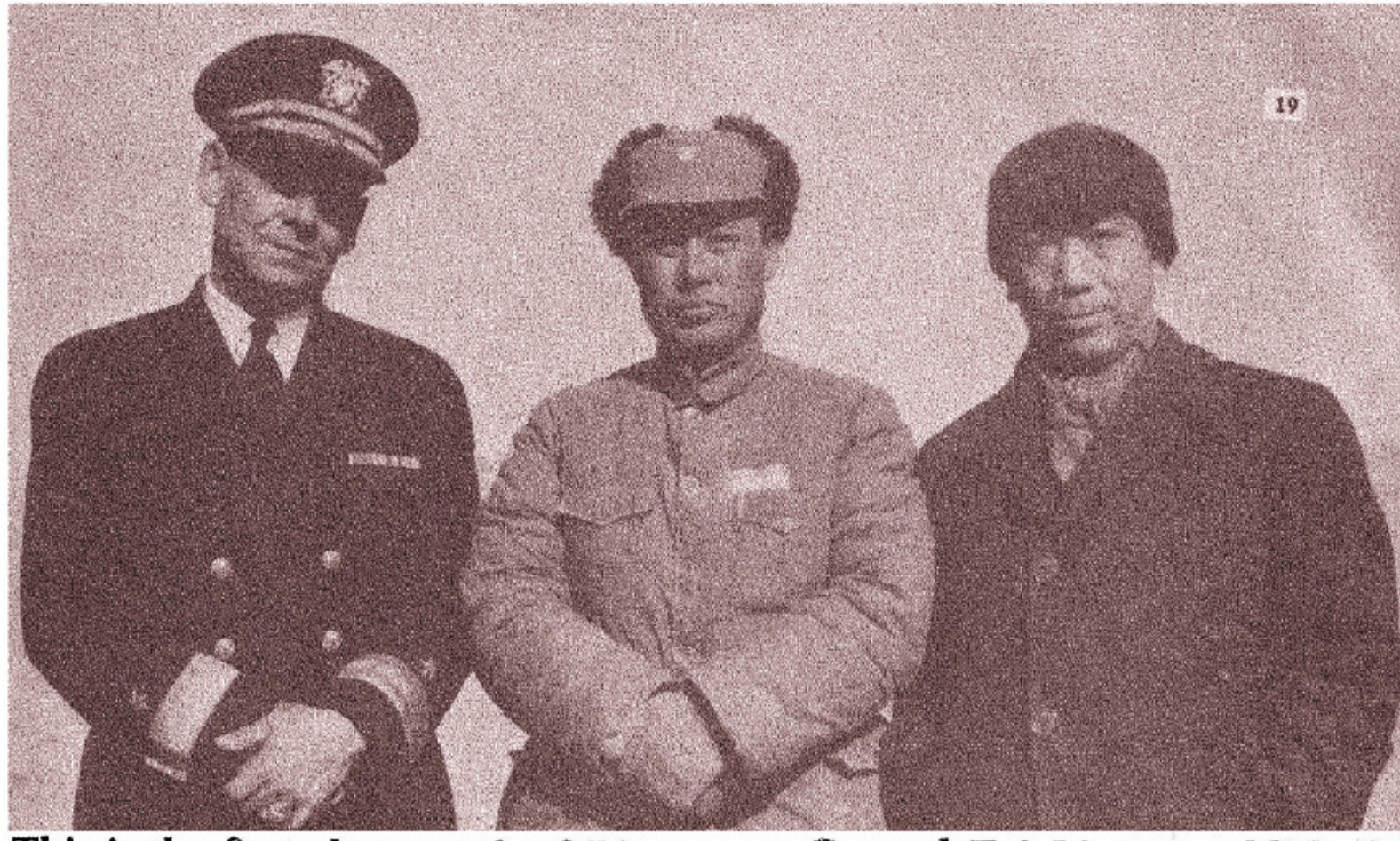


CHINA'S MYSTERY MAN

BY

LT. COMDR.

