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# Thailand's Secret War

OSS, SOE, and the Free  
Thai Underground  
During World War II

E. Bruce Reynolds

## Thailand's Secret War

This book is an absorbing account of secret operations and political intrigue in wartime Thailand. During World War II, Free Thai organizations cooperated with Allied intelligence agencies in an effort to rescue their nation from the consequences of its 1941 alliance with Japan. They largely succeeded despite internal differences and the conflicting interests and policies of their would-be allies, China, Great Britain, and the United States. London's determination to punish Thailand placed the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) at a serious disadvantage in its rivalry with the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The US State Department, in contrast, strongly supported OSS operations in Thailand, viewing them as a vehicle for promoting American political and economic influence in mainland Southeast Asia. Declassification of the records of the OSS and the SOE now permits full revelation of this complex story of heroic action and political intrigue.

E. BRUCE REYNOLDS is Professor of History at San José State University. His previous publications include *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance, 1940–1945* (1994) and *Japan in the Fascist Era* (2004).



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# Thailand's Secret War

*The Free Thai, OSS, and SOE during  
World War II*

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E. Bruce Reynolds



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*In loving memory of my parents:*  
*Virgil E. Reynolds (1908–1986)*  
*Sibyl Lane Reynolds (1913–1977)*





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## Preface

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When the Japanese attacked Great Britain and the USA in December 1941, they planned to use independent Thailand as the main launching pad for their invasions of British Malaya and Burma. They expected cooperation from the ambitious and increasingly dictatorial Thai Premier, Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, whom they had helped gain territory from French Indochina after a brief border war earlier in the year. After brief initial Thai resistance, Phibun agreed to free passage for the Japanese forces, then within days agreed to an alliance that made Thailand Japan's first true Asian ally. British and American residents were interned and their properties confiscated. In January 1942, Phibun declared war on Great Britain and the USA, in May he sent his troops into the British Shan States, and in 1943 he accepted territory in the Shan territories and four states in northern Malaya proffered by the Japanese to ensure his continued support. Thailand had become a critical supply base for Japanese operations in Burma.

When the tide of war turned against the Axis Powers, Thailand found itself in difficult straits. Unless a way could be found to escape the embrace of Japan, Thailand would go down in flames, too; perhaps even lose its treasured independence. Phibun's chief civilian political rival, Pridi Phanomyong, sought to salvage the nation's position and gain the political upper hand by secretly seeking Allied support for a government-in-exile and an anti-Japanese underground. By this time, the Thai minister in Washington, Seni Pramot (Pramoj), had initiated Free Thai movements there and in London, and each of the Allied states had recruited Thai volunteers it hoped to infiltrate into the country.

My previous book, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, focused on the relationship between Thailand and Japan before and during World War II; this volume examines Thailand's secret war, this surreptitious campaign to win the favor of the Allies. Factional and personal differences among the Thai, the divergent interests of the nations opposing Japan, and often bitter rivalries between ambitious Allied intelligence agencies complicated this effort, creating what British Special Operations



Executive (SOE) Asian Chief Colin Mackenzie aptly described as a “very tangled skein.”

American and British policies toward Thailand remained out of sync throughout the war, sparking a particularly intense rivalry between the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the British SOE. With strong backing from the State Department, the OSS sought by hook or by crook to thwart perceived British schemes to “colonize” Thailand.

In the end, Thailand’s secret war proved to be a nearly bloodless affair and Pridi, with American support, succeeded in saving Thailand from the worst consequences of Phibun’s alliance with Japan. Problems left over from the war and long-simmering political jealousies, however, would ultimately destroy his effort to establish a stable and more democratic postwar political order.

The declassification of reams of OSS and SOE documents have made it possible for the first time to explore fully the complexities of Thailand’s wartime relations with Allied intelligence agencies.

## Acknowledgments

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My study of Thailand's role in World War II began over two decades ago, so it is impossible adequately to acknowledge all my debts to the many who have helped along the way. First and foremost, however, I must thank my wife, Pilaiwan, who has patiently assisted with Thai language translations and graciously tolerated her husband's historical and other obsessions.

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Special thanks also to my mentor John Stephan for inspiration and encouragement over the past twenty-two years.

*San Jose, CA, January 2004*

E. BRUCE REYNOLDS

## Notes on names and transliteration

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At the end of World War II, in part to please the British, the government of Thailand changed the country's international designation back to its pre-1939 name, Siam. In 1949, the government restored the name Thailand. In order to minimize confusion, the terms "Thailand" and "Thai" are used in the text for the immediate postwar period, although the terms "Siam" and "Siamese" do appear in quotations.

People in Thailand, including government officials, are commonly referred to by their personal name rather than their family name. I have followed this custom in the text. In the bibliographical listings, Thai names are alphabetized according to personal name.

Different systems are used in the transliteration of Thai words and names. All are inherently problematic because Thai is a tonal language and contains many sounds that have no English equivalent. Also confusing is the fact that Thai consonants often take on different sounds depending on whether they appear at the beginning or end of a syllable. Further, many names are written with unpronounced syllables at the end.

For the sake of consistency, I have used the transliteration system of the Royal Institute of Thailand throughout. Its merits include the representation of syllable-ending consonants by sound and the dropping of unpronounced syllables at the end of words. Its shortcomings include a lack of distinction between long and short vowels and the common representation of quite different vowel sounds by the letters "o" and "u."

With a few exceptions, such as the familiar names of Kings, I have sought to render names according to the Royal Institute system, even when another English spelling is commonly used by the person in question. In such cases, I have placed the common spelling in parentheses after the first reference to the person in the text.

A few other hints may help the general reader with the pronunciation of Thai consonants. An "h" following the letters "t" or "p" signifies an aspirated or plosive sound. Thus the "th" in Thai is pronounced as the "t" in "tie" rather than the "th" in "thigh" and the "ph" as the "p" in pie, not the "ph" in "phone." Without the following "h" the consonants

“t” and “p” are pronounced in an unaspirated form for which there is no direct equivalent in English. The Thai “kh” is similar to the “k” in “kick,” while the Thai “k” is similar to the “g” in “gone.”

With transliterated Thai vowels, the “a” is similar to the “a” in “barn”; the “e” is similar to the “e” in “Ben”; the “i” is similar to the double “e” in “bee”; the “o” most commonly is similar to the “o” in “go”; and the “u” most commonly is similar to the “u” in “tune.”

With the exception of Chiang Kai-shek, Chinese names are rendered in the Wade-Giles system in use during World War II. Japanese names are transliterated according to the modified Hepburn system.

## Prologue

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Thailand's unique role in the history of Japan's World-War-II occupation of Southeast Asia reflected the fact that, prior to the war, it was the only independent state in a region dominated by European colonial powers. It had become the object of rivalry between Great Britain, the chief defender of the status quo, and an expansive Japan in the 1930s. This competition ended when Japan moved troops into Thailand on 8 December 1941 and contracted an alliance with the government of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram. Subsequently, the three chief allies fighting against Japan – Britain, the USA, and China – all developed schemes to counter the Japanese presence and promote their own influence in Bangkok after the war. In order to put these events in context, it is necessary to look briefly at the prewar history of Thailand's internal politics and foreign relations.

From 1782 until 1932, the kings of the Chakri Dynasty ruled Thailand, then known as Siam, as absolute monarchs. Their accommodationist diplomacy, favorable geography, and a measure of good luck enabled Siam to survive the high age of European imperialism somewhat diminished in size, but with its independence relatively intact. The revered king who presided over most of this critical period, Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910), had implemented a program of reforms that modernized the administrative structure, strengthened Bangkok's control over the provinces, and greatly increased the dominance of the royal family at the expense of the once-influential court nobles and regional princes.<sup>1</sup>

The two less capable sons who succeeded King Chulalongkorn failed to maintain positive momentum, however, and in 1932 a cabal of dissatisfied civilian and military officials, calling their faction the People's Party and themselves Promoters, staged a well-planned *coup d'état*. They

<sup>1</sup> David Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven, CT, 1984) is the standard general history of Thailand. For different perspectives on Thailand in the late nineteenth century see B. J. Terweil, *A History of Modern Thailand* (St. Lucia, Queensland, 1983) and Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped* (Honolulu, 1994).

convinced King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, r. 1925–35) to sanction a constitution providing for a partly appointed, partly elected national assembly. The general population, from the largely illiterate peasants to the residents of Bangkok, played no significant part in the change of regime, although it is often called a “revolution.”<sup>2</sup>

Efforts to reconcile the more moderate royalists and the Promoters soon broke down when the intellectual leader of the People's Party, the young French-educated lawyer Pridi Phanomyong (Banomyong), also known by his title Luang Pradit Manutham, put forth a plan to nationalize the economy. When a conservative backlash gained momentum, reform-minded Promoters launched a second successful *coup* in June 1933.

A royalist counter-rebellion in October 1933 failed, dooming the already troubled relations between the Promoters and King Prajadhipok. In 1934 the monarch departed for England, ostensibly for medical treatment. When he abdicated the throne the following year, the Promoters replaced him with his young nephew, Ananda Mahidol. The new figurehead king did not return to Bangkok, instead remaining in school in Switzerland.

These developments irrevocably embittered most royalists against the new regime and stripped the Promoters of the mantle of legitimacy provided by the king's initial acceptance of the new constitutional order. Although maintaining a facade of unity, the Promoters increasingly split into two main factions: one centered on Pridi, the leading civilian figure and the chief intellectual force of the ruling group; the other on the rising star of the army, Phibun Songkhram, the military hero of the struggles of 1933. The navy became the wild card in the political deck, but initially the admirals supported Phibun, primarily because he greatly increased defense spending.

Buoyed by his strong backing in the military, the handsome and charming Phibun emerged as the nation's premier in 1938. Buoyed by the international political trends of the “fascist era,” the aspiring dictator cracked down on his political enemies, increasing the number of political prisoners. He also formally changed the country's name to Thailand in 1939, a shift that signalled his interest in recovering “lost territories” populated by ethnically related peoples. Although Pridi continued to hold the finance portfolio in Phibun's cabinet, he showed increasing dismay over the success of his rival in consolidating his personal power.

<sup>2</sup> Judith A. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand* (Honolulu, 1991) provides a good overview of the political events of the 1930s. Also see Thawatt Mokrapong, *History of the Thai Revolution* (Bangkok, 1972); Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Singapore, 1984); and Kenneth P. Landon, *Siam in Transition* (Chicago, 1939, reprinted New York, 1968).

In international relations, among the three chief allies that opposed Japan in World War II, nearby China naturally had the longest record of involvement with Siam. Natives of southern coastal China had for centuries traded with and emigrated to this tributary state of China-based empires, often settling down and marrying locally. These overseas Chinese established a flourishing trade, enriching themselves and the Thai kings who controlled and shared in the wealth produced by this foreign commerce. The close links between Chinese traders and the Thai court led to mixed marriages even at high levels, and successful Chinese often attained important political appointments. Over time, Chinese immigrants also came to dominate Siam's internal trade.<sup>3</sup>

The flow of Chinese into Siam increased during the nineteenth century, a chaotic time in southern China. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese women began immigrating in significant numbers, changing the previous pattern of Chinese inter-marriage and cultural assimilation. As modern nationalist sentiment rose among the overseas Chinese, Thai leaders began to worry about the loyalty of this growing, economically powerful, and increasingly culturally distinct minority. British-educated King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910–25) famously expressed these fears in an article, written under a pseudonym, that described the Chinese as the “Jews of the East.”<sup>4</sup>

The Promoters shared such concerns about a potential Chinese fifth column. To counter the perceived danger, the leaders of the post-1932 regime, many of them of at least partial Chinese ancestry themselves, passed legislation aimed at pushing Chinese residents toward assimilation and Thai citizenship. The government also took an increasingly hard line against frequent anti-Japanese boycotts that complicated Bangkok's relations with Tokyo and, like previous governments, avoided formal diplomatic relations with the Republic of China. The latter stance reflected concern that Chinese diplomatic representatives would inevitably involve themselves in domestic political matters because resident Chinese – even those born abroad – were still considered Chinese citizens. Such attitudes and actions naturally displeased Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist government, but, weakened by its struggle against the Japanese, it had little ability to exert effective pressure.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The classic work on this subject is G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand* (Ithaca, NY, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> On the “Jews of the East” article and its context, see Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu, 1978), 186–96.

<sup>5</sup> Recent articles on the role of Chinese residents in Thailand before and during World War II include E. Bruce Reynolds, “‘International Orphans’ – The Chinese in Thailand during World War II,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 28 (September 1997): 365–88



Great Britain had taken full advantage of China's nineteenth-century decline, profiting mightily from the opium trade through Southeast Asia from British-controlled India. The British ultimately conquered Burma, Siam's western neighbor and most troublesome rival, and took charge of the Malay states to the south. French expansion into Indochina completed the colonial encirclement of Siam. After French gunboat diplomacy forced Bangkok's relinquishment of its claims to the Lao states in 1893, however, the two European colonial powers agreed to preserve the heartland of Siam as a buffer state between their respective territories.

Caught, as one king of Siam put it, "between the tiger and the crocodile," Siam gave first priority to the maintenance of friendly relations with the British, its most powerful neighbor, an approach that had both economic and political consequences. In the economic realm, British companies gained forestry and mining concessions and came to dominate Siam's foreign trade. Siam became a vital rice bowl for British Malaya, an area increasingly dependent on food imports, as large numbers of Chinese and Indian laborers migrated there to work in the tin mines and rubber plantations. Politically, influential British ministers ensured that their countrymen filled the most slots in Siam's corps of well-paid foreign advisors. Most Thai princes went to England for their education, including the last two absolute monarchs, as well as many ministers and other high-ranking officials.

The 1932 *coup* posed the first of two challenges to the British position in the decade leading up to World War II. Although the British could only regret the overthrow of a regime run by anglophile princes, they made no active effort to reverse the situation, choosing instead a policy aimed at allaying the suspicions of the Promoters. The old Siam hand Sir Josiah Crosby had considerable success in mending fences during his seven-year stint (1934–41) as British minister. However, he found it increasingly difficult to cope with the second challenge, posed by the Japanese. After Tokyo abandoned the gold standard in 1931 an influx of low-priced Japanese goods threatened British trade dominance. More dangerously, Japan abandoned the League of Nations in 1933 and embarked on an aggressive foreign policy that posed a security problem for which the over-stretched British had no effective answer.<sup>6</sup>

and "Failed Endeavors: Chinese Efforts to Gain Political Influence in Thailand during World War II," *Intelligence and National Security* 16 (Winter 2001): 175–204. Also, Eiji Murashima, "The Thai-Japanese Alliance and the Chinese of Thailand," in Paul Kratoska, ed., *Southeast Asian Minorities in the Wartime Japanese Empire* (New York, 2002), 192–222.

<sup>6</sup> See Josiah Crosby, *Siam: The Crossroads* (London, 1945); Richard J. Aldrich, *The Key to the South* (Kuala Lumpur, 1993); and Nicholas Tarling, "King Prajadhipok and the Apple Cart," *The Journal of the Siam Society* 64 (July 1976): 1–38.

In contrast to the longstanding Chinese and British interests in Siam, the United States played a minor role prior to World War II. Although friendly bilateral relations had existed for a century, neither nation had loomed particularly large in the other's calculations. In 1833, when diplomatic contact began, American ships frequently passed through Southeast Asia *en route* to the China coast, but this changed when the USA gained a foothold on the Pacific Ocean during the Mexican War. Thus, except for a substantial Protestant missionary presence, the USA had a low profile and minimal interests in Siam during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The lack of a tangible American stake in Siam at a time of waxing US power inspired the Thai to hire a series of Americans as foreign policy advisors from 1902. Their work, particularly the 1920s efforts by Woodrow Wilson's son-in-law, Francis B. Sayre, to renegotiate Siam's unequal treaties with Western nations, generated considerable goodwill. Still, the bilateral relationship remained of minor importance to Washington. That American diplomats often viewed assignment to Bangkok as a form of exile is evidenced by an off-the-cuff threat once issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Angered by leaks to the press, Roosevelt warned the State Department that if there were any more, "everyone down the line will be sent to Siam!"<sup>7</sup>

The insatiable appetite of the automobile industry for rubber, however, had made the Southeast Asian region an important source of raw materials for American industry in the early decades of the twentieth century. Siam produced some rubber, but remained a minor trading partner. In 1938, US imports totaled approximately \$97 million (primarily rubber and tin) from British Malaya, \$89 million from America's Philippine colony, \$49 million from the Netherlands East Indies, and \$7.2 million from French Indochina. Imports from Siam, in contrast, amounted to only \$200,000, less than one-third of one percent of that nation's total exports. But not only did the USA buy little from Siam, its sales there amounted to only \$2.7 million, a mere 4.1 percent of Siam's imports. This compares to \$90 million in US sales to the Philippines, \$33 million to the Netherlands East Indies, and \$9.8 million to British Malaya. Similarly, American foreign investment – which by 1940 totaled \$91 million in the Philippines, \$71 million in the Netherlands East Indies, and \$21 million in British Malaya – remained negligible in Siam.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Benjamin Welles, *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist* (New York, 1997), 200. The Japanese, too, had long viewed Bangkok as a backwater and diplomatic "dumping ground." See: E. Bruce Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance, 1940–1945* (New York, 1994), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Gary Hess, *The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940–1950* (New York, 1987), 12–13, 15.

The importance of Southeast Asian resources attracted the attention of the US Council on Foreign Relations when it launched its War and Peace Studies Project in 1939. In evaluating the self-sufficiency of the world's regions, the project's Economic and Financial Group judged Germany's continental position as more self-sufficient than that of the Western hemisphere alone, a situation that made American access to another region vital. Integration with the Pacific area would strengthen the US position, but its advantages could best be maximized through a "grand area" of trade encompassing the British Empire. This study, which was passed on to the State Department, encouraged aid to Great Britain in its war with Germany, supported American rearmament, and encouraged moves to check the Japanese from blocking access to Southeast Asian resources.<sup>9</sup> The Roosevelt Administration ultimately acted in all three areas, but the stringent 1941 sanctions imposed in response to the move of Japanese troops into Southern French Indochina hastened the outbreak of war in the Pacific, rather than deterring it as Washington had hoped.

Despite raw materials needs for the concerted build-up of American military power, maneuvers to keep the oil-rich Netherlands East Indies out of Japanese hands, and efforts to shore up the British strategic presence in the Malay Peninsula, economic relations with Thailand were troubled in the period leading up to the Pearl Harbor attack. Nationalistic governmental restrictions led the Standard Vacuum Oil Company to abandon the Thai market in 1939 and the British-American Tobacco Company followed suit in 1941.<sup>10</sup> This left the International Engineering Company (primarily a sales outlet for American manufacturers), a movie distributorship, a Singer Sewing Machine Company outlet, and a typewriter company run by a scion of an old-line missionary family as the only American firms in Bangkok. Of the seventy-two American citizens resident in Bangkok at the beginning of September 1941, more than half were from missionary families, employees of mission-related educational organizations, or staff members of the US Legation. Several others were wives of foreign nationals.<sup>11</sup>

The long-cordial diplomatic relations between Washington and Bangkok also soured in the months before Pearl Harbor when Thai Premier Phibun took advantage of France's defeat at German hands to try to reclaim "lost territories" from French Indochina. American officials viewed Phibun's saber-rattling as a threat to the Asian status quo, so in

<sup>9</sup> Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust* (New York, 1977), 118–131 and Jonathan Marshall, *To Have and Have Not* (Berkeley, 1995), 28–32.

<sup>10</sup> On the oil company pullout, see: Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, 124–25.

<sup>11</sup> "List of American and Philippine Citizens Residing in Bangkok," 2 September 1941 in papers held by Willys R. Peck's daughter, Damaris Peck Reynolds, Corvallis, OR.

November 1940 they abruptly halted the delivery of warplanes purchased by the Thai government in the USA.

The move had little practical effect beyond creating ill will that redounded to the benefit of the Japanese. Having secretly promised to allow Japanese troops passage through southern Thailand in the event of an attack on British Malaya in return for Japan's support of Thai territorial demands against the French, Phibun launched an invasion of French territory in January 1941. When the Thai navy suffered a defeat at the hands of the French in mid-January, Phibun appealed for Japanese intervention. After protracted peace negotiations in Tokyo, the Japanese pressured the French into surrendering two tracts of land on the west bank of the Mekong River in Laos and two provinces in western Cambodia.

During the border conflict, American Minister Hugh G. Grant alienated both the Thai and his British counterpart Crosby by rigidly opposing Bangkok's actions. In contrast, Crosby, with the security of Malaya and Singapore in mind, desperately sought to maintain friendly relations to counter Japanese influence. Grant denounced Crosby's "appeasement" policy as undermining Washington's commitment to the status quo. In Washington, however, support for Britain solidified during Grant's one-year stay in Thailand. Thus, despite the Minister's negative reporting, Washington eventually decided to follow the British lead in regard to Thailand. This left Grant out on a limb that his superiors sawed off in August 1941. They sent veteran China diplomat Willys R. Peck to replace him.

With a portion of the "lost territories" in hand, Phibun proved receptive to Peck's moves to improve relations. After tilting strongly toward Japan during the border quarrel with the French, he now professed strict neutrality and encouraged a strong Anglo-American stance to deter Japan's further advance. Peck recommended American military assistance to encourage Thai resistance to Japanese pressure. Weapons were in short supply because of the pressing needs of the British and American military services, however, and skeptics worried that any arms sent to Bangkok would fall into Japanese hands.

As it became apparent he would not get effective protection from the British and Americans, Phibun turned back to bargain with the Japanese. Aware that they were preparing to move, he suggested that the Thai army would not oppose landings in the south if the Japanese kept their forces away from the Thai capital. Control of central Thailand and the railway linking Bangkok to Malaya were key elements in the Japanese plans, however, so no such concession could be made.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On Thai relations with Japan and the events of this period, see Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*.

On the eve of the anticipated offensive, Phibun disappeared, leaving the Japanese to deal with a cabinet that refused to make a decision in his absence. Thus their forces encountered piecemeal opposition from the Thai army and police when their troops began landing in peninsular Thailand a few hours before the attack on Pearl Harbor. After dawn on 8 December, Phibun returned to Bangkok and granted the Japanese free passage. These maneuvers put Phibun in a position to claim that he had kept his pledge to defend Thai neutrality, but had bowed to overwhelming force. According to Thai government figures, 170 Thai soldiers and policemen died in the brief fighting, along with fifty-four civilians. In addition, 130 uniformed personnel and three civilians sustained wounds.<sup>13</sup>

In the days that followed, Japanese pressures aimed at effecting a military alliance increased, and Phibun realized that Japanese forces would not merely pass through Thailand as he had hoped. Already the Japanese had produced impressive results at Pearl Harbor and had sunk the British warships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* in Southeast Asian waters. Desperate to salvage a degree of autonomy and eager to claim future benefits if the Japanese won the war, Phibun made a fateful decision. He met Japanese demands for full use of Thai facilities, signed a formal alliance and, on 25 January 1942, acceded to Japanese urgings to declare war on Britain, and the United States.

Even though the stunningly successful Japanese offensive left the Allied Powers reeling, China, Great Britain, and the United States all anticipated eventual victory, and each nurtured ambitions to exert influence in postwar Thailand. The Chinese wanted to re-establish their nation as a regional power and hoped for the opportunity to intervene on behalf of the Chinese residents in Thailand. The British sought a measure of retribution for Thai support of the Japanese invasions of Malaya and Burma and the re-establishment of the economic and political influence they had enjoyed before Japan's incursion. Some in London also perceived a golden opportunity to claim strategic territory from Thailand in the Kra Isthmus area. The Americans, meanwhile, began to view Thailand as a potential economic and strategic foothold in a region that figured to be both important and unstable in the postwar era.

<sup>13</sup> The Thai casualty figures are recorded in George (Bangkok) to Thai Committee, 11 September 1945, Folder 749, Box 124, Entry 88, Record Group (hereafter, RG) 226, US National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter, USNA).

# 1 The origins of the Free Thai movement

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The Thai took great pride in their nation's status as the lone independent state in Southeast Asia, so most resented the uninvited arrival of Japanese troops. The nation's leaders were dismayed, too, but painfully aware of the futility of resistance. Some doubted the wisdom of Phibun's decision to embrace Japan fully, however, anticipating that the Allies would prevail in the end. In such an eventuality, they knew that Thailand would be in dire straits if it remained yoked to a defeated Japan.

From 8 December 1941, these skeptics looked to Phibun Songkhram's chief political rival Pridi Phanomyong, who had served as interior minister, foreign minister, and finance minister in successive cabinets, for leadership. Pridi, resentful of the growing army dominance in Thai politics, had responded to Phibun's tilt toward Japan and the Axis Powers by moving toward a pro-British stance even before the war began. Because the Japanese were suspicious of Pridi, Phibun relieved him of the finance portfolio in mid-December 1941, softening the blow by appointing him to the prestigious, but politically impotent, Council of Regents that acted for the nation's absent monarch, the teenaged King Ananda.

Phibun and his supporters saw full cooperation with Japan as the best course available, but were well aware of the risks. As a Thai police officer pointed out to an interned British civilian, if the Japanese won the war they would be in a position to dominate Thailand totally. On the other hand, if the Japanese lost: "Then we must pray to Buddha to give us a golden tongue to explain how it all happened."<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately for Thailand, one such "golden tongue" emerged in the form of the thirty-six-year-old Thai minister in Washington, M. R. Seni Pramot (Pramoj).<sup>2</sup> A great-grandson of King Rama II (r. 1809–24), Seni, like many descendants of the Chakri kings, had gone to study in England

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Sparrow, *Land of the Moonflower* (London, 1955), 92.

<sup>2</sup> "M. R." is the abbreviation of the title "Mom Rachiwong" which signifies that the title holder is a great-grandson of a king.



1. M. R. Seni Pramot (Pramoj) (1905–1997), Thai minister to the United States 1940–1945, who founded and led the Free Thai movement abroad and became prime minister of Thailand in September 1945. (Source: US National Archives)

as a teenager. A superior scholar, he earned an Oxford degree and gained admission to the English bar. Although his father had lost his position as head of the Thai police force with the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, Seni returned home to join the Justice Ministry of the new regime. After participating in a Pridi-directed project to codify the nation's laws, Seni became a judge in the Bangkok Court of Appeals in 1938. He also taught at Thammasat University (then known as the University of Moral and Political Sciences), a school Pridi had founded and made a main base of his political support.

Years later, after he had irrevocably split with Pridi, Seni attributed his 1940 Washington assignment to Pridi's jealousy of his popularity with



the university's students.<sup>3</sup> This attempt to construe his appointment as a form of exile is difficult to credit, however. Surely it was his intelligence, fluency in English, and social status that made Seni, despite a total lack of diplomatic experience, a viable candidate for a significant position at a critical juncture.

Soon after the novice diplomat arrived in Washington, Thailand began pressing French Indochina for the return of "lost territories," an initiative that American officials strongly opposed and Seni himself questioned. "In my reports to my government," he later claimed, "I sought both by direct and by indirect means to dissuade it from involvement in the border dispute, foreseeing that Japan would seize upon it as a pretext for her own aggrandizement at our expense." Nonetheless, Seni had to defend his government's policy and he came to feel distrusted by both the State Department and the Phibun regime.<sup>4</sup>

Seni's situation improved, however, when Phibun declared a policy of strict neutrality and sought to mend relations with the USA. When Seni visited Secretary of State Cordell Hull on 18 August 1941 to appeal for American military support, he predicted that the Japanese would likely move south against Singapore first, then later attempt to cut the Burma Road by striking westward toward Rangoon. Hull agreed with Seni's assessment. When Seni asked how the USA would respond if Thailand were invaded, Hull promised the same type of aid being provided to China; small comfort to a relatively small state with little scope for defense-in-depth. Hull did, however, encourage Seni to request American military aid.<sup>5</sup>

Seni later said that during this tense period he addressed a personal letter to Premier Phibun suggesting that plans be laid for a Thai government-in-exile should the Japanese invade, but received no reply. Seni also discussed this possibility with his trusted subordinate, Second Secretary Luang Dithakan Phakdi (Dithakar Bakdi).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> David Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy* (New York, 1996), 32–45 and Jayanata Kumar Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics* (New Delhi, 1972), 147–49. Edwin Grut, a Thailand expert who worked for British intelligence during World War II, believed that "other and more likely candidates" had turned the ministerial position down because of the risks involved in wartime travel. See "Report by Major Grut on Negotiations in Washington, 20 December 1943–27 February 1944," HS1-73, British Public Record Office (hereafter, PRO), Kew.

<sup>4</sup> Seni to Lieutenant Colonel Hsiao, 30 June 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA; Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, 149–50; and Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 47–48.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 18 August 1941, Reel 32, Cordell Hull Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>6</sup> Seni to Lieutenant Colonel Hsiao, 30 June 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.



When news of the Japanese move into Thailand reached Washington, Seni called at the State Department on 8 December to seek information. During a late-morning interview, Secretary Hull relayed news from Minister Peck that the Thai had ordered a ceasefire after five and half hours of resistance. Peck predicted that this would lead to Japanese control over the Thai government.

Seni remarked that “not many months ago his Government became satisfied of the dangerous character of the Japanese.” He acknowledged the presence of some pro-Japanese elements in Bangkok, but claimed that “the people of Thailand are inherently unfriendly toward the people of Japan and distrust them in most ways.” Seni predicted that Thailand would seek US aid “at opportune times in the future to emancipate itself from Japanese control,” adding that “he himself would watch [for] every chance to be cooperative” with the Americans.<sup>7</sup>

Seni returned to his legation to confer with his staff. He later stated that he was not certain who would win the war, but he hoped for and expected an Allied victory. Although the USA seemed ill prepared militarily, he recognized the nation's great potential. Aware that Washington-based diplomats of some of the small European nations occupied by the Germans had chosen to stay and cooperate with the American authorities, Seni believed that he might “prove useful” to Thailand if he did likewise. On a personal level, the presence of his wife and three young children probably reinforced his inclination to stay put. Keeping his family in Washington may have seemed a much better option than returning to an uncertain fate in Japanese-controlled Thailand.

Financial uncertainty complicated matters, though, as the Thai Legation had only 2,000 dollars in its accounts. Further, there were personal risks involved in repudiating his government. If Bangkok decided to make Seni's repatriation a *quid pro quo* for the release of Minister Peck, he could be forced to return home and face trial as a traitor.<sup>8</sup>

Despite such uncertainties and the existence of personal differences that would soon become apparent, Seni and his small staff – two secretaries and a military attaché – unanimously decided to cast their lot with the Allies. Late the same afternoon, he returned to the State Department to offer their services to the Allied cause. Blaming pro-Japanese elements for the early Thai surrender, he spoke to Secretary Hull of turning

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 8 December 1941, Reel 32, Cordell Hull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>8</sup> Seni Pramot, “Kwam samphan rawang Thai kap Amerika rawang songkhram lok khrang thi song,” in *Khwam samphan rawang Thai kap Amerika* (Bangkok, 1976) 177–78; Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 49–52; and Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, 150–53.

over all Thai assets in the USA to further prosecution of the war and suggested that the Thai in the USA “might organize and preserve a government of true patriotic, liberty-loving Thais while his government is in the clutches of Japan.”

Hull expressed appreciation, but noted that even if Thai assets were unfrozen, the US government could not use these funds for prosecution of the war. Hull indicated that the USA might continue to recognize Seni as his country’s representative, but the latter showed little interest in this and returned to his theme of actively supporting the Allies. Hull commended Seni’s enthusiasm, but suggested that he wait to see how the situation developed. Seni agreed.<sup>9</sup>

In suggesting that the USA might continue to recognize Seni as a diplomatic representative, Hull undoubtedly had in mind the precedent established by Washington’s handling of the Danish minister after the German invasion. He, like Seni, had no basis for claiming to represent a government-in-exile, but American interest in Greenland, Denmark’s vulnerable and strategically important colony, enhanced his importance. Of the policy Washington adopted, Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle Jr. had remarked to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau:

You and the Danish Minister and the President and I are building a Denmark in our heads for the time being . . . we’re just arranging there’s going to be a Denmark existing somewhere . . . and just keep on going until the Germans get out of there.<sup>10</sup>

Lacking a valuable asset comparable to Greenland to bring to the table, Seni, from the first day of the war, viewed the formation of an active Free Thai movement in the USA as the best hope for gaining credit with the Allies. Despite Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles’ declaration on 10 December that there would be no official recognition of any such “free movement” and his warning that American citizens should not involve themselves in lobbying campaigns by foreign groups, Seni would stick by this approach.<sup>11</sup>

Seni called on Berle on 11 December to express his willingness to break with his government and propose blaming the lack of Thai resistance on Premier Phibun’s treachery. Pointing out that the exact circumstances of

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of conversation, 8 December 1941, Reel 32, Cordell Hull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in John Morton Blum, *From the Morgenthau Diaries* (Boston, 1965), II: 135.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum by Adams, 10 December 1941, Box 386, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA and James I. Matray, *Reluctant Crusade* (Honolulu, 1985), 9–10.

events in Bangkok were not yet known, Berle advised Seni to limit himself to a more general statement emphasizing the traditional Thai commitment to national independence and including a declaration that he continued to represent a "free and independent Thailand." Seni accepted the suggestions. He also informed Berle that his military attaché and other Thai in the USA and the Philippines were interested in joining Allied military forces.<sup>12</sup>

Seni issued his statement at a late afternoon press conference on 11 December. He also sent a message to Bangkok declaring that he would "carry out only orders which in my opinion are of His Majesty's Government's free will." The next morning he called at Berle's office to report receipt of an official telegram conveying his government's decision to ally with Japan and advising him to destroy sensitive documents. Seni again ventured the opinion that Thailand "had been betrayed by one or two men, chiefly the Prime Minister." He asked Berle to intercede with the office of Coordinator of Information (COI), headed by Colonel William J. Donovan, so that he might make a speech via shortwave radio to his countrymen.<sup>13</sup>

The Americans agreed, so on 12 December Seni recorded his speech in both Thai and English. East Coast shortwave stations transmitted the speech soon afterward. West Coast station KGEI did not broadcast the Thai version, but aired the English version on the morning of 18 December. In the meantime, the BBC, All India Radio, and Singapore Radio had either broadcast the speech or reported its contents, so word of Seni's stance quickly reached Bangkok. Seni also sent telegrams to the Thai minister in London, the consul general in Singapore, and King Ananda in Switzerland declaring his determination to "struggle for the freedom of our country." The Thai military attaché, Lieutenant Colonel M. L. Khap Khunchon (Kharb Kunjara),<sup>14</sup> urged his counterpart in Singapore to seek British assistance in spreading leaflets inside Thailand proclaiming the launching of a Free Thai movement in Washington.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum by Berle, 11 December 1941, Box 386, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>13</sup> Berle memorandum, 12 December 1941, Box 386, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution and "Dec. 1-11 1941" Folder, Box 213, Adolf Berle Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (hereafter FDR Library), Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>14</sup> "M. L." is an abbreviation of the title "Mom Luang," which is held by great, great-grandchildren of a king.

<sup>15</sup> Report on Seni's speech, 371-31862-3933, F 1341, Foreign Office Files, PRO; Burke to West, 16 December 1941, "Thai Division 11/41-4/43" folder, Box 3117, Entry 494, RG 208 and "The Free Thai Movement," Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA; Smyth memorandum, 15 December 1941, Box 385, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution; and Remer to Donovan, 31 December 1941, Reel 60, "Records

"We cannot very well expect to regain our freedom unless we fight for it," declared Seni in his broadcast speech. Calling on his countrymen to uphold the September 1941 law mandating an active defense of Thailand's neutrality, he rashly exhorted: "Destroy tools, burn up crops, habitation and farm equipment, slaughter all your livestock and destroy everything that may be useful to the enemy." Noting that his military attaché had asked that "he and several Thai young men with military training be sent to fight the enemy," Seni urged Thai residing in the Philippines and Malaya to make similar offers. In a direct appeal to his former students at Thammasat University, he urged: "Start a revolt. Spread it far and wide. Give up your lives for your country!"<sup>16</sup>

Seni's fiery appeal made a good impression at COI, an organization established only six months earlier as an intelligence and psychological warfare organ under the ambitious and dynamic Donovan, a much decorated World-War-I veteran, successful New York corporate attorney, and Republican politician, who had served as assistant attorney general during the Calvin Coolidge Administration. In a memorandum to Donovan, COI's Far East Section Chief C. F. Remer reported that his Thailand expert, Kenneth P. Landon, believed Seni's speech likely to "electrify the Thai people." Noting that Seni, who had described himself to COI representatives as "a Thai DeGaulle," wanted continued access to broadcast facilities, Remer concluded: "It would seem that his attitude offers an opportunity for effective influencing of the Thai people, which you may want to push."<sup>17</sup>

At this juncture, no American shortwave station broadcast regularly in the Thai language. Landon sought to fill this void by working with the Thai Legation to produce recorded fifteen-minute features for broadcast six days a week over two east-coast shortwave stations (near Boston and Schenectady, New York) from 16 January 1942. The west-coast facility that directly targeted the Asia-Pacific region, KGEI, began broadcasting the programs three days later. The State Department, concerned that the programs would provoke the Thai government into demanding Seni's

of the Office of Strategic Services, 1941–1945. Washington Director's Office Administrative Files" produced by the National Archives and Records Service and distributed by Scholarly Resources. This latter microfilm collection is catalogued as M1642 at the National Archives, so hereafter cited as "M1642, USNA."

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from a report on Seni's speech found in 371-31862-3933 in F 1341, PRO.

<sup>17</sup> Remer to Donovan, 31 December 1941, Reel 60, M1642, USNA. Donovan has been the subject of biographies, including Anthony Cave Brown, *The Last Hero* (New York, 1982) and Richard Dunlop, *Donovan: America's Master Spy* (Chicago, 1982). An authoritative account of the emergence of COI is found in Thomas F. Troy, *Donovan and the CIA* (Washington, 1981), 23–70. Also, see Bradley F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors* (New York, 1983), 3–94.

direct exchange for Minister Peck, intervened to halt the broadcasts near the end of January. By promising that Seni would not personally speak for the time being, Landon managed to get the broadcasts back on the air.<sup>18</sup>

Airmailing recorded programs from Washington to San Francisco worked poorly, however, since the information was often outdated by air time. By May, the COI office in San Francisco had crafted a solution to this problem. Two Thai students at Stanford University, Rachan Kanchanawanit (Kanjana-Vanit) and Phunphoem Kairoek (Poonperm Krairiksh), were employed to translate and announce five-minute news-casts written in the San Francisco office. Rachan also voiced ten-minute commentaries provided by the Thai Legation to fill the remainder of a daily, fifteen-minute time block. Nirat Samathapan (Samathapand), a student at the University of California, served as script checker.<sup>19</sup>

Only in April 1943, long after Peck and his staff were safely repatriated, did the State Department permit Seni to broadcast again, but it insisted on carefully screening his scripts. Seni's recorded commentaries eventually aired on a monthly basis. By 1945, the San Francisco-based Thai-language broadcasts had expanded to two-and-a-half hours daily with eight Thai translators and announcers engaged in their production.<sup>20</sup>

Seni had hoped the broadcasts would encourage a "spirit of resistance" and provide "encouraging news about the Allied war effort and success" at a time when there was little good news to report. Although rumors that the early broadcasts had fomented riots led Landon to be hailed in Washington circles "as the man who started a revolution in Thailand,"<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Seni, "Kwam samphan rawang Thai kap Amerika rawang songkham lok khrang thi song," 185; Letters from Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 20, 23 December 1942 and 6, 13, 16, 20, 27, 29 January 1942, Box 1, B6, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL; and "History of the Thai Division" and "Thailand 1944, Misc." folders, Box 3138, Entry 529; and Bookman to Barnes and West, 29 January 1942 and Bookman to Wilgus, 5 February 1942, "11/41-4/43" folder, Box 3117, Entry 494, RG 208, USNA.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Rachan Kanchanawanit and Nirat Samathapan, Bangkok, July 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Seni to Snoh, 6 March 1942, 371-31862-3933, Foreign Office Files, PRO and memorandum of meeting between Landon and Stanton, 1 April 1943, Box 385, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution. Also, Potter to Burke, Scott and Hovey, 8 May 1942; Wilgus to Crow, 9 May 1942; "New Thai Operations," 12 May 1942 and Burke to Murray, 15 May 1942 in "Thai Division 11/41-4/43" folder, Box 3117, Entry 494 and "Notes for a History of the Thai Division," "Preparation San Francisco" folder, Box 2, Entry 6H, RG 208, USNA. Copies of some of the scripts of 1942 broadcasts to Thailand are contained in Box 21, Stanford Listening Post Files, Hoover Institution.

<sup>21</sup> Remer to Donovan, 31 December 1942, Reel 60, M1642, USNA and Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 1 February 1942, Box 1, B6, Landon Collection, Wheaton College.

few dared at the time to make any overt protest against either the Phibun government or the Japanese. In fact, many Thai had been swept up in a wave of enthusiasm over the remarkable success of their seemingly invincible new allies. Thus the short-term importance of Seni's actions and public statements lay primarily in their impact on American official and public opinion.

Seni knew that he faced an uphill battle in winning American sympathy for his country. The negative reporting of Minister Grant had predisposed many officials to view the Phibun government as inherently pro-Japanese. In fact, Washington initially displayed a more negative attitude toward Thailand's capitulation and its alliance with Japan than did London. Seni also recognized that the American public had little knowledge of, or interest in, Thailand. Those who were aware of it, he later wrote, thought of it only as "a Far Eastern country with Siamese twins and cats." The border war with French Indochina had tarnished whatever positive image it had previously enjoyed, and an American magazine had parodied the country's new name as "Toyland." Accordingly, Seni keenly felt the need to "convince the Americans that [the Thai] were patriotic, freedom loving, willing to sacrifice and as idealistic as Americans." He also sought to portray them as traditionally pro-American and hapless victims of a powerful aggressor.<sup>22</sup>

In an interview on Philadelphia's WFIL radio on 8 January 1942, for example, Seni stressed that Thailand had maintained its independence for 700 years, had always bounced back from severe defeats and would do so in this case. Placing Thailand in "the unfortunate category of those other small countries which have already fallen before the cowardly surprise attacks of the Axis Powers," he blamed the paucity of resistance on Japanese "fifth-column elements" and "the overwhelming disparity of forces." Seni likened Thailand to "a small boy alone and single-handed, armed with a pop-gun, being called upon to fight a big, burly bully armed to the teeth."<sup>23</sup>

Although Washington officials appreciated Seni's prompt and vocal support for the Allied side in the dark days after Pearl Harbor, most doubted the practical significance of his efforts. Berle, after conferring with British representatives and his colleagues, reported to President Roosevelt on 5 January 1942: "The Thai Minister here is running a 'Free

<sup>22</sup> Seni, "Kwam samphan rawang Thai kap Amerika," 180–89. Representative of the Free Thai propaganda line is the Free Thai Committee's "Recent Developments in Thailand," 27 November 1942 (mimeo).

<sup>23</sup> WFIL Radio Script, 8 January 1942, Box 386, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution.

Thailand' movement all by himself. There seems to be no objection, though as yet he does not represent much."<sup>24</sup>

A few were more optimistic, however. State Department Political Advisor Dr. Stanley K. Hornbeck saw Seni as a potentially valuable asset. He urged a prompt decision on whether or not the USA would offer him meaningful support lest it become a case of "helping him to get out on the end of a limb and then making it impossible for his efforts to be of any value either to us or to him."<sup>25</sup>

An even more enthusiastic and valuable ally was COI's Landon, who had served as a Presbyterian missionary in southern Thailand for a decade (1927–37) before obtaining a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago and taking up a teaching position at Earlham College in Indiana. COI hired Landon as one of its first area experts in 1941 on the strength of his Thai and Chinese language proficiency and his perceptive study of post-1932 Thailand, *Siam in Transition*. Landon not only saw the Thai people as blameless victims, but viewed Premier Phibun more sympathetically than did Seni. Landon acknowledged that there might have been a "Quisling" or two in Thailand, but blamed Phibun's quick capitulation on Thai "impotency." In a letter to his wife, Landon wrote:

The Thai were helpless to protect their own country. The British had promised nothing and were not prepared to do anything. The Thai military leaders had toured the famed Singapore base and the Malayan defenses just the week before the Japs attacked and they, if they knew how to use their eyes, could see the weakness of the British defense. And we promised them nothing. They saw it as foolhardy to fight and they gave in.<sup>26</sup>

Using his research position at COI as his initial base, the energetic, gregarious Landon began to establish personal connections in other government agencies, including military intelligence. He took full advantage of the fact that he was virtually the only American in Washington with

<sup>24</sup> Berle to FE and FD, 30 December 1941, Reel 17, "Lot Files of the US Department of State Relating to Southeast Asia 1944–1958" C14, USNA. This collection is hereafter cited as "SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA." Also, Berle to FDR, 5 January 1942, Box 67, Adolf Berle Papers, FDR Library.

<sup>25</sup> Hornbeck to Smyth, Hamilton and Berle, 17 December 1941, Box 385, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 12 January and 6 February 1942, Box 1, B6, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College. One of the first Thai students to volunteer for military service, Phisut Suthat (letter to the author, 16 December 2003) recalled that Landon expressed this view to Thai students during frequent visits at the Thai Legation during December 1941 and provided news of developments in Southeast Asia. He encouraged them to believe in the ultimate victory of the Allies. He credits Landon's "sympathy, comfort, guidance, and encouragement" as a factor in his and other students' decision to volunteer for military service.



expertise on contemporary Thailand.<sup>27</sup> His active networking would pave the way for his subsequent upward career moves to the Board of Economic Warfare in mid-1942 and to the State Department in 1943. In the latter position he would exert much influence in the shaping of American policy toward Thailand.

Landon's sympathetic stance – supported by the initial on-the-scene assessments by both Minister Peck and British Minister Crosby – and Seni's anti-Axis actions appear to have had a positive impact on official attitudes in Washington. In contrast, the Japanese advance in Malaya and their invasion of Burma – both assaults primarily launched and supplied from Thai territory – pushed British official opinion on Thailand in precisely the opposite direction. This divergence became clear in Washington's and Landon's responses to Thailand's declaration of war on 25 January 1942.<sup>28</sup>

Seni subsequently claimed that Bangkok had instructed him by telegram to deliver the war declaration to the State Department, but he dramatically informed Hull of his unwillingness to do so at a face-to-face meeting in the latter's office. There is nothing in Hull's office diary or other State Department records to support this story.<sup>29</sup> Bangkok had queried Seni about his failure to uphold his government's policy in a telegram relayed via the Thai Minister in Portugal, but Seni told Berle on 29 January that he had received no official notification of the declaration of war through that or any other channel. Word of it initially reached Washington via Tokyo Radio and the *New York Times*.

Further, Secretary Hull was preoccupied with other matters, out of sorts, ill, and frequently absent from the office. In early February he left Washington for a lengthy recuperation in Florida.<sup>30</sup> Seni dealt with

<sup>27</sup> In a letter of 1 April 1942 (Box 1, B6, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College) Landon proudly advised his wife that "I have made a fair mark here and the higher-ups notice me."

<sup>28</sup> Larry A. Niksch, "The United States Foreign Policy in Thailand's Postwar Peace Settlements with Great Britain and France," unpublished Ph.D. diss. Georgetown University, 1976, 5 and James V. Martin Jr., "Thai-American Relations in World War II," *Journal of Asian Studies* 22 (August 1963): 460 comment on the change in British attitude.

<sup>29</sup> Hull's desk diaries are on Reel 39, Cordell Hull Papers, Library of Congress. The story of the Hull meeting has been attributed to Seni in many sources since it first appeared in an article in *Newsweek*, 3 September 1945, most recently in Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 52–54. The accuracy of the story has been questioned by various Thai critics, including Chintana Yotsunthon in "Seri Thai nai Amerika" in Khana Kamakan Chomrom Phraniphon Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphap, ed., *Songkhram khrang samkhan nai samai krung Rattanakosin* (Bangkok, n.d.), 117–18 and Pridi Phanomyong in *Political and Military Tasks of the Free-Thai Movement* (Bangkok, 1979), 5–7.

<sup>30</sup> Irwin F. Gellman in *Secret Affairs* (Baltimore, 1995), 274–79, 290–91 discusses Hull's illnesses.



Berle during this period, not Hull. The evidence suggests that Seni subsequently attempted to dramatize the situation by transforming his 29 January session with Berle into a meeting with Hull, who was much better known in Thailand.

According to State Department notes, Seni told Berle that he wished to send a telegram to Bangkok, via Berne, stating that he would refuse to deliver a declaration of war, *if* one came. In fact, the formal notice of the declaration of war arrived at the State Department on 2 February via the Swiss Foreign Ministry and the American embassy in Berne. Nine days later, Seni reaffirmed his determination to disregard the declaration in a memorandum to the State Department.<sup>31</sup>

In a 22 January 1942 memorandum, Robert L. Smyth of the State Department's Far Eastern Division explained the reasoning behind the American decision to ignore the declaration of war. He suggested that the USA should "not dignify the action of the present Japanese-controlled Government of Thailand by a formal declaration of war, but treat Thailand as occupied territory and treat any Thai forces that fought or interfered with Allied troops as enemies." The Chinese Embassy endorsed this approach, suggesting that this would show "that the United Nations are actually in sympathy with the Thai army and people." Berle approved, too, pointing out that declarations of war by the Axis satellite states of Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria had been ignored. Secretary Hull agreed, as did President Roosevelt on 28 January. Berle noted the President's desire that the situation be explained to the appropriate congressional committees to "complete the record and treat the declarations with the contempt they deserved."<sup>32</sup>

In marked contrast, on 9 February London responded in kind to Bangkok's declaration of war. As one unnamed British official later put it, London had come to believe that "either the Thais are children and should be subjected to control after the war or they are rogues and should be punished for taking the side of the Japanese."<sup>33</sup> Thus in two

<sup>31</sup> A 30 January 1942 State Department memorandum, 711.92/39, RG 59, USNA, describes the 29 January meeting with Berle and mentions Seni's proposed telegram. The notice of the declaration of war forwarded via the Swiss Foreign Office is printed in *The Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter, FRUS) 1942, I: 915. A copy of Seni's 11 February 1942 memorandum has not been located, but he refers to it in a memorandum to the State Department of 23 December 1943 in "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA. Seni could not have personally presented this document to Hull on 11 February, as the Secretary of State was in Florida by that time.

<sup>32</sup> Smyth memoranda, 27 January 1942, Boxes 285 and 408, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution; two Berle to Hull memoranda dated 28 January 1942, Adolf A. Berle Papers, Box 58, FDR Library; and Chinese Embassy to State Department, 28 January 1942, FRUS 1942, I: 915.

<sup>33</sup> The British official is quoted by Mani Sanasen in "The Free Thais in England," September 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

months' time American and British attitudes toward Thailand had largely reversed, setting the stage for policy conflicts that would persist until the war's end and beyond.

Thailand's declaration of war reinforced Seni's belief that public relations alone could not insure Thailand's continued independence in the event of an Allied victory. A tangible contribution to the Allied cause would be necessary. Seni's only potential assets were the legation and its staff, approximately ten million dollars in Thai funds frozen in American banks and about a hundred Thai residents, but it was not clear how useful any of these might be. Seni's diplomatic status depended upon the continued goodwill of the State Department, frozen Thai funds could be tapped only with the cooperation of the State and Treasury Departments, and the extent to which the Thai in the United States would be willing to fight for, or otherwise support, the Allied cause remained uncertain.<sup>34</sup>

In the event, Seni had good luck. The Phibun government did not make his return a *quid pro quo* for repatriation of Minister Peck, and the State Department decided to pretend that Seni continued to represent Thailand. This enabled him to retain control of the legation property and led the Americans to allow him to tap into the frozen Thai assets. In an internal memorandum Berle described the latter decision as purely political and based on no legal precedent. "The plan," he explained, "is to permit the Thai Minister only to spend a limited amount of money needed for running a very modest legation and to carry out the commitments of the Thai government in respect of the Thai students in this country."<sup>35</sup>

Another positive development came in February when Smyth – at the suggestion of John Paton Davies, the political advisor to General Joseph Stilwell (the newly appointed American chief of staff to Chiang Kai-shek)-asked Seni to draw up a list of "reliable and influential Thai nationals known to be definitely patriotic and anti-Japanese." Seni seized this opportunity to shape American perceptions of Thai politicians, producing a list of "reliables" headed by Regent Pridi, politicians Khuang Aphaiwong and Wilat Osathanon, and diplomat Phraya Sisen. Others Seni suggested as potential opponents of the ruling Phibun clique included his brother, M. R. Kukrit Pramot (Pramoj), and his brother-in-law, Phra Phinit.<sup>36</sup>

With his position stabilized, Seni advanced plans to mobilize Thai volunteers in support of the Allies. Beyond the legation staffers and their

<sup>34</sup> Seni, "Kwam samphan rawang Thai kap Amerika rawang songkhram lok khrang thi song," 178–79, 181–83.

<sup>35</sup> Berle to Welles, 7 March 1942, Box 73, Adolf Berle Papers, FDR Library.

<sup>36</sup> Hamilton memorandum, 24 February 1942, Reel 17, SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA.

families, most of the other Thai residents were students enrolled at a range of colleges and universities, including such prestigious institutions as Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Cornell. These students faced difficult personal circumstances in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Not only were they cut off from their families, but most relied on government stipends, paid through the Legation, which could no longer be counted on. The Thai declaration of war in January deepened their concern about the treatment they might receive from American authorities. A sympathetic New York family went so far as to adopt Cornell student Sala Thasanon (Dasananda) to protect him from a possible forced repatriation.<sup>37</sup>

It gradually became clear that repatriation would be voluntary, but the students had to weigh their options carefully. If they returned to their Japanese-dominated homeland they surely would be suspect because of their former residence in the USA. On the other hand, if they stayed put, they would face an uncertain future. Many wondered if family and friends would understand if they chose to remain in the USA. The offspring of key government figures – including two of Premier Phibun's children – had little leeway; a decision to remain abroad could imperil their fathers' standing with the Japanese. Other special circumstances came into play, too, as in the case of Prince Chakraphanpensiri Chakraphan, a graduate student at Louisiana State University who had a pregnant wife. In the end, though, only eighteen Thai boarded the exchange ship *Gripsholm* in June for the long voyage to Bangkok.<sup>38</sup>

A variety of factors encouraged the majority of the students, most of whom, like Seni, saw their nation as a victim of Japanese aggression, to stay. Some were confident that they could support themselves if they stayed in the USA, but even those less certain of this were encouraged by Seni's success in re-establishing student stipends, albeit at a reduced level. Reflecting government priorities at the time, the majority of the scholarship students were males specializing in science or engineering. Impressed by American technological prowess, most believed a fully mobilized America would emerge victorious. Association with the winning side could offer both personal and national advantages. It remained

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Sala Thasanon (Dasananda), Bangkok, 14 July 1993.

<sup>38</sup> Free Thai Committee, "Recent Developments in Thailand," 27 November 1942 (mimeo), 22; Chintana, "Seri Thai nai Amerika" in Khana, ed., *Songkhram khrang samkhan nai samai krung Rattanakosin*, 118–20; Seni, "Kwam samphan rawang Thai kap Amerika rawang songkhram lok khrang thi song," 177–78; "Free Thai Movement," n.d., Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA; interview with Prince Chakraphan Pensiri, Bangkok, 9 July 1993; and interview with Bunrot (Boonrod) Binson, Bangkok, 13 July 1993.

uncertain, however, how many would be suitable and willing candidates for military service.<sup>39</sup>

As it became clear that the majority of the students would remain, Seni turned his attention to the Thai students in Great Britain. Like their counterparts in America, the majority did not wish to be repatriated to a Japanese-dominated homeland, but they had received neither help nor sympathy from the Thai minister in London. Concerned about the fate of his family in Bangkok, he had followed instructions from the Phibun government. He and a secretary were interned in the Legation to await repatriation, while other staff members and their families were assigned quarters in a London hotel. The Minister cut off the stipends of fifty-seven government-supported students, leaving them in difficult straits, particularly after the British decision to respond in kind to the Thai declaration of war. Widespread fear of fifth-column activity made it difficult for them to secure employment, their movements were restricted, and they were relieved of such personal items as cars, cameras, and maps. But, as Oxford student Arun [Aroon] Sorathet later commented, “at least we weren’t put in a concentration camp.”<sup>40</sup>

Beyond the Legation staff, some of whom sympathized with the students but were afraid to speak out, the natural leaders of the Thai community in Britain were three high-ranking members of the royal family, Prince Chula Chakraphong (Chakrabongse), a grandson of King Chulalongkorn, who was married to a British woman; Queen Ramphai Phanni (Rambhai Barni), the widow of the late, self-exiled King Prajadhipok; and the Queen’s brother, Prince Suphasawatwongsanit Sawatdiwat (hereafter, Prince Suphasawat, also known by his nickname “Chin”), a former Thai army officer and chief of palace security who had accompanied the royal couple into exile. Prince Chula declined involvement in Free Thai activities, opting instead for wartime services with the British home guard. British officials may have encouraged him to remain on the sidelines because they thought he might be politically useful in

<sup>39</sup> Interviews with various Free Thai officers, including Pao Khamurai (Pow Khamourai), Bangkok, 7 July 1993 and Anond Siwatthana (Anond Srivardhana), Santa Clara, CA, 19 August 1993. Also, Free Thai Committee, “Recent Developments in Thailand,” 27 November 1942, 22–23.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Arun Sorathet (Aroon Sorathesn), Bangkok, 29 January 1988. An English secretary at the Thai Legation, Mary Pennington, and the supervisor of Thai students, A. C. Carden, provided Seni with inside information on the situation in London. Copies of their letters are found in HS1-65, PRO. Also, Mani Sansen, “The Free Thais in England,” September 1943, HS1-72, PRO; Puey Ungphakorn (Puai Ungphakon), “Temporary Soldier,” in Direk Jayanama (Chayanam), *Siam and World War II*, translated by Jane G. Keyes (Bangkok, 1978), 126–30; and Thot Phanthumsen, “Seri Thai say Angkrit” in Khana, ed., *Songkhrām khroṅg samkhan nai samai krung Rattanakosin*, 142–49.

the future. This is suggested by a 1942 Foreign Office memorandum that spoke of keeping the prince “on ice” and affording him “rather special treatment.”<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Queen Ramphai and her brother made clear their Free Thai sympathies and used their connections to assist like-minded students.

Prince Suphasawat had reacted to the Japanese invasion by dispatching a letter to Prime Minister Winston Churchill volunteering his services to the Allied cause. Although the Prince had been absent from his country for nearly seven years, British authorities were quick to recognize the potential usefulness of a well-educated military officer whose sincere support of the British cause they never had reason to doubt. On 1 January 1942 they asked him to assist the geographical section of the General Staff in developing maps of Thailand, a project which, through an all-out effort, he completed in six weeks. He also produced an insightful fifty-nine-page analysis of recent Thai politics for the British Ministry of Information. The Prince hoped that by proving his value he could gain a military position.<sup>42</sup>

Suphasawat wrote to Seni in January expressing his desire to join in a united Free Thai effort. Aware from correspondence with an acquaintance among the Thai students in England, Sena Ninkamhaeng (Snoh Nilkhamhaeng), that many of the students there feared being branded pro-royalist if they associated too closely with Prince Suphasawat and Queen Ramphai, Seni sent a cautious reply. Suphasawat himself well understood the student concern, as he made clear in the political analysis he produced for the British. The People's Party had repeatedly used the term “royalist” to tar anyone who disagreed with their policies, he explained. It had become a “bogey word of which everybody is afraid,” despite the absence of significant support in Thailand for a revival of the absolute monarchy.<sup>43</sup>

Their political reservations notwithstanding, two leaders of the pro-Allied students, Sena (Snoh) Tambunyen and Puai Ungphakon (Puey Ungphakorn), called on Prince Suphasawat in March 1942 to explain their desire to participate in the Allied war effort. Impressed by their determination, Suphasawat promised to help. He again contacted Churchill's office proposing that Thai volunteers could infiltrate into their homeland to organize anti-Japanese activities. He astutely pinpointed Pridi as

<sup>41</sup> Broad (Foreign Office) to Jebb (Ministry of Economic Warfare), 18 April 1942, HS1-65, PRO.

<sup>42</sup> Wanthani Phanitchakun, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat* (Bangkok, 2000), 55-123, 223 and Suphasawat to Seni, 14 May 1943, FO 371-31862-3953, PRO.

<sup>43</sup> Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 90. Seni's reply to Suphasawat's initial letter has not been located, but is referred to in Suphasawat's second letter of 14 May 1942.

a likely ally in this effort and correctly judged that the northeastern region of the country would offer the best initial base for operations. The Prince submitted a complete plan for such operations, representing Thailand as a weak spot in Japan's position in Southeast Asia.<sup>44</sup>

Suphasawat's well-conceived scheme attracted favorable notice in British military circles, and responsibility for implementation ultimately fell to Britain's clandestine warfare organization, the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Reflecting the optimism that led Churchill to suggest that SOE could "set Europe ablaze," an agency memorandum noted in its comments on the plan that "A great deal can be done by SOE with comparatively few agents: if hundreds are not available tens will do and can certainly be found."<sup>45</sup>

The Foreign Office, which had to be consulted because of potential political ramifications, reacted less enthusiastically. Its officers considered the Prince "discredited in Siam as a member of the ex-Royal family" and "unlikely to have any following there." They were equally unsupportive of his proposal to bring Seni to London for consultations. They knew the Americans would object, and in any case considered Seni "a man of weak character who is unlikely to be a leader."<sup>46</sup>

In the meantime, in a letter dated 6 March, Seni had promised student leader Sena Ninkamhaeng, that he would dispatch a personal representative, Mani Sanasen, to assist the Thai students. The son of a former Thai minister to Great Britain, Mani had served as a permanent staff member of the League of Nations in Geneva for more than ten years. Stranded abroad with the outbreak of the war, he had joined Seni in Washington. The Foreign Office, which held Mani in higher esteem than Seni, approved his mission.<sup>47</sup>

Bureaucratic wheels ground slowly, however, and in the interim Prince Suphasawat addressed another letter to Seni, attaching his military plan. He sought to convince Seni that he had no political motives other than promoting true democracy and freedom of speech in Thailand after the war. He called for a union of Free Thai efforts in Britain and the USA under Seni's leadership. Arguing that making propaganda from a

<sup>44</sup> Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 61 and Suphasawat to Seni, 14 May 1942, FO 371-31862-3953, PRO.

<sup>45</sup> "SOE Action in Thailand," 17 June 1942 and "Summary of Svasti's Appreciation," 16 June 1942, HS1-70, PRO.

<sup>46</sup> AB/U.1 to AB/U, 6 April 1942, HS1-70, PRO.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., and Seni to Snoh, 6 March 1942, F1341; Washington to London, 10 March 1942, F2491; and London to Washington, 14 April 1942, F2491/396/40 in 371-31862-3933; Mani Sanasen, "The Free Thais in England," September 1943, HS1-72 and "Report by Major Grut on Negotiations in Washington," HS-73, PRO, Kew; and Puey, "Temporary Soldier" in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 126-27.

comfortable sanctuary would not inspire support for the movement inside Thailand, he emphasized the importance of sacrifice and military action. The Prince received no reply, however, as Seni had consigned British matters to Mani.

On 4 June, Mani reached London, where he lobbied British officials and traveled to interview prospective recruits. Seven staff members of the Thai Legation broke ranks with their minister and announced their desire to stay in England. Only a quarter of the approximately one hundred Thai residents chose repatriation; more than half enrolled in what in Britain was called the Free Siamese Movement (FSM). Mani, however, kept Prince Suphasawat at arm's length as he sought to establish his own primacy. Through his work with the SOE, Suphasawat learned that Mani was attempting to discredit him with the British authorities. Further, Mani's reports to Seni made no mention of the Prince's efforts to organize the FSM, and Mani rejected all attempts by Suphasawat to establish better personal relations. When the Prince finally met Seni face to face in Bangkok after the war, he found him still convinced that the organization in England had been solely a result of Mani's efforts.<sup>48</sup>

In late June, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden at last gave his seal of approval to plans to utilize Thai volunteers. Eden suggested that they be organized into a military unit from which "individuals could at a later date be chosen when required for any particular purpose."<sup>49</sup>

British authorities advised Mani that the men could join the Pioneer Corps, a military labor unit open to enemy aliens, with the understanding that "special qualifications possessed by individuals should be made use of in other branches of the armed forces later on." The latter was a critical inducement because the Thai students, most of them from the upper crust of society, considered the Pioneer Corps "very low and dishonorable." Thirty-five males passed physicals and entered military service on 7 August; one additional volunteer joined later. Prince Suphasawat, who continued to work actively behind the scenes, secured a major's commission in the British army. Sixteen other Thai, including Queen Ramphai and three other women, volunteered for non-military tasks. The Queen also sponsored a send-off party for the military volunteers at a London Chinese restaurant.<sup>50</sup>

The several volunteers who were members of the extended royal family were keenly aware that their colleagues doubted their ability to endure

<sup>48</sup> Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 225–26, 417–18, 486 and Mani, "The Free Thais in England," September 1943, HS1-72, PRO. In the latter seven-page summary of Free Thai activities Mani did not even mention Prince Suphasawat's name.

<sup>49</sup> Clarke (FO) to Undersecretary of State, War Office, 30 June 1942, HS1-65, PRO.

<sup>50</sup> Scott (FO) to Mani, 3 August 1942, HS1-65 and Mani, "The Free Thais in England," September 1943, HS1-72, PRO. Also, Puey, "Temporary Soldier," in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 127–28 which lists all the Free Thai in England.



the hardships of military life, so they felt particular pressure to prove themselves as the military training began. Thus the athletically inclined Prince Karawik Chakraphan (Chakrabandhu), who had served as secretary to the late King Prajadhipok, eagerly seized an opportunity to don boxing gloves and spar with a tough British sergeant. In his memoir, he recalled with satisfaction that such displays of toughness helped win over his compatriots. In addition to facing the hardships of military training, the Thai volunteers had to engage in unfamiliar menial tasks, such as digging and peeling potatoes, over the next five months.<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Washington, it remained undetermined how the Thai students in the USA could be employed to best advantage. On 25 March, Colonel Khap, the Thai military attaché, proposed sending volunteers to Burma, the active front closest to the Thai border, to engage in psychological warfare operations against the Thai army. Reports had circulated that Thai forces had accompanied the Japanese army into Burma, although in fact they were assigned to protect the Thailand-Burma border north of the line of Japanese advance. Only in May 1942 would the Japanese permit the Thai army to invade the Shan states.<sup>52</sup>

The Foreign Liaison Office of Military Intelligence passed Khap's proposal to the COI on 30 March. Colonel Donovan's deputy in charge of operations, newspaper publisher Colonel M. Preston Goodfellow – described by a colleague as a “sort of promoter character . . . as irresponsible as a blue-bottle fly” who was noted for “meddling in everything” – enthusiastically took up the task of negotiating with Seni. Khap meanwhile met with Lieutenant Colonel Garland Williams, then in charge of the COI's special operations training, to discuss the military aspects of a Free Thai venture.<sup>53</sup>

Seni found the prospect of establishing a discrete Thai group under the COI appealing. He believed it would help gain cooperation from anti-Japanese forces inside Thailand if his men were not simply US soldiers. He also realized that if Thai volunteers were dispersed within the

<sup>51</sup> M. C. Karawik Chakraphan, *Tai rom chat*, (Bangkok, 1996), 122–32 and Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 225.

<sup>52</sup> Khap to Babbitt, 25 March 1942 and Donovan to Joint Chiefs of Staff, 16 August 1942, Reel 110, “Office of Strategic Services Microfilm Copy of Files Selected for Filming by Gen. William J. Donovan, Director of Strategic Services,” US Military History Institute, Carlisle, Barracks, PA. This microfilm collection is hereafter cited as “Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.”

<sup>53</sup> “Recommendation for Promotion,” Box 2, M. Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution; “Project of the Free Thai Movement,” n.d., Folder 2991, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; and James Grafton Rogers, *Wartime Washington: The Secret OSS Journal of James Grafton Rogers*, edited by Thomas Troy (Frederick, MD, 1987), 9, 14. On Goodfellow's postwar involvements as an ally and promoter of Syngman Rhee, see Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korea War*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1981, 1990).



American forces it would be difficult to evaluate and publicize their contributions to the war effort. Seni offered to pay the expenses of a COI-based Thai unit from unfrozen Thai assets as a means to underscore its independent, non-mercenary nature and to further maximize the credit that would accrue to Thailand.<sup>54</sup>

Seni's staff had pored over the list of Thai students, searching for likely candidates and submitted the chosen names to the COI for security vetting. Those who passed received a letter from the Thai Legation asking that they volunteer for potentially dangerous patriotic service. Students faced another difficult choice, as the letter came before the end of the spring semester and some were close to finishing their degree programs. To Khap's considerable disappointment, only thirteen immediately answered the call, reporting to Washington around the end of May 1942.<sup>55</sup>

Seni and his staff met with the volunteers at the Legation. When informed that they would be trained as soldiers by the Americans, Harvard student Chok na Ranong asked if they would be considered Thai or American soliders. Seni emphasized his preference for the former. Chok suggested that they call themselves "Free Thai soldiers" to distinguish themselves from Phibun's men. Second Secretary Luang Ditthakan interjected that the USA had indicated that it would not recognize any additional "free" movements. Chok responded that, as such movements were not forbidden, one could be organized without seeking official US recognition.<sup>56</sup> The decision did not rest with the Thai, however, as the Americans would have the final say over the military status of any Thai volunteers they trained.

Matters were complicated by the fact that the COI's future remained in doubt in the spring of 1942 as military intelligence agencies and the Federal Bureau of Investigation battled to eliminate this unwanted bureaucratic rival. In the end, COI's overt propaganda activities – including the Thai language broadcasts – were placed under the control of the new Office of War Information (OWI), but the psychological warfare, intelligence, and research and analysis branches remained under Donovan's leadership. Renamed the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), his truncated organization now fell under the aegis of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Donovan's determination to lay the groundwork for a

<sup>54</sup> Seni, in Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, 154 and Thai Legation to Donovan, 6 August 1942, Reel 60, M1642, USNA.

<sup>55</sup> Letters from Phisut Suthat (Pisoot Sudasna) to author, 15 November 2003 and 9 July 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.; interview with Chok na Ranong, Bangkok, 20 July 1993; and Chok's memorandum in Wimon Wiriyawit, ed., *Free Thai: Personal Recollections and Official Documents* (Bangkok, 1997), 37–40.

permanent centralized intelligence agency with clandestine warfare functions remained undiminished.<sup>57</sup>

The student military volunteers began training on 13 June 1942, the same day President Roosevelt signed the order establishing the OSS. Initially expected to infiltrate Thailand to organize anti-Japanese guerrilla units, the men worked their way through a series of OSS camps in Maryland and Virginia, undergoing physical training, learning to use small arms and explosives, practicing radio operations, and engaging in hand-to-hand combat and other guerrilla tactics.<sup>58</sup>

Early plans envisioned China as their operational base because on 29 December 1941 the American and British Combined Chiefs of Staff, meeting in Washington, had allotted Thailand and French Indochina to the China Theater commanded by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The British and Americans were committed to a “Europe first” strategy, so they viewed this as a morale-boosting gesture to encourage Chiang’s perseverance in his already four-and-half-year-long war of resistance against the Japanese. At that dark moment, when all was going badly for the Allies, concern about keeping China in the war outweighed worries about possible postwar Chinese territorial and political ambitions in Southeast Asia.<sup>59</sup>

In January 1942, the COI produced a plan for a China-based operation, Project OLIVIA, aimed at penetrating eight surrounding areas, including Thailand. For this purpose, Donovan’s men recruited a special operations unit, headed by Major Carl Eifler, to operate from China under the command of the recently dispatched General Stilwell. OSS chose Eifler, who had served under Stilwell some years before in a California army reserve unit, on the latter’s recommendation. The bulk of his twenty-man group departed on 28 May by ship, while Eifler and one other officer flew ahead to Asia.<sup>60</sup>

Landon became planner and potential manager of another OLIVIA venture aimed at utilizing Chinese secret societies to penetrate French Indochina and Thailand. The project developed to the point that Landon

<sup>57</sup> On the bureaucratic travails of COI during this period, see: Troy, *Donovan and the CIA*, 117–53. See the comments on Donovan’s long-term goal in Edmond Taylor, *Awakening from History* (Boston, 1969), 349–50.

<sup>58</sup> Donovan to JCS, 18 August 1942, Reel 14, M1642 and “Project of the Free Thai Movement,” Folder 2991, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>59</sup> Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Mission to China* (Washington, DC, 1953), 61–63 and Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind* (New York, 1978), 216–17.

<sup>60</sup> Babbitt to COI, 30 March 1942, Reel 14, M1642, USNA; DePass to Donovan, 27 January 1942, Box 4, M. Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution; interview with Carl Eifler, Salinas, CA, 24 August 1994; and interview with Francis T. Devlin, Washington, DC, 25 October 1994. For more on OLIVIA, see Maochun Yu, *OSS in China* (New Haven, 1996), 24–27.

prepared for departure to China, but his superiors abruptly cancelled the scheme at the end of May 1942. Landon, who had planned to use a position at the American Embassy in Chungking as cover, suspected that the State Department had vetoed the operation, a real possibility given that the irascible ambassador in China, Clarence Gauss, took a dim view of COI's activities.<sup>61</sup>

A further step toward clearing the way for a China-based Free Thai operation under OLIVIA came in June 1942 when Donovan negotiated an agreement with British intelligence giving both nations the right to attempt penetration of Thailand. Donovan then sought the American military establishment's approval to dispatch a Free Thai unit to China.<sup>62</sup>

When Donovan's proposal came before the Joint Psychological Warfare Committee (JPWC) on 20 August, the matter of whether Free Thai volunteers should be inducted into the US Army remained undecided. The fact that the man expected to lead the unit, Colonel Khap, had failed a US Army physical complicated matters, but Donovan recommended that the other volunteers be inducted. He suggested that an American liaison officer and Khap accompany the men to China, with Khap serving in the anomalous position of lieutenant colonel in the "Free Thai Army." Donovan also favored rejecting the Thai Legation's offer to fund the expedition "to insure complete control of this mission by United States military authorities." Four days later, the JPWC decided to forward the plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), contingent on General Stilwell's approval of the project.<sup>63</sup>

By this time, Major Eifler had reached Chungking, where he had to lobby for the acceptance of his twenty-man OSS unit. Stilwell, concerned that its presence would further complicate his touchy relations with the Chinese, refused, instead assigning Eifler's team the task of carrying out guerrilla operations into Burma from a base in India. Eifler recalled that during their conversations Stilwell mentioned the operation involving the Free Thai volunteers and asked: "You don't want them, do you?" Eifler replied that indeed he did, thereby convincing Stilwell to agree to their dispatch.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth Landon's involvement in this scheme is mentioned in numerous letters to Margaret Landon between 13 January and 27 May 1942, Box 1, B6, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College. On Gauss and the COI, see Yu, *OSS in China*, 62–63. This is further discussed in the [next chapters](#).

<sup>62</sup> Hoffman to Buxton, 5 August 1943, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and "Record of Discussion Regarding Collaboration Between British and the US SOE," 17 June 1942, Box 4, Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution. Also, see Jay Jakub, *Spies and Saboteurs* (New York, 1999), 39–53 on the London talks.

<sup>63</sup> Donovan to JCS, 18 August 1942, Reel 14, M1642, USNA.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Carl Eifler, Salinas, CA, 24 August 1994.

Eifler's Burma assignment and the decision to attach the Free Thai officers to his unit made sense in the context of a Stilwell war plan recently approved by Chiang Kai-shek. Because China now could be supplied only via the treacherous and inefficient "Hump" air route over the lofty Himalayan Mountains, Stilwell wanted an offensive southward from India and China to reopen the Burma Road and push into Thailand. The plan called for another force to attack into Indochina to re-open the rail route from Hanoi to Kunming in China's Yunnan Province. OSS guerrilla and intelligence-gathering operations might provide useful support for such a two-pronged offensive.<sup>65</sup>

Once Stilwell had agreed to allow the Free Thai to work under Eifler in Burma, the JCS sanctioned the OSS plan on 11 September, but with two modifications. The JCS decided that the Thai volunteers would not be inducted into the US Army and that the funding offered by the Thai Legation should be accepted for the overseas portion of the mission.<sup>66</sup>

Goodfellow formally notified Seni of these decisions in a letter dated 22 September. Subsequently, the Treasury Department approved the release of \$500,000 in frozen Thai assets to fund the Free Thai group. A check in that amount, dated 18 November 1942, duly arrived at OSS headquarters. Donovan estimated the project's first-year operational expenses at \$245,000.<sup>67</sup>

In early September, additional Thai recruits entered OSS training and Captain Francis T. Devlin assumed the role of liaison with Khap and the Thai Legation. Devlin, a Boston native who had graduated in West Point's class of 1940, had trained with Eifler's group, but stayed behind to serve as the group's liaison and supply officer in Washington. Because the OSS preferred to keep Khap out of its headquarters, Devlin usually conferred with him at the Thai Legation. Devlin chose Lieutenant Nicol Smith, just back from a COI undercover mission in Vichy France, to handle the finances of the group and shepherd the men to China.<sup>68</sup>

The thirty-two-year-old Smith, a short, stout man possessed of consummate charm and the gift of the gab, was among many socialites recruited into COI by Colonel Donovan. The only child of a wealthy California family, Smith had attended the elite Choate School before returning west to Stanford University. His 1938 marriage to oil heiress

<sup>65</sup> Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, 66–67, 136, 151, 181–83.

<sup>66</sup> "Excerpts from Inter-agency Meetings on Free Thai Proposal," Reel 34 and Leahy to Donovan, 11 September 1942, Reel 110, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Marshall to Stilwell, 5 September 1942, 000.24, "Thai 8-20-42," Box 1, RG 165, USNA.

<sup>67</sup> Goodfellow to Seni, 22 September 1942, Box 1, W. Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution. Also, Donovan to JCS, 18 August 1942, Reel 14 and Donovan to Luang Dittthakan, 11 January 1943, Reel 79, M1642, USNA.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Francis T. Devlin, Washington, DC, 25 October 1994.

Moir Archbold – her grandfather had been a key associate of John D. Rockefeller – gave Smith ample financial leeway to pursue a career as a travel writer and lecturer. His 1939 trip through Burma and China's Yunnan Province, described in his popular book, *Burma Road* (1940), had given him some credibility as an expert on Asia.<sup>69</sup>

Advising Smith that his first task would be equipping the Thai group, Devlin attempted to explain the intricacies of the military supply system. Daunted, Smith asked if the Thai Legation had in fact set aside half a million dollars to finance the project? When Devlin affirmed this, Smith suggested avoiding red tape by purchasing the equipment from Abercrombie and Fitch in New York, the company that had supplied his own expeditions. Although initially skeptical, “the more I thought about it, the more I figured it was their money,” Devlin recalled, “It would save time and he could do it right. So the Free Thai became probably the most beautifully equipped small unit in the United States Army, from sleeping bags on.”<sup>70</sup> Smith stocked the unit's supply depot – the garage at the Thai Legation – with everything from weapons to ping pong balls.

While initially the OSS had classified the function of the Thai group as special operations (SO) – sabotage and guerrilla actions against the enemy – the need to obtain information from Thailand made special intelligence (SI) an equal priority. Devlin emphasized the point to Smith by characterizing Thailand as an informational black hole<sup>71</sup> – a considerable overstatement. In fact, the American officials had learned a great deal about the post-Pearl Harbor situation in Bangkok from Minister Peck and other American residents of Thailand who returned by exchange ship in the fall of 1942. Also, although the OSS remained out of the loop, military intelligence regularly intercepted and decoded Japanese diplomatic messages to and from Bangkok. Japanese army codes had not yet been broken, though, so agents inside the country could provide useful information on Japanese troop strength and military movements.

The operational plan Khap drew up for the Thai group reflected the dual SO/SI emphasis. This document, apparently drafted during the last months of 1942, called for infiltration from an advanced base in southern China. The fact that most of the Free Thai officers were from Bangkok and lacked familiarity with the topography and dialects

<sup>69</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 13–17 and Sharon E. Karr, *Traveler of the Crossroads: The Life of Adventurer Nicol Smith* (Dorrington, CA, 1994), 1–228.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Francis T. Devlin, Washington, DC, 25 October 1994. Also, Smith and Clark, *Into Siam Underground Kingdom*, 20–22 and Devlin to Eifler, 27 June 1943, Folder 96, Box 45, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>71</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 16.

of northern Thailand posed a problem. However, Lieutenant Karawek Siwichan (Srivicharn) had been stationed in the north with the Thai army, so Khap chose him for a three-week solo reconnaissance mission. After reporting back to base, Karawek would return to Thailand, accompanied by a radio operator. Additional teams would follow. Once established, each would set up a cell to organize sabotage and guerrilla actions and prepare for an Allied invasion. Khap also envisioned setting up a shortwave broadcasting facility in China from which appeals could be made for Thai to flee their homeland and join the Free Thai.<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, a contemporary OSS report assessed negatively the prospects for stimulating early Thai resistance to the Japanese. It accurately predicted that economic pressures would increase Thai hostility toward the Japanese, but doubted that the Thai would actively support the Allies until liberation came into sight. It did, however, cite reports of a growing "anti-Japanese faction in the Government," estimated to number at least 8,000, a core group that eventually could provide the nucleus for a pro-Allied leadership.<sup>73</sup>

The Thai volunteers found their OSS training a difficult challenge. They were a diverse lot in age and background, ranging from career army and police officers – such as Karawek, Phon Intharathat (Indratat), and Chamrat Follett – to civilians who found military life quite alien. Racial and cultural gaps between them and their trainers were not always easily bridged, a fact reflected in OSS evaluations of the recruits. While the instructors found the Thai pleasant and likeable, they tended to doubt their seriousness and capacity for disciplined, aggressive action.<sup>74</sup>

At the beginning of November the waters were roiled when two Free Thai officers, Phisut Suthat (Pisoot Sudasna) and Ian Khamphanon (Khambanonda) were picked up by the FBI in Oxford, OH. The two had gone there on a radio field exercise. Under orders to maintain cover, they had inadvertently roused the suspicions of Phisut's former English professor from whose house they were transmitting.<sup>75</sup> The irate OSS Director of Training, Dr. Kenneth Baker, reacted to this embarrassing breach of security in a strong memorandum to Lieutenant Colonel Ellery C. Huntington Jr., a middle-aged New York lawyer and Donovan squash partner who had succeeded Goodfellow in charge of OSS secret

<sup>72</sup> "Project of the Free Thai Movement," Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>73</sup> "General Psychological Factors in the Far East," 21 September 1942, Reel 64, M1642, USNA.

<sup>74</sup> Evaluative profiles of members of the first group to enter training are found in Folder 1791, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA. Also, interview with Joseph Lazarsky, Middleburg, VA, 23 October 1994.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from Phisut Suthat to author, 9 July 2004.

operations. Baker blasted the Thai group, charging that despite “months of training, the students showed . . . no apparent comprehension of the basic principles of undercover work or, at least did not seem capable of putting these principles into operation.” Noting the doubts expressed by various instructors about their abilities, he concluded his indictment by citing concerns about “the security and loyalty of certain people in the group,” particularly its leader, Colonel Khap.<sup>76</sup>

Although Baker believed that the OSS should divorce itself entirely from the Thai operation, he recognized that “cutting them off now would entail security measures which we are probably not prepared to execute.” He suggested shipping the agents to the field as quickly as possible accompanied by a disclaimer expressing “our apprehension concerning them, so that OSS will in no way be held responsible for what might happen in the field. It would be pointed out in any such communication that we do not consider these Thailanders trained or capable of any very difficult assignment.”<sup>77</sup>

Colonel Huntington's subdued reply acknowledged that the Thai were “not as well trained as they might be.” However, based on a report from OSS communications chief, he laid the primary blame on an insufficient emphasis on security at OSS Camp C, where the Thai group did its radio training. Huntington, however, agreed with Baker that the unit should be dispatched to the field as soon as possible.<sup>78</sup>

When the FBI subsequently reported that the two officers had been operating the radio under orders from Colonel Khap, Baker advised Captain Devlin to discipline the Attaché. He added: “If you are not in the mood to dress down a Thai colonel, please let me know and perhaps I can help out.”<sup>79</sup>

Concerns that Khap might pose a security risk had already surfaced because of his reputation as a hard-drinking, party-loving, skirt-chaser. In conversation with Lieutenant Colonel Williams and in a formal *aide-mémoire* dated 13 July 1942, Seni had warned the OSS of Khap's irresponsible nature, emphasizing that “under no circumstances” was he “to be considered as a political representative of the Free Thai Movement.” Seni added, however, that he did not wish to judge Khap too harshly and suggested that he might render useful service if closely supervised.

<sup>76</sup> Bissell to Huntington, 11 November 1942 and Baker to Huntington, 7 November 1942, Folder 1790, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA. Also see Rogers, *Wartime Washington*, 15, note 21.

<sup>77</sup> Baker to Huntington, 7 November 1942, Folder 1790, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>78</sup> Lowman to Huntington, 7 November 1942 and Huntington to Baker, 9 November 1942, Folder 1790, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>79</sup> Baker to Devlin, Folder 1790, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA.



Americans with experience in Thailand also cited Khap's close personal ties to Premier Phibun and his reputation for fiscal irresponsibility.<sup>80</sup>

Despite such warnings, the OSS believed Khap's potential usefulness outweighed his liabilities. Colonel Donovan advised Devlin that it was impossible to run a proper security check on Khap, so he would be responsible for keeping an eye on the Colonel. Although Devlin had found no compelling reason to doubt Khap's loyalty, by December he had become concerned about disharmony among the Free Thai. He complained to a British counterpart that his role had increasingly become that of "Father Confessor" because of a widening breach between Khap and Seni.<sup>81</sup>

Ironically, both of the Thai officials were descendants of Thai King Rama II, although Khap was a generation further removed from their common royal ancestor. Like Seni, Khap had been educated in England, but there commonalities ended, as the two were diametric opposites in personality. Compared to the outgoing, fun-loving Colonel, the bookish Seni seemed priggish and stiff. As his brother Kukrit once put it, listening to Seni was "like listening to a proverb." This worked to Seni's disadvantage in his relations with the students, as sociability and the capacity to make others feel relaxed and happy are highly regarded skills in Thai society. Khap's abundant charm and the hospitality he and his wife had afforded the students had made him a popular figure. The fact that Anan Chintakanon, one of the Legation secretaries, had become close friends with Khap especially galled Seni.

Political differences also lay at the heart of the Seni-Khap divide. Khap's favorable military assignments, including his posting to Washington, had resulted from his friendship with Premier Phibun, a fellow artillery officer who enjoyed Khap's company. In contrast, such connections as Seni had with the post-1932 political establishment were with the civilian faction that had increasingly opposed Phibun and the army. When Seni learned that Khap had boasted to an American businessman that he was sent to Washington to "keep an eye" on the Minister, Seni began to view Khap as a spy who could not be trusted.<sup>82</sup> He also came to perceive him as a threat to his control over the Free Thai movement.

By the fall of 1942 it had become apparent that some of the student volunteers were inclined to question Seni's authority and to seek a means

<sup>80</sup> Seni *aide-mémoire* of 13 July 1942; Williams to Vanderbilt, 22 July 1942 and other reports in "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Francis T. Devlin, Washington, DC, 25 October 1994 and 0.4020 to AD/O, 22 December 1942, HS1-65, PRO.

<sup>82</sup> Dolbeare to Shepardson, 4 December 1943, Folder 15, Box 412, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA. The businessman was Herman Scholtz, who joined the OSS after repatriation from Bangkok in 1942.



to check his leadership of the movement. Chok, who had raised questions at the meeting before the first group entered training, emerged as the most vocal proponent of this, despite the fact that he was among the youngest of the volunteers. He came from a Chinese family that had gained wealth and prominence as tax farmers and royally appointed officials in peninsular Thailand under the Chakri Dynasty. His father, the third in the family line to hold the position, had served as governor of Ranong until the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932. The recipient of a coveted King's Scholarship, the outspoken, opinionated Chok had first studied political science in France, then moved on to Harvard, by way of Canada, to pursue a master's degree in international relations.<sup>83</sup>

Although Seni had himself had proposed the creation of a Free Thai Committee with two student representatives during a visit to the first Thai group's OSS training camp in July, he now feared that Khap would control the student members on the committee, leaving Luang Ditthakan and himself in the minority. Thus it was only after all the volunteers for active duty signed a petition asking for clarification of Free Thai goals in October 1942 that Seni permitted the committee to operate. Since the two elected student representatives, Chok and Karawek, were in the first group of Thai volunteers ticketed for overseas duty, it was agreed that two other students, Bandit Kantabut and Somchit Kangsanon, would join the committee upon their departure.<sup>84</sup>

Seni believed that he alone had official standing with the American government, so he had to maintain tight control over the Free Thai movement. But while Seni never lacked confidence in the correctness of his opinions, he doubted his ability to enforce his will. He recognized that if issues were decided democratically he would have difficulty holding his own against the more popular Khap.<sup>85</sup>

In mid-November 1942, at the time the Free Thai Committee was being set up, Seni met privately with Thomas S. Estes, formerly a clerk in the American Legation in Bangkok, who had returned on the exchange

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Chok na Ranong, Bangkok, 20 July 1993; letter from Chok na Ranong to the author, 22 December 1994; and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 18–19, 29–33. An OSS personality profile of Chok (Folder 1791, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA) stated that despite “certain unfavorable qualities,” such as complaining and taking “a number of his exercises in a rather joking manner,” he “must be considered a leader.” It also noted his verbal skills and his “definite ideas on the war.”

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Chok na Ranong, Bangkok, 20 July 1993; letter from Chok na Ranong to the author, 22 December 1994; and Seni to Chok, 26 January 1944, folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> David Van Praagh, *Alone on the Sharp Edge* (Bangkok, 1989), particularly pages 1–8. Van Praagh goes to great lengths to promote his subject as Thailand's “grand old democrat,” but it seems that Seni actually idealized enlightened despotism, as evidenced by his admiration for such Thai monarchs as King Ramkhamhaeng and King Mongkut.

ship *Gripsholm* a few months earlier. Aware that Estes would be reassigned to Berne, Seni asked him to carry a secret message to young King Ananda, whom Seni had tried previously, but without success, to contact through Mani, his representative in London. Seni asked Estes to “use his ingenuity” to reach the King without involving either the State Department or the royal secretariat, members of which he assumed to be loyal to Premier Phibun. He asked Estes to advise the King:

- 1) That the Minister and the adherents to his movement acknowledged the King as their true sovereign and desired to have His Majesty here to lead them;
- 2) That they had no intention of interfering with the line of succession, their only object being the freedom and independence of Thailand; [and]
- 3) That adequate financial support was available for the King and his suite.<sup>86</sup>

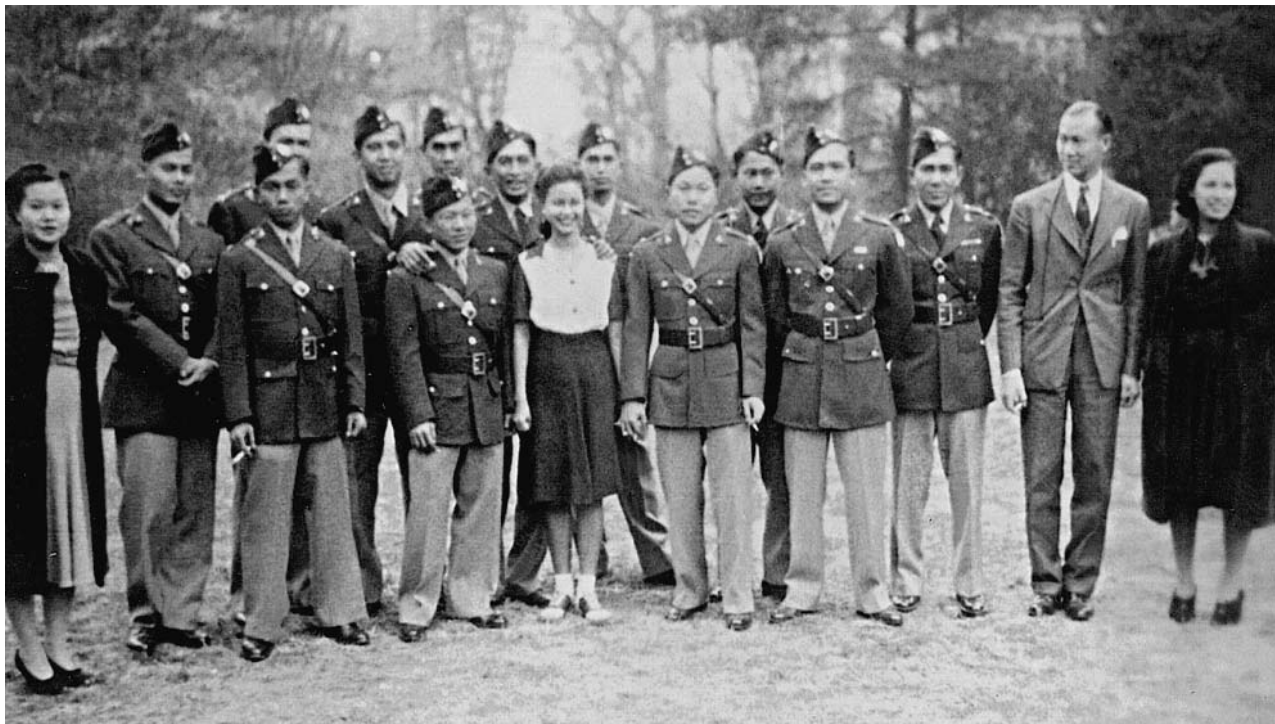
Taken aback, Estes explained that he could not act without State Department approval and suggested that Seni attempt contact through regular channels. Admitting that he was asking Estes to violate regulations, Seni explained that he desired an unofficial contact to avoid embarrassment should the King decline his invitation. Then, according to Estes’ notes:

The Minister explained that if the King were here then he would have authority under the King to do things he cannot do now. He said that he cannot sleep nights so great is the burden of his responsibility, responsibility which he actually does not have the authority to carry. With great emotion the Minister concluded: “The Chakri Dynasty is well loved by the people because of its good works and if my King were here with me our people would do anything.”<sup>87</sup>

Estes refused the mission, but it seems unlikely that the King’s protective mother would have accepted a proposal entailing political risk and possible Japanese retribution against royal family members in Thailand. Seni, however, did not give up on his idea of enlisting the King. In February 1945, Sir George Sansom of the British Embassy in Washington would suggest to London that “the young King of Siam might well be a figure around which to build a new pro-Allied movement in that country.” Seni surely influenced Sansom’s view on the subject, as the two were in frequent contact at the time. Further, in June 1945, Seni used OSS channels to suggest to Pridi – by that time the acknowledged leader of the Thai underground – that plans be made to employ the monarch.

<sup>86</sup> Memorandum of conversation by Estes, 14 November 1942, Box 385, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



2. Members of the first group of Thai volunteers pose with friends on the grounds of the Thai Legation after receiving their commissions as Free Thai officers in December 1942. Left to right: Chup Chintakanon, wife of the Legation's third secretary; Somphong Salyaphong (Somphonse Salyabongse); Ian Khampanon (Khambanonda); Chamrat Follett (in rear); Chok na Ranong; Sawat Chieosakun (Savasti Cheo-sakul) (in front); Chintamai Amatayakun (Chintamaye Amatayakul); M. L. Khap Kunchon (Kharb Kunjara), military attaché; M. L. Inthira Intharathut (Minister Seni's niece); Nitthiphat Chalichan (Nithipatna Jalichandra); Pao Khamurai (Pow Khamourai); Phisut Suthat (Pisoot Sudasna); Karawek Siwichan (Srivicharn); Phon Intharathat (Indradat); Anan Chintakanon, Legation third secretary; Thiap Kunchon (Kunjara), wife of the military attaché. (Source: courtesy of Pisoot Sudasna)

Despite Seni's efforts, however, the King would remain on the sidelines until the end of the war.<sup>88</sup>

When members of the first Thai military group, their number increased to twenty by additional volunteers, completed training they were formally commissioned as Free Thai officers by Colonel Khap at an early December ceremony at the Thai Legation. Captains Phon and Chamrat and first lieutenants Karawek and Bunliang Tamthai headed the group. Among the sixteen second lieutenants were three men with particularly notable family connections: Prince Yuthitsathian Sawatdiwat (Yudhistira Svasti), a student of dentistry who was a grandson of King Mongkut and a brother to Queen Ramphai and Prince Suphasawat; Anon na Phomphet (Anonda na Pombejara), brother-in-law of Regent Pridi; and Karun (Karoon) Kengradomying, son of Luang Kat Songkhram, an air force officer and a prominent political figure.<sup>89</sup>

Despite a strong OSS desire to get the Thai group out of its training camps and into the field, hopes for an early departure were dashed by an inability to arrange air passage for the entire group. Further, with the Battle for the Atlantic still raging and the North African invasion underway, shipping space was at a premium. Forced to bide their time, the Thai group reported to OSS Camp "D" near Quantico, Virginia, on 10 January 1943. While there, Khap revised the plan for the upcoming operations. Now the unit would be divided into an eleven-man headquarters group, with Karawek as chief of staff, and with two four-man combat groups, headed respectively by Captains Phon and Chamrat. A third combat group, to be headed by Lieutenant Bunmak Thesabut (Bunmag Desaputra), would be dispatched to China later. The assignment of four members of the headquarters staff to a public relations unit under Lieutenant Bunrot (Boonrod) Binson reflected Khap's continued interest in establishing a shortwave broadcasting facility.<sup>90</sup>

To relieve the frustrations created by repeated transportation delays, Smith arranged a trip to New York for the group in late February. When they arrived in Washington, they received orders to reverse course, but no sooner had they started back to Camp "D" than word came of a measles outbreak there. The OSS shifted the men to the small town of Orange, Virginia, where they whiled away another three weeks pretending to be Philippine visitors inspecting a local textile factory. The group finally left

<sup>88</sup> AD4 to Mackenzie (B/B 100), 21 February 1945, HS1-54, PRO and an exchange of messages between Seni and Pridi, 1 June and 6 June 1945, Folder 2654, Box 157, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Pridi told Seni not to attempt to involve the King in a public way before the end of the war lest the Japanese take reprisals against royal family members in Thailand.

<sup>89</sup> The ranks are from a roster of Free Thai arrivals in Chungking, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>90</sup> "Operation Order No. 1/2486," 28 January 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

by truck for the port of Baltimore on 15 March. Smith, nineteen Free Thai officers, and several OSS guerrilla warfare trainers embarked for India on the liberty ship *Abraham Clark* two days later.<sup>91</sup>

Plans called for Colonel Khap to fly to China, but a quarrel over allowances for the Free Thai officers gave Minister Seni a pretext to attempt to block the Colonel's departure. Seni and Khap had for some time been at loggerheads about compensation for the Free Thai officers. As students they had received approximately 90 dollars per month for living expenses and 25 dollars "pocket money." As soldiers, their living expenses would be provided for, but Khap had proposed that they receive 120 dollars per month in salary, an amount he and the officers considered reasonable given that they were putting their lives on the line. Seni viewed the 120 dollars as "pocket money," thus a five-fold increase in allowance that would enable the men to "profit" from their service.<sup>92</sup>

The disagreement had first erupted at a 30 November 1942 meeting of the Free Thai Committee. Khap cited the high cost of living in China as a reason why the officers should be allocated not only a 120-dollar salary but also a 110-dollar per month overseas allowance, compensation comparable to that of an American second lieutenant. The committee approved the allowance despite Seni's argument that this would allow the men to build up nest eggs of "several thousand dollars," inviting criticism that they had profited from the war. Although the officers pledged that they would not use the allowance as a means to accumulate funds, they resented what they perceived as Seni's determination to pinch every penny that might benefit them, while maintaining a comfortable lifestyle for himself and his family.<sup>93</sup>

During a 20 March 1943 meeting with Goodfellow and Devlin, Seni charged that Khap, whom he described as "frivolous" and an "opportunist," had drawn overseas allowance checks of 270 dollars per month from the end of December 1942. Seni considered this a sufficiently serious illegality to warrant Khap's dismissal. Seni added, however, that he would not fire Khap if the OSS regarded his services as satisfactory and his retention necessary.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Donovan to Leahy, 15 December 1942 and Halliwell to Donovan, 1 March 1943, Reel 110, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; Halliwell to Donovan, 1 March 1943, Reel 79, M1642, USNA; Metzel to Miles, 7 February 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA; Devlin to Eifler, Folder 368, Box 58, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA; and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 23–27. The 17 March departure date is taken from the chronology of events attached to Hoffman to Buxton, 5 August 1943, Reel 109, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>92</sup> Seni to Chok, 26 January 1944, folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Hoffman to Halliwell, 26 March 1943 and Thai Legation to OSS, 27 April 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

Devlin and the new director of OSS Far Eastern operations, Captain Carl O. Hoffman, thought Seni's complaint "frivolous" and believed it revealed "an element of fear on the Minister's part that perhaps the Colonel is getting too 'strong'." In regard to the overseas allowance, they pointed out that Khap had expected to leave the country in early 1943, only to be delayed by the lack of transport. Further, Khap claimed that he had not cashed the checks and promised to return them. Thus they argued for Khap's retention, emphasizing that firing him at this late stage could endanger security and upset morale. Seni reluctantly bowed to these arguments.<sup>95</sup>

Although the OSS did not consider Seni's allegations sufficiently serious to keep Khap in Washington, the complaints did deepen existing concerns about his reliability. Officers assured Seni that Khap would be a lesser risk in the field where he would be "guarded as closely (although not in the same manner) as a prisoner." Devlin received orders not to let Khap "out of his sight or to permit him to have conversations of any consequence with any other person."<sup>96</sup> Devlin, promoted to major less than three years out of the Military Academy, was instructed to report immediately any suspicious actions on Khap's part. If any security breach were deemed sufficiently dangerous to demand immediate action, Devlin was authorized to shoot the controversial Thai colonel. This, Devlin recalled, came as a shock, adding, "I often thought about how it might possibly happen and watched him carefully, his conduct, on the way over. At all times he was very circumspect as far as liaison with anybody else."<sup>97</sup>

Khap and Devlin departed Washington on 7 May 1943. The flight path took them from Miami via Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Trinidad to British Guiana, followed by three stops in Brazil. From Natal, Brazil, a sixteen-hour flight across the Atlantic to Accra was punctuated by a stopover on tiny, barren Ascension Island. Crossing Africa and the Middle East required seven more stops before arrival in Karachi, the gateway to New Delhi. In all, the journey took sixteen days.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the lengthy trip and the fact that they left the USA seven weeks after the *Abraham Clark*, Khap and Devlin still reached India more than

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Hoffman to Buxton, 5 August 1943, Reel 109, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Francis T. Devlin, Washington DC, 25 October 1994.

<sup>98</sup> Hoffman to Buxton, 5 August 1943, Reel 109, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Demas Itinerary, June 1944, Folder 3, Box 74, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. The latter document contains a complete list of stops and flight times on a trip between Washington and Chungking. Also, see Martin to Lee, 5 March 1944, Folder 10, Box 46, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA; Folder 6, Box 80, Albert C. Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution; Elizabeth P. MacDonald, *Undercover Girl* (New York, 1947), 53–68; Eric Sevareid, *Not So Wild a Dream* (New York, 1976, second edition), 229–238; and Otha C. Spencer, *Flying the Hump* (College Station, TX, 1992), 40–42 for descriptions of similar journeys.



two weeks ahead of the ship. The maritime journey proved to be the exact opposite of a pleasure cruise. Concerns about German submarines kept nerves on edge as the ship proceeded to New York, joined a convoy, then crept down the coast and into the Caribbean. The ship stopped briefly at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, but the Thai personnel were unable to leave the ship until they reached Panama. The number of passengers exceeded expectations and the overworked crew was disgruntled from the beginning. The OSS trainers at one point brandished their Thompson sub-machine guns to nip in the bud what they perceived as an incipient mutiny. A dearth of mess stewards meant that the Thai officers and their escorts had to take turns as waiters, mess attendants, and sanitary engineers throughout the voyage.<sup>99</sup>

Relations among the diverse group of passengers, which included India-bound aircraft mechanics, were problematic. Smith recalled:

The civilians were dissatisfied with their lot from the first moment when they boarded the boat until the last when they left the ship in Bombay. They were divided into two groups – bores and irritants. They irritated you because they ate too much or took too long at the table, or did not bathe, or shave, or write to their grandmothers. It is difficult to tell you why they irritated us, they just did.

Sensing early on that the civilians resented the presence of the Thai group, Smith “spread the rumor among them that our boys were expert with the hatchet, and that they could even throw around corners and get their man.” After that, he noted, “our little friends were treated with a healthy respect.”<sup>100</sup>

Adding to the misery, the toilets malfunctioned, performing, as Smith put it, “like geysers,” spreading foul-smelling water into some cabins. The toilets finally were shut down, giving the captain a pretext to abort the voyage and dump his passengers in Panama. Intervention by local military authorities forced him to back down. By the time the ship sailed again, two toilets and one shower were back in operation.<sup>101</sup>

The accompanying OSS trainers, Lieutenants Joe Lazarsky, Leo Karwaski, and Frank Gleason, carried on whatever military exercises they could aboard ship and joined the Thai in endless poker games. They also found good sport in “shaping up” the thoroughly civilian Smith, initiating him into the ways of the army. He took this with typical good humor, later noting:

<sup>99</sup> Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943, Nicol Smith Papers and previously cited interviews with Joseph Lazarsky, Bunrot Binson, Chok na Ranong, and Pao Khamurai.

<sup>100</sup> Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943, Nicol Smith Papers.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. and interview with Pao Khamurai, Bangkok, 7 July 1993.

My English is completely renovated. I wear my cap cocked over one eye at an angle so precarious that to keep it on I must of necessity miss anything that might approach me from that particular direction. I am never without a loaded gun strapped to my side and I sing out my commands in a high treble, where only the every fifth word is articulate.<sup>102</sup>

From Panama the ship proceeded southward along the western coast of South America to avoid any Japanese submarines that might be lurking in more northerly waters. "For five weeks we did not even see a fish," Smith wrote. "Then in the sixth week when we were so far south we expected to encounter icebergs any minute, two birds were sighted." This roundabout course took them into the Tasman Sea where they hit winds so severe that the lumbering liberty ship seemed to make no forward progress at all. Several of the Thais were plagued by recurrent seasickness. At last, they reached Freemantle, near Perth, Western Australia, where they happily set foot on dry land for two days. They then embarked on a nerve-wracking voyage across the Indian Ocean, where roving Japanese and German submarines would sink nearly one hundred Allied vessels in the twelve months beginning in April 1943. They reached Bombay in early June after eighty-four days at sea.<sup>103</sup>

Once in India, Smith and his charges resumed their odyssey, crossing the sub-continent by rail. In Calcutta they met Devlin, who had placed Khap in the care of another officer in Karachi and proceeded alone. Devlin advised them that instead of being routed to China they would report to the headquarters of Eifler's OSS Detachment 101 at Nazira in the Assam region of northeastern India. This required another grueling journey by boat and rail.<sup>104</sup>

Eifler, now promoted to lieutenant colonel, met them at the station. Based on his contacts with Stilwell, Eifler expected to operate the Thai group, so he assigned them to a riverside camp seven miles from his

<sup>102</sup> Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943 and interview with Joseph Lazarsky, Middleburg, VA, 23 October 1994.

<sup>103</sup> Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943, Nicol Smith Papers and previously cited interviews with Joseph Lazarsky and Chok na Ranong. There is some confusion in the records about when the group arrived in India, but "Dickie" to Wight, 3 June 1945, Box 36, Naval Group China, RG 38 states that arrival at Bombay was expected on 10 June. Comments in Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943, Nicol Smith Papers and Frank Gleason's report, Folder 4, Box 74, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA, point to an arrival date at about that time. Smith indicated the group spent eighty-four days at sea, while Gleason said eighty-seven. Smith may have included the days onshore in Australia. The ship loss figures are from H. P. Willmott, *Grave of a Dozen Schemes* (Annapolis, 1996), 152.

<sup>104</sup> Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943, Nicol Smith Papers and interview with Bunrot Binson, Bangkok, 13 July 1993. On Devlin's travels, see Riheldaffer to Smith, 25 May 1943, Reel 43, M1642, USNA.





### 1. Thailand: target of two Allied Theaters

headquarters. An area “teeming with wild elephants, tigers, king cobras, barking deer and God knows what else,” Smith found it “exactly like living in a zoo with the bars to the cages down.” The head-hunting natives, who walked about nearly naked, had “unbelievably evil faces with opaque eyes, thin cruel lips, high cheek bones and in general an iniquitous expression that defies description.”<sup>105</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943, Nicol Smith Papers. John Coughlin, Eifler’s executive officer radioed Miles on June 15 (Box 36, RG 38, USNA): “We don’t have a thing on Nick [Smith]’s group. Are you going to move them up there at a later date for operations? I think that they could be put in from this side very successfully by air if you do not have a plan for putting them in.”

Eifler's supply-starved unit had hoped that the Thai group would arrive with a large cache, but the results proved disappointing. Much of what had been shipped, including most of the radio equipment and a light plane, went down with a vessel torpedoed by an enemy submarine. Eifler did succeed in commandeering a radio set, some plastic explosives, and two other light planes that the Free Thai had purchased. When the Thai were later transferred to China he kept the planes on the grounds that there was little prospect that they could be carried over the "Hump." Donovan later approved Eifler's hijacking and reimbursed the Thai Legation for the aircraft.<sup>106</sup>

Eifler put the Thai group into a four-week training regimen that included strenuous treks through the surrounding pestiferous jungles. Several of the Thai and three of their American escorts fell ill with malaria. For Smith, who had been promoted to captain by the time he arrived in India, the malaria came in the wake of a painful attack of kidney stones, a double-barrelled illness that landed him in the hospital for nearly three weeks. In his absence, Charles Parkin, an OSS trainer bound for China, attempted to assert authority over the Thai group, much to the irritation of the volatile Eifler.

The Thai officers, who had left the United States expecting to be sent to China, were mystified by their situation and bombarded Smith with questions he could not answer. Devlin remained equally in the dark. "I hope to find out what the situation is when I get to China," he wrote to Eifler on 4 July. "I couldn't be more confused as to my own status or the status of this project than I am now." John Coughlin, Eifler's executive officer, concluded that the "handling of the Thai group is really screw-ball," but at last it became clear that the group would go to China where the OSS had established a new foothold through an alliance of convenience with Captain Milton "Mary" Miles of the US Navy. Accordingly, Eifler shifted the Thai to a camp at a tea plantation near Dibrugarh, a site closer to the primary "Hump" airfield at Chabua. In response to Miles' insistence that "no Thailander is to be tied up with the British," Coughlin reassured him that they would be safely isolated.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Previously cited interviews with Joseph Lazarsky and Carl Eifler; Devlin to Eifler, 27 June 1943, Folder 96, Box 45, Entry 190 and Smith to Miles, 3 September 1943, Folder 3004, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226; and Wight to Miles, 9 September 1943, Box 36 and Miles to Leggett, 7 October 1943, Box 2, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>107</sup> Smith to Hoffman, August 10, 1943, Nicol Smith Papers and Interview with Joseph Lazarsky, 23 October 1994. Devlin to Eifler, 4 July 1943, Folder 96 and Coughlin to Eifler, Folder 93, Box 45, Entry 190; and "General Summary of the Thailander situation as of 15 August 1943," Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. Also, "Thailanders," Miles memorandum circa 1 July 1943, Box 36; Coughlin to Miles, 11 July 1943, Box 35; and Eifler to Miles, 14 July 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

Due to the difficult transportation situation, members of the Thai group made the hazardous 560-mile flight from Chabua over the Himalayas to Kunming, then on to Chungking, a few at a time, between 19 July and 13 August.<sup>108</sup> Even as they completed the last leg of their long journey to China, many American officers remained skeptical of their value. Even before they crossed the “Hump” they had been dubbed “feather merchants,” which Miles explained was “a comic-paper name for something you can’t quite get your hands on.” They were, he added in his memoir, “as unpredictable as a bunch of tiger cubs.”<sup>109</sup>

Smith, who had worked most closely with the Thai group had a different opinion, however. He advised Hoffman that, despite various difficulties, inter-group relations had gone “unbelievably smoothly.” A natural diplomat who worked hard to maintain good relations with his Thai charges, Smith began referring to them as “the family” because they called him “uncle” and came to him for advice about personal problems. He found them “more than willing to do their share” and judged that “without a doubt their heart is in their work.”<sup>110</sup> Smith would remain a strong promoter of the Thai group to the end, but even his buoyant optimism would be sorely tested by the trials that lay ahead.

<sup>108</sup> Roster is contained in Box 36, RG 38, USNA. For a vivid description of Chabua and the Hump supply operation, see Severeid, *Not So Wild a Dream*, 247–48.

<sup>109</sup> Wight to Miles, 9 July 1943, Box 2, RG 38, USNA, which uses the term “feather merchants” and Milton E. Miles, *A Different Kind of War* (Garden City, NY, 1967), 164–65.

<sup>110</sup> Smith to Hoffman, 10 August 1943, Nicol Smith Papers.

## 2 The China tangle

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The delays the first Thai group encountered in leaving the USA and crossing the broad Pacific were just the first of a series that would frustrate them and their American sponsors. They would discover that the Americans and their hosts – first the British in India, then the Chinese – had divergent interests and perspectives and were only, as the late Christopher Thorne so aptly put it, “allies of a kind.”<sup>1</sup>

The British and Americans, representing democracy and liberal capitalism and sharing a common language and culture, seemed natural allies. Thus, like the Russians in the alliance against Germany, the Chinese often saw themselves as the odd men out in the Asian-Pacific war. Aware of this, President Roosevelt sought to stand apart from the British by adopting a conspicuously anti-imperialist stance, a position that reflected his own view of European colonialism as exploitative and anachronistic.

Roosevelt’s anti-imperialist position enjoyed widespread support at home. Despite their nation’s empire building on the North American continent and beyond, Americans believed that their revolutionary heritage and enlightened policies set them apart from Europeans. In particular, they saw the American promise of independence for the Philippines – a decision in part based on the economic concerns of domestic sugar producers and the desire to shed a burdensome defense commitment – as the appropriate model for the other colonial powers in Asia. Roosevelt promoted a trusteeship system to oversee a gradual postwar transition from colonial rule to independence, a scheme he continued to favor until his death in 1945.

American idealists, who considered the United States a “city on the hill” and “the last best hope of mankind,” enthusiastically took up the banner of anti-imperialism. They preferred a neo-Wilsonian crusade aimed at righting old wrongs and reducing the prospects of future conflict to a simple war of revenge or one aimed at restoring a balance of power.

<sup>1</sup> Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*.

After the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, foreign policy realists jumped aboard the anti-imperialist bandwagon, too. Japan's military successes and the potential potency of its "Asian for the Asiatics" propaganda line made a new order in Asia seem essential. As the influential columnist Walter Lippman put it:

western nations must now do what hitherto they lacked the will and imagination to do; they must identify their cause with the freedom and security of the peoples of the East, putting away the "white man's burden" and purging themselves of the taint of an obsolete and obviously unworkable white man's imperialism. In this drastic reorientation of war policy, the leadership of the western nations must be taken by the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long's report on a 25 February 1942 meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee testifies to the widespread support for such an approach. All the members, he noted, Democrats and Republicans alike, criticized reactionary British policies in India, charging that they prevented the effective mobilization of the population of the vast sub-continent against the Japanese. Senators wished to use American financial leverage to push Britain into granting Indian autonomy. Undersecretary of State Welles' blunt declaration in a Memorial Day 1942 speech that "the age of imperialism is ended" reflected this bipartisan political consensus in Washington.<sup>3</sup>

The British empire in Asia did appear to be on its last legs. Malaya and Burma had fallen in humiliating fashion and the threat of further Axis advance, coupled with nationalist agitation by the Indian National Congress, had placed the British position in India in jeopardy. Germany and Japan failed to take full advantage of this opportunity,<sup>4</sup> but the heavy-handed British response to pro-independence agitation in India deepened anti-imperialist sentiment in the USA. An editorial in the 12 October 1942 issue of Henry Luce's *Life* magazine warned the British: "one thing we are sure we are *not* fighting for is to hold the British Empire together. We don't like to put the matter so bluntly, but we don't want you to have any illusions. If your strategists are planning a war to hold the British Empire together they will sooner or later find themselves strategizing alone."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay* (New York, 1978), 134. Lippman stressed that Americans were reluctant imperialists and made much of the Philippine example. For more on the centrality of the Philippine model in American thinking, see Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 214–15.

<sup>3</sup> Long to Welles, 25 February 1942, *FRUS* 1942, I: 606–08 and Welles quoted in Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 155.

<sup>4</sup> This subject is treated in admirable detail in Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy* (Stuttgart, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 198.

Historian Tyler Dennett gave further voice to the American desire for global reform, declaring in a paper prepared for the December 1942 Institute of Pacific Relations Conference in Quebec that “the American people will not permit their government to be an agent of the restoration of the old order in East Asia.” He added: “Americans will wish to see the postwar settlement in the East divested not merely of the appearance but of the reality of nineteenth-century imperialism.”<sup>6</sup>

The experiences of Americans who spent time in India generally reinforced their anti-imperial attitudes and deepened their pessimism about conditions there. When President Roosevelt’s first personal representative, Louis Johnson, returned to Washington in late May 1942, he declared that if the USA did not wish to send in military forces and planes “it would be wise to withdraw entirely from that theater of operations and to consider the country lost.”<sup>7</sup>

Socio-economic conditions in wartime India often shocked American visitors. One pilot recalled:

The beauty of India was offset by the horror of poverty and lack of concern for the lowest of Indian castes. In Calcutta, tours were arranged through “off limits” areas of the ancient city. On the streets we stepped over the dead, the dying, and the poor souls horribly diseased, crippled, and hungry. We saw unbelievable horror – the stench was a fetid barrier we passed through. I can never forget the eyes of those living bones, begging for something no one could give. I suffered knowing there was nothing I could do. Nothing we had ever been told prepared us for this sight. We left as quickly as we could. I was sorry we went. India was a world we had never seen, and may God spare us the sight again. Somehow the British had failed – the world had failed.<sup>8</sup>

Americans also perceived a lack of fighting spirit among the British in India. In the wake of repeated defeats, the British seemed reluctant to go on the offensive and preoccupied with stabilizing India. Their interests did not seem to extend beyond the eventual recovery of their lost colonies in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong.

The British were keenly aware of such attitudes and American visions of a post-imperialist world order. During a visit to Washington in the late summer of 1942, British Minister of State Richard Law encountered a strongly held view “that the United States stands for something in the world – something of which the world has need, something which the world is going to like, something in the final analysis, which the world is going to take whether it likes it or not.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Tyler Dennett, “Security in the Pacific and the Far East,” *Institute of Pacific Relations Quebec Conference* (New York, 1942), 9: 18, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum of conversation by Oakes, 26 May 1942, *FRUS* 1942, I: 657–62.

<sup>8</sup> Spencer, *Flying the Hump*, 142. <sup>9</sup> Quoted in Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 138–39.

Law and other Britons saw considerable irony in the sudden American reconversion to globalism, remembering only too well the precipitous US retreat from Wilson's internationalist agenda in the wake of World War I and its all-too-recent isolationism. It also seemed hypocritical for Americans to wave vigorously the banner of self-determination for colonial peoples at a time when black citizens in the southern USA were routinely denied basic civil rights. Many Britons also resented American hesitation in joining the war against Germany and suspected that the Americans would miss no opportunity to take advantage of their empire's war-weakened position. While the Americans reserved the exclusive right to define their national interests, they seemed utterly unwilling to accord a similar privilege to their allies.

Law likened the Americans to "children, playing with bricks and 'making the world over'," yet he and all clear-sighted Britons knew that the future of their nation and empire was inextricably bound up with that of the economically powerful "cousins" across the pond. They found refuge in wishful thoughts that they could employ their "experience" and "greater political sagacity" to restrain the capricious Americans and protect British interests.<sup>10</sup>

In London, Prime Minister Churchill and many of his colleagues were determined to hold fast, convinced, as Correlli Barnett has written, "that the Empire provided the buttress of British power and importance in the world." Barnett argues that "the Empire actually represented a net drain on the United Kingdom military resources and a potentially perilous strategic entanglement,"<sup>11</sup> but few Britons felt that way at the time.

In fact, defenders of empire viewed it not only as an economic asset and a critical factor in maintaining Britain's great power status, but as a positive force benefiting subject peoples. As Colonial Secretary Lord Cranborne put it:

[T]aken by and large, our record of administration is not one of which we need be ashamed. We created Singapore and Hong Kong, two of the greatest ports in the Pacific, out of nothing. We made Malaya one of the richest and most vital producing areas of the world. We brought to her people law and order, happiness and prosperity. These are no mean achievements. Where we did fail was in giving them protection from Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Although correct in claiming positive accomplishments under British rule, Cranborne and his fellow imperialists were less eager to acknowledge that much of Britain's Asian expansion in the nineteenth century had been fueled by the profits from the lucrative opium trade, and they

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.    <sup>11</sup> Correlli Barnett, *The Lost Victory* (London, 1995), 7–11.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 35.

deluded themselves in thinking that material improvements could outweigh a growing nationalist passion for self-determination. They thus seriously underestimated the difficulties they would face in attempting to restore the British position. Churchill had no intention, as he famously declared in a 10 November 1942 speech, “to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire,” but his efforts to prevent it were doomed to failure.<sup>13</sup>

Hard-pressed British officials in India were particularly sensitive to negative American attitudes, and angry about perceived meddling by the American special envoys to India, Johnson and his successor William Phillips. They fought to prevent US intelligence and propaganda agencies from operating from India, as OSS officer Edmond Taylor put it, “either because they feared we would rummage among the cupboards where the family skeletons of empire were concealed or because they feared we might, perhaps innocently and accidentally, give undue encouragement to the aspirations to freedom of the subject peoples of Asia.” Although both OSS and OWI ultimately gained entry, British officials would continue to regard them with deep suspicion.<sup>14</sup>

A growing professional rivalry between British and American propaganda and intelligence agencies further complicated relations. Early on, London’s rejection of a proposal for OSS–SOE cooperation in North Africa infuriated Donovan and soured his attitude toward collaboration with the British. Ironically, the SOE’s substantial aid to the fledgling COI and later to the OSS – including the training of the first COI recruits at a British-run camp in Canada – also made the Americans eager to demonstrate independence and outshine their British mentors.<sup>15</sup> The fact that domestic critics of the OSS routinely denigrated it as a tool of the British further insured dogged OSS opposition to any coordination that might give the appearance of integration or British control.<sup>16</sup> Although OSS–SOE rivalry developed first in North Africa, Europe, and the Middle East,

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 200.

<sup>14</sup> Edmond Taylor, *Richer By Asia*, 2nd edn. (Boston, 1964), 30, and Richard J. Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan* (New York, 2000), 143–44. Bickham Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular* (London, 1965), 129, noted similar resistance from British agencies in Cairo to OSS operations in the Middle Eastern Theater.

<sup>15</sup> Sweet-Escott, at the time an SOE liaison officer in Washington, vividly describes the North Africa affair in *Baker Street Irregular*, 137–40. On pages 144–45, he comments on a stubborn American unwillingness to learn from British mistakes or to seek SOE’s advice.

<sup>16</sup> For example, a particularly important and vehement attack on the OSS, a lengthy 1945 memorandum by Colonel Richard Park, Jr. of Army Intelligence, charged that “the British are believed to know everything about OSS and exercise quite a good deal of control over the OSS.” A copy of this report is contained in Box 15, President’s Secretary’s File, Harry S. Truman Library.



sharp national differences over the prosecution of the war and the future of the British Empire would make it particularly intense in Asia.

Anglo-American relations were visibly strained in China. Perceptive Australian Minister Sir Frederic Eggleston summed up the situation in Chungking in January 1943:

- a) There is a considerable amount of friction between British and Americans which is likely to impair the efficiency of the conduct of the war in this theatre;
- b) The Americans are largely to blame for their provocative manner, their indiscretions and their habit of arriving at sweeping conclusions without any knowledge of the issues;
- c) The traditional British arrogance no longer exists, but [they are] definitely non-cooperative, resentful of criticism and their leadership and administration leave much to be desired.<sup>17</sup>

But if the British enjoyed less than cordial relations with the Americans in Chungking, their links with Chiang Kai-shek's government were even more problematic. Opposition to British imperialism had been a long-standing rallying cry of Chinese nationalists, and they felt that Britain's "old China hands" had shown insufficient sympathy for China in its struggle against Japan.<sup>18</sup> In early 1942 the Chinese attitude had taken on a contemptuous edge as a consequence of Britain's battlefield embarrassments. The fall of Hong Kong had special impact, Eggleston pointed out, because: "Many Chinese had their wives, and – more important still – their savings in Hong Kong."<sup>19</sup> Further, the Chinese had offered troops to help the British, but had been turned down. The severance of the vital Chinese supply line through Burma dealt Chungking an even more serious blow. Again the British had been reluctant to accept Chiang's offer of military assistance, had mismanaged the Burma campaign after the Chinese were invited in, then had beaten a retreat to India. The growing nationalist agitation and resultant disorder in that British colony, witnessed first-hand by Chiang Kai-shek during a visit in February 1942, represented another sore point. Upon his return from India, the Generalissimo instructed his ambassador in London "to tell

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Edwin Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance, 1942–1945* (Hong Kong, 1981), 117–18.

<sup>18</sup> Maochun Yu, "'In God We Trusted, In China We Busted': The China Commando Group of the Special Operations Executive (SOE)," *Intelligence and National Security* 16 (Winter 2001): 38–40. British writer Freda Utley, a war correspondent in the interim Chinese Nationalist capital of Hankow in 1938, charged in *Odyssey of a Liberal* (Washington, DC, 1970), 185: "The British generally favored Japan, or were not too adverse to letting her teach the 'uppity' Chinese Nationalists a lesson which they foolishly imagined would redound to their advantage by leading to the reestablishment of special rights, privileges, and concessions for all the imperialist powers."

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 117–18.

Churchill that I am personally shocked by the Indian military and political situation.” A depressed-looking Chiang subsequently warned American Ambassador Gauss that “the British Government is blind to the seriousness of the situation.”<sup>20</sup>

As a consequence of such developments, Eggleston reported in April 1942 that “British observers here, diplomatic, journalists and others confirm that British prestige was never lower in China than today . . . I receive information of unrestrained criticism and bitter comment among the Chinese.”<sup>21</sup> Members of a British Parliamentary mission that visited China in late 1942 concluded that Britain had become a special target of Chinese “criticism and hostility.”<sup>22</sup>

Churchill’s opposition to Roosevelt’s attempts to accord China great power status as one of the “four policemen” in the postwar world rankled both Washington and Chungking. Churchill’s negative opinion of Nationalist China reflected both his resentment over Chiang’s obvious sympathy for the Indian independence movement and his disdainful, racist view of Asians generally. The Chinese, and many Americans, believed that Churchill also wanted to keep China weak and divided to facilitate the re-capture of Hong Kong and the re-establishment of British economic interests in Shanghai. Roosevelt himself would declare in November 1944 to Eggleston – then the newly appointed Australian ambassador in Washington – that Churchill was “forty years behind the times on China and had not sufficient respect for the Chinese.”<sup>23</sup>

Beyond Churchill’s Victorian mentality, though, there were concrete reasons for British skepticism about China’s ability to contribute effectively either to the war effort or the maintenance of the postwar peace. Chiang’s best armies had been decimated in the 1937 fighting in the Shanghai area, forcing his government to abandon its capital, Nanking, and retreat far inland to the Yangtze River port city of Chungking in Szechwan Province. Chiang now found himself in the midst of unreliable warlords who had long controlled much of the deep interior of the country. The chaotic war situation also provided Chiang’s bitter enemies,

<sup>20</sup> Chiang Kai-shek to T. V. Soong, 24 February 1942 and Gauss to Hull, 10 March 1942, *FRUS* 1942, 1: 605, 614–15. Also, Yu, “In God We Trusted, In China We Busted,” 49–51.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 117–118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 115, n. 6, 124–25 and Aron Shai, *Britain and China, 1941–47* (New York, 1984), 5, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Eggleston to Evatt, 21 November 1944 in W. J. Hudson and H. J. W. Stokes, eds., *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937–49* (Canberra, 1988), VII: 661. For an overview of British attitudes towards China and Chinese views of Britain, see Shai’s *Britain and China, 1941–47*. Churchill’s attitudes toward China are examined on pp. 23–24 and the impact of British defeats and its colonial policy in India are highlighted on pp. 53–61.

the Chinese Communists, a golden opportunity to spread their message and extend their authority. Further, the wartime disruption had left the Chinese economy in shambles, and Japanese efforts to cut Chiang off from sources of military hardware had largely succeeded.

Under such difficult circumstances, Chiang had long recognized that his situation could be saved only with American aid, so he, like Churchill, had seen the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as a godsend. Brigadier General John Magruder, chief of an American military assistance mission that arrived in China before Pearl Harbor, reported that Chiang and his followers believed that war-weary China had done more than its share in four years of fighting the Japanese; now it was the Americans' turn to carry the main load. Chiang hoped that aid from the United States would revitalize his military forces, but less for the purpose of fighting the Japanese than to shore up his shaky domestic political position. This attitude irritated and frustrated American military officers, who were focused on the early defeat of Japan.<sup>24</sup>

The strong Chinese nationalist perception of China's long victimization at the hands of the imperial powers further complicated Allied relations. Chiang and his colleagues were prickly and difficult allies in part because politically they could ill afford to give the impression of compromising national interests in their dealings with outsiders.

Nor had the Chinese abandoned the time-honored practice of playing one outside power off against the other. Although they saw the USA as a more sympathetic and potentially valuable ally, the Chinese continued to pursue a measure of military and intelligence cooperation with the British. Chiang's minions who worked with the Americans often voiced anti-British sentiments, while those who cooperated with British clandestine agencies were equally quick to criticize the Americans.

Concern that he might make a separate peace with Japan gave Chiang considerable leverage early in the war when things were going badly for his allies. Americans particularly worried about this possibility. For example, COI's Kenneth P. Landon suggested in a 26 January 1942 letter: "If the Japs sweep Burma, as they can easily do, it may well mean that the Chinese will be offered an attractive peace settlement and may withdraw from the war. This is my guess. To go on fighting with no hope of supplies for a year or two would be almost impossible."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Magruder's views are found, for example, in Magruder to War Department, 10 February 1942, *FRUS* 1942 (China): 13–16.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 26 January 1942, Box 1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. For British views on the subject, see Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 186, 192.

