COMMON MAN, UNCOMMON LEADERSHIP:

COLONEL CHARLES N. HUNTER WITH GALAHAD IN BURMA

by

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In the spring of 1944 in northwest Burma, two opposing armies gathered their energies for an epic battle contesting control of South Asia. There, in a mysterious theater little known to Americans, a mixed British-Indian and Chinese-American force fought one of the largest land battles of World War II against the Japanese. In the course of this memorable battle, a great story took form and was played out beyond the front lines in the depths of the deadly Burmese jungle. At the center of this story was a remarkable unit, the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), codenamed Galahad, popularly known in history as Merrill's Marauders.

Unloved, misunderstood, and mercilessly abused, perhaps the most badly handled American force in the war, Galahad rose above the miserable situation in which it found itself and accomplished its extremely difficult missions in heroic fashion but at great cost. The men of Galahad were ably served by a group of selfless, courageous leaders, at the head of whom stood not Brigadier General Frank D. Merrill, as official history records, but Colonel Charles N. Hunter, in name the Deputy Commander but in fact the actual field commander. This article is an account of Colonel Hunter, his uncommon leadership, and the unit he led.

In the China-Burma-India Theater in 1943 an extraordinary collection of commanders had been assembled. Assessed by some military historians as the ablest British field general in the war, Lieutenant General (later Field Marshal) William Slim led the British-Indian 14th Army. In China, the venal and untrustworthy Chiang Kai-Shek headed the Chinese Nationalist army. Young, aristocratic, and regal in bearing, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten presided over the entire theater as Supreme Commander. The two commanding generals closest to Galahad, however, were Major General Orde Wingate and Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell.

Orde Wingate typified a strain of eccentric, unorthodox officer which the British army seems to produce every other generation or so. Moody, suspicious, imperious, brilliant, yet dangerously unstable, Wingate had been saved from an ignoble end to his checkered career by Field Marshal Wavell. Wavell had obtained Wingate's assignment to Burma, where he had placed Wingate in charge of a special, long-range penetration brigade which had successfully interdicted Japanese lines of communication (LOCs) for three months in 1943. One year later, Wingate was raising a total of seven brigades

of special troops (known as the Chindits) to infiltrate into the Japanese rear again to create even more havoc. Galahad was one of the seven brigades, and the only American one, formed for this extremely dangerous mission. Although he was temperamentally unsuited for high command, Wingate's hypnotic power of leadership attracted men of talent and character. His Chindits had scraped out a place of honor in the annals of British military history by the end of the campaign.

Galahad, however, did not go to war with the rest of Wingate's Chindits. Although trained under Wingate's eye in accordance with his vision of long-range penetration, Galahad passed to Stilwell's Northern Area Combat Command in January 1944. Stilwell had accomplished this coup through his adamant personal request to Mountbatten, who acquiesced in the interests of Allied unity.

"Vinegar Joe" Stilwell is one of the more complex and controversial figures in America's military pantheon. Most people remember him as an abrasive and cantankerous general, but one who was ideally suited to deal with the crafty, unreliable Chinese army under Chiang. Stilwell's bluntness and intolerance are often pictured as attractive "American" qualities in this context because of their contrast with the wily, intriguing, false nature of Stilwell's oriental allies. Enshrined in Fort Leavenworth's Hall of Fame, Stilwell retains the image of a hard-talking, tough commander, not given to easy cooperation, but worthy of our admiration in spite of all his faults.

In reality, Stilwell's faults went much deeper than mere flaws in his personality. A full-blooded misanthrope, he hated the British with a passion which defies belief and he lacked true empathy for his own American troops.[1] He had no feel for soldiers, sending them to die seemingly without an inkling of what they might suffer. Stilwell also tolerated an incompetent staff in an era when the skills of American general staffs were acknowledged as the best in the world.[2] Composed of relatives and yes-men, his staff reflected Stilwell's own warped view of the world; they committed many excesses of mismanagement in Stilwell's name. Moreover, despite his reputation as an ascetic fighting general, Stilwell sometimes failed to go forward when he should have to see what was happening on the front with his own eyes. Galahad came to rue the day that they fell under Stilwell's command.

In contrast to these famous general officers, Charles Hunter was a self-effacing, uninspiring, somewhat dour professional officer. A native New Yorker and a West Pointer, Class of 1929, Hunter had previously served in the Philippines and the Canal Zone. Before joining Galahad, he ran a combat training course at Fort Benning for officers going overseas. Hunter knew his military craft and he knew his own mind. He was tough, capable, and confident. He believed in US Army doctrine as the best in the world, and he ran his outfits by the book. As far as Hunter was concerned, no better guide existed than approved field service regulations, yet in Burma he was to show flexibility and adaptability rather than an unthinking, narrow-minded approach to the battlefield. Like most West Pointers of his time, Hunter was no complainer. Duty-honor-country came first with him. A stickler for details, Hunter was a perfectionist in his approach to training and administration. Hunter judged his superiors and subordinates by a harsh standard which he also applied to himself. He sought the respect and loyalty of his subordinates but not their affection. In the end, he won their hearts, though he would never have used those words to describe their regard for him.

THE BEGINNINGS

Hunter's association with Galahad began in September 1943 when he responded to a call from the War Department for 3000 volunteers to participate in a dangerous mission. As the senior man in the contingent heading for Burma from the continental United States, Hunter received a briefing on the operation from the War Department. During this briefing, Hunter learned that Galahad was expected to suffer 85 percent

casualties, a prophecy which proved to be deadly accurate. Hunter organized his detachment on the West Coast and set sail for India, picking up the other Galahad contingents from the Pacific theaters enroute.

