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question, “Who lost China?” The Dixie Mission’s role was questioned. The intelligence it produced was said to be tainted and shunted aside—even within the US intelligence organizations of the time. The information was ignored when it might have been most useful, as US intelligence and military strategists were trying to come to grips with world communism and Soviet and Chinese attempts to shape the world through revolution—and in Korea, through outright war.

**A Blind Spot for US Intelligence**

In the spring of 1944, [General Joseph W.] Stilwell’s headquarters, under the pressure of a new Japanese offensive against central China, began to take an interest in the Communist military. . . Donovan’s officers at Chungking could no longer ignore reports that the Communists controlled a force of one million partisans and intelligence agents in an area of major Japanese troop concentration which was then a blind spot for American intelligence.3

As US participation in the China war—and its alliance with Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists—grew, the communists faded into the background, behind a Nationalist blockade of “twenty divisions of [Chiang’s] best troops.” OSS intelligence chief, William Donovan had become aware of the communists’ military potential “even before Pearl Harbor,” but OSS manpower was limited and focused on the Japanese.3 In October 1943, Roosevelt ordered Donovan “to
The idea for an observer mission into the communist area was first suggested by John Paton Davies, a US State Department officer serving as General Stilwell’s political advisor.

The idea for an observer mission into the communist area was first suggested by John Paton Davies, a US State Department officer serving as General Stilwell’s political advisor. In a June 1943 report to Stilwell, Davies noted the importance of the North China area and that the “last official American observer to have visited the communist region was Captain Carlson in 1938.” Davies sent a second memo to Stilwell in January 1944, which made its way to influential presidential advisor Harry Hopkins. In February, Roosevelt formally requested Chang Kai-shek “to permit military observers to go ‘immediately’ to Shansi and Shensi, tactfully omitting to specify the region as Communist.” Chiang gracefully agreed to ‘facilitate’ the mission which, he added, could visit only those areas under the Central Government’s control.”

Stilwell had already started working on the mission in February. “To ensure observers who would not be at the mercy of their hosts, Stilwell looked for candidates who had knowledge of the language and acquaintance with China,” Tuchman wrote. To lead the mission he chose “Colonel Barrett, said to be the only American who could tell jokes convincingly in Chinese to Chinese.” He also had a close friendship with Stilwell.

Col. David D. Barrett was an assistant military attaché in Peking, between 1924 and 1928, and from 1931 to 1936, when he was named assistant military attaché to Stilwell. In 1942 he succeeded Stilwell as chief military attaché. In early 1944, he was assigned to the Army G-2 section at Kweilin. Stilwell selected him to head the observer mission on 25 March 1944.

On 21 July, the day before the mission’s departure for Yenan, Barrett realized he had no orders on what the mission was expected to accomplish. He contacted Colonel Dickey, G-2 at CBI (China-Burma-India) Headquarters and received a single typed sheet. It was unclassified, unsigned, and “without authentication of any kind.” Actually they were more in the nature of general instructions for the guidance of the mission rather than the sort of orders usually issued to a unit of the United States Army.” It listed 19 subjects on which “information is particularly desired.” These included Japanese and puppet order of battle, target and bomb damage assessments, and weather and economic intelligence. On the communist forces: their strength, composition, dispositions, equipment, training, and combat efficiency. “No other instructions of any kind, oral or written, secret or non-secret were ever given me.”

What was Known of the Chinese Communists?

Even before Pearl Harbor, General Donovan had received information that the Chinese Communist soldiers were “the best guerrilla troops in the world, trained under veteran leaders of long experience in such tactics, and fired by a bitter hatred of the Japanese.”

Little was known of the political or military situation in China when the United States came into the war in Asia. The Chinese Communists were a particular puzzle, closed off to outsiders by their own secrecy and politics and by the remoteness of their Yenan stronghold, where they survived behind the Nationalist Army cordon. In the 1930s, two persistent journalists found their way to the communists and wrote accounts.

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a. Chinese troops belonging to Japanese-established governments in areas of China occupied by the Imperial Japanese Army.
The first chronicler of the Red Army in action was American journalist Agnes Smedley. In 1936, she made her way to Yenan, befriended Red Army commander Chu Teh, and later accompanied the Red Army in Japanese-controlled areas. The first chronicler of the Red Army in action was American journalist Agnes Smedley. She came to Shanghai in 1928 as a journalist for Frankfurter Zeitung. In 1936, she made her way to Yenan, befriended Red Army commander Chu Teh, and later accompanied the Red Army in Japanese-controlled areas. Her China Fights Back: An American Woman with the Eighth Route Army, published in 1938, was the earliest account of the Red Army at war. It was also well received, but not nearly as popular as Snow’s book.

A professional view of the Red Army came from a US Marine Captain, Evans Carlson—the apparent source of OSS Chief Donovan’s information cited above. Carlson had already completed two tours in China when he returned there in 1937 as a language student and observer with the Chinese Nationalist Army. Inspired by Red Star Over China—and with Edgar Snow’s help—he spent eight months with the Eighth Route Army, in his view “the only Chinese military organization that is consistently winning engagements with the Japanese.” He wrote: “These troops are the most mobile I have ever seen. This force will continue to resist the Japanese if every other unit in China lays down its arms. And the resistance will be effective.”

All three writers were criticized as too sympathetic to the communists. As a professional soldier, Carlson in particular attracted criticism from his peers and others. President Roosevelt told Edgar Snow, “but the Marine Corps still insists he’s a Red!” And that was in 1944, when Carlson was already a legend. After the Unit-a. In Shanghai, Smedley was a close associate of legendary Soviet spy Richard Sorge: “The only person in China upon whom I knew I could depend on was Agnes Smedley,” said Sorge. “I solicited her aid in establishing my group in Shanghai . . . used [her] . . . as a direct member of my group.” Her involvement with the Chinese Red Army does not appear related to Sorge’s efforts as a Soviet agent. Source: Gordon W. Prange with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, Target Tokyo: The Story of the Sorge Spy Ring (Early Bird Books, 1984 [ebook]), Chapter 3. Recent information from Soviet Archives and other sources seem to confirm allegations that Smedley was an agent of the Comintern and later of the Soviet Union. Source: Ruth Price, The Lives of Agnes Smedley (Oxford Press, 2005), 6.
b. Names of Chinese Communist officials will be rendered in the Wade-Giles romanization system most widely used during the period of this story. So too with locations, unless popular usage differs, as it does with Peiking, Nanking and Chungking.

