

# Galahad: Intelligence Aspects

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*Faulty intelligence and other factors that brought a bold campaign to Pyrrhic victory.*

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The six-month saga of Galahad's action in Burma has been sketched as a part of the larger history recorded in Romanus and Sunderland's *Stilwell's Command Problems*,<sup>1</sup> and more recently it has been told in vivid detail and with greater accuracy in Charlton Ogburn's *The Marauders*,<sup>2</sup> the unit's nickname invented and popularized by the press. The Army account is marred by omissions and errors, however, and skillful a narrator as Ogburn is, he was not in a position to view the campaign in its command and intelligence aspects nor to take fully into account the failures in planning, coordination, and intelligence that characterized CBI Theater operations under General Joe Stilwell's erratic and nepotistical direction.

Formed on the unorthodox image of Orde Wingate's Chindits, Galahad was used to surprise the enemy--General Tanaka's crack 18th Division, which had fought in Malaya and captured Singapore before participating in the conquest of Burma--in the rear by circling his flank through almost impassable mountain jungles. In the first half of 1944 it made three such flanking penetrations to facilitate the cautious advance of Stilwell's Chinese forces south and east toward Myitkyina--one to the enemy rear at Walawbum, one to Shaduzup and Inkangahtawng above Kamaing, and the last, most daringly, to Myitkyina. In all three it was successful in its immediate objectives; but all three, thanks in part to

deficiencies in theater intelligence, were disappointing in the follow-up.

At Walawbum Tanaka's supposedly trapped forces escaped their Chinese pursuers over trails that Colonel Joe Stilwell, Jr., his father's G2, had not suspected to exist. At Inkangahtawng the roadblock, fumbled through lack of air photos and other reconnaissance, was withdrawn on the basis of dubious intelligence amid a confusion of poor communications and uncertain lines of command, and then vulnerable Kamaing was left unmolested in favor of a defensive action that cost exhausted Galahad severe casualties at Nhpum Ga. At Myitkyina Galahad's designated objective, the airfield, was seized with sensationally neat precision, but what should have been the following quick occupation of the town was turned by lack of planning, international and interservice involvements, and the manipulation of intelligence into a grueling ten-week siege.

## **Provisions for Intelligence**

Intelligence and reconnaissance platoons were organized in each of Galahad's three battalions, and these of course played a key role in the penetration missions; but no regimental intelligence staff had been planned and no personnel were provided for one either originally or by CBI Theater. We had no field manuals covering intelligence. The nearest thing to intelligence personnel assigned us was a detachment of Japanese linguists, Nisei, under the supervision of Lieutenant William A. Laffin, to interpret prisoner interrogations. These I had kept busy on shipboard publishing a daily paper and starting to record the history of Galahad, a record they continued to maintain until they became too few and overwhelmed with other duties. When, during training in India, a combat exercise against some of Wingate's columns demonstrated the need for an intelligence staff, Laffin, although he had very little military experience and none at all in intelligence, was made the S2.

This turned out to be a wise and fruitful appointment. Laffin was mature, physically active, and intelligent, and getting him oriented in combat intelligence was no great chore. All the Nisei, together with Jack Girsham of the Burma Rifles, who remained with us throughout, became excellent interrogators; but Laffin's linguistic skill was so highly

developed that he could determine a Japanese prisoner's home prefecture without questioning him, simply by his accent. His apparent clairvoyance would so astound the homesick and discouraged Japanese that they would break down very quickly and hold nothing back.

To brief ourselves on our projected area of operation we had had on shipboard the advantage of a library of some sixty books on Burma and Southeast Asia, arranged for by G2 in the Pentagon on General Weckerling's own initiative; but two efforts to get first-hand information on the immediate terrain before we jumped off from Ledo were aborted. General Merrill, who had finally been assigned to command Galahad under the designation 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), and I arranged to fly as supercargo on a photographic mission over the projected operations area, but the plane had to turn back after an hour or so in the air. And three officers Merrill had sent, one from each battalion, to reconnoiter the road under construction down into the Hukawng valley as far as Stilwell's forward headquarters at Shingbwiayang and to be briefed there were not permitted to return in time to do us any good: they reported back that on Stilwell's behalf General Boatner, his chief of staff, had dressed them down and questioned their courage for wanting to leave the forward area so soon. This incident gave Galahad the first impression of the headquarters to which it was assigned and a foretaste of what was in store for it.

## **Walawbum**

The move out from Ledo, on 7 February, was made after dark for security reasons. The whole Galahad project was supposed to be highly secret. We had sailed under the not very convincing cover of medical replacements, and I had made an example of one young officer who had talked too much--to CIC men by bad luck--when we put in at Noumea to pick up our third battalion. When I had turned him over to MacArthur's G2 at Brisbane, General Willoughby had warned me that security in the CBI theater was poor to the point of being non-existent. He had been right: the night after we started our southeast march to the fighting zone Tokyo Rose announced that American combat troops were for the first time marching down the Ledo road.

Our first mission was to feel our way around the east flank of the front near Maingkwan, where Stilwell's Chinese had for some time been stalled by elements of Tanaka's 18th Division, and set up a roadblock at some unpredetermined point south of the enemy. For this kind of operation, and particularly for the selection of a good roadblock site, air photos are invaluable; but at this time, and continuously until well after the airstrip at Myitkyina was taken, photographic coverage was unsatisfactory. Air photos of an area of operations were likely to arrive after we had already passed it and no longer had any use for them. From what I learned later of Stilwell's method of planning, or rather his impatience with detailed planning, I imagine that the Air Corps probably received directives for photoreconnaissance missions too late to produce results on time. It gradually became obvious that we were following an artist's sketch rather than architects' blueprints in the campaign.

