

MISSION TO THAILAND

Nicol conceived a plan for his next mission with the OSS as he departed from Lisbon. He was assigned to a desk and chair in the Q Building, OSS headquarters in Washington, D.C., and had barely accustomed himself to speaking English again when he plotted his re-entry to German-occupied territory. On his return from France he had been promoted from lieutenant to captain for his outstanding job in a compromised situation. No one even listened to his concocted plan. Dejected, Nicol worried he would spend the remainder of the war in Washington.

The work he accomplished in France agreed with Nicol. With his knowledge of many parts of the globe now at war, it was inevitable he would be sent on another mission for the OSS. Before his second assignment, Paul Meyer invited Nicol to a luncheon. He blithely assumed the engagement was strictly social. Upon arriving, he found not only Paul Meyer, whom he had traveled with over the Burma Road, but Leonard Clark, his partner from Hainan Island, and Sabin Chase, a State Department official. Unknown to Nicol, Leonard was now a lieutenant in the OSS.

The topic of discussion was Hainan Island. Nicol and Leonard were asked to write a report concerning the findings of their 1937 expedition. They were considered the foremost authorities in the world on Hainan Island. Chase referred to the island as "one of the most important places in the world today."¹ Little was known about Hainan Island and it was considered a possible location for a base in the Pacific, but more information was

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needed. With Japan conquering the Pacific and the Asian countries, the U.S. was looking for additional footholds in the region.

Following lunch, the group went to the office of Mr. Grosvenor of the National Geographic Society. There they obtained a copy of the article written by Leonard for the magazine several years earlier. They learned that Chase was gathering information for a detailed report that would be available to the State Department but not to the OSS. His comment was a cause of concern for Nicol and Leonard. Each of the men advised Chase that they were connected to OSS and would have to consult with their superiors. They received an affirmative reply. The report was needed.

As they prepared their extensive report, with approximately five hundred pages of written material and 750 photographs, Nicol's second mission began in earnest and his efforts on the report were short lived. Leonard continued gathering the material on Hainan Island and completed his work in August of 1943. Incorporating Nicol's preliminary work, Captain Carl O. Hoffman of OSS later forwarded the information to Captain Milton Miles of the U.S. Navy. Nicol's duties demanded his attention on the China-Burma border, however, and thoughts of the Hainan report were far from his mind.

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Nicol's next mission had been approved before his return from France. Fully expecting to be sent into a German-occupied territory of Western Europe, he was surprised by the plan that was presented to him. Major Frank Devlin summoned him to his office. He needed a quartermaster and finance officer for a mission to Thailand, a country Nicol had not even considered for an expedition, let alone OSS duty. His knowledge of Thailand was zero, but his experience with outfitting expeditions, managing expenses and traveling in the Far East qualified him for the job.

The OSS Detachment 101 commissioned a Special Operations mission, FE-3, to send a group of Thailand nationals into their country to make contact with any underground organization, if it existed. If not, an underground must be organized. The country, under Japanese influence since the occupation on December 8, 1941, had declared war on the Allies. Little was known

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about the situation in Thailand, but at the time it declared war on the U.S., officials of the Thai Legation in Washington D.C. declared themselves independent of their home country and the State Department recognized the legation.

Thailand was a blind spot in the intelligence of the Far East. The OSS wanted to put Allied agents there to assess Japanese control of the country. The need for information was critical. General Stilwell wanted to know how many Japanese soldiers were in Thailand, how many Thais were under arms and whether they really wanted to fight. The Air Force lacked knowledge about the locations of important Japanese installations. General Chennault, who Nicol had met during his Burma Road expedition, required information about prison camps and whether any of his fliers downed over Thailand could be rescued. With agents and a transmitter slipped into Thailand, possibly a wealth of information could be made available to the Allies.

Twenty-one Thai men had been hand-picked for the operation. They were Thai nationals who were in the U.S. on scholarships. They attended the leading American universities, including Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They had completed their OSS training and were prepared to head for Thailand. Nicol was briefed on his responsibilities and sent to Area B in the Catoctin Mountains of Maryland, now known as Camp David, the weekend presidential retreat, to begin his training. He began the rigorous daily regimen with the earliest recruits of OSS Detachment 101 which was the first class to be trained at the newly established school.