Star Over China—
ed States entered WWII, Carlson became the creator and leader of the US Marine Corps Raiders, which operated according to philosophy and tactics he had learned from the Red Army.\textsuperscript{a}

In 1944 there was no current “intelligence” on the Chinese Communists, but the journalistic accounts and Captain Carlson’s reports were reasonably accurate, although of questionable credibility to some readers. The pictures they painted were rosy, but they did provide good insight into the communist leaders and the strength and direction of their movement. The Red Army and the guerrilla tactics that became people’s war are well described. Together, the three accounts may be as good as what intelligence officers of the time could have produced, even better, perhaps; All three writers had extensive China experience and progressive political views that should have helped them comprehend the ways of the Chinese Communists.\textsuperscript{b} Their combined work—once their biases are recognized—was a good overview and could have served as the basis for specific intelligence requirements the Dixie Mission might have addressed to fill gaps in the picture of the Chinese communists in 1944. There is no indication that was considered.

The First contingent of nine observers of the Dixie Mission arrived at Yan’an in Shensi Province, North China on 22 July 1944; the second contingent, also of nine, arrived on 7 August. Two of the 18 represented the Department of State; four officers and one sergeant were from the OSS. One officer was from AGAS, one from the US Navy, five from the US Army Air Corps (two of whom were from AGFRTS),\textsuperscript{c} and an assortment of US Army officers, mostly infantry, but including a doctor, Major Melvin A. Casberg, from the Army Medical Corps (who would be both Dixie physician and intelligence collector).

\textsuperscript{a} And Carlson brought the Chinese words “Gung Ho” (together) into the vocabulary of Marines. Source: Thomas, Season of High Adventure, 172.

\textsuperscript{b} Some have argued that they did not fully comprehend the movement: “Despite Snow’s (and Mao’s) careful emphasis on the Reds’ Marxist-Leninist credentials and goals, the book left a lasting impression that these revolutionaries were only so-called Communists.” Even among US China experts, the Chinese Communists were long looked on as agrarian reformers. Captain Carlson thought “he had witnessed among the Reds a unique example of Christian ethics and brotherhood in practice.”Source: Thomas, 178. Socialist Agnes Smedley strongly supported the communists and wrote enthusiastically, but her work adds to the sense of what people’s war could be.

\textsuperscript{c} AGAS was the “Air Ground Aid Service,” to assist the escape of American POWs; AGFRTS was the “Air and Ground Forces Resources and Technical Staff,” an OSS/14th Air Force unit hidden from Dai Li inside the Fourteenth Air Force structure.
Lectures began the morning after our arrival . . . we were scheduled for talks with senior cadres, most of whom had been teachers at Whampoa Military Academy in the 1920s . . . [who] shared with us what they considered their most effective military tactics.

Working Days at Yenan

Lectures began the morning after our arrival . . . we were scheduled for talks with senior cadres, most of whom had been teachers at Whampoa Military Academy in the 1920s . . . [who] shared with us what they considered their most effective military tactics . . . Of all our teachers . . . Mao was the most interesting.  

In turn, the Americans taught the communists new guerrilla warfare techniques. Capt. John Colling, the most senior OSS member of the mission, was a demolitions expert, and he had brought along 400 pounds of state-of-the-art demolition supplies, including Composition C, a new putty-like explosive, and Primacord, a highly effective detonating cord. Colling did four demonstrations, each drew over 1,000 interested observers. The communists were impressed, and eager to obtain such equipment. To Colling’s regret that was not possible; arming the communists was beyond the Dixie charter.

Colling brought extraordinary experience to the team, having been selected for Dixie after completing 15 months operating against the Japanese in Burma. He had helped organize the Kachin Scouts and led them in intelligence and guerrilla operations. Raised in Tianjin, China, where his US Army captain father had retired, he was a proficient Chinese speaker. He saw his job in Yenan as investigating “the potential of using Chinese Communist Armies.” His memoir, The Spirit of Yenan, which was published in 1991, would provide some of the most detailed, and colorful, accounts of Chinese Communist forces and their behavior in and around Yenan during the life of the mission.

Colling was eager to get out of Yenan and join the Red Army in the field. It would be a month before that happened, however. In the interim, he was introduced to intelligence possibilities at Yenan: Red Army Chief of Staff, General Yeh Chian-ying, wanted an “Air Intelligence” organization for the Red Army. With AGAS assistance, a plan was drawn up in the first week. Colling himself had a special top secret project he hoped to move forward at Yenan. Named the “Apple Project,” its objective was to acquire actual Japanese perspectives on the effectiveness of US B-29 bombing of Japanese cities. An improbable task, but at Yenan it would become possible.

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a. Casberg spent four months behind Japanese lines, “hiking with the Chinese Communists by night and hiding during the day.” Source: Caroline J. Carter, Mission to Yenan (The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 33.
b. After the original Dixie Mission ended in about January 1945, the United States maintained a small presence at Yenan until 1947. From 22 July 1944 to 11 April 1946, the mission was called the US Army Observer Group; From 13 April until the last man departed Yenan in 1947, it was called the Yenan Liaison Group. These residual elements were also called the “Dixie mission.” This article covers only the approximate first six months, when the majority of the original 18-member observer group was still engaged in Yenan. By early 1945, communist leaders had begun to leave the region for other areas in a race to take control of territory as the Japanese left the country.
c. “The biggest bang,” in Colling’s demonstrations “came from a .22 caliber assassination pistol.” It had a hair trigger, and Colling’s assistant managed to accidentally fire off a round that “whistled past Chou En-lai’s ear. There was a stunned silence - broken only when the imperturbable Chou, smiled and casually quipped, ‘Close.’” Source: Colling, The Spirit of Yenan, 72.
Intelligence Lost in Politics

Soon after he arrived in Yenan, Colonel Barrett was presented an insight into Red Army acquisition and use of intelligence information at the most fundamental level.