Americans deemed continued Chinese participation vital because of the number of Japanese divisions tied down in China and US plans to use the Asian mainland as a launching pad for attacks on Japan. Less economically dependent than the British on Asian colonial interests – and therefore less emotionally committed to their re-establishment – the Americans also better appreciated the potential appeal of Japanese pan-Asian propaganda, and the extent to which China's continued resistance undercut it.

Ironically, though, despite Nationalist China's obvious internal weaknesses, the Europeans and their American allies alike feared that Chiang's government would seek a postwar sphere of influence in Southeast Asia by taking advantage of the overseas Chinese presence in the region. The Dutch ambassador to China, for example, predicted that the Chinese would seek "economic freedom and privileges which would give them practically an extraterritorial position" in the Dutch and British colonies there, while a British analyst warned that the Chinese would push for as much "as they are allowed to get away with." On the American side, one OSS report noted that "the human bonds between Free China and the Chinese of Southeast Asia are a reality of which allied strategy must take account"; another warned of a "Chinese and Russian monopoly" of influence on revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia which, if not broken up, could "complicate economic adjustments in these areas and threaten legitimate American interests."<sup>26</sup>

Yet another OSS analyst believed that an "Asiatic bloc, led by China, supported by India and participated in by all countries from Afghanistan to Japan, and possibly from as far west as Turkey and Egypt," could emerge at war's end. He warned:

Unless its development is prevented through intelligent understanding and diplomatic and strategic action, the result will be an even greater human struggle to redistribute world power after this war. This will be the Inter-Continent War. The alignment is continental and racial. It is an alliance of the East against the West and of the so-called non-white races against the so-called white race. It is promoted by increasing solidarity of all Asiatic peoples and, apparently, by strengthening their alliance by reaching out to the racial minorities in Europe, Africa and the Americas.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Shai, *Britain and China, 1941–47*, 66, 76; Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 190; and "Our Chinese Allies in Southeast Asia" and "American Strategy and Revolutionary Movements in Asia," in *The Amerasia Papers* (Washington, DC, 1970), I: 196, 280. The Dutch Colonial Minister H. Van Mook was equally concerned about the Americans and Chinese and sought to make common cause with the British, as indicated in Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> "Report from the Far East," Box 21, Norwood F. Allman Papers, Hoover Institution.

Americans saw maximizing their influence over the Chinese government as the best way to avert such a disastrous outcome. Supplying the Chinese army represented a key means to this end, but after the fall of Burma the treacherous trans-Himalayan air route, over which the workhorse C-47 cargo plane could carry less than three tons of cargo per trip, became the only avenue of delivery.<sup>28</sup> The China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater's low priority in the overall Anglo-American war scheme also caused repeated delays in the provision of promised supplies, equipment, and manpower. This took a heavy toll on morale and encouraged the bickering and backbiting which became rife. As Major General Haydon L. Boatner, who served in the theater from beginning to end, pointed out: "Those in the CBI had no share in the glory, glamor, publicity, and successes associated with Eisenhower, MacArthur, Nimitz, Halsey and Patton."<sup>29</sup>

Such unhappy circumstances magnified disagreements on issues ranging from grand strategy to intelligence-gathering among American military, naval, and diplomatic officials. General Joseph Stilwell, a hard-nosed, tough-talking infantry officer who had served in China for many years as a soldier and military attaché, stood at the center of the various controversies by virtue of his complicated array of titles and multiple responsibilities. Stilwell, whose visage and prickly manner had earned him the nickname "Vinegar Joe," commanded the limited contingents of American personnel in the CBI Theater and served as chief of staff to Chiang Kai-shek. The Chinese leader retained command of the China Theater, but American officers tended to view this as an inconvenient technicality. Stilwell's responsibilities included supervising the Lend-Lease program, the supply airlift, and the program to improve the effectiveness of the Chinese army.

Stilwell, who had arrived at his post in time to participate in the disastrous Sino-British effort to defend Burma in early 1942, firmly believed that no real progress could be made without a land supply route. American, British, and Chinese critics of this strategy charged that it reflected Stilwell's obsession with avenging his humiliating defeat in Burma. They argued that opening the land route would take too long and yield too little to justify the resources required. Further, Stilwell could achieve his goal only by utilizing in northern Burma large numbers of Chinese troops that Chiang was reluctant to provide lest this disrupt the

<sup>28</sup> The heftier C-46, more commonly used on the Hump route from 1944, could carry seven tons of cargo. Spencer, *Flying the Hump*, 64, 101.

<sup>29</sup> An apparently unsent letter responding to Jonathan Spence's review, in the *New York Times Book Review*, of Barbara Tuchman's *Stilwell and the American Experience in China*, Box 1, Haydon L. Boatner Papers, Hoover Institution.

delicate internal balance of military power. As a prerequisite to Chinese participation, Chiang demanded greater material support than his allies were willing or able to provide. The resulting political stalemate repeatedly forced Stilwell to delay or scale down his operational plans.

Stilwell's disagreements with Chiang on military issues and his role as bearer of bad tidings regarding supply deliveries and broken Allied promises, insured that relations between the two would be difficult. However, Stilwell's blunt approach and his difficulty in disguising his contempt for the Generalissimo and his corrupt, inefficient régime made matters worse. Stilwell remained in his position until late 1944 only because of strong backing from the powerful American Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, the man who had chosen him for the job.

In contrast, Stilwell's chief American antagonist, his air commander General Claire Chennault, enjoyed good personal relations with Chiang and his entourage as a result of his pre-Pearl Harbor role as an aviation advisor. Subsequently, the strong-willed Chennault had organized and led a rough and rowdy mercenary air force, the American Volunteer Group (AVG) – better known as the “Flying Tigers” – which had fought effectively in Burma and subsequently from bases in Yunnan Province. In 1942, Chennault's unit had been incorporated into the American military structure as the core of the 14th Air Force, headquartered at Kunming. The exploits of the “Flying Tigers,” his skill as a tactician, and his flair for publicity had earned Chennault an international reputation. He also had gained political clout by cultivating links to Washington insiders, including Roosevelt's right-hand man, Harry Hopkins.

Convinced of the decisive importance of air power, Chennault saw an air offensive from China as the key to victory over the Japanese. Discounting warnings from Stilwell and Marshall that a premature air assault would only invite a Japanese counterattack against indefensible air bases, Chennault lobbied to obtain the bulk of the space on the “Hump” flights, a prerequisite for his envisioned operations. His promise of quick results at minimal cost appealed to Chiang Kai-shek and politicians in Washington, including President Roosevelt.

While the arguments over military strategy between Chiang, Stilwell, and Chennault have received much attention, equally bitter conflicts raged in regard to intelligence gathering and unconventional warfare activities in China. As Maochun Yu emphasized in his study *OSS in China*,<sup>30</sup> these quarrels were complicated because each of the three allies had competing intelligence organizations that were engaged in intramural turf battles, in addition to their frequent extramural struggles with rival

<sup>30</sup> Yu, *OSS in China*.

allied agencies. Two controversial officers, General Tai Li, the head of the Nationalist government's secret police and his American ally, Captain "Mary" Miles of the US Navy, stood in the vortex of most such disputes in wartime China.

An unswerving loyalty to Chiang Kai-shek had facilitated Tai Li's rise to the leadership of China's Bureau of Information and Statistics (BIS). Although charged with multiple responsibilities, including spying on foreigners and maneuvering against the Japanese, the bureau primarily focused on ferreting out and neutralizing Chiang's domestic enemies. Contemporary critics portrayed Tai as a black-hearted "Chinese Himmler" and his organization as ubiquitous, if not omnipotent. For example, a September 1942 British report characterized the BIS as: "A Gestapo in formation, under Generalissimo's personal control; mainstay, eyes, ears, and dagger of the present regime."<sup>31</sup>

Yu paints a rather different picture, emphasizing that Tai occupied a less secure position than his foreign critics believed, and that the BIS constantly had to jockey for position with rival Nationalist intelligence agencies. Yu supports the longstanding view that Tai was anti-British, but argues that perceived British efforts to influence Chinese domestic politics played a greater role in this than the personal grudge Tai nursed as a consequence of having been arrested by the British in Hong Kong in 1941.<sup>32</sup>

Miles had arrived in China in the late spring of 1942, charged with establishing coast watching and weather reporting stations. A Naval Academy graduate with considerable past service in China, this idiosyncratic officer enjoyed firm backing at the highest levels of the Navy Department and had forged a strong personal bond with Tai Li's representative at the Chinese Embassy in Washington, Lieutenant Colonel Hsiao Sin-ju. Yu attributes Tai's interest in this American connection to recent setbacks sustained by the BIS, including successful Communist penetration of the agency. Tai, he argues, hoped to utilize American equipment and expertise to strengthen his organization.<sup>33</sup>

Miles reached Chungking in the wake of a dispute that had led to ejection of a British-sponsored commando unit from China. Chiang Kai-shek acted because of allegations that the British were playing "warlord politics" in dealing with provincial authorities.<sup>34</sup> In light of this incident,

<sup>31</sup> "Notes on General Aspects of Military Intelligence in China," 23 September 1942, Box 2, McHugh Papers, Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

<sup>32</sup> Yu, *OSS in China*, especially 31–59 and 91–94. Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley, 2003) offers a fuller biographical background.

<sup>33</sup> Yu, *OSS in China*, 47–59. Roy Stratton, who served under Miles in China, points out contradictory aspects of Miles' character in his *The Army–Navy Game* (Falmouth, MA, 1977), 14–16.

<sup>34</sup> This affair is fully detailed in Yu, "In God We Trusted, In China We Busted'," 49–51.



Marine Colonel James M. McHugh, the American naval attaché, warned Miles of the futility of attempting to conduct clandestine operations in China, a judgment that echoed the opinion of McHugh's brother-in-law, General Magruder. Undaunted by their pessimism, Miles believed that he could carry out his assignment if he avoided offending Chinese sensibilities, cemented a solid personal relationship with Tai Li, and adopted a generous, open approach toward the Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

To his credit, Miles recognized that resolute opposition to imperialist meddling in their country and deep resentment of the condescending attitudes of "old China hands," both British and American, affected the attitudes of Tai Li and other Chinese nationalists. He also understood Chinese reluctance to allow Western intelligence agencies untrammelled access because such organizations inevitably would pursue their own national agendas, scrutinize China's political divisions, and possibly support anti-government elements. Accordingly, Miles aspired to be the model guest, accepting Tai as his superior and demanding that his men play by Chinese rules, even mandating that they eat the same food as their hosts. Miles believed that most Westerners with long experience in China inherently assumed an attitude of superiority, so he sought to keep his operation free of "old China hands," preferring instead men whose minds were blank slates in regard to China. This preference provided powerful ammunition for Miles' critics, who accused him of being played for a sucker by the Chinese as he narrowly focused on achieving the goals assigned him by the Navy.<sup>36</sup>

Yet even his critics had to acknowledge that Miles managed to open doors that other Americans had been unable even to approach. Tai not only offered to support the navy's weather reporting and coast-watching activities but made it possible for Miles to take an adventurous exploratory tour behind Japanese lines, developments that flabbergasted the Chungking veteran McHugh. In return, the Chinese spymaster asked that the USA equip and train a force of 50,000 guerrillas. Miles seized the

<sup>35</sup> James M. McHugh, "Failure of the British Commando Effort in China," 25 April 1942, Folder 11, Box 2, McHugh Papers, Kroch Library, Cornell University; Magruder to War Department, 7 January 1942 quoted in Hornbeck to Donovan, 9 January 1942, Box 150, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution; "Interview – Hollington Tong," 19 December 1942, Folder 1, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 225, USNA; and Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 281–82.

<sup>36</sup> Miles delineated his view on "Old China Hands" in an attachment to a letter to Metzel and Leggett dated 20 November 1942, Box 1, RG 38, USNA: "Most old timers in China have a foreigner's contempt for a Chinese and his inferior methods and his shortcomings. Missionaries and business men in spite of their calling are generally apt to be included as Old China Hands – in a derogatory sense. The less [a potential recruit] knows about China the better – if he is willing to learn." A further explication of his views appear in Halliwell to Bruce, 5 January 1943, Folder 10, Box 1, McHugh Papers, Kroch Library, Cornell University.



opportunity and his superiors in Washington backed him up. The Navy also agreed to provide FBI trainers to instruct Tai's agents in the latest scientific police techniques.<sup>37</sup>

The acerbic General Stilwell attributed Miles' success to the fact that "the Chinese had a great nose for money and that to them Miles probably looked like he had a lot of it," but the General tolerated Miles' ventures. Although skeptical of their value and concerned about any potential drain on the limited flow of supplies, Stilwell knew that Miles had strong support from powerful admirals. Already beset by a plethora of vexing problems, Stilwell had no desire to pick a new fight by overtly opposing Miles.<sup>38</sup>

The American diplomatic establishment in Chungking took a more forward anti-Miles stance, with John Paton Davies, a brilliant, well-respected Foreign Service officer who became Stilwell's political advisor, leading the charge. No doubt influenced by his contacts with Chinese moderates and leftists who were the objects of Tai Li's domestic political surveillance and repression, Davies despised the Chinese general. Not only did he share Stilwell's doubts that Miles' activities would contribute much to the war effort, he had no faith in the staying power of the corrupt Nationalist government. Accordingly, Davies feared that close collaboration with one of Chiang's least savory henchmen would compromise long-term US interests. Ambassador Gauss, similarly pessimistic about the prospects of the Nationalist government, held an equally negative view of Tai Li. Moreover, he resented the fact that Miles, over whom he had no control, had been attached to his embassy as "naval observer."<sup>39</sup>

Miles' success in establishing a beachhead in China caught Donovan's attention because his fledgling COI had floundered in its efforts to do the same. Stilwell had initially accepted – albeit conditionally and without enthusiasm – the COI's OLIVIA plan for regional unconventional warfare operations based in China. He soon had second thoughts, warning at the beginning of April 1942 that the project now seemed "highly inadvisable" and suggesting that COI base its men in India or Burma instead. The bungling of an early COI representative in Chungking, Dr. Esson M. Gale, a former employee of the Chinese salt monopoly, further impaired the organization's prospects. When a COI colleague, Alghan Lusey, reached the scene on 3 May 1942, he found that Gale had

<sup>37</sup> Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 51–52, 147.

<sup>38</sup> Stilwell is quoted in R. Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Berkeley, 1972), 249.

<sup>39</sup> McHugh to Knox, 1 August 1942, Folder 9, Box 1, McHugh Papers, Kroch Library, Cornell University, and John Paton Davies Jr., *Dragon By the Tail* (New York, 1972), particularly 287–88.

alienated the American diplomatic establishment, was “not in the best of repute” with the Chinese and had come under surveillance by Tai’s agents. Gale would return to Washington within a few months.<sup>40</sup>

Lusey, a former wire-service employee with expertise in radio electronics, struck up a friendship with Miles when the two came into China on the same plane. The two met Tai Li together and found him “open to any kind of proposition that would give him equipment and technical assistance.” Impressed by what he saw of Tai Li’s operations, Lusey informed Donovan near the end of May 1942 that his communications center regularly received messages from secret agents in such diverse locations as Korea, the Philippines, Indochina, Singapore, Thailand, and Burma, as well as many areas of Japanese-occupied China. Reporting that the Chinese had devised a simple means of converting a common radio receiver into a transmitter, Lusey even asserted that secret radio messages were coming in from Japan itself.

Lusey not only accompanied Miles on his subsequent trip behind Japanese lines, but later claimed to have instigated it to investigate and possibly sabotage a Japanese intercept station in Shanghai. The party could not reach Shanghai, but, like Miles, Lusey determined that Tai’s organization, though staffed by “a bunch of cutthroats,” was “very efficient and we can use it to great advantage.” Upon his return to Washington, Lusey argued that the OSS could best establish itself in China through association with Miles and Tai Li.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Stilwell to Donovan, 4 April 1942, and Lusey to Donovan, 23 May 1942 Folder 2, Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution; Washington to Chungking, 2 March 1942, Chungking to Washington, 21 May 1942, and Chungking to Washington, 14 August 1942, Box 175, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution; McHugh to Currie, 16 March 1942, Folder 9, Box 1, McHugh Papers, Kroch Library, Cornell University; and Yu, *OSS in China*, 13–22. Naval Attaché McHugh particularly disliked Gale, describing him as “the biggest false alarm I have ever seen out here; a pompous ass of the first water; a complete fraud as a Chinese scholar; and notorious to the Chinese as a man who funked out during the initial fighting at Shanghai and ran away from his old job in the Salt Gabelle leaving a bunch of signed checks with his Chinese colleagues to carry on the job.” Ambassador Clarence Gauss, meanwhile, characterized Gale as “a broken down old hack who had been kicked out of China” to an OSS representative in India in May 1942. In a meeting with President Roosevelt’s representative in India, Louis Johnson, Gauss described “Gale’s misbehavior at various points in China during his previous service there and gave Johnson to understand that Gale was a thoroughly bad lot.” See: “Excerpt from letter to J. R. Hayden from Robert Aura Smith,” 3 May 1942, Reel 41, M1642, USNA. Gauss, as consul general in Shanghai, had reported Gale’s controversial departure from the Salt Gabelle in 1937. See Gauss to Hornbeck, 14 October 1937, Box 175, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>41</sup> Lusey memorandum, n.d., Folder 680, Box 49, Entry 146 and Lusey to Donovan, n.d., Folder 3934, Box 267, Entry 139, RG 226; Miles to Leggett and Lee, 10 May 1942, Box 1 and Donovan to Miles, 21 September 1942, Box 2, RG 38, USNA; and Lusey to Donovan, 23 May 1942, Box 4, Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution.

Various circumstances made Lusey's proposal attractive. Faced with Chinese opposition – which Miles attributed to suspicions about connections between the OSS and the British – Stilwell had refused flatly to permit Major Eifler's OSS group into China. Moreover, blocked by both General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz, the OSS had been unable to establish a foothold in either Pacific theater. Accordingly, Donovan, recently promoted to brigadier general, worked out a pragmatic alliance with the Navy Department that made Miles concurrently regional OSS chief. The admirals accepted the deal because they hoped to tap into OSS unvouchered funds and benefit from Donovan's political clout. Colonel Hsiao saw no problem with the arrangement because it established a unified command under Miles, whom the Chinese "trusted and respected."<sup>42</sup>

No one bothered to consult Miles, but when he learned of his new role he initially welcomed it, anticipating that the OSS connection would allow him to claim a larger portion of the meager flow of supplies. His liaison office in Washington certainly encouraged this line of thought. Commander A. B. Leggett boasted: "All that Captain [Jeffrey] Metzger and I have to do is say 'boo' and Colonel Donovan buys us the White House, so let's make hay while the sun shines."<sup>43</sup>

Miles, however, had little interest in shifting his focus from the specific objectives laid out for him by the Navy and the guerrilla operation desired by the Chinese, so his honeymoon with the more ambitious OSS proved exceptionally brief. Dr. Joseph Hayden, a University of Michigan political scientist and former vice-governor of the Philippines, who was dispatched to Chungking by Donovan in the fall of 1942 in a futile attempt to get Stilwell's support for an OSS intelligence-gathering scheme in China, pegged Miles perfectly when he reported:

I believe that the "Friendship Plan" will be executed primarily as a Naval operation, with OSS having only an incidental connection with it. Captain Miles personally is 100% Navy, and 00% OSS. It would be a mistake to underestimate the effect of this fact upon the manner in which he will direct this operation.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Price to Wilson, 2 September 1942, Folder 3934, Box 267, Entry 139, RG 226, USNA; Miles to Leggett, 7 and 15 September 1942, Box 1, Donovan to Miles, 21 September 1942 and Purnell to Miles 21 September 1942, Box 2, RG 38, USNA; and Yu, *OSS in China*, 77–78. One reason for Chinese concerns was the fact that John Keswick, who had been in charge of the British project ousted from China earlier, had been transferred to the SOE office in Washington, and the Chinese believed that he was advising OSS.

<sup>43</sup> Miles to Donovan, 19 October 1942, Reel 79, M1642, and Leggett to Miles, 22 October 1942, Box 2, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in "SACO-Tai Li Report," Hoffman to Donovan, 20 July 1944, Reel 107, M1642, USNA.

Not surprisingly, Miles and Hayden soon clashed. When the former learned the latter had relayed Stilwell's critical comments about his project to Washington, Miles threatened to order Hayden out of China. Hayden, whose relations with Stilwell were equally poor, soon departed on an OSS mission to Australia.<sup>45</sup>

Miles' opposition to the intelligence-gathering project Hayden had sought to promote, and which Lusey had been ordered to initiate, became the initial source of his problems with OSS headquarters. Miles believed that Tai distrusted the OSS because he viewed the organization as close to, and possibly controlled by, the British.<sup>46</sup> Concerned that the introduction of OSS intelligence operations would destroy his carefully cultivated relationship with the Chinese spymaster, Miles advised his naval superiors at the beginning of December 1942: "No SI [special intelligence] man is wanted here. The very fact that he is here would put the Chinese on their guard against not only him but our whole organization out here. Tai Li has to be on guard against people that slip in unseen and unasked, and I am going to help him do it."<sup>47</sup>

Miles affirmed this stance in a remarkable letter to Tai Li dated 19 December 1942:

My concept of getting secret information in China is very simple and does not contain anything of the "spy" system which is often advocated by our Old China Friends and Allies. If I am asked to find out something or desire to seek information about something of a secret nature I would naturally ask General Tai personally to give me that information. It really makes no difference to me whether or not General Tai sees fit to give me the information requested. If he can't, for any reason whatever, he will tell me so. If he can he will tell me. The main thing is that I value the policy of being frank and above board with each other more than any other part of our organizational relationship. If, at any time this policy is abandoned, I shall very regretfully leave this position and take my organization with me. I do not want to step in the least little bit upon the sovereign rights of China.<sup>48</sup>

The Navy Department backed up Miles' objections to the OSS intelligence plans. Captain Metzel advised OSS Colonel Ellery Huntington on 11 December 1942 that "Friendship" policy opposed "all duplicate

<sup>45</sup> COMINCH to Miles, 12 November, 1942, Miles to Donovan and Purnell, 16 November 1942, Miles to Metzel and Leggett, 20 November 1942, Box 2, RG 38, USNA; and Donovan to Deane, 22 December 1942, Reel 41, M1642, USNA. Stilwell apparently despised Hayden even more than Miles did, referring to him variously in his diary as "tiresome," "Old fart-head," "the mush-faced mutt," and "pest." Stilwell Diary, No. 6, 19 October 1942 to 17 February 1943, Joseph W. Stilwell Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>46</sup> Yu makes the case on this point quite convincingly in *OSS in China*, 91–94.

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum for Friendship (US), 2 December 1942, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>48</sup> Miles to Tai Li, 19 December 1942, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

or parallel effort." Consequently, the Americans should only assist the Chinese in intelligence gathering. The OSS backed down for the moment.<sup>49</sup>

Miles' attitude enraged a group of old China hands – including C. V. Starr, Harold Jones, U. S. Harkson, and Norwood F. Allman – who had been developing plans for OSS intelligence operations in China. Starr, a wealthy businessman formerly based in Shanghai, viewed Miles' approach as "a very dangerous policy," not only because the Chinese "would not report faithfully to the Americans," but because their intelligence organizations had been "largely penetrated by the Japanese." Harkson judged Miles "thoroughly incompetent to handle the Chinese situation" and considered his arrangement with the Chinese a "complete sell-out." Allman accused Miles and his supporters of using "poison pen technique" and going "so far as to manufacture and peddle false dossiers" on repatriated Americans like themselves who had joined the OSS in late 1942.<sup>50</sup>

But if its intelligence plans for China were stymied for the moment, the OSS did gain approval for the Thai group to enter China. In his memoir, Miles suggests that the Thai contingent appeared suddenly and that the reason for its dispatch was something of a mystery. Neither contention is true. As early as 9 October 1942, the OSS had proposed that the Thai group's leader, Colonel Khap, would "report directly to Commander Miles personally" and the Chinese would direct operations aimed at infiltrating Thailand after the Free Thai unit's "reliability and usefulness" had been verified. In a message of 20 October 1942, the Navy requested that Miles seek Tai Li's approval for the Thai venture. "After considerable discussion," Miles later wrote, "it was decided that Thailanders were probably not as trustworthy as we would like, but that those trained and educated in America might have been subjected to the American influence enough to make them useful to our cause."<sup>51</sup>

Tai already had his own supply of agents for use in Thailand because many patriotic Chinese youths had left that country for China to assist in the war against Japan. These Thai-speaking Chinese could easily infiltrate Thailand's borders and operate within the sympathetic confines of the Chinese communities in Bangkok and elsewhere. As Lusey had discovered, some of these agents were already established in Thailand when

<sup>49</sup> Metzel to Huntington, 11 December 1942, Box 1, RG 38, USNA and Yu, *OSS in China*, 90.

<sup>50</sup> Bowden to Donovan, 20 February 1943, Reel 79, M1642, USNA and "History – Far East SI," Box 7, Norwood F. Allman Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>51</sup> Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 164; "Friendship Agreement of 9 October 1944," Box 2, COMNICH to Miles, 20 October 1942, Box 37, and Miles to Donovan, 26 May 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA; and "General Summary of the Thailander Situation as of 15 August 1943," Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

the war began and were radioing reports to Chungking. Japanese military police had caught one group of agents in the act of transmitting information in late 1942.<sup>52</sup>

Although the Thai government had not declared war on China, Premier Phibun had taken several provocative actions once Japanese troops had entered the country. In late December 1941, he curried favor with the Japanese by publicly urging that Chiang Kai-shek end his war of resistance. When Phibun's troops invaded and occupied the Shan States along the northwestern border of Thailand in May and June 1942 they clashed with the retreating Chinese Nationalist forces that had crossed into Burma to help the British. Finally, in July 1942, under Japanese pressure, Phibun recognized the Wang Ching-wei puppet government in Nanking.

The post-Pearl Harbor decision by the British and Americans to place Thailand in the China Theater of operations suggested that the Chinese might have the opportunity to occupy Thailand and settle scores for the "anti-Chinese" actions of the Phibun government. Davies, for one, took a skeptical view of Chungking's statements that it would respect postwar Thai independence. "Nominally the Chinese have toward Indochina and Thailand a policy which parallels ours," he wrote in October 1943, but "Actually, those two areas are to the Generalissimo pretty much what Sudetenland was to Hitler ten years ago."<sup>53</sup>

Clearly, many in the Nationalist government, including Chiang Kai-shek himself, did consider mainland Southeast Asia in general, and Thailand in particular, part of China's traditional sphere of influence and anticipated that China should, at minimum, play a "big brother" role there after the war. As Chinese representative S. C. Chen would make clear at the January 1945 Hot Springs Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Chungking's minimal expectations included the establishment of diplomatic relations with Bangkok and modification of laws adversely affecting the Chinese residents. Chen accused the Thai government of intentions "no less sinister than Japan" in treating Chinese residents "inhumanely and cruelly." He called for a postwar Allied commission to provide guidance "not only in [Thailand's] foreign conduct but also in her internal affairs, for at least a certain length of time."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> This incident is related by Miles in *A Different Kind of War*, 180–81 and is mentioned in Miles to Metzel and Leggett, undated, but written near the end of December 1942, Box 2, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>53</sup> On Chinese policy toward Thailand, see *FRUS* 1942, I: 32–33, 37–40. Davies to Donovan, 6 October 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

<sup>54</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu, *A Partnership for Disorder* (New York, 1996), 83–84, 110, 141, 310, and S. C. Chen, "China and Southeastern Asia," *Institute of Pacific Relations Hot Springs Conference* (New York, 1945), 2: 28–29. Liu notes that in a December 1942 conversation

Chungking's interest in the postwar settlement in Thailand gave the Chinese reason to desire control over any American ventures in that country, while Thailand's assignment to Chiang Kai-shek's theater provided justification for demanding it. The Sino-American Special Technical Cooperation Agreement, negotiated between China and the USA in late 1942 and early 1943, explicitly gave the Chinese such power of veto.

This agreement, which established the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO – pronounced “sock-oh”), followed Miles' joint appointment as head of the OSS in China. Miles contended in his messages to Washington and in his memoir that the initiative for a formal pact came from the Chinese side. Lusey, however, who was at the time in personal contact with Tai Li, later claimed that it was Miles himself who pushed for the SACO agreement to strengthen his own position and to insure “that he could freeze out any other American intelligence or sabotage operation in conjunction with Tai Li.”<sup>55</sup>

In any case, article six of the pact stated that all SACO functions “will be discussed and determined jointly by the Director [Tai Li] and the Deputy Director [Miles].” Regarding Thai and other native agents from surrounding territories, article eight stipulated that personnel “who have completed suitable training in the United States, have proved their trustworthiness, and have sworn loyalty to the Allied Nations, upon being proposed by the American side and agreed to by the Chinese side, may be permitted to undertake various activities under the direction of the organization.”<sup>56</sup>

Not surprisingly, the draft encountered opposition when it reached Washington, most significantly from General Marshall, the army chief of staff. He objected to a number of its points, but particularly the placement of SACO under Chinese control, outside General Stilwell's jurisdiction. Thus, on 16 February 1943, the Joint Chiefs proposed placing all American personnel, including Miles, under Stilwell. The two officers were requested to consult before Stilwell responded to Washington's proposal. Marshall obviously expected that Stilwell would insist on control over SACO.<sup>57</sup>

with Wellington Koo, Chiang acknowledged that China lacked the strength actively to push for the decolonization of Asia. Koo was then the Chinese ambassador to Great Britain, so presumably Chiang was alluding in particular to India. Liu argues that Chiang adopted a policy of verbally supporting Asian liberation movements to boost China's “spiritual appeal” to other Asians and to give him leverage in negotiations with the Western powers.

<sup>55</sup> Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 107–09; Yu, *OSS in China*, 94–98; and Lusey memorandum, n.d., Folder 680, Box 49, Entry 146, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>56</sup> Kermit Roosevelt, et al., eds., *The Overseas Targets: War Report of the OSS* (New York, 1976), 2: 424.

<sup>57</sup> Yu, *The OSS in China*, 96–97.



The Joint Chiefs had also taken up an OSS Planning Group scheme for psychological warfare in Asia that called for all OSS personnel in China to be subject to Stilwell's control. In an appended personal commentary, Donovan acknowledged, but did not endorse, the navy opposition to placing Miles directly under Stilwell. James Grafton Rogers, chairman of the OSS Planning Group, noted in his diary entry of 19 February: "A flurry over Bill Donovan's amendments to the Asiatic Plan. He almost repealed it in forwarding it. The generals and sailors were upset." Donovan's strong demands for more air transport space and additional radio operators might have been partly responsible for the fuss to which Rogers refers, but it seems more likely JCS staffers feared that the OSS proposal would re-open a nettlesome command controversy at just the moment when a solution appeared to be in hand.<sup>58</sup>

In the end, much to Marshall's chagrin, Miles skilfully blocked the Army's effort to place SACO under Stilwell. First, Miles claimed that Tai Li had objected violently to the JCS proposal. Miles then persuaded Stilwell that dire consequences would result if Chinese control over SACO were diminished.<sup>59</sup> Stilwell backed away from asserting control, the SACO agreement was accepted as originally proposed, and the final version of JCS Policy Document 245 on psychological warfare was revised to give Miles autonomy and sweeping authority. The key paragraph instructed:

Charge the Chief of OSS Activities, China Theater [Miles] with the responsibility for prosecuting US psychological warfare operations based on or concerned with China, Korea, Indochina and Thailand, in cooperation with and under the direction of the Director of the Sino-American Special Technical Cooperative Organization (SACO) who is under the direct command of the Generalissimo, Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> "Special Military Plan for US Psychological Warfare Operations Against the Japanese Within the Asiatic Theater," Folder 213, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA, and Rogers, *Wartime Washington*, 49, 56. Rogers, the chairman of the Planning Group, was skeptical of the idea of submitting to Stilwell's command. "The theater commander principle' seems a high hedge against getting irregular warfare really done," he confided to his diary. "The rough-shod boom-boom soldier has no faith or sympathy with total war." Although Yu (*OSS in China*, 114–15), reads Donovan's reference to Navy policy as an indication that he did not favor Marshall's proposal to place Miles under Stilwell, the OSS chief did not endorse the Navy's position and the reference appears to have been a diplomatic gesture.

<sup>59</sup> Yu, *OSS in China*, 96–98 and Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 113–15. Miles describes the frosty reception he and his naval colleagues received when they called to get General Marshall to initial the SACO accord.

<sup>60</sup> A copy of the document and the proposals from which it was drawn can be found in Folder 213, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. While Yu suggests (*OSS in China*, 114–15) that the language of JCS 245 embodied contradictory language in regard to command, the final version clearly endorsed the Navy's position.



Once President Roosevelt had approved the SACO agreement, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Donovan, and Miles signed the pact for the United States on 15 April 1943. They had avoided designating it as a formal treaty to avert the necessity of State Department and Senate review. Diplomats were horrified by its contents and doubtful of its legality. Within the OSS, Hayden complained to Donovan that it demeaned the position of the President by linking him directly with Tai Li, undermined Stilwell, and was loosely drawn to Chinese advantage. He described it as “a dangerous weapon which . . . could be used against the OSS both during the war and when the historical record is finally written.”<sup>61</sup>

The SACO deal left British intelligence officers in Chungking scratching their heads. Major S. F. Crawford of Force 136, the Asian arm of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), reported that the OSS had “somehow tied themselves hand and foot” to Tai Li “and are scared to move a step without his knowledge and consent.” The OSS situation appeared to him “more a busted flush” than any setback sustained by British intelligence in Chungking. The British link with a rival Chinese intelligence organization, the Institute for International Studies (IIS), seemed favorable and flexible by comparison.<sup>62</sup>

Donovan surely had his own reservations about the pact,<sup>63</sup> but Stilwell's unwillingness to assert authority over Miles left him in no position to challenge its arrangements. Beyond the fact that the OSS owed the Navy for its limited foothold in China, it had come under renewed assault from the OWI and Army Intelligence. With once-strong White House backing now largely absent, only timely support from the Joint Chiefs allowed the OSS to survive a February 1943 crisis.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, events had created a new sense of urgency in Chungking regarding Thailand operations. Thai Premier Phibun, impressed by

<sup>61</sup> Davies to Coughlin, 24 April 1944, Folder 1167, Box 82, Entry 146, RG 226, USNA, and Hayden to Donovan, 13 May 1943, Folder 10, Box 1, McHugh Papers, Kroch Library, Cornell University.

<sup>62</sup> 0.111 to AD/O, 2 March and 15 March 1943, HS1-163, PRO.

<sup>63</sup> Yu (*OSS in China*, 114–15) argues that Donovan actually wanted SACO to remain outside Stilwell's control so that he might exploit the resulting ambiguity of command, but provides no convincing evidence of this. To the contrary, it seems that by February 1943 Donovan and the OSS viewed China operations under Stilwell as preferable to the SACO option.

<sup>64</sup> On the OSS February crisis see Troy, *Donovan and the CIA*, 197–204 and Rogers, *Wartime Washington*, 54–61. Interestingly, according to Leo Marks in *Between Silk and Cyanide: The Story of SOE's Code War* (London, 1998), 8, 147, SOE faced a similar challenge to its existence from its chief domestic rival, the Secret Intelligence Service, during the same month.

the decline in Axis fortunes evident in the Russian success in the battle for Stalingrad and the Japanese failure to dislodge the Americans from Guadalcanal, had begun to distance himself from the Japanese. In late January 1943, he had instructed two divisional commanders in the Thai expeditionary force confronting the Chinese 93rd Division along the border between the Shan states and Yunnan Province to make a gesture of friendship toward the Chinese side. They were to return a group of prisoners of war with a message declaring that the "Chinese and Thai were no longer enemies" and emphasizing that the Thai had been coerced into joining the Japanese side.<sup>65</sup>

Subsequently, twelve Thai-speaking POWs were identified and four chosen for repatriation. According to one of the officers involved, it became necessary to threaten them with execution before they agreed to go, but eventually they crossed the Lam River to Yunnan. When a Thai signal unit received a positive reply from the commander of the 93rd Division, five Thai representatives, led by Colonel Luang Krai Narai, crossed over for a parley in mid-February 1943. Northern Army Commander Major General Han Songkhram reported to Phibun that the two sides had agreed to cease hostilities and maintain regular, twice-monthly meetings. A second meeting occurred later that month. Chiang Kai-shek revealed these contacts to Ambassador Gauss on 2 March.<sup>66</sup>

The Thai approach led the Chinese to undertake a political initiative they had planned almost a year earlier, but had held in abeyance for just such an opening. In a broadcast statement of 26 February 1943, Chiang Kai-shek expressed sympathy for the plight of the Thai people, describing Thailand as one of the "captive nations." He declared that China had "no territorial ambitions in Thailand and harbors no intention of undermining her sovereignty and independence." He called on the Thai army and people to cooperate with the Chinese in opposing the Japanese forces occupying their country.<sup>67</sup>

The Chinese encouraged their allies to make similar statements. The State Department, despite ongoing discussions on possible postwar international trusteeships for Southeast Asia, had agreed to do so in May 1942 when China had first advised Washington of its intentions. Accordingly, President Roosevelt endorsed Chiang's position at a press conference on

<sup>65</sup> Translated article by Han Songkhram in "The Biography of General Luang Haan-sonkram," Library of Congress Microfilm, 81.

<sup>66</sup> Articles by Han Songkhram and Saman Werawithaya in *ibid.*, 81, 114–15 and Gauss' dispatch of 3 March 1943 in *FRUS* 1943 (China): 15–16.

<sup>67</sup> The text of Chiang's statement appears in *FRUS* 1943 (China): 13–14. This policy had been outlined in April of the previous year in a memorandum handed to the State Department printed in *FRUS* 1942, 1: 32–33.

12 March 1943.<sup>68</sup> The British, however, still smarting from the Thai support of Japanese operations against Malaya and Burma and the only one of the three major allies formally at war with Thailand, declined to follow suit.

In an exchange of memoranda with the Foreign Office in early 1943, John Keswick of the SOE expressed the bitter sentiments toward Thailand that put the British out of step with the Chinese and Americans. Britain should assert, Keswick urged,

that the Thais have been foolish enough to throw their lot in with the Japanese in fighting against us, that we intend that she [Thailand] will sue for peace, that our interests in Siam in relationship to Malaya and Burma have always been great and that we have no intention of completely relinquishing those interests when the time comes for a settlement of the problems of the Pacific.<sup>69</sup>

British security interest in the Kra Isthmus emerged, however, as a specific stumbling block to a British endorsement of the Chinese and American declarations. Prime Minister Churchill personally “drew attention to the fact that it might be necessary after the war to consider some sort of protectorate over the Kra peninsula area including Singgora [Songkhla] and that it would therefore be as well to refrain from any specific declaration as to Siam’s political integrity.” Further, Colonial Office officials saw a golden opportunity to annex the southern Thai provinces, largely populated by Muslim Malays, that had formed a territorial wedge between Malaya and Burma. An editorial in the *Crown Colonist* in 1945 justified such annexation on security grounds, describing Thailand’s southern provinces as “the back door to Malaya, through which, owing to the craven capitulation of Siam . . . the Jap invaders poured in overwhelming strength.” Although the British outnumbered the Japanese in Malaya and there is little reason to believe that the campaign would have turned out much differently if Thailand had resisted to the best of its ability, the British journal opined that “This territory in the future must be controlled by us, and if necessary a just sum in compensation be paid to Siam.”<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The State Department’s support for China’s stance is outlined in Hull to Roosevelt, 2 May 1943, *FRUS* 1943 (China): 37–38. The text of Roosevelt’s press conference can be found in Box 385, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution. Interestingly, Roosevelt had once previously lumped Thailand together with surrounding colonial areas in making the suggestion that Southeast Asians would need at least twenty years of postwar tutelage before being permitted self-government. This apparently inadvertent remark by the President came during a 1 June 1942 meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov, and is quoted in Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 157.

<sup>69</sup> Keswick to Broad, 22 February 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>70</sup> On Churchill’s intervention, see Foreign Office memorandum “Free Siamese,” 8 September 1943, HS1-72, PRO. Also, Nicholas Tarling, “Atonement Before

If Miles had any appreciation of the underlying factors that motivated Chinese policy toward Thailand, there is no hint of it in either his papers or his memoir. He continued to make every effort to meet Tai's desires, including a trip to Washington in March 1943 to help push the SACO agreement to final approval. Speaking before the OSS Planning Group on 18 March, Miles related what its chairman described as "an amazing Fu Manchu story" about his endeavors in China. He criticized Stilwell "as out-of-date, conventional, [and] disliked by the Chinese as a scornful Old China Hand." He also disparaged Stilwell's Burma strategy, portraying a naval landing operation supported by SACO's guerrilla units as the best way to attack the Japanese in China.<sup>71</sup>

Festering ill-will between Miles and OSS officials surfaced during this 1943 trip when he clashed with Captain Carl O. Hoffman, Devlin's replacement as liaison for Asian operations. Miles viewed Hoffman, a wealthy thirty-seven-year-old New Jersey-born corporate lawyer whose wartime service had begun with the loan of his yacht to the Coast Guard, as a prime example of the "greenhorn" type Donovan had brought into OSS. Miles was equally unhappy about the presence of too many "old China hands" at OSS headquarters.<sup>72</sup>

An incident during Miles' return journey to China further soured his relations with the OSS. On 8 May, Donovan instructed Miles to wait in Cairo pending a meeting the OSS chief had scheduled with Stilwell, who had come to Washington for the Anglo-American TRIDENT Conference. Donovan expected Stilwell to propose major changes in SACO and wanted Miles to be available for consultation. Miles, who had reached Karachi by the time he received the message, replied by urging no change in the SACO arrangement, then proceeded on to Chungking. Despite the fact that Donovan had worded his message as a request rather than an order, he saw Miles' failure to comply as disrespectful.<sup>73</sup>

Davies, who had accompanied Stilwell to Washington, had taken responsibility for supervising psychological warfare and related activities since February. His strong desire to establish direct contact with the

Absolution: British Policy Towards Thailand in the Second World War." *Proceedings, Seventh LAHA Conference* (Bangkok, 1979), 2: 1433–1449; Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 219, 347, and Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 119–22 on British interest in the southern provinces. The *Crown Colonist* editorial is quoted in "Thailand Intelligence Digest," 22 June 1945, Box 3108, Entry 488, RG 208, USNA.

<sup>71</sup> Rogers, *Wartime Washington*, 70.

<sup>72</sup> Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 117–18 and Hoffman's bio-data in Folder 3, Box 97A, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>73</sup> Donovan to Miles, 8 May 1944, Box 2, RG 38, USNA; "Chronological Development of FE-4-CBI," Reel 91, M1642, USNA; chronology attached to Hoffman to Buxton, 5 August 1943, Reel 109, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; and Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 120.

Chinese Communist base area, centered on the northern town of Yen-an, a scheme that Tai Li and Chiang Kai-shek would oppose vehemently and one in which Davies hoped to interest the OSS, apparently motivated his interest in this realm. This gave Davies another good reason – beyond his general antipathy toward Tai and Miles – to seek means to circumvent and undermine the SACO agreement. He had begun gathering ammunition by slyly pumping Miles' executive officer, Commander David Wight, for information about SACO's operations. Unaware of Davies' motives, Wight had advised Miles on 11 March that the diplomat "is a smooth operator and has ideas, and good ones, I think." Wight initially had even welcomed the prospect that Stilwell might appoint Davies as liaison with SACO.<sup>74</sup>

Before leaving India, Davies discussed the intelligence situation with OSS Major Richard P. Heppner. A thirty-five-year-old graduate of Princeton University and Columbia University Law School and a member of Donovan's New York law firm since 1938, Heppner had come to India as the military advisor to Ambassador Phillips, President Roosevelt's personal representative. Heppner and Phillips had worked together previously at COI/OSS in London, and before departing there Phillips had requested British approval for establishment of an OSS unit in India. The SOE had not objected, but colonial authorities in India insisted that only liaison officers could be permitted and they also reasserted an old demand that Eifler's Detachment 101 be placed under SOE control. In light of this, Heppner and Davies decided that British opposition to an OSS foothold in India could best be circumvented by the attachment of an OSS officer to General Stilwell's headquarters in New Delhi. Davies recognized that such an arrangement could facilitate his effort to employ the OSS as an ally against Miles and SACO.<sup>75</sup>

Other members of Stilwell's staff had also developed interest in alliance with the OSS. Beginning with a proposal from Colonel Benjamin G. Ferris in New Delhi in late March 1943, CBI staffers had been discussing the creation of a unit under Stilwell's control for gathering military intelligence from Burma, Thailand, and Indochina. Ferris initially suggested that it might be organized either by the OSS – perhaps by Eifler-or Army Intelligence. After a month of exchanges on the subject, Stilwell's staff decided not to involve Eifler, but to base the operation in Yunnan

<sup>74</sup> Wight to Miles, 6, 11, 23, 24 March, 1943, Box 2, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>75</sup> "Chronological Development of FE-4-CBI," Reel 91, M1642, USNA; Warner Interview with Heppner, undated, Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 195; Davies, *Dragon by the Tail*, 286–87; and Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 143–44.

under the aegis of the Americans' favorite Chinese general, Chen Cheng, with Colonel Frank Dorn as its commander. Colonel Frank Merrill, who accompanied Stilwell to Washington, would determine which agency might best provide the necessary personnel.<sup>76</sup>

Phillips and Heppner arrived in Washington ahead of Stilwell's party, positioning Heppner to serve as liaison between the OSS and Stilwell's staff. He arranged for Davies to brief Donovan just prior to a meeting between the OSS chief and Stilwell at the Pentagon on 13 May 1943, a session at which the two generals endorsed the Davies-Heppner proposal to attach an OSS officer to the CBI staff in New Delhi. Stilwell subsequently accepted Davies' recommendation that Heppner fill the position, but with the understanding that he must avoid an early confrontation with Miles by steering clear of China for the time being. Responding to the desire of Stilwell's staff officers for an intelligence operation targeting Southeast Asia, Donovan slyly offered to place the OSS Thai group under the theater commander rather than SACO as previously planned. Stilwell agreed.<sup>77</sup>

Accordingly, Donovan advised Miles in a 23 May message that the Thai group should report to Colonel Merrill's headquarters in Kunming instead of proceeding to Chungking. This development stunned Miles, who recalled that Stilwell once dismissed the Thai group with the derisory crack "that it was impossible to do anything with those people down there." Miles also recognized that Tai Li would view a transfer of the Thai group as a violation of the recently concluded SACO agreement.<sup>78</sup>

With both Tai and Stilwell absent from Chungking, Miles sought to clarify the issue. When Stilwell's chief of staff, General Thomas G. Hearn, pleaded ignorance, Miles informed the OSS via the Navy Department that he would hold the Thai group at Detachment 101 pending talks with Stilwell and Tai Li, but complained:

<sup>76</sup> Ferris to Stilwell, 24 March 1943; Joseph Stilwell, Jr. to Ferris and Pape, 23 April 1943; Ferris to General Stilwell, 24 April 1943; Hearn to Dorn, 26 April 1943 and Hearn to General Stilwell and Ferris, 26 April 1943, Reel 1, "'Eyes Alone' Correspondence of General Joseph Stilwell," M1419, USNA. Eifler's knowledge of this proposal explains why, as noted in the [previous chapter](#), he expected to retain the men of the first Thai group when they reached his camp in June 1943.

<sup>77</sup> Stilwell Diary, No. 7, 13 May 1943, Stilwell Papers, Hoover Institution, and "Chronological Development of FE-4-CBI," Reel 91, M1642, USNA. Stilwell later claimed that he agreed to take control of the Thai group at Donovan's urging as a favor to the OSS chief. However, given the existence of plans within his command to bring the OSS into CBI operations he was surely a more willing partner in the arrangement than he wished to acknowledge once strong opposition from Miles and Tai Li became apparent.

<sup>78</sup> "General Summary of the Thaiander Situation as of 15 August 1943," Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226 and "Chronological Development of FE-4-CBI," Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

I originally secured Tai Li's permission [to] use [the] Thais over his objection because [of the] wishes [of] OSS. This resulted in Tai Li making extensive preparations on locations and expending large funds anticipating control [of] their operations. Your proposal [is the] equivalent to crossing him up.

Continued efforts to modify the SACO agreement, Miles warned, would bring an end to Chinese cooperation. Emphasizing that Tai Li had been assured that all OSS activities would be concentrated under SACO, Miles predicted that his Chinese counterpart would "be perturbed and ask embarrassing questions about our sincerity towards the whole project."<sup>79</sup>

Washington's reply, signed jointly by Donovan and Admiral William R. Purnell, but clearly reflecting the former's views, stressed the importance of stimulating Stilwell's interest in SACO projects. Referring to Stilwell's control over the flow of supplies, the message pointed out that promises made under the SACO agreement could be fulfilled only with his cooperation. It urged that Miles employ this argument to gain Chinese approval for placing the Thai group under Stilwell. This response neither convinced nor appeased Miles.<sup>80</sup>

The TRIDENT Conference went poorly for Stilwell. In light of British opposition to his plans for a major offensive in Burma, the conferees approved only a limited effort dependent on Chinese troop commitments. Further, Chennault convinced Roosevelt of the merits of a large-scale air campaign that would give him first call on "Hump" supplies. Chiang Kai-shek strongly backed Chennault's scheme, so Stilwell knew he would face an uphill battle in convincing the Generalissimo to allocate troops for operations in Burma. It was after a tough session with Chiang on 16 June, the day after his return to China, that Stilwell and four of his staff members received Miles and three of his aides at the General's residence.<sup>81</sup>

Commander Leggett, who was visiting Chungking, wrote that "the conference consisted mainly of Mary [Miles] talking and everyone else listening, and at the end the General saying no to everything." Stilwell showed little enthusiasm for either the Thai operation or a parallel proposal to infiltrate Indochina. Regarding the Thai group, Stilwell recalled that he had told Donovan he would provide them with all possible help. Then, according to Leggett's notes, he turned and asked Colonel Merrill: "What was the final decision on that?" Merrill replied that Heppner was to "bring the final details when he comes." Citing negative British attitudes, particularly their opposition to the SACO/OSS Indochina scheme,

<sup>79</sup> Miles to COMNICH, 26 May 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>80</sup> Purnell and Donovan to Miles, 29 May 1943, Box 14, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>81</sup> Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, 320–35; Davies, *Dragon by the Tail*, 265–69; and Leggett to Metzel, 29 June 1943, Box 3, RG 38, USNA.



Stilwell grumbled: "Donovan is out to screw us. [I] do not like the whole idea, because I am supposed to be playing an open hand with the British, due to the operations coming up. I think it's just asking for trouble bringing these two groups in."<sup>82</sup>

When Miles pressed the issue of who would control the Thai group, Leggett wrote, "the General hedged and intimated that he just wished to have some control of their operation more from a coordinated [sic] point of view than actual control." In the end, Stilwell agreed to shelve the matter until Miles could discuss it with Tai Li. Stilwell's skeptical comments led Leggett to the entirely erroneous conclusion that the OSS had foisted the Thai group on the General. "The Thais have been a headache ever since OSS pulled them out of the pot," Leggett commented, "and it now seems that someone is using them to sell Mary [Miles] down the river."<sup>83</sup>

The meeting in fact demonstrated only that Stilwell had no intention of becoming embroiled in a direct fight with Miles over disposition of the Thai group. Stilwell's low level of interest in the project is suggested by the fact that he made no reference whatever to it in his diary. Stilwell had strong misgivings about Miles' activities, criticized him behind his back, and gave frequent aid and comfort to his enemies, but he had no intention of stirring up a hornet's nest by directly assaulting a favorite of the Navy Department.

Stilwell's negative comments about Donovan seem purposefully calculated to mislead Miles. In fact, the General had left Davies behind in Washington with instructions to develop the OSS connection. Just two days after Stilwell's encounter with Miles, Davies radioed that Heppner intended to set up research and analysis offices in both Delhi and Chungking and expand special operations through Detachment 101. Heppner also wished to launch intelligence-gathering activities, including an operation in China, outside SACO, that would be "military in character and under military direction" to allay British and Chinese suspicions. The Free Thai officers, Davies added, had been "taken from Miles" and were being trained by Eifler "to use when you wish." Davies considered the OSS, with ample unvouchered funds at its disposal, the "most experienced and feasible organization" to undertake such activities. Significantly, Stilwell made no objection to any of this in his notations on the cable, simply noting that the entire matter should be handled on an "eyes alone" basis. He did, however, emphasize that Heppner and

<sup>82</sup> Leggett to Metzel, 29 June 1943, Box 3, RG 38 and notes of the 16 June 1943 meeting in Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*; the chronology of events attached to Buxton to Hoffman, 5 August 1945, Reel 109, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; and "General Situation of the Thailanders as of 15 August 1943," Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.



other new personnel should remain in Delhi for the time being. A further indication of Stilwell's attitude is the fact that when the chief of Military Intelligence, General George Strong, a bitter enemy of Donovan's agency, attempted to short-circuit the new arrangements, both Colonel Ferris and Stilwell himself affirmed that they would proceed with their plans to utilize the OSS.<sup>84</sup>

Miles, heartened by Stilwell's studied display of indifference toward the Thai operation, took up the matter with Tai Li at a dinner meeting on 25 June. Leggett, who met the Chinese general for the first time and came away much impressed, found him adamant about controlling the Thai group "even though they caused him a lot of trouble." Tai declared that:

the Thais would have to associate with his people in order to get into Thailand and to operate with his people inside Thailand in order to be of use to anyone and also that his people would have to keep their eye on them in any case, and from his standpoint it was far simpler for him to run them.

He warned that if Stilwell insisted on controlling the Thai group, the matter would have to be taken up with the Generalissimo and the SACO agreement would require modification.<sup>85</sup>

When Miles reported this to Stilwell on 28 June, the latter reaffirmed his unwillingness to fight forthrightly for control of the Thai group, commenting disingenuously that "he was happy to get rid of them and hoped he didn't hear any more about them." Three days later, Miles wrote confidently to Wight: "Stilwell and I agreed on our operating the Thais and I am going to do it or they are going home."<sup>86</sup>

Stilwell's refusal to oppose Miles directly meant that the OSS effort to detach the Thai group from Miles had failed for the moment, but Heppner's assignment to Stilwell's staff had laid the groundwork for later success. Donovan had sold Heppner's appointment to the admirals on the grounds that it had been requested by Stilwell and that it would not impact Miles' position in SACO. Admiral Purnell had sought to head off any complaints from Miles by radioing that Davies had been named as

<sup>84</sup> Davies to Stilwell, 18 June 1943; Pape to Stilwell and Ferris, 19 June 1943; Ferris to Stilwell, 19 June 1943; and Stilwell to Ferris, 21 June 1943, Reel 1, "Eyes Alone" Correspondence of General Joseph Stilwell, M1419, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> Leggett to Metzel, 29 June 1943, Box 3, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid; and Miles to Donovan, 30 June 1943, Box 37 and Miles to Wight, 1 July 1945, Box 3, RG 38, USNA. Stilwell did make note of the 28 June meeting in his diary, but commented on a supply matter rather than the Thai issue: "Miles and gang in. More petty larceny. They have put one over on ATC [Air Transport Command]." Stilwell diary, no. 7, 1943, Box 22, Stilwell Papers, Hoover Institution. This is an apparent reference to Miles striking a deal with Chennault to provide Navy planes in return for supplies. See Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 128.

Stilwell's liaison with SACO in Chungking and that Heppner would be attached to Stilwell's New Delhi staff as part of a Donovan deal "intended to help you."<sup>87</sup>

Miles had already learned of Heppner's appointment during the 16 June meeting with Stilwell. Colonel Merrill explained that Heppner would be involved in staff planning and serve as liaison between Stilwell on the one hand and Miles and Eifler on the other, but Miles, supremely confident of his ability to handle Stilwell, wanted no such buffer. In a message to the Navy Department, he emphasized that no one could be appointed to SACO without prior approval from himself, Tai Li, and Colonel Hsiao in Washington. Davies promptly advised Stilwell that OSS headquarters considered Miles' stance "inadmissible and presumptuous."<sup>88</sup>

In fact, Colonel Hsiao had already accepted Heppner's appointment, which in any case was not directly to SACO. Hsiao had approved it largely because Commander R. Davis Halliwell, the new OSS deputy chief for special operations, and Hoffman had convinced him that Heppner's presence would facilitate the flow of supplies without affecting SACO's independence.<sup>89</sup>

Miles' bitter complaints, coupled with reassurances that he and Tai Li were committed to giving wholehearted assistance to Stilwell, soon gave rise to second thoughts about the Heppner appointment at the Navy Department. Thus Captain Metzel sought to delay Heppner's scheduled 29 June departure from Washington on the grounds that he had failed to seek Navy counsel on the unique nature of Miles' operation. Heppner's appointment, Metzel suggested, now seemed unnecessary because of Miles' commitment to working more closely with Stilwell, but added that if the OSS insisted on sending him he should have no authority in China unless he first received "indoctrination" from Miles.<sup>90</sup>

Concerned that obstinance on the Heppner issue might sink lingering hopes for an OSS role in the Pacific Theater, Colonel G. Edward "Ned" Buxton, who was sitting in for the absent Donovan, adopted a conciliatory approach. He advised Metzel that Heppner would proceed to London on OSS business and would not go on to India immediately. Buxton insisted that Heppner would not interfere with existing command relationships and sought to allay Miles' concerns, pointing out that Davies'

<sup>87</sup> Purnell to Miles, 15 June 1943, Box 18, RG 38 and chronology attached to Hoffman to Buxton, 5 August 1943, Reel 109, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>88</sup> Miles to COMNICH, 20 June 1943, Box 2, RG 38; Davies to Stilwell, 1 July 1943, Reel 1, "Eyes Alone" Correspondence of General Joseph Stilwell," M1419; and Heppner to Donovan, 20 July 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA. Also, Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 123–24.

<sup>89</sup> "Chronological Development of FE-4-CBI," Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

high standing with Stilwell would make him a valuable ally. Recognizing the "most delicate" nature of the matter, Donovan endorsed Buxton's cautious approach by radio from Algiers. Pointing out that he had reaffirmed Miles' position as head of the OSS in China in front of Davies and Stilwell, Donovan added: "Heppner must play the game straight with Mary [Miles] even though this is a hard job."<sup>91</sup>

Once he had placated Metzel, Buxton authorized Heppner's advance to India, but he remained sufficiently concerned about the Navy's attitude to consider removing China from Heppner's sphere of responsibility. For its part, the OSS Planning Group offered reassurances that the OSS would not forge ahead with planned new intelligence operations in China unless Stilwell first cleared the matter with Miles and the Chinese. Nonetheless, Donovan soon made clear that his true aim was to circumvent Miles. He declared to SOE representatives in London on 27 July "that OSS has now an understanding with General Stilwell and Chennault whereby OSS will carry out any operations required by the generals, and this work will be under the command of Major Heppner."<sup>92</sup>

In the meantime, OSS London chief Colonel David K. E. Bruce gained assurances from British intelligence agencies that "their representatives will be told to give Heppner every possible collaboration." These pledges reflected British acceptance of the unpleasant fact that OSS entry into India could no longer be averted. An effort to extract a *quid pro quo* had failed when the Americans rejected a proposal to unify allied intelligence and psychological warfare operations in India put forth in May by Major General W. J. Cawthorn, intelligence chief of the Indian army. Davies led the lobbying against Cawthorn's proposal, contrasting the incompatible goals of the British ("fighting primarily for the retention, if not the expansion, of their empire") and the Americans ("fighting without imperialistic designs solely for the defeat of Japan").<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Buxton to Donovan, 30 June 1943 and Donovan to Buxton, 2 July 1943, Reel 39, M1642, USNA.

<sup>92</sup> Buxton to Heppner, 3 July 1943, Reel 39 and Hoffman to Donovan, 6 August 1943, Reel 91, M1642; and Pape to Stilwell and Ferris, 27 July 1943, Reel 2, "Eyes Alone" Correspondence of General Joseph Stilwell, M1419, USNA. Minutes of 27 July 1943 OSS/SOE meeting in London, HS1-341, PRO. In "Report by Theater Office in the Far East," 31 August 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA, Heppner, in a third-person reference to himself, wrote: "As the OSS officer, it is his duty to coordinate all OSS activities in the Theater. As yet he has not started to function with respect to China."

<sup>93</sup> "Combined Liaison Committee," Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226 and Bruce to Buxton, Reel 39 and Davies memorandum, 31 May 1943, Reel 56, M1642, USNA. Warner Interview with Heppner, undated, Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA notes that General Cawthorn had "a rather stormy interview" at this time in Washington with General Donovan. Donovan reportedly remarked that if Cawthorn "wouldn't let us in the door we would come through the transom."

During his visit to London, Donovan negotiated a formal agreement that permitted OSS operations in India in exchange for the right of the SOE to maintain its foothold in China. Under this pact, the SOE would be the “predominant partner” in India, while the reverse situation would apply in China. But while the agreement provided that each party would have “full knowledge” of and give consent to the other’s operations from India and China, it established no formal structure or procedures for effective coordination. Accordingly, it did little to dampen OSS–SOE rivalry or allay mutual suspicions. It did, however, insure Donovan the foothold in India he had long sought.<sup>94</sup>

In Chungking, meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Khap Khunchon had arrived by plane on 7 June 1943. Lieutenant Karun Kengradomying, who had missed sailing on the *Abraham Clark* due to a case of the measles, accompanied him. With Major Devlin ill and confined to a Calcutta hospital, Lieutenant Rollo Haatvedt of SACO escorted the two Thai officers to Chungking and, on orders from Miles, took Khap in as a temporary house guest. Haatvedt recalled that in his absence Khap had behaved like “a caged lion,” pestering a household servant for a bottle of gin. When Haatvedt returned and broke out a bottle, he later wrote, Khap “practically snatched it from my hand before I could wrestle a gimlet.”<sup>95</sup>

Negative reports about Khap had preceeded him. An SOE officer in Cairo heard of his new role from Prince Suphasawat – now attached to the SOE and *en route* to the headquarters of its Asian branch, Force 136, in Meerut, India – and dispatched a warning to his organization. The officer, who had supervised Khap during a stint at the British Staff College, recalled that he

was most anti-British and was involved in Siamese intrigue throughout most of his stay at the Staff College, and that, coupled with fast and loose living which I found it difficult to keep up with or control, prevented him from absorbing anything whatsoever useful from the Staff College course. I formed the opinion that in no circumstances was he a man to be trusted. He always put himself first and would back any side just so long as it was the winning side but if the matter was at all in doubt he would play a double game.<sup>96</sup>

Force 136 did not dare to object to Khap’s presence on the basis of a single damning report, but it heightened British determination to isolate

<sup>94</sup> “New Brief for SOE Negotiations with General Donovan,” July 1943; minutes of 27 July 1943; and “SOE–OSS Cooperation in the Far Eastern Theatre,” 1 August 1943, HS1-341, PRO. Also, Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 145–46.

<sup>95</sup> Hoffman to Buxton, 5 August 1943, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Haatvedt to Miles, 4 June 1957, Box 2, Milton Miles Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>96</sup> D/H366 (CAIRO) to London, 8 April 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

their own Thai recruits from Khap and other members of the OSS group when they passed through India.<sup>97</sup>

An envoy sent by Pridi from Bangkok to China, Chamkat Phalangkun (Chamkad Balankura), wrote a devastating report describing Khap as an intimate of Phibun, an active participant in the border war with French Indochina at the beginning of 1941, "a good friend of many Japanese officers and a known Axis sympathizer." The report concluded:

It is thought that he has a secret understanding with Phibun to pretend to be a Free Thai. He is not the man to be believed in. As soon as he arrives here he will certainly get in touch with Phibun and the Japanese somehow, and not only will the Free Thai Movement's plan be frustrated but the forces of China will suffer as a result. Beware of this man.

Chamkat suggested that Khap be required to write a lengthy report on conditions in Thailand, his military plans, and his political views. At most, he suggested, Khap would be suitable for propaganda work aimed at Thai soldiers and in military planning.<sup>98</sup>

The Chinese sent Chamkat's unsigned assessment to the SACO representative in Washington, who sought a reaction from the Thai Minister. While Seni had no hard evidence to prove that Khap was acting under instructions from Phibun, he did not hesitate to lambaste his rival as lacking the ability of "being pro anybody except himself" and "an opportunist, with hardly enough backbone for any kind of conviction or ideal whatsoever."<sup>99</sup>

Aware of these reports and generally uncertain about the future of the Thai group, Miles initially barred Khap from Friendship Valley, his headquarters west of Chungking, keeping the Thai colonel in the city under the watchful eyes of Chinese agents. Khap almost immediately acquired a mistress, a woman surely screened, if not directly provided, by Tai Li's organization. When Devlin later questioned the security of Khap's living arrangements, Miles replied: "He couldn't be under heavier guard than he is right now, and he doesn't know it."<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Pointon to Mackenzie, 29 January 1945, HS1-64; and Force 136 to SOE-London, 17 April 1943 and SOE-London to Force 136, 19 April 1943, HS1-72 PRO.

<sup>98</sup> Chamkat memoranda, n.d., Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA and attachments to Deputy Commissioner of Police, Security Control, Calcutta to Jenkin, 2 April 1944, HS1-56, PRO.

<sup>99</sup> Seni to Lt. Col. Hsiao, 30 June 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>100</sup> Tai Li, a notorious womanizer in his own right, was known for employing sexual connections ("skirt and sash relations") as a tool of espionage and control. See Wakeman, *Spymaster*, 226–30. A Chinese told a Free Thai officer that Khap's mistress turned out to be a Japanese spy. This might have been a case of mistaken identity, however, as it was reported elsewhere that another woman who lived in the same building as Khap

Tai Li and General Cheng K'ai-min, an influential intelligence officer and one-time resident of Thailand who had been assigned special responsibility for Thai operations, hosted a dinner party for Khap on the night of 23 June. Miles described the session as "an inquisition" during which Khap's "faith was tested in every possible manner under a cross-fire of questions at the table." Afterward, Miles and Tai pegged Khap as a self-promoter, but "could not definitely establish that he was disloyal to the United Nations." In regard to the rest of the Thai group, they somehow concluded, sight unseen, that they were "loyal" and "very useable."<sup>101</sup>

As the additional Thai officers began arriving in China, however, two factors had complicated an already murky situation in Chungking. First, Chamkat had come to China in March 1943 claiming to represent a nascent anti-Japanese underground headed by Regent Pridi. Secondly, SOE's Force 136, which had been developing its own plans to penetrate Thailand, had begun elbowing its way onto the stage.

was arrested as a spy in early 1944. Interviews with Francis T. Devlin, Washington, DC, 25 October 1994 and Chok na Ranong, Bangkok, 20 July 1993. Also, Karawek to Khap, 10 January 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>101</sup> "General Summary of the Thailanders Situation as of August 15, 1943, Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

### 3 Chamkat and the Allies

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In Bangkok, Regent Pridi Phanomyong, Premier Phibun's chief political rival, had also taken note of the early 1943 shift of momentum in the war. This encouraged him to attempt to make contact with the Allies and develop a plan to escape from the country to organize a Thai government-in-exile. Pridi's initiative further intensified the internal political divisions and personal rivalries within the Free Thai movement and sparked a scramble for position by the Allied intelligence agencies.

Over a year earlier, on 8 December 1942, immediately after the Japanese army had arrived, Pridi had discussed the potential for resistance with some of his followers who had congregated at his residence. They discussed forming a secret organization to oppose the Japanese and to inform the Allies of the true sentiments of the Thai people. They considered retreating to northern Thailand in order to create an anti-Japanese base area.<sup>1</sup>

After the meeting broke up at 11 P.M., Luang Kat Songkhram, father of OSS Free Thai officer Karun Kengradomying, appeared at Pridi's house. Pridi and Kat discussed the possibility of leaving Bangkok to rally Thai troops in the North. Kat offered to go to Nakhon Sawan by boat to investigate the possibility of seizing the northern railway line, but the Japanese moved too quickly to make this feasible.<sup>2</sup> Pridi decided to lie low for the time being. Most others opposed to Phibun's collaboration with the Japanese did likewise, although eleven men, most of them Chinese, had been arrested by the police in early 1942 for printing and distributing anti-government leaflets.<sup>3</sup>

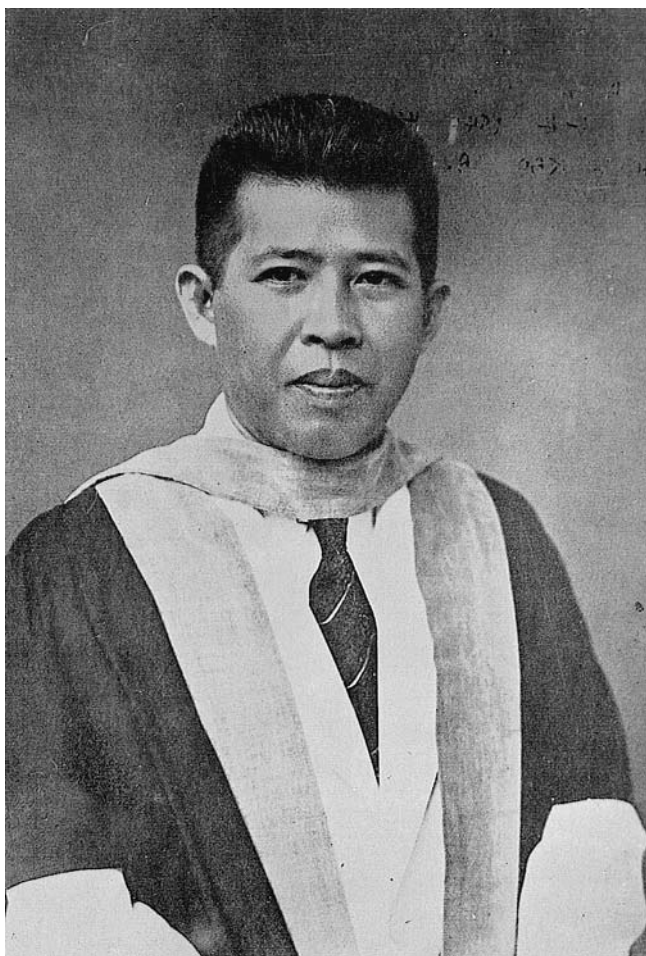
Among those who opposed the Phibun regime were several members of the National Assembly from the northeastern provinces, an

<sup>1</sup> Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, eds., *Pridi by Pridi: Selected Writings on Life, Politics, and Economy* (Chiang Mai, 2000), 197–200.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Vichitvong na Pombhejara (Wichitwong na Phomphet), *Pridi Banomyong* (Bangkok, 1982), 178–79; *Bangkok Chronicle*, 6 June 1942 and 27 January 1943; and *Bangkok Times*, 8 June 1942.





3. Pridi Phanomyong (Banomyong) (1900–1983), former cabinet minister, regent, and future prime minister, who headed the Free Thai underground inside Thailand. (Source: US National Archives)

area traditionally neglected by Bangkok and therefore a fertile breeding ground for political dissidents. Tiang Sirikhan and Thawin Udon led this group. Another anti-Phibun group coalesced around Chamkat Phalangkun, scion of a prominent Bangkok family and an Oxford University graduate who had been disqualified for government service because of his refusal to repudiate an article, published in a Thai student journal in England in 1939, in which he criticized the Phibun regime. Leaders



of the two cliques came together to form a small core organization, "X-O Group," under Pridi's leadership. Pridi's brother Louis Phanomyong served as treasurer with Chamkat as secretary.<sup>4</sup>

In August 1942, Pridi sought to inform the British of the existence of this secret group. He did this by dispatching a message to Andrew Gilchrist, first secretary of the British Legation, and secretly meeting with the manager of the Hongkong-Shanghai Bank prior to their repatriation.<sup>5</sup> Pridi also attempted to send word of his anti-Japanese movement overland to China via Indochina, a route that seemed promising because couriers used this path to deliver money sent by overseas Chinese to the homeland. The men he dispatched disappeared, however, and were not heard from again. His ally Thawin, meanwhile, located and met with men believed to be Nationalist Chinese agents in early February 1943. Thawin revealed the existence of the opposition movement and explained its need for arms to resist the Japanese. Both sides were wary of the other's bonafides, but this established a basis for future contacts.<sup>6</sup>

The political tensions that had festered in Thailand since the arrival of the Japanese surfaced during that same month when Phibun sought to clear the way for a cabinet re-shuffle by submitting his resignation. Pridi's faction, supported by the now disgruntled Thai navy, attempted to maneuver Phibun out of office. The effort failed when the Premier, with backing from the Japanese, withdrew the resignation. Phibun had won the round, but the incident further polarized domestic politics. Thai navy gunboats came to protect Pridi's riverside residence, where he and the other regent were staying, the beginning of an ultimately disastrous alliance between the navy and Pridi. The resignation incident enabled Pridi to pick up other new allies, including the able bureaucrat Thawi Bunyaket, who resigned as cabinet secretary in its wake.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Vichitvong, *Pridi Banomyong*, 189 and Col. L. T. Ride, "Report on Interviews with Chamkad Balankura," HS1-62, PRO.

<sup>5</sup> Gilchrist received and duly reported the message, as noted in Andrew Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret* (London, 1970), 19–20. Minister Sir Josiah Crosby reported that Pridi had brought the banker to his residence for a "hurried and furtive meeting" at which he had been "very non-committal in what he said" in his "Narrative of Events" submitted to the Foreign Office, F7056/1083/40, PRO.

<sup>6</sup> Krachang Tularak, "Seri Thai say tamniap Ta Chang," a copy provided to the author by Kraisi Tularak; Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 227; and "Free Thai Movement," n.d., Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>7</sup> These events are described in detail in Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 146–49. The version of events Pridi wanted to present to the Allies is found in "Free Thai Movement," OSS Intelligence File XL 45586, RG 226, USNA.

These developments inspired a new effort by Pridi to contact the Allies and Seni in Washington. Pridi hoped to convince the Allies that the majority of Thai officials and citizens, as Seni had maintained, did not support the decision to ally with Japan and that, moreover, the declaration of war had been illegal because he, as one of the regents, had not actually signed it. Pridi also wished to arrange the escape from Thailand of a sufficient number of prominent figures to form a credible government-in-exile, under his leadership, in India. Pridi hoped Seni could convince London and Washington to recognize this government and assign their prewar ministers, Crosby and Peck, to work with it. Pridi also wanted to re-employ two prewar advisors, Briton W. A. M. Doll (finance) and American Frederick Dolbeare (foreign affairs). Pridi thought that he and the others might be evacuated by seaplane from a small island in the Gulf of Thailand during the April/May hot season, a period when Bangkok residents could retreat to the shore without arousing suspicion.<sup>8</sup>

While Pridi focused primary attention on winning over Britain and the USA, his envoy had to get out via China, so that country could not be ignored. Negative Chinese attitudes toward Phibun, coupled with Chiang Kai-shek's previously mentioned broadcast statement on Thailand of 26 February 1943, raised hopes that the Chinese government would recognize a Free Thai government-in-exile and "give facilities to the nucleus of the Free Thai Army, which will be recruited from Thai personnel now residing in Allied territories." This Free Thai force would confront the Thai Northern Army and attempt to encourage its officers and men to defect. Pridi hoped eventually to turn the entire Northern Army to the Allied side.<sup>9</sup>

When Pridi's representative reached China he would claim that "seventy-five percent of the junior officers and other ranks of the Army and about ninety percent of the civil officials are sympathetic" to Pridi's movement, but this was at best an optimistic estimate of anti-Japanese sentiment, not an accurate statement of active involvement in the movement. One member, Sawat Trachu, suggested in his memoir that the active X-O core group consisted of only about ten members. By Sawat's

<sup>8</sup> Ride, "Report on Interviews with Chamkad Balankura," HS1-62 and "SOE/G.40,000 Operations in Siam," n.d., but circa December 1943, HS1-54, PRO. Chamkat told Colonel Ride that the decision to pursue the government-in-exile plan by sending out an envoy was made at an X-O Group executive council meeting on 17 February 1943, just two days after the political crisis created by Phibun's abortive resignation had climaxed at a meeting of the National Assembly.

<sup>9</sup> "Free Thai Movement," n.d., Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

account, a colleague sold a steamboat and he himself marketed at a loss a stock of dried chili peppers in order to raise sufficient funds to dispatch an envoy to China.<sup>10</sup>

Pridi's decision to send Chamkat, a twenty-eight-year-old with no official status, might seem odd given the importance of the mission, but his lack of stature had one important advantage – his absence from Bangkok would be little noticed. Chamkat was committed, enthusiastic, and well informed on X-O Group's objectives. Moreover, he had recently been in England, his family home was near Seni's, and he had two brothers collaborating with the Allies – one a Free Thai in Washington and the other a member of the Force 136 group. Surely Chamkat's identity and pro-Allied bonafides could be established easily.<sup>11</sup>

Chamkat took advantage of various personal connections to obtain the travel documents needed to leave the country. Phra Sarasat, a controversial former Thai cabinet minister who lived in Tokyo, had attempted to involve Chamkat in a journalistic venture during a visit to Bangkok at the beginning of 1942, a trip made at the behest of Sarasat's Japanese sponsors. Chamkat declined, but he now convinced Sarasat's son, Somwang – a Thai army captain also well connected with the Japanese – that he had changed his mind and wished to go to Tokyo to discuss the matter further. In addition to Somwang's letter of endorsement, he secured a financial guarantee from a prominent businesswoman by promising to purchase goods for her in Japan. One of Pridi's allies helped him obtain a visa to enter French Indochina.<sup>12</sup>

A Sino-Thai interpreter, Phaisan Trakunlee (Chinese name: Lee Hui-san), an employee of a rich merchant friend of Pridi's brother, would accompany Chamkat. Arrangements were made, too, for a Chinese named Tia Hang to follow after Chamkat some weeks later. He was expected to stop at the Chinese border to arrange the sending of messages back to Thailand. Tiang Sirikhan, who had planned the trip, and Chamkat's wife, Chalopchalai, saw the two men off at the Mekong River town of Nakhon Phanom on 4 March 1943. Tiang's wife, who was also present, offered her gold jewelry as additional financial support for the mission.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ride, "Reports on Interviews with Chamkad Balankura," HS1-62, PRO and Sawat Trachu, *Lapsutyot mua khaphachao pen Seri Thai kap khunphon Phu Pan Tiang Sirikhan* (Bangkok, 1984), 8–10.

<sup>11</sup> Ride, "Report on Interviews with Chamkad Balankura," HS1-62, PRO.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.; B/B505 to SCS 10 August 1944, PRO; and Krachang Tularak, "Seri Thai say tamniap Ta Chang," a copy provided to the author by Kraisi Tularak.

Chamkat and his companion crossed into China from French Indochina with aid from Professor Georges Coedès of L'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient in Hanoi. Before leaving Bangkok, the scholarly Prince Dhani had given Chamkat a letter of introduction to Coedès requesting his assistance. The French scholar complied by convincing the local chief of police to provide two Vietnamese detectives to escort the Thai envoy and his interpreter by ship to the Chinese port of Mon Cay.<sup>14</sup>

Across the border, the local Chinese military commander welcomed Chamkat. A five-man party arrived to take him into protective custody as a government "guest." Removed to Liuchow, on 20 March Chamkat asked the army commander there to forward messages to Chiang Kai-shek, the British and American embassies in Chungking, and Minister Seni in Washington. It is not clear if a telegram reached Seni at this point, but the two embassies received word of Chamkat's presence. The British advised Chamkat to contact their consulate in nearby Kweilin.<sup>15</sup>

Only at the end of the first week of April did Chamkat persuade his Chinese custodians to take him to see Acting Consul General G. E. Stockley. During their conversation Chamkat proved reluctant to reveal much in the presence of his Chinese handlers. He did suggest that former Minister Crosby and the former manager of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank branch in Bangkok could vouch for him.

Stockley suggested that Chamkat contact the British Army Aid Group (BAAG), a Kweilin-based unit organized to assist escapees from Japanese-controlled territory, but which also gathered intelligence about conditions in Hong Kong and surrounding areas. This led to meetings on 8 and 9 April between BAAG's Major Dinesh Chandra Misra and Chamkat in the presence of Chinese officials. However, BAAG's commander Lieutenant Colonel Lindsay Ride, an Australian physician who had escaped from Hong Kong in January 1942, later managed to interview the Thai envoy alone, taking advantage of the fact that Chamkat's newly married Chinese guard liked to slip off late at night off to spend time with his wife. Although not convinced of the practicality of Chamkat's proposals, Ride sympathized with his fellow Oxonian and concluded that "as a long term investment" the Thai underground "may be well worth putting time and money into." Accordingly, he urged his superior, Major General G. E. Grimsdale, the British military attaché in Chungking, to help Chamkat gain access to British and American diplomats. Ride also

<sup>14</sup> Ride, "Report on Interviews with Chamkad Balankura," HS1-62, PRO and Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 225-29.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. A handwritten text for the telegram to Seni, n.d., is in Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

arranged the 15 April broadcast of a coded message over Chungking Radio reporting Chamkat's safe arrival in China.<sup>16</sup>

On 13 April, the Force 136 office in Chungking had reported Chamkat's presence and its suspicion that the Chinese were delaying his progress to Chungking because of a desire "to control any free movement that might be going." Chamkat, by this time, had come to doubt he would be allowed to leave China and feared that he might end up in prison. Fortunately, the British Embassy, prodded by Ride, intervened with the Chinese authorities, requesting that Chamkat be sent to the capital. Ride advanced the money for the tickets, and on 21 April Chamkat and Phaisan flew to Chungking.<sup>17</sup>

The two remained under Chinese escort and were first taken to see Dr. K. C. Wu of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Wu acknowledged the Chinese government's reluctance to recognize Chamkat as an official representative and rejected his request that he be sent to Washington, explaining that China did not recognize Minister Seni as a legitimate representative of Thailand either. When Chamkat brought up Pridi's proposal for a government-in-exile in India, Wu replied that the matter would have to be referred to Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>18</sup>

Chamkat personally appealed to the Chinese leader in a letter of 26 April. After amply praising the Generalissimo's leadership and the sympathetic attitude toward Thailand reflected in his February broadcast, Chamkat asked for assistance in getting his message to the leaders of Britain and the USA, as well as aid in rescuing Pridi and his followers from Bangkok.<sup>19</sup>

The State Department, after learning of Chamkat's arrival in China in mid-April, consulted the Thai Legation in Washington, which gave a "favorable opinion" of him. Seni told Colonel Khap, who was about to leave Washington, to seek out Chamkat upon his arrival in China. Seni cabled Chamkat on 18 April that he had "taken up" the matter, although it is not clear whether he referred to Chamkat's desire to come to Washington or a request for an advance of 2,000 dollars. Over six weeks later, on 3 June, Seni advised State Department officials that he had urged Chinese Ambassador T. V. Soong to allow Chamkat to come to Washington. Seni told the Americans that he "had no doubt as to the loyalty, intelligence, and courage" of Chamkat, but feared that because of

<sup>16</sup> Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 225–30 and Ride, "Report on Interviews with Chamkad Balankura," HS1-62, PRO.

<sup>17</sup> Chungking to SOE-London, 13 April 1943 and SOE-London to Chungking, 14 April 1943, HS1-70, PRO.

<sup>18</sup> Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 231–32.

<sup>19</sup> Chamkat to Chiang, 26 April 1943, Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

his “fiery temperament” he might “be tactless or indiscreet in statements which he might make.”<sup>20</sup>

Critics have condemned Seni for a less-than-vigorous effort to bring Chamkat to Washington and his failure to advance the money that Pridi’s envoy requested. Seni, always budget-conscious and concerned about legalities, apparently did not wish to set a precedent that might encourage any Thai citizen who escaped to China to seek financial support.<sup>21</sup> However, the real issue was a State Department decision to defer to the Chinese in the handling of Chamkat. Seni, who continued to operate as Thai minister through the Department’s sufferance, had limited ability to influence American, much less Chinese policy. Chamkat’s departure from China did not hinge on receipt of funds from Washington. He needed Chinese permission, as well as travel documents and flight accommodations from the Americans. If and when the two allies decided he should go, money would not be an issue. Chamkat remained stuck in China primarily because of Chinese possessiveness and American reluctance to intervene, not because of Seni’s inaction.

As for the British, although Chamkat believed that Crosby had been informed of the existence of the underground “X-O Group,” the term rang no bells with the former minister, who considered Chamkat an insignificant figure. The British thus doubted that he truly represented Pridi. Further, London, still angry over the Thai declaration of war and Thai support of the Japanese invasions of Malaya and Burma, opposed the formation of a Thai government-in-exile and considered resistance activities in Thailand premature. This led Grimsdale to tell Ride at the end of May that he should not pursue contacts with the Free Thai. The Chungking branch of SOE’s Asian branch, Force 136, showed interest in Chamkat, but saw no way to “snatch” him, because he was in the custody of the Chinese government and had formally contacted the British Embassy.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Banchoet Phalangkun, Bangkok, 19 July 1993; “General Summary of the Thailanders’ Situation as of 15 August 1943,” Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99 and Vincent to Washington, 6 May 1943 in OSS Intelligence File XL 36004, RG 226, USNA; Hornbeck memorandum to Far Eastern Division, 17 April 1943 and Benninghoff memorandum of 28 May 1943, Box 385, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution; a biographical card on Chamkat under “Thai Diplomats, Military and Public Figures,” Box 23, Norwood Allman Papers, Hoover Institution; memorandum of meeting of 3 June 1943, 892.00/23, RG 59, USNA; and Charles Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East* (Oxford, 1983), 104. The Benninghoff memorandum refers to a biographical report on Chamkat given to the Far Eastern Division on 19 April 1943 by the Thai Legation.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Sawat Sisuk, *Seri Thai: kosanget pathibatgan Chamkat Phalangkun lae pathibatgan tang tahan bangruang* (Bangkok, 1995), 19–22, 40–41, 51–52.

<sup>22</sup> Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 232–34. Also, AD.U. to AD.O., 21 April 1943 and “SOE/G.40,000 Operations in Siam,” n.d., but circa December 1943, HS1-54, PRO.

Reluctant to offend the Chinese before a promised meeting with Chiang Kai-shek, Chamkat fretted under guard at the Foreign Office Guest House as precious time slipped away. He sent Phaisan to deliver an impassioned letter to John Carter Vincent, the chargé d'affaires at the American Embassy. Vincent warned Phaisan that attempting surreptitious contacts was unwise, adding that any American response would involve consultations with the Chinese government. He advised Washington of his impression that Chamkat, whom he had not seen, was "not an entirely balanced person, or at least not a person well suited for the mission with which he states he has been charged." He recommended letting the Chinese handle the matter.<sup>23</sup>

Vincent's judgment had validity in the sense that Chamkat lacked diplomatic expertise and official status, but the overheated tone of his communications reflected not mental instability, but concern that the window of opportunity for bringing Pridi out of the country, the main objective of his mission, was rapidly closing. Deteriorating health increased Chamkat's sense of desperation. He began to experience severe stomach pains and rectal hemorrhaging. Soon he could hardly eat, was losing weight, and having difficulty sleeping. He complained about being relegated to a basement room and the poor quality of his food.<sup>24</sup>

On 25 May, the Chinese revealed to Chamkat the British refusal to embrace his proposals, handing him the letter sent to the Chinese Foreign Ministry. In response to this devastating blow, Chamkat drafted a bitter eight-page memorandum for the Chinese. In it, he speculated that the British hoped to use Phibun as a conduit to negotiate a separate peace with Japan and that they opposed Chinese–Thai relations out of fear that the Chinese would subsequently use Thailand as a base for undermining European colonialism. He also worried that London had ambitions to restore monarchical rule over a diminished, British-dominated Thailand after the war, a concern surely reinforced by news of Prince Suphasawat's involvement with British intelligence.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Chamkat to Vincent, 3 May 1943 and Vincent to Washington, 6 May 1943 in OSS Intelligence File XL 36004, RG 226, USNA; and Benninghoff memorandum, 28 May 1943, Box 385, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>24</sup> Chamkat's health problems were recorded in his diary, cited in Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 234.

<sup>25</sup> "A Rejoinder to the British Government's View of the Free Thai Movement," Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA and Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 42–46. As noted in the latter source (based in part on excerpts from Chamkat's diary), Chamkat's Chinese handlers sought to intensify his dissatisfaction with Seni, as well as the British. A letter Chamkat wrote to Prince Suphasawat on 21 June 1943, reproduced in Wanthani Phanitchakun, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat* (Bangkok, 2000), 279, indicates he knew of the Prince's presence in India in late May when Suphasawat first sought permission to enter China.



Restrictions imposed on him by Shao Yu-lin, chief of the Intelligence Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, further frustrated Chamkat, as did Byzantine political relations among the Allies. The Chinese relayed Seni's advice, via T. V. Soong, that Chamkat should work only with the Americans and Chinese, not the British, and should not trust Khap. Meanwhile, Shao and his subordinate Henry Chen – who a year later would be executed as a Japanese spy – were pressing him to establish the Thai government-in-exile in China. They later apparently offered him substantial funding if he would abandon his efforts to seek assistance from other countries.<sup>26</sup>

Chamkat learned of Khap's presence in Chungking on 8 June, the day after the latter arrived. Although reluctant to meet the Colonel because of his close relationship with Premier Phibun, Chamkat knew that Seni intended for Khap to see him. Therefore, he requested a meeting, only to have the Chinese refuse on the grounds that he should make no such contact before the promised meeting with Chiang Kai-shek. When Khap inquired about Chamkat, the Chinese refused even to acknowledge his presence in Chungking.<sup>27</sup>

With time on his hands, Chamkat devoted much effort to preparing for his long-awaited interview with the Generalissimo, outlining in a series of draft memoranda the points he wished to make. He sought to defuse Chinese hostility to Pridi's plan to establish the government-in-exile in India by pointing out the importance of British facilities and the need to gain access to Thai assets held in London. Chamkat emphasized Pridi's admiration for Chiang's political mentor Dr. Sun Yat-sen, suggesting that Pridi would eventually move to China and would make his brother the first Thai minister to Chungking. He also sought to play on Chiang's suspicions of the British by repeating his speculations about evil British motives.

Chamkat also argued that an attack southward into Thailand would make good military sense. If Chiang Mai were captured, he emphasized, this would cut off the Thai Northern Army and hasten its surrender. A thrust further southward would imperil Japanese supply lines into Burma, possibly forcing their withdrawal. He promised that an Allied invasion would receive full assistance from the Free Thai movement and the Thai people.

<sup>26</sup> B/B505 to Siam Country Section, 10 August 44, HS1-48 and "SOE/G.40,000 Operations in Siam," n.d., but circa December 1943, HS1-54, PRO. Also, Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 235 and Miles' War Diary of 15 August 1943, Folder 2, Box 52, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.



Chamkat's memoranda also asked five specific things from China: 1) recognition of a Free Thai Committee, headed by Chamkat, in China; 2) facilities for the Committee and "permission to form the nucleus of the Free Thai army" including "Thai-speaking and Thailand-born Chinese," as well as the provision of equipment and training officers; 3) unfreezing of Thai assets and a credit of one million Chinese dollars; 4) provision of radio facilities for communication with Thailand; and 5) a plan for the extraction of Pridi and his colleagues from Thailand."<sup>28</sup>

Chamkat's twenty-five-minute session with the Generalissimo on 28 June brought positive results, as Chiang expressed sympathy for Thailand's plight and interest in cooperating with the Free Thai. This demonstrated that the Chinese had concluded, probably based on contacts with their men operating underground in Thailand, that Chamkat did represent Pridi. It also reflected their interest in establishing the Thai government-in-exile in Chungking and developing a Sino-Thai army in Yunnan Province that could initiate guerrilla warfare activity and later spearhead an Allied military advance into Thailand. Chinese enthusiasm for the latter project became apparent to the Americans a few days later when Tai Li "personally and energetically" took up the matter of Thailand operations at a SACO conference. On 14 July, Chamkat received notice that the Foreign Ministry had turned him over to Tai Li's organization.<sup>29</sup>

The Chinese had already established a Korean model for the provisional government/guerrilla army scheme they proposed for the Free Thai. Kim Ku, a right-wing nationalist who had enjoyed covert Nationalist Chinese patronage in the mid-1930s and more open support since the outbreak of war with Japan in 1937, headed the favored Korean group. During 1941 and 1942 the Chinese had sought to pressure rival Korean factions to bury their differences and coalesce behind a Kuomintang Party-financed Korean Provisional Government (KPG) headed by Kim. Chinese leaders hoped that this KMT-backed Korean coalition would be able to compete effectively against rival Korean groups that the Soviet Union and/or the Chinese Communists might field at the end of the war. Forging unity among the Koreans proved more difficult than anticipated, however, not least because they resented Chinese coercive tactics.

<sup>28</sup> Several versions of this memorandum are located in Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>29</sup> An account of the meeting in Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 235–37 based on Chamkat's diary. Also, see Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 46–47; and "Memorandum on a Visit to Balankura," 15 August 1943 and "Comment on Seni Pramoj's Attitude," 16 July 1943, HS1-56, PRO. On Tai Li's attitude, see Wight to Miles, 9 July 1943, Box 2, RG 38, USNA.

Thus, the Nationalist Government had yet to formally recognize the KPG.<sup>30</sup>

In parallel, the Chinese were attempting to unite Korean military volunteers in a guerrilla army for deployment in northern China. According to an 8 April 1942 memorandum by then Foreign Minister T. V. Soong, the purposes of this force would be: 1) to operate in Korea at some opportune moment to be selected by the United Nations; 2) to be headquarters for sabotage activities by Korean workers in munitions works and vital communications centers in Korea and Japan; and 3) to constitute an intelligence service through Koreans working in the lower ranks of civil servants and police in Korea, North China, and Japan.<sup>31</sup>

In the wake of his meeting with Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese afforded Chamkat a radio link with an underground station located at Sakon Nakhon in northeastern Thailand through which he could exchange brief coded messages with Pridi. This led to the dispatch of the follow-up mission, headed by National Assembly member Sanguan Tularak, which left Bangkok on 14 July. In August, Chamkat reported that he had sent or received a total of ten messages via this radio link.<sup>32</sup>

During his meeting with Chiang Kai-shek, Chamkat had brought up his desire to go to Washington for consultations with Seni. The Generalissimo indicated that he might go if Seni sanctioned the trip, but suggested that Chamkat should meet Khap first. In response to the Generalissimo's comments, Chamkat asked Shao, his handler, that he be allowed to leave promptly, and he sought Seni's approval. On 8 July he received a telegram from Seni stating: "Anxious to meet you. Am doing everything to facilitate [your] journey."<sup>33</sup>

Now hopeful that the Americans would be willing to assist him, Chamkat visited the US Embassy on 26 July. During the call he revealed

<sup>30</sup> Suzuki Masayuki, "The Korean Liberation Movement in China and International Response," in Dae-sook Suh and Edward J. Shultz, eds., *Koreans in China* (Honolulu, 1990), 130–38.

<sup>31</sup> Soong memorandum, 8 April 1942, *FRUS* 1942 (China): 868–69.

<sup>32</sup> Suphasawat, "Memorandum of a Visit to Balankura," 15 August 1943, HS1-56 and E. Grut, "Report on the Free Siamese Movement and its Representatives in China," 5 September 1943, HS1-63, PRO. The list of messages appears in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 284. Oddly, Sanguan ("Interview with S. Tularaksa," 11 September 1943, Folder 2994, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA) declared that Bangkok had heard nothing from Chamkat in the months between his arrival in Chungking and his own departure from Bangkok. Also, Sanguan's secretary, Daeng Kunadilok, specifically denied knowledge of the radio link when interviewed by the British ("Meeting with Nai Daeng Kunadilok in Delhi," 12 November 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA).

<sup>33</sup> Chamkat to Shao, 1 July 1943, Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226 and Wight to Miles, 9 July 1943, Box 2, RG 38, USNA. Also, Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 47.

that the second Free Thai party, headed by Sanguan, was *en route* to Chungking. He also expressed his doubts about Khap's reliability. Chargé d'Affaires George Atcheson, reported the visit to the State Department, enclosing a letter and memorandum Chamkat delivered, but did not recommend any specific action.<sup>34</sup>

Force 136, which was gearing up its own Thailand operation, now entered the picture directly. The British clandestine warfare organization had been for some months keeping a wary eye on the OSS Free Thai project and grappling with conflicting concerns. Force 136 officers worried that, with the OSS operation based in China and their own in India, this would lead to uncoordinated approaches that would invite trouble. However, the absence of a clearly defined British postwar policy toward Thailand made it unclear whether or not a common approach was possible. Further, given the personal, and in some cases family, links between members of the American and British Thai groups, SOE officers doubted that they could keep their agents completely isolated from their OSS-sponsored counterparts if they were based in the same country. Awareness that American official attitudes toward the Free Thai were more positive than the British, and that their American counterparts enjoyed higher ranks and salaries and separate status as "Free Thai officers," would surely undermine the morale of the Force 136 Thai group. As one SOE officer asked: "May not the disparity of treatment between the Americans and British Groups cause serious anti-British feeling among what may become quite an influential group of Thais?"<sup>35</sup>

Still, as in other matters related to Southeast Asia, the British hoped that experience would ultimately enable them to overcome material and other disadvantages. While the OSS Thailand operations were being organized by officers like Miles, Eifler, and Devlin, who had no prewar involvement with Thai affairs, the British had been able to muster a corps of men who had lived in Thailand for extended periods as employees of British firms. One of them, Lieutenant Colonel. A. C. "Peter" Pointon, a former forestry manager for the Bombay Burmah Company in Thailand, headed Force 136's Siam Country Section.<sup>36</sup>

SOE-London, which had come to value his expertise, had dispatched Prince Suphasawat by air to serve as chief advisor to Pointon's section

<sup>34</sup> Atcheson to Washington, 3 August 1943 and Chamkat to Atcheson, 24 July 1943 in OSS Intelligence File XL 45584, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>35</sup> "Memorandum – Free Thais," 5 January 1943; Ad/6 to D/Mil 24 January 1943; and Ad/6 to AD/0, 24 January 1943 and Keswick (SOE) to Clarke (FO), 26 January 1943, HS1-65; and New Delhi to London, 12 July 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>36</sup> For a list of such personnel, see: "Statement of Case for the Provision of the Thailand Country Section," 17 February 1943 and "List of ex-Siam Residents Now in India," HS1-48, PRO.

at Force 136 Headquarters in Meerut, India. He arrived in April 1943 under the alias "C. Arun." After consultation with an old friend, Major Luang Suranaong, a Thai army officer who had left Bangkok just days before the Japanese invasion to take up a liaison post in British Malaya, Suphasawat updated and revised his extensive plan for infiltrating and organizing guerrilla units in Thailand. Force 136 also appointed him as "conducting officer" for the Thai student volunteers selected for guerrilla warfare training and who had preceded him to India.<sup>37</sup>

From the beginning, Suphasawat encountered problems, not least the fact that most English officers assumed he was a Burmese and resented his rank of major in the British Army. "One cannot help feeling the atmosphere of being an Asiatic officer of a subject race," he wrote to his wife. "We are born free and do not understand this inferior position that we [are] supposed to feel and observe. And that only makes us feel it very acutely and sadly. We are not a subject race, but we get the same treatment, unless we are with people who know."<sup>38</sup>

Like their American counterparts, the thirty-five Thai military volunteers from England had a tedious journey to Asia by ship. Although they had completed their basic military training in November 1942 it was only on 23 January 1943 – after one false start and many delays – that they left Liverpool for South Africa aboard a merchant ship of Dutch origin that carried some 4,000 troops. In the North Atlantic the ship came under attack from a German aircraft, but escort ships fought off the raider. Nothing, however, could fend off a five-day storm, during which all but three of the Thai fell victim to seasickness. When they arrived in South Africa a month later they received an unpleasant introduction to South African racial segregation.<sup>39</sup>

After almost a month's delay, the Thai group at last reached Bombay in late April. The twenty-two men considered the fittest and best suited for secret operations entered five months of Force 136 guerrilla warfare training at Poona, beginning in mid-July. They were dubbed the "White Elephants," or simply "Whites," by the SOE. Prince Suphasawat had argued strenuously that the Free Thai could not be expected to give wholehearted cooperation unless they were treated with respect, as officers. He emphasized that the Americans had not only given their Thai

<sup>37</sup> New Delhi to London, 17 and 23 April 1943, HS1-72 and "SOE Appreciation of Situation in Siam No. 2 by BB/299," 21 May 1943, HS1-63, PRO. A letter from B/B 269 to B/B 126, 5 July 1943 reproduced in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 359, clarified Suphasawat's position.

<sup>38</sup> Suphasawat letter of 23 December 1944 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 457–58.

<sup>39</sup> Karawik, *Tai rom chat*, 134–40 and interview with Arun Sorathet, Bangkok, 29 January 1988.

volunteers such status, but allowed them their own Free Thai unit, complete with uniform patch. His argument carried the day and the men were classified as officer cadets during training, with commissions for those who completed the course successfully. The Asian branch of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), which operated under the pseudonym Inter-Services Liaison Department (ISLD), employed three other members of the group, while the remainder of the men were divided up and prepared for other duties.<sup>40</sup>

The British assigned five of them to the Ministry of Information (MOI) office in Delhi which had already established, under the direction of A. C. S. Adams, formerly of the British Legation in Bangkok, a schedule of Thai-language propaganda broadcasts. Clear indication that these widely listened to programs had gotten under Premier Phibun's skin came in late October 1942 when his Bangkok Radio propagandists, "Nai Man" and "Nai Khong," described the Allied broadcasts as "most contemptible." They charged that the Thai working for the British and Americans had lost their "sense of proportion" in criticizing the Premier for cooperating with Japan. "They should realize," Phibun's mouthpieces declared, "that siding with Britain and America would mean war with Japan. This is not a confession of cowardliness, but means that Thailand was behaving in the right way, not [indulging in the] bravery, if bravery it could be called, of the man who jumps from a high building for nothing."<sup>41</sup>

Phibun's announcers offered a carrot, assuring the wayward "youngsters" that if they came home their sins would be forgiven and they could broadcast on Thai radio in support of "national reconstruction." The following night, however, the two took up the stick, threatening that broadcasting for the Allies was "tantamount to rebellion and according to law punishable by death." Young girls in particular "should think about it many times before indulging in politics of which they have no knowledge," they warned. They also charged that Seni had stayed in the USA because of a promise that he would become premier in the event of an Allied victory. In a third consecutive broadcast aimed at the Free Thai, Phibun's announcers declared that they had been "duped by the enemy."<sup>42</sup>

Further indication of Phibun's displeasure came on 8 January 1943 when the Thai government ordered all owners of radios to register them

<sup>40</sup> Lists and training evaluations of the Thai students who worked with the British in HS1-51 and Mani Sanasen, "The Free Thais in England, September 1943, HS1-72, PRO. On the matter of commissioning the Thai volunteers, see "Agenda for the Conference on White Elephants - July 4" and "Minutes of a Meeting on Siam Policy," reproduced in Wanthani, *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 344-55.

<sup>41</sup> *Bangkok Chronicle*, 24 October 1942. <sup>42</sup> Ibid.



4. A group of Thai officers of British Force 136, the Asian branch of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Front row (left to right): Thep (Deb) Semthiti; Praphrit na Nakhon (Praprit na Nagara); Arun Sorathet (Aroon Sorathesn); Pat Pathamasathan (Padama Patmasatana); Samran Wannaphrik (Varnabriksha); Bunsong Phungsunthon (Boonsong Phungsoondara). Back row (left to right): Prince Chridanai Kitiyakon (Kitiyakara), Krit Tosayanon (Kris Tosayanonda), Chunkeng Rinthakun (Chungkeng Rinthakul), Thana Posayanon (Poshyananda), and Prince Phisadet Rachani (Bhisadej Rajni). (Courtsey of Pisoot Sudasna)

with the police and announced that only those with special permission could listen to Delhi Radio. Owners of shortwave sets largely ignored such prohibitions, however, and the government acknowledged as much on 27 September 1943 when Radio Bangkok again devoted air time to blasting the British propaganda broadcasts. A speaker calling himself “Constitutionalist” charged that one of the scriptwriters and one of the announcers for the British-sponsored broadcasts were former pro-royalist political prisoners. He claimed that they were wasting their time in accusing Phibun as a traitor for cooperating with Japan because the people in Thailand “perfectly understood” his actions. “Constitutionalist” described the broadcasters as “mercenaries who are helping a foreign nation to condemn their own nation,” an act for which they would be “stigmatized as traitors . . . for all times.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Bangkok Chronicle*, 8 January and 29 September 1943.



The presence of the MOI-employed Thai in Delhi came to the attention of American officials there in August 1943 when diplomat Bruce E. Rogers encountered them at a social function. Rogers reported with obvious satisfaction:

Toward England these Thais are moved less by a feeling of gratefulness than one of wary acceptance of aid. Their attitude is nationalistically Siamese and they resent any attempt, even at the early stage, to interfere with their country's independence or territory. They regard America as a traditional friend of Siam, and a country with no political or imperialistic ambitions in their region.<sup>44</sup>

The "White Elephants" were not alone in training under Force 136 auspices for clandestine work in Southeast Asia. The British also had acquired the services of a number of young Chinese patriots who had gone to the homeland to join the fight against the Japanese. Force 136 accomplished this, despite the anti-British mood that prevailed in Chungking in 1942, through their cooperative link with Wang Ping-shen, head of the Institute of International Relations, one of five rival Nationalist intelligence agencies. A Singaporean Chinese, Lim Bo Seng, played a key role in the recruitment of the first group of agents targeted for work in Malaya. After receiving a thorough political indoctrination from the Chinese authorities and instructions to continue to report to them, the first party of Chinese departed for training in India in early 1943. A group of recruits qualified for Thailand operations soon followed.<sup>45</sup>

Eleven of the twelve Chinese tabbed for service in Thailand were recruited from the Chungking Military Academy; the other one, later expelled from the group for bad behavior, came from the Kweichow Military Academy. All members of the party – dubbed the "Red Elephants," or simply "Reds," by Force 136 – had some Thai language proficiency and had lived in Thailand for extended periods. The army captain chosen by the Chinese authorities to head the group, Chin Pe-hai (alias Chang

<sup>44</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 15 August 1943, Reel 60, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Intelligence Report 45119, 31 August 1943, RG 226, USNA. Ironically, Herbert Deignan of OSS encountered the same MOI Thai officers some thirteen months later and described them as "on the whole more English than the English, down to the last Oxford mannerism" and supportive of "the British viewpoint on the future of Thailand (which is very distinct from the Free Thai point of view)." Deignan noted that he was "thoroughly disgusted with what I found." Deignan to Ripley, 9 October 1944, Folder 2328, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>45</sup> Puey Ungphakorn (Puai Ungphakon), "Temporary Soldier," in Direk Jayanama, *Siam and World War II* (Bangkok, 1978), 130; Thot Phantumasen, "Seri Thai say Angkrit," in Khana Kamakan Chomron Phraiphon Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphap, ed., *Songkhram khrang samkhan nai samai krung Rattanakosin* (Bangkok, n.d.), 147–49 (hereafter cited as *songkhram khrang samkhan*); and Tan Chong Tee, *Force 136*, translated by Lee Watt Sim and Clara Show (Singapore, 1995), 24–67. Tan, a Singaporean Chinese, was one of Lim Bo Seng's first recruits in Chungking.

Fu-lai) and his associate Ma Keh-wu (alias Huang Hung) had personally selected the men. Problems developed during training, however, not least because the British found Chin an unsatisfactory leader but were reluctant to risk upsetting the Chinese by replacing him. Further, all the Chinese recruits were wary of being used for strictly British ends and expected, contrary to the plans of Force 136, to operate in the field as a group. At the beginning of September 1943, the British officer in charge of their training prophetically warned that the agents might prove useless once they were inserted into Thailand. He added:

It is obvious that the Americans are still gaining prestige in China at our expense by comparing the amount of equipment and help they are giving China compared with the British. If we could possibly confine our selections in Chungking to those who are prepared to serve under the British and consider it an honour (there are some) as opposed to those who think they are doing us a favour, we should get less [sic] recruits but they would be much better and free from the "Chungking taint."<sup>46</sup>

The British wanted to send Chinese "Red Elephants" into Thailand first to lay groundwork for the insertion of the Thai "White Elephants," but were uncertain how best to get them in. Submarine or seaplane drop off in the Gulf of Siam offered the advantage of delivering the agents near to Bangkok, yet into a rear area where the Japanese were less likely to be on the alert. Entry from the sea seemed less risky than a blind parachute drop on land, but various obstacles existed, including the great distance involved and uncertainty when the necessary transport would be available. The British deemed a landing on the Andaman Sea coast feasible, but this would leave the agents far from Bangkok. Accordingly, the British also considered overland routes, particularly for the dispatch of the initial Chinese agents.<sup>47</sup>

In May 1943, having extracted permission and an escort from Chinese War Minister Ho Ying-chin, Force 136 sent Captain R. B. Bryce-Smith of the Siam Country Section to reconnoiter the most direct overland path through southern Yunnan. For six months, Bryce-Smith explored the route to Thailand that members of the first OSS Thai group would take the following year.<sup>48</sup>

Major Edmund Grut, a Danish resident of Bangkok who had joined the British army after his homeland was occupied by the Germans, followed Bryce-Smith into China. Fluent in the Thai language and well connected

<sup>46</sup> A series of documents concerning the "Red Elephants" and the problems that developed during their training are contained in HS1 48, PRO, particularly a 1 September 1943 report to Force 136 Chief Colin Mackenzie.

<sup>47</sup> "Minutes of a Meeting on Siam Policy," 4 July 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. and accounts of Bryce-Smith's journey in HS1-178, PRO.



in Bangkok by virtue of his previous managerial position with the Thai Electric Company, Grut, on loan to Force 136 from ISLD, arrived in late July 1943 to determine if dispatching agents from a more easterly Chinese base, perhaps even by sea from a coastal port, might be advantageous. He also hoped to interview Chamkat.<sup>49</sup>

Since May, Prince Suphasawat had been seeking Chinese permission to visit Chungking to interview Chamkat, whom he knew personally from the latter's student days in England. Suphasawat also sought Seni's assistance, but the Minister brushed him off, replying on 16 July that he was focused on getting Chamkat to Washington. The Chinese stalled, ostensibly because of Suphasawat's royalist heritage, but in fact they simply wanted to insulate Chamkat from British influence.<sup>50</sup>

Grut, who saw himself as the logical candidate to enter Thailand and negotiate with Pridi, made a determined effort to see Chamkat, but the Chinese deflected him by falsely claiming that Chamkat was already working closely with the American Free Thai group and therefore had no interest in meeting British representatives. This led Grut to seek out Miles.<sup>51</sup>

The Grut-Miles encounter on 1 August 1943 can only be described as a disaster, as Miles flatly rejected Grut's suggestion that the American and British Thai groups join forces. Citing Prince Suphasawat's involvement with Force 136, Miles declared: "As we are backing a different political group we cannot agree to any discussion or meeting taking place." Dismissing Grut's protestations that the British had no intention of supporting a royalist restoration in Thailand, Miles would promise nothing more than that the American-sponsored agents would assist the British group in any way possible once both were in the field. Their differences did not end there, though. Grut considered Miles' willingness to allow the OSS-Thai group to develop its own operational plans, his intention to blind drop agents into Thailand, and his claim that operations would be underway within two weeks as reckless in the extreme. According to Miles' account of the meeting, Grut disparaged the Thai as untrustworthy and political-minded. Miles, in turn, derided the idea of infiltrating Sino-Thai agents via southeastern China.<sup>52</sup>

When informed of the meeting, Force 136 Chief Colin Mackenzie judged protest against Miles' proposed operations "useless" and

<sup>49</sup> "Siam Country Section," B/B 100 to B/B, 30 August 1943, HS1-56, PRO.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. and "Free Siamese," 25 May 1943 and AD/O to B/B100, 2 June 1943, HS1-163; New Delhi to London, 4 July 1943 and New York to London, 15 July 1943; HS1-71; and "Report on my Interview with Balankura," 17 August 1943, HS1-56, PRO.

<sup>51</sup> Raichle to Miles, 24 July 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>52</sup> "General Summary of the Thailander Situation as of 15 August 1943," Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA and untitled eight-point memorandum, 10 December 1943, HS1-54, PRO.

suggested that his efforts would cause little damage since “with so little preparation liquidation of most of the parties concerned seems extremely probable.” SOE officials in London, however, were taken aback by Miles’ strong opposition to SOE–OSS cooperation and the American alignment with the Chinese. Miles’ willingness to undertake early sabotage efforts inside Thailand particularly alarmed them. In a letter to David K. E. Bruce, the OSS station chief in London, SOE liaison John Keswick – a former executive of the Jardine–Matheson Company who earlier had been in charge of the British guerrilla group that had been expelled from China in early 1942 – expressed concern that “premature” action by the SACO Thai group might “prejudice the long-term objectives in that country.” Keswick further warned that “uncoordinated OSS and SOE activities” might “result in our two organizations finding themselves, through their protégés, at loggerheads politically in Siam.” The British, he emphasized, wished to avoid political commitments and defer sabotage activity until agents and communications were well established inside the country and action was approved by the theater commander. Keswick expressed doubt that the Chinese would cooperate, noting that their efforts to keep Chamkat “away from their Allies for many weeks makes us wonder what policy they will follow.”<sup>53</sup>

As logical as Keswick’s concerns seemed, OSS leaders viewed his approach with suspicion because of their aversion to subordination to the British. Donovan would address the importance of such organizational independence a few months later during a speech to officers at US Army Staff College. He acknowledged that the OSS had learned much from the British, but cited security, control, and verification needs as reasons why “the only healthy thing for both countries is to have a separate and independent intelligence service for each.” As far as intelligence gathering was concerned, he continued:

there must never be a monopoly on the part of anyone in that field. That is a mistake that our own military men are apt to make. A monopoly in intelligence is just as evil as a monopoly in industry. It only results in consolidated stupidity and a means of keeping the other fellow out so he won’t find your mistakes. Common sense and good judgment will enable you to keep out of one another’s way but competition in the field of intellect is damn good.<sup>54</sup>

Although Donovan, as a price for gaining a foothold in the newly created Southeast Asian Command (SEAC), would agree to the

<sup>53</sup> New Delhi to London, 8 August 1943, HS1-72, PRO and Keswick to Bruce, 11 August 1943, Folder 4, Box 64, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. A version of Grut’s telegram reporting on his meeting with Miles is contained in Hoffman to Miles, 14 August 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>54</sup> Text of Donovan speech of 1 November 1943, Reel 45, M1642, USNA.

coordination of allied clandestine activities in the theater during a September 1943 visit to London, he maintained a wary attitude toward renewed SOE appeals for overall coordination of Thai operations. The British, who feared that Miles might launch an independent venture into Thailand before a liaison system could be implemented, proposed that joint instructions be sent to officers involved to "at once get in touch and discuss fully and frankly all plans for Siam, and endeavour to reach agreement as to what action should be taken by each party." Donovan, however, refused to act, citing a need for consultations with his staff in Washington. It was only in early November, after additional British entreaties, that Donovan finally informed the British that he had ordered a halt to all efforts to enter Thailand pending his forthcoming personal inspection visit to China. Still not satisfied, the British would dispatch Grut to Washington in December 1943 to renew the push for effective allied coordination of Thai operations.<sup>55</sup>

Although Grut's attempt to elicit cooperation from Miles had failed; British efforts to contact Chamkat bore fruit in early August 1943. A cordial personal letter from Chamkat to Suphasawat dated 21 June requesting a meeting led Force 136 to override Grut's concern that Suphasawat's presence would only reinforce Chinese and American suspicions that the British were backing Thai royalists. The Prince flew to Chungking and, with assistance from British Ambassador Sir Horace Seymour, went with Grut to see General Cheng K'ai-min on 4 August. Before they could get down to business, the General pleaded an urgent appointment and abruptly walked out, leaving an aide to deal with the visitors. Suphasawat produced Chamkat's letter and insisted that a meeting was essential to insure Free Thai unity. Subsequently, Ambassador Seymour again intervened with the Chinese on his behalf.<sup>56</sup>

General Cheng called on Chamkat the following morning. Since his arrival in Chungking, the Free Thai envoy had been short of funds, so Cheng took the opportunity to announce a loan of 50,000 Chinese dollars. He also invited Chamkat to inspect a training camp for one-hundred Sino-Thai volunteers. Thus having demonstrated Chinese generosity and interest, Cheng asked if Chamkat wished to see Grut and

<sup>55</sup> SOE to Colonel Bruce, 20 September 1943 and A.D. to B.B., 1 October 1943, HS1-72; and untitled eight-point memorandum, 12 October 1943 and "Directive to Major E. Grut," 11 December 1943, HS1-54, PRO.

<sup>56</sup> New Delhi to AD/O, 24 July 1943; Chungking to New Delhi, 27 July 1943; Chungking to AD/O, 4 August 1943; Chungking to London, 5 August 1943, HS1-72; and "Report on My Interview with Balankura," 17 August 1943, HS1-56, PRO. Chamkat's letter to Suphasawat, dated 21 June 1943, is reproduced in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 279.

Suphasawat. When Chamkat responded eagerly, he arranged a meeting that afternoon.<sup>57</sup>

Well aware of Chamkat's suspicions about his politics, Prince Suphasawat first met him alone to disclaim any personal political motive in supporting the Free Thai movement. While voicing concern about the fate of royalist political prisoners in Thailand, Suphasawat emphasized his personal commitment to democracy and expressed his admiration for Pridi, a sentiment that he had earlier revealed in his May 1942 letter to Seni. Impressed by the Prince's explanation, Chamkat emphasized that he had been sent by Pridi, the man who, as Grut later wrote, had "come to be recognized as the main driving force in Siamese politics, its brain and its backbone." As their discussion continued, Suphasawat sought to allay Chamkat's suspicions about British policy toward Thailand.<sup>58</sup>

Suphasawat then arranged a meeting between Chamkat and Ambassador Seymour on the following day, 6 August. The Chinese were pressing him to base a Thai government-in-exile in China, Chamkat told Seymour, adding that "he was waiting for an expression of the British Government's views before considering this invitation" because his instructions had been to establish it in India. He also emphasized Thai concern about the British failure to endorse Chiang Kai-shek's pledge that Thailand's territorial sovereignty and independence would be respected after the war.<sup>59</sup>

The Ambassador could offer no specific assurance in his reply, but he pointed out that Britain had renounced territorial aspirations in subscribing to the Atlantic Charter. Recognition of a government-in-exile, he added, would require evidence that it enjoyed popular support. Chamkat's presentation had made an impression, though, as the Ambassador subsequently warned the Foreign Office that unless London took the initiative, some form of provisional Thai government probably would be set up in China.<sup>60</sup>

Greatly encouraged by the talks, the Prince reported to Mackenzie that Chinese and American apprehensions about British intentions in regard to Thailand were based on three factors: 1) what he described as Mani Sanasen's unilateral decision to separate the Free Siamese in England from the Free Thai in the USA, 2) Britain's failure to endorse Thailand's

<sup>57</sup> Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 48, based on an excerpt from Chamkat's diary.

<sup>58</sup> "Memorandum on a Visit to Balankura," 15 August 1943, H1-56 and SOE/G.40000 Operations in Siam," n.d., but *circa* December 1943, HS1-54, PRO.

<sup>59</sup> "Notes on H.M.A.'s Conversation with K. Balankura in Chungking on 6th August, 1943," HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. and Chungking to Foreign Office, 8 August 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

postwar independence, and 3) the unfavorable initial British reaction to Chamkat's proposals. Unaware that Prime Minister Churchill was determined to demand air bases, if not outright annexation of territory, in the Kra Isthmus region of Thailand, Suphasawat believed the British government could be convinced to clarify its position on Thailand's postwar independence and to host a Thai government-in-exile in India. Already Chamkat had accepted Ambassador Seymour's explanations and had promised to reassure the Chinese and Americans.<sup>61</sup>

Suphasawat saw a viable British plan for Pridi's rescue from Thailand as the other key to securing Chamkat's full cooperation. To this end, he advised Chamkat that the British were best positioned to carry out the operation because the most promising evacuation sites along the coasts of southern Thailand could be reached from India by submarine or sea-plane. He argued, too, that an India-based government-in-exile would be more likely to attract international recognition than one located in China.<sup>62</sup>

Suphasawat's success in establishing a firm, friendly relationship with Pridi's representative is evidenced by the fact that Chamkat – who for the moment was enjoying relative freedom of movement – met the Force 136 representatives daily until the Prince departed Chungking on 12 August. He accepted Suphasawat's argument that his radio link with Bangkok via the Chinese would not be a suitable means of communicating evacuation plans to Pridi. Instead, Chamkat suggested that a diamond worth 4,000 rupees would be sufficient to convince an unnamed Chinese general to facilitate the dispatch of personal messengers to Bangkok. These couriers would notify Pridi where his men could receive submarine-borne British agents, who would then set up an underground radio station and work out the details of the Regent's evacuation.<sup>63</sup>

During one of his conversations with Suphasawat, Chamkat sought to play on British fears, claiming that a Chinese diplomat had revealed China's desire to gain a privileged position in postwar Thailand and to use the country as a base to project Chinese influence across the border into Malaya. Chamkat added that the Chinese expected to annex the northern portion of Vietnam after the war, and believed that forthcoming military campaigns would establish their influence in Burma. He suggested, however, that many of the overseas Chinese who had returned to the homeland were so disillusioned by the unpleasant realities of Kuomintang rule

<sup>61</sup> Suphasawat to Mackenzie, 7 August 1943, reprinted in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 290–93.

<sup>62</sup> "Memorandum on a Visit to Balankura," 15 August 1943 and "Report on My Interview with Balankura," 17 August 1943, HS1-56, PRO, Kew.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

that they could be persuaded to work in Thailand's interest rather than China's. Grut concluded from Chamkat's remarks, and other intelligence he had gleaned in Chungking, that anti-British Chinese army officers – particularly Tai Li – harbored ambitious plans for postwar Chinese gains at British expense. "There can be no doubt," Grut emphasized, "that the temper of Chinese military circles is decidedly hostile to the British, and it is a regrettable fact that this resentment is fanned by the Americans for reasons known to themselves."<sup>64</sup>

The Chinese Foreign Ministry had been unable to resist Ambassador Seymour's repeated requests for access to Chamkat. Now, with a new Free Thai party, led by a member of the Thai National Assembly, on the way to Chungking, it seemed a good time to be rid of this highly-strung young man whose attachment to the foreign country where he had been educated seemed to be coming to the fore. Even before the meetings with Grut and Suphasawat, Tai Li told Miles on 2 August that, after communication with T. V. Soong in Washington, Chiang Kai-shek had approved Chamkat's longstanding request to go to Washington, frankly acknowledging that strong British interest in the Thai envoy made it urgent that he be dispatched "via the fastest means available without his being annoyed by anyone *en route*." Afraid that the British might "kidnap" him in India, Tai suggested that an American officer escort Chamkat. Miles assigned this task to Major Devlin, who recently had arrived in Chungking. In Washington, the OSS cleared Chamkat's trip with the Thai Legation. His departure was delayed on 9 August, however, when Sanguan, leader of the new Free Thai party, telegraphed a request that Chamkat await his arrival in the Chinese capital.<sup>65</sup>

Foiled in their effort to get Chamkat out of the way before Sanguan arrived, the Chinese moved to limit his contacts with British representatives in Chungking immediately after Suphasawat's departure. Tai Li's organization relocated Chamkat from the Foreign Guest Hostel to a tightly secured house near BIS headquarters. Chamkat received pointed warnings that he must avoid close relations with the British, and General Cheng K'ai-min called to urge that he encourage Sanguan's party to work with the Chinese through the BIS.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Suphasawat, "Memorandum on a Visit to Balankura," 15 August 1943, HS1-56 and E. Grut, "Report on the Free Siamese Movement and its Representatives in China," 5 September 1943, HS1-63, PRO.

<sup>65</sup> "General Summary of the Thailander Situation as of 15 August 1943," Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99 and memorandum by Fisher of 9 August meeting, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226. Also, Balankura to Arun, 26 August 1943, HS1-72, PRO, Kew and Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> "B/B 852," 0.125 to B/B 100, 25 August 1943, HS1-72 and Chamkat to Suphasawat, 27 August 1943, HS1-65, PRO.

The latter appeal reflected the competition that existed between Chinese government agencies. The BIS had gained control of Chamkat from the Foreign Office, but General Wu Teh-chen, Secretary-General of the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang Party, which was responsible for the Korean Provisional Government, had dispatched a reportedly cash-laden representative, Shing Sheng-chow (Nai Sing), a former resident of Thailand, to intercept Sanguan's party at the town of Nam Leng on 14 August. Findlay Andrew, the chief of the Force 136 Chungking office, heard that C-C Clique leader Ch'en Li-fu and War Minister General Ho Ying-chin also were belatedly seeking a share of the Thai action. Rumor had it that Ho had sent a major general to interview Chamkat, only to have Tai Li's men send him away and threaten to arrest him if he returned.<sup>67</sup>

Chamkat so vehemently protested against efforts to restrict his movements that the Chinese backed off, permitting him instead to shift to a residence called "Victory House," from which he could move more freely. When he re-established contact with Force 136, Chamkat declared that Pridi had instructed him – via the radio link to Bangkok through the Chinese – to await an answer from London before agreeing to set up a provisional government in China, but that the establishment of a military mission in Chungking could proceed. Chamkat complained that the Chinese were delaying his communications and trying to break his code. He also anticipated that Tai Li's organization, with Miles' support, would attempt to isolate him from Sanguan because he opposed the early establishment of a provisional government.<sup>68</sup>

Chamkat told Prince Suphasawat, in a letter written on 27 August, that the Kuomintang Secretariat was advancing plans for a Free Thai counterpart to the Chinese-sponsored Korean Provisional Government. Plans were being developed, he explained, to muster as many Sino-Thai as could be found for the inauguration ceremony, an event over which Chiang Kai-shek would personally preside. Chamkat reported that the Chinese were prepared to offer 100 million Chinese dollars<sup>69</sup> to support the Thai provisional government. He had sent a message to

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. and Sangvan Tularak, *Anuson ngan phrarachathan ploengsop Sanguan Tularak* (Bangkok, 1995), 168. The U-C Clique was an important political faction within the Chinese Nationalist Party led by Ch'en Li-fu and his brother Ch'en Kuo-fu.

<sup>68</sup> "B/B 852," 0.125 to B/B 100, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>69</sup> In Chamkat to Arun, 26 August 1943, KS1-72, PRO, Kew. At the official exchange rate, 100,000,000 Chinese dollars were equivalent to 5,000,000 US dollars, but the American military authorities believed at the time a more accurate exchange rate would have been approximately four to five times the official twenty-to-one ratio. If so, this mean that such a loan would have been on the order of one million US dollars. See Gauss to Hull, 20 October 1943, *FRUS* 1943 (China): 567–68.



Sanguan urging him to make no commitments before reaching Chungking. Although unaware what resources the follow-up party might have at its disposal, Chamkat indicated that the funds on hand could support the entire Thai party for no more than two months. Accordingly, Chamkat worried that financial pressures might induce Sanguan to accept Chinese terms.<sup>70</sup>

In conversations with the British, Chamkat had declared that he did not intend to return to China after his visit to the USA, but would operate from British India. He, however, would need money "to exert a hold on the Party and exact their obedience." Only in this way, he insisted, could the Free Thai avoid the fate of the Korean Provisional Government "which has no liberty at all, because it has to depend on Chinese support." Although Seni had access to Thai funds in the United States, Chamkat doubted that he could get money from that source because "it seems at the present moment that the Chinese and US Governments are walking hand in hand" and any transfer could be blocked by the Chinese. Chamkat therefore asked if Suphasawat could provide a 50,000 rupee subsidy.<sup>71</sup>

In the absence of supporting evidence, Chamkat's claims about Chinese inducements, financial and otherwise, cannot be accepted at face value because it seems he was trying to provoke a bidding war between the Chinese and British. He did not reveal to the British that at the same time he was asking Chiang Kai-shek for a two-million dollar loan. If Suphasawat harbored any doubts about Chamkat's claims, however, he did not let on. Instead he replied on 10 September that he was "making every effort to obtain funds."<sup>72</sup>

In the meantime, Grut's mission in Chungking had come to an abrupt end. Not only had he clashed with Miles, but he and Suphasawat had not

<sup>70</sup> "Translation of Letter from Balankura to Major Arun," 26 August 1943, HS1-72; E. Grut, "Report on the Free Siamese Movement and its Representatives in China," HS1-63; and Chamkat to Suphasawat, 27 August 1943, HS1-65, PRO. Chamkat also told Findlay Andrew of the alleged offer of 100,000,000 yuan to back a provisional government as reported in 0.125 to B/B 100, 25 August 1943, HS1-72, PRO. The British understood that Chamkat had received an initial loan of a million Chinese yuan (the equivalent to 50,000 US dollars at the official exchange rate, or approximately 11,000 dollars at the black market rate) after his meeting with Chiang Kai-shek. He told Suphasawat that he had 700,000 dollars left in late August. This does not jibe with complaints of poverty, a stated aversion to becoming indebted to the Chinese, or solicitation of a loan of only 50,000 dollars from General Cheng recorded in Chamkat's diary and cited in Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 42, 58. It appears that Chamkat was exaggerating the amounts of the Chinese loans and proposed financial incentives in an attempt to goad the British into providing support.

<sup>71</sup> "Translation of Letter from Balankura to Major Arun," 26 August 1943, HS1-65, PRO.