Arriving in India in late October 1943, Galahad and Hunter were badly treated from the start. Having been assembled from various units in several theaters, the men of Galahad needed a bond about which to cohere—a stirring name, a flag, a patch, a crest, a recognized leader. Incredibly, all these were denied for some time. When an official name finally was assigned, it stirred up snorts of derision: the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). It sounded more like a rear-echelon service unit than a fighting regiment about to embark on a dangerous mission. The question of a unit commander was similarly botched. A number of officers senior to Hunter cycled through the unit from October to December 1943 without assuming command. Finally, on 6 January 1944, Stilwell placed Brigadier General Frank Merrill in command, forcing Hunter, now the Deputy Commander, to rescind the order he had published only days earlier assuming command himself.

Despite these unfortunate events, Galahad began to acquire a sense of being, largely due to the efforts of Hunter and his three battalion commanders. In the absence of a clear command structure, Hunter stepped in to fill the vacuum. Assisted and guided by Colonel Frances Brink, who was well acquainted with Wingate's operational concept, Hunter quickly implemented an arduous training regimen designed to forge the unit into the tempered steel that the coming operations demanded.

Wingate's plan for 1944 envisioned the infiltration by ground and air of his Chindit brigades deep into the Japanese rear. Using the cargo aircraft as supply truck, the radio as telephone, and fighter-bombers as direct support artillery, the Chindits intended to remain behind enemy lines for an extended time in order to disrupt seriously the Japanese LOCs, especially those leading north to the enemy forces facing Stilwell. In addition, these Chindit operations were designed to contribute directly to an advance by forces under Slim and Stilwell. Thus, the Chindits, including Galahad, had to be experts in junglecraft and had to be tough enough to survive for some time on short rations in forbidding terrain under constant threat from the Japanese.

Wingate announced that the brigades would be withdrawn after 90 days. The US War Department had also warned theater headquarters that a three-month operation was envisioned as the probable limit to the unit's capability. The previous year's Chindit operation had demonstrated beyond doubt that remaining in the enemy's rear beyond this time risked complete destruction. The Japanese themselves formed only one part of the danger. Tropical diseases, malnutrition, injury, psychoneurotic breakdown, and sheer exhaustion also threatened each man. Ultimately, noncombat casualties far exceeded those inflicted by the enemy. Many soldiers simply faded into death, losing their desire to go on as sickness, terror, and weariness sapped their will to live. The question of a 90-day limit to Galahad's operations became a source of great bitterness to them.[3]

Being forewarned of these perils, Hunter undertook to reduce such losses by insuring that his men were as well conditioned and well trained as possible before they crossed into enemy territory. As a result, he placed them on limited water and rations, loaded them with huge packs, marched them unmercifully day and night, and pushed them beyond the limits they thought they could

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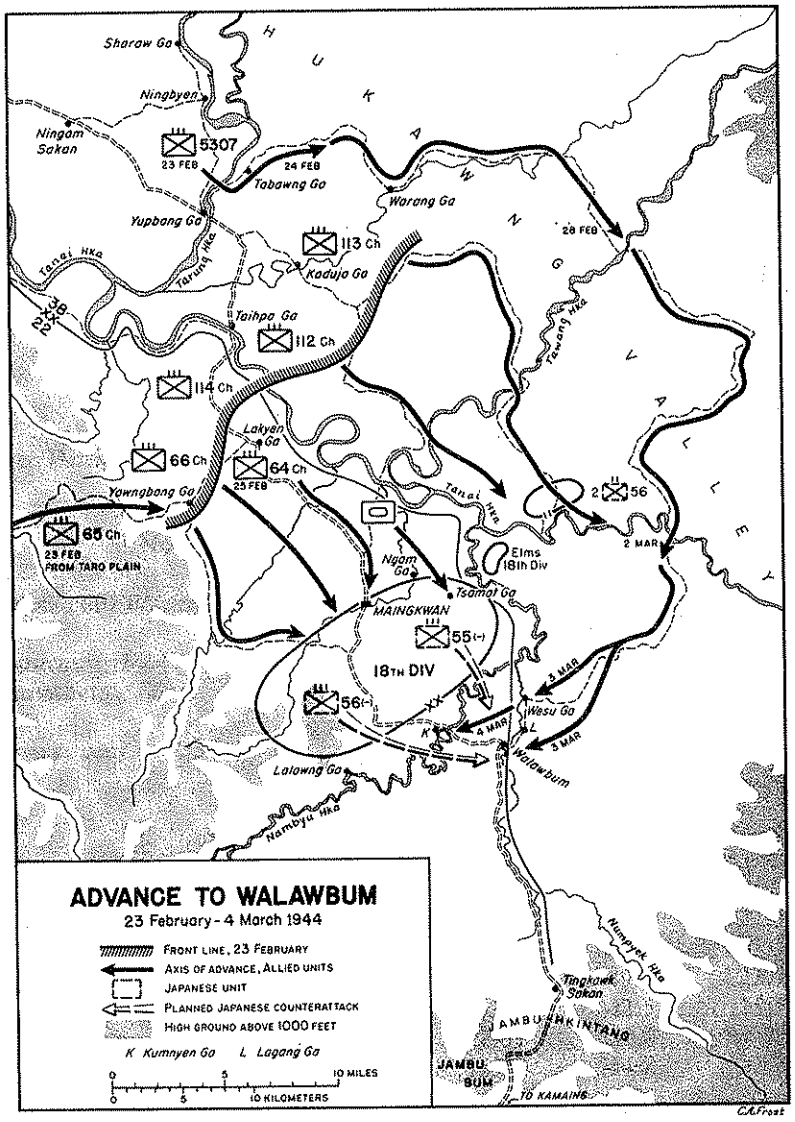
endure. Moreover, he trained Galahad in the vital skills needed to operate in deep jungle: map reading, jungle navigation, patrolling, river crossings, tactical drills, infiltration, night operations, evasion, camouflage, hand-to-hand combat, and especially marksmanship. Hunter permitted every man of Galahad to fire every weapon in the unit and he insured that leaders were cross-trained in several skills. Life was hard, the demands unrelenting. Under these harsh conditions, and impressed with the competence of their leaders, Galahad grew into a capable, confident unit, which perversely began to take a measure of pride in its stepchild status.



