AIRPOWER AS A TOOL OF DIPLOMACY: 
THE SINO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE IN WORLD WAR II, 1941-1945

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INTRODUCTION

Writing shortly after the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century, Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz declared in his seminal work *Vom Kriege (On War)* that “War is merely the continuation of policy by another means.” He described the usage of force as a fully-integrated component of the foreign-policy spectrum, rather than as the failure of foreign policy. Clausewitz therefore asserted that war was a means of achieving specific political goals, and that “means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.”¹ A little over a century later, the eminently quotable Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Mao Zedong 毛泽东 echoed this concept in a May 1938 speech: “Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed” (zhèngzhì shì bù liúxuè de zhànzhēng, zhànzhēng shì liúxuè de zhèngzhì).² This, in turn, laid the framework for the Chairman’s most famous aphorism, first uttered half a year later: “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” (qiang gànzi limián chú zhèngquán).³ These Machiavellian statements, of course, have a readily apparent application in the form of “gunboat diplomacy,” or the use of military force as a means of overt coercion against real or potential enemies. However, this approach neglects a secondary, more positive


³. Mao, “Problems of War and Strategy,” *Selected Works*, 2:272. Incidentally, both of these Mao quotes are also found in the fifth chapter of the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (毛主席语录 Mao zhiixi yǔlù), commonly known as the “Little Red Book.”
effect of the martial option: the country exercising force affirms support for its allies, which may in turn bolster its own international prestige by promising similar support for other friendly nations in the future.

The rise of aviation in the twentieth century provided a unique flexibility to nations seeking to project force in remote areas. In particular, American military aviation has afforded military commanders and political leaders a quick, tangible, cost-effective, and seemingly politically-sterile way of counteracting enemy actions, warning off potential foes, and representing American commitment to and support of its allies. This strategy, and its limitations, were perhaps seen most clearly in the Vietnam War, where US involvement both began and ended with airpower, and where the Linebacker I and II bombing campaigns served political purposes in both North and South Vietnam. Over twenty years before American involvement in Vietnam, however, another conflict in Asia demonstrated the function of airpower as a diplomatic tool as being just as important, if not more so, than its military utility: the American support of the Kuomintang (国民党 Guómíndàng, KMT) government during the Second World War.

After the Japanese annexed Manchuria in 1931 and invaded China proper in 1937, KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石 Jiang Jièshí) recognized that China’s divided and under-equipped armies stood no chance against the united, well-disciplined, and technologically dominant Japanese forces. As such, the Generalissimo turned to Western powers to provide military advice, training, and equipment. Although he dealt with virtually all of the major European powers over the course of the decade, by the late 1930s Chiang came to see the United States as being the best potential ally. By then Germany and Italy were all but allied with Japan, and the Soviet Union was on more
friendly terms with what would eventually become the Axis powers. Britain and France, meanwhile, were preoccupied with the growing Nazi threat in Europe, and at any rate had major colonial holdings in Southeast Asia (not to mention significant concessions in China itself) which would be threatened by the Chinese almost as much as the Japanese. America, by way of contrast, seemed to have somewhat less colonial baggage than the European powers, and its people were decidedly opposed to Japanese aggression in China. Moreover, although the United States was still fundamentally and obstinately isolationist, Chiang could rely on a powerful group of American and American-raised lobbyists—chief among them his own wife, Soong May-ling (宋美齡 Sòng Měǐlíng)—to keep China’s plight foremost in the minds of the American people and their political leaders and, in time, sway them into providing concrete assistance.4

American leaders, of course, had their own reasons for wanting to ally with China. Besides the weight of popular sympathy for the Chinese, based largely on romanticized portrayals of that people and their sufferings such as the popular 1931 novel (and 1937 film) *The Good Earth*, US politicians and businessmen viewed the Asian nation as a potential major trading partner after its crisis with Japan was settled. If war with the expansionist powers of Europe and Asia came to pass, as seemed likely, China’s geographic proximity to Japan made it an ideal launching point for air raids and amphibious assaults on the Japanese home islands. However, the notion of a two-front war also loomed large in the minds of American political and military planners, and the accepted grand strategy of “Europe First” placed a greater emphasis on defeating

Germany over Japan. As it turned out, the devastating Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and their subsequent rampage through Southeast Asia and the Pacific meant that significant resources were also diverted to meet this threat. The net effect of all of this was that the bulk of the US Army and Navy was otherwise engaged and unavailable to be deployed to China; at any rate, Japanese control over much of the Western Pacific made the transport and resupply of ground and naval forces impractical, if not impossible.  

The essence of American military aid to the beleaguered Chinese, then, was in the form of airpower. This thesis will examine the many ways in which this support was manifested, arguing that the usage of airpower in China was first and foremost a diplomatic initiative, more subject to political motivations than military need. The history of the Sino-American alliance in World War II, especially in terms of airpower, lends itself both to a chronological as well as a thematic approach: the three main operations discussed here are the fighters of the American Volunteer Group (AVG, or “Flying Tigers”), the Hump airlift, and the bombing offensive against Japan known as Operation Matterhorn. Conveniently enough, the volunteer pilots of the Flying Tigers were operational in the first six months of American involvement in the East Asian war, from late December 1941 through early July 1942; the Hump began operations in April 1942 and continued all the way until November 1945; and Operation Matterhorn launched its first raid in June 1944, being terminated in March 1945. Thus, in addition to covering three primary forms of airpower, the narrative follows a roughly chronological format, as discussed below.

The first chapter functions as an extended backstory to the Sino-American alliance, tracing its foundations across the backdrop of the Second Sino-Japanese War from the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937 to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. More specifically, it stresses the ways in which the United States government attempted to provide covert aid for China and indirectly restrain Japanese aggression without offending American public proclivities towards isolationism and without provoking a bellicose Japanese response. This leads into the second chapter, which focuses primarily on the American Volunteer Group (AVG, or “Flying Tigers”), but also covers some of the initial American efforts to build up an indigenous Chinese air force, such as the short-lived Jouett mission and the training of Chinese pilots in US bases. As America was not officially a belligerent in the Sino-Japanese conflict, it took great pains to avoid the appearance of governmental sponsorship of these ventures, to the point of staffing the AVG with “retired” pilots and support personnel who were “employed” by a private aircraft manufacturing company. Nonetheless, these air missions provided a means of expressing solidarity with the Chinese and promising them more aid to come.  

The remainder of the thesis shifts away from the clandestine aspects of this diplomacy, with the third chapter covering the Hump airlift, a massive undertaking that involved the resupply of Allied forces in China via an “aerial bridge” over the Himalaya mountains. While undoubtedly the least glamorous form of airpower, the transport aircraft and pilots would also prove to be the most important, as the operation lasted for the entire duration of the war and came to be the outstanding quantitative measure of US support for China. Unfortunately, this lengthy period of time also saw the gradual

worsening of the Sino-American alliance as American diplomats and generals, failing to comprehend the extremely complicated Chinese political situation and its ramifications on the military sphere, came to see the fundamental divergence between American and Chinese strategic goals as corruption and laziness on the part of the Nationalists. Chiang, meanwhile, failed to understand or address the concerns of his American benefactors, and his constant badgering of Washington for increased aid earned him unflattering nicknames such as “General Cash-My-Check.” Meanwhile, American commanders in China also had differing views on how the war should be waged: while General Joseph L. “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell favored a systemic restructuring and retraining of the Chinese army, subordinate Major General Claire L. Chennault, the former head of the Flying Tigers, argued that airpower alone could defeat the Japanese. As such, these two men were drawn into the political controversy surrounding the Generalissimo and their disagreement became almost as personal as it was political and professional.8

Matters came to a head in 1944, even as the military situation continued to develop irrevocably in the Allies’ favor. A renewed Japanese offensive in eastern China appeared to validate Stilwell’s reservations about the status of the Chinese army and the limitations of airpower. Chiang, finally fed up with what he saw as the American general’s maneuvering to be placed in charge of all Chinese forces, requested Stilwell’s recall; notwithstanding this success, American political leaders grew steadily more disgruntled with the Generalissimo’s unwillingness to fight. In order to maintain a


semblance of support for the Chinese, however, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the deployment of America’s new B-29 Superfortress heavy bombers to China. This led to Operation Matterhorn, a campaign to bomb the Japanese home islands from China. Again, several issues prevented this ambitious plan from reaching its full potential: the inability of the Hump airlift to supply enough oil and bombs for a sustained campaign; the technical limitations of the aircraft itself, exacerbated by a curtailed testing phase; the lack of sufficient numbers of aircraft needed to conduct such a campaign; and the aforementioned Japanese ground assault that captured many forward airbases. The bombers were eventually withdrawn to the US-controlled Marianas Islands, an ominous foreshadowing of waning support for Chiang and his KMT regime.

The historiography of the Sino-American alliance is a fascinating study in and of itself. Because the Sino-Japanese War was followed almost immediately by a resumption of the Chinese Civil War, which led to the expulsion of the Nationalists to Taiwan and a subsequent bitter debate in America over who “lost China to the Communists,” the World War II American-Chinese partnership is probably the most controversial of that conflict, with histories of that alliance thoroughly informed by contemporary political considerations. Although official Army and Army Air Forces histories of the war have carefully tried to remain nonpartisan, most other works in the large body of secondary literature have been decidedly less inhibited.

The anti-Chiang faction, which felt that the KMT government was far too corrupt and unpopular to survive and that the CCP victory was only a matter of time, rallied around General Stilwell (the general himself passed away in 1946, just one year after the

conclusion of the Second World War). Works such as *The Sino-Japanese War, 1937-41*, by longtime Stilwell aide Frank Dorn; *Thunder out of China*, by prominent journalists Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby; *Dragon by the Tail* by "China Hand" John P. Davies, Jr.; and perhaps most importantly *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* by historian Barbara Tuchman have all portrayed the general as being correct in his (typically acerbic) assessment of Chiang's political and military incompetence and being hampered in his quest to make China work in spite of itself by a vocal and well-connected "China Lobby" in Washington.10

The pro-Chiang faction, whose military paragon was General Chennault, concluded that Stilwell's unyielding drive towards imposing his strategy on the Chinese—exemplified by the "public love affair" supposedly carried out between Stilwell's staff and the CCP at Yan'an—led to the general's systematic undercutting of the heroic exertions made by Chiang and the Nationalists in fighting the Japanese.11 In his memoirs, published in 1949, Chennault contended that the Generalissimo, then on the brink of being forced off of the Chinese mainland, offered the best hope for a democratic, free, and US-aligned China. Interestingly enough, Chennault also blamed Washington for stymieing the Chinese war effort through its lackluster support because of its designation as a low-priority theater. Unsurprisingly, notable adherents to this point of view include


conservative journalists such as Joseph Alsop (the official staff historian of the Flying Tigers) as well as pro-KMT Chinese writers such as Chin-tung Liang (General Stilwell in China, 1942-1944: The Full Story) and Maochun Yu (The Dragon’s War: Allied Operations and the Fate of China, 1937-1947).12

On the broader subject of Sino-American relations, the most important primary source is the Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers series, released by the US Department of State. Early secondary works, such as former State Department advisor Herbert Feis’ The China Tangle: The American Effort in China from Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Mission, were criticized by later writers such as Michael Schaller (The US Crusade in China, 1938-1945) and Paul Varg (The Closing of the Door: Sino-American Relations, 1936-1946) as “overemphasizing the naivete [sic] of American diplomacy” and minimizing the deliberate contributions made by American foreign policy to the eventual undermining of US interests in China.13 This increasing nuance, the recognition of the fact that no one party was completely right or completely wrong in the World War II Sino-American alliance, is also reflected in the literature coming from the People’s Republic of China. Initially downplaying or even eliminating the role of the KMT in the “Anti-Japanese War” (抗日战争 kàng Rì zhànzhēng) and dismissing the Generalissimo as an American stooge, more recent works such as the massive, two-volume China’s Anti-Japanese War Combat Operations (中国抗日战争正面战场作战记


Zhōngguó kāng Ri zhànzhèng zhèngmiàn zhànchǎng zuòzhànji, published in 2002) acknowledge the leadership of Chiang and his government in the fight against Japan.\footnote{Guo Rugui 郭汝瑰 and Huang Yuzhang 黄玉章, eds., Zhongguo kang Ri zhanzheng zhengmian zhanchang zuozhanji [China's Anti-Japanese War combat operations] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2002), 2 vols.}

Finally, of course, there exists a significant body of literature focusing more or less exclusively on the military operations discussed in this thesis. Books such as Wing to Wing: Air Combat in China, 1943-45 by Carl Molesworth and Steve Moseley and articles such as John Correll’s “Over the Hump to China” in Air Force magazine provide more in-depth and technical information about specific groups or campaigns, while memoirs of individuals such as Flying Tiger volunteer James Howard (Roar of the Tiger) or bomber pilot Elmer Haynes (General Chennault’s Secret Weapon: The B-24 in China) offer a more personal viewpoint.\footnote{Carl Molesworth and Steve Moseley, Wing to Wing: Air Combat in China, 1943-45 (New York: Orion Books, 1990); John T. Correll, “Over the Hump to China,” AIR FORCE Magazine, October 2009, 68-71; James Howard, Roar of the Tiger (New York: Orion Books, 1991); A.B. Feuer, General Chennault’s Secret Weapon: The B-24 in China (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992).} However, these narratives generally offer only the barest hint of the greater political forces at work, much as the bigger-picture works mentioned above reference military operations only in passing. This thesis strives to bridge the gap between the two: focusing specifically on military force, but making connections to the larger political sphere of foreign relations and diplomacy.

A note on the Romanization of Chinese words: the scheme used here will be a hybrid of pinyin and the older Wade-Giles system, with pinyin being the favored style (hence Beijing not Peking, Xi’an not Sian). Wade-Giles will be used only for certain Chinese Nationalist Party figures (Chiang Kai-shek, T.V. Soong) as well as for the name of the party itself (Kuomintang or KMT), and when directly quoting older sources.
CHAPTER 1

THE SECOND SINO-JAPANESE WAR:
The Foundations of the Sino-American Alliance

On the evening of 7 July 1937, Japanese troops stationed near Beijing were out conducting night maneuvers at the Marco Polo Bridge (卢沟桥 Lúgōuqiáo), as they had been doing all summer. The Chinese government had requested that the Japanese provide advance notice of such activity so as not to disturb the local populace. However, on this night the exercises were unannounced, alarming the local Chinese garrison. The startled Chinese opened fire, sparking a brief and confused firefight with the Japanese. After the skirmish, a Japanese soldier failed to return to his post and his superiors requested to enter the nearby Ming-era fortress of Wanping to search for him. In fact the soldier, Private Second Class Shimura Kikujiro 志村菊次郎, had merely gotten lost in the unfamiliar terrain and returned to his comrades shortly after the demand was presented. Nevertheless, both the Chinese and the Japanese rushed more troops to the area in the early morning hours of 8 July, with the Japanese launching a series of attacks on the Wanping fortress and the Marco Polo Bridge. The Japanese were able to seize a portion of the Bridge later that day, but it was recaptured by the reinforced Chinese forces early the following morning. Meanwhile, members of the Japanese military and diplomatic corps in Beijing negotiated a truce and a ceasefire, after which Japanese forces withdrew to the northeast. ¹

Ironically, this minor and quickly-resolved altercation turned out to be the spark that ignited the Second Sino-Japanese War, which would eventually become the Pacific Theater of World War II. In response to the invasion and annexation of Manchuria in 1931, the KMT government implemented a policy of "internal pacification before external resistance" (攘外必先安内 rǎng wài bì xiān ān nèi) due to leader Chiang Kai-shek's preoccupation with defeating his primary foe, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As this strategy

2. Although this is the most widely-accepted view of the origins of the war, some competing narratives exist: Ikuhiko Hata claims that the Imperial Japanese Navy, traditionally seen as being more moderate than the Army, was in fact the instigator of the larger war, calling on the deployment of two Army divisions in Shanghai as a reaction to the murders of Navy personnel in that city between 1935 and 1937. Katsumi Usui writes that Chiang Kai-shek’s unwillingness to compromise, supposedly due to his desire to unify the nation by engaging a widely-hated foreign power, was another primary cause of the expansion of the conflict. On the other hand, some authors have charged that the CCP, indisputably the ultimate beneficiaries of the war, were in some way connected with the 7/8 July incident, either originating the attacks themselves or seeking to increase tensions in the immediate aftermath. Ikuhiko Hata, “The Marco Polo Incident, 1937,” in *The China Quagmire: Japan’s Expansion on the Asian Continent, 1933-1941*, ed. James W. Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 233-286; Katsumi Usui, “Japanese Approaches to China in the 1930s: Two Alternatives,” in *American, Chinese, and Japanese Perspectives on Wartime Asia, 1931-1949*, ed. Akira Iriye and Warren Cohen (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1990), 93-115; Tetsuya Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 52; Kimitada I. Miwa, “The Chinese Communists’ Role in the Spread of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident into a Full-Scale War,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 18 (1963): 313-328.

3. The actual policy name was astoundingly long: “Resist Japan after defeating bandits, external resistance after internal pacification; pacification of the interior in order to resist externally, defeating bandits in order to resist Japan” (抗日必先勤王, 掳外必先安内, 安内以攘外, 戦罪以抗日 kàng Rì bì xiān qín wáng, rǎng wài bì xiān ān nèi, ān nèi yì rǎng wài, zhàn zuì yì kàng Rì). *Huangpu jianxiao liushi zhounian lunwenji* [Selected essays on the sixtieth anniversary of Whampoa Military Academy] (Taipei: Guofangbu shizheng bianyiju, 1984), 2:121. Taylor cites this policy as having been inspired by Sun Yat-sen, who in 1915 viewed the ouster of would-be emperor Yuan Shikai as being of greater importance than resistance to the imperialistic Japanese Twenty-One Demands. Unfortunately for both Sun and Chiang, popular sentiment dictated otherwise. Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 29.
entailed non-resistance to the Japanese until the Communists were defeated, however, it was widely unpopular with the Chinese people as well as with the warlords who were directly combating the Japanese. In December 1936, two of these generals—Chiang’s supposed allies Zhang Xueliang 张学良 and Yang Hucheng 杨虎城—kidnapped the Generalissimo in Xi’an as he prepared to launch a new campaign against the CCP. The Xi’an Incident resulted in the formation of the Second United Front (第二次国共合作 Di’èrcì Guό Gόng Hézuō), an even more nominal KMT-CCP anti-Japanese alliance with Chiang as the overall leader. Thus, by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident the following year, China had both the nationalistic sentiment and the political unity to resist the Japanese. On 17 July, ten days after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the Generalissimo proclaimed to an assembled group of Chinese leaders that China had reached its “final limit” (最后关头 zuihòu guàntóu) of tolerating Japanese aggression and that a “struggle for national survival” (求国家生存 qiú guójiā shēngcún) was now a necessity (Fig. 1.1). The Japanese, meanwhile, demanded more Chinese territory as a “buffer zone” between China and Manchuria and quickly mobilized five divisions totaling nearly 100,000 men “with intent to call for grave reflection on the part of China,” according to Prime Minister Prince Fumimaro Konoe 近衛文麿.

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Japanese militarists assured reluctant members of their government—including Prime Minister Konoe and Emperor Hirohito— that the Chinese “situation” would be “resolved” in three months. Even if their prediction turned out to be woefully misguided, their overconfidence was not hard to understand. The Rising Sun, notwithstanding Chiang’s melodramatic declarations, had no desire to engulf all of China. Instead, Japan’s initial goal in the war was to compel China to recognize Manchukuo as an independent state, which the Generalissimo had steadfastly refused to do, and they were confident that a few quick, decisive victories would shock the KMT into negotiating a peace settlement. At any rate, despite an obvious disadvantage in numerical strength, Japanese forces possessed almost every other conceivable advantage over their Chinese opposites: thorough (if brutal) training and unquestioning obedience; loyalty and competence at all levels in the officer corps; and an overwhelming technological superiority backed up by an efficient supply system. Chinese military training, on the other hand, “with the exception of 10 fairly well-trained divisions...could be characterized as unsatisfactory to nonexistent.” Its huge number of divisions were commanded by various regional warlords, whose allegiance to the central government was often suspect. The KMT only directly controlled a quarter of the more than two million men that formed the National Revolutionary Army (国民革命军 Guómíng Gémíng Jūn, NRA), and therefore political

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7. Dorn, Sino-Japanese War, 6; Wilson, When Tigers Fight, 24.

8. Dreyer, China at War, 207-210. Liu writes that the Japanese clung to a “Cannae style of war,” seeking a large-scale battle of annihilation that would decide the overall war (which, incidentally, bears less resemblance to Cannae than it does to the Japanese naval victory at the Straits of Tsushima in 1905). This fixation with seeking out a “Decisive Battle” would cost the Japanese dearly, not only in China but also later in the Pacific. Liu, Military History, 105.

9. Ibid., 212-213; Dorn, Sino-Japanese War, 6-9.

reliability was emphasized over military skill in officers and generals. This decentralized and ineffective Chinese military system was paralleled in the political sphere, as Western observers noted that the Nationalist government was “a political-military dictatorship” and that Chiang’s nationwide prestige, although “higher than that of any leader in modern Chinese history,” according to journalist Edgar Snow, was due mainly to widespread hatred of the Japanese. Similarly, Chinese military and governmental structures alike were rife with corruption, with generals receiving a lump sum from the central government to pay their troops based on the number of men on the monthly roster. Perhaps the most immediately noticeable deficiency of the Chinese army, however, was its equipment: while Japanese weaponry included machine guns, grenade launchers, field howitzers, and tanks, the Chinese inventory consisted of little more than rifles, the majority of which were obsolete, poorly maintained, and came from a wide variety of sources, making ammunition resupply extremely difficult. While the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) was the third most powerful in the world, ranked only after those of the British and the Americans, Chinese maritime forces consisted of exactly twelve obsolete torpedo boats and other assorted smaller vessels. Finally, in contrast to the 2,800 domestically-produced aircraft of the Japanese army and navy, the Chinese air force had some 600 obsolescent airplanes manufactured by the Italians, Soviets, Germans, and Americans, only about half of which were intended for combat.