<sup>72</sup> Chamkat's loan request to Chiang Kai-shek is found in a handwritten draft dated 24 August, 1943, Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA. It is not clear if it was actually presented to the Chinese. Also, New Delhi to Chungking, 10 September 1943, HS1-65, PRO.



seen eye to eye either. The British Embassy, meanwhile, believed that Grut had overstepped his bounds in political discussions related to Free Thai matters, and the Major himself was frustrated by the "antagonistic attitude of the Chinese." Thus, Force 136's decision to recall Grut to India at the end of August apparently pleased everyone.<sup>73</sup>

Consultations between Prince Suphasawat and the staff at Force 136 generated a concrete plan for contacting Pridi, a scheme to be concealed from the Chinese and the Americans. Copies of a microfilmed message, ostensibly from Chamkat and the Free Thai abroad, would be sent overland by two separate couriers. The message would propose a submarine rendezvous on the western coast of peninsular Thailand, south of Ranong, during the full moon period either in December or January. After Pridi confirmed plans to receive them – either by broadcasting specified code words over Bangkok Radio or by sending out a messenger overland – four radio-equipped British Free Thai officers would land to lay groundwork for Pridi's rescue by submarine from near Hua Hin in March 1944, the earliest time seasonal weather conditions in the Gulf of Thailand would permit a mission. In addition to the message, Force 136 provided the diamond ring Chamkat had requested, 500 baht in Thai currency and a promise of financial support for the Free Thai in China. In the latter regard, London approved the payment of the equivalent of 1,000 pounds per month for five months. Andrew reported giving Chamkat 100,000 Chinese dollars on 29 September.<sup>74</sup>

In developing their plans for contacting Pridi, Force 136 recognized the necessity of obtaining Foreign Office approval and official guidance on how to answer inevitable questions about Britain's postwar intentions toward Thailand. They induced the British commander in India, General Sir Claude Auchinlek, to request both in a 22 July 1943 message to the British Chiefs of Staff.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Chungking to New Delhi, 8 August 1943; New Delhi to Chungking, 11 August 1943; and New Delhi to London, 30 August 1943 HS1-71 and E. Grut, "Report on the Free Siamese Movement and its Representatives in China," 5 September 1943, HS1-63, PRO. Cheng K'ai-min admitted to Chamkat that he had baldly lied to Grut in denying that Sanguan Tularak was part of the new group from Thailand that had entered China. See "Translation of a Letter from Balankura to Major Arun," 26 August 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>74</sup> Arun to Chamkat, 23 August 1943 and the text of the message from Chamkat to Pridi, HS1-53; B/B 100 to B/B, 30 August 1943, HS1-56; B/B 100 to AD/O, 7 September 1943; 0.125 to B/B 100, 29 September 1943; and 0.125 to B/B 100, 6 October 1943, HS1-72, PRO. Chamkat specified that one of the messengers would be a Sino-Thai who came out of the country a month ahead of him.

<sup>75</sup> New Delhi to London, 18 July 1943; Auchinlek to CoS, 22 July 1943; and "SOE and Siam," 29 July 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

Authorities in London were willing to authorize communication with Pridi, but the Foreign Office strongly opposed making any political promises. The Chiefs of Staff advised Auchinlek:

The contact should therefore confine himself to saying that our immediate war aim is to drive the Japanese out, and he should refuse absolutely to commit himself about the post-war status of Siam. He should be as evasive as possible on local politics and if pressed might say that he presumes that much will depend upon the attitude and behaviour of Siam between now and the end of the war.<sup>76</sup>

Dissatisfied with this response, Force 136 authorities warned that unless London were more forthcoming, the Chinese and Americans might sponsor a provisional Thai government without British participation. This would make it “unlikely that SOE will be able to retain its own Siamese recruits or representative” and create “obvious and serious repercussions in the post-war future.” On the other hand, British “recognition and approval” of the Free Thai movement, coupled with an unfreezing of Thai funds in London, “would place us in what might be a controlling position in the future.”<sup>77</sup>

General Auchinlek again cabled the Chiefs of Staff, this time urging a British declaration along the lines of Chiang Kai-shek’s statement of 26 February 1943, subsequently endorsed by President Roosevelt, as well as some “further expression of sympathy to Free Siamese aims.” Auchinlek pointed out the urgency of the matter given Chinese attempts to control and pressure Free Thai representatives, and the American refusal to cooperate. Both problems he attributed largely to London’s failure to clarify its intentions in regard to Thailand.<sup>78</sup>

Buoyed by his success with Chamkat, Prince Suphasawat proposed that he be sent to London to lobby for a suitable British declaration. Success, he suggested to his Force 136 superiors, would lift his own prestige so that he could negotiate more effectively with Seni (linked to the Americans) and Chamkat (unwillingly linked to the Chinese). Thus, “when the formation of the Siamese Provisional Government becomes inevitable, I would be in a firm position to maintain our control.” He personally favored Thai reliance on Britain, Suphasawat declared, because the “two countries’ interests in South Eastern Asia are mutual as we have to safeguard ourselves against a certain common danger,” an allusion to the possibility of US-supported Chinese domination of the region.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> CoS to Auchinlek, 6 August 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>77</sup> “Aide-Mémoire on the Situation in Siam,” 4 September 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>78</sup> Auchinlek to CoS, 23 September 1943, PRO.

<sup>79</sup> Suphasawat, “Memorandum of a Visit to Balankura,” 15 August 1943, HS1-56, PRO.

To illustrate his point, Suphasawat likened Great Britain to satiated fleas that had long established themselves on the back of a buffalo (Thailand). In contrast, "if the former swarm of well-fed fleas were to depart, [the Americans and Chinese] would descend with ravenous hunger." He added:

The British Government must not lose this fight for leadership since it would be detrimental to both Great Britain and Siam. She must try to maintain her influence against the others and carry on with her leadership in this sphere which we all desire. If she were to let go now, it will be very difficult to resume it again. That is my belief. And if you trust me that I am really keen to look after the interest of SOE and our two countries, then I should be given the assistance to retain a certain amount of control and influence over this Free Siamese affair, which has now come into the sphere of our work whether we like it or not.<sup>80</sup>

Suphasawat had it all planned. With a British declaration in hand, he would call Seni and Chamkat to London, convince them of British good intentions and unite the overseas Free Thai under Seni's titular leadership. He concluded:

With all the questions among the Siamese factions settled satisfactorily, we shall reap the result and attain leadership, co-operation and unity of all concerned. A *fait-accompli* could be placed before them [Britain's allies] stating that we are already contacting the Free Siamese leaders in the country to effect their rescue and set up a firm organization and that it would be no use for anybody else to effect any further contact, since they would only create confusion. It is best for them to fall in line with us.<sup>81</sup>

No doubt impressed both by Suphasawat's pro-British attitude and his well-packaged plan, Force 136 dispatched him to London, but his unshakeable reputation as a dyed-in-the-wool monarchist came back to haunt him once again. Crosby, the retired long-time minister to Thailand, commented in a 4 October memorandum that Suphasawat was a "good fellow in himself," but as the son of "the most unpopular of all the Princes with the men who came into power in Bangkok after the [1932] *coup d'état*" and as the brother-in-law of King Pradjadhipok, he would be *persona non grata* with both Pridi's and Phibun's political factions. Further, Crosby warned, Suphasawat's emergence in a prominent role would fuel old fears that the British were promoting a royalist revival, the same concerns Crosby had labored mightily to overcome during his long pre-war service in Bangkok. Grut, who followed Suphasawat to London in late October, had similar views, no doubt influenced in part by his own ambitions to play the leading role in SOE Thai operations. The

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.      <sup>81</sup> Ibid.

Thai officers in India with Force 136 also opposed a leadership role for Suphasawat on political grounds and had accepted Mani as Seni's representative. The Foreign Office not only preferred to deal with Mani, but knew he was jealous of Suphasawat and would be quick to complain if the Prince were given a political role. Moreover, Seni showed no inclination to cooperate with Suphasawat despite old personal ties. He now ignored Suphasawat's letters and had acknowledged to the OSS his wariness of the Prince "because of his connection with the British and because of the possibility of a Royalist *coup d'état*" should he "become active in the movement." The Americans and Chinese, of course, had already made their hostility clear, so granting Suphasawat a forward role seemed unwise. Under these circumstances, Force 136 Chief Mackenzie advised London that the "best course seems to keep him sweet by consultations and retain his goodwill."<sup>82</sup>

On the American side, Miles had been bluffing when he told Grut at the beginning of August that his Thailand operations would be underway within two weeks. In fact, the last members of the first OSS Thai group did not reach Chungking until mid-month, while much of the necessary equipment, including radio gear, did not arrive at all. In an effort to overcome the latter problem, Miles dispatched Nicol Smith on a procurement mission to India at the end of August. It took two months, but the resourceful Smith managed to obtain most of the items on his shopping list, including a cache of cosmetics for Khap's Chinese mistress. He had little success, however, in acquiring scarce baht currency for agent use inside Thailand. He had to buy gold instead.<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, Miles had based the members of the Thai group two miles from SACO headquarters in a converted Buddhist temple, a gray stucco

<sup>82</sup> "Aide-Mémoire on the Situation in Siam," 4 September 1943, HS1-72; B/B 100 to B/B, 30 August 1943, HS1-56; Crosby memorandum, 4 October 1943, HS1-70; London to New Delhi, 25 October 1943 and New Delhi to London, HS1-72; New Delhi to London, 4 November 1943, HS1-71; and "SOE/G.40,000 Operations in Siam," n.d., but *circa* December 1943, HS1-54, PRO; and Fisher memorandum of meeting of 2 October 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA. Suphasawat fought in vain to counter the efforts to keep him on the sidelines. See his 12 November 1943 letter to Colonel Guise in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 412–18 in which he pleaded to be allowed to go to Washington to attempt to win over Seni.

<sup>83</sup> The list of items to be procured and Smith to Khap, 30 September and 2 October 1943 in Folder 3004, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226 and Smith to Miles, Box 36, RG 38, USNA. Other letters regarding Smith's sojourn in India are found in Box 37, RG 38, USNA, and a colorful account of his adventures appears in Nicol Smith and Blake Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom* (Indianapolis, 1946), 80–90. The trip is also described in Smith's letter to Ellen A. Dockery, 9 January 1944 (misdated 1943), Box 3, Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution. Chamkat told the British that he had managed to delay Miles' operations, an odd claim since at the time (early August) there is no evidence that he had yet met Miles. See Andrew to New Delhi, 8 August 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

structure that he characterized as “not near enough to headquarters that SACO’s security would be violated.” He and Tai Li had agreed that the Thai project “would be kept as a separate project outside of SACO, but controlled from within SACO.” A training schedule, including radio operation, sketching, intelligence gathering, and weather observation, had been set up by late August to keep the men busy.<sup>84</sup>

In planning the infiltration into Thailand the OSS group faced a fundamental choice between aerial or overland penetration. Parachute entry would be faster, but in the absence of a friendly reception party agents would face a high risk of capture by the Japanese or Thai officials loyal to Premier Phibun. On the other hand, an overland trek through French Indochina would be both slow and risky, unless trustworthy local guides could be obtained. Few Japanese ventured into the remote Lao territories between Yunnan and Thailand, but cooperation from the French colonial authorities, who were administering the area at Japanese suffrance, could not be expected. Miles initially favored the parachute option, despite the fact that neither training facilities nor aircraft for the drops were at his disposal.<sup>85</sup>

New plans drawn up by Khap, in consultation with Miles, reflected this early focus on aerial entry. These aimed at the gradual build-up of a series of five regional intelligence cells to cover all strategic regions of Thailand. Even if all went well, though, it would not be possible to man these cells fully until a second group of Thai volunteers arrived. Accordingly, Miles requested another twenty-five agents at the beginning of August, then soon asked for even more. Washington replied in mid-September that only sixteen men were lined up for training and few, if any, additional men would be available.<sup>86</sup>

As the plan stood in mid-August 1943, eight men from the first group would go into Thailand. Entering either by parachute or overland,

<sup>84</sup> “General Summary of the Thailander Situation as of 15 August 1943,” Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 69. Three of the Free Thai officers – Chok, Bunrot, and Karun – had an early brush with death on 25 August. An overloaded riverboat the three had just boarded at a landing near their camp tipped to one side and capsized in mid-stream. Fortunately, they were standing on the open deck near the bow and were able to jump clear of the sinking vessel. All three swam to safety, but more than one hundred passengers, many of whom were trapped inside the boat, perished. Written reports by the three officers are found in Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> A preference for parachute entry was expressed by Miles as early as 25 July 1943 in Miles to COMINCH, Box 37, RG 38, USNA. Also, see Coughlin to Eifler, 11 September 1943, Folder 93, Box 45, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>86</sup> Miles to Hoffman, 3 August 1943; Miles to Donovan, 9 September 1943; and Halliwell to Miles, 13 September 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

Karawek Siwichan and Pao Khamurai (Pow Khamourai) would establish themselves at Udon in the northeast. Phon Intharathat and Somphong Salayaphong (Sompongse Salyabongse) would be dropped near Uttaradit in the north, Sawat Chieosakun (Cheo-sakul) and Phisut Suthat would parachute near Ayutthaya in the central plain. Chok na Ranong and Ian Khamphanon would enter via Burma and set up in Chumphon in the south. The remaining officers would man a forward headquarters in southern Yunnan.<sup>87</sup>

Before 1 September these assignments were revised. Under the new plan, Karun Kengradomying was shifted to join Karawek in the Udon assignment, scheduled to be the first penetration. Phon would still drop near Uttaradit, with Ian parachuting near Lampang, and Somphong near Chiang Mai. Bunyen Sasirat (Sasiratna) would take the Ayutthaya assignment, with Sawat going to Samut Prakan. Anon na Phomphet would accompany Chok to Chumphon and Pao and Phisut would drop near Prachinburi, with the former going to Aranyaphrathet and the latter to Sattahip. Each agent would take a radio set, three storage batteries, dry batteries, a hand-generator, emergency rations, and three carrier pigeons.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to mission planning and continued training, the Thai group also dabbled in psychological warfare, termed "morale operations" (MO) by the OSS. In response to a Bangkok Radio report that Premier Phibun had hosted a celebration for regional and district officials, Miles approved the printing 10,000 copies of a Thai-language leaflet blasting the Premier for trying to win their favor through bribery. When Miles attempted to have them dropped over Thailand, however, he ran into a bureaucratic dead end. He finally was referred to the OWI for clearance, but the director of the local office was away in India, so the leaflets were never dropped.<sup>89</sup>

By the time Smith returned to China, almost half the Thai officers had advanced to Kunming, a step closer to their anticipated forward base in southern Yunnan. As the gateway to blockaded Nationalist China – first as the terminus of the railway from French Indochina and the Burma Road and now as the key entry base for aircraft flying over the

<sup>87</sup> "General Summary of the Thailander Situation as of 15 August 1943," Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226 and Miles to Hoffman, 3 August 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>88</sup> "Secret War Diary," 1 September 1943, Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99 and the undated plan "Strength and Operation," Folder 2995, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226; and "Log of Daily Events," 4 September 1943, Box 4, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>89</sup> "Secret War Diary," 1 September 1943, Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226 and Miles to "Ray," 4 September 1943; Raichle to Miles, 17 September 1943; and "Secret War Diary," 1 October 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

“Hump” from India – Kunming had ballooned from a prewar population of 50,000 to over 300,000. It had become a cesspool of corruption as avaricious Chinese and foreigners alike – including not a few American military officers – fattened their bank accounts through graft and smuggling. Impressed by the opportunities for profit, the SOE had assigned officers for the specific purpose of clandestine financial dealings. A visiting US Treasury representative dubbed Kunming “a thoroughly disgusting town.”<sup>90</sup>

Phon, Nithiphat Chalichan (Nithipatna Jalichandra), Bunliang Tamthai and Navy radioman Tom Lux reached Kunming first, on 12 October. Phon immediately got into a squabble with Miles’ local representative, Lieutenant Ray Kotrla, because the house that was to serve as Free Thai headquarters was not yet ready. They were able to move in within a week, by which time the group had been reinforced by the arrival of Chamrun Disayanan (Chamroon Tishyanandana), Chintamai Amatayakun (Chintamye Amatayakul), Phiset Pattaphong (Pises Patabongse), Bunrot Binson, Wichian Waiwanon (Vichien Vaivananda), and Prince Yuthitsathian. They were able to establish regular radio contact with their colleagues who had remained at the base near Chungking.<sup>91</sup>

Khap stayed in Chungking, as always, generating controversy. Informed that Smith had been appointed finance officer for the Thai group, Khap, who had expected to control the purse strings, complained that the OSS and Seni had arranged this behind his back. His reason for concern became apparent during Smith’s two-month absence in India when he seriously exceeded his budget. Khap wrote to Smith on 18 October that there had been “quite a lot of expenses incurred around Chungking, especially for me.” This forced him to borrow 300,000 Chinese dollars from Miles and to cut off his wife’s allotment from his salary. By late November, Khap had borrowed nearly 1,800 dollars from

<sup>90</sup> M. R. Nicholson to Henry Morgenthau, 6 October 1941; Solomon Adler to Irving S. Friedman, 3 April 1944; and Solomon Adler to Harry Dexter White, 1 March 1945 in Henry Morgenthau *Morgenthau Diary (China)* (Washington, DC, 1965) 1: 475 and 2: 1093 and 1431. The British activities are explained in Robert Bickers, “The Business of a Secret War: Operation ‘Remorse’ and SOE Salesmanship in Wartime China,” *Intelligence and National Security* 16 (Winter 2001): 11–36.

<sup>91</sup> Free Thai Logs, Folders 3005–6 and Phon to Khap (translation), 13 October 1943, Folder 2992, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Miles to Kotrla, 19 October 1943 and Kotrla to Miles, 20 October 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA. The clash with Kotrla put Phon on the Navy’s blacklist. When Miles’ operational officer, Commander Wight, later discovered that Phon had attempted to circumvent censorship in dispatching a personal letter, he labeled Phon a potential liability, because of his “independence, lack of discipline, and failure to comprehend the whole purpose of regulations.” See Wight to Miles, 27 November 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.



the Free Thai treasury. The puzzled Smith advised Miles that he was “somewhat at a loss as to why he [Khap] is having such heavy expenditures.”<sup>92</sup>

Khap’s reluctance to move from the relative comforts of Chungking to the Free Thai base near Friendship Valley irritated his men. Chok, ever outspoken despite his youth and lowly rank, claimed that he confronted the Colonel, challenging him to join his subordinates at the camp or go back to Washington. If he elected to stay in Chungking, Chok suggested, the rest of them should go home. Although Khap did finally move to the camp, as early as mid-August Miles had concluded that the group would be better served if he returned to Washington once the first penetration was made and plans were fully developed.<sup>93</sup>

Miles adopted a condescending tone in describing the members of the Thai group as unpredictable “feather merchants” in his postwar memoir, but he sang a very different tune in his cables to Washington during the latter half of 1943. In early August, he reported that they were on the way to becoming “a full-fledged, proud, cooperative, happy, efficient group” capable of rising to the standard set for them. He judged them “a lot better than personnel of OSS in Washington believe . . . apparently very patriotic, clean cut and ready to go.” He used similar superlatives throughout the fall as he made preparations to send the Thai group into the field.<sup>94</sup> Little did he suspect that the group would not establish radio contact from inside Thailand for more than a year, long after the Thai project would be wrested from his control.

In India, Force 136 Chief Mackenzie also felt optimistic. Suphasawat’s success in wooing Chamkat had led Pridi’s envoy to suggest to Findlay Andrew that if he were dispatched to Washington he might try to slip away from the Americans while passing through India and proceed to London under Force 136 auspices instead. Commenting on prospects for Thailand operations in a message to London on 9 September, Mackenzie, a Cambridge-educated veteran of World War I who had worked as an executive of an international textile company, wrote: “It is a very tangled

<sup>92</sup> Khap to Miles, 18 August 1943, Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99; and Khap to Smith, 18 October 1943 and Smith to Khap, 25 November 1943, Folder 3004, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Smith to Miles, 22 October 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA. Khap’s wife soon learned about his mistress in Chungking and was predictably displeased about this and the loss of her allowance. Several of her letters to Khap from early 1944 are found in Folder 2992, Box 196, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Chok na Ranong to the author, 30 November 1994 and “General Summary of the Thailander Situation as of 15 August 1943,” Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>94</sup> “General Summary of the Thailander Situation as of 15 August 1943,” Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.



skein, but I feel that if we play our cards carefully we may come through quite nicely and be comparatively well placed when co-ordination is carried out.”<sup>95</sup> His metaphor perfectly captured the complexity of the situation but, like Miles, he as yet had no idea just how tangled the skein would prove to be.

<sup>95</sup> 0.125 to B/B 100, 1 September 1943 and B/B 100 to AD/O, 7 September 1943, HS1-72, PRO. On Mackenzie's background and personality, see Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular*, 228.

## 4 Showdown in Friendship Valley

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Push increasingly came to shove in the troubled relationship between the OSS hierarchy and Captain Milton Miles during the fall of 1943. Also, to the dismay of the OSS and the State Department, events surrounding the arrival of the latest group of Thai representatives from Bangkok touched off a new row between Thai Minister Seni and his military attaché that drew members of the Thai group in China into the fray. Finally, near the year's end, General Donovan flew to China in a personal effort to clear the obstacles impeding his organization's progress in the Middle Kingdom, including its Thai operation.

Although Donovan's first attempt to remove the Thai group from SACO had failed, he had laid the groundwork for future success by attaching Lt. Col. Richard P. Heppner to General Stilwell's New Delhi staff, making him "part of his official family." Heppner, who returned to India via London in the company of John Paton Davies, wasted little time in expanding his beachhead. He requested a substantial staff of approximately thirty, including a research and analysis team, a microfilm unit, personnel, and equipment for a radio base station, a special intelligence group for Burma operations, and five clerks and stenographers.<sup>1</sup>

Although Heppner steered clear of China for the time being, he closely monitored the situation there. In a letter to Donovan, he forecast that Miles was headed for trouble because of growing antagonism in Stilwell's command over "his attitudes and methods" and concern about the political implications of SACO's training program for Tai Li's police. Heppner had heard, no doubt through Davies, that Stilwell had reacted strongly to a message from Washington suggesting that Miles had sufficient independence from the American Theater commander to block separate OSS operations under Stilwell. "The General is thoroughly fed up with Mary [Miles] who has and is producing nothing," Heppner advised Donovan.

<sup>1</sup> "Chronological Development of FE-4-CBI" and Warner interview of Heppner, n.d., Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

Perceiving a golden opportunity for the OSS, Heppner urged: "it is necessary that we get personnel without delay no matter how it is done."<sup>2</sup>

General Marshall, still miffed about being trumped by the navy during earlier negotiations over SACO and the related JCS Directive 245, wanted Stilwell to assert his right as theater commander to operate separate intelligence operations. Marshall pointedly advised Stilwell on 28 July to "request that JCS 245 be amended to clarify your right to base espionage activities in China additional to those required for special operations under the SACO agreement."<sup>3</sup>

At OSS headquarters, meanwhile, Captain Hoffman spearheaded bureaucratic maneuvers against Miles and SACO, seizing every opportunity to promote the idea that an OSS staff under Stilwell could work wonders in China. In July, he suggested that the OSS become an equal partner with the Navy inside SACO by placing an OSS colonel on Miles' staff as Donovan's representative. The objective would be to "limit Mary [Miles] to a small and efficient unit instead of one that is spreading itself all over Asia." Soon Hoffman began sounding out the Navy Department and Colonel Hsiao, Tai Li's representative in Washington, regarding modification of SACO's structure.<sup>4</sup>

Concerned about Miles' troubled relations with Donovan and Stilwell, his liaison in Washington, Captain Jeffrey Metzel, sternly warned him on 24 August:

You have *got* to make Wild Bill and Uncle Joe feel you are on their teams. First step is to try like hell – second is to keep all semblance of [wise] cracks out of general messages and letters . . .

. . . If there be *good* Old China Hands, TL [Tai Li] will best serve his cause by hand picking a few and asking for them.

Most important of all [are] early and frequent reports of kills. Even very small ones will help us no end.<sup>5</sup>

In response, Miles agreed to relax his strictures against "Old China Hands," met complaints that he had failed to inform the OSS of his activities by submitting lengthy "war diaries," and asked for additional OSS personnel; generally showing signs, in Hoffman's view, of "at least becoming conscious of [OSS] headquarters." It was too little, too late, though,

<sup>2</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 20 and 27 July 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA and Heppner to Donovan, 15 August 1943, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI. The message to which Heppner referred was almost certainly Pape to Stilwell and Ferris, 27 July 1943, "'Eyes Alone' Correspondence of General Joseph Stilwell," Reel 2, M1419, USNA.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall to Stilwell 29 July 1943, "'Eyes Alone' Correspondence of General Joseph Stilwell," Reel 2, M1419, USNA.

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman to Donovan, 6 August, Reel 91 M1642, USNA and 6 October 1943, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>5</sup> Metzel to Miles, 24 August 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

and Miles' detailed and characteristically breezy war diaries would only provide OSS headquarters with more ammunition to fire at him.<sup>6</sup>

Near the end of August, Donovan hit the ceiling after receiving a copy of a Miles letter advising Metzel that Tai Li continued to distrust the OSS. Donovan sent a terse note to Hoffman declaring that if this were true: "we should do two things at once: 1) remove him as our representative there; [and] 2) Ask if the people with whom he has contact feel as he does, and if they do, use that as the basis for withdrawing from the SACO agreement." Hoffman drafted a letter requesting Miles' resignation, but Donovan, who soon afterward left for North Africa, decided not to send it, perhaps because of his plan to visit Chungking before the end of the year.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after receiving Marshall's encouragement to assert his rights as theater commander, Stilwell ordered Davies to Chungking to, as Heppner put it, "find the facts upon which Miles could be ousted." However, Davies and the other passengers on his plane – including journalist Eric Sevareid – had to bail out over northern Burma when their aircraft experienced mechanical problems. Although they hiked to safety, Davies reached China a month behind schedule.<sup>8</sup>

At a meeting with Miles in early September, Davies passed along reports, which Miles discounted as stale rumors, that Tai Li had fallen from favor and might be ousted. Davies went on to warn Miles of Stilwell's dissatisfaction with SACO's intelligence output and his disapproval of such SACO activities as police training for Tai's men. Well aware of Stilwell's previous equivocations, the unruffled Miles called Davies' bluff. If Stilwell really felt this way, he retorted, the General should express his views "in black and white and send them back to the State, War, and Navy Departments and demand a cancellation of our treaty and my removal from China."<sup>9</sup>

Stilwell held an intelligence conference during Davies' stay in Chungking, giving Heppner a pretext for his initial foray into China. According to Heppner's account of this conference, Stilwell acknowledged the value

<sup>6</sup> Miles to Metzel, 1 September 1943, Box 3, RG 38 and Hoffman to Donovan, 2 September 1943, Reel 41, M1642, USNA; Hoffman to Donovan 6 October 1943 and "SACO-Tai Li Report," Hoffman to Donovan, 20 July 1944, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>7</sup> Donovan to Hoffman, 30 August 1943 and Hoffman draft of letter to Miles, 3 September 1943, Reel 71, M1642, USNA.

<sup>8</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 15 August 1943, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; Davies, *Dragon by the Tail*, 287; and Sevareid, *Not So Wild a Dream*, 250–301.

<sup>9</sup> Miles, "Log of Monthly Events," 9 September 1943, Box 4 and Miles to Raichle, 19 October 1943, Box 14, RG 38, USNA. The false rumor about Tai Li's sacking was reported in Atcheson to Hull, 10 September 1943, *FRUS* 1943 (China): 112–13.

of Miles' weather reporting, coast watching, and radio intercept activities, but insisted that his wings must be clipped. Miles "should not be duped by Tai Li, should cut down on his police work and not meddle in politics," he declared. Stilwell specifically criticized Miles' "dog in the manger" attitude toward the plans by his headquarters to establish OSS-run intelligence operations from China into Southeast Asia. Stilwell suggested remedying the situation by amending the SACO agreement to place the organization under the theater commander's control, the same objective that Marshall had sought seven months earlier when Stilwell had shied away from confronting Miles.<sup>10</sup>

Pointedly excluded from Stilwell's intelligence conference, Miles learned of it from Metzel, who got his information from OSS headquarters in Washington. In response, Miles complained to Metzel that he had been trying to cooperate with Stilwell, but the General recently had refused to see him, insisting that he deal with Davies instead. Miles expressed confidence, however, that he could again bring Stilwell around to his point of view as soon as he could arrange a face-to-face meeting.<sup>11</sup>

Stilwell's remarks, and signs that Miles might be backing away from his opposition to separate OSS intelligence-gathering activities under Stilwell, encouraged Davies and Heppner. After a meeting with Miles, Heppner concluded:

he would like to quit if he can do so as a martyr, taking with him his entire organization. He makes dark reference to the enmity of Tai Li should he be forced to quit, and in the next breath speaks with nostalgia of the bridge of a cruiser. General Stilwell is alive to the importance of Mary [Miles]'s naval functions, and will do nothing which may result in his becoming a martyr. The General is resolved, however, that amendments in existing directives be made.

Heppner described Stilwell as "cordial and friendly," adding that he no longer tended "to blame OSS for Miles' misdeeds."<sup>12</sup>

To push matters along, on 6 October Davies sent Donovan a seven-page memorandum blasting Miles for his political naiveté in dealing with the Chinese and iterating the supposition that Miles wished to position himself as a victim of army "villainy." Davies acknowledged that Miles' connections with the Washington admirals and Tai Li had made him something of a "sacred cow," but recommended that Heppner be given

<sup>10</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 23 September 1943, Reel 91, M1642 and Hoffman to Metzel, 4 October 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA; Hoffman to Donovan, 6 October 1943, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; and Yu, *OSS in China*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Metzel to Miles, 8 October 1943, Box 1; Miles to Metzel, 8 October 1943, Box 38; and Miles to Raichle, Box 14, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>12</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 23 September 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

authority over Miles and Colonel Eifler of Detachment 101 before Stilwell's staff lost all confidence in the OSS. He cited the recommendation of an unnamed staff officer that both Miles and Eifler be sacked.<sup>13</sup>

Bolstered by word of Stilwell's new stance, the OSS hierarchy judged the time ripe to push for "immediate amendment of JCS 245" to permit OSS intelligence activities in China – including projects aimed at penetration of Thailand, Indochina, Burma, and Malaya – outside SACO. The plan called for continued participation in SACO, too, because "a final divorce" from Miles and SACO was "not recommended at this time." Cooperative behind-the-scenes efforts by the OSS, Stilwell's staff, and sympathetic army officers at the Pentagon bore fruit on 27 October when Joint Chiefs mandated the "direct control" of all OSS activities by theater commanders. They sought to avert a frontal challenge to the admirals by embedding the desired language in Directive 115/11/D, the last in a series of documents that established general parameters for operations of the OSS, rather than attempting amendment of JCS 245. This directive gave Donovan valuable new leverage against Miles.<sup>14</sup>

Miles' control of the OSS Thai group would increasingly become a bone of contention in the ensuing quarrel that pitted SACO and the Navy on one side and the OSS, the Army, and the American Embassy in Chungking on the other. Two developments fed into the controversy: 1) Tai Li's determined effort to involve the Free Thai representatives from Bangkok and the OSS Free Thai group in a Chinese scheme to create a Sino-Thai army and 2) related negotiations involving Miles, Tai Li, Khap, and the Free Thai party that reached Chungking from Bangkok at the beginning of September 1943.

<sup>13</sup> Davies to Donovan, 6 October 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

<sup>14</sup> Putzell to Donovan, 5 October 1943; Hoffman to Donovan, 6 October 1943; and Smith to Timberman, 12 October 1943, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; Memo by Pape and attached draft, 21 October 1943, Folder 213, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; and Troy, *Donovan and the CIA*, 206. Yu believes (*OSS in China*, 121) that the OSS was shocked and taken aback by the JCS action, but cites no evidence in support of this interpretation. In fact, the 5 October Putzell memorandum cited above (and cited in another context by Yu) explicitly states: "General Stilwell's desire to put Captain Miles and SACO under his control and to use the facilities of Friendship Valley in limited respects is felt to be an advantageous move for OSS." Further, Hoffman, in the above cited 6 October memorandum to Donovan, wrote: "Whenever I was called to the Pentagon Building for either my views or suggestions, I stated, (after receiving specific authority from Colonel Buxton) that it was the Director's attitude that any change that was necessary in any of the pertinent documents that would make OSS useful to General Stilwell and to give him appropriate control would be consented to by the Director and that if General Stilwell for any reason did not wish to initiate the change a request from him to the Director would bring the necessary action." The outcome was one that Donovan and the OSS hierarchy had worked to achieve and, as will be seen, they wasted little time in using the new directive as a weapon to oust Miles.

Details of the Sino-Thai army scheme first appeared in a memorandum of a 6 September conversation between Miles and General Cheng K'ai-min. It called for American financial and material support for the establishment of a guerrilla camp at P'uerh in Yunnan Province, where successive groups of 200–500 Sino-Thai volunteers would receive six-to-eight weeks of training. As "raider battalions" they would then move to more southerly bases and attempt to win over Thai Northern Army units occupying the adjacent Shan state of Kengtung in preparation for cooperative offensive operations in Burma and northern Thailand. The man designated to command the raiders, Major General Tso Hsien-hsu, a diminutive officer who had undergone three years of military training in Turin, Italy, hailed from Swatow and thus spoke the Teochiu dialect most common among Chinese residents of Thailand. However, unlike many of the other officers and men assigned to the project by the Chinese, Tso had not lived in Thailand and did not speak Thai.<sup>15</sup>

The second aspect of the Chinese plan envisioned attaching Sino-Thai agents to the OSS Free Thai teams preparing to enter Thailand. Beyond an obvious Chinese desire to keep tabs on the activities of the US-backed group, the proposal suggests that Tai Li now recognized the potential usefulness of the Thai volunteers. While he had numerous Thai-speaking Chinese at his disposal, none had the social standing and Bangkok connections of the Free Thai officers from America.

The Chinese sought backing for the Sino-Thai army scheme from Colonel Khap and Sanguan Tularak, leader of the new Free Thai party from Bangkok. As noted previously, the Chinese, influenced by Chamkat, had initially taken a skeptical view of Khap. Now, however, they had decided that this popular figure in Thai military circles could be manipulated. In addition to his appetite for wine, women, and song, Khap was susceptible to flattery and sufficiently ambitious to be attracted by Chinese suggestions that he could become a general and lead the Sino-Thai army. Tai Li underscored the new Chinese attitude toward Khap when, in the midst of a banquet attended by all the members of the Thai group, he dramatically removed a gold Rolex watch from his wrist and presented it to the Colonel. Sanguan also showed interest in the Sino-Thai army scheme and threw his support behind it.<sup>16</sup>

Although planning for a Sino-Thai training camp at P'uerh continued through the month of October, the details of the scheme did not become known in Washington until a copy of Miles' 1 November war diary arrived. In it, Miles outlined plans for the USA to finance the entire

<sup>15</sup> "Log of Daily Events," 6 and 11 September 1943, Box 4, RG 38 and Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944, Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Bunrot Binson, Bangkok, 13 July 1993 and "Secret War Diary," 1 November 1943, Folder 352, Box 23, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

project, dubbed “Pact Wally” after Marine Captain Wally Young, the officer chosen to spearhead it. The scheme involved successive purchases of herds of scarce, expensive horses and the establishment of a powerful broadcast station in an area which had no ready source of electricity. The plan also called for the assignment of “one or two” Sino-Thai agents to each of the Free Thai intelligence cells in Thailand. Miles seems never to have questioned the extraordinary costs associated with “Pact Wally,” nor to have seriously scrutinized its general feasibility. Among many questions not satisfactorily answered was how a large number of troops could be sustained in southern Yunnan Province where food was already in short supply? Nor does it appear that Miles pondered the political implications and potential security risks involved in merging Tai Li’s men with the American-trained Thai officers.<sup>17</sup>

While the magnitude of the proposed P’uerh project would not become known in Washington until after it had been in development for more than two months, Miles’ handling of the new group of Free Thai representatives from Bangkok, which had arrived in Chungking on 1 September, generated a swirl of controversy in the American capital almost immediately. Sanguan, director of the Thai Tobacco Monopoly and a member of the Thai National Assembly, headed the group that also included a British-educated official of the Thai Foreign Ministry, Daeng Kunadilok (Dilaka); a Tobacco Monopoly employee, Wibun Wimonprapha; Sanguan’s wife (Bunma); his daughter (Ramphai), his son (Kraisi); and his younger brother (Krachang). Sanguan brought with him detailed intelligence on the disposition of Thai and Japanese forces.

A longtime Pridi acolyte and member of the 1932 *coup* group, Sanguan had obtained a diplomatic passport on the pretext of purchasing supplies needed for cigarette production. A Thai citizen of Chinese heritage, Sanguan could speak a little Teochiu, but his brother Krachang had better language skills, having attended Chinese school as a youngster. Daeng, a brother-in-law of Thai cabinet member Khuang Aphaiwong, also served as an interpreter for Sanguan, who was less than fluent in English. A Thai citizen of Ceylonese background, Daeng had cited ill health in asking for a leave absence for a “vacation” in Indochina. Wibun, who had been educated in France, served as French-language interpreter and as Sanguan’s secretary. Concern about possible government reprisals led Sanguan to bring his wife and children along, too, a move he had justified by claiming that his wife would take the children to Japan for schooling.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> “Secret War Diary,” 1 November 1943, Folder 352, Box 23, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>18</sup> Krachang, “Seri Thai say tamniap Ta Chang,” and reports on conversations with the group by Chok na Ranong, Pao Khamurai, Karawek Siwichan, and Phisut Suthat in Folder 2994, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



The seven had left Bangkok by train for Battambang, near the Indochina border, on 14 July when most officials were busy celebrating Premier Phibun's birthday and would be unlikely to take notice. They reached Saigon by car, took a train to Hanoi, and went by boat to the border town of Mon Cay. There they divided into three groups to cross the bridge into China's Kwangsi Province on 28 July, mingling with Chinese returning home from a Mon Cay casino.<sup>19</sup>

Sanguan immediately contacted the Chinese authorities, presenting himself as president of the Committee for Siamese National Liberation and asking that his party be permitted to go to Chungking to meet Chiang Kai-shek. After some investigation, a party of soldiers arrived to conduct them to Kweiyang, the capital of Kweichow Province, via Nanning and Liuchow. Various traveling on foot, by boat, and by car, they arrived in Kweiyang on 24 August. In Liuchow, Sanguan had managed to contact an old friend, Dr. Luan Wongwanit, proprietor of the British Pharmacy in Bangkok before the Phibun government forced him into exile because of his China-related political activities. Dr. Luan joined the party, as did Lt. Col. Shing Sheng-chow (also known as "Nai Sing"), a Kuomintang (KMT) official sent to conduct the Thai party to the capital. Shing, an official of the KMT's Overseas Department, had also been deported from Thailand before the war.<sup>20</sup>

When the Thai party reached Chungking on 1 September they were welcomed and given quarters by the KMT. General Wu Teh-chun, executive secretary of the party's Central Executive Committee, called on Sanguan the next day and agreed to broadcast a pre-arranged, coded message on Radio Chungking to inform Pridi of the party's arrival. On 3 September Sanguan met Chamkat at Victory House. According to Sanguan's diary, Chamkat confided that he was suffering from cancer. Oddly, Suphasawat, who had seen Chamkat for seven consecutive days less than a month earlier had discerned no evidence of this illness. Allied officials in Chungking also would remain unaware of a cancer diagnosis for nearly a month.<sup>21</sup>

News of the impending arrival of Sanguan's group on Chinese soil contributed to a heightened level of interest in Thailand at OSS headquarters in Washington from around mid-August 1943. Another factor

<sup>19</sup> Sanguan funeral volume *Anuson ngan phrarachathan ploengsop Sanguan Tularak* (Bangkok, 1995), 167–69 and Krachang, "Seri Thai say tamniap Ta Chang."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Also, on Shing, see Nicholson to Siam Country Section, 2 December 1944, HS1-56, PRO, which suggests that in addition to the Kuomintang Party Overseas Bureau, Shing worked for Tai Li's organization, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The report indicates that he was involved in Chinese subversive activities aimed at both Thailand and Indochina.

<sup>21</sup> Sanguan funeral volume, 169–70.

was Donovan's success in gaining an OSS foothold in India, where the Allies were organizing a new military headquarters. It now appeared that this Southeast Asia Command (SEAC), approved at the August Quebec Conference, might offer a base beyond the reach of Miles and Tai Li from which to penetrate Thailand.

Although they had assigned Thailand to the China Theater at the beginning of the war, at Quebec the British and Americans transferred it to the new Southeast Asian Theater without consulting Chiang Kai-shek. Incensed by this high-handed move, the Chinese not only protested vehemently but refused to accept its validity. The commander of SEAC, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, turned on his considerable charm and attempted to paper things over during a subsequent visit to Chungking. He deflected Chiang's proposal for the establishment of a Chinese-American-British committee to supervise all intelligence operations into Thailand and left believing he had obtained Chiang's verbal agreement that Thailand could be the target of operations, clandestine and otherwise, from either theater. In the absence of a formal agreement, this presumed accord would later become a point of contention and controversy.<sup>22</sup>

On the surface there seemed little reason to think that India would provide a more favorable base for OSS operations. American General Albert Wedemeyer, assigned to SEAC as Mountbatten's deputy chief of staff, described Stilwell's CBI headquarters and British GHQ-India as "suspicious of – in fact, almost hostile to – each other." The reluctance of British authorities in India to host OSS and OWI offices has already been noted. Mountbatten, however, had an interest in clandestine warfare and had pledged to foster Anglo-American cooperation. Edmond Taylor, a journalist-turned-OSS officer who would play a key role in subsequent OSS operations, reckoned that Mountbatten also saw Donovan as a potentially useful American counterbalance to the anglophobic Stilwell.<sup>23</sup>

Donovan had established friendly personal relations with Mountbatten, a connection variously reported to have been enhanced by the OSS chief's ability to obtain New York theater tickets, to procure Cadillac automobiles and/or to provide the services of Hollywood's John Ford to record SEAC's anticipated successes on film. Donovan struck an agreement that

<sup>22</sup> On Mountbatten's visit to Chungking, see Philip Ziegler, ed., *Personal Diary of Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten, 1943–1946*, (London, 1988), 8–18; Gauss to Washington, 10 November 1943, *FRUS* 1943 (China): 840; Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 300–01; and Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 180–81.

<sup>23</sup> Wedemeyer to Handy, 17 January 1944, Wedemeyer Papers, Folder 9, Box 78, Hoover Institution and Taylor, *Awakening from History*, 349.

Mountbatten would retain “full operational control” over a new OSS unit in his theater, but the latter “would not lose its individuality as an American organization, and would not be integrated with nor placed under the command of any purely British unit.” Pleased that their British counterparts felt Mountbatten had been “outmaneuvered,” Donovan’s representatives in India saw the agreement as “a major victory for OSS.”<sup>24</sup>

Early evidence of OSS interest in using India as a base for Thailand operations appears in a report on psychological warfare operations in the Far East and Pacific, dated 2 September 1943. The author, Major Herbert F. Little, described as “impracticable” the deployment of additional Free Thai officers to Chungking and suggested that the remaining volunteers be sent to SEAC instead. He argued that consolidating all Thailand operations in India might prove advantageous.<sup>25</sup>

In response to the new opportunities presented by the advent of SEAC and the arrival of additional envoys from Thailand, OSS headquarters sought clarification of American policy from Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Hull responded on 26 August, stating that the USA considered Thailand an independent state, although it did not recognize the current Bangkok government and viewed the country as Japanese-occupied territory. Hull pointed out that America had “refrained” from responding

<sup>24</sup> “Status of OSS Units in CBI and SEAC,” n.d., Reel 88, M1642, USNA and “Analysis of Position,” Taylor to Donovan, n.d., Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; Dunlop, *Donovan*, 413–14; Stratton, *Army–Navy Game*, 39–40; and Ian Trenowden, *Malayan Operations Most Secret – Force 136* (Kuala Lumpur, 1978), 111. Although it appears that Mountbatten had reservations about OSS operating in his theater, he hid them well when dealing with the Americans. According to Miles (“Secret War Diary,” 1 November 1943, Box 39, RG 38, USNA), during Mountbatten’s mid-October 1943 visit to Chungking he became upset when Miles – then still head of OSS in China – told him that Donovan had ordered Miles to end his operations in Burma because it was a British theater. Miles claimed that Mountbatten heatedly replied that he had told Donovan “that under no circumstances is he to decrease his activities, but wherever possible to increase them. I consider that Donovan is working for me, because he has pledged cooperation; therefore I am changing your orders now.” Although Miles considered himself a target of the British and they often criticized him behind his back, this was one of several occasions when they showed interest in working with him. Like the OSS during 1942, the British were not above trying to gain some advantage from Miles’ good relations with Tai Li. Once Miles was separated from the OSS, however, Mountbatten increasingly gave him the cold shoulder.

<sup>25</sup> “Outline of OSS Psychological Plans, Far East and Pacific Theaters,” Little to Donovan, 2 September 1943, Reel 112, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI. Frederick Dolbeare, a former advisor to the Thai Foreign Ministry, then working for the OSS in New York, had a similar view. Disturbed by the plans to base the Thai movement in China and particularly opposed to close cooperation with Tai Li’s organization because of strong and deep-seated Thai mistrust of Chinese political organizations, including Chiang Kai-shek’s party, the Kuomintang, he suggested basing Thailand operations in India in Dolbeare to Onthank, 23 October 1943, Folder 15, Box 412, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA.

in kind to Thailand's declaration of war, continued to recognize Seni as "Minister of Thailand," and "sympathetically regarded" the Free Thai movement.<sup>26</sup>

The Secretary of State went on to say that the USA "looks forward to the re-establishment of Thailand's independence as quickly as possible." He indicated knowledge of Pridi's underground activities and made clear a favorable American attitude toward him, but emphasized that this did not represent a commitment to the Regent as the leader of postwar Thailand:

The attitude of this Government . . . is a provisional one pending a free expression of the wishes of the Thai people following the liberation of Thailand by United Nations forces. The efforts of the Government of the United States are and should be limited to assisting the Thai people to restore a native regime capable of discharging its responsibilities and free from foreign control. The final choice of the leaders of such a government is a matter for the Thai people alone to decide.<sup>27</sup>

Buoyed by this formal statement of American policy, Donovan acted quickly when he heard that Sanguan's group had reached the Chinese capital. He radioed Miles on 10 September, urging that Chamkat and others "informed on current conditions" in Thailand be sent to Washington as soon as possible. Herman F. Scholtz, the American owner of the Bangkok International Engineering Company and an OSS Secret Intelligence (SI) branch employee since his repatriation from Thailand in mid-1942, considered Sanguan corrupt and untrustworthy, so he most wanted to interview the two British-educated Thai representatives, Chamkat and Daeng. Scholtz took an even dimmer view of Khap, expressing alarm that he had "been placed in a position to intimidate [Chamkat] and threaten those whom he represents."<sup>28</sup>

Miles soon learned from the Chinese that Sanguan, too, doubted Khap's reliability. No doubt prodded by Tai Li, Miles decided to try to forge unity among the Thai.<sup>29</sup> Davies sarcastically commented on this foray into Thai politics, in a memorandum to Donovan: "International politics and intrigue is a very alluring activity. Miles has succumbed to the allure, just as I certainly would be unable to resist an ill-advised proffer of command of a particularly intriguing heavy cruiser."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Hull to Goodfellow, 26 August 1943, Box 4, M. Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Donovan to Miles, 10 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38; and Katz to Hoffman, 2 October 1943, Folder 13 and Scholtz to Katz, 27 September 1943, Folder 15, Box 412, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>29</sup> Miles to Donovan, 8 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>30</sup> Davies to Donovan, 6 October 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

Sanguan met with Khap, Miles, and General Cheng K'ai-min on 11 September, a Saturday evening. Following Pridi's instructions, Sanguan requested that the Thai alliance with Japan and the declaration of war on Britain and the USA be considered unconstitutional and thereby void; that the United States officially recognize the Free Thai movement and ultimately a government-in-exile set up on Allied territory; that it consider prewar treaties as remaining in force; that it attach its prewar minister, Willys R. Peck, to the government-in-exile; and that Frederick Dolbeare be reappointed as advisor to the government-in-exile. On the subject of a Sino-Thai army, Sanguan suggested that weapons and equipment might be purchased from the USA with Thai government funds held there, but went on to ask if Lend-Lease equipment might also be obtained. According to the Thai record of the conversation, Miles indicated that all this could be arranged with little difficulty.<sup>31</sup>

Sanguan went on to request the incorporation of the OSS Free Thai group into the movement, the evacuation of key underground leaders from Thailand by seaplane or submarine, the provision of planes for dropping propaganda leaflets, and the establishment of a powerful radio station which would broadcast from China on the same frequency as Bangkok Radio. Again, Sanguan interpreted Miles' response as favorable on all points. Miles subsequently advised Tai Li that "everything appeared to be satisfactory."<sup>32</sup>

Suspicious of the political motives of Khap and certain other members of the American Free Thai group, Sanguan arranged a meeting with Anon, Pridi's brother-in-law, the next day. Also present were Chamkat and Robin Lo (an anglicization of his Thai name, Rabin Lohakun), known also as Leung Ping-chai and Lu Pin, a Thailand-born officer from Tai Li's organization who had been assigned to Chamkat as interpreter and chaperrone. Chamkat apparently had come to believe that Lo could be trusted not to betray Thai interests. Sawat and Bunrot had accompanied Anon to Chungking, but did not attend the meeting. When Anon rejoined his fellow officers several hours later, he expressed concern that Sanguan and Chamkat seemed to know all about their group's activities and plans.<sup>33</sup>

Anon subsequently discussed the meeting with Khap, revealing, among other things, that Pridi's envoy knew of the Colonel's troubled

<sup>31</sup> Sanguan to Miles, 16 September 1943, Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226 and Miles to Tai Li, 16 September 1943, Box 42, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. and Miles to Tai Li, 16 September 1943, Box 42, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>33</sup> Text of Sanguan's address of 17 September 1943, Folder 2994, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; and Sawat ("Sam") report, 14 September 1943, Box 36 and Anon ("Arnold") report, 12 September 1943, Box 42, RG 38, USNA. Chamkat had given Robin Lo a payment of 5000 Chinese dollars out of the 50,000 loan he received from General Cheng at the beginning of August. See Sawat, *Seri Thai*, 50.

relationship with Seni, and that Sanguan had doubts about Karun because he distrusted his father, Luang Kat Songkhram. Anon explained that he had defended Khap, Karun, and his other comrades as loyal and patriotic. He also revealed in some detail Sanguan's and Chamkat's knowledge of the OSS group's plans, including the Sino-Thai army scheme. This led Khap to suspect that Anon had spoken too freely. When informed of Anon's remarks, Miles definitely thought so. He detained Anon on charges of revealing secret information and giving an untruthful explanation. A three-man investigatory panel of Karawek, Chintamai, and Phiset ultimately found him innocent, so Miles released him from detention after three weeks.<sup>34</sup>

On Monday 13 September, Khap informed the Free Thai officers of his Saturday interview with Sanguan, telling them that both the Chinese and Americans were attempting to gauge the "sincerity and loyalty" of the new arrivals. Khap met Sanguan again that day, apparently in private. According to Sanguan's diary, the Colonel accepted his request for cooperation. In Khap's version, he claimed that Sanguan had iterated his desire to establish a government-in-exile and had endorsed the Chinese suggestion that Khap lead the proposed Sino-Thai army in southern China.<sup>35</sup>

Afterward, the two went to see Chamkat to inform him of their mutual understanding. Chamkat declined to reveal to Khap the names of any members of his group in Bangkok, but boldly claimed support from four current cabinet ministers, five former ministers, four generals, two admirals, three police colonels, and fifty-two other persons of importance. According to Khap's account, Chamkat told him that Chiang Kai-shek had agreed to recognize a Free Thai government if it were established in China. He supposedly quoted the Generalissimo as saying that he wanted to include Khap in the organization, but preferred to exclude Seni since he "is very difficult to handle." Chiang Kai-shek almost certainly made no such remark, as an account of Chamkat's meeting with him, based on the former's diary, indicates that the Generalissimo spoke positively about Seni.<sup>36</sup> Instead it appears that Chamkat contrived the remark about Seni in an attempt to manipulate Khap, or, more likely, the latter did so in an effort to undermine Seni's credibility with Miles and other American officers who would read his memorandum.

<sup>34</sup> Sawat's report, 14 September 1943, Box 36; Anon's report, 12 September 1943, Box 42; "Secret War Diary," 1 October 1943, Box 35, RG 38; and Free Thai logs, 16–17 September 1943, Folders 3005–06, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>35</sup> "Conversation between S. Tularaksa and Col. Kunjara," 13 September 1943, Folder 520, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA and Sanguan funeral volume, 170.

<sup>36</sup> "Interview Chamkat Balangkura," 14 September 1943, Folder 2994, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. The account of the meeting with the Generalissimo, based on Chamkat's diary, appears in Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance*, 235–37.

After these talks, Khap cabled Seni that he had met Sanguan and found his position in accordance with that of the Free Thai from the USA. Of the rest of Sanguan's party, he promised to "interview each man in turn. If sure of their sincerity and patriotism [I] will wire later."<sup>37</sup>

News of Khap's involvement with Pridi's new emissaries convinced Seni that his worst nightmare had come true. Chamkat lacked official status, but he came from a family of good reputation and high social standing. In contrast, Seni, like Scholtz, viewed Sanguan as a shady character. He also certainly knew of Daeng's reputation as a playboy who had failed to obtain a law degree despite extended studies in England. Visions of Khap conspiring with Sanguan and Daeng in faraway Chungking sent chills down the Minister's spine. He particularly feared that Khap would make a commitment to the Chinese, on behalf of the Free Thai, to lay the groundwork for Phibun to switch to the Allied side. On 16 September, Seni's aide, Luang Dittthakan, addressed a letter to the OSS protesting Khap's involvement in political matters, warning that the representatives from Thailand, who were familiar with the Colonel's "notorious record," might hesitate to deal with the Free Thai in Washington.<sup>38</sup>

Commander R. Davis Halliwell, the OSS deputy chief for special operations, advised Miles of Seni's concerns on 17 September, emphasizing that the Minister did not want Khap presenting himself as representative of the Free Thai movement in the United States. He asked that Miles isolate Khap from political matters and make the strictly military nature of his role clear to the Thai representatives from Bangkok. Miles replied on 20 September that there was no reason for concern because Khap had not "been represented either by himself or others as a political agent."<sup>39</sup>

All the while, Khap, the would-be general, plowed forward. He met Sanguan again at a Chinese-sponsored Moon Festival party on 14 September. Then, on 16 September, Miles and Khap took Sanguan and Daeng to meet Chargé d'Affaires Atcheson at the American Embassy. The Thai representatives explained their desire to establish a government-in-exile and the plans for organizing a Free Thai force in China. In response, Atcheson requested that they draw up a written proposal that he could forward to Washington.<sup>40</sup>

Next, the four called on Chamkat, whose physical condition was deteriorating. His stomach problems were initially blamed on nervous tension

<sup>37</sup> Khap to Seni, 14 September 1943, Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>38</sup> Seni to Mani, 23 November 1943, HS1-72 and "Report by Major Grut on Negotiations in Washington," 27 February 1944, HS1-73, PRO; and Bhakdi to Fisher, 16 September 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>39</sup> Halliwell to Miles, 17 September 1943 and Miles to Donovan, 20 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>40</sup> "Secret War Diary," 1 October 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.



and he was expected to make his long-delayed trip to Washington a week later. During this interview, Miles, while disclaiming any political or diplomatic authority, took the opportunity to express his views on the Thailand situation. He emphasized that although the Thai would have primary responsibility for freeing their country from Japanese domination, he wished to help in any way possible. While Miles insisted that the operations for Khap's group should remain separate from the Chinese scheme to raise a Sino-Thai army in Yunnan, he endorsed Khap as an appropriate commander for such a force, and personally suggested that the Thai representatives bury their differences and unite in order to encourage recognition of their government-in-exile. When Chamkat took this suggestion to its logical conclusion and asked about union with the British Free Thai, Miles quickly backtracked, warning against close collaboration with the British group because it was under "foreign influence." He declared that, in contrast to himself, Major Grut did not trust the Thai. When Sanguan requested that Miles expedite the dispatch of Chamkat and Daeng to Washington, he agreed. It was suggested that Khap accompany them to lend expertise on military matters.<sup>41</sup>

Following this meeting, Miles radioed Donovan that differences between the Thai representatives had been smoothed over. He casually summarized Sanguan's ambitious goals – recognition for a government-in-exile, the use of unfrozen assets, the establishment of a Free Thai army in southern China equipped with Lend-Lease materials, air support, and the secret evacuation of key officials from Thailand – in ten lines of text. He then explained that Sanguan wanted Chamkat and Khap to go to Washington, neglecting to mention Daeng. Of the Thai group, Miles commented: "we now have only the sincerest admiration for them and their leader." Speaking optimistically of the chances for successful operations, he went on to suggest that Khap be "adequately promoted" and given charge of any Sino-Thai army, while simultaneously retaining command of the Free Thai officers and overseeing their planned project.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, Miles directed a message to Tai Li asking permission for Chamkat, Daeng, and Khap to go to Washington. Because the Chinese considered both Chamkat and Daeng pro-British, they had little reason to object to their departure, so long as the key player, Sanguan, remained in Chungking. Aware, however, that Tai would be displeased by the proposal to send Khap, Miles sought to justify it on the grounds that the Colonel's presence in Washington could be useful "in order that any political, diplomatic and military differences may be ironed out immediately without any waste of time once the party has arrived in Washington."

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Miles to Donovan, 16 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.



He added: "I will personally guarantee that the Thailanders will be operated exactly in accordance with our wishes just as though he were here to actively take charge of them."<sup>43</sup>

Soon it became apparent, however, that Chamkat's declining health would prevent him from undertaking the long journey to Washington. By the time OSS officials met with Seni to discuss travel plans on 2 October they were discussing a party composed of Sanguan, Daeng, and Khap. Seni suggested that their travel expenses be provided, but declined to approve Sanguan's request for a 250,000-dollar advance. The OSS indicated that it would be useful for Khap to return, not only for consultations, but to help organize a new group of Free Thai volunteers. Although he had regretted permitting Khap to go to China, Seni now expressed reluctance to let him return to Washington, lest he stir up trouble. Aware that the British were planning to send the ill Chamkat to a hospital in India for treatment, Seni urged that a high-ranking OSS officer visit him there.<sup>44</sup>

Back at Friendship Valley, the OSS Thai group hosted a party for Sanguan's entire group at its headquarters on the night of 17 September. Miles, Devlin, Gleason, and Commander H. S. Williams also attended. The Free Thai officers questioned the Bangkok representatives closely and later prepared reports as Khap had instructed. After dinner, Khap and Sanguan spoke, with Daeng interpreting the latter's remarks. Sanguan declared that the Free Thai inside the country wanted a democratic, constitutional monarchy after the war, with the cabinet formed from an all-elected house of representatives. He frankly acknowledged his doubts about the political reliability of the Free Thai abroad, even revealing that he had asked Anon to keep an eye on his colleagues. Miles then took the floor to reiterate his opinion that all the Thai participants – excepting of course those working with the British – needed to pull together. Miles recorded with satisfaction that his speech "was met by united acclaim from both of the 'factions' present."<sup>45</sup>

The next day, Miles reported to Halliwell and Hoffman about his meetings with Atcheson and the ailing Chamkat. He indicated that the Thai "are going to form one party and let all party or political differences die completely at least till defeat of Nips. They appeared sincere even if idealistic." He assured that he had "promised nothing except what help Washington empowers me to give."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Miles to Tai Li, 16 September 1943, Box 42, RG 38, USNA. On the Chinese view of Daeng, see New Delhi to London, 9 September 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>44</sup> Fisher memorandum of 2 October 1943 meeting, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Written reports by several of the Free Thai officers and notes on Sanguan's speech are found in Folder 2994, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>46</sup> Miles to Halliwell and Hoffman, 18 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

With Donovan in London, the handling of Miles' extraordinary messages fell to "Ned" Buxton, Donovan's top aide. He and other OSS leaders were taken aback by Sanguan's proposals that "went into matters of profound politics" that would require State Department involvement. On Buxton's instructions, Halliwell warned Miles that no quick answers could be expected to the difficult questions involved. On 20 September, Buxton re-emphasized that recognition of governments-in-exile, the release of frozen assets, and Lend Lease were beyond the province of the OSS. He warned Miles to avoid further discussion of such matters, adding that the State Department would make the final decision in regard to the travel of Thai representatives to Washington.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, after at least two more conferences with Khap and one with Karawek and Chintamai, on 25 September Sanguan and Daeng again came to the OSS Free Thai headquarters and, as recorded in the Thai operational log, "discussed with all officers the aims of our groups." Chok described the origins of the movement in the USA and the events leading to the formation of the Free Thai Committee. Sanguan explained what he hoped could be accomplished in Washington. Then Khap read the text of a telegram he had sent to Seni the previous day:

I have made certain that the Thai people [who] came out from Thailand are sincere. They have full co-operation of Chinese authority. All our boys are confident in co-operating with them. The boys and I are not anxious to be mixed up in politics unless absolutely forced upon us. Unity of Thai group is most essential to be able to liberate our country. I had information that the Thai group from England had also pledged their full co-operation. We out here realize that we are not working for personal favors so be assured about this point. We all hope everything will turn out well.<sup>48</sup>

Khap's message merely affirmed Seni's suspicions of Khap's deep involvement in political matters. In this context, one can imagine Seni's reaction when, a few days later, he received news of Chamkat's death.

Force 136's Findlay Andrew's reports to Mackenzie in India provide the best available account of Chamkat's last days. On 18 September, British Major R. J. H. McMullen gained access to the sequestered envoy by disguising himself as a doctor and ordering "the watchers out of the room whilst he made a thorough examination of the patient." Andrew then used a personal connection with the Chinese doctor attending Chamkat to secure his transfer to the Canadian Mission Hospital on 20 September.

<sup>47</sup> Halliwell to Miles 17 September 1943 and Buxton to Miles, 20 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA; and "Thai Situation," Hoffman to Magruder, 23 September 1943, Folder 4, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>48</sup> Khap to Seni, 24 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

When Andrew visited him there on 22 September, Hospital Superintendent Dr. A. Stewart Allen warned that Chamkat was seriously ill. Five days later the doctors diagnosed cancer. The British began making arrangements for Chamkat's transfer to Calcutta for treatment there, but before these could be effected fluid build-up began and Chamkat died in the early morning of 7 October. Dr. Allen's report concluded, based on the presence of a hard mass in the upper abdomen, that death had resulted from cancer spreading from the liver into the stomach.<sup>49</sup>

Sanguan declared an autopsy unnecessary, so the funeral service and cremation took place at a Chungking Buddhist temple the following day. General Cheng K'ai-min called on Sanguan to express condolences, while Tai Li assisted with the arrangements, followed the funeral procession to the temple, and laid a wreath. Khap, Karawek, and Bunrot represented the OSS group.<sup>50</sup>

Miles forwarded the hospital's verdict to the American Embassy without comment, but an unpublished draft of a memoir chapter written years later suggests that he was among those who had doubts about the cause of Chamkat's death. In the memoir, Miles seemed to endorse a suggestion made to him by unnamed Chinese that Chamkat might have been done in by "an infamous type of assassination where finely chopped pigs bristles are fed to the person over a period of weeks and eventually he succumbs to perforated intestines and dies." Miles gave no hint as to whom he suspected of perpetrating such a crime, but a number of others, including Davies, Nicol Smith, Edmond Taylor, Force 136 Major N. F. Nicholson, and Prince Suphasawat suspected Chinese foul play aimed at preventing Chamkat from leaving China. Smith, for example, advised an OSS debriefer in March 1945 of "the very distinct possibility that he was poisoned by Tai Li." Given the fact that Chiang Kai-shek had given permission for Daeng to travel to Washington, the most plausible reason for such an assassination would have been Chamkat's pro-British inclinations.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> 0.125 to B/B 100, 22 September 1943, 29 September 1943, 6 October, and 13 October 1943, HS1-72, PRO. Miles to Atcheson, 16 October 1943, Box 36, Naval Group China, RG 38, USNA. Sanguan funeral volume, 172.

<sup>50</sup> Free Thai Logs, Folder 3005-6, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA and 0.125 to B/B 100, 13 October 1943, HS1-72, PRO. Sanguan funeral volume, 172. Sanguan's wife returned Chamkat's ashes to Thailand in September 1945 where he was given a state funeral.

<sup>51</sup> Miles to Atcheson, 16 October 1943 and "Secret War Diary," 1 November 1943, Box 36; and "Siamese Story," Box 37, RG 38; untitled draft of memorandum criticizing Miles apparently written by Davies or based on his writings, 8 November 1943, Reel 107, M 1642; and "Interview with Maj. Nicol Smith," 29 March 1945, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA. Also, Taylor to Wedemeyer, 9 November 1943, Folder 4, Box 80, Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution; and Mani to Seni, n.d., HS1-72 and letter to Jenkin, 2 April 1944, HS1-56, PRO.

Curiously, subsequent OSS and SOE interviews of Sanguan and Daeng in Washington produced diametrically opposite reports on their opinions about Chamkat's demise. Scholtz of the OSS, who talked with the two on 13 December, reported that they believed Chamkat had died of cancer and did not suspect foul play. They had opposed an autopsy, they explained, simply because it would have "offended the Chinese." In contrast, SOE's Major Grut, who arrived in the American capital a few days later, wrote: "It is our conviction which is shared by the Free Siamese who were in Chungking at the time and are now in Washington, that Balankura's [Chamkat's] death was brought about by the Chinese to delay any coordination of British and Free Siamese plans." Grut's opinion is clear, but the extent to which Sanguan and Daeng shared it is not. However, in Chungking, they had seen ample evidence of American-Chinese collaboration and Chinese-British hostility, so perhaps they merely told Scholtz and Grut what they thought each would wish to hear.<sup>52</sup>

For his part, based on no evidence whatsoever, at a meeting with OSS officials on 13 October, Seni blamed Khap for Chamkat's demise. Referring to Chamkat "as the one man" he trusted, based on his demonstrated "independence of spirit, honesty and his fidelity to principle," Seni announced his strong opposition to Khap's return to Washington, declaring that his presence would further divide the Thai community. Seni further suggested that if he could censor mail from Thai in the USA to the men in China it might help "keep the minds of the Thais on fighting" rather than factional politics.<sup>53</sup>

Five days later, however, Seni again reversed course, declaring in a memo to the OSS his "final decision" that Khap should be "recalled to be discharged and relieved of all his duties and functions in connection with the Free Thai movement and the Free Thai mission now operating in China." Seni complained that while he had been assured that Khap would be "under close surveillance, practically as though he were a prisoner," instead he had been "unwisely allowed to interrogate the members of a political delegation . . . and was given the power to pass judgment on their political trustworthiness." Seni further accused Khap of encouraging his subordinates to involve themselves in politics.<sup>54</sup>

Hoffman advised Seni on 21 October that the OSS was reviewing Khap's situation, but he took issue with a number of the Minister's contentions. Hoffman reaffirmed the OSS view that Seni was unjustified in accusing the Colonel of misappropriating funds and challenged

<sup>52</sup> Scholtz to Katz, 13 December 1943, Folder 31, Box 475, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA and Grut, "SOE/G40,000 Operations in Siam," n. d., HS1-54, PRO.

<sup>53</sup> Demas memorandum of 13 October 1943 meeting, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>54</sup> Seni memorandum of 18 October 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA.

Seni's contention that the OSS had promised to treat Khap "practically as though he were a prisoner." Rather, he had been

kept under close observation until such time as it was determined he was fit. Our officers in the field were fully informed of your claims as to the Colonel's disloyalty, and after observation of some months they report not only that he is fit but they are enthusiastic in recommending both him and his group. There is no record of any dissension among the personnel under the Colonel's charge. The morale is reported to be excellent.<sup>55</sup>

Describing Seni's attempt to implicate Khap in Chamkat's death as an "unfortunate inference," Hoffman addressed the Minister's complaints about political involvement by the Thai officers:

We had understood that the men of Thailand made available to us were the cream of that country and its future leaders. At a time when the United States is engaged in a global war to promote the Four Freedoms it is clear that this organization can infringe upon the freedom of speech and communication only insofar as security may require. If you do not have confidence in these individuals and require that this organization act as their political custodian, it may be necessary to reconsider and reevaluate the entire mission.

In conclusion, Hoffman flatly rejected Seni's suggestion that Khap be ordered home immediately.<sup>56</sup>

Hoffman had meanwhile contacted the State Department and explained the situation to Laurence Salisbury and Kenneth P. Landon of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs. The latter, formerly COI's Thailand expert, had recently joined the State Department after a stint with the Board of Economic Warfare. Hoffman, who had good personal relations with Khap and considered him "essential," suspected that Seni was "primarily motivated by jealousy." Referring to the Minister's recent reversal of course on the issue of whether Khap should be recalled, Hoffman commented that recalling the Colonel "for the express purpose of discharging him would most certainly precipitate a rift." He added that "the mere fact that a few escaped Thais would create so much concern in the Minister's mind might well forewarn us of future difficulties, as part of the program would be to aid fugitives to escape and build up a strong agent, sabotage and intelligence net." The diplomats agreed to consider the matter.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Hoffman to Seni, 21 October 1943, Box 36, RG 38, USNA. <sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Hoffman to Donovan, 26 October 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA and State Department memorandum 892.01/10-2043, RG 59, USNA. By Landon's own account, he was hired by the State Department after an argument with Laurence Salisbury over access to some Department cables which contained responses to some queries he had made. Landon's spunk and persistence impressed Salisbury, who took him to see his superiors, Joseph Ballantine and Stanley Hornbeck. Landon relates

On 25 October 1943, Joseph Ballantine, chief of the State Department's Division of Far Eastern Affairs, presided over a meeting attended by Salisbury, Landon, and a three-man OSS delegation headed by Hoffman. Based on Landon's assessment of Khap as a "man of intelligence and exceptional personality who might be unscrupulous if he thought he could advance himself," the diplomats suggested that the Colonel might best be isolated from political involvement if he and his men were promptly dispatched to the field to carry out their mission. The OSS representatives agreed. They then sought to arrange for General Donovan to meet Seni and persuade him to defer the matter until the former's upcoming China trip.<sup>58</sup>

Donovan, who had at last returned to Washington from his European travels, first sought advice from Acting Secretary of State Edward Stettinius. On 1 November the latter expressed his department's view that Americans should "scrupulously refrain from any action or activity at this time which might imply support of any particular Thai group in connection with plans by that group for establishment of a 'Free Thai Government-in-exile' or any similar political movement."<sup>59</sup>

Donovan and Seni met, although the date is uncertain because no memorandum on the meeting has been found. Seni claimed that during this session Donovan reacted angrily to his complaints, pounded the table, and warned the Minister about interfering with the Allied war effort. Seni finally agreed that any decision on Khap's status could be deferred until after Donovan's trip.<sup>60</sup>

Chagrined by his confrontation with Donovan and well aware that some American officials suspected that he was motivated by political ambition, Seni drafted a memorandum to the State Department, dated 29 November 1943, aimed at clarifying his position. He had insisted from the beginning, he pointed out, that members of the Free Thai must "disclaim all political ambitions in postwar Thailand." Declaring that he had no such ambitions, Seni asserted that at the end of the war he would accept no government post other than his current one or his former position as a judge.<sup>61</sup>

the story on Reel 45, Side A of the "Landon Chronicles," an oral history in the Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection at Wheaton College.

<sup>58</sup> State Department memorandum 892.01/10-2043, RG 59, USNA; Landon memorandum, 25 October 1943, OSS File, Box 323, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution; and Hoffman to Donovan, 26 October 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>59</sup> Stettinius to Donovan, 1 November 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>60</sup> Donovan to Stettinius, 8 November 1943, Reel 110, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>61</sup> Seni to State Department, 29 November 1943, Reel 115, M642, USNA.

Donovan, in the wake of his meeting with Seni, contacts with the State Department, and discussions within OSS about the possibility of shifting the Thailand operation to the new Southeast Asia Command, radioed Miles on 3 November: "Thai situation extremely complicated here. Because of this and [the] combined chiefs over-all plans for the Southeast Asia Command the Thais should remain at their present headquarters in Friendship Valley until I have opportunity to discuss matters with you."<sup>62</sup>

Miles interpreted the Seni-Khap feud as a case of "both juggling for future power," but his writings at the time and later make clear that he had only the vaguest conception of Thai politics and had difficulty keeping the actors straight. He did know, however, that other members of the OSS Thai group besides Khap were at odds with the Thai Minister. In mid-August 1943 he had reported the following statement that a censor had copied from one of Chok's letters to Washington: "After the war is over, we'll see how much power Pramoj [Seni Pramot] has. Right now we are too busy trying to fight the war to worry about Pramoj and his political game. We are more interested in battling the Japs, then we will worry about Pramoj."<sup>63</sup>

The day after Chamkat's funeral, the Free Thai officers held a meeting, according to their log, "to discuss the activities of the Free Thai Movement in America." The officers were under the erroneous impression – which Khap undoubtedly fostered – that Pridi's representatives had been stuck in China because of Seni's unwillingness to pay the transportation costs. There is no detailed record of the meeting, but it was probably at this session that they agreed, as Chok asserts they did, to offer their own money for this purpose. After the session, Khap, Chamrat, Karawek, and Chok met with Miles. Two days later, Miles advised Hoffman that the Free Thai were "becoming restless" and urged the United States to act to expedite the dispatch of Daeng to Washington.<sup>64</sup>

In his mid-October war diary, Miles reported that student friends in Washington had advised the Free Thai officers "how high-handed" Seni

<sup>62</sup> Donovan to Miles, 3 November 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA. A memorandum from Hoffman to Donovan dated 4 November 1943 (Reel 91, M1642, USNA) titled "Decisions to be Made Respecting OSS Far East Position" included the possibility of a shift of the Thai operation to SEAC.

<sup>63</sup> "General Summary of the Thailander Situation," 15 August 1943, Folder 2, Box 68, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>64</sup> Free Thai logs, Folders 3005–06, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. An offer by the Free Thai officers to pay for the trip of a Free Thai delegate to Washington is related by Chok na Ranong in his memorandum in Wimon Wiriyawit, ed., *Free Thai: Personal Recollections and Official Documents* (Bangkok, 1997), 46–47. I have found no reference to this in any of the OSS or Naval Group China materials.



had been. He added: "I have discouraged them from doing anything officially because it would look as though they, as military officers, were more interested in the political angle than they are in the practical military angle. However, since it is their country that is involved, they naturally want to have something to say in the formation of the government."<sup>65</sup>

They were, in fact, quite determined to have their say. Chok drew up a memorandum, addressed to Sanguan as "President of the Free Thai Movement in Thailand," which he, Karawek, and Chamrat signed. Dated 15 October, it expressed the hope, based on their several conferences, that all Free Thai groups could be amalgamated and in that way gain both cooperation and recognition from the United Nations. The second paragraph declared:

We have had, as we have already informed you some conferences in the United States. We, the officials at the Legation and all the students, finally set up a Free Thai Committee and a constitution governing the said committee. Though this Committee has not received "de jure" or "de facto" recognition from the United States' Government, it is for all intent and purposes the only entity to which we owe allegiance. Therefore it is in the interest of all parties that when you send your representative to Washington to negotiate the forming up of a Free Thai Government or Liberation Committee, you should not fail to consult the said Committee and if possible have its approval. We are aware of the fact that during our conference with you in Chungking you have promised to do so.

The memorandum went on to praise Sanguan for his "democratic principles," to laud his "goodwill towards the Free Thai Forces abroad," and to express confidence in his ability to lead the way to their mutual goal of liberating Thailand.<sup>66</sup>

Sanguan's reply, dated 27 October, expressed thanks for the vote of confidence. He echoed Miles' calls for unity and expressed his intention to confer with the Free Thai Committee in Washington. Copies of both letters were sent to all members of the Committee, as well as to Miles and Hoffman.<sup>67</sup>

When Major Devlin personally delivered these memoranda to Seni on 8 December, the Minister hit the ceiling and proceeded to withdraw from the Free Thai Committee, a right he had reserved a year before. In a memorandum explaining the action, he stated that he had agreed to the establishment of the committee only "for fear of misguided disaffection,"

<sup>65</sup> "Secret War Diary," 15 October 1943, Folder 361, Box 42, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>66</sup> Free Thai Officers to Sanguan, 15 October 1943, Folder 2994, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>67</sup> Sanguan to Free Thai Officers, 27 October 1943, Folder 2994, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



but with the proviso that it “be kept strictly as an internal arrangement” because of American unwillingness to recognize it. He charged:

By communicating to the United States government officials, namely Captain M. E. Miles, USN and Major Karl [Carl] Hoffman of the OSS, the contents of the . . . [memoranda], particularly that dealing with the subject of negotiating for the establishment of a Thai Government in exile or a Committee of a [sic] National Liberation, you not only acted against our previous understanding but also indicated your intention to invest the . . . [existing] Committee with external power and authority. This move on your part renders my position in the Committee untenable.

Seni accused the members of the group in China of creating a “sorry situation” by “taking a direct and active interest in political affairs, thereby diverting their own attention from the important and patriotic task assigned to them.” Seni declared that he had resigned to protect his position as a “free agent and representative of the nation,” although he later admitted to an American diplomat that a chief reason had been the fact that he had been repeatedly outvoted.<sup>68</sup>

In the meantime, the Free Thai officers in Chungking were shocked by the receipt of a letter from Khap's wife revealing that Seni had severely criticized them at a meeting of the Free Thai Committee on 4 June 1943. According to subsequent explanatory letters written by sympathetic committee members Anan Chintakanon and Bandit Kantabut, Seni had made the accusations after the OSS had permitted Khap's May 1943 departure from Washington despite his objections. After pledging all present to secrecy, Seni had produced a nineteen-page memorandum containing, in Anan's words, “charges against everyone except the two semi-gods,” a sarcastic reference to Seni and his faithful ally Luang Dittthakan. Bandit described Seni's actions as “nothing less than foul play,” but explained that he had refrained from revealing the incident to the officers overseas both because of the secrecy pledge and concern that it would undermine the men's morale. His explanation did not sit well with the Free Thai officers, who felt that their friends had betrayed them twice, once by not standing up to Seni, a second time by failing to report the incident to them promptly.<sup>69</sup>

In response, Chok addressed a letter to Seni dated 30 October. After urging coalition with Sanguan's group and suggesting that the Minister

<sup>68</sup> Seni to Free Thai Officers, undated, but apparently written in late December 1943, Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226 and Moffat memorandum, 892.01/9-1344, RG 59, USNA. Seni told Moffat that since one of his two supporters on the committee (presumably Mani Sanasen) was usually away, Khap's supporters had a 3–2 advantage.

<sup>69</sup> Bandit to Pao, 14 December 1943 and Pao to CO (Khap), 13 January 1944, Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

attempt to set up a government-in-exile or a liberation committee, Chok noted that the Free Thai officers had learned of Seni's charge that the Free Thai Committee had been established "illegally (underline illegally) and that we are mercenaries, hired soldiers trying to make money out of this war." Moreover, he continued, it had been reported that Seni had accused the members of his group of being "satellites" of Khap. After expressing doubt that Seni, a man with a "moral code," would say such things, Chok offered him the opportunity to "dispel all bad feeling" by denying the reports.<sup>70</sup>

On the same day Chok wrote to Bunmak, then still in Washington, about these "fantastic stories," saying of Seni:

From what I know he is smart and has a moral code and if I am not mistaken a man like that can not play such a dirty trick as to say nasty things about us when we are not there. Besides it is impolitic to make us his enemies. He cannot go far if nobody supports him or if we denounce him now or after the war. It would be one man sitting behind a desk sleeping in a comfortable bed against a group of resolute men facing all the hardships of war and risking there life [sic] to restore the independence of their country.

Emphasizing that he wished to know the truth of the matter, Chok added that if Seni had not impugned their motives, how did such a rumor get started?<sup>71</sup>

In a letter to his wife, Khap assailed Seni for acting selfishly, describing him as an "evil fellow . . . who will be under the observation of all of us later on." He also wrote to Hoffman that he had heard Seni was trying to limit the salary of the officers of the second Thai group to 120 dollars a month. In southern China where the men were to be deployed, Khap noted, "the food is so scarce and expensive" that even the 230 dollars his men were receiving might be inadequate. He asked that the OSS ensure that the second group of officers were paid at least that much.<sup>72</sup>

Seni did not answer Chok's letter until January 1944, and Chok would not receive and respond to that reply for another three months, so their subsequent exchange will be dealt with in the following chapter. In the meantime, angry that his comments at the Free Thai Committee meeting

<sup>70</sup> Chok to Seni, 30 October 1940, Box 37, RG 38, USNA. My assumption that the information came from Khap's wife is based on a letter from Bandit Kantabut to Pao dated 14 December 1943 in Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Bandit wrote: "I wish to confirm without reservation the contents of Madame Karl's [Karl was Khap's nickname] letter regarding the Free Thai officers. They are substantially correct."

<sup>71</sup> Chok to Bunmak, 30 October 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>72</sup> "Translation of a letter in Siamese from a Thai in Chungking to Washington," received by OSS 12 November 1943, Reel 65, M1642 and Khap to Hoffman, 8 November 1943, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

had been divulged to the men in the field, Seni called Khap's wife on the carpet in an effort to pin down the source of the leak. Anan, Khap's ally on the Legation staff and surely the prime suspect, reported cryptically that she had "acquitted herself creditably well."<sup>73</sup>

Three former American residents of Thailand supported Seni's campaign against Khap. Scholtz's aforementioned allegations about the Colonel's lack of honesty and his ties to Premier Phibun were echoed in a 4 December 1943 memorandum by Frederick Dolbeare, who had served from 1935 to 1940 as advisor to the Thai Foreign Ministry and was currently employed by the OSS Special Intelligence office in New York. Also, Sarah Ann Davies, the American widow of a British teacher, who had recently returned from Bangkok on the second exchange ship, visited State Department Political Advisor Stanley K. Hornbeck on 20 December 1943 to criticize Khap. Apparently without providing any evidence to support the charge, she alleged that Khap had been sending unauthorized secret messages of a political nature into Thailand. This claim reflected Seni's suspicion that Khap had communicated with the Premier via Phibun's son, who had been repatriated from the USA during the 1942 exchange. Given the fact that Davies was at the time staying at the Thai Legation, there is little doubt that Seni had encouraged her visit to Hornbeck and an anti-Khap letter she sent to the War Department.<sup>74</sup>

Pridi's envoys, Sanguan and Daeng, caught in the middle of the Seni-Khap feud, revealed their doubts about both parties after reaching Washington. They told Scholtz that the Free Thai inside Thailand were indeed suspicious of Khap because of his previous close association with Phibun. They also described the Colonel as "a gambler [who] drinks excessively, and has a strong weakness for women," a man "better suited to train troops than to lead them." As for Seni, they characterized him as "a true Thai patriot," but an inexperienced diplomat and a poor politician. They defended the Free Thai officers, telling Scholtz that the young men in China "were pro-Thai and wanted action," not involvement in "political disputes."<sup>75</sup>

The Free Thai in China did not hold a monopoly on dissatisfaction with Seni's leadership. The British student volunteers, too, complained

<sup>73</sup> Anan to Khap, 19 January 1944, Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>74</sup> Dolbeare to Shepardson, 4 December 1943, Folder 15, Box 412, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA; memorandum of 20 December 1943, Saran Ann Davies file, Box 138, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution; and "Differences Between the Thai Minister and the Thai Military Attaché," Reel 17, SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA. Seni mentioned the friendly relations between Khap and Phibun's son in Seni to Lieutenant Colonel Hsiao, 30 June 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>75</sup> Scholtz to Katz, 13 December 1943, Folder 31, Box 475, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA.

about what they considered the Free Thai movement's undemocratic organization. In a letter to Puai Ungphakon at the end of 1943, Sena Tambunyuen, a member of the parallel committee in London, groused that they were "pawns" of Seni's designated leader, Mani Sanasen, who, despite his presence in London, "never consults me nor tells me about our movement." Alluding to the fact that Mani had lived for years in Europe and had married a Dutch woman, Sena complained that the diplomat "knows nothing of our culture [and] sentiments, but has a high ambition." He further noted the "curious tone" of a letter he had received from Seni in which the Minister had denied that the movement was "one party" and declared it instead "an individual effort to help one another to redeem our nation." This, Sena believed, suggested that only Mani's views mattered and that Seni expected the student volunteers to ask no questions about his policies. Sena urged Puai and his colleagues in the field to write to Seni in order to "give him the true picture of our movement."<sup>76</sup>

Back in the Chinese capital, Chiang Kai-shek, as previously noted, had given permission for Daeng to go to Washington even before Chamkat's death. He had done so at a 26 September meeting with the two leaders of the second Free Thai mission, but he had expressed a desire to keep Sanguan in China. Miles had intended to send Khap with Daeng, but after discussing the mission with the Colonel, Miles changed his mind. Perhaps he realized that if Khap returned to Washington Seni might block his return, which would irritate the Chinese. Thus, when Miles and Wight called at the Embassy on 28 September, they advised newly returned Ambassador Gauss and Counsellor Atcheson that in light of Chamkat's illness they were now planning to send Daeng to Washington alone. Miles also tried to convince the diplomats that he had not intended to encroach on the prerogatives of the State Department, declaring that his unit wished "to turn these people over to the Embassy and not concern ourselves on these matters." Miles asked that Washington facilitate Daeng's journey, adding that Major Devlin would be dispatched to accompany him.<sup>77</sup>

Although Pridi's envoys had come to suspect that Seni was obstructing Daeng's planned trip to Washington – a suspicion that Khap had done his best to encourage – in fact the Minister recently had been emphasizing to the State Department that he wanted to consult with both Sanguan and Daeng. Above all, however, he wished to separate them from Khap

<sup>76</sup> S. Tambunyuan to P. Ungphakon, 30 December 1943, HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>77</sup> "Secret War Diary," 1 November 1943, Box 36 and Miles to Donovan, 28 September 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

and the Chinese, as Seni had learned, probably from his British contacts in Washington, that the Chinese were pressing for the establishment of a provisional Thai government in China. Atcheson advised Miles on 18 October that the State Department supported the Minister's request that the two proceed to Washington. Miles at first reported no objection from the Chinese and said that the two might leave about the 27th, accompanied by Devlin, but Tai Li advised on 26 October that no decision on Sanguan's departure had been made.<sup>78</sup>

With Sanguan's status in limbo, Devlin and Daeng flew to Kunming on 6 November. Just prior to take-off on their planned flight over the "Hump," Devlin received unexplained instructions to stand by for orders. Afraid that the Chinese might have changed their mind about letting Daeng go, Devlin disregarded the message and the two proceeded to India. As it turned out, Donovan had wanted them to await his arrival in China.<sup>79</sup>

At about the same time, the American Embassy learned that the Chinese would permit Sanguan's departure, a decision the latter attributed to his direct personal plea to Chiang Kai-shek that Daeng should not go alone because he lacked full information about the political situation in Thailand. The Generalissimo no doubt extracted a pledge from Sanguan that he would return as soon as possible, a promise the latter underwrote by leaving his family behind in Chungking. Sanguan's intention to press for American financial support for the Sino-Thai army scheme surely influenced Chiang's decision. Sanguan left China on 16 November.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Message from Sanguan and Daeng to Seni relayed from New Delhi to New York, 20 October 1943, HS1-72 and B/B 505 to SCS, 10 August 1944, HS1-48, PRO; "Secret War Diary," 1 October 1943, Box 36; Washington to Chungking, 11 October 1943, Box 37; and Atcheson to Miles, 18 October 1943, Box 36; Miles to Donovan, 21 October 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>79</sup> Devlin to Miles, 19 November 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>80</sup> Atcheson to Wight, 9 November 1943, Box 37; Miles to Scribner, 11 November, Box 36; Miles to Kotrla, 19 October 1943, Box 36; Khap order of 11 November 1943, Box 37; and Davis to Miles, 13 September 1945, Box 2, RG 38, USNA. At Khap's instigation, Smith advanced 5,000 dollars each in expense money from Free Thai funds to Sanguan and Daeng on the understanding that if Seni did not authorize the payment, it would be considered a loan. Sanguan's wife and two children finally were permitted to join him in Ceylon in January 1945 and his brother Krachang re-entered Thailand with Chinese agents in 1944. Wibun remained in China for the duration of the war. Interview with Sanguan, Folder 694, Box 45, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA and Ripley to "Lilly," 17 January 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA. Grut reported in a message to New Delhi of 15 January 1944 (HS1-73, PRO): "Further talks with Sanguan here [Washington] indicate that Chinese have asked Sanguan to discuss these plans [for guerrilla warfare] in Washington and London and endeavour to obtain Lend-Lease aid for equipment of Sino-Siam army and of Siam Liberation group in Siam." Sanguan had hoped to obtain additional funds from the British-American Tobacco Company, whose facilities had been

Although Seni had urged that the Thai representatives be prevented from making contacts with the British while passing through India, when Daeng reached Delhi on 10 November the OSS permitted British officials, including John Keswick of the SOE, Mountbatten's political advisor M. E. Dening, and the overseer of Thai-language propaganda broadcasts A. C. S. Adams, to interview him. Daeng also met two of Adams' Thai employees, a former Thai diplomat from London and Luang Suranarong, the Thai military attaché in Singapore when the war began. On 18 November, Daeng and Devlin flew to Karachi, expecting to wait there for the arrivals of Sanguan and Donovan. In the end, however, Donovan delayed his journey to attend the Allied conferences in Cairo and Tehran, so when Sanguan arrived, he and Daeng were hustled off to Washington. The change of plans reflected American determination to thwart Force 136 plans to intercept Sanguan and route the two envoys to Washington via London. The Thai representatives reached the USA on 28 November.<sup>81</sup>

Back in Friendship Valley, Miles had arranged a trip to New Delhi to confer with Mountbatten, a meeting the Admiral had suggested during his recent visit to Chungking. As Miles was completing his preparations for departure after midnight on 30 October, Donovan's advance man, Commander Halliwell, arrived at his headquarters. Miles, in Halliwell's view, "displayed tactlessness and superiority to an unpleasant degree." Miles' contended that Halliwell "wanted me to cancel my appointment with New Delhi so he could talk to me. I told him I just could *not* do it. As a result he got a little huffy, but I felt that I had to do this little job here first." The two did talk until Miles' departure for the airport the next morning. Miles declared that he welcomed Donovan's upcoming visit, but Halliwell discerned "considerable nervousness and discomfort" about it.<sup>82</sup>

bought out by the Thai government. In a letter to the company's director, he claimed that BAT owed the Thai government 200,000 pounds and requested that 50,000 pounds be made available to him. Apparently nothing came of this latter initiative. See Daeng to Suphasawat, 6 October 1943, HS1-66; B/B 100 to London, 30 September 1943, HS1-72; and Sanguan to Sweeney, 20 September 1943, HS1-76, PRO.

<sup>81</sup> Fisher memorandum of 2 October 1943 meeting; Van Millingen memorandum of 15 November 1943; and Demas memorandum of 2 December 1943, "Thailand" folder, Box 364; and Devlin to Heppner, 19 November 1943, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA. Miles to Scribner, 11 November 1943, Box 36; Devlin to Heppner and Devlin to Miles, 19 November, 1943, Box 37; and Gauss to Washington, 4 December 1943, Box 2, RG 38, USNA. Also, Taylor to Wedemeyer, 9 November 1943, Box 80, File 4, Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution; and Chungking to Delhi, 6 November 1943, HS1-72 and B/B to D.T., 1 February 1944, HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>82</sup> "Secret War Diary," 1 November 1943 and Miles to Purnell, 3 November 1943, Box 39, RG 38, USNA; and Halliwell Report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI.

Halliwell spent the next several days investigating the situation in China. On the night of 31 October he attended a four-hour Tai Li banquet where he managed to remain vertical through his host's incessant toasts. Halliwell came away with the impression that most of Tai's men were "able, competent, keen, and friendly." On 1 November he visited Chungking, where he talked with Sanguan and called at General Stilwell's headquarters. The following day Halliwell inspected the Free Thai barracks where the officers appeared "in good condition and anxious to get into action." Khap assured Halliwell that there was no reason to suspect foul play in Chamkat's death, explaining that he "had been ill for some time . . . and seemed to get progressively worse."<sup>83</sup>

After another Tai Li-hosted banquet on the night of 3 November, Halliwell and Nicol Smith left for Kunming, where Smith planned to join the Free Thai advance party and organize their movement to a more forward base. After inspections in Kunming, Halliwell had accompanied Daeng and Devlin to India on their 9 November flight.<sup>84</sup>

Miles returned from New Delhi pleased with the outcome of a meeting with Mountbatten, although somewhat puzzled that the Admiral did not discuss coordination of joint operations into Thailand, an issue Miles had expected to be at the top of the agenda. Despite a warning from Admiral Purnell more than a month earlier that "numerous recent occurrences indicate [the] possibility [that] OSS [is] working to create complications for you to meet with [a] view [of] eliminating you from picture," Miles continued to maintain a positive tone in his communications with Washington. He expressed optimism that he had mended his fences with Stilwell and spoke of good links with Atcheson at the Embassy. He concluded a 3 November message in inimitable fashion:

OSS and I don't know how we stand with each other. Halliwell wants to fire me. Fer gosh sakes don't let them do it until they see me in my new tuxedo – or at least until General Donovan sees General Tai Li.

I believe a conference with Tai Li, Donovan, Miles and Hsiao will fix things up – I'll do my best.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Halliwell Report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 69–79. In his book, Smith presents this banquet as coming before his trip to India, but in fact it was three days after his return. Apparently Smith fuses August and October events together, as Miles was not present at the party for Halliwell. Oddly, Halliwell's report suggests Nicol Smith was not yet back from India on 2 November, but the Free Thai logs (Folders 3005–06, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226) clearly indicate that Smith returned on 28 October and attended the dinner on the 31st, as did Khap.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> "Secret War Diary," 1 November 1943; Miles to Purnell, 3 November 1943; and memo by H. S. Williams, 4 November 1943, Box 39, RG 38, USNA.



In fact, Hoffman had begun work on a letter justifying Miles' ouster from his position as OSS chief in China. It enumerated five OSS objections to the current arrangement: 1) Miles' insistence on control over the assignment of personnel, 2) his refusal to accept a high-ranking OSS officer on his staff and misuse of personnel sent, 3) his failure to provide adequate information on SACO activities, 4) a lack of accountability for equipment sent, and 5) a general lack of results. The letter also cited Miles' negative attitude toward the OSS, his problems with Stilwell and the State Department, the lack of direct OSS control over him, and the Captain's efforts to block the establishment of an OSS intelligence gathering organization.<sup>86</sup>

Hoffman initially favored deferring action until Donovan reached China, but the General, infuriated by Halliwell's report of his encounter with Miles, dispatched the letter to Admiral Purnell on 3 November, declaring that "Captain Miles and OSS are now in an impossible situation not only in relation to General Stilwell but in relation to each other." Citing a Miles comment to Halliwell that in his meetings with Mountbatten he would represent only the Navy, not SACO or the OSS, Donovan declared: "He cannot divest himself as if it were a coat of his representation of OSS or of the Navy. His obligation is a continuing one or it is worth nothing." He also criticized Miles' barring of certain OSS personnel and his refusal to "engage in intelligence activities." Severance of ties to Miles would enable the OSS "to carry out its obligations to the Theater Commander without conflict. The situation will then be clear and your groups and ours can work together without embarrassment or difficulty." At the same time, Donovan pledged to uphold OSS obligations under the SACO agreement, suggesting that an OSS representative be added to the SACO board.<sup>87</sup>

Purnell responded with obvious irritation, saying that efforts to set up a separate OSS operation should be undertaken only with the approval of Chiang Kai-shek and General Stilwell, and emphasized the difficulty in changing the SACO agreement. Taking issue with unspecified "statements and implications" in Donovan's letter, he attributed the problems between Miles and the OSS to "misunderstanding, mishandling, inexperience and mixed nationalities on both ends of a 7,000 mile line." He maintained that Miles was engaged in intelligence activities in collaboration with the Chinese. Pointing out Chinese objections to separate OSS intelligence gathering, Purnell warned that the OSS would run into

<sup>86</sup> Hoffman, "Memorandum for Navy," no date, but *circa* late October 1943, Reel 88, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>87</sup> Donovan to Purnell, 3 November 1943, Reel 107, M1642, USNA.



“much greater obstacles and difficulties” in trying to operate independently. He urged Donovan to defer any decision until he inspected the situation on the ground. Nonetheless, Purnell enclosed draft cables, to be sent in both their names, that would inform Miles and Stilwell of the changes the OSS desired. Purnell misconstrued Donovan's intent, however, assuming that he intended to retain Miles as “chief of OSS activities under SACO” while setting up a separate operation outside it.<sup>88</sup>

Neither the tone nor the substance of Purnell's letter pleased Donovan, who simultaneously was dealing with another major irritation, a reorganization proposal prepared by some of his key lieutenants that would have removed him from direct executive authority over the organization. This “palace revolt,” as a Donovan biographer dubbed it, reflected widespread discontent in headquarters over disorganization and the Director's frequent absences. On the same day that Donovan rejected the reorganization scheme, 8 November, he informed Purnell that he would not approve the text of the cable drafted for dispatch to Miles, saying that he intended to sever all Miles' connections with the OSS.<sup>89</sup>

An internal OSS memorandum, also dated 8 November, laid out the reasons for the change. Its author, presumably Hoffman, drew heavily on the 6 October memorandum from Davies to Donovan, alleging that “Miles' ventures with Tai Li into the maelstrom of international intrigues take the Captain into water for which Annapolis did not prepare him.” He added that “While this partnership is undoubtedly highly gratifying to Tai, and Miles apparently finds fulfillment in it, still, there are larger interests at stake. And they are being betrayed as surely as Miles in his innocence is being betrayed by Tai.” The document went so far as to imply responsibility for Chamkat's death, noting that “while still a guest of Captain Miles” – a blatant misconception – the Free Thai representative had “suddenly passed away at the ripe old age of 29.”<sup>90</sup>

On 9 November, the same day he departed Washington on the overseas tour that ultimately would take him to Chungking, Donovan informed Miles of his decision by radio. Citing JCS Directive 115/11/D of 27 October placing OSS units under the control of theater commanders and “certain difficulties” that had arisen as a consequence of Miles' “dual

<sup>88</sup> Purnell to Donovan, undated, but between 4–7 November 1943, Reel 107, M1642, USNA. The draft cables are found in Box 2, Naval Group China, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, *The Last Hero*, 508–15; the contemporary negative remarks about Donovan's management of the OSS by Planning Board member James G. Rogers, *Wartime Washington*, 112–14, 143, 170, 178; Gen. John Magruder's criticism of the OSS intelligence operation (“a national failure”) in Magruder to Donovan, 11 September 1945, Folder 13, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226 and Donovan to Purnell, 8 November 1943, Reel 107, M1642, USNA.

<sup>90</sup> Memorandum, 8 November 1943, File 2066, Box 113, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

responsibility,” Donovan informed the Captain that his services were no longer required, adding that he intended to work out the details in consultation with the Chinese during his upcoming visit. Prior to leaving Washington, Donovan had strengthened his hand by obtaining presidential sanction for independent OSS intelligence operations in China.<sup>91</sup>

Donovan departed before Purnell could respond to his 8 November memorandum, so the Admiral waited a week before telling Donovan by letter that he had advised Miles of the Navy’s grudging approval of the new OSS scheme. He expressed concern, however, that Donovan had erred in interpreting the new JCS general directive as a repudiation of Directive 245, which related specifically to the situation in China. Purnell warned that unilateral OSS action might evoke a negative Chinese reaction that would create more problems than it solved. He urged Donovan to discuss the matter with Stilwell and Tai Li.<sup>92</sup>

Upon learning of his ouster, Miles went to see Stilwell and laid his “cards on the table.” After he had informed the General of the OSS move to fire him, Miles reported, Stilwell commented “good” and “expressed our mutual feeling by saying ‘now you can really get down to work.’” He said he would inform General Donovan of his personal satisfaction with our past and present performance and we parted with best friendliness and promise of mutual support.”<sup>93</sup> The devious Stilwell once again had given Miles the false impression that he supported the Captain’s enterprise.

Hoffman arrived in India ahead of Donovan, permitting him to join Halliwell, Heppner, Taylor, and other OSS New Delhi staffers in preparing a plan to lay before the General calling for separate OSS commands

<sup>91</sup> Donovan to Miles, 9 November 1943, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI and Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 168. I have been unable to locate any direct documentation of Donovan’s meeting with Roosevelt, but Donovan refers to it in a 6 November 1944 memorandum to the President, Box 150, President’s Secretary’s File, FDR Library. Particularly in the early stages of COI, Donovan’s clout had been largely a factor of perceived support from Roosevelt. Although this was less of a factor once OSS came under the wing of JCS, Donovan was an old hand at using the White House for leverage. Moreover, at the beginning of May 1943 (Jones to Donovan, 1 May 1943, Reel 79, M642, USNA), Donovan had been urged to cultivate support for China intelligence operations among certain individuals working for the White House – including Wayne Coy, Walden Jones, Edward Kemp, and Howard Marsh – who had interest in promoting such efforts. The memorandum suggested that if White House support could be obtained “it would seem more than probable that the Navy would cooperate and trouble with the State Department and Army would be obviated.” To what extent Donovan was influenced by this memorandum, and the degree to which he laid groundwork for his approach to Roosevelt according to its advice, is not clear.

<sup>92</sup> Purnell to Donovan, 15 November 1943, Reel 88, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>93</sup> Miles to Purnell, 16 November 1943, Box 38 and Devlin to Miles, 19 November, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

in the China and Southeast Asian Theaters, with the latter having "a loose jurisdiction" over the former. They hoped to get rid of Miles completely, recommending that he be replaced by another naval officer. They suggested Admiral Willis A. Lee, who ironically had played a key role in initiating Miles' mission. They also called for the amendment of the SACO accord and the appointment of an army officer with at least the rank of colonel to head up OSS activities in China.<sup>94</sup>

The group agreed, too, that Colonel Eifler should be removed from command of Detachment 101 ostensibly due to "his unsatisfactory mental condition," thought to be the consequence of a severe head injury he had sustained some months before. Because of his sometimes extreme behavior, Taylor claimed that Eifler's men had come to view him as "something between a military Caligula and a jungle Ahab." However, OSS higher-ups were also displeased by Eifler's insubordinate attitude and his refusal to answer to anyone but Stilwell. Like Miles, Eifler had resented both Heppner's appointment and Halliwell's "pussyfooting around." More than fifty years later, Eifler would gleefully recall that he had told Halliwell, a textile company executive in civilian life, to "get your ass back to Washington and get a little more rank on your shoulder, then come out and talk to me."<sup>95</sup>

In regard to the Thai mission, the memorandum recommended leaving the existing group in China, but under "competent, independent American political direction." Additional Thai intelligence agents should, however, operate out of South Asia "because of the political importance of such a situation in view of our relations with the SEAC." This obtuse phrase alluded to the concerns of Heppner and Taylor that, contrary to the initial hope that Mountbatten would give them considerable scope to operate, the British were thought to be seeking either to control OSS

<sup>94</sup> Halliwell et al. to Donovan, 20 November 1943, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA and Halliwell Report, Box 68B, USMHI. On Admiral Lee, see Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 9–18.

<sup>95</sup> Halliwell et al. to Donovan, 20 November 1943, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA, and Halliwell Report, Box 68B, USMHI; Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 258; Taylor in *Richer By Asia*, p. 71–72; and interview with Carl Eifler. Eifler had also been a major target of Davies' 6 October 1943 letter to Donovan (Reel 91, M1642, USNA). However, one of Donovan's aides, Captain Duncan Lee, who had toured OSS posts in Asia earlier in 1943 and been forced, along with Davies, to bail out of the plane carrying them to Chungking at the beginning of August 1943, generally defended Eifler (Lee to Donovan, 20 October 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA). Miles' staff, who thought they shared the same enemies, also took Eifler's side. For example, Miles' man in Delhi, Hal Williams (Williams to Miles, 5 December 1943, Box 39, RG 38, USNA) described efforts to get Eifler into the hospital as "the dirtiest trick I ever heard of yet. That guy is crazy like a fox. He actually did a remarkable job on this last show and if it takes a crazy guy to do things like that what we need is more crazy guys in this man's Army and less OSS."

operations in SEAC, or freeze them out altogether. The two had already developed a siege mentality and, in Halliwell's view, "desperately needed help" – assistance which they were counting on Donovan to provide. They viewed Force 136 Chief Mackenzie with particular suspicion, describing him as "a thoroughly unscrupulous behind-the-scenes manipulator," who, they believed, desired to "get the OSS Thai out of American hands and under his control."<sup>96</sup>

Donovan, now wearing the two stars of a major general, reached New Delhi on 28 November. In a conversation with Stilwell in Cairo three days earlier, Donovan had proposed to provide "such men as may be necessary" for independent operations under army command in China. He acknowledged OSS plans to set up separate operations under Mountbatten, but promised that activities would be coordinated and any overlapping activities would be cleared with both commanders. Donovan sold this arrangement to Stilwell, Heppner later explained, by suggesting that by giving the British a separate OSS unit in SEAC "they would be less inclined to interfere and hamstring the purely American activities which were being set up to serve Stilwell." Donovan advised his New Delhi staff on 29 November that he would not launch a frontal assault on the vested interests of the Navy or the Chinese. Thus he would not seek Miles' recall or a formal revision of the SACO agreement.<sup>97</sup>

On 2 December, Donovan, Halliwell, Hoffman, and party flew into Kunming aboard a combat-ready B-24. Donovan hastened to call on General Claire Chennault, an important step toward the establishment of a separate OSS intelligence-gathering operation under the aegis of the latter's 14th Air Force. Chennault's good relations with Chiang Kai-shek meant that the Chinese would be unlikely to oppose such an enterprise, thereby insuring the OSS a new foothold in China outside SACO.<sup>98</sup>

Near midday, Donovan's party made the nearly three-hour flight to Chungking where they were welcomed by Miles, Tai Li, and Colonel Hsiao, who had flown out from Washington ahead of the Donovan party. After lunch, Donovan met with Miles, Halliwell, and Hoffman. He immediately asked for information on the Thai group. After discussion of that subject and the status of a French group recruited to establish an

<sup>96</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 12 November 1943, Reel 89, M1642; Halliwell et al. to Donovan, 20 November 1943; Taylor memorandum (undated); and Heppner to Lee, 22 November 1943, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. Also, Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI and Taylor to Wedemeyer, 9 November 1943, Folder 4, Box 80, Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>97</sup> Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI; and Donovan to Stilwell, 26 November 1943, Reel 91, M1642 and Warner interview of Heppner, n.d., Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>98</sup> Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI.

intelligence network in Indochina, Donovan voiced his dissatisfaction with the status quo and made clear his intention to replace Miles with a "regular OSS officer." He expressed hope that the changes could be arranged in talks with Tai Li without formal alteration of the SACO agreement.<sup>99</sup>

In describing the meeting in a subsequent letter to Metzel, Miles could not repress his irreverent sense of humor. He wrote:

We did a tremendous job of arguing and, although I understood most of what they were talking about, I am afraid I enjoyed the situation too much to let it pass as simply as that. To an outsider it would have been amazing to see one poor little Naval Officer being harangued on three sides by expert professional lawyers with a very innocent look on the Naval Officer's face and a continued insistence that he did not understand all those big terms, such as assessments, procure, assizes, testaments, instruments, pax vobiscums, etc. Finally it was necessary for the simple little Naval Officer to tell them that he had had absolutely no law training and could they tell it to me in common American slang. This they did in about three sentences and it seemed to work, much to the lawyers' relief.<sup>100</sup>

On the morning of 3 December, the group toured Friendship Valley and lunched with Tai Li. In the afternoon, Donovan and his Chinese counterpart got down to business. The OSS chief wasted little time in playing his trump card: White House sanction for an independent OSS intelligence-gathering program. He emphasized his desire to avoid major alteration of SACO, indicating that he first would attempt to achieve OSS goals through SACO during a six-month trial period. If that didn't work out, Donovan indicated, OSS would operate outside SACO. He expressed the hope that the Chinese would not be so unwise as to interfere. Donovan cited "overwork" as the reason for removing Miles from his position as OSS chief. Tai agreed to consider Donovan's proposals, departing with obligatory polite words about his desire to cooperate.<sup>101</sup>

Donovan then continued discussions with Miles about separate Navy and OSS operations under the umbrella of SACO, stating somewhat disingenuously that all this had been discussed with Metzel and Purnell. In regard to Miles' removal, Donovan stated that Hoffman would assume temporary control of OSS elements and serve as his personal representative.<sup>102</sup>

Miles, who relished the role of impudent innocent, told Metzel later that at one point he had

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. and Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>100</sup> Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. and Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI.      <sup>102</sup> Ibid.

suggested that, since it was impossible for me to be both an OSS officer and a Naval officer, that it might also be impossible for me to be a Naval officer and at the same time Deputy Director of SACO. At this intimation, General Donovan practically bit off my head and there was a general free for all for some minutes in which General Donovan completely lost his temper and the Naval Officer grinned at him.<sup>103</sup>

Miles raised little protest, however, and did not seek aid from his superiors in Washington. He seemed overwhelmed by the force of Donovan's assault, subsequently telling Purnell that Donovan's plan had been "already made and offered in a way to make difficult any alternatives other than acceptance or causing bad relations." He added:

On the surface this plan appears workable providing [the] Chinese do not object from [the] standpoint of endangering their authority which might easily happen because of OSS assuming jurisdiction over political angles such as French and Thai groups.

Donovan has already stated [that] OSS should handle these groups and such a setup would go directly against Chinese wishes politically and inject politics into our organizations which we think highly undesirable.

Miles indicated he planned to go "as far as possible in agreeing to everything desired by Donovan and at the same time try to get Tai Li [to] agree to modifications."<sup>104</sup>

Purnell replied that in his view the removal of the Thai and Indochina groups would be an advantage for SACO, "separating politics from SACO rather than injecting politics." He pointed out that this also might get the State Department off SACO's back.<sup>105</sup>

After one of Tai Li's lavish banquets on the night of 3 December, Donovan spent the next day in Chungking. That morning, Colonel Hsiao contacted Donovan's party to suggest that OSS objectives could be met under the SACO agreement. Tai himself appeared in the afternoon, giving Donovan a chance to re-play his presidential-sanction trump card. In the late afternoon, Donovan spent an hour discussing the Thailand operation with Khap. The Colonel reassured Donovan that Chamkat had died of cancer. He promised to eschew politics until after the war, declaring that "he was a soldier and only interested in rescuing his country from the enemy." Donovan accepted his representations, as he permitted Khap, counter to Seni's wishes, to remain in the field. When Donovan met Ambassador Gauss the same day he assured him that Khap would

<sup>103</sup> Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. and Miles to Purnell, 4 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>105</sup> COMINCH to Miles, 4 December 1943, Box 39, RG 38, USNA.

not be permitted a political role. Conversations with Tai resumed in the evening.<sup>106</sup>

On the following day, Sunday 5 December, Donovan met with Stilwell's chief of staff, General Hearn. Meanwhile, Hoffman and Halliwell drafted a memorandum summarizing the results of Donovan's talks with Tai. This document called for a SACO planning board with both Navy and OSS representation. They also prepared orders related to Miles' dismissal and Hoffman's new assignment.<sup>107</sup>

In the afternoon, Donovan returned to Friendship Valley for a performance of Chinese opera. Miles wrote:

One of the operas, which went over the heads of everybody except me, was about three brothers who were supposed to get along together, but were generally fighting all the time. Eventually they did join forces and worked well ever after. I later asked General Tai if this was intentional and he said "Yes," that obviously OSS, Navy and the Chinese should get along together but were not doing it very well yet.<sup>108</sup>

After dinner, Tai began a meeting with Donovan, Miles, Hoffman, Hsiao, and Halliwell that lasted until 2 A.M. The Chinese indicated that while much remained to be worked out, OSS objectives should be attainable. When the subject of intelligence-gathering came up, however, sparks flew. The Chinese argued that they could best obtain intelligence, evoking strong counter-arguments from the OSS team. Donovan reportedly shook his finger at Tai, behavior the latter apparently took as a personal insult.<sup>109</sup>

According to Miles' account, a heated argument flared over the control of materials. He wrote:

[Hsiao] Sin Ju got real angry and his English fell off. He yelled and became unintelligible. General Donovan yelled and became ungentlemanlike. Hoffman butted in and made them all mad. At one time General Donovan stated that we had better shake hands and call the agreement off. General Tai said, in Chinese, that it was all right with him to call off the agreement, but before Sin Ju could interpret this, Mr Hwang [Huang Tien-mai], the diplomat [who was serving as interpreter], stepped in and advised that it should not be translated into English.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI; and Miles to Purnell, 4 December 1943 and Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1; and Gauss to State, 4 December 1943, Box 2, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>107</sup> Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI; and Miles to Purnell, 4 December 1943 and Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1.

<sup>108</sup> Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. <sup>110</sup> Ibid.



"I was very depressed," Miles recalled. "I did manage, however, to lower my voice as much as they raised theirs. At the end of the conference I was talking in a whisper which made them all shut up and listen in order to understand me at all." In the end, they scrapped a proposed agreement, leaving it to Halliwell, Hoffman, and Hsiao to work out a more functional substitute.<sup>111</sup>

Various versions of the clashes between Donovan and the Chinese have surfaced. Miles later reported that he had heard from the Chinese that Chiang Kai-shek had admonished Donovan to respect China as a sovereign state at a meeting on 6 December, emphasizing that he expected all foreigners within her borders to do so. To this Donovan was said to have responded that, based on his presidential mandate to place intelligence agents in China, he would send men in. If the Chinese eliminated them, he would send more. Later, in India, Donovan boasted to Mountbatten that he had told Tai Li that for every OSS man killed by the Chinese he would kill one of Tai's generals. While it cannot be determined precisely what Donovan said, he clearly believed that he had put the "second-rate policeman" (Tai) in his place and had carried the day.<sup>112</sup>

Following a meeting with T.V. Soong, Donovan prepared for departure, only to discover that his flight had been delayed until the following day. Donovan insisted on leaving that evening, however, when he learned that his plane was being held up to accommodate comedian Joe E. Brown, who was in China on a USO tour. After Donovan confronted General Hearn, the plane departed for Kunming that evening. In Kunming, he met with Chennault again.<sup>113</sup>

There is no indication that the P'uerh "Pact Wally" project came up in the Chungking meetings, although on 18 November Admiral Purnell had sent a message to OSS headquarters for relay to Donovan on the subject. Purnell judged the project "legitimate enough," indicating that the Navy could supply most of the equipment, but suggested that paying the proposed army "would seem to come more properly from OSS." It appears that either the message did not reach Donovan or he failed to realize the magnitude of the P'uerh undertaking until he talked with Nicol Smith on the night of 7 December in Kunming. Taken aback by

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. and Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers USMHI.

<sup>112</sup> Miles to Chief of Information Branch Central Planning Staff, Central Intelligence Group, 17 May 1946, Box 3, Milton E. Miles Papers, Hoover Institution and Taylor, *Awakening From History*, 347. Taylor (349) suggests that Donovan's account of his encounter with Tai Li was aimed at impressing upon Mountbatten his determination to carry out operations even in the face of Allied opposition.

<sup>113</sup> Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers USMHI and Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

what he heard, Donovan asked Smith to produce a memorandum on the subject. Dated 8 December, it noted that of the eighty-three horses required immediately for the project, more than fifty had already been purchased at a total cost of over 14,000 dollars. Smith pointed out that mounts alone for the additional groups scheduled to start training within two months would cost an estimated 85,000 dollars. Beyond this, OSS was expected to pay the salaries of the troops, with total expenditures increasing by about 100 percent each year. The resources provided by the Thai Legation, Smith emphasized, were inadequate to finance the project.<sup>114</sup>

Donovan invited Smith, a personal favorite, to accompany him on his visit to Detachment 101. It was there that Eifler essentially dared Donovan to join him on a foolhardy aerial foray to a guerrilla base behind enemy lines. Impressed by Eifler's fortitude and flair, if not by his judgment, Donovan decided to transfer him back to Washington so he could make morale-boosting presentations on 101's accomplishments.<sup>115</sup>

With his inspection completed, Donovan found time to deal with the P'uerh project. He wrote to Hoffman:

I had no idea that Miles had gone to such lengths in commitments before consulting us. This you will stop at once. The whole conception is cock-eyed even if it were not beyond the terms of our directive. Either you finish it by taking the group [,] which I understand is under 100 and using it experimentally [sic]. But I entirely disapprove the larger scheme [-] and tell the Chinese so frankly - as politically [and] militarily unsound, logistically impossible and economically stupid.

When he reached Delhi on 9 December, Donovan instructed Halliwell to hand deliver to Admiral Purnell a letter repudiating the project.<sup>116</sup>

Donovan held a key OSS staff meeting on 13 December. At the end of lengthy discussions, orders were dispatched appointing Colonel Heppner to head OSS operations in SEAC (Detachment 404) and Colonel John Coughlin to command the unit in the China Theater (Detachment 202). Hoffman would remain in Chungking until completion of this reorganization. In a meeting on 15 December with a member of Stilwell's staff,

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. and Purnell to Buxton, 18 November 1943, Reel 88, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>115</sup> Donovan to Hoffman, undated but probably 10 December 1943, Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. and Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI. In his letter to Hoffman, Donovan suggested it "worthwhile to consider Nicol Smith for [a] position on the staff when he finishes his present task, where he is doing a difficult job pleasantly and competently." Donovan sent a message to Stilwell on the 10th (Folder 2066, Box 113, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA) advising him of the replacement of Miles and the appointment of Coughlin as head of OSS in China.

Donovan expressed the opinion that his “bold stand had in fact resulted in a favorable Chinese reaction.” The following day, Donovan issued orders to Heppner and Coughlin that stressed the necessity of respecting the authority of their respective theater commanders.<sup>117</sup>

Donovan’s visit greatly boosted morale at OSS-New Delhi. In a Christmas eve message to his chief, Heppner noted that on the previous day, at a meeting with the chiefs of the British intelligence units, Admiral Mountbatten had emphasized that OSS would retain its autonomy in SEAC and would be permitted to move with his headquarters to Kandy, Ceylon in March 1944. “I believe Mountbatten means to treat us fairly and will not allow an excess of dirty work on the part of our sister organizations,” Heppner reported hopefully. Less than two months later, in mid-February 1944, Heppner would fly to Washington and “push to make OSS-SEAC a major unit and press for large-scale operations.”<sup>118</sup>

For his part, Donovan apparently left the area convinced that he had cleared the thickets that had impeded OSS operations in China, but as historian Bradley F. Smith so aptly put it: “China was too complicated, too full of intrigue and nuance, for anything to happen that simply.”<sup>119</sup> The trials of OSS operations in China generally, and those of the Free Thai group in particular, had only just begun.

<sup>117</sup> Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI; memorandum by Pape, 18 December 1943, Folder 1, Box 80, Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution; and Warner interview of Heppner, n.d., Folder 518 and Donovan to Coughlin and Heppner, 16 December 1943, Folder 511, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>118</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 24 December 1943, Reel 45, OSS M642, and Warner history of Detachment 404, Folder 520, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. Also, Richard J. Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan* (New York, 2000), 170–180 on Mountbatten’s directive to the various agencies.

<sup>119</sup> Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 259.

## 5 Frustrated hopes

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General Donovan's visit to Asia brought a number of significant changes that would affect the OSS Thailand operation. He had re-ordered SACO, laid the groundwork for a new OSS unit attached to Chennault's 14th Air Force, replaced Eifler, and boosted the position of OSS in the India-based Southeast Asia Command. Most importantly, Donovan had vetoed Tai Li's P'uerh operation, apparently clearing the way for the Free Thai mission to pursue its main task of penetrating Thailand for intelligence gathering.

Donovan's visit took place at a time of strain in the broader relationship between the United States and China. Although his participation in the Cairo Conference had boosted Chiang Kai-shek's prestige, soon after returning to Chungking he learned that the Allies had backed away from promises of an offensive in Burma, citing pressing needs for vital equipment in other theaters. The angry Chinese leader demanded a one billion dollar loan in a 9 December 1943 letter to President Roosevelt.<sup>1</sup>

Relations were no happier among the Americans and Chinese in Friendship Valley after Donovan's departure, despite positive reports from Hoffman, the aide Donovan left behind to implement the changes he had demanded in the SACO agreement.<sup>2</sup> Miles advised Metzel, his Washington liaison, in a 10 December 1943 message, that Donovan's visit had "caused a whole lot of hard feelings." Noting that Hoffman and Colonel Hsiao had engaged in shouting matches during their negotiations, Miles complained the former was "not helping things at all." Soon Miles' subordinates were describing Hoffman as the "upstart."<sup>3</sup>

Donovan's veto of Tai Li's Sino-Thai army became an immediate bone of contention. At a 12 December SACO conference the Chinese cited

<sup>1</sup> Chiang to Roosevelt, 9 December 1943, *FRUS* 1943 (China): 180–82.

<sup>2</sup> Hoffman to Metzel, 7 December 1943; Hoffman to Fisher, 10 December 1943; and Hoffman to Buxton, 13 December 1943, Reel 107, M1642, USNA.

<sup>3</sup> Miles to Metzel, 10 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38 and Coughlin to Donovan, 20 January 1944, Reel 55, M1642, USNA.

Miles' promise to support the P'uerh project as a reason why SACO also should back a parallel operation aimed at French Indochina. Hoffman, who suspected that the Chinese were mainly interested in establishing a sphere of influence in Southeast Asia, leapt into the fray by declaring that the P'uerh operation exceeded the OSS directive. He added that he would not approve it nor the proposed Indochina venture.<sup>4</sup>

When the Chinese reminded Miles of his commitment to the P'uerh project, the Captain blamed Donovan's intervention for his inability to carry it through. Hoffman interjected that the training of troops had never been an authorized OSS function, thus any promise Miles might have made was either strictly on behalf of the navy or illegitimate. Hoffman subsequently would maintain that all SACO projects beyond the Thailand and French Indochina intelligence missions, for which the OSS had supplied personnel, were entirely the Navy's responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

The 16 December arrival of Donovan's choice for permanent OSS chief in China, Colonel John Coughlin, further exacerbated the tensions between the navy and OSS contingents at Friendship Valley. Miles complained that Coughlin's appointment had not been cleared by the Chinese. Although he described Eifler's former executive officer at Detachment 101 as a fine soldier and good friend, he expressed "grave doubts" that Coughlin would accept Tai Li's leadership.<sup>6</sup>

Hoffman likened the complex politics of Friendship Valley to "any large corporate matter" in a personal letter to his fellow lawyer Donovan. He believed he had "uncovered" the Chinese, forcing them to face key issues, while at the same time compelling Miles to cope with the consequences of his "errors." Hoffman credited himself with getting "tough as hell" when the Chinese "welshed" on OSS-related agreements made during Donovan's visit. As an officer on temporary assignment, Hoffman believed it useful to play "bad cop," permitting Coughlin to assume a more conciliatory stance. Coughlin described the situation as "just as screwed up as you can imagine," but was sufficiently impressed by Hoffman's maneuvers to urge his promotion. "He has met every situation that has come up . . . with tact and a most intelligent understanding," Coughlin wrote. "His ability to call his shots and predict the moves of both Miles and the Chinese have been uncanny." Coughlin warned, however,

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman to Buxton, 13 December 1943, Reel 107, M1642, USNA.

<sup>5</sup> Hoffman to Donovan, 22 February, 1944, Reel 89, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Miles to Purnell, 17 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA. As of early November 1943, OSS had assembled eight French officers and two enlisted men, as well as eighteen Vietnamese in China for operations in Indochina.

<sup>6</sup> Miles to Purnell, 17 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

that the embittered Miles would "leave no stone unturned to weaken and hurt" Hoffman.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with relentless Chinese pressure that he support the P'uerh operation, the increasingly desperate Miles sent a long plea to Metzel on 20 December asking for Navy funding. Miles claimed that he had obtained both Stilwell's and Mountbatten's approval for the project, but acknowledged his failure to clear the matter with the State Department. Chiang Kai-shek, he continued, had personally emphasized the importance of the P'uerh operation, so Chinese anger about its cancellation could adversely affect other projects.<sup>8</sup>

Admiral Purnell, who had not yet received Donovan's message strongly condemning the P'uerh project, replied sympathetically and held out hope. Purnell suggested that the Navy could provide support, though "OSS appears [to be the] only practicable source of cold cash." Suggesting that Donovan might not have anticipated the Chinese reaction, he noted that he had appealed to OSS for reconsideration. Miles, Purnell suggested, should convince Stilwell to request the project and seek endorsements from Mountbatten and Ambassador Gauss.<sup>9</sup>

In a letter to the OSS, Purnell argued that the P'uerh project seemed "legitimate enough," suggesting that the Navy could provide equipment if OSS would help with funding. But the proposal had hardly cleared Purnell's desk before he received Donovan's letter uncategorically rejecting the enterprise as outside the OSS directive, unsustainable, and fraught with political hazards. When he read Donovan's strong missive, Purnell realized the futility of pushing the matter further until the OSS chief returned to Washington.<sup>10</sup>

Heartened by Purnell's sympathetic response, Miles told the SACO Planning Conference on 26 December that Washington authorities were reviewing the P'uerh project. Hoffman, who had come to view Miles as "worse than the Chinese," immediately interjected that under no circumstances could OSS support it; that it could only be carried out as a separate project, under Stilwell, with approval from the Joint Chiefs. Tai Li responded with equal conviction that the project

<sup>7</sup> Hoffman to Donovan, 18 December 1943, Reel 91 and Coughlin to Donovan, 20 January 1944, Reel 55, M1642; and Coughlin to Peers, 17 December 1943, Folder 93, Box 45, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA. Also, Hoffman to Buxton, 2 January 1944, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>8</sup> Miles to Metzel, 20 December 1943, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>9</sup> Purnell to Miles, 21 December 1995, Box 14, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>10</sup> Purnell to Buxton, 21 December 1943, and Buxton to Purnell and Purnell to Buxton, 23 December 1943, Reel 88, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI. Also, Halliwell report, Box 68B, Donovan Papers, USMHI.

must be implemented because it had been part of the original SACO agreement.<sup>11</sup>

The conference participants then took up the matter of sending the OSS Thai group to its forward base. Earlier, Khap had complained in a letter to Hoffman that when the Chinese promised something would be done tomorrow, "it only means that they are going to think of doing it tomorrow." In an effort to force the issue, Hoffman had threatened to remove the Thai group from China if its members were not promptly sent to the field. Responding to this pressure, Tai Li announced that Khap would be dispatched to Kunming in two days with necessary clearances and full support. Khap then made a statement disavowing any personal political ambition. He declared that politically he operated under orders from the Thai Legation in Washington, but militarily commanded the Thai group under the aegis of the OSS. Khap's speech was really addressed to Minister Seni, to whom he radioed its contents immediately after the meeting.<sup>12</sup>

Although Khap departed on schedule for Kunming, Miles reported that the Free Thai leader and his men were "fairly angry at OSS." Miles added in a letter to Metzel dated 30 December: "They are going to work for [the OSS], but they will not do it as whole-heartedly as they would have had OSS not jumped in the left-handed manner in which they did." Khap's disgruntled attitude surely reflected the fact that OSS refusal to fund the Sino-Thai army had derailed his hopes of acquiring a general's star as its commander. He had not given up, though. Hopeful that the Navy might yet sponsor the P'uerh operation, Khap informed Miles from Kunming on 10 January 1944 that he intended to return to Chungking as soon as possible to discuss matters and might fly on to Washington to convince Seni of its merits. "I am still with you Mary," Khap wrote. "I will keep you informed at all times of what we are doing and what result we get."<sup>13</sup>

In Washington, meanwhile, the admirals prepared to take up cudgels with Donovan over the fate of the Sino-Thai army and the modifications to the SACO agreement he had engineered. A 5 January

<sup>11</sup> "SACO Planning Conference, 26 December 1943," Folder 3000, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA and Hoffman to Buxton, 2 January 1944, Reel 107, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffman to Donovan, 22 February 1944, Reel 89, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; and Khap to Hoffman, 8 November 1943, Folder 2997 and "SACO Planning Conference, 26 December 1943," Folder 3000, Box 73, Entry 154, RG 226; and Khap to Seni, 27 December 1943, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>13</sup> Miles to Metzel, Box 14, RG 38 and Khap to Miles, 10 January 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



Navy memorandum charged that Donovan's abandonment of the P'uerh project was "calculated to injure both Captain Miles and the whole project by losing face for Captain Miles and destroying the faith of the Chinese in reliability of promises made by accredited US authorities." Further, it described the new SACO arrangement as both unworkable and in violation of existing Joint Chiefs of Staff directives. Noting that the navy had furnished more than 90 percent of both personnel and supplies for SACO, it recommended that all changes implemented since 1 November be rescinded because Admiral Purnell had not approved them in advance.<sup>14</sup>

The globetrotting Donovan returned to Washington by such a circuitous route that Miles arrived before him. Joining a meeting of Navy and OSS officials on 7 February, Miles accused his new OSS counterpart, the strait-laced West Pointer Coughlin, of acting without consultation and failing to observe "military courtesy." After threatening to court martial Coughlin for his alleged offenses, Miles went on to denounce Hoffman, insisting on his removal from all connection with Asian matters.<sup>15</sup>

When Halliwell asked why Miles no longer accepted the agreements he himself had signed in the wake of Donovan's visit, Miles lamely stated that he had been excluded from a number of meetings and was "unaware" of the agreements. Faced with evidence that he had signed the accords, Miles claimed that he had done so "under duress." A divided command could not work, he argued. SACO could function only if his powers as sole deputy director under Tai Li were fully restored. The debate quickly reached an impasse, so Metzel suggested that the issues be taken up again when the OSS director returned.<sup>16</sup>

The showdown came in the office of Rear Admiral F. J. Horne, Chief of Naval Operations, at high noon on 23 February 1944. After Admiral Purnell presented the Navy's case, alleging that Donovan's December rearrangement of SACO violated the intentions of the Joint Chiefs, Donovan responded that Miles, Tai Li, Chiang Kai-shek, and General Stilwell had approved the new arrangements. He then again slapped down his trump card, the claimed presidential mandate for an OSS intelligence program in China. When Miles stressed the Chinese objections to the new arrangements, Donovan abruptly dismissed him, declaring: "We used to be overwhelmed by your reports of the Chinese attitude, but since we have thoroughly discussed matters with them I am no longer impressed with your representations." The meeting came to an end when Donovan

<sup>14</sup> Untitled memorandum, 5 January 1944, Box 2 and Metzel to Miles, 11 January 1944, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>15</sup> "Notes on the Weekly Meeting," SACO, 7 February 1944, Box 1, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

rejected a Navy proposal aimed at bridging the gap between the two sides.<sup>17</sup>

After three weeks of further negotiations, Purnell bowed to Donovan's insistence that OSS activities under SACO be run by Coughlin, who would report to Tai Li, not Miles. Donovan's opposition to the P'uerh project remained unshaken. But although Purnell warned Miles on 6 March to cooperate with the OSS, the admirals gave their man a strong vote of confidence, promoting him to commodore and creating Naval Group China, a new organizational designation for the Navy portion of SACO. The latter move accommodated Ambassador Gauss's desire to terminate Miles' position as "naval observer" attached to the American Embassy.<sup>18</sup>

Although no strangers to political infighting, the Chinese must have been mystified by the internal dynamics of these American wrangles. Certainly they were becoming impatient. When Major Herbert S. Little arrived in Chungking at the end of March to push the development of an OSS Morale Operations section under SACO, Colonel Hsiao and Tai Li showered him with a litany of complaints about lack of American performance and the failure to deliver promised supplies. Tai also criticized Colonel Coughlin for his frequent absences from Chungking.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, OSS Free Thai officers had begun advancing from Kunming toward the Thai border. Captain Smith had purchased fifteen riding horses and seven pack animals for a caravan journey southward, but continued to explore alternatives. Fortunately, General Chennault's 14th Air Force had an interest in an airstrip at Ssumao (Szemao; otherwise known as Fuhsingchen), a town directly south of P'uerh, approximately 220 air miles southwest of Kunming. At the beginning of December 1943, Smith learned that SACO's Commander Wight had negotiated an arrangement under which an Army Air Force C-47 would fly supplies and mail to the Free Thai camp at least once a month in return for radio reports on conditions at the airfield. Using his personal connections with Chennault – he had met the General during his pre-war adventures in Yunnan – Smith convinced him to airlift the Free Thai officers and some of their equipment to Ssumao. Accordingly, the OSS decided on 3 January 1944 to

<sup>17</sup> "Aide-mémoire of SACO meeting with Admiral Horne," 23 February 1944, Reel 88, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Donovan to Coughlin, 16 March, 1944, Folder 11, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>18</sup> Donovan to Horne, 28 February, 3 March and 10 March 1944, and Horne to Donovan, 13 March 1944, Reel 88, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; Purnell to Miles, 6 March 1944, Box 2, RG 38, USNA; and Stratton, *Army-Navy Game*, 148.