CHARLES G. DOBBINS, USNR



This is the first photograph of Lieutenant General Tai Li ever published. He is shown, at extreme right, with Rear Admiral M. E. Miles, left, and General Fu Tso-yi, governor of Suiyan Province, during visit to a SACO unit.

The head of China's secret police has been called a second Himmler and an outstanding Chinese democrat. Few Americans know Lieutenant General Tai Li; here one who does tells how he helped us during the war

THE chief of China's secret police for years has been a mystery man of Asia—never photographed, never interviewed, a man of fearful power and shadowy reputation. Cursed and hated by many, shot at repeatedly, he has climbed steadily upward among the strong men of the East.

From the early days of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's rise to supremacy, Lieutenant General Tai Li has been his able lieutenant and trusted protector. Today, facing the crucial test in his long-time ambition to unify China, Chiang depends heavily on the old friend from his home province of Chekiang.

Tai Li (pronounced Die Lee), now about fifty, was graduated in the sixth class at Whampoa National Military Academy, Canton, of which Chiang was founder and commandant. Upon graduation he pledged his allegiance to Chiang, then earned the everlasting respect and faith of his leader in two vital assignments.

One was when Chiang, having assumed command of National armies at Canton in 1926, marched north in his first effort to bring all the provinces under a single strong Central government. On that march Tai Li was advance agent extraordinary, sent ahead to study sentiment, evaluate military and political developments, advise on the safest and most strategic routes of approach. His masterly intelligence was an important factor in Chiang's succession of victories.

Tai Li's second notable achievement is famous—the magnificent defense of Shanghai in 1937. It was Tai Li, commanding the Loyal Patriotic army, who astonished the world by standing off Japan's modernized units for three dogged months. Any military leader of any nation might be proud of his feat.

Yet the international reputation of General Tai Li derives largely from his work as head of the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (BIS), China's secret police. He organized BIS in 1932 and has directed it ever since.

Until recently Tai Li has stayed carefully hidden from the public. He still will talk to no one without express authority from the Generalissimo. Among Chinese his name is rarely mentioned, and only in hushed tones. Foreigners, showing him an awed though grudging respect, often develop Tai Li phobia; in Chungking during the war, many believed that every cook and houseboy was a Tai Li agent.

China's chief of secret police has been called everything—executioner, torturer of political prisoners, and a ruthless, trigger-happy tyrant. If all these things were true, Tai Li would have every reason for wearing his cloak of mystery. He could wear it, however, because with deadly enemies it is safer not to be recognized on street corners. Already he has cheated death so many times that the idea of invulnerability is fast attaching itself to his personal legend.

Accused as Exponent of Chinese Fascism

Critics of Tai Li say that as head of the so-called "thought police" he has been responsible for the death or imprisonment of scores of liberal college professors and other progressive leaders, and that he personifies the Fascist element in China. I am not qualified to judge the accuracy of these charges. I write only of the Tai Li who was known intimately during the war to a little band of Americans, and to one man in particular. That man is Rear Admiral M. E. (Mary) Miles, USN, and the others are the 1,800 Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard men who served with him in China. Tai Li was our friend, protector and—as director of "SACO"—technically our leader during three years of war.

China's Mystery Man

The Navy sent Miles early in 1942 on an urgent mission, labeled "Friendship Project," to get weather intelligence in China. Japan then held what might have been a decisive advantage over the U.S. Fleet in the simple fact that the weather for the western Pacific makes up in Siberia, moves down over China, eastward across the Japanese home islands and across the Pacific. With a network of reporting stations from Manchuria down through occupied China and almost to Australia, the Japs had advance knowledge on Pacific weather conditions while the U.S. Fleet was forced to advance blindly from the east. The Navy had to get in behind the Japs and set up a weather net as good as or better than theirs. China was the only solution.

Miles, a commander then, was picked for the job because he knew China, and because on his record he was established as an officer who loved to kick "the book" out the window and get things done the best and quickest way.

