

The 2 August 1943 crash of C-46 # 41-12420 and significance of the rescue of its crew and passengers

Although Army Air Forces search and rescue units had accomplished numerous impromptu parachute rescues of survivors of crashed aircraft in remote wilderness areas of North America since December 1940 none of these parachute rescue operations were conducted in an area inhabited by warlike indigenous peoples and visited by patrolling and raiding enemy forces. Despite these other by parachute rescue operations conducted by various Army Air Forces air rescue units since 1940, this mission is the most attributed as being considered the origin of USAF Pararescue Teams and the USAF Pararescue enlisted specialty. Unfortunately the often simplistic informing reference to this mission is dismissing how and why this mission conclusively demonstrated if the risk is accepted a parachute rescue team can be dropped anywhere to aid and assist survivors of an aircraft crash or bailout.

Military operations in China-Burma-India (CBI) relied and depended on parachute/glider assaults and airdrop resupply capabilities immensely more than in any other combat theater. This air support mission need encouraged more acceptance of risk to develop and utilize a wide variety of solutions in the whole field of air support of ground operations. The August 2, 1943 crash of C-46 #2420 in the CBI Theater during WWII resulted in the first rescue of survivors from enemy patrolled and raided territory by use of a self-sufficient parachute-rescue team supported with airdrop resupply techniques, methods, procedures and tactics.

Not only is this mission credited in official military histories as being the first into such a populated with potentially belligerent peoples area it is also considered to be the dominant successful of the numerous parachute rescues accomplished in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater during WWII. By the time of the May 3, 1945 when a C-47 crashed at a location in the dubbed Hidden (renamed Shangri-La) Valley, Dutch New Guinea such long range parachute rescues needing airdrop resupply were no longer a rarity. The lost in Shangri La Valley parachute rescue team operations is comparison mentioned as it has garnered much more public interest following at the time and a current times following as it involved a female WAC Corporal lost in the jungle with "savages".

To gain appreciation of the significance of the August 2 thru September 1, 1943 parachute rescue team activities some awareness of the geopolitics and asymmetrical combat nature of the CBI Theater is necessary.

When WWII began the China-Burma-India region was predominantly an unexplored and not an accurately mapped region. Most of the region lacked roads and established marked trading foot trails. The indigenous populations in the remote mountainous isolated areas were tribal and intratribal conflict was likely particularly in the hill country along the border of far eastern India and northwestern Burma where C-46 # 41-12420 crashed on August 2, 1943.