Laffin had secured all the information available about known Japanese positions, but whether we had got far enough east to clear the Japanese right flank had to be determined by patrols of the I and R platoons, which therefore suffered Galahad's first combat casualties as they ran into enemy patrols rounding the bends of trails. One scout was wounded and one killed during our first day in enemy-held territory. General Sun Li Jen's liaison officer with Galahad, a Colonel Lee, who had brought with him his orderly and little else except a cheerful and cooperative attitude, was incredulous about Galahad's dispersed methods of operation. To the day he left us at Myitkyina he continued to express amazement and concern over the distances at which the I and R platoons operated away from the battalions. They were in fact generally beyond the range of the portable FM SCR 300 and so had to carry a heavy 284 on muleback.

Ogburn describes well the eight-day march on this first mission, punctuated by river crossings and supply drops, the successful placing of a double block at Walawbum and three miles up the road at a river crossing, Galahad's baptism of shell fire as it held against the Japanese counterattacks, Roy Matsumoto's tapping of the Japanese telephone line and interception of reports and orders, including Tanaka's eventual order to withdraw, and Galahad's relief on 7 March by the Chinese coming down from the north. He also refers to the loss of a bag of silver rupees in the withdrawal and says that Lt. Col. Osborne, his battalion commander, still chides him as responsible for it. He was not: I had this silver, the 5000-rupee headquarters portion of our 20,000 of secret intelligence funds, buried at Walawbum in order to lighten loads on our

depleted complement of mules. There was little demand for silver in Burma, and still less for the thousands of Japanese yen and the trinkets some stateside expert had had included in our equipment. Food, medical attention, parachute cloth, and needles and thread were our most valuable currency.

The operation at Walawbum broke a long stalemate and effected a significant advance down the Kamaing road. In its failure to entrap the Japanese the Stilwells, father and son, played the key roles. It was a glaring deficiency in young Joe's theater intelligence not to have discovered that Tanaka's forces had constructed a route of withdrawal south and west of Walawbum. And the elder Joe did not know what his own forces were doing: on 8 March, twenty-four hours after Merrill had pulled Galahad out and broken communication with theater headquarters, Stilwell ordered a coordinated action by Galahad and the Chinese forces. When he learned that Galahad was gone he decided, says the official history, "that his orders to Merrill had not been clear enough." Why were communications not maintained and why weren't orders reduced to writing? There is an Army way of doing things, and there was a Stilwell way.

The uncertainty of theater intelligence was impressed on me personally a few days later, when I was flown to Stilwell's headquarters to get approval for our plan for the next mission. The headquarters staff criticized our proposed routes as ones on which we would have to carve drop zones out of the jungle to receive our supplies. When I said that Galahad's British experts, Jack Girsham and Evan Darlington--the latter a former area political officer who, knowing the country and the people intimately, kept us supplied with Kachin guides--thought there were ample open areas for drops, Stilwell commented caustically, "If the terrain is like that, how come I don't know about it?"

## **Detachment 101**

This time Galahad was to split up from the start, Osborne's 1st battalion with the 113th Chinese regiment behind it marching on a tight circle over the Jambu Bum to cut the road around Shaduzup, and the other two battalions sweeping wide up the Tanai Hka to put in a block closer to

Kamaing, a roadhead of considerable importance. Command Problems tells how Merrill did not want to divide his force but was hampered in making his proposals to Stilwell by "extremely faulty coordination" amounting to a "hoarding of information": he had not been informed that a force of Kachins under OSS Detachment 101's Lieutenant Tilly, operating on the route to Shaduzup, was available to guide and screen the march. In Galahad we had the impression that the two Stilwells didn't set much store by 101.<sup>3</sup> First battalion learned of Tilly's existence, as Ogburn narrates, in an almost accidental meeting half way to Shaduzup after unwittingly fighting a joint action with him against a Japanese patrol.

Merrill was told before we set out, however, that at Naubum on the Tanai Hka, where 2nd and 3rd battalions would pass, Detachment 101 had a field headquarters for Kachin guerrilla activities and had carved out of the jungle an air strip big enough for liaison planes, keeping it camouflaged except when planes were actually landing or taking off. Approaching Naubum after several days' march, we saw first an unofficial representative of the guerrillas, a strangely uniformed individual leaning against a tree. Without insignia to indicate his nationality or status, he was sporting an Australian wide-brimmed felt hat turned up, British style, on the left side. Stocky and good looking, with a black beard on his otherwise cleanly shaven face, he reminded me instantly of my Irish uncle Jack McNary. He was chewing on a twig and seemed to be trying to hide his intense interest behind a faint but impish grin. Such was my first glimpse of the Christian Brother missionary Father James Stuart, whom I later came to consider a trusted friend, a gentleman, and a true man of God.

The OSS unit was commanded by Captain Curl, a wiry old soldier with the finest beard I have ever seen on any human being. Deep auburn in color, it was carefully brushed back from a precision part in the exact center of his chin into two luxuriant flowing waves. It reminded me of an old painting of the prow of a clipper parting the waters of the Indian Ocean as it sailed into the burnt-orange sunset. Curl made us welcome to his headquarters, where he was protected by a circular screen of trail blocks and watchers forty miles in diameter that no Jap had yet lived to penetrate. He said he was prepared to march south with us with 300 Kachins.