Two other US priorities were also implemented with communist assistance. The first was obtaining weather reports, essential to the 14th Air Force’s bombing missions and to the US Navy’s warships closing on the Asian mainland. “Large numbers of small radios . . . were sent to distant parts of the communist-controlled areas, and an astonishingly large number of useful reports, sent by means of these small radios, were received in Yenan.”

The other priority was the rescue of downed American aircrews. “One of the most strategically beneficial contributions the Dixie Mission [made] . . . was the development of a rescue system . . . for American airmen downed in Communist territories behind Japanese lines.” B-29s returning from missions over Tokyo, low on fuel and sometimes with battle damage, had to cross Japanese-occupied areas of North China. Red Army intelligence and its direct help with the rescues made it possible for AGAS to save “approximately 300 American lives.” AGAS Lieutenant Whittlesey, who helped implement the system, was Dixie’s only casualty, shot by the Japanese when he and his Chinese counterpart entered a village they believed had been abandoned by the Japanese.

When the day’s work was done, there were friendly dinners and occasional banquets. The communists presented theatrical performances, and the Americans hosted showings of American films. Smedley wrote of Gen. Chu Teh that he “was seen at almost every showing, howling at Abbott and Costello.” When the weather was good, everyone went to the dances in the pear garden, and “capered . . . to the noise of a battered phonograph playing scratchy records of ancient vintage.” Mao always attended and accepted invitations from pigtailed girls who asked, “Chairman, please dance with me.”

White’s evaluation of Chinese intelligence capabilities was reasonably accurate. It became apparent that the Red Army had good accountings of the Japanese Army’s strength and disposition in areas where the communists operated. Understanding how the Chinese Communist system functioned, however, required a bit of learning that would provide some surprises.

Soon after he arrived in Yenan, Colonel Barrett was presented an insight into Red Army acquisition and use of intelligence information at the most fundamental level. On 26 August, at Barrett’s request, the 718th regiment put on a tactical

a. The dances were Smedley’s legacy, a tradition she started at Yenan in 1937. After the work day, “During such idle, friendly moments I would often line everyone up and teach them the Virginia Reel . . . General Chu . . . would swing his partner do-si-do and kick up the dust with a gust as great as that of the youngest guard in the line.” Source: Smedley, The Great Road, 3.
exercise, a sham battle. The Chinese scenario included the appearance of a Japanese regiment. Barrett asked how the Red Army would have learned of the Japanese presence; where had the information come from? “The people told us.” Had there been patrolling or reconnaissance “to determine the possible intentions of the enemy?” That was not necessary; “everything needed was learned from the people.” Barrett was not impressed, but he failed to see something very significant.

Shortly afterwards, Barrett visited the “Japanese Resistance Military-political University” at Suiteh, northeast of Yenan, where a small village had been turned into dormitories and classrooms. At this military university, Barrett discovered, there was “no military instruction. . . . It was actually sort of a rest and recreation center where party workers, officers, and enlisted men were sent for recuperation and indoctrination. . . . Classroom work consisted mostly of sitting around in small rooms and reading the [Liberation Daily].” Back at Yenan, Barrett expressed his disappointment to the Chinese chief of staff. Once again, Barrett had missed the significance of what he had seen.

In his foreword to Barrett’s book, Fairbank explained what Barrett had missed—the birth of people’s war, a new era that Barrett, like most others then, could not see or grasp. “One fascination of this memoir,” Fairbank wrote, “is to see how one can be a true China hand and yet remain in some ways quite culture bound:”

Barrett is reporting on the Chinese Communist forces . . . but he sees them in the American military categories which exclude politics. He finds their military training school really doing next to nothing militarily; the trainees seem to spend their time merely reading the [Liberation Daily]. Out of this reading, of course, came the revolutionary army so ideologically indoctrinated that it could retain popular support and operate decentralized but under discipline. On manoeuvres Barrett finds the Communists rely on the populace to get accurate intelligence on the enemy and so fail to do that energetic scouting and patrolling that has been part and parcel of the American army tradition since the French and Indian War.”

People’s war was central to almost all things at Yenan, as it would remain at the center of the Chinese Communist movement for decades, while the “wars of national liberation” it inspired would be the preoccupation of US intelligence and military strategists over the many long years of the Cold War.

**Observing People’s War**

*The mobilization of the common people throughout the country will create a vast sea in which to drown the enemy.*”

A number of Dixie Mission observers would visit “Japanese Resistance Bases,” the areas inside Japanese-occupied territory that were under Red Army control, and report back their impressions that “the Communists were being supported by the entire civil population.” To which Chairman Mao remarked, “if they did not have the support of the people, they would never survive in areas virtually surrounded by the Japanese.”