11. Ibid.; Schaller, Crusade, 104.
The prediction of a three-month campaign seemed to be borne out by the smoothness of the initial phases of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Indeed, the speed and efficiency with which the invaders marshaled their troops and achieved their objectives caused some observers to speculate that the Marco Polo Bridge Incident had been a manufactured crisis, similar to the 1931 Mukden Incident that precipitated the Japanese incursion into Manchuria. By the end of July, the number of Japanese troops in North China had swelled from a mere 6,000 to more than 160,000; Beijing had surrendered without a fight; and Tianjin had fallen shortly afterwards. While CCP and local warlord forces desperately tried to slow the Japanese onslaught, Chiang dispatched his best troops—the German-trained and equipped 36th, 87th, and 88th Divisions—to reinforce the garrison at Shanghai, agreeing with his German advisors that the cosmopolitan port city “must be held” and that urban warfare was more advantageous to his lightly-armed forces than the open ground of North China.

The resulting clash, which began in mid-August and ended in late November with the Japanese capturing the city, has been one of the most controversial battles of the war. On the one hand, the Chinese suffered more than 250,000 casualties, and subsequent

15. Both sides steadfastly declined to call their conflict a war, as neither had issued a formal declaration of war and both were dependent on the American materiel and supplies which would have been embargoed should this terminology be employed. Not being bound by the same diplomatic strictures, and in the interest of relative simplicity, I have elected to describe the conflict by its most common (Western) name.


17. White and Jacoby, Thunder, 49-51; Taylor, Generalissimo, 146-147.

scholars have pointed out that those troops might have been used more productively at a later time. While Shanghai bore several resemblances to the pivotal Battle of Stalingrad that would occur five years later, as both were large-scale, long-term urban battles, the ultimately futile defense of Shanghai had little military value besides the utter derailment of the Japanese invasion timeline. However, even the most acrimonious critics of the Generalissimo have had to concede that “in a political sense [Shanghai] was one of the great demonstrations of the war... [It] was even more valuable internally. The tale of the battle, carried into the interior by word of mouth, kindled a spreading bonfire of patriotic fervor.” Chiang had been faced with a quandary: if he abandoned Shanghai without a fight, he would expose himself to ever-harsher accusations of appeasement and squander the political capital that had resulted from Xi’an and the formation of the Second United Front. On the other hand, if he resisted, he risked losing his most elite forces and severely weakening his power base—namely, the troops directly loyal to him. Shanghai was a major industrial center as well as being, like all port cities, an important political base for the KMT. However, its status as an international city offered two unique political advantages: first, the Sino-Japanese conflict would be brought onto a world stage that was preoccupied with the unstable European situation; and second, it would provide isolationist Western powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom an impetus to ally with China, if only to protect their own investments.

19. Elleman, Modern Chinese Warfare, 203; White and Jacoby, Thunder, 52; Dorn, Sino-Japanese War, 78-79.

20. Taylor, Generalissimo, 147-148; Tuchman, Stilwell, 168. Tuchman interprets Shanghai as a ploy to engage foreign intervention to defeat the Japanese so that Chiang could focus on destroying the Communists, which Taylor points out would have been counterproductive since the “ploy” resulted in the decimation of the Generalissimo’s elite forces.
From the outset, American public opinion was squarely on the side of the Chinese. For instance, a public-opinion poll taken in October 1937 revealed that fifty-nine percent of respondents sympathized with China as opposed to a mere one percent for Japan, with forty percent holding no opinion of the conflict.21 Throughout the war, Japanese officials fervently believed that they were the victims of a superior Chinese propaganda machine which had turned the world against them. Although this notion was of course ridiculous, it was closely related to the truth: America had a strong unofficial presence in China, especially with its various Christian missions in that country, and the literature produced by these individuals had a profound impact on American public opinion. Perhaps the two chief figures in presenting China to Americans were not themselves missionaries, although they were both born into missionary families. Pearl S. Buck, in her 1931 novel *The Good Earth* (made into a film in 1937), painted a romanticized portrait of the average Chinese peasant as a hardworking man struggling to eke out a living against the odds—images which must have resonated with a readership undergoing the Great Depression, especially after the Dust Bowl hit in the mid-1930s.22 Even more important, arguably, was the contribution of Henry R. Luce, co-founder and founder of *LIFE* and *TIME* weekly newsmagazines. Luce, who unlike Buck was actually born in China, was a strong supporter of Chiang and the Nationalists and ensured that his magazines kept the Sino-

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Japanese conflict in American public and political consciousness. When the Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred, the Generalissimo had already appeared on the cover of *TIME* no fewer than five times, with a sixth shortly to follow (fifth cover shown, Fig. 1.2). Many prominent American families also had business dealings with Chinese, including that of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. During policy sessions concerning China, the President would often wax rhapsodic about his connections with that Asian country:

Well, now, we've [America has] been friends with China for a gr-e-e-at [sic] many years. I ascribe a large part of this feeling to the missionaries. You know I have a China history. My grandfather went out there, to Swatow and Canton, in 1829, and even went up to Hankow. He... made a million dollars, and when he came back.... in eight years he lost every dollar. Ha! Ha! Ha!...  

Self-serving as this statement was, conveniently overlooking the unequal treaties and cultural imperialism imposed by the United States upon China in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it nonetheless summarizes the general American outlook towards the Chinese as the Sino-Japanese War unfolded: benevolent, if more than a little paternalistic.

Undoubtedly the most effective anti-Japanese propaganda, however, was provided by the Japanese themselves. “Bloody Saturday,” a seminal photograph depicting a crying

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baby alone amidst a railway station freshly bombed by Japanese naval aircraft in the early phases of the Shanghai battle, was viewed by an estimated 136 million people even before it was published in *LIFE* magazine in October, voted as one of ten “Pictures of the Year” for 1937, and spawned a “tidal wave of sympathy” for China with a corresponding antipathy for the Japanese “forces of evil” (Fig. 1.3). By far the most important and controversial episode was the Nanjing Massacre (南京大屠杀 *Nánjīng Dàtūshā*), which occurred over a six-week period following the capture of the capital city on 13 December 1937. The impact of this outrage was not only due to its scope and brutality, but also because it literally occurred in front of a Western audience. Five journalists departed the city a few days after it fell, but not before witnessing the “wholesale atrocities” which would make the front page on many influential newspapers. This story, although shocking, was soon overshadowed in the American press by perhaps the only news that could have been worse for US-Japanese relations. On 12 December, the day before Nanjing fell, Japanese naval aircraft bombed and sank the USS *Panay*, an American

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gunboat evacuating American personnel from the city. The attack, which killed three crewmen and wounded forty-eight others, including five civilians, was described as unintentional by the Japanese government, who apologized immediately and profusely and paid an indemnity of over $2 million. Among the surviving civilians aboard the Panay, however, were two newsreel cameramen, who had the presence of mind to film portions of the attack and whose footage, albeit slightly censored, was released to the public on the 29th.27 Less than a month later, on 26 January 1938, a consul at the Nanjing US embassy was slapped in the face by a Japanese soldier while investigating claims that Japanese troops were looting American property in the city. After initially claiming that the envoy had been "insolent," the Japanese military and government were forced to issue another formal apology.28 Although these two incidents did not result in any dramatic policy changes by the American government, they certainly contributed to the hardening of public and political opinion against the Japanese.

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27. A US Navy court of inquiry held later that month determined that the Panay had been flying large American flags clearly visible from the air before and during the assault. Moreover, intercepted and decoded communications indicated that an officer aboard the Japanese aircraft carrier Kaga had deliberately planned the attack, possibly to provoke a war between America and Japan. On the other hand, a tremendous outpouring of sorrow and regret amongst the Japanese public prompted Ambassador Joseph Grew to remark, "[N]ever before has the fact that there are 'two Japans' been more clearly emphasized." Harland J. Swanson, "The Panay Incident: Prelude to Pearl Harbor," United States Naval Institute Proceedings 93, no. 12 (December 1967): 26-37; "Yarnell to Swanson, 23 December 1937," U.S. Department of State, Papers Relating to the FRUS, Japan: 1931-1941 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 1:542-546; John Toland, The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945 (New York: Random House, 1970), 49; Joseph C. Grew, Ten Years in Japan (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 236.

Meanwhile, Americans were once again learning of the carnage at Nanjing. Some twenty Western businessmen, missionaries, and physicians had remained in the city after its capture by the Japanese, establishing a demilitarized 3.4-square-mile Nanking Safety Zone (南京安全区 Nánjīng Ānquán Qū) for Chinese civilians and organizing themselves into the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone. Committee members witnessed—and, when possible, interfered with—the horrors Japanese soldiers inflicted on the populace of Nanjing, complained repeatedly to military commanders (who did nothing) as well as the local Japanese consulate (whose diplomats were powerless to stop their own military), and actively informed friends, officials of their respective governments, and Christian organizations of the chaos in the city. Many of this correspondence found its way into books and articles published the following year, such as the monograph *What War Means* (published in the US as *The Japanese Terror in China*) and an article in *Reader's Digest*, “The Sack of Nanking,” both of which appeared in July 1938. This quest to ensure that the world remained informed about the Massacre continued after the Japanese declared that they had restored order to Nanjing and liquidated the Nanking Safety Zone in early 1938, with former Committee members

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29. The Committee was formally recognized by the Nanjing local government and assumed administrative responsibility for the city after that government fled. German businessman John Rabe, elected leader of the Committee due to his status as a Nazi party member and the existence of the German-Japanese bilateral Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936, commented in his diary that he had “become something very like an acting mayor.” The Japanese, meanwhile, refrained from intentional bombardment of the Safety Zone. However, Japanese soldiers routinely entered the Zone under the pretext of looking for Chinese soldiers and carried off groups of men and women for summary execution or rape and murder. John Rabe, *The Good Man of Nanking: The Diaries of John Rabe*, ed. Erwin Wickert, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 54, 274.


returning to their respective countries to lecture about the atrocities. In a curious parallel
with the *Panay* incident, these presentations included photographic and film evidence,
brazenly collected by Committee member and American missionary Rev. John G. Magee
at the height of the Massacre. These forms of propaganda, for which the Japanese could
blame no one but themselves, exacerbated the hostile attitude of the American populace
towards the Japanese and further weakened the already-fragile US-Japanese relationship.

Public outrage, however, did not immediately translate into calls for action.
Isolationist feeling ran strong in the psyches of both the American people and Congress,
who vowed that the nation’s costly involvement in the Great War would never be
repeated. The aforementioned October 1937 survey which gauged the lopsided public
sympathy for the Chinese also revealed that an even greater majority of Americans were
inclined to sit out of the conflict, with sixty-four percent of respondents opposing the
shipment of arms and ammunition to China, to say nothing of direct military
involvement. After the Japanese rushed to apologize for the *Panay* incident, moreover,
subsequent public-opinion polls indicated a strong preference for pulling American forces
out of China in order to prevent future confrontations. This pacifist mindset was

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33. Gallup and Robinson, “Surveys,” 389. Incidentally, this reluctance for action was matched by
that of the international community as a whole. On 6 October 1937, the League of Nations adopted a report
condemning Japan for its actions in China. In the following month, the month-long Nine Power Treaty
Conference (including representatives from China but not Japan) produced a declaration stating that Japan
had violated the eponymous Treaty; that the Sino-Japanese War was of grave concern to all nations; and
that the warring parties ought to suspend hostilities. Both of these events, which occurred as the Battle for
Shanghai was raging, failed to result in any substantial measures to curb Japanese aggression. U.S.
Department of State, *Peace and War*, 50-52, 393-394.

34. Schaller, *Crusade*, 15. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who had hoped that the
*Panay* attack (which came hours after the Royal Navy gunboat HMS *Ladybird* was shelled by a Japanese
artillery unit) would result in the formation of an anti-Japanese Anglo-American alliance, complained that
the Americans were “incredibly slow and have missed innumerable busses.” Ironically, Chamberlain’s
reflected in legislation enacted by Congress, most notably the Neutrality Acts of the mid to late 1930s. These acts imposed an arms and war materials embargo on all belligerent states, which partially explains the reluctance by both the Japanese and Chinese to issue formal declarations of war as well as the care taken by their diplomats to avoid referring to the conflict with that term. On the American side, Roosevelt feared that such an embargo would harm the Chinese more than it would the Japanese, due to the recent addition of a “cash-and-carry” proviso which allowed countries at war to purchase nonmilitary supplies in the US so long as the buyers paid in cash and assumed all risks in transport.35 As such, he limited the implementation of the Neutrality Acts when dealing with the East Asian crisis to a ban on government-owned merchant vessels transporting weapons or arms to China and Japan, which triggered a storm of protest from Congressional isolationists who charged that the President was undermining the spirit of the laws.36 Clearly, any more direct or forceful policies which might draw the United States into the Sino-Japanese War were politically untenable.

Gradually, however, world events began to lend their weight to that of popular anti-Japanese sentiment. In March 1938, a resurgent Nazi Germany annexed neighboring Austria. The Anschluss Österreichs was followed by the seizure of Czechoslovakian

handling of the 1938 Sudeten Crisis (which he famously claimed bought “peace in our time”) would lead to his being branded an “appeaser” by future historians. William R. Rock, **Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States, 1937-1940** (Columbus: OH: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 54.


Sudetenland in September.\textsuperscript{37} Although both takeovers were greeted with joy in the occupied regions, the prospect of a powerful, remilitarized Germany—which had earlier fortified the Rhineland region in violation of the 1919 Versailles Treaty and had withdrawn from the League of Nations in 1933—worried European powers such as Britain and France, whose preoccupation meant that they would be less likely to play a deterrent role in the Pacific. As this meant that only the United States and China would be powerful enough to resist Japanese expansionism, it gave impetus for American political and economic efforts to contain the Rising Sun.\textsuperscript{38}

As early as October 1937, Roosevelt had given his so-called “Quarantine Speech” in Chicago, calling for an international economic “quarantine of the aggressor nations” (unnamed but widely recognized as referring to Japan, Germany, and Italy). Although this speech met a mixed reception and did not result in the hoped-for quarantine, it still signified a shift, however tentative, away from the non-interventionist policies of the time.\textsuperscript{39} The President next imposed a “moral embargo” on Japan, similar to that which had been placed on Spain in 1936. On 1 July 1938, the State Department notified American aircraft manufacturers and exporters that the US government was “strongly opposed to the sale of airplanes or aeronautical equipment which would materially aid or encourage [the practice of bombing civilians from the air] in any countries in any part of the world.” The letter acknowledged that this embargo was not legally binding and that the government would continue to allow the exportation of such items, but only “with

\textsuperscript{37} Powaski, \textit{Entangling Alliance}, 77-80.


great regret." This unofficial but highly effective ban was expanded the following year to include "materials essential to airplane manufacture and to plans, plants, and technical information for the production of high-quality aviation gasoline"; as these were the major arms purchases of Japan in the US, this embargo essentially halted American munitions exports to Japan. Also in July of that year, the US announced that it planned to terminate its 1911 commercial treaty with Japan. This agreement, the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between the United States and Japan, granted the latter nation "most favored nation" status and was felt to be "a bar to the adoption of retaliatory measures against Japanese commerce"; its abolition paved the way for an official, legally binding embargo on Japan. This embargo appeared in July 1940 in the form of the Export Control Act, which allowed the President to prohibit the export of military equipment or requisite materials whenever he deemed it "necessary in the interest of national defense." Although the embargo was undeniably an unfriendly act towards Japan, worsened by the addition of aviation gasoline, machine tools, and scrap iron and steel to the banned items list in the following months, oil was intentionally unregulated (as it had been for all of the previous "moral embargoes"): Japan was heavily dependent on


America for this resource, and it was feared that cutting it off completely could be seen as a provocation to war. 43

The use of economic diplomacy was not restricted to anti-Japanese embargoes, nor was it a strictly American tactic. As it became obvious in 1938 that Chiang would not surrender or even negotiate with the Japanese despite staggering losses in both manpower and territory, Japanese planners sought to undermine what little financial stability remained within the Chinese government, particularly by weakening the regime's fabi currency. Having lost their economic base, the coastal cities and the rich southeastern provinces of China, the Nationalists realized that they desperately needed foreign aid in order to survive as well as to continue the resistance. 44 As American policymakers gradually began to stress the necessity of supporting China, and as reports filtered in about the Soviet Union providing financial and military assistance to the beleaguered Chinese, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau spearheaded an effort to extend a loan of $25 million to the "Universal Trading Corporation" (UTC), a front organization for the Chinese government. These funds were intended for currency stabilization as well as for the purchase of military supplies, and were the first of many such credits America would grant to its Asian ally in the years to come. 45

43. U.S. Department of State, Peace and War, 97; FRUS Japan, 2:211-218, 220-223; Feis, Pearl Harbor, 92-93, Powaski, Entangling Alliance, 107. Feis, a former State Department economic advisor, estimated that Japan imported 35 million barrels of oil each year between 1937 and 1939, of which 26 million barrels—three-quarters of its imports—came from the United States. Other authors claim that Japan's dependence on American oil was even greater, with figures ranging as high as eighty percent of Japan's oil products and ninety percent of its gasoline coming from the US. Feis, Pearl Harbor, 268; Powaski, Entangling Alliance, 106.


45. Morgenthau noted in his diary that delays in the loan decision nearly drove Chiang into the "hand of Russia." Apparently, fears of "losing China" predated the late 1940s. Schaller, Crusade, 25-29.
The Japanese, unsurprisingly, were infuriated by the loan, coming as it did just as an end seemed to be approaching of the Chinese quagmire in which they found themselves. Although their April 1938 defeat at the Battle of Tai’erzhuang (near Xuzhou) and Chiang’s decision to breach the Yellow River dike in June of that year were merely temporary setbacks, delaying an otherwise relentless advance, Japanese battlefield prowess proved unable to overcome the overall Chinese strategy of “trading space for time” (以空间换取时间 yi kongjian huangqiu shijian).46 The October 1938 capture of the KMT provisional capital at Wuhan after one of the largest battles in history (in which the attackers used poison gas, authorized by no less a figure than Emperor Hirohito),47 which many Japanese hoped would result in the Chinese coming to their senses and suing for peace, instead resulted only in Chiang and his government evacuating to Chongqing, deep in the interior of the country. The Japanese offensive finally ground to a halt outside of Changsha, and being unable to reach the Chinese capital by any other means, the Japanese resorted to a campaign of terror bombing, using incendiary bombs on the civilian population of Chongqing. The first two air raids in May 1939 resulted in the deaths of more than five thousand Chinese civilians (Fig. 1.4).48 However, not only did the bombardment fail to break Nationalist resistance, it resulted in the embargo of aircraft materials and aviation gasoline mentioned above. Similarly, any effect that the already-unpopular collaborationist Wang Jingwei 汪精卫 regime formed in March of 1940 were

46. Dreyer, China at War, 226-229; Spence, Search, 424-425; Guo and Huang, Zhongguo kang Ri zhanzheng, 1:638.


nullified by tyrannical programs such as the “Three Alls Policy” (三光政策 Sānguāng Zhèngcè) implemented in Japanese-occupied China to try and eradicate ongoing CCP and KMT guerrilla operations.49

The outbreak of the Second World War further complicated matters. On 1 September 1939, Hitler’s Wehrmacht smashed into Poland, plunging Europe into conflict as Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. With European colonial powers now focused on the immediate crisis, American officials grew even more cautious about antagonizing Japan, as any war in the Asia-Pacific region would essentially force the US to fight Japan without any European allies.50 In China, the Nationalists soldiered on, launching counteroffensives in the winter of 1939-1940 that demonstrated their continuing willingness and ability to resist the Japanese, even if the campaigns themselves were not overly successful.51 The establishment of the Wang Jingwei government at Nanjing, on the other hand, seemed to exemplify the lengths to which the Japanese would go in order to dominate all of China. On 7 March 1940, a galvanized Roosevelt administration granted the UTC an additional $20 million in credit,

49. “Kill all, burn all, loot all” (杀光, 烧光, 抢光 shāguāng, shāōuguāng, qiāngguāng). This should not be confused with the Chinese scorched-earth policy (variously referred to as 空室清野 kōngshìqǐngyě and 窥室清野 jūnshìqǐngyě), which sought to delay the Japanese advance much like the Soviets would later do against the Nazis. Guo and Huang, Zhongguo kang Rì zhanzheng, 1:23, 353, 2:1087; Kataoka, Resistance and Revolution, 270.

50. Schaller, Crusade, 30-31.

51. Dom, Sino-Japanese War, 304-322; Dreyer, China at War, 237-238.
to be paid for by future Chinese tin shipments. Additionally, the President moved a large portion of the Pacific Fleet—many of whose ships had only been reassigned from the Atlantic the previous year—from its traditional base at San Diego to Pearl Harbor, Hawai‘i. Meanwhile, the European and Asian wars continued, with the boundary between conflicts sometimes blurring. Following the German defeat of France in June, Japan invaded French Indochina in September as a means to expand its blockade of China. The US government responded with prohibitions on iron and steel scrap exports, still carefully trying to balance between restraining Japan in China and goading it into war with America. On the 27th of that month, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, an agreement whose wording clearly signified that it was directed against the United States and which, in Roosevelt’s eyes at least, transformed the still-undeclared Sino-Japanese War into a component of a larger Axis plot to dominate the world. In China, meanwhile, the CCP launched their only large-scale anti-Japanese action of the war, the Hundred Regiments Offensive (百團大战 Bāituán Dàzhàn), which resulted in the draconian Japanese “Three Alls Policy.” Two more loans were made to China: one of $25 million in September, followed by one of $100 million in November. America, though ostensibly still determined to seek peace, was in fact reducing the

52. Schaller, Crusade, 32.


54. Powaski, Entangling Alliance, 106-107; Schaller, Crusade, 34-35; Toland, Rising Sun, 63-64.

55. Dom, Sino-Japanese War, 342-343; Dreyer, China at War, 240; Spence, Search, 438-439; Wilson, When Tigers Fight, 165-178.

56. Powaski, Entangling Alliance, 106-107; Schaller, Crusade, 36-37.
likelihood of the same through its heavy investment in anti-fascistic belligerents such as
China.

This economic support only intensified as 1941 dawned. Just a few days before
the new year, Roosevelt made his “Arsenal of Democracy” radio broadcast to the
American public, calling on them to “arm and support” the Allied powers in Europe and,
to a lesser extent, China. In March 1941, the President signed legislation that instituted
the Lend-Lease program (Fig. 1.5). This program gave the White House the authority to
supply American military aid to allied nations and effectively ended any
pretense of American neutrality in the
Sino-Japanese War as well as in the
European conflict. As Roosevelt
declared at a White House
Correspondents’ Association dinner,
“China, through the Generalissimo,
Chiang Kai-shek, asks our help. America has said that China shall have our help.”

