SOUTH OF THE CLOUDS

YUNNAN AND THE SALWEEN FRONT, 1944: MEMORIES OF A BRITISH NURSING SISTER

BY

MRS EVELYN R WHITE

THE CHINA SOCIETY
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THE CHINA SOCIETY

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Mrs Evelyn R. White, née Dangerfield, in
Overseas Red Cross uniform, 1943-1944

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Even a ten thousand *li* journey has its first step", says the old Chinese adage. In the journey I shall describe my first step was to volunteer to serve abroad with the British Red Cross and Quaker-sponsored Friends' Ambulance Unit. It was June 1943, after completing my General Nurses' training, in the course of which I had happened to work at a hospital with a number of members of the F.A.U. Their keen desire to salvage and build up life in the midst of destruction and devastation had made a deep impression, and since three of my four brothers were serving in the Army and Airforce in theatres abroad, namely the Middle East and Burma, I decided too to volunteer. When offered the chance of nursing in China, I speedily accepted. It did, however, surprise my family, one of them saying, "Fancy going to China when you know you loathe rice pudding!"

Early in 1944 I took a short course in spoken Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, on Malet Street. That completed, I and three others got ourselves kitted out with Red Cross uniforms and other equipment, including mountaineering boots, not to speak of large quantities of soap which, we were told, was a scarce commodity in China. Next we submitted to numerous inoculations, designed, it would seem, to protect us from every disease, known and unknown, and then spent two valuable days at the Horsham Laboratories in Sussex, studying malaria and learning to 'read' malarial slides. Finally, what more fitting than a feast in our honour: the Hong Kong restaurant, Shaftesbury Avenue, was the scene, and Nora Waln, authoress and China expert, our hostess. She enlightened us on the finer points of Chinese etiquette, including the supreme importance of 'saving face', and instructed us in the art of chopsticks, with results totally hilarious.

In the spring of 1944 we sailed from the Clyde in the British India Company's vessel, the *"City of Exeter"*, bound for Bombay, and joined one of the first convoys to go through the Suez Canal after its re-opening. German fighters attacked us off Algiers and, sadly, one of the escorting aircraft was lost. So far as I was aware, we reached Bombay without other mishap and after a short stay crossed in two days by train to Calcutta.

Kunming, our immediate destination in China, was now only a few hours away. We flew there in an aircraft of the China National Aviation Corporation on the 15th of April. On the previous day, unbeknown to us, an important military decision had been taken in China which would affect our future movements.

The first stage of the journey was over the tea terraces of Northern Assam to Dinjan, a tiny refuelling airstrip in the middle of

nowhere. A Japanese raid was thought possible at any time, despite their having been defeated, with heavy loss, about a month before in the battle of Imphal, Assam. Undeterred we consumed an al fresco lunch of brown stew and tinned sliced peaches, all served together on an enamel plate; they were the last tinned peaches I was to enjoy for a very long time.

Emplaning once more, we left Dinjan without regret, slightly uneasy about what lay ahead. The flight over the barrier ranges of Upper Burma, extending South from the eastern end of the Himalayas, was light-heartedly called 'crossing the Hump'; but ascending to 18,000 ft in the unpressurised aircraft of those days, even though oxygen was available if needed, was alarming, especially in monsoon weather. Fortunately we were spared that and could indeed look down on majestic mountains, the jungles of Burma, and great rivers pursuing their course down sinuous defiles. We tried to forget that the country below was held by the Japanese. (We only heard later that U.S. servicemen were awarded the Purple Heart if they survived, as eventually most of them did, five trips across the Hump.) Soon we overflew the Salween and Mekong rivers and for the present it was sufficient to know that we had entered the air space of Yunnan province in Free China.

The name of Yunnan has the poetic meaning 'south of the clouds' and its higher regions are blessed with a climate happily described as 'spring at all seasons'. A high plateau averaging 6,000 feet above sea level, it is a Mecca for astronomers and, especially, botanists from all over the world: it is the home of the rhododendron, the camelia, the peony and many other beautiful plants. In the region bordering Upper Burma there is a pageantry of ethnic minorities which have existed there during long centuries. There are the Lisu peoples, fun loving and gregarious, the shy and mysterious Miao, the wild Kachins, the people of Tai race known here as Shans, and many others, then still conserving their special cultures and distinctive dress. But in this same border region the Mekong, Salween and Shweli rivers have carved out ravines where malaria is rife, especially in the rainy season. Here, in a 100-mile broad strip running from north to south, is one of the most malarial sections of the earth. To conclude this brief survey, away to the North-West, beyond the ancient city of Ta Li, lies Tibet, while contiguous with Yunnan's southern borders are Vietnam and Laos. (Map 1, at the end of this paper, shows the general outline of the province.)

The Military Background

As our brief was to help staff and provide mobile medical teams on the China/Burma war front, a digression concerning the strategic situation may not be out of place. The Japanese not only had a firm grip on Burma since April, 1942, but also occupied a strip of Yunnan along the frontier with Upper Burma. They held well-nigh impregnable strong-points commanding the passes over the north-south mountain range which runs west of the Salween River. With the Chinese not wishing to risk a costly attack on this front, it had remained quiescent, and meanwhile the famous 'Burma Road', laboriously built for the transport of war supplies to China, was cut. On the other side of Burma, facing Assam, the Japanese in 1943 planned to capture Imphal, in preparation for a possible move against India. They did attack in mid-March 1944, but the British 14th Army repulsed them with heavy losses and saved Imphal.

United States and British strategy was now directed towards driving the Japanese out of Upper Burma, in order to make the air route to China more secure and enable overland communications with China to be established as well, thus opening up new possibilities for action against Japan. To bring the maximum pressure to bear on Upper Burma it was decided that a simultaneous Chinese offensive, designed to break Japan's hold over the Salween front, was essential. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was most reluctant, however, to risk an attack at a time when the Japanese threat in Central China was increasing, and it was only after persistent pressure from the U.S. Government that on 14th April, 1944, he at last gave the necessary orders, and fixed a date for the crossing of the Salween.[1] This was the 'important military decision' to which I have earlier referred. The arrival of our small party on the very next day, that is the 15th of April, was indeed timely.