This was his second war. On the day the U.S. entered World War I, Miles was seventeen and a volunteer. That was when his mates nicknamed him "Mary" for the currently popular movie star, Mary Miles Minter, but he's never minded the feminine moniker. Appointed to Annapolis in 1918, commissioned in 1922, he spent eight years in China, made it his business to walk over most of China's coast, photograph ports in his (*Continued on page 65*) memory, study the whole Asiatic picture.

When Miles landed at Chungking on May 4, 1942, he was not sure how to proceed. Back in Washington he and his boss, Vice-Admiral Willis A. (Ching) Lee, USN, had talked the problem over with Colonel Sin-ju Pu Hsiao, acting Chinese military attaché. He knew Colonel Hsiao had asked Chungking for approval of the mission and had received it. He knew little more.

At the airport a Chinese civilian came out of the crowd and asked simply, "Do you know Colonel Hsiao?"

"Yes, I know Colonel Hsiao."

"Good."

With that, Miles's baggage was magically whisked past the inspector of customs, and he began to climb the interminable steps up into the city. At street level waited trim Eddie Liu and big-eyed Peter Pan—Tai Li's first-string interpreters, Miles learned later. They took him in a car through the crowded, bombed-out city to a place on Hsien Shien Tung Street. It was a big establishment, with a high wall around it. A sentry stood at the gate, and servants were all over the place.

Eddie Liu said, "This is to be your house."

"Whose house has it been?" asked Miles.

"General Tai Li has provided it for your convenience. He hopes you will find it comfortable."

Miles knew little of China's Tai Li, though in Washington he had heard both good and bad said about him—mostly bad: From one source—"Tai Li is a straight-talking Chinese who has plenty of power out there and can help you . . ." From another—"Tai Li is the most cruel thug in China. He's worse than Germany's Himmler. Stay clear of him."

A Portrait of the General

Next day Tai Li called. He was a short, heavily built man, rather swarthy for a Chinese. There were things about his face—its length, and the big, projecting jaw—that didn't look Chinese at all. He wore a plain blue, Sun Yat-sen type of semimilitary uniform without insignia. His manner was courteous but forceful, and during the conversation Miles knew that the intent black eyes were sizing him up. The visit was only for getting acquainted, but Tai Li invited him to dinner.

That night when they had proceeded through many dishes of the excellent Chinese meal, Miles realized he had been spared an embarrassment usually experienced when he was entertained—the necessity of refusing any form of fowl, to which he is allergic.

"I notice you serve no feathered foods, General," Miles remarked.

"I am informed that you don't eat feathered food."

"That's right." Miles grinned. News of his allergy had preceded him.

They discussed prospects for weather intelligence, but talked mostly of the war situation in Asia. Miles found Tai Li more Western than Eastern in his direct manner and positive way of speaking. As a host he showed grace and consideration, but none of the lush hospitality offered by many political notables in the Orient. It pleased Miles to note that Tai Li lacked also the subtle arrogance being displayed by some Asiatics during that time when white men were being chased out of the Far East. Tai Li's attitude seemed to be, "Well, maybe the Japanese have chased them out—We've been taking a licking, too."

During the next few days Tai Li revealed the effectiveness of his intelligence service—

China's Mystery Man

reports came in from practically every city in occupied China, from Indo-China, Burma, Bali, Borneo, Formosa, several places in the Philippines. Tai Li wanted to play on Miles's club, too. He needed radio equipment. His guerrillas and agents lacked arms, ammunition, training in modern techniques. He desired a source of general intelligence to supplement his Asiatic information. There were fine possibilities for exchange of skills, services and supplies.

Already the two men were beginning to feel mutual confidence, but Miles had to know more. "With your permission, General, I want to visit the coast. Before bringing in men and matériel, the Navy desires more definite information on the possibilities for joint operations."

"Good," said Tai Li. "I will go with you."

On the road with Tai Li 24 hours a day, Miles first realized the man's terrific energy and stamina. He walked as much as 30 miles a day, conferred with his leaders far into morning hours, demonstrated his power among Chinese behind the lines as well as in Free China. Miles no longer could doubt Tai Li's ability to move men and equipment into occupied areas and protect them there.