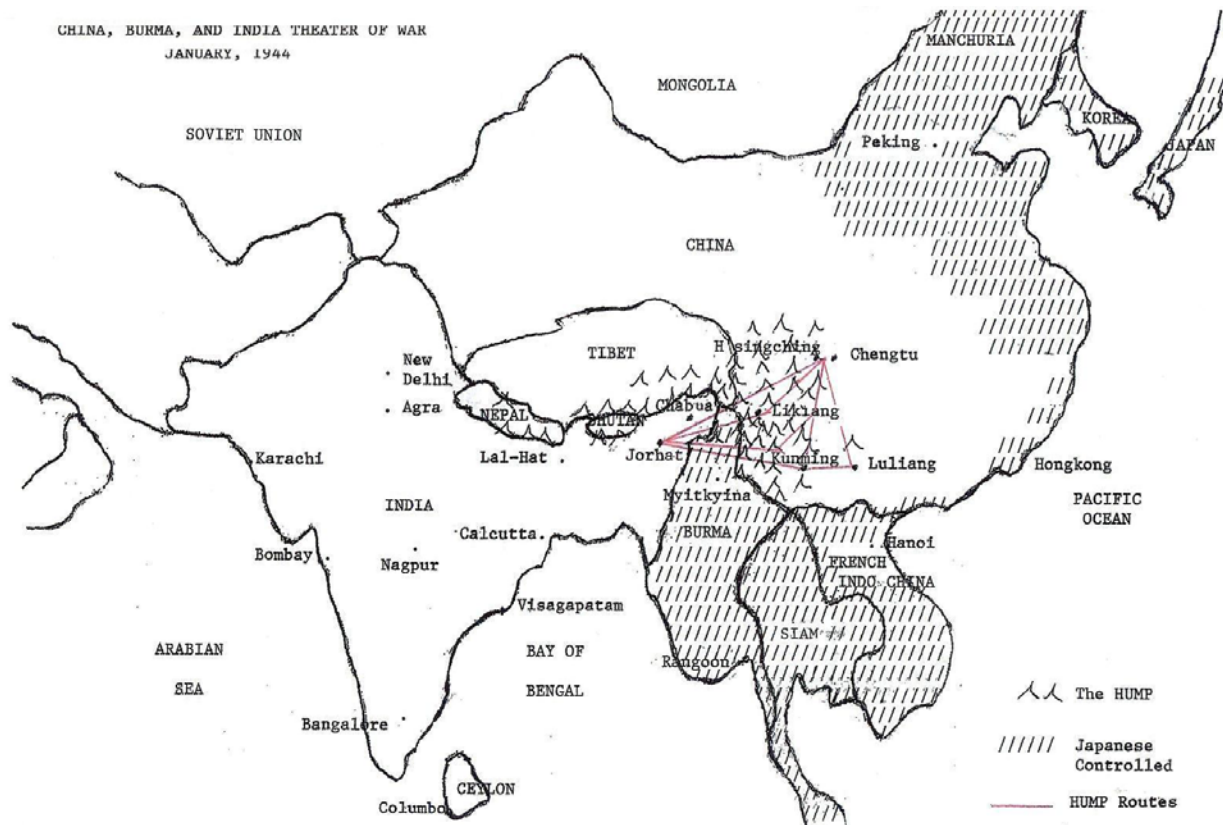
This area is known as Nagaland is mostly a mountainous region. The Naga Hills rise from the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam to about 2,000 feet (610 m) and rise further to the southeast, as high as 6,000 feet (1,800 m). Mount Saramati at an elevation of 12,552 feet (3,826 m) is the regions highest peak; this is where the Naga Hills merge with the Patkai Range in Burma. Rivers such as the Doyang and Diphu to the north, the Barak river in the southwest and the Chindwin river of Burma in the southeast, dissect the entire region. The terrain is rich in flora and fauna with areas of wooded evergreen tropical and subtropical forest.

The indigenous population had a headhunting reputation and such savagery is known to have happened in Naga Hills during November 1943 when a combined force from Chingmei, Nokluk, Pangsha, Tsaplaw, Tswalaw and possibly some other small villages had attacked and destroyed Law Nawkum taking between 250 and 300 heads. American and British forces took no action as the headhunting intratribal conflict did not threaten the Ledo Road or its construction. Naga tribesmen were normally shy and smiling but they were ferocious when provoked and these peoples built secure and self-sufficient villages on hilltops to protect the village from surprise attack from other villages.

The Japanese Army was active in the area too.

The Japanese occupation of Burma began during the spring 1942 with the included the military objective to gain control of the Burma Road (completed in 1938) to cut resupply links from the port of Rangoon with the Chinese province of Yunnan. The war in northern Burma was fought in three phases. The first phase began in November 1943 and ended in late August 1944, with the capture of Myitkyina and the securing of flights over the hump to China from disruption by the Japanese Air Force. The second phase ended with the capture of Lahio, Maymyo, and Mandalay in March 1945. The third phase ended in July 1945 with all of the old Burma Road from Rangoon to Lashio and Kunming back under Allied control.

Nevertheless, during the period from the spring of 1942 to until March 1944 six Japanese army divisions controlled the territory of Burma to the Border with India and China with the American



and British allied forces lacking the resources and organization to recapture Burma.

Although the Japanese Army's March 1944 invasion of India failed, Allied transport aircraft flying air routes between India and China along the Brumes India China border were subject to attack from where Japanese fighter aircraft operating out of the Burmese city of Myitkyina until August 1944.