In addition to being on the spot in the hour of need, we could also claim the distinction of being the first women to join the China operations of the Friends' Ambulance Unit. In the chronicles of the Unit it is stated that "Women for China" was "as much, and as long, a matter of controversy as the original admission of women into the Unit", but by June, 1944, the chronicler declared, four women members from England – Margaret Briggs, Connie Bull, Elaine Conyers and Rita Dangerfield – had arrived in China.[2] The last on that list was myself, my maiden name being Dangerfield, while the name of Rita was one which I used in my youth; later, when I married and settled down, I preferred my other name of 'Evelyn'.

First Impressions

As our plane gently descended at Kunming, the Yunnanese provincial capital, my foremost impression was of colour: rich red earth, the brilliant emerald of the rice fields, and stately rows of Lombardy poplars to ward off high winds and dust. Then the blue clothes of the peasants working in the fields, with their large straw hats shading and shielding them from hot sun and cold rain, and the demure black bonnets seemingly worn by all the gentle old ladies of 40 years or more. On closer inspection one could not fail to notice how often their clothing had been repaired and patched, and not a few went barefoot, unable to afford the customary straw sandals or canvas shoes. The only time we were to see beautifully embroidered silk gowns was on very special occasions such as weddings.

After touch-down at Kunming, several members of our team walked to temporary headquarters to check in and attend to passport and other matters, whilst a colleague and I stayed behind to keep an eye on our personal effects and equipment. A noisy crowd of coolies (a term which has since become taboo) soon collected, pushing and jostling each other, all anxious to be off and away with our luggage. This they carry suspended from the two ends of a *zhugan,* i.e. a bamboo carrying pole placed across the shoulders rather like a European milkmaid's yoke of former times. They carry thus incredibly heavy loads. I was told that at that time the average coolie's life-span was only thirty years, hardly surprising when one saw the heavy loads they carried and their appalling living conditions. Malnutrition was one of the most common medical problems we encountered, and often our first task was to treat both civilians and soldiers for deficiency diseases such as scurvy and beriberi. The daily diet of the ordinary soldier was boiled red rice with a few green vegetables and copious bowls of weak green tea. Meat, eggs, salt and protein in the form of milk and butter were for the most part a rare luxury, if not absent altogether. It was pointless to try to heal broken limbs unless one saw to it that the patient was reasonably well fed. The soya bean was a life saver: our cook would make up large quantities of soya bean milk, of which each patient received a bowl daily.

While I was waiting at the airport surrounded by coolies, I thought I would try out some of my newly-learned Chinese. I said to one of them, *hao bu hao?* meaning "how are you?" He made no response whatever. Nothing daunted I tried again, but much louder, *HAO BU HAO!* Suddenly his face lit up: success at last. He and his friends roared with laughter, slapped each other on the

back and pointed at me. Feeling very foolish, I wondered whether I had got the tones wrong, a mistake which can easily convey a meaning quite different from that intended. Very confusing for a beginner but a source of great fun for our Chinese friends, who had a delightful sense of humour and were always ready for a laugh.

Organisation of Medical Teams

In 1943 three Friends' Ambulance Unit teams were functioning under the wing of the Chinese Red Cross, and our organisation was to be modelled upon theirs. A team would comprise about 8 people, including two doctors, two nursing sisters and a laboratory technician who doubled as dispenser and was also often called upon to be delousing expert. In addition there was a quartermaster, preferably Chinese, to look after food supplies, accommodation and other problems, and to act as interpreter. The complement was made up by a capable handyman or technician who could turn his hand to X-ray equipment, not to speak of splints, bandages and drugs, and finally an administrator, if available, so leaving the rest free to concentrate on urgent medical and surgical work. The teams might be working in hilly, heavily forested country with no roads, so that equipment had to be light yet fully comprehensive, including generators to work the X-ray apparatus. In the wilder, more remote parts a team would be fortunate if it could have the use of trucks. Most often the best means of transport would be strong wooden cases loaded onto mules and moved from one location to another over rough tracks and ancient caravan routes. In practice the teams developed into multi-national, compact groups of British, Chinese, American, Canadian and New Zealand volunteers. Sleeping and working in barracks, temples, private houses and tents, we lived off the country, always ready to move on a sudden call or emergency. 'Flexibility' was the key word.

Initiation and Training at Church Missionary Society Hospital, Kutsing

After 24 hours in Kunming we travelled by rail north-eastwards to the town of Kutsing (now Qujing)[3] where our regional headquarters were located, and here we spent six weeks learning Chinese hospital methods at the Church Missionary Society hospital. We also struggled with more Chinese lessons so that when in the field we would know enough to be able to communicate, in particular to ask simple questions such as, "where is the pain?" "have you a headache?"

or "please take your medicine", just the basics for correct diagnosis aided by our own sight, sound and touch.

On 22nd May 1944, the seventh day after my arrival in China, I was called at 6 a.m. by the team leader who said that there had been a serious rail accident 60 kilometres away, on the Yunnan-Szechwan railway. This was the railway destined to link the two provinces, but so far only a short stretch inside Yunnan had been built.

I dressed hurriedly, had a quick breakfast and we set off: one doctor, four experienced first aiders and stretcher-bearers, and myself. It was a disaster area. A troop train had become de-railed while negotiating a viaduct which had a steep gradient, and the engine and most of the carriages had toppled off the viaduct and dropped 50 ft into a stream. The dead and injured were strewn everywhere. The injured had to be given morphine and tetanus injections before we could begin to cope with their injuries, and when Dr Alan Lonshore, an American, and I had done this, we wrote 'M' and 'T' on their foreheads to remind ourselves that at least for the time being they were out of pain. Nearby was a farm with some buildings, and officers somehow found a way for us into shelter so that we could begin the work of dressing wounds and splinting fractures.

My most vivid recollection later in the day was of when I was sprinkling sulphonamide powder into the compound fracture of a soldier's leg, kneeling over him in the farmyard. Just as I had finished, a little pig came rushing out of a sty and jumped right over the leg before I had time to cover it with a dressing prior to splinting. I sat back and laughed; it was a bit of light relief in an otherwise sombre day. We worked solidly from 9 a.m. until six in the evening, when the last of the bodies had been put into coffins and the worst of the wounded sent back by rail to the Chinese Army hospital at Kutsing, the rest, who could walk, being sent back by truck. There were 59 killed and 66 injured. It was rather macabre to see carpenters on one side of the embankment making coffins for the dead while we cared for the living on the other side.