The Japs were busily slicing off more territory every day. Once, separated from Tai Li, Miles was caught behind a fast-moving enemy column and escaped only because his alert 15-man guard knew the way through a hidden pass in the mountains.

Jap agents were puzzled by the new man traveling with Tai Li. He was reported to be a Russian aviation adviser. Whoever the man was, he and Tai Li made a worth-while target . . . Jap planes bombed their overnight stop time after time. Near Amoy, fourteen light bombers celebrated July 4, 1942, by plastering the town of Hai Chang just as they entered at four in the afternoon. Tai Li escaped untouched with his charmed life: Miles caught five fragments in his legs.

Guerrillas His Chief Interest

The two men talked of every possibility—weather stations, mining operations, coast watching, guerrillas. Tai Li's prime interest seemed to be arms and training for guerrillas. This puzzled Miles at the time. Two months passed before he discovered that Tai Li was also commander in chief of all organized guerrillas.

By August they were in Chungking again. Back in Washington an old Navy partner of Miles, Captain J. C. Metzger, USN, became project officer for "Friendship," and with Colonel Hsiao began turning the messages from Miles and Tai Li into a program. More Americans and a limited supply of arms were flown over "the Hump."

Not far from his own residence Tai Li provided a "Friendship Headquarters"—twelve miles west of the city near the Chialing River in "Happy Valley." Happy Valley is Tai Li's own tight little kingdom, where at every entrance and cross path sentries armed to the teeth stand 24 hours a day. It really is not a valley at all, but a ragged succession of stony hills and deep little vales close under a towering mountain. Yet the flowers, the neat cultivated green hillsides and the friendly Chinese people make it a pleasant place.

Families of BIS men killed in the war are given employment here in small industries for making paper, shoes, cloth and uniforms. Several hundred work in Tai Li's offices, in the gleaming new hospital, and the two schools. One is a crowded elementary school, the other a special school-home for the orphans of Tai Li's agents.

Tai Li's wife died a few years ago. His personal life in the valley was a closed book to all Americans save Miles, but he entertained with no lack of poise, or of beautiful, smartly-gowned Chinese women. Every



General Di Li

China's Mystery Man

American who came to the valley was told the story of how Mary Miles "ruined things" for the boys. This account had it that when Miles began arranging to care for the personnel he planned to bring in, Tai Li offered a suggestion.

"Of course," he is supposed to have said, "we must make your men happy."

"Sure," said Miles, "they'll be happy . . . What do you mean?"

"I mean that each American should be provided with a suitable female companion in order that he may enjoy his service in China."

That is where Miles was supposed to have put his foot down—hard. The facts are different. Miles did put his foot down—but not against Tai Li. It was a Chinese doctor and a member of Miles's own staff who were making the arrangements for "happiness." When Miles and Tai Li heard about it, they were equally emphatic in opposition . . . The Chinese doctor was most upset of all, claiming that failure to provide was contrary to nature. "General Tai Li," he sputtered, "is being a fuddyduddy about this!"

By the end of 1942 Miles had arranged for the fleet to get limited weather reports from Chinese sources, and had trained a promising small group of Tai Li's guerrillas for special sabotage work. But progress toward the goal of important co-operative effort was being severely hampered by administrative problems involving other American agencies in China. Tai Li suggested to Miles that, as a means of clarifying matters, they have a written agreement setting forth exactly what responsibilities the U.S. Navy and the Chinese government would assume.

Miles accepted the suggestion. After months of struggle an agreement, establishing the "Sino-American Co-operative Organization," was signed April 15, 1943, with Tai Li as director and Miles as deputy director.

Under SACO things moved. More Americans—aerologists, communicators, combat experts—flew in over the Hump bringing weather and radio gear, arms and explosives. Tai Li threw the full power of BIS and his guerrillas behind the American program.