Although the Japanese were alarmed at this overt act of solidarity for the Chinese, they
felt threatened by what happened next: as a response to Japan’s moving into southern
Indochina, the US government froze all Japanese assets on 26 July and embargoed oil

58. Schaller, Crusade, 47; U.S. Department of State, Peace and War, 100-102, 631-637.
and gasoline exports to Japan six days later.\textsuperscript{59} Japanese planners had long looked at resource-rich Southeast Asia as the next phase of an expansionist plan designed ultimately to make the Home Islands economically self-sufficient but had decided (incorrectly) that an invasion of the area would inevitably trigger a forceful response from the US Navy at Pearl Harbor or in the Philippines. With the embargo on oil, however, time was of the essence: if oil-rich Brunei and rubber and tin-rich British Malaya were not seized quickly, Japan’s war machine would grind to a halt and its entire imperialist program—including its China misadventure—would be placed into jeopardy. Military strategists concluded that a preemptive strike on the American fleet would be necessary if Japan was to realize its colonialist aims.\textsuperscript{60}

On Sunday, 7 December 1941, Japanese naval forces launched a surprise attack upon the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor (Fig. 1.6). In just ninety minutes, 353 naval aircraft from six aircraft carriers sank four American battleships and damaged another four; sank or damaged eleven other warships; destroyed or damaged 347 aircraft; killed 2,402 servicemen and civilians; and wounded 1,247.\textsuperscript{61} Approximately three and a half hours after the assault, Japanese Imperial Headquarters officially declared war on the United States as well as the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{62} The following day, addressing a joint session of Congress, Roosevelt called on Congress to “declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, a state of war has existed

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{61} \textit{Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack}, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946, S. Doc. 244, 64-65.
\bibitem{62} Prange, Goldstein, and Dillon, \textit{At Dawn We Slept}, 558.
\end{thebibliography}
between the United States and the Japanese Empire.” Congress complied later that day, pledging “all of the resources of the country” to the defeat of the Japanese Empire.63 On the other side of the International Date Line, and allegedly amidst much rejoicing throughout all levels of society, China on 9 December declared war not only on Japan, but on its Axis partners Germany and Italy as well.64

At long last, America was allied with China in a war against Japan.

Figure 1.6. The “date which will live in infamy”: the USS Arizona burns on 7 December 1941, following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Source: US Navy.


CHAPTER 2
THE FLYING TIGERS:
Diplomacy Undercover

In his famous Warring States-era military treatise The Art of War (孙子兵法 Sūnzī Bīngfǎ), Chinese general and strategist Sun Tzu postulated that “Warfare is the Way [Tao] of deception” (兵者, 諸道也 bīng zhé, gǔ̀ dào yè). While Sun was referring to the tactical or operational spheres of combat, as implied by his following statements concerning troop movement and disposition, his assertion is no less applicable in the realm of grand strategy, wherein nation-states seek to advance their own agendas vis-à-vis those of others. The Second World War provided an excellent example of this, as American military involvement in both the European and Pacific theaters of the conflict began with diplomatic subterfuge. In Asia, US covert assistance to China took the form of the Flying Tigers, a group of volunteer fighter pilots whose exploits would become the stuff of legend. Their deeds, as well as the under-the-table nature of the group’s creation and realization, demonstrated the earnestness of American support for the Chinese and laid a potent foundation for the Sino-American alliance.

Axis power reached its zenith in June 1940. In Europe, the German blitzkrieg rampaged all over the northern and western parts of the continent, having secured its eastern border with the Molotov-Ribbentrop (or Nazi-Soviet) Pact the previous year. In just three months, from March through June, the Nazi tide had engulfed the Scandinavian nations of Denmark and Norway as well as the Low Countries of Luxembourg, the

Netherlands, and Belgium. Fascist Italy, looking to capitalize on the situation, joined the
German side by declaring war on Britain and France on 10 June. Finally, on the 22nd,
France capitulated, meaning that Great Britain stood entirely alone against the Axis
onslaught. In Asia, Japanese forces continued to consolidate their gains in China and plan
to move into the resource-rich Southeast Asian colonies of the suddenly-preoccupied
Western powers. The Chinese were badly fragmented; although most were committed to
the struggle against Japan and were nominally under the command of the KMT
government in Chongqing, in reality a majority owed allegiance either to one of a dozen
regional warlords, whose loyalty to the Nationalists was usually suspect, or to the CCP,
whom KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek vehemently mistrusted. Moreover, not all Chinese
were convinced that Japan was the foe: in March, KMT leftist Wang Jingwei became the
head of a collaborationist government in Nanjing, pledging to work with Japan to resist
Communism and Western imperialism. As such, Britain and China shared several key
similarities in the dark months of 1940. Both were engaged (as it seemed) in a life-or-
death struggle, standing alone against Axis powers that had already devoured large
swathes of territory in their respective continents. For both, airpower would mean the
difference between victory and defeat: the climactic Battle of Britain was about to begin,
a campaign in which the Royal Air Force (RAF) would win eternal glory for itself in its
duel with the German Luftwaffe; while foreign correspondents had been reporting that the
neutralization of the nascent Chinese air force was "a cardinal point of policy" for

2. Although Japan and Germany had signed an Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936 (which Italy also
signed in late 1937), Japan did not formally join the Axis Powers until the signing of the Tripartite Pact on
27 September 1940 (with the term "Axis" only emerging later to refer to the signers of the 1940 Pact).

3. Wang Jingwei, "Radio Address by Mr. Wang Jingwei, President of the Chinese Executive Yuan,
Broadcast on 24 June 1941," in The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection, ed. Pei-Kai
Japan's military leaders ever since the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War.4
Finally, both looked to the United States for military aid and, hopefully, alliance.

As America viewed all of this with sympathetic but resolutely noncommittal eyes, Roosevelt and his advisors sought to assist friendly nations in way more tangible than economic but that did not offend the prevailing isolationist mood of the American people or violate the Neutrality Acts passed by their Congress. 1940 was a Presidential election year, and one of the major promises made by the incumbent was to keep the US out of everybody else's fights: American boys, he repeatedly reassured parents, were "not going to be sent into any foreign wars."5 While this unqualified promise was doomed to be broken little more than a year after it was made, Roosevelt in June 1940 had no interest in risking US neutrality by providing direct, overt assistance to any belligerent.

However, this did not necessarily mean that Americans could not fight in the ongoing wars. Besides the time-honored tradition of private individuals crossing into a warring nation to offer their services to that state, there was also precedent for groups of US volunteers forming entire units in foreign militaries while their home country was technically neutral, despite the legal difficulties this entailed.6 It is probably no coincidence that many of these groups formed fighter squadrons, as young men eagerly

6. Specifically, Article 4 (Chapter I, Convention V) of the 1907 Hague Convention outlawed the formation of "corps of combatants" or "recruiting agencies" in a neutral country, with Article 5 placing the onus of enforcement on ratifying states: "A neutral Power must not allow [such acts] to occur on its territory." Article 6, on the other hand, held that "persons crossing the frontier separately" did not engage "the responsibility of a neutral Power." The Avalon Project, "Laws of War: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land (Hague V); October 18, 1907," Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague05.asp (accessed 21 February 2013).
sought to partake in the imagined excitement and romanticism of this novel form of warfare. The most celebrated example of such a unit, of course, was the Lafayette Escadrille, in which some 180 volunteers flew for the French prior to American entry in the Great War. These men were credited with 199 victories, suffered fifty-one losses in action and another twelve from accidents and disease, and provided a valuable nucleus of veteran pilots when the United States finally joined the Allies on 6 April 1917. Similarly, Americans flew alongside Polish pilots under the aegis of the less well-known Kościuszko Squadron, named for Polish American Revolutionary War hero Tadeusz Kościuszko, during the 1919-1921 Polish-Soviet War. The popular acclaim won by these units merely compounded the already near-mystical aura of the fighter pilot, a bold and romantic practitioner of this new and glamorous form of warfare that nevertheless hearkened back to the imagination of gladiators and knights of old. As such, airpower seemed to be a safe, inconspicuous, and politically defensible—not to mention logistically convenient—form of military support for America's beleaguered quasi-allies around the globe.

China was no stranger to military aviation, having witnessed the use of such aircraft as early as 1914 when the Yuan Shikai government deployed four observation and bomber planes to help suppress the Bai Lang Rebellion.

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Seeing both the threat and potential of this new technology, various warlords and cliques began to develop their own air forces and use them against each other in the 1920s. The recently-ousted KMT was no exception, with leader Sun Yat-sen (孙中山 Sūn Zhōngshān) acquiring aircraft to use against his rivals in 1920 and establishing an aviation bureau (航空署 Hángkōng Shū) in his headquarters shortly afterwards (Fig. 2.1). Another important milestone was the founding of a military aviation school in Guangzhou in 1924, the same year that the more famous Whampoa Military Academy (黄埔军校 Huángpǔ Jùnxiào; officially the Chinese KMT Army Officer Academy or Zhōngguó Guómíndāng Lìjūn Jīnguān Xuéxiào) opened. Graduates from these training programs played major roles in the Northern Expedition (北伐 běi fā) of 1926-1928; and while the effectiveness of the Nationalist air arm was limited, KMT military commanders—

**Figure 2.1. **Sun Yat-sen and his wife Soong Ching-ling (宋庆龄 Sòng Qìnglíng) pose in front of the “Rosamunde No. 1” (乐士文号 Lèshìwén hàohào, named for Madame Sun) in 1923. *Source: Armed Forces Museum (Taiwan).*

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11. Xu, *War Wings*, 14. The Nationalist air force was initially referred to as the “Canton [Guangzhou] Air Corps” by contemporary foreign-language newspapers, but no such moniker seems to have arisen amongst the Chinese themselves. “Canton’s First-Built Aeroplane,” *North China Herald*, 18 August 1923.
including its supreme leader, Chiang Kai-shek, who had finagled his way into power following the 1925 death of Sun Yat-sen—realized that aerial warfare was becoming an increasingly integral component of a nation’s warfighting capability.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, the Generalissimo fully recognized the importance of a modern air force long before China’s battle with the Japanese, notwithstanding Claire Chennault’s later remark that the Chinese leader only began to “think seriously about airpower” after the Japanese incursion into Manchuria.\textsuperscript{13} In April 1931, five months before the Mukden Incident, a five-day National Aviation Conference (全国航空会 Quânguô Hângkông Hui) held in Nanjing resulted in an ambitious plan to expand the air force, develop an indigenous aircraft-manufacturing industry, improve the instruction of aviation students, and construct airfields and landing strips throughout the country.\textsuperscript{14} Unfortunately, these efforts—collectively christened the “aviation for national salvation” (航空救国 hângkông jiûguô) campaign after a slogan coined by Sun Yat-sen\textsuperscript{15}—were hugely expensive and widely unpopular with the Chinese people. For example, influential writer and liberal social critic Lu Xun 鲁迅 (writing under the pseudonym “He Jiagan” 何家干) blasted the policy as being impractical and wasteful in his column in a February 1933 issue of the

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{12}] Chan, \textit{Arming the Chinese}, 121-122; Xu, \textit{War Wings}, 14-15.
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] Chennault, \textit{Fighter}, 36.
\end{itemize}
Shanghai News (申報 Shen Bao). China, it appeared, would require substantial external aid to complete this project.

Fortunately for Chiang, the Western powers proved only too glad to partake in the Chinese aviation market. Although an international arms embargo, implemented in 1919, slowed down the importation of airplanes somewhat, its lifting in 1929 quickly resulted in the Asian country being inundated with offers of aircraft, both civil and military, from various countries. Although the Chinese government eagerly bought whatever it could, it soon realized that it lacked the means to train enough pilots. The Minister of Finance, American-educated T.V. Soong (宋子文 Sòng Zìwén, brother of Madame Chiang and thus the Generalissimo's brother-in-law), approached the American legation in early 1932 with a request for a military mission to set up an aviation instruction program. As would become a familiar pattern, the US government proved very reluctant to antagonize Japan with an overt show of support for China. (This was exacerbated by the fact that an American, Reserve Lieutenant Robert M. Short, had been shot down and killed over Shanghai in January while flying a Chinese fighter against Japanese bombers; Tokyo had protested strongly about the supposed breach of neutrality.) Eventually, however, through the good offices of a Commerce Department that foresaw the possibility of

16. Lu Xun 鲁迅, "Hangkong jiuguo sanyuan" 航空建国三愿 [Three wishes for the "Aviation for National Salvation" campaign], Shen Bao 申報, 5 February 1933.

17. The China arms embargo, organized by the United States, was the first international arms embargo directed against a specific country. It aimed to stop the civil wars then raging throughout China as warlords jockeyed for power. However, each of the ratifying states had different definitions of "arms and munitions of war," thus making effective enforcement impossible. The ban was lifted in 1929, when the KMT emerged as the dominant faction after the Northern Expedition. Xu, War Wings, 15-20; William M. Leary, Jr., "Wings for China: The Jouett Mission, 1932-1935," Pacific Historical Review 38, no. 4 (November 1969): 447-448.

increasing exports during the Great Depression, a compromise was reached: an ostensibly civilian training mission, headed by retired Colonel John H. Jouett and consisting of nine instructors plus six support personnel, would go to China.19

Arriving at Hangzhou in late July, Jouett and his team quickly established a flying school (named the Central Aviation School 中央航空学校 Zhōngyāng Hángkōng Xuéxiào by Chiang, who served as its president) and, after giving a refresher course for current Chinese pilots, determined that fully one quarter of them were qualified to fly. The dropouts were replaced, however, by enthusiastic and well-educated cadets; some three hundred of them would graduate from the school in the next three years, forming the nucleus of the Chinese Air Force (CAF). The Americans also set up training programs for support functions such as engineering, meteorology, and flight medicine. Nor was the mission confined to operations: Jouett put together a comprehensive five-year plan to modernize the entire CAF, sketching out plans to reorganize the corps, streamline administration and command, and acquire new aircraft. Among other things, he revamped the pay and promotions system, removing opportunities for corruption with the former and eliminating the influence of political connections with the latter. Organizationally, he made the air force an independent organization by moving it out from under the Minister of War and placing it directly under Chiang's authority. This latter move, the dream of every US Army Air Corps (USAAC) aviator, undoubtedly met minimal resistance from the Generalissimo, who stood by the Americans when political pressure was brought on them to reinstate the washed-out pilots.20


This pleasant camaraderie, however, was not to last. Chiang, always sensitive to potential threats to his power, worried that his brother-in-law was having too great of an influence over what could quite possibly become the single most potent military force in China and therefore removed him from his supervisory role at the school in 1933. Jouett found Soong’s replacement, General Ge Jing’en of the Aviation Bureau, a most disagreeable overseer. At the same time, an Italian aviation mission arrived in China at the invitation of H.H. Kung (孔祥熙 Kóng xiāngxī), another of Chiang’s brothers-in-law who would shortly replace Soong as Finance Minister. Benito Mussolini seemed eager to help the Chinese, remitting a portion of the Boxer Indemnity fund to pay for an initial batch of Italian planes as well as to pay the salaries of the mission members. The Italians, moreover, promised not only to open a flying school of their own in Luoyang, but also to open an aircraft factory in Nanchang. The Italians enjoyed the full backing of their government, while Jouett’s own efforts to gain official sanction met a cool response from a State Department which had never supported his mission. Their hostility, of course, was due to a desire to avoid offending the Japanese, who were already loudly objecting to the Americans of the presence of “some forty non-commissioned officers on the active list of the American Army... lent to China... to take part in the hostilities against Japan,” a rather comically exaggerated if not entirely untrue report.21 (Meanwhile, the Japanese also attempted to pressure China to end its so-called “using barbarians to fight barbarians’ policy,” or “以夷制夷” 政策 yìyízhìyí zhèngcè, with markedly less success.)22


22. This term was apparently used in the formulation of Japanese Foreign Minister Kōki Hirota’s “Three Principles” (广田三原则 Hirota Sangensoku) on 28 October 1935. Lugouqiao shibian qianhou de
Dejected by this lack of support and feeling that he was being snubbed by both the American and Chinese governments, Jouett resolved to return to the United States as soon as possible. As it turns out, the Chinese opted to allow the contract of the American mission to expire on 1 June 1935, turning instead to the Italians to provide aircraft and aviation training.  

The Italians themselves only lasted another two years, withdrawing shortly after the outbreak of the undeclared Sino-Japanese War. (They were soon followed out by the Germans, Chiang’s foremost military and economic partner, as both Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini desired closer relations with Japan.) Even before they departed, the Generalissimo had been looking for a more reliable solution to China’s aviation woes. He found it in Captain Claire Lee Chennault, a twenty-year USAAC veteran and brilliant pursuit aviation tactician. Reared in the swamps of Northeast Louisiana, young Chennault had found his life calling in the cockpit of a fighter plane; although initially dismissed as “not possess[ing] necessary qualifications for a successful aviator,” he nonetheless managed to become a pilot in 1919 at the age of twenty-six, and his first command (of the 19th Pursuit Squadron based at Luke Field on Ford Island, Pearl Harbor) occurred just four years later. However, Chennault’s “rabid” zeal for pursuit aviation quickly landed

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*Zhong Ri waijiao guanxi* 中日外交关系 [Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations before and after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident], vol. 4 of *Zhong Ri waijiao shiliao congbian* 中日外交史料丛编 [Collected Documents of Sino-Japanese Relations] (Taipei: Zhonghua Mingguo waijiao wenti yanjiuhui, 1966), 31.


25. Chennault, *Fighter*, 3-12. Luke Field is now the Naval Auxiliary Landing Field (NALF) Ford Island, having been transferred to the Navy in the late 1930s. In the late 1940s, the US military redesignated their “pursuit” aircraft (P-) as “fighters” (F-), and the 19th Fighter Squadron continues to
him on the wrong side of no fewer than two seminal debates concerning the role of aviation in the US military: not only did he believe that the US air service should be autonomous from Army oversight, similar to the recently-formed Royal Air Force (RAF) of the British military, but he also championed the cause of pursuit aircraft while the vast majority of influential USAAC leaders saw bombers as being the future of military aviation. The former position put airmen at odds with senior Army and Navy officials, which culminated in the 1925 court-martial of controversial and outspoken Brigadier General William “Billy” Mitchell;26 the latter placed Chennault in opposition to other airmen, especially as he possessed far more zeal than tact and argued ceaselessly and vociferously on behalf of pursuit aircraft, making little headway and winning few friends. By 1936, forty-four-year-old Chennault realized that his Air Corps career had reached a dead end. When letters from friends teaching at the Hangzhou Central Aviation School—which had continued to run after the departure of the Jouett mission, albeit under Chinese administration, and continued to employ Americans as individual contractors—were followed by an official job offer from the Secretary-General of the Commission on Aeronautical Affairs (航空委员会 Hángkōng Wēiyuánhuì), none other than Soong May-

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26. In response to a series of high-profile aviation-related disasters, Mitchell publicly accused Army and Navy leaders in September 1925 of “incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the national defense.” These inflammatory comments were almost certainly intended to provoke a court-martial to draw public attention to the matter, although Mitchell probably did not anticipate President Calvin Coolidge personally preferring the charges. The court-martial found the recalcitrant airman guilty of acting in a manner prejudicial to “good order and military discipline” and sentenced him to a five-year suspension from active duty, whereupon he elected to resign his commission. Mitchell died on 19 February 1936, but his claims about the importance of airpower were largely vindicated in the years following his death. James P. Tate, *The Army and Its Air Corps: Army Policy Toward Aviation* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1998), 39-44.
ling or Madame Chiang Kai-shek, the airman decided that this was his “channel out of the eddy” in which he found himself. Chennault resigned from the Army on 30 April 1937 and was on a ship bound for China mere hours later, ostensibly as an employee with the Bank of China, beginning an association with Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists that would endure for the rest of his life.27

The original offer was for Chennault to make a three-month inspection of the CAF, and his initial results were damning: the Italian flying school, as he remembered later, “graduated every Chinese cadet who survived the training course as a full-fledged pilot regardless of his ability.” This practice was politically shrewd, as these students generally came from influential families in the KMT, but as Chennault acerbically stated, it “all but wrecked the air force.” The aircraft factory at Nanchang, meanwhile, he denounced as a “fraud,” as the fighters it produced “proved to be a firetrap in combat” and the bombers “were of such obsolete vintage that the Chinese could use them only as transports.” The Italians, according to Chennault, were also responsible for the practice of padding the Chinese aircraft roster with damaged (or in some cases completely destroyed) aircraft, and had even recommended on one occasion that the Chinese limit further aircraft purchases to trainers. Chennault, infuriated, concluded that the Italians had been engaged in a program of deliberate sabotage all along.28

27. Chennault, *Fighter*, 18-31, 37; Martha Byrd, *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 36-65; Schaller, *Crusade*, 68-69. Chiang formed the Commission to replace the Aviation Bureau in 1934; his appointment of his American-educated wife as the secretary-general (秘书长 mishūzhăng) is perhaps a recognition that the formation of a Chinese air force would require substantial Western aid. Madame Chiang’s official position and role was a source of confusion for Western newsmen, as one 1943 article claims that she “founded and once directed” the CAF! Guo and Huang, *Zhongguo kang Ri zhanzheng*, 1:267; William H. Lawrence, “Mme. Chiang Asks Defeat of Japan, and House Cheers,” *The New York Times*, 19 February 1943.