Some weeks later, when the first pangs of grief had lessened, the Railway officials and Chinese Army representatives invited us to a banquet at which they expressed their gratitude for our help in many speeches, in Chinese and French. The climax was the entry with a flourish of a huge platter, bearing a delicious, large golden carp, wonderfully cooked and wreathed in exquisite sauces and ginger. It would have befitted the table of any emperor of the Middle Kingdom.

Another treat at Kutsing was an invitation to a four-hour performance of *Lady Precious Stream,* presented by a travelling company, a sort of E.N.S.A. to the Chinese Army. The costumes were magnificent, but the singing and music were painful to my western ears. Men played the ladies' parts, three stringed violins were the orchestra, and the audience throughout the whole of the performance never ceased to crack sunflower seeds with their teeth, the while spitting out the casings to the four winds.

May 1944: Chinese armies cross the Salween
June 1944: I move forward to Baoshan[4]

Our six weeks at Kutsing were chiefly occupied with acclimatization and training, and passed quietly with the one tragic exception I have described, but in the interval fighting had flared up all along the west Yunnan border zone. On the 10th of May 1944, as prearranged, Chinese forces crossed the Salween River at several places on a front of approximately 60 miles and were unopposed. According to reports, 20,000 men crossed. By the end of May they had recaptured several passes through the mountains on the further side of the Salween, and in June were within striking distance of Tengyueh[5] and Lungling. These towns were important strong-points of the Japanese on this front, and to recapture them as soon as possible was a principal target. The Chinese Expeditionary Force in this region was said to have a total strength of 72,000. Besides being supplied with a considerable amount of U.S. material it had support from the Fourteenth Air Force. It was, however, poorly supplied with artillery.

By mid-June the Chinese were held up by stubborn Japanese resistance and had suffered heavy casualties. The Expeditionary Force's headquarters were at Baoshan, a walled town of fair size on the Burma Road, situated on the eastern side of the Salween and about 25 miles distant from it as the crow flies. At the army hospital there casualties were pouring in from the battle front. Contemporary reports from H.M. Consulate-General at Kunming, now in the archives of the Public Record Office, are illuminating:

> *June (1944)* On 13th June the Chinese occupied Lungling but withdrew on 16 June. They have however now overcome strong positions on the Burma Road leading to Lungling from the east. In the northern sector the Chinese have captured places about 20 miles north of Tengyueh (now Tengchong). . . The Assistant Military Attaché comments on these operations as follows: "One must realise that this is one of the first times the Chinese

have attacked the Japanese on their own initiative, most of the other 'victories' having been after the Japanese had withdrawn; and even though the Chinese have suffered heavy casualties they are still on the offensive". "Qualified observers have attributed the heavy casualties to a lack of tactical sense on the part of their officers".[6]

It was in these conditions that two colleagues and I were asked to go to Baoshan to join the staff of Mobile Team 5 at the base hospital there. Our progress on the 400-mile journey was as follows:

27th May 1944: From Kutsing to Kunming by rail.

29th May 1944: Departed Kunming by Chinese Red Cross ambulance, proceeding along the Burma Road, which had been completed a few years before. Later in the day we were joined by General (Lu Dizhe?) and his Adjutant, Dr Wang, whose business it was to inspect Army medical facilities down the Road. Arrived Ch'u-hsiung, approximately 125 miles westward of Kunming, and spent the night with missionaries. My diary states: "This day we *pao-mao*'d several times". This Chinese expression means literally 'to cast anchor', but at that time was popularly used to refer to an engine breakdown on the road. It was a good example of the Chinese partiality for a little joke. Foreign visitors soon picked it up as part of their everyday vocabulary.

30th May 1944: Continued westwards by truck, again in the excellent company of our two Army medical friends, who treated us very courteously. Beautiful scenery, with mist on the mountain tops. Drove over a mountain called the 'Temple of Heaven', 8,000 feet above sea level. My diary does not record where we stayed this night. My enjoyment of the day was somewhat tempered by frayed nerves, caused by drivers who negotiated the hairpin bends at break-neck speed. Driving tests were apparently unknown, and worse still, some drivers were tempted to 'squeeze' fuel in order to sell it on the black market. This practice could lead to recklessly unsafe driving.[7]

1st June 1944: We stayed with a Miss Morgan, a devoted missionary who had lived in Yunnan and at the same place for 30 years. She was the soul of hospitality and I find in my diary: "Wonderful mosaic floor and camp beds. Creepers growing round the outside walls and orchids in the garden!" One could not but admire people who chose to settle down for years to lead an isolated life in far-away places.

2nd June 1944: "Saw the most wonderful 'water-lizards', black and

gold tracings on their backs, swimming in rivulets and pools made by the rains."

3rd June 1944: Arrived at Hsia-kwan (Xiaguan), an important political and economic centre in western Yunnan, situated ten miles south of Ta Li and its beautiful lake. The accommodation to which we were directed at Hsia-kwan turned out to be a hotel for U.S. engineers and the arrival of two British nurses caused quite a stir.

4th June 1944: Had a delicious breakfast amid pleasant company. This evening arrived Yung-p'ing, and spent the night.

5th June 1944: My memory tells me that we crossed the Mekong River by a wooden bridge, which swayed as we drove cautiously over, and this must have been at the site shown on maps as 'Achievement Bridge' (*Kung-kuo-ch'iao*). But in 1939, when Gerald Samson passed this way, he described it as an "impressive steel cable suspension bridge capable of carrying a strain of 7½ tons", so my memory must have deceived me[8] Late that night, covered in the red dust of the road, we finally arrived at the Army base hospital at Baoshan.

At the Army Hospital, Baoshan

The hospital consisted of huts situated some 4 miles outside the town, and our team lived in tents and one small hut, rat-ridden and lice-infested, nearby the pharmacy. Before getting into bed, which consisted of boards with a palliasse and a sleeping bag, we would dust ourselves down with D.D.T. powder and duck quickly underneath our mosquito nets, listening to the sounds of bullfrogs calling each other and a Yunnanese rat eating our precious English soap.