Detachment 101, the first U.S. unit of its kind, was officially activated in April 1942. It was an organization very different from the resistance efforts in Western Europe that was trained to conduct a wide variety of clandestine operations. It would conduct a warfare that knew no rules, with a wide variety of operations, including espionage, sabotage, guerrilla warfare, propaganda, escape, evasion and assassination. Its area of operation was the Far East. The men recruited had to show extraordinary enthusiasm and ingenuity. Their duties and responsibilities required an abundance of both.

The first people Nicol met after arriving for his intensive training were the three instructors who spent the next two weeks with

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him, Lieutenants Frank Gleason, Leopold Karwaski and Joseph Lazarsky, otherwise known as the three “Ski” brothers. All were experts with dynamite. They had learned their skills in the anthracite mines around Hazelton, Pennsylvania, where they were raised.

Lieutenant Joe Lazarsky ran Nicol through a variety of exercises including the handling of a number of explosives. Nicol was a little frightened as he worked with the demolitions using booby-traps, Composition C (a new plastic explosive), dynamite, TNT, delaying devices, caps and fuses. The “Ski” brothers always wondered if Nicol was soldier material, but trained him to the best of their ability.² Nicol’s true identity was not revealed during training camp nor was anyone else’s. He was given GI fatigues to wear, a nickname and no reference could be made to his civilian occupation or status.

Nicol’s skills grew as he trained in areas introduced to him in his earlier experiences in France. Cryptography, secret writing, methods of agent operations and searching for downed air crews were agent responsibilities in which he excelled.

Graduation exercises brought out Nicol’s true colors. He and Ray Peers, who Nicol recognized as an exceptional leader during training camp, were instructed to gain entry into the Fairchild Aircraft Division plant near Hagerstown, Maryland. The plant made primary and advanced trainers and cargo planes. It was carefully guarded against enemy sabotage and espionage. Their mission was to study the plant and determine where bombs should be placed to cause the most destruction.

Nicol had friends everywhere and one was a Fairchild executive who had previously been a high school principal at a school at which Nicol lectured during his annual circuits. Calling his friend from a hotel lobby, after changing from scruffy fatigues into presentable clothing, Nicol made the necessary arrangements for a lunch meeting.

During lunch, the executive offered to take Nicol and Ray on a tour of the factory. For an hour and a half, Nicol amused the Fairchild executive with his stories, as Ray made mental notes of everything he saw. The tour turned out better than they ever expected and needless to say their Area B instructors were impressed with the information they gathered.

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The procedure used by Nicol and Ray Peers may not have been in close accordance to the rules of the exercise. With only a short period of time to accomplish the task, Nicol knew every shortcut available to employ. His experience in France educated him on the time it could take to finish the simplest assignment. Besides, Nicol's methods were proven. Everywhere he went he knew people or met those of influence whose assistance could later be called upon.

Finished with his training, Nicol now needed to complete his remaining responsibilities to coordinate the Thai agents for departure. He was in charge of purchasing all necessary supplies and equipment and responsible for all monies spent on the mission. The officer in charge of special funds, Douglas Diamond, made out ten checks to Nicol. Each was for the amount of fifty thousand dollars.

The funds were drawn on Thai money unfrozen by the State Department (Thai assets had been frozen when the country declared war on the U.S.) for the purpose of the mission. The Thais wanted to pay their own expenses wherever possible.

Nicol decided to deposit the money one check at a time in the Bank of New York. Having banked there for some time, his own checking account rarely ran over three figures. Meeting with the bank manager, a personal friend of his, he opened a new, personal account with the first of the checks. The manager was inquisitive and Nicol carefully skirted his prying questions. The remaining nine checks he deposited one a day for the next two weeks at a different teller window each time. Nicol was sure his sudden wealth raised questions among the bank employees.

With money in hand his shopping led him from secondhand Army-Navy stores to big sporting goods shops and finally to Abernathy & Finch, the upscale expedition supplier in New York City that he frequented for his own expeditions. He bought each man a forty-five pistol knowing each had been trained in its use. For protection against the tropical diseases with which they would be plagued, he bought quantities of quinine and other drugs, including eight thousand sulfa pills. To combat vitamin deficiency he obtained special tablets so potent that each one contained a ten-day supply. They were almost too big for the men to swallow. Knowing how agents whose lives were in constant danger need

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to relax their tense nerves, he purchased fifty pocket-sized books, as well as seventy-five packs of playing cards, six pairs of dice and a small roulette wheel.