28. Chennault, *Fighter*, 38; Fenby, *Chiang Kai-shek*, 281. Chennault’s observations, of course, need to be taken with more than a grain of salt, as (American) nationalism undoubtedly played a major role
The Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred while Chennault was conducting this inspection, and the American immediately offered his services to the Generalissimo and was directed to Nanchang to assist in the training of CAF pilots. Occasionally, he was also called upon to plan combat missions, the first of which ended in disaster: on 14 August, Chinese aircraft attempting to attack the Japanese cruiser Izumo, docked in the Yangtze River in Shanghai near the International Settlement, accidentally bombed the Settlement instead and killed or injured some 3,000 civilians.\footnote{Chennault, \textit{Fighter}, 38, 43-44; Dorn, \textit{Sino-Japanese War}, 70-72; "1,000 Dead in Shanghai: Devastation by Chinese Bombs," \textit{The Times} (London), 16 August 1937. The day would become known as "Bloody Saturday," not to be confused with the famous photograph that was taken two weeks later in the aftermath of a Japanese bombing raid, also in Shanghai. Ironically, Lu Xun had written in his 1933 article that a Chinese air force might possibly bomb civilians, given its poor combat record over Shanghai in 1932. Perhaps it is just as well that he did not live to see the realization, however unintentional, of his fears. Another irony is that the Japanese Navy commander actually assessed the raid as a success, using it to petition successfully for the dispatch of additional ground forces to Shanghai. Lu, "Sanyuan"; Crowley, \textit{Japan's Quest}, 342-343; Dreyer, \textit{China at War}, 217.} Despite this debacle, CAF airmen generally performed well in combat, inflicting heavy losses on unprotected bomber formations and carrying out bombing missions with acceptable if not spectacular results. Unfortunately, the Japanese outmatched their adversaries in both the quantity—some 450 aircraft, as compared to the 91 flyable warplanes in the Chinese inventory—and quality of airmen and aircraft, and attrition gradually took its toll on the Chinese air force. By October, less than a dozen CAF planes were still operational, and the Japanese gained aerial dominance over Shanghai.\footnote{Chennault, \textit{Fighter}, 41, 47-51, 53-59; Xu, \textit{War Wings}, 116, 118-119.}

With the Italians departing and his own air force in tatters, Chiang now turned to China's northern neighbor, the Soviet Union. Sino-Soviet relations had been rocky as of
late, as the USSR had broken off diplomatic relations following the Generalissimo’s purge of the CCP in 1927. Nevertheless, Premier Joseph Stalin viewed Japan as the greater threat following the latter’s conquest of Manchuria in 1931, directed the CCP to work with the KMT during and after the 1936 Xi’an Incident, and entered into an alliance with China on 21 August 1937. Although the Soviets provided both economic and military assistance to the Chinese, their most vital contribution came in the form of airpower, as nearly five hundred warplanes were delivered to China between 1937 and 1941 (Fig. 2.2). Moreover, in a move reminiscent of Soviet aid to the Republicans in the ongoing Spanish Civil War and prefiguring that of the impending American operation, four fighter and two bomber squadrons were dispatched to China: although Chinese pilots continued to receive training, foreign “volunteer” groups were beginning to get directly involved in the Sino-Japanese War. As Stalin was as anxious as Roosevelt to retain the pretense of official neutrality in the East Asian conflict, the Soviets took great care to hide their contributions to China’s war effort. In particular, they classified their hundreds of airmen and advisors as embassy staff. Chennault wryly noted that the Japanese never seemed to protest “the presence of an armored division and six Red Air Force squadrons in China.” The Soviet Volunteer Group would serve in China for the next five years, even though Chiang and Stalin never
fully trusted each other and would clash several times over Mongolia and other territorial disputes.31

As the Soviet airmen began combat operations in China, Chennault struggled to keep the CAF a viable force. A hastily-formed International Squadron, “a weird collection of four Frenchmen, a Dutchman, three Americans, and a German” plus six Chinese pilots, flew a couple of bombing missions against targets in North China in 1938 before the Japanese caught them on the ground and destroyed all of their aircraft.32 Later that year, Chennault moved to Kunming to train a new Chinese air force, but Japanese bombers visited the training fields regularly. Although the American was able to establish an air raid warning network of local spotters, as well as direct the construction of additional airfields for future use, not to mention gather intelligence on Japanese warplanes, the actual training of pilots proceeded at a frustratingly slow pace, even as the CAF planes and personnel continued to fall to the Japanese.33 By 1940, despite the presence of flying schools and aircraft factories, the CAF had been attrited to virtual nonexistence; Japanese aircraft roamed the sky at will. Chiang, realizing the desperation of this situation, decided that the most time-effective way to deal with this problem was to purchase the latest American aircraft and hire military pilots and maintainers, essentially creating a ready-made fighter squadron for the Chinese. In mid-October, he dispatched air advisor Chennault and General Mao Bangchu 毛邦初 of the CAF Operations Division back to the United States to consult with T.V. Soong, now the


Generalissimo’s representative in Washington. Chennault harbored no illusions about the challenges facing him: American aircraft manufacturers were struggling to meet domestic military requirements, and any excess airplanes were being shipped over to the beleaguered British. Furthermore, while American citizens could slip across the border into Canada in order to enlist in the Eagle Squadrons of the RAF à la the Lafayette Escadrille of the Great War, the fact that any American volunteer units in China would be on their own required the recruitment of active-duty US servicemen, who were strictly prohibited from serving in China as this would violate the official neutrality of the nation.34

Chennault’s pessimism was well-founded. Although some US government officials, such as Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, were impressed by the retired airman’s schemes for bombing Japanese cities with a five-hundred-plane air force and defeating the enemy threat using only airpower, others were quick to criticize it as unrealistic. The issue of priorities came up, of course, as policymakers reminded Chennault that the “Arsenal of Democracy” had its commitments to Europe (specifically Great Britain), but Chennault’s request for the USAAC’s new B-17 Flying Fortress long-range bomber also raised eyebrows: some doubted whether the Chinese had the aptitude to fly the B-17, while others noted that the United States Army itself had less than two hundred of the aircraft, and still others wondered if Chennault was over-exaggerating the effectiveness of airpower in general. All, however, worried that this operation would significantly damage American claims of disinterested neutrality in the conflict, and might in fact be used by Japan as a casus belli to attack US interests in Southeast Asia.

34. Ibid., 107; Chennault, Fighter, 88-92; Xu, War Wings, 149-150.
Eventually, the original grandiose Chinese proposal was whittled down to just one hundred obsolescent P-40 Warhawk pursuit aircraft authorized for sale, after which Chennault had to locate the aircraft to buy. Finally, on 10 February 1941, the Curtiss-Wright Corporation agreed to sell a shipment of P-40s originally designated for Britain to the Chinese. (The British would get newer, improved P-40Es.) As these American aircraft would be flown by American pilots and serviced by American crewmen—an American fighter squadron in all but name, unlike the Lafayette Escadrille or Eagle Squadrons—a novel method of circumventing the neutrality regulations was applied, that of front organizations. One of these, "China Defense Supplies" (CDS), became the official purchaser of the aircraft.35

Simultaneously, Chennault sought to recruit active-duty pilots from the various armed services, although as he later recalled, "personnel proved a tougher nut to crack."36 The Army, Navy, and Marine Corps were rapidly expanding in anticipation of possible involvement in the global conflict, and they were fiercely opposed to discharging any highly-trained men for this wild adventure in China. Army brass, in particular, were none too pleased to deal with the recalcitrant ex-captain, now the exalted executive agent of a foreign head of state.37 The State Department, asked whether the issue of Americans volunteering to fly for China could be resolved in the same manner as those flying for Great Britain, responded that although it was not illegal for Americans to volunteer per se, State Department policy was "to refuse passports to persons who state that they desire to

35. Byrd, Chennault, 108-112; Schaller, Crusade, 71-76; Xu, War Wings, 151-152.
36. Chennault, Fighter, 98.
37. Heiferman, Flying Tigers, 18, 22.
go abroad for the purpose of enlisting in the armed forces of a foreign state." President Roosevelt ultimately intervened, personally authorizing some three hundred pilots and support crewmen from the various services to resign and join what was known as the First American Volunteer Group (AVG) for one year, with no loss in seniority. Although Chennault later asserted that the President signed a "secret executive order" to this effect, later researchers have concluded that Roosevelt preferred a more informal (and less politically and diplomatically inconvenient) "wink-and-nod" approach to this endeavor. The diplomatic fiction continued: the volunteers were hired not by the Chinese government, but by the "Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company" (CAMCO), a private American corporation that had already constructed an aircraft factory in Hangzhou. Chennault himself became a "supervisor" at CAMCO. In June, all was finally ready, and a first group of volunteers boarded the Dutch steamer Jaegersfontaine for their trip to China. In a more colorful rendition of the Soviet personnel trick from 1937, the passenger manifest of the Jaegersfontaine included "salesmen, artists, actors, musicians, school teachers, and acrobats[;] even an undertaker"—but no airmen or mechanics. The Japanese of course saw through this flimsy ruse and threatened to sink the ship and the "paid American bandit pilots" it was carrying. In response, the US and

38. U.S. Department of State, FRUS Diplomatic Papers, 1940: The Far East (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), 670, 677-678. This ban on passports was of course easily nullified if the receiving country did not require them, as was the case for Eagle Squadron volunteers.

39. Xu, War Wings, 153-154. The Second and Third AVGs never became a reality due to the Pearl Harbor attack, so the "First" AVG became the only AVG and is here referred to as such. Chennault, Fighter, 124; Schaller, Crusade, 82.


Dutch navies dispatched vessels to escort the Jaegersfontaine through each leg of her journey.\(^\text{42}\)

The voyage proved to be uneventful; the volunteers arrived safely at Rangoon, Burma, in August 1941, and were immediately constituted as a CAF unit by order of the Generalissimo. Nor did they arrive any too soon: the Soviets had withdrawn their forces in late April, following the signing of the Soviet-Japanese Non-Aggression Pact, and any further aid was discontinued following the German invasion of the USSR in June. Unfortunately, the Americans began to run into problems almost immediately. Their aircraft had been delayed by legal arbitration, and their Chinese training bases were flooded by summer monsoons. When the P-40s finally arrived, they lacked the guns, ammunition, and spare parts needed for the planes to fight as well as fly. Meanwhile, the British offered training facilities at Toungoo, Burma, and the volunteers arrived in late August. Here, Chennault discovered to his dismay that a number of his aviators had embellished their previous flying experience: although he had advertised for pursuit pilots, many of his volunteers had instead flown bombers or less powerful craft, and hence would have to be retrained to fly the smaller, more nimble P-40s. Even while that was occurring, Chennault schooled his men in the hit-and-run tactics that he had developed in order to counter an enemy whose aircraft were much more maneuverable, but less rugged, than the volunteers’ own. He emphasized teamwork in the air, as opposed to the individual heroics of the aviators of the Great War which continued to be the established doctrine in the United States. Moreover, Chennault’s observation of Japanese fliers had debunked several popular racist stereotypes of that people: “Your

enemies.... can see as well as you, they’re brave, and they’re good gunners,” he told his men. 

As Chennault had been assembling the AVG, other parties had been at work concerning the revitalization of the Chinese air arm. American officials such as Lauchlin Currie, a powerful economic advisor to President Roosevelt, toured CAF training facilities and airfields and determined that the Chinese lacked suitable equipment, not to mention a proper environment, for pilot training. Currie and Brigadier General Henry B. Clagett recommended that American instructors and advisors be brought in to train Chinese pilots, and the Chinese themselves asked to send student pilots to train in the US. In October 1941, the first group of fifty Chinese arrived at Thunderbird Field in Arizona to begin their studies. After some initial embarrassment caused by reporters forcing Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to acknowledge that the Chinese were there for aviation training, the US took steps to hide the Chinese students’ presence, again in an attempt to maintain official neutrality. Eventually, several hundred Chinese airmen received training at Thunderbird Field and other training bases in the US. 

The American volunteers at Toungoo, meanwhile, were busily earning the reputation of a group of “hell-raisers,” due to their antics in their off-duty hours. “Theirs was a military organization that somehow was not military,” as one historian later wrote. Someone found an illustration of an RAF P-40 squadron in Libya with a shark’s


gaping maw painted on the aircraft
nose, and soon the AVG P-40s sported
a similar design (Fig. 2.3). Chennault
did not hold his men to standards of
dress or personal appearance or
discipline; the cavalier attitude of the
volunteers towards military etiquette
irked both British and American observers, one of whom acidly predicted that the unit
would “not last two weeks in combat.” News of the Pearl Harbor attack in early
December, however, stiffened the wills of the volunteers. “We were now on the front
lines,” recalled one of them years later. The British, although dismissing an offer of
Chinese assistance in defending Burma, strongly petitioned to have the AVG remain in
the country. Chennault protested that the major advantages enjoyed in the Kunming area,
especially the early-warning spotter network of which he was so proud, were lacking in
Burma. However, political necessity overrode military concern: Roosevelt and British
Prime Minister Winston Churchill personally intervened, eliciting a grudging agreement
from Chennault to leave one of his three squadrons at Mingaladon airbase, near
Rangoon.

Nevertheless, the airman redeployed his remaining two squadrons to Kunming in
mid-December. Their training would soon be put to the test: on the 20th, Chennault’s
spotters radioed in sightings of a formation of ten bombers headed towards the city, and

the shark-mouthed P-40s rose to defend it. This first engagement resulted in the AVG shooting down four of the intruders and forcing the rest to flee for one friendly loss. News of this action electrified the Allies, as even tactical military successes were few and far between during the first months of US involvement in World War II. It did not matter to the public that this "victory" was won by fighters over unescorted bombers, as the Axis in general and the Japanese in particular seemed to be well-nigh invincible. (Chennault, for his part, noted with annoyance that the lesson was apparently lost on the "bomber generals" in the USAAC, who stubbornly believed that "the bomber will always get through.") The grateful Chinese, for their part, soon dubbed the group as the "Flying Tigers" (飞虎队 Fēi Hǔ Dui, Fig. 2.4).51

The next three months, however, saw the volunteers in action mostly in Burma, defending the country and its capital against Japanese bombardment. The squadron in Burma received their baptism of fire on 23 December, when—as foreseen by Chennault—the lack of an early-warning system hampered their response to a Japanese strike force of fifty-four bombers escorted by twenty fighters. While the Americans somehow downed six Japanese aircraft while losing five P-40s and two pilots, 

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the Japanese were able to inflict massive damage on Rangoon.\textsuperscript{52} However, even when the AVG had advance warning, as happened two days later, enough enemy aircraft still made it through to bomb the city and terrify its population. As had earlier happened to the CAF over Shanghai, the Flying Tigers found themselves on the losing side of a battle of attrition. While the Japanese seemed to have limitless reserves, the AVG had begun the war with just eighty-two pilots and seventy-nine aircraft (including those deemed not yet ready for combat) and every loss suffered through combat, accidents, or fatigue was dearly felt. Chennault carefully husbanded the AVG, switching squadrons in and out of Burma as necessary and allowing exhausted pilots to rest in the relative peace of China. However, he could not fabricate the spare parts so urgently needed by the P-40s, nor could he replace the men that inevitably fell in battle.\textsuperscript{53} The Flying Tigers were international celebrities, at least amongst the Allied powers. One pilot later recalled being "suddenly engulfed" by "news correspondents... photographers... generals, air marshals, and other big shots."\textsuperscript{54} Unfortunately, this fame did not translate to increased support for the volunteers from a nation which was consumed by war and whose priorities were aptly summed up by the name of its "Europe First" grand strategy.

Rangoon, meanwhile, was descending into chaos. English civilians had long since fled, and the anti-Western Burmese posed almost as large a threat to the volunteers on the ground as the Japanese did in the air. The pilots, quartered in the city, eventually took to posting armed guards at night as a precaution against being murdered in their sleep. Not that they got all that much sleep anyway: the Japanese took to sending small nuisance


\textsuperscript{53} Heiferman, \textit{Flying Tigers}, 14-15.

\textsuperscript{54} Howard, \textit{Roar of the Tiger}, 104.
raids designed to keep the volunteers awake, knowing that the Flying Tigers lacked any sort of night-fighting equipment. The Japanese had invaded Burma in mid-January from neighboring Thailand, and as their inexorable advance neared Rangoon, authorities released "criminals, lunatics, and lepers" into the streets to fend for themselves. By mid-February, the city had descended into "jungle law." More importantly, the Japanese advance also forced Allied spotter personnel to withdraw closer and closer to Rangoon, giving AVG and RAF pilots less and less advance warning of Japanese bombers. The fall of the British bastion at Singapore on 15 February also freed up additional veteran Japanese forces and aircraft to the Burma campaign. Finally, on 27 February the British removed their radar set from Rangoon, meaning that the pilots at Mingaladon would have no warning whatsoever of Japanese raids. At this juncture, Chennault ordered his men to withdraw to Magwe, two hundred miles to the north, and abandon Rangoon. The capital fell two days later.

The remainder of the Burmese campaign played out in much the same fashion: although the AVG continued to inflict losses on the enemy disproportionate to its own size, it never seriously checked the Japanese advance. By now, due more to operational than combat losses—a critical lack of spare parts which had bedeviled the group since its inception meant that something as mundane as a blown tire could ground an aircraft—the combat strength of the Flying Tigers had dwindled to the point where Chennault recombined the three squadrons into one unit which still had less than twenty usable warplanes in total. Although Prime Minister Churchill extolled the efforts of the


56. Byrd, Chennault, 144-145; Howard, Roar of the Tiger, 131; Chennault, Fighter, 137, 139.
volunteer airmen, proclaiming that "the victories of these Americans on the rice paddies of Burma are comparable in character if not in scope with those won by the RAF over the hop fields of Kent in the Battle of Britain," perhaps a more apt comparison would be with the Battle of France: discord between Allied leaders and commanders and a lack of an overall strategy combined with an unexpectedly strong enemy offensive to create a retreat that spanned the length of the country and was soon bogged down by masses of panicked refugees, with any individual attempt at forming a defense line swept away by the relentless onslaught.\(^57\) In some cases, British units were encircled by Japanese forces; although they managed to fight their way out, they were forced to abandon their heavy weapons and equipment.\(^58\) As the Burmese situation continued to unravel, the Flying Tigers were increasingly pressed into reconnaissance and ground-support missions, both of which were unsuited for their P-40 pursuit aircraft as well as being dangerous. Even more wasteful, in the eyes of the pilots, were the politically-motivated "morale missions," low-altitude flights intended to raise the morale of Chinese ground forces by showing they had air cover. Unfortunately, the very first of these missions nearly ended in disaster, as unbeknownst to the AVG the city over which they flew had just been taken by the Japanese. Disgust with their assigned missions, the strain of constant combat, the continuing lack of proper equipment and spare parts, and above all a growing sense of

\(^{57}\) Byrd, *Chennault*, 145-146; Howard, *Roar of the Tiger*, 125; Denning, *Sino-American Alliance*, 66-74. One difference is that the refugees in the Burmese case were predominantly Indian, as many had migrated to Burma to look for work and were viewed by the Burmese with the same hatred and contempt as the British.

isolation and abandonment by the US, all combined to lead the pilots to stage a revolt in mid-April. Twenty-four men offered their resignations, although in the end Chennault managed to persuade, cajole, or threaten all but four of them into staying on. By the end of May, although the conquest of Burma was essentially complete, continued air attacks by the new P-40Es of the AVG on advanced Japanese positions prevented an incursion into China itself and the situation devolved into a stalemate, not unlike that already facing the Japanese in the eastern part of China.

While the volunteers fought desperately against the Japanese, their commander battled another hostile entity that threatened the survival of the American Volunteer Group. The US Army air arm (having been redesignated the Army Air Forces, or USAAF, in June 1941) had long cast a covetous eye on the unofficial but outstandingly-popular Flying Tigers, and had first approached Chennault in late January about inducting the unit. Chennault, who had attempted to return to the Army on several occasions during his stint in China, eventually agreed to a personal reinstatement with the promise of a colonelcy and immediate promotion to brigadier general—quite a leap for the retired captain. However, he continued to insist that the volunteers themselves remain independent until the expiration of their CAMCO contracts on 4 July, citing their varied service backgrounds, freewheeling lifestyle and habits, and above all their unique esprit de corps. The ranking AAF officer in China, Brigadier General Clayton Bissell—whom Chennault had clashed with in the past—tried to strong-arm the men into staying with the unit after induction: “And for any of you who don’t want to join the Army, I can guarantee to have


your draft boards waiting for you when you step down a gangplank onto U.S. soil." The volunteers, feeling insulted by the arrogant attitude of the AAF general, responded by teaching Chinese coolies the phrase “Piss on Bissell,” which became an enthusiastically-shouted greeting for all incoming aircraft for some time. By the time 4 July arrived (on which date four Japanese aircraft were shot down with no losses), exactly five pilots and thirty-four support personnel had signed on to remain in China, although Chennault also managed to talk almost twenty more pilots into staying over for an additional two weeks to help “hold the fort” until enough Army pilots arrived to take over operations. However, the vast majority of the volunteers rejoined the armed forces, serving heroically in many theaters of World War II, with two being awarded the Medal of Honor, America’s highest decoration for valor. Chennault himself continued to serve in China, eventually rising to be the head of the Fourteenth Air Force in 1943 (Fig. 2.5). His reputation as a maverick continued to haunt him, however, as his old foes were now the chiefs of the USAAF; this personal enmity was only enhanced by his close relationship with Chiang.

Figure 2.5. “Chennault of the Fourteenth Air Force”: the 6 December 1943 cover of TIME. Chennault’s leathery, deep-lined face, acquired from years of open-cockpit flying, bore certain resemblances to Hollywood leading man John Wayne, who would portray a suspiciously similar airman in the 1942 propaganda film Flying Tigers. Source: TIME.

61. Ibid., 170-172; Howard, Roar of the Tiger, 149-150.

Kai-shek. Furthermore, his insistence that airpower could singlehandedly defeat the Japanese both proved unrealistic and won him few friends in the Army.63

In the end, the Flying Tigers only commenced operations following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and America’s formal entry into the war, and existed for half a year after that, being absorbed into the United States Army Air Forces on 4 July 1942. Moreover, during that time their primary mission was to support the faltering Allied defense of Burma, and despite their impressive air-to-air kill ratio (some 115 Japanese planes shot down for the loss of 12 P-40s, although many more were destroyed on the ground or through accidents), their numbers were always too few to have a decisive effect on the relentless Japanese advance. However, despite their lack of tangible strategic results, the American Volunteer Group served two vital purposes throughout its existence: first, in the dark days of late 1941 and early 1942 when Allied fortunes were at their nadir, the very existence of positive news on any front was a substantial morale boost to the US government as well as the general public. Furthermore, this demonstration of support for the Chinese in their struggle against the Japanese gave the Americans credibility in the eyes of the Chinese Nationalist government as well as of its people—Ambassador Gauss wrote of the AVG’s “splendid effect on Chinese morale” in a March telegram, and T.V.