Equally, of not a more contributing, the combination of rugged terrain on, extreme altitude, unpredictable weather and severe shortages of spare parts and experienced, properly trained crews contributed significantly to high aircraft lost rates. Unfortunately, with few roads to travel no capabilities existed for search and rescue of downed aircrews and aircraft passengers in this region until the mid-July 1942 arrival of Detachment 101 Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Detachment 101 was created to perform unconventional tasks such as espionage, sabotage, guerrilla warfare, propaganda, and escape-and-evasion missions in the China-Burma, India theater. Detachment 101 is credited with pioneering the unique art of unconventional warfare; it is first United States unit to form an intelligence screen, organize, and employ a large guerrilla army deep in enemy territory. In the process of utilizing parachute airdrops of small tactical teams to accomplish wartime rescue and recovery of downed aircrew and aircraft passenger operations Detachment 101 developed tactics, techniques and procedures that became the origins of USAF Pararescue concepts of operations and the Guardian Angel weapon system requirements. Although no centralized controlling air-sea-ground rescue agency for CBI emerged, Detachment 101 was proactive in forging the feasibility acceptance of search and rescue operations being a multi-purpose tactical power projection mission.

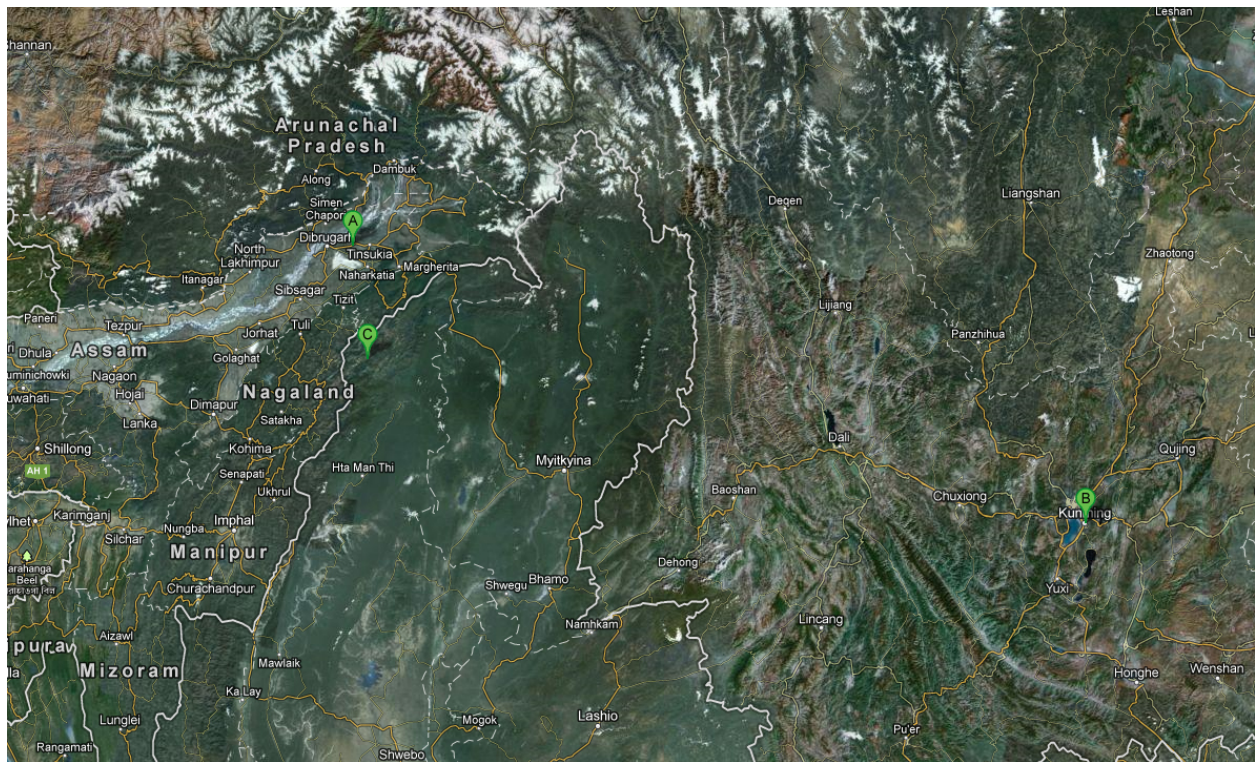
Early in 1943, the Air Transport Command (ATC), which was losing aircraft on the Hump run at a rate of nearly one aircraft a day. Concurrently Detachment 101 had not yet acquired an air-drop capability to infiltrate, resupply and exfiltrate its unconventional harassment teams and intelligence agent/radio operator teams. This resulted in a deal being made between Detachment 101 and ATC that the ATC would furnish the planes, parachutes, and parachute instructor personnel to Detachment 101 and in return, Detachment 101's base and training camps at Nazira in northern Assam would develop an aircrew rescue program and help train aircrews in jungle survival skills. The Detachment also built trails and cache sites along the Hump run. Swiftly realizing Naga aid could prove critical in rescuing downed aircrew and passengers who would otherwise perish before trekking out of the jungle caused OSS Detachment 101 to send its agents to several Naga villages, to inform tribesmen that any-and-all help would be handsomely rewarded with trinkets, coin, and opium.