<sup>19</sup> "Report of Maj. H. S. Little on MO in the Far East," 28 May 1944, Folder 7, Box 137, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.



2. Southern China to Northern Thailand

set up the forward base near the Ssumao airstrip rather than at P'uerh, a unilateral change that further irritated the Chinese.<sup>20</sup>

Under the new plan, Smith disposed of ten riding horses and dispatched the remaining animals overland to Ssumao. Free Thai Lieutenant Bunrot, a former member of a riding club at the University of Wisconsin, took charge of this caravan. The star he wore to signify second lieutenant's rank in the Free Thai army gave him the appearance of an unusually young brigadier general. Among the ten Chinese soldiers and ten grooms who accompanied him were several Sino-Thai lieutenants whom he befriended. He relied heavily on these men during his travels in China and would maintain contacts with several of them in Thailand after the war. The caravan departed Kunming on the morning of 21 January and safely reached Ssumao on 9 February.<sup>21</sup>

Already on 15 January, two navy men, Khap, and seven Thai officers had flown to Ssumao in the first C-47 to land on the newly improved airfield. By the next day they had established radio contact with Kunming. Smith and three more Thai officers made the eighty-minute flight over "magnificent valleys and wild corrugated mountains" on 21 January. Impressed by the beauty of their new station, which was located at an altitude of over 4,000 feet and surrounded by peaks of up to 7,000 feet, Smith compared the terrain to the mountainous regions of Southern California. He likened the town of Ssumao, a forty-minute walk from the airfield, to "a California ghost town in the mother lode country" because of depopulation in the wake of a severe earthquake.<sup>22</sup>

The Free Thai were now based on the northern edge of the Thai Lü kingdom of Sipsongpanna ("twelve countries"). In the nineteenth century, Nan, a vassal state of the Chakri kings of Bangkok, had been one of several contenders for suzerainty over this region. In the 1890s, however, the French had established control over Sipsongpanna's southernmost

<sup>20</sup> Kotrla to Miles and Wight, 8 November 1943; Smith to Miles, 13 November 1943; Tai Li to Miles, 14 November 1943; Wight to Miles, 24 November 1943; Smith to Miles, 25 November 1943; Smith to Miles, 2 December 1943; Khap to Wight, 15 January 1944; and Pan to Wight, 19 January 1944, Box 37; and Wight to Pan, 16 January 1944, Box 36, RG 38, USNA. Also, Smith to Khap, 25 November 1943, Folder 3004; Khap to Miles, 10 January 1944, Folder 2997; and Free Thai logs, Folders 3005–06, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>21</sup> Free Thai logs, Folders 3005–06, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; Smith to Coughlin, 14 February 1944, Reel 91, M1642; and interview with Bunrot Binson, Bangkok, 13 July 1993. Smith's report says Bunrot left on 14 January and in *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 116, he says 5 January. I have used dates from the Free Thai logs.

<sup>22</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 14 February 1944, Reel 91, M1642; Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944, Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99; and "Memorandum for SI Files," 16 October 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Smith's report of 14 February says this first flight was on 14 January, but I have used the date of the 15th contained in the Free Thai logs, Folders 3005–06, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226.

state, Muong Sing, and the surrounding Lao principalities, pre-empting Nan's claims to the northern region. The territorially diminished Nan kingdom subsequently was subsumed into the kingdom of Siam. Active trade routes still linked Nan and other towns in northern Thailand with Sipsongpanna, however. The Free Thai hoped to penetrate their homeland along paths long well-traveled by Yunnanese traders known to the Thai as Haw. The language spoken by the Thai Lü in the Ssumao area bore close relation to the dialects of northern Thailand, but was quite different from the central Thai spoken in Bangkok. Still, the OSS Thai officers could manage some basic communication with local residents.<sup>23</sup>

A temple school four kilometers from the airfield offered the only suitable accommodation for the Thai officers. In lieu of rent, they donated the equivalent of about 200 dollars to the school, which was not in session. Although extensive remodeling would be needed to permit the officers to share the facility when the students returned, Khap initially thought that such modifications would be more practical than building from the ground up. At the first opportunity, he flew to Chungking to seek central government permission to use the school, only to be told that none was needed. When he returned to Ssumao, however, his Chinese liaison, General Tso, insisted that a new building be erected, apparently viewing this as a convenient means to tap the Free Thai treasury. A radio shack, a cook house, and a headquarters building rose between two pine groves on a hilltop half-a-mile from town, albeit very slowly and at great expense.<sup>24</sup>

The necessity of supporting several 14th Air Force ground crewmen and forty-four Chinese soldiers assigned by General Tso to cut wood

<sup>23</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 14 February 1944, Reel 91, M1642, USNA and "Report from Lt. N. R. Charles" (Chok na Ranong), a copy of which was provided by William Pye. On the Thai Lü, see Erik Seidenfaden, *The Thai Peoples* (Bangkok, 1963), 23–28; Reginald Le May, *An Asian Arcady* (Bangkok, 1986 reprint of 1926 original), 184–85, 189; and W. A. R. Wood, *Land of Smiles* (Bangkok, 1935), 137–38. On Nan's role in the area, see, Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, 73–74; James MacCarthy, *An Englishman's Siamese Journals, 1890–1893* (Bangkok, 1983, reprint of 1895 private edition), esp. 91–92; David K. Wyatt, tr. and ed., *The Nan Chronicle* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), esp. 9; and Wyatt, "Voices from Southeast Asia's Past," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 4 (November, 1994): 1076–91. Le May encountered Thai Lü who had migrated to northern Thailand and noted (184) that their language was "very nearly the same" to that of the locals, although they spoke "in a different tone of voice and not so distinctly as the latter." Chok estimated it would take a Bangkok Thai four to six months to master the Thai Lü language. Michael Moerman in "Chiangkham's Trade in the Old Days," in G. William Skinner and A. Thomas Kirsch, eds., *Change and Persistence in Thai Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1975), 151–71, notes that Thai Lü residents of Chiangkham, a vassal state of Nan, had been brought there as war captives in the mid-nineteenth century. On the trade between Yunnan and China see: Ann Maxwell Hill, *Merchants and Migrants* (New Haven, CT, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 14 February 1944, Reel 91, M1642 and Khap, "Report of Activity of the Thai Group," Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

and serve as guards placed additional strain on Smith's budget. He found living costs in the "sparsely settled . . . wild and remote area" 50 percent higher than in Chungking or Kunming. Still, Smith proudly described the Ssumao headquarters as "probably the best-equipped frontier station in China" in terms of radio gear. Not only had Miles provided the radios earmarked for the P'uerh operation, but Smith had procured additional equipment, including three SSSTR-1 field radio sets, from the Kunming operational headquarters of Y-Force, an American-aided Chinese army stationed along the Burmese border in west-central Yunnan. Smith also had cadged a substantial stock of medicines.<sup>25</sup>

On his final shopping trip to Kunming prior to launching operations, Smith obtained 10,000 piastres for agent purchases in French Indochina, as well as additional gold for use elsewhere. He also regained the services of Lieutenant Leo Karwaski, one of the OSS officers who had accompanied the group on its sea voyage to China, and hired six Chinese carpenters. Although a dispute between the 14th Air Force and the Chinese over responsibility for protection of the landing strip delayed Smith's return flight to Ssumao, a personal appeal to Chennault got a plane off the ground on 26 February. Smith's personal charm had gone far in gaining the cooperation of agencies often at odds with the OSS and each other.<sup>26</sup>

In preparation for the first attempts at infiltration into Thailand, Khap again revised the unit's plan. The Ssumao headquarters would be staffed by Chamrat, Khap's deputy commander; Wichien, Khap's adjutant; Chinthamai, unit quartermaster; Nitthiphat, signal officer; Phiset, chief technician; Bunrot, intelligence officer; and Bunliang, medical officer. Those designated to infiltrate Thailand and their target locations for intelligence gathering were Somphong (Chiangmai), Ian (Lampang), Karawek (Udon), Karun (Uttaradit), Phon (Tak), Bunyen (Ban Pong), Sawat (Samut Prakan), Phisut (Sattahip), Pao (Aranyaprathet), and Chok (Ranong). Because Bunyen, Sawat, Chok, Bunyen, and Phisut had remained at Friendship Valley, the other five were slated to go in first.<sup>27</sup>

Khap, Phon, Sompong, Ian, Karun, and Karawek began a six-day, 175-kilometer advance to Ching Hung (also known as Ching Rung and Cheli) on leap year day 1944. They were accompanied by an influential

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; OSS China Theater progress report, 15 February 1944, Reel 91, M1642; Smith to Dimond, 23 February 1944, Folder 2, Box 75 and Hykes to Pan, 29 February 1944, Folder 2, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226; and Khap to Wight, 18 February 1944, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See Khap's orders, dated 18 and 20 February 1944 in Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

Thai-born Chinese, Hsiao Soon-chien (Seow Song Khim), whose father, Hsiao Fo-ch'eng (Seow Hood Seng), had been a prominent Bangkok supporter of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement. Hsiao had left Bangkok for China two months prior to Pearl Harbor and had subsequently joined Tai Li's organization. His younger brother came to China separately and took up duties in Chungking. Smith, Karwaski, another interpreter, four soldiers, and a groom followed Khap's party two days later. The parties spent four to eight hours per day on the trail, depending on the spacing of the villages along the way. Few villagers had any surplus food to sell, but some could provide forage and water for the animals. The men knew that tigers and bandits often lurked along the trail and they heard reports of a herd of 300 wild elephants in the area.<sup>28</sup>

The five men expected to infiltrate Thailand would each carry 2,000 piastres, 176 Thai baht (which was in short supply), and gold (in the form of ornaments and Indian coins) worth approximately 2,300 baht. The total value in American money came to about 1,800 dollars per agent, enough, Khap anticipated, to last them for about a year. They also carried miniature medical and escape kits, a silk map of the area they would pass through, and button compasses sewn onto their clothing. They dressed as itinerant merchants.<sup>29</sup>

On the journey southward, the men saw firsthand the miseries of life in the Chinese army. On the third day, Smith's party passed 300 Chinese recruits headed southward to 93rd Division headquarters. Few of the men were armed and most carried sixty-pound blocks of salt, which at the end of the trail would be sold for the profit of their officers. Of the miserable soldiers, Smith wrote:

Many had minor wounds or were covered with sores or an angry heat rash. Their odor was infinitely worse than that of the horses. They were without the most rudimentary knowledge of sanitation. They drank out of streams without boiling their water, had no quinine and were without nets.

Khap commented that the Chinese troops were "treated much worse than we treat animals in the States," noting that those who could no longer walk were beaten or even shot. Smith witnessed the shooting and abandonment of one would-be-deserter.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944, Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99 and "Route Log from Szemao to Cheli," 21 March 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, on Hsiao, letter from Chok na Ranong to the author, 22 December 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944 and Khap, "Report of Activity of the Thai Group," Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99; and "Route Log from Szemao to Cheli," 21 March 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>30</sup> Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944 and Khap, "Report of Activity of the Thai Group," Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.



Near noon on the sixth day, Smith's party reached the Mekong River and crossed by ferry to Ching Hung, the walled main town of Sipsong-panna's most important city state. The Free Thai officers and Smith's party stayed in separate quarters in the former American Presbyterian mission, founded in 1917 by the Reverend and Mrs. W. Clifton Dodd. They met Tai Li's man, General Tso, and his subordinate, Colonel Chao (Prince) Chiew, a member of the ruling family of Muang Bor, north of Ssumao, who would oversee the first stages of infiltration. Although Chiew's operational base at Meng La would be far from his native town and his people were Northern Thai rather than Thai Lü, his princely status nonetheless would stand him in good stead.<sup>31</sup>

Explaining that the Japanese were closely guarding avenues of entry into Thailand through the Shan States, Colonel Chiew outlined plans for the agents to travel with his guides from Ching Hung via Meng Ham and Meng La to the frontier with Indochina at San Yong. Other guides would then lead them across French Laos, skirting towns and villages, to the Mekong River near Luang Prabang. In that vicinity the river then marked the frontier with Thailand because the French had ceded the territory on the west bank of the river in the settlement of the Franco-Thai border war of 1941.<sup>32</sup>

His conversations with Tso and other Chinese officers in the region gave Smith a clearer picture of Yunnanese politics. After the breakdown of the Ch'ing empire, the region's inaccessibility had permitted its warlords virtual autonomy, but they were hardly model rulers. In the fall of 1938, a salt commissioner had advised the visiting American journalist Edgar Snow that in Yunnan "the only difference between a bandit and an official was that the official was a successful bandit." Although the move of Chiang Kai-shek's government upriver to Chungking and Yunnan's new strategic importance as a supply gateway had brought an increased Nationalist government presence, the diminutive regional warlord Lung Yün – who controlled 60,000 troops – was struggling to avoid subordination. Smith learned that Lung, whom he had described as "colorless but charming" when they had met during his Burma Road journey, was obstructing both Tai Li's organization and the main Nationalist military unit in southern Yunnan, the 93rd Division. Smith did not know that relations between the two sides had become so strained that a Kuomintang peace mission including Madame Chiang Kai-shek, her sister Kung Ai-ling, her brother T. V. Soong, and her brother-in-law H. H. Kung

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. and "Report from Lt. N. R. Charles," a copy of which was provided by William Pye. On Dodd, see Arthur J. Brown, *The Expectation of Siam* (New York, 1925), 130–31.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. and Khap to Wight, 18 February 1944, Box 37, RG 38, USNA.

would soon arrive in Kunming, but he did discover that Tai Li, on Chungking's behalf, was meddling in the local politics of Sipsongpanna by backing the claim to the throne of the fifteen-year-old adopted son of the previous king. Lung's provincial government, in contrast, favored the boy's chief rival, an uncle who ruled a district to the south.<sup>33</sup>

On 9 March, Smith, accompanied by General Tso, Khap, Karwaski, and ten Chinese, left on a one-day journey to the 93rd Division headquarters of General Lu Han at Meng Hai. There Smith had the good fortune to meet Father Jean Tung, a Chinese educated in Shanghai by French priests, then in Geneva. A fit, athletic thirty-eight-year-old former boxer, Father Tung had served in southern Yunnan for four years. Although he spoke "tolerable" English, he was, of course, fluent in French, which Smith also spoke well. The two hit it off immediately.<sup>34</sup>

Smith noted that Father Tung, who advised General Lu on hill tribe affairs, seemed to have considerable influence and might prove useful. When the priest mentioned his desire to visit his bishop in Chungking, the Captain invited him to return with his party to Ssumao and fly with him to Kunming. Smith promised to arrange a flight to Chungking for the priest. After a visit with the bishop the two could fly back to Ssumao and go to the border together. Delighted by the proposal, Father Tung agreed to provide Smith with intelligence reports and map enemy positions in the Shan States.<sup>35</sup>

At dinner, General Lu pledged his cooperation and agreed to allow Smith to inspect an airfield under construction at Meng Se, fifteen miles to the south. Lu spoke at length of his difficulties in the remote region, claiming that all but three of 600 replacement troops sent the previous year had died of malaria and dysentery. He complained that his troops were forced to spend all their time cultivating food to keep themselves alive. Although he told Smith he had 10,000 men, an American intelligence report in mid-August 1943 had estimated the actual strength of his

<sup>33</sup> S. Bernard Thomas, *Season of High Adventure* (Berkeley, 1997), 69; Nicol Smith, *Burma Road* (Indianapolis, 1940), 210–12; and Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944, Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. On Lung Yün and his relations with Chiang Kai-shek, see Ringwalt to Hull, 9 March 1944, *FRUS* 1944 (China), 374–75; Lloyd E. Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949* (Stanford, CA, 1984), 10–44; and Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Nationalist China at War* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1982), 115.

<sup>34</sup> Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944 and Khap, "Report of Activity of the Thai Group," Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, and "Memorandum for SI Files," 16 October 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Father Tung was also said to speak German and Russian, as well as five tribal languages. An ancestor had converted to Catholicism in the mid-sixteenth century.

<sup>35</sup> Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944 and Khap, "Report of Activity of the Thai Group," Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

force at about 4,000, “poorly equipped, underfed and without medical assistance.” In regard to the reinforcements, the same report indicated that 2,000 men had been sent from Kunming, but that fewer than 600 actually reached Meng Hai. It also accused Lu of profiting by drawing pay for more men than he actually had, from the sale of produce grown by his soldiers on agricultural lands abandoned by local inhabitants, and from illicit trade across the frontier. Khap heard that Lu was making so much money that he did not want the war to end.<sup>36</sup>

While Smith and Karwaski rode off to examine the Meng Se airfield the following day, Khap remained in the company of General Lu. During his talks he learned “in a roundabout way” of the 93rd Division’s contacts with the officers of the Thai Northern Army occupying the adjacent Shan States. At Khap’s request, Lu agreed to deliver a message to one of the officers, Sawaeng Thapphasut, who had been Khap’s student at the military staff college. The letter stressed the need for Thai forces to switch sides at the appropriate moment and asked for the names of Thai officers in the area who would be willing to cooperate with the Allies. Once delivered, the letter passed upward to Premier Phibun in Bangkok. A Thai officer, Saman Werawaiithaya, heard that Phibun had remarked that it was just as well that Khap “does not know our business.” Nonetheless, a delegation of Thai officers that came to meet the Chinese on 2 April 1944 had hoped to meet the Colonel. The Chinese truthfully informed them, however, that he had gone to Chungking.<sup>37</sup>

On 13 March, two days after his return to Ching Hung, Smith witnessed the departure of the first five Thai agents and Captain Cheng, a Thai-speaking subordinate of General Tso, who would accompany them on the seven-day journey to Meng La. Their three pack animals bore baskets concealing sidearms and four SSTR-1 suitcase radio transmitters. At Meng La the men planned to split up, with Somphong and Ian composing one team and Phon and Karun a second. The two teams and Karawek, who would operate alone, would be guided separately by Chinese escorts from Colonel Chiew’s group on what was anticipated to be a journey of about twenty days through Indochina to Luang Prabang. Khap had

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.; GHQ India Military Intelligence Summary, 13 August 1943, Box 3 John L. Christian Papers, Hoover Institution; and Khap, “Report of Activity of the Thai Group,” Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>37</sup> Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944 and Khap, “Report of Activity of the Thai Group,” Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA; Saman Werawaiithaya article in “The Biography of General Luang Haansonkram,” 130–31; and Net Khemayothin, *Ngan taidin khong Pan-ek Yothi* (Bangkok, 1967), 388–90. The Chinese contacts with the Thai had been reported to the American ambassador (Gauss to Washington, 3 March 1943, *FRUS*, 1943 (China), 15–16. They are also reported in the GHQ India Military Intelligence Summary, 13 August 1943, Box 3, John L. Christian Papers, Hoover Institution.

set 1 May as the deadline for them to reach their assigned locations and establish radio contact with Ssumao. A violent downpour that began just minutes after their departure seems in retrospect an appropriate omen of the travails they would encounter.<sup>38</sup>

The following day, General Tso accompanied Smith and several other men on an excursion down the Mekong River to Meng Ham to inspect another potential airfield site, one they found less promising than the one at Meng Se. Upon return to Ching Hung on 15 March, they attended a lavish banquet hosted by Sipsongpanna's boy king at his traditional stilted palace. Among the delicacies served were bear's paw, sinews of deer, elephant's nose, and what Smith described as "a spinach that would have strengthened the jaws of Popeye."<sup>39</sup>

Two days later, Smith, Khap, Karwaski, Father Tung, and their Chinese escort began the journey back to Ssumao. The sickening stench of the abandoned, rotting bodies of Chinese conscripts that littered the way overwhelmed them at times, so they hurried and completed the trek in five days. Smith counted twenty-eight corpses on the trail and detected odors from more than thirty others lying out of sight in the tall grass. Khap noted encountering forty Chinese "not yet dead, but left for dead," of whom they were able to revive three. The survivors accompanied them back to Ssumao and were attached to General Tso's unit.<sup>40</sup>

As Smith and the others were exploring southern Yunnan, the six OSS Thai officers still at Friendship Valley had come under the direction of a newcomer, Captain John Wester, a prewar employee of Herman Scholtz's International Engineering firm in Bangkok. Like Scholtz, Wester had entered OSS after his repatriation in mid-1942. The Thai officers felt "they had been neglected and the victims of bad planning," so Wester sought to revive their morale by instituting a new training program, which included physical workouts, map work, and intelligence classes.<sup>41</sup>

Wester had his own ideas for advancing Thailand operations. First, he hoped to get Hsiao Soon-chien, the Sino-Thai luminary who had accompanied Khap on his trip to Ching Hung in February, to work for the OSS. Wester had known Hsiao before the war in Bangkok and believed him "now idle, and personally . . . anxious to work with us and help us." The Chinese rejected the request for Hsiao's services, however, having already assigned him to work under General Tso.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Nicol Smith report, 3 April 1944 and Khap, "Report of Activity of the Thai Group," Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. <sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Wester to Coughlin, 3 March 1944, Folder 2, and Khap, "Report of Activity of the Thai Group, Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226; and OSS China progress report, 15 February 1944, Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

<sup>42</sup> Wester to Coughlin, 3 March 1944, Folder 2, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

Wester's other pet scheme involved the infiltration of agents into Thailand through eastern Yunnan province. He drew up a formal proposal and requested Chinese approval to visit the town of Hok'ou, located opposite the Vietnamese town of Lao Cai. After some delay he was permitted to undertake the reconnaissance journey, but while he was *en route*, Khap and Smith reached Kunming and reported optimistically on the launch of their first group of agents. Thus Colonel Coughlin accepted Khap's recommendation that the six officers at Friendship Valley be sent forward to the Ssumao base. By the time Wester completed his reconnaissance, the officers he had intended to infiltrate were otherwise occupied and the dry season almost over. Wester concluded that both the Chinese and the French were ready to provide assistance and that it might be possible to get agents into Thailand's Udon Province within two weeks by this route. His plea fell on deaf ears, however, as OSS headquarters ordered the unhappy Wester to Ceylon to work with three newly arrived Free Thai officers who had been diverted for operations under the aegis of OSS Detachment 404.<sup>43</sup>

Upon his return to Kunming, Smith learned of his promotion to major and confronted a crisis provoked by complaints from General Wei Li-huang, commander of Y-Force, that Smith had attempted to organize militias in various districts in Southern Yunnan. Wei's American chief of staff, General Dorn, who previously had vouched for the OSS Thai project with the Yunnan government, angrily warned Coughlin that he might withdraw his support if the reports were true. After Father Tung and Smith convinced Dorn that they had no basis in fact, the Chinese military authorities backed down and promised in the future to investigate such reports more carefully.<sup>44</sup>

Smith's problems did not end there, however, as the 14th Air Force's security officer charged the Ssumao radio station with five security violations, Yunnan authorities claimed the Thai officers were destroying the air field's camouflage by riding their horses on it, and there was grumbling that Smith had been "talking too much." Lieutenant Colonel R. B. Hall, the OSS station chief in Kunming, subsequently advised Coughlin that all the problems had been rectified or smoothed over, but that he and

<sup>43</sup> Wester to Coughlin, 24 February 1944, Folder 2995, Box 173 and Coughlin to Hoffman, 31 March 1944, Folder 2370, Box 191, Entry 154; and Wester to Coughlin, 30 April 1944, Folder 2, Box 70; Donovan to Coughlin, 4 May 1944, Folder 4, Box 76; and Theater Officers Pouch Review, 17 June 1944, Folder 2, Box 75, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. Also, Coughlin to Donovan and Heppner, 11 May 1944 and Buxton to Coughlin, 19 and 20 May 1944, Reel 10, M1642, USNA.

<sup>44</sup> Wei to Dorn, 7 March 1944; Dorn to Wei, 30 March 1944; Smith to Coughlin 3 April 1944; and D. M. Hykes undated memorandum, "Thai Project," Folder 3, Box 69, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

Smith had agreed that "until things were launched and in production, it was just as well to lay low, and not give more opportunities for sniping than is absolutely necessary."<sup>45</sup>

Colonel Khap, meanwhile, drew new fire as well. In Washington, Sanguan, Daeng, and SOE's Grut had all strongly backed Seni's position that Khap should not enter Thailand because of his past connections with Phibun. Thus Donovan had issued instructions in late February officially barring his infiltration. The Colonel received an additional no confidence vote when Coughlin warned him on 31 March to keep Smith informed of all his activities, to include Smith at all conferences of the Thai officers, and to conduct all conversations in Smith's presence entirely in English. Otherwise, Coughlin warned, Free Thai activities would be "looked upon with suspicion." To add insult to injury, the following day, Khap received a letter from the Free Thai officers still in Chungking complaining that they had been barred from sending messages to him without OSS approval. This, they noted, showed a distinct lack of trust and brought into question whether they could continue to work for the OSS. Noting that they were "volunteers and not hired soldiers or colonial troops," they suggested that if the OSS did not trust them "it would be useless to go on with the work."<sup>46</sup>

While Smith was mending fences in Kunming, Khap traveled to Chungking, where he was felled by a stomach ailment for several days, a malady that undoubtedly further soured his mood. He raised the trust issue in a letter to Coughlin dated 11 April, noting that while he had always kept the OSS informed and had no objection to Smith's presence at all conferences, "there is a certain limit to everything." Attaching a copy of the letter from the Free Thai officers, Khap iterated the point that the Thai were all volunteers. He noted that they appreciated the trust the OSS had previously shown, but "now it appears that we are being watched with distrust and every move we take is being looked upon with suspicion." Warning that this was undermining morale, Khap asked for a clarification from Coughlin. It is not clear if Khap actually sent this letter or, after venting his frustration, he merely deposited it in his files.<sup>47</sup>

That Khap was also engaged in surreptitious dealings with the Chinese is revealed by a notation in the diary of Sanguan Tularak's daughter, Ramphai, that on 30 March "Khap came back [to Chungking] from Kunming with Luang Kat, who had left Thailand via Thakhek." This

<sup>45</sup> Hall to Coughlin, Folder 3269, Box 191, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>46</sup> "F.E. 3," Folder 1, Box 73, Entry 99; Khap to Coughlin, 11 April 1944; and Free Thai officers to Khap, 1 April 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Devlin to Scribner, 19 January 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>47</sup> Khap to Coughlin, 11 April 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

was Kat Songkhram, father of OSS Free Thai officer Karun and of the wife of Luang Dithakan of the Thai Legation in Washington. Originally an air force officer, Kat had been a prominent member of the ruling clique in Thailand since burnishing his reputation during the suppression of the royalist counter-coup in 1933. He had served as director-general of customs and acting minister of finance, before resigning that post in October 1943 and slipping off to China. He had not been sent by Pridi, so he either came on his own or at the behest of Phibun. The latter seems a distinct possibility. Mindful of Sanguan's failure to return to Chungking, the Chinese chose to keep Kat under wraps, no doubt envisioning him as a possible leader of a provisional Thai government. Khap kept his contacts with Kat secret from the Americans, as no mention of the latter's presence in China appears in OSS documents until mid-summer 1944.<sup>48</sup>

During his stay in Chungking, Khap had hoped to meet with Miles and Tai Li to discuss the use of Chinese agents. At the end of January, the Chinese had proposed the integration of their agents into the Free Thai parties infiltrating Thailand, noting that Miles previously had agreed that one Chinese would accompany each pair of Thai agents. Khap had denied knowledge of any such agreement and declined to integrate the two groups, but he had expressed interest in the separate dispatch of the Chinese agents. Miles had stopped to report to Admirals Chester Nimitz and William Halsey on his way back from Washington so had not yet returned, but Khap did meet Tai on 10 April. When Khap explained that he could put nineteen agents into Thailand when the second OSS-trained Free Thai group arrived, Tai Li emphasized that more would be needed. The Chinese spymaster offered to provide twenty to thirty Thailand-born Chinese. Although Khap subsequently advised Coughlin of this proposal by letter and asked that it be considered, he did not reveal to his OSS superior that Tai had once again suggested that Khap work to arrange the defection of the Thai forces in the Shan States.<sup>49</sup>

Before leaving Chungking, Khap made the mistake of revealing to Major William C. Wilkinson, Coughlin's deputy, that he intended to wait

<sup>48</sup> Sanguan Tularak funeral volume, 173. On Luang Kat, see: "Luang Kach Songkaram Kengradomying," 30 April 1945, HS-1-61, PRO. The first reference to Kat's presence in China found in OSS materials is in Ripley to Shepardson, 24 June 1944, Folder 2484, Box 141, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA, although it is unclear how the information reached Ripley in Ceylon. Also, see Gauss memorandum, 5 August 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA. The Ambassador's sources erroneously believed that Kat had only reached Chungking in July. See also E. Bruce Reynolds, "Failed Endeavours: Chinese Efforts to Gain Political Influence in Thailand during World War II," *Intelligence and National Security* 16 (Winter 2001): 175–204.

<sup>49</sup> Khap to Wight, 18 February 1944, Box 37 and Miles to Metzel, 27 April 1944, Box 4, RG 38; and Khap to Coughlin, 11 April 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Smith to Coughlin, 14 February 1944, Reel 91, M1642, USNA.



in Kunming for Miles' return. Asked his purpose, Khap explained that Miles wished to talk with him about training a guerrilla group for SACO, a project that Wilkinson correctly assumed to be a revived version of the P'uerh operation. When Wilkinson warned Khap that he was working for the OSS and should have nothing to do with Miles, Khap replied that he would not consider taking on the project until the OSS operation was up and running, then only after consulting with Coughlin and Seni.<sup>50</sup>

Although the alarmed Wilkinson would have preferred to have sent Khap back to Ssumao immediately, circumstances made this impossible. Smith had run into difficulty in arranging a return flight and the Navy had come to the rescue by offering him a SACO plane. By the time the aircraft was ready to leave on 19 April, Miles had arrived in Kunming. He jumped at the chance to accompany Smith, Khap, Father Tung, and six Thai officers to Ssumao to inspect their new base. Miles naturally lent a sympathetic ear to any and all complaints, reporting to Metzel in Washington that "OSS practically ignored [the Free Thai] and [was] unable to facilitate their travel." The men were, Miles wrote, "rather disgusted with OSS and want to work for [the] Navy."<sup>51</sup>

During their conversations, Khap acknowledged his interest in joining a revived P'uerh project and expressed confidence that he could successfully subvert the Thai forces in the Shan States. Miles suggested that Khap "unofficially and off the record" look into "contacting the Thai Army Command." Miles reported that the Thai colonel was willing to work with SACO to this end and "would be most happy if and when he is released by OSS and the Thai Minister."<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the discontent with the OSS, which Miles so gleefully reported, perhaps with some exaggeration, the Free Thai officers were seething with renewed resentment toward Seni. A lengthy letter from the Minister to Chok, dated 26 January 1944, had reached Kunming in early April. In it Seni reviewed the troubled history of the Free Thai Committee and attacked Khap, blaming him for misleading and corrupting the "young, inexperienced, and short-sighted" officers serving under him. He accused Khap of turning them into "mercenaries" and "tools" by "flattering, currying favor, and pandering" to their desires, including their lust for women and liquor. Regarding his actions at the controversial 4 June 1943 meeting of the Free Thai Committee, Seni stated that he had revealed Khap's guilt, and expressed determination to crack down on any behavior which might reflect badly on the Free Thai movement, warning that anyone acting improperly might be prosecuted after the war. In turn, Seni invited the officers in China to scrutinize his actions and

<sup>50</sup> Wilkinson to Coughlin, 13 April 1944, Folder 2, Box 75, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>51</sup> Miles to Metzel, 27 April 1944, Box 14, RG 226, USNA. <sup>52</sup> Ibid.

bring charges against him after the war if they felt he had done anything wrong. In the meantime, he implored them to “turn over a new leaf,” steer clear of politics, and “be steadfast in serving the nation.”<sup>53</sup>

Chok drafted a reply, dated 20 April 1944, and sent it with a covering letter to the Free Thai Committee, as had been suggested earlier by Bandit, one of the committee’s student representatives. In his covering letter, Chok pointed out that, despite the vote of confidence Seni had given Khap in a meeting with representatives of the Free Thai officers, the Minister had subsequently engaged in a personal war with the Colonel, a quarrel that, Chok contended, had delayed operations for six months. In the attached document addressed to Seni, he described the Minister’s 20 January letter as containing “distortion of truth from beginning to end.” Chok offered eight points of refutation, two of which related to matters involving him personally. Twelve of his fellow officers signed an attached statement attesting to the truth of the other six points, while two others attested to the truth of five, but declined to endorse point three in which Chok contrasted Seni’s “Führer-like” leadership with the democratic ideals of the officers. “You may believe you are a benevolent dictator,” Chok charged, “but you certainly do not look like one to us.”<sup>54</sup>

Referring to the controversy over their overseas allowances, Chok maintained that the officers had to pay for their living expenses in China, including mess bills of up to 100 dollars a month. Under such circumstances, he declared, none of them could possibly amass large savings. He attributed the early distribution of the allowance to uncertainty about when the group would depart. Accusing Seni of allowing his personal animus towards Khap to dominate his actions, Chok urged that he stop spreading stories about the Attaché in Washington circles and cease impugning the young officers’ patriotism. He implored:

Do not say that we are mercenaries as you tried to make the committee believe, and please do not say that we are opportunists either. We could have pushed on with our studies with the prewar pay and could still have our automobiles. We could have worked in the States and get as much pay as we are getting now if not more. We could easily out-live the war and spend our vacations in nice places as you do now, in spite of the fact that the rest of our country is suffering terribly from the Japanese occupation. But we gave all that up by our own free will.<sup>55</sup>

Although up to this point the OSS generally had backed Khap in his feud with Seni, new evidence that he was negotiating with Miles and

<sup>53</sup> Seni to Chok, 26 January 1944, Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Smith reported the arrival of the letter in Kunming in Smith to Khap, 4 April 1944, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>54</sup> Bandit to Pao, 14 December 1943; and Chok to Free Thai Committee and Chok to Seni, 20 April 1944, Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>55</sup> Chok to Seni, 20 April 1944, Folder 2999, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

Tai Li severely undermined his standing. Wilkinson advised Coughlin of Miles' complaints about the handling of the OSS French Indochina project, his proposal to "borrow" Khap after the OSS intelligence project was underway, and his allegation that OSS had insufficiently supported the Thai project. "All these things indicate that Mary hated to lose these two groups and is trying to knife us in the back with reference to them with Washington," Wilkinson concluded. In response to these new developments, Hoffman, previously Khap's ally, advised Coughlin on 18 May that it would be possible to have Seni recall him. A follow-up message twelve days later instructed that, based on an agreement made with the British and the Thai Legation, Khap should not negotiate with either Tai Li or Miles, nor should he be permitted to join Miles' Thai project.<sup>56</sup>

In the meantime, the effort to infiltrate Thailand had gone awry. Phon returned from the border with the news that three of the agents had not ventured forth and Ian and Karun, who had done so, had been brought back by their Chinese guide, ostensibly because of reports that the French had stepped up border patrols in response to the killing of a soldier by opium smugglers. Because the Free Thai officers could not easily pass for natives and lacked facility in Chinese or the local dialects, the Chinese claimed it was too dangerous to dispatch them.<sup>57</sup>

Smith's account of the meeting held to discuss this matter indicated that Khap confronted General Tso about the failure of the Chinese to get the agents in as promised, but Khap's own report of the session gives no hint of this. In any event, when the possibility of alternative routes came up, Father Tung volunteered that it might be possible to infiltrate through Meng Long into French Indochina across a narrow, mountainous salient of Shan territory. He suggested that this could be done even during the fast-approaching rainy season, a time when such infiltration would be least expected by the enemy. Smith seized this opening to suggest that Father Tung lead the men in. The priest initially demurred, but Smith won him over by promising him 1,000 silver dollars toward the construction of his long-desired church. General Tso had been bypassed, much to his dismay.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Heppner to Coughlin, 12 May 1944, Folder 2216, Box 126, Entry 154; and Wilkinson to Coughlin, 30 April 1944, Folder 2, Box 70; Hoffman to Coughlin, 15 and 30 May 1944, Folder 4, Box 75; and Ripley to Lilly, 17 July 1944, Folder 1, Box 76, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>57</sup> Khap to Coughlin, 14 June 1944, Folder 3, Box 70, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 151–54. Smith's account seems to incorporate negative feelings about the Chinese that did not develop until sometime later. In a 29 June 1944 memo to Colonel Hall (Folder 3, Box 70, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA) Khap still spoke of his relations with Tso as "most intimate" and he suggested that Tso had "given me all the information that I desire."

When the subject of a courier route through Lao territory to supply agents inside Thailand came up, Tso suggested that he could help in this regard. He certainly had the capacity to do so, as Tai Li's organization was known to have a system of runners who carried information to and from its agents inside Thailand. Khap assigned Chok – who spoke French fluently – to work with Tso's men on this project. Because Chok, like Phon, lacked facility in Morse code, Anon would serve as his radioman.<sup>59</sup>

On 27 April, Khap, Chamrat, Wichien, Chok, Anon, Bunyen, Sawat, Pow, and Phisut left Ssumao by caravan for Ching Hung. A day later, Smith, Karwaski, and Father Tung followed in a second party. After a rendezvous at Ching Hung, Khap, Wichien, Chok, General Tso, and Hsiao Soon-chien departed for Meng La on 6 May to check on the whereabouts of the first agents and to launch the courier route project. Anon, who was ill, would follow ten days later. Because the rainy season had already begun, the going proved tough. Occasionally, the men found it necessary to unload their pack animals and carry their gear, piece by piece, up steep, slippery hills. They traveled part of the way by boat on the Mekong River while the horses and pack animals were led overland. They also had to detour around a village hit by a smallpox epidemic.<sup>60</sup>

When they reached Meng La on 13 May, Colonel Chiew told Khap that the delay in the infiltration effort had resulted in part from the failure of the Chinese guides to follow instructions carefully, so new plans were drawn. This time Karawek and Somphong would make up one team and Ian and Karun a second. On 10 May, Ian and Karun left, accompanied by a man Khap described as “the best guide available.” Eager to place agents inside Thailand and confident that the planned courier route would provide a means to get radio sets to the two men, Khap sent them off without communications gear, ordering them to “get into the country somehow.” Phon then departed on 27 May, accompanied by two Chinese, to investigate possible courier routes inside northern Thailand. Plans were laid for Karawek and Somphong to leave by boat in the company of the Prince of Phong Saly. They departed on 31 May.<sup>61</sup>

The Chinese proposed six possible courier routes from Meng La through Indochina to the Thai border. Their plan designated eleven Laotian towns where Chinese businesses could serve as safe houses and supply depots. Such Chinese assistance, however, would come at the stiff

<sup>59</sup> Khap to Coughlin, 14 June 1944 and Khap to Hall, 29 June 1944, Folder 3, Box 70, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>60</sup> Khap to Miles, 27 April 1944, Box 37, RG 38 and Khap to Coughlin, 14 June 1944, Folder 3, Box 70, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>61</sup> Khap to Coughlin, 14 June 1944, Folder 3, Box 70, Entry 99 and “Location of Agents in the Field,” Folder 3003, Box 173; and Smith to Coughlin, Folder 3423, Box 202, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



5. Free Thai officers on the trail in Yunnan province in China in 1944. Left to right: Bunyen Sasirat (Sasiratna), Wichian Waiwanon (Vichien Vaivananda); Sawat Chieosakun (Savasti Cheo-sakul) (front), Phisut Suthat (Pisoot Sudasna), M. L. Khap Khunchon (Kharb Kunjara), two unidentified Chinese, and Pao Khamurai (Pow Khamourai). (Source: courtesy of Pisoot Sudasna)

price of CN three million (about 150,000 dollars at the official exchange rate, approximately 12,000 dollars at the black market rate). Although Khap passed on General Tso's suggestion that the money be viewed as loans to the merchant front men, he surely understood that such "loans" would never be repaid.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, Smith, Karwaski, and Chamrat had accompanied Father Tung, his assistant, and the four-man party of Pao, Bunyen, Sawat, and Phisut on their trek to the border. Upon leaving Ching Hung on 17 May,

<sup>62</sup> Khap to Hall, 29 June 1944, Folder 3, Box 70, Entry 99 and "Location of Agents in the Field," Folder 3003, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; and "Report from Lt. N. R. Charles" (Chok na Ranong), a copy of which was provided by William Pye.

the four men sought to toughen themselves for their long trek by walking barefoot behind their pack animals. Their radios were carefully packed in baskets on the backs of the animals, hidden beneath goods typically carried by itinerant merchants. Once they reached Indochina, they would claim to be on a French-sanctioned religious mission, returning items to Vientiane from a Catholic church in China.<sup>63</sup>

At the border at Meng Long a Chinese major took Smith, Karwaski, and Father Tung up a mountain side to show them where the frontline units of the Thai army were located, across the border in the Shan States. The two armies had established a secret armistice, but sometimes engaged in fake hostilities when Japanese officers visited on the Thai side. The next day, 21 May, Father Tung, his assistant, and the four disguised Thai officers sallied forth on their mission, accompanied by newly acquired, surefooted pack mules.<sup>64</sup>

By the time Smith arrived back at Ssumao at the beginning of June, two additional Thai officers, Ekchai Khambu (Ekjai Khambhu) and Chanai Ruangsiri, had reinforced the base unit. Both had attended medical school in the United States, so Khap had requested their early dispatch in the fall of 1943 on the assumption that they would serve as doctors for the men of the Sino-Thai raider battalions envisioned under the P'uerh project. By now, the Free Thai radio shack was operational, and construction was proceeding on the Ssumao "Pine Cone House" headquarters. Such amenities as an icebox, horseback riding, swimming, pets – including a bear cub – and the occasional movie had made the malarial backwoods more liveable. Smith expressed optimism in a personal letter of 4 June that: "After fifteen months and many disappointments I think we are at last coming into our own. At last we are a going concern." He added that he had become "very fond" of the Thai officers, adding: "I prefer them to many of the Americans I have met in this part of the world."<sup>65</sup>

Having launched his agents, Khap returned to Ssumao from Meng La. The OSS expected him to stay there, but when a supply plane arrived on 18 June, Khap seized the opportunity to escape to the brighter lights of Kunming. From there he intended to fly on to Chungking to confer with Miles and Tai Li. Because Coughlin had gone to the United States for

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. and Pao's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 83.

<sup>64</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 157–61; GHQ India Military Intelligence Summary, 13 August 1943, Box 3, John L. Christian Papers, Hoover Institution; and Wilkinson to Hoffman, 6 July 1944, Folder 4, Box 75, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>65</sup> "Memorandum for SI Files," 16 October 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; Smith to Dockery, 4 June 1944, Box 3, Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution; and Smith to Miles, 26 July 1944, Box 37, Naval Goup China, RG 38, USNA. Ellen A. Dockery was Goodfellow's personal secretary and a friend of Smith's wife, Moira.





6. Disguised as itinerant traders, the four-man team led by Pao Khamurai (Pow Khamourai) prepare to leave southern China on an overland journey to Thailand in 23 May 1944. Left to right: Chinese groom, Lieutenant Leo Karwaski, Pao, Phisut Suthat (Pisoot Sudasna) behind Pao, Major Nicol Smith, Sawat Chieosakun (Savasti Cheosakul), and Bunyen Sasirat (Sasiratna). (Source: courtesy of Pisoot Sudasna)

consultations, Khap also hoped to fly on to Washington to confer there with him and Seni.<sup>66</sup>

Matters did not proceed smoothly at Meng La in Khap's absence. Forced to stay at Colonel Chiew's headquarters, Chok and Anon soon realized that the Chinese were not cooperating fully. They learned that some of the Thai-speaking officers in General Tso's organization were under orders not to reveal their linguistic facility so that they might engage in unsuspected eavesdropping. Further, the two Free Thai officers were outraged when Chinese soldiers took precious radio batteries without asking permission, then failed to return them. Information dredged from Chiew's subordinates that the Chinese had an established courier route into Thailand used both for intelligence purposes and for smuggling opium and consumer goods disturbed them even more. Agents made a round trip once a month from Meng P'eng (a town to the west of

<sup>66</sup> MacCarthy to Peers, 19 June 1944, Folder 3265, Box 191, Entry 154 and Khap to Hoffman/Coughlin, 20 June 1944, Folder 4, Box 75, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.



Meng La) via Muong Sing and Houei Sai in French Indochina to Chiang Khong in Thailand. Instead of sending the Free Thai agents on this established route, the Chinese had dispatched them toward Luang Prabang.<sup>67</sup>

When confronted on the latter point, Colonel Chiew admitted that a separate headquarters had been set up at Meng P'eng before the Thai officers arrived, that the main Chinese route had been kept secret, and that he had not warned Khap of dangers inherent in entry via Luang Prabang. Chiew lamely explained that Khap and General Tso had already agreed upon the Luang Prabang route and had not asked him about the dangers.<sup>68</sup>

Chok also soon recognized the elaborate courier scheme proposed by the Chinese as an impractical boondoggle. When Chiew acknowledged that it was a long-term project and that nothing could be accomplished for two years, Chok moved to set up his own system. At the home of the local ruler in Meng La he had met a trader named Wong, who smuggled opium from the Chiang Rai area in Thailand. Hiring him as a sub-agent, Chok sent Wong with seven other men to explore a route to Muang Hongsa on the Thai side of the Mekong River on 1 June. At the end of July, Chok would dispatch Anon and two Chinese guides to the Thai border via this route.<sup>69</sup>

On 17 July, Chok forwarded devastating news to Ssumao. A message from his sub-agent Wong reported that the Thai police had killed Karawek and Somphong on 21 June – the actual date was 11 June – a day after they had crossed the border twenty kilometers upriver from the Lao town of Luang Prabang. Further, Chok revealed his total loss of faith in Tai Li's organization, advising Smith that the Chinese had sent the first Thai groups over dangerous, untested trails to keep them away from the route Tai Li's organization used for its own purposes, including opium smuggling.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 18 August 1944, Folder 3424, Box 202 and interview of Major Dick, 31 October 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154; Smith to Coughlin, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190; and Chok to Khap, Report 3, n.d., Folder 3, Box 84, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA. Also, Chok in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 52–52 and Interview with Chok na Ranong, Bangkok, 20 July 1993.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. In peaceful times many Haw traders plied this trade route as evidenced by Reginald Le May's account of a visit the Chiang Rai area in *An Asian Arcady*, 197, 204.

<sup>70</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 22 July 1944, Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154 and Smith to Coughlin, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA. Thammanun Ruangsinsin, ed., *Khamphiphaksa khadi Seri Thai chak Saharat Amerika* (Bangkok, 1979), cites the 11 June date. Smith later learned that the profits from the cross-border trade not only supported Tso's operations in southern Yunnan, but that quantities of cash were being forwarded to Kunming and Chungking. He also came to the conclusion

When Smith radioed news of the two Thai officers' deaths to Khap in Kunming, the Colonel reported that he had already received the information seven days earlier, via Ramphai Tularak, together with news of the capture of three other Free Thai. She had learned this via a coded radio message from her uncle, Krachang, who had reached the Luang Prabang area. Krachang had trained with Tai Li's men for two months at the end of 1943, then headed south in the company of nine Sino-Thai agents disguised as opium traders. One task was to carry a radio to Pridi, a set which Krachang subsequently delivered to Tiang Sirikhan at Nong Khai. He also delivered a Chinese request that Pridi dispatch a new liaison party including both military and political representatives, a group that would be sent in October 1944. Over the next year, Krachang remained in the northeast, working with Tiang in organizing the anti-Japanese underground activities in the latter's home area, Sakon Nakhon.<sup>71</sup>

Bunrot, who had left Ssumao in early July on a re-supply and reconnaissance mission to Meng La, returned on 12 August with more details about Karawek and Somphong's fatal mission. He reported that they had reached Phong Saly safely at the end of May, then traveled by boat to the vicinity of Luang Prabang in the party of a wealthy merchant. Accompanying them was Bunchuai, a Chinese from Lampang who worked for Hsiao Soon-chien. They crossed the Mekong River and, for reasons that are not clear, went to the home of a village headman, who notified the police. Two Thai policemen came to question them the following morning, loading them onto boats for transfer to the police station. An account by a teacher from the village, who claimed to have witnessed the incident, suggests that the police officers killed the three men in order to steal the gold they were carrying, then created the cover story that the men had attempted to escape. Bunchuai and Karawek were shot and died in the boat. The wounded Somphong jumped into the river, where he was shot again and drowned.<sup>72</sup>

that not only did competition exist between Chungking and Yunnan provincial agencies, but that Tai Li's own organization contained multiple elements that were competitive and mutually suspicious of each other. Also, General Stilwell noted in his diary on 4 March 1943: "Opium traffic in Yunnan still enormous." (Joseph W. Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers* [New York, 1948], 107) and William O. Walker III concluded [*Opium and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991), 151] that the prime beneficiaries of the cross-border opium trade were Tai Li, Madame Chiang Kai-shek's brother-in-law H. H. Kung, and Tu Yueh-sheng, head of Shanghai's notorious Green Gang.

<sup>71</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 22 July 1944, Folder 3424, Box 202 and Khap to Coughlin, August 1944, Folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; Sanguan Tularak funeral volume, 174; Krachang Tularak, "Seri Thai say tamniap Ta Chang," copy provided to the author by Kraisi Tularak; and letter from Kraisi Tularak to the author, 4 July 2001.

<sup>72</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 12 August 1944, Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; Thammanun, ed., *Khamphiphaksa khadi Seri Thai chak Saharat Amerika*; and Chok's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 53.

Bunrot did have some positive news to report, however. A Chinese guide reported that Ian and Karun had safely reached a point of entry south of Luang Prabang. Their guide had returned to Meng La and in late July was about to depart with their radio gear. The Chinese, meanwhile, reported that Father Tung's six-man party had passed through the area of Muong Sing in early July. Phon's whereabouts were unknown.<sup>73</sup>

By this time Chok had come to suspect that the Chinese were not only attempting to delay Free Thai operations, but were actively sabotaging them. Acting under Khap's orders to attempt to make connections across the border, Chok had sent messages to the French commander at Phong Saly with no positive result. He then turned his attention to a reputedly anti-Japanese French military officer, Captain Pierre Bocquet. Although based near the Thai border at Fort Carnot in Houei Sai, Bocquet periodically visited Muong Sing, a mud-walled market town and administrative center near the Yunnan border.<sup>74</sup>

In an effort to find out when Bocquet would be in the north, Chok sought Colonel Chiew's help. Chiew subsequently reported that the French officer was in Muong Sing, so Chok prepared to go there, but came down with a severe diarrhea that forced him to cancel the trip. Wong later told him that a pro-Japanese Eurasian officer had been in Muong Sing at the time, not Bocquet.<sup>75</sup>

Convinced that he had been set up, Chok claimed that he decided to wrest a confession from Chiew by getting him drunk. First, though, he had to increase his tolerance for the local liquor. On his initial attempt, a quarter of a bottle set his stomach afire and kept him up all night, but after a month's practice he could down an entire bottle. He then invited Chiew to his quarters where they swapped stories and progressed into a second bottle of liquor. At that point, Chok confronted Chiew, who broke down in tears, saying that even though he was a Thai, he had a responsibility as a Chinese officer to follow orders to prevent the Free Thai officers from entering Thailand. He explained that the Chinese did not want the better-equipped American-trained agents to overshadow them or endanger their carefully developed intelligence operations.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 12 August 1944, Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>74</sup> "Report from Lt. N. R. Charles" (Chok na Ranong), provided by William Pye, and Chok's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 54–55. Muong Sing is described by McCarthy in *An Englishman's Siamese Journals, 1890–1893*, 107–09. He erroneously predicted it "certain to become an important place in the future."

<sup>75</sup> "Report from Lt. N. R. Charles" (Chok na Ranong), provided by William Pye, and Chok's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 54–55.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*; and interview of Chamrat Follet, 31 October 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

Chiew also made reference to Chinese plans to share postwar control of Thailand with the British, surely an allusion to Chinese hopes of occupying northern Thailand to disarm the Japanese at the end of the war, a responsibility that the British were expected to carry out in central and southern Thailand. Such a military occupation of Thai territory, of course, would give China leverage to force the Thai government to establish diplomatic relations with the Nationalist government and to modify its restrictive policies toward the Chinese residents.

Evidence that Chok's suspicions about the Chinese were well-founded appears in a March 1945 OSS intelligence report from Bangkok. It indicated that the Thai police had compiled a "complete photographic record" of the China group "with correct names and ranks of each," the latter based on intelligence provided by Tai Li's organization.<sup>77</sup>

Chiew subsequently revealed that the Chinese had only one successful route, to Houei Sai via Moung Sing, which had been established over a year earlier by Thai Lü agents whom he had hired. This came after a failed attempt to establish a communications route by a group of Chinese officers. The Thai Lü contacted Chinese residents along the way, laying the ground work for Tai Li's men. After a year of effort, the Chinese had established friendly contacts with certain French officials.<sup>78</sup>

Determined to make his own arrangements, independent of the Chinese, Chok tried again to contact Captain Bocquet in September. Crossing the border to Muong Sing, he dispatched a letter requesting an interview with Peurotte, a French civil servant reported by Wong to be anti-Japanese. When they met, Chok asked for a pass to proceed to Houei Sai to see Captain Bocquet. Peurotte told him to return to China and await a reply. A week later, he summoned Chok back to Muong Sing and sent him and Colonel Chiew under military escort to Houei Sai.<sup>79</sup>

Bocquet promised Chok that Free Thai agents could pass freely through his area and provided code words for use in the event that they were arrested. Bocquet agreed to favor Colonel Chiew's men, too, so long as they behaved, but warned that they would be arrested and liquidated if any effort at sabotage were detected. Chok and Bocquet also discussed setting up a training camp in a remote area of Indochina. Although eager to receive equipment and supplies from the OSS, Bocquet asked that the shipment be delayed for a month or two while he posted reliable officers at key locations. He also expressed willingness to cooperate with the Americans in setting up an intelligence operation in Indochina. Finally,

<sup>77</sup> DURIAN to Coughlin, 11 March 1945, Folder 1257, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>78</sup> Chok to Khap, Report 2, 22 July 1944, Folder 3, Box 84, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

he made arrangements to meet Chok at the end of November at Muong Sing.<sup>80</sup>

Back in Ssumao, Major Smith, unaware of these new developments, fretted over his continuing difficulties with the Chinese. His successful effort to recruit Father Tung as an alternative guide had been based on early skepticism about General Tso's organization, but now Smith recanted all earlier expressions of confidence in the Chinese. In a 22 July 1944 letter to Coughlin he concluded that whatever assistance the Chinese had provided was based solely on the hope that financing for its P'uerh project might be obtained. "We receive no help from the Chinese we don't pay for – and pay through the nose," Smith complained, concluding his letter on an uncharacteristically pessimistic note:

I like my work and the Thais as much as ever. It has all been very interesting. But in some ways it has rather changed my opinion of my fellow man. I am beginning to think that Carl Hoffman saw more on his first short trip to China than I have over the years. I am also beginning to think, John, I will not write a book about all this. I am afraid the light touch would be missing.<sup>81</sup>

In fact, gloom and doom pervaded the entire China Theater at the time Smith penned these lines. Several hundred miles to the northeast Japanese forces had scored major victories in Operation ICHIGO, placing the key city of Kweilin in grave danger. Chinese generals in the endangered region were actively plotting against Chiang Kai-shek and seeking American backing for a *coup*. Yunnan warlord Lung Yün, concerned by the Japanese advance, but eager to capitalize on Chiang's weakness, was demanding that Chungking supply American arms to his troops. The Americans, meanwhile, had sent an observer mission to the headquarters of the Chinese Communists at Yen-an and were pressuring Chiang to place General Stilwell in command of the Chinese armies.<sup>82</sup>

As the long, frustrating summer dragged on, relations between the Thai officers and the Chinese soldiers at Ssumao deteriorated. Chamrat, acting as commander in Khap's absence, chafed at Chinese surveillance. He had come to view an interpreter from Tai Li's organization as a spy, and he perceived Colonel Liu, a former Bangkok resident who commanded the local Chinese troops, as excessively "nosey."<sup>83</sup> When Chamrat and

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. and interview of Chamrat Follet, 31 October 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>81</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 22 July 1944, Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>82</sup> Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, DC, 1956), 399–442.

<sup>83</sup> Interview of Chamrat Follet, 31 October 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226. Chok noted in a letter to the author of 30 November 1994 that in 1947, when he was general manager of National Navigation, a Chinese-registered company in Shanghai, Colonel Liu came to ask him for a 600-dollar loan for passage to Bangkok.

Liu clashed in August, the Chinese threatened to cut off all cooperation. Smith negotiated a truce, but had despaired of real amity. He radioed Coughlin:

We have dozens of instances showing Chinese and Thais do not get along. Thailand is an enemy of China; has been fighting China. Chinese villages have been burned by Thai planes. In face of this hostility our group arrives in southernmost China very near [the] Thai frontier. OSS Thais are in [an] enviable position, with unlimited American backing, plenty of money, salaries colossal compared to Chinese. They have good clothes, cigarettes, have traveled abroad. They are well educated – MA's, Ph.D.s. Chinese interpreters [are] not so well educated. Feeling against Thais affected our agents in Cheli [Ching Hung], Meng La and abroad in Indochina.<sup>84</sup>

At the time Smith wrote his pessimistic assessment the second and last large group of fourteen American-trained Thai officers had reached Asia. They had entered OSS training in late October 1943, and by the end of February 1944 had completed three OSS training courses and undergone parachute training at Fort Benning, Georgia. They left California in early April on the liberty ship *Frederick C. Hicks*, arriving in Calcutta on 17 June via Australia. From there they flew to Chabua and took the train to a Detachment 101 camp at Nazira.<sup>85</sup>

Lieutenant William Pye, the group's conducting officer and chief booster, felt that fellow officers at Detachment 101 considered the Thai interlopers a "nuisance." Their anomalous status to some extent reflected uncertainty about where they would be based. In light of the failure of the China group's agents to establish radio contact from inside Thailand, opposition to sending the new men to Ssumao was rising within the OSS. Pye, however, cited another reason for the inhospitable attitude the Thai encountered at Detachment 101:

They'd been dealing with these Burmese Kachins and of course they'd beat 'em around. Well, these men were all college graduates and you couldn't treat them like Kachins. Nevertheless, the thinking was that you should. It put me in one hell of a spot.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile in Kunming, Khap drew up a report at the beginning of August which revealed the extent to which his views were out of harmony

<sup>84</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 2 September 1944, Folder 3, Box 76, Entry 99 and Smith to Coughlin, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> Charoen Charoen-Rajapark, "Memorandum of Activities of a Free Thai in World War II," photocopied, n.d., 3–8.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with William Pye. Pye launched a determined and ultimately successful campaign to obtain parachutists' badges for the members of his group decades after the war. He received a decoration from the King of Thailand (Order of Direkgunabhorn) in February 1998 shortly before his death.

with both his OSS superiors and his Thai subordinates in the field. In a variant of Tai Li's scheme of merging the Free Thai officers with his Sino-Thai men, Khap proposed that two-man teams, composed of one from each group, should enter the country "via the usual commercial route, and work their way about in Thailand." The Sino-Thai officer would then "work his way out towards the border" to pick up radio equipment. Khap acknowledged that this method of infiltration would be "very tedious," but "it seems a much surer way of getting the boys in."<sup>87</sup>

Khap revealed his larger plan in instructions left for General Tso. He first indicated that four Chinese agents would need to undergo training at Detachment 101 to prepare for establishing the routes into Thailand. Also, six English-speaking Chinese would be needed to serve as radio operators along the route. This would be only the beginning, however, as eventually he envisioned implementing the old Sino-Thai army scheme, hopefully with support from Miles. Finally would come Khap's own moment in the sun, a personal effort to turn the Thai Northern army to the Allied side for a campaign against the Japanese.<sup>88</sup>

His plans laid and eager for a change of scene, Khap sought permission to travel to Washington to discuss future operations, a trip that the OSS was now more than willing to approve. Khap's continued desire to cooperate with Miles and the Chinese and his behavior in Kunming made his OSS superiors uneasy. They were worried by the fact that he consorted "with numerous ladies who were connections of Chinese agents" and "entertained extensively in public." Khap had recruited his own network of Sino-Thai agents from around the fringes of Tai Li's organization, operatives with such intriguing codenames as "Rogue" (Phaisan Trakunlee, the Sino-Thai who had accompanied Chamkat to China in 1943, now working for the British); "Honey" (Lucy Yuan); "Pearl" (Hsiao Eng); and "Baby" (Zte Yoo-lan). Through "Rogue" he attempted to get information from Thailand and intelligence on British activities directed toward Bangkok. The three women were expected to facilitate contacts with Chinese generals connected with both the Chungking government and Yunnan warlord Lung Yün. With this network of agents to tend and his own expensive life-style to maintain, Khap spent the CN 100,000 Smith had authorized him, drew out another 100,000 and borrowed 300,000 more. At first the loan was reported to have come from "a money changer," but a subsequent report described its source as a "highly placed Chinese." He also finagled a 1,000 US-dollar advance from Detachment

<sup>87</sup> Khap to Coughlin 14 July 1944, Folder 4, Boc 75, Entry 99 and Khap to Coughlin, August 1944, Folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>88</sup> "Instruction for General Tso," n.d., Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.



202, a debt that would catch up with him in Washington some months later.<sup>89</sup>

Once cleared to leave Kunming, Khap flew to Assam on 17 August for a three-day visit with members of the new Thai group at Detachment 101. There he got himself into more hot water by revealing the deaths of Karawek and Somphong, a breach of security that the OSS feared had dealt a serious blow to the morale and discipline of the Thai officers. A report that Khap somehow knew that two Force 136 parties were in police captivity in Bangkok roused British consternation.<sup>90</sup>

In Washington, Seni lay in wait, now determined to fire the Attaché. He had delivered a broadside to the State Department renewing his allegation that Khap, a Phibun man "sent to spy on him," was mistrusted by the Free Thai inside Thailand. He accused Khap of extravagance, political ambition, and a desire to undermine the Minister's authority. At a subsequent meeting, Seni went so far as to warn that Khap might reveal the names of resistance movement members to the Japanese. Even Seni's ally Mani Sanasen expressed dismay with his handling of the matter, noting that "the great body of students" were on Khap's side and that Seni stubbornly refused to talk the matter out with the Colonel.<sup>91</sup>

At OSS headquarters, Hoffman continued to consider Seni's charges "based on an old and long feud and of little or no consequence" and his proposed solution extreme. While urging the State Department officials to forge a compromise, Hoffman suggested that the OSS might hire Khap if Seni cut off his salary. In response, Assistant Secretary of State Berle summoned Seni for a meeting on 6 September. He emphasized that the Americans had investigated Seni's sole substantive charge – that Khap had misappropriated funds – and found no evidence to support it. Berle urged Seni to maintain Free Thai unity during the war.<sup>92</sup>

Three days later, the Chief of the State Department's new Southwest Pacific Division, Abbott Low Moffat – an out-of-office New York

<sup>89</sup> Scribner to Wilkinson, 15 July 1944, Folder 4, Box 75 and Detachment 202 Progress Report, Folder 2, Box 73, Entry 99; and Smith to Coughlin, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA. Also, Landon memorandum, 1 November 1944, 892.01/11-144, RG 59, USNA. Khap's 1,000-dollar debt, and his efforts to claim that payments made to his Sino-Thai agents were operational expenses, sparked a round of correspondence in which none of the responsible parties would support his claim. These are found in Folder 254, Box 22, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>90</sup> Irwin to Hoffman, 21 August 1944, Folder 5, Box 75, Entry 99 and "Report on Thai Operations," n.d., Folder 2289, Box 131, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, "Kunjara," n.d., HS1-66, PRO.

<sup>91</sup> State Department memoranda of meetings on 9 September and 13 September 1944 in File 892.01, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. and "Differences Between the Thai Minister and the Thai Military Attaché," 6 December 1944, Reel 17, SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA.

politician who before joining the State Department had interviewed for a position with the OSS – and his chief Thailand expert, Kenneth P. Landon, persuaded the reluctant Seni to withdraw his charges and agree to co-exist with Khap for the duration of the war. A few days later Moffatt and Hoffman met with Khap to urge his cooperation. Thus when the Thai Legation celebrated the King's birthday on 20 September, Khap joined the party.<sup>93</sup>

Khap now presented his modified plans for the infiltration of Thailand. He suggested that Thailand-born Chinese recruited in China be used to establish a safe route through Indochina to Thailand before members of the second Thai group were dispatched. He still envisioned himself as commander of the operation and looked forward to initiating negotiations with the Thai army at the border. He prudently made no mention of the Sino-Thai army or his desire to involve Miles, but noted that his role in contacting the Thai army would require "his working in close cooperation with the Chinese central government troops" so he needed "the privilege and freedom of movement and judgement" to carry through the initiative.<sup>94</sup>

Back in Chungking, Tai Li made clear his displeasure over Khap's sudden, unanticipated departure at a marathon meeting with Coughlin on 11 September 1944. Arguing that there was an excellent chance of turning the Thai forces in the Shan States against the Japanese, Tai requested an urgent cable to Donovan asking for Khap's immediate return. Coughlin agreed to inform Washington of Chinese desires, but his message expressed doubts about the viability of the scheme. He also acknowledged his puzzlement about Khap's relations with the Chinese.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. and Halliwell to Wilson, 9 June 1943, Reel 71, M1642, USNA regarding Moffatt's interview with OSS. Landon's support of Khap and his insistence that Seni stop petty harassment of the Colonel infuriated Seni, who responded by sending a letter to Assistant Secretary of State Berle describing Landon as an "enemy" of Thailand who should be "removed from office and have nothing more to do with Thailand." Landon says he was given Seni's missive and asked to draft a reply. On tape 45, side 2 of the "Landon Chronicles," an oral history in the Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College, Landon recalled: "So I drafted a beautiful letter, dispassionate, objective, disinterested, but indicating very clearly that the staffing of the Foreign Service was a matter for the officials responsible in the Department of State. That his remarks would be taken under consideration and given due weight . . . something like that. In other words 'nuts to you brother' in a very nice and diplomatic fashion." Thereafter Landon joined Hoffman on Seni's enemies list.

<sup>94</sup> "Over All Plan of Action of the Thai Group," n.d., Folder 3, Box 319, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>95</sup> Memorandum of conference, 11 September 1944, Folder 13, Box 71 and Coughlin to Donovan, 12 September 1944, Folder 5, Box 75, Entry 99; and Coughlin to Donovan, Folder 660, Box 44, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

Hoffman wasted little time in dismissing Tai Li's proposal, radioing on 14 September that "OSS policy is not in sympathy" with such plans. He advised Coughlin that he had asked Khap to lay out his ideas about future operations, "but warned him in advance that if any of them contemplated a command over Thai-born Chinese troops, his relations with OSS would have to be severed."<sup>96</sup>

After pondering the matter for a few days, Coughlin addressed a lengthy memorandum to Donovan, in which he acknowledged mixed feelings about Khap:

If he could be trusted I feel he could be of some help. I, however, doubt that he can be trusted, certainly not in China. I feel that he will make deals with Tai Li of which I will not be informed and that he will likewise make deals with Miles. I have no proof but I have the feeling that he had in the past. I am at a loss to figure out Tai Li's extreme interest in him, unless there is some agreement between them that I know nothing about.

Coughlin concluded that while he would leave the decision up to Donovan, he favored keeping Khap in Washington.<sup>97</sup>

A few days later Coughlin radioed from India, where he had discussed the situation with Wester and another OSS Thai specialist, John Holladay, a former missionary. Both indicated their distrust of Khap. Coughlin asked that Washington defer a decision until he could consult Nicol Smith.<sup>98</sup>

Donovan responded in a 6 October message, explaining that he was inclined to isolate Khap by sending him to Detachment 101 under orders that he not be permitted to enter China. This would accord with the State Department's desire to separate Khap from Seni, and it was thought Khap's presence might boost the morale of the Thai officers in the second Thai group. Donovan indicated, however, that if Khap became restless, he would be given only one option: return to Washington and severance of his relationship with the OSS.<sup>99</sup>

Smith, in India for a conference with Coughlin in mid-October, disagreed with this plan and suggested that Khap stay in Washington, at least for the time being. He acknowledged that the Thai officers considered Khap their leader and wanted him in the field rather than in Kunming, Chungking, or elsewhere, but he suggested that morale could be salvaged and "face" saved if Khap were kept in Washington on the pretext that he

<sup>96</sup> Hoffman to Coughlin/Heppner/Peers, 14 September 1944, Folder 2318, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>97</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 19 September 1944, Folder 660, Box 44, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>98</sup> Coughlin to Donovan/Hoffman, 24 September 1944, Roll 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>99</sup> Donovan to Coughlin, 2 October 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

was needed there. While this could be portrayed as a temporary assignment, it could be extended as long as the OSS considered it expedient.<sup>100</sup>

Coughlin agreed, emphasizing that he did not want Khap back because of his relationship with Tai Li. Further, he and others who had observed the Colonel doubted he would be content in the jungle with Detachment 101. If it proved necessary to get him out of Washington, Coughlin suggested that Khap be given a psychological warfare task in urban Calcutta where "he should find suitable entertainment." As a last resort he could be dispatched to Ssumao with an OSS handler, but Coughlin expressed doubt that the task could be carried out effectively, even in a remote location.<sup>101</sup>

For a time, Hoffman remained inclined to assign Khap to Detachment 101 because he shared the State Department's doubts about the Attaché's ability to co-exist peacefully with Seni in Washington. However, the diplomats finally decided to leave the matter to OSS. After reflecting on the reports of Khap's activities in Kunming, Hoffman swung around to the view that he should remain in the United States, at least for three or four months. In fact, Khap would remain in Washington for the duration of the war and beyond.<sup>102</sup>

The idea of subverting the Thai forces in the Shan States did not die immediately with Khap's departure, though, as one of Stilwell's subordinates briefly considered such an effort. The first evidence of interest came in a radio message received at Ssumao around the first of August from Colonel James O. Wade, head of a US Army training unit that had been attached to the Chinese 93rd Division since late spring. Wade asked that Khap or his second-in-command come to see him. He did not specify the reason, but later developments make clear that he wished to discuss the prospects of bribing the Thai forces over to the Allied side, an idea that had sparked the interest of Wade's superior, General Dorn. Dorn had queried Detachment 101 on the matter, too, so Colonel Peers sent Major John Raiss to discuss the matter with Wade at Ssumao. When the plane carrying Raiss attempted to land on the soggy airfield on 10 September, it nosed over and sustained damage. Wade failed to make the rendezvous, but the two men managed to communicate by radio.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>101</sup> Coughlin to Donovan/Hoffman, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190 and Coughlin to Hoffman, 2 November 1944, Folder 2075, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>102</sup> Hoffman to Coughlin, 20 October 1944 and De Sibour to Coughlin, 30 October 1944, Folder 2318, Box 133, Entry 154 and Hoffman to Scofield, 13 November 1944, Folder 5, Box 75, Entry 99, RG 226; Grew to Donovan, 21 October 1944, Reel 65, M1642; and Landon memorandum, 1 November 1944, 892.01/11-144, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>103</sup> Raiss, "Report on Visit to General Dorn," 10 October 1944, Folder 192, Box 23, Entry 165, RG 226, USNA.

Wade finally reported to Dorn that the Thai had little desire to fight the Allies, but in order to secure their active cooperation there would have to be a military thrust eastward from the Salween River south of their dispositions "to protect the Thais from the wrath of the Japs." But if that were done, he concluded, the Thai troops surely would surrender anyway. Based on Wade's assessment, Dorn judged the project useless.<sup>104</sup>

Nonetheless, in September 1944 Miles made a final stab at enlisting Stilwell's help in reviving the P'uerh project, touting the proposed Sino-Thai army as a vehicle for subverting the Thai Northern Army. Stilwell cut him off, declaring that the Thai army was "no good and it did not make any difference whether it was taken over or not." He also pointed out that approval from Mountbatten would be needed for such a venture. Still, Stilwell again shied away from unequivocally opposing Miles. He concluded, according to Miles' note-taker, that "he did not think any work done there would be any good, but he himself would not object to [SACO] doing the work there if we desired."<sup>105</sup> Nothing further came of this, however.

Khap's second-in-command, Chamrat, meanwhile had visited the border on his own mission of subversion. A police officer by occupation, he had learned the name of the police chief in Thai-occupied Kengtung (Chiang Tung) and hoped to contact him. He failed, but brought back news of a British Force 136 military group, code-named Hainton, based along the China-Burmese border in the Wa States. Although the original intention of the mission had been to organize guerrilla attacks on Japanese lines of communication, this did not prove feasible, so the men were gathering intelligence and training guerrilla volunteers. Force 136 had included two of its Free Thai lieutenants – Arun Sorathet (Aroon Sorathesn) and Khamhaeng Phalangkun (Kamhaeng Balankura, the ill-fated Chamkat's younger brother) – with the group in hopes they might make contacts across the Thai border. At the request of the Hainton party, Chamrat carried documents back to the British Army Aid Group on his return journey to Kunming. Otherwise, his trip accomplished nothing.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, at the beginning of October 1944 the OSS Thailand project appeared to have capsized in the political riptides of the China Theater.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. and Wade to Stilwell, 22 September 1944, Folder 192, Box 23, Entry 165, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>105</sup> Memorandum of meeting, 29 September 1944, Box 15, RG 38, USNA.

<sup>106</sup> Raiss, "Report on Visit to General Dorn," 10 October 1944, Folder 192, Box 23, Entry 165 and Ripley to "Lilly," Folder 2713, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Terence O'Brien, *The Moonlight War* (London, 1987), 51–52 and Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 110.

Of the eleven agents who had departed for the Thai border, two were dead, three were reported to have fallen into the hands of the Thai police, and the whereabouts of the others were unknown. Although the radio monitors at Ssumao dutifully maintained their schedules, they had heard nothing directly from any of the men who had crossed the Chinese border. In his monthly report at the beginning of October 1944, Coughlin glumly noted:

There has been no worthwhile report from this mission. At the present time Major Nicol Smith is waiting for transportation to come out and report on the situation there. Other than having a base station close to the border, I feel that very little has been accomplished.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>107</sup> CBI monthly report, dated 6 October 1944, Folder 13, Box 71, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

The OSS China group's failure to infiltrate Thailand in expeditious fashion came at a time when Anglo-American policy differences made direct contact with Regent Pridi Phanomyong a high priority for both the State Department and the OSS. Accordingly, the OSS leadership turned its attention to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Theater as an alternative base from which to dispatch agents by sea or air to Thailand. Force 136 hoped that the shift of American focus to a British command would facilitate coordination of Thailand operations, but the OSS continued to resist integration, and the rivalry between the clandestine warfare organizations only intensified.

London's failure to state forthrightly its postwar policy toward Thailand contributed greatly to the problems between the Allies. This silence left the OSS and State Department searching for clues about British intentions in unofficial proposals and casual remarks by British officials. For example, a speech – later published as an article – by former British Minister to Thailand Sir Josiah Crosby drew much American attention even though Crosby had been severely criticized for pursuing an excessively “pro-Thai” policy in prewar Bangkok and in retirement had little influence. Speaking at Chatham House on 1 July 1943, Crosby advocated a form of international tutelage in postwar Thailand, not unlike the old system of foreign advisors, to avert a recurrence of the prewar rise of the army. Although much of the speech argued against permitting China a prominent role in postwar Southeast Asia, American observers focused on Crosby's emphasis on “tutelage” for Thailand, contrasting this proposal with the State Department's advocacy of full independence and sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Josiah Crosby, “Observations on a Post-War Settlement in South-East Asia,” *International Affairs* 20 (July 1944): 357–368. Crosby elaborated on his ideas in his book *Siam: The Crossroads*, 150–64. For an OSS take on Crosby's proposals, see “British Imperial Policy: The Case of Thailand,” *Amerasia* 9 (26 January 1945): 23–24. The publication of this OSS Research and Analysis Branch Publication led to government investigation of *Amerasia* and John S. Service, who had passed the report to the journal.



After two proddings from the British commander in India, General Auchinlek, Chamkat's meeting with their ambassador in Chungking, and the establishment of the new Southeast Asia Command, the Foreign Office had at last begun re-assessing its position. It now seemed that a significant Thai resistance movement might emerge, and if important Thai officials were to escape from the country they should go to India, not China. The Foreign Office decided it might endorse postwar Thai independence without guaranteeing the restoration of prewar frontiers, thereby leaving scope for adjustments in the strategic Kra Isthmus area that had drawn the interest of Prime Minister Churchill.<sup>2</sup>

This led SOE-London to send Force 136 an optimistic telegram on 1 October 1943 predicting an early declaration supporting postwar Thai independence and the establishment of a Free Siamese committee in India, backed by unfrozen Thai funds. It also anticipated approval of a message to Pridi "holding out expectations of ultimate recognition of [a] provisional government."<sup>3</sup>

When notified of this by the Foreign Office, M. E. Denning, Mountbatten's political advisor, replied by emphasizing the need "to disabuse the Americans of the idea (which some of them appear to hold) that we desire to influence in our own interests the form which the future government of Siam should take" and to forge Anglo-American unity in opposing Chinese designs on Thailand. "Apart from the suspicions mentioned above, there does not seem to be any fundamental divergence of opinion between the United States and ourselves in regard to Siam," Denning wrote. "Chinese aims on the other hand appear less altruistic."<sup>4</sup>

Force 136, however, feared that putting too many controversial issues on the table would sidetrack the achievement of SOE's main objective – an early declaration to put Britain on an equal footing with its allies. Pridi's rescue and the establishment of a committee or provisional government were secondary matters to Force 136, important only to the extent that they affected the goal of placing British-sponsored parties inside Thailand. The Delhi interviews with Daeng Kunadilok and OSS efforts to prevent British contacts with Sanguan Tularak had convinced SOE officials that unless a statement were forthcoming soon "the Americans will steal the game." The Foreign Office ultimately agreed, so the documents submitted to the cabinet in December focused solely on the need for a declaration.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Free Siamese," 8 September 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Office to Denning, 29 October 1943, HS1-65, PRO.

<sup>4</sup> Denning to Foreign Office, 12 November 1943, HS1-72, PRO.

<sup>5</sup> New Delhi to London, 4 November 1943, HS1-71; G. N. Young (FO) to Wren (WO), 14 November 1943; and CALG/1475 (SOE) to G. P. Young (FO), 15 November 1943,

In a parallel effort to lobby for a coordinated Allied effort in Thailand and to unify the Free Thai movement overseas, the British sent an envoy to Washington in December 1943. With Prince Suphasawat sidelined by concerns about his royalist politics, Edmund Grut drew this important assignment. The Foreign Office optimistically advised him that "a declaration would be made, probably included in a ministerial speech" in a matter of days. However, "a distinct bias against Free Movements . . . in high places" and Churchill's trips to the Cairo and Tehran Conferences delayed matters. This left Grut uncomfortably bereft of tangible evidence to back up his protestations of British good intentions.<sup>6</sup>

When Sanguan and Daeng reached Washington in early December it was by no means apparent that they could see eye to eye with Seni Pramot. Pridi's envoys were miffed over what they perceived as Seni's lack of action in facilitating their departure from China, dissatisfaction that the Minister's arch-enemy, Colonel Khap, had missed no chance to encourage. On Seni's part, the caliber and social standing of Pridi's representatives did not impress him, and he and Mani Sanasen had heretofore opposed setting up even a Free Thai committee, much less the government-in-exile envisioned by Sanguan and Daeng. Nonetheless, after an uneasy start, the three managed to forge a united front. Seni dropped his opposition to a government-in-exile and supported the proposal to extract Pridi from Thailand. Grut attributed his change of position in part to his nervousness about the dubious legality of his position. In return, Sanguan and Daeng supported Seni's efforts to recall Khap.<sup>7</sup>

Next the Thai trio sought to convince the State Department to recognize a government-in-exile headed by Pridi. In a written brief they argued that Pridi might be "liquidated" if he remained in Bangkok, and that he could most effectively rally the anti-Japanese elements in Thailand from abroad. They indicated, however, that his participation would be contingent on a promise of recognition. They asked State Department permission for the government-in-exile to use Thai funds in the USA.

HS1-72; and New Delhi to London, 9 January 1944, HS1-73, PRO. SOE clearly stated its position in London to New Delhi, 29 December 1943, HS1-73, PRO: "Our general attitude is . . . that all that is necessary from SOE point of view is that HMG should appear as being at least as well disposed to the Free Siamese Movement as Americans . . . Our object . . . is merely to keep the Free Siamese sweet, so that we can continue to use the individuals associated with the Free Siamese Movement, both inside and outside Siam for our operational purposes. Our real interest is in getting parties infiltrated into Siam."

<sup>6</sup> "Report by Major Grut on Negotiations in Washington," HS1-73; A/D to B/B, 8 December 1943, HS1-72; and "Directive to Major E. Grut," 11 December 1943, HS1-54, PRO.

<sup>7</sup> Ballantine memoranda, 11 and 31 December 1943, *FRUS* 1943, 3: 1119, 1121-25; Seni memorandum, 23 December 1943, Reel 90, M1641, USNA; and Grut to London, 25 December 1943 and "Report by Major Grut on Negotiations in Washington," HS1-73, PRO.

Sanguan further sought Lend-Lease aid to finance a China-based Sino-Thai army, and spoke of returning to Chungking to pursue “para-military plans evolved in consultation with Chinese and Americans.” He proposed a push southward from China as the first element in a guerrilla warfare scheme. Sanguan hoped that good results in Washington would lay the groundwork for similar success in London.<sup>8</sup>

The State Department had developed a strong interest in cultivating Thai goodwill. Its planners already were considering the US role in post-war Southeast Asia and American military and diplomatic initiatives in Thailand. In September 1943, the Department had received a new study from the Council on Foreign Relations’ Peace Studies Project that iterated the importance of Southeast Asia’s raw materials and the need for “placing political and economic control in hands likely to be friendly to the United States.”<sup>9</sup> As the lone independent state in the region, Thailand offered the best venue for an active effort, not least because, as an October 1943 State Department policy paper noted, “American interests in Thailand have been largely cultural and philanthropic. The Thai people trust the United States more than any other country and regard it as having no designs on the integrity of Thailand.” Such goodwill might enable the Americans to promote “impartial settlement of disputes which the new Thai regime might have with United Nations governments [for example, Great Britain and China] . . . in accordance with fundamental principles long championed by the United States.” America could thereby uphold “its traditional prestige in a strategically situated independent country which is surrounded by territory under the sovereignty of European Powers.” The planners even pinpointed the ideal person to head such an American diplomatic effort, Francis B. Sayre, the former governor-general of the Philippines who was well respected in Bangkok for his service as a diplomatic advisor to the Thai government in the 1920s.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this keen interest in Thailand, the State Department, faced with constant pressure from Korean and other “free groups,” remained reluctant to change its policy of non-recognition of governments-in-exile and provisional governments. Far Eastern Division Chief Joseph

<sup>8</sup> Grut to London, 25 December 1943, HS1-73, PRO; and Seni aide-mémoire, 23 December 1943 and Devlin to Scribner, 19 January 1944, “Thailand” folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>9</sup> Shoup and Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust* (New York, 1977), 225.

<sup>10</sup> “Considerations in Regard to American Position with Respect to Thailand as Affecting Civil Administration Following Occupation,” 1 October 1943, Reel 18, SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA. Ironically, former British Minister Crosby had proposed a similar American role in postwar Thailand in a memorandum drafted for the Foreign Office. Not surprisingly, this idea garnered no support. See Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 347.

Ballantine concluded in a lengthy memorandum of 31 December 1943 that Pridi and a handful of Thai officials should not be considered a genuine government-in-exile. He suggested that they instead set up an advisory council representing a national liberation movement, a body that could mobilize support both externally and inside Thailand, but one the USA would not officially recognize.<sup>11</sup>

State Department officials at last permitted the Thai representatives to argue their case on 1 February 1944. Seni emphasized the importance of bringing out a sufficient number of Thai dignitaries to form a body that would be "regarded by the Thai people as the actual government of fact and law, capable of making treaties and agreements and giving orders to the Thai people." Seni pointed out that Pridi and his colleagues naturally would want some assurances that they would be able to "organize and function effectively regardless of what their international status might be." He endorsed Pridi's proposal that they operate from India.<sup>12</sup>

Three weeks later, on 22 February, Ballantine formally dashed Thai hopes by advising Seni, Sanguan, and Daeng that the USA could not make any specific promises about recognizing a provisional government. Ballantine consoled the Thai representatives by emphasizing the otherwise sympathetic American attitude, pointedly contrasting the US support for Thailand's postwar independence with Britain's silence on the issue.<sup>13</sup>

When Grut called at the Thai Legation to learn the results of the meeting, the glum delegates peppered him with complaints about London's failure to clarify its policy. Grut responded that the State Department and Foreign Office attitudes toward the Free Thai were largely parallel, adding that the long-awaited British declaration would "undoubtedly be made in due course." Although unconvinced by Grut's representations and thoroughly disappointed by the results of their negotiations with the Americans, Sanguan and Daeng decided to go on to London.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout his stay in Washington, Grut had labored to convince the OSS of the necessity of coordinated Anglo-American Thailand operations. When he first made his appeal to Joseph M. Scribner, OSS operations chief for the Far East, Hugh R. Wilson, and Commander Halliwell on 7 January 1944, the latter displayed a "hostile attitude," openly alleging British preoccupation with "establishing a future government in Siam favourable to British interests." Grut denied this and the familiar charge of British support for a royalist restoration, then countered

<sup>11</sup> Ballantine memorandum, 31 December 1943, *FRUS* 1943, III: 1121–25.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum of meeting, 1 February 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum by Grut, 23 Feb. 1944, HS1-54, PRO. <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

by emphasizing British concerns about Khap's reliability and Chinese intentions. At Scribner's request, Grut agreed to draft a memorandum outlining the British position, a document he submitted three days later.<sup>15</sup>

Grut's efforts merely reinforced OSS suspicions of British intentions. Halliwell, for example, erroneously surmised that the idea of establishing a Thai government-in-exile had originated from the British side.<sup>16</sup> Thus, when Halliwell, Scribner, and Wilson called on State Department officials on 26 January they warned that SIS/SOE activities related to Thailand "appeared to them to be more political than military in intent." Assistant Secretary of State Berle, well known for his mistrust of the British and his determination to distance the USA from the colonial powers, responded that "it was to American national interest to help establish strong nations on the western shores of the Pacific." Alluding to Britain's failure to pledge support for Thailand's postwar independence, he asserted that Americans "should not be hesitant or diffident in such a way as to let the British take the lead." In the end, the conferees agreed that the USA should extricate Pridi from Thailand, albeit "without political commitments."<sup>17</sup>

After consulting Donovan upon his return to Washington, Wilson formally advised the State Department on 25 February that the OSS would take up the task of contacting Pridi and offering him sanctuary in Washington. Asked how many persons might be brought out, Wilson suggested only the few that could squeeze into a small plane. State Department representatives pointed out that Seni and Sanguan believed that more than a dozen officials would be needed, so they suggested a submarine evacuation during the hot season, preferably in April when Thai officials could visit the seashore without attracting attention. Wilson replied that lining up a submarine would not be easy, a point soon confirmed by Detachment 404, the OSS unit attached to SEAC.<sup>18</sup>

On 26 February, OSS officials informed Seni, Sanguan, and Daeng that the State Department and the OSS had agreed to release funds for the expenses of the Thai representatives and would move ahead with

<sup>15</sup> "Report by Major Grut on Negotiations in Washington," HS1-73, PRO and Grut's memorandum, "SOE/OSS Operations in Siam," 10 January 1944, Folder 10, Box 317, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>16</sup> Halliwell to Scribner, 14 January 1944, "Thailand" folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>17</sup> Washington to Foreign Office, 19 January 1944, HS1-71, PRO and State Department memorandum of 26 January 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI. On Berle's view of Britain, see: Jordan A. Schwarz, *Liberal: Adolf A. Berle and the Vision of an American Era* (New York: 1987), especially 175–187.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson to Donovan, 26 February 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files and "FETO Daily Report," March 1944, Folder 4, Box 75, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

the plan to rescue Pridi. They emphasized, however, that this did not imply political recognition, and that the OSS viewed the operation as “unorthodox warfare,” not a diplomatic maneuver. The OSS officials asserted American determination to take the lead in carrying out the project.<sup>19</sup>

Donovan had given Grut the opportunity to make an appeal for coordinated Anglo-American Thailand operations the previous day at a high-level conference that included Scribner, Wilson, and Halliwell, as well as two recent arrivals from Asia, Colonels Carl Hoffman and Heppner. Donovan agreed to “mutual exchange of information about operational plans,” but made clear that OSS operations in China could not be subordinated to SOE's in SEAC, and that each side must have the right to independent intelligence gathering. He revealed that his concerns about the Chinese had led him to restrict the OSS Thai group to intelligence-gathering activities only and to order the remainder of the OSS-trained Thai officers to India. Donovan did not mention the decision to push for Pridi's rescue from Thailand.<sup>20</sup>

Grut told the Americans, as he had the Thai, that the British soon “would be releasing a statement which would indicate their ‘sympathy’” for Thailand. He did so in ignorance of how badly things had gone awry in London. Drawn out consultations between the Foreign Office, the Treasury, the Colonial Office, the military staff in London, SEAC, and Cabinet ministers steadily reduced the parameters of what a British statement might say.<sup>21</sup>

SOE's Colonel Leonard Guise had received a revised draft of the proposed declaration in early January. In a memorandum he pleaded for editorial change, warning the Foreign Office that “there is considerable danger that its severity will defeat its object.”<sup>22</sup> Even after his suggestions were taken into account, the proposed British statement bore little resemblance to that made the previous year by Chiang Kai-shek. It read:

The position of Thailand is in some respects unique in the Far East though not without parallel in Europe. A country with a long traditional friendship with us has, though admittedly under pressure from Japan, betrayed that friendship. Not content with collaborating with our enemy and despite her treaty of

<sup>19</sup> Hoffman memorandum of 26 February 1944 meeting, “Thailand” folder, Box 364, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>20</sup> “Minutes of Meeting at the OSS on Friday, February 25, 1944,” Folder 5, Box 314, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>21</sup> An excellent account of this internal British debate appears in Tarling, “Atonement Before Absolution,” II: 1452–60.

<sup>22</sup> “Memorandum of Conference With British Representatives,” 25 February 1944, Folder 5, Box 314, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA and Guise (SOE) to Ashley Clarke (FO), 12 January 1944, HS1-348, PRO.

non-aggression with us the quisling government of Luang Pibul [Phibun] took the initiative in declaring war upon us. For these acts Thailand is already paying the price and undoubtedly will pay a heavier price as the war reaches her territories. It is still possible for the people of Thailand to do something to save themselves from the worst possible consequences of their betrayal, and they will be judged by the efforts that they make to redeem themselves from the position in which the action of their present régime has placed them. Like other countries in like case "They must work their passage home". If they do so they can look to this country to support the emergence of a free and independent Thailand after the war is over.<sup>23</sup>

The arrival of this text at the State Department on 28 February only confirmed American suspicions of sinister British intentions. The USA reply warned that such a declaration "would not be helpful in giving encouragement to the Thai people to resist the Japanese, might very likely be exploited by the Japanese to the disadvantage of the United Nations and would augment distrust in the United States and in China and elsewhere of the motives of Great Britain." The memorandum suggested that it would be better to say nothing at all, but added that if the declaration were to be issued it should be accompanied by "an unequivocal commitment that Great Britain has no territorial ambitions in Thailand."<sup>24</sup>

Although reluctant to issue the statement in the face of such strong objections from Washington, British officials resented American interference. At the same time, circulation of the draft to the dominions had evoked questions and suggestions from Australia. The muddle led Foreign Secretary Eden, little interested in Thailand and never enthusiastic about the declaration in the first place, to complain: "This silly business becomes an increasing bore."<sup>25</sup>

London's failure to produce a statement on its Thailand policy provided a convenient pretext for the OSS to claim the right to lead the effort to rescue Pridi and bring him to Washington under OSS control. OSS officials asserted this to SOE liaison officer Lieutenant Colonel B. P. "Barty" Bouverie, while offering the SOE an opportunity to cooperate in the effort. The OSS added pressure by portraying Donovan's pledge to limit the activities of the Thai group in China to intelligence

<sup>23</sup> "Proposed Declaration by the British Government in Regard to Thailand," *FRUS* 1944, V: 1312.

<sup>24</sup> State Department memorandum, 20 March 1944, *FRUS* 1944, V: 1312–14 and Wilson to Donovan, 22 February 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>25</sup> B/BT to BB/100, 30 May 1944, HS1-73, PRO. The communications with Australia on the issue appear in Hudson and Stokes, eds., *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937–49* (Canberra, 1988), VIII: 122–23, 200–01, 360, 408. By May, the proposed declaration had been whittled down to a single paragraph and the Australians were seeking inclusion of a phrase that Thailand's security would be "guaranteed within a general system." Eden is quoted in Tarling, "Atonement Before Absolution," 1,464.



gathering as an interim measure only, thereby implying that if Force 136 failed to cooperate, the OSS might attempt an independent effort to reach Pridi through China.<sup>26</sup>

Force 136 urged outright rejection of this cheeky American stance but SOE-London, advised by Colonel Bouverie, who flew in from Washington, reacted more calmly. It seemed best to humor American pretensions as long as the effort to contact Pridi was based in India and coordinated through P Division, Mountbatten's new intelligence coordinating committee – a “sort of senior cabinet” as Colonel Heppner described it – headed by Captain G. A. Garnons-Williams of the Royal Navy. Under these circumstances, the British believed that Force 136 ultimately could assert formal leadership, not least because OSS had few American officers with Thailand experience and at the time had not a single Free Thai officer in India. In contrast, the Siam Country Section of Force 136, which had been up and running for a year, boasted a stable of “old Thailand hands” and a contingent of “White Elephants,” fully trained and ready to go. Further, the Americans had no suitable planes or submarines at their disposal in the theater, so Pridi's rescue would have to be effected by the Royal Air Force (RAF) or Royal Navy. As for the hedging of Donovan's pledge that China-based operations would be limited to intelligence gathering only, the British suspected that he was bluffing.<sup>27</sup>

The effort to evacuate Pridi from Thailand now came under the aegis of an OSS-SOE committee. The plan, Operation UDDINGSTON, called for two Catalina seaplanes to pick up the Regent and his family from near the Gulf of Thailand resort town of Hua Hin “as soon as contact is made.” The officers of Detachment 404 had little enthusiasm for working with the British, but were painfully aware of the hollow nature of the OSS claim of “leadership” in the matter. The diary entries of Carleton F. Scofield, a psychology Ph.D. from Yale who arrived in early February 1944, reflected

<sup>26</sup> “Report by Major Grut on Negotiations in Washington,” HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; New York to London, 4 March 1944; New Delhi to London, 11 March 1944; and London to Delhi, 14 March 1944, HS1-57; and “Application for UDDINGSTON,” 6 April 1944, HS1-55, PRO. Also, Heppner to Shepardson, 27 January 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. On 20 June 1945, Mackenzie advised London (B/B 100 to B/BT, HS1-73, PRO) that if the rescue of Pridi succeeded “the fact that we are the executive body will be clear to all concerned. This is the main point and will have the greatest influence on subsequent developments.” On P Division, see Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 181–87. The sidelined Prince Suphasawat met Sanguan in London and came away convinced that the OSS had stolen a march. In an 8 March 1944 letter to Colonel Taylor of SOE (Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 419–23), he lamented the failure to establish the overarching Free Thai committee he had advocated the previous fall. As the best means to salvage British influence, he suggested a special joint OSS-SOE committee to oversee Thailand operations in the hope that SOE “methods, ability and efficiency would emerge on top.”

the prevalent skepticism about the prospects for an OSS “big show” in SEAC. Scofield grumbled to his diary on 11 March 1944 that he would prefer “doing something real and active in northern Burma, however small it might be, than sitting in Ceylon planning grandiose things that never happen.” The British seemed to hold all the cards, but a joint project at least would keep an American foot in the door.<sup>28</sup>

Heppner sought to strengthen Detachment 404’s weak hand by requesting the urgent dispatch to Ceylon of Frederick Dolbeare, who had worked closely with Pridi during his tenure as advisor to the Thai Foreign Ministry from 1935–40. “The importance of forthcoming operations in Thailand makes it essential that we have an expert in our midst in an elevated position politically,” Heppner explained. Dolbeare’s doctor ruled that his patient’s health would not stand the long journey, however, so Washington advised Heppner that he would have to manage without him.<sup>29</sup>

Dolbeare did draw up a list of considerations related to the extrication of Pridi, material radioed to Heppner in mid-June by OSS headquarters. Dolbeare suggested that Pridi be supplied with funds, briefed on the type of intelligence the OSS desired, and given the chance to set up an intelligence network before his departure. Also, provision should be made to bring out one or two assistants and his family so they would not be held hostage. Pridi should be reassured of American sympathy, but could not be promised that a government-in-exile would be recognized. Once out, Dolbeare added, Pridi would need to be provided “picked servants and guards” and “sufficient amounts of money” to insure “a close relationship,” but not so much as to create the impression of bribery.<sup>30</sup>

In the meantime, the American and British clandestine agencies had contended for physical possession of Pridi’s envoys Sanguan and Daeng. At the beginning of March, the two had flown with Grut for talks in London. Extension of their stay fueled American suspicions of British intrigue, as did an intimation by the British that the two had expressed a preference for proceeding to India under SOE escort. The OSS responded by ordering its Cairo office to – in the British view – “kidnap” the men as they passed through on the way to India. Grut, however, believed that the two Thai were “thoroughly annoyed” by the absence of

<sup>28</sup> OSS/SEAC monthly report, May 1944, Folder 301, Box 47, Entry 99 and Ripley to Shepardson, 24 June 1944, Box 141, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Scofield Diary, 11 March 1944, Folder 5, Carleton F. Scofield Papers, University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC) Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 13 May 1944, Folder 4, Box 75, Entry 99 and “Lilly” to Ripley, Folder 2717, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>30</sup> “Lilly” and Shepardson to Heppner, 17 June 1944, Reel 10, M1642. USNA.

a British declaration and "disposed to abandon their cooperation with the SOE in favour of the Americans." He suspected that they had cooperated willingly with the OSS.<sup>31</sup>

The British and Americans were of one mind, however, in their determination that Sanguan not be permitted to return to China as he had originally intended. Force 136's Siam Country Section Chief Pointon noted that "everyone was agreed that these Siamese were bound to be very troublesome" and needed to be isolated. They were escorted to what OSS Lieutenant Guy Martin described as "a concentration camp" in Meerut, site of Force 136 headquarters. Martin, one of the two Americans on the three-man Anglo-American committee assigned to plan the Pridi rescue operation, recalled that this left Daeng, who had been "looking forward to hitting the hot spots of Delhi . . . boiling mad."<sup>32</sup>

The two were soon joined by Mani Sanasen, who had been sent out in the company of Grut to serve as Seni's liaison with Force 136. This arrangement, made during Grut's visit to Washington, was aimed at boosting the morale of the "White Elephants," who felt cut off from Seni, the recognized leader of the Free Thai overseas.<sup>33</sup> The SOE, however, had in the meantime soured on Mani and, like the Americans and Chinese, now considered Sanguan the key figure among the Free Thai outside the country. London advised Force 136:

Contrary to impression you may have held before we do not consider Sanasen very reliable or likely to be of much use. In so far as any rivalry between him and Sanguan develop we feel sure Sanguan is the man to back. In particular you must not be influenced by idea that Sanasen is [the] British candidate and Sanguan under American influence.<sup>34</sup>

By their own later admission the British handled Mani badly, using his unauthorized contact with two Force 136 Thai officers in Meerut as a pretext to send him along with his two Thai colleagues to Ceylon on 6 April 1944. The transfer of Sanguan and Daeng to a site near the new SEAC headquarters made sense because they were expected to offer advice regarding Thai operations, but Mani had no such expertise

<sup>31</sup> "FE-3," Folder 1, Box 73, Entry 99 and Scribner to Cairo, 18 March 1944, Folder 1, Box 469, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA and "Minutes of Meeting of Siam Country Section," 19 March 1944, HS1-57 and London to New Delhi, 24 March, HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>32</sup> New Delhi to London, 11 March 1944 and "Minutes of Meeting of Siam Country Section," 19 March 1944, HS1-57; New Delhi to London, 15 March 1944, HS1-73; and New Delhi to London, 22 March 1944, HS1-66, PRO, Kew. "FE-3," Folder 1, Box 73, Entry 99 and Guy Martin interview, 13 April 1945, Folder 694, Box 45, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>33</sup> Grut, "Report on the Free Siamese in India, April-July 1944," HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>34</sup> London to New Delhi, 24 March 1944, HS1-73, PRO.

to offer, having been away from Thailand for years. Both Force 136 and Detachment 404 backed the decision to exile Mani, justifying it on security grounds and “the necessity for keeping all three together so that there may be no impression at home and in America of divided forces at work – with the inevitable repercussions.” The three Thai were quartered on a 1,500-acre tea plantation at Clodagh (Camp K), 22 miles east of Kandy. Despite Clodagh’s lush tropical setting – an OSS officer described it as “the most completely ideal spot imaginable” – it was very isolated and the three Thai were unhappy, particularly Mani.<sup>35</sup>

Both the Americans and British later laid a considerable portion of the blame for their discontent on the OSS officer assigned as the group’s handler, Major Herman Scholtz. A sixty-year-old Louisville, Kentucky native with civil engineering degrees from the University of Kentucky and Cornell, Scholtz had served as an army captain in World War I before going to Thailand to work on a railroad project. He subsequently established the International Engineering Company in Bangkok, prospering in large part by marketing products from various American manufacturers. Initially crushed by the Japanese seizure of his 1.5 million-dollar business, Scholtz rallied and became determined to recoup his loss. He had arrived in India in December 1943 expecting to run intelligence operations into Thailand from a base in Kunming, China, but found to his disappointment that plans had been changed in the wake of Donovan’s confrontation with Tai Li. The Thai suspected Scholtz’s motives, believing him preoccupied with his quest to reclaim his assets in Bangkok and gain postwar economic advantage for American trade. The British knew that Scholtz missed no opportunity to cast them in a bad light. All sides were pleased when Heppner, who also heartily disliked Scholtz, replaced him with a more agreeable figure, former missionary John Holladay.<sup>36</sup>

Heppner, who thought Scholtz too old and impractical for a field assignment, found an excuse to send him back to Washington permanently in late summer 1944, but not before Mani had used British channels to inform Seni of Scholtz’s misdeeds. Upon reading the telegram,

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; Grut, “Report on the Free Siamese in India, April-July 1944,” HS1-73, and P.O. to SCS, 5 April 1944, HS1-55, PRO, Kew. Berno to Scribner, 7 April 1944 and Heppner to Bigelow, 30 April 1945, Folder 4, Box 75, Entry 99; and Heppner to Hutcheson, 12 May 1944, Folder 2216, Box 126, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Scofield diary, 21 May 1944, Carleton F. Scofield Papers, UMKC Archives and memorandum of 2 August 1944, Sarah Ann Davies File, Box 138, Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>36</sup> Personal data on Scholtz was found in a 24 February 1966 *Bangkok Post* supplement on International Engineering, a copy of which is in Box 12, Raymond A. Wheeler Papers, Hoover Institution, and J. C. Warner, “Confidential Information Regarding People Who Resided in Thailand,” Folder 35, Box 122, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA. Grut, “Report on the Free Siamese in India, April-July 1946,” HS1-73, PRO.

Seni treated the SOE messenger to an anti-OSS tirade, describing it as “an organization which is largely composed of very second rate men” promoting a program of “economic imperialism.” Seni particularly criticized Hoffman – who stood high on his enemies’ list because of his defense of Khap – suggesting that he was working to subvert cooperative relations and “freeze out all British participation in Thailand operations.”<sup>37</sup>

The British finally rescued Mani from his exile, sending him to visit the “White Elephants,” then on to Washington for consultations with Seni. Although Mani had foresworn any political interest in Thailand, word reached Grut that he had discussed the make-up of a provisional government with the Thai officers and had criticized Sanguan and Daeng. Grut also judged from his contacts with Mani and the Thai officers that the “majority” had “political ambitions in postwar Siam” and some were uncomfortable that Pridi would likely assume a leading role. “I am convinced,” Grut wrote, “that there is an almost general determination that, once inside Siam, it is for the Siamese officers themselves to decide with whom to cooperate, and for *them* to build up a resistance movement with whatever elements *they* consider suitable and desirable.”<sup>38</sup>

For his part, Daeng, who was of Sinhalese ethnicity and had relatives in Ceylon, had developed a strong ambition to return to Thailand as the chief representative of Allied intelligence. In mid-May he proposed that he could operate in Thailand by growing a beard and posing as a Sinhalese from Singapore who was searching for a Thai-born wife abducted to Bangkok by the Japanese. The missing “wife” would in fact be his niece, a resident of Ceylon with whom he could have his picture taken. Using this cover, Daeng hoped to contact friends in government positions who could shelter Allied agents. He further suggested the possibility of kidnapping two of Premier Phibun’s children and placing them in Allied hands as a means of insuring that Phibun would not move against the underground.<sup>39</sup> Daeng’s complex scheme apparently made little impression on his OSS handlers.

While the various personality conflicts and allied policy differences were problematic, the effort to rescue Pridi got nowhere during the first half of 1944 primarily because neither the British nor the Americans had any success in establishing communications with the Regent. This failure did not result from lack of effort, particularly on the British side.

<sup>37</sup> G-140 (Ivan Bryce) to A.D., 23 May 1944, HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>38</sup> Grut, “Report on the Free Siamese in India, April–July 1944,” HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>39</sup> “Plan of Operation (inside the country),” 14 May 1944, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

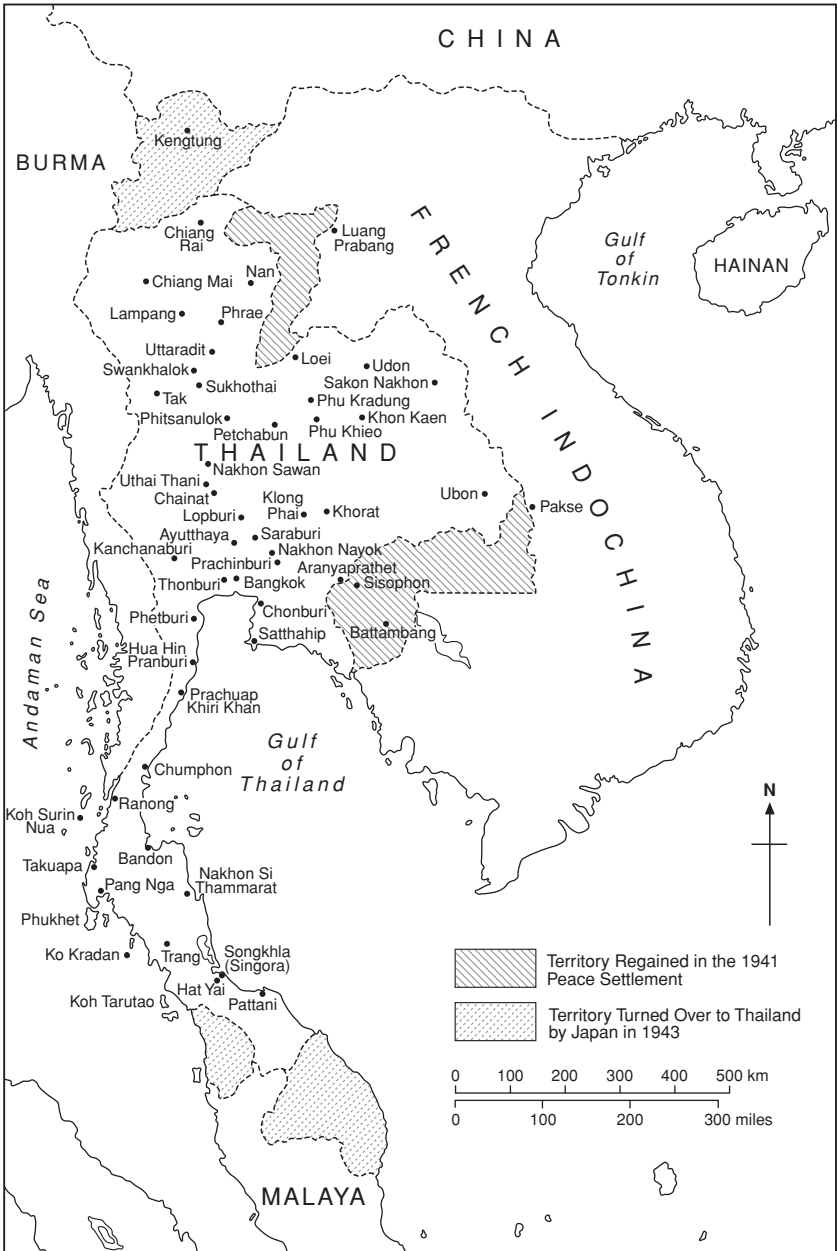
Force 136 had followed up its contacts with Chamkat in August 1943 by providing copies of a microfilm message for dispatch to Pridi from China the following month. The British proposed sending a submarine with Thai agents to a rendezvous point on the Andaman Sea coast of Thailand in December. Robin Lo, the Sino-Thai who had shadowed Chamkat for Tai Li's organization, later told the British that Pridi's envoy had given one microfilm to Phaisan, his companion on the journey to China, apparently with the understanding that he would deliver it to Pridi via Tia Hang, the Sino-Thai who had been instructed to await messages along the China-Indochina border. Whether because of timidity – as Lo suggested – or as a consequence of machinations by the Chinese, Phaisan failed to carry out this mission. The second copy of the microfilm went to Sanguan's brother Krachang, who was accompanied into Thailand by three Chinese agents in mid-1944. Krachang destroyed the film before leaving China, but he did convey the gist of its contents to Pridi, albeit far too late for it to matter.<sup>40</sup>

The British had asked Pridi to confirm reception of the message through code words broadcast over Bangkok Radio, but monitoring proved difficult on the specified days, leaving Force 136 in doubt about whether or not the signal had been broadcast. The British dispatched three radio-equipped Force 136 Thai officers by submarine to the proposed landing site at Takuapa in December 1943 (Operation PRICHARD). The three "White Elephants" brought radios and a new message for Pridi that recognized his leadership of the Free Thai movement and suggested that a British public declaration on Thailand's post-war independence would be forthcoming soon. It also said that London was considering the unfreezing of Thai funds and possible recognition of a government-in-exile. The message outlined plans to establish the "White Elephants" in Thailand to organize guerrilla warfare, with the first to be parachuted in March 1944. It further requested assistance in selecting a drop zone and clarification about whom Pridi wished to designate as his official representative on the outside.<sup>41</sup>

The submarine *Tactician* arrived off the Thai coast on 9 December, three days behind schedule, and remained in the area until the night of the 16th. Because Pridi knew nothing of the planned contact, no signals

<sup>40</sup> Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 104. The 1944 Sino-Thai informant was Lu Pin (otherwise known as Robin Lo and Leung Ping-chai) who worked as an interpreter/agent with Chinese intelligence and over whom the British had leverage. See a series of messages from Chungking in HS1-48, PRO, Kew, especially B/B505 to SCS 10 and 21 August 1944. Lo also claimed that after Chamkat's death Sanguan had sold the diamond ring the British had provided for the purpose of bribing a Chinese general. Krachang detailed his activities in the memorandum "Seri Thai say tamniap Ta Chang."

<sup>41</sup> "Operation PRICHARD, Order No. 1," 11 November 1943, HS1-53, PRO.



3. Underground-related locations in Thailand



were received, and a four-hour reconnaissance ashore on the night of the 12th produced no results. The vessel's unhappy captain finally scrubbed the mission.<sup>42</sup>

Although not involved in the effort to contact Pridi, the Inter-Service Liaison Department (ISLD), the Asian branch of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) also launched two operations into Thailand during this period. The first involved the landing of two Thai from England – Chungkeng Rinthakun (Rinthakul) and Sawat Sisuk (Svasti Srisukh) – from a submarine in southern Thailand in November 1943. They landed successfully and carried out their intelligence-gathering assignment, but the submarine scheduled to pick them up was delayed, leaving them stranded. They stayed in Thailand and would eventually re-establish contact with the British a year later through the Thai underground. They subsequently shifted their employment from ISLD to Force 136.<sup>43</sup>

A second ISLD venture (Operation SUN) involved five Sino-Thai agents who were airdropped near Nakhon Pathom on 6 March. They were spotted, however, and the police captured two and killed two others. The other agent eluded capture. The prisoners were transferred to Bangkok where the Thai police, headed by General Adun Adundetcharat, kept them out of Japanese hands. Adun permitted the Japanese to question them, but only under Thai supervision, and after they had been coached on how to respond.<sup>44</sup>

In the wake of the failure of PRICHARD and difficulties in securing submarine transportation from a reluctant Royal Navy, Force 136 placed its bets on the blind air drop of three Thai agents in a remote area of Thailand (Operation APPRECIATION). The party would establish

<sup>42</sup> "Escorting Officer Captain Read's Report on PRICHARD," 21 December 1943, HS1-56; and copy of the message to Pridi in HS1-53, PRO.

<sup>43</sup> Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, 279, note 80.

<sup>44</sup> G. L. Coleman. "Brief History of Clandestine Air Operations in the South East Asia Theater of War, 1 June 1942 to 31 August 1944," AIR 2311950-57713, PRO. Richard J. Aldrich kindly provided a copy of this document. Also, Murashima Eiji, "The Thai-Japanese Alliance and the Chinese of Thailand," in Paul H. Kratoska, ed., *Southeast Asian Minorities in the Wartime Japanese Empire* (New York, 2002), 213. OSS-trained Free Thai officer Phon met a group of four British-connected Chinese agents living under Thai police protection in Bangkok during the latter part of 1944, some of whom came from Kunming and some from India by parachute. He mentioned that two other British Sino-Thai agents connected with them had been shot by police and a third remained "at large," so two of the men apparently were the survivors of this "Red Elephant" mission. The other two were likely the ones sent in overland from China in a mission that Puai says arrived in June 1944. Phon noted that the four Chinese "send out no intelligence and engage in no activities." Interview with Phon, 19 January 1945, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 225, USNA. Free Thai Officer Chamrat also refers to a "first group" of two British-trained Sino-Thais dispatched from Yunnan in "Interview of Chamrat," Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

radio contact and prepare to receive a second and larger party (Operation RAZOR). Force 136 planned to attach a British officer to the RAZOR mission, which would be responsible for contacting Pridi. The men of the APPRECIATION mission were instructed to attempt such contact only if RAZOR failed to arrive on schedule. If APPRECIATION did not establish radio contact, another three-man team (Operation APPRECIATION II) would go in ahead of the RAZOR mission.<sup>45</sup>

The first effort to launch APPRECIATION on the night of 6 March 1944 failed because clouds and mists obscured the drop zone, but on the morning of 14 March, three Force 136 "White Elephants" – Puai Ungphakon (Puey Ungphakorn), Prathan Premkamon (Pratan Pramekamol), and Prem Buri – parachuted from an RAF B-24 into Chainat province, northwest of Bangkok. They expected to land in a remote valley where Force 136 Siam Country Section Chief Pointon had once supervised teak logging for the Bombay-Burmah Company, but instead they came down close to a village. Within three days they were captured by local authorities and taken to Bangkok. Attempts to radio their base had failed.<sup>46</sup>

After the first group disappeared without a trace, the APPRECIATION II party parachuted into Nakhon Sawan province on 4 April 1944. The three officers – Samran Wannaphruk (Vardnabriksha), Rachit Buri, and Thana Posayanon (Poshyananda) – carried a coded message to Pridi from Sanguan and Daeng expressing optimism about allied attitudes toward the Free Thai movement. This group landed off target, too, and soon fell into the hands of Thai police. Their radio signals were briefly heard by an SOE party on Elphinstone Island, but not by the British monitors in Kunming and Colombo. A few days later, the *Bangkok Chronicle* published a call from General Sinat Yotharak to "annihilate the parachutists." Stories about the capture of the three parties of British agents appeared in the Thai press shortly thereafter.<sup>47</sup>

Although unconnected with the effort to contact Pridi, another SOE aerial venture into Thailand (Operation BILLOW), launched on 2 May, also failed. A party of four Sino-Thai "Red Elephant" agents, charged

<sup>45</sup> Copies of orders for the APPRECIATION I Party and other relevant documents are contained in HS1-56, PRO, Kew. The pros and cons of inserting a British officer with RAZOR were laid out in Pointon to P.O., 16 March 1944, HS1-53, PRO, Kew. In the end, because both APPRECIATION missions failed, the RAZOR mission did not proceed as planned.

<sup>46</sup> Puey Ungphakorn (Puai Ungphakon), "Temporary Soldier," in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 133–39; Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 106–07; and Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 45–47.

<sup>47</sup> "Operation APPRECIATION," 9 September 1944, PRO; Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 47; and *Bangkok Chronicle*, 11 and 18 April 1944. A copy of the message for Pridi from Sanguan and Daeng is found in HS1-59, PRO.

with establishing a base to lay groundwork for the introduction of additional parties and preparing to sabotage Japanese lines of communication, landed by Catalina seaplane along the southern Thailand coast. Surrounded by Thai police the next day, they engaged in a gun battle that left two of the men dead and the other two in custody.<sup>48</sup>

Force 136 learned of the failures of its Sino-Thai parties almost immediately, but the fate of the two APPRECIATION missions remained a mystery for some time. On the chance that damaged or defective equipment had caused their radio silence, on 6 May a British B-24 dropped nearly five tons of supplies in the area where the parties were supposed to be operating. On 21 May, though, the disturbing news arrived via China that both parties were in custody. At first it remained unclear whether the men were held by the Japanese or the Thai police, but even the latter prospect was unsettling. Although Sanguan believed Police Chief Adun to be anti-Japanese, there was no hard evidence to support his theory and Adun's prewar reputation inspired no confidence.<sup>49</sup>

An army officer by training, Adun was a classmate and longtime friend of Premier Phibun. As British Minister Crosby noted in 1941, Adun's main function as police chief had been "unearthing conspiracies" against the government, a role similar to that played by Tai Li in China. Describing Adun as "a past master at his job" and his intelligence organization "as good as anything of its kind on the continent of Asia east of India." Crosby added that "its methods are based on the Gestapo and it is supported in the last resort by Courts of Justice staffed by judges who, in the present temper of the nation, have shown themselves capable of inflicting very heavy punishments for so-called offences against the State which at the worst are of no more than a minor nature." Having their agents in such hands seemed bad enough, but further intelligence revealed that the Japanese also had interrogated the men.<sup>50</sup>

Sanguan's assessment of Adun's attitude proved correct, however, as the British-trained officers were being well protected. Adun's men instructed them to tell the Japanese that they had stayed in England to continue their studies, but were forced to join the British labor service

<sup>48</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 47–49.

<sup>49</sup> "Operation Appreciation," 9 September 1944, HS1-56, PRO. Sarah Ann Davies, who had been recently repatriated from Bangkok told Grut that Adun "and almost the whole police force are actively cooperating with the Free Siamese Movement." Grut to London, 14 January 1944, HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>50</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 47–49; Coleman, "Brief History of Clandestine Air Operations . . ." AIR 311958–57713, PRO and "Note by Sir J. Crosbie (sic) on the covert activities of the Far Eastern Mission of the Ministry of Economic Warfare," 12 November 1941, HS1 227–22652, PRO. Paul Kratoska kindly provided a copy of the latter document.

when they ran out of money. They then had agreed to become intelligence agents so they could return home. The Japanese were permitted to question them only in the presence of Thai police officers, so the men were not physically abused.

Further, an "old school" link worked to the advantage of the British Free Thai. APPRECIATION I team leader Puai and the police officer put in charge of the men, Captain Phayom Chantarak (Chantaraksa), were fellow graduates of Thammasat University. At the beginning of June, Phayom would facilitate contact between Puai and Pridi, the university's founder, through Professor Wichit Lulithanon, a key ally of the Regent. This enabled Puai to deliver the message he had carried into the country.<sup>51</sup>

The Japanese did not insist that the men be handed over, but were not fooled by Adun's tricks. The Thailand Garrison Army's chief of staff reported at the end of May 1944 that Adun had conducted only a superficial investigation of the British-trained officers. The Japanese suspected that some Thai officials, despite denials and perhaps with Phibun's approval, were using the agents to "converse with the enemy."<sup>52</sup>

In fact, Phibun did not attempt such communication. Adun later claimed that the Premier initially believed that the British agents might have been sent to assassinate him or to engender mistrust between the Thai and the Japanese. When he discovered that they were attempting to contact Pridi, his political rival, his suspicions were reinforced. Adun attempted to allay his concerns by having the men address flattering letters to the Premier, but Phibun had little reason to trust them. He also knew the British were hostile toward him and that he could regain credibility with them only by actively resisting the Japanese. It was for the latter purpose that he had initiated his effort to collaborate with the Chinese and had begun building a new capital in remote northern town of Petchabun to make this a more feasible possibility.<sup>53</sup>

For his part, Adun, while resentful of the Japanese and protective of the agents, remained reluctant to take the initiative to contact the British so long as Phibun remained in power. Phibun previously had chosen him to

<sup>51</sup> "Operations War Diary, PRICHARD/APPRECIATION," HS1-68, PRO; Suphot Dantrakun, ed., *Phon tamruat ek Adun Adundetcharat phut thung khothetching prawat-tisat kieokap Nai Pridi Phanomyong lae Chomphon P. Phibun Songkhram* (Bangkok, 1979) (hereafter, "Adun's Testimony"), 206-07; and Puey, "Temporary Solider," 139-40.

<sup>52</sup> Suphot, "Adun's Testimony," 206-07 and Bōeichō Bōei Kenshūjo Senshishitsu, *Daihon'ei rikugunbu* (Tokyo, 1974), 8: 411 and MAGIC diplomatic summary, SRS 1349, 30 June 1944, "The MAGIC Diplomatic Summaries and Transcripts of the Top Secret Diplomatic Communications of Japan, 1938-1945" (Washington, DC, 1980).

<sup>53</sup> Suphot, ed., "Adun's Testimony," 43-44, 203-08 and Wester to Coughlin, 20 February 1945, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. On Phibun's scheme to ally with the Nationalist Chinese, see: Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 169-72.

head a planned high-level mission to China. Although Adun, like Pridi, now expected that Japan would lose the war and therefore believed that Thailand's interests would best be served by a change in leadership, the two had been associated with rival political factions and did not trust each other. Accordingly, Adun held back a message to Pridi carried by the second APPRECIATION party, and cooperation between the Police Chief and the Regent evolved only gradually.<sup>54</sup>

The British agents quartered in the Central Investigations Division (CID) compound near the Ratdamri intersection soon were joined by a growing contingent of OSS-trained Free Thai officers from China. Karun and Ian apparently had entered Thailand at about the same time as the ill-fated Karawek and Somphong. They had reached Luang Prabang before the end of May, but were forced to hide for twenty days in the upper story of a Chinese teacher's house until a boat and three boatmen could be hired. In June, the party journeyed downriver for four days, landing at Paklay, on the Thai side of the river.

After a nervous night at the home of a Chinese merchant, they set out westward, walking separately, about an hour apart. Police questioned Ian, but did not arrest him. The two came together again at a village said to be seven days' walk from Nan. They decided to forge ahead by traveling early and late, hiding in the woods at midday. Although they were told that the next village did not have a police station, in fact it did. When they arrived there, on 15 June, the police searched them and found radio crystals and a codebook, revealing them as "fifth columnists."<sup>55</sup>

Returned to Paklay, the two were interrogated by police officers. Although Karun refused to answer questions, saying that he would talk only to Adun, the local police chief recognized him as the son of Luang Kat Songkhram, the prominent air force officer and politician who had escaped to China the previous year. The two were well treated and were escorted by boat to Nong Khai, by bus to Udon, then by train to Bangkok, arriving on 25 June.<sup>56</sup>

Karun revealed his identity and his desire to establish contact with the Free Thai underground to a police lieutenant colonel. The officer told him that he had chosen a dangerous method and instructed him to keep his mission secret. He was told that he and Ian would be held under protective custody at the CID compound. They were kept in cells

<sup>54</sup> Suphot, ed., "Adun's Testimony," 43–44, 203–08; Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 169–72; and Murashima, "The Thai-Japanese Alliance and the Chinese of Thailand," 209.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154 (notes) and Folder 520, Box 52, Entry 110, (typed summary) RG 226, USNA. The notes are more informative than the summary.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

at night. Spared the ordeal of interrogation by Kempeitai officer because the Japanese were unaware of their presence, they soon realized that their fellow detainees included the six British "White Elephants," two British-trained Chinese from the failed BILLOW mission, and two of Tai Li's men.<sup>57</sup>

Like the British officers, the American Free Thai came under the control of Captain Phayom. In response to his request for a written report, Karun produced a twelve-page explanation of the purposes of the Free Thai movement in the United States and his mission, concluding with an appeal to Adun for police assistance. He received no reply. Karun talked with Puai, leader of the "White Elephant" group, but dealt with him warily because of his distrust of the British.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, the four Free Thai officers – Pao, Phisut, Bunyen, and Sawat – who had left Yunnan in late May, escorted by Father Tung and his assistant, had been tramping through the disease- and insect-infested hills of the Shan and Lao States during the early weeks of the 1944 monsoon season. Concerned that their radio gear would be discovered by Indochinese authorities, the men took a circuitous route, avoiding lowland settlements. Illness and injury delayed the party's progress. Sawat nearly died from severe dysentery, recovering just before the group's supply of anti-diarrhea medicine ran out. Phisut sustained injuries when a pack horse slid down a hillside. Pao, the leader of the group, kept the men fed by producing a squash and chicken soup meal after meal. All efforts to make radio contact with Ssumao from the field failed.<sup>59</sup>

The men's survival depended on the maintenance of friendly relations with hill tribe peoples, with whom they bartered needles and thread for food. A crisis arose in one Meo village when Pao angered a tribesman by inadvertently falling asleep in front of the man's house facing in an inauspicious direction. Accused of offending the spirit of the property, Pao was threatened by a large group of villagers. Father Tung managed to negotiate a settlement under which Pao appeased the spirit with food offerings.<sup>60</sup>

After a journey of more than two months' duration, the party finally reached the Mekong River, a considerable distance upriver from where Karun and Ian had entered Thailand. They parted company with Father Tung and his assistant and rafted across the river, which, since the territorial cession at the end of the 1941 Thai war with Indochina served as the international border. They buried three of their radio sets and all

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.      <sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Pao account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 83–86; Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 187–88; and Phisut Suthat, "Phi Pao chuai chewit puan tahan sam nai" in *Kroprob 90 pi Acharn Pao Khamurai* (Bangkok, 2003), 131.

<sup>60</sup> Pao account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 86–87.

non-essential equipment at the edge of the forest near the river. Hiding their radio crystals in the seams of their clothes, they disassembled the remaining radio set and divided up the parts so they could carry them more easily as they turned their pack animals into mounts. Convinced that nothing could be accomplished by sneaking around the countryside, Pao had decided to seek aid from a Thai official at the first good opportunity. In the meantime, they would pretend to be policemen returning from a secret mission in Laos and Burma. They had produced a fake order to bolster this cover story.<sup>61</sup>

Near midday on 30 July, they reached a Meo village and stopped at the most prosperous-looking dwelling where they were received hospitably. They learned that they could reach the Han Songkhram district office – located in the Lao town presently known as Hongsa – in half a day, and that the official in charge was named Chan. The latter information greatly boosted Pao's hopes because he knew that a former high school classmate, Chan Suwannathap, had become a district officer. The four decided to stay overnight in the village so they could be certain of reaching the district office in daylight.<sup>62</sup>

Later in the afternoon two Thai men arrived at the village. Although they were not in uniform, their host introduced them as police officers who were delivering documents to the district chief. Before proceeding on their way the two confirmed that the district officer was indeed Pao's classmate, news that convinced the four Free Thai that the worst part of their mission was over and allowed them to enjoy a restful night's sleep. They would have slept less well, however, had they known that their colleagues Karawek and Somphong had died at the hands of police from the same district to the east from which the two couriers had come.<sup>63</sup>

On the morning of 31 July, the four set out for the district office, but *en route* met a squad of eight or nine armed police officers. Unaware that these policemen had been sent to take them into protective custody after the two couriers reported their suspicious presence in the Meo village, the Free Thai men approached them warily. The sergeant in charge ultimately revealed his mission but said he would have to search them before they proceeded. Bunyen replied that there was no need because they were all going to the same place and that the police, who had superior numbers, had no reason to fear them. Sawat produced the fake orders and suggested that they respect each other as fellow officials. The sergeant relented and agreed to escort them.<sup>64</sup>

When they arrived at the district officer's home at about noon, Pao felt as if "in heaven" to see his classmate come out to meet them. From Chan

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 87 and Phisut, "Phi Pao chuai chewit puan thahan sam nai," 132.

