

Tom Bodman  
L. J. ...

OFFPRINT

*Southeast Review  
of  
Asian studies*

Ronnie Dolan  
Ilia Tolstoy

1942.43

VOL. XVIII

1966

9

A PUBLICATION OF SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE  
ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES

# **“Mud” and “Slug”: The First American Mission to Tibet**

**Derek Waller**

This paper will investigate the first official American mission to Tibet, led by Iliia Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan and organized during the Second World War by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>1</sup> The mission was important not only for what it accomplished, but also for representing the first ever direct communication between the governments of the United States and Tibet. The mission also brought into sharp relief the actual status of Tibet in the international arena.

There had been contacts between the United States and Tibet in the early years of the century, as a result of correspondence and meetings between the thirteenth Dalai Lama and W. W. Rockhill, minister at the U. S. legation in Peking.<sup>2</sup> Indirect contacts continued in the 1920s and 1930s between the Dalai Lama and the U. S. Department of State, through the good offices of the American traveler Charles Suydam Cutting.<sup>3</sup> In 1942, however, Tolstoy and Dolan carried with them a letter and presents from President Roosevelt to the fourteenth Dalai Lama. Although the presidential letter was addressed to the Dalai Lama as the religious head of Tibet, and not to him in his capacity as political leader of the country, it nevertheless represented the first direct official communication between the two heads of state.

## **Background to the Mission**

Shortly after Pearl Harbor, on 9 December 1941, China formally declared war on Japan. The widening of the war in Asia brought further advances for Japanese forces. The Chinese Nationalist Government of Chiang Kai-shek, now based in Chungking, was shocked by the surrender of Hong Kong on 25 December and the threat posed to Singapore by the seemingly inexorable advance of the Japanese. Singapore fell in February 1942. In March, Japanese forces took Rangoon. In May, they seized Lashio, a terminus of the Burma Road, and occupied the rest of Burma shortly thereafter. The United States feared that China would feel increasingly isolated and might be tempted to reach a kind of “undeclared peace” with Japan. Fur-

---

<sup>1</sup>“Mud” and “Slug” were the code names used to designate the mission leaders, Iliia Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Paul A. Varg, *Open Door Diplomat: The Life of W. W. Rockhill* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952).

<sup>3</sup>Suydam Cutting, *The Fire Ox and Other Years* (New York: Scribner's, 1940).

thermore, the very real threat existed that if German and Italian forces were to continue their successes in North Africa, then Turkey, Iran and Iraq would be conquered, and the possibility presented itself of the Axis forces linking up and forming a hostile bloc from the Atlantic to the Pacific.<sup>4</sup> Support for Chinese resistance to the Japanese was therefore imperative.

The government of Chiang Kai-shek considered Tibet to be a province of China. In reality, China had little authority over Tibet, and the Tibetans became involved in the Second World War only with extreme reluctance. Because the volume of supplies that could be shipped over the Burma Road (itself threatened by Japanese forces) was insufficient, in early 1941 Chiang Kai-shek ordered a motorable road to be built running from southwest Szechwan, across the southeast corner of Tibet, to the border of the north-eastern Indian province of Assam. When asked by the British, the Tibetans agreed to an aerial survey of the route, but they refused to consider any suggestion of road building. Chiang then announced he would open the road anyway and sent a party of surveyors which proceeded to the Tibetan border, only to be turned back by Tibetan troops.<sup>5</sup>

In February 1942, Chiang visited India and continued to urge the opening of new military supply routes to China. The idea of cutting across southeastern Tibet was abandoned in favor of a more southerly route avoiding Tibetan territory. In order to show good-will to both China and the United States, the Government of India agreed to make another request to Tibet that permission be granted for goods to cross Tibet, using pack animals along existing tracks.<sup>6</sup> Although the British representative in Lhasa, Rai Bahadur Norbu Dhondup, urged the Tibetan government to agree, it refused, fearful of compromising its neutrality and of the likelihood of increased Chinese influence in Tibet. Frank Ludlow, the British assistant political officer in Sikkim, was sent to join Norbu in Lhasa, but a fresh approach by him to the Tibetan Government was equally unsuccessful.

In the face of increased British political pressure and the threat of economic sanctions, and after some incursions by Chinese forces along the border in the Chinghai area, the Tibetans agreed to permit pack animals to be used for the transport of non-military supplies. The Tibetans had become more conciliatory, in part because they could see a Japanese enemy on the horizon which was a potentially greater threat to their independence than Chiang Kai-shek. On its side, the Chinese government agreed to drop all proposals for the construction of motor roads through Tibet and to refrain from any further military initiatives against Tibet.

---

<sup>4</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers* (hereinafter cited as *FRUS*), *China 1942* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1956), p. 96.

<sup>5</sup>Hugh Richardson, *Tibetan Précis* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1945), pp.70-71.

<sup>6</sup>Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 380.

The actual use of these routes, however, using Tibetan trading companies and avoiding Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, became bogged down by political factors. China sought political advantage by demanding that Chinese officials be stationed in Tibet to organize the transport. Tibet then refused to open the routes at all, even to non-military goods, after which Chiang moved troops to the border in April 1943. The Chinese were furious at the intransigence of Tibet, a territory which they considered to be an integral part of China. On their side, the Allies were most perturbed to see Chiang Kai-shek, supposedly at full stretch in resisting the Japanese invader, threatening military action against Tibet. The Allies protested to China, Chiang agreed not to use force against the Tibetans, and Chinese interest in trade routes—always largely political rather than military or economic—declined, and the trade was left in the profitable hands of private companies.