The young men were enthusiastic and eager to begin their duties. Eighty-seven days after departing from Baltimore, Maryland, on the liberty ship, *Abraham Clark*, they disembarked at Bombay, India, the port city on the Arabian Sea. Morale had flagged as the twenty-one men suffered numerous delays before leaving the states. Then the days at sea crept along as a myriad of problems arose onboard the ship.

Nicol's relationship with the men developed during this lengthy and critical period. On board the liberty ship the "Ski" brothers held training classes for the Thai nationals, while Nicol organized their duties. Nicol's success in establishing a rapport with them was apparent when they began. He was rewarded when the Thai men began calling him "Lung Nick." Lung meant "honorable uncle" in Thai. This new title was used with respect by his Thai charges during the two and a half years they spent together in China, Ceylon and Thailand.

Travel, illness and additional training in the Naga Hills of the Indian state of Assam with Colonel Carl Eifler's organization prolonged their journey. During the stay, General Donovan arrived to inspect the accomplishments of his Detachment 101. Colonel Eifler would fly Donovan behind Japanese lines in what Nicol thought was an extremely dangerous mission. Nicol's roommate that night turned out to be General Donovan himself. Nicol voiced his fears to Donovan, questioning the consequences if the Japanese should catch the director of America's secret service organization. He handed over his wallet and identification papers for safekeeping with Nicol in order to travel incognito in case the plane went down. Donovan assured him that his men risked their lives daily and they deserved his personal evaluation and recognition when necessary. All the men in the camp in the Naga Hills were on edge until the Tiger Moth, piloted by Eifler, touched down on the strip. By that trip, General Donovan earned the devout loyalty of everyone in the North Burma jungle. It gave the Thai group a tremendous boost in morale to feel that a man was working for them in Washington who understood exactly what they were going through and was doing all he could to help.

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Finally after Nicol's lengthy recovery from malaria, which he contracted after reaching India, he and the Thai men arrived in Friendship Valley, ten miles from Chungking, China, homebase of Rear Admiral Milton Miles, head of the Navy Intelligence Group and OSS in China. Now located at the headquarters of Detachment 101, the next weeks were spent in more precise planning.

Colonel Kharb Kunjara, the Thai Military Attaché who was in charge of the group, had flown in ahead to greet them as he had not accompanied them on the trip aboard the liberty ship. He had strange news. Before Kunjara left Washington, the Thai Legation received a perplexing message from Chungking. It was from a man named Balankura requesting funds to bring him to the United States. No one at the legation had previously heard of this person. When Kunjara reached China, he set out to find Balankura and discover whether or not he was a true patriot escaped from Thailand. Possibly the man might be a point of contact inside the country. Unfortunately, Kunjara had no luck before Nicol and the Thai men arrived. Balankura could not be produced for questioning. Delays occurred and Kunjara did not meet with the man from Thailand for a couple more weeks.

While Kunjara negotiated for a base in South China with General Tai Li, head of China's incredible secret-service organization and reputed to have an agent in every railroad station and post office in most parts of China, Nicol went to Calcutta for additional supplies and to replace radio equipment that had failed to arrive. At the OSS Security Office, Nicol met Harry Little who had trained at Area B with him. To his surprise his brother-in-law, John Archbold, walked in. Neither knew the other one was associated with the OSS in the China-Burma-India Theater. They enjoyed the impromptu reunion and shared news from home during every spare moment they spent together.

When Nicol returned two weeks later, he was informed by Kunjara that an underground existed within Thailand. The news excited Nicol. He had feared that each agent would have been forced once inside Thailand to build up an intelligence network of his own among his trusted friends. By this tedious and dangerous method, months could elapse before there would be much hope for information on a large scale. The news was splendid—if true.

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During Nicol's absence, Tai Li's men informed Admiral Miles that two more Siamese, Tularak and Tilaka, had also arrived in Chungking. When the men were questioned Tularak assured them that a loyal group was well organized into an underground within Thailand. In 1942, the head of the Thai underground had sent a mission to China which mysteriously disappeared. Then in 1943 Balankura was dispatched. He had been picked up by Tai Li's men. When no word had come from Balankura, the underground head back in Bangkok tried a third time with Tularak and Tilaka. The two men were sent to Washington to meet with Thai Minister M. R. Seni Pramoj, who had originally repudiated the Thai government's declaration of war on the United States. The two men wanted to establish a government-in-exile and use radio to rally patriots inside the country to join the Free Thai army.