The historical record on the success of Detachment 101's aircrew rescue and escape-and-evasion operations vary from a total of 232 to 425 allied airmen rescued. The higher figure may include those who parachuted to the ground and used Detachment 101's trails and cache sites to escape. It may also include airmen who were brought to safety by Kachins who were influenced to help by the 101, but were not directly under the control of Detachment 101 personnel. The lower figure, 232, was taken from the Northern Combat Area Command's historical account of the northern and central Burma campaigns, and it does not include those who may have been rescued during the last four months of the war in Burma.

Thus when the crew and passengers bailed out of C-46, tail number 41-12420, on Monday August 2, 1943 the subsequent rescue activities was beyond the nature of any previous parachute

rescue team utilization into remote formidable and dangerous terrain. The inhospitality of the remote isolated wilderness, the warlike character of the Naga tribes and potential presence of the Japanese army patrols made traveling alone or even in small groups a venture little a short of suicide. Nonetheless, the ingenious peoples outreach efforts of Detachment 101 likely predisposed the well-armed tribesmen to be friendly towards those who successfully bailed out of the C-46 and the three-person parachute rescue team that jumped in to aid and assist the survivors a few hours later. Twenty-two days later the rescue party and survivors walked out of the jungle proving a small team inserted by parachute to accomplish ground rescue operations within and behind enemy lines is achievable by properly trained, equipped, and led teams.

This rescue event begins with C-46 tail number 41-12420 taking off at about 8 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 2, 1943 to fly a route from Chabua, India (A) to Kunming, China (B). Crash location (C).



Onboard were four crewmembers (Pilot Flight Officer Harry Neveu, co-pilot 2nd Lieutenant Charles Felix, Radio Operator Sgt Walter K. Oswald, and fight engineer Staff Sergeant Ned C. Miller), seventeen passengers and roughly seven thousand pounds of cargo and baggage.

The seventeen passengers: Mr. William T. Stanton, Board of Economic Warfare; Mr. John Davies, State Department-General Stillwell's office; Mr. Eric Sevaried, War Correspondent-CBS; Col Wang Pao Chao, Chinese Army; Lt Col Kuo Li, Chinese Army; S/Sgt Joseph Giguere, HQ ATC; Cpl Edward Holland, HQ ATC; Joseph Clay, HQ ATC; Sgt Francis Signor, JHQ ATC; Cpl Basil Lemon, HQ ATC; Sgt Glen Kittleson, HQ ATC; Cpl Lloyd Sherrill, HQ ATC; Cpl S. M. Waterbury; HQ ATC; Pvt William Schrandt, HQ Delhi SOS; T/Sgt E. Wilder, HQ 12th AF; 2ndLt Roland K. Lee, HQ ATC; Captain D. C. Lee, War Department, Adjutant General Department.

About an hour and thirty minutes into the flight, approximately 200 miles flown, while the plane was over the Patkai Mountains, the left engine lost oil pressure and was shut down and aircraft is turned around and headed back to Chabua. Although jettisoning cargo reduced weight and bought some time the overworked right engine caught fire and emergency bailout became the only option.

Point C is the Burma crash/bailout location in relation to Chabua, India (point A). The crash site was in close proximity of the village Pangsha (point C above) and the survivor and the parachute rescue team stayed there until August 18. Severeid gives the location as 26°25'N, 95°20'E.



