THE FINAL TACKS OF SACO

> In May 1945 we [SACO] heard by way of our usually excellent sources that General Yamashita had the Emperor's orders "to conclude the war quickly and at little cost." (Miles, 1967, p 492)

Standing orders for SACO were to capture ports and key facilities; hasten the departure of the retreating Japanese; and reduce their sabotage efforts.

In the Middle of May 1945, Gen. Lin and LT Swartz with 500 Chinese Army regulars and 12 Americans from Unit Seven captured both Foochow, a major port 20 miles up the Min River, and its airfield. The attack was planned as a surprise but spies erroneously reported over 1,000 invaders when they forewarned the Japanese, who fled with hardly a shot fired. The buildings, bridges, utilities, and food supplies were abandoned intact.

By the end of July, Unit Seven had cleared the Japanese from the areas downstream to and including the islands at the mouth of the Min River as well as from Matsu Island, 20 miles further to the east.

In July Unit Six gained control of the coastal stretch between Amoy and Swatow, 120 miles to the southwest. In the process they killed about 1,500 of the 3,700 Japanese troops who had evacuated the Quemoy and Amoy Islands. The unit already had captured Changchow, 25 miles west of Amoy, during September of the preceding year.

By the end of July 1945, SACO was in control of three seaports – major parts of Amoy Harbor, Changchow, and Foochow – and important airfields at Changchow and Foochow as well as almost 600 miles of coast between Swatow and Hangchow. Navy planes from the Philippines were airdropping 3,000 pounds of supplies per day into Changchow and Foochow. This effort was the brainchild of LT Stan McCaffrey and code named Operation Ding How, Chinese for "very good."

General Tai's intelligence network had received the word that, "the Japanese had already worked out plans for the destruction of Shanghai—that they intended to wreck it as they had Manila." (Miles, 1967, p 508) The first SACO man to reach Shanghai and initiate the end-of-war plans to protect that city was RM1c Bill Bartee; he arrived on August 2 during the dark of night and was smuggled from his sampan into the home of the police chief. Bill was joined the next day by RM1c W.E. Earle and the two set up a CW (clear wave, not voice) radio station. These two manned that station in that home 24-7 for several months; they transmitted to Chungking in the clear, received back the coded version that they broadcasted to the Fleet and the Fleet answered in the clear. Code protocols were being ignored; all understood that the war was over.

On the 6th and 9th of August the atomic bombs were dropped. Years later, almost a dozen SACO veterans told this writer that they had observed the glows on the horizon to the east but at the time had no idea of the sources. On August 14th the Japanese formally sued for peace.

Commodore Miles sent the following message while he and Gen. Tai were surrounded by about 7,000 Japanese troops in northern Chekiang Province. The two had just been notified by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek that the Japanese surrender was impending.

> August 12 All SACO: General Tai Li has ordered Commando Army, Loyal Patriotic Army, and other miscellaneous forces under his command to proceed to major cities in occupational zones to establish order for Central Government. This is in accordance with directives from Gimo. SACO Americans will proceed with their authorized Chinese unit commanders. Carry with you complete radio equipment and go fully armed. . . (Miles. 1967, p 520)

As a matter of record, the next day Miles was spot promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral.

Foul weather associated with a typhoon grounded air transport and Chinese troops could not be flown to the Shanghai area. On August 19 two SACO men, intelligence officers LCDR Henry Shoemaker and LCDR David Fairbrother who were assigned to AGAS (Air Ground Aid Statistics), entered Shanghai. The Japanese refused to yield control of the city and threatened the Americans. The two officers were rescued by the Swiss consul and given sanctuary in the consulate for a few days.

The next SACO hands to arrive in Shanghai were 8 Americans and 25 Chinese from Unit Eight. At Haimen they commandeered two Ningpo junks with Chinese fishermen crews; LT Swentzel commanded one and he assigned 2nd Lt. Pittman (USMCR) to the other. During the morning of August 19 they sighted a northbound junk that appeared to be under Japanese control just north of Chungming Island. Lieutenant "Swede" Swentzel ordered his men to hoist an American flag. The Japanese fired on them with a 75-millimeter field piece lashed to their foredeck. One shot took away the rudder from Swentzel's craft; a second round cleared one mast from Pittman's junk.