After much delay, in accordance with plans made with General Tai Li and one of his regional assistants, General Tso, Nicol and his men established their base at Szemao. Originally plans had been made to locate at Cheli, a town on the bank of the Mekong River in the Yunnan Province near the border of China and Laos, but General Chennault had built an air strip at Szemao which facilitated their transportation to the new base. Nicol had bought horses to caravan to Cheli. With the change in location, he was able to work a deal with Chennault, whom he had met during his earlier Burma Road travels. Nicol arranged for Chennault to loan him two C-47's to transport his group and all of their equipment. In return Nicol was responsible for daily reports and the guarding of the fuel supply at the airstrip. Chennault forewarned Nicol that when the Thai men infiltrated Siam, he would need an additional favor.

They were located 250 miles south of Kunming, China, the equivalent of twenty-one days by caravan. The area was inaccessible by motor car. The trip by caravan would have been a grueling one. For some the C-47 trip provided plenty of hardship. Lieutenant Karwaski, six of the Thai men and Nicol left Kunming to arrive at Szemao only one hour and twenty minutes later. All of the Thais were violently ill for the greater part of the short journey. All but one of the remaining Thai men were transported the following day, while the other agent caravanned to their base with the twenty-three mounts Nicol had purchased.

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Szema, once a rich Chinese customs and trading center, had fallen to ruins. Located at an elevation of forty-three hundred feet, it overlooked a large valley surrounded by peaks from six to seven thousand feet. The climate was mild with cool nights. Pine trees surrounded the compound. It was big-game country with tigers and cobras. The area was known as one of the worst malaria regions in China. The group made their base headquarters in a boarding school in which they had eight bedrooms and a recreation area. Five minutes from headquarters was a three-story tile pagoda which they converted to a radio tower. It was the most powerful field station in China with a 100-watt transmitter. From here they were to slip the agents down to General Tso at Cheli. He was to arrange the rest, coordinating the movement of the Thai agents with his underground contacts on the border between Burma and Thailand.

Five of the men were selected to blaze the trail. Cary³ had a B.S. from M.I.T. and a M.S. from Syracuse University. He was a splendid athlete and was also very resourceful. Sal,⁴ who had been a student of pharmacy at Philadelphia College, was impetuous and afraid of nothing. Ian,⁵ who had just obtained his M.S. degree in agriculture from the University of Iowa, was the most intellectual member of the group. Ken⁶ had been a student of mechanical engineering at Miami University. He was the brother of Madame Bhakdi, wife of the first secretary of the Washington Legation. He was an extremely good-natured and hard-working youth. Paul,⁷ the fifth member of the group, was in his middle thirties, financially well-to-do and was the ladies' man of the group.⁸

Tuesday, February 29, 1944 at 10:00 A.M., the five men, disguised as Chinese merchants, together with Colonel Kunjara and a guide, took the cobblestone trail to Cheli. The distance to Bangkok from Szema was 650 to 700 miles. Ken and Sal had lived in their outfits for days and somehow looked more natural than the others. Ken had a tiny "cavity compass" which was actually small enough to carry in a hollow tooth that he inserted into a Buddhist talisman which hung about his neck. Sewn on each man's shirt was a button compass which looked like a duplicate of the buttons on their coolie outfits. Each one carried a square, silk scarf on which was printed a map of Indo-China and Thailand.

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They also carried a tiny but complete escape kit. Each set contained a diminutive steel saw, a canteen, halazone tablets, Benzedrine, a bar of chocolate and a pack of chewing gum. Concealed in salt bags across the mule's back, each agent had an OSS-developed, demountable radio set. Power plant, transmitter and receiver made a package no bigger than six loaves of bread, but once assembled, it could send a message five hundred miles with ease.

Each man was well set with cash, carrying what amounted to a portable mint, considering the amounts concealed on their bodies. Two thousand dollars worth of gold was hidden somewhere on the body, usually in a small leather pouch secured to the belt or suspended from a cord around the neck. One-fourth of the amount was in the form of chains, rings, and bracelets. The rest was in gold Indian tolas specially made without markings so that no one who might receive them would have any inkling as to their place of origin. Also well hidden was a small sum of French Indo-China paper piastres and one hundred Yunnan silver dollars.