Here we lived from June to October, 1944, during most of which time the Chinese armies struggled to take Tengyueh and Lungling against stubborn resistance by the Japanese, who fought almost to the last man and the last round. Casualties from the Salween and Shweli river fronts poured into base hospital at Baoshan and we had our hands full. Many of the wounded would already have had to wait several days before reaching a first aid post, and from there been carried by bamboo stretcher over mountainous terrain before continuing the journey by truck, so those who survived were often in a poor state. They would be met by an admissions officer, one or other of our Team, who was responsible for initial assessment, looking for the three most serious types of wound: abdominal or head wounds and cases of severe haemorrhage. During the height of the fighting, from

50 to 100 soldiers might be admitted every 24 hours. The overflow would be placed on straw beds in the outer courtyard to wait their turn for treatment and nursing care. Our two surgeons would be operating from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. as well as being subject to call during the night in emergencies such as an air raid or the arrival of serious wound cases.

I was asked to take charge of the 56-bed surgical ward in a large hut made of bamboo, with mud floor and thatched roof. Here that number of soldiers, victims of the ravages of war and maladies of the region such as malaria, relapsing fever, tetanus, and the ever prevalent dysentery, would be stretched out on beds. These consisted of three long wooden boards placed on trestles or bricks, with a thin straw palliasse to serve as mattress, and one or two grey blankets for warmth and protection. The chronicler of the F.A.U. to whom I previously referred (see Note 2) thoughtfully recorded the names of the members of Team No. 5 other than the two surgeons. "Rita is running the 40-bed surgical ward", he wrote, "Connie and Ron are theatre 'Sisters', Derek Cox is the anaesthetist and X-ray man; and Alan McBain has the odious job of delousing. . .". 'Rita', in fact, was none other than myself, as I explained earlier. As a minor point, the ward in my charge undoubtedly had 56 beds (not 40), as I well remember.

At Baoshan the daily routine began with a breakfast of rice cakes or hot sweet potatoes with strong green Yunnan tea, but no milk, followed by short prayers, and then a staff meeting to discuss priorities for the day. We would then go our various ways to work. For me this usually meant looking for any new cases which had arrived during the night, then beginning the regular medicine and dressing round in the acute surgical ward.

The Chinese Red Cross arrived one day at the hospital with a large quantity of cotton pyjamas. "How wonderful", we thought; "now we can give them a clean change of clothing and get their cotton uniforms deloused and washed!", but no such luck. You can imagine our frustration when the soldiers insisted on putting their uniforms straight on top of their fresh clean pyjamas. They were afraid that if they let go of their uniforms they would never see them again.

A brief sidelight on our personal finance may be of interest. We received no salary, but pocket money amounting to the Chinese equivalent of five shillings each week. In Baoshan that gave myself and my fellow nurse, Connie Bull, enough for a mug of coffee and a Chinese moon cake once a week in a local restaurant (*fan dian*), a special treat! Our basic needs such as tooth paste and so forth were provided for us.

The Team leader, Dr John Perry, an American, was a very wise man and when I noticed strangers – 'traditional healers' – coming into the ward, he decided that providing they did not disturb the dressings or worry the patients, we keep a discreet eye on them but allow them to practise their skills. I remember quietly watching one such healer place metal discs on the chest of one of my patients and wondered what on earth, or in heaven, he was hoping to do. It certainly was not acupuncture, and whether it did any good I shall never know. It was probably harmless, but the same could not be said of all 'traditional healing'. There was the case of the child with a badly damaged hand as a result of picking up a live grenade. His relatives 'treated' him by killing the nearest live chicken and putting chicken feathers, head, the lot right round the wounded hand, afterwards tying it up with banana leaves. They brought the little lad to me fully expecting that the spirit of the live chicken which had entered the lacerated hand would, with the help of the foreign doctor's skills, make it whole, but sadly, it did not.

Our living conditions at Baoshan were extremely primitive. After weeks of washing from one wooden bucket of water, my nursing colleague and I approached, through our interpreter, the Superintendent of the Army hospital. He was a charming man, non-medical, whose responsibilities included rations, transport and administration. We asked if there was any possibility of getting a bath or at least bathing facilities. After many cups of tea and much polite conversation the Colonel told us, through the interpreter, that he would lend us his own bath. Several weeks later, a day arrived when the kitchen boys heated up water which they then carried in buckets to our room, while we awaited the promised bath with great interest. We speculated that it might be a canvas one, or perhaps a tin bath, once the property of a consul or travelling missionary. Then we heard a loud rumbling sound like distant thunder, coming nearer. We opened the door and there, to our amazement, was a large wooden barrel. When we stopped laughing and remembered to thank the kitchen helpers, we got it inside our room, removed several little toadstools which were growing at the botton of the barrel and enjoyed, in great haste because it leaked, our first real bath for several months, courtesy of the Colonel.

Transfer to Tengyueh

While we were busily employed at Baoshan the Chinese forces on the further, western, side of the Salween River (in Chinese called the'Nu-jiang') were involved in a long-drawn-out struggle

to drive back the Japanese. The bitterest battles occurred when the Chinese were besieging Tengyueh (now Tengchong). Before the war it had been a prosperous walled town, astride the ancient caravan route between Yunnan and Burma, which should not be confused with 'the Burma Road' somewhat to the south. It seems likely that Marco Polo once passed that way. In modern times a British Consulate existed in Tengyueh from about 1900 until 1942, when the last Consul, Michael Gillett, prudently withdrew in the face of the advancing Japanese, who entered the town on 10th May 1942.[9]

On 2nd August 1944 U.S. bombers breached the town walls by air attack, but it was not until the 14th of September that Chinese ground forces finally put the Japanese to flight. Contemporary reporting from H.M. Consulate-General, Kunming, was as follows:

July: "Rains at their height. Chinese still struggling to take Tengyueh and Lungling."