Under his protection American convoys roamed China setting up fourteen main units for weather observations, radio communications, coast watching, guerrilla training and combat operations. Even in the smallest villages Yanks always found the omnipresent Tai Li men ready to help. By Tai Li's authority Americans were able to go anywhere, be fed and housed as the locality could afford, receive every available aid in carrying out their missions, while representatives of some U.S. agencies found tough going.

Moving Supplies—the Hard Way

When Miles and Tai Li agreed upon a new location for a SACO unit, a convoy of decrepit trucks, doctored along by two Chinese mechanics per machine, would set out from Chungking or Kunming with supplies and the initial Sino-American complement. If it were a coastal destination, then the party must cross Jap lines on foot and walk for days or weeks, followed by a coolie train of 100 or more bearing supplies. Going north the trip could be made only in dead winter so that trucks could cross the Yellow River on the ice.

The concentration of units was behind Japanese lines along the coast where shipping could be observed and there was greater opportunity for guerrilla operations. Such a unit was Number Six, at Hwaian, in south Fukien Province not far from Jap-occupied Amoy.

Ancient, semiabandoned Buddhist temples were everywhere most commonly selected by the Chinese for use as American headquarters, and such a temple was provided at Hwaian. Chinese personnel established themselves in adjacent quarters, which were generally less desirable.

Technical men at Unit Six went to work at once setting up communications with Chungking and equipment for weather observations. Combat instructors began preparation of a drill field and firing range for their 300 Chinese guerrilla trainees soon to arrive. What with all the tasks of setting up for living—piping water via bamboo, striving to shut out the hard-working malarial mosquitoes, and building a flyproof latrine—the place was a hive of industry for weeks. Eventually, though, life became quiet around camp, and the business was carried on mostly in offshoot activities.

Some of these were rare. There was the time Ensign John N. (Tarzan) Mattmiller,

China's Mystery Man

USNR, of Kellogg, Idaho, spent weeks training four Chinese swimmers to go with him on a special job. On May 4, 1945, Matt-miller and assistants embarked in a junk for a point adjacent to enemy-held Amoy harbor. That night, with explosives strapped high and dry on their backs, they waded through mud and swam to a freighter tied up at Amoy docks. Working rapidly they set time charges and swam hard for safety. Just as they were being hauled aboard their junk, four violent explosions shook the harbor area. The freighter sank at the dock. Chinese agents from within Amoy reported Japanese running madly about, many of them sure they were being attacked from the sea.

Unit Six was the base for a chain of coast-watcher stations, manned jointly by Chinese and Americans for some hundreds of miles up and down the coast. Their reports, flashed to Unit Six and on to Chungking, then to the fleet and waiting submarines, were responsible for sinking many thousands of tons of Jap ships.

This coast watching was a tough business. Alfred Warner Parsons, RM2c, USNR, served on a regular two-man watch maintained at Sungseu Point due west of Amoy Island.

On December 21, 1944, he and Chinese Captain Lin boarded a sampan for the usual 150-yard trip over to Whale Island where they could have a better view of Jap shipping at Amoy. As the two men walked across Whale Island 50 Japs, hidden in the tall grass, sprang up and overpowered them. They were taken to Amoy, where Tai Li agents sought by every possible stratagem to achieve their escape. But Parsons was reported taken to Japan, and Lin killed. Parsons has since been liberated.

Americans learned that Tai Li controlled police everywhere, in Jap-held China as well as Free China.

Whenever the Japs advanced into a city they had to have Chinese police, and always Tai Li men were at hand to take the jobs. Even in the big occupied cities—Hankow, Shanghai, Nanking—the long arm of Tai Li somehow held on to police power.

Incredibly, his domination extended even to Japan's puppets. Long before war was over, it was made known to Miles that at the proper time, puppet troops could be expected to throw whatever strength they had against Japan. Americans in the field with guerrilla sabotage units discovered that in attacks on bridges, rail lines and warehouses, they could always discount effective defense by puppets. Tipped off by Tai Li's men, the puppets always "arranged" to be elsewhere.

Many phases of this complex, paradoxical power of Tai Li were beyond the understanding of Miles and his Americans. They could only be grateful it worked for their cause.