Thursday morning, Nicol and Captain Leo Karwaski took to the trail. They were to meet Kunjara at General Tso's headquarters in Cheli but were to see nothing more of the infiltrating agents for fear of endangering the mission.

A six-day journey over mountain trails brought them to the Mekong River. On the other side lay Cheli and the area of General Tso's command. There Nicol met the colonel who was to be directly in charge of Cary, Sal, Ken, Ian and Paul on the first lap of their journey to the Indo-China frontier and who then was to assume responsibility for getting them into Thailand. Although the Japanese guarded all main roads leading across the borders, the colonel and his agents had lived all their lives in this region and knew many unpatrolled back trails.

On Nicol's way back to Szemao from Cheli, he and Leo stopped at the headquarters of General Lu of the 93rd Army, where they met a most unusual man, who was a political advisor to the 93rd Division. He was a Chinese Catholic priest, Father Jean Tong, thirty-eight years old, one-time amateur boxing champion of China and educated by the French fathers in Shanghai. As a priest he worked among the people of all the border regions

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in that part of China, including the little-known headhunters of the remote Wa states. Nicol promised to get him a ride by plane to Kunming to see his bishop, to whom he had not reported in five years, if he came with them to Szemao. Nicol saw potential in the priest.

By the middle of April the men remaining at the Szemao base were at the radio every hour of every day desperately listening for word from the agents whom they expected by then to be inside Thailand. Washington was continually asking, "Why the delay? Where is the information we sent you to get?"

To Nicol's amazement, one morning Paul walked in. They had not even started on their infiltration. The promises made by Tai Li were not being fulfilled by his lieutenants. It was discouraging. Thousands of dollars and months of valuable time had been spent to get to the very edge of China, only to be stopped there by the agents of people whom they had most counted upon.

Father Tong, returning from his visit with the Catholic bishop in Kunming, became the answer to Nicol's prayers. Knowing the country as no one else did, he could get a group across the border if anyone could. Nicol offered him a thousand silver dollars with which to build a church for the reward of risking his life. Overjoyed, Father Tong agreed to assist the Thai mission.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Charles⁹ volunteered to go on his own into Indo-China and work back and forth between the Thai frontier and their subbase at Meng La. He was a logical choice as he had studied in France and spoke French fluently. He would attempt to set up a courier system over which extra radio parts and spare crystals could be moved. Alone, he set out on his mission.

Having secured additional pack animals, there was no reason to delay. Pow, Pete, Bunny and Sam,¹⁰ guided by Father Tong, followed soon after. Their radio sets were wrapped in waterproof blankets and packed into the bottom of hampers lined with a layer of leaves and straw. On top of the blankets were their items of trade: safety pins and needles, small mirrors, spools of thread and blue cotton cloth, quinine pills and even a few sulfa tablets, stories of the tablets miraculous properties having reached even this remote corner of the world.

Again Nicol and Leo accompanied the party to Meng Long on China's Yunnan-Burma border. Climbing to a summit of the

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mountain, Nicol and Leo watched the sons of some of the oldest and wealthiest families of the Orient, looking exactly like impoverished peddlers as they went down the mountainside. That morning it began to rain, a pounding, continuous, drenching downpour. The monsoon season had started.

Back in Szemao, July 1 arrived and no messages. When the radio receiver was adjusted to the frequency assigned the young men, they heard nothing. Finally, nine days later, a message came in from Charles on the Indo-China border. It was startlingly clear, "Cary and Sal have been killed. More following."¹¹

Charles told how Tai Li's men had faithfully guided Cary and Sal to the capital of Laos and into the hands of a merchant about to cross into Thailand. He in turn led them to a house believed safe, where someone working with the enemy tipped off pro-Japanese police. They arrested the agents, took them into the woods and murdered them for their gold.

All the more anxiously Nicol and the remaining young men listened at the radio ten times a day for the four men left at the border by Father Tong. The waiting continued. The interminable months of the monsoon wore on—July, August, September.

Each month Nicol wrote reports of his activities in letter form for Colonel John Coughlin who was now in charge of OSS activities in China. By July, Nicol was thoroughly discouraged. His last hope rested on Father Tong. The politics of the controlling Chinese organizations was exasperating Nicol. Working through General Tso, a Tai Li adjutant, Nicol and his men began to distrust Tso. Nicol learned that the Tso organization was in a nearly bankrupt situation and felt they were pressing him for inordinate sums of money. Each passing month he became less trusting. His use of Father Tong circumvented his group's dependence on General Tso's rank-and-file agents.