All crew and passengers bailout but it took a few hours before they all met up in a Naga village to discover the copilot, 2Lt Felix and a passenger, Cpl Lemmon, were unaccounted for.

Naga tribesmen found Corporal Lemmon three days later after he spent those three days hiding from them, thinking they were Japanese soldiers. He was found in real bad shape suffering from insect and leech bites from head to foot that practically consumed much of his blood, he was hypothermic from lack of shelter and warmth, his shoeless feet (lost shoes during bailout) were cut up and bleeding and he was half-hysterical.

The only fatality, co-pilot 2nd Lieutenant Charles Felix, was found a few more days later under the tail of the C-46 with his chute fouled up in the tail assembly. Most likely, the C-46 was in a roll and he prematurely deployed his parachute as he was exiting causing his canopy hit and entangle on the stabilizer as it was deploying.

Fortuitously the radio operator had been transmitting distress calls before bailing out which resulted in a search and rescue C-47 arriving overhead within an hour or two that airdropped them weapons and other supplies that included signal panels.

The survivors used signal panels to communicate they had injured personnel and later that afternoon Lt. Col. Don S. Flickinger, Sgt. Richard S. Passey and Cpl. William MacKenzie parachuted into the jungle, met up with the survivors and began treating the injured.

Pilot Flight Officer Harry Neveu had several fractured ribs, Radio Operator Sgt Walter K. Oswald had a broken leg, one of the passengers a broken ankle and six others less serious injuries.

After seeing to the needs of the injured survivors, Flickinger and the two enlisted medics set up a clinic for the villagers, earning the gratitude and cementing friendly relations with the villagers. Flickinger also thought the survivors and the parachute rescue team might be safer from attack should the villagers become hostile, so he paid some of them to construct three huts, one for the civilians and Chinese passengers, one for the officers, and one for the enlisted men.

The survivors and parachute rescue team remained at Pangsha as they were advised by dropped note a ground team is on its way to escort them out. There was concern other tribes might be hostile and ambush them as they trekked out. The survivors and parachute rescue team left Pangsha on August 18, escorted by a party of armed natives led by the British deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills, Philip Adams. The survivors and rescue party struggled through a brutal six-day trek that taxed everyone to the limit.

Although this rescue is credited as the origin heritage for USAF Pararescue, there is much collateral mission implications emerging from this first in a combat area parachute rescue team operations.

Perhaps the significance of establishing a medical clinic to provide healthcare of indigenous population by Lt. Col. Don S. Flickinger, Sgt. Richard S. Passey and Cpl. William MacKenzie in the immediate bailout/crash location to gain safety by establishing goodwill relations the most overlooked detail of this mission. The Commander of the Air Rescue Service clearly and concisely reflects upon this importance to his subordinate commanders in June 1951.

The Pararescue teams have, inherent with their design, the facility of establishing communication with the native populace of remote wilderness areas. Should such areas be-present within your area of responsibility, then you are well aware of the complete disregard such natives usually have of aircraft incidents. Oftentimes this is due to superstitions of the natives while in other cases the only interest the natives may have is in sacking the wreckage. Proper coordination with the natives in the past has resulted in the saving of many aircrew lives. Such operations could well prove valuable again when maximum rescue effort is taxed by a war time workload. However, now is the time to establish this native coordination, not after the balloon goes up. The training the team member receive in native psychology and rescue operations permit them to do this mission for you. The establishment of advanced teams and assistance in maintaining them when all base facilities are nonexistent is another faculty a Pararescue team member provides you, if called upon to do so. In summation, a well trained Pararescue team can be a very valuable asset to your command if exploited to the maximum.

The parachute rescue aiding and assisting of the crew and passenger survivors of C-46 # 41-12420 contributed to the further developing of putting small team capability working in isolation in far forward positions. It prompted much rethinking on incorporating parachuting and unconventional efforts to rescue prisoners of war from Japanese prison camps in Southeast Asia, the Philippines and other Japanese occupied areas in the Pacific Theater.

This mission also prompted the availability of (no mission jump utilization evidence found) parachute rescue teams to support rescue of bomber crews based in India that were bombing Japanese war effort targets in Burma, Thailand, French Indo-China (Vietnam) and Malaya.