An interesting occurrence during this training phase demonstrated one of Hunter's most characteristic traits, his great faith in US Army doctrine and experience. During the first of his several visits to Galahad's camp, Wingate addressed the men and explained his long-range penetration concept in some detail. Unimpressed by Wingate, Hunter held the troops until he had left the area. He later recalled,

> I explained that his [Wingate's] concept should not be considered too revolutionary and reminded the men that the United States Army had a long tradition of fighting deep in hostile Indian territory; that we should look at the coming operation in light of the history of our Army in opening the West.[4]

Incidentally, although Wingate, Mountbatten, and others frequently visited Galahad (somewhat to Hunter's annoyance), Stilwell did not visit the unit at all during their training and preparation, a fact which lowered Stilwell in Hunter's estimation.

As final preparation before going into battle, Hunter hiked Galahad over 140 miles from their last assembly area to their jump-off site well beyond Ledo. Hunter claimed later that this decision, despite its unpopularity at the time, "paid the highest dividends" in bringing the unit into its final fighting trim. Galahad marched right past Stilwell's headquarters during this trek. Again, the great man failed to make an appearance and so missed an opportunity to encourage the unit with a kind word, handshake, or simple acknowledgement of their existence. Stilwell did, finally, drop in to talk

to Galahad's officers in their assembly area just before their departure.[5]

COMBAT OPERATIONS

In February 1944 Stilwell directed Galahad to conduct a series of deep encirclements around the right flank of the Japanese to establish blocks directly athwart the single main road in the enemy's rear, but close enough to the forward defenders to pose a short-term threat. The plan called for the first blocks to be established at Walawbum in the Hukawng Valley and the second blocks near Shaduzup in the Mogaung Valley. Once Galahad was in position, Stilwell intended to push his Chinese divisions hard against the Japanese 18th Division, forcing them to divide their attention between his two forces. Stilwell issued no written orders for these two initial operations. Instead, he simply told Merrill, "Oh hell, Frank, let's settle this together. You know what I want, so go and get it for me."[6]

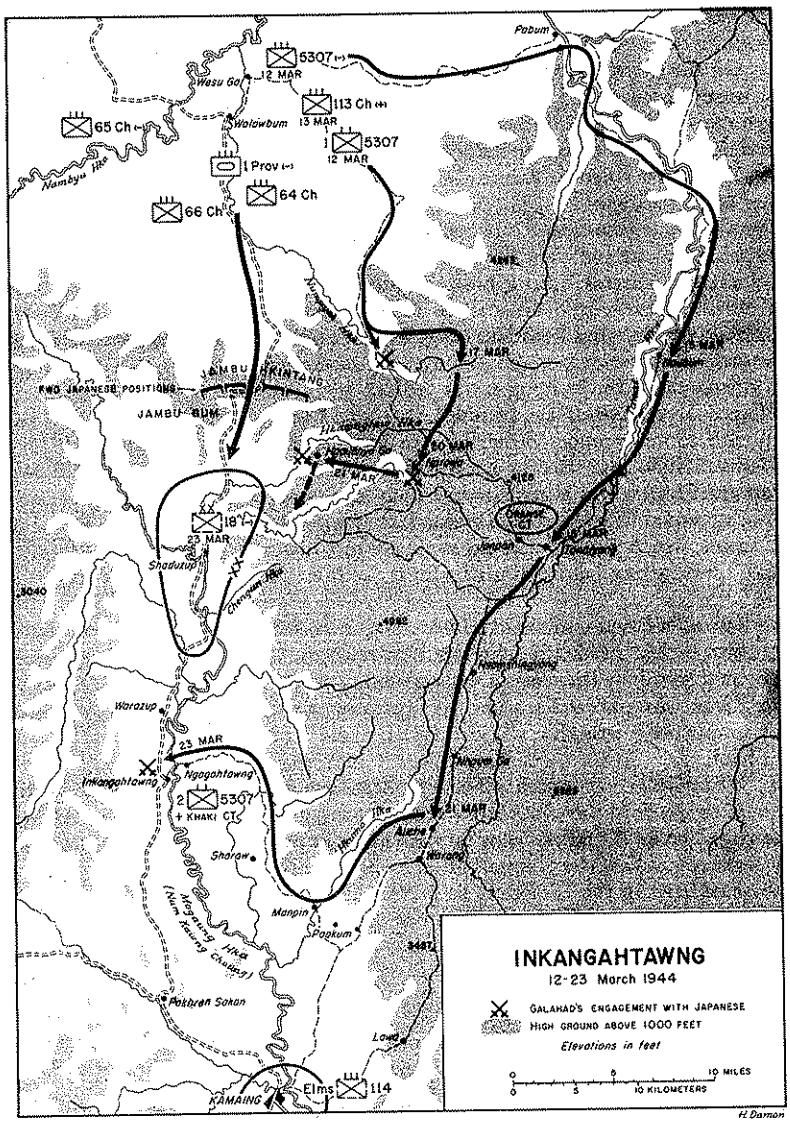
Stilwell's disregard for such a basic practice as issuing written orders disgusted Hunter. Later he wrote that there were two ways for doing things in northern Burma—the Stilwell way and the Army way.[7] Especially disturbing to Hunter was the absence of any intelligence of Japanese dispositions. Merrill did not question or object to this slipshod approach to combat; as Deputy Commander, Hunter did not feel he had the right to make an issue of it. Thus, Galahad pushed off on 24 February 1944, unclear in regard to where the Japanese were, but determined to do well.

The first operation at Walawbum was a definite success. Probing carefully along the Japanese right flank, the three battalions of Galahad snaked around to the Japanese rear with such speed and skill that they arrived at their objectives retaining tactical surprise, despite having made contact enroute several times. Brushing aside the small Japanese rear detachments in the area, the battalions settled in quickly to fight off a determined and heavy enemy counterattack conducted by the Japanese main forces which acted rapidly to remove the threat to their rear. In particular, the 2d and 3d battalions fought two intense engagements in which platoons and companies found themselves fighting for their lives in separate actions. Merrill and Hunter monitored the situation closely and coordinated air resupply, but essentially they permitted the battalion commanders to fight their own battles without interference.

