze the old elders who had left my room were gathering about a fire and cooking the opium that I had given them. I finally fell asleep with the smell of opium in my nostrils. I was awakened during the night by a baby crying, and I thought to myself how much alike we all were, for there in the dark I might have been any place in the world. I could not tell the difference between that little savage's cry and the cry of any baby that I heard in any other part of the world. The smoke from the fires drifted through the thatched roof so that it was not at all uncomfortable in the room. Still in all, sufficient smoke stayed in the air of the room so that mosquitoes evidently found it quite unhealthy, and at least we were not at all bothered by mosquitoes that night.



Celebrating Eifler's promotion to colonel in the field.

I awakened in the morning to find three kids and one man sitting in my room watching me. No sooner was I awake that they brought me water to wash, and a cup of hot coffee. I had three fried eggs for breakfast.

As we prepared for the day's march, my head felt a bit sore from some hard object in my musette bag. Repacking the bag, I checked to see what it was, and found that the object which had annoyed me during the night was nothing less than some blasting caps. As we started out Dave said, "Damn, that was a wonderful sleep." During the day we arrived at a village that was having a sacrifice to the spirits. As we approached the outskirts of the village, bamboo poles with cups tied to the top of them filled with fresh blood greeted us. Blood was splashed along the trail. As we neared a hut in the center of the village we heard singing and wailing. I was unable to determine what the sacrifice was being held for, but I believe someone had died. In the center of the village was a fresh goat's head, which indicated that the person for whom the sacrifice was being held was not of too great importance.

## **Reckoning with the Rivers**

We only walked ten miles that day. I rode one hour and Dave rode the rest of the way. We made camp alongside a large stream, and shortly after making camp I gathered some of the natives, went to the stream, and dynamited it for fresh fish. I indicated by sign language what I intended to do, and of course it was my idea that the natives were to gather the fish, but within a few minutes after the fish started coming to the surface, I became just as excited as the rest of them, and pulling off my clothes, I was soon diving and swimming for the fish in the midst of a dozen natives. The water felt damn good, and when we were finished fishing I continued swimming and then washed my clothes. Dave did likewise. That day was the shortest hike that we made on the trip. I gave all of the fish to the natives with the exception of one, which weighed about six pounds. This I cleaned and wrapped in banana leaves, and then packed it in mud. I then made a large bonfire and put the mudpack in it. The natives cut up their fish and

added a bit of pepper to it, pressed it in a hollow bamboo tube, blocking the open end with a wad of banana tree leaves. They set this in an angle against a small fire, and in little better than an hour they had fish curry, and Dave and I had fresh-baked fish.

The following day we left at 6 a.m., and approximately noon reached a town where some Levies were stationed. We had heard of a young American aviator who was badly burnt in a crash being at this village, so we looked him up. An American doctor (a Lieutenant in the Medical Corps) and a Major in the Air Corps were in attendance. They were glad to see us, as any strange face is of course a welcome sight. We went in and talked to the Sergeant. The Lieutenant said that he was in bad shape, but that they would be able to take him out in another week or two. I promised to send messages to their families for them, as they had been out of touch for some time, and they were worried. These were the messages that I sent to you, Carl, and asked you to forward on. One was returned as not being any such address. Although I have attempted to make contact with the Lieutenant since, I have not been able to do so, so [I] do not know where the mistake was made. The British Captain of the Kachin Levies gave us a drink of V.O. [brandy], and damn was it good.



River crossings presented constant challenges.

We managed to get another horse from the headman, and set off at 2 p.m., singing along the trail. It felt mighty good to be riding again after all the walking we had done. The trail was approximately level for 19 miles. Along in the afternoon we came to a bamboo bridge that did not look too good. Dave got his horse across all right by leading it. Mine balked and did not want to cross. However, by soothing and petting, and coaxing and pulling, I finally managed to get the horse on the bridge. I was just off the bridge when the bridge broke. The horse gave a leap, made the bank okay, but damn near knocked me down as it sailed past. We made camp about nine miles farther on in an old Government bungalow. During the night a storm broke, and the bungalow leaked badly. We rigged up our shelter halves over the spot in the floor where we were lying, and spent a very uncomfortable night. In the morning I sat on the porch and looked out across the hill to the hill on the opposite side of the Malihka. On top of this hill was the town of Sumprabum and the stronghold of the Japanese in the vicinity. Dave wanted to know what would prevent the Japanese from crossing the Malihka and coming up to where we were, or to have crossed the Malihka and be forward on the trail that we would take that day. I

told him not a damn thing, but that I thought we had the country well enough organized that if the Japanese did this we would be notified, and would merely make a wider arc in getting around them.

At 12:30 that day we came to another large stream, which I again blew with a pound of Composition "C." We got six large fish averaging about six pounds each, and a number of small ones. I gave all the fish to the natives with the exception of one, and when we arrived in camp that night I fried him in butter. The British Captain had given us a can of butter when we stopped at his camp the day before. I believe that was just about the best fish I have ever eaten in my life. The natives in this particular village were re-thatching one of the bungalows with palm leaves. The principle of thatching is practically the same as shingling. There was a tree of "star-fruit" to one side of the cabin. This is the first time that I have seen "star-fruit" since I left the South Seas. I didn't know that there were any in this part of the country. While sitting on the porch I noticed a medium-sized chicken picking on a smaller chicken, and the smaller chicken went streaking to its mother, who in turn chastised the first chicken. No sooner had the hen left than the medium-sized chicken repaid with interest to the smaller chicken everything that the hen had given her, and I smiled to myself how alike everything is the world over. That night I again went to sleep with the cries of a baby in my ears.