Getting acquainted with these OSS people was a delightful experience. The next morning, silently and unannounced, a file of seven elephants,

trunks holding tails ahead and one with a young calf at her side, was led in by Kachin mahouts and halted in front of General Merrill. Captain Curl was putting them at Galahad's disposal. We tried them out at our next supply drop in the demanding job of clearing the drop zone promptly. They and their mahouts proved quick-witted at learning the business and were regularly so used thereafter. As far as I can ascertain, Galahad is the only American combat force ever to have included elephants as a regular part of its combat train.

As we moved on we were now preceded by a scouting detachment of the OSS Kachins, who from this time on worked under Laffin's direct supervision. Curl's men had also thoughtfully built a foot bridge for us where the trail crossed the Tanai before rising with incredible steepness some 2000 feet to Janpan. Curl personally guided the Galahad battalions up this trail; although he was suffering from a bad knee, he insisted on marching with the column. And at Janpan, when I arrived with an advance guard some two hours ahead of Merrill, I was amazed to watch the Kachins, with the help of the village experts, build a rainproof shelter for him, complete with door and a fireplace for cooking, before the main column began to arrive.

None of the Janpan villagers had ever in his entire life seen so many human beings assembled in one place. As the column continued to pass through the village to its bivouac area on the far side, they became convinced, Father Jim Stuart told me that night, that with this number of men engaged the war would surely soon be over.

## **Inkangahtawng**

It was good to have Curl's knowledge of the country, because it was time to decide on the location of our projected roadblock and we had no air photos of the area. Along the march we kept expecting the requested photos of the terrain ahead of us, but when they were dropped they always covered only country we had already passed through. Now, moreover, on 20 March, we received a message giving us the additional mission of blocking the trails running north along the Tanai against any Japanese moving from the south to threaten the Chinese left flank below Walawbum. Half of Lt. Col. Beach's 3rd battalion was assigned to

undertake this job with the help of the OSS Kachins and patrol the trails south of Auche, while I took the other half and the 2nd battalion, under Lt. Col. McGee, to establish a block somewhere on a five-mile stretch of the Kamaing road around Inkangahtawng. Merrill would stay at Janpan.

We had got as far as Auche and taken our last air drop when another of Stilwell's "Hurry up" messages--we had received one on the way to Walawbum that made us abandon at a drop site a good part of the supplies we had just received--caused the time for the roadblock to be set up some 36 hours. Now, in addition to having no air photos, we would have no time for reconnaissance, and would simply have to blunder across the Mogaung river through the Japanese positions and out onto the Kamaing road. I was not even sure the Mogaung was fordable, although the Kachins thought it was.

Blunder we did. On 24 March McGee, whom I had sent ahead while I saw to preparing an airstrip for evacuations, got across the Mogaung and found Inkangahtawng dead ahead and too well fortified for the reinforced patrols he sent to envelop it. He dug in 300 yards from the road and withstood repeated counterattacks and shell fire. I couldn't reach him by radio, but I wasn't worried because I expected to catch up with him and take over before he could get hit very hard. In the meantime, however, McGee received a message from Merrill--my own radio operators were having difficulty communicating with Janpan--to the effect that a captured map showed two Japanese battalions moving to outflank our blocking force. Although it was not an action message, McGee decided to withdraw. When I took a liaison plane to look over the blocks I supposed by now established and perhaps to land on the road, I found his battalion marching back up the trail.

I could not object to Merrill's dealing directly with McGee because of the communications difficulties, but in my opinion this message should not have been sent. It transmitted unverified information from a source that could easily have been a plant. If I were being outflanked by a force close enough to endanger my mission and didn't know it, I should have been relieved and sent back to the infantry school for a refresher.

Back at Manpin, at the base of the hills and the point closest to Kamaing on our route, I finally got through to Janpan and we were instructed to move rapidly to Auche to block the trail north: Beach's patrols were fighting a delaying action against Japanese forces advancing north from Kamaing. We took a supply drop before leaving

Manpin, and while it was being cleared an OSS Chinese agent appeared. Operating under a code name, he relayed information by radio to Lt. Col. Ray Peers, commander of Detachment 101. He said that a large Japanese force had left Kamaing on a trail to Auche only four or five hours ago, according to a reliable native informant, a purveyor of milk to the Japanese officers' mess in Kamaing.

Luckily the evening patrol of fighter planes came over as I was digesting and plotting this information, and I asked the flight leader to verify it. When he reported back that the tail of a column could be seen disappearing up the trail in question, I designated it a target and the fighters proceeded to work the Japs over. We knew they were successful, for they returned some time later to buzz Manpin, pull up in a steep climb, and end with the barrel-roll signifying *Mission accomplished*. Working with Galahad was a pleasure for the fighter pilots and a relief from supporting the Chinese. We pinpointed targets for close-in strafing and bombing and we checked and reported results of missions flown, whereas the Chinese designated whole areas as targets, never reported results, and were quite unreliable in reading maps.

It seemed to me, on the basis of all information available, that with this detachment of Japanese out of the way the important installation at Kamaing must now be wide open; and here I sat with a battalion and a half of troops just five or six miles away. I radioed Merrill for permission to move in on the place; it would be a bigger coup than our now abandoned Inkangahtawng project and would cut off the rear of the Japanese forces we had been ordered to intercept at Auche. To my disappointment I was told to withdraw; I still believe it was a golden opportunity that should have been exploited.

## Nhpum Ga

What followed were Galahad's darkest days so far. McGee's battalion, moving back exhausted from Auche to Nhpum Ga on 28 March, was attacked and within two or three days cut off from 3rd battalion and the headquarters staff, which had taken up position in a valley to the north to protect the airstrip at Hsamshingyang. Merrill had a heart attack and was evacuated. As the situation became critical Father Stuart informed

me that the Kachins might pull out at any time. Nevertheless, on 3 April, I ordered Kachins substituted for patrols wherever possible and all able men assembled for a determined drive to relieve McGee. As this drive made progress the Kachins perked up again and began to feel out the trails.