Despite being outnumbered by a wide margin, Galahad dealt the enemy a hard blow through its superior marksmanship and steadiness under fire. Striking down 800 of the enemy for the loss of only eight of its own killed and 37 wounded, the 5307th stunned the Japanese, who had expected to sweep them away with ease. Ominously, a large number of sick soldiers had to be evacuated at the end of the action.[8] Already, the jungle was taking its toll in disease and exhaustion. The outfit as a whole, however, blooded and well-rested, turned to its next mission with confidence.

In winning its first battle streamers in Walawbum, Galahad's turning movement caused the Japanese to fall back farther in one week than they had in the previous three months. The next "short hook" embraced the same concept as at Walawbum. Galahad's battalions were to slip around the Japanese rear again into blocking positions on their LOCs at specified areas north of the important Japanese supply depot at Kamaing. However, several problems occurred in this second operation.

To begin with, Stilwell modified Hunter's plan to take all three battalions on a wide loop to their objectives. Instead, he directed two widely separated approach marches into the area. He sent the 1st Battalion on a very shallow approach to Shaduzup while the other two battalions under Hunter infiltrated on the wider loop to a greater depth at Inkangahtawng. The 1st Battalion bumped into the Japanese again and again as they pressed toward their objective in an agonizingly slow and tension-filled advance. (The 2d and 3d battalions, although traveling a much greater distance, arrived at their blocks four days earlier.) The 1st Battalion surprised the Japanese garrison at Shaduzup in a night attack, held against



the inevitable counterattacks, then turned their positions over to the advancing Chinese.

Hunter's operation, on the other hand, almost immediately went awry. Just as Hunter was positioning his blocking forces, Merrill received a report from Stilwell's staff that a strong Japanese force from the south was trying to flank Galahad. Stilwell's staff ordered Merrill to withdraw from the blocks in order to meet this threat. Despite his belief that the higher headquarter had overreacted, Hunter immediately coordinated the withdrawal, ordering his commanders to evacuate wounded and take a resupply enroute to the new block.

The sudden orders to reverse direction created a sense of insecurity in the ranks of the 2d Battalion, which disintegrated into panic as the long winding column of men came under accurate artillery fire from the Japanese with whom they had recently broken contact. Order was restored and the chaos subdued when Merrill and his staff made contact with the battalion and quieted their fears. Merrill had reassumed direct command of the 2d and 3d battalions as a result of the change in plans.

Eventually both battalions negotiated the long, difficult trek into their new positions, conducting several masterful tactical actions along the way. Merrill put the 3d Battalion in at Hsamshingyang (the site of a small air strip) and the 2d Battalion at Nphum Ga, but then had a heart attack and was evacuated, leaving Hunter to handle the coming battle. The Japanese, following close behind, quickly surrounded the 2d Battalion, cutting their link to Hsamshingyang. Over the next 11 days, from 30 March to 9 April, there followed the siege of Nphum Ga, a desperate, vicious fight with no quarter asked or given.

The ferocity of the engagement matched anything seen in any theater during the war. Resupplied only by air and fighting by day and night, the 2d Battalion's men lived a day-to-day existence. Wounded men were treated by aid men and returned directly to foxholes on the tiny perimeter. When the water ran out, sulfa drugs were taken dry; the mules all died of thirst or fire. Unable to break through to Nphum Ga with the 3d Battalion, Hunter recalled the 1st Battalion from Shaduzup, from whence it raced with breakneck speed.

During the impasse, Hunter was asked if he feared that they might all be trapped. "Don't you ever get scared?," his questioner asked. Hunter replied, "Wait until you've had twins." Hunter believed that an officer must keep his fears to himself.[9]

On 4 April, Hunter ordered an all-out effort by the 3d Battalion to relieve the 2d. The 3d Battalion commander asked Hunter to address his men before they pushed off again. In his no-nonsense fashion, Hunter replied, "We have been attacking up this g-------- hill for four days now and getting two-bitted to death by casualties and getting nowhere. Today, let's take what casualties we have to, to get the job done. In the long run you will lose fewer men. Good luck."[10] In order to increase the chance for success, Hunter also had a faked message dropped into Japanese lines that described a plan to drop a battalion of paratroopers behind the Japanese. The message was to be supported by a dummy drop of supplies in the area. Showing additional imagination, Hunter also sent a platoon around the left flank and ordered it to simulate a much larger force.

The 1st Battalion arrived at Hsamshingyang on the 7th, but the men were exhausted and crippled with dysentery and malaria. Nevertheless, a 250-man force was assembled under the command of Captain Tom Senff. Sparing no effort to relieve the men trapped at Nphum Ga, Hunter directed Senff to circle around to threaten the enemy's rear.

By 9 April, the Japanese had had enough. Pressured from the rear, pounded by US aircraft, and having lost at least 400 men to Galahad marksmen, the Japanese command pulled out. The siege of Nphum Ga was over; Hunter had won. However, the battle had cost Galahad 59 killed, 314 wounded, and around 379 too sick to remain in the field.