In July he wrote to Colonel John Coughlin of his daily difficulties and feelings about the Chinese he was depending upon:

Lt. Charles no longer trusts the Chinese in the Tai Lee [sic] setup. He has informed me that the Chinese have tried to keep the news of Cary and Sal's death from him. He also believes they used our first group as an experiment and sent them to Thailand over a new untested route, keeping from them the established trail along which they had operated for

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some time. He also feels they are in a semi-bankrupt condition and their own agents are not given sufficient food. Certainly General Tso's trying to get some 3,000,000 piastres out of me for a courier system through Indo-China to Thailand by the beginning of June was odd to say the least. I refused to do this as you know from my letters of that time. He said the money was to be in the nature of a loan to be paid back by the Chinese after the war.¹²

The problems persisted even in their daily lives at Szemao with the Chinese employed at the wilderness base:

Here in Szemao we have met with one difficulty after another in regard to the Chinese. The soldiers whose food bill we pay and whom we use in connection with the construction of the house are always sick. To have thirty-three and a third per cent available in any one day is a miracle. We are squeezed on all sides. There are petty difficulties with the Chinese Colonel in command. I will not bother you with these troubles at this time. They are only incidental in the big picture but the net result is THE MEN HAVE LOST ALL FAITH IN THE THAI LI CHINESE.

We have since found out Tai Li himself does not completely trust the TSO group in this area but has another group—a civilian unit to compete with it and report on the men in the rival section.¹³

Between listening schedules at the pagoda transmitter they passed the time as best they could. Nicol taught the men new poker tips. A garden was planted and provided fresh vegetables as a welcome change to their diet. Nicol collected several pets, Lucky and Happy, both dogs, Spooky, a monkey, and Teddy, a bear cub whom he fed with a bottle until he was nearly as large as a Great Dane.

Writing from Szemao to Colonel Coughlin, Nicol provided the latest information supplied by Ben¹⁴ who had returned from their temporary radio station at Meng La:

Our suspicions have been realized about the Chinese. The two officers definitely assure us, General Tso has kept the established route to Thailand through Indo China from our men and they were forced to journey over new experimental routes. The

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general has not turned out the Rose I pictured him in earlier reports. I was mistaken.¹⁵

Nicol continued the report chronicling the deaths of Cary and Sal. He had received information that a Thai had turned them into the police. Paul and his two companions “disappeared into the blue”¹⁶ and nothing was known about Father Tong’s movements with Pow, Bunny, Pete and Sam. Nicol concluded with the latest information at Szemao:

We have moved into our new house. The main building is four-fifths finished. The radio and cook houses are both completed. The toilet is in working order and the shower and servants shack are both under construction. The tension of waiting for news is sometimes difficult but everyone’s health remains better than expected and the weather has been considerably less rainy than I thought possible. We all continue on the best of terms with each other and only wish our men could get through to THAILAND, so that we could send you daily messages of interest and complete our job.¹⁷

At this point he felt the mission was a failure. This letter revealed the lowest ebb of Nicol’s emotions. The waiting was taking its toll on all of the men. Six days later the letter was forwarded to General Donovan at headquarters with an accompanying note:

Please find enclosed copies to Colonel John Coughlin from Major Nicol Smith who has long been with the Thai Group.

It should be born in mind that Nicol is, at present, somewhat malarial and so may be unduly pessimistic.¹⁸

By October 5 they had nearly given up hope. That evening Nicol was playing what seemed like his ten thousandth game of seven-card stud. It was about 8:20 P.M. when the door flew open and in rushed Lieutenant Nick, the leading radio operator.¹⁹

Yelling excitedly, he announced that contact had been made. All at once Nicol and the men jumped up, their makeshift table crashed to the floor and they ran for the radio pagoda. The tap-tap-tap sounded over and over again. Ironically, because of an electrical storm the reception was the poorest it had been in all their months at Szemao.

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Nick had arranged a special grouping of letters, different for each man, that would represent a "danger group." Its appearance at the beginning of his message would indicate that he was in the hands of the enemy or had revealed the location of the home station and was operating under duress. Nick quickly determined that the danger code was not there and handed the message to Jim.²⁰ In ten minutes, Jim had the translation.