On the Communist question, Miles's policy was simple. He said to his men, "We have been directed to co-operate with the Central government of China in order to meet essential needs of the Fleet. General Tai Li has been authorized by the Generalissimo to work with us, and with his help we are accomplishing our mission. As for the Communists, you are ordered not to oppose them, help them, contact them, or deal with them in any way. They are not our pidgin. They are China's problem."

Charges and Counter Charges

Though SACO's program advanced, there were many complications and at least one serious crisis. Tai Li was charged with accepting American arms ostensibly for carrying on the fight against Japan, but in reality for use in China's postwar internal battles. Because he feared discovery of this deceit, it was charged, he would not permit Americans with guerrilla columns at the front. Miles faced Tai Li with the charge. In a violent conference Tai Li and his staff denied the charges, countercharged that Friendship was not meeting its promises in arms and equipment.

For a moment Miles saw his mission at a disastrous end. But on both sides there was earnest desire to go ahead. The basic question was permission for Americans to go with guerrilla columns into combat. It was finally agreed that Americans should go with the columns so as to continue guerrilla training begun in the camps, advise Chinese commanders on tactical use of weapons, and make official reports on combat achievements.

And when men like Captain Theodore R.

China's Mystery Man

Cathey, USMC, Captain Milton A. Hull, USMC, and Lieutenant Joe Champe, USNR, went into the field and fought with the Chinese columns, there no longer could be any doubt that Tai Li's men were using American guns and ammunition for fighting Japs.

Champe led the Yangtze River Raiders, a Chinese-American unit that operated in the Tungting Lake area astride the Yangtze River shipping route and Japan's most important north-south rail lines. "Little Joe," a business-machine engineer before the war, fought from a pocket deep behind the enemy lines, depending for supplies on a two-week coolie walk and occasional air drops. He and his Americans, reddened by sun and yellowed by atabrine, achieved perfect deception in their knee-length coolie garments and big straw hats. Alternating between attacks on trains and Yangtze River steamers, Champe's raiders repeatedly severed Jap supply lines in central China.

Captain Hull, a powerful, broad-shouldered Floridian who could never quite look the part in his coolie costume, fought with guerrilla units in northern Chekiang Province just below Shanghai, blowing up trains and ripping out rails under the guns of protecting Jap pillboxes.

Captain Cathey, from his long service as instructor of trainees and as adviser with columns in the field, became a sort of unofficial "dean" among American guerrilla men and wrote a Textbook for Chinese Guerrillas. A quiet-spoken South Carolinian (men from the South seemed especially effective in liaison with the Chinese), Cathey developed a philosophy of co-operation which he once expressed this way:

"From many experiences I have learned to take things easy. One trivial matter is an example. The general would never buy oil until dark. One day I knew we were out of oil and I said, 'Look, the sun is shining now but in another six hours it is sure to be dark and we have no oil for our lamps. How about sending for oil now while there is plenty of time?' But the general said, 'Oh, no, it would never do to buy the oil so early. The men would use it up before night and we would have to buy more. We shall buy oil when it is needed.'"

Added Cathey, "You can't drive a Chinese, you can't push him. It takes some Americans a long while to learn that. But you can be his friend, get out ahead of him, and lead him!"

A Grim Toll of Destruction

In the last 13 months of war Tai Li's guerrillas, aided and advised by Miles's Americans, destroyed 209 bridges, 84 locomotives, 141 ships and river craft, and 97 warehouses. They killed 23,540 Japs. Tai Li protected Americans so carefully that not one was lost in combat, though three coast watchers were captured.

But all this was beyond the objectives of Miles's original mission. SACO weather stations by 1944-45 were functioning smoothly. As the fleet advanced westward, Fleet Weather Central at Chungking became the key weather source for final operations of the U.S. Fleet against Japan.