<sup>62</sup> Phisut, "Phi Pao chuai chewit puan thahan sam nai," 133. <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 133–36.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 136–39.



they learned the bad news about the deaths of Karawek and Somphong. Chan and the local police chief had both received special orders to guard against any repetition of that tragic incident.<sup>65</sup>

After resting for two days, the four left under police escort on a five-day trek to Nan. From there, a charcoal-powered bus carried them to Denchai rail station, by way of Phrae. On the train to Bangkok, a Japanese soldier boarded and sat down next to the startled Pao. He relaxed when he realized that the soldier had no reason to suspect him.<sup>66</sup>

At CID headquarters in Bangkok, the police treated the Free Thai officers well. They were told to pretend to be police officers and received an allowance of three baht per day. They were quartered together in a large second floor office and encouraged to stay out of view there, although they were permitted to go have their meals at an eating facility for policemen nearby. Some time later, Karun and Ian were allowed to move into the office as well.<sup>67</sup>

Pao asked Captain Phayom for an audience with Adun. Nothing came of this, but each man was instructed to write a report for the police chief. In his letter, Pao emphasized that he wished to discuss anti-Japanese underground activities with Adun, but this brought no results. Although police had retrieved the radios the men had hidden, they did not allow them access to the sets. Depressed by their inability to carry out their mission and debilitated by the illnesses contracted on their long journey, the four were deeply frustrated. "We were haunted by all kinds of thoughts and were on the verge of nervous breakdown," Pao later recalled.<sup>68</sup>

Karun, equally frustrated, had meanwhile befriended a fellow prisoner, Sawat Trachu, who had been arrested on a train in July in possession of a radio transmitter of Chinese origin. Karun learned that Sawat was an associate of Assemblyman Tiang Sirikhan from northeastern Thailand, a close ally of Pridi and a leading figure in the anti-Japanese underground. Karun sought to arrange a meeting with Tiang, but his first three attempts failed.<sup>69</sup>

These middle months of 1944 were depressing times at Force 136's Siam Country Section in Calcutta, too. Six of the "White Elephants" had been lost and two "Red Elephant" missions had failed even more disastrously. To add insult to injury, after a year of dithering, the British

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 139–40 and Pao account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 88–89.

<sup>66</sup> Pao account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 90.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 91 and letter to the author from Phisut Suthat, 27 October 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Wimon, *Free Thai*, 91–92.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 225, USNA.

cabinet had once again failed to produce a statement of postwar policy toward Thailand. In July it decided a declaration would be “premature” because:

- A) declaration’s terms were too favourable
- B) we should be asked to making corresponding statements about neighbouring territories, e.g. of certain Malay states
- C) it was impossible to make a statement about Siam until we had made one about Burma
- D) it would be better not to make a declaration of this kind until we had recovered some of the territories we had lost in the Far East
- E) it was doubtful whether declaration would be of much assistance so far as SOE’s operational projects were concerned.

The last point reflected the view of Lord Selbourne, the minister representing SOE in the cabinet, who failed to support the declaration that his men in the field so ardently desired.<sup>70</sup>

It was amid this gloomy atmosphere that a new Force 136 recruit, Major Andrew Gilchrist, formerly of the British Legation in Bangkok, arrived in India. Asked by Force 136 headquarters to assess the Thailand situation, Gilchrist posed the radical alternative that the British forget about Pridi and approach Phibun instead. Granting that Pridi and his circle of “timid and respectable Bloomsbury intellectuals” were more appealing political allies, Gilchrist argued that Phibun, a consummate opportunist, would be a more effective one:

If time is short and inside assistance is vital, then deal with Pibul [Phibun]. If we shook hands with Darlan we can use Pibul; when the time comes for the cat to jump, Pibul will leap, and the Army will leap with him. There is no other way of getting the Army on our side: it is not formidable, but it is better with us than the enemy. No high-level commitments or promises would be required to win Pibul over: it would be a question of working his passage home, and the reward, if any, could be adjusted later. The position of Pibul’s new capital [Petchabun] should make it easy to work through Indochina if necessary.<sup>71</sup>

Gilchrist understood Phibun well, but unanticipated events would soon transform the political landscape in Thailand.

Grut, who for a year had played a central role in Force 136’s Thailand effort despite his Danish nationality and his primary employment with ISLD, did not advocate such a drastic departure, but he worried that the British were losing their advantage. Sanguan and Daeng recently had told him that they preferred for working with Force 136 because of superior British experience in Thailand, but Grut recognized that the Americans

<sup>70</sup> Foreign Office to Mountbatten, 26 July 1944, HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>71</sup> Gilchrist, “Ideas on Siam,” 21 June 1944, HS1-73, PRO.

were closing the expertise gap as quality men with Thailand experience like Holladay and Herbert Deignan arrived in Ceylon. He wrote:

The Americans are not yet ready – their personnel is [sic] not yet fully trained, nor have they a sufficient number of officers. We were first in the field and have so far had the advantage that gave us. If, by the time the Americans are ready to operate, we have produced no results, the advantage will have passed to the Americans, who cannot then be denied their chance. If they succeed the ball will obviously have passed to them.<sup>72</sup>

The arrival of a three-man Free Thai team of Bunmak Thesabut, Wimon Wiriyawit, and Anond Siwatthana (Srivardhana) had buoyed OSS hopes of getting things moving. The three initially had been ticketed to serve as field agents for the intelligence operation that Scholtz had expected to run, separately from the first Free Thai group, from Kunming. However, as noted earlier, the OSS scrapped the Kunming scheme in the wake of Donovan's visit to China. In early February 1944, Heppner had requested the three officers for a Detachment 404 project aimed at establishing an intelligence network in southern Thailand.<sup>73</sup>

The three departed Los Angeles on the Victory ship *Carole Lombard* on 3 February 1944, reaching Calcutta on 19 April. Their escort, Al Boehl, a forty-year-old former mechanic and tractor operator with Scholtz's International Engineering firm in Bangkok, immediately ran into trouble. Citing instructions from Washington, he refused to show his orders, then failed to report as instructed to the Alien Registration Department. Police eventually located the four men at the Grand Hotel. Boehl finally acknowledged that the men were with the OSS and orders were cut for their passage to Ceylon. Their departure was delayed, however, by the lack of requisite visas. "Meanwhile," Lieutenant Martin of the OSS recalled, "the story of Al had gone the rounds and everyone wanted to have a look at this eccentric character. About this time Al's security was about point nought zero; it simply did not exist."<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> "Report of the Free Siamese in India, April–July 1944," HS1-73. PRO.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 24; Heppner to Donovan, 8 February 1944, Folder 4, Box 75, Entry 99 and Katz to Hutcheson, 27 October 1943, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. Khap's lack of knowledge of this plan is reflected in his memorandum to General Donovan, dated 4 December 1943, Folder 2997, Box 173, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. It is likely that Scholtz and his associate John Wester planned an infiltration into Thailand via Hok'ou, since that was the route Wester set out to explore in April 1944. As noted in the [previous chapter](#), Wester's infiltration scheme was rejected. It had been intended that two other Thai were originally to be part of this group, but one was dropped for disciplinary reasons and the other, Prayun Atthachinda, was held back because he had previously studied in Japan (letter from Wimon Wiriyawit to the author dated 16 January 1995).

<sup>74</sup> J. C. Warner, "Confidential Information Regarding People Who Resided in Thailand," Folder 35, Box 122, Entry 92; Halsey to Coughlin, 29 April 1944, Folder 3, Box 357, Entry 210; and Guy Martin interview, 13 April 1945, Folder 684, Box 45, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

Upon arrival in Ceylon in early May, the three Thai officers were assigned the task of establishing a base north of Trang in peninsular Thailand. After setting up a radio station, they were to attempt "infiltration into and contact with the Bangkok area." Transferred from China to oversee the mission, Captain John Wester led the three Thai officers through training in the use of radios, kayaks, and rubber boats. "He lived, worked and played with the group," Martin, the Trincomalee camp commander, wrote of Wester. "Though an older man he never asked them to undertake any field training, however strenuous, in which he himself did not fully participate." Martin, however, felt that inadequate OSS planning for the mission had dampened the high morale of the Thai officers and undermined their faith in "the ability and effectiveness of our organization."<sup>75</sup>

With the apparent failure of British efforts to contact Pridi, Detachment 404 now wanted to show that the Americans could do better. The acting chief of the unit's Research and Analysis Branch, Dr. Cora Du Bois, strongly favored an all-out OSS effort. She made her views clear in two memoranda written in June 1944.

Du Bois first critiqued a John Davies memorandum on America's Asian policy. In making the case for military actions that directly supported the China Theater – the course advocated by his boss, Stilwell – Davies had, since the previous fall, opposed American participation in British-proposed campaigns aimed at Malaya and Sumatra. This, he argued, would align the United States with a doomed imperialism and "place us in opposition to the rise of nationalism in Asia." In response, Du Bois attacked Davies' preoccupation with China and his assumption that American participation in SEAC military actions would commit the USA to support British imperialism. On the contrary, she argued, such involvement would put the USA in a position to have a role in determining the area's postwar future. Americans should participate, but their involvement should be based on a clear national policy.<sup>76</sup>

Although Du Bois had not specifically mentioned Thailand, she took up that subject in a subsequent memorandum, referring to it as "our

<sup>75</sup> Ripley to "Lilly," 21 April and 4 May 1944, Folder 2713, Box 160, Entry 154; "Operations Report," 9 May 1944 and "Schools and Training Report," July 1944, Folder 510, Box 51; and Martin, "Report on Y Camp," 31 May–14 July 1944, Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110; and OSS/SEAC monthly report, May 1944, Folder 30, Box 47, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>76</sup> Du Bois' comment on Davies, "American Policy in Asia," Reel 41, M1642, USNA. Davies had expressed his opposition to US involvement in SEAC beyond the campaign in Northern Burma in the memorandum "The China and South East Asia Theaters: Some Political Considerations" produced during the Cairo Conference. See *FRUS, 1943, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran*, 371–71.



7. Members of the Free Thai training for the OSS DURIAN operation pose at Trincomalee, Ceylon with their trainers and advisors. Left to right: Anond Siwattana (Srivardhana), Bunmak Thesabut (Bunmag Desaputra), Sanguan Tularak, Herman Scholtz, John Wester, Wimon Wiriyawit, and Al Boehl. (Source: US National Archives)

most important problem and, fortunately, the one which could promise most success.” She described Thailand as “politically the most important postwar consideration in South East Asia,” noting its strategic importance to Japan and pointing out its accessibility for OSS operations because of its independent status. Du Bois believed that Detachment 404 had not acted decisively despite Thailand’s obvious importance, a failure she attributed to a malaise of British origin, the “Singapore spirit.” She called for the appointment of a special committee to plan and push OSS operations aimed at Thailand.<sup>77</sup>

At the State Department, meanwhile, the Asian expert most sympathetic to the British position on Thailand, Stanley Hornbeck, had been ousted from his overlordship of the Far Eastern Division after a rebellion by his subordinates in early 1944. London’s continued failure to produce an acceptable policy declaration, and acknowledgment in May by the British Embassy’s Sansom of London’s interest in the Kra Isthmus, had

<sup>77</sup> Du Bois to Heppner, 29 June 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

reaffirmed the Department's suspicions of British intentions. Reflecting such concerns, Hoffman radioed Heppner on 27 July 1944: "It is urgently necessary that we get Ruth [Pridi] out, and return him to the US for a conference with the State Department. This action is required by British activity here."<sup>78</sup>

Heppner replied on 31 July that Detachment 404 had a project designed to achieve the goal, an allusion to Operation ARISTOC, a plan to drop a group of Free Thai into a mountainous area near Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. The scheme called for the men to establish a radio station, then contact the Thai underground and make arrangements for Pridi's escape. Heppner advised Washington that the operation's organizer, the former missionary Holladay, urgently needed four Free Thai officers from the group of fourteen that had arrived in India on 17 June 1944. The group had been temporarily assigned for field training at Detachment 101 in Assam because of continued uncertainty about their ultimate deployment.<sup>79</sup>

Then, at a 1 August P Division meeting, the British unveiled a new British scheme to contact Pridi. Apparently a revised version of Operation RAZOR, it proposed the airdropping of agents north of Bangkok near Nakhon Sawan. Taken aback, Heppner claimed that the plan represented "a modification of the existing agreement between SOE and our organization," making it necessary for him to consult Washington.<sup>80</sup>

Heppner's report to headquarters revealed that he was merely seeking to buy time. Heppner acknowledged that the British plan was "legitimate" and that "P Division cannot stop it," even though his colleague Edmund Taylor was, in the absence of Garnons-Williams, serving as its acting chief. Heppner said of the Force 136 proposal:

it shows that the British are in dangerous competition with the United States in Thailand and that the future relations of our government with Thailand depend to a large extent upon the actions of our organization in that country. Without precisely rescinding our agreement with SOE, and at all times observing any outward forms of cooperation which may be advantageous, I propose, with

<sup>78</sup> On Hornbeck's sympathy for the British position, see Tarling, "Atonement Before Absolution," 1456, 1460 and Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 347, 461. On the rebellion against Hornbeck, see: Gary May, *China Scapegoat* (Washington, DC, 1979), 90–93. On Sansom's remarks, see Annex B to "British-American Policy Toward Thailand," 25 January 1945, 740.00119 PW/1-2545, RG 59, USNA. Also, Hoffman and Scribner to Heppner, 27 July 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>79</sup> Hoffman to Donovan, 31 July 1944, Reel 90, M1642; 404 SO Branch monthly report, July 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110; and Scofield to McFadden, 8 October 1944, Box 117, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>80</sup> Heppner to Hoffman, Scribner and Donovan, 1 August 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

your approval of course, to play more or less a lone hand in communicating with and removing Ruth [Pridi]. We are preparing several operations which are better planned than the projects of the other two [British] organizations [SOE and ISLD] and therefore, I believe that our plans have a good chance to succeed.<sup>81</sup>

The next day, Heppner fired off a message to Lt. Col. Ray Peers, commander of Detachment 101, aimed at insuring that Detachment 404's request for the four Free Thai officers would be granted. Citing "a directive from the State Department" to bring Pridi out of Thailand, he declared that they would be used in a project (ARISTOC) that "has long range importance to US foreign policy."<sup>82</sup>

Within a few days, Peers had met with Holladay in Calcutta and agreed to provide the four men. Although the Thai officers had been recruited from the best institutions of higher education in the United States, Peers warned Holladay "not to expect too much as all of these boys are quite young, and I would definitely classify them as typical American high school students." Holladay went to Assam in mid-August and chose four volunteers: Sit Sawetsila (Siddhi Savetsila), Chaloem Chittinan (Chittinandhana), Udomsak Phasawanit (Udomsakdi Bhasavanich), and Kusa Panyarachun (Punyarjun).<sup>83</sup>

As Heppner pressed to get ARISTOC into motion, P Division Chief Garnons-Williams reached Washington for consultations. His American deputy, Taylor, had optimistically advised Donovan:

Garnons-Williams is pro-American and particularly OSS. He has been much more than fair to us and actually OSS has more freedom of action and enjoys more high level military support in this purely British theater than in any theater in the world. As a result, Dick Heppner's unit is organizing an American intelligence service and brings American influence in many ways into the toughest stronghold of British imperialism. All Americans out here who have had any experience in dealing with the British are flabbergasted at the results we are getting, and are naturally jealous and suspicious, because we are doing so much better in furthering American interests than the John Davies-CBI crowd which spends all its time talking about them.

Taylor noted that OSS support had kept Garnons-Williams in his position, and he in turn had thwarted the SOE's plans to expel or control OSS. Garnons-Williams' argument for keeping the OSS in SEAC, Taylor

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Heppner to Peers, 2 August 1944, Folder 192, Box 23, Entry 165, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>83</sup> Peers to Heppner, 5 and 19 August 1944, Folder 2152, Box 119, Entry 154 and SO Branch Report, July 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. Also, Sala's memorandum in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 119.



suggested, was that it was better to have “a separate OSS unit in SEAC away from the anti-British atmosphere of CBI and where they can keep an eye on us.” If the SOE had its way, Taylor argued, “our day in Southeast Asia will be over, at least as far as working in or from British imperial territory is concerned.” Alarming evidence that SOE had specific plans to undercut P Division had come at the end of July when Heppner received a proposal that special operations be negotiated directly between the SOE and the OSS, with the latter in a subordinate position, attached to the British 14th Army.<sup>84</sup>

After Taylor’s positive build-up, OSS officials were shocked to learn that one purpose of Garnons-Williams’ Washington trip was to propose a collaborative intelligence relationship between the British SIS and Miles’ SACO operation in China, in response to a Chinese proposal for intelligence cooperation sent to the British in June 1944. Maochun Yu attributes the initiative to the Chinese government’s exasperation over Davies’ determined and ultimately successful effort to dispatch an army/OSS mission to the Chinese Communist headquarters at Yen-an. Both intrigued and troubled by the proposal, the British were reluctant to reject it outright, particularly because the Chinese director of military intelligence was visiting India. When Heppner learned what the British were proposing, he radioed: “All of us feared that sooner or later something akin to this would materialize and we have never been wholly convinced that the British desired to stay away from Miles.”<sup>85</sup>

Donovan did his best to torpedo such a joint venture, warning Garnons-Williams that Miles had “aped the Chinese to solicit their favor and permitted himself to become Tai Li’s ‘boy.’” He described Miles’ “entirely subservient” position to the Chinese as “unsupportable from any security standpoint.” While admitting to indiscretion, Donovan went on to blast the flawed security of Tai Li’s organization and the Navy Department’s “unquestioning support” of Miles.<sup>86</sup>

Although the Washington admirals reacted coolly to the British proposal, OSS suspicions were not entirely allayed. Hoffman suspected that Miles had a hand in the scheme, theorizing that he wanted to trade supplies to the British for a SACO foothold in SEAC. Garnons-Williams

<sup>84</sup> Taylor to Donovan, 7 July 1944 and Heppner to Donovan, 25 July 1944, Folder 2, Box 357, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> McGivern to Hoffman, 1 and 2 August 1944 and Heppner to Donovan, 2 August 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; Yu, *OSS in China*, 164–66; and Wakeman, Jr., *Spymaster*, 313–14, which notes that the US Army’s intelligence chief also strongly opposed a new cooperative venture between the British and Chinese.

<sup>86</sup> McGivern to Hoffman, 7 August 1944, reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

further unnerved OSS headquarters by suggesting consolidation of the communications facilities of British and American intelligence agencies.<sup>87</sup>

Back in Ceylon, as Detachment 404 began to organize the ARISTOC aerial mission to northern Thailand, the seaborne Operation DURIAN, aimed at landing two members of the three-man special group – Bunmak and Wimon – at an Andaman seacoast site near Takuapa got underway. It began inauspiciously on 8 August 1944 with the failure of the port main engine on the British submarine *Severn* on which the men embarked. The submarine proceeded, but encountered adverse weather off the Thai coast four days later. Plans called for a two-man party to ferry the two agents and their 130 pounds of equipment to the shore, but this seemed impossible under the circumstances. Although Bunmak and Wimon volunteered to venture forth without escort in a rubber boat, this seemed too risky. Under orders to proceed to a rendezvous point near Penang by the 15th, the submarine's captain could not wait for weather conditions to moderate. Instead he promised to return in about six days.<sup>88</sup>

The necessity to remain submerged during the daylight hours made life miserable for the boat's crew. The submarine lacked an effective cooling system, so all hands suffered from heat and the stench of a malfunctioning toilet. Periodic failures of the three remaining engines made matters worse. The *Severn* returned to the Thai coast on 18 August, this time in favorable weather, but before nightfall the captain received orders to proceed immediately to the vicinity of Singapore, probably in connection with Eastern Fleet Operation BANQUET aimed at targets in Sumatra. Again he cancelled the landing operation.<sup>89</sup>

"Fleet seems to be raising hell with our operations," Scofield complained to his diary after receiving word of the aborted mission. He continued, venting his frustrations:

Damn it, why are we here. The Dutch are afraid and the British haven't given us a break yet. Sometimes I can't be sure who the enemy is. Almost every British officer or civilian I have met has been O.K., but institutionally they seem to want to get us out. All right, I'm for pulling out. In May I said I wouldn't be surprised if OSS were pulled out of here in six months – well, I have two and a half to go!<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> McGivern to Hoffman, 1 and 2 August 1944 and Lowman to Donovan, 3 August 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Hoffman to Heppner, 30 August 1944, Folder 4, Box 229, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>88</sup> Operation report, "DURIAN," 30 August 1944, Folder 4, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. and Willmott, *Grave of a Dozen Schemes*, 163.

<sup>90</sup> Scofield diary, 19 August 1944, Carleton Scofield Papers, UMKC Archives.

A recurrence of engine trouble eventually forced the ill-starred *Severn* to turn back to Ceylon. The OSS party returned on 26 August, “a weary group with a grim experience to relate.”<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, the mission report of the Canadian escorting officer, Lt. Cmdr. Derek Lee, praised the efforts of the *Severn*’s captain and crew, blaming the failure on equipment malfunctions and the “blatant and inexcusable case of lack of cooperation” by the Fourth Submarine Flotilla command. Detachment 404’s monthly report noted that while the British Eastern Fleet was unenthusiastic about placing its submarines in exposed positions in support of clandestine operations, the OSS did not seem to be the object of discrimination because “the British opposite numbers are suffering to about the same extent.” The shortage resulted in part from a decision to redeploy a number of boats to Australian bases as well as to a “low serviceability rate” caused by a “lack of maintenance facilities and shortage of parts.”<sup>92</sup>

In the meantime, news of a shocking political change inside Thailand had reached the Allies. Phibun, the premier who had aligned Thailand with Japan, had submitted his resignation in late July after the Thai National Assembly voted down two pieces of legislation. Although Phibun apparently expected to be called back to service, his enemies in the Assembly, who were allied with his rival, Regent Pridi, argued that Phibun, because of his alliance with the Japanese, was in no position to salvage Thailand’s position. They rallied sufficient support to elect a new prime minister, Khuang Aphaiwong, Daeng’s brother-in-law. When the other regent, Prince Athit, who was wary of incurring Phibun’s wrath, resigned on 31 July, this left Pridi as the sole representative of the King, clearing the way for a change of government. The Japanese, whose attitude toward Phibun had soured, actually abetted the change of régime by warning Phibun’s followers against a military *coup*.<sup>93</sup>

On 3 August 1944, the Assembly approved a new cabinet including a number of individuals Sanguan and Daeng recognized as Pridi supporters. An “extremely excited” Daeng urged Heppner to forward a message asking Seni to urge a halt in the bombing of Thailand, the supply of Lend-Lease weapons to the Thai underground, and the avoidance of any statements in radio broadcasts hailing the new cabinet, lest they trigger a Japanese reaction. For his part, Sanguan predicted that if Phibun were

<sup>91</sup> Operation report, “DURIAN,” 30 August 1944, Folder 4, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA and Scofield diary, 26 August 1944, Carleton Scofield Papers, UMKC Archives.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.; OSS/SEAC monthly reports, August 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; and Ian Trenowden, *Malayan Operations Most Secret – Force 136* (Kuala Lumpur, 1978), 74–75.

<sup>93</sup> For a full account of the downfall of Phibun, see Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan’s Southern Advance*, 169–98.

replaced as commander-in-chief, the entire army would “go over to the Allies altogether,” leading to hostilities with the Japanese.<sup>94</sup>

The following day, 4 August, Daeng met with Marine Captain Walter Mansfield, chief of Detachment 404's Special Operations Branch and Colonels Guise and C. J. P. Hudson of Force 136. Guise suggested it would be wise to send in a new group quickly to take advantage of the changed political circumstances. Although he claimed that he had a party ready, Mansfield discovered that the British were still undecided about a drop zone. Daeng interjected that he would like to join the mission, suggesting an area in southern Burma near the Thai border as a point of entry. He hoped to carry a message of allied support to Pridi and Khuang.<sup>95</sup>

Taken aback, Mansfield pointed out that Daeng would have difficulty maintaining cover and could “blow all of our efforts to pieces” if captured by the Japanese. Mansfield then declared that in light of a series of British failures he “felt the ball was now in our hands.” Alluding to ARISTOC, he said the OSS wished to move deliberately to insure the effort to contact Pridi was well planned. He added that if Force 136 wanted to send a mission within two weeks it should be limited to “a communications man briefed only for contact with the very lowest levels,” so that failure would not prejudice future operations. Guise and Hudson agreed to discuss the matter further with Pointon. Mansfield left the session hopeful that the British would be unable to get a mission together quickly.<sup>96</sup>

Force 136 moved fast, however, and by 16 August had filed a proposal for Operation BRILLIG with P Division. Daeng had formally stated his willingness to enter Thailand in a 7 August letter to Guise, so the British plan called for airdropping him and a Thai radio operator in the Hua Hin area during the full-moon period around the beginning of September. Daeng would contact the leaders of the new Thai government and assure them of Allied support for a Thai resistance movement. His partner would establish a radio communications base at Hua Hin.<sup>97</sup>

Daeng's push to join BRILLIG, and British interest in including him, infuriated the Americans. They pulled out all stops to block his

<sup>94</sup> Heppner to Donovan, and Ripley to Shepardson and Donovan, 3 August 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>95</sup> Mansfield to Heppner, 9 August 1944, Folder 2570, Box 150, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Daeng's draft message and Daeng to Guise, 7 August 1944, HS1-59, PRO.

<sup>96</sup> Mansfield to Heppner, 9 August 1944, Folder 2570, Box 150, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>97</sup> Daeng to Guise, 7 August 1944, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA; and P Division to CoS, 16 August 1944 and Siam Country Section to Force 136, 17 August 1944, HS1-59, PRO. Kew. Prince Suphasawat also saw Hua Hin as the best location for effecting contact with Pridi and from England volunteered to go himself. See his 19 August 1944 letter to Colonel Taylor of SOE in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 424–29.

participation, emphasizing the security risk inherent in sending in an individual who “knows too much” and had been in Washington. The fact that three months earlier Detachment 404 itself had considered sending Daeng into Thailand served to undercut this argument, however. Furthermore, if Daeng knew too much about current plans and operations, this suggested lax security on the part of Detachment 404, which had been minding him over the past several months. The Americans next argued that Daeng’s capture could precipitate Japanese action against the new Thai government, but the British countered that the Japanese surely knew the complexion of the government and were likely to act against it only “if they feel themselves sufficiently powerful to face the consequences,” not in response to an isolated incident.<sup>98</sup>

Obviously worried that the British were winning the argument, Mansfield, after discussing the matter with other OSS staffers, sought to effect Daeng’s recall to Washington on the pretext that he was needed as an advisor there. “As long as he stays here,” Mansfield argued, “he not only becomes a problem for us but may prejudice our whole policy with respect to Thailand by playing into the hands of the British.” On the other hand, Sanguan should remain because he “is not so easily susceptible to British overtures.”<sup>99</sup>

Intelligence Officer Dillon Ripley radioed a request for Daeng’s recall on 9 August, a proposal endorsed by Heppner when he returned from a trip two days later. Heppner’s mood can be gauged by his complaint in a message sent the same day to Colonel Peers that the “SOE is getting in our hair more and more” with efforts “to integrate us with them.”<sup>100</sup> In his signal to Washington, Heppner suggested that the OSS ask Seni to recall Daeng for appointment to the Legation staff. Describing Daeng as “an unstable character,” Heppner warned that “there is a possibility that he may endanger our policy by succumbing to the wiles of the British without meaning to do so.” He added:

The point should be made unequivocally to all involved that all British endeavors in Thailand up to the present time have resulted in complete failure. These operations were carelessly devised and hopelessly executed. We, ourselves, were not connected with these attempts. As for our own activities, we are conducting operations there which have much better prospects for success.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> London to New York, 17 August 1944, HS1-59, PRO. On the origin of the idea of sending Daeng into Thailand, see London to New York, 25 August 1944, HS1-71 and Grut, “Notes on Cypher Telegram from New York No. 343, dated 30 August 1944,” HS1-79, PRO.

<sup>99</sup> Mansfield to Heppner, 9 August 1944, Folder 2570, Box 150 and Memorandum, 7 August 1944, Folder 2600, Box 153, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>100</sup> Heppner to Peers, 11 August 1944, Folder 192, Box 23, Entry 165, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>101</sup> Ripley to Shepardson and Donovan, 9 August 1944 and Heppner to Bigelow, Hoffman, and Donovan, 11 August 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

Heppner also called into play Max Bishop, a young American diplomat at the consulate in nearby Colombo who served as political advisor to the American officers in SEAC. Bishop supported Heppner, dispatching a message to the State Department advocating Daeng's recall, the first of several times that this future American ambassador to Thailand would prove useful to Detachment 404. In Seni's absence, Mani responded to the OSS queries, saying that Daeng could be returned if Sanguan approved.<sup>102</sup>

Sanguan did approve, and he made clear his own discomfort with Daeng's actions and pro-British proclivities to Deignan. Sanguan emphasized that Daeng had "not one drop of Siamese blood," had spent much of his life in Europe, spoke Thai with an Indian accent, and "must under no circumstances be considered representative of the Thai, nor should he be looked upon as a necessarily trustworthy interpreter of the ideals and aspiration of the Thai nation." Sanguan accused Daeng of abandoning his duties as interpreter-secretary to engage in frivolous pursuits and freelancing.<sup>103</sup>

The endless squabbling and repeated disappointments had taken their toll on morale at Detachment 404. After the usual Monday staff meetings on 14 August, Scofield complained to his diary that "Dick [Heppner] talks glibly about operations on one hand, and then along come all the array of facts which block us – personnel, supplies, and transport." A week later he lamented: "Of all the Mondays this was the purple mongoose. Never thought anything could be quite so bad. Another one like this, and I'll go nuts!"<sup>104</sup>

The situation now appeared particularly bleak because the British, whose Thailand efforts Heppner had so gleefully derided, had suddenly struck pay dirt. First, the British Embassy in Geneva had been contacted at the end of July by Pridi's brother, Atthakit Phanomyong (Arthakitti Banomyong), chargé d'affaires at the Thai Legation there. On 17 August London advised Force 136 that Atthakit had received messages from Pridi, sent in a personal code, alerting the British to the fact that their Thai officers in Bangkok were attempting to establish radio contact. Pridi also suggested dropping a new SOE mission near Hua Hin. By odd coincidence, on the same day a Chinese messenger, dispatched by Pridi's ally

<sup>102</sup> Bishop to Secretary of State, 11 August 1944, Reel 90, M1642 and E. L. McClure to Ripley, 19 August 1944, Folder 2712, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Mani was acting in Seni's absence because the latter's usual number two, Luang Dittthakan Pakdi, was in New Delhi for liaison with OWI officials. See New Delhi to Taylor and Fairbank, 30 August 1944 and New Delhi to Taylor, 7 November 1944, "Thailand Policy," Box 112, Entry 358, RG 208, USNA.

<sup>103</sup> Deignan to Heppner, 12 August 1944, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>104</sup> Scofield Diary, 14 and 21 August 1944, Carleton Scofield Papers, UMKC Archives.

Thawin Udon, reached Kunming with five messages from Puai, leader of the APPRECIATION I party. These messages, encoded in late May and early June, reported that the six British-trained Thai officers were under police protection, were in contact with the Free Thai inside the country, and were attempting to communicate by radio. The British resumed monitoring the APPRECIATION frequencies and on 22 August established the long-sought two-way radio communication with Bangkok. By 27 August, the Bangkok party had passed a special security check devised by Gilchrist, convincing Force 136 that the men were "our own agents held by Siamese and free from any Japanese control."<sup>105</sup>

By August 19, Force 136 had custody of Daeng, but agreed that he would not enter training without approval from Washington. Heppner later remarked that the British "more or less kidnapped him from us" and the Detachment 404 commander kept up his determined effort to bar Daeng's participation in the BRILLIG mission. Given the weakness of his case, Heppner was fortunate that the more ambitious aspects of Force 136's plans were undermined by Dening and the British Foreign Office.<sup>106</sup>

Dening had informed the Foreign Office on 19 August that the main objective of the BRILLIG mission would be military. He opposed sending any official message at all, and made clear that he viewed Daeng's inclusion in the mission insufficiently important to provoke a quarrel with the Americans. "To my mind," he added, "we have no need at this stage of the war to offer inducements to anyone in this theatre and I suggest that our attitude should be that the extent to which Governments or individuals are prepared to assist the Allies now, will be the extent to which they find favour with us."<sup>107</sup>

As noted earlier, in July the British War Cabinet had declined to issue the long-debated and much-edited statement on policy toward Thailand. In the wake of this setback, SOE-London made clear the prevailing negative attitude toward Thailand in a 20 August message to Force 136:

Foreign Office are particularly concerned not to give the Siamese Government impression that Allies are anxious to contact them. They consider new Government will not in fact do anything effective to aid us in war against Japan through

<sup>105</sup> Geneva to CXG 895, 30 July 1944 and Berne to London, 3 August 1944, HS1-73; London to Force 136, 17 August 1944, HS1-59; "Operation APPRECIATION," 9 September 1944, HS1-56; "Operations War Diary, PRICHARD/APPRECIATION," HS1-68; and Pridi to Calcutta, 27 November 1944, HS1-61, PRO. Also, Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 54–60, 69–79 and Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 107.

<sup>106</sup> Warner interview of Heppner, Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; Force 136 Ops. to Pointon, 19 August 1944 and Kandy to Force 136, 27 August 1944, HS1-59, PRO; and Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 65–66.

<sup>107</sup> Dening to Foreign Office, 19 August 1944, HS1-73, PRO, Kew.



fear of provoking Japanese reaction. They are inclined to regard B.B.855 [Pridi] and his party as people who are trying to reinsure cheaply on strength of previous known preference for Western Allies. They therefore feel that attempt to contact new Government at present moment, particularly *if* made on political or diplomatic plane, would not only encourage Siamese to think they were already working their passage home, when in fact they are not, leading to future confusion and ill feeling.<sup>108</sup>

Grut prepared an analysis of the Foreign Office stance, basing it in part on his conversations with former Minister Crosby, even though he acknowledged that the latter was “rarely consulted and his views probably have little weight with the FO.” Grut concluded that the policy was based on the assumption that Britain should insure the future security of Malaya and Singapore by establishing a protectorate over Thailand and possibly laying claim to predominantly Islamic provinces in the south of Thailand. In light of such plans, Grut concluded, “it is not in the interest of HMG to afford *any* Siamese government an opportunity to redeem the Siamese cause and exonerate their war guilt.” If London maintained such a stance, he pointed out, SOE had little chance of achieving its goals in Thailand.<sup>109</sup>

Drawing on Grut's analysis, SOE headquarters challenged the Foreign Office's position, arguing that the present situation offered a marvelous opportunity to get Force 136 parties into the country, while failure to act would enable the Americans to steal a march. SOE-London urged Force 136 to muster military support for the operation because “we are convinced that the outcome will turn on the strength of SEAC's report.”<sup>110</sup>

Mountbatten, then in England, obliged with a “Dear Anthony” letter to Eden. He stressed the military importance of establishing parties in Thailand capable of creating a significant diversion at a critical moment. While acknowledging that the Foreign Office had to weigh the political implications, Mountbatten urged Eden not to overlook the military opportunities presented by the emergence of the new Thai government.<sup>111</sup>

On 22 August, Force 136 sent London the draft of a proposed message from Mountbatten to Pridi. It expressed “congratulations” to the new government, stated that Britain “favoured the restoration to Thailand after the war is over of complete security as a free sovereign and independent state,” and urged that the Thai assist in ousting the Japanese as a means of balancing the Phibun regime's hostile acts toward Britain. It offered full support for anti-Japanese resistance.

<sup>108</sup> B.B. 100 from A.D., 20 August 1944, HS1-59, PRO.

<sup>109</sup> “On the F.O. Reaction to the Pradit Government,” 18 August 1944, HS1-73, PRO.

<sup>110</sup> London to Delhi, 20 August 1944, HS1-59, PRO.

<sup>111</sup> Mountbatten to Eden, 21 August 1944, HS179, PRO.

SOE-London promptly advised that the draft would never pass muster. It warned that even stronger intervention from Mountbatten's headquarters – which was not anticipated – would be necessary to gain any ground in the struggle with the Foreign Office and War Cabinet.<sup>112</sup>

As preparations for BRILLIG proceeded, at a 26 August Kandy meeting involving Heppner and Taylor of the OSS, Guise of Force 136, Air-Marshall Whitworth-Jones and Denning, the British abruptly abandoned their effort to include Daeng in the mission. Ostensibly a concession to OSS security concerns, this move is not explained by any of the available Force 136 documents. It came just after the Foreign Office had encouraged Denning to refuse to bow to American objections, which it correctly viewed as aimed at “keeping SOE out of the field and not based on security danger.”<sup>113</sup>

In reality, this was not a concession at all. A memorandum by Krit Tosayanon (Kris Tosayanonda), the Thai radioman assigned to the BRILLIG mission, reveals that Daeng sidelined himself by spraining his ankle during his first practice jump at the British parachute school. With the thorny issue of Daeng's involvement eliminated, the two sides agreed to defer any action on extricating Pridi until the Foreign Office and the State Department could discuss the new political situation inside Thailand. They correctly judged that, under the new political circumstances, Pridi would prefer to remain in Bangkok.<sup>114</sup>

Then, as if determined to confirm all the worst American suspicions, Guise suggested that the successful British APPRECIATION link gave the British the exclusive right to contact the Regent. The Americans countered by questioning the security of communications with men in the custody of the Thai police and known to the Japanese. Here they struck Achilles' heel, because the British themselves had lingering suspicions that the messages from Bangkok might be a clever Japanese ruse. As a compromise, the conferees agreed that in the current unsettled situation more channels of contact were desirable and “infiltration by OSS and SOE will go right on in the same free and unrestricted manner.”<sup>115</sup>

The British were also concerned because Pridi had suggested the Hua Hin drop site in a message to his brother in Berne in a private code considered vulnerable. They decided to go ahead with their mission, but

<sup>112</sup> Force 136 to London, 22 August 1944 and London to Delhi, 25 August 1944, HS1-59, PRO.

<sup>113</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 26 August 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA and London to New York, 25 August 1945, HS1-71, PRO.

<sup>114</sup> Krit's memoranda in Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 214.

<sup>115</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 26 August 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA and Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 67–79.

subsequently dispatched Grut to Stockholm, Atthakit's new post, to discuss code security and other matters. Grut carried out this mission in October 1944.<sup>116</sup>

BRILLIG, coordinated with Pridi and launched by a B-24 on 6 September, succeeded completely, as Krit and Prasert Pathumanon (Prasert Padumananda) parachuted safely near Hua Hin around 1:30 the next morning. A party led by Chan Bunnak (Charn Bunnag) received them. A motor launch of the Thai Customs Department, headed by Pridi's ally Luang Bannakon Kowit (Bannakorn Kovit), picked them up at the beach the next morning and transported them to Samut Songkhram. This boat, captained by Sin Uthaisi, would do yeoman's work for the underground over the next year. Transferring to the railroad, they reached Thonburi on 8 September. Late that night, they were in conference with Pridi at the Thonburi residence of Luang Narubet Manit, where they were first quartered. On 11 September, Krit established a radio link with India outside the control of Adun's police.<sup>117</sup>

However, thanks to Denning and the Foreign Office, the BRILLIG officers carried no official reassurances regarding future British policy toward Thailand. They brought only a message from Mountbatten, greatly watered down by Denning, authorizing them "to find out how the Siamese resistance movement could work with the Allies, to promise to help, and to warn against premature action against the Japanese." The letter was addressed to no one in particular, although the agents were, of course, instructed to deliver it to Pridi.<sup>118</sup> The Regent could not fail to notice the far less positive tone of this letter, compared to the one brought by Puai just six months earlier.

Force 136's troubles with London were not over, either. Eden suddenly developed cold feet, causing the Foreign Office to beat an embarrassing

<sup>116</sup> Force 136 Ops to Pointon, 19 August 1944, HS1-59 and Grut, "Report on Contact with Mr. Attakit Banoyong," HS1-57, PRO.

<sup>117</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 81–82, 213–21. The latter reference is to Krit's memorandum. Prasert's version and an recounting of the events by Sawat Sisuk appear in Prasert Prathumanon, *Ruang khong kabuangan Seri Thai pathibatgan taidin nai Prathet Thai khong Prasert Prathumanon* (Bangkok, 1995) 3–5, 23–26. Around this time, the British also attempted to infiltrate three Sino-Thai "Red Elephants" overland from Yunnan in Operation BLANDINGS I, but Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 115, notes that they disappeared, only to turn up in Bangkok at the end of the war with a claim for expenses.

<sup>118</sup> Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 108–11 and Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 62–63, 83, 86–88, 191–92, 214. The text of the message from Mountbatten is contained in Denning to Foreign Office, 8 September 1944, HS1-54, PRO. Interestingly, among the items carried in by BRILLIG was a personal letter from Gilchrist to Premier Khuang Aphaiwong, an old friend, and letters from Daeng to Pridi and his sister, Khuang's wife ("Documents Taken on the Person" by BRILLIG officers, 9 September 1944, HS1-59, PRO, Kew).

retreat from its qualified approval of contacts with Pridi and to return the whole issue to the Cabinet once more. Fortunately, news of this latest backward step did not reach Ceylon until after the BRILLIG mission had departed for Thailand. The Cabinet did retroactively approve the mission some weeks after it had been launched, but with the strict proviso that Force 136 make no political commitments.

Eden also rejected a new State Department effort to bring Britain in line with American policy on Thailand. In a 4 September letter to Ambassador John G. Winant, Eden indicated that Britain favored postwar Thai independence, but he cited the state of war existing between the two countries, the necessity for the return of "ill-gotten" territories and the likely need for "special arrangements for security or economic collaboration as may be judged necessary within an international system" as reasons for not issuing a public statement. While granting the military utility of stirring up Thai resistance to the Japanese, Eden explained:

His Majesty's Government do not rate its practical value very high and feel that it is any case of doubtful wisdom to encourage the comfortable view that the Siamese can count on an easy and assured future regardless of their attitude toward the Japanese and the efforts which they make to help themselves and us. We feel, in fact, that if resistance is to be encouraged it may need a spur rather than a sugarplum.<sup>119</sup>

Unaware of Force 136's problems with the Foreign Office and Cabinet, but acutely cognizant of his men's sagging morale, the weak OSS position in regard to Thailand, and the very real danger that the window of opportunity might slam shut, Heppner made a bold move to keep the Americans in the game. He did so after receiving strong encouragement from Washington. In a letter of 8 August, Hoffman had advised that Landon, the State Department's Thai expert, agreed that "the American sphere of influence should not be overtaken by the strong British 'advances' on the Far East diplomatic and military front." Donovan, he added, "feels that since the British want to make an independent show out of the RUTH mission that gives us license to take the same approach. If there is a reprimand we would be in a position to open the issues and back them down or at least have it out." Hoffman further argued that it was time for a "determined stand" and a display of the "good old-fashioned American rugged attitude." Accordingly, he urged, "plan your RUTH mission, ask for whatever support you need from here, China, or Burma and we will back you up. The success of this mission

<sup>119</sup> Hull to Winant, 16 August 1944 and Winant to Hull, 5 September 1944, *FRUS* 1944, V: 1314-17.



8. Colonel Richard P. Heppner who commanded OSS Detachment 404 in Kandy, Ceylon, before transferring to head Detachment 202 in China in late 1944. (Source: courtesy of Elizabeth McIntosh)

means a great deal to your country and to your detachment and I am betting on you to out-manuever our cousins.”<sup>120</sup>

Heppner sought help from General Stilwell – then temporarily commanding SEAC while Mountbatten and other high-ranking officers participated in meetings in London – asking for an American plane to carry out a hastily conceived operation, appropriately dubbed HOTFOOT I. Contrary to all agreements, the British were not informed of this venture. Heppner hoped that Bunmak and Wimon could parachute into Thailand and lay the groundwork for HOTFOOT II, the dispatch to Bangkok “of an American officer representing OSS, for the purpose of discussing the development of intelligence, sabotage, and guerrilla operations.” If

<sup>120</sup> Hoffman to Heppner, 8 August 1944, Folder 3, Box 82, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

things went really well, “an American, or combined American-Thai party, authorized by General Stilwell to open negotiations for American military assistance to a resistance movement” could be inserted.<sup>121</sup>

It could not be taken for granted that Stilwell, who had displayed an ambivalent attitude toward the OSS, would accept Heppner’s proposal. But while Stilwell had been initially impressed with Mountbatten, the Admiral subsequently had enraged him by supporting Churchill in focusing SEAC’s efforts on an amphibious invasion of Sumatra instead of Stilwell’s cherished ground campaign in Burma to open an overland supply route to China. Stilwell made his dissent clear in the months after the Cairo Conference by taking to the field with Chinese troops in northern Burma. He nonetheless found time to carry on a running battle with Mountbatten’s staff over information policies, hoping to combat what he viewed as British efforts to downplay American and Chinese achievements. The hostility of Stilwell and his “CBI crowd” toward SEAC had grown so intense by early July 1944 that Taylor worried that they might seek to establish “a single OSS head or coordinator responsible to Delhi [Stilwell] instead of to Kandy [Mountbatten],” a move that could doom Detachment 404. Stilwell arrived in Kandy at the beginning of August 1944 well aware that Mountbatten had been attempting to oust him as deputy commander of SEAC.<sup>122</sup>

Heppner knew how to cultivate superiors, however. He had maintained good relations with “Vinegar Joe” as a member of Stilwell’s staff for several months from mid-1943. Since moving to Kandy, he had focused his efforts on Wedemeyer, Mountbatten’s American deputy. He had convinced Wedemeyer to move into the comfortable OSS officers’ bungalow located on a scenic hill a few miles west of Kandy. Heppner happily reported that Wedemeyer seemed pleased to be staying “where he can

<sup>121</sup> Warner interview of Heppner (undated, but during 1945), Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110 and Scofield to Operations Committee, 14 September 1944, Folder 2558, Box 149, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>122</sup> Stilwell’s anger is strongly expressed in a letter he wrote to General Hearn in February 1944, a document which Hearn passed on to Madame Chiang Kai-shek. It is quoted in “Excerpt from C.B.I. Historian’s Record Entitled ‘Mountbatten’s Four Proposals,’” “Folder 28, Box 78, Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution. Mountbatten’s American deputy, Gen. Albert P. Wedemeyer, supported the idea of bypassing Burma as evidenced by Wedemeyer to Handy, 17 January 1944, Folder 16, Box 78, Wedemeyer Papers. See also, Taylor to Donovan, 7 July 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI. On the conflict between CBI and SEAC, see Taylor, *Richer By Asia* 28–40. On Mountbatten’s efforts to replace Stilwell, see Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell’s Command Problems*, 377–78. Stilwell’s displeasure with the British was frequently expressed in his diary entries from this period, as was his awareness of British efforts to remove him. See Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, 276–313. The American perspective on the battle over SEAC information policies is presented in Fred Eldridge, *Wrath in Burma* (Garden City, NY, 1946).

more or less cut himself off from those with whom he has contact all day long." Stilwell followed Wedemeyer's example, bunking in the OSS bungalow during his month-long stint in Kandy.

By then, Stilwell realized that the chief target of his North Burma offensive, the town of Myitkyina, would soon fall. He also was receiving messages detailing military and political disarray in China and knew that Washington was pressuring Chiang Kai-shek to place him in command of China's armies. Bouyed by a vote of confidence in the form of a fourth star, Stilwell treated his stay at SEAC headquarters as a well-earned vacation. He canceled the usual daily staff meetings and delighted in contrasting his simple tastes with what he viewed as British pretentiousness.<sup>123</sup>

Heppner first appealed to Stilwell on 15 August to block an SOE effort to attach its DILWYN mission to OSS Detachment 101. Although Peers had favored this proposal, Heppner feared the British aimed to set a precedent for broader integration of operations that would lead to the subordination of Detachment 404 throughout SEAC. When Stilwell agreed to block the British proposal, Taylor happily informed Washington that at last the General had shown "an interest in the future of 404" and recognized "Heppner's successful battle to maintain our status at this end."<sup>124</sup>

"It had to be done, we thought," Heppner later told OSS historian Robert Warner of his decision to seek Stilwell's support in launching Operation HOTFOOT. He added: "I went to him on a personal basis; whatever you say about the old man he is acute politically, because some of these American generals couldn't see the utility of our being in Thailand, but Stilwell sees these hookups immediately."<sup>125</sup>

In fact, Stilwell's statements and actions over the past two years suggested that he had minimal interest in Thailand and little regard for the Thai, but such a perfect opportunity to twist the British lion's tail did not come along every day. Stilwell instructed his air commander, General George Stratemeyer, to provide a plane for the OSS mission.<sup>126</sup>

Heppner urged that OSS headquarters keep a tight lid on information regarding these operations. "The top authority in this theater has approved of them," he warned, "and there would be serious results if

<sup>123</sup> Wedemeyer to Marshall, 9 July 1944, Folder 16 and Wedemeyer to Donovan, 13 July 1944, Folder 5, Box 78, Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution; Little to Stevens, 23 February 1944, Heppner to Donovan, 18 July 1944 and Heppner mission report, July 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 255–56, 380–84; Taylor, *Richer By Asia*, 36–37; and Eldridge, *Wrath in Burma*, 289–93.

<sup>124</sup> Taylor to Donovan, 16 August 1944, Folder 2, Box 357, Entry 210, USNA.

<sup>125</sup> Warner interview of Heppner (undated, but during 1945), Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.



anything concerning them got out.” If the British did catch on, Heppner would claim that the HOTFOOT mission had been authorized by OSS Detachment 202 in China.<sup>127</sup>

After initiating hasty preparations to launch the covert operation during the full moon at the beginning of September, Heppner met with Garnons-Williams, Force 136 chief Colin Mackenzie, and Guise. Energized by their recent successes, the British had developed plans for the Allied clandestine warfare organizations to establish a total of 300 underground radio stations throughout Southeast Asia, including eighty in Thailand. Mackenzie proposed that SOE and OSS undertake joint planning for Thailand operations, but Heppner delayed matters by tossing out a red herring. He claimed a difference of opinion in regard to joint operations, stating that the OSS viewed the project to bring out Pridi as a one-time undertaking, while the British seemed to see it as “a continuing program which would involve all future activities into Thailand.” He could agree to no such joint operational plan, Heppner maintained, until he got Washington’s reading on the matter.<sup>128</sup>

Heppner acknowledged in his subsequent message to Washington that he was merely stalling. “It is now clear,” he warned, “that totally separate and unconnected efforts in Thailand will not be allowed.” It might be necessary, he continued, for the OSS to make a commitment to collaborative effort as a means to “forestall any attempts by the high command to cut down or do away with OSS work into Thailand,” thereby buying time for his covert HOTFOOT initiative to bear fruit.<sup>129</sup>

Ironically, at the time Heppner was questioning the British proposals for joint action in Kandy, Hoffman, who had extracted an apology from the SOE for its handling of the Daeng affair, was seeking to blame the British for failing to maintain a cooperative effort to evacuate Pridi. Hoffman warned the SOE’s Washington representative “that if the British wanted to operate independently we could not stop them,” but that the OSS would consider this justification for going its own way, past agreements notwithstanding.<sup>130</sup>

Suspicion of British motives had grown so intense that the Americans now viewed joint action proposals as efforts to subordinate the OSS, while interpreting any independent action by Force 136 as an effort to freeze the Americans out. Reflecting this “damned if they do and damned if they

<sup>127</sup> Heppner to Donovan and Cheston, 7 September 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>128</sup> Heppner to Cheston, 7 September 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA and “SOE Requirements for Wireless Sets for the Indian Theater,” 2 September 1944, Folder 192, Box 23, Entry 165, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>129</sup> Heppner to Cheston, 7 September 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>130</sup> Hoffman to Heppner, 30 August 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

don't" attitude, headquarters advised Heppner that he might advocate either joint or independent action "without embarrassment." In other words, since the British could not be trusted, he should follow whichever approach he deemed most expedient. Also, Hoffman advised Heppner of his willingness to play "bad cop" by taking responsibility for decisions likely to engender a negative British reaction, noting: "We can take plenty of blame here as we do not have to 'live' in the theater."<sup>131</sup>

Although the Americans had yet to establish communications with Bangkok, Hoffman, in his role as OSS Chief of Asian Special Operations, began laying the groundwork for American support of a Thai resistance movement. Inspired by the advent of the new government, Minister Seni had spoken to Hoffman about obtaining Lend-Lease assistance for Thai resistance forces. Hoffman replied that the OSS could do the job. When he asked Seni how many men would be involved, the Minister suggested 7,000. Hoffman immediately petitioned his superiors, requesting the mustering of supplies in Calcutta for 20,000 men. He noted that Thailand had "done an admirable job in maneuvering itself into a position of resistance," thus that the OSS would be "remiss in its duties if we were not ready to supply them when and if they needed help suddenly." In a subsequent memorandum, citing a shortfall of resistance supplies in Europe as an object lesson, Hoffman urged that "every pencil, every machine gun, rifle revolver, pistol, plastic or other explosive that is capable of going be shipped." He later explained that his actions were based on the necessity "to keep our sphere of influence in Thailand."<sup>132</sup>

The OSS Planning Group, to which Taylor had reported Stilwell's interest in such preparations, more conservatively suggested building up supplies for an army of 10,000 men, while cautioning that weapons should not yet be delivered "in view of the difficulties of supply and the small effect the activities of such forces would have on the general military situation." Charles S. Cheston, acting as OSS chief during another of Donovan's frequent absences, upped the ante in a big way, however, pushing for a regional stockpile of supplies in Calcutta for 50,000 men. Heppner's assurance that warehouse space could be provided cleared the way for acceptance of Cheston's ambitious initiative.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. and Cheston to Heppner, 8 September 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>132</sup> Hoffman to Coughlin, Heppner, and 6; Peers, 14 September 1944, Folder 2318, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; Hoffman to Cheston, 4 August and Hoffman to Fisher, 7 August 1944, Reel 131 and Hoffman to Cheston, 24 August 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>133</sup> Ream, Demas, and Cheston to Heppner and Coughlin, 9 September 1944 and Heppner to Ream, Demas, and Cheston, 11 September 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; and Hoffman to Coughlin, Heppner, and Peers, 14 September 1944, Folder 2318, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

Scholtz, meanwhile, had reached Washington on 18 August and enthusiastically joined the campaign to whip up concern about the perceived British effort to shut the OSS out of Southeast Asia. He enlisted the aid of his old acquaintance Dolbeare in proposing to OSS Intelligence Chief Whitney Shepardson that the State Department be asked to coordinate American policy toward the new Thai government. In its response, the State Department reiterated support for Thai independence and offered to lodge protests with the British Foreign Office if British diplomatic actions threatened the security of the OSS.<sup>134</sup>

The positive State Department response to the OSS approach sharply contrasted to the Foreign Office reactions to Force 136's requests regarding Thailand. Surely no OSS assumption missed the mark so far as the widely held view that British military and civilian bureaucracies moved in lockstep in regard to Southeast Asian policy in general and Thailand policy in particular. Beyond the difficult relations between the SOE and the Foreign Office on Thailand-related issues, British civilian and military leaders had been engaged in a knockdown, dragout fight over broad strategy in the Asian war. The Chiefs of Staff were pushing for a Pacific strategy involving naval cooperation with the Americans in the main offensive against Japan, while Churchill and Mountbatten advocated independent British action in Southeast Asia, specifically an amphibious invasion of northern Sumatra. This particular debate – which historian H. P. Willmott describes as characterized by “chaos and confusion” – had become so intense in late March 1944 that the Chiefs of Staff threatened mass resignation. The Foreign Office ultimately sided with the Chiefs, but the dispute was settled only when Mountbatten agreed to abandon the Sumatra project in favor of a SEAC focus on Burma that would permit a simultaneous British naval effort in the Pacific.<sup>135</sup>

Further, the rivalry between the agencies responsible for clandestine warfare and intelligence gathering was no less bitter on the British side than on the American. Force 136 trespassed flagrantly on the traditional intelligence-gathering territory of the SIS (or ISLD, as the agency was

<sup>134</sup> Hoffman to Heppner, 30 August 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110; and Ripley to Lilly, 31 July 1944, Folder 1, Box 76; Dolbeare to Scholtz, 24 August 1944, Folder 13 and Scholtz to Shepardson, 28 and 31 August 1944, Folder 15, Box 412, Entry 99; and McClure to Ripley, 26 August 1944, Folder 2712, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Hoffman and Cheston to Donovan, 1 September 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA. Just as Scholtz was preparing to leave Ceylon, Washington advised Detachment 404 that he had been relaying complaints about his work to his wife and using her as a liaison with the Thai Legation. See Lilly to Solon, 8 August 1944, Folder 2712, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>135</sup> Willmott, *Grave of a Dozen Schemes*, 47–48, 54, 82, 103–04, 112–23.

called locally).<sup>136</sup> Yet American officers at Detachment 404 remained oblivious to the dissonance between the SOE and the Foreign Office and completely missed the significance of the SIS–SOE rivalry. It appears that they were blinded by their own deeply held assumptions about Perfidious Albion, as well as a superior British ability to mask internal differences in the presence of outsiders.

Back at Detachment 404, Bunmak and Wimon were briefed on plans for the top secret HOTFOOT operation soon after their return from the abortive DURIAN mission. Neither had received parachute training and there was no time for a course, but they still volunteered for the risky mission. They studied a handbook on parachuting and stacked up empty oil drums as platforms from which to practice tumbling exercises. Sanguan briefed them on political matters and alerted them to likely contacts, particularly Prince Wong Saensiriphan, who held a timber concession in the area of the drop area in the Rong Kwang district of Phrae province. A friend of Pridi's, Prince Wong had attempted to send agents to China on the Regent's behalf in 1942, but the men had disappeared. Fortunately, Bunmak had some firsthand knowledge of the Phrae area, having served there in the Thai army.<sup>137</sup>

On the morning of 2 September, the two men, accompanied by Captain Wester, their Free Thai colleague Anond, and other OSS officers, flew from Colombo to Calcutta. The Thai officers stayed at an OSS bungalow at Ranegan until the day of their sortie, 5 September. Magneto problems on the B-24 caused a delay in take off from Ondal Air Field and forced the pilots to plan an interim stop at Barrackpore for an engine check. When they arrived there, however, they saw no lights and could make no radio contact. The engines had begun functioning properly, so they proceeded across the Bay of Bengal. Crossing into Burma at a point sixty miles north of Rangoon, they encountered overcast. When they reached the target area about half an hour after midnight, ground fog obscured the Chao Phraya River, their key reference point. When the fog persisted, the pilots scrubbed the mission. The weary group landed at Ondal at 6:20 A.M. on 6 September.<sup>138</sup>

They took off again less than twelve hours later. Upon reaching Burma, they again encountered bad weather. Heavy rain over the drop

<sup>136</sup> Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 249–54 and Richard Aldrich, "Britain's Secret Intelligence Service in Asia During the Second World War," *Modern Asian Studies* 32 (1998): 179–217.

<sup>137</sup> Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 26–27 and Wester to Scofield, 18 September 1944, Folder 708, Box 45, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>138</sup> Wester to Scofield, 18 September 1944, Folder 708, Box 45, Entry 148 and Norton to Heppner, 25 September 1944, Folder 4, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

zone obscured all landmarks, forcing a second abortion. At the end of another long, exhausting night the B-24 landed at Ondal at 5:30 A.M. on 7 September. After consultations they decided to skip a night to get some much-needed rest and allow the weather to clear. With the full moon period nearing an end, they would make a last try on 8 September.<sup>139</sup>

They left at 7 P.M. on the 8th, this time encountering rain squalls both over the Bay of Bengal and the mainland. The target area, however, was clear. At 1 A.M. Bunmak, after slight hesitation, leaped out of the open hatch, striking its aft end on the way out. Wimon followed closely behind. Anond and Wester shoved out two containers behind them. Although the mission report makes no mention of the altitude, subsequent OSS documents suggest that the men were dropped from a higher than normal altitude.<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps for this reason, Wimon blacked out temporarily upon leaving the plane. When he regained his senses he hastily pulled the ripcord with his legs spread and become entangled. He struggled to right himself as he descended into the forest, where the branches of a huge tree caught his chute. In the darkness he could not ascertain the distance to the ground, but when attacked by red ants he elected to cut loose from the parachute and slid roughly down. There he stayed until dawn, nervously gripping his pistol.<sup>141</sup>

Unable to retrieve the chute from the tree, Wimon abandoned it and buried his uniform and boots. Dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, he began a fruitless five-day search for Bunmak and the supply chutes, subsisting largely on wild bananas. Bunmak also failed to find the equipment. Instead of landing near the edge of a forest as planned, the two had descended in the middle of it. Neither had the opportunity to radio Ceylon, so from Detachment 404's perspective they disappeared into a void, just as their predecessors from China had.<sup>142</sup>

Thus, although he had managed to keep the HOTFOOT operation secret from the British, as October 1944 began Heppner still had no indication that it would produce any results. Accordingly, he notified Force 136, as if it were a concession, that the OSS was willing to continue to regard the effort to contact Pridi as a joint effort. He had done so,

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. On the altitude, see "Greenlee's Diary," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154 and Warner interview of Heppner, Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. Greenlee mentions 5,500 feet, while Heppner gave the figure of 8,000 feet. Both are likely wrong. In his book *The Moonlight War*, 257–58, Terence O'Brien notes that "Liberators could not always get down to dropping height" and describes 3,000 feet as an exceptional height for a drop.

<sup>141</sup> Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 27–28.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. and "Story of Button," Folder 2553, Box 149, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

Heppner advised to Washington, simply "to get the benefit of anything they may pick up by virtue of the operation BRILLIG and perhaps get the benefit of a reception committee here and there."<sup>143</sup>

With the OSS falling further behind, Heppner continued to fret about British actions. Malaya had also become a major bone of contention since Force 136 had blocked JUKEBOX, an OSS operation aimed at landing agents on the eastern coast of the peninsula. Ostensibly, JUKEBOX had been put off because of a shortage of submarines, but Force 136 had also raised security issues about the planned project. Taylor suspected that British suspicions of "sinister political designs in Malaya" on the part of the OSS were the real concerns. At the end of August, Taylor had complained to Garnons-Williams that Force 136's actions seemed to be part of a "deliberate policy . . . to break up OSS as an independent organization and absorb it into SOE." He also accused Colonel Guise, the ranking SOE officer in Ceylon, of a campaign to subordinate OSS by undermining the authority of Garnons-Williams and P Division.<sup>144</sup>

The Malaya issue had flared up again in September when the British vetoed the OSS JUKEBOX II project on the grounds the British had "a similar and better operation," a scheme (Operation OATMEAL) which the Americans suspected had been developed as a pre-emptive move. P Division then merged the OSS project with the British one, only to have the British native agents refuse to work with the American team. When the British dispatched their party alone in October 1944, an outraged Heppner described British behavior as "quite deceitful," while Ripley concluded that the incident revealed the SOE's success in "sowing suspicion of OSS in British military and naval circles."<sup>145</sup>

In the midst of the JUKEBOX controversy, Dr. Amry Vandenbosch, a civilian expert on the Netherlands East Indies, had the temerity to challenge the attitudes of his colleagues by calling for closer Allied cooperation based on a recognition of pre-eminent British and Dutch interests in the region. In a memorandum addressed to Ripley, he quoted an American officer as saying that "one of the functions of OSS in this theater was to keep an eye on the British and to win the friendship of the native

<sup>143</sup> Heppner to Hoffman, 5 October 1944, Folder 3, Box 82, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>144</sup> Taylor to Garnons-Williams, 30 August 1944, Folder 2, Box 357, Entry 210; OSS/SEAC monthly report for August 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110; and Scofield to Heppner, 20 August 1944 and OSS to P Division, 21 August 1944, Folder 2600, Box 153, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 191–93.

<sup>145</sup> OSS/SEAC monthly report, September 1944, Folder 305, Box 47 and OSS/SEAC monthly report, October 1944, Folder 306, Box 48, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA; and Heppner to Donovan, 30 October 1944, Reel 130 and Heppner to Donovan, 5 November 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

peoples” and another as suggesting “it might be wise to secure the loyalties of the students and prospective agents by stimulating opposition to the British and the Dutch.” Labeling such attitudes as “highly unfriendly to our allies, if not a breach of faith,” Vandenbosch warned against raising “expectations which the United States could never fulfill.” He sought to put the OSS stance in perspective, suggesting that “It would be as if Great Britain should send agents into the United States to stir up the negroes, or sent a representative to Puerto Rico to express British sympathy for Puerto Rican aspirations.” He added, “I am sure Americans would not view any such act with tolerance.”<sup>146</sup> Vandenbosch’s superiors predictably rejected his heterodox views, and soon sent him home.

Heppner reiterated the prevailing wisdom in a 4 October letter that Donovan summarized and passed on to President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull. Heppner cited the impending arrival of a French military mission to SEAC as evidence that the European imperialists were closing ranks, adding: “It would appear that the strategy of the British, Dutch, and French is to win back and control Southeast Asia, making the fullest use possible of American resources, but foreclosing the Americans any voice in policy matters.”<sup>147</sup>

Heppner’s report surely resonated well in both the White House and in the State Department. A month earlier, in a memorandum included in the briefing papers for the Quebec Conference, the latter had advised Roosevelt of “persistent reports,” denied in London, of British plans to establish “a Southeast Asian federation of Burma, Malaya, Thailand and Indochina under British aegis, if not direct control.” It also cited the absence of a British statement on Thailand’s future and their interest in the Kra Isthmus as “strong evidence that the British hope to gain predominant influence over the post-war government of Thailand.” The report added that a Colonial Office official’s August 23 memorandum on postwar problems had suggested that Thailand “would probably have the status of an occupied country for some time.”<sup>148</sup>

Such concerns led Secretary of State Hull to raise the Thailand issue in a communication to Eden on 19 October. Hull expressed appreciation for the Foreign Secretary’s comment in September about the British desire for an independent postwar Thailand, and assured him that the USA

<sup>146</sup> Vandenbosch to Ripley, 19 September 1944, Folder 2728, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>147</sup> Scofield to Ripley, 21 September 1944, Folder 2728, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226 and Heppner to Donovan, 4 October 1944, Reel 89, M1642, USNA.

<sup>148</sup> Hull to Roosevelt, 8 September 1944, *FRUS: Conference at Quebec*, 1944, 263–65 and Annex B to “British-American Policy Toward Thailand,” 25 January 1945, 740.00110 PW/1-2545, RG 59, USNA.



agreed that territories acquired by Thailand, with Japanese assistance, since 1941 would have to be returned. But Hull sought clarification about the "special arrangements for security or economic collaborations" that the British envisioned. Eden, however, refused to be pinned down.<sup>149</sup>

By this time, though, the OSS had struck a major blow against the perceived British effort to freeze the Americans out of Thailand by establishing radio contact with Bangkok. This connection, made the very next day after Heppner had sent off his strong warning against imperial schemes, revived hopes for a significant American role in Thailand. The HOTFOOT mission had paid off.

After landing in the forest and searching unsuccessfully for Bunmak and the supply chutes, Wimon elected to follow a stream out of the forest. On 17 September he picked up Bunmak's trail and by the next afternoon came upon a village. He buried his gun, knife, and gold, then headed toward the settlement, where he encountered the headman and other villagers in pursuit of Bunmak. Wimon denied any knowledge of his colleague. In an effort to allay suspicions created by his disheveled appearance and his inability to speak the local dialect, Wimon claimed to be a police officer on a special mission for Adun.<sup>150</sup>

The headman permitted Wimon to stay overnight and the next morning sent him under escort to the district office in Rong Kwang. There, on the afternoon of 19 September, Wimon sought to allay suspicions that he was an opium smuggler by repeating his cover story and requesting permission to proceed to police headquarters in Phrae. He was trying to talk his way into a meeting with Adun, whom Sanguan believed to be anti-Japanese.<sup>151</sup>

The next morning, Wimon reached Phrae by bus, but the police chief there proved reluctant to send him to Bangkok. Desperate to surmount this obstacle, Wimon recalled that Sanguan had told him of a rumor that Adun had memorized the names of the Thai students who had not returned. He thus gambled that if he sent a telegram to Adun containing his real name, the police chief would recognize him as a Free Thai. He convinced the Phrae police chief that "Wimon Wiriyawit" was a code word that only Adun would understand. The ploy worked. Adun ordered that Wimon be escorted secretly to Bangkok.<sup>152</sup>

On the morning of 21 September, accompanied by two plainclothes officers, Wimon travelled by bus to the Denchai railway station. By late evening, his train reached Bangkok, where he and his escorts reported to the CID compound. Wimon spent the night locked in a cell, the same

<sup>149</sup> Hull to Winant, 19 October 1944 and Winant to Hull, 24 November 1944, *FRUS* 1944, V: 1318–20.

<sup>150</sup> Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 28–29. <sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–30. <sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

one, he later learned, where the pro-Japanese politician Wanit Phananon allegedly had hanged himself four months earlier.<sup>153</sup>

Wimon recalled that on the morning of 22 September Captain Phayom, the officer who had assisted Puai in his efforts to make contact with Force 136 in India, listened sympathetically to his story. Wimon told him that the American government had sent him on an urgent mission with a special message intended for both Adun and the Regent. Phayom took Wimon's request for an audience to Adun. In the afternoon, word came back that the meeting would occur that night.<sup>154</sup>

According to Wimon's account, after regular duty hours Phayom appeared at the CID headquarters dressed in civilian clothes and driving his personal car. He and Wimon motored to the Thewakamrangrak Bridge over a canal in the Nangloeng area of the city for a prearranged rendezvous with Adun. Phayom parked, and the two walked to the middle of the span. Soon Adun's black car crossed the bridge. As he had been trained to do, Wimon memorized the license number before it passed into the darkness. Dressed in a suit and carrying an umbrella, the fierce-eyed Police Chief walked onto the bridge and led Wimon back to his car. Much to Adun's amusement, the observant Wimon pointed out that the license plate on the car had been changed.<sup>155</sup>

The chauffeur drove Adun and Wimon on a circuitous course to a Chinese restaurant, where they ordered food and ate in the back seat of the car. According to Wimon's account, he appealed earnestly for Adun's assistance. Although he had been sent to contact Pridi, Wimon knew that Adun had blocked the colleagues who had preceded him from carrying out their missions and could block him as well. He told Adun that with the Japanese doomed to defeat, the Americans had sent him to offer support to the men seen as potential leaders of the Thai underground – Adun and Pridi – on the condition that they cooperate with each other. If they failed to unite, he warned, the United States would not help Thailand. Then, Wimon says, Adun took him to a prearranged meeting with Pridi at former foreign minister Direk Chayanam's house, where Wimon again urged cooperation between the Regent and Police Chief.<sup>156</sup>

In the wake of this meeting, Pridi dispatched a search party to look for Bunmak. Wimon claimed that the next day Adun permitted him to attempt radio contact with the OSS, although one of his messages from early 1945 suggests that this sanction was limited to using the radio inside CID headquarters. This effort did not succeed.<sup>157</sup> The evidence suggests

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.    <sup>154</sup> Ibid., 30–31.    <sup>155</sup> Ibid., 31–32.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 32–33 and interview with Wimon Wiriyawit, Bangkok, 6 July 1993.

<sup>157</sup> Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 32–33; a letter from Wimon Wiriyawit to the author, 17 January 1997; and DURIAN to Kandy, 14 January 1945, Folder 1256, Box 295, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

that subsequent attempts to use the radios from other sites in Bangkok were permitted by Phayom, on instructions from Pridi, without Adun's approval. Phayom involved Wimon, Karun, and Pao in these later efforts. Since neither Wimon nor Karun had their own crystals or codes, Pao would play the central role in effecting contact with the Ssumao base.<sup>158</sup>

Because none of the others said to have participated in the meeting Wimon described wrote about it, some have questioned the accuracy of his account, recorded decades after the fact. There is, however, contemporary evidence that Wimon did meet both Adun and Pridi soon after his arrival. He mentioned his contact with Pridi in a 17 October message relayed to Kandy through Szemao. In a longer message in mid-January 1945, Wimon told Kandy that he was "brought to Bangkok and met BETTY [Adun] and RUTH [Pridi]."<sup>159</sup> Certainly, Wimon's arrival can be seen as a catalytic event, although the most detailed near-contemporary account indicates that there were signs that the prospects for the American-trained Free Thai officers in Bangkok had improved even before he reached Bangkok.

According to notes on a debriefing after he returned to China in early January 1945, Karun stated that a few days after Pao had written a second letter (which Karun had seen) to Adun in mid-September 1944, Phayom told Pao and Karun that Adun would "help soon." Noting Wimon's subsequent arrival two or three days later, Karun related that Phayom told Wimon he would meet Pridi, a privilege afforded none of the other Free Thai officers. This caught the immediate attention of Karun's OSS interlocuter, who wrote in brackets: "Now seven Thais; how does Wyman (Wimon) get to see Ruth (Pridi)? Because from India? He was secret. Query whether he saw Ruth or not."<sup>160</sup>

Why indeed would Pridi decide immediately to receive Wimon after making no attempt to contact the men from the China group? Similarly, why would Adun have agreed to meet Wimon after having for weeks ignored appeals from Karun and Pao? As the OSS debriefer suspected, the fact that Wimon came from India, where Mountbatten's command was based, surely played a significant role. Tai Li's men in Thailand, who had contacts with both Adun and Pridi, had provided a list of the OSS men in China and the Thai army knew of Khap's presence there. News of the deaths of Karawek and Somphong must have circulated widely in official circles. Accordingly, many insiders knew something of OSS attempts

<sup>158</sup> Letter from Phisut Suthat to the author, 28 November 2003.

<sup>159</sup> WYMAN to Kandy via Kunming, 17 October 1944 and DURIAN to Kandy, 14 January 1945, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 225, USNA.

to penetrate Thailand from China. Beyond the fact that these attempts were less than completely secret, there is considerable evidence that Pridi considered the OSS-trained agents sent from China tainted by their association with Khap, Phibun's protégé, a concern perhaps reinforced by his Chinese contacts. As for Adun, Wimon himself believed that the fact that he was parachuted in and taken into custody alone, without equipment, might have piqued the Police Chief's curiosity.<sup>161</sup>

Still, propitious timing played a significant, perhaps decisive role, in determining the favorable outcome. During the previous month, Adun had played a key part in averting a military coup against the new Pridi-backed Khuang government and pushing Phibun out of his position as supreme commander of the armed forces. Then, in September, Adun had been persuaded to agree to the release of sixty-one political prisoners as part of an effort by Pridi to win support from the royalist faction and satisfy the chief concern of Prince Suphasawat. Direk, who had good relations with both Adun and Pridi, had played a go-between role.<sup>162</sup>

Further, recent contacts with the British surely had reinforced Pridi's concerns that London's negative attitude might imperil Thailand's independence, making a connection with the more favorably disposed Americans seem more important than before. Moreover, beginning in late August, the Kempeitai cracked down on the Chinese underground, arresting a number of agents and capturing a secret radio station in Thonburi, disrupting the operations of Tai Li's organization in Bangkok.<sup>163</sup> If the Chinese had been discouraging the Thai leaders from dealing with the OSS, they were in a weaker position to do so after this raid.

Pridi's search party failed to locate Bunmak, who had managed to elude capture and reach Phrae. He could not find the two contacts Sanguan had

<sup>161</sup> Letter to author from Wimon Wiriawit, 16 January 1995 and H. G. Deignan memo of 17 January 1945, Folder 15, Box 412, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA. The latter describes a conversation with Luang Dittthakan in which he expressed the view that Khap's involvement made Pridi reluctant to utilize the American agents sent in from China.

<sup>162</sup> On the maneuvering that follow Phibun's resignation, see Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 194–96. On the release of the political prisoners, see Sorasak Ngamcachonkulkid, *The Free Thai Movement and Thailand's Internal Political Conflicts (1938–1949)* (Bangkok, 1991), 24–25. According to the memorandum by Dwight Bulkley, "Political Prisoners in Siamese Politics," XL 34352, RG 226, USNA, originally a total of 382 persons had been sentenced to prison in the wake of the failed royalist rebellion of 1933, while twenty-three persons had received life sentences in connection with an alleged conspiracy against the government in 1938.

<sup>163</sup> Murashima Eiji, "The Thai-Japanese Alliance and the Chinese in Thailand" in Paul H. Kratoska, ed., *Southeast Asian Minorities in the Wartime Japanese Empire* (New York, 2002), 213. This raid is mentioned by Krit in his memorandum in Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 216 and in Prasoet, *Ruang khong kabuangan Seri Thai*, 5. The incident caused Pridi to shift the Force 136 radio from Thonburi to Chan Bunnak's Bangkok residence.

recommended, but received aid from a sympathetic female teacher. He eventually took a bus to Denchai, where he boarded a train to Bangkok. There, he tracked down Thawin Udon, one of Pridi's trusted lieutenants, who arranged for him to meet the Regent. It is not clear precisely when Bunmak reached Bangkok, but it may have been before 1 October, and it is possible that he played a behind-the-scenes role in facilitating contact with the OSS. Near the end of October, in hopes of recovering the lost radio sets so he could set up a communications link with the Americans unknown to Adun, Pridi sent Bunmak back north to search for them. The party spent a month in the forest, but failed to find the radios.<sup>164</sup>

In the meantime, police in northern Thailand had taken Phon into protective custody. After a difficult journey across Lao territory, Phon had taken up his assigned task of organizing courier routes in northern Thailand in the vicinity of Chiang Khong. In August he dispatched an extensive intelligence report by courier to Ssumao, including information on the disposition of the Thai army and various hand-drawn maps and diagrams. In September, he fell into police custody in the Phrae area under circumstances that are not clear. The police transported Phon to Bangkok, but kept him separated from the other Free Thai officers, because Adun intended to send him back to China as a personal emissary. On the day of his arrival in Bangkok the other seven Free Thai were given new accommodation.<sup>165</sup>

Pao's first attempts to make radio contact with Ssumao from Amphon Sathon Palace, near the National Assembly building failed. Karun suspected a problem with the sets and asked Phayom to bring a radio to the CID headquarters for repair. According to Karun's account, Adun observed the transfer of the set and expressed anger over Phayom's action, ordering him not to do it again.<sup>166</sup> This suggests that Adun had not approved efforts to use the radios outside CID headquarters, apparently because he considered such action too risky. Although Wimon has

<sup>164</sup> "The Story of BUTTON," Folder 2558, Box 149, Entry 154, RG 226 and Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 12.

<sup>165</sup> Phon's lengthy intelligence report, handwritten in Thai, is in folder 3003, Box 173, Entry 154; interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154 (notes) and Folder 520, Box 52, Entry 110, (typed summary) RG 226, USNA; and interview with Wimon Wiriyawit, Bangkok, 6 July 1993.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 225, USNA. Karun's report suggests that Wimon was with Phayom when Adun caught him with the radio. In mentioning this incident, Wimon (letter from Wimon Wiriyawit to the author, 15 June 1994), citing Phayom, said that Phisut had been the Free Thai officer involved. Phisut, however, said (letter from Phisut Suthat to the author, 27 October 2003) that he was not involved.



9. Operating his radio from the second floor of this Bangkok house, Pao Khamurai (Khamourai) made the first successful contact with the OSS base at Ssumao, China, on 5 October 1944. (Source: photo by author)

written that from 23 September 1944 Adun provided “full and active cooperation,”<sup>167</sup> messages from Bangkok at the time, including his own and those from the British officers, consistently criticized Adun’s foot-dragging. A report written by Bunmak stated that Pridi, through the agency of Phayom, had arranged the early attempts to establish radio contact. On 10 November, Pao specifically reported that Adun had not authorized the initial successful radio contact.<sup>168</sup> Adun did decide in early October to contact the Americans, but his plan focused on sending a selected Free Thai officer overland to China.

<sup>167</sup> Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 33. Although later Wimon became embittered toward Pridi and praised Adun in his memoir, he had a quite different attitude at the time. For example, on 14 January 1945 (Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226) he advised Kandy: “By his nature BETTY (Adun) works selfishly alone and against anybody else even with some ideal. He is never popular because he is dictatorial and egoistic. A few police underlings submit to him but nobody likes him. Now BETTY yields to RUTH (Pridi) because he thinks the Allies trust RUTH so that he can introduce himself to the Allies through RUTH. Nevertheless he may be useful in some way. Advise you deal with him cautiously.”

<sup>168</sup> Pao’s comment is quoted in Smith to Berno, 15 December 1944, Folder 2318, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Bunmak’s account is in “The Story of BUTTON,” n.d., Folder 2558, Box 149, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

After several failures to contact Szemao, Pao shifted the set to the second floor of a small, wooden house, owned by a relative of Phayom, on Soi Suan Oy, off Samsen Road. This location had the advantage of proximity to a Thai military headquarters. If Japanese picked up the transmission they might assume it was coming from the army facility, which also might offer a potential place of refuge in the event of a Japanese raid. With a wire stretched out the window as an antenna, Pao connected his SSTR-1 set to the house current and went on the air on the evening of 5 October 1944. As he began tapping the key, the lights in the house began blinking on and off in sync with the dots and dashes. Pao stopped to unscrew the light bulbs, then resumed his efforts.<sup>169</sup>

Over 600 miles to the north, Ssumao's chief radio operator, Nitthiphat, strained to hear Pao's long anticipated signal through the crackles and pops of an early evening thunderstorm. In hopes that the static would abate, he requested suspension of the transmission for an hour. The contact resumed at 7:30 P.M. with the entire Ssumao crew crowded into the radio shack. The initial messages revealed that seven of the Free Thai were safe in police hands in Bangkok, although "not allowed any great freedom of movement" because of Adun's concerns about detection by the Japanese. They reported, however, that Adun "was thinking of helping us in a secret but unofficial way" and that an officer would be sent out with detailed information. Pao warned against the dispatch of additional agents.<sup>170</sup>

Although puzzled by a third message in an unknown code from "Wyman" (Wimon's nickname), which they were asked to pass on to Detachment 404, the men at Ssumao were understandably elated. Putting many months of frustration behind them, they stayed up all night to celebrate a sweet success.<sup>171</sup> Heppner's bold gamble had paid off and the Americans were still in the game.

<sup>169</sup> Pao's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 11, 92–93.

<sup>170</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA; Coughlin and Hall for Hoffman, 8 October 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA; and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 180–83.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. Oddly, the news of the contact with Bangkok was apparently not relayed from Kunming to Washington until 8 October and did not reach there until the 9th. The reason for the delay is unclear.



## 7 The OSS commits to Pridi

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Although the Free Thai agents in Bangkok established radio contact with the OSS station at Ssumao on 5 October 1944, relations between the Thai regent, Pridi Phanomyong, and the Americans developed slowly. Complications included the ongoing OSS rivalry with the SOE, suspicions roused by the nature of the information radioed from Bangkok, and the uneasy alliance between Pridi and Police General Adun Adundecharat (RUTH and BETTY as they were code-named). The connection would solidify only after OSS made a full commitment to Pridi and dispatched American officers into Bangkok.

Obviously relieved and elated that his HOTFOOT gamble had paid off, Detachment 404's Colonel Heppner radioed General Donovan on 10 October 1944 that "evidently" Wimon had reached Pridi and "made arrangements" for the China group to establish contact. "No one not a member of OSS has any knowledge of this, and the whole operation was completed with the greatest secrecy," Heppner added. Responding to word that an American air support unit might be placed at his disposal, Heppner suggested the necessity of "numerous drops of personnel and supplies" to follow up "our first notable success in Thailand."<sup>1</sup>

The Bangkok contact also greatly buoyed the spirits of the OSS group at Ssumao, China. When the first supply plane in two months reached the remote base on 9 October, Nicol Smith seized the opportunity to report to his superiors, including his old acquaintance and benefactor, General Chennault, in Kunming. From there, Smith traveled on to New Delhi to meet Coughlin and Heppner. His written report emphasized the Free Thai agents' contacts with Pridi and Adun and the receipt of promising bits of intelligence. Given the hardships experienced by the men who had reached Bangkok, reports of stepped up Japanese activity in Indochina, and evidence of Chinese perfidy, Smith argued that it would be foolhardy to attempt to infiltrate additional agents overland. He noted that new agents could be airdropped from India, but suggested that given

<sup>1</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 10 and 11 October 1944, Reels 35 and 90, M1642, USNA.

the number of men already in Bangkok this might not be necessary. He proposed that the Free Thai officers still with Detachment 101 be sent to Ssumao to help man the radios, permitting leaves for members of the first group. He further suggested that non-essential Thai personnel be released so they could resume their studies.<sup>2</sup>

In a report to OSS Headquarters, dated 17 October, the more skeptical Detachment 202 chief, Colonel Coughlin, commented:

There is not too much known at the present time but it is felt that seven of the boys are now in Bangkok in good hands with considerable radio equipment. They have been answering three times daily and the signal has been strong. This would indicate that we should have a good contact with the top side of that government and be in a position to ask questions or transmit statements. The next month should prove whether or not this is true.<sup>3</sup>

Coughlin agreed that if the men already in Bangkok functioned effectively, Smith's suggestions made sense. As a preliminary move, he transferred Free Thai lieutenants Sala Thansanon (Dasananda) and Chalong Puntrakun (Puntrakul) and their conducting officer, Lieutenant William Pye, to Ssumao, while assigning the other officers still with Detachment 101 to Ceylon. Detachment 404's Morale Operations claimed Lieutenant Bunyong Nikhrothanon (Boonyong Nikrodhananda), an architect with artistic talents, leaving the SO and SI branches to fight over the other seven men: Charoen Watthanaphanit (Vadhanapanich), Amnuai Phunphiphat (Amnuey Poonphiphatna), Charok Losuwan (Jaroch Losuvalna), Sunthon Khanthalaksa (Soontorn Khantalaksana), Udom Phuphat (Puhpadhana), Ayut (Ayus) Issarasena, and Prayun (Prayoon) Atthachinda.<sup>4</sup>

Initially the SO branch prevailed and sent the seven into training for two sabotage missions, BOSOM and PEWIT. BOSOM aimed at establishing an American demolitions expert and three Thai officers on the Kra Isthmus near the railway line connecting Bangkok and Malaya. Operation PEWIT, would place a similar group in an area north of the Thailand-Burma Railway.<sup>5</sup>

Although the OSS attempted to withhold news of its new Bangkok connection from the Chinese, there is every reason to assume that Tai Li's

<sup>2</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190 and "Memorandum for SI Files," Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226.

<sup>3</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 17 October 1944, Folder 488, Box 67, Entry 190, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; Coughlin to Wilkinson, 20 October 1944, Folder 3332, Box 196 and "History of the 2nd Free Thai Group," Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154; and "SEAC Monthly Report for Nov. 1944," Folder 2, Box 61, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>5</sup> Report on operations, November 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110 and "Report of Interview with Lt. Ayus Isarasena," Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

organization learned of it almost immediately either from its sources in Bangkok or in China; perhaps from both. Pridi's ally Thawin Udon, after many months of contact with Chinese agents, had received an invitation in September to travel to China. For the sake of maintaining relations with the Chinese, Pridi instructed Thawin to go as his personal representative. He also instructed Thawin to establish contact with Seni in Washington and an expected Free Thai mission to India. The Regent assured the British by radio that there would be no free-lance negotiations in Chungking.<sup>6</sup>

Adun, who had already established his own independent liaison with the Chinese through Kengtung, initially had intended to send Phon back to China with Thawin, but at the last minute chose Karun instead. Karun had surreptitiously contacted Thawin after three unsuccessful efforts to meet Tiang Sirikhan, so it is possible that the Assemblyman requested Karun. Other considerations may have been the facts that Karun's father, Luang Kat Songkhram, had fled overland from Thailand to China some months earlier and was in Chinese custody, while his elder sister, the wife of Luang Dittthakan of the Thai Legation, was in Washington. Adun told Karun to convey to the Americans his willingness to cooperate, together with a request for equipment and supplies.<sup>7</sup>

Carrying a fake ID card, Karun and a plain-clothes police officer boarded the train for Udon on 10 October 1944. In Udon, he met Thawin, who accompanied him to a hotel. From there, they went by bus to Nong Khai, then crossed the Mekong to Vientiane by boat. The party had grown to five, as the two were joined by a retired army officer, Chalo Intaramban; Chalo's police officer son, Prayun; and journalist Manot Wutthatit, who served as Thawin's secretary. A wood-burning steam launch provided by Tai Li's agents carried them upriver to Luang Prabang two weeks later.<sup>8</sup>

From there they then journeyed via a Chinese opium smuggling trail to Yunnan, joined by a man Thawin later identified as the key figure in the Chinese underground network in Indochina, a forty-three-year-old

<sup>6</sup> Pridi to Calcutta, 27 November 1944, HS1-61, PRO.

<sup>7</sup> Nicolson to SCS, 20 November and 2 December 1944, HS1-56, PRO; and interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. On the escape of Kat's family, see Smith to Hoffman, 20 March 1943, Reel 128, M1642, USNA; and letters of 9 and 21 January, from Kat to his daughter in Washington, DC, 9 and 21 January 1945, HS1-61 and memorandum by Luang Kat, 1 April 1945, HS1-75, PRO.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154 and Manot Wutthatit report, XL 14550, RG 226, USNA. Clear evidence of continued Chinese radio links with Thailand is the fact that in Chungking Robin Lo informed Ramphai Tularak on 14 October that Thawin's five-man party was *en route* from Thailand. Sanguan Tularak funeral volume 174.

Hainanese businessman resident in Luang Prabang, Ko Kien. Lao Chieng, a thirty-seven-year-old ruffian from Yunnan, whom Thawin described as a “rather frightening type to the easily intimidated,” also accompanied them. Lao seemed “to have the rougher elements of the various native villages under his thumb,” Thawin reported. The party stopped at “well-organized resting places, where food for travelers and fodder for the pack-mules is always available” in a succession of hill-tribe villages. The journey to the Chinese border took thirteen days; the trek from there to Szemao consumed another eighteen.<sup>9</sup>

When they reached Ssumao on 11 December, the Chinese attempted to insulate the envoys from the Free Thai officers, claiming that British agents had infiltrated the OSS group. After prolonged negotiations, however, Major Chamrat met the group and accompanied Thawin and Karun on a flight to Kunming. Smith witnessed their arrival on 4 January 1945, but was allowed only the briefest introduction to Thawin before Tai Li's men hustled Pridi's envoy away. Thawin did manage to hand over a message for Sanguan scrawled on the back of a Lucky Strike cigarette package. Karun explained that the Chinese possessiveness reflected an understandable concern that the Americans would attempt to whisk Thawin off to Washington, just as they had done with Sanguan and Daeng a year earlier.<sup>10</sup>

Sometime in October, apparently after Karun's departure, Anon, Pridi's brother-in-law, had arrived in Thailand. While holed up in a Meo village on the French Indochina side of the border, he had heard that the Thai police were now cooperating with the Free Thai. Accordingly, he crossed the Mekong and contacted the police. The same officer who had accompanied Pao and his colleagues escorted him to Bangkok. After a brief stay at police headquarters, officials moved him to the house where Pao had been operating his radio.<sup>11</sup>

Phon left Bangkok a month after Karun, on 11 November 1944, carrying maps and other intelligence information. Included was a coded letter from Pridi to Sanguan complaining of British unwillingness to

<sup>9</sup> Nicholson to SCS, 15 February and 13 March 1945, HS1-61, PRO.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ken (Karun), 5 January 1944, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154; Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 193–94; and Smith to Hoffman, 4 January 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA. Chinese fears were well founded. In a letter of 6 January 1945, Sanguan urged Thawin to leave China and come to SEAC headquarters. He had urged Seni to facilitate the move and had heard that the US government was interested in Thawin's transfer (Sanguan to Thawin, 6 January 1945, Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA). Thawin's party soon very much wanted to leave China, as revealed in Heppner to Donovan, 1 March 1945, Folder 2650, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>11</sup> Copy of a letter written by Anon na Phomphet in 1986 provided to the author by Phisut Suthat, and letter from Phisut Suthat to the author, 27 October 2003.

discuss political questions. Escorted to the border by police, Phon exited Thailand via Chiang Khong. Chok, back at Meng La in the company of Nitthiphat after a November trip to Ssumao and Kunming, received instructions to facilitate Phon's entry in light of reports that the Chinese might attempt to block him at the border. Accordingly, Chok and Colonel Chiew met Phon in Muong Sing, then Chok accompanied Phon to Ssumao, arriving there on 8 January 1945. Along the way, Phon briefed Chok on the political situation in Bangkok, telling him that Adun, while "very cautious because the Japanese were watching him closely," had complete authority over the police and was recruiting "field police" – officers who served in military-style units – in preparation for a guerrilla war against the Japanese.<sup>12</sup>

Adun had instructed Phon, as he had Karun, to request arms from the Americans. However, because Pridi did not want weapons flowing directly to the police, Phayom, the Regent's ally at CID headquarters, told the Free Thai officers that Adun did not really want arms, but had merely sent Phon to China to impress the OSS. They radioed this report to Ssumao where it was passed to Chok. From there it reached the ears of "Mary," Adun's representative at Chiang Khong. Both "Mary" and Adun were irate about the apparent double-cross, clear evidence that a gap still existed between Pridi and Adun.<sup>13</sup>

Immediately after Phon's arrival at Ssumao, Karun and Chamrat left for debriefing in Washington. Karun reported Thai concerns about British and Chinese intentions, declaring that the Thai underground "offers full cooperation to America and attempts to satisfy [the] British and Chinese by good manners." He emphasized the potential strength of the underground and warned of possible Japanese action against the Thai government. Acknowledging that Pridi distrusted the Free Thai officers from China because of their connection with Khap, Karun defended his colleagues and urged that the Americans encourage Pridi to utilize them.<sup>14</sup>

In Kandy, Heppner continued to withhold news of the successful OSS penetration of Bangkok from his British counterparts and was cheered by reports that the SOE had problems in Thailand. Apparently influenced by

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Phon, 19 January 1945, Folder 2990, Box 172, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; "Report from Lt. N. R. Charles" (Chok na Ranong) a copy of which was provided to the author by William Pye; and Smith to Hoffman, 6 January 1945, Reel 128 and Ripley to 154, 24 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>13</sup> "Report from Lt. N.R. Charles on Courier Routes and French Contacts in Indochina," n.d., and "Interview with Maj. Nicol Smith," 29 March 1945, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>14</sup> Hutcheson and Hoffman to Donovan, 23 January 1945, Reel 90, D1642 and Hutcheson to Ripley, 29 January 1945, Folder 2712, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

a memorandum from Dillon Ripley concerning the 30 October P Division meeting, Heppner informed Donovan on 5 November that the British were "dissatisfied" with Pridi and "making overtures to members of the former pro-Japanese Thai government." Heppner seems to have drawn this conclusion from the reasonable British surmise that Pridi and Adun were still operating separately and perhaps competing with each other. Noting Detachment 404's "regular contact with Bangkok," he indicated that his British counterparts "had received no word from their groups there for the past month." In a separate message to Donovan, Ripley theorized that the British might be considering cooperation with the Chinese in setting up an alternative Thai regime.<sup>15</sup>

In truth, the British had not lost contact with Bangkok and certainly were not contemplating joining forces with the Chinese. A contemporary British memorandum claimed that "high grade intelligence" was being received from Thailand regarding the location of POW camps, troop concentrations, and bombing targets, as well as results of Allied bombing raids. Moreover, the APPRECIATION parties had reported on 21 October that they were under Adun's protection and had "greater freedom."<sup>16</sup>

There were significant problems, though, as a consequence of the British cabinet's hard-line policy toward Thailand. Force 136 wanted to bring a high-level Thai delegation from Bangkok to Kandy, an effort they hoped would cement the British advantage and perhaps persuade the OSS to join in a cooperative effort in Thailand, led of course by the British. In October, Pridi had proposed sending out a delegation including Direk Chayanam, a former foreign minister and ambassador to Japan. Direk's inclusion suggested that the Regent wished to discuss Thailand's future in light of the state of war that existed between the two countries, but SOE headquarters, well aware of the Foreign Office attitude and chastened by political complications that had developed during European operations, insisted that any talks be restricted to military matters. Because Pridi had acquired few reliable military allies and Direk had no military expertise, the Regent abruptly dropped his proposal.<sup>17</sup>

Worried that communication might break down entirely, Force 136's Siam Country section radioed Pridi to emphasize the important role the Thai underground could play in overcoming British anger over Thailand's

<sup>15</sup> Heppner to Donovan, 5 November 1944, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI, Reel 131, USMHI; and Ripley memorandum, 3 November 1944, Folder 2289, Box 131, Entry 154 and Ripley to Donovan, 3 November 1944, Folder 2, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>16</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 85–90; Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 111; and "Operations War Diary, PRICHARD/APPRECIATION," HS1-68, PRO.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. and Ambler to Siam Country Section, 22 September 1944, HS1-74, PRO.

alliance with Japan and Phibun's declaration of war. Pridi replied by suggesting that the British send in one of its specialists from the Siam Country section – Peter Pointon, N. F. Nicholson, or Andrew Gilchrist – for consultation. Force 136, however, considered the insertion of a European into Thailand unduly risky. It demurred, leaving matters, as Gilchrist put it, “in something like an impasse.”<sup>18</sup>

Although these British political difficulties opened a door of opportunity for the Americans, the officers of Detachment 404 had developed their own suspicions about Pridi. This resulted in part from their dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of intelligence radioed by the Free Thai officers in Bangkok, but it was even more a consequence of Detachment 404's unfortunate decision to disregard Pridi's request that no additional agents be dispatched until reception arrangements could be made.

Two OSS missions were already in preparation when radio contact was established. One, Operation ARISTOC, was based on the plan to set up a base in the vicinity of Thailand's highest mountain, Doi Angka, thirty-five miles southwest of Chiang Mai. Three of the four volunteers former missionary John Holladay had collected at Detachment 101 in August 1944 were selected to accompany Holladay on the mission. The former missionary knew the area and spoke the northern Thai dialect, while his OSS colleague Herbert Deignan, who had formerly taught at the Presbyterian-sponsored Prince Royal's College in Chiang Mai, had visited Doi Angka on an ornithological expedition. The two anticipated that White Karen hilltribesmen in the area would assist the party and help them establish a guerrilla base. The mission's ultimate purpose was to contact Pridi, but once the SOE had established communications in Bangkok the British opposed this aspect of the plan, arguing that if ARISTOC failed, their own successful operation could be jeopardized. OSS representatives countered by dropping the plans to contact Pridi. They also assured their British counterparts that the ARISTOC participants were not aware of the Force 136 contact, so they could not reveal it even if captured.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “404 SO Branch Report,” July 1944, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110; Peers to Heppner, 19 August 1944, Folder 192, Box 23, Entry 165; “Materials for ARISTOC,” 7 September 1944, Folder 705, Box 45, Entry 148; “ARISTOC,” Folder 706, Box 45, Entry 148; Heppner to Guise, 5 October 1944, Folder 2484, Box 141, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Despite the OSS insistence that ARISTOC was no longer intended to make contact Pridi, the fifth mission objective was to “establish contact with the Free Thai Movement and/or other resistance groups,” and in his memoir of the mission Sit Sawetsila revealed that their plans called for one of the three men, Udomsak, to go to Bangkok. See “ARISTOC: Report of Escorting Officer,” Folder 4, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA and Sir's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 108.



In the wake of these assurances and given the intense American anger over the Operation JUKEBOX fiasco, the British could not oppose the ARISTOC plan too strongly. They did, however, take the opportunity to match it with a similar plan of their own, Operation COUPLING, a scheme to insert a party onto the remote Phu Kradung plateau in northern Thailand (approximately half way between Khon Kaen and Loei). The British envisioned a base there as a back-up in case their Bangkok connection went awry. In approving OSS's ARISTOC and SOE's COUPLING, P Division head Garnons-Williams emphasized: "These two [parties] for the time being will only establish themselves and remain dormant."<sup>20</sup>

Heppner proceeded with the ARISTOC mission despite internal opposition to its launch. At a meeting with Heppner and Coughlin in Delhi in mid-October, Nicol Smith warned that "Holladay would certainly be killed and probably any agents going in with him." Undeterred, Heppner advised Bangkok of the mission on 20 October as "a matter of courtesy," but with the intention of proceeding regardless of the response. Pridi's request that the mission be held up until reception could be arranged gave Heppner pause, but he decided on 30 October to send the three Thai officers – Sit, Chaloe, and Udomsak – and hold Holladay back. The decision disappointed the latter, but pleased the Thai officers who feared that Holladay's presence would make their mission more risky. The men demonstrated their eagerness by agreeing to proceed even though adverse weather had prevented effective aerial reconnaissance of the drop site.<sup>21</sup>

The ARISTOC party took off in a British B-24 on 1 November 1944 from Jessore, India. The plane arrived in the target area at midnight, but the crew had difficulty finding a suitable site for the air drop, despite clear weather. Consequently the plane circled for fifty minutes before the three men and eleven supply chutes were released and the B-24 departed.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Garnons-Williams to Donovan, 5 November 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI. According to Sawat Sisuk, *Seri Thai nai phak Isan lae ruang khong Phan Tho David Smiley* (Bangkok, 1997), 7, E. H. Morris, a former Bangkok resident working for Force 136, had visited Phu Kradung and suggested it as a likely location for a secret base. Fortunately, one of the Whites, Sena Ninkhamhaeng, had been there and could lead the COUPLING party. See Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 94–96.

<sup>21</sup> "Interview with Maj. Nicol Smith," 29 March 1945, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210; Coughlin, Heppner, and Smith to Wimon, 20 October 1944, unnumbered folder, Box 104, Entry 88; message of 30 October 1944, Folder 2599, Box 153, Entry 154; and "ARISTOC: Report of Escorting Officer," Folder 4, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>22</sup> "ARISTOC: Report of Escorting Officer," Folder 4, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. After capture of the three agents, the time the plane spent over the drop zone became a matter of controversy. However, the escorting officer, Waugh, verified that "with the exception of the final buzz at the field every bit of the time was necessary" due to problems in locating a good drop zone. See Mansfield to Scofield, 20 November 1944, Folder 706, Box 45, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA.

The three landed safely in a muddy rice paddy. After signalling their aircraft by flashlight, they scrambled to gather their 2,800 pounds of equipment and supplies. Barking dogs had alerted them to the fact that they were uncomfortably close to houses. When dawn broke, they found that residents of a nearby hilltribe village, Mae Sop Po, had slipped away into the forest, but were gradually filtering back. The three approached the villagers, claiming to be air force officers on an inspection tour. They sought to win over the tribespeople with gifts of canned food and trinkets. In return, the villagers helped to carry the officers' equipment to a prospective campsite, along a stream, some distance away.<sup>23</sup>

When advised by an itinerant Thai trader that Japanese soliders were camped only thirteen kilometers away, the three officers decided they must move. First, however, they set up parachute silks for shelter and attempted to radio Ceylon, but could not make contact. Udomsak went out on a reconnaissance mission and returned in less than two hours in the company of a squad of Thai policemen led by Lieutenant Prathan Chaiyaphan, a former schoolmate of Sit's at Bangkok's Suan Kulap School. Alerted by Adun that the ARISTOC mission was coming, the police had set out to find the party, hoping to locate them before a patrol of sixty Japanese soldiers could do so. The three hurriedly packed their gear, changed into civilian clothes and accompanied Prathan. The other policemen returned by a different route.<sup>24</sup>

After a two-day hike, Prathan's party reached a police station and were granted an audience with the provincial governor. They then advanced to Lamphun and caught the train to Lampang, sharing the coach with a number of unsuspecting Japanese soldiers. Although they had intended to stop for the night, when they saw many Japanese soldiers in Lampang they decided to walk on to the next rail station, Mae Tha. After a twenty-kilometer hike, they rested on benches at the station to await the next day's train.<sup>25</sup>

During the subsequent trip southward, the passengers had to disembark and walk across the bomb-damaged Bandara bridge to another train waiting on the other side. While making this change, Sit became separated from his comrades in the darkness and found himself in a car almost entirely occupied by Japanese soldiers. One, his seatmate, frisked him for firearms, but fortunately none of the officers were carefully searched or questioned.<sup>26</sup>

In Bangkok, the three met Captain Phayom and, after a night at the CID headquarters, were removed to a police general's Thonburi house.

<sup>23</sup> Sit's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 106–08 and “SEAC Monthly Report for November 1944,” Folder 2, Box 61, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>24</sup> Sit's account in Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 108–09.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–10. <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–11.

Sit and Chaloem were suffering from malaria, but as soon as they were feeling better the three went to the Soi Suan Oy house from which Pao had first radioed Ssumao. Using Udomsak's crystal, Chaloem established contact with Ceylon, reporting:

Japs knew where we landed 15 miles north of actual [intended] drop point. All safe in Bangkok under the police RUTH [Pridi] sorry you did not follow instruction. Makes it hard to protect us. Do not send anyone til change. Not safe to contact you often now. Stop KING [Kusa] and ARNOLD [Anond]; coast full of Jap patrols and very dangerous<sup>27</sup>

The latter reference reflected the ARISTOC party's knowledge that Detachment 404 had simultaneously launched another mission aimed at Thailand. The fourth man Holladay had recruited, Kusa Panyarachun, had been paired with Anond Siwatthana, who had accompanied Bunmak and Wimon to India. These two officers and two Chinese had trained under the supervision of John Wester for a landing from a submarine at Kradan, a normally uninhabited narrow island in the Andaman Sea off the Kra Isthmus (Operation DURIAN II).<sup>28</sup>

Kusa and Anond's two Chinese colleagues had reached Ceylon as the result of a concerted effort by Allied intelligence agencies to seize boatmen along Southeast Asian coasts. The Allies not only expected to gather intelligence from such captives, but hoped that some could be pressed into service to alleviate a severe shortage of native agents. The two Chinese who trained for DURIAN II had been picked up by a British submarine that sank their boat between Trang, Thailand, and Penang Island. They were relatives of a local official on Muk Island, near Kradan, so it was hoped that they would prove useful in making contacts. During survival training in the jungle, however, the older of the two Chinese fell ill with a fever. When the party radioed base for instructions, they were ordered to stay put. In the absence of proper medical treatment the man died, leaving his younger colleague, Ah What, to accompany Kusa and Anond on the British submarine *Tally-Ho*.<sup>29</sup>

The warning from Bangkok came too late. The submarine carrying the party had departed Ceylon on 29 October, although on the way, it had been diverted on an abortive mission to intercept a German submarine. A fruitless search for downed Allied airmen near the Straits of Malacca further delayed the mission, but the submarine arrived off Kradan on the morning of 9 November. After observing and photographing the landing

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 111–12 and Williams to Scofield, 15 November 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>28</sup> "Number 20," Folder 7, Box 64, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA and interview with Anond Siwatthana (Srivardhana), Santa Clara, CA, 9 August 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Anond interview and Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan*, 184–86.

site, it surfaced at dusk and offloaded two motorized landing boats to transport more than a ton of equipment and supplies, including a canoe. By 8:15 P.M. the transfer was effected and the landing craft returned to the *Tally-Ho*.<sup>30</sup>

Only the landing went well. Once on shore the three men found relatively little cover, so had difficulty concealing their equipment. While engaged in this effort, Anond heard the sound of whistling, so from the beginning they realized that they were not alone on the supposedly deserted island. In the morning's light they sighted a man on the ridge behind their camp. He did not approach, so Kusa and Ah What climbed to the top of a hill and sighted makeshift fishermen's shacks on the opposite shore of the island. Reluctant to attack what they assumed to be innocent fishermen, the three decided to try a peaceful approach.<sup>31</sup>

As the three advanced over the ridge, the leader of the group of fishermen came forward. The Thai officers claimed they had been sent to establish a lighthouse on the island, but Anond suspected from the beginning that their story did not ring true. The Free Thai officers did not know that the fishermen were living temporarily on Kradan because they had been expelled from Trang due to trouble with the authorities there.<sup>32</sup>

After returning to their camp, the DURIAN II team members decided to attempt to reach Muk Island, the home of Ah What's relative, located between Kradan and the mainland. As they waited for the cover of darkness, they spied one of the fishermen sailing off in a small boat. When they finally launched their canoe it began to leak because the heat inside the submarine had loosened its caulking. Forced back to shore, they crossed to the other side of the island where a newly landed group of gypsy fishermen agreed to transport them to Muk for five baht.<sup>33</sup>

When they reached their destination, Ah What's relative offered to escort them to the mainland, but Kusa, the team leader, hesitated, concerned about the fate of their radios, machine guns, and supplies still on Kradan. They decided to return to Kradan to collect the equipment the following night, then set up an observation station on Muk.<sup>34</sup>

The fisherman who had sailed away from Kradan the previous day had informed the Trang police of the DURIAN II landing. The police

<sup>30</sup> "Operation Report: DURIAN," Folder 4, Box 63 and "SEAC Monthly Report for November 1944," Folder 2, Box 61, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. The *Tally-Ho* had an eventful year in 1944, sinking at least five enemy ships, including the light cruiser *Kuma* off Penang on 11 January, a Japanese transport off Little Andaman Island on 15 January, a German cargo submarine off Penang on 14 February, a submarine chaser off Penang on 6 October and a minelayer off Great Nicobar Island on 20 November. See H. P. Willmott, *Grave of a Dozen Schemes* (Annapolis, 1996), 158–59, 164, 166.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Anond Siwatthana, Santa Clara, CA, 19 August 1993.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. <sup>33</sup> Ibid. <sup>34</sup> Ibid.

gathered up the party's equipment on Kradan, then sailed to Muk. The Free Thai officers, armed only with pistols, knew they could not elude capture on such a small island. Because Sanguan Tularak had advised them that the police were cooperating with the underground, they decided to surrender, hoping that they would be protected.<sup>35</sup>

The police landed the men and equipment on the mainland in broad daylight, so the Japanese soon learned of their presence. A Japanese naval intelligence officer came to inspect them at the local jail. For his benefit they pretended to have received severe treatment from the police. The governor of Trang, whose name they had got from Sanguan, came to talk with them, but could offer no effective assistance. He explained that they would be transported via Trang to Bangkok. Anond told the governor that if the Japanese insisted on taking custody of the party, he would try to escape. He asked that the police shoot him rather than leaving him to face torture at the hands of the Kempeitai. As it turned out, no such drastic measures were required. The DURIAN II trio, like the ARISTOC party before them, reached Bangkok safely, in Thai custody.<sup>36</sup>

In an effort to insure that the officers would be handled as prisoners of war rather than spies, Thai officials represented all of them to the Japanese as members of the US Army. Each had to appear individually before a sword-bearing Japanese officer for interrogation, but with Thai officers present. At the time, the Japanese were seeking a 40-million-baht supplementary military expenditure loan and, according to a message sent by the British APPRECIATION party, the Japanese demanded custody of the Free Thai officers as a form of leverage to gain Thai compliance with the loan request. In the end, the Japanese got their loan and the six men remained under Thai control at the Allied internment camp on the Thammasat University campus, which also housed Allied civilians, mostly Britons, and three captured American airmen. They would remain in custody until the end of the war.<sup>37</sup>

In the wake of the abysmal failure of these two operations, a gloomy Ripley analyzed the situation in messages to Washington on 16 and 17 November 1944. He labeled DURIAN II "a failure of the worst sort, since our first information of it comes from Japanese sources inside. The Japanese knowledge of the presence of ARISTOC and ARISTOC's knowledge of DURIAN II seem to fit together into an unpleasant

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.      <sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. and Ripley to Washington, 30 November 1944, Microfilmed Donovan Files, Reel 131, USMHI. A message from DURIAN to Kandy, 20 December 1944, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA seems to discount any connection between the loan and the status of the Free Thai officers, but Prime Minister Khuang Aphaiwong affirmed it in postwar comments to Sit Sawetsila. See Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 112–13.

picture.” Further, the ARISTOC party’s knowledge of the DURIAN II mission revealed a breach of security and, adding insult to injury, the OSS had received the news of the DURIAN II failure from the British!<sup>38</sup>

Ripley pointed out that several Free Thai missions had reached Bangkok and communicated with headquarters, “albeit very slowly,” and “urged us to refrain from sending additional parties into the country.” He added that “while each group was made up of trained intelligence agents, we have not as yet received any significant information from them.” Despite the fact that just two weeks before he had criticized the British for being too distrustful of Pridi, Ripley continued:

Indications are that at this time RUTH [Pridi] is desirous of shielding Thai nationals, particularly those exchange students who are important for the future of Thailand, but that at the same time, he will not permit them to perform their task and thereby aid the cause of the Allies. It is necessary for us to determine whether RUTH’s attitude is indicative of: 1. plain dread of the Japanese, 2. apprehension over the members of the Phibun government still in office in his region, 3. a decision on his part to cooperate with the British parties instead of our groups, 4. a possible compromise understanding between him and the Japanese whereby the Japs are cognizant and tolerant of his activities.<sup>39</sup>

The possible Japanese involvement, Ripley theorized, might reflect a “recognition of eventual defeat” and a willingness to assist the Thai escape the consequences of their alliance with Japan as part of a long-term Japanese strategy “for future influence in Southeast Asia.” Pridi, Ripley contended, needed to demonstrate his reliability by making “some more overt efforts at assisting us than he has to date.” On 28 November Kandy radioed Wimon:

You have not yet answered our urgent request for military intelligence. Tell RUTH [Pridi] if he wishes to aid American cause he should give you military information to transmit to us. We have been especially asked by our government to furnish intelligence from Thailand through American channels.<sup>40</sup>

Further reflecting the suspicions of the moment, Ripley worked on a new scheme to set up a base in eastern Thailand that could be kept secret “both from the Free Thais and the Japs.” However, he noted that

<sup>38</sup> Ripley to Washington, 17 November 1944, Reel 91, M1642 and Scofield to Gilmartin, 19 November 1944, Folder 2484, Box 141, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>39</sup> Ripley to Washington, 16 November 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>40</sup> Ripley to Washington, 17 November 1944, Folder 2327, Box 133, Entry 154 and Heppner and Robin to Wyman, 28 November 1944, Folder 1254, Box 207, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

manning the operation would be problematic because of the “political consciousness” of the American Free Thai agents.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, both OSS missions had failed because of Detachment 404's failure to coordinate them with Pridi, but the Americans were slow to acknowledge this basic mistake. The British, however, caught on more quickly. In launching their northern Thailand mission, Operation COUPLING, they acquiesced when Bangkok insisted that the mission's three SOE-trained Thai agents – Sena Ninkamhaeng, Praphot Paorohit (Praphod Paurohitya), and Thep Semathiti (Deb Semthiti) – be dropped in Uthai Thani, far from their assigned base area at Phu Kradung. The men landed on the evening of 5 December 1944 and five days later were conferring with Pridi and Adun in Bangkok. They were transported safely and securely to Phu Kradung in early January where, supported by the governor in Khon Kaen, Udom Bunyaprakop, they began preparations to receive supply drops and reinforcements.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to this Force 136 success, other developments in the first half of December ultimately encouraged the OSS to follow the British lead in relying on Pridi, not least a strong State Department endorsement of the Regent. At a 7 December 1944 meeting with OSS SI Branch officials (including Frederick Dolbeare), Joseph Ballantine, chief of State's Far Eastern Division, declared that he viewed the connection with Pridi “as advantageous as any that could be found in that nation” and warned against precipitate action that might provoke a Japanese move against the Regent. Ballantine explained that the State Department believed it essential that European powers adopt a liberal attitude toward their former Asian colonial subjects in the postwar period. Ballantine pointed out that Washington could quite openly express its view that Thailand should remain a “free country” without being accused of directly meddling in the imperial affairs of its Allies. The British, Dutch, and French, he hoped, would interpret the American stance as “typical of the way *we* would like to see them handle their colonial possessions in the area.” Four days after this meeting, OSS Headquarters declared that unless Pridi had “clearly outlined and approved the mission, no further personnel should be parachuted with supplies and equipment.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> “SEAC Monthly Report for November 1944,” Folder 2, Box 61, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>42</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 91–97; “Report on Operation COUPLING/MUSLIM,” 8 June 1945, HS1-58, PRO; and Ripley to Washington, 14 December 1944, Folder 2713, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>43</sup> Hutcheson to Shepardson, 13 December 1944, Folder 15, Box 412, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA and instructions to Coughlin, 11 December 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.



Further supporting the decision to back Pridi was receipt of his assurance, via Ssumao, that he had made no secret agreements with the British and wanted “only the sympathy of the Allies, particularly . . . America.” Pridi declared that his organization would like to cooperate militarily with the USA while “carrying out our task to restore once again the independence of our country.” A similarly positive message radioed to Kandy on 13 December promised daily intelligence reports and revealed plans for receiving American officers. Soon came word that the owner of the Kradat Island in the Gulf of Thailand had suggested that agents arriving by seaplane or submarine might use the nearby sea as a landing site. Thus initial American planning focused on basing OSS representatives on the island.<sup>44</sup>

Another encouraging aspect was the fact that the latter message came from the long-missing second member of the HOTFOOT team, Bunmak, who was now operating under Pridi’s aegis, communicating from 16 December via a British-made portable transceiver obtained from the Thai signal corps. Using codes and crystals brought in by the DURIAN II party and working in cooperation with Wimon, Bunmak transmitted from the residential compound of Pridi’s ally Chan Bunnak, located across the street from Vajiravudh College. Now Detachment 404 had a new, direct link with Pridi, unknown to Police General Adun, who had been repeatedly criticized in the early messages from Bangkok as overly cautious, selfish, unpopular, and obstructionist. In fact, many of Pridi’s loyalists considered Adun their political enemy and believed that any cooperation he offered was motivated by a simple desire to “save his own skin.”<sup>45</sup>

Although his protest came after the OSS had already made its decision to rely on Pridi and Detachment 404 had put its planned SO operations (BOSOM and PEWIT) on hold, ex-missionary Holladay strongly demanded a new “Thai-sensitive” approach in a 18 December memorandum to Colonel Harry Berno, then acting as chief of the unit in Heppner’s

<sup>44</sup> DeSibour for Smith, 12 December 1944, Reel 90, M1642; and Ben to Heppner, 13 December 1944, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88; Ripley and Scofield to Shepardson, 30 December 1944, Folder 8, Box 231; and Ripley to Donovan, 11 January 1945, Folder 3, Box 227, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor to Coughlin, 23 December 1944, Reel 90, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; Operations Committee memorandum, 12 December 1944, Folder 2599, Box 151; Ripley to Washington, 14 December 1944, Folder 2713, Box 160; Smith to Berno, 22 December 1944, Folder 2318, Box 133; and “Digest of Messages from DURIAN,” 30 January 1945, Folder 2327, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Also, Gilchrist to Ops, 31 January 1945, HS1-307, PRO, Kew and interview with Wimon Wiriyawit, Bangkok, 6 July 1993. Notes on a debriefing of Greenlee in Washington, Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA describes the radio as a “Mark 2 British Agent set” which had superior receiving capacity to the OSS SSTR1. Presumably it was a set sent in with British SOE-trained agents.

absence. Holladay accused his superiors of ignoring the counsel of their Thai specialists, including his own insistence that "we must have faith in the Free Thai, and we must prove faithful to them if we expect to accomplish anything worthwhile." The failure to arrange for the reception of the ARISTOC and DURIAN II missions had caused the underground "great embarrassment and endangered their freedom of action," Holladay charged, and had the potential to precipitate a "premature break between the Free Thai and the Japanese."<sup>46</sup>

Backed by a pledge from the remaining Free Thai officers that they would not undertake any mission of which he disapproved, Holladay demanded that future operations be well planned, well organized, and have a good possibility of success. He suggested placing Sanguan in charge of mission planning, with an American Thai specialist as his associate. Holladay added:

There has been a growing feeling of distrust in the possibility of developing the Free Thai contact. This is a defeatist attitude taken by men who know little about the Far East, and less about the Thai. Unless we are to give up hope of anything worthwhile from the Free Thai, we must have a change of leadership.<sup>47</sup>

Detachment 404 did in fact undergo a change of leadership, although this had no direct connection with the Thai situation. Bowing, at last, to pressure from Chiang Kai-shek, Washington had recalled Stilwell in October 1944, replacing him with Wedemeyer. Coughlin, head of Detachment 202, had seldom visited Friendship Valley and was, like Stilwell, on poor terms with the Chinese. Aware of Heppner's good relations with Wedemeyer and hopeful of leaving the OSS for a combat assignment, Coughlin urged that Heppner take his job. He further proposed that Colonel Peers, head of Detachment 101, assume the role of OSS chief in the now separate India-Burma Theater. For his part, Heppner had declared in a 16 October letter that he was feeling run down and suggested that Donovan might recall him to the USA "for a rest and change of scene for several months." After consulting with Coughlin and Heppner in Washington, Donovan decided the two should simply switch jobs.<sup>48</sup>

Coughlin's known skepticism about Thai operations did not seem to bode well for their future at Detachment 404. At a meeting with Lieutenant Pye in Calcutta, Coughlin had remarked that the Thai were

<sup>46</sup> Holladay to Berno, 18 December 1944, Folder 2328, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. and Callahan to Burstein, n.d., Folder 2570, Box 150, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>48</sup> Coughlin to Peers, 1 and 6 November 1944 and Coughlin to Dickey, 6 November 1944, Folder 2075, Box 114, Entry 154; Donovan to Mountbatten, 14 November 1944, unnumbered folder, Box 565, Entry 88, RG 226; and Heppner to Donovan, 16 October 1944, Reel 89, M1642, USNA.

“nothing but a bunch of playboys,” a judgment based no doubt in part on his unhappy experiences with Khap. Pye challenged his superior’s assessment, declaring that “when the chips are down these men will be there.” Pye had indiscreetly related this story to the Free Thai officers he had escorted to Detachment 101, so they were understandably hostile to Coughlin.<sup>49</sup>

Coughlin would not reach his new post until late January, however, and, in the interim, optimism about the Thai project soared. A John Wester memorandum written at the end of 1944 noted that a total of forty-three messages from the HOTFOOT agents contained useful information on the Japanese order of battle and the results of recent Allied bombing raids on Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Further, Wester pointed out, Pridi had organized an independent intelligence operation under his personal control, and on 29 December had radioed specific information on a seaplane or submarine contact site in the Gulf of Thailand for the proposed infiltration of American OSS officers. Also, Donovan and Pridi had exchanged friendly and mutually appreciative New Year’s greetings.<sup>50</sup>

Wester’s report contrasted the success of the HOTFOOT mission with limited results produced by the Ssumao-based Free Thai group, which remained under the thumb of Adun, “an opportunist and a hangover from the former regime.” Wester was not alone in his negative attitude toward the China-based Free Thai group. Repeated reports of Chinese obstructionism had long since brought into question the future of the Ssumao base, an issue that had dominated a conference in Donovan’s Washington office on 6 December 1944, a meeting attended by Coughlin, Heppner, Hoffman, Major Duncan Lee, and three Thai representatives – Khap, Bunrot, and Chamrun. The latter two had just arrived in the American capital, the first Free Thai officers to be granted leave.<sup>51</sup>

Khap suggested that the lack of Chinese cooperation reflected “the loss of face which TL’s [Tai Li’s] representative had suffered” because of the Free Thai operational success. He expressed confidence that Chok’s arrangements with the French authorities in Indochina would now permit adequate overland liaison with Thailand. Noting that the men in Bangkok were under “protective custody” and could be expected to provide significant intelligence, Khap urged closer liaison with theater authorities

<sup>49</sup> Interview with William Pye, Leominster, MA, 11 October 1994.

<sup>50</sup> John Wester, “OSS/SEAC Set-up in Thailand,” Folder 2289, Box 131, Entry 154; and Donovan to Pridi, 29 December 1945, Folder 1254, Box 207 and DURIAN to Kandy, 29 December 1944 and Pridi to Donovan, 31 December, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>51</sup> Duncan Lee memorandum, 9 December 1944, Folder 21, Box 589, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA.

to insure that the OSS station in Bangkok would not be bombed. Khap subsequently submitted two memoranda in which he laid out in detail the evidence of Chinese interference with operations of the Thai group. He suggested further means to deal with the situation, including the possibility of seeking the cooperation of the Yunnan warlord Lung Yün, whose hostility to Chaing Kai-shek's central government was evident.<sup>52</sup>

Donovan, however, was concerned not only about Chinese obstructionism but also the political implications of Chok's success in establishing cooperation with the French. Well aware of President Roosevelt's frequently expressed hostility toward French colonial rule in Indochina, he decided that an alternative route into Thailand from Burma should be investigated. If such a route could be established, Thai operations could be shifted to Detachment 101 at Mitkyina, Burma.<sup>53</sup>

Smith, worried that the Japanese army's ongoing offensive in China might threaten the viability of the Ssumao site, endorsed Donovan's proposal by radio. With Coughlin's approval, Smith dispatched a radio operator to Detachment 101 to lay groundwork for the proposed transfer. Subsequently, Coughlin, Heppner, and Donovan, who had left Washington together the day after Christmas 1944, discussed plans to consolidate Thai operations at Detachment 101 at a meeting with Smith at Kunming on 18 January 1945.<sup>54</sup>

Conflict created by the divided arrangements inside Bangkok further hastened the demise of the Ssumao operation. The officers from the China group had continued their transmissions under the aegis of Adun, while Bunmak, assisted by Wimon, operated separately under Pridi's control, communicating directly with Detachment 404. Wimon had warned in a 14 January message that information about any future infiltrations of Thailand must be kept from Adun, lest all personnel fall under his restrictive control.<sup>55</sup> This imperative meant that the China group officers

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., and Khap to Donovan, 13 December 1944, Folder 3, Box 319 and Khap to Heppner, 21 December 1944, Folder 3, Box 73, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>53</sup> Duncan Lee memorandum, 9 December 1944, Folder 21, Box 589, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>54</sup> Coughlin to Smith, 13 December 1944, Folder 5, Box 75, Entry 99, RG 226; and Smith to Hoffman, 7 December 1944, Reel 128 and Hoffman to Smith, 13 January 1945; Peers to Donovan, 16 January 1945; and Coughlin to Berne, 18 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>55</sup> Wimon to Heppner, 14 January 1945, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. The Force 136 Thai agents in Bangkok had the same view of Adun as their American-trained counterparts. Puai (message of 10 March 1945 in HS1-60, PRO) complained that Adun "was too narrow-minded and not wholeheartedly with RUTH. His over-cautiousness makes our work slow. He may be ambitious." In response, Andrew Gilchrist (SCS to Group Commander "A," 12 March 1945, HS1-60) commented that the Siam Country Section held the view that "a brake is just as important as an accelerator." He suggested that there should be room for both "to play their separate games when circumstances do not make them bedfellows."

in Bangkok were unaware of Pridi's evolving plan to receive American officers in the Gulf of Thailand. They had, however, through their police contacts, prepared to receive a supply drop in roughly the same area where the Americans would land.

Bunyen, who had first proposed the supply delivery just before Christmas 1944, asked that the goods – including \$10,000 worth of gold, \$20,000 worth of Thai money, weapons, and medical supplies – be delivered by a seaplane with an American crew to a site off the coast near Rayong. He and Sawat insisted on an American crew because they believed that the British had not permitted Adun and Pridi to contact the Americans via the Force 136 APPRECIATION party, that British treachery might have contributed to the deaths of Karawek and Somphong, and that the British “played many serious dirty tricks on our friends [Wimon and Bunmak] from India.” They went so far as to suggest the removal of Wimon and Bunmak “as quickly as feasible and having one Thai show as remote from the British as possible.”<sup>56</sup>

On 18 January, Pridi, irritated by the independent actions of the men from Ssumao, sent a message to Detachment 404 asking for immediate cancellation of the supply drop lest it imperil the security of the landing zone where he planned to receive the American officers (Operation SIREN). Because Pridi's scheme could not be revealed to the China group officers, the drop was cancelled without explanation, sparking an angry Bunyen to complain that “thousands of dollars” had been wasted preparing for the delivery. He warned that “America will be considered incapable” if it failed to materialize. This outburst suggested to Sanguan, Ripley, and others at Detachment 404 that Bunyen and other “hot-tempered and impatient” members of the China group had gotten “ahead of the situation” and were sending messages that neither had Pridi's approval nor reflected his views.<sup>57</sup>

News of Pridi's abrupt cancellation of the supply drop initially upset Smith, too. He had purchased the requested gold and was operating under the mistaken assumption that Detachment 404 had arranged a plane to carry out the mission. He was also taken aback when informed for the first time of the SIREN venture on 16 January. Fearing that it might endanger existing operations in Bangkok, he protested so forcefully that he was sent to Kandy with the authority to halt the SIREN mission if he

<sup>56</sup> Smith to Coughlin, 21 December 1944, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; and Smith to Berno, 8 January and 10 January 1945, Reel 128; and DeSibour to Smith, 14 January 1945 and Bob to Donovan, 20 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>57</sup> DURIAN to Kandy, 18 January 1945, Folder 1256, Box 295, Entry 88 and Ripley to Washington, 25 January 1945, Folder 2713, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226; and Kunming to Donovan, 20 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

deemed it necessary. When he arrived in Kandy on 24 January, however, he was quickly convinced that it should proceed.<sup>58</sup>

Detachment 404 had chosen Richard "Dick" Greenlee and Major John Wester for the mission into Thailand. Greenlee, another of the ubiquitous lawyers in the OSS, had no military rank nor area expertise, but Wester had resided in Thailand for more than fifteen years and had been deeply involved in the planning and execution of several operations, including HOTFOOT. Phunphoem Kairoek, recently recruited by the OSS from the OWI San Francisco office, would accompany Greenlee and Wester.

This risky OSS attempt to infiltrate Americans deep behind Japanese lines could hardly be justified on purely military grounds. No invasion of Thailand by Allied forces could be anticipated for a year and any such operation would be primarily a British undertaking. Still, Ripley wrote, "there is no doubt that we have an opportunity here to perform a service in developing our current contacts in Thailand."<sup>59</sup> Although those contacts might be of limited military importance, American planners recognized that they could be most useful in advancing long-term American political and economic goals.