On a first encounter with people’s war, professional US military officers—their careers devoted to the study and practice of conventional warfare—the concept must have been perplexing. It required the full involvement of the civilian population as an effective adjunct to the main fighting force. The Dixie observers who went into the field with the Red Army saw that the Chinese people were indeed engaged against the Japanese invader. Under the Red Army’s

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a. John Stuart Service, the diplomatic observer for Stilwell and the US embassy in Chungking, echoed the observation, commenting in his collection of despatches on Major Casberg’s report: “The Eighth Route Army depends to a great extent on the People’s Militia for intelligence . . . While I was behind the Japanese lines in the Eighth sub district the military men in our party could give me daily information on the exact movements of the enemy around us. . . . When we attacked a blockhouse we knew not only the exact number and size of the firearms, the exact number of the soldiers, both Japanese and puppet, but also in many cases even the names of the soldiers.” Source: John S. Service, *Lost Chance in China: The World War II Despatches of John S. Service*, 238.
Intelligence Lost in Politics

In brief, this unit is an organization of peasants banded together and cooperating with the Eighth Route Army to fight the Japanese. In some ways it resembles the Minutemen of our Revolutionary War days, for they are really civilians, receiving no pay and wearing no uniforms. Their support comes from their farms. Each member has a rifle ... and three or four hand grenades. ... Villages near the front are organized by the People's Militia for rapid evacuation. These minutemen keep constant watch over Japanese strongpoints and spread the alarm the moment the enemy starts on the march. 

Casberg described the “elaborate caves which extend a distance of two...
miles underground . . . as a means of escape from the raiding parties of
the enemy,” and militia mine warfare
so effective “that in many areas the
Japanese are afraid to venture far
from their blockhouses.”44 A final
section of his report contains his ob-
servations of the Eighth Route Army
regulars. He begins: “There have
been numerous accusations by the
Kuomintang that the Eighth Route
Army is not fighting the Japanese.
From my observation I am convinced
that nothing could be further from the
truth.”45

Intelligence Exploita-
tion of Japanese POWs

Particularly valuable as sources
of intelligence were the Japanese
prisoners of war.46

When Colonel Barrett was given
a tour of the Japanese POW quarters
at Yenan, he found about 150 cap-
tured Japanese soldiers, “a number
which seemed impressive to me in
comparison with the 25 or so held
by the Nationalist Government just
outside Chungking.”47 All were
wearing Chinese Communist uni-
forms. The Chinese referred to them
not as prisoners, but as “members
of the Japanese People’s Liberation
[or Emancipation] League,”48 Barrett
considered the possibility that some
were Chinese “ringers” posing as
Japanese, but “prisoners later inter-
viewed . . . were genuine Japanese.”
Barrett also suggested the probability
that the prisoners had been ‘thor-
oughly brainwashed,” noting that the
term itself was not in ‘common use’
at the time.49 (The only American at
Yenan who appears to have come into
contact with the idea of brainwashing
was Theodore White.)50 Meanwhile,
back at the OWI headquarters in
Washington, John Fairbanks was fol-
lowing these developments closely:

I can vividly recall the fascina-
tion with which we greeted . . .
the reports on Chinese commu-
nist success in psychological
warfare against the Japanese . . .

by our own observer there,
Francis McCracken Fisher . . .
Japanese troops had almost
never surrendered to American
forces. . . . Despite the leaflets
so assiduously dropped on them
by the O.W.I . . . the Japanese
captured alive had usually been
unconscious at the time. . . .

Fischer sent back food for
thought.”51

Captain Colling was quick to
recognize the “strategic importance”
of the JEL. The league was directed
by Susumu Okano, who had organ-
ized it and the associated Japanese
Peasant and Workers School. The
school helped the Japanese POWs
assimilate into their new life with the
Red Army, and turned them willing
collaborators.52 “The league also
operated an intelligence network
that ran from behind Japanese lines
in China to Tokyo, through which a
stream of Japanese newspapers and
other media flowed. It was through
these newspaper and radio reports
that Okano received messages in
code from his sources in the Japanese
media.

44 Barbara Tuchman added: “No one had ever seen the prisoners claimed by the Kuomintang except for a token group which was always
the same, like the captured helmets.” Source: Tuchman, Stillwell, 476.
45 The head of K’ang-Ta (Fight Japan) University at Yenan, Politburo member P’eng Chen, told White that “whether semiliterate battalion
commanders or college-trained intellectuals, [his students] had to have their minds washed out, had to be remolded in ideology.” Source:
White, In Search of History, 256.
46 Okano was Sanzo Nosaka, a founding member of the Japanese Communist Party. He spent the war years in Yenan. After the war he
returned to Japan to lead the Japanese Communist Party.

a. The American Embassy’s Japanese
Specialist, John Emmerson, had
arrived in Yenan in October. He
reported that he had spent several
frustrating months in Burma with
General Merrill in an unproduc-
tive effort to interrogate Japanese
prisoners. Emmerson contrasted his
experiences with those in Yenan: The
Chinese Communists, employing
very effective psychological warfare,
had achieved remarkable success
in dealing with Japanese soldiers.
Communist interrogation methods,
based more on persuasion than force
or brutality, led to much valuable
intelligence information about the
enemy.52

According to the information obtained
in Yenan, about 2500 Japanese
soldiers were captured by Red Army
troops between July 1937 and De-
cember 1944.53

After three days, all prisoners were
given the option of returning freely to
their unit, and according to League
members, sometimes a prisoner
would choose to leave. However, a
three-day absence from any Japa-
nese troop unit meant summary
execution, and so most decided to
remain.”54

Other Contemporaneous Per-
spectives on POW Treatment
in Communist Hands
Using Okano’s sources and the coded message system from Tokyo, Colling’s “Apple Project” was made a reality.\textsuperscript{55} The accepted US view was that the Japanese would fight to the last man to defend the Japanese homeland. Apple Project information revealed that B-29 bombings were demoralizing the Japanese people and eroding their will to fight, knowledge that was an important factor in US planning at that stage of the war.

