

~~HEADQUARTERS  
OSS-SU DETACHMENT 505  
APO 465~~

Kunming, China  
18 Nov., 1945

This diary has lain fallow for approximately one month, and the reasons therefor are valid, if uninteresting. However, there is something magic in the air I am now breathing which is conducive to diarizing.

A couple of days ago Frank and I came back to our room to find Lt. Cdr. Percy Wood, our Commanding Officer, finishing our last bottle of Carew's gin with a triumphant expression on his face. Percy is strictly a white man, and wrote a political column for the Chi. Trib. for twenty years. He has sweated out China with us for three months, and at this point was exceptionally proud of his assistance at the long deferred delivery. He gave us eight hours to get out of Calcutta, and we called in some other brass and all got drunk together.

It was a typically mild, warmish, dampish evening in Calcutta when we drove out to Barrackpore to take the 2345 plane. This plane, by the way, was a new C-54, known as the Douglas Skymaster, known to some as the MacArthur Special (since it commutes between Calcutta and Manila), known to its pilots as the Marco Polo (since it is now on a round the world run), and known gratefully to its passengers as a Plush Seat job.

It was regrettable that we flew by night since that precluded any rubbernecking of the Himalayas. The hump between Calcutta and Kunming direct is not as steep as from the upper Assam Valley, and we used no oxygen, and probably didn't have to fly over 12000 feet. However, it was evident that had the heating broken down we would have been a sorry lot of fresh frozen passengers. Furthermore, the trip would conceivably have been more comfortable with oxygen, since it was annoying to wake up constantly, gasping for air like a mackerel on a mud bank. I did catch about two hours sleep, and when the flight clerk woke me up to strap my safety belt for the descent, it felt as though someone had jammed great quantities of cotton into my sinuses and pharynx. Starting out with a mild cold may have had something to do with it, but nonetheless, the transition from the humid, steamy valley of the Hoogley to the Kunming Plateau, elevation 6240 ft., is something for the books. For the first time in many months I was cold, but no fooling. Naturally, we weren't dressed for winter, and damn near expired when we stepped from the plane at five AM. An hour later we had been assigned beds (I am flattering these rope nets on a wood frame) in Hostel 6 at the 14th Air Force field, and were under three wool army blankets, and were still shivering.

At this writing I am able to report that the definitely therapeutic qualities of the climate here are beginning to have their effect on me. But at first it was like coming up from a deep dive and skipping the decompression chamber.

For the climate here is really something. ~~For the books.~~ Kunming and its environs, including the huge air base, and completely ringed by a mountain chain, giving thee effect of a great basin, although it is actually a plateau, elevation six thousand feet. The mountains and cliffs are, I think, red sandstone--at any rate, they stand out ~~like~~ against the azure, cumulus-studded sky ~~it~~ somewhat like the San Bernadino range in Southern California. The air is chill, dry, and bracing. It is as dry as Arizona, and would be ding hao for a sinus condition if one could only stay to enjoy it.

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This is complicated somewhat by the soil conditions— the soil is a red clay, very fertile, but with a dry topsoil. As a consequence, there is a heavy layer of fine red dust on everything in this plateau, and its tendency is to choke and irrevocably strangle the unwary.

On making our presence known to the local Navy detachment, we were extended the courtesy of the very fine compound where the three remaining Naval officers are living. Being in the Navy does have its advantages, since the ATC passenger hostel where we were initially billeted is the worst I've ever seen—filthy, stinking, and disorganized. This Navy unit is attached to the 14th Air Force, and I'm afraid that if Mary Miles (Rear Admiral Miles, CO of ComNavForces China) knew I was being extended the courtesy of his detachment, he would wax wrathful—behind this lies a long and unpleasant story of OSS-Naval Group China wrangling, rivalry, and throat-cutting. Anyway, I am now the senior US Naval Officer in Kunming, the local CO being an Ensign! At any rate, it is much pleasanter here, there is transportation to throw away, the food is delicious compared to the garbage sold by ATC, and they will put us on the 0900 plane tomorrow morning for Shanghai via Chungking and Hankow.

The Americans here are still going around armed, and in groups, since the recent revolution in Kunming, and they expect another one daily. What I have learned here confirms what I had learned at second hand for the past year of attempting to study China from a distance—and that is that the fundamental rule in China is that everyone fights everyone else, and no one is to be trusted. One compelling reason I had to come here was because I found it impossible to get the true facts from the literature. That in itself is a fine reason for me not to attempt to discuss Chinese politics until I have been able to test my information against what I see and hear. But there is no snap judgement involved in reporting that the Nationalists are guarding every street and installation with fixed bayonets, and that the Provincial Army, nominally incorporated into the Central Government forces by the recent revolt, is still the Provincial Army, as unintegrated with the Nationalist army as the US Rainbow Division. ~~ix~~.