Certainly political issues could not be ignored. Not only would Greenlee and Wester need to be prepared to respond to Thai questions, but in response to an OSS invitation that he send out a personal representative, and to promptings from Sanguan, Pridi had decided to dispatch a diplomat authorized to set up a Free Thai committee, the latest in a series of initiatives aimed at establishing a government-in-exile. This, of course, had been the major objective of Sanguan and Daeng's mission. More recently, in October 1944, Pridi had sent a message to Washington via his brother, the Thai Minister in Sweden, asking that Seni send a representative to Stockholm for the purpose of discussing such a venture. Pridi hoped that Seni would head the government-in-exile, but he had resisted the idea before and had not changed his position. Also, the Regent had urged Sanguan to push for a Seni-led government-in-exile in a November 1944 message sent out with Phon, an entreaty he repeated through OSS channels in January 1945. The matter now had become more urgent in Pridi's eyes because prospective members of the new United Nations organization countries were required to declare war on the Axis by 1 March 1945. Participation in the UN seemed the best means to insure Thailand's postwar independence and Pridi hoped a provisional

<sup>58</sup> "Interview with Maj. Nicol Smith," 29 March 1945, Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210 and Smith to Dimond, 19 January 1945, Folder 3, Box 75, Entry 99; and Ripley to Washington, 25 January 1945, Folder 2713, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226; and Smith to Peers, 24 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>59</sup> Ripley to Donovan, 2 January 1945, Folder 2289, Box 131, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

government based abroad could make the required declaration before the deadline. He also believed that the establishment of such a body would strengthen his hand in winning the support of fence-sitting military officers and politicians.<sup>60</sup>

The Americans were generally sympathetic toward Pridi's initiatives and increasingly inclined to view Thailand as a potential American foothold in a vital area, as a series of memoranda written in the wake of the August 1944 change of government in Bangkok made clear. For example, in late September 1944, Detachment 404 analyst Dwight Bulkley, son of a missionary family formerly stationed with the Landons at Trang in peninsular Thailand, had submitted a paper entitled "The Importance of Thailand's Political Future." He cited the country as a "singular example of an Asiatic nation with stable, capable, and streamlined government," arguing that its "post-war status will be the example to the rest of Asia, and will determine to a large extent whether we have the hope and confidence of Asiatics in post-war problems, or whether the dominant attitude is of disillusionment and resentment." He also noted Thailand's strategic importance, particularly in terms of air routes, strongly implying that Bangkok's Don Muang airfield should not fall under British control. Bulkley suggested that the Americans could win Thai cooperation by guaranteeing the nation's political sovereignty, establishing "most favorable" liaison with Thai leaders and assuring them that the USA was not ignoring the "intrigues" of the British and Chinese. Bulkley's commander, Colonel Heppner, obviously agreed. In a 9 October 1944 letter to Donovan he cited America's "great post-war stake" in Southeast Asia and referred to the "tug of war now going on in Thailand and Indo-China with our Allies."<sup>61</sup>

The State Department had likewise come to view Southeast Asia as important to the nation's future. In a briefing paper prepared for President Roosevelt prior to the September 1944 Quebec Conference, Secretary Hull argued for promises of independence for former colonial areas, particularly Indochina, and "a joint commitment to restore the independence of Thailand." In psychological warfare terms this would appeal to the growing nationalistic sentiments in the region "and would appear to

<sup>60</sup> Scofield to Wimon, 10 January 1945 and Sanguan to Pridi, 12 January 1945, Folder 1254, Box 207, Entry 88; and Pridi to Sanguan, 10 January 1945, Folder 2333, Box 134, Entry 154, RG 226; memorandum of conversation, 892.01/10-1844, RG 59; and Pridi to Sanguan, 12 January 1945 and Ripley to 154, 24 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA. Also, memorandum of conversation, 12 December 1944, *FRUS* 1944, 5: 1320-21.

<sup>61</sup> "The Importance of Thailand's Political Future," 892.00/9-3044, RG 59, USNA and Heppner to Donovan, Oct. 9 1944, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.



be directly in line with American post-war interests." The memorandum elaborated on the latter point:

These areas are sources of products essential to both our wartime and peacetime economy. They are potentially important markets for American exports. They lie athwart the southwestern approaches of the Pacific Ocean and have important bearing on our security and the security of the Philippines. Their economic and political stability will be an important factor in the maintenance of peace in Asia.<sup>62</sup>

A separate memorandum warned that rumored British plans to establish economic hegemony over mainland Southeast Asia, perhaps through a Southeast Asian federation, posed serious problems. Not only might this hinder American trade, but such action would be seen in the region as "restoration" of "highly unpopular" British imperialism. British desires for "a fairly extended military occupation of Thailand" and "strong economic control of all these regions to assure revival of sound industrial and agricultural practices" seemed to signal that "the British envisage economic ascendancy in those areas."<sup>63</sup>

In late December, Don Garden, an OSS intelligence staffer in Washington who had worked previously in Thailand as a journalist, laid out ambitious goals for the proposed OSS mission to Bangkok. While acknowledging that preparing the Thai army to fight the Japanese should be the mission's top priority, Garden suggested that the OSS also should seek "to win the friendship of the Thai people, as a possible island of American goodwill in a future uncertain Orient" and "attempt to preserve the integrity and sovereignty of Thailand against British encroachments." For maximum effectiveness, he suggested the possibility of keeping the mission secret, not only from the British but, for the sake of deniability, from American military and civilian authorities as well. After all, he argued, OSS had been "created to do things the established elements could not do."<sup>64</sup>

Detachment 404's Edmond Taylor also saw real opportunities for the USA. "We hope that the State Department will allow us to offer the Thais some encouragement," he wrote in January 1945. "We think that this would be a fine chance for us to take over the leadership of the Thai resistance movement, if we can act at once." Pridi, Taylor suggested,

<sup>62</sup> Hull to Roosevelt, 8 September 1944, *FRUS: The Conference at Quebec 1944* (Washington, DC, 1972), 261–63.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 263–65.

<sup>64</sup> "Possibility of Introducing a Military Mission Into Thailand," Dec. 21, 1944, Folder 2712, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. An attached letter from Lilly to Ripley (dated December 30) said of Garden's plan: "This is a brainchild of Don's from which something useful with perhaps local adaptations may be extracted. Do not take it as a directive from us, but a slant which you might develop if it seems expedient."

seemed to be “furnishing us with more reliable information than he is giving to the British.”<sup>65</sup>

Critical to the ultimate success of the OSS venture in Thailand, though, was support from the State Department. Kenneth P. Landon, the former COI analyst, now assistant chief of the Division of Southwestern Pacific Affairs at State, weighed in with a memorandum on the strategic importance of the enterprise on 10 January 1945. Landon emphasized that Thailand, “the only market in Southeast Asia not complicated by colonial relationships,” could serve as an important postwar outlet for American goods and provide needed rubber and tin. Landon stressed the importance of protecting and capitalizing on America’s anti-imperialist image in securing access to the Thai market, warning that the nation would suffer a “severe loss of prestige throughout Asia” if Thailand “should lose prewar Thai territory or have its sovereignty impaired by the victors.”<sup>66</sup>

Despite the strong desire “to maintain [an] American sphere of influence” in Thailand, however, the State Department would not budge from its policy of non-recognition of provisional governments. Accordingly, OSS Headquarters provided this advice to Greenlee and Wester:

No official statement on [a] provisional Thai government can be made by parties to be infiltrated but the parties can voice to RUTH [Pridi] their well-founded American opinions as follows: American interest in post-war independence of Thailand is realistic since as a non-colonial power our best interest is served by keeping the peoples of the world free and it would be contrary to our policy and damaging to our friendships and prestige if we allowed Thailand as a result of this war for freedom to have its freedom impaired.<sup>67</sup>

Two RAF Catalina seaplanes launched Operation SIREN from Cocanada Airfield on India’s eastern coast at mid-morning on 25 January. Manned by eight-man crews, the lumbering “Cats,” skimmed over the the Indian Ocean, zigzagging periodically to avoid detection. Greenlee and Phunphoem traveled in one plane; Wester and conducting officer George Ghizoni in the other. After passing just to the north of the Andaman Islands, the planes reached the Malay Peninsula by 11 P. M., Indian time. About two hours later, the crew of Greenlee’s plane, the first to arrive, spotted four lights marking the landing zone, near Kut Island, south of Trat.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> “Developments in Thailand,” Reel 90, M1642, USNA and Taylor to Washington, 16 January 1945, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>66</sup> “Postwar Status of Thailand,” 892.00/1-1045, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>67</sup> Lilly to Taylor and Ripley, 19 January 1945 and Hutcheson and Hoffman to Donovan, Reel 90, M1642 and Hutcheson to Ripley, 29 January 1945, Folder 2712, Box 160, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>68</sup> Operation report, SIREN I, 8 February, 1945, Folder 3, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.



10. This Thai Customs Service launch, captained by Sin Uthasi and pictured here on the Chao Phraya River, did yeoman's service in shuttling Free Thai infiltrators back and forth from the Gulf of Thailand to Bangkok. (Source: US National Archives)

Within half an hour both seaplanes had landed and men and cargo – a half-ton of supplies and weapons samples – were transferred to Captain Sin's thirty-foot-long Thai Customs Service launch for transport to Bangkok. Nine crew members and passengers were aboard the boat, including Bunmak. In boarding the launch, the Americans crossed paths with Pridi's envoy to Washington, young diplomat Konthi Suphamongkhon, who boarded one of the Catalinas. His plane would reach Cocananda some twelve and a half hours later.<sup>69</sup>

Konthi's arrival in Kandy coincided with a visit by General Donovan, so the OSS Chief participated in a debriefing session on the afternoon of 29 January. Konthi explained the importance of establishing a provisional Thai government, including its potential utility in swaying an estimated fifty percent of the army off the fence and behind the Regent. He stated

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

that Pridi had instructed that he, Sanguan, and Seni form a three-man committee to negotiate with the Allies. In response, Donovan requested that the Thai work to obtain "military and economic information about Japan, Manchuria, and Indochina," particularly intelligence on Japanese intentions in the latter area. He promised to inform President Roosevelt of Pridi's plans and invited Konthi, Sanguan, and Detachment 404 SI Chief Ripley to fly with him to Cairo *en route* to Washington.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, after the successful landing in the Gulf of Thailand, the SIREN mission's supplies were transferred to a second boat and the American officers headed directly to Bangkok. Powered by an old "hot bulb" – type engine that needed frequent repairs, the Customs Department launch made slow progress. As it entered the mouth of the Chao Phraya River on the morning of 27 January, Greenlee and Wester peered from the portholes below deck, taking careful notes on riverside activities, including wooden boat construction by the Japanese. They headed upstream to the bomb-damaged Rama VI railway bridge, before circling back for a dusk landing at King's wharf.<sup>71</sup>

Wearing military-issue shoes and trousers under gaudy sport shirts and hats provided by their hosts, Greenlee and Wester disembarked and entered a sedan driven by the shy, thin Chan Bunnak, chief wireless engineer for the Thai Department of Posts and Telegraph. Captain Phayom rode shotgun in uniform. During a twenty-minute drive through Bangkok's darkened streets Greenlee looked out at an approaching bicycle and peered into the eyes of a Japanese private, but the soldier paid him no heed. When they arrived at Chan's compound about 7:30 P.M., among those greeting them was Lt. Col. Samroeng Netrayon, Chan's half-brother and an old acquaintance of Wester's. Attached to the Thai General Staff, Samroeng served in a liaison capacity with the Japanese army and the German military attaché, so he was a most important contact. Phunphoem and the mission's gear arrived later in a van.<sup>72</sup>

After a shower and change of clothes, Greenlee and Wester enjoyed a sumptuous banquet with Chan, Phunphoem, Bunmak, Wimon, and others. Their plans to go to bed early were disrupted by air raid sirens. No bombs fell on the city because the planes were dropping mines at the mouth of the river.<sup>73</sup>

After a day of briefing on military intelligence matters with Colonel Samroeng on the 28 January, Pridi arrived for a conference at 10:30 A.M.

<sup>70</sup> Donovan to Cheston, 30 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642 and Konthi to Pridi, 29 January 1945, Folder 1254, Box 207, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>71</sup> Greenlee diary, 24 January to 8 February 1945, "War Plan of RUTH," Reel 91, M1642, USNA.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. <sup>73</sup> Ibid.

on the 29th. When the Regent emphasized his strong desire to form a provisional government abroad, Greenlee and Wester indicated that the State Department had made no commitments on this subject, so they could not comment.<sup>74</sup>

Pridi then bid for American military support by unveiling his "war plan." He proposed to take advantage of a weak spot in Japanese defenses by coordinating a Thai uprising with American landings along the coast of the Gulf of Thailand. He suggested that the Americans attack with a division and two regiments, making a main landing on the west coast at Hua Hin and a secondary one on the opposite shore at Sattahip. In support of the invasion, Pridi explained, the Thai First Division would attack the Japanese in Bangkok, while army units in the north would block Japanese reinforcements. Meanwhile, Thai soldiers at Phetburi and Ratburi would support the Hua Hin landing force by attacking the southern and Thailand-Burma railway lines, while Thai marines stationed at Sattahip would join the landing forces there for an attack northward toward Bangkok. Pridi also hoped for heavy bombing of Japanese lines of communication and coordinated supporting attacks, in the form of a Chinese offensive from the north, an Allied landing in Indochina and/or an assault in southern Burma.<sup>75</sup>

Greenlee and Wester could give Pridi no assurance that Washington would accept the plan, but agreed to present it to their superiors. For their part, the Americans proposed establishing "black" radio broadcasts (transmissions of dis-information on or near frequencies used by Japanese or Thai stations), a medical supply drop for propaganda purposes, and the establishment of additional landing zones for supplies and personnel.<sup>76</sup>

On 30 January, Greenlee and Wester discussed with Chan the sensitive issue of relations between Pridi and Adun. Chan proposed that all Free Thai officers in the country be placed under command of Bunmak, noting that only he and Phunphoem were completely independent of Adun. Even Wimon, he suggested, was "in custody of Adun," although he had more freedom than the others.<sup>77</sup>

That same day, Donovan radioed Pridi to inform him that all Thai officers would be removed from China and that "All the resources and support of the OSS will now be given to one united Thai show." Donovan also advised that more trained Thai agents could be dispatched to help gather intelligence, while supply of the Thai underground was planned "on an ever increasing scale." He explained the new roles of Coughlin and Heppner, indicating that Thai operations would be consolidated under

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.      <sup>75</sup> Ibid.      <sup>76</sup> Ibid.      <sup>77</sup> Ibid.

the control of Detachment 101's Colonel Peers. He assured Pridi that Khap would remain in Washington.<sup>78</sup>

Plans had been laid for Greenlee's early exit from Bangkok so he might report personally to his superiors, but it appeared that a needed overhaul of the engine on the Customs Department launch might delay his departure. By 2 February, however, all was set. Pridi gave Greenlee a silver cigarette case for presentation to Donovan and a solid gold one for President Roosevelt. The Regent also asked that Seni dispatch fifty kilograms of gold to finance underground operations. Most of the money, Pridi suggested, would be used to procure a more reliable vessel for agent pickup.<sup>79</sup>

After a delay, caused by the non-appearance of a member of the escort party, Chan drove Greenlee to the wharf. The party avoided the mined main channel of the Chao Phraya River, detouring through narrow, often shallow canals. Once they ran aground and were stuck for an hour until the rising tide enabled them to proceed. Such delays and the rough seas they encountered in the Gulf of Thailand put them behind schedule, but they reached the pick-up zone off Sattakut Island in time. The sea remained rough and clouds obscured the waning moon.<sup>80</sup>

In the early morning hours of 4 February, the men heard the drone of Catalina engines and made their flashlight signals. "How Pilot Officer Brooke landed her I'll never know," Greenlee wrote in his report. "There was so little light we could not see the plane landing and the waves were very high." He later learned that the British crew had violated instructions by attempting a landing under such adverse conditions. After some confusion over code words, Greenlee boarded the aircraft, bringing along six quarts of Thai beer, bananas, and pomelos for the long return journey.<sup>81</sup>

Greenlee reached Delhi on the night of 5 February, conferred with Coughlin and, on the following day, met General Daniel Sultan, now commander of the newly partitioned India-Burma Theater. Although impressed by the audacity of Greenlee's adventure, Sultan responded to Pridi's war plan with the gruff declaration that Thailand "was none of [our] damn business." Still, despite Sultan's negative attitude and his own sense that the Thai were untrustworthy, Sultan's intelligence chief, Colonel Clarence W. Bennett, encouraged Coughlin to send Greenlee on to Washington for liaison with OSS Headquarters and the

<sup>78</sup> Donovan to Pridi, 30 January 1945, Folder 2650, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>79</sup> Operation report, SIREN I, 8 February 1945, Folder 3, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. <sup>81</sup> Ibid.

State Department. Coughlin concurred, happily accepting Bennett's further suggestion that Pridi's war plan be kept from Mountbatten until Washington could evaluate it.<sup>82</sup>

Greenlee departed Delhi in the wee hours of 8 February and arrived in Washington early on the 11th to begin a month-long round of conferences at OSS Headquarters, the Pentagon, and the State Department. Yet when Greenlee began his return flight to Kandy on 12 March, now wearing the oak leaves of a newly minted army major, the OSS had received no word from the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding Pridi's proposal.<sup>83</sup>

Once he had digested Greenlee's initial report and dispatched him to Washington, Coughlin reconsidered the plan to concentrate Thai operations at Detachment 101. The scheme had been based on the assumption that because the eventual invasion of Thailand would be launched from Burma, headquarters should be as near the border between the two countries as possible.<sup>84</sup> However, the invasion would not occur for months and insertion of agents into Thailand by seaplane from India had worked so well that Coughlin decided that consolidation under Detachment 404 made more sense. Further, recognizing the dangers posed by the gap between Pridi and Adun, he deemed it urgent to remove the remaining Thai officers from Ssumao. He radioed Peers:

Until we have taken the codes away from Nicol's feather merchants, I am scared as hell of them because they can send in messages that Nicol never sees based on whatever conversation he makes, and it may result in a leak to the policeman [Adun]. The first thing to do is gather up their codes; the second thing, I think is to convince them that they should all be on that [Pridi's] side, and that we should handle this side. If you put them in a pool at some nice safe place (this island [Ceylon] has wonderful possibilities along this line), we can send them in as RUTH [Pridi] okays their arrival. If, in the meantime, things open up on your end, they can be shipped up there.<sup>85</sup>

Peers did not appreciate the sudden change of course. His subsequent complaints spurred Coughlin to fire off a stern 13 February letter warning him in no uncertain terms to follow orders.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. and Coughlin to Donovan, 10 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>83</sup> Notes on Greenlee's report taken by Miss Gutterson, Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>84</sup> Peers to Donovan, 16 January 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> Coughlin to Peers, 10 February 1945, Folder 2650, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>86</sup> Coughlin to Peers, 13 February 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. Peers' response of 17 February, in which he indicates that his discontent reflected his concern about a lack of clarity rather than the proposed shift itself, is in the same folder.



Coughlin received full support from Donovan, who notified Pridi of the change in a 13 February 1945 message. He also endorsed the Regent's efforts to assert sole control over the OSS agents in Thailand:

All our Thai agents who were formerly divided between Szemao and Kandy are now under one single command. Agents will be removed from Szemao as soon as possible to another headquarters outside China. Policy will be controlled from Kandy. If agents from Szemao are especially useful for training other agents for you in wireless and guerrilla warfare inside Thailand, they will of course remain with you. If not, we suggest they be exfiltrated so we may have them available for you at an appropriate time rather than risk their getting into hands of Japs while they await action. We would appreciate your advising all our agents inside Thailand that they are now under your orders and we suggest you appoint one of these agents as chief who will report directly to you. Please advise us of your decision regarding these suggestions and give us name of whomever you may appoint as chief agent.<sup>87</sup>

Pridi responded quickly by naming Bunmak chief agent and requesting that the OSS transmit orders placing all its Free Thai officers directly under his command.<sup>88</sup>

With the exception of his brother-in-law, Anon, none of the China group officers in Bangkok had yet seen Pridi. In fact, they did not even meet Adun face to face until he received them as a group on 4 February 1945, a session at which he promised them more assistance. When informed of the new situation, they immediately queried: "Suppose RUTH [Pridi] order conflicts with HQ order. Who should we obey? In hands of BETTY [Adun] we may not have freedom to obey RUTH. Please explain. Shall we continue present activities or stop to get RUTH's approval? Do we report all to RUTH?"<sup>89</sup>

Washington promptly responded: "RUTH is the final and last word. Any orders that conflict with his except 109's [Donovan's] should be ignored. If the agents find conflict with BETTY's interests and RUTH's they should advise RUTH at once. RUTH's approval for present activities should be obtained at once. Agents should be warned to conduct themselves as soldiers, and less as independents concerned with politics."<sup>90</sup>

The establishment on 21 February of a Thailand Committee at OSS Headquarters reflected General Donovan's heightened personal interest

<sup>87</sup> Donovan to Coughlin and Taylor, 13 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>88</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 19 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>89</sup> DURIAN to Coughlin, 11 March 1945, Folder 1257, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226 and Peers to Donovan, 20 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>90</sup> Donovan and Hoffman to Coughlin and Peers, 23 February 1945, Folder 2650, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 225, USNA.

in Thailand. Chaired by Colonel Hoffman of SO Branch, it also included Lieutenant Colonel Aubrey D. Hutcheson of SI Branch, Lieutenant Edward Wilson of the Field Section, and Kenneth Wells of Research and Analysis. Donovan asked the committee to advise him on Thai matters and maintain liaison with the Thai Legation and the State Department, tasks for which Wells had unique qualifications. Not only had the former missionary educator lived in Thailand from 1927 until his family's escape to Burma from Chiang Mai in December 1941, Wells was a long-time personal friend of Landon, the State Department's Thai specialist. The two had entered the Presbyterian mission field in Thailand during the same year.<sup>91</sup>

A message sent to Ssumao on Adun's behalf in late February clearly indicates that he had yet to realize that the OSS had decided to operate solely through Pridi. Adun proposed to fly three high-ranking Thai officials – a soldier, a civilian, and a policeman – and a Free Thai officer from northern Thailand to Ssumao to discuss guerrilla operations. Wester learned of the proposal even before it was transmitted and made clear that it had not been authorized by Pridi. Following Pridi's advice, the OSS did not take up Adun's suggestion, but he would not formally drop the proposal until Pridi informed him on 29 March – hours before Greenlee's scheduled return – that the Ssumao station would be closed down and operations consolidated. Now aware that he had no choice but to follow Pridi's lead, Adun formally released all the Free Thai officers under his control, including Ian and Sawat, whom he had sent to Korat in mid-March, and Bunyen and Pao, who had been dispatched to Hua Hin.<sup>92</sup>

Once the OSS had affirmed his authority, Pridi approved the China group's long delayed supply drop in an effort to boost their morale, but he made clear that no weapons were to be included. Commenting on this, Coughlin advised Peers:

I don't think he [Pridi] completely trusts this group. He is more or less afraid of them; so the big effort from that direction is going to have to come from within. Nick [Smith]'s boys are going to have to convince RUTH that they will give him their complete allegiance. I myself don't know if they are prepared to do this or

<sup>91</sup> "Establishment of Thailand Committee," 23 February 1945, Folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226 and Donovan to Coughlin, 7 March 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>92</sup> Wester to Coughlin, 20 February 1945, Folder 1256, Box 205; Scofield to Smith, 16 March 1945, Folder 1259, Box 208; and Pete to Kandy, 30 March 1945, Folder 1250, Box 207, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA; Peers to Coughlin, 26 February 1945, Reel 90 and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 31 March 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USA.

not. My impression is that they are a bunch of politicians, and probably prefer BETTY, so I think RUTH has every grounds for being suspicious.<sup>93</sup>

While Coughlin could order an end to communications with Bangkok via Ssumao, several of the Free Thai officers were assigned in China on field assignments could not be transferred to Ceylon immediately. As a consequence, the last activities of the Free Thai in China involved the contacts which Chok had cultivated in Indochina.

When Chok had reported on his Indochina connections to Ensign Gunnar Mykland of OSS-Kunming in November 1944, Mykland had advised that the OSS did not wish to set up an agent-training school there as Chok had suggested. Mykland did agree, though, to supply machine guns and radio sets to the cooperative French Captain Bocquet. After his previously noted trip with Phon from Muong Sing to Ssumao, Chok had headed southward again on 16 January 1945 to meet Bocquet, accompanied by Thai Lieutenants Chalong and Ayut. The latter officer had begun an SO training mission in Ceylon, but had been transferred to Ssumao when Smith requested an additional radio operator in mid-December. The three Free Thai officers reached Meng La on 1 February.<sup>94</sup>

From there, Chok and Chalong journeyed to Muong Sing to rendezvous with Captain Bocquet. In support of a scheme to pass equipment and messages to Bangkok through Adun's man at Chiang Khong, Bocquet agreed to provide an escort for Thai officers traveling to Houei Sai. In return, Chok promised radio sets for the French, equipment that Bocquet planned to place at key locations in Indochina.<sup>95</sup>

However, on 16 February, shortly after he had returned to Meng La, Chok received orders to cease his activities and return to Ssumao. He instructed the other three officers then at Meng La – Chalong, Ekchai, and Ayut – to go to Muong Sing and inform Bocquet that all plans were off. While they were *en route*, an order came for Chok to return to Ssumao immediately, so he left instructions for his three comrades to follow as soon as possible. Along the way, Chok learned, to his dismay, that the OSS had instructed Lieutenant Pye to take over and expand the same Indochina operation that he had just disbanded.<sup>96</sup>

The day after Chok reached Ssumao, 9 March 1945, the Japanese overthrew French authority in Indochina, but they did not immediately

<sup>93</sup> Coughlin to Peers, 23 February 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>94</sup> "Report from Lt. N. R. Charles" (Chok na Ranong), a copy of which was provided to the author by William Pye and Smith to Hoffman, 13 December 1944, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. <sup>96</sup> Ibid.

send troops into the remote Lao states. So, as part of a new Indochina intelligence operation (codenamed QUAIL) Pye and three Thai officers – Ayut, Ekchai, and Sala – organized a caravan to deliver three intelligence agents across the border. Ayut accompanied the caravan, while Pye greatly impressed the local residents by parachuting into Meng La on 29 March. After a rendezvous with Ayut, the caravan crossed the border to Muong Sing. From there Pye, his female interpreter, a Chinese agent, and two Chinese soldiers headed southward for Houei Sai.<sup>97</sup>

Although QUAIL's sole focus was intelligence gathering in Indochina, Pye had another objective during this trip: finding a means for Ayut to enter Thailand. Only temporarily attached to the QUAIL project because he knew the caravan route to Meng La, Ayut was expected to follow the other Thai officers to Ceylon. However, he had been with Detachment 404 once and did not wish to return. Not only did Ayut share his comrades' grudge against Coughlin, but he believed he had been transferred because the OSS staff in Ceylon considered him "too intelligent." In fact, they had judged him ill qualified for an operational assignment. Pye, however, sympathized with Ayut and was willing to buck the system.<sup>98</sup>

As Pye's party neared Houei Sai, it encountered a retreating troop of French soldiers led by Captain Bocquet. Informed that the Japanese had already entered the town, Pye reversed course and accompanied the French back to Muong Sing. In the meantime, Ayut had grown concerned about Pye's whereabouts and went out with a pilot to conduct aerial searches. On one such flight he had to bail out when the aircraft encountered a storm and ran short of fuel over Yunnan. His chute caught on the door, suspending him in mid-air, but the pilot managed to dislodge him.

No doubt glad to be back on terra firma, Ayut helped to close down the Meng La station, then went by caravan to Muong Sing. There he reconnected with Pye and met two Thai military men, one of them a mysterious character known by the sobriquet "The Old One." The two Thai suggested that if Ayut infiltrated into northern Thailand he could

<sup>97</sup> William Pye, "Ayus Isarasena's Contribution to the Free Thai Movement," n.d., copy in author's possession; interview with William Pye, Leominster, MA, 11 October 1994; and Mahoney to Pye, 9 March 1945, unnumbered folder, Box 104, Entry 88; Helliwell to Pye and Ambelang, 9 March 1945, Folder 3373; and Helliwell to Heppner, 10 April 1945, Folder 3373, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>98</sup> Pye, "Ayus Isarasena's Contribution to the Free Thai Movement," Interview with William Pye, Leominster, MA, 11 October 1994; and "Report of Interview with Lt. Ayus Usarasena," Folder 2990, Box 172 and "Number 75," Folder 7, Box 64, Entry 99, Entry 154; Pye to Helliwell, 25 and 29 March 1945, unnumbered folder, Box 104, Entry 88; and Waring to Ripley, 25 November 1945, Folder 84, Box 5, Entry 168, RG 226, USNA.

provide the isolated Thai Northern Army a direct link to the outside world. Thus Ayut headed southward, accompanied by "The Old One."<sup>99</sup>

Ayut radioed from Houei Sai on 14 May that the Japanese were expected to occupy Fort Carnot soon and that he was prepared to cross the border into Thailand with his radio. He proceeded to Chiang Saen where, after some delays, he contacted Luang Suranuchit, chief of staff of the Northern Army, through the good offices of Lek Thorangkun, a prominent local businessman. On 27 May, the Northern Army, headquartered at the former British-American Tobacco Company curing station near Chiang Mai, notified Pridi of Ayut's presence.<sup>100</sup>

News of Ayut's unauthorized movements aroused much consternation within the OSS. His superiors at Ssumao advised him that Thailand was now outside their jurisdiction so he should return to Kunming or contact Detachment 404. Ayut replied that it was "too late" to return to Kunming and he had no codes that Kandy could read. When Heppner advised Coughlin of the situation, the Detachment 404 commander, keenly aware of Pridi's sensitivities and of recent disputes between Mountbatten and Wedemeyer over operations into Indochina, insisted on assuming control over the wayward agent. He viewed any continuing link between Ayut and Detachment 202 in China "absolutely dynamite."<sup>101</sup>

Heppner accepted Coughlin's demand, but because a drop of additional equipment and new codes (Operation SYNTAX) was postponed until mid-July, Ayut's radio contacts through Ssumao continued for some weeks. He reported expectations of a clash with the Japanese in the wake of a 22 May incident in which Thai police had shot a Japanese intelligence officer. He also passed on the Northern Army's request for arms.<sup>102</sup>

Ayut's unauthorized journey into Thailand somehow seems a fitting conclusion to the ill-starred Free Thai operation in China. Its officers had endured many frustrations and hardships, and two had died in the

<sup>99</sup> Pye, "Ayus Isarasena's Contribution to the Free Thai Movement;" interview with William Pye; and Patti to Helliwell, 29 April 1945. Archimedes Patti indicates in his book *Why Vietnam?* (Berkeley, 1980), 79 that he was met by Pye when he arrived at Ssumao in late April. This is almost certainly an error either of sequence or identity, as Mahoney to Helliwell, 25 April 1945, unnumbered folder, Box 104, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA makes clear that at this time Pye was still in Indochina.

<sup>100</sup> Letters from Wimon Wiriyawit to the author, 9 December 1993 and 11 February 1994; and Spaulding to Holopaw, 14 May 1945, unnumbered folder, Box 194, Entry 88 and Coughlin to Heppner, 28 May 1945, Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>101</sup> Coughlin to Heppner, 28 May 1945; Heppner to Coughlin, 11 June 1945 and Coughlin to Heppner, 12 June 1945, Folder 3424, Box 202; and Patti to Spaulding, 6 June 1945, Folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>102</sup> Numerous messages concerning Ayut are contained in Folder 3382, Box 199 and Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154. Also, Coughlin to P Division, 18 June 1945, Folder 289, Box 26, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

field. Members of the group had manned the radios on both ends of the initial OSS radio link with Bangkok. Yet, tarred by their associations with Khap, Miles, the Chinese, and Adun, they were not fully trusted by Pridi or by Detachment 404.

In any case, in February 1945, Donovan had made two critical decisions. The OSS would consider Pridi the sole leader of the Free Thai underground and Coughlin's Detachment 404 would manage all the organization's operations into Thailand.

## 8      Pridi's bid for national redemption

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As it became increasingly clear during the first five months of 1945 that the Axis Powers were doomed to defeat, Regent Pridi Phanomyong struggled to find a means to salvage his country's independence and prestige. Although he had established regular contacts with the Allies, London's negative attitude repeatedly frustrated his efforts to obtain a guarantee concerning Thailand's postwar status. The Americans had adopted a much more favorable stance and made no secret of their suspicions of the motives of their empire-minded "cousins," yet Washington officials had been unable to convince the British to modify their policy and had shown limited willingness to press the issue. With the British controlling the regional Allied command, their troops would be the ones to invade or occupy Thailand. The British were also preparing to restore colonial rule in neighboring Malaya and Burma, so Pridi had little reason to expect that American support would be any more effectual in modifying British policy in the future than it had been to date. The Chinese, meanwhile, had their own agenda and might attempt to occupy part of Thailand. Under such circumstances, Pridi sought the best possible relations with each of the three Allied states, while simultaneously trying to gain whatever advantage he could by playing one against the other.

Pridi faced equally complex challenges on the home front. His relations with Police General Adun Adundetcharat and high-ranking army officers remained uneasy at best. In addition, he had to maintain a facade of friendly cooperation with the Japanese, knowing all the while that his secret dealings with the Allies might at any moment be uncovered by the Kempeitai or revealed to the Japanese by a political rival.

In Kandy, Coughlin and his staff at OSS Detachment 404 worried about the problematic relationship between Pridi and Adun, but remained as obsessed as ever by their rivalry with their British counterparts. Allied relations were not helped by the fact that those responsible for day-to-day management of British covert operations in Thailand were based at Force 136's Siam Country Section in distant Calcutta and



seldom, if ever, met their OSS counterparts. This separation served to deepen suspicions and encouraged misunderstandings.

The new year of 1945 had begun auspiciously for Force 136 thanks to the initiative of British Free Thai officer Krit Tosayanon of the BRILLIG mission. He had trained two radio operators to work for Pridi and arranged a supply drop near Hua Hin on 2 January. The drop contained weapons coveted by Assemblyman Tiang Sirikhan, a close Pridi ally who wished to organize guerrilla units near his hometown of Sakon Nakhon in the northeast. This led to a transfer of the weapons and the establishment of a radio station there.<sup>1</sup>

In establishing this new training center, Pridi sought British help to facilitate the enlistment of allies who had no wish to be associated with the controversial Adun. He asked that Force 136 send in a message suggesting that he organize additional resistance cells involving civil service and navy personnel that would operate separately for security reasons. This Pridi saw as a way to avoid offending Adun, as he had “more and more openly cooperated with me,” even though his caution had caused delay. Force 136 complied.<sup>2</sup>

The British delivered a payload of arms by parachute directly to Sakon Nakhon (designated CANDLE) on the night of 27 January. Force 136 Chief Mackenzie advised Coughlin that the weapons were intended for “instructional purposes,” but acknowledged his interest in sending more. By mid-February, Tiang reported that 150 men were in training and five additional camps had been established in the northeastern region. A British officer later wrote of Tiang: “He speaks English, is very easy to get on with, and has the people of this area completely under his thumb . . . He is a very rich man and much of the area is his own property.”<sup>3</sup>

The British undertook several other operations in January, too. They reinforced their depleted ranks of Thai agents through a difficult seaplane pick up of seven of Adun's policemen and Sawat Sisuk – originally sent into Thailand by ISLD – off Tarutao Island in the Andaman Sea. This would be the first of several exfiltrations of Thai recruits, operations collectively called INFLUX. The British also sought to establish an additional radio-equipped party outside Bangkok. On 29 January, Force 136 launched Operation SAVANNA, dropping three Thai

<sup>1</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 111–12. 216–20. The latter pages are from Krit's memorandum on his operation. The date of the drop is from “Air Operations” (to August 1945), HS1-67, PRO.

<sup>2</sup> Unsigned to Stendale Bennett, 8 January 1945, HS1-79, PRO.

<sup>3</sup> Hudson, “Interim Report on Operation CANDLE,” n.d., and David Smiley, “CANDLE Area,” n.d., but *circa* 8 August 1945, HS1-60, PRO.

officers – Thot Phanthumasen (Tos Pantumasen), Prince Chiridanai Kitiyakon (Kittiyakara), and Bunsong Phungsunthon (Boonsong Phungsoondara) – near the COUPLING party's base at Phu Kradung. Thai officials, working under orders from Pridi, had begun improving an airfield at Na An, near Loei, as a site where supply planes might ultimately land.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Force 136 had selected Brigadier Victor Jacques, a decorated World War I veteran and a lawyer in Bangkok before the war, to enter Thailand for talks with Pridi. Delays in arranging Jacques' transfer, however, would leave the British far behind the Americans in getting a representative into Thailand. In the interim, Force 136 developed plans to bring Lt. Gen. Chat Nakrop, the chief of staff of the Thai army, to Ceylon for debriefing. Eager to open political negotiations, Pridi insisted on sending former foreign minister Direk Chayanam and the young diplomat Thanat Khoman with the General. He attempted to justify this by suggesting that Direk confer in Kandy with Seni Pramot or Mani Sanasen.<sup>5</sup>

Keenly aware of what Siam Country Section Staffer Maj. Andrew Gilchrist described as London's "disinterested, frigid, and negative attitude," Force 136 cautiously sought Foreign Secretary Eden's approval, arguing that receiving Direk was a small price to pay for the opportunity to pick the brain of a key Thai military figure. M. E. Denning, Mountbatten's political advisor, agreed, suggesting that there would be no harm in listening to what Direk had to say. Sir George Sansom warned from Washington that a hard-line stance would put the British further out of step with the Americans and invite the latter to pursue a unilateral approach. The Foreign Office thus agreed to Direk's participation, but followed with warnings and restrictions. The British had no desire to bring Seni or Mani into the picture, so they made no effort to comply with Pridi's request that one or the other be sent to Kandy.<sup>6</sup>

When advised of the British plan, the suspicious Coughlin radioed Wester in Bangkok to ask if Pridi had informed him of the mission. Wester vouched for the Regent's good intentions in sending the mission, but warned that the British were attempting to keep intelligence from

<sup>4</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 112–24; SAVANNA Operational Instructions, 28 January 1945, HS1-58, PRO; Sawat, *Seri Thai nai phak Isan lae ruang khong Phan Tho David Smiley*, 9; Khana Kamakan Chomron Phraiphon Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Damrong Rachanuphap, *Songkhram khrang samkhan nai samai krung Rattanakosin*, 152; and Coughlin to Donovan, 21 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>5</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 103–09.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 83; Denning to Sterndale Bennett, 16 February 1945 and Sansom to Sterndale Bennett, 12 February 1945, HS1-55, PRO; and Coughlin to Donovan, 21 February 1945, Reel 88, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

Thailand to themselves. In a subsequent message to Donovan, Coughlin would suggest that the OSS was "in a stronger position with respect to the Thais," but acknowledged that the British were getting much the same information and that Thai intimations of favoritism could be a form of manipulation.<sup>7</sup>

Fear of just such Thai manipulation, as well as security concerns, had inspired the British to continue their efforts to effect better coordination of operations into Thailand. In November 1944, SOE representatives had extracted from Donovan a promise to discuss the matter when the latter visited Kandy in January. The British wanted the SOE and the OSS to sit down together, "putting all their cards on the table," and engage in long-range planning. At the Kandy meeting on 29 January 1945, the British further urged that OSS and Force 136 send a joint message to Pridi stating clearly that the two intelligence agencies were working together. They also proposed a joint headquarters in Bangkok. Donovan flatly rejected the latter proposal and fended off the British request for a joint message on the grounds that he needed instructions from Washington. Donovan accepted in principle the need for cooperation, but no special liaison or coordinating committee was established.<sup>8</sup>

Having received no further guidance after Donovan's departure, and wary of giving the impression that the Americans supported British policy, Coughlin declined when the British offered the OSS an interview with members of the Thai mission. In advising Washington of his decision, Coughlin expressed the entirely erroneous opinion that Direk's party represented Adun's faction more than Pridi's.<sup>9</sup>

OSS headquarters immediately recognized that Coughlin had erred in turning down the opportunity to meet the Thai representatives, but Donovan's message instructing him to do so arrived too late. Donovan also advised that the Thai should be told that the British and Americans were collaborating militarily, but that the Americans would continue to cooperate with Pridi no matter what the British might do. Coughlin relayed this information to Wester on 28 February.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Coughlin to Wester, n.d., but circa 16 February 1945 and Wester to Coughlin, 18 February 1945, Reel 90; and Coughlin to Donovan, 21 February 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>8</sup> "Col. G.S. to Donovan," 22 November 1944, Folder 2, Box 357, Entry 210 and British memorandum of the meeting of 29 January 1945, Folder 510, Box 51, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>9</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 23 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>10</sup> Donovan to Coughlin, 24 February 1945 and Coughlin to Donovan, 26 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642; Coughlin to Donovan, 28 February 1945, Folder 2328, Box 133, Entry 154; and Coughlin to Wester, 28 February 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. Gilchrist (*Bangkok Top Secret*, 106) notes that Direk's mission was arranged through the Force 136 station under Pridi's direct control so that Adun would not know of the plans.

An RAF Catalina had picked up Chat, Direk, Thanat, and two Force 136 Thai officers near Tao Island in the Gulf of Thailand on 20 February. A second plane brought out seven Thai policemen for training in India. Two days later the Thai party reached Trincomalee, Ceylon, via Calcutta, carrying documents outlining military dispositions in Thailand, Japanese military manuals, maps, and other materials. To the disappointment of Force 136, Mountbatten declined to meet the Thai representatives during their three-day stay; instead he assigned the diplomatic aspects of the visit to Denning.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to meeting Denning, Direk had sounded out Gilchrist, an old acquaintance, about a British declaration of support for Thailand's post-war independence. Gilchrist dampened his expectations, emphasizing the negative response in Britain to the Thai alliance with the Japanese and their declaration of war, so Direk could not have been surprised when Denning hewed to the line that the Thai must "work their passage home." In response, Direk emphasized Pridi's opposition to the declaration of war, his eagerness to establish a resistance government, and his willingness to lead a rebellion against the Japanese whenever the Allies requested such action.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Thai party returned without the hoped-for assurances from the British, Mountbatten did send Pridi a message affirming that Free Thai contributions to the defeat of the Japanese "would be regarded as a valuable contribution by your country to the Allied cause." Also, the British had expressed much interest in the attitude of the 80,000-man Thai army. Force 136 proposed providing radio sets to establish direct communication with its high command. This raised hopes in Bangkok that the British would soon provide the arms and supplies that the Thai army badly needed. These expectations would go unfulfilled and eventually cause difficulties for the British, but in the short term the SEQUENCE mission had positive results on both sides. In Thailand, hopes for strong Allied support encouraged fuller army cooperation with Pridi. In Kandy, meanwhile, Coughlin reported that the Thai mission had made a "very favorable impression" on the British and had done much to convince them that Pridi could control the Thai army and air force.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> "Suggestions for Dealing with SEQUENCE," n.d., HS1-55, PRO; Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 112; Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 103–04; and Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Gilchrist to Pointon, 22 February 1945 and Denning to Foreign Office, 26 February 1945, HS1-55, PRO; Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 125–26; Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 104; and Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 112–13.

<sup>13</sup> "Suggestions for Dealing With SEQUENCE," n.d., HS1-55 and Jacques, "Siam, the British Position," 2 August 1945, HS1-53, PRO; and Coughlin to Wester, 28 February 1944, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

Concerned about the success of the SEQUENCE mission, the American India-Burma Theater Commander Daniel Sultan's lack of interest in operations in Thailand, and the possibility that all OSS assets in SEAC might be transferred to the China Theater, Coughlin radioed Wester on the last day of February, urging him to press Pridi for the early entry of men and weapons to support the Thai resistance. "So much depends on you, John," Coughlin declared. "Cannot you start asking for men, Americans and Thais, and supplies to be either landed or dropped, working with C-47[s] from Bhamo [Burma]?"<sup>14</sup>

Wester replied three days later, reporting that Pridi had agreed to establish a nationwide intelligence operation and was transferring loyalists to posts as provincial governors and military commanders in strategic areas. Already Pridi had approved the infiltration of a Free Thai officer into Ranong in the south and had selected a landing site for C-47s in the north. At the end of the month, Free Thai operatives would be dispatched to work with Thai forces in the Phetburi-Kanchanaburi areas and plans for the northeastern region were advancing. Although Pridi "is cooperating to the fullest extent," Wester explained, "it takes time for him to arrange official transfers to loyal Thai to help carry out plans and give protection to [our] men."<sup>15</sup>

In recruiting young men for underground work, Pridi turned to the sons of trusted supporters. Among them was Chulalongkorn University student Piya Chakkaphak, son of Luang Bannakon Kovit. He underwent initial training under Bunmak at the OSS station at Chan Bunnak's house, then participated in receiving a supply drop near Hua Hin. Having proved his mettle, he received a call to Thammasat University where he and six others were received by the Regent. He told them that they were being honored by their selection to undertake a mission for the nation and gave them a last chance to back out. The group would leave via seaplane on 24 March. Five, including Piya, would train with the OSS as radio operators in Ceylon. Nineteen other trainees eventually joined them in the OSS camp Y at Trincomalee, where they were supervised by Phon, from the China group.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Coughlin to Wester, 28 February 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>15</sup> Wester to Coughlin, 3-4 March 1945, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>16</sup> Piya Chakkaphak, "My Role in the Free Thai Movement," 17 March 1997, a copy of which was provided by the author, and interview with Piya Chakkaphak, MacLean, VA, 8 May 2000. In the former, Piya gives 8 March as his departure date, but from OSS records it seems clear that it was on 24 March. After training, Piya was scheduled to parachute into the Ubon area in August 1945 as part of a team led by Alexander MacDonald. When the war ended he agreed to serve as a radioman for an OSS team headed for Saigon and spent a month there before returning to Thailand.

Only a relatively few trainees could be sent out of the country, however, and the underground needed officers to lead guerrilla forces in the field. To meet this need, Pridi and his allies devised a clever plan for an officer-training program, taking advantage of a desire on the part of the feared Japanese Kempeitai to have the Thai set up a parallel military police unit. Pridi assigned a loyal supporter, Admiral Sangwon Suwanachip, to head this organization in January 1945. In March, Sangwon recruited a contingent of nearly 300 male students, including his own son, from Chulalongkorn University. The school, which had suspended regular classes because of the bombing raids, had offered military training courses, so the recruits had a degree of experience. Sangwon, who spoke some Japanese and met frequently with Kempeitai officers, sold the new training program to his counterparts as preparation to resist an Allied invasion. Japanese dignitaries, including the local commander, General Nakamura Aketo, participated in the launching of the program in mid-April. Japanese propagandists shot film of the recruits, who were ostensibly preparing to defend Greater East Asia.<sup>17</sup>

Despite such efforts, the underground was developing more slowly than Detachment 404 had hoped, giving rise to doubts about Wester's effectiveness. On the same day that he urged Wester to speed things up, Coughlin warned Donovan of staff concerns that their man in Bangkok "is easily sold a bill of goods" and "is intensely anti-British and may show it to an unwarranted degree."<sup>18</sup> He added in a 2 March message to Hoffman: "The personnel here feel that Wester would not follow through on policy originating here unless he personally was in agreement and as a result our men have no faith in him. He is liable to exaggerate the facts because of his strong feelings for the Thais. The feeling is that he is not persistent enough."<sup>19</sup>

In fact, Wester was finding it increasingly difficult to reconcile Detachment 404's agenda with that of his Thai hosts. This, together with the inherent strain of his confinement, behind enemy lines, in a second-floor bedroom in the main house of the Bunnak compound had begun to affect his mental health. Breakfast and lunch were brought to his room, but otherwise monotonous days were broken only by twice-daily meetings with the Free Thai radiomen – Bunmak, Wimon, and Phunphoem – and periodic late-afternoon sessions with Thai officials. Only after 8 P.M. could Wester venture downstairs for his evening meal and outdoor

<sup>17</sup> Suphon Bunmak, ed., *Anuson nakriat sarawat thahan 2488* (Bangkok, 1994), 23–28. John "Jack" Carroll kindly loaned his copy of this commemorative book.

<sup>18</sup> Reeda to Donovan et al., 10 March 1945, Reel 90, M1642 and Coughlin to Donovan, 28 February 1945, Folder 2328, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>19</sup> Coughlin to Hoffman, 2 March 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

exercise behind the walls of the compound. Bouts of dysentery and fever made his life more unpleasant.<sup>20</sup>

The extent to which Wester had sensed Detachment 404's lack of confidence is not clear, but the pressures on him intensified near the end of March. In part this was a consequence of Thai concerns about possible British operations in the Shan States, which Pridi feared would create a dilemma for Thai forces in the Kengtung area. Thai failure to counter a British military move there would precipitate a crisis with the Japanese, while resistance to the British would further complicate Thai efforts to repair relations with London. When advised of the Regent's dilemma, the OSS Thai Committee in Washington immediately suspected a British anti-Thai scheme. In fact, none existed, but the even more suspicious Wester had no way of knowing this.<sup>21</sup>

A mid-April report from Lieutenant Guy Martin on separate conversations with P Division Chief Captain Garnons-Williams and Colonel Guise of SOE exacerbated OSS concerns. Both British officers complained that the Allied efforts were too focused on Pridi, whom they expected the Japanese to eliminate at some point. Commenting on Martin's report, Taylor wrote that it was not clear whether the British actually wished to see Pridi removed, or merely considered it an inevitability that had to be taken into account. If the former were true, Taylor speculated, perhaps they were calculating that Pridi's fall would make it easier to impose British military rule at the end of the war.<sup>22</sup>

Colonel Bennett, General Sultan's intelligence chief in New Delhi did not share the OSS apprehensions about British maneuvers in the Shan States, nor their sympathetic attitude toward the Thai. Bennett considered Wester "pro-Thai" and acidly declared the intelligence from Bangkok not "worth a damn." Both he and Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, an American officer assigned to SEAC, imagined that the Japanese were using Pridi to "fish" for information about Allied intentions. Accordingly, Bennett requested the dispatch of what OSS's Taylor described as "a long and violent message to Ruth [Pridi] implying that his information had been worthless and he would have to work a great deal harder if he wanted us to consider him as a friend."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Palmer "Diary Report of SIREN III-D and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226 and Greenlee to Coughlin, 12 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>21</sup> Thai Committee to Donovan, 4 April 1945, Reel 90 and Buxton to JCS, 12 April 1945, Reel 31, M1642, USNA.

<sup>22</sup> Martin to Taylor, 12 April 1945 and Taylor to Shepardson, 13 April 1945, Folder 21, Box 554, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>23</sup> Taylor to Donovan, 9 April 1945, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; and Taylor to Vander Hoef, 5 April 1945 and Smith to Coughlin, n.d., Reel 90, M1642, USNA.





11. This house, owned by Chan Bunnak (Charn Bunnag) and located across from Vajirvudh College, served as a secret radio station and sheltered OSS officers John Wester and Richard Greenlee when they arrived in Bangkok in January 1945. (Source: US National Archives)

Angered by Bennett's attitude, Taylor complained to General Donovan that "the more the Thai offer to cooperate, the more they are denounced and considered as enemies by both British and Americans." Not surprisingly, Taylor suspected "an active and skillful propaganda campaign behind the scenes" by the British. American officers, he noted, now seemed to "echo British propaganda themes in regard to Thailand, sometimes using phrases lifted bodily from British slogans like "The Thais must work their passage back." He bemoaned the US Army's refusal to credit the accomplishments of the OSS and its obstructionism of Washington's policy: "The American military attitude seems to be, 'We are at war with the little bastards, aren't we?' It does very little good to point out that as far as the President, the State Department, Congress, and the American people are concerned, we are not at war with Thailand – though the British are."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Taylor to Donovan, 9 April 1945, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

Taylor defended the quality of Detachment 404's intelligence in a letter to the commander of Detachment 303 in Delhi, noting that any deficiencies reflected a lack of Thai experience in intelligence reporting, not unwillingness to provide information. If, as Taylor suspected, Bennett was unaware that the OSS was the source of all the Thailand information crossing his desk, Major Nicol Smith made it a point to remind the Colonel at a Delhi cocktail party. Thus confronted, Bennett admitted that the data from Bangkok was impressive, but he complained about a lack of information from the north. Smith pointed out to Bennett that "he was lucky to have what he has got and without OSS he would have nothing from the area." He added that OSS expected to have more extensive coverage of the country soon.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to Pridi's urgent pleas that the Americans help the Thai avert trouble with the British in the Shan States, Wester also had to cope with strong complaints that Allied bombs routinely missed Japanese facilities and inflicted death, injury, and property loss on Thai civilians. For example, during a 5 March raid on the Bangkok Noi rail station in Thonburi many stray bombs landed on the east bank of the river. The errant bombing and strafing killed seventy-eight people. Not only was Pridi's house damaged and the residence of his aide-de-camp destroyed, but hospitals, temples, and buildings at Thammasat University were hit. Two European inmates of the Thammasat internment camp sustained injuries, causing the authorities to move the internees to a safer location at Vajiravudh College.<sup>26</sup>

The next problematic bombing came on 22 March when Allied planes hit a train carrying Thai troops on the railway line near Paknambo. The attack came despite a Thai request that the line be left intact to facilitate the transfer of troops to the northeast in preparation for a potential showdown with the Japanese. Wester asked Coughlin for action to avert such counter-productive raids, but was advised that the OSS had very limited influence over bombing policy.<sup>27</sup>

Coughlin commented to the OSS Thai Committee that the air forces seemed to be concentrating on Thailand because the British had restricted air attacks on Singapore and Burma to avoid damage to property they hoped soon to reclaim. He added that he would endeavor to "obtain sufficient sympathy, appreciation and cooperation from our Air Force" although he was well aware that, as Taylor put it, the OSS could

<sup>25</sup> Taylor to Vander Hoef, 5 April 1945 and Smith to Coughlin, n.d., Folder 3, Box 228, Entry 210, RG 225, USNA.

<sup>26</sup> DURIAN to Kandy, 8 March 1945, Folder 1257, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>27</sup> DURIAN to Kandy, 24 March 1945, Folder 1257, Box 205, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

expect to be "berated for even raising the subject" of collateral damage. Coughlin decided to write a letter to General George E. Stratemeyer of the Eastern Air Command, proposing, as tactfully as possible, that Thai concerns be taken into account. He dispatched the letter with maximum discretion, asking that the OSS commander at Calcutta deliver it personally to Stratemeyer or his deputy, then destroy it once it had been read. Coughlin's cautious appeal brought no results.<sup>28</sup>

During Wester's trying solo stint in Bangkok, the OSS had begun to infiltrate additional Thai officers into outlying locations, coordinating all such operations with Pridi. The first to enter, Sunthon Khantalaksa, joined the OSS BALMORAL team based on the normally uninhabited, forested islands of Ko Surin Nua and Ko Surin Tai, located in the Andaman Sea approximately forty miles off the Thai coast, about seventy miles southwest of Ranong.

Operation BALMORAL had begun on 6 September 1944 when a reconnaissance party, including two American OSS officers, landed from an RAF Catalina. Finding conditions inhospitable, they requested evacuation and were picked up eight days later. The OSS did not give up plans to establish a permanent observation/staging base on the island, however, as a second party of five men, led by Lieutenant John D. Calhoun, came ashore from a British submarine on 26 November. This party established radio contact with Ceylon on 11 December. By the end of January 1945, the mission had expanded to fourteen, seven Americans, and seven Malays and Chinese.<sup>29</sup>

When Detachment 404 notified Pridi of the BALMORAL operation in mid-February, he expressed immediate interest in linking it with plans to create an intelligence network in the Kra Isthmus. He promised to assign a cooperative governor to Ranong to pave the way for Sunthon's transfer from BALMORAL to the mainland.<sup>30</sup>

On 2 March, on its third try, the RAF Catalina carrying Sunthon banged down onto a rough sea off the islands, damaging its hull in the process. Supply offloading took an hour due to the difficult conditions, but finally the plane took off successfully, leaving a very seasick Free Thai officer behind.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; Coughlin to Thai Committee and Coughlin to Commanding General Eastern Air Command, 28 March 1945, File 2357, Box 134, Entry 154; and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 2 April 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>29</sup> Derived from many BALMORAL-related reports in Folder 1, Box 62, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>30</sup> See a series of February 1945 communications between Kandy and Bangkok, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>31</sup> "Operation Report, Balmoral V-C," 6 March 1945, Folder 1, Box 62, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA and interview with Sunthon Khantalaksa, Bangkok, 22 July 1993.

At first it was anticipated that the BALMORAL party would deliver Sunthon to the mainland and land two Chinese agents on the island of Phuket, so Calhoun's men had been looking to commandeer a fishing boat of suitable size. On 19 March, BALMORAL reported plans to seize two boats from the Phuket area that had entered their area and requested preparations for the removal of the crewmen from the two vessels. Alerted that two Catalinas would arrive on the evening of 23 March, the BALMORAL party invited the eleven fishermen to a beach party and gave them gift articles of clothing. Amidst singing and dancing, the planes appeared. After helping to unload the aircraft, the unsuspecting fishermen were then forced aboard the Catalinas and whisked away to India. A month later, Dwight Bulkley of the OSS interviewed the leader of the unlucky group, Ma Hem, at an internment camp in Ceylon. The thirty-year-old fisherman of Malayan ethnicity complained of homesickness, illness, and beatings at the hands of the camp guards.<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, the mass kidnapping served no purpose other than preserving security because the captured boats were never used as intended. Thai authorities decided to pick up Sunthon, and the plans to place the Chinese on Phuket were dropped. The latter decision came after one member of two British reconnaissance parties was killed, two men were captured by the Japanese, and four taken by Thai authorities on the island during March. This led to stepped up security precautions and surely contributed to British abandonment of plans to attack the island (Operation ROGER).<sup>33</sup>

On 31 March, a customs officer and a policeman, representing Pridi's new governor at Ranong, Chan Sombunkhun, landed from a Customs Department launch and held a lengthy discussion with Lieutenant Calhoun. They revealed that the Free Thai movement in the South relied entirely on sympathetic personnel dispatched from Bangkok. They declared their distrust of local residents, showed no interest in recruiting them into

<sup>32</sup> Various messages between Kandy and BALMORAL, Folder 1253, Box 207, Entry 88; "Report on Balmoral," 26 March 1945, Folder 1, Box 62, Entry 99; and Bulkley, "Interrogation and Assessment of Ma Hem," 17 April 1945, Folder 520, Box 37, Entry 148, RG 226, USNA. Also, interview with Sunthon Khantalaksa, Bangkok, 22 July 1993. The Thai fishermen flown into captivity from BALMORAL had company. A letter from Birn to Bird, 14 March 1946, Folder 246, Box 22, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA refers to nineteen Thai fisherman allegedly taken aboard a British submarine at about the same time as the BALMORAL incident. "Balmoral VII-B Reconnaissance Report," circa 15 May 1945, Folder 1, Box 62, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA describes the capture of eight fishermen by the British submarine *Clyde* on 14 May 1945.

<sup>33</sup> The fate of British reconnaissance parties on Phuket is reported in the SEAC war diaries of 26 March 1945, Box 61, and 7 April 1945, Box 63, with further details in Box 75, RG 331, USNA.

the underground and seemed annoyed that they were expected to take the two men earlier scheduled to go to Phuket – a Sino-Thai agent from the BALMORAL party, Moh, and a Singaporean Chinese, Saw – to the mainland with Sunthon. The Thai officials also expressed strong anti-British sentiments.<sup>34</sup>

Once safely on the mainland, Sunthon pretended to be the Governor Chan's nephew from Bangkok. He moved into the Governor's official residence and set up his radio there. It took him a month to rig a workable antenna, but thereafter he was able to transmit intelligence information. In July he would organize the transfer of equipment to fellow officer Chua Hunchamlong (Hoonchamlong) at Chumphon and the receipt of a load of arms sent in by seaplane. Sunthon sometimes relaxed by playing badminton with unsuspecting Japanese soliders stationed in the town.<sup>35</sup>

Three additional OSS Thai officers – Prayun Atthachinda, Amnuai Phunphiphat, and Charoen Watthanapanit – entered Thailand on RAF seaplanes in the early morning of 23 March 1945. The two Catalinas landed near Sattakut Island in the Gulf of Thailand, unloaded a ton of supplies, and picked up the seven young men sent out by Pridi for training. Five mornings later a fourth Free Thai officer, Charok Losuwan, and thirteen supply chutes were dropped from a B-24 in a remote area between Phrae and Lampang in north central Thailand.<sup>36</sup>

Having received a lengthy briefing prepared by the OSS Planning Board in Washington that outlined the points he was expected to raise with Pridi, Major Greenlee re-entered Bangkok on the final day of March. He brought this carefully crafted political statement:

The US has at the moment a policy vis a vis Thailand, of maintaining its independence, or supporting [its] territorial integrity, of hastening its liberation from Japan, and [of] recognizing its services to the United Nations in so far as this can be done without raising diplomatic issues with Great Britain. This last is partly due to a desire by the US not to emphasize British and American differences concerning Thailand. The US is pursuing a policy of collaborating with Great Britain for purposes of prosecuting the war in Southeast Asia. However, the State Department is thoroughly sympathetic with Ruth [Pridi] and his Government.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> "Preliminary Report on Conversations with Thai," Folder 8, Box 231, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Sunthon Khantalaksa, Bangkok, 22 July 1993 and "Monthly Report, Operations Office," 31 July 1945, Folder 2593, Box 152, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>36</sup> Mission report of SIREN III-A, 3 April 1945, Reel 8, M1642 and DURIAN to Kandy, 24 March 1945, Folder 1257, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA; and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 2 April 1945, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>37</sup> Greenlee briefing, 29 March 1945, Entry 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

Greenlee's party landed on very rough seas in the Gulf of Thailand off Sattakut Island. Once on the surface, the British pilot had difficulty finding a patch of water sufficiently calm to permit unloading, so it took over ninety minutes to exchange Greenlee, his colleague Major Howard Palmer, and their baggage (including the 50,000 dollars in gold requested by Pridi) for the eight Thai being sent out. Seven were young trainees, but the eighth man was Colonel Coughlin's West Point classmate Major Buomat Praphandyothin, who was dispatched to seek military aid for the Thai army. The plane's first attempt at a takeoff from the sea's pitching surface failed, and the rough waves damaged the seaplane's hull. But after revving up again, a fifth bounce off the surface gave the aircraft sufficient lift to take off.<sup>38</sup>

The Thai Customs Department launch performed efficiently this time, allowing the party to reach Bangkok just after 10:30 P.M. on April Fool's Day 1945. The arrival amounted to a homecoming of sorts for Palmer, as he had been born in Bangkok to missionary parents and had lived in Thailand until he was nine years old. Colonel Samroeng drove Greenlee and Palmer to the compound where Wester had been operating alone for two months. To their surprise, Wester showed little enthusiasm when they arrived, then voiced strong opposition when Greenlee revealed plans to promote closer cooperation between Pridi and Adun.<sup>39</sup>

Early the next morning, Pridi arrived to learn the results of Greenlee's talks in Washington. Greenlee informed the Regent that the Joint Chiefs had not yet responded to the proposed war plan, but admitted that it was unlikely to be approved. He then went through a long agenda of issues, including the matter of cooperation between Pridi and Adun.<sup>40</sup>

Concern that the latter would be a touchy subject evaporated the next day when the two Thai leaders agreed to coordinate fully the activity of all the OSS Free Thai officers. Plans were established to base Ian and Sawat at Korat, Pao at Phetburi, Bunyen at Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Phiset at Kengtung for intelligence gathering. Guerrilla training camps were also envisioned in these areas.<sup>41</sup>

Although Washington had minimal interest in intelligence on military movements in Thailand, OSS officials hoped operations there might uncover information of wider import. Still reeling from the negative

<sup>38</sup> Escorting Officer's report, SIREN-III-D, 3 April 1945, Reel 89, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>39</sup> "Operation SIREN," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA and Palmer account in *Bangkok Post*, 7 August 1947.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. and "Diary Report of SIREN III-D and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

backlash triggered by the revelation of Donovan's proposal for a postwar centralized intelligence agency by hostile newspapers in early February,<sup>42</sup> OSS Headquarters desperately needed spectacular successes to insure a postwar role for the OSS.

Accordingly, Greenlee brought a proposal that a Thai agent enter Japan and send back information from a radio transmitter inside the Thai Embassy or via a new device, the pocket-sized "J/E" transceiver, which was capable of communicating with bombers flying overhead. While Konthi was in Washington, the OSS had trained him in the use of the latter device, presumably on the assumption that he could be sent back to Tokyo, where he had served during the early part of the war. Premier Khuang Aphaiwong's scheduled participation in an April meeting in Tokyo seemed to offer a golden opportunity to introduce the necessary equipment into Japan.<sup>43</sup>

Although Greenlee characterized success in this project (Operation JACKPOT) as the greatest possible Thai contribution to the American war effort, Pridi immediately dismissed its feasibility, pointing out that the Premier's trip had been cancelled and that there was little chance that the Japanese would permit any additional Thai diplomats to travel to Tokyo. Although the Regent apparently did not mention them, there were other difficulties, too. Thai Ambassador Wichit Wichitwathakan, had long been outspokenly pro-Axis; moreover, Thai diplomats in Tokyo were under close surveillance by the Japanese authorities.<sup>44</sup>

On 4 April, Greenlee and Palmer got their first taste of the pressure to which Wester had been subjected when Colonel Samroeng arrived at 4 P.M., greatly agitated about an Allied air attack, two days earlier, on a railroad station that the Thai had specifically requested be exempted from bombing because of troop movements toward the Korat area. Claiming that 400 civilians and fifty Thai military personnel had died in the raid, Samroeng threatened to stop providing military information if such

<sup>42</sup> Thomas F. Troy, *Donovan and the CIA* (Frederick, MD, 1981), 255–60 and David F. Rudgers, *Creating the Secret State* (Lawrence, KS, 2000), 25–31.

<sup>43</sup> Lilly to Coughlin, 12 April 1945; Donovan to Coughlin, 19 March 1945; Taylor to Thai Committee, 29 March 1945; and Greenlee to Coughlin, 12 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642; and Greenlee Briefing, 29 March 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>44</sup> Greenlee report, 15 April 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. Ambassador Wichit had, however, recently come to recognize the imminence of Allied victory and had talked with the Soviet military attaché in Tokyo, who urged that Thailand change its alignment with Japan and promised future Soviet assistance. Wichit wired Bangkok for instructions, but, not trusting him, Pridi instructed his brother in Stockholm to contact the Soviets there and attempt to open diplomatic relations. See Reeda to Donovan, 4 March 1945, Reel 90, M1642 and notes on comments by Pridi taken during Greenlee's second trip into Bangkok, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.



actions continued. The American officers sent a message to Kandy warning that "indiscriminate bombing and strafing" were destroying good will toward the USA.<sup>45</sup>

This incident pushed Wester, who had been displaying symptoms of malaria, over the edge. The next morning he arose early and prepared a message declaring the mission a failure and stating that all hands would come out. Greenlee and Palmer dissuaded him from sending it. That evening they sought to explain to Samroeng that the OSS had been unable to affect bomb targetting decisions because theirs was "not a military mission but an intelligence and liaison mission," a distinction the Thai officer had understandable difficulty comprehending.<sup>46</sup>

In response to renewed prompting from Bangkok, and armed with a list of Japanese-related bombing targets in Thailand, Coughlin tried again to impress the seriousness of the bombing problem on the ranking American officers attached to SEAC. Again he had little success, and the bombing continued. On 7 April, American planes attacked Don Muang airfield north of Bangkok, causing considerable damage to the Thai air force. Two planes that had just arrived with the Thai Northern Army Commander and members of his staff were among the aircraft destroyed.<sup>47</sup>

Coughlin bluntly advised Wester in a 5 April message that his efforts to influence bombing policy were meeting resistance in part because of:

increased impatience on American side at what many consider demanding attitude of Thais and their failure to supply us with information they should be able to procure. Virtually all intelligence we are getting is what Thais want us to know in our own interest, what the Japs tell them, or what they can see for themselves. They are not making serious efforts to discover important Jap military secrets. This is better than nothing but certainly not enough to consider Thais as real allies.<sup>48</sup>

If Wester saw this message it surely contributed further to his nervous breakdown, a condition that became more severe each day, despite the best efforts of a Thai doctor. Greenlee tried to explain to Coughlin why Wester had been under such great pressure:

<sup>45</sup> The message is found in Folder 14, Box 412, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>46</sup> Wester to Coughlin, 1 April 1945, Box 1257, Box 208, Entry 88, and "Diary Report of SIREN III-D and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>47</sup> "Diary Report of SIREN III-D and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52 and Greenlee report, 15 April 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110; "Bombing Targets In and Around Bangkok," 3 April 1945, Box 2, Entry 53; and Coughlin to Greenlee, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. Three American flyers – Captain Abrahams, Lieutenant Mackenzie, and Lieutenant Wimer – were taken into Thai custody and placed in the internment camp after they bailed out of a disabled plane during this raid.

<sup>48</sup> Coughlin to Wester, 5 April 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

Contrary to the feeling at Headquarters that the Thais are demanding without producing, they believe the shoe is on the other foot. They have not pulled their punches on John. Moreover, they cannot understand how we can profess friendship for Thailand and allow our own air force to bomb Thai installations, kill Thais when no Japs are in the vicinity and strafe airfields when no Jap planes are ever present.<sup>49</sup>

On the evening of the same day, 12 April, the American officers changed location, a move motivated both by the concern that they had been in the same place too long and a desire for roomier quarters. They relocated to Maliwan Palace on the Chao Phraya River, most recently the official residence of the late Regent Chao Phraya Pichayen Yothin who had died in 1942. Today the Bangkok office of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the palace was located two doors upriver from Pridi's official residence.

The move proved, in Palmer's words, "as secret as LaGuardia going to fire" because, appropriately enough for a mission codenamed SIREN, the horn of their car, which had been borrowed from the army chief of staff, stuck, sounding loudly as they passed through the heart of Bangkok. Their driver, Colonel Samroeng, ignored entreaties that he stop and disconnect the wires, instead issuing "vocal hushings which were not effective." Fortunately no one paid much attention and the horn fell silent before the officers reached their new home. Having had quite enough excitement for the day, the Americans declined a late-night invitation to attend a party, only to discover later that they had missed an unusual opportunity. The Thai authorities had concluded that Wester's problems might in part be due to the absence of feminine companionship, so at great expense had engaged eight girls to entertain their American guests.<sup>50</sup>

The OSS officers now occupied more comfortable second-floor quarters overlooking a large first-floor ballroom. The palace also offered a pleasant veranda facing the river. Free Thai officers Bunmak, Wimon, Phunpoem, Phisut, and Amnuai moved in to operate the communications gear. Under the pretext that a high-ranking official was occupying the palace, Adun stationed two police guards at the gate, while six additional civilian security men patrolled the compound. The absence of kitchen staff, however, meant that food had to be catered: Chinese food for breakfast and lunch, and Thai curries for dinner. CID police activities

<sup>49</sup> Greenlee to Coughlin, 12 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>50</sup> "Diary Report of SIREN III-D and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110 and "Operation SIREN," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

would be cited as the reason for radio transmissions from the house in case these were discovered by the Japanese.<sup>51</sup>

Friday 13 April began with Palmer and Greenlee receiving news of President Roosevelt's death, heard by Thai listeners to the morning news-cast from San Francisco station KGEI. Later in the day, in an effort to boost Wester's spirits, Pridi came to bestow a medal. That evening Pridi returned with Adun and Direk to discuss means of rescuing downed Allied pilots. This was the Americans' first opportunity to meet the controversial and mysterious Adun face to face.<sup>52</sup>

If Friday the 13th had gotten off to a bad start with the shocking news of FDR's death, Saturday the 14th brought more immediate problems for the SIREN party. Despite doses of sedatives, Wester turned violent. Greenlee sent an urgent message to Coughlin: "John gone completely berserk. Advise soonest when Catalina can come." He later described the situation in harrowing detail in a letter to the Colonel:

He wanted us to kill him and beat his head on the floor. He had the strength of a maniac and all of us were required to subdue him. The strain on everyone is apparent. He was screaming loud enough to be heard for a block. We are on a main thoroughfare now – about 50 feet from it. The other side of the house fronts directly on the river and sampans continually parade past near the shore. This afternoon eight Jap soldiers in field dress marched by the house, just a few feet from our window. Had Wester been in his tantrum then, the Japs would have attempted to come in and we might have had to shoot it out.<sup>53</sup>

Pridi dispatched two doctors, instructing that one should remain with Wester at all times. A third doctor later reinforced them so the three could alternate on eight-hour shifts. However, Wester had now become highly suspicious of his Thai handlers, so either Greenlee and Palmer had to attend him, too, whenever he was awake.<sup>54</sup>

Yet more nerve-wracking excitement lay in store. At 3 P.M., British and American B-24s bore in on Bangkok for a two-hour air raid that further unhinged Wester. Palmer recalled that he was "never rational for more than two minutes a day thereafter." In addition to killing 200 civilians, the bombs virtually destroyed the Samsen power plant and badly damaged the city's other power facility, leaving most of Bangkok without power and water. Palmer described it as "a useless piece of work" because the

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. and Greenlee, "Report of Operation SIREN for May 1945," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> DURIAN to Kandy, 14 April 1945, Folder 1257, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226 and Greenlee to Coughlin, 14 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>54</sup> "Diary of SIREN III-A and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110 and "Operation SIREN," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

Japanese Army had its own facilities. "Considering our position we felt pretty miserable about it," he added, "but there was nothing we could do beyond complaining to base and making sincere apologies."<sup>55</sup>

The final event of that seemingly endless Saturday came at 9 PM when Adun arrived at SIREN's headquarters with a stunned, long-captive American. As a means of gaining favor with the air forces, the OSS had sought to fulfill General Chennault's special request that it rescue one of his long-captive Flying Tiger pilots, William "Black Mac" MacGarry, whose plane had been shot down in the Chiang Mai area in January 1942. The Japanese came to inspect the POW camp periodically and would certainly notice his absence, so removing him involved considerable risk. After weighing several possible schemes, Adun decided to send a policeman to the camp with an order to remove MacGarry, a document he planned to disclaim as a forgery if the Japanese later discovered the pilot's absence. The Japanese would be told that MacGarry had died.<sup>56</sup>

Greenlee, now in charge of the SIREN mission, obviously needed to get both MacGarry and Wester out of the country as soon as possible. The Thai had promised to prepare a Thai air force field at Phu Khieo (north of Chaiphaphum; west of Khon Kaen in north central Thailand) for landings by Allied planes, but it was not yet ready. Thus Greenlee requested a special seaplane pickup, but a mission could not be sent in the dark of the moon. In the interim, Detachment 404 headquarters instructed Greenlee to take all necessary measures, including gagging, to keep Wester quiet. The Thai doctors repeatedly injected sedatives, but with limited effect. Once, on the afternoon of 16 April, Wester broke free from his attendants and attempted to climb out of a second-floor window, all the while crying out in a loud voice. The presence of two passersby on the street raised concern that security had been fatally breached.<sup>57</sup>

Radio problems created further worries for the SIREN party. With no electrical power they were forced to rely on batteries that had to be

<sup>55</sup> "Diary of SIREN III-A and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; Palmer account in *Bangkok Post*, 11 August 1947; and bomb damage reports of 18 and 24 April in Folders ZM-850, Box 398 and ZM-162, Box 397, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>56</sup> Greenlee report, 15 April 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. On 11 November 2003, a memorial to the Flying Tigers was dedicated in Chiang Mai. One pilot from the group, Jack Newkirk, died when his plane was shot down in northern Thailand. MacGarry and Charles Mott, who was shot down over western Thailand and was held as a POW from the early days of the war, are commemorated on the monument. One face of the monument pays tribute to the Free Thai.

<sup>57</sup> "Diary Report of SIREN III-D and IV-A," Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110 and "Operation SIREN," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



12. Smoke billows from the Allied bombing of Bangkok's Samsen power plant on 14 April 1945. OSS officers took the photo from the riverside balcony of SIREN headquarters, Maliwan Palace. (Source: US National Archives)

recharged by the Thai Army Signal Corps. Not only did this pose an additional security problem, but due to incompatible equipment a charge would last for only an hour. In his report to Detachment 404 Greenlee emphasized the need for a quiet-running steam generator. He also pointed out other serious equipment deficiencies, including a shortage of high-frequency crystals, resulting from mistakes in the selection and packing of radio equipment.<sup>58</sup>

On 18 April, Allied bombers revisited Bangkok, this time inflicting serious damage on Japanese facilities and starting fires at the Borneo Company wharf that were still burning two days later. On the night of the raid, Greenlee, Palmer, and MacGarry set out on the Chao Phraya River in a small boat to see the results. The craft sprung a leak, however, and they were fortunate to get it back to the dock before it sank.<sup>59</sup>

At last, arrangements were set for a seaplane pickup on the night of 21 April. Palmer would accompany Wester and MacGarry so that he might report personally at Detachment 404. Pridi sent along four Thai air force pilots in hopes that their advice on bomb targeting might be heeded. The senior officer, Wing Commander Thawi Chulasap, was an old hand at foreign liaison work. He had been part of a 1941 Thai military mission to British Malaya and subsequently was attached to the Japanese army during the Malayan campaign, during which time he presumably shared intelligence on British dispositions gained on the earlier trip. The pickup planes would carry 1,400 pounds of equipment, including much-needed radio gear, and three Free Thai officers – Karun, the China group member who was returning from his leave in the USA, Chua Huncham-long, and Somchit Kangsanon (Kansananda). The latter two officers, like Phunphoem, had been recruited directly by the OSS in the United States.<sup>60</sup>

Transporting Wester to the rendezvous site proved a harrowing chore. The Thai doctors sedated him in hopes of keeping him unconscious for twenty-four hours. Wester appeared sound asleep as the other members of the party gathered for a pre-departure meal on the night of 20 April, but he stunned them by walking fully dressed into the dining room some minutes later. Several “double doses” of sedatives later, Wester was loaded onto the launch. He still did not remain quiet. When they passed through a canal where his cries could be heard by passersby, the Thai officers sought to drown them out by singing and carousing as loudly as they

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. and Greenlee report, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>59</sup> “Diary Report of SIREN III-D and IV-A,” Folder 518, Box 52, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. and “Operational Report SIREN IV-A,” 25 April 1945, Reel 89, M1642, USNA.



could. In the end, the launch reached the pick-up point on time. The two planes lifted off shortly after midnight on 22 April.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, the 9 March 1945 Japanese takeover of French Indochina had heightened concerns in Bangkok that a similar action might follow in Thailand. Some two weeks before this, on 19 February, Pridi had informed the Allies that General Sinat Yotharak, vice-commander of the Thai army, had secretly instructed its commanders to resist if the Japanese attempted to seize control in Thailand. In the wake of the Japanese move against the French, it was revealed that the Thai cabinet had formally endorsed this policy. In response, on 19 March, the OSS Thai Committee had dispatched a detailed list of questions to Pridi, seeking specific information about his plans in the event of a Japanese takeover.<sup>62</sup>

The OSS also seized this opportunity to seek Joint Chiefs of Staff sanction to supply the Thai resistance, an initiative which received invaluable State Department endorsement in a parallel appeal to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee. A 26 March Donovan memorandum pointed to the OSS mission in Bangkok as the chief source of information on events in Thailand for both the State and War Departments, itemized the OSS weapons and supplies available in Calcutta, and posed two key questions:

1. Should OSS supply the Thai army and any other resistance arms, ammo, and other supplies?
2. Should OSS send personnel to Thailand to help organize and train resistance forces?<sup>63</sup>

On the matter of a possible Japanese *coup* in Thailand, SEAC's intelligence section analyzed the situation astutely, predicting such a move unlikely unless the Japanese anticipated an imminent Allied attack, or the Thai rebelled. One motive for the Japanese action in Indochina, the report pointed out, had been concern that in the event of an American seaborne invasion the French would seize the opportunity to turn on their occupiers. It continued:

Perhaps the most important difference between the two countries is that whereas F.I.C. was the only part of S.E. Asia still nominally under the domination of a western power, SIAM, having been outwardly a free Sovereign State from the

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. and interview with Wimon Wiriyawit, Bangkok, 6 July 1993. Wester had a long recuperation, but eventually recovered fully and would return to Thailand after the war to manage International Engineering.

<sup>62</sup> DURIAN to Kandy, 19 February 1945, Folder 1256, Box 205, Entry 88 and "Aid to the Thai Resistance," 26 March 1945, Folder 315, Box 49, Entry 99, RG 226; and Thai Committee to Reeda, 19 March 1945 and Reeda to Washington, 21 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>63</sup> Donovan to JCS, 26 March 1945, Folder 315, Box 49, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. The State Department memorandum appears in *FRUS* 1945, 6: 1260-62.



beginning of the war, has been held up by the Japanese as the example *par excellence* of voluntary co-operation in the establishment of the Great East Asia and as one of the props of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. For the Japanese to knock away this prop would be to undermine the whole edifice of moral war aims on which they lay stress.<sup>64</sup>

The Japanese had begun increasing their troop presence in Thailand, but intelligence indicated that the existing Japanese forces in Thailand were insufficiently numerous to control the northern part of the country, where the bulk of Thai forces were stationed. The Japanese would hardly wish to divert troops there from other areas unless it were absolutely necessary. British analysis suggested that even if an Allied landing on the Kra Isthmus were anticipated, the Japanese would be more likely to seize localized control of strategic areas rather than attempting a general takeover of Thailand.<sup>65</sup>

But should the Allies encourage a Thai uprising? Some British and American officers thought so, but for different reasons that reflected their particular national military concerns. Brigadier John Anstey, Deputy Director of Force 136, believed that such action would force the Japanese withdrawal of troops from Malaya into Thailand, facilitating British plans for an attack in that area. General Brink, an American officer on the SEAC staff, meanwhile, viewed a Thai uprising as a good means to tie down Japanese troops that might otherwise be withdrawn to oppose an American landing on the China coast.<sup>66</sup>

The Allies were in no position to offer the Thai resistance effective support, however, so the OSS estimated that if the Thai rebelled, they could hold out for a month at best. In the event that Bangkok had to be abandoned, the Allies hoped that Pridi and other key leaders would flee upcountry to spearhead a continued resistance that might tie down substantial numbers of Japanese troops, but there was no guarantee that they would be able to do so. Consequently, most Allied officers believed it made more sense for the Thai to avoid a confrontation until the Allies were prepared to launch an offensive. This would permit the Allies to continue to glean intelligence from Thailand, while arming and training guerrilla forces that could augment the Thai military.<sup>67</sup>

But would the OSS be permitted to participate in a guerrilla training program in Thailand? As Palmer and Wester returned from Bangkok this

<sup>64</sup> "Possible Japanese Action in Siam," 22 March 1945, Folder 1, Box 90, Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. and "Military Traffic in Northeast Thailand," 22 March 1945, Folder ZM-162, Box 397, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>66</sup> Donovan to Stettinius, 26 March 1945, Reel 90, M1642 and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 2 April 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226.

<sup>67</sup> "Aid to the Thai Resistance," 26 March 1945, Folder 315, Box 49, RG 226, USNA.

remained very much in doubt because of General Sultan's determination to keep tight rein on all OSS operations in his India-Burma Theater. Sultan's negative attitude in part reflected the skeptical view of OSS activities that he shared with other "old-school" army officers, but he particularly opposed expansion of Detachment 404's operations into Thailand. Aware that in military terms the American Joint Chiefs saw Southeast Asia as a peripheral area and wished to concentrate all possible resources in support of General Wedemeyer in China, Sultan viewed Thailand as part of the British sphere. Aware of the policy differences between London and Washington regarding Thailand's future, Sultan feared that greater OSS involvement there would only stir up a political hornet's nest that might embarrass him. On top of this, Sultan was mightily irritated that OSS Headquarters had failed to consult him before placing a proposal to supply the Thai resistance before the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>68</sup>

When Greenlee re-entered Thailand at the end of March, he had been briefed to tell Pridi that while the OSS could not supply the Thai army – for both logistical and political reasons – it stood ready to arm and train guerrillas. Detachment 101 had been highly successful in its guerrilla operations, and with the fighting in northern Burma nearing a conclusion its mission would soon be completed. The OSS anticipated that most of the 101 unit would be transferred to China where Colonel Heppner, with support from General Wedemeyer, was rapidly expanding OSS activities, but Detachment 404 officers hoped to acquire some of its assets. They instructed Greenlee to ask Pridi if some of its resources might profitably be redirected to Thailand. They also revealed their short-term plan to introduce twelve American guerrilla trainers into the country. Pridi responded enthusiastically to both proposals, suggesting that the entirety of Detachment 101 could be gainfully employed in support of the Thai resistance.<sup>69</sup>

Greenlee, who had been alerted on 17 April that General Sultan's obstructionism had forced Detachment 404 to put all such plans on hold, sent a report out with Palmer emphasizing the potential of the Thai guerrillas. He cautioned, however, that

they cannot be organized without American officers or arms. Of these, arms are most important. If arms are not soon forthcoming, the guerrillas will not be able to operate in time. And if arms are not furnished, we cannot count on our

<sup>68</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 28 February 1945, Folder 2220, Box 126, Entry 154 and Merrill to Coughlin, 4 May 1945, Folder 310, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226; and Sultan to Marshall, 23 April 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>69</sup> Greenlee briefing, 29 March 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110 and Wilkinson to Greenlee, 17 April 1945, Folder 2070, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226; and Greenlee to Coughlin, 14 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

Thais furnishing intelligence. They are disgusted with us for letting them down. Their manner of doing their work has changed and they overlook many of our requests.<sup>70</sup>

Sultan had already made his position clear to Coughlin on 13 April, declaring during consultations on the future of Detachment 101 at Bhamo, Burma, that OSS operations in Thailand must be restricted to intelligence gathering only. Coughlin traveled on to Kunming, where he met Heppner and Wedemeyer on the 18th. He had hoped that Wedemeyer might support the idea of arming the Thai underground and help him change Sultan's mind. General Marshall, however, had warned Wedemeyer to avoid encroaching on his fellow general's prerogatives, so he judiciously declined to intervene. Discouraged, Coughlin asked OSS headquarters: "Should I accept TC [Theater Commander's] decision to not undertake operation or try to sell?" He added: "I would prefer accepting and so advising Ruth [Pridi]." Donovan's deputy Charles Cheston responded that Coughlin instead should "undertake to sell Sultan." Cheston also transmitted the expected news that the Joint Chiefs had formally rejected Pridi's proposal for an American seaborne invasion of Thailand.<sup>71</sup>

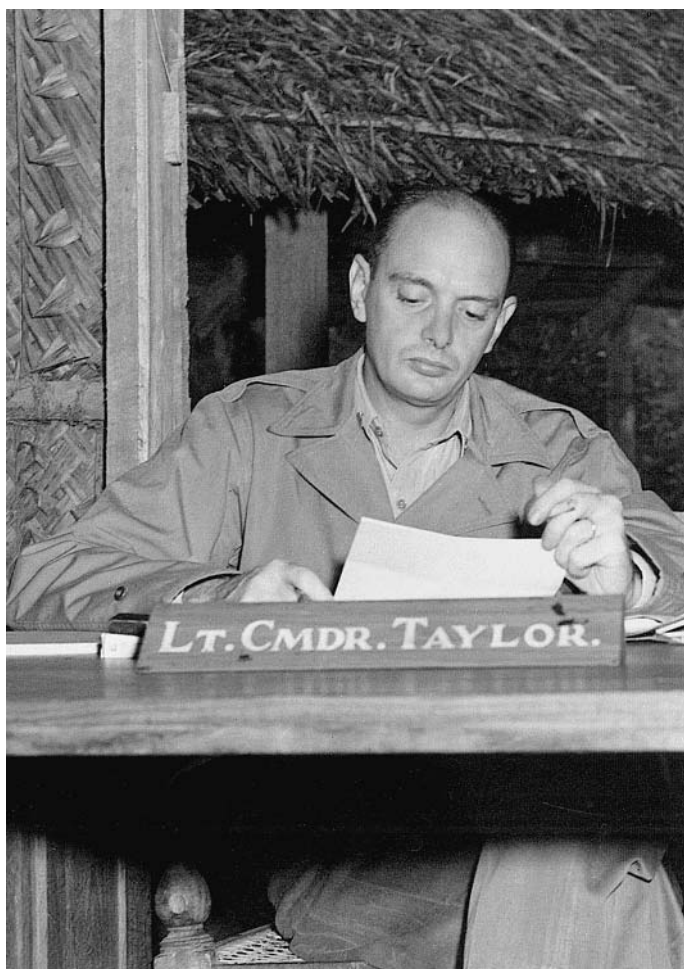
Detachment 404 OSS Intelligence Officer Taylor meanwhile had been attempting to devise an alternative plan for Thailand that could fit within the severely limited parameters established by Sultan. In Taylor's view, OSS officers needed to be present in Bangkok to affirm "the importance of Thailand's cooperation – or at least their complete willingness to cooperate[–]and to report on any political maneuvering of our British or Chinese allies in Thailand." He suggested justifying an OSS presence to the military on the grounds that intelligence connections in Thailand would be invaluable in the postwar era. Taylor foresaw a power vacuum in Southeast Asia that would make the region a "storm center." Long-range intelligence gleaned through relations with Pridi would be useful in calculating national policy and would provide "a basis for effective American intervention, whether military or political, in Asiatic crises should such intervention ever seem necessary to us." Coughlin dispatched Taylor to Washington to plead the case.<sup>72</sup>

Ironically, by 23 April when Sultan informed General Marshall of his decision to restrict OSS activities in Thailand to intelligence gathering only, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had already endorsed limited support

<sup>70</sup> Greenlee report, 15 April 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>71</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee, 18 April 1945, Folder 3424, Box 202, Entry 154, RG 226 and Coughlin to Donovan, 24 April 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>72</sup> Taylor to Coughlin, 24 April 1945 and Taylor to Donovan, 25 April 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.



13. A journalist in civilian life, Edmond Taylor served as the chief American representative on P Division before becoming Detachment 404 Intelligence Officer in 1945. (Source: US National Archives)

for the Thai underground. On the 20th, Ned Buxton, acting in Donovan's absence, had sent the Joint Chiefs Pridi's estimate that the Thai underground could muster a force of 13,000 civilians and 30,000 Thai policemen, together with news that Adun planned to capture and deliver to the Allies two key Japanese staff officers – Chief of Staff Major General Hamada Hitoshi and Operations Section Chief Colonel Yano Toshio – at the time of a Thai uprising. Strong personal entreaties from OSS

headquarters no doubt accompanied the delivery of this document to the Pentagon, and the State Department offered critical backing. The latter considered supplying the resistance "of highest political importance," in part because Hoffman's unauthorized promise of such supplies to Seni several months earlier had been subsequently relayed to Pridi. Also, bolstering the underground would make it possible for the Thai to show that they were "working their passage home" as the British demanded. Thus a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs, issued under a cover letter dated 21 April, gave the OSS the green light. Citing Donovan's original 26 March query on the subject, the memorandum authorized aid to the Thai resistance, under Mountbatten's operational control, "consistent with other theater requirements, and within the resources available to General Sultan."<sup>73</sup>

On 28 April, Marshall informed Sultan: "It is the State Department's opinion that both secret intelligence and subversive operations directed inside Thailand are of such importance that they should be carried out if they do not interfere with other theater commitments." Reflecting the contents of a memorandum received from Donovan three days earlier, the message also noted the complementarity of secret intelligence and subversive operations.<sup>74</sup>

Enthusiastic State Department support played the key role in enabling the OSS to outmaneuver the Theater Commander. Sultan's political advisor, Max Bishop, had taken issue with his stance, and Taylor reported from Washington that the "State Department has gone down the line for us in a really surprising way." In late May, State would go even further, suggesting that the OSS undertake supply of the Thai army and police, a proposal the Pentagon rejected.<sup>75</sup>

Taylor also noted that the officers at the War Plans Division at the War Department had offered sympathetic support, and that General Donovan expected Detachment 404 "to push our Thai plan with all vigor." Coughlin reported from Kandy that the Joint Chiefs' instructions had

<sup>73</sup> Buxton to JCS, 20 April 1945 and JCS memorandum, 21 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA. The State Department's position is laid out in Grew to Merrell, 28 April 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1264-67.

<sup>74</sup> Marshall to Sultan, 28 April 1945, unnumbered folder, Box 80, Entry 88, RG 226 and Donovan to Byroade, 25 April 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>75</sup> Vander Hoef to Coughlin 29 April 1945 and Taylor to Coughlin, 16 May 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA. In a memorandum to the Pentagon (Lockhart to Wise, 21 May 1945, 740.0011PW/5-3145, RG 59, USNA) the State Department suggested advising Mountbatten that if the British were, for political reasons, unwilling to arm the Thai army and police, the OSS could do so. The Pentagon (Lincoln to Lockhart, 1 June 1945, 740.0011PW/6-145, RG 59, USNA) declined on the grounds that its policy guidelines on support of the resistance were already sufficient and such a new initiative would create "confusion."

“improved immensely” his unit’s position and had “cheered” his staff by giving them “reason for remaining.”<sup>76</sup>

Piqued by Washington’s over-ride of his Thailand directive, and well aware that Detachment 404 had again gone outside channels to influence the Joint Chiefs’ decision, Sultan lashed back. On 27 April his representative at Mountbatten’s headquarters, Brig. Gen. Thomas Timberman, issued a nettlesome directive demanding that copies of all outgoing OSS communications be sent to his office.<sup>77</sup>

In his dealings with Timberman, Coughlin had applied the strategy Heppner had employed with Wedemeyer and Stilwell, moving him into the OSS bungalow and attempting to cultivate good personal relations. Coughlin had found his guest “friendly” on a personal level, but Timberman was up for promotion and thus responsive to the desires of his superior.<sup>78</sup> Thus Timberman took a cautious stance on expanding OSS activities in Thailand, pointing out in a May Day memorandum to Sultan:

When Siam is cleared of Japs, British troops will do the clearing. Arming of resistance group, timing of an uprising, responsibility for relief in aid in the event such action results in difficulties are matters which are SAC’s [Mountbatten’s] sole concern. The British are in a better position as regards ability to furnish and transport arms and ammunition to Thai resistance groups than is OSS. Consequently any effort on our part to participate in such rearming looking toward open revolt would be meagre in comparison to the British scale of operation, particularly when it is remembered that British troops will eventually enter Siam. The good will for the US generated by such rearming activity on the part of OSS would be far out-weighed by the danger of assisting and encouraging an uprising which might be premature and abortive. We should not participate in a responsibility which is purely British and chance being tarred with their brush in the case of a failure or disappointment to the Thais.<sup>79</sup>

Desperate to find a means of mending his broken relationship with Sultan’s Headquarters, Coughlin sought personal advice from the deputy commander, General Merrill. Expressing humble willingness to correct “some of the many things that are wrong with our organization,” Coughlin wrote, “I personally would like more than anything else to be a recognized part of the India-Burma Theater with no special privileges, but with all the privileges of any other organization.” In reply, Merrill pointed to Sultan’s belief that the OSS had “repeatedly ‘gone out of the ballpark’

<sup>76</sup> Taylor to Coughlin, 16 May 1945 and Coughlin to Peers, 4 May 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>77</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, n.d. but *circa* 1 May 1945; Timberman to Coughlin, 27 April 1945; and Doering to Donovan 17 June 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>78</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 16 February 1945, Folder 288 and Coughlin to Peers, 4 May 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>79</sup> Timberman to Sultan, 1 May 1943, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

in efforts to by-pass the Theater Commander” as the root of the problem. Citing OSS efforts to mobilize State Department support, Merrill concluded, “It is skullduggery of this nature which has given rise to a feeling that OSS is not on the mean and not on the team.”<sup>80</sup>

No matter how much Sultan despised the OSS and its political maneuvers, though, the Joint Chiefs had spoken. Accordingly, Merrill added:

We have been given a job in Thailand. All we want from you is clean cut fulfillment of whatever mission is assigned you by the Theater Commander. If you will stick to this mission and keep away from any activities not directly connected with your mission, all of us will be a happy family.<sup>81</sup>

In response to the instructions from Washington, Sultan's headquarters issued a new Thailand directive on 16 May charging OSS with securing intelligence, carrying out subversive and sabotage activities, organizing and training resistance forces, and supplying arms, ammunition, and other supplies. It further instructed that operations would involve cooperation and coordination, but not integration, with the British and would imply no additional commitment of military support. Based on “closest friendly relations” with Pridi, the operations would “be designed to enhance United States influence in Thailand and to strengthen American efforts to establish Thai independence.” The document made clear, however, that the Thailand venture would be secondary to “operations of greater importance” in China and SEAC in the allocation of supplies.<sup>82</sup>

Despite this new order, Sultan did not cease his petty harassment of Detachment 404. He instructed it to channel all business through his intelligence chief and sought to restrict its open market procurement activities. Sultan also complained to Washington about messages passed between Seni and Pridi without his approval, suggesting that all such communications should be routed through his headquarters. General Marshall's office – backed by Landon at the State Department – cut Sultan short on the latter proposal, however, upholding the OSS position that it was impractical.<sup>83</sup>

Full relief from Sultan's wrath would come only when he was abruptly replaced by Lieutenant General Raymond “Spec” Wheeler on 23 June 1945. Coughlin could not have been more pleased, as he had earlier

<sup>80</sup> Coughlin to Merrill, 2 May 1945 and Merrill to Coughlin, 4 May 1945, Folder 310, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>81</sup> Merrill to Coughlin, 4 May 1945, Folder 310, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>82</sup> Milani to OSS Commander I-B Theater, 16 May 1945, Folder 2341, Box 34, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>83</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 18 May 1945 and Doering to Donovan, 17 June 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.



connived to have Detachment 404 placed under Wheeler, Mountbatten's American deputy since Wedemeyer's move to China. Coughlin had an invaluable inside connection with the new commander, as Wheeler's beloved only child worked at Detachment 404 headquarters. Not only was Peggy Wheeler a staunch and highly effective advocate for the organization, but she also was romantically involved with Coughlin's deputy, Wilkinson. Coughlin later admitted that he had prodded Wilkinson to court the General's daughter for "what it was worth on the good relations end," but the two fell in love and subsequently married.<sup>84</sup>

The shift in command represented a sea change for the man who had been implementing Sultan's anti-OSS policies in Kandy. Timberman lamented in a letter to his wife: "Everything is in turmoil . . . Woe is me! I represent one man [Sultan] and in order to carry out his instructions circumvent another [Wheeler] who suddenly gets to be my new boss." Coughlin happily reported that Wheeler had "put the fear of the Lord" into Timberman by demanding in no uncertain terms that he adjust his negative attitude toward the OSS. The chastened Timberman promptly rescinded all the irksome directives restricting Detachment 404 communications. Wheeler had also "nearly taken apart" Colonel Berno, now the OSS representative at P Division. Berno "was becoming so integrated with our friends [the British] that at times I wondered whose side he was on," Coughlin commented. "It is not that way now."<sup>85</sup>

While Detachment 404 had been struggling to expand its Thailand operations in the face of Sultan's obstructionism, the British had been preparing Operation ROGER, the planned invasion of the Thai island of Phuket. OSS officers viewed ROGER with great wariness, suspecting it aimed at aim furthering British designs on the Kra Isthmus. Although some thought the OSS should steer clear of the project, Dillon Ripley insisted that it must participate, noting that an American absence "would seriously damage our whole relationship" with the Thai underground and "serve to decrease American prestige."<sup>86</sup>

In preparation for Operation ROGER, Force 136 planned to place ten radio-equipped operatives at six locations in peninsular Thailand – Yala, Prachuap, Chumpon, Pang Nga, Takuapa, and Bandon (Operation PRIEST and Operation SQUALID). Prasoet Prathumanon of the

<sup>84</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 18 May 1945; Doering to Cheston, 29 May 1945; and Coughlin to Donovan, 18 August 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> Timberman letter of 19 June 1945, Box T-4, Thomas S. Timberman-Fiske Family Paper, USMHI; Coughlin to Donovan, 24 June 1945 and Coughlin to Doering, 12 July 1945, Folder 228, Box 20; and Timberman to Coughlin, 28 June 1945, Folder 310, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>86</sup> Ripley to Donovan, 11 April 1945, Folder 4, Box 555, Entry 92, RG 226, USNA.



14. Colonel John Coughlin, commander of OSS Detachment 404 (left) and General Raymond B. Wheeler commander of the American India-Burma Theater (center) confer with Detachment 404 Operations Officer Carleton B. Scofield at Kandy, Ceylon. (Source: US National Archives)

BRILLIG mission, who had been operating a small training facility near Hua Hin, supported this effort from inside Thailand. Sawat Sisuk parachuted in to join him on 9 May after a stint in India. The two worked to establish camps in the Pranburi and Prachuap areas, near the southern railway line.<sup>87</sup>

The British sent in six additional officers to lead the other peninsular operations at the end of April in a two-stage insertion. Wattana Chitwari (Jitivare) and three British officers landed by seaplane off Terutao Island, then received two additional planes the following night. At the same time, twenty Thai soldiers were brought out for training in India. When SEAC

<sup>87</sup> Accounts by Prasoet and Sawat in Prasoet, *Ruang khong kabuangan Seri Thai*, 5-7, 31-35.

cancelled Operation ROGER, the men inserted took up intelligence-gathering duties and later set up small guerrilla training bases.<sup>88</sup>

With the cancellation of ROGER, the British switched their focus to Operation ZIPPER, the invasion of the Malay Peninsula planned for the fall of 1945. Detachment 404, worried about the political implications of ZIPPER, heatedly debated the issue of OSS participation. In a message to Washington on 19 May, Coughlin and two colleagues argued that the American focus be kept entirely on Thailand, citing "the risk of becoming involved with the British in a territory where we have little interest." Cheston replied, however, that the State Department had approved OSS participation, adding: "We are interested in ZIPPER as a way of effecting intelligence [gathering] in that territory."<sup>89</sup>

In April, the British made their last effort (Operation ROTARY) to utilize the Chinese agents provided by the Nationalist government. As with all previous operations involving men from this group, it proved an utter failure. Three agents were parachuted safely in the vicinity of Bangkok, but once on the ground they kept a low profile, never utilizing their radios nor carrying out any of the subversive activities they were expected to accomplish.<sup>90</sup>

The British prepared at about the same time to launch Operation PANICLE, sending in Brigadier Jacques, Major A. T. "Tom" Hobbs, and Prince Suphasawat (Major Arun) to effect direct British liaison with Pridi. Suphasawat's participation in this venture was a remarkable development, given that Pointon, Gilchrist, and others at the Siam Country Section considered the Prince a political pariah of whom they thought they had seen the last. They had not been consulted when Mackenzie brought him back to India in December 1944. The Force 136 chief, who dampened the Prince's spirits by informing him upon arrival that for political reasons he was not to contact the British Free Thai officers, had a mission in mind for him.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 149–76 and Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 118. The Americans finally decided to limit their participation in ROGER to the dispatch of observers. To do more, as Hoffman put it, "would be inconsistent with earlier declarations" in regard to Thailand's postwar sovereignty, if OSS used "its men and material in British operations which are to be the basis of territorial claim." See Hoffman to Donovan, 24 April 1945, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Donovan to Coughlin, 4 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>89</sup> Coughlin, Martin and Vander Hoef to Donovan, 10 May 1945 and Cheston to Coughlin 24 May 1945, Reel 108, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USNHI.

<sup>90</sup> Force 136 operations, 6 April 1945, SEAC diaries, Box 62, RG 331, USNA and Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 114–15.

<sup>91</sup> Mackenzie to Pointon, 26 January, 1945; Pointon to Mackenzie, 29 January, 1945; Mackenzie to Pointon, 7 February 1945 and Pointon to Ops, 10 April, HS1-64, PRO; Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 129–30; and Suphasawat letter of 14 December 1944 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satarwan Suphasawat*, 453.

Mackenzie had come to doubt the wisdom of putting all Britain's eggs in Pridi's basket, so he wanted to establish an independent operation (NERONIAN) in the vicinity of Tak, near the Burmese border, led by Suphasawat and Major C. S. "Soapy" Hudson, a veteran of SOE operations in Europe. While Pridi would be notified of their entry, the men would be expected to operate outside his control, with the understanding that Suphasawat would eventually make contacts with the Thai army. The Prince had no desire to participate in such a mission, knowing full well it would only rekindle suspicions about his political motives. The Prince's reluctance and Pointon's strong opposition to the scheme led to its modification. After an exchange of letters between Pointon and Mackenzie, Force 136 decided to obtain Pridi's sanction for Suphasawat to enter Thailand via Bangkok to serve as a military liaison.<sup>92</sup>

This liaison assignment underscored the ongoing Force 136 interest in the Thai army, as effective resistance against the Japanese could hardly be expected without active army participation. To Gilchrist, who had a year earlier even suggested the possibility of working with Phibun, winning over the army boiled down to a simple matter of supply. He complained at the beginning of May 1945 that the number of planes currently available for Thailand operations would not suffice. "To put it bluntly," he wrote, "the Siamese Army will not fight for us on 12 Liberators [B-24s] a month, but they might do so on 80 Dakotas [C-47s]." <sup>93</sup>

In the wake of SEQUENCE, Force 136 had implemented its plan (Operation MACHINE) to place radio operators and wireless sets with the various Thai army headquarters to facilitate communication in the event of a Japanese move against the Thai, but despite SEAC interest in supplying weapons to the army, London's dithering over political policy blocked any action. The War Cabinet decided that the dominions would need to be consulted before arms could be supplied to the armed forces of a country with which Britain was at war, a glacial process that remained incomplete three months later. Coughlin, who like the Thai had been led to expect that the British would supply the army, expressed surprise when nothing developed. Like the Thai, he viewed this as a reversal of course by the British.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Suphasawat's own version appears in "A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of Thai Politics," 20 June 1947 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 524–25. This remarkable document was written as a memorandum to King Phumipol Adulyadej in an effort to convince him of Pridi's good intentions and to defend Pridi against the charge of responsibility for the death of the King's brother.

<sup>93</sup> Gilchrist to S.C.S., 5 May 1945, HS1-64 and Mackenzie to Pointon, 14 May 1945, HS1-53, PRO.

<sup>94</sup> SEAC war diary, 6 April (Box 62) and 27 and 28 April 1945 (Box 65), RG 331, UNSA; minutes of OSS/Force 136 meeting, 4 June 1945, HS1-57 and Mackenzie to Kandy,

Thai suspicions that the British were playing games were deepened by the fact that the PANICLE liaison party did not land on its first sortie. In fact, the pilots were not able to locate the pick-up boat. After a quick turnaround the mission landed safely twenty-four hours later, on the night of 27–28 April. The three men spent four days in Bangkok, lodging in a house on the Thonburi side of the river, across from Pridi's official residence.<sup>95</sup>

To the relief of Force 136 officers, Suphasawat and Pridi hit it off well. They engaged in a long personal discussion on the Prince's first night in Bangkok. Pridi already knew, from a message brought in by one of the Force 136 missions, that the fate of the royalist political prisoners was Suphasawat's foremost concern. Accordingly, he had already engineered their release the previous fall. Thus the two got off on the right foot with each other and had little difficulty in concluding that they shared the goal of a democratic Thailand in the postwar era. With a relationship established, Suphasawat went off on his first assignment – helping to get a modified version of NERONIAN off the ground. To this end, he traveled to Sukhothai to meet Arun Sorathet, a veteran of Shan States Operation HANTON, and Prince Karawik, previously an escorting officer with INFLUX, who had parachuted into the area on 9 May.<sup>96</sup>

In discussions with Jacques on the night of 30 April, Pridi renounced any claim to the British territories given to Thailand by the Japanese. Declaring that the Thai were prepared to resist a Japanese takeover attempt, he claimed that the underground had 5,000 trained guerrillas at the camps near Sakon Nakhon and Phu Kradung. Pridi sought assurances regarding the British attitude toward Thailand, but Jacques, forbidden to deal with political matters, could offer none. He carried no official message from the British government and left Bangkok acutely aware of Thai suspicions about British intentions and their more favorable attitude toward the Americans.<sup>97</sup>

8 August and A.D. 1 to Mackenzie, 10 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO; and Coughlin to Donovan, 4 June 1945, Folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>95</sup> Pridi told Greenlee that he believed the British had seen the boat and its signals, but simply decided not to land. In light of the short turn-around time for the second attempt, he speculated that the British might have made a test run with no agents actually on the plane. See Greenlee to Coughlin, 28 April 1945, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>96</sup> "Directive to Lt. Col. Arun," 15 April 1945, HS1-55 and Kaifa to Pointon, August 1945, HS1-60, PRO; Suphasawat, "A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of Thai Politics," 20 June 1947 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 525–26; and Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 128–30 and 167–71.

<sup>97</sup> Jacques, "Operation PANICLE," 7 May 1945, HS1-53, PRO and SEAC war diary, 20 April 1945, Box 64, RG 331, USNA.

When Jacques and Hobbs left on 2 May, Pridi send out both a military liaison, army staff officer Colonel Net Khemayothin, and Puai Ungphakon, who had made the initial contact with Kandy. Pridi assigned Puai the task of reminding the British of their failure to keep three promises contained in the letter he had carried into Thailand a year earlier: 1) a pledge on Thailand's postwar independence, 2) the unfreezing of Thai assets in London for use by the resistance movement, and 3) permission to set up a government-in-exile or committee in India. Puai also voiced Pridi's discontent about the treatment accorded the SEQUENCE mission, pointing out that the Regent had sent much higher-level representatives to Kandy than to the USA and China, yet they were denied a meeting with Mountbatten. Also, the British were accused of failing to facilitate liaison between the SEQUENCE party and Seni, Mani, or the Americans. Puai finally pointed out that arms and supplies had not been supplied at the level anticipated. He urged that the British win Thai confidence by rectifying this deficiency, unfreezing Thai assets, and assuring "British respect of independence and territorial integrity of Siam after the war."<sup>98</sup>

The young economist made an earnest effort to sway British opinion, not only in Ceylon and India, but in London, too. Lacking personal connection with high government officials in the British capital, Puai approached a former professor, the influential Labourite Harold Laski, in an effort to get his message to British cabinet ministers. However, neither his efforts, nor Laski's, had any discernable effect on British policy.<sup>99</sup>

Although their supply deliveries to Thailand fell short of Pridi's expectations, the British nonetheless held the early lead in this realm by default. With the OSS hobbled by General Sultan, Force 136 delivered three times more material to Thailand than Detachment 404 between the beginning of April and mid-June 1945. Approximately half of 75,000 pounds of British supplies went to Operation CANDLE bases near Sakon Nakhon.<sup>100</sup>

Force 136 saw CANDLE as its most promising guerrilla-training operation in Thailand, so not surprisingly it reacted negatively when it learned of an OSS plan to send an American-led intelligence-gathering party (Operation SLEEVE) to the same area. Wester had proposed this operation after a March meeting with Tiang Sirikhan in Bangkok. Force 136 officers suspected that Tiang had invited the Americans in hopes

<sup>98</sup> Puai Ungphakon's "British F.S.M. Relations," 10 May 1945, HS1-62, PRO and his "Temporary Soldier," in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 140-41.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> "SD Squadron Deliveries for the Clandestine Services," 26 June 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.



of attracting more supplies. They feared that, once on the ground, the Americans might assert control over the operation. Accordingly, they hastened plans to send in a party led by a British officer.<sup>101</sup>

The OSS got in first, though, as Holladay, the Thai-speaking missionary who had been pulled from the ill-fated ARISTOC mission at the last minute the previous fall, and radio operator, Chalong Puntrakun, landed safely in on 12 May. Free Thai officer Amnuai welcomed them and accompanied the party to a camp sixty kilometers northwest of the town. Holladay reported that 100 men per week, many of them school teachers, were receiving military training there with British-supplied weapons. Tiang's men had established ten separate camps and were preparing to build airstrips.<sup>102</sup>

Near dawn on 30 May, Force 136 parachuted its party into Sakon Nakhon: British Major David Smiley and Sergeant "Gunner" Collins, who had earlier worked together in Albania, together with two Thai trained in India. About 100 men in uniform loaded their supplies in some twenty wagons pulled by buffalo. It took forty-five minutes travel down a rough, muddy road to their camp.<sup>103</sup>

The next day Tiang took Smiley, at his request, to meet Holladay. According to the latter's account, Smiley initially expressed pessimism about his situation and spoke of a desire to return to India, but he apparently changed his attitude after touring Tiang's camps. As usually was the case when they were actually in the field, the British and Americans established friendly personal relations and coexisted without difficulty. Although involved to some extent in working with the guerrillas, Holladay focused on gathering intelligence, particularly on the Free Lao underground which was cooperating with Tiang. Amnuai remained with Holladay, while Chalong moved to Udon Thani to establish a station there.<sup>104</sup>

Jacques, struck by Thai bewilderment over the separate, even competitive, operations of the OSS and Force 136, gave new impetus

<sup>101</sup> Wester to Coughlin, 23 March 1945, Folder 1257, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA; and Williams-Thompson to Pointon, 22 April 1945, HS1-57 and Hudson, "Interim Report on Operation CANDLE," n.d., PRO.

<sup>102</sup> Holladay to Coughlin, 16 May 1945, Folder 2642 and "SLEEVE Operational Report," 27 September 1945, Folder 2643, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>103</sup> Smiley's account in Sawat, *Seri Thai nai phak Isan lae ruang khong Phan Tho David Smiley*, 33–35. Smiley had a previous acquaintance with Prince Suphasawat. The two met in Cairo in late 1944 when the Prince was *en route* back to India and their conversation apparently inspired Smiley to volunteer for operations in Thailand. See Suphasawat's letter to his wife of 1 December 1944 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 449–50.

<sup>104</sup> Sawat, *Seri Thai nai Phak Isan*, 36–37 and Holladay, "SLEEVE Operational Report," 27 September 1945, Folder 2643, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



to the longstanding Force 136 campaign for greater integration of Allied clandestine efforts upon his return to India. To his pleasant surprise, he found that the new SI Branch Chief of Detachment 404, Colonel Waller "Wally" Booth, a veteran of one of the mixed Anglo-American-French "Jedburgh" teams that had operated behind enemy lines in occupied France, shared his views. Based on his European experience, Booth believed that the effectiveness of the Thai underground could be maximized by introducing substantial numbers of Allied personnel to create multiple bases combining intelligence-gathering and guerrilla-training activities. "The British have important plans for Thailand which, if carried out, will complement and strengthen our own efforts," Booth wrote in a 24 May memorandum to Coughlin. "I feel that it would be valuable to attempt to present, if not a united, at least a cooperative front to the Thais."<sup>105</sup>

Most of Booth's colleagues, however, were so deeply suspicious of the British that they viewed his suggestion as heretical. Coughlin firmly opposed integration, and dashed Booth's hopes that he might enter Thailand together with Jacques to coordinate matters with Pridi. Describing Booth as "frantic to get into Thailand one way or another," Taylor advised Washington on 22 June that he was "terrified at the idea of turning him loose" there. A few days later, Taylor expressed similar sentiments to Coughlin, suggesting that Booth be sent elsewhere unless he changed his approach.<sup>106</sup> Coughlin agreed, explaining to Washington:

His relations with the British were so happy in Europe that he feels that is the only way to do it out here. As he talked integration under them I was afraid to even consider allowing him to visit JULIA [Bangkok]. He may be an expert on British relations and he may be an expert on Europeans. However, he is not an expert on Asiatics, and they are slightly different.<sup>107</sup>

The dispute between Booth and Taylor created a serious morale problem within Detachment 404's SI branch. Major William Reeda, who supported Booth, complained that Coughlin had set up an army-style G-2 system under Taylor, relegating the SI branch to irrelevancy. Criticizing Detachment 404's failure to accept Booth's suggestions, Reeda

<sup>105</sup> Jacques, "Operation PANICLÉ," 7 May 1945, HS1-53; Williams-Thompson to Mackenzie, 16 May, 1945, HS-63; "Memorandum of Conversation at S.C.S.; Jacques to Pointon, 18 May 1945 and Pointon to Ops, HS1-57, PRO. Also, Booth to Coughlin, 24 May 1945, Folder 2753, Box 161, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>106</sup> Coughlin to Greenlee, 3 and 9 June, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136; Taylor to Hutcheson, 22 June 1945, Folder 2092, Box 115; and Taylor to Coughlin, Folder 2297, Box 131, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>107</sup> Coughlin to Hutcheson, 29 June 1945, Folder 2297, Box 131, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

commented: "The anti-British feeling is quite strong, perhaps with reason, perhaps not."<sup>108</sup>

Taylor prevailed, however. At a meeting with Mackenzie on 4 June, Coughlin strongly resisted any integration with Force 136 in Thailand, agreeing only to hold a weekly meeting to discuss any issues that might arise. Finally, during a visit to Kandy at the end of July, General Donovan accepted the defeated Booth's request for a transfer.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, despite his best efforts and those of his representative to Washington, Konthi Suphamongkon, Pridi had got nowhere in his efforts to establish a government-in-exile. On Valentine's Day, Konthi, Minister Seni, and Sanguan Tularak had submitted a memorandum to Secretary of State Edward Stettinius citing the replacement of the Phibun government and increased cooperation with the Allies as justification for the establishment of a government-in-exile that could serve as a rallying point for Thai citizens. It would repudiate all post-Pearl Harbor acts of the Phibun government, declare war on Japan, urge Thai resistance, and seek military aid through Lend-Lease. As an interim body, it would give way to a provisional government as soon as some part of Thailand was liberated. The Thai memorandum warned that the Japanese "are certainly suspicious of Thai intentions and when these suspicions are confirmed, as they must be at any moment, they will undoubtedly resort to a complete and total military occupation of Thailand, thus rendering the Resistance Movement much less effective if not powerless."<sup>110</sup>

Still unwilling to sanction a government-in-exile, the State Department instead proposed to the British that a Free Thai committee be established. The extended Allied consultations dashed Pridi's hopes that an early Thai declaration of war on Japan and Germany might allow Free Thai participation in the United Nations conference scheduled for April in San Francisco.<sup>111</sup> Matters were further complicated by the fact that Pridi's representative in China, Thawin Udon, was unable to communicate easily with either Pridi in Bangkok or Seni in Washington.

Seni radioed the Regent on 19 March to acknowledge that there was little prospect that either Thailand or Denmark, which was in a similar situation, would be represented in San Francisco. He explained that the Allied view of Thailand had been shaped largely by its alliance with Japan

<sup>108</sup> Undated letter from Reeda to Booth, Booth to Donovan, 21 August 1945, and related documents, Folder 3, Box 74, Entry 94, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>109</sup> HQ Ops to S.C.S., 5 June 1945, HS1-307, PRO and Donovan to Cheston, 31 July 1945, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>110</sup> Memorandum to Secretary of State transmitted 14 February 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>111</sup> Several relevant memoranda appear in *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1254–59, 1262–64.

and its declaration of war on Britain and the United States. "To span the gulf between that public conception and a seat at the conference of the United Nations requires a great amount of explaining," Seni pointed out, "and this cannot be accomplished at present without endangering the security of our leaders at home." He reassured Pridi that territorial issues were not on the agenda at San Francisco, and that non-participation should not prejudice Thailand's postwar independence or ultimate UN membership.<sup>112</sup>

Disappointed, Pridi suggested that Konthi – whose mission had been originally projected to include a trip to London – return by the end of April, ostensibly because his continued absence from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would raise suspicions. On 9 April, Konthi and Seni met Far East Division Chief Ballantine and Landon at the State Department. The Americans reported that Sansom of the British Embassy had emphasized Anglo-American agreement on ultimate objectives in Thailand and British appreciation of Pridi's sincerity, but had rejected the American proposal to recognize a Free Thai committee. Relations instead should be conducted directly with Pridi until a provisional government could be established on liberated Thai territory. For its part, the State Department would not act unilaterally because "action respecting Thailand without collaboration and agreement with Great Britain would be disadvantageous to all concerned."<sup>113</sup>

When Konthi reached Kandy in late April, Dening, who had just returned from London, advised him that the British wished to avoid "a premature outbreak in Thailand which would lead to the Japanese stepping in," so Pridi should "use all possible caution to avoid unnecessary provocation of the Japanese at present." Dening emphasized areas of agreement in British and American policies toward Thailand, while downplaying the significance of their disagreement about recognition of a Free Thai committee.<sup>114</sup>

Konthi returned to Thailand via RAF Catalina on the night of 29–30 April. A collision with the pickup launch on the rough sea fortunately did not seriously damage the plane. Konthi disembarked and eight Thai were loaded onto the Catalina. The group included Captain Suang Yutthakit,

<sup>112</sup> Pridi to Seni, 22 February 1945 and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 8 March 1945, Reel 90, M1642; and Seni to Pridi, 19 March 1945, Folder 2650, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>113</sup> Ruth to Seni, 6 April 1945 and Sanguan to Pridi, 7 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA; memorandum by Ballantine, 9 April 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1263–1264; and Hoffman to Donovan, 24 April 1945, Reel 131, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>114</sup> Taylor to Thai Committee, 25 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA and Wilkinson to Donovan, 25 April 1945, Reel 19, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

a naval officer Pridi was sending to serve as attaché to the Washington Legation.<sup>115</sup>

Precisely what advice OSS officers in Kandy offered Konthi is not clear, but it probably reflected that which Coughlin had been sending to Greenlee. On 9 April, Coughlin had opined that the Japanese position "is probably weaker in Thailand now than ever before" and that "bold action would have many advantages." He suggested that "the best time to strike may be very close."<sup>116</sup>

Writing in the wake of a disappointing encounter with General Sultan, Coughlin further declared on 17 April:

[I] Cannot overemphasize [the] importance [of] initiative and surprise. If Thais intend [to] resist should not wait to coordinate with Allied effort as [this] may be too late. By well coordinated plan [the] Japs took over FIC [French Indochina] with little effort. FIC heads [were] invited to dinner [on the] day Japs moved. None [have been] heard from since. Such [an] initiative by Thais or something similar should be [an] all out effort damaging Japs and convincing our people. Decision and times selected is up to Thais. Irrespective [of] what we decide, promise, or do, they know better than we time is short. Jap[s are] being pinched badly in [the] Pacific and that [is] where our major effort lies.<sup>117</sup>

It can be assumed that Greenlee passed the gist of such advice to Pridi, either directly or via one of the Regent's subordinates.

Also, Prince Suphasawat, who had arrived with the British PANICLE mission at the end of April, believed that the Thai underground had to take military action before Allied troops entered Thailand in order to gain any real credit with the British. Jacques believed that Suphasawat expressed such views to his contacts in Thailand.<sup>118</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that Pridi re-assessed his strategy and made difficult decisions. His efforts to create a government-in-exile had come to naught and the British were still refusing to guarantee Thailand's post-war independence. They had spoken of the Thai "working their passage home," yet Denning had discouraged the one action certain to earn credit for the Thai, an uprising against the Japanese. A series of recent events – the Japanese defeat in Burma, the successful American invasion of Okinawa, and Germany's surrender – suggested the possibility that the war might end soon.

<sup>115</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 26 April 1945, Reel 90, M1642 and "Operational Report – SIREN IV-G," 4 May 1945, Folder 3, Box 63, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>116</sup> Coughlin to Greenlee, 9 April 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>117</sup> Coughlin to Wilkinson, 17 April 1945, Folder 2650, Box 156, Entry 154 and Wilkinson to Greenlee, 17 April 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>118</sup> Jacques to Pointon, 21 May 1945, HS1-53, PRO. Jacques pointed out that Suphasawat had in mind guerrilla action coordinated with Allied activities, but thought his ideas might "have carried his hearers further than he intended."

Thai plans for an anti-Japanese uprising relied heavily on the success of a quick, surprise strike by a special police unit against the Japanese command structure. The residences of ten leading officers and Japanese communications facilities were under surveillance. The police assault would be coordinated with a general attack by Thai military forces against the Japanese army in Bangkok. Fortifications, in the guise of air raid shelters, had been dug at key street intersections in the city and additional troops had been transferred into Bangkok in small groups, dressed in civilian clothes. The task of Thai forces elsewhere in the country would be to interfere with Japanese efforts to reinforce their Bangkok garrison by cutting lines of communication and seizing airfields. Colonel Net believed that the Thai could, at best, hold Bangkok for ten days. When the city had to be abandoned, Thai troops were expected to retreat into northeastern Thailand.<sup>119</sup>

Given this reliance on surprise, Pridi had to take into account the fact that the Japanese were building up their forces in Thailand, which figured to become a battlefield in the near future. Although previously most of the the Japanese forces stationed permanently in Thailand had been support troops, the local command had been upgraded from garrison status to a field army in December 1944. In early May, the Thai estimated that there were 55,000 Japanese soldiers in Thailand, just over half of them combat forces. The Japanese had begun accumulating supplies and constructing fortifications in preparation for a last-ditch defensive effort at Nakhon Nayok, about 100 kilometers northeast of Bangkok. Not only were reinforcements expected from Indochina and Sumatra, but with the British capture of Rangoon, bedraggled Japanese troops were retreating in disarray from Burma into Thailand.<sup>120</sup>

It appeared that chances for a successful Thai *coup* would diminish with each passing week as the Japanese re-grouped and their force levels increased. Further, the build-up would put the Japanese in a better position to take pre-emptive action against the Thai, particularly if Pridi's underground contacts with the Allies became known. The latter seemed a very real possibility because the Japanese were keeping close tabs on the Regent and other high officials. Although SEAC intelligence officers were downplaying the possibility of an early Japanese takeover, Chinese spymaster Tai Li believed that the Japanese would move against Thailand

<sup>119</sup> Chalo Sisarakon, *Santiban taidin* (Bangkok, 1946), 88–102; Net, *Ngan taidin khong Phan-ek Yothi*, 241; Coughlin to Thai Committee, 18 April 1945, Folder 3424, Box 202; “Capabilities of the Siamese Resistance Movement and Its Effects If a Rising Occurs,” Folder 2335, Box 134, Entry 154; and OSS Intelligence Report L55883, 20 April 1945, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>120</sup> Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 205–06, 211–20.

soon as a matter of "absolute military necessity." Some Thai army officers expected such an action during the upcoming rainy season, when the weather would limit Allied air activities.<sup>121</sup>

While these factors favored an early move, Coughlin, who had recently advocated prompt action, suddenly reversed course under pressure from Sultan and Timberman. He warned Greenlee on 1 May:

Theater commander's fear is that we may do something which would result in premature uprising or attempt to take over by Japs. Thailand, as you know, is in Mountbatten's theater and we cannot and must not force any issue. Our support compared to British support will be trifling when they decide to support because it is their theater. We wish to help RUTH [Pridi] but be sure he understands this important principle. We must not precipitate any premature action. It is for RUTH and the British to decide how and when and where. Meanwhile we will help in any way we can.<sup>122</sup>

After weighing the situation, Pridi concluded that a demonstrated willingness to act against the Japanese offered the best – and perhaps only – hope for gaining credibility for the Thai resistance movement and some leverage in postwar negotiations. Based on his contacts with the Allies, Pridi may have expected that he would be instructed to avoid premature action. This would put him in a position to say truthfully that he had offered to fight the Japanese, but was told to wait. The possibility remained, though, that the Allies might say "go ahead," so the offer could not be made lightly.

Jacques, who was not in Bangkok at the time, but returned at the beginning of June, believed that Pridi may have perceived the decision as a "diplomatic" effort to pressure the British to clarify their policy toward Thailand in a favorable way. Jacques pointed out, however, that the preparations for a clash with the Japanese were made earnestly by subordinate officials, many of whom harbored overly optimistic expectations. In Jacques' view, the Thai "gave absurdly high value to the advantages of getting in the first blow and visualised a torrent of Allied aid by air as well as an amphibious operation into the Inner Gulf of Siam." They also, he thought, "underrated the Jap and classed his troops in Siam as second category."<sup>123</sup>

Pridi made his proposal for active Thai resistance in mid-May, claiming that a Japanese demand for a supplementary military loan of 100 million

<sup>121</sup> "War Plan of RUTH," Folder 2334, Box 144, Entry 154, RG 226 and Mackenzie to CoS., 24 May 1945, HS1-75, PRO. On Tai Li's views, Bird to Heppner, 10 May 1945, Folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>122</sup> Coughlin to Greenlee, 18 May 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>123</sup> Jacques, "Siam: British Position" and "Liaison HQ-Siam, July Report, 4 August 1945, HS1-53, PRO.

baht had created a serious crisis in Thai-Japanese relations. In fact, there was no reason why the Thai leaders should have been surprised by this Japanese request, nor was the amount so unusually large as to provoke such a strong reaction. After all, the Thai had already made a 420-million-baht loan to cover Japanese military expenditures for the first six months of 1945. The Thai had long been irritated by and concerned about the loans, but as part of the Khuang government's effort to placate the Japanese they had recently handed over the funds with minimal footdragging. The Japanese remained completely unaware that anything remotely resembling a loan request "crisis" existed in May 1945. Clearly, Pridi seized on the loan issue as a convenient pretext for breaking with the Japanese.<sup>124</sup>

Pridi's proposal caught the Allies entirely by surprise. Although Detachment 404 officers had previously believed that the British did not wish to stir up resistance in Thailand because it might draw more Japanese troops into the SEAC theater,<sup>125</sup> they now asked Greenlee in Bangkok: "Is there any evidence [the] British have been pushing the Thai too hard for action and may be helping to bring on [this] crisis?" Given the fact that the British had repeatedly urged the Thai to delay action, Greenlee obviously could not confirm such suspicions, but he offered this interpretation:

The Japs seem to be about to do something and the Thais believe they may attack the Thais. RUTH [Pridi] is caught in a dilemma. If he hits first you will say he is premature; if the Japs hit first, he will be left holding the bag and still not a member of the Allies. If he waits until after the Allies have struck, the British can argue that he waited too long. Unless he gets notice of *when* to hit, he feels he must strike . . . He may hurt the Allied plans, but he can do more for his country that way than any way else . . . He is thinking of his country and I believe thinking extremely well. He knows he will lose many men in the process but he wants to strike a blow at the Japs and also allow Thailand to hold its head up again.<sup>126</sup>

Pridi next advised Mountbatten and the State Department that early action by the Thai resistance movement would, in his judgment, hasten the surrender of the Japanese. He pointedly asked Mountbatten if such a move would lead to British recognition of Thailand's postwar independence. Pridi also requested that the Americans respond to a Thai uprising by issuing a declaration upholding the nation's independence and stating

<sup>124</sup> Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 214.

<sup>125</sup> Statements about British reluctance to support resistance in Thailand appear in Moffat's memorandum of a conversation with Taylor, 16 May 1945, 740.0011PW/5-1645, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>126</sup> Coughlin to Greenlee, 19 May 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88 and Greenlee to Coughlin, 20 May 1945, Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



that Washington considered Thailand a member of the United Nations, not an enemy state.<sup>127</sup>

Mountbatten sought instructions from London about the political aspects of Pridi's proposal, but sent an interim reply on 25 May instructing the Regent to discourage sabotage operations and generally avoid provoking the Japanese. SEAC's intelligence officers concluded that the Japanese troops in Thailand could quickly crush the poorly trained, ill-equipped Thai forces, and were skeptical that guerrilla warfare could be carried out effectively in the short term. Moreover, because the Japanese were not expected to send substantial reinforcements into Malaya from the north, they did not believe that an early uprising in Thailand would contribute substantially to the success of Operation ZIPPER, the invasion of Malaya. In fact, they saw no British advantage from a Thai uprising until after the capture of Singapore. Accordingly, they proposed November 1945 as the target date for dropping 1,384 tons of supplies, the amount deemed necessary adequately to prepare the Thai underground for action. SEAC intelligence officers continued to believe that the Japanese were attempting to avoid a showdown with the Thai and were unlikely to act precipitously. In these circumstances, it made sense to delay action by the Thai, aim at fully supplying the resistance by November, and, in the meantime, reap the benefits of the existing intelligence networks in Thailand.<sup>128</sup>

The Americans followed the British lead. Detachment 404 had no grounds on which to dispute the British assessment, and OSS Headquarters viewed Thailand and China as the only significant fields of operations for the embattled organization. Delaying the Thai break with the Japanese would give the OSS valuable time to prove its worth. Further, Pridi's proposal to precipitate a crisis over the Japanese loan demand made no sense to officials in Washington. Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew's reply to Pridi endorsed Mountbatten's military policy while implicitly criticizing Britain's diplomatic stance toward Thailand. Grew declared that the USA would be "happy publicly to reiterate at an appropriate time its respect for Thai independence and to declare that it has at no time considered Thailand an enemy."<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> State Department memoranda of May 22 and 28, 1945 in *FRUS, 1945*, 6: 1268–69 and Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 117.