Good treatment of POWs, unlike the traditional practice of torturing and killing captives, was first established in 1938, by Red Army commander Chu Teh.\textsuperscript{56} Agnes Smedley, accompanying the Eighth Route Army then, wrote how this came about after a battle with the Japanese 20th Division in early November 1937. The first two “uninjured” Japanese had been captured, “one a radio operator, one an infantry captain.” They were shown to the local people as part of a program to organize the anti-Japanese resistance. “Pandemonium broke loose and hoarse voices shouted: “Kill the devils!” To restore order, General Chu addressed the town’s people:

\textit{He asked the people to realize that the Japanese soldiers were workers and peasants who had been conscripted and sent to China by the Japanese warlords and financial magnates. The Japanese people had not made this war; he said, and large numbers of Japanese anti-fascists had already been imprisoned or killed for opposing it. The Eighth Route Army intended to capture, educate, and train Japanese soldiers to fight their own rapacious ruling classes, and to help China win the war."}\textsuperscript{57}

General Chu later issued an order to all Eighth Route Army troops forbidding “injury or insult . . . confiscation or damage to [POW] personal possessions . . . and required “special care and medical treatment . . . to all sick or wounded Japanese captives,” as well as “proper work” for those who wish to remain in China.\textsuperscript{58}

At Yenan, General Chu’s orders were still being carried out. Colling and others who accompanied Chinese combat units noted that the communists, working with the JEL, “devised ingenious methods to lure disgruntled Japanese troops to fight alongside them . . . tapping into telephone lines, dispatching letters, and infiltrating comfort kits” across the lines. Once in Chinese hands, new POWs “were given food and cigarettes . . . as though they were among friends. After a few days interrogations would begin. . . . Sometimes the prisoner told everything . . . when a prisoner was stubborn and refused to talk, they were educated slowly and methodically. During this period of continued education, a prisoner was given a fair amount of freedom and detained in a place called a “guest house.”\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{tcolorbox}
\textbf{Colling on POW and Militia Cooperation}

At San Chiao we took an important blockhouse that overlooked the railway line . . . and were able to take about a dozen prisoners with the help of JEL members who accompanied us on the raid. . . . On nights before a blockhouse was to be stormed . . . JEL members would speak through megaphones, calling to the soldiers in the blockhouse, telling them . . . their cause was hopeless . . . to remain meant certain death, and that if they surrendered voluntarily, they would . . . live to see their families. . . . Coming from a Japanese whose accent cannot be mistaken, this was convincing.

As we approached our target area, San Chiao, the sound of marching feet of the peasants echoed off the hills . . . hundreds and hundreds of them. . . . Of the 120 Eighth Route Army Members . . . only 40 of us took the blockhouse . . . eight of us dug underneath its foundation to build a tunnel into the middle . . . where the explosives were set . . . we blew the blockhouse, setting it afire. . . . The JEL men showed Japanese character cards and told the soldiers inside, ‘We won’t hurt you if you come out and surrender [or] we’d have to seal them alive inside. . . . ’ that brought them out immediately. . . . about 100 members of the Peoples’s Militia . . . knocked it down brick by brick.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{tcolorbox}

\begin{tcolorbox}
\textbf{With the Red Army, the People’s Militia and the JEL in the Field}

“On 4 September 1944, we left Yenan for the Chin-Cha-Chi border region where we would work with the Eighth Route Army and the People’s Militia.”\textsuperscript{60}

In early September, Captain Colling and other mission members anxious to travel to forward areas got their chance to escape the “diplomatic games” at Yenan and see the Red Army in the field, to gain the “experience to file a realistic report documenting the Communists potential.”\textsuperscript{62}

On the 4th, Colling, Navy Lt. Herbert Hitch—the only Navy man attached to the mission\textsuperscript{63}—and Army Air Forces Lt. Louis Jones left Yenan for the Chin-Cha-Chi border region on horseback. Their equipment went by mule. “Piles of rubble where towns
once stood were constant reminders of the consequences of Japanese domination.”64 “War for the villagers meant saving their land. Seventy-five percent of the villagers we met did not know much about either Chiang Kai-shek or Mao. They were eager to accept us, and the villagers showed their respect for the Red Army with the unconditional sharing of food, shelter and resources.”65

Colling took note of the losses the Japanese were suffering and wrote that they had “adopted what could be called a ‘fort’ policy” in which they “constructed defensive outposts using forced labor by the local populace.” “From these forts they could emerge at strategic periods . . . to engulf and lay waste the surrounding territory. The Chinese answer was to destroy the blockhouses.”66 As a demolition expert, Colling was a natural participant:

Colling spent six weeks in the field with the Red Army and the People’s Militia. On his return to Yenan, in front of a huge gathering of peasants come for the dances in the pear orchard, Chou En-lai bestowed on Colling the award of Demolitions Hero: “The award was a large flower with paper bunting and four Chinese characters on it, in blue and pink.”67

The Dixie Mission was making progress. The Americans were collecting a wealth of information, and the communists were happy to oblige. New initiatives were being considered. Everything was going well.

**Enter the Special Emmissary of the President of the United States**

Hurley’s arrival in Yenan during that first week in November 1944, to begin negotiations with Chinese communists, is a classic instance of the derailment of history by accident.”68

On a dull November afternoon, the usual crowd of Chinese and Americans gathered at the Yenan airstrip to await an incoming flight. The C-47 arrived, and a second aircraft appeared. Some recognized it as Stilwell’s former command airplane. From it stepped “a tall gray haired, soldierly, extremely handsome man wearing one of the most beautifully tailored uniforms I have ever seen.”69 Colonel Barrett recognized Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Hurley, special emissary of the president. Neither the Americans nor the Chinese at Yenan had been advised of his visit.

Barrett quickly told Chou En-lai who the visitor was. Chou “disappeared in a cloud of dust,” but reappeared quickly with Mao and a “hastily mustered” honor guard. General Hurley reviewed the troops, “drew himself to his full impressive height . . . and let out a Choctaw war whoop . . . . I shall never forget the expression on the faces of Mao and Chou,” Barrett recalled.70 Hurley had come to Yenan to solve the problem of the communists.