In the meantime Osborne's 1st battalion, after a brilliantly professional job of reconnaissance by its I and R platoon, had surprised the Japanese at Shaduzup on 28 March, set up a block, and held it against counterattacks until relieved by the Chinese with their pack artillery. Osborne's men were now ordered back over the long roundabout trails, the sum of both forces' earlier routes, to join us. They arrived on 7 April after a forced march on short rations. Exhausted as they were, and with dysentery and malaria widespread among them, 250 were found fit for immediate employment. With these and the help of air photos which had finally arrived, I was able to order a flank attack around the right side, protected by a diversionary move on the left, which cut the Japanese supply line.

By 9 April, Easter Sunday, the Japanese had had enough and pulled out. We were ordered not to pursue. McGee's men had performed a near miracle in holding out against what we thought was an enemy battalion; after the war we learned that it was two mixed battalions of infantry reinforced by a company of artillery. This force, the main Japanese reserve in north Burma, was badly mauled, and its withdrawal ended any serious enemy threat to Stilwell's forces there.

As I walked into the defense perimeter that Sunday I paused to look at a motionless horse whose gray color I did not recognize. On close examination I was stunned to find that every inch of his body except his hooves was covered with inanimate gray flies, gorged with the flesh of the poor animal, too weak to flick his tail. Bloated animals, also covered with flies, lay with legs grotesquely extended in protest where they had fallen and died from shell fire, thirst, or starvation. An all too familiar nauseating odor lay over the area, heavy as a London fog.

McGee took me around the perimeter, reviewing the events of the past ten days. Here a soldier took a direct hit from a mortar and had to be buried in his foxhole; that scarred tree was used by a bazooka man to fragment his shells over the bunched-up Japanese; this was where Matsumoto crept forward and listened to the Japanese officers giving their attack orders; here a soldier shot his buddy in the morning mist;

and there a lieutenant, unrecognized without his glasses, was shot by his own men. The Japanese, in their haste, had left several dead behind, including the bloated lower half of a body that looked for all the world like a pair of football pants stuffed with gear for an out-of-town game. Galahad had 52 dead, 302 wounded, and 77 evacuated sick, as against more than 400 Japanese killed; but it was badly weakened and needed a rest.

## Arang

About the time we had got Nhpum Ga cleaned up Colonel Hank Kinnison, Stilwell's G3 at NCAC, visited us at Hsamshingyang and said that Stilwell was seriously thinking of organizing a task force to seize the airstrip at Myitkyina, head of navigation on the Irrawaddy, the northernmost railhead and the main Japanese base in north Burma. Although we considered this idea of Stilwell's a wild dream, involving as it would the crossing of the jumbled Kumon range in the rains preliminary to the coming monsoon, I thought the staff would benefit from the exercise of preparing a study on its feasibility while the men and animals were getting back into condition. Laffin made a study of the terrain. Working from our maps, such as they were, and questioning the OSS Kachins and local villagers, he selected routes that might be negotiable over the mountains and south to Myitkyina. Father Stuart was an invaluable help, not only because of his own knowledge of the country but because he could evaluate for our purposes a Kachin estimate of the usability of a trail.

When, a few days later, I was asked to send a staff officer to Stilwell's headquarters, I gave him the staff study to take along as of possible use, incomplete as it was and scratched with pencil on all kinds of paper. Merrill, on his feet again and active at headquarters, incorporated it into plans he had been making for our next mission and presented it to Stilwell within a couple of hours. Galahad was ordered back to Naubum, where the Myitkyina Task Force would be formed.

Naubum, Curl's once recondite retreat, was alive with activity. Many new bashas had been built around the airstrip, now uncamouflaged with two liaison aircraft parked brazenly in the open. Merrill was there; he was to

command the task force. His executive officer would be Colonel John E. McCammon, a Chinese-speaking officer newly brought from Stilwell's Kunming headquarters, for the task force would consist of Galahad and two Chinese regiments being flown in over the hump from China. I was to command a subordinate Task Force "H" comprising Osborne's 1st battalion and the 150th Chinese regiment, under Colonel Huang, plus a Chinese battery of 75-mm. pack howitzers. Kinnison would have a similar "K" force composed of Beach's 3rd battalion and the other Chinese regiment.

Jack Girsham and Laffin would be with H force. During the few days at Naubum Laffin made an intense study of the trails, leading or sending Kachins out to test routes that looked possible. The problem was not just to find a trail over the mountains, but to find a route that the animals with their heavy packs could take. He finally selected one and proposed that it be tried out all the way to Arang on the other side of the range.

The OSS people could talk by radio with Arang, where there was a secret setup similar to Captain Curl's at Naubum, and I asked them to have Arang dispatch a patrol to Naubum over the proposed route to check it. In a few days the fourman patrol reported in with the information that it was passable and with invaluable detail about it. Laffin was sent ahead with some Kachins and an engineer officer to improve it as far as they could.

