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INTRODUCTION

Most Group activities were participated in by units ranging in size from combat crews to the entire Group. Once in a while, however, someone in the Group was involved in a solo mission about which almost none of us had any knowledge. In this issue of MEMORIES and in Issue #16 to come, we record two such solo experiences.

Louis Jones was guest speaker at the Denver reunion. He told us this story that evening. We are making it this issue of MEMORIES because it deserves to be a part of the written history of the 40th and because only about 200 of our membership of over 1,500 heard Louis' account of his mission with the communist Chinese in bleak northern China more than 40 years ago.

THE "DIXIE MISSION" TO THE COMMUNIST CHINESE

I was an intelligence officer in the 45th. Nothing either interesting or important ever happens in the life of a squadron intelligence officer, however, I was lucky. I got a call one day from Col. Foss at Bomber Command headquarters who informed me that I had been selected to represent the XX Bomber Command on a fact-finding mission to communist Chinese headquarters. My primary assignment was to act as liaison between the communists and the XX Bomber Command. I was to determine to what extent they could be of assistance in recovering B-29 crews that might be down in areas they controlled.

At this period in history the United States Government recognized Chiang Kai-Shek as the political and military leader of all China. His nationalist forces had defeated the communists in the civil war that was underway at the time China was invaded by the Japanese. The communists were driven back into the mountainous and hilly region of North China. Their headquarters was located in Shensi province in the town of Yen-an.

Both the nationalists and the communists agreed that the common enemy was Japan and each waged war against the Japanese but in their own way. There was no attempt at coordinating efforts against the common enemy.

The big difference was that the nationalists got military aid from the United States but the communists did not.

I joined the other members of the mission in Chungking, China, and learned for the first time that our mission was to be known by the code name "Dixie Mission".

The mission was composed of approximately 20 people, both officers and enlisted men, under Col. Barrett, an old China hand. We had signal corps personnel, infantry officers, Navy officers, medical personnel, weather observers, two O.S.S. officers, two California Nisei who acted as interpreters of the Japanese prisoners, as well as two high ranking state department men and of course, me.

At Yen-an we lived in a walled compound area guarded by the Chinese and buttressed by a hill approximately 1,500 feet high. Our rooms were actually caves in the hillside. We bunked two to a cave. A wooden frame doorway covered the entrance to the cave. The doorway openings were covered with rice paper. There was a four foot overhanging roof that sheltered the entrance to all caves.

In meeting with the communist leaders I emphasized that we were going to bomb Japan from bases in nationalist China and there was a probability that American flyers might come down in areas they controlled. They were eager to help.

Col. Barrett ordered eight of us to make field trips to evaluate the communist military forces. Of course, I spread the word that (1) all downed American flyers were to be harbored and kept safely together and (2) that Yen-an was to be notified and everyone - crew members and rescuers - were then to wait for instructions.

The state department delegates and the mission commander remained behind in Yen-an and carried on discussions with the communist leadership.

On these evaluation trips, usually we traveled in pairs. My fellow officer was Johnny Colling, a captain in the infantry who spoke fluent Chinese. His specialty was demolition.

We rode horseback and each had a pack animal for belongings. Two Chinese attendants were assigned to each of us. One was actually a "valet" (Jao-Di-Yuan) and the other tended to the horses (Ma-Fou). Due to the nature of the countryside and condition of the trails, we did quite a bit of hiking. On those occasions we lead the horses.

We wore American uniforms unless we were crossing Japanese controlled territory and then we dressed in Chinese communist uniforms.

On the flat lands we rode. We would be mixed in with approximately 15 other riders. We crossed flat areas at a trot and would have approximately a company of infantry surrounding us moving at double time.

In the mountainous regions we traveled single file and lead our horses. The company of Chinese troops would be spread out about a mile in front and behind us. Immediately in front of me -- running ahead on the trail -- was a German shepherd dog that hated Japanese. He would never let us out of his sight. When the trail curved he would sit and wait until we caught up to him before running ahead again. I was impressed by this dog and the Chinese let me keep him when we completed our travels. He usually slept on the foot of my bed. We knew that if we got in a "fire-fight" with a Japanese unit and the Chinese were unable to protect us, we would no doubt be killed as spies since we were out of uniform. Nevertheless, both Colling and I thought we would be killed, if captured, whether we were in or out of uniform. So, we had no hesitancy or misgivings about wearing Chinese communist uniforms.