Hurley was a corporate lawyer and self-made millionaire from Oklahoma. Born in a log cabin in Indian territory, he was for a time the national attorney for the Choctaw Nation. A soldier in World War I, he became secretary of war in the Herbert Hoover administration. A Republican, he supported the Roosevelt administration, and became useful to the president as his representative on overseas assignments. When the long-standing feud between Chiang

Ambassador Patrick Hurley, met by Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai, and Zhu Teh. Source Wikimedia Commons.
Kai-shek and Stilwell reached crisis proportions, Roosevelt dispatched Hurley to resolve it. Hurley’s instructions: “to promote harmonious relations between Chiang and General Stilwell and to facilitate the latter’s exercise of command over the Chinese Armies placed under his direction.” The Chiang-Stilwell relationship was likely beyond help at that point; Stilwell was relieved on 18 October and replaced by Gen. Albert Wedemeyer. Disgusted by the decision, US Ambassador Clarence Gauss resigned soon afterward. On 17 November 1944 General Hurley replaced him.\(^7\)

At Yenan, Hurley had no idea what he was stepping into. He was not a reader of embassy reports and was “atrociously uninformed about Chinese affairs” and a firm believer in “personal diplomacy.”\(^73\) He and Chiang seemed to get along favorably. At Yenan, Hurley apparently set off to work in the belief that his not inconsiderable charm would similarly win over the communist leadership—most importantly, “Moose Dung” as he called the communist leader.\(^7\) After three days of negotiations, Hurley was able to obtain Mao’s signature on a document outlining the conditions for a coalition with the Nationalists, conditions the Nationalists in turn rejected.”\(^74\) Looking at the document, Nationalist Foreign Affairs Minister T.V. Soong, and Chiang’s brother-in-law, immediately told Hurley, “The Communists have sold you a bill of goods.”\(^75\) Hurley nevertheless tried to continue his negotiations.

**The Bird Mission**

At the end of November 1944, OSS China headquarters was advised of an upcoming visit by OSS Chief General Donovan. General Wedemeyer planned to use the visit to present Donovan “some comprehensive ideas for assistance to the Communist guerrilla forces. Two separate proposals emerged.” The OSS proposal was more complex. On 15 December 1944 Heppner’s deputy, Lt. Col. Willis Bird and Dixie Mission command-\(\_\)er Barrett flew to Yenan to present the proposals to the communists. The usual procedure was to discuss such matters first with the Nationalist government. In this instance, the proposals would first be raised with the communists.

In a message later sent to the chief of staff of US Forces, China Theater, Bird cites eight points in the “tentative agreement” reached in discussions with Red Army commander Chu Teh, and his Chief of Staff, General Yeh [Chian-ying]. Among the points:

OSS to place Special Operations [SO] men with their [Communist] units for purposes of destroying [Japanese targets]. . . . and to generally raise hell and run; to provide complete equipment for up to twenty-five thousand guerrillas except food and clothing;[to] Set up school to instruct in use of American arms, demolitions, communications, etc;[to] Set up intelligence radio network. . . .; To supply at least one hundred thousand Woolworth one shot pistols for Peoples’ Militia; To receive complete cooperation of their [Communist] army of

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a. Hurley apparently thought so: “The Generalissimo’s case for recall [of Stilwell] was forwarded by Hurley [to Roosevelt] on October 11 and endorsed [by Hurley] on the essential basis that Chiang and Stilwell were “fundamentally incompatible.” Source: Tuchman, Stilwell, 501.

b. T.H. White experienced how personal it could be. On Hurley’s arrival White “briefed Hurley” on his own conversations with Mao. “I did not know, when I told Hurley that his unannounced and unbriefed mission was probably futile, how much it would enrage him. Hurley sent a dispatch to the State Department the next morning, “concerning my disruptive presence. . . . White’s whole conversation was definitely against the mission with which I am charged.” Source: White, In Search of History, 265–66.

c. In fairness, Hurley addressed the Generalissimo as “Mr. Shek.” But Hurley’s charm did not win him many supporters among the Americans at Yenan or elsewhere. “His favorite stunt of yelling Oklahoma Indian war whoops branded him a buffoon.” The OSS code name for Hurley was “The Albatross.” Source, Smith, OSS, 272, 172.

d. Some accounts of the Army’s offer seem to conflate the 5,000 paratroops in this proposal with the 28,000-strong paratroop division that was the subject of the MG McClure issue and of Barrett’s 27 December visit to Yenan discussed below. Neither Barrett nor Bird mention this initial 5,000 paratroop proposal as a subject of discussion with communists on 15 December. It does not appear again in the narrative.
On 27 December, Barrett went back to Yenan; it would be his final visit. Wedemeyer was out of town, and Maj. Gen. Robert B. McClure, Wedemeyer’s chief of staff, gave Barrett “a most important mission”

They seemed “reasonably pleased” at prospects of a large US presence on their territory and assured Barrett that they could provide such support as might be needed. Soon after his return from Yenan, Barrett received good news: General Wedemeyer had nominated him for promotion to brigadier general.

But then, “Early in January the roof fell in on me. Nationalist Government intelligence agents in Yenan had reported back to Chungking that I had offered . . . the Communists an American paratroop division. . . .” The Nationalist were “naturally much upset” and asked Hurley for an explanation. “It developed my visit to Yenan had not been cleared with the ambassador . . . or . . . he had forgotten the whole thing.” Barrett would write that Hurley “blew higher than a kite” and had his promotion rescinded.

On 27 December, Barrett went back to Yenan; it would be his final visit. Wedemeyer was out of town, and Maj. Gen. Robert B. McClure, Wedemeyer’s chief of staff, gave Barrett “a most important mission”: He was to inform the communist leaders that “after the defeat of Germany . . . a US paratroop division [28,000 strong] . . . might be sent to China to take part in the final attack on the Japanese islands.” He was to ask: “if the communists could take care of the supply of the division . . . [until] regular U.S. Army supply procedures could begin to function.” Barrett was “to impress upon the Communists that my talk with them was purely of an exploratory nature.” Barrett was assured that his mission was cleared with Ambassador Hurley. Barrett met with the communist leadership, including Mao, on 27 December.

