

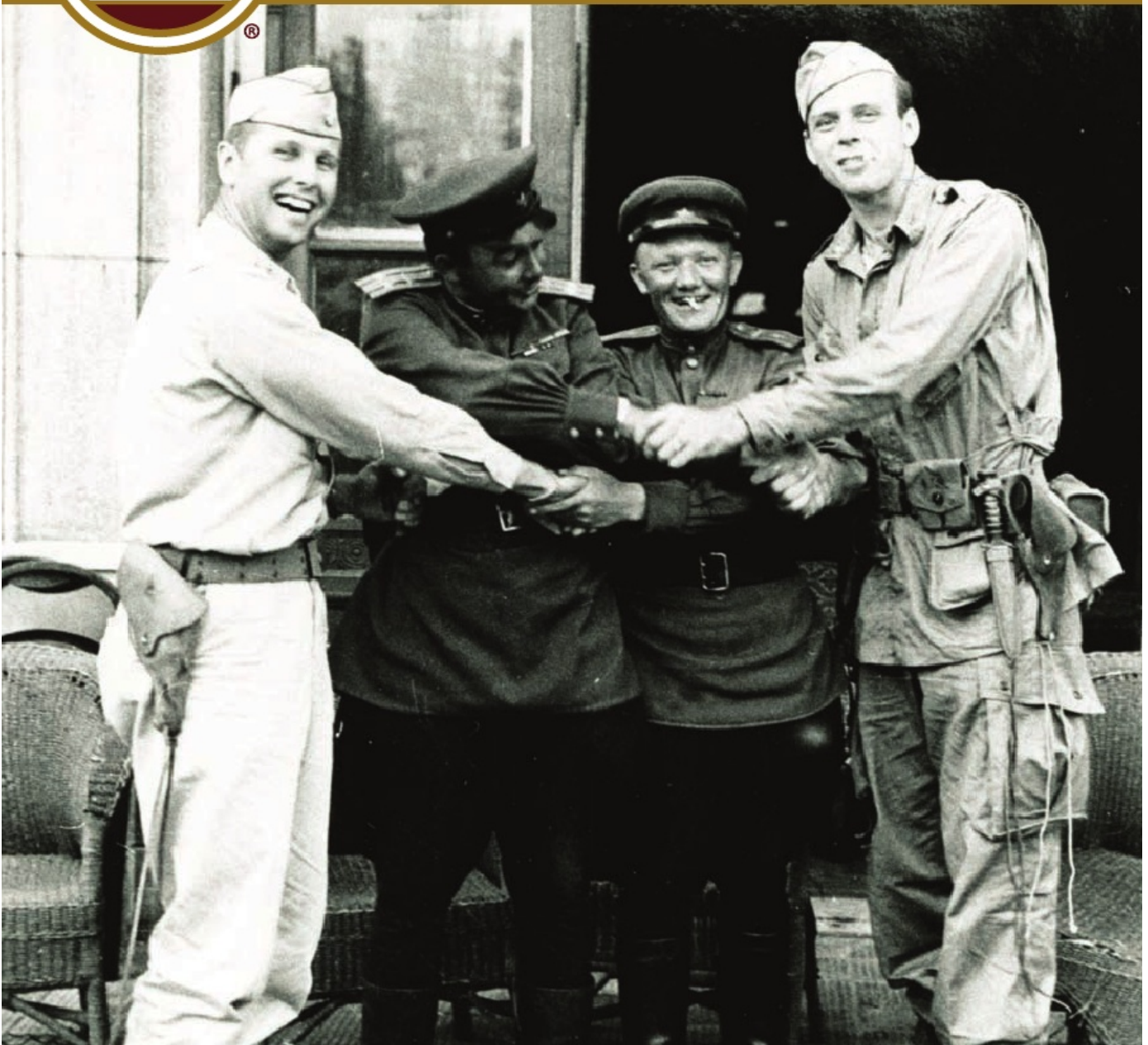


Operation Cardinal: OSS in Manchuria



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OSS IN MANCHURIA: OPERATION CARDINAL



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...in the jaws of victory over Japan, the OSS men foretold the problems the United States was already having in Asia with a resurgent Soviet Union whose ambitions were far different from those of America."

Peter Clemens

Author of *Operation Cardinal*

On the evening of August 9, 1945, after atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the President of the United States addressed the nation. "The military arrangements made at [Potsdam] were of course secret," the President said. "One of those secrets was revealed yesterday when the Soviet Union declared war on Japan." Three days later, the London *Sunday Observer* reported that the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and northern Korea was part of a five-point secret agreement between President Roosevelt and Premier Stalin prior to the Yalta Conference. The plan called for Manchuria to become an independent republic within the Soviet zone of occupation, and the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905 would be annulled, ending Japan's 40-year domination of Korea. American historians refer to the Soviet invasion of Manchuria as August Storm while Russian historians refer to it simply as the Manchurian Strategic Offensive.