Direct traceable linkage or influences of this mission to military operations in other combat theaters is lacking other than in its broadest interpretation the term special operations covers all military operations within or behind enemy lines. Prior to 1943 special operations was in a tenuous state as the Office of Strategic Services was not established until Executive Order on June 13, 1942 as an agency of the Joint Chief of Staffs. The directive charging the OSS with the conduct of sabotage and guerrilla warfare did not materialize from US Joint Chief of Staffs until the fall of 1943. However during 1942, General Douglas MacArthur in the South Pacific and Admiral Chester Nimitz in the Central Pacific saw little use for OSS and prevented OSS contributions to the struggle against Japan in the Pacific Theater until the last year of the war.

The earliest most favorable opportunity for extensive OSS operations was found in the CBI Theater. Although General Stilwell in the CBI Theater lacked enthusiasm of OSS being useful, he allowed OSS to deploy Detachment 101 to India. When Detachment 101 reached New Delhi in mid-July 1942, there were no orders awaiting it. A directive from General Stilwell to

Office of Strategic Services: Missions and Bases in East Asia as of 30 September 1945



“establish a base camp in northeast India and from to plan and conduct operations against the roads and railroad leading into Myitkyina in order to deny the Japanese the use of the Myitkyina airfield was obtained in mid-August.

With this directive, the untested OSS agency had found a combat theater in which to expand its mission and capabilities into full-fledged operations and to demonstrate its effectiveness. By October 1944, the OSS in CBI had become a noticeable key player in operations and analysis in the CBI Theater. OSS remained a key player in CBI until the war with Japan ended in September 1945.

Besides being the first United States unit to form an intelligence screen, organize, and employ a large guerrilla army deep in enemy territory, OSS in CBI began to get involved in the rescue of downed aircrews. In March 1943 a six-man unit was parachuted into the Lawksawk Valley, 75 miles southeast of Mandalay to assist Air Transport Command crewmen who had been downed there. Unfortunately, the two villages in the area were in collusion with the Japanese resulting in three being killed by the villagers and the others captured and delivered to the Japanese.

WWII histories often neglect mention Thailand had actually declared war on the United States and Great Britain after Pearl Harbor and was host to several Japanese bases. Nor do these histories adequately disclose all the labyrinth of feuds and jealousies existing in the indigenous populations throughout Southeast Asia that provided ample supply of guerrilla forces to both the Japanese Army and allied American and British forces. Many competing social-economic-political governing ideologies having dedicated organized followers also already existed during WWII in Burma,



China and elsewhere provided paramilitary forces to the side most likely to help them gain or retain political power.

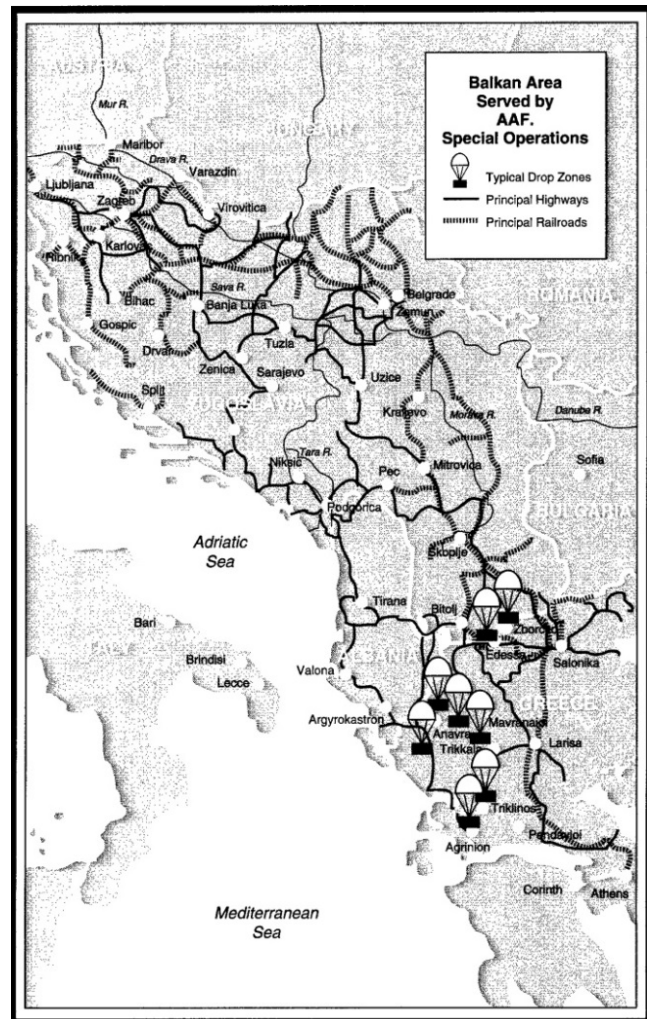
On August 26, 1943, the Commanding General of the European Theater of Operations, United States Army approved OSS plans of operations. These plans were primarily to airdrop resupply resistance groups in France, Holland, Belgium, and Norway. Expansion into ground operations having the on ground within enemy lines and behind enemy lines combatant utilization intensity similar to that conducted in CBI did not materialize for OSS in Europe until 1944.