Knowing that depression and listlessness frequently followed such a desperate fight, Hunter immediately put the survivors to work burying the dead, burning the mules, and covering other remains with lime chloride. He also sent out patrols to track the fleeing Japanese. Once the area had been restored to a measure of wholesomeness, Hunter instituted a program of training and rehabilitation, even to the point of ordering close order drill. Hunter commented in his book, *Galahad*, on this decision:

> I am constantly amazed at the reaction of the troops, the historians, and professional colleagues. One would think that only a crackpot or a genius would prescribe close order drill for a jungle outfit deep in North Burma. Actually soldiers like to drill. It is good exercise, it creates a feeling of comradeship, acquaints the men and officers with each other's good and bad points, and it requires little preparatory mental work.[11]

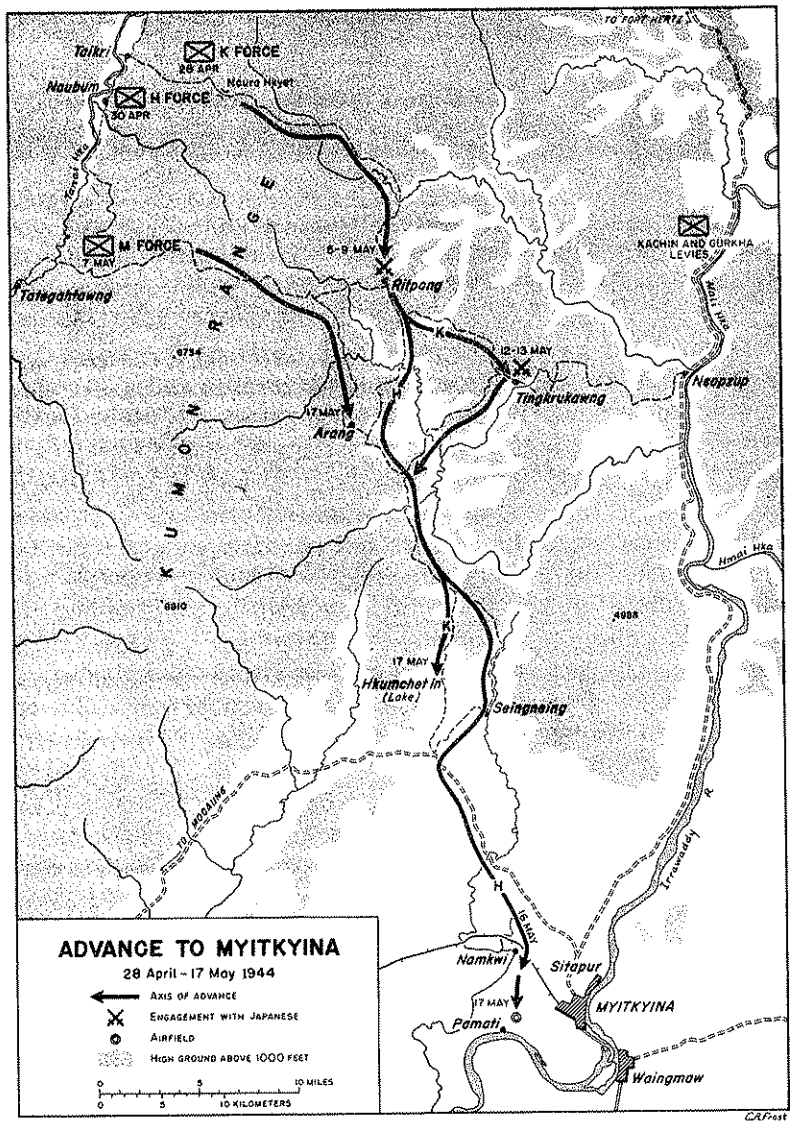
Whatever one might think about the quality of Hunter's decision, one would be inclined to agree with him that only a crackpot or a genius—or an officer who knew his men very well—would do such a thing.

By the end of this short rest and recuperation period, Galahad had been in action behind enemy lines for over nine weeks. They had suffered a very heavy blow at Nphum Ga in a battle for which they were not suited by organization or training. After fighting over 500 miles of jungle, the men were exhausted. They were subsisting almost exclusively on K-rations, a survival ration wholly inadequate for maintaining strength in the demanding conditions of jungle war.[12] Sickness and disease had infiltrated their ranks. Every day, soldiers fell ill with malaria or dysentery or some other malady. Now another danger had appeared, the deadly scrub typhus, transmitted by a tiny mite. Moreover, the sheer tension of operating in territory controlled by the Japanese had also taken its toll on nerves and well-being. Under these conditions and having fought two major battles, the men of Galahad felt that they had earned relief. They all remembered that Wingate had promised a 90-day limit on their operations. That time window was closing, and Galahad expected Stilwell to honor it.

It was not to be. Stilwell intended to keep Galahad in the field until he had extracted every conceivable ounce of military utility.[13]

As the rumors filtered through the organization that Stilwell had another mission for them, the first reaction was that the rumors were an ugly joke by someone with a warped sense of humor. When it became clear that Stilwell was serious, the men grimly set their teeth and accepted their ill fortune with the fatalism of men who are doomed.

Colonel Hunter, however, had no illusions about a 90-day limit. Having been forewarned by Merrill (who was recuperating in the rear) and being the kind of man to keep looking ahead, Hunter put his staff to work planning a move to Myitkyina (pronounced Mitchinar), the next obvious objective. He sent local native scouts over the formidable Kumon Mountains, 6000 to 8000 feet high, to seek an unobserved route to this vital Japanese strongpoint 65 miles away.



ON TO MYITKYINA

Stilwell had, in fact, decided to send Galahad to seize the airfield at Myitkyina. Galahad was reinforced with a Chinese regiment and reorganized into an M, K, and H Force. Though unwell, Merrill remained in overall command from the rear. Rather than promote Hunter to field command of the force, however, Stilwell brought in another member of his personal team to act in Merrill's stead. Hunter apparently did not begrudge this decision, but his men resented it strongly.[14]

Hunter was appointed to lead H Force to make the main attack. Hunter received no instructions regarding what he should do after the airfield was taken. Merrill simply told him that when the airfield fell, he (Merrill) would fly in to take command again. Merrill also announced that Galahad would be relieved at Myitkyina. This news reinvigorated the men.[15]

In an incredible feat of endurance and sheer perseverance, Galahad marched 18 days without pause, crossed the mountains (which were so formidable that they were not even outposted by the Japanese), and appeared undetected on the outskirts of Myitkyina. One of the participants in this trek described it most vividly:

> We set off with that what-the-hell-did-you-expect-anyway spirit that served the 5307th in place of morale, and I dare say served it better. Mere morale would never

have carried us through the country we now had to cross. We had fought with mountains before, but none like those of the Kumon Ranges under the monsoon rains . . . .