August: "The battles for Tengyueh and Lungling continued throughout August. Chinese troops fought their way into Tengyueh on 21st August and into the suburbs of Lungling on 22nd August, but are still meeting with strong resistance in both places. Chinese casualties since the beginning of the Salween operations have been estimated at between 22,000 and 24,000, and Japanese casualties at between 4,500 and 7,000". "The British Consulate at Tengyueh passed into Chinese hands on 23rd August. The building was a Japanese strongpoint and judging by photographs little of it remains".

After its recapture Tengyueh was in urgent need of rehabilitation. Since it had no civilian hospital, several of our Team at Baoshan were asked to form a new team to go there and start up a hospital and medical service, sponsored by the Friends' Ambulance Unit. We had hoped to get an airlift from Baoshan, but it could not be arranged, so we started by road, knowing that we should have to cross the Salween and Shweli rivers and would need to take a roundabout way, since the nearest bridge over the Salween had long since been destroyed. The journey was eventful.

31st October 1944: Departed from Baoshan by truck and proceeded down the Burma Road. According to my diary we spent the night at 'Daban', but available maps show no such place. Could this be a corrupt pronunciation of T'ai-p'ing, which maps do show in about the right location?

1st November 1944: Onwards, but this day by weapon-carrier. We drove through a battery of shell fire coming from Lungling, saw U.S. dive bombers attacking Japanese positions at that place[10],

and observed Chinese coolies and Burma Road engineers, presumably American, working at a terrific pace to get the road finished to Tengyueh. I do not remember crossing the Salween on this day; perhaps the road's descent in deep zigzags from 7,200 feet to 2,500 feet and the combination of speed and a rough highway drove all else out of one's mind. The same evening we reached the Shweli River which is in Chinese *Lungchuan-jiang,* and my diary states that "this river is even lovelier than the Salween". But there were also creature comforts, for I added, "living conditions here A 1, actually had cocoa and coffee with milk in it."

2nd November 1944: From here on no motor transport was available. Early in the morning we hired six coolies, who in turn borrowed or hired four thin, bony oxen (mules were at a premium), and on them were loaded our X-ray equipment, generator and boxes with medical supplies, while we set off on foot for Tengyueh. The city was supposed to be some 65 kilometres distant. It was much more a climb than a walk and in fact we crossed a mountain range, which the coolies never ceased to tell me was a 'short cut'. Early in the day, when we were on a comparatively good road, I well remember the three of us, Dr Robert McClure, a Canadian, Doug. Crawford, a Scot, and myself going along singing "Guide me O thou Great Jehovah". Po Chu-i might have sympathised, for did he not write

"My mad singing startles the valleys and hills,
The apes and birds all come to peep"?

What our Chinese companions thought of us I do not know.

To make this journey in the company of that remarkable person, Bob McClure, was a lucky chance for me, and quite unexpected. The son of a Canadian missionary family, he was born and partly brought up in China, spoke the language like a native, and knew many parts of the country like the palm of his hand.[11] He had become a dynamic figure in the medical work in China of the Red Cross and Friends' Ambulance Unit, and at this particular time held a roving commission. Once described as having the energy of a whirlwind, he spared neither himself nor his co-workers. Now, he typically insisted that while we travelled with Chinese we were to live as they did, which meant a strict regimen of two meals a day, one at eleven and one in the evening. On this day we arrived at eight in the evening at a derelict and abandoned village, and our rations were scant: some rice and one precious tin of corned beef. Doug. Crawford was detailed to heat up the latter on the camp fire, and how dismayed we were when he knocked the can over and the contents fell to the ground. Picking up as much as we could and remembering the adage

about a 'peck of dirt', we still managed to enjoy it.

Our coolies shared the same roof with us, at very little remove I may say, and I noticed that they ate their rice with rock salt which was jealously guarded in a bamboo container. One of them actually had an egg which he cooked with anticipation, and I thought he might share it with his friends, but not a bit of it – he swallowed every morsel while the others watched enviously. After supper, footsore and weary, we laid our sleeping bags on the rough floor and slept like proverbial logs.

3rd November 1944: Next day more foot-slogging, and I recall, not without pricks of conscience, that at some point Doug. Crawford and I got a short way ahead of Bob, and came across a little house before which a few wizened pears were displayed for sale. The temptation was too much. Departing from our regimen, with what guilty feelings did we each buy and eat one before our redoubtable chief hove in sight! That evening we reached the Headquarters of the Chinese 54th Army, situated some little way outside the walls of Tengyueh, and slept the night as guests of the military.

Walking into the town next morning, we called on the Magistrate and were shown our future base, a shop with a house adjoining. After some inspection we discovered a grenade under the floor boards and what I took to be Japanese post cards.

The town presented an appalling sight. All except a few buildings were razed to the ground. Ditches and wells were filled in and the bodies of men and mules were lying in shallow graves. It was apparent that the town's recapture by the Chinese had been a tremendous task, in which every house was a strong point. Two members of our Team had arrived earlier and were attending to the more urgent public health tasks, John Perry in particular seeing to the proper burial of soldiers and mules. Parties of Chinese soldiers were collecting the live ammunition which littered the town.

Three-quarters of the civilian inhabitants had fled or been driven out during the Japanese occupation. Now that they were returning from the surrounding hills, medical services were in demand and we speedily set to work:

> *6th November 1944:* "Began out-patients today, quite a flourishing clinic. So many people need treatment it's pathetic to see. They brought us gifts of fruit, camelias and eggs in return for treatment, which none of them can afford". Eggs then cost 50 Chinese dollars each!

This Outpatients' Department was at our base in the town, but we very soon established another in addition.

The Friends' Ambulance Unit proposed to start a civilian hospital at Tengyueh, as mentioned. Fortunately a large Confucian temple, situated just outside the town wall, was placed at our disposal for that purpose. During the fighting it had been used alternately by the Japanese and the Chinese as an ammunition store, and when we first walked down the road towards it we were warned to look out for wires sticking up out of the ground, as it had been mined. Of course it needed re-conditioning, but it comprised a nucleus of buildings which, enlarged, could be suitably converted into a hospital. In the meantime parts of it were usable and soon, under the gaze of the Confucian sages whose statues adorned the temple, we established our second Outpatients' Department.