It was from China weather reports that Task Force 58, moving in for the first full-scale, 1,500-plane attack on Japan's homeland, in the late fall of 1944, was able to predict the cloud cover that permitted unobserved launching of planes only 60 miles from the target. China data were equally indispensable in the attacks on Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

China coast watchers gave Halsey detailed locations of Jap ships when he made the "clean sweep" of the south China Sea and its ports in January, 1945, and gave intelligence that led the U.S. Submarine Barb to her "PT boat adventure"—an incredible harbor slaughter of Jap ships by the surfaced submarine.

Under protection of a special guerrilla detachment assigned by Tai Li, two major Navy reconnaissance groups studied the China coast for possible amphibious landings. At times only two hours ahead of Jap searching parties, they photographed, sounded, charted all the way from Shanghai to Hong Kong.

Two Years of Sharing Danger

During their two years of teamwork Tai

China's Mystery Man

Li and Miles, often in coolie disguise, flew, rode and walked the length and breadth of China time after time on visits to their 14 units and their fighting columns. Experience taught them that each trip through Jap lines might mean sudden death. They were a famous pair now, and since the 1942 bombing, repeated attempts had been made on their lives. Once Miles fought off a lone assailant but suffered deep wounds in his arm and leg. Another time bullets riddled their car in a south China city. For protection Tai Li took along a strong guard—and his own trusted cook. Through it all the two men came to understand and trust each other.

Miles liked the way Tai Li came straight to the point. "You didn't have to go and drink tea two days with him to find out what he meant. If you wanted to put a matter to him you would say, 'Look, General, how about this?' And right back he would say, 'Okay, I agree to it. Now let's have some tea.' He did it backwards from the way most Chinese do.

"Questions of major importance he referred to the Generalissimo for decision. I found that sometimes, too, when he did not want to do some minor thing and was afraid my feelings might be hurt, he would say, 'I must refer it to higher authority,' and that would mean a long delay. But after we really got to know each other he would just say, 'Look, you know the Chinese as well as I do. I can't do that for you.'"

Frequently Tai Li invited members of the Chinese-American staff for conference at his home in Happy Valley. On such occasions Tai Li made a distinctly formal entrance, going around the room to each guest for a short handshake. There would be a preliminary period in the sun parlor where scalding hot tea and crisp peanuts were served while Tai Li, with Eddie Liu beside him, spoke in conventional generalities. But the meals were no commonplace affair—chicken, fish, liver, pork, bean curd, all in the finest Chinese style.

Tai Li accepted criticisms, but reminded Americans that he knew Chinese weakness as well as anybody. "Chiefly we lack education and knowledge of teamwork. Once the Generalissimo said to me, 'If you put one Chinese up against one foreigner, the Chinese will compare favorably. But if you put three Chinese up against three foreigners, the Chinese will not do so well. And if you put ten Chinese against ten foreigners, the Chinese will fall far behind. Why? Because our people do not understand how to work together.'"

SACO Americans for a long time were not sure whether General Tai Li knew what foreigners said about him. One night he let them know.

It was April 3, 1945, the day Chiang Kai-shek reviewed crack troops of Unit Nine, near Chungking. The show went off beautifully, and Chiang praised all the Chinese and Americans responsible. Tai Li was visibly proud and pleased.

He had planned a dinner and Chinese opera in "The Valley" that evening as celebration. It was a splendid affair—the very choicest of Chinese dishes washed down by 200 catties of rare rice wine that Tai Li had brought all the way from his home in Chekiang. The food and wine were duly honored by Americans and Chinese alike. The local band had recently undertaken to learn Yankee Doodle and Dixie, and in appreciation of their efforts the big auditorium rang with clapping, shouts, and rebel yells. The opera never really got going.

Near midnight Tai Li went to the microphone with Eddie Liu. First he said the Generalissimo had expressed his pleasure that afternoon, therefore everybody had reason to celebrate. He was glad to see joy all around him. But, he continued, now while his American friends were there together, all in one big family, he would speak to them on a matter. It was this: He stood for democracy, and he would not have American friends deceived into believing bad things said about him and his organization. He was not a Himmler, he was not a Gayda, he was just "the Generalissimo's Tai Li and nothing more."

THE END