On 27 April we set out, K force in the lead to cut off to the left from Ritpong for a feint at Nsopzup on the Myitkyina-Sumprabum road, H force to continue via Arang and attack the Myitkyina airfield with a target date of 12 May, and what was left of McGee's battalion, reinforced by 300 Kachins, to take a more direct route south of ours, providing security on the right flank as far as Arang. Past the improved first portion of the trail the going was brutal. Third battalion, in K force, lost twenty animals with their loads of ammunition and equipment; they would slip in the mud and roll down the mountainside. H force lost several. I once found a soldier struggling along with a pair of obviously heavy saddle bags in addition to his pack; they contained 1500 silver rupees, H force's intelligence funds. He was first incredulous and then dismayed when I ordered him to throw away the supposedly precious burden he had clambered down 200 feet to retrieve from his dead pack-horse.

We reached Arang, the OSS headquarters on the Kumon eastern slopes, behind schedule, having been delayed as far as Ritpong by the straggling tail of K force column. At Ritpong K force had met unexpected Japanese resistance and we had slipped on through without being observed by the enemy. Arang was a pleasant little spot, where we could take our last relatively safe air drop, evacuate those unfit to continue, and receive the latest intelligence and any changes in plan. I was never given any estimate of the Japanese strength to expect at Myitkyina, but I did receive here a large air photo of the town and one of its airfield, about two miles west of the town nearer the downstream settlement of Pamati.

Merrill flew in at Arang. Since I was going to impose radio silence from about the time H force left Seingneing, we agreed on a set of code words to keep him informed and to enable me to order the necessary resupply of food and ammunition when we had taken the airstrip. Galahad carried on its collective human and animal back only enough ammunition for ten to twelve minutes of fire from all weapons, and immediate resupply would be imperative if there were any kind of fight. The codes were as follows:

*Cafeteria lunch:* H hour minus 48.

*Strawberry sundae:* H hour minus 24. Ready resupply transports.

*In the ring:* Attacking. Transports take off.

*Merchant of Venice:* Field secure; no repairs needed. Transports land.

If I judged that the field needed repair, engineers would land by glider. I repeatedly pressed Merrill for instructions on what to do after taking the airfield, whether to take the town and whether to cross the river, but he would only say, "Don't worry. I'll be the first man on the field and take over."

## **Merchant of Venice**

We marched south from Arang behind a screen of 75 OSS-trained

Kachins under the command of Lt. Bill Martin. Laffin stayed at the head of the column with Martin. In two days we reached Seingneing, which was reported to have been occupied by the Japanese at one time. Laffin, scouting it, found no signs of recent occupation, and we could therefore take a supply drop here. I tried to make use of this last opportunity to evacuate those too sick to go on: dysentery and a strange new fever which we eventually found to be mite typhus had become rampant. A few litter planes got in and out of the improvised airstrip until the wind shifted, but then after a near crash on the short take-off the pilots could no longer risk it. We had to leave two officers and 32 men there in charge of Major Tom Senff, who had a wrenched back and an infected throat. Somehow my request that they be taken care of was lost at headquarters, and they were left untended for five days until Senff in desperation limped the twenty miles to find us at Myitkyina.

There were two exasperating incidents with the Chinese at Seingneing. First, I found that they had got tired of carrying the rather heavy batteries of their radios and had thrown them away some days before, and so couldn't be used in a dispersed operation. And now the commander of the pack howitzers wanted to leave all his ammunition behind because he had several lame horses and mules. It took about two hours to convince him that his battery without ammunition would be as useless as the radios without batteries.

Having radioed *Cafeteria lunch*, we left Seingneing in the afternoon on 15 May, planning a night march in order to cross the Mogaung-Myitkyina road half way to Myitkyina by early daylight. We were a small force--under 400 Americans, fewer than 800 Chinese rifles, and an untested battery of the lightest of light artillery--to be attacking an important enemy base, and everything depended on achieving surprise. The column could get across the road in three hours by daylight; at night it would take a great deal longer. Moreover, air observation and Kachin road watchers indicated that any largescale use of the road occurred under cover of darkness. This schedule should give the men a chance to rest the following night before attacking on the morning of 17 May.

We were guided on this furtive march by one particular OSS Kachin whose knowledge of the country was a major factor in our successful approach; he had formerly been a forest ranger in the Pidaung National Forest through which we were moving. We also had at the head of the column three or four OSS agents of Anglo-Burmese extraction, not very aggressive but likable men. Like the sons of other mixed marriages

throughout the Orient, the war had put them in the difficult position of having to choose between their opposing inherited loyalties and made them treasonable to the side they chose against. They had now irrevocably committed themselves to the Anglo-American war effort, and they were scared: as we neared the road crossing they would nervously step aside on the trail at every opportunity to relieve themselves. I wondered each time whether they would come back, but they always did. Courage is essentially self-control under frightening conditions, and these OSS agents had it.

Bill Laffin himself was in a similar or worse position. The son of an American retired sea captain and his Japanese wife, he had been repatriated on the Gripsholm after signing a pledge not to wage war against Japan. His parents remained in Japan under the watchful care of the Kempri Tai; it would go ill with them and him if he were captured by his mother's people. I often wondered from what source he drew the calm courage that complemented his unflinching dignity and sense of decency. I admired him.

In the wee hours of that night, as we made our way through the intense darkness, I was radioed for permission to use a flashlight: our Kachin guide had been bitten by a snake, perhaps a hamadryad, and the doctor wanted to examine and treat him. The column halted, waiting for the verdict on our one indispensable man. His leg was swelling fast, Doc McLaughlin reported, and it would endanger his life to go on. I said he had to go on. "It will kill him," Doc answered. "We'll have to let him rest at least two hours." I told Doc he had to go on until he collapsed; too much depended on him. I sent my horse forward and told Laffin to disregard Doc's orders and put the Kachin on it and get going. McLaughlin, governed by selfless devotion to his profession and the precepts of the Hippocratic oath, could not bring himself to endanger a human life; but a commander must put the success of his mission above all other considerations.