Figure 2.6. Sino-American cooperation: a Chinese soldier guards a row of AVG P-40s parked at a Kunming airbase. Source: US National Archives.

63. Byrd, Chennault, 176-353.
Soong later remarked that the Flying Tigers were “the soundest investment China ever made.” From its origins as a ragtag, officially-denied assemblage of adventurers whose usefulness was doubted by some American politicians and flat-out rejected by most conventional military personnel, the American Volunteer Group established itself not only as a premier fighting outfit, but more importantly as the most enduring symbol of Sino-American cooperation in the Second World War (Fig. 2.6).

And what of the military legacy of the Flying Tigers? The AVG was replaced by the 23rd Pursuit Group, with its three squadrons becoming the 74th, 75th, and 76th Pursuit Squadrons. These squadrons still exist today, and although it is not without irony that they fly the A-10 ground attack aircraft (given the original volunteers’ fame as dogfighters and disdain for air-to-ground operations), they are also the only units currently authorized to use the distinctive shark’s mouth insignia (Fig. 2.7). The success of the Flying Tigers was such that airpower would become the initial military commitment of the United States in every conflict it fought, continuing into the present day. There is a shadier side to this, however: both Chennault’s supporters and detractors have noted that the overwhelming emphasis on secrecy in the

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initial formation and deployment of the AVG probably laid the foundation for American use of clandestine air operations during the Cold War. In particular, the postwar Civil Air Transport （民航空运公司 Minhăng Kôngyun Gôngsĩ, CAT）—co-founded by none other than now-Major General Claire Chennault—and its follow-on organization, Air America, have been described as “paramilitary arms” of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). These two groups, staffed largely by ex-military men (and in the case of CAT, ex-AVG fliers), flew transport aircraft in support of covert missions in China, Korea, French Indochina, Indonesia, and Laos over the next thirty years (Fig. 2.8). This concealed aspect of airpower as a diplomatic tool must be considered one of the primary legacies of the American Volunteer Group.


66. Byrd, Chennault, 152; Schaller, Crusade, 83-84; Jerome Klinkowitz, With the Tigers over China, 1941-1942 (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 159-162.
CHAPTER 3

THE HUMP AIRLIFT:
Diplomacy in Action

Napoleon is widely (if apocryphally) credited with uttering the famous adage, "An army travels on its stomach."\(^1\) While the origination of this maxim is doubtful, its veracity is not: armies are comprised of human beings who require sustenance, and the ability to move supplies efficiently and in sufficient quantities—not to mention the troops that use them—is a fundamental prerequisite to success in a military conflict. During the Second World War, airpower emerged as a powerful new tool in the logistics efforts of all major combatants, principally those of the United States. This was perhaps nowhere more evident than in the Chinese theater, where an airlift came to be the single most consistent expression of alliance throughout the entirety of the war.

Like other forms of airpower, aerial resupply was seen as having maximal results for a relatively low investment of both money and manpower by an America preoccupied with numerous other theaters of conflict.\(^2\) Additionally, Japanese victories rendered all other supply routes into China untenable for nearly two critical years of the war. Ultimately, just as the Flying Tigers failed to inflict decisive blows against the Japanese onslaught in Southeast Asia, the airlift was never able to meet any of its military goals: no modernized Chinese army emerged to reclaim their country, much less invade the Japanese mainland, and the air forces sustained by the resupply operation were never in a

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position to launch a sustained offensive, let alone effect the singlehanded victory promised by its most vociferous proponents. However, as a symbol of continuing American support for the beleaguered Chinese, the value of the Hump airlift as a tool of diplomacy is inestimable, easily surpassing that of the Flying Tigers in terms of longevity and sheer scale if not publicity.\(^3\) For the historian, the fact that the airlift was in effect for the entirety of World War II (April 1942 through November 1945) renders it an ideal narrative wherein to trace the disintegration of the relationship between the Americans and the Chinese over the course of the conflict, as well as to explore the complex dynamics within the Allied camp as a whole in the Pacific War, most notably the tensions with the British.

By December 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the United States officially entered into World War II, and the Flying Tigers began combat operations, China’s external resupply system was in a crisis. The Japanese had rapidly seized control of China’s ports and coastal cities after their invasion, and in September 1940 they invaded French Indochina with their primary objective being to halt the flow of supplies to China through that colony.\(^4\) Afterwards, all military supplies entering the country did so through two tenuous land routes. When the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact with Japan in April of 1941, however, one of these routes—beginning in Russian Turkestan and passing through Xinjiang over the famous Silk Road—was put out of

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commission. China’s sole remaining means of resupply came through the still-standing British colony of Burma: supplies were landed at the port city of Rangoon and moved to the railhead at Lashio, which was the western terminus of the recently-constructed Burma Road (滇缅公路 Diān-Miǎn Gōnglù, “Yunnan-Burma Road”). Built by Chinese hand labor soon after the start of the Sino-Japanese War when it became clear that Japan was systematically cutting off China’s supply routes, the Burma Road consisted of some seven hundred torturous miles of paved mountainous paths passing over the Himalayas, eventually ending in Kunming (Fig. 3.1).5 As may be expected, accidents were frequent on this route, and factors such as “corruption, political intrigues and jealousies and plain incompetence” meant that the volume of supplies carried over the Road was never above half the four hundred tons per day it was capable of sustaining.6 Yet another vulnerability of this route was exposed in July 1940, when the British—engaged in the opening phases of what would become the desperate struggle for survival known as

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the Battle of Britain—temporarily succumbed to Japanese diplomatic pressure and closed the Burma Road for three months, despite American protests.  

Even with all of these shortcomings, the Burma Road remained China’s lifeline as the United States and its allies scrambled to meet the Axis threat around the world. Japanese military leaders recognized this as well, viewing the seizure of the Road and complete Chinese economic isolation as the means to achieve a favorable conclusion to their China quagmire. Thus, when Japan invaded Burma in January 1942, it was as much a bid to shut down the Burma Road as it was to gain access to Southeast Asian natural resources. All three major Allied powers in the Pacific—the United States, Great Britain, and China—ostensibly had a vested interest in defending the colony. But here several fundamental differences and disagreements sprang up that were to bedevil attempts at cooperation between the Allies for the rest of the war. America and China were both antagonistic to British imperialism, having fought it in the past, with the Chinese in particular harboring suspicions of Britain’s long-term goals. For their part, the British were annoyed with American idealism but viewed the Chinese with deep-seated misgivings, as Chiang Kai-shek had denounced Western imperialism on more than one occasion and was known to be friendly with Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi; thus, any Chinese successes on British-claimed soil would be only slightly less dangerous than Japanese victories. Overlaying these political issues were practical military concerns: while the British were more than happy to augment their airpower in Burma


9. Yu, Dragon’s War, 7.
with planes and personnel from the AVG, commander Claire Chennault opposed such a move as a dilution of his already meager strength and on the grounds that Burma lacked an efficient early-warning system, key to the success of the Flying Tigers in China. On the other hand, British commander Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell actually refused an initial offer of six Chinese divisions made by Chiang, supposedly because of "bad roads" but more likely due to the political sensitivities mentioned above as well as doubts as to the quality of the troops. This snub irritated the Generalissimo, who (along with the Americans) could cite the dismal British performance at Singapore and Hong Kong as reasons to doubt the commitment and fighting spirit of the British. Meanwhile, the Chinese and the Americans did not see eye to eye on all matters, as Chiang and his people complained that their share of promised Lend-Lease supplies—already paltry in comparison with what was sent to the British and the Soviets, due in no small part to the "Europe First" grand strategy—was regularly diverted to other theaters, without Chinese input, and on occasion had been requisitioned by the British without even American authorization.

Of course, the Americans would soon have their own grievances against the Chinese. As the situation in Burma fell to pieces, a new American commander arrived to head up the newly-designated China-Burma-India Theater, one whose personality and influence would shape the course of the Sino-American alliance more profoundly than any other, save perhaps Chennault. Major General Joseph L. "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, recently named the top corps commander in the United States Army, had originally been

slated to lead the Allied invasion of Northwest Africa but had been dispatched to Asia instead because of his prior experiences in China—he had served three tours in the country as a junior officer and had been the military attaché at the US Legation in Beijing when the Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred—but as well as his fluency in Mandarin. Unfortunately for everyone involved, Stilwell’s knowledge of Chinese culture did not extend into the dizzyingly-complicated world of politics in which he found himself. Also, his nickname was well deserved: famous for his disdain of pomp and ceremony, the general habitually conversed in straight talk, pulling few if any punches, and had little use for diplomatic niceties and formalities.

Stilwell arrived in the theater in late February 1942, landing in Burma on 11 March to a situation that was rapidly decaying into chaos. Although initial interviews with leaders such as Chiang, Wavell, and Chennault produced positive impressions (with the exception of the “tired, depressed,... beaten down” Wavell; Stilwell was notoriously Anglophobic, and he was far from unique in that regard), the general soon discovered that appearances and reality

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13. Tuchman, Stilwell, 61-89, 91-122, 164-166; Dorn, Sino-Japanese War, 3. As an interesting historical footnote, Stilwell’s first trip into China, while on leave as a junior officer, placed him in Shanghai just after the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution that resulted in the founding of the Republic of China. It does not seem to have left much of an impression on him, though. Tuchman, Stilwell, 25-41.

could be quite far removed from each other (Fig. 3.2). Stilwell was nominally in command of the Chinese Fifth and Sixth Armies, comprising seven divisions that were deployed in Burma. However, Stilwell was also Chiang’s chief of staff, complicating matters immensely when the Generalissimo insisted on dispensing military “advice” and retaining de facto control over Chinese units. A frustrated Stilwell noted in his diary that Chiang adamantly refused to consider launching any kind of counteroffensive action against the advancing Japanese—due to a mistrust of his supposed British allies, which Stilwell ironically shared—and that the commanders of the Chinese armies were not following his (Stilwell’s) orders, presumably because of interference from the Generalissimo. For his part, Chiang viewed Stilwell first and foremost as his American chief of staff and privately complained that the general was not behaving as a proper subordinate.

As the situation in Burma continued to deteriorate, Allied leaders faced the prospect of China becoming completely cut off from resupply and possibly making a separate peace with Japan. This was politically unacceptable for several reasons. First, China’s propaganda value was inestimable: with Japan loudly (if somewhat fruitlessly) proclaiming that its “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” was a noble quest to reclaim “Asia for the Asiatics” and to throw off the hated yoke of the white man, a Sino-American alliance showed that the conflict was not necessarily between Western imperialists and Asian peoples, thus defeating the attempts of the Japanese to turn the Pacific War into a race war (Fig. 3.3). On a strategic level, the fact that China remained a

16. Ibid., 76-77.
17. Liang, General Stilwell, 3; Schaller, Crusade, 102.
belligerent in the fight against Japan meant that nearly one million Japanese soldiers were tied up as an occupational force, men who could potentially be deployed elsewhere should the Chinese capitulate. Moreover, China’s geographic proximity to Japan made it an attractive potential staging base for long-range bomber attacks or even a land invasion against the Japanese home islands, not unlike the advantages Great Britain offered in the European theater of the conflict. Finally, business-minded leaders felt that China had the potential to be a major postwar trading partner for the US. Thus, America was determined to keep China in the war against Japan, and this would be accomplished by ensuring that supplies continued to reach Chiang Kai-shek. It was anticipated that these supplies would not only provide the Chinese the physical means to continue fighting, but would also have a potent psychological value, stiffening Chinese resolve by reassuring them that they were not being abandoned by their American allies.

The foundations of what would grow into the Hump airlift (驼峰航线 Tuó fēng hángxiàn) may be traced back as early as 23 December 1941, when President Roosevelt told US Army Air Forces Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Henry “Hap” Arnold that

“supplies for China would have to be taken by air.” Roosevelt continued to harp on the necessity of opening an air route into China throughout the winter and into the spring, and indeed continued to take a personal interest in the Hump for the duration of the war. It is instructive to note that the airlift originated as a political decision, with political concerns, rather than from a purely military standpoint. By March 1942, the newly-created Tenth Air Force commander, Major General Lewis H. Brereton, and his staff were mapping out the complex logistics required for what was then referred to as the India-China Ferry (Fig. 3.4). Here, as with the Flying Tigers just one year previously, the lines between civilian and military were blurred. In this case, the civil-military partnership was due to the inexperience of the military in planning a long-term cargo airlift over treacherous terrain. By way of contrast, the commercial China National Aviation Corporation (中国航空公司 Zhōngguó Hángkōng Gōngsī, CNAC), jointly owned by Pan Am Airlines and the Chinese government and employing both American and


Chinese pilots and ground personnel, had been exploring air routes between China, Burma, and India in an attempt to continue operations even as the Japanese overran Burma. CNAC’s experience, albeit limited, in navigating the treacherous mountains—not to mention its much more expansive familiarity with efficient ground operations—would prove to be invaluable to the fledgling military airlift.21

The planners of the Hump faced several daunting obstacles. First, airfields were scarce in northeastern India, and thanks to burgeoning Indian nationalism directed primarily against the British but spilling over onto the Americans, recruiting local labor for construction projects met with stubborn resistance. Second, the Assam-to-Kunming route which the airlift would use passed over some of the most rugged terrain in the world: the Himalaya mountains, poorly mapped and complete with unpredictable but usually bad weather. The Army Air Forces had no experience in this theater, and moreover had no organizational framework for conducting a large-scale aerial transport operation. For instance, weather forecasting was initially done by word of mouth between fellow pilots, as formal weather briefings by trained weathermen would not be standardized until 1944. A closely related problem was the acute shortage of aircraft and aircrew—in December 1941, the USAAF had just over 250 transport aircraft, and upon entry into the war the need for such assets became critical in every theater. The planes (and, initially, pilots) were also ill-suited to tackle the Hump, being underpowered and inexperienced. Finally, a comparatively minor issue was that unescorted transport aircraft

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would be vulnerable to whatever Japanese fighters appeared, although Hump routes were generally too far north for the enemy to make contact.22

In addition to the support CNAC provided to the military fliers and planners of the Hump, President Roosevelt provided another means whereby various USAAF transport commands could harness the expertise of civilian airlines. Executive Order 8974, signed by the President on December 13, authorized Secretary of War Henry Stimson "to take possession and assume control of any civil aviation system, or systems, or any part thereof, to the extent necessary for the successful prosecution of the war."

This allowed for an infusion of career airline pilots and executives into the American armed forces while avoiding formal militarization of the nation's airlines. This hybridization was seen at all levels: when the Air Transport Command (ATC) was established on May 29, officially replacing the Air Corps Ferrying Command but effectively assuming all responsibility for all air transport for the US military around the globe, the commander was a career airman, Brigadier General Harold L. George; but his executive officer, personally selected by AAF commander Arnold, was Cyrus R. Smith, the respected president (and future CEO) of American Airlines, who had been commissioned as a colonel in the Army Air Forces just over a month previously (Fig. 3.5). While the cooperation was by

Figure 3.5. C.R. Smith, CEO of American Airlines, on the cover of the 17 November 1958 magazine of TIME. Smith's expertise at building an airline was sought by the newly-formed ATC. Source: TIME.

no means flawless—“army men” grumbled about their ex-civilian counterparts’ lack of military bearing, while the career airline personnel resented “interference” and looked down upon the relatively unqualified Army fliers—the end result was a vastly more skilled Air Transport Command, one which was able to carry out an airlift on the scale of the Hump in addition to numerous other responsibilities worldwide. 23

Just as the hybrid nature of Hump manning was decidedly unorthodox, so was the command structure of the operation. Organizationally, the Tenth Air Force was responsible for flying and protecting the Hump route. However, actual command of the airlift, insofar as policymaking was concerned, rested in a “central office in Washington,” according to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, but was partially delegated to Stilwell. 24 Tenth Air Force commander Brereton complained loudly about this atypical command arrangement, to no avail. The strategic mission of keeping China resupplied and in the fight overrode the petty concerns of local theater commanders, and as such the airlift would be directed by the most senior American civilian and military leaders. 25

Not even top-level involvement could shield the Hump and the Chinese from competing political and military priorities, however. As mentioned above, Allied forces everywhere were clamoring for American supplies and equipment in early 1942,


24. U.S. Army Air Forces [USAAF], Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, Historical Division, The Tenth Air Force, 1942, 32.

transport planes included. As per the “Europe First” grand strategy adopted by the United States and the United Kingdom, forty-three percent of all transport aircraft shipped overseas that year were sent to Europe, compared to eighteen percent to General Douglas MacArthur’s Far East Air Force and a mere fifteen percent to what was now being designated the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater. This was partially due to a perception of stalemate in China: while ambitious offensives were being devised elsewhere, such as a possible invasion of continental Europe in 1943, the Torch invasion of North Africa, or MacArthur’s plans to chip away at the Empire of the Rising Sun even while that Empire appeared nigh-invincible, Chiang seemed content to let the Japanese alone, making no attempt to dislodge them from Chinese soil. Whether justified or not, however, this policy and the resulting allocation of resources seemed to confirm a perception of China’s second-rate status widely shared amongst Allied leaders and commanders in the theater. The resulting bitterness was most evident in the Generalissimo, who badgered Roosevelt and other officials continually to increase the admittedly paltry flow of supplies by making oblique threats of surrendering to Japan should the requisite aid fail to be delivered.26 These dynamics may be seen in one particular incident: in late June, with the German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and his Afrikakorps threatening Alexandria and the vital British-held artery that was the Suez Canal, Brereton was ordered to take his bombers and transports to Egypt to help stabilize the situation; additionally, other aircraft that had been slated for China were diverted to the Middle East. Chiang, infuriated, remarked that “the China Theater of War is lightly regarded.” Three days later, the

26. Plating, *The Hump*, 74. As stated in the official Army history of the CBI Theater, “Every transport sent to the CBI area was a diversion from the main effort [in Europe; specifically, a projected cross-English Channel assault on the European mainland], and so the War Department regarded the matter all during the war.” Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1953), 165.
Generalissimo issued his famous “Three Demands”: that the United States dispatch three Army divisions to the Burmese front; that five hundred planes, with concomitant replacements, be promised to him; and that Hump monthly tonnage be increased to five thousand tons by August. (At this point, the airlift was not even bringing in three hundred tons per month.) The message also contained veiled hints that China might be forced to surrender if these demands were not met. Even Stilwell, as antagonistic to the Generalissimo as he was and as annoyed as he was at being caught in the middle of this debacle—he had been forced to inform Chiang of the reallocation of the aircraft, and then to relay the “Three Demands” to Washington—bitterly noted the seeming American indifference to China: “Now what can I say to the G-mo? We fail in all our commitments, and blithely tell him to just carry on, old top.”

The truth is that Chiang was as adept a politician as Roosevelt, if not more so. The Chinese leader had no illusions about his nominal status as one of the “Big Four” (ostensibly placing the Chinese leader on par with Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin), knowing that the President was given to making whimsical and grandiose rhetorical pronouncements and that the British, in particular, would never accept an Asian nation as a truly equal ally (Fig. 3.6). He was more than willing to play the game, however, calculating that American propaganda stressing China’s long and dogged (if not particularly successful) resistance to the Japanese onslaught put US leaders in something of a bind: quite apart from the

27. Stilwell, Papers, 118-119; Romanus and Sunderland, Stilwell’s Mission, 168-172.

28. Churchill, for instance, later recalled that he found “the extraordinary significance of China in American minds, even at the top, strangely out of proportion... [Americans] accorded China almost an equal fighting power with the British Empire, and rated the Chinese armies as a factor to be mentioned in the same breath as the armies of Russia.” Winston Churchill, The Hinge of Fate, vol. 4 of The Second World War (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 133.
diplomatic and military concerns listed above, American public sympathy was squarely with the Chinese in general and Chiang Kai-shek in particular, and the emphasis on years-long struggle gave weight to his repeated threats of a separate, negotiated peace. The dependably crusty Stilwell summarized the situation in the general's inimitably-forthright manner: "Our fool publicity 'heroic resistance—five years' struggle' etc., etc. have set it up for Chiang K'ai-shek [sic]—he can say to us 'Sorry, we've reached the limit: without help we can't go on.'" All of this, added to the ceaseless rhetoric from Roosevelt and his advisors about the importance of China in the war effort, emboldened Chiang to make frequent demands of his American allies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these demands were usually for an increase in Hump tonnage.

Of course, hardly anyone would say that the tonnage carried by the Hump was anything near sufficient for any military purpose. While the numbers of both aircraft and tonnage had climbed slowly upwards in the first few months of the operation, Brereton's

29. Stilwell, Papers, 125.
30. Plating, The Hump, 2-3; Spencer, Flying the Hump, 45.
departure in June left the Tenth Air Force with fewer than thirty transport planes; moreover, the onset of the summer monsoons meant that the airlift was able to ferry a meager 106 tons into China, the worst monthly total of the war.\footnote{Plating, \textit{The Hump}, 87. The lack of planes meant that more sorties were flown per aircraft, leading to more maintenance issues and, with spare parts often being unavailable, frequent grounding of aircraft. USAAF, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, Historical Division, \textit{The Tenth Air Force, 1942}, 58, 60.} Back in Washington, politicians and generals alike looked on these low figures with alarm. While Roosevelt sent his personal representative Lauchlin Currie to China to placate the Generalissimo, Arnold went so far as to suggest that CNAC assume full responsibility for the airlift operation.\footnote{Denning, \textit{Sino-American Alliance}, 90; Plating, \textit{The Hump}, 94.} Stilwell retorted that the airline company was too closely connected with “internal Chinese politics,” being majority-owned by the Chinese government, and that turning over the airlift to CNAC could jeopardize the final goals of the airlift. The general also had personal motives for keeping the Hump a military operation: he felt that his command over the airlift, however incomplete, was the one factor whereby he managed to retain some vestige of relevance as the nominal head of American forces in China, and he was loath to lose such authority. He may also have remembered his difficulties with the AVG, whose freewheeling and mercenary sensibilities had clashed with established military order.\footnote{Leary, \textit{Dragon’s Wings}, 155-157; Romanus and Sunderland, \textit{Stilwell’s Mission}, 167; Spencer, \textit{Flying the Hump}, 44.} This continuation of the Hump as a military airlift, under the auspices of the United States government, ensured that the operation would become a potent and tangible symbol of American solidarity with its Chinese ally.\footnote{Plating, \textit{The Hump}, 94-95.}
Meanwhile, the planes and crews flying the Hump struggled on. If their problems had been limited to a paucity of aircraft, that would have been enough. However, they had other issues to deal with on a daily basis. Airfield construction proceeded at a depressingly slow rate, reflecting the low priority placed upon it by British authorities as well as local nationalistic sentiment against what was perceived as forces of Western imperialism, no doubt exacerbated by the British imprisoning Mahatma Gandhi in early August in reaction to the latter’s anti-colonial “Quit India” campaign. Conditions at the base—and in all subsequent bases in India—were primitive, with crew quarters consisting of tents and bamboo huts and frequently playing host to pythons and other animals. The area was invariably and oppressively hot, and high humidity and regular torrential rain caused clothing and shoes to mildew within a few days. An abundance of mosquitoes and a near-complete lack of sanitation meant that illnesses such as malaria, dysentery, and diarrhea were widespread amongst flight crews. When taking off, the airstrip first had to be cleared of cattle and local villagers.