We lost one officer to the Japanese, he was captured, his hands were tied behind his back and his legs were tied at the ankles. He was made to kneel and was shot in the back of the head. A sword was also used. We later recovered his body.

The Pointee-Talkee Chinese pamphlet in the survival kits was not as useful as was anticipated because of so many of the Chinese peasants could not read their own language. After a flyer was down it might take him a couple of days to find someone who could read.

Further, when we were out on tours, we would have to change our Chinese attendants every couple of days because they could not communicate with their own countrymen when they were over 50 miles from home because of the difference in dialects and inability to read.

Other rescue materials, other than medicines, in the survival kits were of little use if you were downed. Once you were in communist hands, you would be fed and clothed and you followed their instructions. Usually, it wouldn't be too many days before word got to Yen-an and we would begin arranging a pick-up.

The method of rescuing downed B-29 crews was to move them to an area where there was an air strip. The instructions were to stay concealed near the strip and to wait. We came as soon as we thought the conditions were right. We had to consider many things besides the weather -- Japanese troop movements -- Japanese fighters, etc.

We used a stripped down B-25, which was actually General LeMay's personal plane, to attempt pick-ups.

Ten days to two weeks might go by without a pick-up attempt. The crews would get "itchy" and would begin to lose confidence in the communists and to look for other activities.

The rescue of George Varoff's crew is an example of how painfully boring it was to remain concealed near an air strip for ten days to two weeks.

When the first rescue attempt was made Varoff's crew was not there. They had gone to a neighboring village to be wined and dined as guests of the communists. Once it was determined the crew was not at the strip, the rescue plane took off immediately. They could not afford to stay on the ground any length of time because the Japanese fighter bases were too close.

There were nothing but pleas over the communist network to come again. The second attempt went smoothly. The entire crew of 11 got out safely.

Varoff's crew was the only one I knew personally since I was in Yen-an and the rescue plane went directly back to A-1. By the time I got back to A-1 on a training mission, rescued personnel were already back in the states on R & R. After 35 years, in 1980 at our first reunion in New Orleans, I got a chance to visit with George Varoff and re-play his rescue.

All of our activities in Yen-an were not rescue related. I have some other vivid memories.

The communists were anxious to get U.S. Military aid. General Patrick Hurley was Roosevelt's personal Emissary and Ambassador to China. In September 1944, he met with the communist leadership in Yen-an.

An appropriate billet had to be prepared for General Hurley. My cave was selected since I had rigged up the only bed in the American compound. It consisted of three 2" by 12" boards across two saw horses. I had an inflatable rubber mattress. I slept on this improvised bed in a sleeping bag. I got the sleeping bag from Red Woolsey. Everyone else slept on a Chinese bunk which consisted of a hollow clay-based rectangular platform across the rear of the cave about two feet high and four feet wide.

There was a thin cotton pallet on this bunk. Underneath one corner of the bunk was a fireplace. Each night the Chinese would build a fire and this would heat the bunk. I found out the hard way that it also awakened all the hibernating vermin.

For General Hurley the Chinese made up my bed with a pillow, sheets and blankets. It was very "stateside" they also put new rice paper over the doorway. I moved down about 8 caves and stayed with the weather officer.

In the middle of the night a problem developed and one of the guards stationed at General Hurley's cave entrance came to get me. It seems I forgot to tell my German shepherd, who always slept on the foot of my bed, that I wasn't there. Before they sent for me my trusty dog had been kicked out of the bed by the General twice. The last time the dog growled at the General. That was when they sent for me.

The next day I apologized to the General who was really a good sport. In fact, he insisted I bring the dog around so he could see him in the daylight.

In January, 1945 when the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that they would not land American troops on the China mainland, but would island-hop to Japan, the communists were notified that they would not receive any military aid from the United States. This put a chill on our otherwise friendly relationship. All the top military personnel and state department representatives departed Yen-an. There remained only two officers of the original contingent -- myself and the weather officer. As a result, I became the mission commander.

Once a week Chairman Mao would invite the American Mission Commander to have dinner with him and other political and military leaders.

During one of these meals I was sitting next to Chairman Mao. I reached over toward the center of the table with my chop sticks to try a succulent-looking meat dish. Mao put his chop sticks on top of mine and spoke to me in Chinese. Since I did not understand him I turned to my interpreter who told me that Mao realized that in my country the dog was a pet, but that in China the dog was a meat animal and that I did not have to eat it if I did not want to. I started to pull back, but when I looked up I saw that everyone had stopped eating to see what my reaction would be; therefore, I went ahead and ate the dog meat and everyone went back to eating and appeared satisfied with my reaction. Nevertheless, for the rest of the meal I dodged this local delicacy.