It was not long now before our guide, in great pain but still in command of his faculties, said that the Mogaung-Myitkyina road lay ahead. Laffin and OSS Lieutenant Martin scrupulously refrained from setting foot on it; they wanted me to have the honor of being the first to cross this so important little ribbon of gravel. Sending security detachments a mile out on either side in the gray dawn, we crossed unobserved and without incident. When the whole column was across I had the radio unslung and transmitted *Strawberry sundae*--"H minus 24; ready supply

transports."

The next crossing was the railroad, at a point some five miles from its terminus at Myitkyina. Here we expected no trouble, and had none. Herbie, one of our Nisei, climbed a telephone pole and tapped the line; there was nothing of importance on the wire. We did not cut it, not wanting to bring a repair crew down the tracks on us. Beyond the railroad lay the village of Namkwi, on the east bank of the Namkwi Hka. As a precautionary measure I had Martin and his Kachins round up the entire population, man, woman, and child, and bring them along as our guests for the night.

Elated at having reached our point of assault without being discovered, we bivouacked on the river south of Namkwi and spent a busy evening gathering information. Martin and his OSS agents engaged the villagers in long periods of questioning about the Japanese strength and habits, the condition of the airstrip, etc., until they were squeezed dry of what they knew. After dark Laffin sent a patrol to reconnoiter the airfield, and its leader got through and actually onto the runway and back without being seen, although Japanese were all about. As a result of these efforts I was in possession by midnight of excellent information on which to base an attack order, as follows:

The Japanese worked on the airfield at night, repairing any bomb damage incurred during the day. The repair crews were billeted on the far side of the strip toward the Pamati end. At Pamati there was a Japanese military police headquarters for the area. There was no wire around the airfield, and the revetments around the strip which I had noticed on my air photo and had been worried lest they be fortified were not. The 55-gal. oil drums the photo showed checkerboarding the field were still there. Cover was sparse, and observation points between us and the field were lacking. Laffin's patrol had plotted a compass course that could confidently be used as an axis of attack.

It was learned also that a train left Myitkyina for Mogaung at about eleven every morning, that in Myitkyina there had been 2000 Japanese some time ago, and that the Japanese had 25 geishas in the area. (This last item became one of absorbing professional interest to Herbie, who by the time the city fell on 3 August had an accurate list of the names of all of them.)

The attack, at 10:30 the next morning, 17 May, went like clockwork, like

part of a peacetime maneuver. As the troops moved out we sent our message *In the ring*, the signal for our supply transports to take off. The Chinese swept across the field and dug in on the east, toward Myitkyina, against shell fire. Osborne took Pamati and, leaving a platoon there to hold it, proceeded upstream toward the Zigyun ferry south of Myitkyina, the ultimate objective I'd given him. OSS Lieutenant Martin and his Kachins first blew up the railroad bridge over the Namkwi--the train escaped, coming through apparently ahead of schedule while the charges were still being placed--and then supervised the local villagers in the job of rolling the oil drums off the runway.

By mid-afternoon the field was operational. I radioed *Merchant of Venice* for transports to come in and land. We had difficulty getting an acknowledgment, so I asked the leader of a flight of P-40's that shortly flew over--with orders to support us, but we had no targets--to relay it in again.

Then the clockwork went crazy. The planes came in promptly, but they brought no ammunition, no food, no General Merrill, only sundry goods and personnel not ordered, not wanted, and not needed. First it was gratuitous engineers, landing in gliders with great hazard to Col. Huang's men at the edge of the field. Then came a 50-caliber antiaircraft battery that proved useless. Then a battalion of the 89th Chinese infantry regiment that had to be disposed someplace where they wouldn't shoot up the troops doing the fighting. What with taking care of all these arrivals I had no time for running the battle. The afternoon was a nightmare. *Command Problems* says it was General Stratemeyer of the Army Air Force who "intervened and upset the planned schedule." Why he was allowed to intervene and why Merrill or someone with authority from Task Force or Theater headquarters didn't arrive I still do not know.

## Chinese Fiasco

The next morning, 18 May, Stilwell did fly in. He would have been welcome if he had brought food and ammunition, or even an idea of what we were to do next. But he brought only a dozen correspondents anxious to show how brave they were in visiting the combat zone. He did not say where Merrill was, and plans to follow up the success of our

mission apparently had simply not been laid: when I told him that I was going to send the 150th Chinese against the town as soon as the supplies came in, he merely grunted, neither agreeing or disagreeing.

This day and the next, however, with ammunition low, I had to hold the Chinese in position east of the airfield. Osborne took the Zigyun ferry crossing but ran completely out of food and had to be withdrawn. On the 18th we lost Bill Laffin. I had asked him to take a liaison plane to find K force, whom we couldn't reach by radio, and deliver a message outlining our situation. He was in the air when a flight of Zeros, hiding behind a cloud formation that regularly hangs over the Irrawaddy bend at Myitkyina, heard our fighter patrol radio that it was getting low on gas and was returning to base a few minutes early, before its relief arrived. The Zeros came in, and Laffin's plane either was shot down or crashed trying to get away. This was the only air attack we ever had. My orderly was killed, my own face was pock-marked by spent dum-dum fragments, and considerable damage was done to the fighter planes parked on the field. Stratemeyer could just as well have kept his ack-ack at home: it consumed a lot of food and ammunition, but no Zeros.