It began by saying all four of the men were safe. It then confirmed the deaths of Cary and Sal, which had advertised to the enemy that there was a movement afoot for infiltration of agents with radio sets. The Japanese were on the alert everywhere along the frontier and patrolled areas never before guarded. The party had been forced off the already remote trails onto barely discernible jungle paths. Their provisions soon became exhausted and at times berries and roots were all that kept them alive. All five contracted malaria and Sam almost died of dysentery. It took them eighty-seven days to reach the Thai frontier. Father Tong left them once they were several miles across the border.

Fortunately, the word about agents with radio sets reached not only the Japanese but also the Thai underground. When they finally crossed the frontier border, the Thai police, whose leader General Adun Adundetcharat (code-named Betty), the number two man of the underground, secretly arrested and jailed them. They were transported to Bangkok, from where they were sending the message. Regular contact could be counted on. Their report confirmed the British operations were simultaneously attempting to infiltrate the Thai underground.

Within the hour, the news was sent to Kunming, Delhi, Chungking, Kandy and Washington. Contact had been made by the OSS agents within the borders of Thailand at Bangkok more than 650 miles to the south.

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Requests for information from Allied posts began to pour in. General Wedemeyer wanted to know how many Japanese troops were in Thailand and whether any were moving from Indo-China across Thailand to Burma. The Air Force needed information on which side of the Don Muang airport, the closest airport to Bangkok, was used by Thais and which by the Japanese. General Chennault asked them to find one of his best fighter pilots, Bill

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McGarry. Supposedly he was located in a Japanese-supervised Thai internment camp. The Air Force requested twenty-four-hour weather reports. From the pagoda they radioed the information as quickly as it was transmitted to their station.

The men inside Thailand discovered that "Ruth," (his OSS code name) head of the now extensive Thai underground, was none other than Luang Pradit Manudharm, brother-in-law of the agent, Arnold. He was also regent of the country in the absence of the Boy King Ananda Mahidol, who was in Switzerland studying when the war broke out and could not return home. While Luang Pradit was ostensibly cooperating with the Japanese, he was actually coordinating the underground and its contact with the Allied forces.

Daily information poured in over the airwaves from Bangkok. The infiltration of more OSS-trained agents was arranged. A short four months later, on January 28, 1945, the first Americans entered the Japanese-occupied country. Major Richard Greenlee and Major John Wester flew in from Kandy, Ceylon, by British seaplanes. They landed on the Gulf of Siam and were taken by motor launch up the coast and then by automobile through the streets of Bangkok to a mansion in the Japanese-occupied city.

Five days later, Greenlee slipped out of Bangkok on his way to Washington with the information he had learned about the plans of the Japanese Army in Thailand and a proposal for a Thai uprising.

Ruth was trying to persuade the State Department to agree to a supply of arms from the OSS to the Thai Army. Department officials were not in favor of dropping guns to the armed services of a country that had declared war on the U.S. It was agreed, however, to begin arming the guerrilla groups.

One by one, daring American OSS men parachuted in at night to train the guerrilla bands. By summer, twenty-eight Americans had armed and trained more than three thousand guerrillas now ready to fight. They were just waiting for the signal.

With the successful completion of mission FE-3, Nicol traveled to Washington in April 1945 for two months. In Washington State Department officials briefed him on the political complexities of the Allied planning for Thai guerrilla training

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and warfare. Colonel John Coughlin was hesitant to send him as he greatly valued Nicol's abilities to manage the men:

As you know, Major Nicol Smith is located here at Kandy now and will be leaving for the States in about a week.... Nicol has been a big help down here and I am most anxious that he return. He has done more to weld the two groups into one than all the rest of us put together.... At the present time, Nicol says he wants to come back. I want to be sure that he doesn't change after he gets home. I think he is completely up-to-date right now on our plans and thinking Thai-wise. He should be helpful to you, but don't keep him. Nicol has agreed to come back after sixty days in the States. If you can see that he doesn't spend one day over sixty days back there, I will appreciate it too.

