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CLOAK AND DAGGER IN CALCUTTA

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: We depart somewhat from memories of the 40th Group to tell this special story in MEMORIES for two reasons. (1) It involves a distinguished former member of the 40th and (2) It is a story that might never be found elsewhere except in some yellowing classified papers in the Air Force archives.

Paperback readers believe that spying and attendant dangers occur only in the pages of novels. Not so. The event which is the subject of this issue of MEMORIES occurred during the Christmas holidays of 1944 in Calcutta. James Garcia had served in the 40th in Puerto Rico and Panama. He returned to the States, rose to colonel and went to India as Intelligence Officer of the XX Bomber Command.

On June 15, 1944, the first B-29 raid on Japan was carried out. Col. Garcia flew on the raid with his brother-in-law, Winton Close (40th and later 444th). The world, and especially Washington, was waiting for word that bombs had been dropped on Japan. A code word was established to be flashed over the radio when the bombs were released if the mission was a success. That code word was "Betty," the name of Jim Garcia's wife.

Against the possibility of capture if he flew over enemy territory, special permission had to be obtained from the XX Air Force in Washington for Col. Garcia to fly the mission. Approval was received by scrambled telex at the Bomber Command Headquarters in Kharagpur only just in time. Meanwhile, as is known, U.S. cryptographers had cracked the Japanese most secret code. Security was so tight that transmission of such information was extremely limited.

In fact, only just prior to the June 15 mission, an officer was dispatched from Washington to brief Gen. K.B. Wolfe and his Intelligence Officer, Col. Garcia, on information derived from this code-cracking effort.

Col. Garcia sensed that the briefing would hold such high classified information that he would be precluded from flying the mission if he knew it. Accordingly, he sent his deputy Col. George A. Stinson, to attend the briefing in his place.

By the time Christmas 1944 had come around, Col. Garcia had received orders transferring him to Guam. Celebrating Christian holidays in a non-Christian land was an alien experience; but American troops, with their British counterparts, carried on their traditions in India at this season as best they could! Garcia was invited to a Christmas party in Calcutta. As Leonard Lozano, who was, at that time, M/Sgt. and chief clerk of the Bomber Command Intelligence section notes, "The Christmas party was only an incidental part of an official trip to Calcutta. I remember Col. Garcia would not go 60 feet from his quarters to attend a party--much less 60 miles."

On this evening in Calcutta, Col. Garcia was driving his own car. He agreed to drive some nurses, who were attending the party, back to their quarters. It was his intention to spend the night with a U.S. Naval officer friend who was stationed in Calcutta and who had an apartment in the city. Heading toward his friend's apartment after returning the nurses to their quarters, Garcia became uncertain of directions. (How could it be otherwise in the streets of Calcutta at night?) To orient himself, he stopped to read a street sign at an intersection. To better read the sign, he got out of the car leaving the engine running.

It was at that moment that he was jumped by perhaps four men. They asked him to come with them. Garcia protested, saying that he was just an American officer having no knowledge of anything that would be of use to them. One of his captors responded by saying, "We know who you are, Col. Garcia."

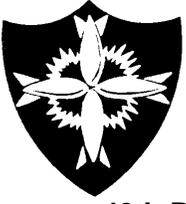
Well his captors could say they knew who he was. Garcia recognized one of them who was Chinese and who walked with a decided limp. He had attended the Christmas party where Col. Garcia had also been a guest. (Knowing that Col. Garcia could not possibly fail to identify him, removes from speculation the chances that the Colonel would have survived this kidnapping.)

Garcia was forced into a car which he recognized as being of American make. Garcia also made another life-saving observation, it was that, on this make of car, the door release was activated by pushing the door handle forward. The car was being driven at moderate to slow speed. The captors drove in a pattern of turns and changes of direction intending to confuse Garcia so that he would not know where he was when they reached their destination. Thwarting this move, Garcia kept track of the turns that were made and continued to hold a picture in his mind where they were. He was being loosely held in the back seat between two of his captors, with another in the front and the fourth driving. As they made a turn, Garcia leaned in that direction and eased forward as if to absorb the turn. In doing so, he suddenly fell forward, pushed down on the door handle and opened the door. As he tumbled forward, one of his captors reached out and slashed Garcia in the back with a knife. Garcia got to his feet and dashed back in the direction of his car, backtracking from the spot of his escape. He reached the intersection and there his car still stood with the engine running. He jumped in and made his escape. He made it to the quarters of his Navy friend and together they patched the slash in his back sufficient to hold until he could get to a military hospital. He was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds suffered in this encounter.

British counterintelligence was brought into the case and they said they believed they knew who the perpetrators were. One of the kidnappers had a friend in a Calcutta hospital. When it was known that his suspect was going to visit the hospital, it was arranged to have an appropriate CID man bedded next to the patient. Screens were positioned and Garcia was introduced into the screened area in an effort to listen to the voices to see if he might be able to identify them. The effort was inconclusive. Being scheduled for transfer to Guam, Garcia did not participate further in the investigation of the incident. No successful conclusion ever was reached.

General LeMay, in 1988, noted that the purpose of the kidnapping was never determined for sure although it was thought that somehow the Chinese might have been involved. The only action taken by the Bomber Command was to close the Chinese restaurants that had concessions at some of our bases. That was unfortunate, this officer observed, because we were on British rations and the Chinese restaurants were the only places a good meal could be found.

Garcia served in the Marianas as Intelligence Officer of the XXI Bomber Command. He had not previously qualified as a pilot of a B-29 and he wished to be so qualified, before returning home when the war was over. Tragically, he was killed in a crash while shooting landings on the last day of the war.



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Address Correction Requested