Spies at Work

Tai Li got wind of the plan, and Miles was ready to brief Hurley about this clandestine contact.\(^1\)

Lt. Gen. Tai Li was Chiang Kai-shek’s spymaster, the head of the KMT intelligence and security. Tai Li was also head of SACO, the Sino-American Cooperative Organization, a joint project with US Navy Commodore Milton “Mary” Miles as his deputy. SACO’s strained relationship with OSS and most US military units in China, is beyond the scope of this paper, but much of that was due to Tai Li’s secret police methods and SACO efforts being more focused on Chiang’s political enemies than the invading Japanese. Early in January 1945, Commodore Miles invited Ambassador Hurley to “Happy Valley,” SACO headquarters, “where the ambassador was greeted with pomp and circumstance.”\(^2\) As Miles described it in his memoir:

We greeted him with flags, ruffles and flourishes, and The Star-Spangled Banner. . . . And we even slipped in a full review. The troops passed—ten minutes of infantry ending with the drill team. . . . The dogs made their attack. The pigeons flew when released. Our few motor vehicles passed smartly. Then ten minutes of cavalry. (We had only sixty horses for our training school but we borrowed a neighboring troop of five hundred of General Tai Li’s mounted men.\(^3\)

Historian Frederick Wakeman tells the rest of the story:

. . . while being entertained at dinner. . . . Miles persuaded the Oklahoma oilman that a massive conspiracy was being undertaken by U.S. State Department officers to send American troops and weapons to the Communists. Miles also offered the ambassador the use of SACO’s Navy radio communications link with Washington in order to bypass the American embassy.

a. The “clandestine contact” was Barrett’s proposal—and the OSS proposal Bird had delivered earlier—to Yenan. While Wakeman cites the 15 December Yenan visit for both, by Barrett’s own account, Hurley’s anger was triggered by his 27 December 1941 visit.
“Hurley’s direct access to the President was the trump card.” He used it “to press what amounted to a purge of the professional China experts in the field, the men who had been in the country for years, who spoke the language, who knew the place and its dramatis personae.”

**Messengers Were Not Well Received**

I have wondered just what became of my reports.91

Colonel Barrett wrote “many reports, all on military subjects. . . . I devoted particular attention to estimates of the strength of the Communist forces . . . and their tactics, equipment, training, discipline, and morale.”92 There was apparently no feedback, from Chungking or Washington, on intelligence reporting from Yenan. In December 1944, as the Dixie Mission was winding down, several Dixie members traveled to Washington. They were taken aback by their reception.

Because of a letter he was asked to hand deliver to Chief of Naval Operations Admiral King, Lt. Hitch found himself addressing the Joint Chiefs or Staff on the China situation. He described “the Chinese Communist scene as he saw it.” From what he had observed, he concluded that no matter how much [US military support] we give to the Nationalist Government, “the people calling themselves Communists will someday take over China.” Hitch’s comments “were not well received; he was told he would not be going back...
The environment the team worked in was unusual, but the mission succeeded. It gathered a wealth of fresh information and developed solutions to immediate problems like weather reporting and the rescue of downed US airmen. It even produced intelligence information from inside Japan.

The Dixie Mission was meant to be a military mission in pursuit of strategically important information. What became clear soon after was that the politics that brought us to Yenan eventually silenced our reports of what we had learned.

The Dixie Experience and Its Lessons for Intelligence

The Dixie Mission is an early example of the task force approach applied to an intelligence problem. Participation in the team was wide, the Army, Navy, and Air Force were represented, as was the OSS and other specialized elements that could evaluate Chinese Communist capabilities. The environment the team worked in was unusual, but the mission succeeded. It gathered a wealth of fresh information and developed solutions to immediate problems like weather reporting and the rescue of downed US airmen. It even produced intelligence information from inside Japan.

Much of Dixie’s success came from Stilwell’s direction to use “China hands” or others with extensive Asian experience. The Chinese Communist experience was new for everyone, but having the language, or at least past experience with an Asian culture, eased the team’s entry into its interactions with communist counterparts. The principle of using experienced area specialists in the most difficult situations has always been valid.

Extensive intelligence information was collected on the Japanese military and on the communists. That much of this information was later disregarded was due to external factors. The war would end quickly and unexpectedly and totally devalue intelligence on the Japanese. Intelligence collected on the Chinese Communists should have had a longer life, but it became tainted by political conflict that grew out of America’s involvements in China and post-war concern about the global spread of communism and was shunted aside. The lack of anyone in Washington wise enough to glimpse the true significance of the Chinese

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a. The letter Hitch delivered to the CNO was a “secret” appeal for US assistance from Mao—one of several attempts by the Communists to circumvent Ambassador Hurley and other reactionary elements among the Americans in China.”
The major lesson from Dixie for the managers of intelligence services and for the non-intelligence outsiders appointed to oversee them is that an intelligence service must be kept well clear of politics and actively protected from any such involvement.

Communists and the intelligence produced by the Dixie Mission was the killing blow. That insight might have come from OSS Chief Donovan, by war’s end the only “high official interested in the Dixie Mission,” but OSS was disbanded in September 1945 and Donovan was gone.

Did the loss of this intelligence have an effect on US strategic efforts in the post-war period and the Cold War? In retrospect, one can imagine the effects in US decisions made during the Korean War to support imagined Nationalist remnants fighting the new communist government—Dixie Mission members are likely to have argued that communist control was so great no Nationalist counterinsurgency could possibly cause enough damage to disrupt People’s Republic of China war efforts in Korea or gain control over territory in Northeast China.

On a more global scale, if we imagine that the information had been put to use, for example, in the training of US intelligence officers, particularly those assigned to countries experiencing Wars of National Liberation. During the Cold War, most US intelligence officers were reasonably grounded in Soviet communism, but even officers sent to countries contending with Maoist insurgencies had little grounding in Chinese communism. The presumption was that it was the Soviet hand that guided world communism, and Chinese communism was simply subordinate to that. Soviet communism received the emphasis.