Lieutenant Swentzel "showing seamanship to unbelieving sailors in Shanghai River front" (Miles, undated, v 4, p 82).

The Americans put out sweeps to replace the rudder; jury rigged a replacement mast; and mounted an attack. Each junk carried one .50-caliber machine gun mounted in the bow on a homemade swivel, two short-range .30-caliber Lewis guns, and one bazooka with five rounds; they needed to close the distance to be effective with their own weapons. The Japanese 75 was disabled by a .50-caliber

machine gun fired by Gunner's Mate Rose. The Americans crossed the bow of the Japanese junk and raked her fore and aft with machine gun fire. Gunner's Mate Reid hit the enemy with four Bazooka rounds. The Japanese Junk surrendered; of the 78 on board 39 had been killed and 35 were wounded.

Lieutenant Swentzel commanded the last U.S. Naval battle of record between ships under sail. Arguably it was the last battle of WWII.

Lieutenant Don Wilcox and 1st Lt. Jim Jordan (USMCR), a fluent speaker of Chinese, were ordered to proceed immediately from Camp Four in Shempa to Peiping (or Peking) and secure the city. The distance is 1,100 miles as the crow flies but the two were turned back 170 miles from Peiping and the trip became a three-week ordeal. By the time the two entered Peiping, LT Carl Divelbiss, of the Intelligence Group, was on site with an operating communications center.

In mid-August, Unit Six, Chinese and Americans together, landed on Amoy Island and went straight to the Japanese headquarters at the Sea View Hotel. The national flags of China and the United States as well the SACO "What-the-Hell?" pennant were raised. No shots were fired.

Unit Five with Columns 1 and 3 traveled east and on August 26 hoisted the Chinese flag over Wuchow. Six days later they had moved 60 miles further east and met Unit Robby, a demolition group commanded by LT Charles Robinson. These SACO units entered and occupied Canton.

On August 24, Unit Seven – a complement of 23 men – left Tung Feng and arrived September 1 a few miles upstream of Hangchow, 60 miles southwest of Shanghai. They joined Maj. Gus Bruggeman from Kienyang and his squad of 50 Americans. The town was occupied by about 30,000 Japanese led by an officer who did not believe the surrender was official. After two days of serious negotiations, Maj. Bruggeman gained entrance to Hangchow and met Lt. John Masterson with two other SACO Americans. These three had moved into the city from the opposite side of town and already were operating their radio station.

In September the men of the Tungting Lake Unit began clearing the mines out of the Yangtze River. They started at Ichang, and continued 800 miles downstream to the sea at Shanghai.

Admiral Miles was both the senior U.S. officer and the senior Chinese officer in Shanghai when he arrived the evening of September 4; it was his 20th wedding anniversary.

> . . . Army Major Jimmy Googe, my "Navy personnel officer," had arrived to arrange for the quartering we needed, and Webb Heagy and Si Morris had come by train from Hangchow. "Swede" Swentzel was also there with his crew. Even Joe Champe and Ed Martin had arrived by plane a few hours earlier, but they and everyone else admitted having the creeps when they found themselves sharing the crowded elevators of the Park Hotel with Japanese officers. (Miles. 1967, p 531)

Nerves were further strained by the joyful, persistent, and frequent detonations of firecrackers.

Without electricity to pump sewage, Shanghai – at sea level and without drainage – would face severe hardships and probably deadly epidemics. Lieutenant Commander Joe Champe took charge of Shanghai's public utilities. He secured one of the steam-powered plants just minutes before Japanese-rigged demolition charges could be detonated. Joe Champe repaired one plant and restored the run-down 33,000-kilowatt output to the full 175,000 capacity.

The Glen Line Building was cleared of Japanese occupants and became SACO headquarters; the location overlooked the waterfront and was ideal for both watching the river traffic and communicating with ships. Within a few days Fleet Weather Central was up and operating. The building's metal accessories – radiators, water pipes, and even doorknobs – had been scavenged by the Japanese; fortunately these parts were located in a go-down. During the refitting, some operations were situated in a building borrowed from the North China Daily News.