The city itself, in the heart of which I am staying, is crowded, dirty, and newly infected with the prospect of refugees returning, sometime, to their homes in the North or East. Driving through it at night, it could easily be an Indian city, with its narrow, crowded streets, its drunken GIs, its little shops lit only by an oil-soaked wick in a shell. And let me say that driving at night in a jeep without the benefit of a fur lined jacket is sheer suicide. There is one street known as GI Street. Along it one can purchase almost any American commodity from jeep carburetors to soap, both, incidentally, usually unobtainable at the American sources from which they have been pilfered. It is the most open, above-board black market I have ever seen. Along it, also, the femmes de joie ply their trade. These Chinese delicacies are distinguished, to my eye, by the shapeless gowns they wear, the bad figures (to the Western eye) which those gowns accentuate, and by the gold on the front teeth, a mark of great beauty to the Chinese. They do a thriving trade among the Americans, and

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one has only to slow down for perhaps eight or ten to come over to the jeep, and chatter "You say how much". Once when I stopped to light a cigarette I was almost assaulted by an enthusiastic little demimonde, and you never saw a Naval Officer depart the scene of potential action with such expedition. We did drop into the only remaining night spot for GIs, and I shall never forget it. It was jammed with people, sprawled informally on the few bare tables and chairs, consuming the incredibly poisonous Chinese spirits and wines. There were at least as many Chinese prostitutes there as Americans, and they were a well-disciplined and well-organized group, silently but effectively routed, dispatched, and occasionally inspired by the efficient madam and her staff, who occupied a strategic corner table. The scene was one of unbridled Babylonian excess—a Bacchanalian orgy complete with Pompeian obscenities. The three of us drank a bottle of sickly Yunnan wine, for which we paid \$1600 (CN), and picked our way out as carefully as we could, as many Americans were being both ill and belligerent.

Today the little CO devoted to shepherding us about the city. It is actually a walled city on a little plateau of its own, surrounded with little green farmlands, each plot of which would be put to shame by the smallest suburban victory garden—and yet those same little plots each represent the annual productivity of some marginal farmer. One great improvement over India which caught my eye immediately is the cattle. The steers and cows are raised for meat and milk (which we cannot touch, pasteurized or no), and are not simply allowed to rot because Hinduism considers them too sacred to touch. The waterbuffalo are good-looking animals here. In India the average useful life of a water-buffalo in the farmlands is 10-12 years; in the cities, where they are shamefully and unmercifully worked as beasts of pure burden, it is 2-3 years. The people are a gayer lot than the Indians, and the children have completely captivated me. Everyone has a smile or a laugh for you, even if it is the laugh of idiocy or despair. The exposure of "night soil" is even more casual than in India, and the aroma makes Calcutta smell like a perfumed houri. But in this climate, the most wretched and sordid items are softened by the magnificently clean air, and the light, which around evening time is very much like the crystal-clear, golden aura which one sees at dusk in the Swiss Alps, what I always remembered as the "Alpine Glow".

There is an old Kunming and a new one, which is quite modern indeed compared with the former. In Old Kunming, the streets are almost but not quite too narrow for a jeep, and wind up and down hills like a miniature and extremely noisome San Francisco. The people are mostly dressed for winter, wearing the characteristic padded blue cottons. I learned that the padding is not cotton, but results from glueing, yes, glueing many layers of the cloth together, and then stitching it. The many soldiers look ragged and poorly clad, and never does a uniform fit. Coolies carry on their "pogo stacks" loads which would stagger even a Bengali coolie, and there is an air of actual physical hardship and long-suffering about these people— In India, except for the coolies, the suffering was sometimes more aesthetic than physical. Here, as there, there are only the very rich and the very poor. Many people feel that the only true supporters of the Central Government are these very rich.

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I am reminded that in India I concluded that true, callous oppression of the masses came not from the British raj, but from the Indian aristocracy. I am also reminded that Beverly Nichols' controversial book, "Verdict on India" is most informative.

This afternoon Frank and I were paid. Because of the haste of our departure from Calcutta, we entered China with three dollars American between us. We drew a hundred each here, and were directed to the black market to change it. I don't think there has been a case on record of an American changing his money legally, since the "legal" rate, which I believe Uncle Sam has been paying officially, is around one tenth of the illegal, or common, every day, in-which-business-is-conducted rate. In other words, turn in one hundred American "legally" (I don't even know where this can be done) and you emerge with ten dollars buying power. At any rate, we staggered from the gold shop with \$180,000 (CN) apiece, and it was an armload. I enclose a few hundred dollars to light your cigarettes with.

I am informed that we are now to leave on the 6 AM plane, which goes via Canton.

On the streets a pedestrian's life is worth even less than when Americans were driving all the vehicles, since now they are owned and operated by the Chinese. I feel that the discussion of whether we are helping Chiang is rather academic. We have already turned over 19,000 vehicles to his government, aside from countless weapons, planes, etc. Our motive, I read, was to expedite the taking of the Jap surrender by Central Govt. forces. The implications are fairly obvious, and explain why ATC flew several fully equipped Chinese armies North to accept the surrender, and also just plain to be there. The Communists throughout the war armed themselves solely from captured Jap equipment. For them to accept any sizable surrender in their areas would augment their armory enormously, and, in fact, did. They now appear to have at their disposal, visavis Chungking, even more Jap arms than they could conceivably have been surrendered. \$64 question: did the Russians turn these over to them when they took the surrenders in Manchuria? \$64,000 question: are the Russians arming the Communists with Russian arms now? These questions, speculations, and lucubrations are not for publication, and my career with the State Dept. would undoubtedly be more short-lived than I expect it to be if I brooded aloud in this fashion. But why not be able to read my own bad guesses, faulty analyses, and specious conclusions ten years from now.