ROOM 2732 AND FRIENDSHIP

It was in Room 2732 during the Fall of 1941 that Project Friendship – a joint Chinese-and-American effort to acquire essential weather information for the Pacific Fleet – was conceived. Room 2732 was in the Main Navy Building on Constitution Avenue between 18th and 20th Streets in Washington, DC. "The space to which this number was assigned actually consisted of two rooms . . ." (Miles, 1967, p 6).

By the end of June, 1942, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek suggested that Project Friendship, which had been expanded in concept by Gen. Tai Li and CDR Miles, be given a more distinguished and encompassing name. Thus SACO (Sino-American Cooperative Organization) became an official entity. Throughout the war however, in America the outfit continued to be referred to as Project Friendship.

Captain Metzel was transferred there on July 5, 1942 and became Head of the Readiness Section in the newly formed Readiness Division as well as Project Officer for Friendship. The responsibilities of the Readiness Section were too massive to be itemized here but included the planning and preparing for Naval operations in the Pacific. Room 2732 was the portal for all things SACO – personnel, material requests, and orders.

As a result of a letter that Admiral King wrote just before I left Washington [April 5, 1942], the Bureau of Ships and the Bureau of Ordnance set up a special "Project Officer" who would keep his eye on my needs and requisitions. In addition, a liaison officer in the Bureau of Supplies was designated to round up supplies and send them to me when that was requested by my old office, the Interior Control Board, which remained under the direction of Admiral Lee until he returned to sea duty some months later. Also, I was pleased beyond words to be told that Captain Jeffrey C. Metzel, a good friend of mine whose thought processes I knew and with whom I had previously worked most intimately, was soon to arrive in Washington. He was to be responsible for whatever liaison might be necessary when I needed to get special or additional supplies and men from the United States. (Miles, 1967, p 24)

Captain Jeffrey C. Metze
Miles, undated, v 4, p 153)

When Admiral Leahy found the President free for a moment he took the Agreement in. There were no questions. As a matter of fact, Admiral Leahy told me that the project was just the type to please Roosevelt. Later we were told that he often asked how things were going with the Navy in the middle of China, and when times were bleak his staff sometimes used some of our amusing episodes to lighten the gloom.

"We're no longer bastard," said Jeff Metzel on April 1, 1943, when the Agreement was finally signed. [The official date is April 15, after necessary approval by Senate.] Two fine English copies were typed in Room 2732 of the Munitions Building by WAVE Lillian Gilroy and Yeoman James Hotard. (Miles, 1967, p 115-16)

Yeoman First Class Lillian Rebecca Gilroy was the only female member of SACO. She reported for duty as secretary to CAPT Metzel during the Summer of 1942; she stood five feet and eleven inches high. Her new boss surveyed her from foot to head and announced "You are a tall drink of water. I'll call you 'Slim'." She proudly recounted that story in 1990 as if it were a current event.

As signs of both respect and familiarity, throughout the remainder of this article YN1c Gilroy will be referred to as Slim and this writer, in the first person.

Yeoman First Class L. R. "Slim" Gilroy, 1943. Photo courtesy of D. M. Knapp.

As a civilian Slim was a very proficient legal secretary. In her Washington billet she toiled late into the nights and weekends for CAPT Metzel. She called him "Cap'n Jeff" in non-official surroundings.

After June 1943, all potential personnel were required to score high on the Acceptance Test (it measured one's ability to cope with different living conditions and cultures and was designed by LT William D. Glenn) before being allowed to join the secret-but-unnamed operation in an undisclosed location. Then all received their shots (usually at the Navy Dispensary down the street), arranged for passports, signed papers to send their paychecks home, brought their wills up to date, and were sworn to secrecy concerning all future activities. Very few knew that they were heading for China; many did not learn that fact until they reached Australia, or maybe even India. The journey often lasted at least two months and usually included trains, ships, and a plane for the stretch over the "hump".

Most recalled encountering Yeoman James Hotard (not a SACO hand) as they passed through Room 2732; few remembered meeting Slim. But she knew them and affectionately called them "the boys". At one convention Bill Bartee wondered why he did not remember her and Slim replied "I remember you. It was supposed to be a one-way looking glass."

Slim and my mother, "Billy" Miles, roomed together at the SACO conventions, both in the U.S. and Taiwan. Slim always packed a coffee pot; I was tasked with producing sweet rolls (almost non-

existent in Taipei near the Grand Hotel) which were my price of admission to their breakfast.

Slim at a SACO convention in the 1970s.
Photo courtesy of D. M. Knapp.

While visiting Taiwan during the 1985 SACO reunion, Slim was ushered into the museum at the Military Intelligence Bureau with great fanfare and showed the SACO agreement. "You typed that" the General proudly stated. As a matter of record she also typed the Admiral's book, *A Different Kind of War*.

Slim hosted the 1990 convention at Gulf Shores, Alabama. After choosing the Quality Inn Beachside, she called in Hal Bonin who negotiated a real sweet group rate and a complimentary director's suite; one could easily spit into the Gulf from the windows. I occupied the second bedroom of that suite and still remember drifting asleep to the sound of the waves. One evening Slim invited Gen. Huang Shih-chung and all the visiting Chinese to our rooms for a down-home shrimp boil. The shrimp were huge, fresh-caught, and purchased dockside; huge pots for the cooking were part of the suite's kitchen. It was a first for the guests; peel-and-eat shrimp, beer in the bottle, and newspapers as tablecloths. That party lasted til midnight.

Slim faithfully attended every SACO convention until that of 2004. I telephoned and pleaded for her to reconsider skipping the Seattle event but she remained unwavering. "I neither see nor get about well. I do not want to be a burden on the boys."

On July 5th 2012, in reply to my request for information for Slim's obituary, David M. Knapp (Slim's nephew), emailed:

> Yes indeed she was patriotic, dedicatedly so. Fourth of July was always spent watching the fireworks over Mobile Bay bursting above the USS Alabama and Drum. When the National Anthem played she was first on her feet with hand over heart. When she could no longer stand she still had her hand over her heart. How she loved America and her time of service.

Cited references:

Miles, M. E., 1967, A Different Kind of War: Doubleday & Co, Garden City, NY. 629 p.

Miles, M. E., undated, SACO Photograph Albums: unpublished, in four volumes.

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