We were twenty-three miles from the British outpost of Laawnga. That normally was three stages, or three days march, but I decided to do it in one. It was the roughest of all the trails that we had traveled so far. It started to rain during the morning, and in addition to the trail being rough, it became slippery. For the past two days the trail had been too steep for me to do much riding, so most of the time I was walking and leading my horse. Along about noon, we arrived at the Malihka. The banks of the river were steep and muddy. The Kachins in attempting to get my horse on the ferry succeeded in having the horse fall, so that its hind legs were dangling in the river, and its front legs were hanging on the ferry, with the rough *[sic]* bamboo ends of the ferry cutting the horse's belly. I hollered instructions, but it didn't do any good. I wish, Carl, you could have been there, for it must have been funny as hell to anyone not interested in the welfare of that horse. Finally, unable to do anything else, I plunged down the side of the bank, my feet sinking between 2 and 2½ feet in the mud. My shoes stayed in the mud, and I eventually got on the ferry barefooted. I thought to myself, "Oh hell, I might as well be barefooted as to have what's left of the shoes anyway." We finally managed to get the front legs of the horse off the ferry and into the stream, pushing the ferry out into the stream and swimming the horse downstream to where the bank was more firm. There the horse was taken out of the river. We then built a gangway by taking a couple doors off some of the natives' huts and laying them on top of bamboo poles, and in this manner, we eventually got the horse on the ferry and across the river.

We were then seven miles from the British outpost at Laawnga. The river had been in flood, and for approximately one mile we had to wind our way through bamboo and cane brakes that had recently been under water. The bamboo snatched at my hat and though I saved it a number of times, the bamboo eventually won, and knocked my hat from my head. I was riding at the time so I had to dismount to recover my hat. Shortly thereafter, the improvised trail which we were following wound to the edge of the river bank. I did not like the looks of the spot, but put the horse to it. He made it all right with his front hoofs, but as he placed his back hoofs on the edge of the trail the bank gave way. I turned a forward somersault off the horse's head with the reins in my hand, and managed to land with my feet braced, and again my horse was hanging with his forefeet supported, but this time instead of his hind feet being in the water they were pawing the air. With a little help, however, he managed to get his feet in the bank, and a few

moments later I had him back on the trail. I walked the balance of the way through the canes. Our next obstacle was when we came to a spot where the trail crossed a stream. The bridge was out, and the flood had washed the mud belly deep in the stream bed. But by coaxing and pulling and floundering, we finally got the horses through, and there in the little clearing before us were some decorations which when I first looked at them definitely appeared to be the type of decorations put up by the Japanese on some of their holidays. My hand flew to my gun, and I could hear Dave throwing a shell into the magazine of the carbine. We rode on forward and both of us were expecting a shot at any moment, but as we approached I saw that they were not Japanese but Kachin. However, it was a tense moment and a bit of a thrill.

## End In Sight



Eifler in 1997, honored at the dedication of a sports plaza at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

Just before dark that night we arrived at the British outpost at Laawnga, and spent the night with the Post Commander, Colonel Ford. This post has the only British troops in the Northern part of that section of Burma. The next morning Colonel Ford furnished us with a jeep to finish the last 54 miles of our journey, and about 3 o'clock in the afternoon we returned to Major Aitken's headquarters at Fort Hertz. It was quite a trip. We had seven people in the jeep. We had half a dozen streams to ford, and three ferries. Some of the streams were shallow enough, and in one instance the fan was cutting the water, and I held my breath waiting for the motor to die in midstream. However, the jeep made it okay. Just before we reached Hertz we passed an elephant convoy. It was the first time Dave had ever seen an elephant outside of a circus. One of the elephants was badly frightened by the jeep, and just as we got opposite it, it raised its trunk and trumpeted. I laughed like hell. To this day I don't know who was the most scared, Dave or the elephant.

We had wired for a plane to come in and get us, but the weather was bad on the 12th and no plane came in. On the afternoon of the 13th a plane got in to us. The pilot told us that he had tried to come in that morning, but had been chased by some [*Japanese*] "Zeros." They had heard that the Japs were playing "Merry" in that district. On the way back we kept our eyes open, and about half way across the hump [*Himalayas*] I saw a plane overtaking us fast. It was too far away to determine whether it was a Jap or an American ship, but we went into the clouds, and

when we came out he was nowhere to be seen. On arriving back in India we learned that the Japs had shot down four transports that day.

And so ends the story of the ill-fated flight of “O.S.S. Plane #1.”

/s/ Carl F. Eifler

Colonel, Infantry

*Editor's note: When Col. Eifler returned from his trek, he immediately went to see the commander of the China-Burma-India theater, General Joseph Stilwell, without cleaning himself up. Apparently, the conversation went something like this:*

Gen. Stilwell: “Have you eaten?”

Col. Eifler: “I’ve just walked out from behind the lines in Burma.”

Gen. Stilwell: “You look it.”[6]

[1] William R. Peers and Dean Brelis, *Behind the Burma Road: The Story of America's Most Successful Guerrilla Force* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 217-220.

[2] National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 226 (Office of Strategic Services), Entry 99, Box 78, Folder 1.

[3] Barnard was an Anglo-Burmese officer who took part in Detachment 101's first operation in Burma, in which several teams of saboteurs parachuted behind the lines and conducted operations against Japanese-held railroads.

[4] The UDM was a 9 mm submachine gun made exclusively for the OSS, whereas the Thompson .45 caliber submachine gun was more widely available.

[5] Opium was carried by the OSS in Burma as a form of payment for the natives or Chinese that worked with them since paper money was not accepted by any of the Kachins.

[6] Richard Dunlop, *Behind Japanese Lines: With the OSS in Burma* (New York: Rand McNally & Co., 1979), p. 230.

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