In anticipation of a sudden collapse or surrender, General George C. Marshall, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued a basic outline plan, designated "Blacklist," for the "progressive and orderly" U.S. occupation of Japan and Korea, as well as the "care and evacuation of Allied prisoners of war and civilian internees." Shortly after Japan surrendered, General Wedemeyer requested that the Office of Strategic Services organize POW rescue missions behind Japanese lines. Each OSS team was assigned an area, and each intelligence operation was named after a bird: Duck (Weihshien), Magpie (Peking), Flamingo (Harbin), Sparrow (Shanghai), Pigeon (Hainan), Seagull (Hankow), Albatross (Canton), Quail (Hanoi), Raven (Vientiane, Laos), Eagle (Keijo), and Cardinal (Mukden).

Operation Cardinal's area of operation included the Hoten POW camp and two smaller camps in the area: the Hoten North Camp and Mukden Club, which, by



Hal Leith sitting between two Russian soldiers.

late August, were squarely in the Soviet Army's zone of operation. Operation Cardinal drew OSS personnel from Special Operations and Special Intelligence with skills in "clandestine operations, communications, medicine and language training in Japanese, Chinese and Russian." The team comprised Major James T. Hennessy (Special Ops team leader), Major Robert F. Lamar (physician), Technician Edward A. Starz (radio operator), Staff Sergeant Harold "Hal" B. Leith (Russian and Chinese linguist), and Sergeant Fumio Kido (a *nisei*—second-generation—Japanese interpreter). Cheng Shih-wu, a Chinese national, accompanied the OSS team as an interpreter.

On August 15th at 0430 hours, a B-24 with extra fuel tanks departed Hsian, China, for Mukden, the former capital of Manchuria. At 1030 hours, with Soviet troops 120 miles away and Japanese aircraft in the area, six men and 17 cargo parachutes were deployed including 1,300 pounds of rations and a half-ton of equipment: weapons, ammunition, two radios, and batteries. Despite a 20 mph wind, the decision was made to jump. "Our first priority was to rescue the POWs," Leith said. As the B-24 left the area, a kamikaze pilot headed his Zero straight for it. Fortunately, Lieutenant Paul Hallberg, the B-24 pilot, pulled back on the controls and the Zero passed underneath, avoiding a collision.

Hundreds of Chinese descended on the drop zone; one offered to lead four members of the Cardinal team down

FEATURES

a dirt road toward the Hoten POW camp. After walking a half mile, the team was confronted by a platoon of Japanese troops. When the Chinese guide saw the Japanese approaching, he ran away, and Major Hennessy waved a white handkerchief to signal their peaceful intentions. A Japanese sergeant ordered the team to “halt and squat down” while Japanese soldiers “aimed their rifles at us and clicked their bolts,” Hennessy said. While in the squatting position, the team was ordered to throw their weapons on the ground while Hennessy attempted to explain that the war was over and they were only there to establish contact with the POWs. The Japanese sergeant, who remained “suspicious and unconvinced,” responded that he had heard that the war with the United States was over, but that the Japanese were still fighting the Soviet Union. The Japanese were officially notified of armistice 45 minutes after the Cardinal team set foot on Mukden. And it was only by “sheer tact and presence of mind,” and utilizing the services of a Japanese interpreter, that Major Hennessy was able to convince the Japanese commander that the war was indeed over.

The following morning, the Cardinal team was driven to Japanese secret police (*Kempeitai*) headquarters where they met a *Kempeitai* colonel who bowed deeply and informed the Americans that he was surrendering. With hand gestures, he declared his intention to commit hara-kiri in full view of the Cardinal team. They declined the offer.

Accompanied by an escort of Japanese soldiers, members of the Cardinal team were taken to the Hoten POW camp where 1,600 British, Australian, Dutch, and Americans prisoners—malnourished and emaciated—survived nearly three and a half years of internment. When it was discovered that General Wainwright, the commander of Allied forces in the Philippines who had been taken prisoner following the surrender to the Japanese, was not among the prisoners, an attempt was made to contact OSS headquarters in China. When that failed, Major General George M. Parker, the highest ranking American POW, and Colonel Matsuda, the commandant of the camp, informed the Cardinal team that General Wainwright and other high-ranking officers were in Sian, about 100 miles northwest of the Hoten camp. The next morning, Leith and Lamar, accompanied by a Lieutenant Hijikata, a guard, and an interpreter boarded a train for Sian. After long delays and a change of trains, they arrived at the camp the following morning at 0300. After a brief rest, the OSS team met Generals King and Moore, Governor Tjarda Von Starkenbergh, General Wainwright, and Arthur E. Percival, Governor General during the fall of Singapore—a defeat that Winston Churchill described as the “biggest humiliation in British military history.” Leith recalls that

Wainwright looked thin and his hearing was failing. “He had experienced a brutal captivity,” Leith wrote in his diary. In his autobiography, *Reminiscences*, General MacArthur described seeing Wainwright for the first time:

I rose and started for the lobby, but before I could reach it, the door swung open and there was Wainwright. He was haggard and aged He walked with difficulty and with the help of a cane. His eyes were sunken and there were pits in his cheeks. His hair was snow white and his skin looked like old shoe leather. He made a brave effort to smile as I took him in my arms, but his voice wouldn't come. For three years he had imagined himself in disgrace for having surrendered Corregidor. He believed he would never again be given an active command. This shocked me. “Why, Jim,” I said, “your old corps is yours when you want it.”