Help for the new hospital-to-be was forthcoming from various sources. The Canadian Red Cross promised medical equipment, the British Government a grant and, notably, a number of far-sighted local dignitaries, including the Tengyueh Guild at Kunming, donated one million Chinese dollars. I was chosen to collect the latter sum from Baoshan and flew there by courtesy of the U.S. Air Force in a 2-seater plane, bringing back the funds stuffed into two large rucksacks. In no time at all the temple's centre courtyard was a scene of activity as carpenters and masons started to renovate and adapt, and we speedily had the rudiments of a real hospital, with some beds occupied. Having regard to conditions in the area treatment was generally free, except that wealthy people were assessed by the local committee or guild.

18th December 1944: An outbreak of bubonic plague was reported at Nandian, a village five miles south of Tengyueh, the *bacterium* having been identified by our own laboratory technician, Alan McBain. The village was immediately subjected to a *cordon sanitaire,* restricting all movement in and out. Anti-bubonic serum was urgently flown into Tengyueh and we began a programme of immunisation, first inoculating the Tengyueh population and then going out to the surrounding villages. We found that persuading people to come forward for immunisation posed no problem. Market days were by far the most favourable for setting up a clinic. At the order of the local mayor or headman, the town crier would go round the streets beating his gong and proclaiming that the foreign doctors were at the corner of such-and-such a street, with free medicine. However we had to keep a strict check, for some people actually wanted a double dose for good measure and would queue up for a second jab.

Departure

3rd February 1945: Time was passing and a day came when I left Yunnan, however reluctantly, for compelling personal reasons. On the voyage out, on board the *S.S. "City of Exeter"*, I had met a certain Reverend David White who, as it turned out, would be my future husband. He was on his way to take up his post as Anglican chaplain, Basra and the Persian Gulf, in the diocese of the Bishop of Jerusalem, and additionally to establish the Mission to Seaman, Basra, Irak, and when we parted at Bombay we knew that it was only temporarily. By January 1945 the situation at Tengyueh had eased. The Japanese were retreating before the British advance in Burma; thus I could leave with a good conscience. The insistent message from David was "my need is greater than that of the Chinese" At that time, to obtain a passage from the East in a homeward direction was like getting blood from a stone. But one day a cable arrived from the Gulf, through official channels, which read, "Philanthropic team needed for Basra", and that worked the oracle. It had been sent by Major Ridley, a friend of David's, who was in charge of Army Movements. I was soon winging my way westwards.

I rejoiced to think that Tengyueh was now at peace and that the hospital we had dreamed of was functioning. It was given the name of Tengyueh Peace Memorial Hospital and the Friends' Ambulance Unit continued to staff it until the end of the War, when an American missionary group took it over. I like to think that it still serves the citizens of that charming town.

Our contribution to the people we met was but a tiny brush stroke on the large and fascinating canvas of China's history, but I hope that in some small measure our Chinese friends may perhaps, if and when they remember us, think of these words from the late fifth century B.C.:

> "I saw you coming down the western road and my heart laid down its load".

NOTES

1 The proceedings which led to this decision are described in General Woodburn S. Kirby, *The History of the Second World War, The War Against Japan,* Vol. III, H.M.S.O., 1961. See pages 231 and 394-7.

2 A. Tegla Davies, *Friends' Ambulance Unit, The Story of the F.A.U. in the Second World War,* Allen and Unwin, 1947. See page 283.

3 See Map 1. The spelling 'Kutsing' for this town represented the dialectal pronunciation and was in vogue in 1944. In Wade-Giles it is spelt Chü[illegible]-ching, and in present day *pinyin*, Qujing.

4 Baoshan (in Wade-Giles Pao-shan) is the township on the site of the old Imperial Prefecture of Yung-ch'ang.

5 Tengyueh (see Map 2) was the name of the Prefecture under the Empire, as distinct from the township on the same site called T'eng-ch'ung (in *pinyin* spelt Tengchong). The name 'Tengyueh' was still prevalent in 1944.

6 See F.O. 371/41639, file 474, at the Public Record Office. (Monthly military situation reports by H.M. Consulate General, Kunming).

7 Mr W.G. Beckmann, O.B.E., formerly of H.M. Diplomatic Service, has commented as follows: "The lorries, or 'trucks', were 5-ton American built Dodge or Chevrolets. Until the Japanese took over, a convoy of four or five would leave Lashio loaded mostly with petrol for the return trip, thus carrying precious little pay load. After the fall of Lashio the trucks had to run on alcohol made from crushed sugar-cane. This worsened the m.p.g., so needing more fuel for the return trip, and even less pay load. One hazard of the journey, though rare as far as our Embassy trucks were concerned, was to collide with an oncoming truck, usually as you were going up and the other was tearing down-hill. This could cause both trucks to fall over the lip of the road and into the precipice below – a nasty end! The main cause of this was the tendency for the drivers to 'squeeze' some fuel for themselves by coasting down-hill in neutral with the engine switched off. This meant using the brakes which would soon heat up and fail. As a precaution all our convoys had one foreigner sitting in the cab of each truck – and that was why I did the run in 1942".