The Hump itself was a difficult route to fly, as mentioned above. The trip above the “knuckled fingers of death,” as one journalist described the Himalayas, took from four to six hours depending on the weather. Poorly-marked mountain passes, through which aircraft generally tried to fly, were flanked by peaks that reached as high as 16,500 feet and were often wreathed in thick clouds (Fig. 3.7). It was always turbulent, although that was as predictable as the wind got: both its speed (up to 100 miles per hour) and direction were always different, and it often deflected off the rough terrain with terrifying results. “Planes caught in a downdraft could drop at the rate of 5,000 feet per minute,

then suddenly be whisked upward at almost the same speed,” as one commander remembered, creating an invisible and unpredictable roller coaster that was capable of flipping aircraft upside down. Perhaps the deadliest hazard facing the Hump fliers, however, was icing, which was always a problem when planes flew directly from the scorching and muggy Indian climate into the cold Himalayan environment above 12,000 feet. These perils would take their toll on the airlift; an “aluminum trail” of downed aircraft lined the treacherous route over the Hump. Should an airplane crash and its crew survive, their only option was to walk back to base, as the harsh landscape—steep mountains surrounded by dense jungle—rendered recovery operations next to impossible. 36 Then, after successfully completing a mission, the exhausted crews could only anticipate another one, with yet another to follow in a seemingly endless cycle. Over time, the impersonal and implacable nature of the “enemy”—that is to say, the climate and terrain encountered on a daily basis—wreaked havoc with the mental constitutions of Hump aircrew. Morale, unsurprisingly, was often low, and this was only aggravated by an administrative oversight: although flying a transport over the Himalayas was even

more dangerous than flying a bomber over Germany or occupied Europe (at least in terms of casualty rates), airlifts were not considered to be "combat" operations, and promotions and awards were accordingly scarce. 37

If the measure of transport crews' contribution to the war effort was the effective use of their cargoes, then Hump airmen were fully justified in doubting their raison d'etre. Unlike bomber or fighter crews, who were able to witness the direct results of their efforts, transport fliers played a much more indirect role, rarely if ever seeing the final fruits of their labors; one pilot recalled that few Hump crewmen knew much of how the war was progressing outside of their own airfields. It was hard to get excited about helping to win the war when your contribution was hauling typewriters, mules, and "at least one piano" from one place to another, and cynicism was inevitable if your cargo consisted of items such as fine liquor or Chinese paper currency. 38 KMT officials had long declared to the Americans that with adequate supply, Chinese armies would begin to take the initiative in the CBI Theater of operations, with counteroffensives in China and Burma treated as future certainties. 39 These rosy promises failed to materialize, however, as it became increasingly obvious that the Chinese were either hoarding or selling Lend-

37. Plating, *The Hump*, 97, 117-118. It did not help that transport pilots were often looked down upon by combat aviators as being unable to "hack it" in a real fight. To be sure, sometimes this was the case: one Fourteenth Air Force flier remembered a fellow fighter pilot proving his incompetence during his first mission and getting reassigned immediately to cargo planes (one of which he then proceeded to fly into a mountain less than a month later, killing all aboard). Donald S. Lopez, *Into the Teeth of the Tiger* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 140.


Lease deliveries on the black market, seemingly content to allow the Americans to fight the Japanese while functioning as a bottomless source of free supplies to boot. US military and diplomatic personnel stationed in the country, from General Stilwell down to the lowest clerk, came to despise the Nationalist government as being "corrupt, inefficient, and unreliable...profoundly bad."\textsuperscript{40}

In fact, the reason for Chiang's seeming intransigence largely stems from the fact that the Japanese were never his main concern: the Generalissimo famously declared to a Western journalist in 1941 that "the Japanese are a disease of the skin; the Communists are a disease of the heart."\textsuperscript{41} Chiang had previously studied to become a military officer in Japan as a young adult before being caught up in anti-Manchu revolutionary activities led by Chinese expatriates such as Sun Yat-sen. Although the standoffish Chiang did not form close personal ties with any Japanese, he learned to speak and read the language. More importantly, he excelled in the atmosphere of "rigid discipline and...absolute loyalty" demanded by the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA), and the samurai's \textit{bushido} code of personal honor left a deep imprint on a youth already steeped in the ethics of neo-Confucianism.\textsuperscript{42} By way of contrast, while the roots of the Generalissimo's longstanding antipathy towards Communism (ironically shared by his Japanese foes) are harder to trace, by 1927 he had reached the conclusion—eventually proven correct—that the CCP posed the greatest threat to his rule and authority. The civil war which had followed Chiang's purging of the CCP at the close of the Northern Expedition raged unabated even

\textsuperscript{40} Plating, \textit{The Hump}, 216; Stilwell, \textit{Papers}, 316; Tuchman, \textit{Stilwell}, 377; White and Jacoby, \textit{Thunder}, 164-165.

\textsuperscript{41} White and Jacoby, \textit{Thunder}, 129; Elleman, \textit{Modern Chinese Warfare}, 194.

\textsuperscript{42} Taylor, \textit{Generalissimo}, 17-22.
after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, with the Generalissimo reckoning that Western powers would never tolerate Japan upsetting the Asian balance of power in such a fashion and would intervene on China’s behalf. It took the 1936 Xi’an Incident to coerce him to stiffen his stance against the Japanese and commence the Second Sino-Japanese War while forming a shaky alliance with the CCP, but he never lost sight of who his real enemies were; these suspicions seemed to be confirmed (in his mind, anyway) with the January 1941 New Fourth Army Incident, claimed by the Nationalists to be the result of Communist treachery. Chiang had even less incentive to participate in the Pacific War than the Sino-Japanese conflict, especially as he found himself allied with the Western imperialists he had formerly denounced and was expected to send his troops to defend the British Empire in Burma and India. These complexities and nuances, which have led subsequent historians to conclude that the Generalissimo was hoping to use the time-honored Chinese trick of “using barbarians to control barbarians,” were largely glossed over by American senior officials who had already decided that Chiang was the ideal man to lead the Chinese both in war and in peace.43

These officials, however, could not fail to notice the intense disagreement erupting between the senior US military leadership in China, whose differing branches of service and expertise translated into a fundamentally different outlook as to how the war was to be conducted and won. On the one side was traditionalist and career infantryman Stilwell, who was convinced that the Chinese soldier could be just as effective as those of any other nation given the right care and training. Immediately after having gotten “run out of Burma” in late May 1942, the general called for sweeping changes to the Chinese

43. Plating, 5-6.
army, including reducing the number of divisions and the purging of incompetent senior officers. Stilwell, perhaps the quintessential embodiment of duty divorced from politics, steadfastly refused to consider the political aspects of such reforms. (One historian would later write the general "spoke the Chinese language and was aware of Chinese realities, which his plans ignored.") The Generalissimo's authority relied on a system of fragile alliances with numerous regional warlords; his mistrust of their allegiance was only deepened by episodes such as the 1936 Xi'an Incident. Even though Chiang nominally commanded the three hundred divisions and 3.8 million men of the National Revolutionary Army (NRA), in practice only about thirty divisions—commanded by men who had been cadets at the Whampoa Military Academy and were personally loyal to their former commandant—were under the direct control of the Generalissimo. These divisions, the best-trained and equipped soldiers of the Chinese army, had been badly mauled at Shanghai in 1937 and again in Burma, with a corresponding loss to Chiang's power vis-à-vis his rivals (not to mention the CCP). As a result, the Generalissimo was extremely reluctant to risk his remaining troops in battle with the Japanese.

Stilwell's overall strategy was to recapture Burma and reopen the Burma Road, as according to one of his biographers "everyone knew" that the Road—combined with the Ledo Road, which was under construction and would essentially extend the Burma Road

44. Stilwell, Papers, 106. Yu claims that Stilwell wished from the outset "to wrest command of the entire Chinese army from Chiang Kai-shek and place it under his [Stilwell's] control," but this is exaggerated. Yu, The Dragon's War, 165.

45. Dreyer, China at War, 275.

46. Schaller, Crusade, 104; Spence, Search, 423, 446. In fact, Chiang had attempted to reduce the size of the Chinese army in 1928, based on recommendations from his German advisors. That effort had failed when various warlords balked, fearing a weakening of their own power bases. Denning, Sino-American Alliance, 18-19; Liu, Military History, 71-74.

47. Taylor, Generalissimo, 147-148.
into India—was “the ultimate solution” to China’s supply difficulties, in contrast to “the Hump airline” which was nothing more than “an emergency expedient.”

Simultaneously, the general sought to establish training centers at Ramargh (India) and Yunnan to reequip and retrain the battered Chinese divisions that had escaped Burma, with an eye towards using them to spearhead the drive into Burma. The British and Chinese received both of these measures unenthusiastically: the British were uneasy with a powerful Asian force in increasingly-nationalistic India, while Chiang was again unenthusiastic about losing troops, even temporarily; and both considered Burma of secondary importance and were unwilling to commit manpower to the operation.

Opposing Stilwell was none other than Brigadier General Chennault, celebrated commander of the Flying Tigers. Chennault fervently believed that airpower would be the decisive factor in the Chinese theater, possibly even defeating the Japanese singlehandedly, and he preached this message to anyone he thought would listen. Stilwell, Chennault’s superior, scoffed at this idea, pointing out that any air force which significantly threatened Japanese interests in China would only provoke a reaction that Chinese armies would be unable to handle. The airman had powerful friends, however: his stint as the head of the AVG had earned him a close personal friendship with the Generalissimo and his wife, as well as capturing the attention of President Roosevelt. Both heads of state appreciated the political expediency of an air campaign which was advertised as being both quick and relatively inexpensive; for Chiang, the fact that the

48. Stilwell, Papers, 108-109. The quotes are from attached commentary provided by journalist Theodore H. White, who also wrote Thunder out of China. British leaders were of a different opinion: Lieutenant General (later Field Marshal) William Slim, a long-serving British commander in Burma who got along remarkably well with Stilwell, later remarked that he “doubted the overwhelming war-winning value” of the Road. Slim, Defeat into Victory, 215.

49. Dreyer, China at War, 273.
balance of power would not be altered was an added bonus. Roosevelt, notorious for his mistrust of the bureaucracy and penchant for personal interaction, assured Chennault that he was to feel free to contact the president directly. The airman never hesitated to do so, to Stilwell’s lasting fury.\(^5\) In one of these correspondences, Chennault claimed that with just “105 fighters, 30 medium bombers, and 12 heavy bombers” he could defeat Japan.\(^5\)

Of course, neither of these competing plans could be carried out without the supplies carried in by the Hump, and thus many of the disputes between Stilwell and Chennault boiled down into squabbles over the percentage of Hump tonnage that would go to each.\(^5\) Chiang, though for obvious reasons favoring Chennault’s proposal, was nonetheless worried more about total tonnage, as were the politicians and generals back in Washington. At the Third Washington Conference (otherwise known as the TRIDENT Conference) held in May 1943, both Stilwell and Chennault presented their strategies, with the British supporting an expansion of the airlift as an alternative to reopening the Burma Road.\(^5\) (The Chinese were not present at the conference.) Roosevelt, ever the politician, decided to please everybody by expanding the size of the Hump operation and

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 276-277; Chennault, *Fighter*, 212-216; Byrd, *Chennault*, 186-187.

\(^{51}\) Bagby, *Eagle-Dragon Alliance*, 74; Chennault, *Fighter*, 214; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission*, 251; Eric Larrabee, *Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants, and Their War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 545. As an example showing how wildly optimistic this claim is, Tokyo in 1945 was bombed on more than fourteen separate occasions by a combined total of 1,699 long-range B-29 Superfortress (classed as Very Heavy Bomber) aircraft dropping a total of nearly 11,500 tons of bombs, which did not induce a Japanese surrender. USSBS, Military Analysis Division, Army and Army Air Section, *The Strategic Air Operation of Very Heavy Bombardment in the War Against Japan* (Twentieth Air Force), 34.

\(^{52}\) White and Jacoby, *Thunder*, 154-155.

\(^{53}\) Stilwell’s annoyed conclusions about the British regarding their lost colony are remarkably similar to his perceptions of the Chinese regarding their lost territory: that they were content to sit back, let the Americans bear the brunt of the fighting, and “get Burma back at the peace table.” Although the general’s strong Anglophobia undoubtedly influenced his thinking, events proved that he may not have been all that inaccurate. Stilwell, *Papers*, 204-205.
setting a goal of 7,000 tons per month to be airlifted into China by July, to be increased to 10,000 tons by September.\textsuperscript{54} The first figure was derived from the tonnage figures needed by both commanders for their operations, and both goals were hopelessly unrealistic—in the month of the conference, 2,278 tons made it over the Hump; this increased to 3,451 tons in July and 5,125 tons in September, but both of these numbers fell well short of the amounts promised by Roosevelt. However, TRIDENT marked a qualitative turning point for the airlift: it, rather than the Burma Road, was now the centerpiece of American commitment to China, securing the interest and intervention of both American and British leaders, and the amount of supplies it carried would become the most easily-quantifiable gauge of the Sino-American alliance. Although the figures given above were disappointing, the necessary operational infrastructure had already been laid with the establishment of what was now known as the India-China Wing (ICW) of the ATC the previous December to serve as the sole Hump unit, and the newfound political backing and mandate would pave the way for continuing expansion of the airlift.\textsuperscript{55}

The operation itself had progressed considerably from the “barnstorming” days of 1942 and early 1943, when personal initiative seemed to be the most common resource. To be sure, living conditions remained primitive and a lack of spare parts continued to bedevil maintenance crews. Nevertheless, the influx of newer and heavier (if more complex and cantankerous) aircraft and pilots (including civilian airline employees contracted in the mad scramble to meet the President’s goals), as well as the fact that more airfields were slowly coming online, indicated that the ICW was gradually finding


\textsuperscript{55} Plating, \textit{The Hump}, 132-133.
its feet. It became more institutionalized as well in September, when former TWA vice
president Colonel Thomas Hardin was named to command the Eastern Sector of the
ICW. The demanding Hardin immediately standardized loads and schedules and
requiring pilots to get supervisory approval before canceling a flight. He was not averse
to firing base commanders or chewing out men who committed infractions or failed to
meet standards, spending his afternoons flying missions as a way of showing his men that
he would do everything he asked them to. Thanks to his hard-driving leadership style,
Hump tonnage shot up from a depressing 6,491 tons in November to 12,594 tons the next
month, surpassing its objective for the first time. The dramatic increase—and the ability
to prove that America was finally meeting its promises to China—thrilled Roosevelt, who
directed that the ICW be awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, the first non-combat unit
so honored. Unfortunately, this increased tonnage came at a price: in October, the
Imperial Japanese Army Air Force (IJAAF) began to appear over the route, shooting
down seven unarmed transports in the final months of 1943. More ominously, the
accident rate rose dramatically, with sixty-six crashes in November and December alone,
and would remain high well into 1944.

As the new year dawned, the Hump airlift could finally deliver the quantity of
supplies promised by overeager politicians nearly two years previously. ATC and ICW

56. The Western Sector controlled trans-India flights, while the Eastern Sector was responsible for the Hump.


58. Craven and Cate, *Services*, 131-132; Plating, *The Hump*, 148. Hardin realized this problem, as well as the continuing issue of low morale, and made efforts to enhance safety and improve morale such as building an air traffic control system at airfields and establishing a schedule of rotating pilots out of the theater. However, these programs would require time before their effects were felt. Plating, *The Hump*, 167-173.
leaders worried that as the operation met its tonnage goals, the requirements would be increased, and issued warnings that the airlift was approaching its maximum capability. They need not have worried, however: Stilwell launched his offensive into Burma in late April, using the forces he had been training at Ramargh and Yunnan. While the ICW diverted some of its aircraft to support the campaign, thus lowering tonnage figures for the first few months of the year, the capture of the airfield near the northern Burmese city of Myitkyina in mid-May proved a huge boon to the airlift, as it had previously been the base from which Japanese fighters had harassed Hump transports. Now, the airlift could range further south, over lower-altitude routes; soon, a direct flight from Calcutta to Kunming would be established.\textsuperscript{59}

However, even as the airlift itself was beginning an exponential growth that would continue for the duration of the war, China as a theater and Chiang as a figurehead were becoming less and less of a priority for American policymakers. This was due largely to Operation Ichi-Go（一号作戦, called 豫湘桂会战 Yù Xiāng Guì Huìzhàn or “Battle of Henan-Hunan-Guangxi” by the Chinese), a massive Japanese ground offensive beginning in March 1944. The Japanese sought to connect their holdings in China to those in French Indochina, as well as to capture airbases from which the Fourteenth Air Force had been launching bomber attacks on Japanese troops and shipping—exactly as predicted by Stilwell. The Chinese once again proved unable or unwilling to counter this

\textsuperscript{59} Craven and Cate, \textit{Services}, 133-135. Incidentally, among the Japanese casualties in this latest Burma campaign was none other than Shimura Kikujiro, whose temporary disappearance one July night had sparked the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, seven years ago. Sources vary widely as to the exact date of his death, however. Ford, \textit{Flying Tigers: American Volunteers}, 265n; Qu Jiayuan 曲家源, “Dui ‘yi shibing shizong’ de kaozheng” [A critique of the ‘one missing soldier’ narrative], \textit{Jindaishi yanjiu} 近代史研究 13, no. 3 (1991): 282; Yang Fei 杨飞, “Yinfa ‘Qi Qi Shibian’ de ‘Rijun shibing’ shizong shijian zhengxiang” [The truth about the “missing soldier” that triggered the “Marco Polo Bridge Incident”], \textit{Shiji qiao} 世纪桥 24, no. 4 (2010): 17.
drive, which lasted for most of the year before becoming bogged down by the onset of winter.\textsuperscript{60} Even as Stilwell fumed against Chinese military incompetence yet again, he felt himself vindicated by events and was excited to receive a telegram in mid-September from Roosevelt, to be delivered to Chiang, ordering that the Generalissimo place Stilwell in command of all Chinese armed forces. “The harpoon hit the little bugger right in the solar plexus, and went right through him,” Stilwell gloated in his diary.\textsuperscript{61} For the Chinese leader, this was the last straw. From his point of view, Stilwell had been obsessing over Burma for years, even now denying the Chinese troops and supplies right at their greatest hour of need. Furthermore, the American had been agitating for control over the Chinese military for quite some time, and had even managed to persuade the President to back him. Chiang refused to countenance what he considered to be China’s subjugation (and the loss of his power base) and formally requested Stilwell’s recall, promising to support “any qualified American officer” who replaced him. After attempts to find a compromise failed, Roosevelt complied, relieving Stilwell on 19 October and replacing him with Lieutenant General Albert C. Wedemeyer. Chiang’s victory was not as complete as it may seem, however, given that Roosevelt seems to have taken a much colder approach towards the Generalissimo in the final year of the war than he had previously.\textsuperscript{62}

Indeed, American officials were largely disenchanted with the Nationalist government as a whole by this point, sending missions to the Communists at Yan’an and

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\textsuperscript{62} Romanus and Sunderland, \textit{Command Problems}, 452, 468-469.
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prioritizing the “island-hopping” campaign in the Pacific that brought the US Navy and Marines (and Army Air Forces) ever closer to the Japanese home islands. Ironically, the scale of the Hump operation continued to rise in 1945; the India-China Wing had been renamed the India-China Division (ICD) the previous July to reflect its greater size, and monthly tonnage totals were above forty thousand tons and rising. 63 This was no doubt a diplomatic effort to show continuing American interest in their Chinese ally, even though such interest was now due more to geographical advantages rather than any hope of real military cooperation. This was reflected in the amount of supplies being sent to directly the Chinese government: having gradually decreased to about 14% of all Hump tonnage by 1944, in 1945 that figure dropped to less than 2% (Fig. 3.8). 64 The vast majority of supplies flown over the Himalayas went to supporting American projects such as Operation Matterhorn (to be discussed in Chapter 4), the basing of new B-29 Superfortress bombers in China to attack the Japanese home islands. The Hump struggled to keep the B-29s supplied for a sustained aerial offensive—one B-29 sortie, for instance, required four Hump trips worth of gasoline, not including bombs, bullets, or spare parts.

The Ledo Road, finally completed in late 1944 and soon renamed the Stilwell Road at the unlikely instigation of Chiang Kai-shek, did little to alleviate the issue. Eventually, the Matterhorn mission would turn out to be a disappointing failure, and its assets would be

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63. Much of this was due to Hardin’s successor, Brigadier General William H. Tunner, who built on his predecessors’ efforts and instituted several programs to enhance the safety and morale of Hump crews, such as instituting regular maintenance and scheduling guided excursions into the jungle both for R&R purposes as well as for practical survival training. The accident rate in August 1945 was one-third that of what it had been when Tunner assumed command in October 1944, even as the tonnage had doubled. Tunner, Over the Hump, 99-104, 132-134.

64. U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey [USSBS], Military Analysis Division, The Air Transport Command in the War Against Japan, 12-13. Note that this still meant the Chinese received an average of 2,500 tons each month in 1944, some three and a half times the average monthly Hump tonnage just two years previously. However, the average plummeted to a mere 1,100 tons per month in 1945.
transferred to the Pacific islands of Tinian and Guam in January 1945. The Hump continued operations until November of that year, having become for all intents and purposes a regular cargo airline. Its contributions to ending the war, however, were almost completely overshadowed by the atomic bombs and Soviet invasion of Manchuria in August—an apt microcosm of the entire American effort in China throughout the war.\textsuperscript{65}

Given the lack of clear military effectiveness of this supply operation, the necessity of the Hump airlift (and, by implication, the Chinese theater as a whole) has been a constant source of debate. While the operation brought some 650,000 net tons (that is, total tonnage minus the fuel necessary for the transport flights themselves) into...