Another significant lesson lost in time was how the Red Army treated Japanese POWs and the dividends that paid. John Fairbank saw the meaning of that immediately. Whether American adoption of the Red Army’s “lenient” treatment of POWs might have served American interests in later wars is difficult to say. Regrettably, the Red Army way was not considered, or even the subject of serious study.

An example can be taken from Thailand. During the Vietnam era, the Thai government found itself suddenly confronted by a Maoist Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) insurgency. Within 10 years it affected half the country. “Thirty-six of Thailand’s 73 provinces were under strong communist influence.” In looking for ways to defeat the CPT, the Thai turned to captured party members as teachers on communism and Maoist thought. In time, former senior CPT members became advisers to the police, and military effort focused on the insurgency. The key to the CPT insurgency’s collapse was amnesty, and reintegration of the insurgents into Thai society. The insurgency ended in 1982; the peace established then has never been broken. The approach that led to the end of the Maoist insurgency in Thailand came from senior Maoist-rained CPT members.

The major lesson from Dixie for the managers of intelligence services and for the non-intelligence outsiders appointed to oversee them is that an intelligence service must be kept well clear of politics and actively protected from any such involvement.

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Endnotes

4. Ibid, 259.
5. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
15. Ibid, 171.
17. Captain Evans F. Carlson, USMC, Letter to Captain Stapler, from “Hq. 8th Route Army, somewhere in Shansi, 20 December 1937,” prepared as an Intelligence Report by South China Patrol, Canton, China, 3 January 1938. Available at: http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/fullbrowser/collection/p15799coll12/id/1155/rv/compoundobject/cpd/1160
18. Thomas, *Season of High Adventure*, 268. “FDR had known Carlson since he commanded his presidential bodyguard at Quantico, where they became friends. White House backing had become essential to overcome the old-line Marine opposition to the whole Raider training system, which Carlson had set up. . . . Jimmy Roosevelt had been Carlson’s executive officer, and he later become commander of the second Raider Battalion. “Jimmy,” his father once said to me, “is crazy about Carlson.” Source: Edgar Snow, “Random notes on Red China, 1936–1945,” Harvard East Asian Research Center, included as Appendix II In Colling, *Spirit of Yenan*, 163–70.
19. Richard Bernstein, *China 1945: Mao’s Revolution and America’s Fateful Choice* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 91. Bernstein noted that Mao himself helped to set the affable tone, writing in an editorial that the mission was “The most exciting event since the war against Japan started.”
27. Ibid., 77.
32. Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, from the Foreword by John K. Fairbank: “[The Dixie Mission] also coincided with the admission to Yenan of a group of American journalists who got across the Kuomintang blockade to report on that other China...” Theodore White had made his own way, accompanying the second Dixie contingent with the help of friends at the US Embassy.”
33. Theodore H. White, *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure* (Warner Books, 1981), 249: “And all—except Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung—were convinced, apparently, that I was a semi-official and friendly reportorial arm of the American government.”
34. Ibid, 250.
35. Ibid, 249.
37. Ibid, 41–42.
40. Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, 44. Mao made the comment to John Service.
44. Ibid., 236, 237.
45. Ibid., 238.
46. Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, 34
47. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 34.
50. Ibid., 7–8. OWI rep Francis McCracken Fisher was not a member of the Dixie team as such. The date of his appearance at Yenan could not be determined. Said to have been “one of America’s foremost newspaper correspondents” in China, he most likely accompanied the group of journalists that had arrived almost concurrently with Dixie. In December 1941 he had been sworn in as an Auxiliary Foreign Service officer to represent Donovan’s OSS precursor office, Coordinator of Information, and later OWI. Source: Page on Fisher at “Social Networks And Archival Context” website.
51. Colling, *The Spirit of Yenan*, 80–81. Spies sent by the Japanese Army had been discovered in the school. Colling wrote that “After good treatment and indoctrination, some agents confessed and worked for the group [JEL]”
52. Head, *Yenan*, 82.
54. Ibid., 86. In this author’s dealings with early members of the People’s Liberation Army Air Force—i.e., those who had trained in the early 1950’s—he learned that their flight instructors were primarily Japanese Army pilots, former POWs who had decided to remain in China after the war. Bob Bergin, “Growth of Air Defenses: Responding to Covert Overflights, 1949–1974,” *Studies in Intelligence* 57, No. 2 (June 2013), 20.
58. Smedley, *The Great Road*, 364. The date of the order is unknown, but was probably November 1937, the time of the above incident.
59. Colling, *The Spirit of Yenan*, 85–87. Captain Evans Carlson records an encounter with Japanese POWs in about mid-1938. Two officers and 11 enlisted men were being held in a small village. “The people smilingly informed us that the Japanese “guests” were doing their lessons. We found them in a sunny courtyard . . . a Chinese soldier stood before a blackboard talking to then in Japanese. The subject, I was informed, was the basic theory of co-operative societies. . . . All appeared to be in good health and well fed, and all were cheerful.” Source: Evans Fordyce Carlson, *Twin Stars of China: A Behind-the-Scenes Story of China’s Valiant Struggle for Existence, by a U.S. Marine Who Lived & Moved With the People* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), 229.
61. Ibid., 101–106.
62. Ibid., 93.
63. Ibid., 158.
64. Ibid., 95.
65. Ibid., 96.
66. Ibid., 100
67. Ibid., 106.
68. White, *In Search of History*, 261.
70. Ibid.,
73. Smith, *OSS*, 274.
79. Ibid., 79.
80. Ibid., 78.
82. Ibid.
84. Wakeman, *Spymaster*, 348.
86. Ibid., 48.
87. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
96. Ibid., xxi.
97. Ibid., 125