Six junks filled with Japanese soldiers tried to escape Shanghai; LCDR Ed Martin with four men commandeered a tugboat and gave chase. A Japanese major, armed with a 75-millimeter field piece, threatened to kill Martin who nevertheless jumped aboard the junk and talked the Japanese into surrendering. Asked what convincing words he had used, Ed Martin told this writer that he took out a hand grenade, pulled the pin, and ordered them to surrender or else. The major laughed and pointed out that he too would die if it exploded. Martin said, "My Admiral ordered me to bring you back; if I fail I will lose face." The major drew his sword, broke it in half, and presented it to Martin.

During the end of August, Maj. Dutch Kramer, commander of Camp Three, was ordered to prepare for the arrival of the U.S. Navy at Tsingtao, 350 miles north of Shanghai. He traveled from Sian by plane, private passenger car, and a hijacked Japanese locomotive. Tsingtao still was under Japanese control. He went to the airfield and showed a copy of his orders to the Japanese commander, who assigned him a Japanese "Betty" – a heavy bomber made by Mitsubishi – with Japanese markings and a Japanese crew. They flew to Shanghai through a major rainstorm; the Betty was so full of bullet holes that all the occupants arrived soaking wet.

Admiral Miles assigned Maj. Kramer the additional task of freeing the British pilots who had experience with the Taku Bar and the river to Tientsin, 50 miles southeast of Peiping. Some of these pilots were imprisoned at Tsinan 220 miles west-southwest of Tsingtao. Major Kramer returned to his now-impounded Betty; found and freed the Japanese crew; and took off without authorization. By the time that ADM Thomas G. Settle arrived to accept the Japanese surrender at Tsingtao Maj. Kramer had arranged for the billeting of the Americans and for the return of the British river pilots to Tientsin.

> Our men who had arrived all besieged the tailors to make them uniforms and, by mail, they even got caps and insignia. Consequently, they made up a very impressive reception committee when the Marines landed in Tientsin on September 30. The first major ashore arrived in battle dress and was met by my SACO men in new, well-pressed Navy dress blue and Marine green.
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> "Well where the hell," the major asked, "did you come from?"
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> (Miles, 1967, p 536)

The Second World War officially ended on September 2, 1945 when Japan unconditionally surrendered aboard the U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay. And on September 9, 1945 – on the ninth hour of the ninth day of the ninth month – the Sino-Japanese war concluded when the Japanese signed their surrender to the Chinese in Nanking.

The Americans of SACO were ordered to proceed to Shanghai for processing; a few exited from Calcutta and some had to fly back over the Hump to get there. A point system that took into account both time in service and time overseas determined one's eligibility to be discharged as well as his priority for transportation. Those returning stateside mostly went by ship. The U.S.S. Cambria (APA-36, operated by the U.S. Coast Guard) sailed October 24 and arrived in Seattle the evening of November 12. Transport Kenmore left the first week of December, stopped in Hong Kong and then Manila Bay, and landed in San Francisco around Christmas. Bill Sager remembered that there were many SACO men aboard the Kenmore and that Doc Coggins played the piano during happy hours. One transport that left China in February 1946 discovered a freighter dead in the water and escorted her back stateside. Because of the damage, the convoy speed was limited to a maximum of six knots; the crossing took 40 long days.

U.S. Naval Group China – SACO – was dissolved September 30, 1946. A few SACO hands remained in China for some time; the following list probably is not complete. Bill Bartee manned the Shanghai radio shack in the Glen Line Building and briefly was assigned to graves registration. He searched for U.S. pilots downed and buried in the area south of Shanghai; Bill said, "Worst duty I ever had." Herman Westkamp assumed the duties of the Shanghai harbor master. Both Bill and Wes left China in 1947. Joe Champe managed the steam-powered generating plants of Shanghai Power And Light for several years. Norman Gordon was selected by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to advise the Chinese Ministry of the Interior in ways to rebuild China. Joe Osterman became the radioman in the U.S. Consulate in Canton. He married locally and did not return stateside until the early 50s.

> It is true, of course, that they [the Americans of SACO] have the inner satisfaction of having done their job and—for what it is worth to them—they also have my own deeply felt "Very well done!" (Miles, 1967, p 574)

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