\textsuperscript{65} Craven and Cate, Services, 139, 149.
China, it was never enough to sustain a long-term, large-scale campaign either in the air or on the ground. Like the Flying Tigers before, the Hump was conceived first in the minds of politicians and diplomats, and despite the impressive achievements of both operations, they ultimately failed to live up to the strategic expectations of their initiators. Both, of course, carried with them the opportunity cost of missed combat opportunities elsewhere; for the Hump, its transport aircraft might profitably have been used to keep Patton’s Third Army moving during the breakout from Normandy in September 1944, which might have materially altered the course of the war more than the 22,315 tons that were flown into China that month. On the other hand, the true success and relevance of the Hump (as well as the Flying Tigers) lies in terms of its diplomatic impact: the airlift was first and foremost a political operation, a means of backing up America’s stated promises of support for an ally with tangible deeds and results. It was diplomacy in action, bridging the gap between the “hard power” of military force and the “soft power” of international statecraft, and represented—both literally and figuratively—the essence of the Sino-American alliance of World War II. In this regard, the airlift was a resounding success.

With that having been said, the Hump has also had a positive long-term military legacy. To be sure, the inherent fixation with number-crunching in an airlift operation does not necessarily translate well into other aspects of a successful military campaign, as Hump statistical analyst and future US Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara would  

66. USSBS, Military Analysis Division, Air Transport Command, 12.

later discover in Vietnam. However, the lessons learned during the Himalayan airlift about how to conduct such an operation have served the American military well ever since. The most famous spiritual successor to the Hump is undoubtedly the 1948 Berlin Airlift, the first major operation of the newly-formed US Air Force (Fig. 3.9). This latter operation was flown by many ex-Hump aviators and aircraft and directed by a former Hump commander, who utilized many of the same policies and procedures that had proven so effective in Asia. The Berlin Airlift, as a political gesture directed towards a major Cold War ally, also affirmed the ability of airpower to be used as a diplomatic or humanitarian tool, utilizing its speed, range, and flexibility to deliver urgently-needed supplies to disaster-affected areas. Although the Himalayan airlift was not itself humanitarian in nature, the framework and methods it pioneered and developed have ensured the success of countless relief operations in the years since the Second World War. This, then, is perhaps the most important legacy of the Hump.

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CHAPTER 4
OPERATION MATTERHORN:
The Limits of Diplomacy

An American ambassador, writing in a confidential memo about a despotic regime a few years before that regime’s downfall, stated that officials within that government had “long felt that, at best, we [the US] take them for granted; and at worst, we deliberately ignore their advice while trying to force our point of view on them.” This self-critical assessment, however, did not prevent the diplomat from concluding that the regime in question was “very often a stubborn and recalcitrant ally.”

Although this particular regime happened to be that of Hosni Mubarak’s Egypt, with the 2009 memo being one of several hundred thousand released by WikiLeaks in late 2010, the statements quoted above nonetheless encapsulate the prevailing American political and military attitude towards Chiang Kai-shek’s China in 1944. In Europe as well as in Asia, the Axis was being pushed back. Following the end of German and Italian resistance in North Africa in mid-1943, the Allies had invaded Italy and were steadily if slowly moving up the rough terrain of that country. In the Eastern Front, Soviet forces had forced the Nazis out of nearly all Soviet-claimed territories, beginning a massive offensive that would culminate in the capture of Berlin. In order to support these two major offensives, Allied commanders planned for the opening of a “second front” in

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2. Although the Italian government had surrendered in September, the Germans quickly moved in and mounted a spirited defense.
Western Europe: an amphibious invasion of France, scheduled to take place in early June 1944. In the Pacific, meanwhile, the great carrier battles of Coral Sea and Midway had broken the back of Japanese naval aviation, and the US Marines were arduously progressing westward in an island-hopping campaign, bringing American military might ever closer to the Japanese home islands.³

In China, by way of contrast, Chiang seemed to be perfectly content not to fight the Japanese, much to the annoyance of the Allies. While Lieutenant General Joseph W. “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell labored to build up an American-trained Chinese force and prepared it to move into northern Burma—against the wishes of the Generalissimo—and Major General Claire L. Chennault directed his meager 14th Air Force in harassing Japanese transportation and shipping, Chiang continued to call loudly for more economic and military assistance, bigger loans, and an increase in Hump tonnage. As General Henry H. Arnold of the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) later remembered, “[the Generalissimo’s] only thought was: ‘Aid to China! Aid to China!’”⁴ Nor was the general alone in his disgust, as many American politicians and military commanders were frustrated at Chiang’s refusal to do anything but plead for more supplies and hint at impending collapse of the Chinese war effort. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was among those exasperated by his Chinese ally, but nonetheless continued to cling to the idea that the Generalissimo offered the best hope for a united, strong, and pro-American postwar China. As such, the President ensured that America’s unequal treaties with China were repealed and pressured the other Allies to accept Chiang as one of the “Big Four”:

3. Dreyer, China at War, 280-281.

ostensibly, at least, the Asian nation was on par with the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{5} Additionally, this ally needed to be supported, and like before this support would be in the form of airpower. Thus, against the advice of his senior military commanders, the President ordered the implementation of Operation Matterhorn, a strategic bombardment campaign using B-29 bombers based in China to strike targets in the Japanese home islands. This operation, unfortunately, would become a microcosm of everything that went wrong in the Sino-American alliance, as political promises could not be matched by actual military performance; technical issues were matched by the nearly insurmountable question of logistics; and waning political support finally translated into the employing of alternate plans of action.

The idea of stationing bombers in China was not new or unique to Matterhorn. Even before the First American Volunteer Group (AVG), a fighter group flying P-40s, had commenced operations in 1941, a second AVG consisting of light bombers had been formed and a group of its men were actually \textit{en route} to China when Pearl Harbor was attacked, resulting in the reabsorption of men and aircraft into the American armed forces.\textsuperscript{6} In April 1942, the sixteen B-25 Mitchell medium bombers that launched off of the USS \textit{Hornet} were supposed to land in Chinese airbases after bombing Tokyo and other Japanese cities (Fig. 4.1). Unfortunately, fearing a breach in security, Washington informed neither Chiang nor Chennault until about a week before the planned raid. In the event, the bombers were launched earlier than expected and met bad weather over the Chinese coast; all crashed, except for one that landed in the Soviet Union. As Chiang had

\textsuperscript{5} Schaller, \textit{Crusade}, 147.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 82; Chennault, \textit{Fighter}, 124.
forewarned, the Japanese launched the massive three-month Zhejiang-Jiangxi Campaign (浙赣战役 Zhè Gàn Zhàn yì) both to destroy any airfields that might have been used in the attack as well as to punish the Chinese population for their cooperation and assistance to the downed American airmen. Although the Doolittle Raid provided a crucial morale boost for American public morale, for Chiang it meant only the loss of some thirty thousand troops and an estimated quarter-million civilian casualties. 7

Bombers had eventually gotten to China, of course, with Chennault’s Fourteenth Air Force boasting heavy B-24 Liberators in addition to lighter B-25s by late 1943. These aircraft raided Japanese-held territory, bombing shipping, docks, airdromes, and other targets of opportunity in Hankou, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Hanoi, among other locations. 8 However, the low numbers of bombardment aircraft in the Fourteenth AF—fifty-one B-24s and twenty-three B-25s in December 1943, while the Eighth AF in


Europe would launch its first thousand-bomber raid just two months later—meant that Chennault's fliers did not have a decisive impact on the military situation in China and were certainly not the war-winning weapon he had promised in late 1942. His superior Stilwell did not fail to notice, recording in his diary: “Chennault has been screaming for help! Ha Ha Ha. ‘The japs [sic] are trying to run us out of China!’ It is to laugh.—Six months ago he was going to run them out.” Even more serious than the lack of military results, however, was the possible implication of a lack of support for the Chinese by the US.

The idea of bombing the Japanese home islands from China was first seriously discussed at the January 1943 Casablanca Conference, when President Roosevelt suggested basing heavy bombers in the Asian nation, not only as a military effort against the Japanese but also as a political aid for Chiang and the KMT. After intensive study, USAAF planners drafted an ambitious plan in August calling for some 280 B-29s to be based around Changsha by October 1944. Stilwell, at the request of Washington, offered


11. “Meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff with Roosevelt and Churchill, 18 January 1943,” U.S. Department of State, FRUS: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 630. The conference would be best remembered for its resulting Casablanca Declaration, which proclaimed that the Allies would accept nothing less than the “unconditional surrender” of the Axis powers. Notably, this doctrine seemed to have been promulgated unilaterally by Roosevelt; British Prime Minister Winston Churchill later recalled that he had only halfheartedly supported it and had been “startled by [its public] announcement.” This sort of rhetorical grandiloquence on the part of the President would be repeated less than a year later in announcing Chiang as one of the “Big Four.” Ibid., “President Roosevelt's Press Conference Notes,” 837; Drew Middleton, Retreat from Victory: A Critical Appraisal of American Foreign and Military Policy from 1920s to the 1970s (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), 54.
a counterproposal that was more limited in virtually every respect. This plan, known as Twilight, was based on the premise that Hump tonnages, while increasing, were insufficient to meet even the current needs of the Fourteenth AF and the American-trained Chinese ground forces at Yunnan. Consequently, Twilight had the bombers permanently based in India, close to Calcutta, with Chinese airfields used only as staging bases. B-29s would haul their own fuel over the Hump, and it was anticipated that a sustained effort would not be had until April 1945. This latter proposal was further modified by USAAF staff, mainly in an effort to advance the starting date of the operation by reducing the initial number of bombers and moving the Chinese forward bases further west to the Chengdu area. Even then, Roosevelt was unhappy that the bombing operation could not begin in 1943. Noting that Hump tonnages and aircraft deliveries to the China theater consistently failed to meet the levels and numbers pledged, the President complained that “the worst thing is that we are falling down on our promises [to Chiang] every single time.” Nevertheless, at the Cairo Conference in November, Roosevelt could reassure the Generalissimo that a substantial heavy bomber force would soon be headed to China.¹²

Chiang returned from Cairo exultant, feeling that the conference had been “an important achievement” in his “revolutionary career.” Not only were the American bombers coming his way, he had reached an agreement (he thought) with the British on launching a joint operation against northern Burma in the spring, which would both reopen the Burma Road as well as greatly increase the flow of supplies across the Hump.

Moreover, he had been named one of the “Big Four” by Roosevelt, seemingly confirming the eminent role of China in world affairs. He would have been less jubilant had he known what was transpiring at the Tehran Conference, where Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met with Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. The Russian leader argued forcefully for the opening of a “second front” in Western Europe, and Churchill concurred. Roosevelt, outnumbered, agreed to an amphibious invasion of France in mid-1944, whereupon Churchill backed out of the planned Burma campaign. The President, again outnumbered, reluctantly allowed the operation to be postponed, leaving Stilwell to break the news to Chiang. “A brief experience with international politics confirms me in my preference for driving a garbage truck,” wrote the general bitterly.

Apparently, though, that was not the only bit of dirty work Roosevelt had Stilwell do. According to the general’s friend and longtime aide, Brigadier General Frank Dorn, Stilwell returned from Egypt claiming to have received instructions from the President to “prepare a plan for the assassination of Chiang Kai-shek.” As Dorn remembered it, Stilwell asserted that Roosevelt had told him “in that Olympian manner of his: ‘if you can’t get along with Chiang and can’t replace him, get rid of him once and for all. You know what I mean. Put in someone you can manage.’” Dorn dutifully came up with a plan that involved faking engine trouble on a routine inspection flight and then helping

13. Stalin, citing the neutrality of Russia in the war against Japan, had declined to attend the Cairo Conference.

14. Byrd, Chennault, 210; Schaller, Crusade, 150; Taylor, Generalissimo, 253, 261; “Meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff with Roosevelt and Churchill, 4 December 1943,” U.S. Department of State, FRUS Diplomatic Papers: The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 681; Stilwell, Papers, 256. An additional consequence of this “second front” was that the Hump airlift would have to do without any new transport aircraft for nearly half a year, as every such plane was needed in the buildup to what would be known as Operation Overlord.
the Generalissimo into a faulty parachute, although he never heard anything more about
the plot afterwards.\textsuperscript{15} This bizarre little episode brings to mind the later American
betrayal of Ngo Dinh Diem during the Vietnam War, although this earlier tale is much
harder to verify. Dorn, the lone source for this information, was a loyal friend of
Stilwell’s and like him detested Chiang, so he would have had little reason for fabricating
such a story. Stilwell did record that Roosevelt in Cairo briefly mentioned looking for
“some other man or group of men, to carry on” in the event of the Generalissimo’s
overthrow, and it is not impossible that the general seized upon this comment and turned
it into an “order” for Chiang’s “elimination.”\textsuperscript{16} It would not be the first, the last, or
anywhere near the most important miscommunication made concerning the China
Theater of the war.

While this anticlimax worked itself out, the planning continued for what was now
being referred to as Operation Matterhorn (named after a prominent and difficult-to-
climb mountain in the Swiss Alps). Still worried about the unfavorable supply situation in
China, USAAF leaders carefully reserved the option to transfer the Superforts used in this
operation out of the CBI Theater, should more convenient airbases become available.
Moreover, just like the Hump before it, Matterhorn was felt to be too important to be
entrusted to theater commanders. As such, General Arnold created the Twentieth AF to
carry out the campaign and named himself executive agent; the commander of the
subordinate Twentieth (XX) Bomber Command, who would actually oversee the day-to-
day operation of the B-29s, would report directly to Washington as opposed to anyone in

\textsuperscript{15} Schaller, Crusade, 153; Taylor, Generalissimo, 257-258; Fenby, Chiang Kai-shek, 412; Dorn, Walkout: With Stilwell in Burma (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1971), 75-79.

\textsuperscript{16} Stilwell, Papers, 252; Taylor, Generalissimo, 258.
the local theater. Again, this division of command prompted protests from field officers, with the complainer this time being none other than Chennault, who felt that with this arrangement “neither [the Fourteenth nor the Twentieth AF] will achieve maximum effectiveness.” He was also undoubtedly worried about the drain that the bombers would place on the supply allotment for his Fourteenth AF and the resulting undermining of his own air offensive. Nevertheless, Arnold (who as a “bomber general” had never much cared for the outspoken advocate of pursuit planes) had made his decision, and he stood by it.  

Unfortunately, other problems were not as easily solved. After the essential cancellation of the joint Burma campaign, Chiang informed Washington that rallying his nation to continued resistance had become “infinitely more difficult” and requested a $1 billion loan. American officials, knowing that China still had some $460 million in unpledged funds in the US, refused to extend the money. The Generalissimo next estimated the cost of the Chengdu airfields as being, in Stilwell’s words, “2 to 3 BILLION [Chinese yuan]!... My God.” Additionally, as Chiang insisted that the Americans pay using the official twenty-yuan-to-one-dollar exchange rate (while the actual ratio was 120 to 1 by November 1943 due to rampant inflation), this called for $100 million, or “50 million gold to build the fields & 50 million gold squeeze!” as the dumbfounded Stilwell put it. Otherwise, warned the Generalissimo, “the American Army in China would have to depend upon itself to execute any and all of its projects....

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17. Byrd, Chennault, 211-212; Johnson, “Matterhorn,” 40. The creation of the Twentieth AF was also intended to keep it out of the hands of General Stilwell of the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater, General Douglas MacArthur of the Southwest Pacific Theater, and Admiral Chester Nimitz of the Pacific Theater. As Arnold later remarked, “unity of command” was essential for “economy and maximum effectiveness” in Pacific Theater operations, but there was “no unity of command in the Pacific.... no one out there... wanted unity of command, seemingly, unless he himself was made Supreme Commander.” Arnold, Global Mission, 347-348.
including the construction of works for military use.” This quarrel over money was not completely resolved until July 1944, although regular currency advances without regard to the exchange rate kept the project ongoing (Fig. 4.2).18

A third issue was in the aircraft itself. The Boeing B-29 Superfortress was in every respect a “superbomber,” having a combat radius of over 1,600 miles, a top speed of 357 miles per hour, and a payload of some twelve thousand pounds. (By way of contrast, B-24s serving with the Fourteenth AF had a combat radius of eight hundred miles and traveled at 290 mph when carrying five thousand pounds of bombs.) The “Superfort” was also the most complex aircraft ever designed up to that point, with advanced features such as cabin pressurization and heating and remotely-controlled defensive gun turrets.19 In the rush to make the B-29 operational as soon as possible, the USAAF ordered it to go into production even before the prototype had been completed—and then promptly began changing requirements and modifying the design of the bomber, with some nine hundred such alterations made to the aircraft even before its prototype

18. Fenby, Chiang Kai-shek, 412; Schaller, Crusade, 154-155; Stilwell, Original Diaries, entry for 18 December 1943; Tuchman, Stilwell, 410-412. The official USAAF history states that a total of $210 million was paid to China, although this figure includes “other items…and an accurate breakdown is impossible to achieve.” Craven and Cate, Matterhorn, 69-70.

first flew in September 1942. Eventually, newly-manufactured aircraft were flown
directly to maintenance depots to receive the latest modifications. Not surprisingly, this
counterproductive process meant that by the Cairo Conference, even as Roosevelt assured
Chiang that a bombing campaign would soon be operational, less than one hundred B-29s
had been produced and less than fifteen of those were actually flyable. In March 1944
Arnold found, much to his fury, that exactly zero Superforts were ready for combat. He
immediately made the B-29 program the top-priority project of the USAAF and dictated
that no further changes would be made to the aircraft. The resulting Herculean effort,
known as the "Battle of Kansas," resulted in 150 Superforts being readied for combat by
15 April 1944.20

Meanwhile, the situation in China was quickly coming to a head, both politically
as well as militarily. In October 1943, Stilwell directed his American-trained Chinese
force at Ramargh, designated X Force, to advance into northern Burma. Running into
heavy Japanese opposition in March 1944, Stilwell pleaded with Chiang to commit the
other Yunnan American-trained divisions ("Y-Force") to the campaign; when the
Generalissimo balked, perhaps remembering the heavy losses incurred in Burma in 1942,
Stilwell eventually had Roosevelt pressure the Chinese leader with a veiled threat of
revoking military aid.21 No sooner had Y-Force crossed the Salween River into Burma,
however, than the Japanese launched Operation Ichi-Go, their largest ground offensive of
the war. The primary goal of this operation was to carve out a land bridge connecting

Magazine, February 2012, 94-97; R. Cargill Hall, ed., Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment

21. Romanus and Sunderland, Command Problems, 45-48, 119-188, 297-312; Schaller, Crusade,
155, 158; Taylor, Generalissimo, 265-267; Tuchman, Stilwell, 443; Plating, The Hump, 182-183.
Beijing and Hanoi, allowing resources and supplies to move up from Southeast Asia and the East Indies to northern China as well as the Japanese home islands without a reliance on shipping (which was being thoroughly mauled by US Navy submarines as well as the actions of Chennault's bombers). A secondary goal was to capture the airfields in East Asia that were being used by the Fourteenth, especially as raids on locations such as Taiwan had convinced the Japanese that attacks on the home islands themselves were only a matter of time.22

Even as the massive Japanese ground assault kicked off, a far more modest aerial offensive began to take form. By 8 May 1944, 130 B-29s were in India, and they were quickly put to work hauling fuel, munitions, and spare parts over the Hump to forward bases in Chengdu. It was not until 5 June that sufficient quantities of supplies allowed for the first Matterhorn raid, made on the Makasan rail facilities in Bangkok, Thailand. Of the ninety-eight Superforts that took part in the mission, fourteen were forced to turn back due to overheated engines and five crashed on landing. Then, another ten days of stockpiling were required before the next mission could be launched, this time against the Imperial Iron and Steel Works in Yawata on Kyushu Island. This raid, the first attack against the Japanese homeland since the Doolittle Raid more than two years previously, coincidentally happened on the same day—15 June 1944—as the American invasion of Saipan in the Marianas, where the Superforts would ultimately be redeployed.23

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22. Plating, The Hump, 183-184 Tuchman, Stilwell, 457; Hsi-sheng Ch'i, Nationalist China at War: Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937-45 (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1982), 72-74; Wilson, When Tigers Fight, 234-235. Elleman claims that Ichi-Go was launched in response to a B-29 raid on the home islands, though this is anachronistic. Elleman, Modern Chinese Warfare, 211.

23. Craven and Cate, Matterhorn, 94-103; Plating, The Hump, 189-190; Correll, "The Matterhorn Missions." AIR FORCE Magazine, March 2009, 63. Kyushu was the only one of the Japanese home islands within range of Chengdu.
Disappointed with the slow pace of the bombing campaign, Arnold replaced the first commander of XX Bomber Command, Brigadier General Kenneth B. Wolfe, with Major General Curtis E. LeMay at the end of August. In contrast to Wolfe, who had played a major role in the development of the B-29 but had no operational experience, LeMay had extensive combat and leadership experience from his time in Europe and had a well-deserved reputation of being a tough leader who could deliver results (Fig. 4.3). However, even the hard-charging LeMay could not solve all of Matterhorn's woes. "The scheme of operations had been dreamed up like something out of 'The Wizard of Oz,'" he would later grouse. "No one could have made it work." The chief obstacle was that of supply, the problem that had hampered American operations in China since the Flying Tigers had taken to the skies. Even with the Hump providing some logistical support, LeMay later recalled:

24. Correll, "Missions," 63-64. LeMay was the youngest major general in the USAAF, and would go on to be longest-serving general (four-star) in the US armed forces. Known as "Iron Ass" to his men (softened to "Iron Pants" by the press, which apparently infuriated him), LeMay had served as a B-17 heavy bomber group and wing commander since 1942—the very beginning of American involvement in the war—and led many raids over occupied Europe, including the Regensburg portion of the infamous Schweinfurt-Regensburg double mission that saw sixty of 376 B-17s lost. After his stint at XX Bomber Command, he would be called upon to troubleshoot the XXI Bomber Command in the Marianas, overseeing the firebombing campaign against Japan. After World War II, LeMay would head up the Strategic Air Command (SAC), responsible for the bomber and ICBM legs of America's "nuclear triad," from 1948 to 1957 and would become USAF Chief of Staff in the early phases of the Vietnam War. Jim Smith and Malcolm McConnell, The Last Mission: The Secret History of World War II's Final Battle (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 17; Barrett Tillman, LeMay, Great Generals Series (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

We were flying seven trips over the Himalayas with every B-29, off-loading as much gas as we could to still get back to India. On the eighth trip across the Hump to Chengtu [sic], we would finally take a load of bombs and fly a bombing mission against the Japanese....[Then] we would fly back to India and start all over again (Fig. 4.4). 