On the 19th still no supplies. Merrill flew in, but so unannounced and briefly that I saw him only in time to wave an astounded goodbye as he was taking off. After reporting to Stilwell that afternoon he had another heart attack that put him permanently out of the campaign. He had visited my headquarters, however, and been given our intelligence estimates that there had been between 400 and 500 Japanese in Myitkyina at the time of our attack on the field, that these had grown in a matter of hours to about 2000, and that now there were two and a half battalions, with more coming up from the south. With a supply of ammunition we could have kept going and got into the town on the 17th or 18th; now it would be more costly. Merrill reported these estimates to Stilwell, but curiously and perhaps with a purpose it was the 400-500 figure that stuck in young Stilwell's mind at his father's Shaduzup headquarters and in the mind of the intelligence officer at Myitkyina Task Force headquarters, at this time inexplicably still back at Naubum. More on this later.

The supplies finally arrived on the 20th. The 150th, ready to go, moved out against the town, beginning with an embarrassing fumble. I had unwisely given Colonel Huang an azimuth as axis of advance; he read his compass wrong, got off in the wrong direction, and had to come back and start all over. This time we lined his regiment up in a column of

battalions, a simple attack formation not easily fouled up. The initial assault was successful beyond imagination, carrying to the railroad station in the heart of the city. But when orders from Japanese fire intended for the leading battalion began to hit those following in column, the latter stupidly opened fire on their own troops ahead of them; the British lend-lease uniforms the Chinese wore were indistinguishable except by their helmets from the Japanese. Then the entire regiment broke and ran, leaving close to three hundred dead or dying in the streets. It was every man for himself, and stragglers were even collected by McGee's force now arriving at Namkwi four miles away.

## The Siege

On 21 May Merrill was formally replaced by Col. McCammon, his executive, who began to organize a new task force headquarters at the airfield. He would be commanding the 30th and 50th Chinese divisions, whose remaining elements were then arriving, as well as all of Galahad, which was now under my command; but he kept the two stars of his ad hoc Mexican promotion in his pocket. Osborne's battalion was kept at the airfield to guard it and the headquarters. The rest of Galahad-- McGee at Namkwi and K force at last at Charpate--was assigned to provide security on the north and attack Myitkyina from there. Hardly a man of Galahad was by now free of dysentery or malaria or typhus, and the evacuation rate had become alarming.

McCammon was a reluctant debutant, and not well. He mounted one attack that failed. His reports to Stilwell were pessimistic. An atmosphere of apprehension, fear of an all-out Japanese attack to retake the field, began to prevail, not shared by Galahad. On 30 May Stilwell abruptly relieved McCammon and put Boatner, his own chief of staff, in command. I was given makeshift reinforcements in the form of two American engineer battalions from the Ledo road whom I was to introduce to combat operations. At this time Stilwell could probably have got the 36th British division to take Myitkyina, but having, in his own words, "burned up the Limeys" by his coup in seizing the airfield, he insisted on keeping it an American-Chinese show.

General Boatner almost immediately ordered an attack, but it got

nowhere. Then in the early days of June the town was completely invested by the Chinese on the south and the Americans on the north. The original Galahad almost disappeared during this time. The doctors ordered first McGee and then Beach evacuated with the bulk of their battalions. Osborne, held inactive at the airfield against my wishes, was down to 18 officers and about 350 men. An unorganized batch of the greenest of green replacements were formed into what we called 2nd battalion New Galahad and placed at Mankrin to block a small road running north along the river. On 4 June I had set up my headquarters at Radahpur, where the main road out from Myitkyina forks west to Mogaung and north to Sumprabum, and there it was to remain for the next two months. South of Radahpur, about half way to Myitkyina, the two engineer battalions, by now reliable combat forces in a limited defensive role, were in position on either side of the road. The siege began.

During June and July the question of the Japanese strength in Myitkyina became a sore subject between my headquarters on the one hand and task force and theater headquarters on the other. After Jack Girsham and our Nisei had interrogated some fifty prisoners and talked to hundreds of evacuees from the town, it was very clear that over 2000 of the enemy were still alive there. Yet the figure 400-500 had become so fixed at the headquarters on the airfield and in Shaduzup that they would not revise it even when more than that were known to have been killed in and around the beleaguered town. Our positive unit identifications and casualty counts were brushed aside.

It is my personal belief that this ostrich-like attitude was adopted in order to deceive the Chinese troops and shame them for their lack of aggressiveness. Young Stilwell could not have been so ignorant of the situation as the intelligence estimates he furnished us all through June and July indicated; if he was he should have been relieved. Neither the Chinese nor Galahad fell for this deliberate manipulation of intelligence, if that is what it was; it only gave us a complete lack of confidence in any intelligence information put out by our higher headquarters. Information received from above was carefully analyzed and then usually discarded.

Galahad's estimate of 2000 was still 'way short of the correct figure, as we learned after the war from Japanese officers, for a very simple reason. Every Japanese soldier we had hitherto killed or captured had been found to have his name and unit marked in India ink on the fly of

his breeches. In June we began to find bodies without this marking, and so could not tell whether they had belonged to units already identified or to new ones. Our estimates, therefore, based on the known organizational strength of positively identified units, were incomplete, and we did not suspect that at one point in the battle there were some 4,500 enemy troops opposing us.

While thus underestimating Japanese strength for the benefit of the forces under his command, General Boatner was attempting to create a quite different impression in General Stilwell's mind. Here he dangled the prospect of losing even the airfield, saying in one report, "On the face of it it might appear that we have plenty here on the field for protection. Such is not the case; we in fact have only a prayer." Galahad would actually have welcomed an all-out banzai attack from the Japanese, having long since learned that these offered the best opportunity for rapid mass slaughter of the enemy. As it was, June under the monsoon dragged on as a month of frustration--sodden foxholes, one futile assault by a Chinese force, then advances measured in yards, everything in short supply, more casualties from combat, disease, and self-inflicted wounds among the green troops than we could handle, more green replacements. Still we never lost confidence that the job would eventually be accomplished.