<sup>128</sup> Cruikshank, *SOE in the Far East*, 117; "Capabilities of the Siamese Resistance Movement and its Effects if a Rising Occurs," 29 May 1945, Folder 2335, Box 134, Entry 154, RG 226 and "Policy to be Adopted Toward the Siamese Resistance," 9 June 1945, SEAC diaries, Box 72, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>129</sup> Coughlin to Greenlee, 9 May 1945, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226 and Moffat memorandum, 16 May 1945, 740.0011PW/5–1645, RG 59, USNA. Quoted is the State Department memorandum of 28 May 1945 in *FRUS 1945*, VI: 1269–70.

In the end, Pridi's move served Thailand well. He had obtained British and American sanction for a policy of maintaining relations with the Japanese while building up resistance forces with clandestine Allied support. Coughlin believed that the Regent's offer to strike the Japanese increased his stature and that of the Thai underground.<sup>130</sup> The Allied response had spared the Thai the bloody task of fighting the Japanese army for the moment, but it remained to be seen how long Pridi could maintain his difficult juggling act.

<sup>130</sup> Coughlin to Greenlee, Folder 1258, Box 208, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

## 9      Arming and training the underground

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As American forces pushed their campaign on Okinawa and tightened their naval encirclement of the Japanese islands in mid-1945, the divergence between British and American policies toward Thailand, the rivalry between SOE Force 136 and OSS Detachment 404, and the British focus on the recapture of their lost colonies complicated efforts to supply, train, and control substantial guerrilla forces in Thailand. Meanwhile, Japanese forces in Thailand showed an increased awareness of underground activities, raising fears of a Japanese military strike against the Thai.

Security concerns were never far from the mind of Richard Greenlee as he operated for a month, from late April 1945, as the sole American officer in Bangkok, a city swarming with Japanese troops. The loss of electrical power at Maliwan Palace since the bombing raid of 14 April meant that his radiomen had to use a noisy gas-powered generator for up to eight hours a day to meet their schedules. When the operators sought to solve the noise problem by fitting a car muffler to the generator, it overheated and froze up. Fortunately, Greenlee managed to appropriate a replacement from the supplies of a recently infiltrated agent, but the noise problem remained unsolved.<sup>1</sup>

Concern that the Japanese were aware of enemy agent and supply landings near Hua Hin proved unsettling, too, and led Pridi on 15 May to request a halt to flights to the Gulf of Thailand. Despite British denials, the Regent believed that an RAF seaplane had shone a spotlight toward the town on the late April night when John Wester and Howard Palmer left the country. On another occasion, fishermen had sold the payload of two errant British supply chutes on the open market.<sup>2</sup>

Greenlee, eager to obtain needed equipment and reinforcements, persuaded Pridi to permit a landing on the opposite side of the Gulf of Thailand. The two planes of this SIREN V mission returned Howard

<sup>1</sup> Greenlee, "Report of Operation SIREN for May 1945," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Palmer and brought in two Free Thai officers, Sala Thasanon and Ekchai Khambu, on 23 May. The planes carried out two prominent graduates of American universities, Phra Phisan Sukhumwit, director-general of the Highway Department, and his brother, Luang Sukhumnaipradit, who were Washington bound. Their tasks included shoring up American support for Thailand and helping Seni negotiate for postwar aid. Accompanied by two secretaries, they briefed American officials in Kandy and New Delhi before leaving for the USA on 13 June.<sup>3</sup>

During Greenlee's solo stint in Bangkok, frictions had developed both within the SIREN headquarters and between its men and Pridi's. Based on earlier communications from Kandy, Pridi had counted on receiving significant American supplies of arms and trainers to work with the underground. General Sultan's determined efforts to restrict expansion of OSS operations in Thailand had forced Greenlee to dampen Pridi's hopes for arms while stressing the need to produce more intelligence. This did not sit well with either the leaders of the underground or the Free Thai officers who had been dispatched to the provinces. The latter found that their local protectors had high expectations, and the US-trained officers were personally eager to get guerrilla training underway. Even though they were also schooled in intelligence gathering, the Free Thai officers tended to be, as Greenlee put it, "SO at heart."<sup>4</sup>

Friction developed, too, between the American Free Thai officers and Konthi Suphamongkhon, who, since his return from Washington, had been appointed as Pridi's liaison with Greenlee and the SIREN mission. During Konthi's absence Bunmak and Wimon had held back a private communication to Konthi from an influential friend that they deemed inappropriate to send through military channels. Curious as to why he did not receive the message, Konthi demanded to see the file of messages sent. Punpoem refused and appealed to Greenlee. Neither knew the real reason for Konthi's request, but both considered it inappropriate. In the argument that ensued, Konthi, angry because the Thai officers had not taken his side, declared them "fit for one thing, radio operation!"<sup>5</sup>

Konthi appealed to Pridi, who at the time was also unaware of the whole story. Usually Bunmak reported to Pridi nightly, but this time Wimon did the briefing and he seized the opportunity to urge Konthi's

<sup>3</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee, 10 and 29 May 1945 and Thai Committee to Coughlin, 23 May 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA; and Phra Phisan's account in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 143–45.

<sup>4</sup> Greenlee, "Report of Operation SIREN for May 1945," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154 and communications between Kandy and Prayun Attachinda (Ray) in the Sawakhalok area (MISSION) in Folder 1251, Box 207, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>5</sup> Greenlee, "Report of Operation SIREN for May 1945," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA and letter from Phisut Suthat to author, 9 July 2004.

replacement. Pridi, who believed that the American-trained Thai officers had developed an inflated sense of self-importance and did not sufficiently respect his authority, lost his temper. According to Wimon's account, Pridi delivered a lecture on the reasons for his reliance on Konthi and pointedly warned that under the wartime situation he held ultimate powers of life or death. The confrontation convinced Wimon that Pridi would not listen to views contrary to his own and destroyed his faith in the Regent's leadership abilities.<sup>6</sup>

Greenlee saw fault on both sides of the rift. He sympathized with the Thai officers' complaints that their talents were insufficiently recognized, but he himself had clashed with Phunphoem when the latter, while serving as an interpreter, got angry and stormed out of the room. Greenlee accordingly recognized the need to tighten discipline.<sup>7</sup>

After consultations, Greenlee and Pridi agreed on means to defuse the tensions. At Pridi's instigation, a rotation policy was implemented whereby the Thai officers who had served long stretches at SIREN headquarters would, with Greenlee's approval, rotate to up-country posts to engage in intelligence and guerrilla training activities as replacements arrived. The new men, Pridi insisted, must be thoroughly indoctrinated by his associates during their first month in the country. Greenlee, worried that Konthi was distorting his messages to Pridi and imposing his own views, in return extracted a pledge that the diplomat would function strictly as a messenger. Pridi also agreed that Greenlee could meet with him whenever he felt it necessary. Greenlee reported at the end of May that good relations had been restored.<sup>8</sup>

By this time, Detachment 404 finally had gotten the go-ahead to begin arming and training the Thai resistance and was ready to move forward. Just as the OSS had sent American nationals into Bangkok (Greenlee and Wester) and the provinces (Holladay) ahead of their British counterparts, it had stolen a march on Force 136 on the night of 26 May by parachuting the first guerrilla training team into Thailand. Free Thai officer Pao Khamurai welcomed Major Eben B. Bartlett Jr., a veteran of OSS operations in France, Sergeant Verlin Gallaher, and a Thai radioman at the drop zone near Phetburi. After a three-day stay at the royal palace near the town, they established a jungle guerrilla camp (PATTERN) twenty-five miles to the west.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Wimon Wiriawit letter to author, 19 December 1994. Also see Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 250–52 regarding Pridi's attitude toward the American officers.

<sup>7</sup> Greenlee, "Report of Operation SIREN for May 1945," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "PATTERN Operational Report," 28 September 1945, Folder 2609, Box 155, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

Activities at PATTERN did not develop entirely to Bartlett's satisfaction, however. Six weeks later he reported that of the sixty-six men who had reported for duty, fifteen were sick and six on leave. Further, his request for an additional twenty men had gone unfilled for a week and food supplies were insufficient. Bartlett threatened to seek recall unless matters improved. "Time is short and we should have trained at least 200 men by now," he complained.<sup>10</sup>

Matters did improve, as PATTERN received ten tons of parachuted equipment and supplies in July. Also, Bartlett's camp became a refuge for POWs escaped from Japanese labor camps in the area. These included two American seamen, James Huffman and Lansing Harris, who had survived the sinking of the *USS Houston* in March 1942 and the horrors of the Thailand-Burma "Death Railway." An Australian, Ronald Vowles, and two British POWs reached the camp, also.<sup>11</sup>

Three Australian enlisted men – Ken Linford, Frank Pinkard, and Frank Crawley – joined the group on 6 August. This trio had escaped from a Japanese camp at Ratburi with Thai assistance. While relieved to have a safe haven, they were puzzled by what they perceived as lax discipline in the camp. Personnel had free access to a remarkable arsenal of weapons and a large stock of canned beer and whiskey. Drinking began in earnest at dark and "most of the commando group and many of the Thais in the camp were drunk as early as 9 o'clock." The Australians worried about the group's ability to respond to a night-time emergency, but were assured by Vowles that "it was impossible to impose strict military discipline in a guerrilla camp and that there was no need to be concerned because the base was so well protected."<sup>12</sup>

The PATTERN drop had gone smoothly, but a second OSS effort to insert a team of guerrilla trainers into the provinces on 29 May proved disastrous. A British B-24 had been scheduled to reach the drop zone in the YIELD area near Klongpai (between Lopburi and Khorat) at dawn, but the necessity to evade storms along the route put it behind schedule. Nine Japanese fighters from a squadron recently assigned to Takli air base attacked the plane as it neared its destination. A cloudless sky offered no refuge from a fusillade of bullets and cannon shells. Pilot Harry Smith took evasive action and crash-landed his shredded "sitting duck" B-24 into the forest. When Smith crawled out of the wreckage he found four of his crew members dead and OSS trainer Corporal Edward Napieralski

<sup>10</sup> Bartlett quoted in Palmer to Coughlin, 15 July 1945, Folder 2070, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>11</sup> Unheaded memorandum, n.d., Reel 91, M1642, USNA. Huffman's account of his experiences appears in Robert S. LaForte and Ronald E. Marcello, eds., *Building the Death Railway* (Wilmington, DE, 1993), 241–47.

<sup>12</sup> Desmond Jackson, *What Price Surrender?* (Sydney, 1989), 117–74.

mortally wounded. Napieralski, who would be the only American to lose his life in OSS operations in Thailand, died later in the day.<sup>13</sup>

The eight wounded survivors made their way to a village where they were picked up the next day by a mounted patrol of Thai police. In order to evade Japanese search parties, the police placed the men in bullock carts for a two-day journey to a river where a boat waited to carry them to Bangkok. This journey took another four days. They spent their first night in the Thai capital in police custody.<sup>14</sup>

Adun considered it necessary to keep the four least injured British airmen as prisoners of war to avoid rousing Japanese suspicions. These men, plus the five who had been killed, represented a normal B-24 crew. The three surviving Americans, plus Smith and one injured British crew member, were transferred to SIREN headquarters where the newly arrived Dr. Ekchai spent thirteen hours dressing the men's wounds. Those with broken bones could not be taken to a hospital for x-rays, so instead were quietly transported to an office equipped with a flouroscope.<sup>15</sup>

Greenlee sought early evacuation of the men to the airfield at Phu Khieo where they could be picked up by plane. Free Thai officer Charoen Watthanapanit had already moved from Khon Kaen and established a radio station at the remote Thai air force base. Moving the battered men there was no small task, however. The five were joined in the evacuation party by an American pilot, Major David Kellogg, a prisoner of war in the Bangkok internment camp since May 1944, and Australian Private Olle. The latter, who had become mentally unbalanced as a consequence of his harrowing experiences, escaped first from the Japanese, then from a Thai party that was attempting to get him safely out of the country.<sup>16</sup>

The Thai first sought to move the party out of Bangkok by bus in the wee hours of 12 June. Two hours later, after a nerve-wracking breakdown on a street corner near a Japanese military installation, the party returned safely. A second attempt succeeded that evening, no doubt to the immense relief of Greenlee and Palmer. The bus carried the men to a small airfield from which they were flown to Phu Khieo by a Thai Air Force plane.<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime, British Brigadier Jacques, accompanied by Captain P. C. Ashwell, had returned to Thailand by seaplane, reaching Bangkok

<sup>13</sup> Harry V. Smith, "Escape from Siam," *Journal of the Air Force Association of Canada* 21 (Winter 1998): 1-8. The Allies were aware of an increased Japanese presence at Takli. An intelligence report from mid-May (Folder ZM-139, Box 386, Entry 108, RG 226) reported 5,000 Japanese personnel and eighty to ninety aircraft at the facility.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, "Escape from Siam," 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.; "Operation SIREN," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226 and Wilson to Donovan, 21 June 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

<sup>16</sup> "Operation SIREN," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Kellogg proved to be an effective intelligence gatherer. See, his debriefings in folder ZM-1450, Box 399, Entry 108, RG 224, USNA.

<sup>17</sup> "Operation SIREN," Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



on 1 June to establish a permanent Force 136 headquarters. The British officers and their radioman, Captain Praphrit na Nakhon (na Nagara), were sheltered not far from the Americans, at Thammasat University, where foreign internees had been housed prior to the 5 March bombing. Thanat Khoman served as chief liaison between the British party and Pridi, but Direk Chayanam also visited frequently. Maintaining extensive radio traffic kept the Force 136 crew fully occupied.<sup>18</sup>

Jacques took the initiative to effect a cooperative relationship with Greenlee and Palmer, whom he found "very pleasant." This good impression of his American counterparts, coupled with his positive interactions with Detachment 404's Colonel Booth in India, left him optimistic about the potential for a truly cooperative effort in Bangkok. Worried that Pridi had shown reluctance to comment on any matter regarding the OSS, Jacques asked for, and got, a message from Kandy informing Pridi that he could discuss operations of either ally in conversations with the representatives of the other.<sup>19</sup>

Force 136, which had wanted integrated operations all along, strongly supported Jacques' efforts to effect cooperation. OSS attitudes had not changed, however. At a 4 June meeting with Colin Mackenzie and other Force 136 officers, Colonel Coughlin rejected Jacques' suggestion for a formal three-sided committee to manage affairs in Bangkok.<sup>20</sup>

Jacques found it necessary to seek coordination on another front, too. ISLD, the British Secret Intelligence Service arm in Asia, had achieved little in Thailand, but had persevered in an effort to establish an intelligence network independent of Pridi's organization. It sent its OCCASION mission, composed of intelligence agent (Sawang Samkoset) and radio operator Phatphong Rinthakun (Rinthakul), into Thailand on the first British aircraft to land at Na An airfield near Loei on 1 June. These men were to operate in the Bangkok area and "recruit and train its own agents independently" of Pridi. They would gather intelligence on Japanese troop movements through Bangkok and establish sub-agents to the Lampang area, Khorat and Ubon. They also would seek to recruit agents to be exfiltrated for training in India. Once they arrived, the two somehow fell under the control of Adun, who brought them to Jacques in late June. Adun expressed concern about the activities of a separate British intelligence organization.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Jacques, "Liaison HQ-Siam, June Report," 28 June 1945, HS1-53, PRO.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.; minutes of Force 136/OSS meeting, 4 June 1945, HS1-57, PRO; and Jacques to Greenlee, n.d., Folder 2314, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>21</sup> SEAC war diaries, 22 May 1945, Box 70, RG 331, USNA; Mackenzie to D-ISLD, 21 June 1944, DS1-64, HS1-76, PRO; and Sawat Sisuk's account in Prasoet Prathumanon, *Ruang khong kabuangang Seri Thai pathibatgan taidin nai Prathet Thai khong*

Some days later, Thai police picked up a three-man ISLD party (OBSTACLE) charged with setting up operations at Hat Yai in southern Thailand near the Malayan border. This led Pridi to request on 8 July that SEAC send no additional parties into Thailand without his knowledge, a pledge he thought the British had given him many months earlier. Jacques, recognizing that Pridi and Adun saw the insertion of the independent parties as evidence of a lack of confidence in them, demanded control over all ISLD groups, arguing that its actions had undermined the trust he had sought to build.<sup>22</sup>

ISLD had two additional parties (QUIVER and STAMPEDE) ready to send into Thailand in July, but with messages in hand from Pridi and Jacques, Force 136 made a strong case for ISLD cooperation. ISLD headquarters in Calcutta agreed that no additional parties should be sent for the moment and endorsed a suggestion from Jacques that its men work with Force 136 to "improve both quality and volume of intelligence emanating from the resistance movement."<sup>23</sup>

Mackenzie, who was in London, extracted a promise from SIS headquarters that its ISLD branch would not attempt independent contacts with Pridi's underground, and that Jacques would be warned in advance if any ISLD parties were going in. SIS, however, refused to forfeit its right to operate independently in Thailand, so Pridi's request ultimately went unanswered. The situation had greatly undermined the relationship of trust he had sought to build with the Thai leaders, Jacques complained.<sup>24</sup>

Another reason Jacques wished to place ISLD personnel under his control was his dissatisfaction with the quality of intelligence the British were acquiring in Bangkok. The Americans had arrived first, were blessed with better communications facilities, and were untrammelled by the troublesome political restraints imposed on Force 136 from London. Jacques felt further limited by insufficient staff and the lack of adequately trained intelligence specialists, deficiencies he thought the attachment of ISLD-trained personnel might remedy.<sup>25</sup>

In Calcutta, the Siam Country Section found it necessary to protest the activities of its own SOE counterparts when, at the beginning of July,

*Prasoet Pratumanon* (Bangkok, 1995), 38. The chief purpose of the 1 June landing was to pick up the two-man PARTERRE mission, discussed later.

<sup>22</sup> B/B 900 to Mackenzie, 7 July 1945 and Mackenzie to B/B 900, 10 July 1945, HS1-76; and Jacques to Mackenzie, 9 August 1945, HS1-53, PRO. On the OBSTACLE mission plan, see SEAC War Diaries, 14 April 1945, Box 64, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes of the 5th meeting of CJPS, 2 July 1945, SEAC War Diary, Box 76, RG 331, USNA; B/B 900 to Mackenzie, 7 July 1945, HS1-46, PRO; and SIS Calcutta to London, 12 July 1945, quoted in Aldrich, "Britain's Secret Intelligence Service," 209.

<sup>24</sup> Mackenzie to B/B 900, 10 July 1945, HS1-76 and Jacques to Mackenzie, 9 August 1945, HS1-53, PRO.

<sup>25</sup> "Liaison HQ Siam, June Report," 28 June 1945, HS1-53, PRO.

it discovered that members of the Malaya Country Section's TRUMPET party were making contacts in the southern Thai state of Pattani. Major Andrew Gilchrist immediately protested, arguing that such activities would invite "suspicion and distrust" on the part of the Thai, not least because of the "strong Chinese complexion" of Force 136 operations in Malaya. He complained to headquarters:

We hope in allowing M.C.S. to undertake this "operation organisation in South Siam you did not have in mind the idea of having a second organisation in Siam unknown to RUTH and the FSM. It could *not* be unknown, and the proof of this is that our allies the Siamese police are now spending more time spying on these Chinese parties than in spying on the Japanese.<sup>26</sup>

Although the Malaya Country Section explained that it had sent its agent north "to try and control certain Chinese elements who have moved from Malaya to Siam in search of food," Force 136 Headquarters recognized the need "to maintain the border as the division of activities." Accordingly it pushed forward preparations for British-trained Thai officers from the APPRECIATION missions to receive a British party near Hat Yai in the extreme south of Thailand. This British party (BROCADE), composed of Captains Charles and Dawson and Sergeant Fairweather, would parachute in on 6 August.<sup>27</sup>

The American SIREN headquarters, meanwhile, had been left with no choice but to focus on intelligence collection during the period of uncertainty about the future of the organization in Thailand. Several of the OSS Free Thai officers in Bangkok had begun training local recruits in radio operations and information gathering. Phisut Suthat, who had developed a close working relationship with Phayom, Pridi's ally in the Police Department, trained a group of fourteen policemen which began operating in late May. Phayom also arranged for Phisut to interview three escaped British POWs whom the Thai were sheltering. Long-term plans called for Phisut's team to work in the Prachinburi area (SHRIVEL), near Nakhon Nayok where the Japanese army was gathering supplies and building fortifications. Wimon was working with Phayom, too, seeking to create an intelligence network operating out of Lopburi. Eventually Wimon would be assigned to Khorat (DINNER). Bunmak, meanwhile, had recruited and was training a group of fifty local agents.<sup>28</sup>

Despite such SIREN initiatives and its success in gaining some firsthand insight into conditions in Japan from two Thai diplomats

<sup>26</sup> Gilchrist to HQ Force 136, 1 July 1945, HS1-64, PRO.

<sup>27</sup> HQ Force 136 to HPD/SACSEA, 11 July 1945, HS1-69 and "APPRECIATION/BROCADE Operation Order," 31 July 1945, HS1-60, PRO.

<sup>28</sup> Greenlee, "Report of Operation SIREN for May 1945," 20 May 1945, Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

who left Tokyo on 15 May, Detachment 404 Intelligence Officer Taylor remained dissatisfied. Like Jacques, Taylor believed the volume and quality of information could be improved if better trained officers were sent in. With the future of the OSS in mind, Taylor believed that Detachment 404's first priority should be intelligence of direct or indirect value to the China or Pacific Theater, the second for "political and economic intelligence of interest to State" and the lowest for tactical reports which might benefit British operations in Southeast Asia. "Bangkok should be particularly urged to think in terms of accomplishing some outstanding intelligence feat, or series of feats, while there is still time," Taylor wrote, noting that despite the establishment of an intelligence network "there has not yet been one single report of outstanding value produced." What Taylor most wanted was some "closely guarded secret of the Japanese army which would be put to immediate use in other theaters," precisely the type of information to which the Thai would be least likely to gain access.<sup>29</sup>

Coughlin, Taylor's commander, appreciated his desire for an attention-grabbing OSS intelligence *coup*, but he also recognized that operations into Thailand would have been curtailed had it not been for the State Department's interest in promoting American influence in Thailand. Detachment 404 officers believed that SEAC's war plan would "isolate Thailand completely by establishing British or British-dominated forces in Burma, Malaya, and FIC [French Indochina] before operations in Thailand are undertaken," so Coughlin saw OSS parties as the sole representatives of American interests in the region. A strong OSS foothold in Thailand, he believed, offered the best opportunity to counter British domination of postwar Southeast Asia. Accordingly, OSS guerrilla teams preparing to enter Thailand during August were instructed "to consider goodwill as the number one priority, intelligence the number two priority, and preparations for future operations the number three priority."<sup>30</sup>

But if preparation for future operations ranked third on Coughlin's priority list, it stood at the top of Pridi's. Eager to demonstrate Thailand's support for the Allies, the Regent had cobbled together the infrastructure for a significant guerrilla-training effort. He had appointed loyal governors in the targeted areas, giving them the tasks of choosing safe locations for training centers, providing cover and shelter for the Free Thai officers from abroad, and recruiting local personnel. Although provincial

<sup>29</sup> Taylor memoranda, 7 June 1945, Folder 2653, Box 157 and Folder 2324, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226. The intelligence on conditions in Japan is found in Booth to Thai Committee, 31 May 1945, Folder 29, Box 8, Entry 6, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>30</sup> Coughlin to Hutcheson, 29 June 1945, Folder 2297, Box 131, Entry 154, RG 226 and Donovan to Byrnes, 17 July 1945, Reel 14, M1642, USNA.

governors had wide-ranging powers, their assignments were difficult to carry out, as the aforementioned problems at the PATTERN camp suggest. The need to involve increasingly large numbers of people in the underground jeopardized security. Mustering and transporting large quantities of supplies to remote locations was arduous, hard to camouflage, and expensive. Government funds could not be used indiscriminantly without attracting attention. Seni sent in 50,000 dollars in gold from Thai reserves in the United States, but despite repeated efforts, Pridi failed to convince the British to permit access to the more substantial Thai assets in London.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, the level of Allied material support for the resistance forces continued to fall far short of Thai expectations. Jacques recognized that this situation reflected particularly badly on the British because of British leadership in SEAC. He pointed out that "the impression is given that we are not really trying if we cannot do at least as well as the Americans." He also had to dissuade the Thai from their belief that the Allies could easily shift forces from Europe for operations in Southeast Asia, and to convince Pridi that the underground must continue to bide its time, despite the heightened security risks inherent in delay.<sup>32</sup>

In Kandy, the Force 136 and Detachment 404 commanders were well aware that expectations were not being met, but serious obstacles remained. Thanks to Colonel Hoffman's preparations during the previous year, Detachment 404 had an ample stockpile of weapons and supplies, but the OSS remained reliant on the RAF for transport because Coughlin's initial efforts to obtain the services of an American heavy bomber squadron had not succeeded. British attitudes toward Thailand and SEAC military priorities meant that few aircraft were available for clandestine activities. Colin Mackenzie of Force 136 warned Coughlin on 24 May that adequate air support could not be expected before August.<sup>33</sup>

Mackenzie did his best to break the logjam. In a memorandum to Mountbatten's chief of staff, he sought to counter the argument that an intensified supply effort would increase Japanese suspicions and make early action against the Thai more likely. Mackenzie believed it thoroughly unrealistic to expect that the status quo could be maintained in Thailand until after the capture of Singapore. The Japanese would almost certainly seize control of vital areas in Thailand in reaction to the invasion of Malaya, scheduled for September. A British deception effort designed to make the Japanese anticipate an early attack on Bangkok made such

<sup>31</sup> Kandy to London, 14 July 1945, HS1-76, PRO.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques, "Liaison HQ Siam, June Report" 28 June 1945 and "Siam: British Position," 2 August 1945, HS1-53, PRO.

<sup>33</sup> Coughlin to 106, 24 May 1945, Reel 90, M1642, USNA.

action all the more likely. Under such circumstances, Mackenzie argued, it would be better to send in supplies as rapidly as possible, thereby putting the Thai in a better position to offer effective resistance.<sup>34</sup>

Coughlin remained active, too. When he heard in early June that the American 10th Air Force might be more willing to consider an OSS request for planes, he asked for sufficient aircraft to deliver 100 tons of supplies to Thailand by the end of July. Given his past unhappy relations with the top brass of the India-Burma Theater, the response Coughlin now received surely amazed him. General Stratemeyer enthusiastically embraced the proposal, granting the OSS use of two squadrons of B-24 and B-25 bombers. Then, on 16 June, his command offered twelve C-47s, planes better suited for dropping supplies with crews experienced in the task. This enabled Coughlin to up his goal to the delivery of 150 tons of weapons and supplies by July 9th.<sup>35</sup>

A final hurdle remained, however, as British officials at SEAC, taken aback by the OSS move, raised objections. A proposal that all available C-47s be used to support British troops in Burma nearly torpedoed Detachment 404's plans, but the Americans pointed out that the British themselves had just reassigned a cargo squadron from SEAC to Australia. This forced the British to back down, enabling Coughlin to launch his supply drops (Operation SALAD) on 21 June. Two days later he reported excellent success to OSS-New Delhi, exulting that the operations were "so much better than anything done to date by the British that it makes us here feel extraordinarily good." He added in an "eyes alone" letter to Donovan the following day that he was "sure the British are more than a little annoyed with the good will we are building up with the Thais."<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, they were. Mackenzie's hopes that General Sultan's negative attitude toward the OSS Thailand operation would prevent the OSS from upstaging Force 136 had been dashed. On 24 June, he renewed pleas to Mountbatten's headquarters that supply deliveries be increased, including the provision of material for the Thai army. He was swimming against the tide, however, as both Mountbatten and the Chiefs of Staff in London were inclined to defer a large-scale supply effort.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Mackenzie to C.O.S. SACSEA, 24 May 1945, HS1-75, PRO.

<sup>35</sup> Coughlin to P Division, 28 May 1945, Folder 289, Box 26, Entry 110; Coughlin to Cheston, 6 June 1945, Folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154; and Wilkinson to Coughlin, 18 June 1945, Folder 228, Box 28, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>36</sup> Coughlin to Dean, 23 June 1945, Folder 289, Box 26 and Coughlin to Donovan, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>37</sup> Mackenzie to Pointon, 14 May 1945, HS1-53 and Mackenzie to CD/G, 20 June 1943, HS1-76, PRO; and CoS to Mountbatten, 27 June 1945, SEAC war diary, Box 75, RG 331, USNA.

Force 136 chose to focus its limited resources on building up extensive guerrilla training centers in the northeast, near Sakon Nakhon (CANDLE) and in the Loei and Khon Kaen areas (COUPLING). Smaller guerrilla training operations were planned to the northwest of Bangkok in the Tak-Sukhothai area (NERONIAN) and to the southwest in the peninsular area. In the latter region, SQUALID would operate in the Prachuap area, SUNGOD in the Nakhon Si Thammarat/Surat Thani vicinity, and PRIEST in Krabi, Phang Nha, and Songkhla. A final Force 136 unit in the extreme south, the aforementioned BROCADE, would seek cooperation with Chinese guerrilla operations in the Malay provinces. Force 136 sent fifteen successful sorties into Thailand during June, with supplies going to the CANDLE, COUPLING, and NERONIAN operations.<sup>38</sup>

Although the CANDLE and COUPLING areas were well developed, NERONIAN got off to a shaky start because the men on the ground had difficulty establishing a drop zone in the heavily forested region. Their inability to receive drops led to problems with their local sponsors, who expected more supplies. Although at one point they gathered as many as 150 men for training, illness and a shortage of medicines cut the number to only sixty by mid-July. Operations in the south developed even more slowly, in part because of security concerns.<sup>39</sup>

On the American side, Pridi had reported in early June that seven potential guerrilla training areas were ready for OSS supply drops. Four were located north and east of Bangkok – YIELD near Klongpai, MISSION near Sawankhalok, DIAGRAM at Phu Khieo (between Khon Kaen and Petchabun) and MIXTURE near Ubon. Two were to the west and south – FAVOUR, near Kanchanaburi and PATTERN, near Phetburi. The final drop zone, SELFISH, was located southeast of Bangkok, in the Rayong area.<sup>40</sup>

The American C-47s involved in Operation SALAD delivered 74.3 tons of weapons and supplies over a nine-day period in late June. Drops occurred to all the assigned areas except MIXTURE. During this interval, the Americans also parachuted an American guerrilla trainer, Captain E. H. A. Grassi, and a Thai radio operator near Kanchanaburi on the night of 26 June. Guerrilla activities in this area received unusually effective support from the provincial governor and Grassi found 200 men already under arms. He divided them into four platoons and began

<sup>38</sup> Air operations records, HS1-67, PRO.

<sup>39</sup> Air operations records, HS1-67 and Kaifa to Pointon, August 1945, HS1-60, PRO.

<sup>40</sup> Coughlin to Wilkinson, 12 June 1945, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA.



weapons training. American officers were now engaged in training activities at two locations to the south and west of Bangkok, but no further training teams would arrive for nearly a month.<sup>41</sup>

The OSS refusal to integrate Thailand operations and Coughlin's success in obtaining planes made it imperative that the American and British operational zones be delineated to avoid confusion. Recognizing that Pridi should play a major role in determining these, and perhaps aware that British-American relations inevitably were better in the field than at headquarters, Coughlin and Mackenzie agreed to let their representatives in Bangkok wrestle with this potentially contentious matter.<sup>42</sup>

A dispute had already arisen over rights to the Thai air force airfield at Phu Khieo, which the British considered within their COUPLING zone. It was to this area that the British sent their first provincial liaison mission headed by a British officer (Operation PARTERRE) on the morning of 26 May. Major C. S. "Soapy" Hudson parachuted near Khon Kaen together with a grandson of King Chulalongkorn, Prince Waranan Thawat, who served as an RAF flight lieutenant under the name of Nicky Varanand. In addition to providing a Thai presence, the Prince would carry out liaison with the Thai air force and evaluate the airfields in the area.<sup>43</sup>

Thai airmen flew the British officers to the Na An airfield near Loei, then to Phu Khieo. They conferred with local officials and were joined at Phu Khieo by three escaped British POWs who had been sheltered by the Thai and six Thai volunteers designated for training with Force 136. On 31 May, the party flew back to Na An, where a C-47 picked them up the next morning. Its pilot ordered the plane's cargo parachuted to reduce weight before making the first successful, planned landing by an Allied aircraft on Thai soil since the beginning of the war. Captain Sena Ninkhamhaeng, who had been spearheading Force 136 efforts in the area, accompanied the British party back to India.<sup>44</sup>

Hudson returned to Kandy brimming with optimism, convinced that headquarters did not appreciate "the extent, enthusiasm or potentialities of the Free Siamese Movement." He pointed out that in the COUPLING zone the resistance enjoyed the full backing of four provincial governors with "power to call up men and requisition labour and food throughout their provinces." He concluded:

<sup>41</sup> "Monthly Report, Operations Office," 30 June 1945, Folder 2593, Box 162 and "Brief Operational Report – Operation FAVOUR," 22 September 1945, Folder 3545, Box 148, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 254–55.

<sup>42</sup> "Minutes of Meeting at HQ, OSS," 12 June 1945, Folder 289, Box 26, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>43</sup> Hudson, "Report on Operation PARTERRE," 4 June 1945, HS1-59, PRO.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

It is essential to realise that the whole country is being organised for future battle with the Japanese under the direction of the Government and using all the properly appointed officials and officers to do so. The entire resources of the country are at the disposal of the Allies within the limitations of security. On D-Day, these restrictions will disappear, and it will be possible to mobilise all available men and material under the various local authorities. It is simply a question of providing the arms. What I have seen has convinced me of their determination.<sup>45</sup>

Hudson was taken aback to discover that not only were the Americans planning to fly a C-47 into Phu Khieo to pick up the survivors of the ill-fated YIELD mission, but intended, apparently with Pridi's sanction, to establish a permanent presence there. Hudson warned that this would "serve no purpose, embarrass the authorities, and compromise security." While the British could hardly block the Americans from landing at the field, particularly since the first flight would rescue an injured RAF pilot, they wanted their COUPLING agents to control operations.<sup>46</sup>

Coughlin brushed off Force 136 security concerns and warnings about the soggy condition of the field, insisting that the OSS mission (Operation DIAGRAM) proceed. Although delayed for ten days because of unfavorable weather, an RAF C-47 landed, fully loaded, at Phu Khieo on the morning of 14 June. In addition to supplies, it carried Thawi Chulapap of the Thai air force back from his liaison mission. The plane's wheels sank into the soft ground, but once the cargo was unloaded the Thai personnel at the airfield were able to push the plane out of the mud and repair minor damage. After sharing the supply of Budweiser beer they carried with them, the crew loaded the five injured men from the YIELD mission and former POWs Kellogg and Olle aboard the plane and took off successfully.<sup>47</sup>

The squabble over control of the Phu Khieo airfield gave additional impetus to the effort to delineate British and American spheres of operations. As a result of the talks in Bangkok, the Americans were permitted to retain their intelligence-only operations in British areas, such as Hollanday's in Sakon Nakhon. The two sides agreed in principle that both sides could use the Phu Khieo and Na An airfields, although in fact the Americans focused their activities on the former, the British on the latter. Nevertheless, Detachment 404 officers resented what they saw as a British effort to "muscle in" at Phu Khieo, and the two sides quibbled about certain aspects of the agreements. For example, the OSS wanted a greater role in the Kra Isthmus than the British wished to grant. Force 136

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. <sup>46</sup> Hudson to Mackenzie, n.d., HS1-59, PRO.

<sup>47</sup> Coughlin to Dean, 5 June 1945, Folder 2536, Box 147 and "Report of DIAGRAM Operation," 15 June 1945, Folder 2681, Box 158, Entry 154, RG 225, USNA. Also, Smith, "Escape from Siam," 11.



15. Members of the Royal Thai Air Force help push a C-47 onto solid ground at Phu Khieo airfield on 14 June 1945. (Source: US National Archives)

was particularly eager to protect its position in that region, and also wanted control of the Khorat area. The tying up of loose ends occurred on 10 August at a Kandy conference that included British and American representatives just back from Bangkok.<sup>48</sup>

Just ahead of Operation SALAD, the Americans executed a long-planned drop of much-needed medical supplies into Bangkok (Operation SUITOR), a scheme cooked up by Sanguan Tularak and Howard Palmer in early 1945. The plan won enthusiastic endorsement from Pridi, but met initial opposition from the Office of War Information (OWI). The scheme's advocates prevailed and at midday on 18 June nine P-38 fighters swept over Bangkok escorting three B-24s. The latter dropped OWI propaganda leaflets and parachuted twenty-five containers of medical supplies from 400 feet above the Pramane ground in front of the Grand Palace. Thai police and soldiers stationed in the area grabbed the containers, while Thawi Chulasap filmed the scene with his movie camera. After the chutes landed, the P-38s swung back over the center of the city, firing on a Japanese gun position. Four soldiers and five Thai civilians

<sup>48</sup> OPERO to Burstein, 23 June 1945, Folder 2536, Box 147, Entry 154 and Coughlin to Palmer, 10 August 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; and Pointon to Jacques, 29 June 1945 and "Liaison HQ-Siam, July Report," HS1-53, PRO.



16. The view of Bangkok from the open hatch of a B-24 above the Chao Phraya River on 18 June 1945 during the Office of War Information (OWI)-sponsored drop of medical supplies. (Source: US National Archives)

were killed and stray bullets sprayed the adjacent Thammasat campus, one of which hit uncomfortably close to Jacques.<sup>49</sup>

Palmer judged the medicine drop, staged before an audience in the immediate area estimated at 10,000 people, a smashing success. The Thai removed all the supply containers before the Japanese could intervene and news of the event spread quickly across the city. That night, Pridi and Adun called to thank Palmer, and were disappointed when he told them that a repetition was unlikely. The brazen American display of aerial dominance greatly embarrassed the Japanese.<sup>50</sup>

The British felt aced again in the “goodwill” game by their “cousins.” Jacques reported the positive Thai reaction to the medicine drop and American propaganda leaflets. He noted, too, that OWI broadcasts

<sup>49</sup> Palmer to Scofield, 9 January 1945 and inventory of items dropped in Folder 1085, Box 105, Entry 144; Greenlee’s notes, n.d., Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154; Coughlin to Dean, Folder 227, Box 20, Entry 110; Thompson memorandum, 18 June 1945, folder 2320, Box 133, Entry 154; and “Operation SIREN, Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. On the initial OWI reaction, see New Delhi to Taylor, 12 February 1945 and Taylor to Block, 14 February 1945, “Thailand Cables,” Box 112, Entry 358, RG 208, USNA.

<sup>50</sup> Palmer to Withrow, 20 June 1945, Folder 290, Box 26, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

by Seni and attendees of the United Nations Conference in San Francisco had repeatedly emphasized the positive American attitude toward Thailand. Jacques further reported that Pridi had, without comment, handed him an article, clipped from a Ceylon newspaper, that advocated the postwar cession of the Kra Isthmus area to Britain.<sup>51</sup>

Jacques did not accuse his OSS counterparts of conveying the inflammatory newspaper article to Pridi, but he undoubtedly suspected that they had. When Coughlin learned of the incident from a message Pridi sent to Sanguan Tularak, he understandably feared the British would "raise hell." In a "please burn this letter" communication to Nicol Smith, who was preparing to enter Thailand, Coughlin instructed him to warn Pridi never to show such materials to Jacques "unless he gets them from a source other than us."<sup>52</sup>

Although Jacques discerned a Thai "bent toward the Americans," he remained confident that the Thai placed a high priority on re-establishing its past friendship with its "neighbor." He believed that the Thai were hopeful that the British might support Thailand's retention of the border territories gained from French Indochina in 1941, and thought that the British would be helpful "in restraining any Chinese claims which, I believe they think, may be supported by the Americans."<sup>53</sup>

British political blunders continued to undermine Jacques' best efforts to counter American influence, however. Colonel Pointon, chief of Force 136's Siam Country Section, had delayed the repatriation of Colonel Net Khemayothin due to a request that the Thai liaison officer travel to Kandy and brief Mountbatten. Pointon had notified Pridi of this and dispatched Net to Ceylon, only to have the meeting abruptly cancelled at the insistence of the Supreme Commander's political advisors. To add insult to injury, despite a specific request from Pointon, no one had turned up to meet Net when he arrived at the airport. "It will be evident to you, as it is to us here," Pointon complained, "that if the Siamese do not regard the incident as positively insulting they cannot fail to feel mortified in the extreme" at the way it had been mishandled.<sup>54</sup>

With the launch of the SALAD operation, Detachment 404 decided to bring Greenlee out of Bangkok for a rest. He traveled to Saraburi by car, then was flown to Phu Khieo the following day, 27 June, where

<sup>51</sup> Addendum to Jacques' June report, 29 June 1945, HS1-55, PRO.

<sup>52</sup> Coughlin to Smith, 10 July 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. The misplaced Thai hopes that the British might support their postwar retention of territories regained from France Indochina were probably based on former British Minister Crosby's rather sympathetic attitude to Thailand's claims against France during the border conflict of 1940-41.

<sup>54</sup> Pointon, "Colonel Yodhi," 3 July 1945, HS1-64, PRO.

he witnessed a successful supply drop. On 29 June, a C-47 landed, off-loaded two tons of supplies, took Greenlee on board and headed back to India via Rangoon.<sup>55</sup>

Jacques, meanwhile, sent Captain Ashwell out to report to Force 136. Ashwell departed from the Na An airstrip on 5 July in the company of Major David Smiley from CANDLE and an INFLUX party of Thai trainees. Smiley, who had headed British operations at Sakon Nakhon since the end of May, had sustained serious burns about two weeks earlier when an SOE document-destroying briefcase exploded. The incoming C-47s brought in Captain Hobbs as Ashwell's replacement, returned Major Hudson and Captain Sena to COUPLING, and belatedly repatriated Colonel Net.<sup>56</sup>

The departures of Greenlee and Ashwell from Bangkok came at a moment when security concerns were mounting. The Siam Country Section of Force 136 noted on 29 June that four of its parties had expressed concern "about Japanese action or suspicion," and CANDLE reported that Tiang Sirikhan had executed a suspected Japanese spy. There also was every reason to assume that the enemy had noticed the stepped-up OSS supply flights over Thailand, but Force 136 feared that its inability to match the American effort posed a security problem of a different sort. Guerrilla recruiting was proceeding in the British areas, producing "thousands of people who at present are practically unarmed and whom present available airlift gives us little prospect of arming." These ill-equipped men, represented "liability rather than asset."<sup>57</sup>

The Japanese had noticed the increased aerial activity and their expressions of concern and other moves intensified Thai fears of an early Japanese counterstrike. Ambassador Yamamoto Kuma'ichi spoke of a possible Thai rebellion against the Japanese in meetings with Prime Minister Khuang Aphaiwong and Prince Wan Waithayakhon, advisor to the Thai Foreign Ministry. At about the same time, Khuang realized that agents of the Japanese military police, the Kempeitai, were shadowing him. Surveillance of Pridi's residence had been suspected, and for some weeks the Japanese had been building fortifications at strategic locations in Bangkok. Then General Nakamura, the Japanese commander, invited senior Thai officials to a dinner party on 29 June, the same evening the Japanese had requested permission to stage night maneuvers. Pridi immediately saw a parallel with the tactics the Japanese had used during their March takeover in Indochina.

<sup>55</sup> "404's Operations in Thailand," n.d., Folder 2069, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>56</sup> "SIT-REP, 24-30 June and 1-7 July 1945," HS1-68, PRO.

<sup>57</sup> S.C.S. to HQ Ops, 29 June 1945, HS1-69, PRO.



Although Pridi took the precaution of keeping the key members of the underground away from Nakamura's party and requested a temporary halt to Allied supply drops, the Japanese did not attempt a takeover. Instead, they continued to express their concerns and demanded Thai cooperation. As part of an effort to impress the Thai with Japanese power and resolve, they gave Thai officers a tour of one of their newly constructed Bangkok fortresses, located near the Victory Monument plaza, on 9 July.<sup>58</sup>

General Nakamura and his recently arrived chief of operations, the notorious Colonel Tsuji Masanobu, issued clear warnings during the tour. Nakamura declared his determination to fight to the end and revealed Japanese knowledge of suspicious activities in the northern and northeastern parts of the country. If the Thai failed to keep him apprised of these, Nakamura declared facetiously, the Lord Buddha would. For his part, Tsuji revealed that the Japanese anticipated a possible paratroop attack by two or three British divisions in the northeast, with Bangkok as the ultimate target. He demanded the cooperation of the Thai army in thwarting such an operation.<sup>59</sup>

As part of the effort to effect cooperation, the Japanese insisted that a joint committee investigate secret airfields, and sought revision of the existing cooperative arrangement with the Thai army. The latter pact, signed on 21 July, called for the Japanese to take over defense of the northern border with Burma and for the two sides jointly to defend Bangkok and other important areas. The Thai army would also have responsibility for defending rear areas, securing lines of communication, and preserving domestic order. The two sides pledged that no troop reductions or withdrawals would be undertaken unilaterally.<sup>60</sup>

Mountbatten readily acceded to Pridi's request for a temporary halt to supply drops. The SEAC Commander informally remarked to an OSS officer, Lieutenant Harold Graves, that the events in Thailand underscored the need to aid the Thai resistance "on an absolute minimum scale" until just before the British could offer real military assistance. Although he doubted that the Japanese were about to seize control in Thailand, if they did so, Mountbatten declared, he could not "lift a finger to give them any assistance at this time." A member of his staff, Air

<sup>58</sup> Kandy to Washington, 30 June 1945, Folder 315, Box 49, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA. According to an intelligence report in Folder ZM-139, Box 396, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA, in early July, 7,160 Japanese troops were stationed in Bangkok.

<sup>59</sup> Reeda to Thai Committee, 11 July 1945, Reel 128 M1642 and Cone to Pluto, 12 July 1945, Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>60</sup> Yamamoto to Foreign Minister, 12 and 26 July 1945, A700 9-31, Japan Foreign Ministry Archives, Tokyo.





17. The Supreme Allied Commander of the Southeast Asian Theater, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, chats with Cora DuBois, head of the OSS Detachment 404 Research and Analysis Branch at Kandy, Ceylon. John Coughlin, the Detachment 404 commander, looks on. (Source: US National Archives)

Vice Marshal Gibbs, meanwhile, signalled an intent to blame any disaster that might develop in Thailand on the OSS supply drops. According to Coughlin, Gibbs suggested that “the Americans are inept at this sort of business, broke security and gave the show away.”<sup>61</sup>

Such comments naturally re-stoked the ever-present OSS suspicions of British motives. Mountbatten’s off-the-cuff comment about his inability to “lift a finger” seemed odd to Coughlin given that the OSS had 450 tons of supplies and Force 136 had some 700 tons, all of which theoretically could be delivered to the Thai resistance in an emergency situation. In a report to Donovan, Coughlin cited the British effort to block Operation SALAD, and warnings voiced from British officers about making Pridi “too much of a big shot” as further reasons to suspect British political games in Thailand. As for Gibbs’ disparaging remarks, Coughlin claimed that the success rate of the American air crews “puts to shame the record

<sup>61</sup> Mountbatten to CoS, 1 July 1945, SEAC war diary, Box 75, RG 331 and Graves to Moscrip, 2 July 1945, Folder 2314, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

of the specially selected and trained crews used by the RAF for their clandestine work.”<sup>62</sup>

When they sought to assess what might happen should the Japanese move against the Thai, Detachment 404 officers came to optimistic conclusions. If the weapons and supplies in hand were dropped rapidly to the Thai, they predicted, at very least “a very large number of Japanese, including high ranking officers,” would be killed and the resistance would be able to hold parts of Thailand and carry out guerrilla warfare “for an indefinite period of time.” With adequate supply and effective bombing of Japanese lines of communication, the assessment suggested that the Thai might even defeat the Japanese. In a comment reflecting both this optimism and his deep suspicion of his allies, Coughlin suggested to Donovan that the British would not want the Thai to “rid their country of the Japs without British military assistance” because it would make a British military occupation and a harsh settlement “more difficult to justify.”<sup>63</sup>

A report subsequently produced by the OSS Research and Analysis Branch elaborated on such suspicions of British conspiracy, speculating that they might welcome an early Japanese action in Thailand to create “a disastrous dissipation of Thai forces and chaotic political conditions which will end in a purely British liberation.” This would clear the way for Mountbatten to impose military rule in Bangkok and facilitate British annexation of Thai territory on the Malay peninsula.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, British policy was less conspiratorial than muddled, thanks to the short-sighted, negative attitude of the London authorities toward Thailand. Nonetheless, the Foreign Office did now recognize that the situation in Thailand posed real dangers. A report to the Cabinet Office warned that if the Japanese moved against the Thai, “There would be a general expectation that we should give assistance to any Siamese resistance which showed itself and we should no doubt be under American pressure to do so.” If Mountbatten were unable to offer adequate assistance, “and the Siamese resistance was overcome for want of it, we should certainly be badly criticised.” Accordingly, the report recommended making every effort to avoid precipitating a clash between the Thai and Japanese, including a continuation of a go-slow approach in regard to clandestine activities.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 5 July 1945, Folder 289, Box 26, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. and “Emergency Plan for Thailand, 6 July 1945, Folder 2329, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>64</sup> “British Strategic Intentions In Southeast Asia II,” 2 August 1945, Reel 14, M1642, USNA.

<sup>65</sup> Campbell (FO) to Maj. Gen. Hollis (Cabinet Office), 7 July 1945, HS1-76, PRO.

This course seemed no more feasible to Mackenzie now than it had before the crisis. The British focus on the recapture of Malaya and Singapore meant that no SEAC offensive action could be aimed at Thailand until February 1946, and no one who had studied the situation believed that Pridi's underground could string the Japanese along for eight more months. Even Mountbatten himself would acknowledge to Donovan in London at the end of July that early Japanese action in Thailand was now expected "and nothing can be done to help it." But Mackenzie hit a stone wall when he proposed to General Hastings Ismay in London that the British arm and supply the Thai resistance to the maximum extent possible, then offer air support to sustain its anti-Japanese activities. Ismay rationalized his opposition by arguing that the Japanese were unlikely to attempt an early takeover. He could only suggest that Pridi be promised specific British assistance later, in the hope that such a pledge would encourage Thai restraint and somehow avert the early confrontation that officers closer to the scene considered inevitable.<sup>66</sup>

With the British caught in a thicket of conflicting desires and contradictory assumptions, Gilchrist of Force 136's Siam Country Section attempted to assess how the Thai might fare in the event of an early Japanese move. Unlike his American counterparts, Gilchrist had no illusions that the Thai could defeat the Japanese, but he concluded that "the guerrilla forces in North-East SIAM, and to a less extent in the West and South could carry out effective harassing operations against the Japanese for a limited period – the duration of their effective action being mainly dependent on the extent to which they could be supplied and maintained." Gilchrist, however, underscored the absurdity of ignoring the potential of the Thai army and guerrillas trained by the OSS in drawing up the plan, something that command restraints had forced him to do. "It is our firm belief," he noted in a sarcastic follow-up message, "that the urgent problem of the moment is for planning to be done at Kandy on the basis of reality (such as the existence of OSS and the Siamese Army) and not by us on a basis of unreality (the non-recognition of the above facts)."<sup>67</sup>

While Allied supply deliveries were curtailed at the end of June, Allied bombing and leaflet-dropping operations over Thailand continued. A daylight raid on the Bangkok Noi rail station in Thonburi by eight RAF

<sup>66</sup> "Post-MAILFIST Strategy," 5 July 1945, SEAC War Diary, Box 76, RG 331 and Donovan to Cheston, Folder 746, Box 123, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA; Mackenzie to CD/G, 10 July 1945; Mackenzie to BB/99, 11 July 1945; and Mackenzie to B/B 900, 14 July 1945, HS1-76, PRO. British plans for the eventual attack on Bangkok is included in the SEAC War Diary for 20 July 1945, Box 78, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>67</sup> Gilchrist to HQ Force 136, 21 and 24 July 1945, HS1-69, PRO.

B-24s on 10 July provided new grounds for Thai complaint about Allied bombing, as the raid left ninety people dead and 400 wounded. Many buildings burned, including the Public Health Department's warehouse which contained most of the city's medical supplies. Thawi offered his professional view that the bombing was as accurate as could be expected, but after visiting the scene four nights later, Palmer reported that "government and private property damage was far greater than any military damage." When reports of the heavy civilian casualties reached India, the RAF defended its targeting and accused the OSS of exaggerating the collateral damage.<sup>68</sup>

After a two-week hiatus, Pridi agreed to the resumption of night-time supply operations to eight locations from 13 July. At the same time, he made one more futile effort to spare his people from Allied bombing raids. Citing damage to Thai civilians and non-military facilities, he requested a halt in bombing, suggesting that leaflets or dummy mines be dropped as cover for the supply operations.<sup>69</sup>

Mountbatten ordered supply deliveries resumed because, as he reported to the Chiefs of Staff, "if we were to cease dropping supplies such action might well drive the Siamese to desperation and so cause the *coup de main* which we desire to avoid." He added that the "Free Thai leader is constantly warned and has accepted the warnings that he can expect no assistance in the case of premature emergency."<sup>70</sup>

Mountbatten's desire to avoid an early Thai-Japanese clash notwithstanding, aspects of British military strategy seemed designed to make just such a "premature emergency" likely. In late July, SEAC's intelligence section expressed confidence that the British deception project (Operation SCEPTICAL) had convinced the Japanese to expect an early attack on Thailand, causing them to concentrate troops there rather than transferring them to Malaya, the real target. The intelligence report advocated intensified bombings in Thailand as part of the deception effort and to damage lines of communication to Malaya. The report further urged that "we should even modify the existing policy of protecting the SIAMESE:

<sup>68</sup> "Bombing of the Bangkok Terminus Railway Station, 14 July 1945, SEAC war diaries, Box 77, RG 331; and bomb damage assessment in Folder ZM-139, Box 396, Entry 108 and Palmer to Coughlin, 15 July 1945, Folder 2070, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA. Although Thailand escaped the war relatively unscathed compared to neighboring Burma, the bomb damage caused by Allied raids was substantial. A government report of December 1945 indicated that 18,583 bombs were dropped on the country killing 8,711 people, destroying 9,616 buildings and damaging 1,194 others. Also, 73 locomotives, 617 trucks and 173 other vehicles were destroyed. See Barnette and Bluechel to Langer, Folder 50, Box 8, Entry 6, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>69</sup> HPD to Force 136, ISLD and OSS, 13 July 1945, SEAC war diary, Box 77, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>70</sup> Mountbatten to CoS, 20 July 1945, SEAC diary, Box 78, RG 331, USNA.

above all we should never wholly stop air operations in Siam – as we did recently – as the Japanese have evidently appreciated the fact that the SIAMESE are in communication with us and a protest to the SIAMESE promptly brings about a cessation of air operations.”<sup>71</sup>

In accord with these British plans to intensify the pressure on the Japanese in Thailand, RAF planes again attacked the Bangkok Noi rail station on the morning of 29 July. The station itself was not hit, but ironically a number of Japanese personnel who had sought shelter near a hospital were killed by a bomb. Among the Thai victims of the air raid were the parents and two siblings of Amnuai Phunphiphat, Holladay’s radioman at Sakon Nakhon. An errant bomb also caused damage to buildings at Thammasat University on the opposite bank of the river.<sup>72</sup>

During the crisis at the end of June, the SIREN mission had shifted its headquarters for the second time, moving from Maliwan Palace to Suan Kulap (Rose Garden) Palace, once the official residence of ex-premier Phibun and the scene of dramatic government meetings at the beginning of the war. The comment of a street vendor that “those Americans in there sure eat a lot of bananas” served as the immediate precipitating cause of the transfer to what Palmer described as “a smaller house with much larger grounds.” As Nicol Smith, who would soon arrive to join Palmer, made clear, however, the new SIREN headquarters, originally the home of Prince Asadang, was no less palatial than the previous one:

It was a large, tower-capped, two-story mansion of yellow stucco, with Swiss-chalet type of brown slate roof mottled in white. The reception hall ceiling was a solid mass of inlaid carved gold roses in boxlike blue wood squares, and the dining room opened into a garden that was a sea of red roses. Upstairs, the magnificent crimson drawing-room carpet was of rose design, and the ceilings of seven spacious bedrooms were carved with a myriad of roses. The fragrance of the rose garden permeated every room.<sup>73</sup>

A pre-existing CID presence at Suan Kulap provided good cover for radio transmissions and tight security at the gate. The house also had the advantage of electrical power, but was much further from Pridi’s residence, making contacts with the Regent less convenient.<sup>74</sup>

The American officers worked in a large second-storey room equipped with red leather furniture and a plentiful supply of alcoholic beverages. The room also served as an armory, housing two bazookas, a light

<sup>71</sup> “Review of Strategic Bombing Policy,” 27 July 1945, SEAC War Diary, Box 79, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>72</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 279–80, 285 and intelligence summary, 30 July–6 August 1945, Folder ZM-139, Box 396, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>73</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 236–37.

<sup>74</sup> Palmer to Coughlin, 15 July 1945, Folder 2070, Box 114, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

machine gun, tommy guns, carbines, and grenades. Dillon Ripley, who arrived later, noted that the military hardware and the “garish pink-shaded bulbs” of the chandelier made the room seem “cold” to him. Later, he added, “it became a rather warm and friendly place, illuminated by the faces of our Thai friends smiling and at ease as they told us simply of the strange tight-rope existence which all in that government led.”<sup>75</sup>

Coughlin chose Smith, who had recently returned from leave in the USA, to fill in during Greenlee's absence from Bangkok, calculating that Smith's charm would be a useful asset in cementing relations with Pridi and convincing him to avert early action against the Japanese. Coughlin also hoped that Smith could return in time to brief General Donovan, who was expected at Kandy in late July. A civilian reports officer, Lloyd George, went with Smith, assigned the task of shaping up intelligence gathering at a time when the OSS-Washington remained hungry for “broad strategic intelligence bearing on the Japanese,” and believed that “in no place do we have the unique contact with the enemy which we have in Thailand.”<sup>76</sup>

The temporary shutdown of air operations delayed dispatch of the mission, but on 16 July Smith and George landed safely at Phu Khieo in the company of Major Alexander Griswold, Prince Yuthitsathian from the original China group, and a Thai radio operator who had undergone training in Ceylon. The latter three men joined Charoen at Phu Khieo and would arm and train the 200 Thai airmen at the base.<sup>77</sup>

That afternoon, Thawi Chulasap, who had been on hand to capture the landing with his movie camera, flew with Smith and George to the Thai air force base at Saraburi, then on to Don Muang. After some tense moments because of a large Japanese presence at the latter location, they were loaded into a car and transported to the OSS headquarters at Suan Kulap Palace. They arrived in time for dinner, followed by a late night conference with Pridi, Adun, and other Free Thai leaders. Conversing with Pridi in French, Smith used his persuasive powers to urge that the underground avoid conflict with the Japanese as long as possible. Pridi responded by emphasizing the difficulties of this course.<sup>78</sup>

The American landings at the Phu Khieo airfield made Force 136 officers extremely nervous. A report from COUPLING described security

<sup>75</sup> Dillon Ripley, “Incident in Siam,” *Yale Review* 36 (Winter 1947): 268.

<sup>76</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee, 27 May 1945, Reel 90, M1642; and Taylor to Hutcheson, 22 June 1945, Folder 2092, Box 115 and Hutcheson to Donovan, 17 July 1945, Folder 2324, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>77</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 208–15.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 218–35.



at the field as poor. Rumors of the C-47 landings were said to have spread as far as Khorat, in part because of the presence of a village near the field, in part because of lax security at the base.<sup>79</sup>

The British also strongly protested Coughlin's decision to send Smith, who in their view knew far too much about both American and British operations, to Bangkok. They also suspected that Smith had knowledge of the general plan for the upcoming British operations in Malaya. Major Amos Moscrip, the Detachment 404 operations chief, could not deny the possibility. He lamely responded that there "would be no risk as Major Smith was not moving around and that he would be due to be exfiltrated in approximately one month's time."<sup>80</sup>

In parallel with the resumption of supply flights over Thailand in July, the OSS stepped up its efforts to insert guerrilla trainers. Just after midnight on 22 July, Captain Van Mumma, Chief Petty Officer Don Gilbertson, and a Thai radioman parachuted to the YIELD camp fifteen miles from Klongpai. Mumma kept a detailed diary that provides an unusually complete account of the guerrilla training effort at this police-run camp, headed by the superintendent of the Klongpai prison. The men landed safely and were welcomed by two Free Thai officers, Sala Thasanon and Sawat Chieosakun.<sup>81</sup>

The initial, strenuous task of collecting and storing twelve plane loads of weapons and supplies kept the men busy and exhausted during their first week at the camp. The skill of the pilots delivering the goods varied and some chutes were scattered in the surrounding jungle. A number of packages attached to chutes that did not open were smashed to bits in landing, and Mumma could not find his bag of personal items that had been fastened to one of the chutes dropped on the first night. When it eventually turned up, the dismayed Mumma found his glasses, camera, and other valuables damaged, while a cheap bottle of aftershave lotion remained intact. On 26 July, the Prison Superintendent broke the monotony of camp routine by taking the men on a nocturnal tour of Klongpai in a battered 1939 Chevrolet truck.<sup>82</sup>

Actual training activities began on the final day of July, with a class of sixteen police personnel present for a ten-day regimen that included practice in the use of rifles, tommy guns, pistols, and bazookas. On 8 August, twenty prisoners from Klongpai arrived for construction duties,

<sup>79</sup> Michel to S.C.S., 17 July 1945, HS1-58, PRO.

<sup>80</sup> "Minutes of Meeting Held at HQ Force 136," 18 July 1945, HS1-57 and Anstey to Garnons-Williams, 19 July 1945, HS1-57, PRO.

<sup>81</sup> "Diary of Van I. Mumma While in Thailand, 1945," typescript copy given to the author by Sala Dasananda and quoted with the permission of Jeanette Mumma.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



including the preparation of a landing strip for small planes. A second class of fifteen trainees began work on 11 August.<sup>83</sup>

Although the party had problems with water supply at their remote location, the prison superintendent provided ample whiskey, and the food proved more than adequate. Bananas were plentiful, as were wild orchids, which were used to decorate headquarters. Mumma and Gilbertson got along well with their Thai counterparts, whom they found "very much like Americans." Bridge games, "bull sessions," and sing-a-longs brightened the evening hours, while salvaged parachutes made excellent bedding. Other than delays in getting supplies and periodic difficulties in communicating with headquarters, insects proved to be the chief bane of their existence. Mumma wrote:

we have white ants, black ants, red ants, little ants and big ants – we have jillions of ants. They are everywhere and in everything. Usually I pick out from three to five ants in my breakfast. I'm trained now, so I just pick them out and continue eating or drinking. Those that I miss don't seem to bother my digestion at all. Some of the large black ones bite and leave a terrific welt.<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, to the southeast of Bangkok, fourteen selected Thai military police officer trainees were dispatched to the SELFISH drop site near Rayong during the second week of July where they came under the command of OSS-trained Free Thai officer Anon na Phomphet. In addition to guerrilla warfare field training, they cleared the drop site for the delivery of arms and personnel. The first supply drop came on the night of 21 July. The men scrambled to recover the chutes and loaded the material onto a Chulalongkorn University bus for transport to a storage area behind the hospital in Chonburi. A second drop followed on 23 July.

The first of two OSS parties, including Captain Francis G. Loetterle, Sergeant Howard Costa, and enlisted men John "Jack" Carroll and Gerald Bennatts, arrived on 24 July. Carroll, recruited from the OSS Maritime Unit, had a memorable first jump as his chute only partially opened, causing him to slam into the ground. "It hurt like hell," he recalled, but fortunately he did not suffer any broken bones.<sup>85</sup>

The diminutive Thai radio operator assigned to the mission, Soem Bunyasuk (Serm Boonyasuk), had an even more harrowing experience when entanglement in the static line left him dangling beneath the plane. He fired his revolver to get the attention of crew members. Once they realized his plight, they tugged him back inside the plane. When Soem recovered from the shock of his ordeal, he immediately expressed the desire to try again, so he returned the following night and landed successfully. One night later, the second OSS party, including Lieutenant

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.      <sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with John "Jack" Carroll, Laguna Woods, CA, 27 July 2002.

H. T. Bush, Sergeant Kenneth Hughes, and Pfc Lambert Smith, followed.<sup>86</sup>

Pridi's ally Admiral Sangwon, head of the Thai military police, had recruited some 300 officer trainees from Chulalongkorn University and about 600 other students from Thammasat and the Chulalongkorn prep school to participate in training at a Thai marine facility at Chonburi. Sangwon ultimately hoped to increase the number of men to 1,200 by augmenting the students with retired naval personnel and civilians from Bangkok.<sup>87</sup> Given the elite background of the recruits and the camp's proximity to the capital, the Chonburi camp became a key facility for the Free Thai.

Loetterle's team sent the trainees through a three-week course that included survival training and experience with "every US Army weapon from the 45 caliber pistol to the bazooka and 60 military mortars." He described the equipment provided the Thai as sufficient "to arm a Thai light infantry battalion."<sup>88</sup>

The OSS trainers in the second party went to a camp near Prachinburi (SHRIVEL). They worked under tighter security constraints and were assigned 126 men for training at a camp at Petriew. Initially they had to work at night and dealt with only twenty men at a time. Despite security concerns, conditions proved quite tolerable for the American team. "We were living in a good house, served the best of food, beds were made for us, laundry washed for us," Bush later wrote in his mission report. "We were protected by capable and loyal men against any harm."<sup>89</sup>

On 27 July, the Thai organized an outing for Smith, George, and Palmer to the SELFISH area. Despite Moscrip's assurance to the British that Smith would not be moving around, the three were driven to meet Loetterle at the seaside resort of Bang Saen. They then proceeded to the Thai naval base at Sattahip. On the return trip to Bangkok the following night, their driver stopped to inspect a tire in an area with a substantial Japanese military presence. After inspection, the driver decided that the tire was intact and sped away just as a Japanese hitchhiker approached the car. The unnerved American trio returned safely to Suan Kulap.<sup>90</sup>

The OSS dropped a total of 100 tons of weapons and supplies to five locations between 21 and 31 July and two additional parties of

<sup>86</sup> "Monthly Report, Operations Office, 31 July 1945," Folder 2593, Box 152, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA and Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 275. Soem received a bronze star for bravery after the war (*Liberty*, 3 July 1946).

<sup>87</sup> SELFISH mission report, 23 September 1945, Folder 2635, Box 155, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>88</sup> Loetterle account in Suphon, ed., *Anuson nakriat sarawat thahan* 2488, 186–88.

<sup>89</sup> "Report on Operation SHRIVEL," 26 September 1945, Folder 2578, Box 150, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>90</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 267–78.

guerrilla trainers entered Thailand near the end of the month. On 27 July, Lieutenant Walter Kuzmak, Sergeant S. J. Sysko, Pfc William Grant, and a Thai radio operator parachuted into the Phrae area (NUMERAL). Received by Free Thai officer Charok Losuwan, they developed a program to train 600 men by 15 September.<sup>91</sup>

Two days later three enlisted personnel, Harry Olwell, Edward Arida, and James Hogan dropped into the FAVOUR area near Kanchanaburi to join Lieutenant Grassi at the most active and successful OSS camp. After the July drops, FAVOUR had sufficient weapons for 1,500 men, and by 10 August Grassi reported 1,200 men under arms and ready for action. A former British POW who visited Grassi's headquarters after the war ended found a "Thai house armed like a fortress," but with "all civilised amenities, including several beautiful Thai girls wearing dresses of parachute silk," Scotch whiskey, and a library of paperback books.<sup>92</sup>

Pridi had approved the establishment of additional OSS guerrilla training centers at Sawankhaloke (MISSION), Ranong (GRASP), Korat (DINNER), Aungton (SNOUT), and Ubon (MIXTURE), projects Detachment 404 remained eager to carry through. The insertion of training teams for all these locations, as well as reinforcements for existing sites, were scheduled for August (Operation FREEDOM). The OSS also hoped to drop 100 tons of additional weapons and supplies.<sup>93</sup>

The overall plan called for the insertion of a maximum of 214 American personnel to organize twelve resistance battalions of 500 men each, and for the delivery of sufficient arms and ammunition for 7,200 guerrillas. Full implementation remained doubtful, however, because of "a shortage of OSS personnel, availability of supplies and air lift." In an effort to convince American military authorities to provide the needed support, the OSS argued that the British had more extensive plans, but:

we wish to avoid giving the Thais, who have enormous respect and good will towards America, the impression that we are a mere tail to the British kite. We feel that a limited program, if it is well and expeditiously carried out, with no political strings attached, we will be able to retain and increase the good will of Thailand toward America in this politically crucial area.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Coughlin, "OSS Air Lift Requirements for Thailand and Burma for August and September," 1 August 1945, Folder 744, Box 123, Entry 88 and NUMERAL operational report, 24 September 1945, Folder 2578, Box 150, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>92</sup> FAVOUR operational report, 22 September 1945, Folder 2545, Box 148, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA; Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 256–60; and John Coast, *Railway of Death* (London, 1946), 246.

<sup>93</sup> Coughlin, "OSS Air Lift Requirements for Thailand and Burma for August and September," 1 August 1945, Folder 744, Box 123, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>94</sup> Coughlin to Doering, 12 July 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110 and "Background of Thailand Operations for OPD," 21 July 1945, Folder 315, Box 49, Entry 99, RG 226, USNA.

In fact, Force 136's plans were on a similar scale to those of Detachment 404. Unable for political and logistical reasons to supply weapons directly to the Thai army, Force 136 estimated the guerrilla potential in the six training areas allotted to it at approximately 8,500, eighty percent of that total in the CANDLE and COUPLING areas in the Northeast. In the event of a clash with the Japanese, these were envisioned as areas into which elements of the Thai army could retreat. The British guerrilla groups in the Tak-Sukhothai region would have the task of harassing the lines of Japanese retreat from Burma. The smaller groups in peninsular Thailand would seek to disrupt Japanese lines of communication, primarily the railroad connecting Bangkok with Malaya.<sup>95</sup>

The Japanese had focused their concerns about Allied activities on CANDLE, so the Force 136 supply effort between 10 July and 7 August concentrated on the COUPLING zone, which received twenty-five successful sorties and six personnel. Three of these missions involved C-47 landings at the Na An airfield (22 July and 1 and 3 August). By the end of the period, COUPLING had sufficient arms for over 1,500 men. Major Hudson reported 700 men armed and ready to fight in the Khon Kaen area. He predicted that the number could be doubled by early September. The other, more secure, Force 136 training camp in the COUPLING zone, near Loei, had just started operations, but 1,000 men had received "elementary training." Although convinced that the Japanese were aware of underground operations at COUPLING, Hudson hoped that the numerically inferior Japanese forces would concentrate on defending lines of communication and refrain from chasing guerrillas in the jungle.<sup>96</sup>

In his reporting Hudson humorously tipped his cap to another and more persistent enemy his men faced – mosquitoes. He wrote:

They surpass in numbers anything one can imagine without having seen. They possess the qualities of initiative and aggressive spirit to the highest degree. They appear to be of the very latest design, highly manoeuvrable, fast and with exceptionally powerful armament. All ordinary means of defence, shirt, trousers, etc. are punctured with ease. They located the target with a persistence which the RAF, on occasions, well emulate and nothing, mosquito net or anything else, will stop them from delivering the attack. The insect repellent provided appears to act as an appetizer.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> "Plan for Siam," 9 July 1945, HS1-79, PRO. In a handwritten farewell letter to Tiang Sirikhan ("Grin" to "Pluto," 8 November 1945, Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA), however, Smiley stated that 16,000 men were trained in the British camps in the Northeast and when the war ended sufficient equipment had been received for 12,000.

<sup>96</sup> COUPLING report, n.d., but *circa* 8 August 1945, HS1-58, PRO.

<sup>97</sup> "Report from Field, COUPLING/MUSLIM Area," 17 July 1945, HS1-58, PRO.

In addition to the July activities centered on COUPLING, Force 136 moved forward its guerrilla training operations at two other locations in Thailand. Four personnel each were dropped to the NERONIAN area, to the west, near Sukhothai, and the SQUALID area, in the peninsula, near Prachuap, on 24 July. The latter party was led by Major Vic Wemyss and Lieutenant Small.<sup>98</sup>

While Smith and George were in Bangkok, all hands at SIREN headquarters were startled by Thai reports of a British attack on Phuket. At first it appeared that the British had resurrected Operation ROGER, but it proved to be a hit-and-run attack to throw the Japanese off balance ahead of the planned invasion of Malaya. The incident raised difficult issues for the Thai army. The British advised that to avoid arousing suspicions the Thai should defend their national territory as the Japanese would expect. The Thai, however, feared not only that such resistance would later be held against them, but that fighting the British would confuse unsophisticated Thai soldiers who would later be expected to support the Allies.<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile, Pridi nervously awaited the completion of a joint Japanese-Thai committee investigative tour of the Northeast. Pridi had ordered the resistance forces at Sakon Nakhon, the main target of the investigation, to avoid battle, but authorized them to resist if attacked. In the event hostilities erupted, the government would deny any connection with the guerrillas and seek to localize the clash. Pridi asked that the Allies continue delivery of supplies to any area deemed "reasonably safe," to keep operations going.<sup>100</sup>

Three Japanese and three Thai officers were scheduled to carry out the joint inspection between 24 and 27 July, traveling via Tak and Sawankhalok to Phu Khieo, then on to Udon, Khon Kaen, and Ubon. The Japanese party included a staff officer from Southern Army headquarters in Saigon and two staff officers from the local command in Thailand, Tsuji's subordinate, Colonel Yano, and Lieutenant Colonel Kishinami Kiyoji, the assistant military attaché.<sup>101</sup>

The Force 136 and OSS groups in the affected areas dispersed and hid their supplies, then retreated into the jungle. At Phu Khieo, Griswold decided to turn away two planes scheduled to land on the night of 23 July

<sup>98</sup> "SUNGOD," n.d.; "Operation SUNGOD/Gaberdine," 11 August 1945 and COUPLING report 197, n.d., HS1-58; and record of air operations, HS1-67 PRO.

<sup>99</sup> Smith and Clark, *Into Siam, Underground Kingdom*, 253 and HQ Force 136 to P Division, 26 and 29 July 1945, HS1-69, PRO. According to Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular* 251-52, this raid had been ordered by the Admiralty without reference to Mountbatten's command.

<sup>100</sup> Pridi to Mountbatten, 19 July 1945, HS1-69, PRO.

<sup>101</sup> Reeda to Thai Committee, 25 July 1945, Reel 90, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

for fear that one might become stuck on the rain-softened field just before the inspection team arrived. He did avert the landings, but one pilot mistakenly assumed that the supplies should be dropped. "It is hard to describe how conspicuous the performance was," Griswold reported, "the bright fires on the field, the soldiers and bullock carts to move supplies, the plane roaring about in circles for two full hours and 26 parachutes dropping, two at each turn."<sup>102</sup>

On the day of the joint committee's visit, 27 July, Griswold spent the day in the jungle reading a book of Macauley's historical essays, while Thai airmen at the field sought to impress upon their visitors the remote and backward nature of their facility. The Japanese officers apparently saw nothing untoward at Phu Khieo, but on 25 July newly constructed airfields in the Sakon Nakhon vicinity were clearly visible when the inspectors flew over that area in two Japanese planes.<sup>103</sup>

It is somewhat ironic that the airfields, built with great local effort, proved the Achilles heel of resistance security since they had been of little use. A strip under construction in the British COUPLING area had been abandoned after several months work in favor of the Thai air force fields at Na An and Phu Khieo. In the Sakon Nakhon area, the strip nearest Holladay's camp had been built over his objections. Apparently the only secret airfield ever actually used was HESTON, about thirty miles south-southwest of Sakon Nakhon built under the supervision of Assemblyman Chamlong Daoruang. A small Thai air force plane landed there on 30 June to evacuate the injured Smiley. A British C-47 successfully landed and took off from the field on 12 July, but the pilot judged the field dangerously soft and future missions were put on hold.<sup>104</sup>

Prior to the joint committee's mission, the ever-resourceful Pridi had found cover for the existence of the airfields in a 1943 law which provided for the construction of local airfields. This did not convince Japan's Southern Army, however, which was laying plans to destroy the airfields and any nearby guerrilla forces. On 15 July a company of Japanese troops arrived in Sakon Nakhon and begun carrying out night patrols. The Japanese also planned to send an infantry battallion into the region by rail, while an infantry regiment, an artillery company, and a unit of engineers were to enter Thailand from Indochina via Thakek. Once these troops were in

<sup>102</sup> Griswold to Coughlin, 5 August 1945. Folder 2313, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>103</sup> Force 136 SITREPs, 14–21 July and to 5 August 1945, HS1-68, PRO and Collins to Force 136, n.d., Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>104</sup> "SLEEVE Operational Report", 27 September 1945, Folder 264, Box 156, Entry 154, RG 226; "Report on Operation COUPLING/MUSLIM," 8 June 1945, HS1-58 and Force 136 SITREPs, 24–30 June and 14–21 July, 1945, HS1-68, PRO; and Smiley's account in Sawat, *Seri Thai nai phak Isan lae ruang khong Phan Tho David Smiley*, 38.

place, sometime in August, attacks would be launched on the airfields and guerrilla camps.<sup>105</sup>

At the point that supply flights were interrupted, CANDLE had received sufficient arms for about 1,200 men. The two Force 136 parties in the area, headed respectively by Sergeant Collins (FELT) and Krit Tosayanon (CHIFFON), fell back into separate jungle areas. Holladay's OSS party also re-located for a third time. The latter considered his group "pretty safe" because of good intelligence and the full support of the local population. "We could get guides, food and shelter anywhere, as well as protection in case of need," he noted in his postwar report.<sup>106</sup>

Pridi sought additional cover for resistance training operations by having the government submit a bill to the National Assembly to establish a home guard volunteer corps. In a related effort to improve security by limiting Thai contact with foreign officers, the Regent proposed to Kandy that British and American trainers instruct only a select group of Thai, who in turn would train their countrymen.<sup>107</sup>

Pridi's chief of guerrilla operations, Thawi Bunyaket, explained to an OSS representative how the scheme would work. An American team would set up a camp where fifty or sixty local leaders, selected by the governor, would come for training in three groups. These men would in turn recruit and train ten men each in their locality. The Americans would remain at the main base, which would serve as a main supply depot. When the time to fight came, the governor would contact the team leaders, who would assemble their men, report to the main base for armaments, and begin operations.<sup>108</sup>

Pridi's proposal clearly implied that fewer foreign trainers would be needed, which seemed to pose a barrier to the full implementation of OSS plans. In response, Colonel Booth argued strenuously that all available FREEDOM personnel, a group that would soon include nearly 100 men, be sent in as soon as possible. Pridi needed to be convinced, Booth argued, that "five or six strangers at a base is just as much a jeopardy to local security as 15 or 20." Through a "saturation" approach, he

<sup>105</sup> Force 136 SITREP, 14–21 July, HS1-68, PRO; handwritten message, n.d., Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA and Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, 221.

<sup>106</sup> "SLEEVE Operational Report," 27 September 1945, Folder 264, Box 156, Entry 154; and S.C.S. to Collins, 24 July 1945 and Smiley to Tiang, 8 November 1945, Folder 1, Box 232, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>107</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee, 22 July 1945, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>108</sup> "Guerrilla Conversation with Minister Tawi," n.d., Folder 2660, Box 157, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.





18. General William J. Donovan, commander of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) (right) decorates Major John J. Gildee at Kandy, Ceylon in early August 1945. The Free Thai underground rescued Gildee and others after the Japanese shot down the B-24 carrying his YIELD operational party on 29 May 1945. (Source: US National Archives)

declared, all possible intelligence could be garnered and lasting contacts established.<sup>109</sup>

General Donovan further ratcheted up the pressure on Detachment 404 to produce an intelligence *coup* during his visit to Kandy in early August. Coughlin advised Palmer that Donovan wanted greater effort to gather information from the Japanese and their collaborators, suggesting the possibility of “tapping telephones and wiring certain conference rooms, living quarters, etc. for sound.” Recording devices and a technician to install the gear were available, he emphasized.<sup>110</sup>

The increasingly tense situation in Bangkok and the planned movement of Japanese troops through the Khon Kaen area made it imperative for both the British and Americans to complete planned exfiltrations from Bangkok as soon as possible. Jacques, leaving Hobbs behind at a new Force 136 Bangkok headquarters at Vajiravudh College, flew to India via Na An on 2 August. Detachment 404, meanwhile, dispatched two planes to pick up Smith and George at Phu Khieo on the morning of 6 August. Their departure meant that Palmer was again left to operate alone at SIREN headquarters, as Greenlee’s planned return was aborted by a sports accident that left him with a collapsed lung.<sup>111</sup>

The lead aircraft, misdirected by an accompanying Thai pilot, landed at the Thai air force field at Non Han, about twenty-five miles northwest of Phu Khieo. Realizing the error, the pilot hastily attempted to turn and take off, but ran off the main runway. The loaded C-47, whose passengers included Sanguan Tularak, returning to Thailand after two years abroad, sank in the mud. Contact with the ground destroyed its spinning propellers. A Thai plane flew to Phu Khieo to report the accident and picked up Thawi Chulasap, who had accompanied Smith and George from Bangkok. When Thawi arrived at Non Han, he decided to create the appearance of a crash by burning the damaged C-47. The second plane, which had landed safely at Phu Khieo, departed with Smith, George, and some Thai trainees on board.<sup>112</sup>

To Force 136, the burned-out C-47 hulk at the Non Han airfield and the noisy supply drop at Phu Khieo on 23 July exemplified OSS bungling. The British soon had to wipe egg from their own faces, however, when one of their operators transmitted in the clear the coordinates

<sup>109</sup> Moscrip to Coughlin, 2 August 1945 and Booth to Coughlin, 8 August 1945, Folder 2551, Box 149, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>110</sup> Coughlin to Palmer, 10 August 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>111</sup> Palmer to Coughlin, 3 August 1945, Folder 2536, Box 147, Entry 154 and Greenlee to Pridi, 8 August 1945, Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA; and Force 136 SITREP to 5 August, HSI-68, PRO.

<sup>112</sup> Cray to Opero, 7 August 1945, Folder 2536, Box 147, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

for a planned supply drop to COUPLING. This mistake forced a suspension, and necessitated an embarrassing request that the OSS curtail a parallel operation.<sup>113</sup>

As August began, security concerns in Bangkok continued to mount, with new evidence that the Japanese suspicions were increasingly focused on Pridi, Adun, and other key figures in the underground. The Thai military police reported on 2 August that the Japanese were aware of intelligence gathering and radio contacts with the Allies and suspected that Pridi had met secretly in southern Thailand with Colonel Khap Khunchon. On the same day, a Japanese embassy staffer appeared at Pridi's residence and insisted on seeing the Regent. Pridi consented to meet the diplomat and found that he had nothing of significance to discuss. The Thai judged that the sole purpose of the visit was to discover if Pridi was still in Bangkok.<sup>114</sup>

Concerned about Pridi's safety, Admiral Sangwon called to Bangkok a fifty-man platoon of military police officer trainees from the SELFISH training camp at Chonburi. Sergeant Costa, the shortest, and therefore least conspicuous, OSS trainer accompanied them. The men set up a defensive perimeter around Pridi's residence during the last days of the war.<sup>115</sup>

When Prince Suphasawat had stopped off in Bangkok on his way to peninsular Thailand in July, he had assisted in drawing up a secret evacuation scheme in case of hostile Japanese action. It called for Pridi and other dignitaries to evacuate to a guerrilla camp near Suphanburi where a plane could land to ferry them out of the country. Direk Chayanam would lead another party of officials to Samut Songkhram to await sea-plane pickup. Thawi Bunyaket would take a third party to Tak and remain there to represent the government and rally resistance after the other parties evacuated.<sup>116</sup>

The mounting evidence of Japanese awareness of the underground's activities notwithstanding, Jacques did not expect an imminent Japanese move against the Thai government. Accordingly, the Force 136-OSS joint committee approved eighty sorties to Thailand for August, dividing them

<sup>113</sup> COUPLING report, n.d., HS1-58, PRO and Dean to Hunter, 9 August 1945, Folder 2536, Box 147, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>114</sup> Cannon to Thai Committee, 4 August 1945, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>115</sup> See John Carroll's account in Suphon, ed., *Anuson nakriat sarawat thahan* 2488, 199–200, 206.

<sup>116</sup> Suphasawat, "A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of Thai Politics," 20 June 1947 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 526–28.

evenly between the two clandestine organizations.<sup>117</sup> Although Jacques' assumption was correct, how long could the Japanese army stay its hand? What if the Thai, eager to prove themselves with Japan's defeat looming on the horizon, disregarded Allied calls for restraint?

On the latter subject, Jacques created considerable consternation when he reported that the Thai Sixth Army, based in Nakhon Si Thammarat, and currently being advised by Prince Suphasawat of Force 136, was contemplating independent action against the Japanese. Officers at SEAC headquarters realized that anti-Japanese operations in the peninsula were all too likely to be triggered by the British invasion of Malaya, scheduled in a month's time. This reinforced the widely held assumption that once the invasion began the Japanese would have little choice but to secure their rear area in Thailand. In such circumstances, the Thai resistance would expect large-scale Allied assistance that SEAC remained unprepared to provide.<sup>118</sup>

It was time, Jacques warned, for the British authorities to deal honestly and forthrightly with the Thai. "For some months we have jollied them along," he pointed out, encouraging hopes that approval to "arm their army and conclude a secret treaty or understanding" could come from London at any moment. Jacques warned that British failure to meet, or at least to temper, such expectations, especially if coupled with a bloody drubbing at the hands of the Japanese, would give rise to "an anti-British feeling which would not be eradicated for a long time in the postwar world."<sup>119</sup>

Fortunately for the British, a rush of events in the first two weeks of August would rescue them from the worst possible consequences of their contradictory policies. These events would also deliver Pridi and his followers from the feared, bloody showdown with the Japanese army.

<sup>117</sup> "Liaison HQ-Siam, July Report," HS1-53, PRO and "7th Meeting of the CJPS," 6 August 1945, SEAC War Diary, Box 80, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>118</sup> "Liaison HQ-Siam, July Report," HS1-53, PRO and Ripley to Coughlin, 11 August 1945, Folder 330, Box 31, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>119</sup> Jacques, "Siam, British Position," HS1-53, PRO.

## 10 The end game

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As the war approached a victorious conclusion, British officials anticipated recovery of their lost colonial possessions, particularly resource-rich Malaya. Inclined to view neighboring Thailand as a stepchild of the Empire and accustomed to exerting primary influence in Bangkok, the Foreign Office could not forget that Thailand had violated its 1940 non-aggression treaty by facilitating the Japanese invasions of Malaya and Burma, occupying the Shan States, declaring war on Britain, and accepting British colonial territory from the Japanese. London sought a peace settlement that would give a measure of revenge, and facilitate the re-establishment of the British position in Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup>

The State Department concluded from consultations with the British that they desired “an extended occupation of the country after liberation from the Japanese, the establishment of an Allied Control Commission and the imposition of economic and military conditions within an international system which might substantially impair Thai administrative control.”<sup>2</sup> Eden’s exchanges with Hull during the second half of 1944 and OSS reports from SEAC had confirmed British interest in controlling the Kra Isthmus area. Denning, Mountbatten’s political advisor, had acknowledged in January 1945 that the British desired control or international supervision over a strategic zone from the Malay border to as far as Prachuap Khirikhan. An OSS officer involved in preparations for the abortive Operation ROGER reported that his British counterparts envisioned Bangkok surrendering predominantly Muslim Pattani province in the extreme south of Thailand “as a punishment for going to war with Great Britain.” Colonel Evelyn Van Millingen of ISLD, a former manager of the Bombay-Burmah Company in Bangkok whom OSS mistakenly believed would play a leading role in a British occupation of Thailand, also had advocated the cession of Thai territory to British

<sup>1</sup> British Embassy to State Department, 5 April 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1262–63.

<sup>2</sup> Ballantine, “British-American Policy Toward Thailand,” 25 January 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1246.

Malaya. An article in the *Crown Colonist* in May 1945 publicly promoted the idea.<sup>3</sup>

Such British ambitions cut across the grain of public, as well as official, opinion in the USA. Once the Americans assumed the larger combat role in the war from mid-1944, anglophobic notions of British incompetence and selfishness steadily gained momentum.<sup>4</sup> Further, most Americans continued to take a jaundiced view of British, French, and Dutch plans to re-establish colonial control in Southeast Asia, where the Japanese had portrayed themselves as liberators and, at least toward the end of the war, actively encouraged nationalist movements. Troubled relations with the Soviet Union and the consequent imperative to solidify ties with the Europeans ultimately would dampen Washington's eagerness to interfere with the recovery of the former European colonial territories, but Washington felt free to take a more forward position in regard to independent Thailand.

The State Department had spelled out its policy in a January 1945 memorandum to President Roosevelt prior to the Yalta Conference:

We favor a free, independent Thailand, with sovereignty unimpaired, and ruled by a government of its own choosing. Thailand is the one country in Southeast Asia which was still independent before the war. We believe that it would be prejudicial to American interests throughout the Far East if, as the outcome of the war in which we will have had the major part in defeating Japanese aggression, Thailand should be deprived of any of its prewar territory or should have its independent status impaired. The history of European pressure on Thailand and of European acquisition of territory in Southeast Asia is vivid in Asiatic memories. This Government cannot afford to share responsibility in any way for continuance towards Thailand of prewar imperialism in any guise.<sup>5</sup>

US military authorities joined the State Department in opposing British territorial aggrandizement at Thai expense. A State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) paper adopted on 9 February 1945 described as "without merit" the British claim that special controls were needed over southern Thailand. The USA, it declared, should

<sup>3</sup> Annex B to "British-American Policy Toward Thailand," 25 January 1945, 740.00116 PW1-2545, RG 59; Grey to Donovan, 27 March 1946, Reel 14, M1642; and "Thailand Intelligence Digest," 22 June 1945, Box 3108, Entry 488, RG 208, USNA.

<sup>4</sup> Randall Bennett Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941-1946* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 248-59. Woods quotes the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax: "Because since 1939 we have had to seek and accept American assistance, and because lately we have seemed to be pleading poverty, the Americans have got too much into the habit of regarding us as weak. Even our friends in the US think we are compelled to make our economic and strategic position our first consideration, and tend to put this conception forward for all our actions. Critics naturally draw the conclusion that we are not interested in a sound world order."

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum for the President, 13 January 1943, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1243.

refuse to participate in any Allied control organs in Thailand “designed to accomplish anything beyond the immediate defeat of the common enemy.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed this approach on 27 June 1945.<sup>6</sup>

As the war against Japan entered its final weeks, the research and analysis staff of OSS Detachment 404 continued to believe that the British were purposefully perpetuating the state of war with Thailand to maintain leverage for postwar demands. OSS officers also thought that the British, despite their protestations to the contrary, might welcome a Japanese–Thai clash that would cause “a disastrous dissipation of Thai forces and chaotic political conditions,” thus setting the stage for a purely British liberation and a long-term military occupation.<sup>7</sup>

The State Department’s concern about British intentions in Thailand had opened the gates for the OSS effort to supply the resistance and given the embattled organization an opportunity to prove its worth. Although Bangkok had not become the invaluable intelligence window on Japan that OSS leaders had hoped it might, the OSS presence in Thailand had kept America’s foot in the door to mainland Southeast Asia.

On the same day the first atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, Detachment 404 Intelligence Officer Edmond Taylor finalized guidelines for a shift in focus that would enable an expanded SIREN mission to provide Washington with in-depth political and economic information from Bangkok. Information provided by Pridi and his allies heretofore had shaped American assessments of the Thai situation, but a broader-based evaluation was now needed. Taylor hoped for continued intelligence collaboration with the Free Thai, but he deemed it “essential to have a thorough and realistic understanding of the Thai character, its strong points and weak points, and of the problems involved in working with the Thai.”<sup>8</sup>

A subsequent OSS plan that established the basis for an ongoing American intelligence presence in Southeast Asia placed Thailand at center stage. It described the country as “one of the spots in the Orient most favorable to the development of capitalist democracy,” one whose friendly leaders would “allow the setting up of almost any type of secret activity.” Assuming British designs on Thai territory and that it would be “against British colonial interest to have a happy, prosperous, independent native state in South East Asia,” the plan suggested the USA could strengthen

<sup>6</sup> SWNCC 5/2 and JCS 1271/3, ABC 092, US–Thailand, 1945, RG 165, USNA.

<sup>7</sup> “British Strategic Intentions in Southeast Asia II,” 2 August 1945, Reel 14, M1642, USNA.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, “Notes on Political Intelligence Requirements from Thailand,” 6 August 1945, Folder 2660, Box 157, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.



pro-American sentiment in Bangkok by assuming the role of Thailand's protector.<sup>9</sup>

In London, meanwhile, the War Cabinet's Far Eastern Committee had glacially edged toward a formal policy consensus on Thailand during the first half of 1945. Its members expected financial restitution for losses sustained by British firms and looked forward to restoring Britain's dominant prewar role in Thailand's trade. They naturally would demand the return of former British territories Japan had ceded to Thailand in 1943. They concluded, however, that Pridi's cooperation with the Allies and the American pro-Thai stance made it impractical either to claim Thai territory in the Kra Isthmus or seek full political control over Thailand in the postwar period.<sup>10</sup> The significant impact of these two factors in dampening British ambitions is thus quite clear.

Rice, however, had now assumed a central role in the British discussions. As a result of war-related transportation problems, Thailand had accumulated a substantial grain surplus, while other regions of Southeast Asia, including Malaya, were suffering from serious shortages. It would be necessary to solve this food supply problem, but the war had left Great Britain in dire financial straits. Moreover, prices would rise if Thai rice stocks were thrown onto the open market and, in the British view, Thailand, Japan's formal ally during the war, would profit from its neighbors' misery. The American pro-Thai stance would make it difficult to demand the surplus rice as war reparations, so the British hoped to shame and otherwise pressure the Thai into donating it free of charge.<sup>11</sup>

Even after the committee issued its policy recommendations, some issues remained unsettled. Not only did London have to circulate its Thailand plan to the dominions, but progress was further impeded by the transition to a new Labour government in the wake of the July general elections. London's consequent failure to clarify its stance continued to complicate relations with Pridi and hamper planning at SEAC headquarters to the very end. Denning complained bitterly to an American officer that former Foreign Secretary Eden's disinterest "in any geographical

<sup>9</sup> Intelligence proposal, n.d., Folder 3, Box 319, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA. Regional intelligence objectives included "1) the relationships of the great powers Russia and Britain to the scene at large, 2) the political solutions still to be worked out in many of these countries, 3) the future of the Colonial powers in this part of the world, and 4) the industrial and commercial reconstruction of the Far East."

<sup>10</sup> Cranborne to Commonwealth Government, 26 July 1945 in Hudson and Stokes, eds., *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, VIII: 272-74 and Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 619.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (Cambridge, 1998), 108-12. On the rice issue, see also Tarling's "'An Attempt to Fly in the Face of the Ordinary Laws of Supply and Demand': The British and Siamese Rice, 1945-7," *Journal of the Siam Society* 75 (1987): 140-86.

area east of Port Said” had left the Foreign Office “totally unprepared” for an early end to the war. In December 1944, he had advised London against an overly harsh approach, warning that the more “realistic” American approach might lead to “popularity” in postwar Thailand, “while a grudge is borne against us.” In June, Denning had lobbied for the appointment of minister of state for Southeast Asia to effect coordination of British political and economic policies, but to no avail.<sup>12</sup>

When the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima making an early conclusion of the war a real possibility, the frustrated Denning passed Victor Jacques’ critique of British Thai policy to the Foreign Office and presciently warned:

If our terms to Siam appear to the Americans to be too stiff I do not doubt that Siam will get to hear that American sympathy is on their side. This will encourage them to hold out for more and we may in the end find ourselves in a position where no credit at all accrues to us while the United States will come to be regarded as the champion for Siamese liberties. At the moment the position is still that Siam looks to Great Britain rather than to anyone else and I think we should be wise to take advantage of this.

Denning pointed out that while he had “never been disposed to overestimate military problems of Siam or to exaggerate her importance in world affairs,” an overstretched Britain would need Thai cooperation “both for strategic reasons and for trade.”<sup>13</sup>

Denning understood that an early end to the war would undermine the effort to restore British prestige through a triumphant military return to Malaya and Singapore, and would complicate the task of restoring order across the region. The American consul at Colombo, C. H. Oakes, reported that the British feared that arrival of troops some days, or even weeks, after a Japanese surrender would create the impression that the British were “merely substituting their occupation for that of Japan.”<sup>14</sup>

Over the next four days, a second atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and reports circulated that the Japanese Dōmei office in Bangkok released this information, provoking the local army headquarters to seize control of the news agency and issue a proclamation that the army would fight on. General Nakamura and two staff officers told Thai Prime Minister Khuang Aphaiwong that this stance reflected instructions from the military high command.

<sup>12</sup> Tilman Remme, *British and Regional Cooperation in South-East Asia, 1945–1949* (New York, 1995), 23–26 and Tarling, “Atonement Before Absolution,” II: 1478.

<sup>13</sup> Denning to Foreign Office, 6 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO.

<sup>14</sup> Oakes to Byrnes, 11 August 1945, 740.00119PW/8-1145, RG 59, USNA.

In response to a question from Khuang, Nakamura added, however, that he would obey any proper order to surrender.<sup>15</sup>

Pridi responded by seeking advice from the Allies on how he should proceed if Japan accepted terms. He suggested to Howard Palmer that he might demand the surrender of the local Japanese command, then take up arms if it refused. This alarmed the British, who feared that Japanese–Thai hostilities would complicate plans for rapid repatriation of POWs and acquisition of Thai rice. When Denning met Jacques in Kandy on 11 August, just before the latter's return to Bangkok, the two decided that it would be less dangerous for Pridi simply to repudiate Thai treaties with Japan and break diplomatic relations.<sup>16</sup>

Still no directive had come from London on Thai policy. In a state of near desperation, on 12 August Denning requested an “immediate decision” from the Foreign Office. He pointed out that the divergent British and American stances toward Thailand had “always been embarrassing,” but “now without guidance it is impossible to plan adequately or effectively to meet the emergency which will arise in the event of an early Japanese surrender.”<sup>17</sup>

Although Dillon Ripley of the OSS realized that the prospect of an early Japanese surrender had “caught the SEAC staff completely off balance,” Colonel Coughlin typically discerned procrastination and evil design. Dismissing the sincerity of Denning's remark that it would be advantageous if the Japanese surrendered to the Thai, the Detachment 404 chief believed that the British were preparing to implement harsh demands on a country still branded an enemy. In fact, however, Mountbatten radioed the Chiefs of Staff on 13 August advising that, in the absence of instructions, “we have assumed that Siam may be treated as a friendly country.”<sup>18</sup>

Coughlin recognized that Britain's unwillingness to reassure Pridi about its plans and the overwhelming demands that would confront Mountbatten when the war ended would offer opportunities for the Americans. He had been pushing a Donovan idea that Mountbatten's American deputy, General Wheeler, take the surrender of Japanese troops in Thailand. On 11 August, Coughlin further suggested that since “SEAC is having difficulty in finding required troops to assume control in all

<sup>15</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee, 12 August 1945, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>16</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee, 11 August 1945, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and Denning to Foreign Office, 11 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO.

<sup>17</sup> Denning to Foreign Office, 12 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO.

<sup>18</sup> Ripley to Alsop, 14 August 1945, Folder 2288, Box 131, Entry 154, RG 226; Coughlin to Donovan, 10 August 1945, Reel 128, M1642; and Mountbatten to CoS, SEAC War Diary, 13 August 1945, Box 81, RG 331, USNA.

regions, and Thailand is not near the top of the list," the USA should bid to carry out the occupation with its troops. While the flattered Wheeler suggested the possibility of a Bangkok trip to General Marshall, other American officers, even in Kandy, reacted unenthusiastically to Coughlin's proposals. They worried that a commitment in Thailand would overstretch their resources and knew that the British would strongly oppose such initiatives. In fact, London would advise Mountbatten on 13 August 1945 that to "re-establish our position there, it is imperative that British troops be the first to arrive in Siam." Coughlin subsequently was, as he put it, "skinned," for prematurely suggesting to Palmer (and Pridi) that Wheeler might go to Bangkok.<sup>19</sup>

A Reuters press report citing Thailand's failure as a "satellite ally" to associate itself with Japan's tentative peace offer reinforced Coughlin's suspicion that the British were angling to place Thailand in the most difficult possible position. He pointed out that a public statement of American policy might strengthen Pridi's hand. He also suggested that the State Department and the OSS provide the press as much information as possible on the underground to demonstrate that the Thais had not jumped on the Allied bandwagon at the last minute. To facilitate such a public relations effort, Coughlin dispatched Nicol Smith, promoted to lieutenant colonel and decorated with the Legion of Merit, to Washington. Smith "has a natural flare [sic] for this sort of thing, and if publicity is wanted, I know of no one who can out-do Nicol," Coughlin advised Donovan. Pending Smith's arrival, Donovan assigned Captain Stewart Alsop to begin preparations. In early September, this initiative merged with a broader publicity blitz aimed at spotlighting OSS successes and mobilizing support for a postwar central intelligence agency.<sup>20</sup>

The Foreign Office at last responded to Denning's pleas on 14 August, the day the Japanese notified the Allies of their acceptance of the Potsdam declaration. London acknowledged that despite the state of war between Britain and Thailand, Pridi's cooperation and his May offer to resist the Japanese would have to be taken into account. The favorable American attitude toward Thailand went unmentioned, although its significance

<sup>19</sup> Coughlin to Donovan and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 11 August and Coughlin to Cheston, 13 August 1945, Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI. Also, Oakes to Byrnes, 11 August 1945, 740.0011PW/8-1145, RG 59; Coughlin to Donovan, 18 August 1945, Reel 88, M1642; and Coughlin to Palmer, 13 August 1945, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>20</sup> Coughlin to Cheston, 14 August 1945 and "Thai Committee Activity - 11 August-19 August, 1945," Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI; Coughlin to Cheston, 15 August 1945, Reel 128, OSS M1642 and Coughlin to Donovan, 18 August 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA; and Troy, *Donovan and the CIA*, 291-92.

was well understood. Policy would be shaped according to Thai "readiness to make restitution for the past and to co-operate for the future." Force 136 officers in Bangkok should "suggest" as their own opinion that Pridi disavow the declaration of war, the alliance, and all treaties with Japan; place "his country and its armed forces at the service of the Allies" and send a representative to Kandy to negotiate an agreement.<sup>21</sup>

Jacques had not yet reached Bangkok, so Hobbs conveyed the suggestions to Pridi on 15 August. The Foreign Office meanwhile informed the State Department that pressing circumstances had made it necessary to act without prior consultation, but promised to communicate British terms to Washington prior to any negotiations. These terms, the message indicated, were still being hammered out.<sup>22</sup>

Major David Smiley, recovered from the burns he had suffered earlier, returned to Thailand via Na An airfield together with Jacques. The Thai conveyed Smiley to the Sakon Nakhon area, where two other British SOE officers, Majors Peter Kemp and Rowland Winn, together with their radioman Sergeant "Spider" Lawson and a Free Thai trainee, joined him by parachute drop on 16 August. These British officers would soon take up the task of rescuing prisoners of war in the northeastern region of Thailand.<sup>23</sup>

Although disturbed by the continued British unwillingness to address him officially and Jacques' report that Mountbatten would have full power to negotiate political as well as military matters, Pridi carried out the first set of "suggestions." He issued the statement renouncing the declaration of war and treaties with Japan at the National Assembly on 16 August, despite Jacques' concern that doing so immediately might provoke the Japanese. Pridi advised SEAC by radio of his willingness to send representatives to Kandy, but asked to be informed of the subjects to be discussed "so that they may take with them appropriate authority."<sup>24</sup>

In the meantime, Pridi had sent a fateful message through OSS channels on 12 August requesting that Seni Pramot return to become prime

<sup>21</sup> Foreign Office to SEAC, 14 August 1945, HS1-55 and Foreign Office to Washington, HS1-76, PRO.

<sup>22</sup> Palmer to Coughlin, 17 August 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226 and memorandum of conversation, 14 August 1945, 740.0011PW/8-1445, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>23</sup> The postwar activities of the British officers in the northeast of Thailand are described at length in Peter Kemp's *Alms for Oblivion* (London, 1961). The British officers had poor relations with the OSS RAVEN mission, sent from China to investigate the situation in Laos, but which crossed over to Thailand. For the OSS version, see the RAVEN mission report, 8 October 1945, Folder 3375, Box 199, Entry 154B, RG 226, USNA and Aaron Bank, *From OSS to Green Berets* (Novato, CA, 1986): 105-29. See also: Arthur J. Dommen and George W. Dalley, "The OSS in Laos: The 1945 Raven Mission and American Policy," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 22 (September 1991): 327-46.

<sup>24</sup> Palmer to Coughlin, 17 August 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA and Force 136 to P Division, "Situation in Siam," n.d., HS1-76, PRO.



19. Tiang Sirikhan (front, right) organized the largest Free Thai guerilla training operation near his hometown of Sakon Nakhon in north-eastern Thailand with support from British Force 136. Major David Smiley sits next to Tiang. In the back row, left to right, are Sergeant “Gunner” Collins, Captain Krit Tosayanon (Kris Tosayanonda); Major Rowland Winn, and Sergeant “Spider” Lawson. (Source: courtesy of Pisoot Sudasna)

minister. He explained to Seni that, according to prior arrangement, the Khuang government would resign after the Japanese surrender, clearing the way for an openly pro-Allied government composed of Free Thai. This request, delivered by an OSS officer on 15 August, placed Seni in an embarrassing position because he had submitted a written disavowal of political ambition to the State Department in late 1943. After consideration, however, Seni agreed to accept the position on an interim basis.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Pridi to Seni in Coughlin to Thai Committee, 12 August 1945; Seni to Pridi in Thai Committee to Coughlin, 15 August 1945; and “Thai Committee Activity – 11 August–19 August 1945,” Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI and memorandum of conversation, 15 August 1945, 740.00119PW/8-1545, RG 59, USNA. Pridi lavishly praised Seni in a message that arrived in Washington through OSS channels on 25 August 1945 (“Thai Materials” folder, Box 3138, Entry 529, RG 208, USNA). Pridi cited Seni’s “absolute courage for the maintenance of Thai national independence” and declared: “The merit of your service will be engraved in history as a good example for future generations.”

Not only had the British long held Seni in low esteem, but Denning realized that Pridi was seeking to gain diplomatic leverage through Seni's early association with the Allied cause. Although Denning suspected that the Americans had arranged the appointment, in fact it caught the State Department by surprise. Abbot Low Moffat, chief of the Southwest Pacific Division, shared British doubts about Seni's suitability, and had expected Pridi personally to lead Thailand in the postwar era. He suggested to Paul Gore-Booth of the British Embassy that the Regent might still step forward after King Ananda Mahidol came of age in September.<sup>26</sup>

Pridi instructed Seni to attempt to elicit friendly proclamations from the Allies. The Americans already had promised such a statement, and he hoped that Seni could convince the British, who had claimed to be pursuing goals similar to the Americans, to follow suit.<sup>27</sup> Seni interpreted the instructions as a signal to seek negotiations on broader issues in Washington or London, but the Foreign Office shared Denning's trepidations about conducting substantive discussions with a man not only viewed as Washington's tool, but who had been away from Thailand for five years. London accordingly welcomed Mountbatten's insistence that political and military talks be held in Kandy with the Thai representatives sent directly from Bangkok.<sup>28</sup>

The State Department, which had received a request from Pridi that they "persuade" the British to adopt a friendly attitude toward Thailand and a warning from Max Bishop that political talks at a British-dominated military headquarters "may not be entirely wise," had different ideas. Washington believed that the British were seeking to maximize their leverage by linking military and political matters. In a meeting with F. C. Everson of the British Embassy on 18 August, Moffat granted that military issues and "ad hoc relations with the Thai Government"

<sup>26</sup> Denning to Foreign Office, 13 August 1945 and Washington to Foreign Office, 14 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO; and memorandum of conversation, 15 August 1945, 740.00119PW/8-11545. Evidence that the British continued to believe that the Americans were behind Seni's selection as prime minister is an unpublished article "Cross Purposes in Siam" written by Andrew Gilchrist in May 1946 at the request of the Foreign Office. Gilchrist wrote: "The Americans . . . immediately produced Seni Pramoj out of a hat and sent him flying to Bangkok, where it was announced he would take over the premiership on arrival." A copy of the article is in the author's possession. It went unpublished, Gilchrist believed, because he criticized British as well as American policy. An article that put the British stance in a more favorable light, written by a fellow British diplomat, Alec Peterson, "Britain and Siam: The Latest Phase," was published in *Pacific Affairs* 19 (December 1946): 364-72.

<sup>27</sup> Pridi to Seni, 16 August 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

<sup>28</sup> Denning to Foreign Office, 19 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 18 August 1945, Reel 174, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHL.



could be taken up in Kandy, but asserted that “longer-range political discussions” should be held elsewhere. Although it was a Saturday afternoon, Moffat then proceeded to OSS headquarters to follow the latest reports from Kandy.<sup>29</sup>

Concerned that the Americans might unilaterally restore diplomatic relations with Bangkok, London sought to head off such action. The Americans agreed to wait, but ignored Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin’s request that he be allowed to respond first to Pridi’s renunciation of the declaration of war. Instead, they seem to have pushed forward by one day the release of American Secretary of State James Byrnes’ statement. Issued on 19 August, a Sunday, it stressed that the USA viewed Thailand “not as an enemy but as a country to be liberated from the enemy.”<sup>30</sup>

Bevin spoke the following day, declaring in the House of Commons that Britain’s attitude would “depend upon the way in which Siam meets the requirements of our troops about to enter her country, the extent to which they are ready to undo the wrongs they have committed, and to make restitution for the loss and damage caused to British and Allied interests, and to the extent of her contribution to the restoration of peace and order and economic rehabilitation.”<sup>31</sup> Despite a British effort to associate the two statements, they unmistakably differed in tone.

China, which early in the war had exercised considerable influence on Allied policy formulation, had been pushed to the margins as the successful naval push toward Japan diminished the country’s strategic importance. Chiang Kai-shek had never accepted the legitimacy of the Anglo-American removal of Thailand from his theater in 1943, and in the spring of 1945 General Wedemeyer had taken his side in opposing SEAC operations in Indochina, which remained in Chiang’s area. When the British pushed for Indochina’s transfer to SEAC at the July 1945

<sup>29</sup> Pridi to Seni in Coughlin to Thai Committee, 15 August 1945 and Bishop and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 16 August 1945, Reel 128 M1642 and Pridi to State Department in Coughlin to Thai Committee, 15 August 1945, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA; Balfour (Washington) to Foreign Office, 15 August 1945, HS1-55 and Denning to Foreign Office, 17 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO; Ballantine to Dunn, 18 August 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6: 1282–83; Moffat memorandum, 18 August 1945, 740.00119 PW/8-1845, RG 59, USNA; and “Thai Committee Activity – 11 August–19 August 1945,” Reel 130, Microfilmed Donovan Files, USMHI.

<sup>30</sup> Text in *Department of State Bulletin*, 13: 321 (19 August 1945): 261 and Foreign Secretary to Washington, 19 August 1945, HS1-76, PRO. Sterndale Bennett of the British Foreign Office commented: “The Americans have behaved very badly in rushing in first with their statement in total disregard of our major interest as a belligerent who has still to settle with Siam for the injury done to us by her association with Japan. But this is typical!” Quoted in Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Songsri Foran, *Thai–British–American Relations During World War II and the Immediate Postwar Period, 1940–1946* (Bangkok, 1981), 200.

Potsdam Conference, a compromise solution divided responsibility for Indochina at the 16th parallel.<sup>32</sup>

Although this salvaged a potential occupation zone for the Chinese in northern Indochina, as in 1943, Chiang had not been consulted. He countered by insisting that he also get an occupation zone north of the 16th parallel in Thailand, a concession he described to the British military attaché as important to his “strategic plans” and “his prestige.” The Americans and British ignored the demand.<sup>33</sup>

Many Chinese residents in Thailand, however, eagerly anticipated the arrival of Chiang's troops. This, they hoped, would enable the settling of old scores over their ill-treatment at the hands of the Phibun government. Chinese activists responded joyously and publicly to the Japanese defeat, contrasting their homeland's role on the victorious Allied side with Thailand's alliance with the losers. Assassins gunned down Ch'en Shou-ming, president of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on 16 August, in apparent retaliation for his cooperation with the Japanese.<sup>34</sup>

Alarmed about possible disorder and extremely wary of any Chinese troop presence in Thailand, Pridi appealed to the OSS and SOE representatives in Bangkok. They, in turn, asked that their governments pressure Chungking to restrain its nationals, while Mountbatten acted to insure that Chinese troops would not enter the country.<sup>35</sup>

The ethnic tensions in Bangkok boiled into violence in late September when militant Chinese elements exchanged gunfire with Thai police over several nights, a conflict that took at least a dozen lives, including that of a former Australian POW. Chinese shops were looted. A strike by Chinese merchants, enforced with threats of violence by the agitators, disrupted the city's commerce for nearly a week.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 626–27 and *FRUS, The Conference at Berlin*, 1945 I: 220–23 and II: 82–85.

<sup>33</sup> Chiang to Truman, 740.0011PW/8-1045, RG 59 and Chungking to London, SEAC War Diary, 10 August 1945, Box 83, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>34</sup> E. Bruce Reynolds, “International Orphans – The Chinese in Thailand During World War II,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 28 (September 1997): 385.

<sup>35</sup> Coughlin to Palmer, 17 August 1945, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, RG 226 and SACSEA to Carton de Wiart, SEAC War Diary, 28 August 1945, Box 84, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>36</sup> In a letter to his wife, Margaret, Kenneth Landon wrote on 27 November 1945 (Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College) that the late September “trouble arose out of the fact that [Sanguan] Tularak (who had been, according to a British report [“Current Situation and Background to Sino-Chinese Relations in the Country,” Box 91, RG 331, USNA] attempting to organize an office representing the various anti-Japanese groups in the Chinese community in Thailand) had a Chinese friend come down from Chungking whom he announced to be a high Chinese official. The Chinese immediately flew Chinese flags and declared a holiday – and did not fly Thai flags. The police broke up the parading and incidentally looted countless shops

Over the next three months, various initiatives were undertaken to mend relations between the Chinese community and the Thai government. The latter set up a mixed commission to investigate the violence and established a joint police Sino-Thai police force in late October. On 19 November, Hsiao Soon-chien, a prominent figure in the local Chinese community, returned from his wartime service in Chungking with the rank of a major general. His "goodwill mission" laid groundwork for the arrival of a Chinese diplomatic representative, Minister to Iran Li T'ieh-chung, who concluded a bilateral treaty, signed on 23 January 1946, that for the first time established formal diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>37</sup> The Chinese thus could claim some success in their effort to boost their position in Thailand, although China's postwar descent into civil war would soon again reduce their ability to take an assertive stance in Bangkok.

In the interim between Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration and formal surrender, the OSS moved to reinforce its SIREN mission by dispatching Detachment 404 Intelligence Officer Taylor, and his predecessor, Ripley, to Bangkok, via Phu Khieo, on 19 August. The advance element of a liaison group of about two dozen men (Operation INCIDENT), the two reached Don Muang in a rickety B-10 Martin bomber only to find no ground transportation available. To avoid revealing their presence to the Japanese stationed at the airfield, they passed a nervous ninety minutes huddled in a hangar while waiting for a car. Eventually, they reached Suan Kulap Palace and were visited by Pridi the same evening.<sup>38</sup>

without provocation." The British report cited above mentions an attempt by a Thai rickshaw driver to "interfere with some Chinese carrying Chinese flags" as the immediate incident that triggered the shooting. According to Krachang Tularak, Sanguan's brother (intelligence report XL 37112, 9 December 1945, RG 226, USNA), "a secret anti-Thai society," using coercive tactics, organized the strike by Chinese merchants that disrupted commerce in the city. Two years later, the Chinese government (*Bangkok Post*, 22 September 1947) sought compensation for victims of the Sino-Thai violence, claiming that twenty-seven had died and 182 were injured in the clashes.

<sup>37</sup> Dwight F. Bulkley, "Chinese-Thai Friction in Bangkok," 22 December 1945, XL 37108, RG 226, USNA and Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 184-85 and the text of the treaty, 297-300. In his "General Impression of the Situation in Bangkok," 9 October 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA, Robert W. Lawson predicted that the hostilities could be overcome because they had been inspired by "a young Chinese crowd which has come into Siam during the war," while "old established Chinese who have been merchants in the city for years, and who have established trade, do not want trouble and are as anxious as the Siamese to stop the disturbances." The latter, he pointed out, "know it would be better to try to win the favor of the present administration than to incur its disfavor by flaunting grievances for which this government is not responsible."

<sup>38</sup> Ripley, "Incident in Siam," 262-68. Taylor's orders and a list of INCIDENT personnel are in Coughlin to Taylor, 14 August 1945, Folder 279, Box 25, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

Taylor recalled that he had gone into Bangkok to get the evacuation of POWs underway and “no less, I gathered, to stiffen Thai resistance to any British encroachments on the nation’s sovereignty.”<sup>39</sup> He reported on 21 August that the Thai seemed equally wary of upsetting either the Japanese or the British:

we have [the] impression that while they sincerely welcome and appreciate American support, our government could easily get into position of seeming more pro-Thai than the Thai themselves as far as relations with the British are concerned. There is some reason to fear that [the] Thai suspect our championing of their cause as partly motivated by rivalry with the British and believe we are putting pressure on them when we are only trying to be helpful.<sup>40</sup>

Taylor’s comments raised so many red flags at the headquarters of the India-Burma Theater that Coughlin received “a screamer” message from General Wheeler’s office. Bishop, Wheeler’s political advisor told Coughlin in no uncertain terms that his men should avoid “political discussions” and “overplaying the situation.” Bishop, who at the time expected to be sent as the first American diplomatic representative in Bangkok, warned that the officers must eschew involvement in Thai politics and Thailand’s relations with other countries. “Thailand was and will be again relatively unimportant in [the] world picture,” Bishop declared. “I hope both Taylor and Ripley will do a lot of listening and no talking until Washington tells us what they want said.”<sup>41</sup>

As Coughlin drafted a warning for his men in Bangkok and crafted disingenuous responses to General Wheeler and Bishop denying any OSS rivalry with the British, he did not yet know just how far Taylor had gone. This would become clear only when Coughlin received a letter Taylor penned on 23 August. It revealed that Taylor had assumed the “duty to pressure the Thai on such matters as not being too polite to the Japs, not telling the British they would be glad to talk politics with them in Kandy when the State Department had informed the British they considered that inappropriate, etc.” Taylor acknowledged he had been freelancing, but declared that his actions were “in line with American

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Awakening From History*, 354.

<sup>40</sup> SIREN to Opero, 21 August 1945, Folder 2575, Box 150, Entry 154 and Kandy’s reply of 22 August 1945 is in Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>41</sup> Bishop’s comments were forward in Coughlin to Taylor, 25 August 1945, Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 88, RG 226 and Coughlin to Donovan, 18 August 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA. In fact, Bishop was ordered to Japan and only a decade later would he reach Bangkok for a controversial stint as American Ambassador. The person chosen by the State Department to reopen the American Legation, George Atcheson, was also sent to Japan, so the task eventually fell to Charles Yost.

policy and it would look bad for OSS if the Thai appear altogether too hopeless.”<sup>42</sup>

Taylor reported that while men like Pridi “have tried to do their best” and “would have died quite well if we had told them to,” with the advent of peace “their martial ardor has vanished and now they are thinking only of making the best deal with everybody at the least trouble and risk to themselves.” He intemperately characterized the Thai as “nearly all hopelessly scatter-brained, vague and incapable of ever getting anything perfectly straight,” problems exacerbated by a language barrier. They had failed, he declared, to provide help regarding war crimes “although I am constantly raising hell about it.” He and Jacques had horrified their nervous hosts by visiting, in uniform, the Allied internees at Vajiravudh College.<sup>43</sup>

Declaring that “in Kandy, and doubtless in Washington, we have sometimes overrated the Thais,” Taylor acknowledged error in thinking that “by being tougher with our Thai contacts Dick [Greenlee] and Howard [Palmer] might have been able to get more high-level intelligence. After meeting these contacts and seeing the way Howard cracks down on them and prods them in the behind day after day I am convinced that nobody could have got any more and it is a miracle we got so much.” Nonetheless, Taylor concluded, “we still have plenty to toot our horn about,” having gotten a “damn sight more than anyone else.”<sup>44</sup>

Taylor’s complaints about Thai incompetence reflected his frustrations in trying to arrange the early departure, via Thai planes to Phu Khieo, of twenty-five POWs – six of them Americans – from Bangkok. As Taylor wrote the letter, he and Ripley were anticipating a banquet at Suan Kulap for the POWs on the evening of their scheduled departure. This led to another misfire, as Ripley later related:

At the last moment the Thai planes did not appear, and we were able to work a radio schedule with Rangoon just in time to call off our C-47’s. However, the trucks went for the POW’s just the same, and the next thing we knew three trucks came wheezing and limping up the drive into the palace. Everyone piled out just as our meagre supply of electricity went off. In the resulting confusion we had to scurry about looking for candles and coconut-oil lamps and dinner.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Coughlin to Timberman, 24 August 1945, Folder 2239, Box 131, Entry 148 and Coughlin to Bishop, 25 August 1945, Folder 2660, Box 157, Entry 154; and Taylor to Coughlin, 23 August 1945, Folder 309, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor to Coughlin, 23 August 1945, Folder 309, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. <sup>45</sup> Ripley, “Incident in Siam,” 269–70.

The OSS POW evacuation, which finally took place the following night, riled the British. Force 136's Siam Country Section felt that OSS had jumped the gun, making the British look "rather foolish." Its report to Kandy left SEAC authorities "steaming," forcing Coughlin to warn Taylor to clear "every step" with SEAC headquarters.<sup>46</sup>

In response to Coughlin's messages, SIREN headquarters solemnly and falsely declared that "no past suggestion from anyone inside has given the Thais impression of rivalry with the British." It implausibly claimed that the impression of Allied rivalry had been created solely by the divergent tone of the statements on Thailand issued by Byrnes and Bevin.<sup>47</sup>

Once SEAC gave the green light, the OSS trio, now operating openly, arranged the departure of another 150 American POWs from Don Muang on 29 August on eight C-47s. Over 300 POWs, including ninety-two Americans, flew out from Phetburi the next day. Palmer reported Pridi "much impressed by American drive," and Coughlin, in his monthly report, declared that the effort had "impressed the Thais like no amount of publicity could."<sup>48</sup>

The OSS did not short the publicity, however, as on 29 August Smith held a "lengthy" press conference in Washington, describing in glowing terms the Free Thai cooperation with the OSS. He talked of his adventures in China and his July trip into Japanese-occupied Bangkok. Smith also revealed the OSS discovery of the presence of survivors of the *U.S.S. Houston* in POW camps in Thailand. Donovan radioed that Smith had made an "excellent impression"; in reply Coughlin reported Force 136's irritation when the story appeared in the British press.<sup>49</sup>

The head of Morale Operations (MO) at Detachment 404, Lieutenant James Withrow, moved to send the Free Thai officers from his section to Bangkok to publicize the OSS effort. He also proposed OSS-OWI cooperation in reminding the Thai of the fifty-year record of the Japanese in "enslaving peoples of Asia."<sup>50</sup> From Bangkok, Palmer requested the

<sup>46</sup> Coughlin to Taylor, 25 August 1945, Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA and "G" to Ops, 23 August 1945, HS1-62, PRO.

<sup>47</sup> Coughlin to Timberman, 27 August 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

<sup>48</sup> Palmer to Coughlin, 30 August 1945, Reel 128 and "Chief of Mission Report – August 1945," Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>49</sup> Paul W. Ward, "300 of Houston Crew Reported Jap Captives," *Baltimore Sun*, 29 August 1945, Reel 35 and Donovan to Coughlin, 29 August 1945, Reel 129, M1642; and Coughlin to Smith and Thai Committee, 3 September 1945, Folder 748, Box 123, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>50</sup> Withrow to Coughlin, 25 August 1945, Folder 2660, Box 157, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

early dispatch of an OWI representative and “all available cameramen” to shoot films of “Thailand as well as POW.”<sup>51</sup>

Two additional OSS men, Robert W. Lawson and Lieutenant Harold Graves, arrived in Thailand through Phu Khieo on 25 August,<sup>52</sup> then the OSS Bangkok mission swelled to thirty personnel with the arrival of the remainder of the INCIDENT party. They landed in two groups at Don Muang, on 29 and 31 August.

Dilworth Brinton, a non-commissioned radioman who had done Thai language training in a military-sponsored program at the University of California at Berkeley, arrived with the second INCIDENT party. After a sumptuous Suan Kulap lunch of “soup, fish, rice and curry and a dessert in a baked shell” served with a table setting consisting of “three plates and a soup bowl, three forks and two knives” he and two fellow Thai language students took to the streets on bicycles. “It was a real triumphant entry,” he wrote to his parents. “When we yelled hello to them in their language they would all yell back and talk excitedly to each other. We were the first US soldiers in the streets of the city.”<sup>53</sup>

Dwight Bulkley, who came with the first INCIDENT group, not surprisingly found the Thai eager to please their American guests. Noting that “OSS took Bangkok by storm,” he described the social whirl of his first weekend in the Thai capital:

Saturday afternoon [1 September] the Publicity Bureau took us on a guided tour of the city, mainly the Royal Palace, Temple of the Emerald Buddha and the Royal Museum. Saturday evening was a dance reception at the modern and swank Ratanakosin Hotel – with many guests, nice orchestra, pretty girls, with concession to the American custom of asking strangers to dance and cutting in on the dance floor. Liquor flowed freely. Midnight came with a late snack in the dining hall, more dancing, and return to the Palace of the Roses 2 a.m. Sunday afternoon the Thais took us on a motor launch cruise up and down the Menam River, stopping to visit the Temple of the Dawn. Tonight the Silapakorn theater will be the scene of 50 to 100 Thai dancing girls entertaining us with Thai dances, to be followed by refreshments. Everywhere we go here food and more food awaits us, and, as delectable as it is, is hard to resist.<sup>54</sup>

Ripley later wrote longingly of a dinner at the home of a prince on 31 August that featured turtle soup in fresh green coconuts, lobster

<sup>51</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee relaying Palmer, 30 August 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

<sup>52</sup> Palmer to Coughlin, 30 August 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

<sup>53</sup> Dilworth C. Brinton letter to his parents, 31 August 1945. Copies of Brinton's letters were kindly provided by his son, Dilworth C. Brinton Jr., Mesa Arizona.

<sup>54</sup> Bulkley to DuBois, 4 September 1945, Box 2, Entry 53, RG 226, USNA. A personnel roster of the Bangkok station dated 12 September 1945 is in Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.



thermidor, stuffed goose, Thai curries, a shrimp soufflé, and banana ice cream.<sup>55</sup> Brinton commented: "MacArthur can have Tokyo. We'll take [Bangkok]. It's really a wonderful experience."<sup>56</sup>

The Americans burnished their image by transporting some key Free Thai figures back to Bangkok. Thawin Udon, whom they hustled out of China without Tai Li's approval, arrived on 4 September. Sanguan Tularak's wife and children came on 6 September, bringing with them the ashes of Chamkat Phalangkun.<sup>57</sup>

The British, meanwhile, were preparing to send in military forces. An 18 August memorandum charged the 207 Military Mission, headed by Brigadier A. T. Wilson-Brand, with advising the Thai army and serving as liaison for the commander of British forces in Thailand. Mountbatten's staff envisioned the mission, which initially included 130 men, remaining in place for "a period of years" because of Thailand's strategic importance. The proposal noted the strategic value of Thai air bases and stressed the importance of attracting Thai to British military schools and equipping Thai forces with British weapons. The latter would not only be good business, the report noted, but would "ease the problem of maintenance should it at any time become a matter of imperial interest for us to either deploy forces in Siam or provide material aid to the Siamese Armed Forces for the protection of Siam." Plans called for nearly 25,000 Indian troops, supported by nearly 2,000 RAF personnel and 140 Royal Navy personnel, to carry out the repatriation of POWs and disarming of Japanese forces.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ripley, "Incident in Siam," 274.

<sup>56</sup> Brinton, letter to parents, 2 September 1945. Although only an enlisted radio operator, Brinton's status as a member of the small OSS contingent enabled him to hobnob with Bangkok elites. His letters describe numerous such social events. He found Jim Thompson "a bit rank conscious" and felt excluded from some functions during his brief tenure as commander, but his successor, Alexander MacDonald, who took over in November, proved "much more considerate" (Letter of 22 November 1945). At one dinner Brinton "sat between two Thai generals . . . the Prime Minister [Seni] was just across the table and down a couple and the Regent [Pridi] was three to my left" (Letter of 2 December 1945). He and MacDonald accompanied Pridi and Khuang on a tour of the Cambodian border region and at a banquet honoring Khuang sat between the guest of honor and his wife (undated letter because first page is missing). Brinton also tutored Pridi's children in English (letter of 16 December 1945). Dwight Bulkley, who served as an intelligence analyst and whose brother was an officer, felt particularly limited and discriminated against because of his enlisted rank. See "Bangkok Outpost Letter," 27 November 1945, unnumbered folder, Box 2, Entry 53, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>57</sup> Coughlin to Heppner and Wilkinson to Dean, 5 September 1945, Folder 748, Box 123, Entry 88; and Palmer to Moscrip, Folder 1092, Box 99, Entry 139, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>58</sup> "207 Military Mission-Siam," 18 August 1945, SEAC war diary, Box 82; "Future Operations as a Result of Japanese Capitulation," 22 August 1945, SEAC war diary, Box 84; and "Forces of Siam," SEAC war diary, Box 85, RG 331, USNA.