Nicol is a great guy as we both know. Don't let him talk you into three months instead of two.²¹

Returning to the South East Asia Command (SEAC) headquarters at Kandy, where the Szemao base had relocated in order to remove themselves from Tai Li's territory and work more closely with OSS Detachment 404 and with Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten and the British, Nicol was now going into Bangkok himself to meet with Ruth and to discuss certain problems. During Nicol's debriefing in Washington, his value during this critical period became apparent. A letter to Colonel John Coughlin re-emphasized Nicol's importance in the cooperation of operations between OSS and SEAC forces located at Kandy:

We all know of Nick's special value to this particular situation at its critical period, and he is not only willing but anxious to go back and help in putting it through to a successful conclusion.... We are increasingly impressed with the value to the organization here of having men who have been long in the field help us with our problems in servicing our foreign operations.²²

Nicol made his clandestine trip into Bangkok in mid-July 1945. Reaching Rangoon, Burma from Kandy he departed in a C-47 accompanied by Lloyd George, an intelligence specialist and Major Alex Griswold, an OSS agent, Dr. Chanai, and Les, a Thai radio operator.

TRAVELER OF THE CROSSROADS

The first stop was at Pukiew, one of the remoter districts of Thailand where Alex was to be left in charge of the secret airfield. The next stop was at Saraburi, another Thai-controlled airfield only half an hour's flight from the Don Muang airfield, a village fifteen miles north of Bangkok. Waiting for the cover of darkness, they continued their covert trip.

At Don Muang the pilot did not risk circling the field but instead made a quick landing on the Thai side of the airfield. Men quickly rolled the plane into an open hanger and the door was closed. Huddled on the floor, Nicol and Lloyd waited for the okay to disembark. Finally a car, an old Dodge, was at the side door, and Nicol and Lloyd ran through the pitch black hanger and cowered in the back seat of the automobile. After a short drive through dark streets they arrived safely at the palace of the late Prince Asdang. Known as the Criminal Investigation Department, it was actually OSS headquarters in Bangkok.

Operating a radio from the palace did not alarm the Japanese with their direction finding equipment. The Criminal Investigation Department had long had a radio operating in connection with their work. It was adequate cover for the operating of the OSS radio. The Japanese also wished to maintain their "friendly" relationship with the Thai and never fully investigated the suspicious radio signals emitting from Thai-controlled buildings.

Nicol's instructions included persuading the Thai underground to wait until the British were prepared before rising up against the Japanese. Ruth had already stated on several occasions that he was having difficulty in holding his people back and could not do so indefinitely. Now in Bangkok, Nicol could appreciate the tense situation. He found the days of inaction nearly unbearable. He and the other men were confined to the building. Meeting with Ruth, Nicol again heard the trouble he was having holding his people back. As instructed by his superiors in Washington, Nicol could only repeat they must wait. Both Washington and London were in agreement. They wanted to wait until Admiral Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander for Southeast Asia, was ready and that certainly would not be before November.

Checking on his men, he was glad to see they were in good

MISSION TO THAILAND

form. They were equally relieved to see "Lung" Nick and provide him with any information they had.

Nicol's responsibilities included improving the productivity of communications coming from the Bangkok underground station. He obtained information on the Thai Navy and the location of Japanese troops within the country during his visit. While he was there he arranged to visit the British post. They were engaged in the same type of operations as the OSS.

Nicol's anticipation of the trip to visit the British was not without danger. It took some courage to accept their hospitality as it required traveling through Bangkok past numerous Japanese guards. An ancient automobile waited for the unnerving trip to the British headquarters. Timing was essential to catch the Japanese off guard so the car would not be stopped.

The trip went without a hitch, except once when the driver flooded and killed the engine. Quickly the point of the visit was reached and Nicol and Lloyd made the return trip after obtaining information about the British efforts in Thailand.

The next forty-eight hours seemed like as many days. The Japanese had discovered several of the clandestine airfields in northern Thailand. Then they began a search for ammunition and supply dumps. The situation was beginning to look bad because the air route from Burma might be cut off.

Preparing to leave, Nicol carried documents from Ruth to the State Department and the Free Thai Legation in Washington. As he said his good-byes, Ruth presented him with a pair of royal cuff links in a green velvet box. They were pure gold and red enamel made from pounded ruby dust. On one link were the initials "A.M.," for the boy king, Ananda Mahidol, and on the other a replica of his golden crown above the mark of his dynasty.

On Saturday, August 4, Nicol and Lloyd completed their responsibilities for OSS Operation Siren, their clandestine and highly successful trip to Bangkok. They started their return journey to the outside world two days before the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan.

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