We were scarcely ever dry. When the rain stopped and the sun came out, evaporation would begin. The land steamed. The combination of heat and moisture was smothering. You had to fight through it. For those most weakened by disease, it was too much. For the first time you began to pass men fallen out beside the train, men who were not just complying with the demands of dysentery—we were used to that—but were sitting bent over their weapons, waiting for enough strength to return to take them another mile. During the worst times heretofore we could always count on one thing to keep us going—and that was the process of keeping going itself. As long as the column was on the march, men somehow seemed to be able to keep up, and it was only when we laid up for a day that the sufferers would collapse. But it did not work any longer. We had stragglers. Whenever we bivouacked, men who had been incapable of keeping up with the column, slowly as it moved, and were too tired to worry about the danger from any Japanese there might be lurking about, would be plodding in for hours afterward, unsmiling and clammy with sweat. There was a feeling in the organization that it was coming apart. And Myitkyina was still 60 miles away.[16]

After a quick reconnaissance and a short rest period, Hunter captured the airfield on 17 May in a quick, daylight attack which caught the Japanese completely off guard. At the conclusion of this short battle, with the airfield in Allied hands, Hunter had only 1310 Galahad soldiers left of 2200 that had started the trek. Almost all of the casualties were from injury, disease, and exhaustion. Virtually every soldier had a fever of some kind and was plagued with oozing sores or dysentery. Despite these terrible losses, the capture of the airfield was a stunning success, thanks to the maneuver which only Galahad could have performed, coupled with a prompt, effective tactical attack. Stilwell was overjoyed.

Inexplicably, in a display of gross military incompetence, Stilwell completely failed to take advantage of this coup-de-main. Instead of flying in strong infantry reinforcements, food, and ammunition, as expected by Hunter, Stilwell's staff deployed antiaircraft units and airfield construction troops! As a result, a magnificent opportunity was lost. Stilwell's mental lapse, which no one has ever satisfactorily explained, allowed the Japanese to build up the Myitkyina garrison to the point where it could only be taken after a three-month siege instead of by storm. In this manner, the stage was also set for the final and most dismal chapter in Galahad's history.[17]

Stilwell compounded his initial error of not taking Myitkyina by storm by refusing to accept the offer of an excellent British division to accomplish the task.[18] Stilwell insisted that the town be captured by the Chinese and American troops. Once more, Galahad was pressed into the fray despite the fact that it had virtually ceased to exist as a fighting force. Merrill flew in as promised but he didn't stay, his health again making him unfit for duty. Once more, Stilwell elected not to elevate Hunter to command. Instead, he brought in a succession of new faces, none of whom worked out to Stilwell's satisfaction. During the next several weeks, Hunter endured the sight of seeing the remnants of his force destroyed in fruitless attacks against Japanese strongpoints without proper combat support. In one case, the 2d Battalion's men were so tired that they kept falling asleep during an engagement (the battalion commander himself fainted three times); by the end of the month of May, the battalion was down to 12 men.[19] Yet, these were the men (among Chinese units) that Stilwell intended to use to win Myitkyina. There is no evidence that Merrill attempted to deter Stilwell from this course.

Hunter's faith in the Army system at the time was so strong that he assumed that Stilwell simply had not been made aware of the appalling condition of the 5307th. Realizing that neither Merrill nor his interim replacements intended to brace the old man, Hunter decided that he would be remiss not to do it himself. Accordingly, he wrote a

short, blunt letter in which he described the shameful treatment which Galahad had received from Stilwell's staff. He personally delivered the letter to Stilwell on 27 May rather than send it through channels where clerks might read it. The letter essentially described Galahad as an unwanted "visiting unit for which the theater felt no responsibility." It enumerated numerous instances in which the morale and health of the command had been damaged, such as: the apparent ban on promotions and decorations; the unresponsiveness of Stilwell's staff to legitimate requests and inquiries; the lack of credence given to reports describing the poor health of the command; and the continued retention of the unit in the combat zone past the expected time for relief. Stilwell never responded to Hunter regarding any of the specific allegations other than to note that the letter was strongly worded. Later the letter became part of the basis for an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the complete breakdown of Galahad.[20]

Over the next two months, Hunter observed the sorry spectacle of previously evacuated Galahad men still unrecovered from their ailments being returned to the mud-filled trenches at Myitkyina for combat duty. Some accounts also allege that members of Stilwell's staff deprived some men of Galahad of their airplane passes after they had been identified by medical personnel at Myitkyina for evacuation to the rear as unfit for duty. These travesties, and others, were committed in an overzealous attempt to comply with Stilwell's command to get every able-bodied soldier to the front. The same overzealousness led to the commitment of woefully untrained replacement units into the breach, where they were massacred. Meanwhile, in the rear, the care afforded the men in the convalescent area set aside for Galahad was so bad that there were virtual riots.[21] Seldom have American soldiers been treated so heartlessly.

Thus came Galahad to an inglorious end. It was never reformed. Instead a new unit, the 475th Infantry Regiment, a proper unit with a flag and a lineage, was established. It embraced the Galahad survivors and was commanded by the former 1st Battalion commander of the 5307th. Today's US Army Ranger battalions trace their lineage through the 475th to Galahad.

Hunter's involvement in the Burma campaign ended similarly. His fate remained tied to Stilwell, who finally gave Hunter command of the American forces engaged in Myitkyina. In his indomitable way, Hunter knocked these forces into shape. They were still hammering away at the Japanese in Myitkyina when the town finally was captured in August. In typical fashion, Hunter was relieved of command without explanation by note and ordered back to the United States *by boat*. Later, the reason for this unusual order became clearer. The treatment of Galahad had become a scandal. Several different organizations were prying into the facts, including the press. Hunter's return by ship guaranteed that he would be incommunicado for some time, long enough for interest to die and for the responsible parties to cover the trail. The bitterness which Hunter experienced as a result of this whole affair is evident from his memoir, yet it is also clear that he treasured his service with the men of Galahad.