Palmer reported Thai concerns about the composition of the Allied occupation force. His sources told him that American troops would be most acceptable, followed in order by white British troops, Indians, Africans, and Chinese. In Washington, Colonel Khap Khunchon warned American officials that if the British sent in Indian troops the result would be "great friction, even bloodshed, since the Thai Army is very hostile to the Indians." Khap suggested that "even American Negro troops would be preferable." As it became apparent that primarily Indian troops would be deployed, SIREN reported the "Thais dismayed at [the] thought of any Allied occupation but particularly averse to Indians, whom they neither like nor trust."<sup>59</sup>

On the diplomatic front, on same day as Bevin's remarks in Parliament, 20 August, The British had handed the State Department the text of a military agreement and "a political agreement of purely British interest" to be presented to Pridi's representatives in Kandy.<sup>60</sup> Two days later, the Americans signaled their concern about the complex document, the printed version of which ran to six pages. Reflecting American preoccupation with maintaining the "open door," the State Department first asked clarification of "the apparently far reaching economic controls suggested." In a fuller response on 1 September, the State Department cited seven clauses in the proposed agreement that infringed inappropriately on Thailand's sovereignty, including the British attempt to extract free rice. The Americans were also wary of measures that would establish a basis for a prolonged British military occupation.<sup>61</sup>

State again mustered military support for its position, as the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) on 29 August instructed the American Joint Chiefs of Staff to demand through the Combined Chiefs of Staff that negotiations be "limited strictly to matters of military concern to the Allies in relation to effecting the surrender of Japanese forces." The Americans also proposed handling the rice issue through an Anglo-American agreement with the Thai government.<sup>62</sup>

The State Department earlier had suggested that the Thai preempt the British by offering a quantity of free rice. Thus, Pridi's aide Thawi

<sup>59</sup> Coughlin to Bishop, 20 August 1945, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, RG 226; Jamerson to Booth, 4 August 1945, 740.0011PW/8-2945, RG 59; and George to Thai Committee, 1 September 1945, Folder 748, Box 123, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>60</sup> The full text is in British Embassy to State Department, 20 August 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1283–90.

<sup>61</sup> State Department to British Embassy, 22 August 1945 and 1 September 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1290–91, 1296–1303.

<sup>62</sup> Byrnes to Winant, 25 August 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1294–95; and Guenther to Landon, 30 August 1945, 740.0119PW/8-3045 and Ballantine to Acheson, 31 August 1945, 740.0119PW/8-3145, RG 59, USNA.

Thawethikun crafted an offer of 20,000 tons of rice monthly for one year. This represented one-sixth of 1.5 million tons presumed to be available for export, if the current crop met expectations. The British, however, wanted it all.<sup>63</sup>

In the wake of Bevin's statement, Pridi had announced his willingness to send representatives to Kandy, but he remained wary. When he tried to clarify the agenda, the British replied ambiguously that it would include issues related to the surrender and disarming of the Japanese and "political questions which arise out of the present situation." The message then further muddled the waters by adding that no authorization for political talks had been received from London. Under the circumstances, the Thai could only hope that the more sympathetic Americans might have a role in the Kandy negotiations.<sup>64</sup>

Still unclear about what the British had in mind, concerned about maintaining national sovereignty, and eager to avert a large-scale British military occupation, on 25 August Pridi proposed that the Thai army disarm the Japanese. Jacques opposed this, warning that leaving matters to the Thai would risk Japanese weapons falling into the hands of "dacoits and guerrillas." Mountbatten predictably rejected the offer, advising Pridi on 29 August that he would send British troops to Thailand "to ensure the surrender and disarmament of the Japanese forces."<sup>65</sup>

Despite Bishop's effort to rein in Taylor's activities in Bangkok, he was no less concerned about British intentions. He concluded from reading the SEAC documents that "future British operations will be motivated in large measure, if not solely by political considerations." He suggested that the USA might disassociate itself from Great Britain by ending its participation in the theater. However, the State Department, which had bowed to British pressure to delay the resumption of diplomatic relations with Thailand until an Anglo-Thai agreement was signed, viewed the OSS presence in Bangkok as essential.<sup>66</sup>

While the State Department and Foreign Office squabbled over the British draft, Mountbatten faced the daunting task of dispatching forces across a wide, diverse region where hundreds of thousands of armed

<sup>63</sup> Moffat memorandum, 18 August 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1282 and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 30 August 1945, Reel 128, M642, USNA.

<sup>64</sup> Bishop and Coughlin to Thai Committee, 16 August 1945, Reel 128, M1642; and Coughlin to Palmer, 17 August 1945, Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 99; Palmer to Coughlin, 17 August 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 119; and George to Thai Committee, 1 September 1945, Folder 748, Box 123, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>65</sup> Chat Nakrop (JAMPA) to Force 136, 25 August 1945 and Mountbatten to Pridi, 29 August 1945, HS1-57, PRO, Kew.

<sup>66</sup> Bishop memorandum, 25 August 1945 and State memorandum for SWNCC, 17 August 1945, 740.00110PW/8-1145, RG 59, USNA.

Japanese troops remained. General Douglas MacArthur further complicated matters by barring entry of Allied forces until Japan's formal surrender, a move that provided local nationalists an interregnum in which to organize.<sup>67</sup> How they and the Japanese would respond to the arrival of British forces remained to be seen. Given Pridi's eagerness to cooperate, Thailand posed a lesser problem, but Mountbatten wanted early conclusion of an agreement that would provide adequate scope for British troops to operate.

To avoid the impression that they were recognizing the Thai government, the British insisted that representatives of the Thai armed forces sign the interim pact. Lieutenant General Sak Senanarong, chosen for the task because his forces had resisted the Japanese in peninsular Thailand on 8 December 1941,<sup>68</sup> headed the eight-man delegation that also included Puai Ungphakon, still a major in the British Army. Thawi Thawethikun, director of foreign trade and one of Pridi's right-hand men, was the lone civilian delegate.

On the eve of the mission's 2 September arrival in Kandy, General Wheeler's office reported to the War Department that Denning had told General Timberman in Kandy that "only military problems" would be taken up with the Thai mission, but he did not "definitely limit such problems to those having to do with the common enemy," nor indicate that the occupation forces would be limited to the number needed to deal with the Japanese. Although Denning left the impression that political discussions would occur later, the message warned that the Americans had no local leverage over the British. Accordingly, only "prompt and firm action in Washington" could insure that US desires would be taken into account.<sup>69</sup>

Reports on 1 September that the British were planning to send nearly 20,000 Indian troops into Thailand caused much dismay to a just formed interim Thai government, headed by Thawi Bunyaket. Rumors circulated that the British force would include a civil affairs unit. The Thai now feared that the USA was "leaving them to be handled without restraint as a conquered enemy nation by the British," Bulkley reported. Ripley, who left Bangkok together with the Thai mission to Kandy and a number of former POWs on a British plane, radioed an appeal that the OSS throw

<sup>67</sup> Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, 345–46.

<sup>68</sup> An account by General Sak of his men's resistance to the Japanese was given at the war crimes trial of Phra Sarasat Phonlakon and is reported in the Bangkok newspaper *Liberty* of 10 January 1946. He stated that thirty-nine Thai soldiers died and "many more" were wounded on the morning of 8 December 1941.

<sup>69</sup> Wheeler to War Department, 2 September 1945, "Japan Surrender, Folder 4," Box 11, Papers of Naval Aide, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO.

"at least one formal party" to demonstrate hospitality to the Thai, who were "eager for a little American support." Upon arrival, he reported their unhappiness over Jacques' contention that "peace does not exist in the country and that [the] Government cannot control robbers," one of the British justifications for an "unusually large" occupation force.<sup>70</sup>

In a similar vein, Taylor radioed from Bangkok on 4 September: "All signs here point to British intention to humiliate Thai and intervene drastically in their internal affairs." He advocated early release of the names of the Thai underground leaders and emphasis on their cooperation with the OSS and the State Department. In a separate message he added that the British had circulated press releases "playing down American achievements."<sup>71</sup>

Taylor and Lieutenant Commander Alexander MacDonald encouraged the Thai Publicity Department and the English-language papers to monitor OWI broadcasts as a counterpoint to Reuters reports. The OWI, like the OSS, had been targeted for early closedown, however, complicating efforts to establish an overt American information office in Bangkok. Accordingly, Taylor and MacDonald, both journalists in civilian life, began writing stories themselves. Efforts to circulate these abroad through Kandy were blocked, but they issued releases to the local press. They also obtained OWI newsreels for local screening and American recordings for use on Thai radio. Coughlin, meanwhile, ordered OSS motion picture and still cameramen to document the Thailand operation.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> George to Thai Committee, 1 September 1945 and Coughlin and Ripley to Thai Committee, 3 September 1945, Reel 128, M642; and Ripley to Coughlin, 31 August 1945, Folder 1092, Box 99, Entry 139, and Bulkley to DuBois, Box 2, Entry 53, RG 226, USNA. On his departure from Bangkok see Ripley, "Incident in Siam," 272-76.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor to Coughlin and Taylor and MacDonald to Coughlin and George, 4 September 1945, Folder 747, Box 123, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. Don Garden, another journalist-turned-intelligence officer, had warned nine months earlier ("US Propaganda in Thailand," 1 January 1945, Folder 2325, Box 133, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA) that Americans "must be ready and equipped to tell our story, both *before* and *after* Thailand is liberated. This by force of circumstance, becomes primarily an OSS job." An American representative should provide material, if necessary, "under cover to avoid a run-in with the occupation authority set up by the British." Garden continued: "The British will be inclined to put out dreary propaganda of a political nature, the sort of thing that makes Thais yawn. We must dress ours up with tales of derring-do, of mystery and adventure, which they dearly love."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid; MacDonald to George, 12 September 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110; and Coughlin to Dean, Folder 749, Box 124, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. The National Archives in College Park, MD holds both silent motion picture and still negatives taken by OSS cameramen in Bangkok in September 1945. Unfortunately, the negatives have not been printed and the films lack captions. The movies were shot the second week of September and include a re-enactment of American officers arriving by boat and being transferred to Chan Bunnak's residence, their first station in Bangkok. There is also film

The OSS released a fuller account of its Thai operations, including the names of Thai and American participants, on 8 September. A lengthy *New York Times* story described Thailand “as one of our few sources of direct intelligence on the Japanese.” In reporting on this unilateral American publicity campaign, the British were quick to note the absence of any mention of their own activities in Thailand.<sup>73</sup>

The Thai military mission met as a body with SEAC staff on the morning of 3 September in Kandy. Denning explained that Mountbatten had decided to establish an interim military agreement because London had not sanctioned negotiations to end the state of war between the two nations. This course, he declared, would not prejudice “formal agreements” which he hoped would “soon follow.” After a brief response from the head of the Thai mission, members of the group divided up for specialized discussions with members of the SEAC staff.<sup>74</sup> OSS Detachment 404 hosted a dinner for the Thai mission that evening.

On the morning of 4 September, the Thai representatives again met with SEAC staff officers. General Sak made clear Thai sensitivity to the term “occupation” and trepidation about the size, composition, and mission of the British forces. He warned of shortages and lack of facilities, noting that the Thai, who were preparing to host two battalions, were now “very much frightened” by the prospect of accommodating a division. He asked that the number be reduced, offering the full assistance of the Thai army. When told that sixty-five percent of the troops would be Indian, he asked that this be adjusted because “we like Europeans better than Indians.” His hosts diplomatically fended off his requests.<sup>75</sup>

Just before the session began, Denning had handed to Thawi Thawethikun copies of the interim military agreement that he and two SEAC staff officers had drawn up on Mountbatten’s instructions the previous evening. Although assembled without consultation with London, the document incorporated what were deemed military-related elements of the draft the Foreign Office had sent to the State Department on

of an outdoor reception at Suan Kulap Palace, a royal ceremony at the Grand Palace, a Thai-American social event on the lawn of Suan Kulap Palace, and staged meetings involving Pridi, Adun, Sanguan, and other OSS and Thai officials.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph A. Loftus, “Secret Thai Role in War Documented,” *New York Times*, 9 September 1945 and Brain to Sterndale Bennett, 12 September 1945, HS1-307, PRO.

<sup>74</sup> Minutes of meeting, 3 September 1945, Box 86, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes of meeting 1000, 4 September 1945, Box 86, RG 331, USNA. In an unpublished memoir chapter, “Bangkok Again,” provided to the author, Andrew Gilchrist noted that the Thai have a “considerable racial prejudice against Indians.” He added in a marginal note that “in fact the disciplinary record of the Indian battalions was at least as good as the British contingent.” Gilchrist estimated the number of troops actually present in Thailand at 7,000.

20 August.<sup>76</sup> Neither Timberman, the ranking US officer at Kandy, nor any other American had seen the draft. Disturbed by what he perceived as non-military clauses, Thawi seized the first opportunity to inform the Americans of its contents by approaching Coughlin at the day's luncheon, hosted by Mountbatten.<sup>77</sup>

Subsequently, the Thai delegates met Mountbatten and were asked to sign the agreement. General Sak demurred, saying that some clauses dealt with non-military matters beyond his authority. When he refused to budge, Mountbatten proposed dividing the clauses so the indisputedly military-related articles could be accepted. Thawi would then fly back to Bangkok to gain approval for the remaining clauses. After declaring war on Britain, Mountbatten pointedly remarked, the Thai had "a lot to make up for" and were "in no position to argue." He insisted that the matter be settled before his scheduled departure on 9 September for Singapore, where he would preside over a formal surrender ceremony. The draft sent to Bangkok contained twenty-one clauses, a coincidence that led its critics to liken it to Japan's infamous twenty-one Demands on China in 1915.<sup>78</sup>

When the "visibly disturbed" Thawi told Coughlin that the Thai faced a forty-eight-hour deadline to accept British terms, the Detachment 404 commander urged delay. Coughlin then radioed the text of the British document directly to Washington, pointing out that although it referred to "Allied Military Authorities," no American had been involved. He called particular attention to clause 16 which allowed for a "military mission, to be appointed by the appropriate military authority to assist in the organization, training and equipment of the Siamese armed forces."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> SEAC staff meeting notes, 3 September 1945, Box 86, RG 331, USNA and Denning to Sterndale Bennett, 7 September 1945, printed as an appendix to Judith Stowe, "Relations Between Thailand and Britain, September 1945," in D. K. Bassett and V. K. King, eds., *Britain and Southeast Asia* (Hull: University of Hull Centre for South-East Asian Studies, 1986), 62–64.

<sup>77</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee, 6 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA. When Lieutenant General Sak entered the hall for the luncheon, at Mountbatten's request an attendant relieved the startled Thai of his bulky ceremonial sword. General Sak was concerned that he "had been tricked into surrendering." When Mountbatten subsequently had the sword returned, he "was delighted, but seemed completely bewildered by western inscrutability." Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular*, 260–61 and Ziegler, ed., *Personal Diary of Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten*, 239–40.

<sup>78</sup> Minutes of meeting, 4 September 1945, Box 86, RG 331, USNA. The twenty-one articles involved are given in Alec Peterson, "Britain and Siam: The Latest Phase," *Pacific Affairs* 19 (December 1946): 367–69.

<sup>79</sup> Coughlin to Donovan and Thai Committee, 4 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA. Coughlin revealed his unauthorized advice to Thawi in an undated message to Taylor and Palmer in Bangkok in Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, USNA.



In a follow-up “eyes only” message to Donovan the next morning, Coughlin complained that SEAC was “not an Allied Headquarters in fact.” He noted Timberman’s exclusion from the Thai negotiations, and decried the lack of an American political advisor in Kandy. The Thai, he reported, “were not sure of their position.” They were, he believed, “prepared to sign anything we as Allies told them to sign but they did not want to end up with some arrangement which gave the British special privileges.” Acknowledging his own lack of political expertise and the fact that the Thai were “relatively unimportant,” Coughlin argued that “for so little, we might do our country much good for years to come, [and] insure that Britain does not have a favorite position or at least [does] not [get it] without a struggle. Where we sit with the barest representation, these people with large staffs work day and night.”<sup>80</sup>

In order to better coordinate with the Thai, Coughlin invited a mission member who remained in Kandy, Thawi Chulasap, to stay at the OSS compound. In a “please burn when you have finished” message he informed Taylor and Palmer of developments, adding his hope that Pridi “is not intimidated easily and is not afraid to stall when in doubt.” In a subsequent message he suggested, “completely without authorization,” that since General Wheeler had not approved the proposed agreement, Pridi should not “be frightened with it,” adding that “his position would appear to be much stronger if no unsatisfactory agreements are signed.”<sup>81</sup>

Coughlin’s initial report set off alarm bells at the State Department. On the evening of 4 September, Far Eastern Division Chief Ballantine and Southeast Asia Section Chief Moffat called on Sir George Sansom of the British Embassy to point out that Mountbatten’s proposed agreement included objectionable clauses that were still the subject of ongoing Anglo-American negotiations. Sansom replied that Mountbatten must have been unaware of changes in the British position. He promised to request information from London and Kandy.<sup>82</sup>

The next day, the US Joint Chiefs instructed Wheeler to investigate and monitor the British-Thai negotiations. The message seemed to imply that Wheeler and his staff had been asleep at the switch, so it was, as Coughlin termed it, an “embarrassing query.” Although upset because Coughlin had sent his cable directly to Washington rather than through his headquarters, Wheeler could not deny its accuracy. Angry at being

<sup>80</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 5 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

<sup>81</sup> Coughlin to Taylor and Palmer, n.d., in Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, USNA.

<sup>82</sup> Memorandum of 4 September 1945, 740.00119PW/9-445, RG 59, USNA.

left out of the loop, he complained to Mountbatten, insisting that he be informed in advance of any additional negotiations.<sup>83</sup>

Mountbatten replied that because of the pressing need for early POW evacuation he intended to proceed unless the British Chiefs of Staff ordered otherwise. He noted that texts of the British proposal had been sent to London and the British Embassy in Washington. He added that the agreement would contain a clause indicating its interim status.<sup>84</sup>

Unappeased, Wheeler urged on 7 September that the agreement be limited to the matters of repatriating POWs and disarming and interning the enemy. Although General Sak had agreed to sign off on clauses he considered within the purview of his instructions, Mountbatten sought to placate Wheeler by promising that he would sign nothing until late the following day, just prior to his departure for Singapore. This would allow London and Washington time to resolve any differences.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile, the State Department, provided with new ammunition by Wheeler's messages, had acted to block the proposed signing. On the evening of 6 September, Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson phoned Ambassador Winant in London, asking him to seek Foreign Secretary Bevin's intervention. When Bevin could not be reached, Winant contacted Prime Minister Clement Atlee, who promised that London would stop Mountbatten from proceeding with the most controversial portion of the agreement. In fact, the Foreign Office also felt that Mountbatten had jumped the gun and embarrassed the British government. London, however, decided to reject American objections, lodged through the Combined Chiefs of Staff, to aspects of the military terms, and instructed Mountbatten to proceed with the pared-down proposal.<sup>86</sup>

Ironically, Pridi, on 7 September, had informed Mountbatten of Thai acceptance of all the British demands, a decision made before Thawi's return and before Taylor had an opportunity to relay Coughlin's call for delay. When Taylor did meet Pridi that afternoon, the latter explained that he had received the text by cable, through Jacques, accompanied by a strong warning that the sooner the Thai signed, the better. The message

<sup>83</sup> JCS to Wheeler, 5 September 1945, ABC 092 (US-Thailand) RG 165; Coughlin to Donovan, 6 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642; and Coughlin to Palmer and Taylor, 6 September 1945, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>84</sup> Mountbatten to Wheeler, 6 September 1945, Box 86, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>85</sup> Wheeler to Mountbatten, 7 September 1945, Box 11, Papers of Naval Aide, Harry S. Truman Library and Mountbatten to London, 5 September 1946, Box 86 and 7 September 1945, Box 87, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>86</sup> Ballantine to Acheson, 6 September 1945, 740.00119PW/9-645, RG 59, USNA; Moffat memorandum, 6 September 1945 and Winant to Acheson, 6 September 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1306-08; Joint Staff Mission to Chiefs of Staff, 6 September 1945 and Air Ministry Special Signals Office to Mountbatten, 6 September 1945, Box 86, RG 331, USNA. Also, Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 115-16.

from Mountbatten also assured that it was an interim agreement, and that the British troops would stay only so long as it took to repatriate the POWs and disarm the Japanese. Pridi told Taylor that he had assumed that the Americans were aware of the proposed pact and had approved it, so he had not solicited the views of the SIREN officers. With British troops already arriving, Pridi, as John Coast aptly put it, “thought it essential to show the Allies Siam’s good faith; hence he urged immediate acceptance of the ‘21 Points,’ to be followed by more leisurely pleas for clemency.” In a single day, 6 September, he had gained the approval of the Cabinet and the National Assembly.<sup>87</sup>

In reporting this approval to Mountbatten, Pridi did, however, make several requests. He asked that the British release frozen Thai assets and help safeguard Thai gold and funds in Japan. He suggested that Thai representatives be added to combined boards operating in the country and requested that the term “occupation troops” not be applied to the British force. Pointing out that the agreement contained no time lines on various restrictive measures, he expressed hope that “with the whole-hearted cooperation of the Siamese Government and people, the period will prove to be as short as possible.”<sup>88</sup>

While Pridi had accepted the British package, Timberman and Wheeler, now most eager to show their determination to defend American interests, continued to question aspects of even the truncated military agreement. In Denning’s view, this dispute had resulted “partly because of genuine though misguided suspicions of our intentions, and partly through petty jealousy inflamed by the ever sinister activities of OSS.” When the American Joint Chiefs decided against further protest, General Sak and Mountbatten, signed the four-article military agreement on 8 September.<sup>89</sup>

Mountbatten vented his displeasure on Coughlin at a meeting earlier that day. Pointing out that the initial OSS report on the Thai negotiations should have gone through Timberman, he accused Coughlin of putting “him in a very bad light, making it appear as though he was crook and

<sup>87</sup> Coughlin to Thai Committee relaying Taylor, 8 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA; John Coast, *Some Aspects of Siamese Politics* (New York, 1953), 30; and Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, 351.

<sup>88</sup> Pridi to Mountbatten, 7 September 1945, Folder 2093, Box 116, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>89</sup> Timberman to Wheeler, Wheeler to Mountbatten, and Wheeler to War Department, 8 September 1945, Box 11, Papers of Naval Aide, Harry S. Truman Library; memorandum of 7 September 1945, ABC 092, US-Thailand, RG 165; and “Temporary Military Agreement No. 1,” 9 September 1945, Box 87, RG 331, USNA. Denning is quoted from his 7 September message to Sterndale Bennett, appended to Stowe, “Relations Between Thailand and Britain, September 1945,” 64.

would have gotten away with a fast one were it not for the clever OSS boys overseas." He added that only "the end of the war and our previous happy relations" had restrained him from seeking Coughlin's recall. Timberman came to Coughlin's aid, expressing displeasure at his exclusion from the meetings with the Thai and the fact that he had not seen the proposed agreement until 5 September. Displaying surprise and calming down, Mountbatten acknowledged error, attributing the oversight to the heavy workload of the moment.<sup>90</sup>

In reporting this exchange to Donovan, Coughlin noted apologetically that his handling of the matter had been "very clumsy as both Wheeler and SAC [Mountbatten] have been in a rage over it." He added, however, that Mountbatten now recognized the need to include Timberman, while the latter "is aware that he must report them promptly or be beaten to it, which, I think, is the way it should be." Donovan immediately expressed approval of Coughlin's actions and offered to write letters in his defense.<sup>91</sup>

Nonetheless, the OSS found it expedient to recall Coughlin. Already at the end of August it had been suggested that he take leave to attend to his ill wife in the USA, and on 14 September he received orders. He penned a farewell letter to the absent Mountbatten, expressing regret for "the recent misunderstanding," adding that he "would go to any length to rectify our part in same if such was possible." Within four days Coughlin was on his way home, with a "victory lap" through Bangkok.<sup>92</sup>

Seni, meanwhile, had departed Washington on 30 August, stopping off for three days in London. Although the British had ruled out negotiations, he met with J. C. Sterndale Bennett, head of the Foreign Office's Far Eastern Department, a conversation which, among other things, touched on the rice issue. Like the British, Seni believed that Thailand's stocks totaled 1.5 million tons and he apparently supported the idea of a rice donation.<sup>93</sup>

On 6 September, Pridi had dispatched Konthi Suphamongkhon to intercept Seni and brief him on the decisions taken prior to his arrival in Bangkok. Assured by the British that Seni would visit Kandy as Mountbatten's guest, Konthi went there, only to learn that Seni had come to

<sup>90</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 8 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA. According to the British, a copy of the proposed agreement was sent to Timberman's office on September 4. See Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, 353.

<sup>91</sup> Coughlin to Donovan, 8 September 1945 and Donovan to Coughlin, 8 September, 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

<sup>92</sup> Donovan to Coughlin, 28 August 1945, Folder 849 and Donovan to Coughlin, 14 September 1945, Folder 847, Box 147, Entry 88; Coughlin to Mountbatten, 15 September 1945, Folder 228, Box 20, Entry 110; and Moscrip to George, 18 September 1945, Folder 318, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>93</sup> Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 115.

nearby Colombo, met with American Consul Oakes on 11 September, then flew on to Calcutta without contacting Mountbatten's headquarters. The British failure to keep tabs on Seni infuriated Denning, who naturally suspected American shenanigans. Konthi caught up with Seni in Calcutta on 14 September, and the two of them, together with Thawi Chulasap and Richard Greenlee, arrived at Don Muang in an American plane on the morning of 16 September.<sup>94</sup>

Seni described his journey home to his English-language biographer as a series of horrors. An engine on his plane caught fire upon landing in Cairo, and he was forced to spend the "cold desert night" on an army cot. In Karachi, no one received him, leaving him to spend the night in a bunk at an enlisted man's camp. When Seni arrived in Colombo, the British again failed to send anyone to meet him.<sup>95</sup>

Seni's anger over what he perceived as calculated insults surely influenced his decision to contact the American consul rather than communicating with Mountbatten's headquarters. During their two-hour meeting, Oakes no doubt told him of the signing of the Anglo-Thai military agreement. He also probably revealed the American intervention in the negotiations. Unaware of why the interim government in Bangkok had acted as it had, Seni obviously decided to avoid the British authorities in Ceylon. After talking with Konthi in Calcutta, he radioed Pridi through OSS channels on 15 September his view "that we should be firm in our negotiations for our cause is right; we should not be intimidated by anyone. [The] US government is opposed to many of the 21 British points presented to us."<sup>96</sup> Seni thus sounded the initial battle cry in a personal campaign to stop what he perceived as a British attempt to establish a protectorate over Thailand.

Already embarrassed by the fact that he had put his prestige on the line to gain approval for an agreement that the British then had partially withdrawn, Pridi now had to cope with a new prime minister who was supremely suspicious of British intentions. It appears that Pridi doubted that the Americans, who had played a relatively small role in prewar Thailand and had a miniscule postwar presence compared to the British,

<sup>94</sup> Taylor to Coughlin, 4 September 1945, Folder 1092, Box 99, Entry 139; Seni for Ruth and Coughlin to Palmer, 13 September 1945 and Coughlin to Palmer 14 September 1945, Folder 752, Box 124; Entry 88; and Palmer to Coughlin, 16 September 1945, Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. Notes of the staff officers' meeting of 14 September 1945 (Box 88, RG 331, USNA) reveals that the British realized Seni had been in Colombo only after he had already departed. Denning's reaction is contained in Denning to London, 11 September 1945, HS1-66, PRO. Greenlee was on a two-day farewell visit to Bangkok on his way back to the USA.

<sup>95</sup> Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 71–75.

<sup>96</sup> Seni to Pridi and Thawi, 15 September 1945, Folder 26660, Box 157, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

could be relied upon to intervene effectively on Thailand's behalf. Surely the need to preserve Anglo-American accord would, in the end, carry more weight in Washington than sympathy for Thailand's plight or American ambitions in the region. Washington's subsequent unwillingness to resume formal diplomatic relations prior to conclusion of an Anglo-Thai agreement and its refusal to reveal the specifics of its objections to British terms would reinforce this view. Accordingly, Pridi continued to incline to the view that it would be best to accept London's terms, restore amicable relations, then negotiate adjustments. In particular, in this way the Thai might more quickly shed the onerous financial burden of supporting a large British military force.

Prince Suphasawat, now serving as a liaison officer for the British forces, did his best to push Pridi, whom by now he had come to like as well as respect, in this direction. Considering the USA a minor player in the region, Suphasawat believed the Thai needed to take into account British interests and seek mutually beneficial cooperation. He also understood, as Seni seemingly did not, that Great Britain was a financially drained, declining power, in no position to maintain, much less expand, its empire. In a 1946 article he would liken Britain to "a rich old woman who has everything, and is just trying to keep from losing what she has already amassed." Thus, he believed that the Thai had much less reason to fear Britain than in the past. As a long-time resident of England, Suphasawat also appreciated the significance of the Labour Party's election victory in July. Although Labour Party leaders wished to maintain Britain's global role, they could ill afford to shoulder imperial burdens and still deliver promised social benefits to the home constituency. Suphasawat's efforts were undercut, however, by what he termed the "slowness and cautioness" of the Foreign Office and the fact that the Americans, with little at stake, "could afford to say heaps of things to please the Siamese."<sup>97</sup>

Seni had a better feel for the enhanced American sense of power and confidence, firsthand experience with the power of American public opinion, and considerable inside knowledge of Anglo-American wartime differences. Accordingly, he believed effective intervention could be induced. But even Palmer found Seni overly suspicious of the British, noting that he seemed unable "to discriminate between unreasonable and reasonable requests." He cited, for example, Seni's complaints about demands that the Thai police guard Japanese facilities. When Palmer

<sup>97</sup> Suphasawat letter to his wife of 19 September 1945 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 485–88 and a translation of his 1946 article under the heading: "Thai independence: Setting the record straight," *The Nation* (Bangkok), 25 September 1995. Also, Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*, 353.

pointed out that failure to provide such assistance would invite the dispatch of more British forces, Seni responded with the *non sequitur*: “I refuse to be intimidated.” Seni told Jacques that his government would resign rather than sign impossible terms, adding that he would “consider it a personal favor if it became necessary to resign!”<sup>98</sup>

The latter remark reflected the fact that Seni soon found his position at the head of a cabinet packed with Pridi’s loyalists quite uncomfortable. Northeastern populist politicians like Tiang Sirikhan and Bangkok upstarts like Sanguan Tularak – who had gone around the city just after the war dressed in American khakis, carrying a Colt. 45 in a shoulder holster and toting a tommy gun in a bag<sup>99</sup> – were not the sort that the aristocratic Seni preferred to associate with. They, in turn, viewed Seni as an ivory tower elitist who was entirely out of touch with Thailand’s political realities. As one of Pridi’s supporters later put it to an American diplomat, “Seni was given a good reception but he made contradictory speeches in the Assembly and antagonized everyone.”<sup>100</sup> Not surprisingly, Pridi’s most loyal followers continued to look to him to wield power behind the scenes as he had done during the Khuang government.<sup>101</sup> The Regent’s looming presence and overarching authority rankled the proud, thin-skinned Seni, fueling a personal animosity that would poison Thailand’s postwar politics.

Prince Suphasawat sought to play peacemaker between Thailand’s political factions as he made clear in an eloquent plea for unity at an 8 September press conference:

Some people have thought that the reason which prompted me to come into the country in this manner was to avenge the wrongs done to my friends and colleagues and class, as well as myself, in the past. I beg to say that such has not been my intention in the least. I wanted everyone to forgive and forget the past as I had myself, and to join hands together to work for the common aim that is the good of the Nation. Our country has been split assunder the past 13 years, let us all help to mend the breach. Our internal politics and conditions have not

<sup>98</sup> Palmer to Wilkinson, 3 October 1945, Folder ZM5000, Box 401, Entry 198, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>99</sup> Ripley, “Incident in Siam,” 271–72.

<sup>100</sup> Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 15 November 1945, Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College. The informant was Luang Sukhum (Pradit Sukhum), who had returned to Bangkok after several months on a Free Thai mission in Washington. A full memorandum on this conversation is in 892.00/11-2145, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>101</sup> French Consul in Bangkok (Millet) presciently commented in late November 1945 to the effect that Pridi “was an expert in working behind the scenes and letting other people take the rap. If the time comes for him to act openly he might not measure up.” Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 30 November 1945, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College.



been clean. The war has made it worse. It is our duty to work together to clean up all the dirt. Let us all work for posterity by first destroying the jealousy and ill-will against one another, and the idea of partisanship above the unity of the Nation, and secondly to try to gain knowledge which would make us understand one another's own weaknesses and our strength, so as to enable us to forgive and forget the past and then pull together for the cause of the Nation.<sup>102</sup>

Unfortunately, the Prince found his goal even harder to achieve than he had imagined because of the royalists' deep bitterness toward the Promoters and the jealousy of those who felt excluded by Pridi's clique. Also, army officers, already unhappy because the modern arms delivered by the Allies had gone to the Free Thai guerrillas not themselves, were further angered by a postwar demobilization spurred in part by serious budget concerns.<sup>103</sup>

Several former pro-royalist political prisoners emerged as spokesmen for the opposition. They showed little gratitude toward Pridi for their 1944 release or for such efforts at reconciliation as his removal of the controversial Adun from his role as national chief of police. By late November, these angry rightists, who considered Pridi a closet communist and "a virtual dictator," were using the term "Free Thai" as a pejorative term to describe "a small clique in control of the government," particularly men like Direk and the hated Adun, who were accused of having played "a dubious political game" with both sides during the war. An increasingly disillusioned Pridi would tell American representatives near the end of 1945 that "he should have been more ruthless" and left the troublesome political prisoners behind bars. He added that "whoever leads the country must not be afraid to take drastic and powerful measures, since kindness is always interpreted as a sign of weakness."<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> "A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of Thai Politics," 20 June 1947, Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 532.

<sup>103</sup> On demobilization see INCIDENT to Pape, 20 October 1945, Folder 783, Box 131, Entry 88, RG 226 and SEAC "Weekly Intelligence Review," 9 November 1945, Box 96, RG 331, USNA. On army discontent, see Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism Paternalism* (Bangkok, 1979), 25–28 and Thawi Bunyaket's comments in Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, 111–14. For a particularly paranoid view, see the 16 September 1945 letter of Maj. Akadej Bijayendrayothin, 892.00/11-2145, RG 59, USNA. On one hand he accused the British of supporting a royalist plot to place the Anglophile Prince Chula on the throne; on the other he asserted that Pridi was plotting to establish a communist state.

<sup>104</sup> Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 28 November 1945 and 27 December 1945, Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College; and "The Pradist Clique," 29 September 1945, XL 22760, RG 226, USNA which contains bitter opposition criticism of Pridi. Pridi's comments are paraphrased in Landon's letter of 27 December 1945 and in the SSU Intelligence Summary, 27 January 1945–2 January 1946, Folder IS October–December, Box 408, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA. On Adun's unpopularity, see "Thai Police," XL 22759, RG 226, USNA.



20. The two key figures in the Thai underground, Regent Pridi Phanomyong and Police General Luang Adun Adundetcharat toast with an American officer in the *sala* behind Pridi's official residence in September 1945. (Source: US National Archives)

While Pridi “co-operates with me in all sincerity and fairness thinking of nothing but the Nation,” Suphasawat complained in a letter to his wife in mid-September, “the so-called conservative party is very busy attacking me for not helping them.” As for Seni, an interview with the new premier confirmed that “he misunderstands everything and is under an awful illusion about Mani [Sanasen],” who, in Suphasawat’s view had grossly misrepresented the situation of the Free Thai in England. Further, Seni, “could not bring himself to believe that Great Britain’s ideas on Imperialism had changed.”<sup>105</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Suphasawat letter to his wife of 19 September 1945 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 486–88. He claimed to have been offered a choice of positions: army commander in chief, army chief of staff, chief of police, and ambassador to Great Britain. He described himself as torn between “power and honors” and “pauper existence but with my principle and personal honour preserved,” but inclined toward the latter. He asked his wife’s advice. Apparently she agreed, since the only position he accepted was

Still, there were British officials, whose ideas had not changed, and it appeared to the Americans that they were shaping policy. From Bangkok, Brinton wrote to his parents that Pridi had amazingly managed to

run the country, outsmart the Japs, [and] keep almost constant contact with us and the British. Now he has to be doubly smart to keep the British from stealing the whole country. Already the Limeys seem to have forgotten that the only reason that the Thais didn't openly attack the Japs was because the British didn't want them to. Now they want to treat them the same as the Japs.<sup>106</sup>

In a subsequent letter, Brinton complained that the British "have American jeeps and fly American planes but they treat us like we are trespassers in their sacred soil." Although he believed the British had reason to resent the OSS intervention that, in his view, had saved Thailand, "most of them don't know that; their officials just seem to be obnoxious for the pleasure they get out of it."<sup>107</sup>

Officials in Washington, too, had new reason for suspicion and concern. A Foreign Office memorandum presented to the State Department on 8 September expressed the desire to maintain a united front, but politely suggested that the Anglo-Thai settlement was none of Washington's business. London made no substantial concessions to Washington's concerns, standing by the "heads of agreement" from their 20 August proposal, as well as their demand that the Thai donate the 1.5 million-ton rice surplus they were thought to possess. Two days later, the British Embassy delivered a lengthy draft agreement that Denning would present to the Thai.<sup>108</sup>

Before the State Department could respond with a new list of caveats, Palmer, with whom the Thai were sharing British messages they received through Jacques, learned that the British were planning to press ahead with new negotiations in Kandy. When the Thai sought delay, Denning, suspicious of Seni and still fuming over the earlier American intervention, responded sharply, insisting that the delegation depart Bangkok on

as "ambassador at large" in 1946. Literature professor Prince Prem, whom Landon described "as English as an Englishman and [who] speaks Thai as an Englishman" (Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 13 December 1945, Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College) expressed a typical royalist view. He was, according to Landon, "very pessimistic about the country and feels that a bad government is in control, that half of the women of Bangkok are whores, and that it will take 50 or more years to get the nation back to the sound position it was in at the end of Chulalongkorn's reign [1910]."

<sup>106</sup> Dilworth C. Brinton letter to parents, 28 September 1945.

<sup>107</sup> Dilworth C. Brinton letter to parents, 10 October 1945. Even British diplomat Andrew Gilchrist (in "Bangkok Again," an unpublished memoir chapter which he provided to the author) acknowledged that there were "somewhat arrogant and selfish officers on General Evans' staff."

<sup>108</sup> British Embassy to State Department, 8 and 10 September 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1309-14, 1316-22.

21 September. He also emphasized that the agreement would be comprehensive, the Americans had received the text, and there could be no substantial revisions.<sup>109</sup>

In Washington, Moffat took up the matter with F. C. Everson of the British Embassy. Everson confirmed that London intended for Denning to present the text given to the State Department, even though American objections had not been met. He suggested only that London might subsequently modify some terms to meet US concerns. Everson made clear that London expected the agreement to go into effect immediately, without parliamentary ratification. Not satisfied by Everson's suggestion that London ultimately would address American concerns, the State Department sent Charles Yost, Bishop's replacement as American political advisor, to Kandy to argue for delay while US-British differences were ironed out.<sup>110</sup>

Yost, accompanied by General Timberman, met Denning on 24 September. The latter stated that his instructions did not authorize negotiations with the Americans and that he planned to present the agreement to the Thai delegates when they arrived later that day. After giving the Thai twenty-four hours to study it, any objections would be forwarded to London for response. Once this was received, he made clear, the Thai would be expected to sign without further quibbling. He insisted that the talks, which would be conducted in his own quarters, would be bilateral. Yost responded that locating the talks outside SEAC headquarters did not negate America's interest in aspects of the settlement. He suggested that he might reveal the specifics of American objections to the Thai mission.<sup>111</sup>

Irritated by the unilateral British march forward, the State Department took countermeasures suggested by Yost. Acting Secretary Acheson asked Ambassador Winant to request a delay that would permit further Anglo-American negotiations. He also authorized Yost to inform the Thai of the points to which Washington objected if Denning pushed the proposal through. As Moffat stressed to Everson, the USA had a "a deep interest in the long-range economic and security aspects of the proposed agreement."<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> George to Thai Committee, 17 September 1945, Folder 753, Box 124, Entry 88, RG 226 and Wilkinson to Donovan relaying Palmer, 20 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA.

<sup>110</sup> Moffat memorandum of conversation, 20 September 1945, 740.00119PW/9-2045 and Yost to Byrnes, 21 September 1945, 740.00119PW/9-2145, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>111</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 24 September 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 132–33.

<sup>112</sup> Wilkinson to Thai Committee, relaying State Department to Yost, 24 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA and Acheson to Winant, 25 September 1945 and Moffat memorandum of conversation, 25 September 1945, *FRUS* 1945: VI: 1334.

Palmer reported from Bangkok that the Thai mission, headed by Prince Wiwat (Wiwatthanachai Chaiyan), a financial expert, would not sign any agreement unless the USA approved. While the mission would officially communicate with Pridi via Jacques, the OSS provided it with a convenient back channel to the Regent, one which Palmer could monitor.<sup>113</sup>

Upon arrival in Kandy, Konthi, the assigned liaison with the Americans, sought out Yost in the hope of discerning the USA position. Yost would only say that the Americans had seen the proposal and were discussing it with the British. Konthi expressed concern about possible long-term economic controls and pointed out Thai opposition to any security arrangement with the British alone.<sup>114</sup>

The Thai were also concerned by the presence of a French mission intent on regaining the territories lost to Thailand in the 1941 border war settlement imposed by the Japanese. Although Jacques had urged the Thai to talk with the French, they steadfastly refused, declaring that the two countries were not at war and that any bilateral talks should be initiated through the French Legation in Bangkok. The Thai clearly feared British support for French demands and knew they could expect little help on this issue from the Americans, who, like the British, believed that the territories should be returned.<sup>115</sup>

The Thai mission would stick by its refusal to negotiate with the French, their opposition hardened by a French suggestion that the Thai should return the Emerald Buddha in addition to the disputed territories. This sacred relic, the centerpiece of the ornate temple at Bangkok's royal palace, had been captured by the Thai in Vientiane decades before the French established sway over Indochina.<sup>116</sup>

The Anglo-Thai discussions got off to a cordial start as Denning amiably accepted several Thai suggestions for minor modifications and forwarded them to London for consideration. Yost believed that American intervention had induced Denning to relax his schedule to allow the Foreign Office time to deal with Washington's objections.<sup>117</sup> In return,

<sup>113</sup> Palmer to Wilkinson, 20 September 1945, Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 88; and Palmer to Wilkinson, 3 October 1945, Folder ZM5000, Box 401 and Intelligence Summary, 17–24 September, Folder ZM-129, Box 396, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>114</sup> Oakes to Byrnes, 25 September 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1336.

<sup>115</sup> Palmer to Wilkinson, 3 October 1945, Folder ZM5000, Box 401, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA and Acheson to Merrell, 21 September 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1331.

<sup>116</sup> Wiwat to Seni in Palmer to Wilkinson, 3 October 1945, Folder ZM5000, Box 401, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA. Thailand's postwar relations with France are beyond the scope of this study. On Thai involvement with the Indochinese independence movements see Christopher E. Goscha's superb work *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954* (Richmond, Surrey, UK, 1999).

<sup>117</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 26 and 28 September 1945 and 1 October 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1339, 1341–42, 1347–48. Also Wiwat to Seni, 27 and 1 October 1945 in Palmer to

Washington backed off the threat to have Yost reveal its views to the Thai delegation and agreed to continue to defer the re-establishment of formal diplomatic relations with Thailand until the British were prepared to do so.

The question of credentials soon emerged as a sticking point in the Anglo-Thai talks, one on which Denning dug in his heels. He insisted that the Thai mission be given full authorization to sign an agreement, declaring at the beginning of October that discussions could not continue unless this matter were settled. Increasingly exasperated by what he viewed as delaying tactics, Denning, faced with a new list of proposed modifications from Bangkok, lost patience on 9 October. He declared that Britain expected Thailand, as a defeated country, to accept British terms. He adamantly opposed further compromise, including the Thai offer of 240,000 tons of free rice.<sup>118</sup>

British diplomats with experience in Thailand, such as A. C. S. Adams, questioned the wisdom of Denning's methods. Yost likewise deemed them "unwise," concluding that Denning's attempt "to frighten the Thai out of what he considers oriental procrastination and obstinacy, has only succeeded in convincing them that Britain has sinister designs for long-term control of Thailand." Because Denning had not conveyed to the Thai the type of reassurances about British intentions that London had offered Washington, Yost sought to lend a hand by personally advising the Thai delegates that "judging from Anglo-United States conversations, their fears of British long-term intentions are greatly exaggerated."<sup>119</sup>

The State Department subsequently circulated an astute assessment of British policy in Southeast Asia, apparently written by Yost. It observed:

Present British policy toward Siam is rather anomalous since it tends to be less conciliatory toward this independent state than toward dependent peoples. The reasons are (1) anger at Thai collaboration with the Japs and fear that they might unless discreetly controlled collaborate at some future date with another aggressor; (2) willingness to take advantage Siam's position as a defeated enemy to strengthen British political and economic influence there; [and] (3) a colonial habit of mind which consciously assumes that a South Asiatic people is

Wilkinson, 3 October 1945, Folder ZM500, Box 401, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA. Anglo-American exchanges on the Thai matter appear in *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1336–39, 1340–46, 1351–56.

<sup>118</sup> Wiwat to Seni, 1 October 1945 in Wilkinson, 3 October 1945, Folder ZM500, Box 401, Entry 108 and Incident to Pape (2 messages), 10 October 1945, Folder 783, Box 131, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. Also, Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 188.

<sup>119</sup> Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 119–20 and Yost to Moffat, 14 October 1945, Reel 17, SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA.



not really capable of managing its own affairs. This policy bids fair to alienate the Siamese without dominating them and this to work in the long run to the disadvantage of Britain not only in Siam but in SEA [Southeast Asia] as a whole.<sup>120</sup>

In the meantime, on 7 October, a Foreign Office representative, Hugh R. Bird, the prewar British consul in Chiang Mai, arrived in Bangkok to replace Jacques as political advisor to General Geoffrey Evans, the British commander. His immediate task, of course, was to convince the Thai to sign the peace agreement. In his new post, Bird would be dogged by poor health and widely circulated rumors that he had bolted his post at the onset of the war, failing properly to tend to the British residents.<sup>121</sup>

Andrew Gilchrist, who had gone into southern Thailand on a POW rescue mission for Force 136 at the end of the war,<sup>122</sup> shifted employment back to the Foreign Office to become Bird's right-hand man. Long prewar service as a diplomat in Bangkok and his wartime involvement with Force 136 gave Gilchrist a nuanced perspective on Thai affairs that neither his superiors in the Foreign Office, Denning, nor the British army officers in Bangkok shared. The Foreign Office and Denning tended to focus on Thailand's collaboration with Japan, refusing to accord much significance to Pridi's underground, the core of which Gilchrist believed "anti-Japanese from the start" and "animated by a genuine will to fight." The British army officers, in contrast, had been "welcomed with open arms," "entertained by the most charming princes and princesses," and "regaled by their hosts (socialites who had never seen a jungle in their lives) with stories of the gallantry of the Siamese Resistance Movement and the humanitarian work of the Siamese for allied prisoners." The soldiers knew nothing of the earlier acts of the Phibun regime, including "the plunder and ill-treatment of British and American nationals and

<sup>120</sup> Byrnes circular, "British Policy in Southeast Asia," 29 October 1945, 740.00119PW/10-2945, RG 59, USNA.

<sup>121</sup> Palmer to Wilkinson, 7 October 1945, Folder 783, Box 131, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. Also, 18 December, 23 December, and 31 December 1945 entries in Andrew Gilchrist's diary and "Bangkok Again," which he provided to the author. According to Gilchrist, the Chiang Mai allegation had led the British Army to reject Bird's services, but the Foreign Office had investigated the affair and found him blameless. Gilchrist termed it "an utterly unfair and indeed, despicable charge of cowardice made against him by some British people who had chosen to disregard for some time the instructions or advice he gave them." Although only forty-eight, Bird, a heavy smoker, would die of a heart attack within six months of his arrival in Bangkok, on 16 April 1946. His obituary appears in the Bangkok newspaper *Liberty*, 18 April 1946.

<sup>122</sup> Gilchrist describes his mission in peninsular Thailand in *Bangkok Top Secret*, 198–201, 222–31.



business firms,” thus they tended to view their hosts through rose-colored glasses.<sup>123</sup>

Gilchrist further believed that London and Washington officials were equally off base in their approaches to Thailand. He told American Major James “Jim” Thompson that he considered the British stance “too harsh” and the American attitude “unduly optimistic.” Gilchrist admitted that he “was unable to forget the rather rough treatment he and other British internees had received during the early days of their confinement,” recalling that a police officer currently serving as a secretary to Seni, “used to brandish his pistol at him during questioning.”<sup>124</sup>

After an initial meeting with Pridi on 10 October, Gilchrist noted in his diary that the Regent, whom he had earlier viewed as the intellectual type, had transformed himself into a “man of action.” Gilchrist, despite his disapproval of Dening’s approach, advised the Regent in effect to “stop arguing about the bloody treaty – sign it and argue later on a proper diplomatic basis.”<sup>125</sup>

Seni wanted to respond to Dening’s ultimatum by asking the British to put in writing that they were imposing terms on a defeated nation, hoping thereby to stimulate American intervention. Cooler heads prevailed, though. Instead, the government submitted a bill to the National Assembly asking approval of British terms, including the controversial 1.5-million-ton rice donation, on condition of some face-saving British concessions. After the Assembly approved the measure on 12 October, Bangkok instructed its mission in Kandy to bow to British demands regarding credentials and free rice.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Gilchrist, “Cross Purposes in Siam.” SOE officer Peter Kemp described the culture shock of Bangkok social life after several weeks in Northeast Thailand in *Alms for Oblivion*, 70. “I had never thought our frontier life uncomfortable,” he wrote, “but I was staggered by this sudden projection into luxury, and felt awkward, and scruffy in my faded battle dress beside the trim little Siamese and the British in their well-tailored uniforms. The women dancing under the coloured Chinese lanterns or gliding across the lawns in the clear, warm, scented moonlight seemed each one an Aphrodite of voluptuous grace and sensuality. Sadly I noted that none of them showed the least interest in me.” On a subsequent stay in Bangkok (described on pages 74–75), he dived into the social whirl and indulged in happy sexual adventures, aided by the good offices of “a middle-aged nobleman who had rendered valuable and hazardous service to the Allies during the Japanese occupation,” no doubt Prince Suphasawat.

<sup>124</sup> Thompson to Moscrip, 8 November 1945, Folder 777, Box 129, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. Another source of irritation to Gilchrist was Thai failure to impound and return all the motor cars owned by the British Legation. When told by a Thai official that former Premier Phibun had taken them, Gilchrist responded: “What had happened to the Thai Embassy cars in London? Had Churchill got them?” Gilchrist diary, 11 October 1945.

<sup>125</sup> Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, 198–201, 222–31 and early October entries in Gilchrist’s diary.

<sup>126</sup> Yost to Moffat, 15 October 1945, Reel 17, SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA and Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 119–20.

On 15 October, Pridi, in his role as regent, dissolved the National Assembly and called for new elections. He cast this as an effort to clear out former premier Phibun's sympathizers who had begun to criticize the government for "selling Siam to foreign countries." It was no coincidence that the arrest of Phibun and several other Thai on war crimes charges, a move apparently taken largely to impress the Allies and one with which some parliamentary critics could be expected to take issue, occurred on the same day. The dissolution also pre-empted a possible no-confidence vote, as public dissatisfaction with disorder, inflation, and corruption was rising. The dissolution, coupled with the conditions the Assembly had established in regard to the negotiations with Great Britain, also gave the Thai a potential excuse for further delay since a new Assembly would not be in place for at least ninety days.<sup>127</sup>

Before any diplomatic progress could be made in Kandy, Denning had to fly to Java to help cope with a crisis there. His stay was prolonged and British headquarters were shifting to Singapore, so the Thai mission flew home to Bangkok. There, Bird had tried to advance matters on 28 October by providing Pridi with a letter stating that the British had taken into account the contribution of the Free Thai in establishing their minimum demands. He added that he was "empowered to say that when those terms have been accepted you will find His Majesty's Government reasonable in their application and in their ultimate presentation to the public in the eventual agreement." This, however, failed to impress the recalcitrant Seni.<sup>128</sup>

Historian Nicholas Tarling argues convincingly that during this period the British missed their best opportunity to reach an early settlement by refusing to consider modifications put forward by Pridi aimed at limiting Thai financial liability for support of British troops and compensation for Allied losses. In return for satisfaction on these issues, Pridi said he would approve the agreement as falling within the parameters set by the dismissed Assembly. Instead of compromising, however, the British fretted

<sup>127</sup> Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 119; Songsri, *Thai-British-American Relations*, 249; Landon memorandum, 21 November 1945, 892.00/11-2145, RG 59 and SSU intelligence summary, 16-22 October 1945, Folder ZM-139, Box 396, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA. On the arrest of war crimes suspects see Palmer to Pape and Wilkinson, 17 October 1945, Folder 783, Box 131, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>128</sup> A copy of Bird's letter of 28 October 1945 appears in Pridi, *Political and Military Tasks of the Free-Thai Movement*, 49. See Seni's comments in Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, 165 and Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 87-91. In the latter book, Seni is said to have suggested that Pridi might have been willing to accept British terms in return for their help in destroying Phibun and the Thai army. Then, moving from the semi-plausible to the absurd, Seni speculates that this would have been done because it would clear the way for Pridi to lead a communist revolution to liberate Thailand from the British occupation.



21. Thai troops march past Bangkok's Democracy Monument during the Free Thai "Victory Parade" of 25 September 1945. (Source: US National Archives)

over the legality of such action and criticized Pridi's effort to bargain as "blackmail." Consequently, the stalemate continued.<sup>129</sup>

In addition to their role as back channel communicators for the Thai mission, American officers in Bangkok, now under the aegis of the new Strategic Services Unit (SSU) of the War Department in the wake of the 1 October dissolution of the OSS, had busied themselves with public relations activities. Field reports about Thai unhappiness over the British occupation and the "twenty-one demands" had convinced Washington of the need for "immediate psychological warfare operations both black and white." Donovan reported on 14 September that Moffat had given the State Department's sanction for the dispatch of two or more OWI men to Bangkok, ostensibly for "investigating and assessing Japanese

<sup>129</sup> Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 119–21. Gilchrist in "Cross Purposes in Siam" agrees that "some progress might have been possible" at this point in the negotiations had it not been for Dening's absence.

propaganda activities," but also to lay groundwork for an American information office.<sup>130</sup>

Pridi had staged a victory parade as a visible show of Thai support for the Allied cause on 25 September. While the British refused to participate, the OSS contingent wanted to join the festivities. The American command blocked participation in the parade, but the two ranking American OSS officers, Palmer and Thompson, watched the two-hour event from a place of honor near the reviewing stand, while other OSS men viewed the proceedings from a nearby second-floor balcony. The Thai army band led the way, followed by three army battalions, marine and air force units, police officers, leaders of the guerrilla movement, British and American Free Thai officers, and up-country guerrilla units.<sup>131</sup>

Although OSS photographers were on hand for the parade, American journalists were slow in reaching Bangkok, to the chagrin and embarrassment of the OSS contingent. Lawson advised Kandy that Thai officials were "ready to go all out for correspondents" and noted a "bottomless well of amazing OSS stories." He encouraged headquarters to "entice the press by any means," promising that "the best stories in theater from any angle [are] waiting to be written."<sup>132</sup>

Darrell Berrigan, who had escaped from Thailand to Burma in December 1941, apparently arrived first, in the latter part of September.<sup>133</sup> He was followed in October by the famous correspondent Edgar Snow. The financially astute Brinton, who had mastered the art of profiting from shifting currency exchange rates and had developed business relationships with marketers of Thai crafts, took Snow shopping. MacDonald provided the anti-colonialist writer with the OSS view

<sup>130</sup> Donovan, Little, and Thai Committee to Coughlin and Withrow, 14 September 1945, Reel 128, M1642, USNA. A few days after his long session with Seni, Oakes (15 September 1945, 740.00119PW/9-1545, RG 59, USNA) reported that after "nearly four years of peculiarly benign form of Jap occupation Thai are viewing with trepidation inception of 'Allied occupation' which they feel promises to be much more rigorous and restricted than that from which they have just been freed." He noted resentment over the largely Indian composition of the large British occupation force and suspicion it would "be maintained to assure treatment of Thailand like enemy territory."

<sup>131</sup> Coughlin to Ryan, 12 September 1945 and Coughlin to Palmer, 14 September 1945, Folder 752, Box 124; and Moscrip to Wilkinson, 19 September 1945; Palmer to Wilkinson, 21 September 1945, and Palmer to Wilkinson, 23 September 1945, Folder 780, Box 130, Entry 88; and MacDonald to George and Moscrip, 29 September 1945, Folder ZM5000, Box 401, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA. Also, Dilworth Brinton letter to parents, 28 September 1945, copy in the possession of the author. The British in Bangkok did issue a favorable news story about the parade ("Allied Officers Trained Siamese Resistance Movement," 3 October 1945, Box 91, RG 31, USNA).

<sup>132</sup> George to Delhi, 14 September 1945, Folder 752, Box 124, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>133</sup> Berrigan's presence is mentioned in Palmer to Wilkinson, 3 October 1945, Folder ZM500, Box 401, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

of the postwar Anglo-Thai negotiations and arranged interviews with Pridi and Seni during Snow's brief stopover. With characteristic verbal panache, Seni dramatically vowed that he would not "sell Siam into slavery." Snow's article, "Secrets from Siam," infuriated the British when published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in January 1946, but it appeared too late to have any impact on the British-Thai negotiations.<sup>134</sup>

While the OSS/SSU sought to maintain good relations with Pridi and his Free Thai allies, Taylor had also charged the unit with analyzing the Thai political scene more broadly by listening to the views of those at odds with the present leadership. As part of this effort, Dwight Bulkley went to interview former Premier Phibun on 11 October at his "palatial" home in the suburb of Bang Khen a few days prior to his arrest on war crimes charges. Like most foreigners, Bulkley succumbed to Phibun's charm, faithfully recording his apologia, which echoed the line established earlier in a long release to Thai newspapers.<sup>135</sup>

Of all the Americans in Bangkok immediately after the war, it was Lawson, who worked for the counterintelligence (X-2) section, who cast the coolest analytical eye on the situation. In his final report of 9 October he wrote:

During the war the Siamese Government played a two-sided game with extreme skill. If the Japanese had won the war, the Siamese Government would have been in a strong position with the Japanese Government and would have been able to prove the great assistance which that government had given Japan. With the Allies winning the war, the Siamese Government was still in a position to point out to the Allies all the assistance and information which they had given the Allies, even though legally there were the allies of an enemy nation.

The Siamese Government has been so successful in this diplomatic maneuver that today it is difficult to know where the true sympathy of the Siamese lay. They are now undoubtedly whole-heartedly for the Allies since they are the victors.<sup>136</sup>

Lawson warned that the Thai seemed to be continuing this "two-faced policy," noting that they carefully kept "American and British forces separated during social festivities and on innumerable occasions seem to be

<sup>134</sup> Snow's notes from Bangkok are included in "Diaries 1942-1945," Edgar Snow Papers, University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC) Library. His article appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* of 12 January 1946. British anger over this article and a subsequent one by Virginia Thompson, "Siam and the Great Powers," *Foreign Policy Reports* 34 (March 1946): 322-31, led the Foreign Office to ask two of its officers, Alec Peterson and Andrew Gilchrist, to write rebuttals.

<sup>135</sup> Bulkley's report of 12 October 1945, XL 23044 and an English translation of Phibun's long letter to the Thai press of September 1945 in Folder ZMM 90, Box 408, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>136</sup> Robert W. Lawson, "General Report of the Situation in Bangkok," 9 October 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

driving a wedge between these countries.” Of the lavish hospitality the Allies had received, he added, “In several cases our most ardent hosts on investigation turned out to have been equally ardent hosts to the Japanese during their stay in the country.”<sup>137</sup>

Lawson also took a detached view of the British role. While granting that they were “endeavoring to obtain certain concessions which will be advantageous to their postwar trade,” he insisted that their military presence had been necessary to disarm the Japanese. Lawson found the British “extremely fair in the surrender proceedings” and recognized that British were not “endeavoring to establish themselves in such a way that they can eventually take over the country.”<sup>138</sup>

Although the State Department had agreed to defer re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Thai until the British completed their negotiations, the presence of British diplomats in Bangkok provided a convenient pretext for sending in State Department officials. Accordingly, it dispatched Yost and Kenneth Landon to reopen the American Legation.

Landon arrived on 9 November, and initially stayed with the SSU group, now commanded by Thompson, at Suan Kulab Palace. Yost arrived three days later. On 13 November, they met Bird and Gilchrist. Landon soon clashed with the former, whom he described as “a short Abe Lincoln complete with beard but without the compassion.” He recounted the exchange in this fashion:

“The Thai were on the wrong side,” [Bird] pontificated. “Not a Thai lifted a voice to resist.” So, I said, “No doubt *you* yourself would be a very brave man, Mr. Bird, with a Gurkha sitting on your chest and a knife at your throat!” “There should have been some resistance,” he said. “There was in other countries.” “Haven’t you heard of the Siamese underground?” I asked. “Oh that!” He said loftily. “That was nothing.” “Well, I don’t know about you British,” I said. “We of course had an effective intelligence service, very effective in fact.” That tore it.<sup>139</sup>

Landon summarized British policy as aimed at bringing Thailand “down to the level of Burma and Malaya.” He granted that a punitive policy might be “partly deserved because there is no question about it a lot

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.      <sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 13 November 1945, Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Papers, Wheaton College. Landon’s travel and the circumstances of his arrival were reported in other letters in the same file. Landon’s impression of Bird was undoubtedly prejudiced to some extent by the fact that the latter thought Landon’s father had written his books on Thailand. Gilchrist, meanwhile, found Landon every bit as irritating as Landon found Bird. He later remarked in a footnote to his 1946 article “Cross Purposes in Siam” of “ex-missionaries who had done well out of writing books on Siam, the number of books written by missionaries about a country being invariably in inverse proportion to the number of converts they make.”

of sharp dealing going on . . . But it doesn't seem to me that punishment is of value unless it has a progressive rather than a regressive effect."<sup>140</sup>

Landon's comment reflected his own sense of disillusionment about Thai politics and the general atmosphere of postwar society. He blamed the members of the People's Party for setting a bad example with "corrupt practices," noting that "inflation has driven almost everyone to engage in some form of graft. There is a general breakdown in morals and honesty. Night clubs abound." He lamented the decline of traditional culture and the fact that "most of the people are more interested in cabarets."<sup>141</sup>

With the Anglo-Thai negotiations suspended, rumors swirled through Bangkok that the British would impose an indefinite, yearly rice levy of 1.5 million tons, that British tanks were coming, and that Thailand would become a British colony. The fact that the British sent in additional troops and vehicles of the Seventh Indian Division in mid-October fueled such rumors and led Pridi to ask if they were planning to use Thailand as a base for operations in Indochina. Journalists called on the government to clarify the situation, but to no avail.<sup>142</sup>

SSU reported the concerns of Thai officials that the government would need to borrow money from the Allies in order to meet the British terms. The cost of procuring rice held in private hands, coupled with payment for damage to Allied property, "would place a severe burden on the country for two generations," they complained. Seni estimated the cost of the rice purchases alone would amount to 750 million baht, over three times the national annual budget.<sup>143</sup>

Although Seni and others continued to look to the USA for salvation, it seemed, even to the Americans in Bangkok, that Washington had dropped the ball. "If it has been decided by the State Department that Siam, whose fate is linked with US prestige and the political future of South East Asia is to be allowed to fall gently into economic slavery to the British [I] would like to be so informed so that I can stop kidding my Thai friends and myself," Bulkley complained in a message to Kenneth Wells at the end of October. He reported "Very widespread fatalism regarding

<sup>140</sup> Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 24 November 1945, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College.

<sup>141</sup> Kenneth to Margaret Landon, 15 and 21 November 1945, Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College.

<sup>142</sup> SSU intelligence summary, 29 October–6 November 1945, Folder ZM130, Box 396, Entry 108, RG 226 and SEAC war diary, 17, 19, 20, 21 October 1945, Box 93, RG 331, USNA.

<sup>143</sup> Bulkley to Burnette, 23 October 1945 and Bulkley to Wells, 29 October 1945, Folder 783, Box 131, Entry 88; and Intelligence Summaries of 23–29 October and 29 October–6 November 1945, Folder ZM-138, Box 396; and 21–28 November 1945, Folder ZM 41–2, Box 407, Entry 108, RG 226. Also, SEAC war diary, 17, 19, 20 and 21 October 1945, RG 331, USNA.



subservience to the British and lack of US interest other than in moral support. Siam is being sold down the river for peanuts.”<sup>144</sup> In a similar vein, an SSU assessment near the end of November noted that the Thai admired the USA “because of its economic power, its conduct of the war, its treatment of the Philippines, and because of the democratic ideals which it proclaims,” but felt “deserted” by the Americans.<sup>145</sup>

In reporting to the State Department, Yost emphasized the importance of the rice issue, on which Pridi felt he needed some concession to assuage public sentiment and demonstrate that the settlement had been negotiated, not simply dictated to a defeated nation. Pridi claimed the actual surplus of unbroken rice totalled only 800,000 tons, an estimate the Americans tended to accept, while Bird placed the figure at 1,700,000.<sup>146</sup> The British promised modifications if “permanent dislocation” of the Thai economy were threatened, but the Thai side wanted more than oral assurance. Yost suggested that Washington either strongly protest the apparent “obstinate” British intention to act without regard to US views, or propose that the British put in writing their willingness to re-negotiate if the burden proved too heavy.<sup>147</sup>

On 22 November, the Thai cabinet set out its position. It would continue to insist on creation of an Allied Claims Commission to determine liability issues, limits on Thai responsibility for supporting British troops, a clear statement that the British did not intend to take over administration of Thai territory, and some recognition of the rice donation. If the British refused, the Thai would announce that they were bowing to a British ultimatum.<sup>148</sup>

SSU analyst Bulkley worried that British intransigence and American inaction were “driving the Siamese, under the leadership of Luang Pradit [Pridi], to much closer ties with French Indo China, Burma, Indonesia and India on a revolutionary basis. Left to fight for themselves the Siamese may decide that their own sovereign future is linked with the struggle of all South East Asia against white domination.” Basis for this supposition was Pridi’s 15 November revelation to MacDonald of his concept of a federation of Southeast Asian states, initially including Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Pridi told MacDonald that he had shared this vision

<sup>144</sup> Bulkley to Wells, 29 October 1945, Folder 783, Box 131, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>145</sup> SSU intelligence summary, 21–28 November 1945, Folder ZM41-2, Box 407, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>146</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 13 November 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1369–70.

<sup>147</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 21 November 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1370–71.

<sup>148</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 24 November 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1374–75. Prince Wiwat told Yost and Landon on 12 December that there was little expectation that the British would accept the Thai proposals, but that the effort was made for domestic political reasons. See Yost to Byrnes, 12 December 1945 on page 1387 of the same volume.

with area nationalist leaders “since his student days,” and acknowledged his current contacts with representatives of Cambodian and Vietnamese nationalist groups in Bangkok.<sup>149</sup>

Meanwhile, Yost and Landon feared that pro-British elements hostile to Pridi were attempting to take advantage of public discontent to bring down the cabinet. They suspected official British connivance in this as, according to Yost, Bird had indicated “that British dislike Revolutionary Party leaders almost without exception” and would like to see a better government. Similar views were expressed in a contemporary British intelligence report that criticized Pridi for “his domineering manner toward the cabinet” and favoritism toward friends, “some of whom are not fit for any responsible position.” Great Britain, Yost suspected, was “using peace terms to strengthen its already preponderant political and economic influence in Siam.” Accordingly, he favored early resumption of formal US relations with Thailand.<sup>150</sup>

Although not yet ready to take that step, Acting Secretary of State Acheson on 29 November handed the British Ambassador Lord Halifax an *aide-memoire* insisting that the USA should not be accorded secondary status in the settlement with Thailand simply because of its refusal to acknowledge the Thai declaration of war. In particular it demanded US

<sup>149</sup> Bulkley “Survey of Trends in Siam,” 9 December 1945, XL 37109 and MacDonald to Bluechel, 16 November 1945, Folder 777, Box 129, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. That Pridi’s group strongly sympathized with the revolutionary movements in French Indochina was well known at the time. MacDonald, Thompson, and other OSS officers were also fully sympathetic to the Indochinese nationalists. See, Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 142–80 and E. Bruce Reynolds, “Staying Behind in Bangkok: The OSS and American Intelligence in Post-war Thailand,” *The Journal of Intelligence History*, 2 (Winter 2002): 21–48.

<sup>150</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 24 November 1945, FRUS 1945, VI: 1375–76 and “SEAC Weekly Intelligence Review,” 17 November 1945, Box 98, RG 331, USNA. The SSU intelligence summary of 21–28 November 1945 (Folder ZM41-2, Box 407, Entry 108, RG 226) noted: “It is felt that the drastic treaty terms which threaten Siam with bankruptcy are demanded in order to cause the present government to collapse, and that if the royalist return were effected, the terms would be considerably reduced.” However, while many individual Britons were skeptical of the Thai leadership and influenced by the complaints of opposition figures, there is no evidence that British officials were seeking purposefully to undermine the government, even though their policies may inadvertently have had such an effect. Interestingly, Khuang Aphaiwong, who was a personal friend of Gilchrist, was touted in the SEAC intelligence review above as a leading candidate for leadership based on his “sound” politics and personal popularity. When Pridi became prime minister in late April 1946, Yost (Yost to Secretary of State, 22 March 1946, 892.00/3-2246, RG 59) hailed this, but suggested “the British will be less pleased because they found Khuang more amenable than Pradit.” Yet, Gilchrist responded to Pridi’s ascent in his diary entry of 21 March 1946: “Good thing.” Daniel Fineman, in *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu, 1997), 31–36, makes much of a later British perception that Khuang had become the favorite of the Americans.

participation in an Allied claims commission that would determine Thai liabilities and assess its ability to meet demands for financial restitution and rice deliveries without unduly damaging its economy. Dangling a carrot to induce British agreement, Acheson suggested that if London responded favorably, the State Department would tell the Thai that it would raise no further objections.<sup>151</sup>

The Foreign Office agreed that obligations placed on Thailand should not be so excessive as to require foreign loans, and accepted equal footing for the USA on an Allied claims commission. London insisted, however, that the rice issue not come under its purview.<sup>152</sup>

The other issue still under active dispute between Washington and London concerned the semantics of two clauses related to postwar security. The Americans did not object to the language of the second, which required the Thai to participate in security arrangements negotiated through the United Nations, but considered the previous clause emphasizing "the importance of Siam" to the defense of surrounding areas as the language of "protectorate." They insisted on combining the two.<sup>153</sup>

Bird and Gilchrist, who understood the domestic political pressures the Thai government faced, were calling for flexibility on both sides in the Anglo-Thai negotiations. They also realized that Thai rice stocks were so widely dispersed in private hands that the British could never obtain the needed quantity without payment. The Thai government naturally would attempt to meet its obligation by buying rice at the lowest possible price. Under such circumstances, the merchants who held it would seek greater return on a black market that the government would have difficulty controlling, even if it tried — by no means a given.<sup>154</sup>

Perhaps chastened by his experiences in Java, Denning, too, had come to recognize the untenable nature of the British approach. He suggested extending delivery time for Thai rice and offering payment for half of it. He warned:

<sup>151</sup> *Aide-memoire* of 28 November 1945 and Acheson memoranda of conversations, 29 November 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1377–81.

<sup>152</sup> British *aide-memoire* of 10 December 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1385–86.

<sup>153</sup> The original wording of the clauses in question appear in *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1317–18. On the dispute over them, see in the same volume: American *aide-memoire* of 26 September 1945 1336–38; British *aide-memoire*, 6 October 1945, 1351–52; Byrnes to Winant, 12 October 1945, 1355–56; and American *aide-memoire*, 12 November 1945, 1373.

<sup>154</sup> According to SSU intelligence summary, 6–12 December 1945, Folder IS, October–December, Box 408, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA, Bird emphasized the need for mutual compromise directly, if unofficially, in a conversation with Prince Wiwat. Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 122 reports the views on the rice issue of W. A. M. Doll, who had been reinstated as financial advisor to the Thai government.

We are not in a strong position. There is a crying need for rice to avert famine and we are not getting it. American attitude tends to encourage Siamese to employ delaying tactics. We are presumably not prepared to apply sanctions and our forces in Siam are needed elsewhere. We have many other preoccupations in the Far East and the whole of the Far East is aware of them. Our pound of flesh may in the end cost us too much.<sup>155</sup>

Despite his qualms about the British position, though, Denning still sought to bluff the Thai into signing on the dotted line. He transmitted to Bangkok a letter dated 3 December in which he described the British decision not to “impose a treaty of peace” on Thailand as “an act of grace.” He minimized the role of the Thai underground, asserting that it “in fact made no substantial contribution to the cause of the Allies and has taken no part in the vast sacrifices made by them and in particular by the United Kingdom.” He reiterated his refusal to make substantive changes in terms which the British government considered Thailand had “an inescapable obligation to accept.”<sup>156</sup>

Appalled by Denning’s approach, Gilchrist convinced Bird to fly to Singapore to make the case for flexibility. In his diary, he commented that Denning was “fixed on the same old policy *without believing it can succeed* – poor show.” As former Force 136 Siam Country Section Chief Peter Pointon had pointed out in a recent message to Gilchrist, whether British policy was aimed at “obtaining justice” or “preparing a good foundation for post-war trade,” it was achieving neither.<sup>157</sup>

The Thai delegation left for Singapore on 10 December, where Denning reiterated his hard line at a meeting the following day. He refused further negotiations and warned that terms might be stiffened if the Thai delayed.<sup>158</sup>

When Prince Wiwat returned to Bangkok for consultations on 12 December, he briefed Yost and Landon, but under their instructions

<sup>155</sup> Quoted in Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 121.

<sup>156</sup> A copy of Denning to Bird, 3 December 1945 is found in Section 800, Box 57, RG 84, USNA.

<sup>157</sup> Gilchrist Diary, 5 and 8 December 1945. In a note to the author of 24 November 1990, Gilchrist noted: “In the handling of the Thai negotiations Denning had absolutely no one with him, no one who spoke Thai. He thought of the Thai as simple children and was provoked to rage when they outsmarted him in the perfectly legitimate gambit of complaining to the Americans about British imperialism.” Interestingly, the Thai promoted the “simple children” image themselves as a means of evoking sympathy. Seni used the metaphor to excuse Thai capitulation to the Japanese and General Sak Senanarong did the same in a conversation with Denning in Kandy on 6 September. See Denning to Sterndale Bennett, 7 September 1945 printed as an appendix to Stowe, “Relations Between Thailand and Britain, September 1945,” 63.

<sup>158</sup> Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 169 and Songsri, *Thai–British–American Relations*, 262–63.

they could offer no advice on what the Thai should do. Yost construed Denning's approach as an attempt to push through the agreement "without further reference to our views." He urged that Washington immediately resume diplomatic relations with Thailand and issue a statement to the British and Thai that "whether or not the agreement is signed in present form we will continue to resist any infringement [on] Siamese sovereignty, any imposition [of] undue burdens on her economy and any unilateral restrictions on her intercourse with the rest of the world."<sup>159</sup>

For his part, Pridi had hoped that the British-facilitated return of young King Ananda Mahidol on 5 December would distract public opinion away from the negotiations and that the King's presence ultimately would shore up the legitimacy of the government as it grappled with postwar problems and moved to create a new constitution. While the move had positive short-term effect, the return of the reluctant and inexperienced monarch would backfire in the end.<sup>160</sup> The royalist opposition had its own plans for the King and would labor tirelessly to drive a wedge between him and Pridi.<sup>161</sup>

For his part, Prime Minister Seni resorted to a new tactic to stimulate American intervention in the Anglo-Thai negotiations. He had told MacDonald on 15 November of his desire that the British demands be "publicized before the world," and in early December Seni allowed United Press correspondent Stanley Rich to view files on the Anglo-Thai

<sup>159</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 12 December 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1387–88.

<sup>160</sup> SEAC "Fortnightly Intelligence Review," 31 December 1945, Folder ZM-140, Box 407, Entry 108, RG 226. In describing a dinner with the King, his brother (his successor, King Phumipol Adunyadej) and their mother, Landon found the two brothers "immature and very boyish in their interests and comments. Princess Sangwan has sheltered them to such an extent that they apparently have not brushed up against enough life to know what it is about. But neither of them is dull. They are both intelligent and I have the feeling that if they got away from their mother they would begin to develop." Their conversation, he noted, "was chiefly about the things they did not like in Siam. They didn't like the climate, the ceremony, the food, the water, nor their playmates." (Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 11 January 1946, Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College). In his diary, Gilchrist (9 January 1946) described the young King as "*gauche*," commenting that he "doesn't know how to behave like a king or even a normal social being."

<sup>161</sup> Yost to Secretary of State, 7 May 1946, 892.00/5-746, RG 59, USNA reported: "For some time past M. R. Seni Pramroj and others have been seeking to discredit Luang Pradit [Pridi] in the eyes of the King. Apparently some success has been achieved where previously Pradit had enjoyed considerable friendship with the King." In a follow-up message a month later (Yost to Secretary of State, 5 June 1946, 892.00/6-546, RG 59, USNA), Yost affirmed this "success," noting that "Both the British Minister and I have noted marked coolness on part of King and his mother in talking of Pradit. Every effort is obviously being made to align them with opposition and to use Crown against *coup d'état* group."

negotiations. By the time Rich's story appeared in the American press on 5 December, the *New York Herald Tribune* had already published a piece by A. T. Steele alleging that the British terms would put Thailand "under virtual mortgage to the British Empire." In a story released on 11 December, United Press reported the September American intervention in the Kandy negotiations. As Seni had hoped, this flurry of reports inspired commentators and editorial writers to take up Thailand's cause. Radio news analyst Richard Eaton featured Colonel Khap Khunchon and Chamrat Follett on his 6 December program, and spoke sympathetically of Thailand's plight. In a typical editorial, the *Washington Post* on 10 December accused the British of "not only treating Siam as a conquered country, but to all intents and purposes as a British colony."<sup>162</sup>

The *Straits Times* fired back from Singapore on 7 December, criticizing the Thai for two-faced diplomacy. "The essential facts," it concluded, "are that Siam allied herself to the enemy of Britain and remained in that alliance until Japan was defeated. British military control would act as a reminder of the basic truths and check any disposition to truculence that might follow upon success in having gotten away with the remarkable feat of withdrawing a declaration of war after having lost that war."<sup>163</sup>

Dening also took up defense of the British position at a press conference on 14 December, labeling American press reports "grossly inaccurate" and denying any British desire for "the enslavement of Siam and her perpetual bondage." He enumerated Thailand's earlier anti-British actions and, as he had done in his 3 December letter, downplayed the contribution of the Free Thai.<sup>164</sup>

A *Straits Times* editorial amplified Dening's argument, declaring it "no time for sentiment" and insisting that Thailand was an "enemy state" in a strategic position whose "past record is not such to aspire to unbounded confidence as to her intention." It concluded by raising the prospect that a free and uncontrolled Thailand might become the regional

<sup>162</sup> MacDonald to Bluechel, 16 November 1944, Folder 777, Box 129, Entry 88, RG 226 and a summary of the American press stories and editorials that appears in Acheson to Bracket, 29 December 1945 in Section 800, Box 57, RG 84, USNA. Also, *Straits Times*, 12 December 1945 and Phra Phisan Sukhumwit, "Activities in Kandy, New Delhi and the United States During and After the War" in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 151–52. Gilchrist, "Cross Purposes in Siam," writes: "The Siamese Post Office persisted in delivering the Washington cables to British RAF headquarters instead of to the USIS office; they were read there with interest." Seni's claim in Van Praagh's, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy* and in Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, 166–67 that Rich viewed the files on the night of 13 December 1945 after the Thai cabinet decided to accept the British demands, is erroneous.

<sup>163</sup> *Straits Times*, 7 December 1945. <sup>164</sup> *Straits Times*, 15 December 1945.

headquarters for revolutionary nationalists, "disruptive elements" that aimed "to spread discontent throughout South-East Asia."<sup>165</sup>

Although the Voice of America broadcast a State Department expression of support for Thailand's sovereignty, Thai leaders could see no other immediate sign of tangible US government assistance. Accordingly, at a meeting on 13 December, the cabinet decided to accept the British terms. Although Thai officials would downplay the harshness of the agreement in public statements, they would insist that Denning provide a letter stating that it contained the minimum terms acceptable to the British. Cabinet members clearly feared a public backlash at a time when rumors of a military *coup* were rampant.<sup>166</sup> As an Indian journalist critical of the British stance put it, "a Government accepting the Kandy terms gives handle to the opponents to denounce it, so if Britain secures a friendly Government it will at the same time secure an unfriendly electorate and Parliament."<sup>167</sup>

American representatives indeed reported rising anti-British sentiment in Bangkok. Denning's "overbearing, offensive personal attitude" had negatively affected the attitudes of government officials. Because the government had revealed little about the negotiations, among the people "a definite impression has been formed that the terms are almost unbearably harsh and that the demands will enslave Siam." Trade with the outside world remained largely paralyzed and the competition for scarce imported goods had further intensified the runaway inflation that began during the war. The Thai blamed the British military presence "for the high cost

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. This fear, of course, was not entirely unfounded given Pridi's sympathy for the anti-colonial movements in neighboring territories, particularly French Indochina, and his vision of a Bangkok-centered Southeast Asian federation. As Goscha demonstrates in *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, Bangkok did to a degree become a center of revolutionary nationalist activity, particularly in 1946–47.

<sup>166</sup> Yost to Byrnes, 14 December 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1397 and MacDonald to Taylor, 14 December 1945, Folder 777, Box 139, Entry 88, RG 226, USNA. In regard to *coup* rumors, a flier circulated in Nakhon Sawan in late November calling on soldiers to go to Bangkok, rescue the jailed Phibun, and "help together to wipe the capital clean." In December a story spread that the Army Chief of Staff General Chat Nakrop was preparing to lead a *coup*. Most ominously, Luang Suphachalasai, a prominent right-wing member of the People's Party who had supported the Free Thai movement during the war and had served as interior minister in the Khuang cabinet, declared to an American source that he was prepared to lead a *coup* aimed to "get Regent and gangster government." He cited concern about British reaction as the lone restraining factor. See MacDonald, "The Defense of Former Premier Pibul Songkhram," 2 December 1945 and Intelligence Report A-63691, 7 December 1945, Folder ZM2400, Box 401, Entry 108 and Bluechel and Barnette to Shepardson and Langer, 13 December 1945, Folder 5, Box 217, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>167</sup> Quoted in Charivat Santaputra, *Thai Foreign Policy, 1932–1946* (Bangkok, 1985), 353.



of living, the opening of 200 cabarets with resultant immorality, and the reckless driving of military vehicles." Eleanor Hastings, an SSU analyst who visited Bangkok in early December reported: "Everyone seems to feel the British occupation is much harder than the Japanese one, and the people don't look happy." Although food was plentiful and Bulkley believed that most "important people" had profited from the war, among the poor, Hastings noted, "Some families have only one cloth among them, and go outdoors in turns."<sup>168</sup>

As it turned out, Seni had timed his leak perfectly because on 6 December long negotiations culminated in the signing of an Anglo-American agreement on a postwar loan that the British government desperately needed. Even though American negotiators had driven a very hard bargain, battering down imperial barriers to "open door" free trade, the deal faced strong opposition in Congress. Polls showed that less than half of the informed public favored the deal, and fifty-four congressmen had spoken out against it. The reports of British pressure on Thailand provided convenient ammunition for the loan's opponents. Also, Kentucky Democratic Congressman Emmet O'Neal, an old friend of Herman Scholtz who had lobbied for Thai interests in Washington for some months, contacted Acheson to seek information on the Anglo-Thai negotiations, pointedly suggesting that he might bring up the issue on the floor of the House.<sup>169</sup>

The editorial sympathy for Thailand's plight and the possibility it might exacerbate the administration's political problems on Capitol Hill roused the State Department into action once again. In a message dispatched at 5 P.M. on 13 December, Acheson, unaware of the Thai cabinet's decision to bow to the British demands, told Yost to advise the Thai not to sign the agreement until completion of Anglo-American discussions on the rice issue and postwar security matters.<sup>170</sup> Unable to establish a direct teletype link with Ambassador Winant in London, three hours later Acheson sent forth a long message explaining the State Department's continued objection to the British stance on the two issues. He urged that the British accept the Thai offer of 240,000 tons of rice and that

<sup>168</sup> SSU intelligence summary, 13–19 December 1945, Folder IS-October–December, Box 408, Entry 108; Bulkley, "Survey of Trends in Siam," 9 December 1945, XL 37109; and Hastings to Deston, 13 December 1945, unnumbered folder, Box 2, Entry 53, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>169</sup> Woods, *A Changing of the Guard*, 332–69. Congress eventually approved the loan in July 1946. On O'Neal, see Phra Phisan Sukhumwit, "Activities in Kandy, New Delhi and the United States During and After the War" in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 145–53.

<sup>170</sup> Acheson to Yost, 13 December 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1390. Yost's report of the Thai cabinet decision (1397) did not reach Washington until the following morning.

distribution be handled through the United Nations rather than by the British alone. On the security matter, he declared that the USA could not "acquiesce in a clause which gives even the color or appearance of a protectorate, whether founded or unfounded." Acheson threatened immediate resumption of diplomatic relations and a full explanation to the Thai of the US position unless London rescinded what it considered an ultimatum from Denning.<sup>171</sup>

Due to transmission delays, Washington's instructions did not reach Yost until the morning of 15 December. When informed of Acheson's message, Seni and Pridi decided to act without consulting with the full cabinet. They used SSU channels to instruct Prince Wiwat to delay. When Seni expressed concern that the British might impose tougher terms as Denning had threatened, Yost reassured him that the USA would take responsibility.<sup>172</sup>

Technical problems delayed the receipt of Acheson's message in London, too, but the American Embassy reported on 17 December that the British had promised that there would be no signing for at least two days. In response to a question at a press conference on 19 December, Acheson asserted that US views should be considered and Anglo-American talks concluded before the agreement was signed. He cited America's historical ties with Thailand and sympathy for its development as "an independent, democratic country," as well as US support for the "economic open door."<sup>173</sup>

Faced with a "virtual ultimatum" from the US side, the Foreign Office at last put forth a real compromise. The British agreed that a multinational rice commission, including American and Thai members, would oversee the setting of viable rice quotas and deliveries, with the 1.5 million tons as a maximum, not minimum amount. They agreed that financial demands on Thailand should not exceed the nation's ability to pay. The British also acceded to the American insistence on joining the security clauses. This cleared the way for the signing of an Anglo-Thai agreement

<sup>171</sup> Acheson to Winant, 13 December 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1391–97.

<sup>172</sup> Yost to Brynes, 15 December 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1398. In his highly unreliable account to his biographer (Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 93–94), Seni claimed that he alone made the decision to defer signing the agreement. Yost's message makes clear that he met both Seni and Pridi and that they made the decision jointly. SSU radioman Brinton wrote his parents on 16 December: "It is rather thrilling to be the channel through which all of this stuff passes and to have our finger right on the pulse of things." This use of this SSU communications caused Edmond Taylor, at the time the organization's commander in the theater, to fear that Denning would attempt to have SSU expelled as subversive of British interests. See Taylor to Timberman, 16 December 1945, Folder 311, Box 29, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>173</sup> Winant to Acheson, 17 December 1945 and Acheson to Winant, 19 December 1945, *FRUS* 1945, VI: 1399, 1404. Acheson's comments were reported in the *London Times* of 20 December 1945.

on 1 January 1946 in Singapore. The USA and Britain resumed normal diplomatic relations four days later.<sup>174</sup>

Dening acknowledged that the agreement could be said to “impose a burden” on Thailand, though not a permanent one. He emphasized, however, the plentiful food supply in the country that made postwar reconstruction much easier there than in neighboring areas. The *Straits Times* again echoed Dening’s line, describing the economic demands as “stern but just.” The editorial warned that if the British tolerated evasion in compliance with the terms, “the effect on the Asiatic mind will be disastrous.”<sup>175</sup>

In Gilchrist’s view, the wording making the 1.5 million tons of rice a maximum rather than a required minimum represented the only substantive change in the British terms. Although he had been critical of the “free rice” demand and would afterward condemn it as a mistake from the beginning, he described this as “a change for the worse as it encouraged the Siamese to write down their existing stocks of rice and so aggravate the threat of famine.”<sup>176</sup>

Dening arrived in Bangkok for a brief visit on 5 January. Obviously still deeply miffed by Thai tactics in the negotiations, after his return to Singapore, Dening branded the nation’s leaders hopeless “rabbits” in a telegram to the Foreign Office. Gilchrist, who drafted a 25 January response that went out under Bird’s name, in his diary described Dening’s “silly telegram . . . condemning the Thais as crooked and miserable weaklings” as an “altogether wrong appreciation.” He added: “Correct appreciation: the Thais were at their game of playing off one great power against another, they did it before Dening was born. And he forgets that a million and half tons of rice have slipped through his fingers, almost without him noticing it.”<sup>177</sup>

The new British Ambassador Geoffrey H. Thompson, who arrived in mid-March, told Gilchrist that his riposte to Dening’s “rabbits” telegram “did its work in London.” Thompson sought to set an entirely new tone in Anglo-Thai relations by “looking forward rather than back.” He later reported to London that he “was appalled at some of the communications which Bird on instruction, had read to Siamese politicians.” He sought to move beyond taking a “naughty children” approach toward the Thai.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 123–24. The texts of the agreements are found in Direk, *Siam and World War II*, 285–98. An article and editorial defending the British position appeared in the *London Times* of 21 and 22 December 1945.

<sup>175</sup> *Straits Times*, 2 and 3 January 1946. <sup>176</sup> Gilchrist, “Cross Purposes in Siam.”

<sup>177</sup> Gilchrist diary entry of 16 January 1946 and quotes from the two messages in question in Songsri, *Thai–British–American Relations*, 283–284.

<sup>178</sup> Gilchrist diary, 21 March 1946 and Thompson, quoted in Songsri, *Thai–British–American Relations*, 285–286.

The Thai belief that the USA had substantially assisted Thailand in the negotiations predictably led to an outpouring of pro-American sentiment in Bangkok. Landon, who basked in the praise, wrote to his wife: "The people are generally emotionally enthusiastic over [the] US part in Anglo-Siamese negotiations and are embarrassing in their show of friendliness to Americans."<sup>179</sup>

After Admiral Mountbatten went to Bangkok for ceremonial celebration of the peace agreement from 18 to 22 January, the *London Times* correspondent questioned how much the visit would boost British prestige. He wrote:

The newcomer to this country early detects a strong pro-American feeling, and the story has been assiduously promulgated that had it not been for American intervention the British terms to Siam in the peace treaty would have been less lenient. American representation, diplomatically and commercially, appears to be far stronger than the British, and the Americans are displaying a vigour which we might well emulate. Old residents here, however, point out that the Siamese are past masters in the art of playing off one Power against the other.<sup>180</sup>

But if the Thai believed that the Americans had delivered diplomatically, rumored ships laden with American goods did not come in. "Propaganda articles and lavish sympathy are no substitutes in the end for cash and goods," Gilchrist noted. By coincidence, on 28 March 1946, the day the British gave in and announced their willingness to pay the Thai for rice deliveries, a shipload of British goods reached Bangkok. According to Gilchrist, the same night a "leading American official" in Bangkok was heard to remark: "The American bubble is burst."<sup>181</sup>

Pridi's bubble soon burst, too. He began to lose his grip on Thai politics with the Assembly election of 6 January 1946 when his avowed supporters won less than a third of the ninety-five contested seats, a poll that MacDonald described as "a spontaneous vote for government change." Pridi suffered further embarrassment when the Assembly chose Khuang Aphaiwong as the new prime minister by an eighty-one to sixty-five vote over his own candidate, Direk Chayanam. Miffed at Pridi's failure to back him, Khuang included none of the former regent's close allies in his cabinet, but placed many of his enemies, including Seni Pramot as foreign minister and Luang Suphachalasai, whose bitter opposition to Pridi and his willingness to lead a *coup* had been reported to SSU in December, as minister of industry.

<sup>179</sup> Kenneth Landon to Margaret Landon, 1 January 1946, Box 1, F1, Kenneth and Margaret Landon Collection, Wheaton College.

<sup>180</sup> *London Times*, 24 January 1946. <sup>181</sup> Gilchrist, "Cross Purposes in Siam."

Pridi told MacDonald that he still maintained a “warm friendship” with Khuang on a personal level, but complained that his election had been engineered by an unholy alliance of “ex-political prisoners, royalists, and reactionary militarists.” His foes had sought to diminish the Free Thai movement as “an exaggerated farce” – a characterization bolstered by Denning’s disparaging comments – and had attacked Pridi’s followers through the Bangkok press, which they had come to dominate.<sup>182</sup>

Pridi attributed the attacks on the Free Thai to jealousy. For his part, MacDonald perceived two strains of criticism – one based on the prominent role played by such “turncoat” opportunists as Adun; the other on the perception of the Free Thai as “an exclusive secret society.”<sup>183</sup>

Pridi’s followers immediately sought revenge against the Khuang government, forcing a debate on the new cabinet’s policies prior to a vote of confidence and attacking the government in what Prince Suphasawat described as “very crude fashion.” They would eventually spur Khuang to resign in March, but in the process they further intensified the bitterness between Pridi’s supporters on one hand and former People’s Party member Khuang and the royalists, his new allies, on the other.<sup>184</sup>

Pridi finally stepped forward to become prime minister himself in mid-March. In the interim before he assumed office the Thai high court declared the war crimes law under which Phibun and the others were charged as unconstitutional and released them from custody. Although portrayed as a purely legal decision, the evidence suggests that it was part of a behind-the-scenes effort to mend the rift between the civilian and military factions of the People’s Party. The military members of the National Assembly had become a critical swing bloc.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>182</sup> SSU weekly intelligence summary, 31 January–6 February 1946 and 7–13 February 1946, Box 407, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>183</sup> SSU weekly intelligence summary 7–13 February 1946, Box 407, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. and Suphasawat, “A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of the Siamese Politics,” 20 June 1947, in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 543.

<sup>185</sup> Much political maneuvering was going on at this point. Accordingly to information passed to SSU by Seni Pramot, Pridi initially wanted the Assembly to select a coalition cabinet for him, but it declined. Pridi was also said to have expressed a desire to include all former prime ministers, even Phibun, “if he were not in jail.” See “Premier; Release of War Criminals,” Reel 1, “Strategic Services Unit Intelligence Reports, 1945–1946,” M1656, USNA. According to this report and Yost to Secretary of State, 29 March 1945, 892.00/3-2946, RG 59, USNA, Khuang and Seni refused cabinet positions. Further, Yost to Secretary of State, 26 April 1946, 892.00/4-26-46, RG 59, USNA reported that the military Assembly members had supported Khuang in January, but swung to Pridi in March. That the Khuang–Seni group was also actively competing for military support is affirmed in Yost to Secretary of State, 7 May 1946, 892.00/5-746 892.00/5-746, which reports comment by a member of the group that the “Royalists would support

During Khuang's tenure as prime minister, Seni had called for an investigation of the use of the 500,000 dollars in Thai assets unfrozen by the US government that he had turned over to the OSS. He insinuated that the money had all gone to Pridi – actually only 50,000 dollars had – “and that most of the money had not been spent for what it was intended.” Press hints of impropriety provoked Pridi's wrath and led to a “crack-down.” An investigatory panel, however, found no fault, concluding that the Free Thai “performed remarkably well” and that the “Thai people owe a great deal to them.”<sup>186</sup> The outcome left Seni looking extremely foolish, but he would soon get his revenge.

Prince Suphasawat, who returned to Bangkok in late May, now saw a “real war” between the two political sides. He found “not a scrap of good will and friendly spirit left,” with each side set on the “total destruction” of the other.<sup>187</sup>

This hostile spirit became apparent when King Ananda was found dead from a gunshot wound on 9 June. When the government released a statement describing the death as accidental, the opposition seized the opportunity to accuse Pridi of engineering the King's assassination, the

Phibun on reassuming the premiership providing his former close advisors would be left out of the picture.” When the opposition tried to pin Pridi down on the government's attitude toward the court decision, he dodged the issue by saying it was complicated and calling for a commission to look into it. A critical editorial in *Liberty* of 12 April 1946, suggested that apparently “It was hoped that by the time the commission reported, the new Constitution would put all war criminals definitely out beyond the reach of any retrospective law.”

<sup>186</sup> See Thompson to Magruder, 3 April 1946, Reel 128, M1642; Yost to Secretary of State, 26 April 1945, 892.00/4-26-46, RG 59; and memorandum of conversation between Kenneth Landon and Kumut Chandruang, 14 May 1945, Reel 17, SEA Lot Files, C14, USNA. The commission's verdict is reported in *Democracy*, 29 April 1946. An English translation of the commission's report is published in Pridi, *Political and Military Tasks of the Free-Thai Movement*, 54–64. Also, Suphasawat, “A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of the Siamese Politics,” 20 June 1947 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 543–44. The arrest of a newspaper editor for misrepresenting a statement by Pridi in the Assembly was reported in the Bangkok newspaper *Democracy* on 20 April 1946.

<sup>187</sup> Suphasawat, “A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of the Siamese Politics,” 20 June 1947 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 544. The fact that the Prince stayed at Pridi's residence, triggered much speculation. As part of an effort at reconciliation with King Prajadipok's widow, Suphasawat's sister, Queen Ramphai, Pridi had praised King Prajadhipok in an Assembly speech on 7 May (headlined on the front page of *Liberty*, 8 May 1946). A rumored purpose of Suphasawat's return was negotiating the return of the late King's confiscated property and his sister's return to the country with his ashes. “Internal Politics: Return of Suphasawat,” 26 May 1946, Reel 2, “Strategic Services Unit Intelligence Reports, 1945–1946,” M1656 and Thompson to Garden, 3–9 July 1946, ZM595, Box 113, Entry 110A, RG 226, USNA. As revealed in *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 557–63 the Prince subsequently sought to organize a new “royalist” party in effort to split the anti-Pridi Democrat Party recently founded by Seni and others. The appearance of the latter party is reported in *Liberty*, 10 May 1946.

implausibility of the charge notwithstanding. This widely circulated allegation indelibly stained Pridi's reputation and led to his resignation as prime minister on August 1. Needless to say, it also fueled political acrimony. The Assembly election campaign that summer was marred by violence, demagoguery by the opposition, and repression and manipulation by the government. In a clear sign of concern about a possible army *coup*, Pridi installed Adun as commander-in-chief.<sup>188</sup>

The subsequent pro-Pridi government headed by Thamrong Nawa-sawat proved corrupt, incapable of managing the many postwar problems and unable to quell public doubts about the King's death. The opposition, led by Khaung and Seni, cast these failings in sharp relief in relentless attacks on the government. This, coupled with the failure of a behind-the-scenes effort to reconcile the old People's Party group, set the stage for an army *coup d'état* in November 1947 that forced Pridi to flee abroad. After an interim Khuang-headed government, Phibun returned to power in April 1948. Pridi's attempt at an armed comeback failed in 1949. Several of the key figures in the wartime Free Thai underground – including Thawin Udom, Thawi Thawethikul, Chan Bunnak, and Tiang Sirikhan – were subsequently eliminated in extra-legal fashion by the Thai police, run by Phibun's ruthless associate Phao Siyanon. Pridi again escaped abroad.<sup>189</sup>

Fortunately, most of the OSS and SOE Thai officers had returned to their studies in the USA and Britain shortly after the end of the war, so they avoided direct embroilment in the political violence of the late 1940s.<sup>190</sup> The US government awarded thirty-four OSS Free Thai the Medal of Freedom, with thirteen receiving the medal in person from General Donovan at a 6 April 1947 ceremony outside the Pentagon. The British decorated Prince Suphasawat with the Order of the British Empire and dispensed the Military Cross to twelve of the Force 136 Free Thai

<sup>188</sup> Eventually three royal attendants were dubiously convicted and executed for alleged involvement in the King's death. The case is the subject of Rayne Kruger's *The Devil's Discus* (London, 1964). Of the main explanations of the King's death – regicide, suicide, or accident – Kruger thinks it was suicide. According to Alexander MacDonald *Bangkok Editor* (New York, 1949), 49–53, both he and Yost were inclined to the same conclusion. The gun found near the King's body was an American service revolver that MacDonald had given to the King during a visit to the Free Thai camp near Chonburi. Prince Suphasawat makes a case for accident in "A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of the Siamese Politics," in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 554–56. Ironically, shortly after the King's death, Jim Thompson was drawn to a convoluted conspiracy theory that implicated Suphasawat in the King's death. See Thompson to Garden, 3–9 July 1946, ZM595, Box 113, Entry 110A, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>189</sup> As a firsthand account of the era, MacDonald's, *Bangkok Editor* is unequalled. Coast's *Some Aspects of Siamese Politics* provides a succinct overview.

<sup>190</sup> The exception was Phon Intharathat, who was killed by police during the failed *coup* of 26 February 1949.



officers.<sup>191</sup> Among the best and brightest of their generation, many went on to distinguished careers in bureaucratic service or private business, often in both.

The most well-known Free Thai veterans are Puai Ungphakon (Puey Ungphakorn) from the British side and Sit Sawetsila (Siddhi Savetsila) from the American. Puai gained renown for his economic expertise, heading the Bank of Thailand from 1959 to 1971. He subsequently served as rector of Thammasat University before being falsely accused of inciting student protesters during a violent right-wing *coup* in 1976. He found refuge in England, where he died in 1999.<sup>192</sup> Air Chief Marshal Sit, meanwhile, rose through the national security bureaucracy to become foreign minister during the 1980s under Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanon (Tinsulananda). He still serves as a privy councillor.

Although the British and Americans showed a measure of gratitude by facilitating Pridi's escape after the 1947 *coup*, they refused to back his efforts to regain power. Concerned about the communist challenge, both hesitated only slightly before embracing the new Thai military regime, headed by Phibun, the former proto-fascist ally of Japan, as the best hope for stability. The new regime proved its greater efficiency, in part, by pushing endemic corruption to a higher level of sophistication.<sup>193</sup>

The generals soon realized the advantages of alliance with the USA, so Thailand became the cornerstone and a chief financial beneficiary of American Cold War activities in the region. The latter were aimed primarily at countering the same revolutionary nationalist forces for which most of the anti-colonialist OSS officers had held such deep sympathy. The successor to the OSS, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), would facilitate the bloody-handed Phao's development of well-equipped military and aerial arms to his formidable police department. This would give him a sufficient power base to contend for power – albeit unsuccessfully in the end – with Phibun and army strongman and future dictator, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. When the latter won out, the

<sup>191</sup> The British awards are reported in the *London Times* of 9 September 1946.

<sup>192</sup> *The Nation*, 7 August 1999 contains many tributes to Puai.

<sup>193</sup> MacDonald, *Bangkok Editor*, 217–18 wrote: "The people soon saw that the simple raids by Thamrong's rapacious crew on the public treasury were nothing beside the efficient system of the ring of army officers. The military had moved in precision formation into government agencies, taking over the juiciest billets for graft. They even invaded private business, young colonels becoming directors of banks and managers of semi-government industries." Coast, *Aspects of Siamese Politics*, 54, saw "further moral deterioration" and noted that "a degree of corruption was reached such as had never been surpassed by Pridi's henchmen, even in the days preceding the November 1947 Coup."

Americans would embrace him and his successors as invaluable Cold War allies.<sup>194</sup>

The turn of political events greatly complicated the lives of MacDonald and Thompson, both of whom stayed on in Bangkok to pursue business interests. Both had worked closely with Pridi and were prejudiced in favor of the Indochinese nationalists, particularly Thompson whose silk business connected him with northeastern Thailand with its substantial Lao and Vietnamese populations. Finding Thailand increasingly inhospitable, MacDonald sold out his interest in the *Bangkok Post* and returned to the USA in 1953. Thompson remained in Bangkok until his mysterious disappearance during a vacation trip to Malaysia in 1967.<sup>195</sup>

Meanwhile, Pridi, the “brains” behind the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932 and the architect of Thailand’s secret war, would grow old in exile, spending two decades in Communist China, then yet another in Paris, where he died in 1983. As two authors who edited a volume of his writings put it, during the era of military rule he “was cast as a monarchy-destroying communist, a demon designed to frighten off anyone who might be tempted by liberal ideas.”<sup>196</sup> For Pridi and his murdered colleagues, it was, as MacDonald remarked of the events of early 1946, “a sorry reward” for their successful effort to unshackle Thailand from a doomed Japan and ensure its postwar sovereignty and independence.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>194</sup> The best study of this period is Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947–1958* (Honolulu, 1997). On Sarit, see Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Bangkok, 1979).

<sup>195</sup> Both MacDonald and Thompson initially worked as undercover intelligence agents. For more on them and postwar American intelligence in Thailand, see Reynolds, “Staying Behind in Bangkok: The OSS and American Intelligence in Postwar Thailand,” *The Journal of Intelligence History* 2 (Winter 2002): 21–48.

<sup>196</sup> Baker and Pasuk, eds., *Pridi by Pridi*, xvii.

<sup>197</sup> SSU weekly intelligence summary, 7–13 February 1946, Box 407, Entry 108, RG 226, USNA.

## Epilogue

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Now that more than half a century has passed, how has the “tangled skein” of Thailand’s secret war come to be viewed? Given the sharp clashes of interest between the Allies, and the fact that Thai politics quickly polarized, leaving the two most prominent Free Thai leaders, Pridi and Seni, in opposing camps, it is hardly surprising that much controversy remains.

John Haseman, author of the only previous English-language, book-length scholarly study of the Free Thai, published in 1978 before American and British intelligence documents were declassified, credited the Free Thai movement with the preservation of Thailand’s postwar sovereignty, but had little to say about inter-Allied competition, Free Thai internal conflicts, or the postwar consequences. In regard to the latter, he blandly commented that the movement “provided the power base of individuals who were to become major Thai leaders.”<sup>1</sup> Historian Thamsook Numnonda, in a 1977 study of wartime Thailand, better captured the political fallout of the secret war, commenting that “The deep-seated distrust and jealousy among the leading Free Thais resulted in mutual suspicion and irreconcilable differences among their supporters. Effects of these have permeated through postwar Thai politics until today.”<sup>2</sup>

Even the size of the Free Thai movement has become a bone of contention. In his Thai-language study, summarized in an English booklet published in 1991, Sorasak Ngamcachonkulkid questioned figures used by Haseman, Thamsook, and others crediting the Free Thai with mobilizing a force of 50,000–90,000, arguing that the total Free Thai guerrilla force amounted to only about 8,000.<sup>3</sup> To the extent that a precise figure of those actively involved in the latter can be calculated, he is correct. The point he seems to miss, however, is that the larger figures were based

<sup>1</sup> John B. Haseman, *The Thai Resistance Movement During the Second World War* (DeKalb, IL, 1978), 152–59. The book has been reissued with improved graphics under the title *The Thai Resistance Movement During World War II* (Chiang Mai, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Thamsook Numnonda, *Thailand and the Japanese Presence* (Singapore, 1977), 82.

<sup>3</sup> Sorasak, *The Free Thai Movement and Thailand’s Internal Political Conflicts*, 2–4.

on the assumption that the police, the navy, and most of the Thai army would have joined a fight against the Japanese.

Sorasak stresses the domestic political basis of the internal Free Thai movement, arguing that above all it was a Pridi-led effort to overcome his rival Phibun, and that he first gained the support of other factions who wanted to replace military dictatorship with a more democratic system. He contends that because the Japanese behaved less badly in independent Thailand than in former colonial areas where the army enjoyed full control, the Free Thai cannot be considered a mass-based, anti-Japanese movement, but one made up largely of politicians and government officials who above all were seeking to salvage national sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> All are valid points, but Sorasak goes too far in dismissing the negative impact of the Japanese presence, one that was by no means equally felt throughout the country. That the peasants in the remote areas where the largest guerrilla training camps were located did not nurse a burning hatred of the occupier is hardly surprising since most had never seen a Japanese, nor had their lives been disrupted by Allied bombing. Also, the war-caused runaway inflation that severely affected the urban classes had minimal impact on the modest, self-sufficient existence of the peasants.

Relentless unto death in his campaign to destroy Pridi's reputation, in his later years Seni sought to promote the idea that he had single-handedly saved Thailand from a British colonial enslavement that his rival had been willing to accept.<sup>5</sup> When in 1989 *The Nation* newspaper published excerpts from a tendentious biography, based largely on Seni's self-serving reminiscences, British Ambassador to Thailand Derek Tonkin attempted to rebut its extremely negative portrayal of the British generally and Mountbatten in particular. Tonkin assailed the book as "so seriously flawed that it is questionable whether it should be viewed as a work of supposed fact or historical fiction," suggesting that the "mutual suspicions of the time need to be examined soberly and dispassionately."<sup>6</sup>

Never one to hide his light under a bushel, Seni also portrayed himself as the savior of Phibun Songkhram, suggesting that only his war crimes

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–8.

<sup>5</sup> See Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 63–100. Seni died in 1997 at the age of ninety-two.

<sup>6</sup> The *Nation* gave extraordinary coverage to the publication of Van Praagh's *Alone on the Sharp Edge*. After an initial article on 25 July, it published a full-page interview with the author on 30 July and excerpts of more than one full newspaper page each on 30 July, 6 August, and 13 August 1989. Ambassador Tonkin responded with a letter to the editor published on 27 July and an op-ed piece "Snide Character Assassination" on 27 August 1989. Van Praagh's response appeared in the 2 September 1989 edition. A new edition of the biography under the new title *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy* was issued in 1996. In it, Van Praagh notes Tonkin's explanation of the circumstances of the "twenty-one demands" on pages 74–75.

legislation stood between the former dictator and a British hangman's noose.<sup>7</sup> However, by the end of the war, the British not only had abandoned their most ambitious visions for controlling postwar Thailand, but showed little interest in trying Thai leaders, much less hanging them. They presumably had better sense than to become embroiled in such a controversial undertaking at a time when they faced a plethora of more pressing political and financial dilemmas.

The writings of Free Thai veteran Wimon Wiriawit offered support for Seni's fervid anti-Pridi, anti-British interpretation. Wimon wrote that "the main concern of the OSS-trained Free Thai officers during the last year of the war was not so much fighting the Japanese, as they were bound to lose the war, as with 'fighting' the British, who they considered had tried to have the Americans shut out of Thailand by stopping the Free Thai officers from operating successfully in the country."<sup>8</sup> Wimon sought to separate the American group entirely from Pridi, whom he portrayed as in the British pocket. He lamented that since Pridi's final exile in 1949 the OSS-trained Free Thai "have been viewed with suspicion, such as being rebels or communists."<sup>9</sup> Wimon's charges, and his emphasis on his own personal role, rekindled old resentments between the American and British Free Thai and evoked derisive rejoinders from Sawat Sisuk, one of the British-trained officers.<sup>10</sup>

The writings of Nigel Brailey and Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, both of whom portray Phibun in a favorable light and see his wartime downfall as a result of ambitious scheming on Pridi's part, exemplify another line of anti-Pridi analysis. Brailey treats the Free Thai movement as largely a sham and casts doubt on Pridi's pro-Allies bonafides, arguing that it "appears questionable whether Pridi committed himself personally to the Allied cause much prior to August 1942, if even then," suggesting that "his eventual anti-Japanese stance was a consequence primarily of his hostility to Phibun." He believes that Pridi hoped "to create a paramilitary power base" to compete with his armed rivals after the war.<sup>11</sup>

There is no question that Pridi wanted to elbow Phibun aside and that the war offered an opportunity. However, there also should be no question

<sup>7</sup> Van Praagh, *Thailand's Struggle for Democracy*, 97–99.

<sup>8</sup> Wimon, ed., *Free Thai*, 134.

<sup>9</sup> The quote is from Wimon's memorandum, "OSS-Free Thai Activities and the Politics" provided to the author in 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Sawat criticizes Wimon in an appendix to *Seri Thai: kosanget pathibatgan Chamkat Phalangkun lae pathibatgan tang tahan bangruang*, 80–96 and in *Seri Thai: Ban thuk pert phamuk kieokap prathibatgan ruatainam Angkrit khong Bunmak lae Wimon (Prathibatgan DURLAN) Singhakom 2487 (1944) (Bangkok, 1997)*.

<sup>11</sup> Nigel Brailey, *Thailand and the Fall of Singapore* (Boulder, CO, 1986), 98–114. The quotations are from page 114. Also, Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun Through Three Decades, 1932–1957* (Kuala Lumpur, 1995), esp. 19.

that Pridi had recognized well before the war that Thailand's alignment with the Axis powers would work to Phibun's advantage and enable him to further strengthen his dictatorship. Even the Japanese recognized Pridi's orientation, which is why he was shoved out of the cabinet in December 1941. It was also the reason why every knowledgeable person on the Allied side, from fellow Thai like Seni Pramot and Prince Suphasawat to former British Minister Crosby, anticipated that Pridi would be the person to emerge at the head of a domestic resistance movement. There was little that Pridi or anyone else in Thailand could have done to show support for the Allies in the first months of the war when the Japanese were winning on all fronts and the Allies were in retreat. As for Pridi conceiving the Free Thai as a paramilitary power base, he and his men did suspiciously squirrel away the weaponry received from the Allies rather than turning it over to the army. They did not, however, employ these cached weapons in any significant military fashion until Pridi's unsuccessful comeback attempt in 1949. By that time his followers apparently had sold most of the weapons to the Vietminh.<sup>12</sup>

Because, as Wimon emphasized, under military rule, the term "Free Thai," came to be linked to Pridi, the exiled political pariah, the Free Thai veterans received little recognition for their wartime service for several decades. In 1997, however, officials showed a decided change of attitude by dedicating a Bangkok park to the Free Thai (Seri Thai Park). On 16 August 2003 a museum/library, built as a down-scaled replica of Pridi's wartime residence, opened there.<sup>13</sup>

The US government, happy to recall the American role as defender of Thailand's independence, has also taken an active role in recognizing the surviving OSS Free Thai veterans over the past decade. Successive American ambassadors have feted them and, as a result of the late William Pye's tireless lobbying, those who completed the parachute course at Fort Benning or jumped into Thailand were retroactively awarded parachutist badges. Also, the CIA held a commemorative ceremony at the agency's headquarters on 8 May 2000 at which five representative Free Thai veterans – Wimon, Sit Sawetsila (Siddhi Sawetsila), Anond Siwatthana (Srivardhana), Charoen Charoen-Rachapak (the former Charoen Watthanaphanit), and Piya Chakkaphak – received the Agency Seal Medallion from CIA Director George Tenet.<sup>14</sup> US Ambassador

<sup>12</sup> On weapons sales to the Vietminh, see Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 187–89.

<sup>13</sup> Anchalee Kongrut, "Park to be Dedicated to Free Thai Movement," *Bangkok Post*, 16 August 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Pummarie Westgate, "Seri Thai veterans honoured," *Bangkok Post*, 9 May 2000. A tribute to the Free Thai was read into the *Congressional Record* on 4 May 2000 (p. E652) by Representative Porter J. Goss.

Richard Hecklinger presided over a follow-up ceremony in Bangkok on 9 July 2000 to honor the other Free Thai veterans. In conjunction with the May ceremony, the CIA opened a special exhibit at its headquarters featuring Free Thai photos and memorabilia, a display from which Pridi's likeness and name were noticeably absent.

Despite these events and the publication of numerous memoirs and other books on aspects of the Free Thai movement in Thailand over the past decade, veterans at a seminar held at Thammasat University in mid-2003 lamented a "lack of serious research into their World War II activities," contending that the "significance of the underground resistance movement in the Kingdom's Northeast and elsewhere has been overlooked." One complained that "the Free Thai movement is not adequately covered in today's [school] curriculum" and that many episodes "have yet to be recorded."<sup>15</sup>

Writers sympathetic to Pridi, meanwhile, have consistently emphasized his leadership and the heroic role of the Free Thai movement in saving Thailand's sovereignty.<sup>16</sup> One-time conservative monarchist Sulak Siwarak (Sivaraksa), displaying the zeal of a convert, has emerged as Pridi's most ardent champion. A prolific, audacious critic of the Thai status quo, Sulak, in addition to praising the achievements of the Pridi-led Free Thai, has skewered Seni and his political party for complicity in the military's return to power in 1947.<sup>17</sup>

Sulak-led efforts to rehabilitate Pridi have recently achieved some significant results. Two Bangkok streets now bear his name (one his own name, the other his official title under the old monarchy, Luang Pradit Manutham), and in 1997 the Thai government nominated him to UNESCO as one of the great personalities of the twentieth century. Quite remarkably, the nomination described him as "a moral conscience of the Thai people, and more importantly, for humanity. Pridi stands tall as a sociopolitical icon . . . It is most appropriate that the Thai people look up to Pridi as a leading model." On the centennial of Pridi's birth, 11 May 2000, Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid gave the keynote address at a Thammasat University ceremony commemorating this international honor.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Pravit Rojanaphruk, "Free Thai veteran 'forgotten,'" *The Nation*, 16 August 2003. The article did not identify the participants.

<sup>16</sup> An example in English would be Vichitvong na Pombhejara's biography, *Pridi Banomyong*.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Supawadee Susanpoolthong, "Sulak denounces Democrats," *The Nation*, 12 May 2000. Sulak explains his change of heart toward Pridi in his autobiographical work *Loyalty Demands Dissent* (Bangkok, 1998), 165–67.

<sup>18</sup> Sakthip Krairiksh, "Pridi: Asia's great humanist politician," *Japan Times*, 12 May 2000.



Regarding the Anglo-American rivalry over Thailand, writing during the subsequent era of military rule, two Western observers, Briton John Coast and American Frank Darling, lamented Allied failure to demilitarize Thailand as Sir Josiah Crosby had advocated. Ultimately “no precaution from abroad was to be taken against future attempts by the army to interfere in politics,”<sup>19</sup> Coast observed. Building on this point, Darling blamed the Americans for this failure, arguing that British policy toward Thailand was “more realistic and far-sighted than that of the United States.” The British, he claimed, “tended toward the pragmatic and concrete.”<sup>20</sup>

While appealing on the surface, this argument ignores the fact that Pridi had mustered support for the Free Thai underground by portraying it as a patriotic movement to preserve national sovereignty. Even with prolonged resistance to British terms and partially successful efforts to gain American intervention, his enemies would criticize him for “selling the nation to foreigners.” Also, efforts by the postwar government to reduce the size of the national army for budgetary reasons contributed to a subsequent political backlash. Pridi could have ill afforded to be seen as the political beneficiary of a foreign reorganization of the Thai military, so the assumption that a British attempt at this would have, in the long run, helped him establish civilian rule is a dubious one. The bitter royalists, whose objective was the ousting of all the Promoters, Pridi included, were the ones who wanted to see the Allies impose thoroughgoing reforms.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the concept of a missed opportunity to de-fang the Thai military ignores the fact that the thoroughgoing demilitarization scheme proposed by Crosby gained little support in London. The purposes of the British 207 Military Mission were to promote the sales of British-made weapons, encourage Thai officers to attend British training schools, and gain the Thai army’s cooperation in the implementation of Britain’s security agenda. These paralleled the objectives of the later American military relationship with Thailand during the Cold War, so there is little reason to suppose that the British would have done any more to encourage

<sup>19</sup> Coast, *Some Aspects of Siamese Politics*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Darling, *Thailand and the United States*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> On this, see Suphasawat, “A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of the Siamese Politics,” 20 June 1947 in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satarwan Suphasawat*, 533. Of the royalist extremists, he wrote: “They considered that the Resistance Movement was a disaster inasmuch as it gave a fresh impetus to Pradit and his followers. The fact that, had there been no Resistance Movement Siam might have been regarded by the Allies as a criminal nation and suffered subsequent occupation by Allied troops in the same way as Japan, is either ignored by them or elicits the rejoinder that *occupation by foreign troops would have been preferable*.”

an otherwise cooperative Thai army to stay in the barracks and out of politics than the Americans subsequently did.<sup>22</sup>

Although Darling characterizes British policy as more “realistic,” the Americans better understood that the Japanese interregnum would make efforts to restore the old colonial order in Southeast Asia futile. Gilchrist and Denning – the villain of the piece in Thai and American eyes – were among those on the British side who criticized the impracticality of their government’s policies toward Thailand at the time, as noted in the [previous chapter](#). Similarly, with the advantage of hindsight, historian Nicholas Tarling scores London for its “poorly defined objectives” and its “secrecy – and even its obstinacy” which fed American mistrust.<sup>23</sup> Another leading historian of British diplomacy, Christopher Thorne, perceptively wrote:

there are times when it is hard to avoid the impression that British Ministers and officials were viewing Siamese affairs, not in a detached and careful manner, but with an underlying resentment which arose from the humiliation that had been suffered in 1941–42 . . . To aim a few kicks at Japan’s erstwhile jackal . . . may have helped some in London to relieve their feelings, at the same time as fostering the illusion that Britain was once more going to be able to exercise a dominating influence over the affairs of Southeast Asia. Siamese issues, in short, showed London’s Far Eastern policies at their worst.”<sup>24</sup>

The Americans had little difficulty seeing the problems with the British approach, but it was easy for them to ignore Phibun’s alliance with Japan since it had little direct effect on American interests. Surely Washington’s attitude would have been different had the shoe been on the other foot. While the Americans could see little merit in British desires for international security controls over the Kra Isthmus, they were determined to hold trusteeship over strategically located Pacific Islands from which a future attack on American possessions might be launched.

The Americans had a more coherent and consistent policy toward Thailand in part because the State Department enjoyed great leeway in creating it. No other branch of the US government had any real interest in the matter, nor was public or congressional opinion much of a factor. In contrast, multiple agencies in London wanted a piece of the Thailand pie, greatly complicating matters there. Also, the Asianists in the State

<sup>22</sup> To argue that the demilitarization of Japan should have been the model for similar action in Thailand ignores both the great difference in the situations of the two countries and the fact that within five years after World War II the Americans were pushing for the remilitarization of Japan. The extent of remilitarization subsequently was limited by Japanese domestic resistance, not by US strictures.

<sup>23</sup> Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 125.

<sup>24</sup> Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 620–21.

Department enjoyed relative freedom in setting policy toward Thailand, while in regard to neighboring colonial areas they invariably lost frequent arguments with the more numerous and more influential Europeanists.

Darling characterized American policy as tending “toward the humanitarian and altruistic,” but while abloom with idealistic rhetoric, it had pragmatic and opportunistic roots. Edmond Taylor, a leading figure in OSS machinations in Southeast Asia, in retrospect recognized that there had been an American effort “to disassociate ourselves as often as possible from the imperial aims of our colonialist allies while vigorously asserting on occasion our claim to enjoy equally with them the commercial – and implicitly the strategic – rewards of colonialism, in the measure that the institution survived our disapproval.”<sup>25</sup>

John Coughlin, Taylor’s commander who so energetically combatted perceived British schemes, in the end saw the effort as a learning experience. He wrote:

Our association with the British clandestine and intelligence organizations has taught us many things which must prove of real value in years to come. Objectively speaking, I consider this association, these many lessons, this realization of how the empire is built and works, to be the major contribution of this organization in this Theater.<sup>26</sup>

Although Coughlin does not make clear whether he anticipated the “lessons” being put to use in destroying imperialism or supplanting America’s imperial “cousins,” but one suspects he had the latter in mind.

In any case, the Americans did just that. Building on the model established in the Philippines, during the Cold War the Americans crafted a new form of “free world” imperialism in Southeast Asia, one that recognized independence and offered financial aid in return for the economic “open door” and military facilities. Writing at the height of the Vietnam War, Taylor acknowledged a personal epiphany regarding US actions:

I never realized during my Asian tour of duty for several years afterward that as the conscious servant of my country’s consciously anti-imperialist aims in Asia I had been unconsciously helping to enlarge the frontiers of our existing Pacific *imperium*. It did not occur to me, for example, that the OSS wartime operations in Thailand . . . were already starting to forge postwar sentimental, political and ultimately strategic links with Southeast Asia that from the United States’ point of view would eventually turn into something strangely akin to imperial responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, *Awakening from History*, 353.

<sup>26</sup> Coughlin, “Chief of Mission Report–August 1945,” 1 September 1945, Reel 88, M1642, USNA.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *Awakening from History*, 354–55.

That the Japanese hardly figure in this book only partly reflects the fact that an earlier volume focused on that aspect of Thailand's wartime experience. To some extent it is due to the fact that the participants in Thailand's secret war were never called upon to fight, so among the men sent into Thailand by the Allies only one OSS enlisted man and two Free Thai officers died. More importantly though, in the Asian intelligence wars the immediate "enemy" most often was someone or some agency on the Allied side, not the Japanese. As Taylor wrote of the endless operational planning rows, "Neither British nor Americans appeared to give much thought to the relation of these controversial activities to the problem of defeating the Japanese."<sup>28</sup>

While inter-Allied conflict flared elsewhere, it burned most consistently and intensely in Asia, where a confusing Allied organizational structure created too many headquarters, too far from the battlefronts. This situation exacerbated what Taylor saw as an inherent psychological factor in intelligence operations. "Men engaged in underground work," he wrote, "frequently developed delusions about the intentions and capabilities of their adversaries that closely resembled the symptoms of clinical paranoia."<sup>29</sup> Surely this accurately describes the way many OSS officers came to view their British "cousins."

Taylor also cites the "oil and water" American and British attitudes on the issue of colonialism as a critical barrier to reason and compromise. "The most reactionary and cynical Americans held on to the idealistic bias against imperialism even when they repudiated all the ideals from which the bias was derived," he recalled. "The most liberal and realistic British retained the imperial approach to politics even when they resigned themselves to the liquidation of empire."<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps more surprising than the intensity of the Anglo-American conflict, though, was the symbiotic relationship that developed between the State Department and the OSS in regard to Thailand. The two agencies were hardly natural allies. For example, an OSS directive to members of its Africa section warned that some Foreign Service Officers "may look upon OSS representatives as usurpers of their traditional function and may even question the desirability of having such government agents working in their areas."<sup>31</sup> Senior diplomats like Stanley Hornbeck dismissed the OSS men as mere "gumshoe" boys,<sup>32</sup> and in the postwar

<sup>28</sup> Taylor, *Richer by Asia*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *Awakening from History*, 356.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor, *Richer by Asia*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> "Relations of OSS Representatives with State Department Representatives in the Field," n.d., Folder 5, Box 137, Entry 210, RG 226, USNA.

<sup>32</sup> Hornbeck used the phrase in a conversation with a British diplomat and is quoted in Tarling, "Atonement Before Absolution," 2: 1460.

period, when elements of the OSS were merged into the State Department, the newcomers sensed suspicion and disdain in the attitudes of their diplomat colleagues.<sup>33</sup>

Yet in the case of Thailand, the interests of the two agencies converged almost seamlessly. Only the OSS could promote the Department's assertive Thailand policy and Kenneth Landon, a former Donovan employee whose ascent to diplomatic status would never have occurred except for the unusual wartime circumstances, proved only too eager to use this tool. The State Department provided a critical lifeline of support to the OSS in its effort to claim a significant role in Thailand's secret war. Had it not been for this firm backing, American officers might never have reached Bangkok, and the entire operation could have been shut down in the spring of 1945.

Mountbatten and his staff blundered in handing the Thai military delegation a largely political document that had been cleared neither by London nor by the Americans. Still, by August 1945, American pressure and the development of the Thai underground had already forced the British to back away from demanding territory or full political control over postwar Thailand. Had the "twenty-one demands" that Pridi accepted been signed, there is every reason to believe that the British would have subsequently backed off further as the realities of their weakened situation became ever clearer. This is evidenced by the fact that the British ultimately were forced to abandon the demand for free rice even after the formal agreement had been signed. There still would have been prolonged, no doubt heated, Anglo-Thai negotiations over implementation of the "twenty-one demands," but the British might have approached these talks with a more flexible attitude had not the abortive early September negotiations poisoned the well. As Gilchrist summed it up in 1946:

the British tended to underestimate not only the strength of American feeling on the subject, but the diplomatic ability of the Siamese who time and again were able to use the Americans as catspaws for themselves. Further the British had rather expected to rule the roost in Siam, much as the Americans expected to rule it in Japan, but in addition to opposition in the form of reasoned argument they found themselves faced with an irresponsible publicity campaign. Instead of seeing reason when presented in this light, the natural British reaction was to dig in the British toes.<sup>34</sup>

While acknowledging that British policy fell between two stools, producing neither "rice nor reconciliation," Tarling criticizes the Americans as well, charging that "they put more effort into undermining than understanding." He makes a convincing case that, in the end, the dissonant

<sup>33</sup> Rudgers, *Creating the Secret State*, 53–54.

<sup>34</sup> Gilchrist, "Cross Purposes in Siam."

Allied approach weakened Pridi's position. "The US, while declining to stop Great Britain, did not support it either," he wrote. "Instead of a joint and moderate Allied demand which Pridi might have safely met, a long Anglo-American and Anglo-Thai wrangle ensued. The British government did not obtain what it wanted. But civilian government in Siam was the ultimate victim."<sup>35</sup> He is surely correct.

Finally, while on the surface it might seem strange to compare Chiang Kai-shek, a right-wing military officer, and Pridi Phanomyong, a left-wing civilian politician, there is reason to do so. Although their nations veered in opposite directions politically, China to the left and Thailand to the right, parallels can be seen in the downfalls of these two Asian leaders. Both Chiang and Pridi had enhanced their personal prestige by association with the winning side in World War II, yet subsequently suffered from an inability to manage serious domestic problems created by the war. Neither could overcome the deep political schisms that had developed in the years since the demise of dynastic rule in their respective countries. The American response to the political downfall of these two leaders for whom they had held high hopes exemplified Cold War policy. China's veer to the left sent shockwaves through Washington and led to support and protection of Chiang Kai-shek's rump regime in Taiwan. In contrast, when Thailand veered to the right, Washington dumped Pridi and embraced his military successors. It demonstrated the accuracy of Prince Suphasawat's 1947 observation that the British and American governments did not "care two hoots" about the form of the government as long as Thailand "remained stable, peaceful and strong with favourable attitudes toward them."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, 125.

<sup>36</sup> Suphasawat, "A Memorandum on a Certain Aspect of the Siamese Politics," in Wanthani, ed., *Neung satawan Suphasawat*, 537.

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