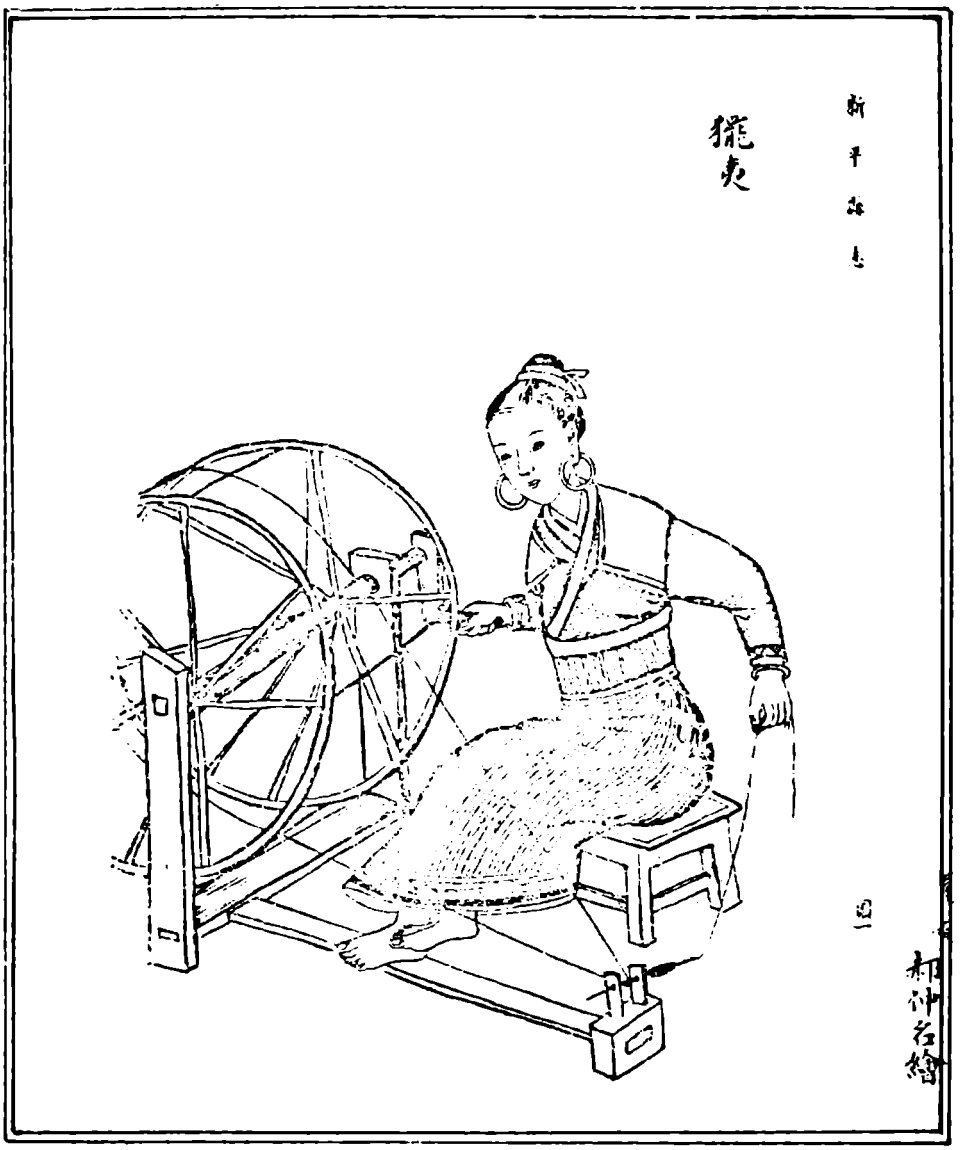
8 Lecture, *The Burma Road,* by Gerald Samson in 1946 to the China Society. Copies available at Han Shan Tang Ltd., London.

9 Lecture, *Some Walks along the China-Burma Frontier*, to the China Society in 1969 by the late Sir Michael Gillett, K.B.E.,

C.M.G. Copies available at Han Shan Tang, London. Formerly H.M. Consul at Tengyueh, Sir Michael described his exit from there in May, 1944, as an 'undignified scuttle' which took him through the lovely country of the Shweli headwaters and across the Mamien Pass (see Map 2).

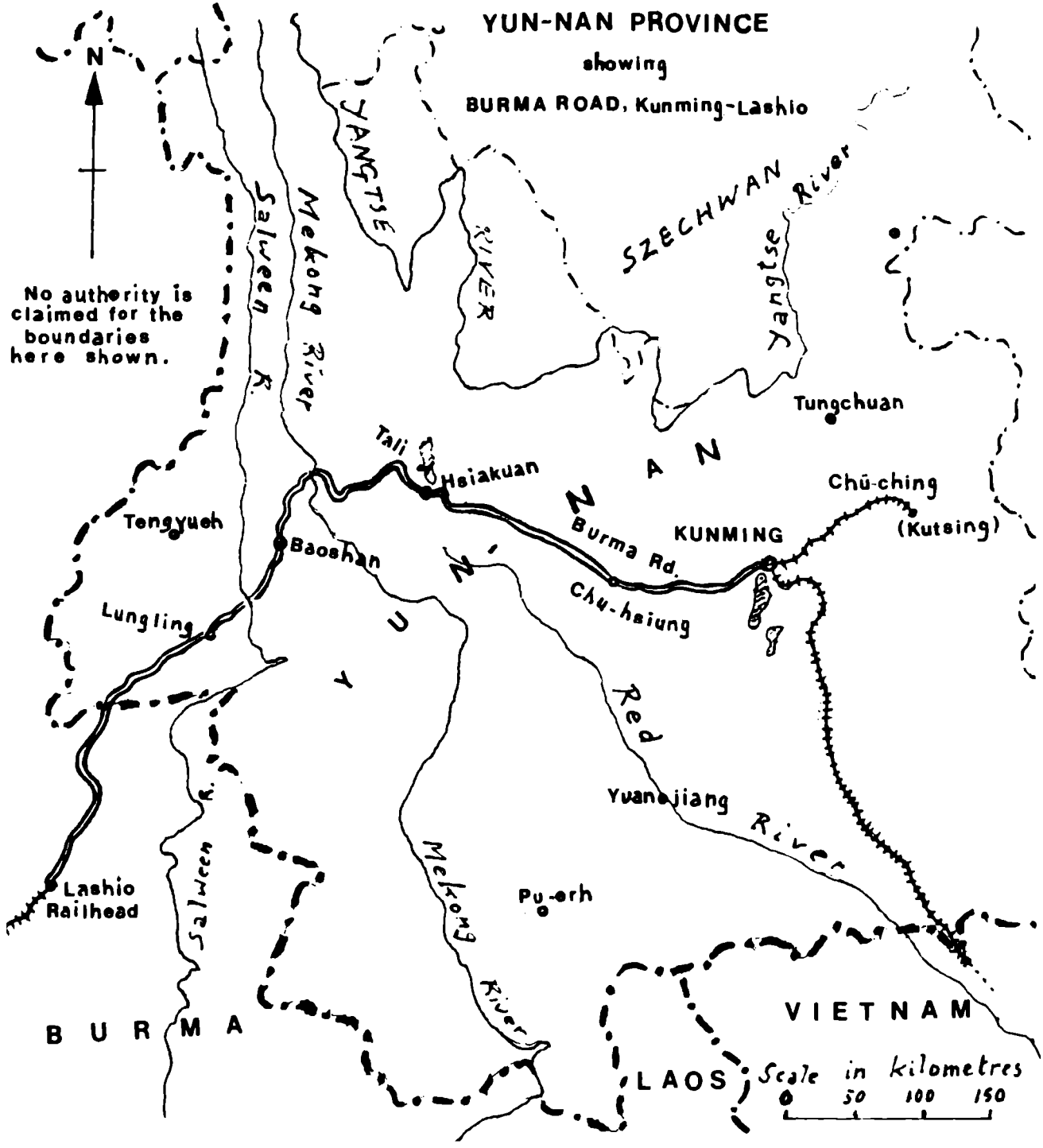
[10] The date tallies with that in General Woodburn S. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, Vol. IV, Chapt. XIII, page 147. On 29th October 1944 two divisions of the Chinese 71st Army (of XI Chinese Army (Group), supported by the 14th U.S.A.A.F. and a strong force of artillery, attacked Lungling frontally. The Japanese abandoned the town on 3rd November 1944.