We were always after the Chinese to lengthen the air strip at Yen-an and improve the surface because when the ground was not frozen it got extremely muddy. We could only get a C-47 in and we wanted to be able to fly in a larger plane.

One day the communist liaison officer came over to check on us as was his custom. He informed me that Chairman Mao had arisen very early that morning and had gone to the air strip to help his people work on lengthening and improving the runway. This was pure propaganda. Not to be outdone, I ordered the entire mission to report for work at the air strip. I gave everyone a cigar and insisted that they smoke it while they worked. We pulled the big stone rollers and carried soil and rocks for one entire day. I just wanted Mao to know that cigar smoking capitalists were not afraid of hard work. The Chinese peasants loved it and cheered us while we worked.

We used to play softball in our compound after dinner in the evening. One day the communist liaison officer informed me that the Japanese prisoners had challenged us to a softball game. I didn't even know that the Japanese prisoners played ball. I told the liaison officer that I would have to think it over.

I discussed it with the men. Our California Nisei indicated that the Chinese were trying to work us into a situation of face. We would lose face if we refused to play the Japanese and it would be even worse if we lost. We decided to play and practiced very hard for about a week.

Our Nisei said we should assert our authority and never let the Japanese forget that they were prisoners. In fact they said we should arrive at the ball field late and make the Japs sweat a little. Also we should be aggressive and make a lot of noise.

We pulled up in two jeeps after letting the Japs wait for us and stopped right over the pitcher's mound. We played a little "pepper ball" and then I sent for the leader of the prisoners. I told him we were very busy and lets get on with the game so we could get back to work. He gave me a traditional Japanese bow and said we could bat first. We did, and scored nine runs in our half of the first inning.

I am sorry to report that we did not score another run, but I am happy to report that we won the game nine to eight.

Our relationship with the communists had become strained and we were having a minimum of contact. As a result we decided to return to our traditional ways.

I was able to get hold of some plates and knives and forks and a supply of cooking utensils. We put our chop sticks away for good. We had an enlisted man who had been employed by the Amana stove company in civilian life. I put him in charge of the kitchen and instructed him to teach the Chinese cooks how to prepare food the way we liked it. He was enthusiastic and actually built a stove which was a 55 gallon drum encased in Chinese clay building material.

We cut large blocks of ice out of the Yen an river and stored them in caves to help refrigerate our food. We actually had ice cream up until late April, 1945.

We even had our own church services every Sunday. They were ecumenical and quite elementary. The professional services of a Father Adler were greatly missed.

General LeMay authorized the delivery of a plane load of medical supplies to the communists to show our appreciation for the rescue help they had given the XX Bomber Command. In one of my last "Dixie Mission" assignments, I participated in the delivery of those medical supplies, flying with an ATC crew in a C-46 from Kharagpur to Yen an.

Editor's Postscript: The Editors of MEMORIES invite you to submit your memories about experiences in the 40th Group. Any story you believe worth telling will be welcome. Right now we are seeking memories especially about flying patrols from "The Rock," the movement overseas from Kansas to India--B-29 flights, ground-sea travel and ATC transportation. We also want stories of experiences on Tinian including POW flights made immediately after the surrender. Please send your recollections to the Editors: William A. Rooney and Robert L. Hall, 517½ Ridge Road, Wilmette, IL 60091. Should you wish to send a check to help support the continued publication of MEMORIES, send it to: M.E. Carmichael, Treasurer, 2514 Oregon Ave., Alamogordo, NM 88310. Harry Changnon, 10455 Westacres Drive, Cupertino, CA 95014 is Group Historian.

MEMORIES seems to be appreciated by 40th Group members and we want very much to get it to everyone. However, we have a difficult time maintaining the mailing list. For example, for one recent issue of MEMORIES or the Newsletter, 22 mailing pieces were returned in one delivery from the Post Office marked "Forwarding Order Expired" or "Attempted, not known." As a result, our list of members has dropped from approximately 1,565 to about 1,517. It is heartbreaking for the Association officers to work so hard to locate members and then lose them through changes of address, etc. Accordingly, please keep the 40th Group in mind when changing address. Send address corrections to: Julian Cochran, Secretary, 1504 Horton St., Ft. Scott, KS 66701.



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