Techniques, methods and procedures used in CBI to insert the parachute rescue teams and then recovery evacuate the rescue team and survivors likely influenced the July 1944 establishing of OSS/15th Air Force's Aircrew Rescue Unit (ACRU) 1 (known to the OSS as the Halyard Mission).

This unit was specifically established to evacuate Allied airmen forced down in either Partisan or Chetnik territory in Yugoslavia. Two ACRU field parties, of six men each, were created and at least one 6-man ACRU field team parachuted into the Balkan area to enable C-47s to evacuate over 500 downed allied aircrew members.

An ACRU field team parachuted in the night of August 2/3, 1944 into Chetnik territory about 55 miles south and slightly west of Belgrade. Roughly, one hundred evading airmen had assembled there. The rescuers immediately set to work on a landing strip. Six days later, C-47s evacuated nearly three hundred men there. No specifics of the other ACRU field team missions are found other than the August 2/3 parachute insertion is described as a mission typical of many flown until war in Europe's May 9, 1945 end. The successful and sustained evacuation of Allied airmen from the Balkans, with the assistance of both the Cetniks and Partisans, ranks as one of the outstanding achievements of AAF special operations.

Although Executive Order 9621 on 20 September dissolved OSS as of 1 October 1945, the experience of many officers having WWII OSS service connected history is identifiable as being involvement influential in establishing the Air Rescue Service and the first USAF Pararescue teams. The original USAF Pararescue specialty training programs and qualifications requirements certainly are strongly oriented towards availability of aircraft to get somewhere a



considerable distance away fast and conducting surface operations within or behind enemy lines and possessing ability to survive in remote isolated wilderness.

Although the WWII CBI Theater is considered minor and unimportant in comparison to the other WWII combat theaters and major combat campaigns the capabilities, methods, procedures and tactics developed in this theater contributed significantly to future force structure being ready and available to accomplish isolated personnel recovery, and ensured future operational capability was adequately trained, equipped and organized. More importantly, this mission originated awareness of U.S. military planners to incorporate this capability into operational objectives and regional plans.



The crash survivors of C-46 # 41-12420 and the parachute rescue team.

Rear row, left to right: P. F. Adams, Sgt E. Wilder, Col Wang Pao Chao, John Davies Jr. (in front of Col. Wang), Eric Severeid, William T. Stanton, S/Sgt. Joseph E. Clay, Cpl. Basil M. Lemon, Sgt Glen A. Kittleson, Sgt. Francis W. Signor and Cpl. J Sherrill, Second row: Lt Roland K. Lee, Lt. Col. Kuo Li, S/Sgt. Ned C. Miller, Flight Officer Harry K. Nevue, S/Sgt. Joseph J. Giguere, Pvt. William Schrondt, Cpl. Edward Holland, Cpl. S. M. Waterbury and Capt. Duncan C. Lee. First row: Sgt Richard Passey, Lt. Col. Donald D. Flickenger, Cpl, William G. McKenzie and Sgt. Walter R. Oswalt.