I participated in one psychological warfare effort, a broadcast by loudspeaker beginning with Japanese folk-songs and then bringing me on to offer the Japanese soldiers a safe and convenient means of surrender. One of our Nisei translated, and surrender passes were dropped over the Japanese lines. The project flopped: the first Japs that tried to use the passes unfortunately approached Chinese positions and were shot.

On 25 June Mogaung fell to a joint British-Chinese attack, and Myitkyina became the last enemy rallying point in the area. The Japanese who had invested Fort Hertz in the north were also being withdrawn, ambushed and harried on their way south by the OSS Kachins. Galahad, astride all the roads north of Myitkyina, had to be constantly looking over its shoulder and hunting down Japanese trying to infiltrate into the city through the fields and down the river. Since the New Galahads were not good at patrolling and couldn't be relied upon to carry out independent missions, I had assembled the best of the Old Galahads, now scarce as hen's teeth, and organized a Headquarters Reconnaissance and Security Platoon. It did an effective job, using scouts from a mercenary force of

30 or 40 local Gurkhas who took their pay sometimes in silver from the intelligence funds, more often in food for their families.

## The Fall

Also on 25 June Stilwell relieved Boatner and put General Theodore Wessels from SEAL in command. Now for the first time we had at Myitkyina a commander with whom we could communicate. He visited every frontline unit, talked to the officers and men, and was receptive to suggestions. Although the first major effort he ordered, on 12 July, turned into disaster when supporting B-25's bombed our own positions and annihilated a platoon of New Galahad--in a small-scale replica of what happened at about the same time to General Bradley's troops trying to break out of the Normandy beachhead--morale began to improve and our daily attacks carried farther.

In mid-July Colonel Ford, the British commander of Ft. Hertz, came through with a party of British and a couple of OSS men; they told us that they had seen little evidence of Japanese. On the way back they did jump a large body that had got inside our own outposts; but this was the last large-scale Japanese attempt at infiltration, and we could now spend less time looking over our shoulder.

Air photos of the Japanese positions also now began to arrive in response to my long-repeated requests for frequent coverage. With these and the large photo I had been given at Arang, which was so much better than any map that I had studied it constantly, it became possible to select individual buildings and other points as targets for the artillery, the 4.2-inch mortars, and bombing. Galahad had the exclusive use of one fighter-bomber flown by Captain Allred, who had been with the group supporting us throughout the campaign and became in effect a member of the organization. Using his P-51 as heavy artillery, he could be trusted to drop 500-lb. bombs close to our own lines and to strafe within 50 yards of them. Our artillery too, built up to six howitzers, had trained itself to an extremely high peak of efficiency. At 2000 yards the gunners on a single piece could get seven rounds on the way before the first one hit the target.

One of the new air photos of the positions opposite Galahad, taken after

a night of heavy rain, showed the roads leading from the town to the Japanese lines as dark in color for some distance and then lighter from there on. I studied it for hours trying to find the reason for this phenomenon, and then the solution hit me like an electric shock wave. The roads changed color at the point where the nightly traffic ceased on each; and therefore a concealed Japanese position must lie near each of these points. After further daylight air reconnaissance we began to destroy them systematically.

On another photo I noticed a patch of ground with many dark furrows across it, each of which terminated, along a very irregular boundary, in a faint blurred line on what seemed to be fine green lawn. After long pondering it struck me that the faint lines were rows of buried oil drums, with the dark furrows ones that had been dug up. I designated the former a target, and was shortly gratified to see large clouds of black smoke billowing from the area. A trained PI team would have discovered these things much sooner; it had been years since I had studied photo interpretation.

An additional battalion of New Galahad, under Lt. Col. Gestring, had been in training at the airfield, and now, though still undertrained and very inexperienced, it constituted the maneuver force we had been needing for sixty days. Stilwell proposed using this force to cross a lake-like flooded padi on the left flank of the engineers' position, take an uncompleted airfield the Japanese had been building, and enter the north part of the town. The rest of the town would then be not worth holding. I agreed, provided that the attack were properly supported by concentrated artillery and mortar fire and that late air reconnaissance and photo coverage were accomplished in time to give all officers and key NCO's identical photos in lieu of maps.

These conditions, with the usual exception of the air photos, were met, the attack was well planned, and on 26 July Gestring carried it out with success. His men established themselves firmly in the north section of the town. I held them there, telling headquarters that now it was time for the Chinese to move. Closing a ring is a delicate operation; I didn't want my men beyond the creek that forms a natural boundary between the north and south parts of Myitkyina, for fear the Chinese would fire on them. The rest of Galahad I put to mopping up from the north, searching every inch of ground in its assigned area.

The Japanese commander, now facing certain defeat, committed

suicide. On 3 August the Chinese made a ceremonial attack on the few Japanese left in the south part of the town, and it was announced that Myitkyina was in allied hands. The north Burma campaign, along with Galahad and my services in the CBI, was finished.

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1 Washington, D.C., 1956. One of the series *The U.S. Army in World War II* which form the official history produced by the Department of the Army. "Galahad," originally a code name for the project to send an unorthodox American force into Burma, in practice came to designate the force itself.

2 New York: Harper, 1959.

3 For an account of Detachment 101's intelligence activities see W. R. Peers in *Intelligence Articles IV 3*, p. A1 ff.

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