CONCLUSIONS

Few people know the real story behind Galahad, but military professionals ought to. Among other reasons, the account is useful as a case study of senior tactical-level leadership. As such, Hunter's example demonstrates that one does not have to be a Patton or a MacArthur to do well as a commander. Perfection, genius, or charismatic leadership are not prerequisites for success in combat. Hunter was a perfectly ordinary officer with many faults whose performance, however, was extraordinary in the situation in which he was thrust. In this context, it is also worth noting that some of the most significant, rewarding, and enduring challenges for a military professional will be found below the general officer level. This study also makes an interesting contrast between an enshrined military hero, Stilwell, and the tactical unknown who brought Stilwell a good measure of his fame. It is the first point,

however, the question of senior tactical leadership, to which I would like to devote the remainder of this article.

To begin, it is important to note as a foundation to further discussion that the situation in which Hunter found himself from October 1943 to August 1944 could scarcely have been more difficult. From beginning to end, Hunter's own personal standing in the organization was uncertain. Was he the commander or was he not? Did he have Stilwell's confidence or did he not? Into what areas could he legitimately extend his authority? What decisions were his alone and which had to be referred higher for approval? How far could he rely on Merrill to defend the interests of the command?

Furthermore, the missions which Galahad carried out so nobly and obediently were fraught with danger and unrelenting pressure. Disease, exhaustion, forbidding terrain, monsoon rains, inadequate rations, unbearable hardship, and the ever-present tension and stress of being in the enemy's rear combined to create an environment which can hardly be described with mere words. On top of it all, no efforts were made by the higher command to assure the men of Galahad that their efforts were recognized and appreciated. Given impossible tasks which they executed faithfully, Galahad's men were treated like dogs. One battalion in the 5307th went two months without mail. Promotions and decorations were withheld until the end of the campaign. Only one hot meal is recorded during the months of March to May. No heritage, no colors, no patch, no mail, no decorations, no comfort supplies, no recognition—it is a wonder and a cause for great admiration that Galahad performed as well as it did.

These, then, were the conditions under which Hunter endeavored to carry out his responsibilities. As one studies his example, it becomes evident that he had good points and bad, both of which bear mentioning.

Hunter's most important quality was knowing his craft. He frequently inspected troop dispositions and made corrections where they were needed, moving foxholes or machine guns to better sites. He would not tolerate tactical incompetence and blistered those responsible for tactical errors. At the same time, he could be innovative and flexible when necessary. He did not slavishly follow tactical doctrine; he molded it to the situation. It is clear that he saw such flexibility as a fundamental aspect of tactical doctrine. All of Hunter's tactical plans proved to be successful during the campaign. His subordinates and the troops had confidence in him. They trusted his tactical sense and ground leadership.

Hunter also led by personal example. He remained in the field, enduring the same hardships as his men during the campaign. His standards were high, even harsh, but he ensured that his own performance measured up. He knew the importance of seeing and being seen, thus he frequently was found on the perimeter and beyond it. He neither complained nor tolerated complainers. He could have aided a collapse of morale by entertaining complaints and being oversympathetic. Mission-oriented to a high degree, Hunter saw great virtue in unvacillating obedience to orders. His speech at Nphum Ga is a clear picture of his attitude to his combat tasks. He neither feared nor was he reckless about closing with the enemy.

Hunter recognized talent in his subordinates and he used it. He gave them a free rein but monitored each situation closely. Clearly, he had no concern about drawing credit to himself, although it must be admitted that he was slow to praise.

In regard to troop welfare, there is no doubt that Hunter understood soldiers and cared for them, albeit in an unsentimental manner. Whenever he could, he saw to it that they were properly resupplied and rested. He endeavored to ensure that Galahad was used only for the tasks for which it had trained. It is true that he pushed them to their limits, yet this too was for their own good. He was strong enough to stand up to their mutterings, knowing that in the end they would understand that he was right. Again, he asked them to endure nothing that he was unwilling to endure himself. Much of the abuse which his men suffered, however, was beyond his control. To the extent of his ability and

within the limits of Hunter's own mission orientation, it is fair to say that he cared for his men as much as he could.

On the negative side, one might criticize Hunter on the grounds that he was too slow to stand up to Stilwell and his staff (although it was reasonable for him to expect Merrill to carry this standard). Perhaps Hunter was overly conscious of his uncertain status. One cannot help but wonder why he did not take Merrill to task for his many failures to make good on his promises. Why did he wait until 27 May to give Stilwell his letter? Why did he not insist more adamantly that his men be withdrawn from the combat zone at Myitkyina? It appears that Hunter may have possessed a quality which is common to many US officers today and which has been noted by many foreign observers—an overly developed loyalty to higher commanders at the expense of subordinates. Hunter's own memoir demonstrates that he had a great unwillingness to question and challenge Merrill, Stilwell, or Stilwell's staff. Still, he was the only one of Galahad's commanders to face Stilwell, and he faced him alone, risking his career to do so.

Hunter also seemed to be overly intolerant of the weaknesses of others and slow to recognize his own. At other times, his judgment showed strange twists. More than once when visitors from rear headquarters came to visit Galahad at Nphum Ga, Hunter staged fake firefights, which he found humorous. Commenting on the poor care being given his men in their convalescent camps, Hunter remarked that everything would have been fine if the camp administration had brought in 50 or so prostitutes to solace them. His distress over the rumors of their poor care apparently was ameliorated by the fact that he technically had no responsibility for them since he remained in the combat zone.