The Russians Are Coming

When the Soviet Army began occupying Mukden, they issued passes to the Operation Cardinal team that allowed them to move freely about. However, since vehicles were in short supply, none were supplied to the Americans. That evening, a Soviet Army mission of four officers and an interpreter arrived at Hoten. They took control of the camp from the Japanese and announced that the POWs were liberated. The prisoners, now armed with Japanese weapons, patrolled the camp. According to Colonel Victor Gavrilov, Institute of War History at the Russian Defense Ministry, the POWs had been “starved and tortured



OSS Majors Robert Lamar (l) and James Hennessey (r) with two Russian soldiers in Manchuria during August 1945 as part of Operation Cardinal.

by the Japanese guards; they could have hardly made good warriors.” After a brevet promotion to major, Leith accompanied Wainwright and the other VIPs to Pei-ling airport, north of the city, where a C-47 and B-24 awaited their arrival. Days later, the 19-man POW Recovery Team No. 1 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James F. Donovan arrived in Mukden to “reinforce and assist” the initial OSS contact team. Although the Cardinal team was relieved, Hal Leith, who spoke Russian and Chinese fluently, remained behind to “keep an eye on the Russians and the Communist Chinese 8th Route Army.” However, the problem of repatriating the officers and men from the Hoten POW camp remained.

POW Supply Missions

On August 27th, over one thousand B-29s began flying POW supply missions to 157 camps throughout the Far East. Each plane carried 10,000 pounds of much-needed food and medical supplies. However, the planned altitude of 500 to 1,000 feet for parachute drops proved too low for efficient operation of the cargo parachutes, and reports began to pour in of barrels plummeting to earth, result-

ing in damage, injury, and, in some instances, the death of civilians and military personnel. As Leith noted in his diary, “The B-29 air drops have improved the food situation 200%. I am really glad,” although OSS headquarters received a message from “Cardinal” which read, “Unless dropping can be improved, recommend it cease as it has done more harm than good.” For instance, a Korean woman in Seoul was killed; in Inchon, barrels crashed through the roof of a hospital, broke the leg of a prisoner, killed a Korean, and injured eight Japanese.

In Konan, Korea (now Hungnam, North Korea), an aberrant parachute drop caused an international incident and nearly resulted in the death of a B-29 crew. On the morning of August 29, 1945, a pair of B-29s dropped supplies in

the vicinity of the Konan POW camp. Unfortunately, the parachutes failed to open properly and some of the barrels crashed to the ground and were retrieved by Japanese and Korean villagers; a British POW noted in his diary, “Some came away from the parachutes and fell into swamps and were buried.” Later that day, as a third B-29, nicknamed the *Hog Wild*, began circling the Konan POW camp suspiciously. Soviet Major Savchenko, the commander of the 14th Fighter Bomber Regiment, convened a “war council” to determine how best to respond. According to Ivan Tsapov, Savchenko’s vice commander, “Being in charge of the zone, we demanded that our rules be obeyed. Even Russian transport and bomber plane pilots kept order. They



General Wainwright (second from left) with Colonel Gustav Krause, OSS station chief in Xian, China.

gave notice on flights in our zone a day earlier. Americans did not want to do so.”

Two pairs of Russian Yak fighters were sent up, “boxed in” the American bomber, and demanded that Lieutenant Joseph W. Queen, the *Hog Wild*’s airplane commander, immediately land the B-29 on a small airdrome. When he refused, and the B-29 instead was flown out to sea, one of the Yaks fired on the Superfortress, setting an engine on fire. When Queen realized that the number 1 engine was “about to explode,” he ordered the crew to bail out; six parachuted into the turbulent and cold Sea of Japan, and the remaining crew braced for a crash-landing on the Soviet airdrome. When the bomber came to rest, the crew of the *Hog Wild* jumped out and Russians threw dirt on the engine to extinguish the fire. Staff Sergeant Arthur Strilky, the *Hog Wild*’s radio operator, later said, “The chances of living through that crash are so remote that I still feel that Joe saved all of us.”

After the crew was interrogated, the Russians apologized for downing a B-29 in “error.” Soviet Lieutenant General of Aviation Preobrazhenskii informed Queen that “two B-29s had been over the camp earlier in the morning and dropped supplies. Some of the drums came loose from the parachutes and crashed through buildings, almost hitting a Russian colonel.” When General MacArthur learned of the incident, he fired off a cable to General Antonov of the Soviet Supreme High Command that read, “The American plane was plainly marked