[11] A vivid and racy account of Dr. Robert McClure is contained in Monroe Scott's *McClure, The China Years,* Penguin Books Canada Limited, 1979.



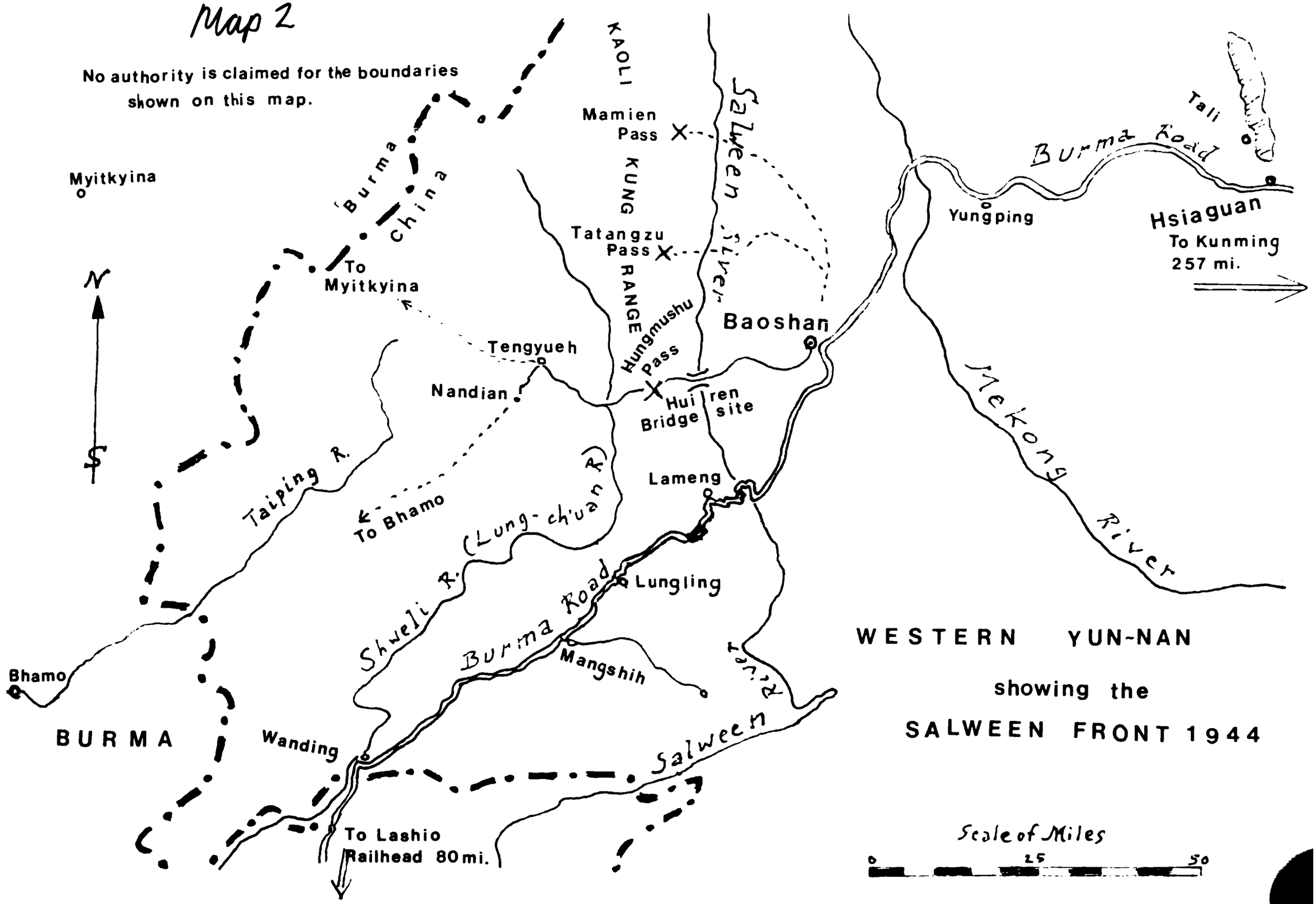
Woman of Tai minority race (from the gazetteer of Xinping Xian, southern Yunnan, publ. 1933)

Map 1


YUN-NAN PROVINCE
showing
BURMA ROAD, Kunming-Lashio
N
No authority is claimed for the boundaries here shown.
Salween R.
Mekong River
YANGTSE
RIVER
SZECHWAN
Yangtse River
Tungchuan
Tali
Hsiakuan
Chü-ching
(Kutsing)
Tengyueh
Baoshan
Burma Rd.
KUNMING
Lungling
Chu-hsiung
Red
Yuanjiang River
Lashio
Railhead
Salween R.
Mekong River
Pu-erh
BURMA
VIETNAM
LAOS
Scale in kilometres
0 50 100 150

Map 2

No authority is claimed for the boundaries shown on this map.



WESTERN YUN-NAN

showing the

SALWEEN FRONT 1944

Scale of Miles

0 25 50