In conclusion, Hunter was no saint. The distilling effect of Galahad's campaign was such that his strengths and flaws both became apparent. Nevertheless, one final comment is in order. Even as the command disintegrated, Galahad's officers and men knew that given the chance, Hunter could pull them together again. Distressed that he had obtained no special recognition, they felt a loyalty and esteem toward Hunter that few commanders can arouse. They forgave him his faults and held him high in their memories. As the ultimate measure of Hunter's leadership, the testimonies of his own men bear the strongest witness that he deserves our respect.

NOTES

1. Stilwell's antipathy for the British is well known and has been cited by many different histories of the campaign. That he lacked true empathy for his own American troops is a harsh statement but also a true one that should be plain to the reader from the facts presented in this article. Louis Allen in his *Burma. The Longest War, 1941-1945* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1984) states twice that Stilwell "crucified" Galahad (pp. 320, 363). Raymond Callahan, *Burma, 1942-45* (Newark, N.J.: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1978), p. 139, states that Stilwell "ruthlessly used" both Galahad and the Chindits. At Myitkyina, Stilwell directed that combat-evacuated Galahad troopers in hospitals or convalescing in rest camps be returned to combat. He also employed untrained US troops as reinforcements in the infantry role at Myitkyina. Totally unready, some of these American soldiers had not seen a weapon since basic training. One entire company was massacred by the Japanese shortly after it arrived. See Charlton Ogburn, Jr., *The Marauders* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), pp. 261-62, for more information on this heartless sacrifice of lives.

2. Every single comprehensive source that I have consulted on the Burma campaign in 1944 indicts Stilwell's staff for poor planning, lack of coordination, indifference to troop welfare, failure to keep lower staffs informed, failure to monitor tactical situations, and other indications of incompetence. The staff even failed to keep *Stilwell* informed about the conditions of the US and British troops under his command. See Michael Calvert, *Prisoners of Hope* (London: Leo Cooper Ltd., 1971); Terrence O'Brien, *Out of the Blue* (London: Collins, 1984), and Shelford Bidwell, *The Chindit War* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), particularly p. 274. The staff's incompetence undoubtedly was exacerbated by Stilwell's own disdain for staff work and his very secretive approach to operations. See also Bidwell, p. 91.

3. The belief that there would be a 90-day limit to operations by Galahad (and the other Chindit brigades) was widely held by the men in the ranks as well as the officers. The belief was based primarily on statements by their own leaders (Wingate, Hunter, Merrill, and even Stilwell) that the units would be withdrawn after this time. There is absolutely no question that Galahad was totally used up by the end of this time period, owing to the unbelievably harsh conditions and privations that they suffered. Expecting relief after their last operation to Myitkyina, the survivors of the force were devastated to find out that Stilwell intended to keep them in the combat zone indefinitely. See Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *The China-Burma-India Theater. Stilwell's Command Problems*, part of the official United States Army in World War II series (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1956), p. 34; Ogburn, p. 227; Allen, p. 366.

4. Charles N. Hunter, *Galahad* (San Antonio, Tex.: The Naylor Company, 1963), p. 5.

5. Ogburn, p. 86.

6. Bidwell, p. 85; Hunter, p. 20; Romanus and Sunderland, p. 149.

7. Hunter, p. 56.

8. The large number of sick soldiers evacuated at Walawbum (136 men) undoubtedly was connected to the fact that a good many of the Galahad volunteers from the Pacific were already sick or had a history of chronic sickness, particularly malaria, when they arrived in India. Some, apparently, had even volunteered in the hopes of receiving better medical treatment in a new command. The medical history of Galahad's campaign is reflected vividly in James H. Stone, *Crisis Fleeting* (Washington: Office of the Surgeon General, 1969), ch. 5.

9. Ogburn, pp. 206-07.

10. Hunter, pp. 77-78.

11. Ibid., p. 83.

12. Ibid., pp. 16-17. Hunter states that the inadequacy of the K-ration was known by all concerned but accepted with the view that the unit would be withdrawn after three months on the "starvation diet." See also Stone, pp. 302-03, 308. Average weight loss exceeded 20 pounds and was as great as 50 pounds. The specific mix of rations provided by air drop to Galahad was 80 percent K-ration, 5 percent C-ration, 5 percent 10-in-1 rations, and 10 percent B-rations.

13. See Bidwell, p. 275, and the citations in note 1. See also Barbara W. Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), pp. 570 and 575.

14. Hunter, p. 88. See also Ogburn, p. 291, regarding the high esteem in which Hunter was held and the distress felt by his men that he received so little recognition.

15. The promise of evacuation probably had the greatest effect on the perseverance of Galahad to keep driving on to Myitkyina. Merrill promised the men that they would be installed in a "well-appointed rest camp" and "given a party to cause taxpayers to shudder." (Ogburn, p. 227). Even Stilwell allowed that Merrill could begin evacuating Galahad at Myitkyina "without further order if everything worked out as expected." (Tuchman, p. 570.)

16. Ogburn, p. 231.

17. The interference of Brigadier General Stratemeyer, CG, USAAF Burma-India, in this affair should not be overlooked. Concerned about airfield security, Stratemeyer disrupted the deployment schedule in order to send in antiaircraft troops and airfield engineers. Stilwell and his staff failed miserably to control the flow of reinforcements to Myitkyina. That there was no immediate plan to take the town of Myitkyina once the airfield fell is incredible. As the author of the Myitkyina operation, Stilwell bears ultimate responsibility for the failures of his staff and the interference of his subordinate, Stratemeyer.

18. Allen, p. 367; Hunter, p. 138; Romanus and Sunderland, p. 233; Bidwell, p. 260. All these sources imply or state that the British 36th Division was available to Stilwell in May. Bidwell says it was "earmarked" for him.

19. Romanus and Sunderland, p. 240.

20. Hunter, p. 191; Ogburn, p. 270.

21. The deplorable conditions of the rest camps are described by Ogburn (pp. 272-78) and Hunter (pp. 203-04). Hunter describes the camp conditions as "indescribably poor"; Ogburn's comments are even more graphic.