Another problem was the aircraft itself: the myriad modifications to the Superfort, coupled with a design phase of insufficient length, led to an aircraft that "had as many bugs as the entomological department of the Smithsonian Institution," according to LeMay. "Fast as they got the bugs licked, new ones crawled out from under the cowling." The most enduring of these technical difficulties involved the four powerful Wright R-3350 Duplex Cyclone engines, which had the distressing tendency to overheat and catch fire, often leading to crashes. One former pilot remembered that the "engine was a disaster the first year in combat," although eventually crews learned how to deal with the temperamental devices.

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28. Correll, "Missions," 63. As the cantankerous R-3350s were air-cooled, crews learned to increase their airspeed (and extend their takeoff runs) before exerting the engines (for instance, by climbing). Ironically, one of the problems not faced by Matterhorn crewmen was significant enemy resistance—Japanese radar capabilities lagged far behind that of the Allies (and the Germans), and by this point in the war the quality of their fighter pilots had markedly declined. Thus, unlike in the European Theater, "the bomber always got through." Chennault, Fighter, 277; Johnson, "Matterhorn," 43.
As the Ichi-Go offensive continued to rage, the relationship between Chiang and Stilwell continued to deteriorate. The question of who was ultimately at fault, like every other matter of import in the CBI Theater of operations, was a very complex one. Stilwell seethed about the perceived incompetence of the Chinese defenders, but was secretly gratified that his dour forecasts had come to pass. "It would be a pleasure to go to Washington and scream, 'I told you so,,'" he wrote his wife in July, "but I think they get the point. This was my thesis in May last year, but I was all alone and the air boys were so sure they could run the Japs out of China with planes that I was put in the garbage pail." Later in the same note, he remarked that "if this crisis were just sufficient to get rid of the Peanut [Chiang], without entirely wrecking the ship, it would be worth it."29 The general also noted with amusement the Generalissimo’s (and Chennault’s) appeals for an emergency increase in Hump allocations for the Fourteenth Air Force, given Chennault’s earlier grandiose declarations, and pointed out that there were no similar requests to resupply the Chinese ground forces actually facing the Ichi-Go assault. When a request made by Chennault (through Stilwell) for a diversion of Matterhorn supplies was flatly rejected, Stilwell informed the War Department that their response was "exactly what I hoped for. As you know, I have few illusions about power of air against ground troops. Pressure from the G-MO forced the communication."30 Finally, the Generalissimo’s demand to be placed in charge of Lend-Lease shocked and outraged Stilwell and other American officials, who believed the Chinese leader to be ungrateful and churlish.31

30. Byrd, Chennault, 236; Romanus and Sunderland, Command Problems, 369; Schaller, Crusade, 164; Taylor, Generalissimo, 267, 271-273; Tuchman, 480.
31. Stilwell, Papers, 331; Tuchman, Stilwell, 484-485.
From Chiang’s point of view, of course, his American chief of staff was the one being unreasonable and hostile. For all of the *ex post facto* bluster about Stilwell predicting a ground offensive if American airpower ever grew too threatening, the general had been dismissive when Chennault’s pilots had detected a buildup of Japanese forces prior to the beginning of Ichi-Go, going so far as to forbid the airman from informing the Generalissimo. When Chennault had done so anyway, Stilwell demanded that the airman be relieved for “insubordination.”32 Despite later claims that Chiang “thoroughly intended in his own mind to stay out of the war” and that “Central Government armies were not engaged,” nearly three hundred thousand Chinese soldiers became casualties during Ichi-Go. Chiang’s “Central Government armies,” meanwhile, were also taking heavy losses—in Burma! Stilwell not only refused to release Y-Force back to China, he actually asked for replacements for his lost soldiers (and grumbled to his wife about how difficult it was to get just ten thousand men). At any rate, Stilwell’s insistence on personally leading the Burma campaign was not very becoming of a theater commander who ought to have a wider focus.33 The final straw was a message from Roosevelt in September instructing Chiang to place Stilwell in command of all Chinese forces. The Generalissimo, deciding that this presented an intolerable affront both to his personal authority as well as to China’s national prestige, requested instead that Stilwell be recalled and that another American be sent in his place. Roosevelt agreed to this, not

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wishing to defy one of the “Big Four,” and named Major General Albert C. Wedemeyer as Stilwell’s replacement.34

Stilwell’s recall was not the victory Chiang may have thought it to be, however. For many American journalists and officials, this action only underscored the lengths to which the KMT would go to avoid implementing necessary reforms. The New York Times ran a front-page story on the general’s ouster before he even reached the United States, proclaiming that “the decision to relieve General Stilwell represents the political triumph of a moribund, anti-democratic regime that is more concerned with maintaining its political supremacy than in driving the Japanese out of China.”35 In fact, this was not the impassioned outburst of a neutral observer; Stilwell, knowing that he would probably be advised to remain quiet on the matter of his recall, called in a few sympathetic journalists just prior to leaving China, gave them his version of events, and urged them to make it public. Nevertheless, it sparked a veritable flood of vicious denunciations and criticism of Chiang’s government from all corners of the media.36 While Washington politicians knew that simply dumping the KMT would be diplomatically unwise, even Roosevelt was by this time clearly disillusioned with the Generalissimo and his government and dealt with them more coldly. For instance, he became more adamant that Chiang work together with the CCP and allow American missions to visit Yan’an.37


36. Tuchman, Stilwell, 503, 505-506; Hans van de Ven, War and Nationalism in China: 1925-1945 (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 60. One researcher notes that this was “uncharacteristically subversive” of the general, as he was usually content to vent his frustrations in private. Joyce Hoffman, Theodore H. White and Journalism as Illusion (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 56.

37. Hoffman, White, 56-57; Romanus and Sunderland, Command Problems, 468-469.
Although it was probably not influenced by the top-level political intrigues swirling around it, the withdrawal of XX Bomber Command from China and the ending of Operation Matterhorn provide an obvious reflection of the growing disenchantment with the KMT. After 15 June, the B-29s had been unable to launch another mission until 7 July, the seventh anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, when just seventeen Superforts raided Sasebo. Thereafter, despite the best efforts of commander LeMay, XX Bomber Command averaged just two bombing raids per month from its Chinese bases. These missions were mostly directed at coke ovens and steel factories in Kyushu and Manchuria, but after General Douglas MacArthur invaded the Philippines in late October the Superforts also visited Japanese airfields and aircraft manufacturing plants in Taiwan and Southeast Asia in support of this operation (Fig. 4.5). (In support of Matterhorn missions in northern China, Mao allowed the placement of a weather and radio relay station in Yan’an, provided assistance to downed crewmen, and offered to build additional airfields in CCP-controlled areas. LeMay regretfully declined the latter, noting that it was already enough of a challenge supplying his Chengdu bases.)

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38. Correll, “Missions,” 64-65; Craven and Cate, Matterhorn, 98-149; Johnson, “Matterhorn,” 43-44; LeMay and Kantor, Mission, 336-337.
By now, however, the Marianas Islands were ready for B-29 use, and the decision was made to shut down Matterhorn. On 15 January 1945, the Chengdu airfields were used for the last time, launching eighty-two Superforts against the Shinchiku airfield in Taiwan. This final Matterhorn mission was accompanied by a change in XX Bomber Command leadership, as LeMay departed for the Marianas three days later to assume command of XXI Bomber Command and its B-29s, already engaged in a bombing campaign against Japan (Fig. 4.6). The ex-Matterhorn Superforts stayed in India for a few more months, supporting Allied offensives in Burma by attacking transportation targets in Indochina, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaya. In March 1945, however, they departed for Tinian to join (and be incorporated into) XXI Bomber Command; like Operation Matterhorn before it, XX Bomber Command simply ceased to exist. 39

In terms of military results, Operation Matterhorn (rather like the entire Sino-American alliance) was a dismal failure. Even the official USAAF history does not bother to whitewash this, noting that although the official title of the Matterhorn plan was “Early Sustained Bombing of Japan,” “the bombing was neither early nor sustained.” Over the course of ten months, the Superforts of XX Bomber Command launched forty-nine missions, dropping 11,477 tons of bombs. No target was heavily damaged or

39. Correll, “Missions,” 65; Craven and Cate, Matterhorn, 149-166.
destroyed, and the strategic impact on the Japanese war effort was slight. However, in
the same vein as the Flying Tigers as well as the Doolittle Raid, Operation Matterhorn
produced effects that far outweighed its meager results. The postwar US Strategic
Bombing Survey would claim that “B-29s based in China—*hitting the Japanese home
islands* [italics original]—was a tremendous shot in the arm to the Chinese people.”
More easily verifiable are the influences which the Matterhorn campaign had on the
subsequent bombing operation of Japan. During Matterhorn, through a painful process of
trial-and-error, B-29 crews had learned how to master their powerful and defect-ridden
aircraft. More ominously, an 18 December eighty-four plane raid on the Japanese army
supply base at Hankou, done as a favor to Chennault, used a new weapon—incendiary
bombs—which left the city burning for three days, a precursor to the massive
firebombing attacks on Japanese cities that would occur in 1945.

Operation Matterhorn also has certain parallels with the Linebacker II bombing
campaign of the Vietnam War (Fig. 4.7). Both were implemented near the end of their
respective conflicts. Both used the heaviest strategic bombers in the American arsenal,
whereas earlier operations employed lighter and smaller aircraft. Both were directed
against an enemy who seemed to be stronger than the local ally. Both were arguably
diplomatic actions meant to express American political solidarity with Asian allies, even
as the US sought to decrease its parallel force commitments to those nations. Finally,
both ended in a highly dissatisfactory manner, with the one campaign unceremoniously

41. USSBS, *China, Burma, India*, 89.
terminating without any meaningful results and the other concluding with the virtual abandonment of an ally.43

Operation Matterhorn, unlike the other two air campaigns discussed in this thesis, cannot be said to have been an overwhelming diplomatic success. It lacked the spectacular and immediately-visible aerial victories of the Flying Tigers as well as the long-duration, quantifiable results of the Hump airlift. The key difference between Matterhorn and its predecessors, which also happens to be its most important similarity to Vietnam’s Linebacker II, is that the bombing campaign began only after the loss of American political will to continue in its partnership with its Asian ally. By 1944, the irreconcilable schism between US and KMT strategic goals had become unavoidably obvious; simultaneously, the disgust of American military and governmental figures with perceived Chinese corruption had reached a fever pitch. As a result, Operation Matterhorn is more of a lesson on the limits of airpower as a tool of diplomacy than anything else. If, as Mao postulates, political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, it appears that substantial political power is also needed to wield that gun.

Figure 4.7. Linebacker II: A B-52 Stratofortress on a bombing run over Hanoi, 1972. Source: US Air Force.

CONCLUSION

At precisely 9:00 in the morning of 2 September 1945, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur strode to a microphone set up on the deck of the USS Missouri, a forty-five-thousand-ton steel behemoth anchored in Tokyo Bay. “We are gathered here,” proclaimed the general, “representatives of the major warring powers, to conclude a solemn agreement whereby peace may be restored.”1 After his brief remarks, Japanese envoys stepped forward to sign the Japanese Instrument of Surrender, followed by senior officers from the various Allied nations. The ranking US Army representative, Tenth Army commander General Joseph W. Stilwell (who would shortly preside over another capitulation ceremony when the Japanese forces stationed in the Ryukus surrendered on Okinawa),2 noted privately that “the allied [sic] signers were a scratchy-looking crowd.... What a crew of caricatures in the eyes of the japs [sic]. The human race was poorly represented.”3 MacArthur, however, was much more invested in the symbolism and theater of the ceremony, having arranged for the American flag that had flown on Commodore Matthew C. Perry’s flagship during his first expedition to Japan to be displayed aboard the Missouri. Similarly, the Allied personnel present included many of the chief figures responsible for planning and effecting the downfall of Japan. Glancing

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2. Although Stilwell was outranked by MacArthur, the latter was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan and as such not a US Army representative *per se*.

3. Stilwell, *Original Diaries*, entry for 2 September 1945; Tuchman, *Stilwell*, 522-523. Interestingly enough, the Chinese delegate—General Hsu Yung-Ch’ang (徐永昌 Xú Yǒngchāng), who does not appear to have interacted too much with Stilwell in the past but still represented the loathed KMT—was specifically excluded from the American’s excoriation. Stilwell, *Original Diaries*, entry for 2 September 1945.
around at this handpicked crowd after the last signature had been affixed to the surrender
documents, MacArthur noticed one conspicuous absence: “Where’s Chennault?”

The crusty airman had not long outlasted the demise of Matterhorn, having been
sidelined following the death of Roosevelt and then eased into retirement—ostensibly for
health issues, as had been the excuse for his previous separation from the Army Air
Corps—in mid-1945. He was on his way back to the United States via the Middle East
and Europe when the atomic bombs exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the
Japanese sued for peace, and was not invited to any of the slew of surrender ceremonies
that followed.² For all of his popularity with (certain) politicians and journalists, the men
under his command, and the Chinese people, not to mention Chiang Kai-shek himself,
Chennault had never quite fit in the military hierarchy. His heterodox views on pursuit
airpower irked his Air Corps peers and superiors, many of whom would become top-
ranking commanders in the USAAF and, later, the USAF.⁶ Similarly, his dogged
insistence that airpower alone could defeat the Japanese alienated Army and Navy brass,
including and especially his boss, Stilwell.

“Vinegar Joe,” meanwhile, was not himself without powerful friends. Chief
among these was General of the Army George C. Marshall, who had served together with
Stilwell during the First World War as well as in several interwar staff positions.⁷

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⁴ Wanda Cornelius, Ding Hao: America’s Air War in China, 1937-1945 (Gretna, LA: Pelican

⁵ Byrd, Chennault, 274-283; Chennault, Fighter, 355.

⁶ For instance, while then-Captain Chennault was teaching at the Air Corps Tactical School in
1933, he wrote a rebuttal to a report stating that fighters would be ineffective in wartime in which he
criticized the way in which fighters were employed. The author of the report, Lieutenant Colonel Henry
Arnold, wrote to the school asking about “this damned fellow Chennault.” Chennault, Fighter, 22.

⁷ Tuchman, Stilwell, 101-102.
Stilwell’s penchant for “straight talk” made him a favorite of reporters, and his forthright antipathy towards the endemic corruption he found in the KMT—which was soon transferred to its leader, the Generalissimo—was mirrored by many long-serving American diplomats in China, the so-called “China Hands.” In the years following World War II, Stilwell’s death, and the “loss” of China to the CCP, these men increasingly and vocally criticized the policies and conduct of the United States in China during the conflict. Although they paid with their careers during the McCarthy era, the controversy they helped spark continued unabated, only increasing in intensity with the start of American involvement in Vietnam—seen as being another alliance with a corrupt, brutal, and inefficient Asian government that was battling a popular Communist insurgency.8

Works dealing with the military campaigns of the Sino-American alliance tend to avoid lengthy discussion of the politics that permeated every layer of these operations, due to its extremely confusing and rather sordid nature. Likewise, works focusing on the diplomatic aspect of this partnership only give the barest details of the strategies and operations that resulted from or influenced political decision-making. This disconnect between the military and diplomacy in the large body of Sino-American alliance literature is indicative of a deeper, more fundamental issue: the compartmentalization of these two spheres of foreign policy in the minds of many historians and government analysts. This dichotomy is perhaps best summarized by the concepts of “hard” and “soft” power, popularized by Joseph Nye in his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. “Soft power,” according to Nye, is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments”—that is to say, everything besides

military and economic pressure. As such, the use of armed force is generally treated as being relevant only towards enemies, as persuasion of friendly or neutral entities is the realm of diplomacy.

During the Pacific War, however, military force was used as non-coercive diplomacy towards an ally, affirming American solidarity with China in a common war against Japan. In this case, airpower was the preferred form of this tangible diplomacy, obviating the need to deploy expeditionary armies or navies. The Flying Tigers, the Hump airlift, and Operation Matterhorn were all politically-motivated operations, with diplomatic goals often outweighing military practicality. In fact, from a purely strategic perspective the three operations were failures. The Flying Tigers, for all of their good press, were unable to check the Japanese advance into and conquest of Burma. The Hump, though heroic, in the end was unable to provide enough supplies for any sort of meaningful air or ground offensive against the Japanese in China. Operation Matterhorn, like the Doolittle Raid before it, did not muster enough aircraft to make any significant damage to Japanese production capabilities.

Perhaps the greatest military benefits from these three missions were the operational lessons which could be applied in the future. The most outstanding example of this was the Hump airlift, which proved that a long-term, large-scale aerial resupply effort was in fact doable and "wrote the book" for later operations such as the Berlin Airlift. Similarly, the 23rd Pursuit Group and later 14th Air Force (both using the moniker "Flying Tigers" and commanded by AVG leader Chennault) used many of the

tactics pioneered and combat-tested by the volunteers over Burma and China. Finally, Operation Matterhorn gave its aircrews the chance to learn how to deal with their cantankerous B-29s, transforming the Superfort from an unpredictable, defect-ridden aircraft into the powerful weapon that so devastated Japan in the final year of the war. On the other hand, the military benefits of these operations may not have justified their enormous opportunity costs. In particular, the supplies and aircraft sent to China may well have been used more profitably in other theaters of the war: the transports that flew the Hump, for example, might have been used in the 1944 airborne operation known as Market Garden to provide the extra edge to allow the Allies to prevail and win the war in Europe by Christmas of that year. Similarly, a more protracted design and testing process for the B-29s may have allowed more of its shortcomings to be exposed and solved in the factory rather than in the field.

In the end, of course, China's contribution to the war effort was not nearly as decisive as Allied planners had hoped and imagined it would be in 1941 and 1942. While the Japanese were forced to divert a significant percentage of their ground forces to garrisoning the massive Asian nation—after the war, more than 1.28 million Japanese

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10. Chennault also claimed that his volunteers, many of whom rejoined the Army Air Forces or the Navy following their tour with the Flying Tigers, helped disseminate these successful if unorthodox fighter tactics to their units. However, his own intelligence reports on Japanese aircraft, which he regularly sent to the War Department even before the AVG was conceived, mysteriously vanished; American pilots would have to rediscover the qualities of their foes' warplanes and airmen in the dark days following Pearl Harbor. Chennault, _Fighter_, 93-94, 114.

11. Operation Market Garden was an audacious plan to seize bridges in Holland and Germany that spanned the Maas (Meuse), Waal, and Lower Rhine Rivers by paratroopers (“Market”), who would then be relieved by the advancing Allied armor (“Garden”). Due to the shortage of transport aircraft, only about 60% of the paratroopers could be dropped into position on the first day, with the remainder being held up by unexpectedly poor weather. The resulting fiasco spawned the idiom “a bridge too far,” the title of a Cornelius Ryan book dealing with the operation that was made into a 1977 movie. David Bennett, _A Magnificent Disaster: The Failure of Market Garden, the Arnhem Operation, September 1944_ (Drexel Hill, PA: Casemate, 2008).
soldiers surrendered in China, out of a total of some 5.9 million men in the Imperial Japanese Army—Chinese troops never succeeded in reclaiming the areas that had fallen into Japanese hands between 1937 and 1941. The Chinese airbases promised at the start of the war, meanwhile, proved to be logistical nightmares and launched fewer than thirty bombing missions against Japan in the six months of their use. Additionally, the unexpectedly abrupt capitulation of the Japanese rendered the KMT more of a liability than an asset to the Americans, as large amounts of territory (often without a single Nationalist soldier or representative for miles) were suddenly in need of occupation, lest the CCP move in and begin to exert control. Many of the final “Hump” missions involved ferrying Nationalist troops to these locations, placing the US squarely in the midst of the rapidly-reheating Chinese Civil War. All of this has led scholars writing from the perspective of purely military utility to dismiss the Sino-American alliance as having been a tremendous waste of time, effort, and money for the Americans.

In fact, however, the chief goal of American airpower support for the Chinese during the Second World War was diplomatic rather than military. As a Soviet advisor to Chiang Kai-shek observed, “[US] military assistance... was intended to symbolize American good relations with China.” The Flying Tigers, for instance, demonstrated

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12. Drea, In the Service, 47, 75; Wilson, When Tigers Fight, 250.


15. Vasily I. Chuikov, Mission to China: Memoirs of a Military Adviser to Chiang Kai-shek, trans. David P. Barrett (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2004), 145. Marshal Chuikov would later attain fame as the Soviet commander at the Battles of Stalingrad (1942-1943) and Berlin (1945), two of the most important campaigns of the Eastern Front, and would be named a Hero of the Soviet Union after each of these operations.
that the US was willing to involve itself in the conflict even before its formal declaration of war against Japan; the Hump proved the consistency of this support; and Operation Matterhorn showed that Americans retained enough interest in their Asian ally in the closing years of the conflict to dispatch their newest, most advanced aircraft to China, despite growing political indifference and hostility towards the KMT. The political underpinnings of this military support to the Nationalists meant that the “loss” of China to the CCP in 1949, representing as it did the negation of American military-diplomatic efforts during the world war, became the subject of intense political debate and acrimonious finger-pointing in the late 1940s and 1950s and may have contributed to the rise of McCarthyism in the latter decade.¹⁶ On the other hand, American support for the KMT continued even after their retreat to Taiwan, and today the US remains the Republic of China’s (RoC) most important—if once again unofficial—ally and its main external weapons supplier, much to the consternation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Thus, the World War II Sino-American alliance has played a major role in shaping the relations between the US and the “two Chinas” in the seventy years since the end of the conflict. However, the effects of this partnership have not been confined to American relations with China. The usage of American airpower (and military force in general) as a form of diplomacy towards its allies, this blurring of “hard” and “soft” power, has become increasingly important for US foreign policy, most notably in the Vietnam War some twenty years later but continuing into the present day.

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