The crisis over routing munitions to China, and the general problem of meeting the military demands of the Chinese, stimulated interest on the part of the U. S. government about routes across Tibet from India to China and about relations between China and Tibet.

### The Tibet Mission

Historians are not in complete agreement as to the primary motivation for the mission. Tsepon Shakabpa, who was a member of the Tibetan government at the time, says that the mission was dispatched "to discover routes to convey supplies to China through Tibet."<sup>7</sup> This is the view taken in the "official" history of the OSS, which describes the mission as "a scouting trip . . . to discover an additional land route to China."<sup>8</sup> Hugh Richardson (who had been in charge of the British Mission in Lhasa from 1936-1940) agrees, stating that the Americans "were sent on a mission to examine routes through Tibet."<sup>9</sup>

Others also concur, saying for example that the mission "attempted to establish a supply route through Tibet into China which would replace the dangerous and costly airlift of war supplies."<sup>10</sup> Robert Payne comments that if President Roosevelt believed that supplies could be sent from India to China via Tibet, "[H]e apparently did not look at a relief map." Payne also assigns a diplomatic motive to the mission,

---

<sup>7</sup>Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 287.

<sup>8</sup>United States War Department, Strategic Services Unit, History Project, *War Report of the OSS. Office of Strategic Services* (New York: Walker, 1976), pp. 83-4.

<sup>9</sup>Hugh E. Richardson, *Tibet and Its History* (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1984), p. 163.

<sup>10</sup>Helmut Hoffman, *Tibet: A Handbook* (Bloomington: Asian Studies Research Institute, 1986), p. 76.

noting that political necessity would dictate an overture to Tibet, given that the advancing Japanese armies might force the Chinese "back to the foothills of Tibet."<sup>11</sup>

It has even been suggested that the real motive lay in the inspection of Tibet as a base for future operations against the Chinese communists.<sup>12</sup>

Even the chroniclers of the activities of the OSS are not wholly in accord with one another. One adopts the standard line that "the War Department was interested in a possible military supply route between India and China through the Tibetan mountains," and he adds that the "State Department wished to assure the young Dalai Lama of American friendship."<sup>13</sup> Others, however, state views that show more covert reasons, alleging for instance that the mission was "supposedly sent to identify possible sabotage locations in the event that Tibet was occupied by the Japanese."<sup>14</sup>

It is probable that the mission had multiple objectives. The use of Tibet to transport war material to China was a clear goal. In addition, both the United States and Great Britain had every reason to be concerned about the possibility of Japan occupying Tibet. Consequently, establishing contact with the Tibetan government and having observers provide first-hand political and economic impressions of the country and its terrain were eminently sensible objectives under the circumstances.

The United States was examining a variety of routes to supply its Chinese allies. The stubbornness of the Tibetans, and the conflicting accounts of developments provided by the Chinese and the Government of India, prompted the Americans to dispatch the mission to provide an independent account of the situation and to report on the feasibility of Tibet as a route for the delivery of supplies to Chiang Kai-shek. In spite of the fact that it appeared that the actual amount of supplies that could be delivered would be marginal to Chinese requirements even under favorable circumstances, the effort was felt to be psychologically important in keeping China as a co-belligerent in the war against Japan.

The available documentation on the start of the mission is rather sparse. A letter of Colonel William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan, director of the Office of Strategic Services, to Secretary of State Cordell Hull said only that OSS men were "on a mission

<sup>11</sup>Introduction to Rosemary Jones Tung, *A Portrait of Lost Tibet* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), pp. x-xi.

<sup>12</sup>A. Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1987), pp. 80-84 and 100-102.

<sup>13</sup>R. Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 254. His words echo those of Corey Ford, *Donovan of OSS* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), p. 213. The theme of the supply route was also picked up by Richard Dunlop, in *Donovan: America's Master Spy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1982), p. 360.

<sup>14</sup>Bradley F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors: O.S.S. and the Origins of the CIA* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 195.

via India and Tibet to General Stilwell in China," and it referred generally to the mission being "of strategic importance and we hope will prove of long term value in the furtherance of the war effort in the Asiatic theatre."<sup>15</sup>

An OSS memorandum to the Military Intelligence Division of the army in August 1942 stated that the mission was "to survey that country (Tibet) for possible sabotage activity in case it should become a theatre of operations."<sup>16</sup>

In September 1943, an internal OSS report on the project described it as "a reconnaissance mission via India to Tibet. The mission was to move across Tibet and make its way to Chungking, China, observing attitudes of people of Tibet; to seek allies and discover enemies; locate strategic targets and survey the territory as a possible field for future activity."<sup>17</sup>

### "Mud" and "Slug"

Ilia Tolstoy (1903-1970), "Mud," was a grandson of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, and he spent part of his childhood growing up on his grandfather's estate. As a boy, he had visited Sinkiang, where his father was stationed as an army officer, and also Mongolia.<sup>18</sup> He later may have fought with the White Russians against the Bolsheviks before he left for the United States.<sup>19</sup> Tolstoy was brought to the attention of the OSS by Archibald McLeish, the Librarian of Congress. McLeish was a good friend of Tolstoy's wife Beatrice, and he passed her husband's name over to his OSS contacts as a suitable candidate for secret work.<sup>20</sup> Brooke Dolan (1908-1945), "Slug," was selected by Tolstoy to accompany him because he had led two expeditions to northeastern Tibet for the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (of which he was a trustee), had read widely on Tibetan Buddhism, and spoke a number of Tibetan dialects.<sup>21</sup>

The pair fitted the OSS job description for what were known as "Special Activities." For this work, the "fundamental requirements were knowledge of a foreign language and, if possible, experience in foreign areas." Good physical condition was also needed, together with "qualities of self-reliance under rugged outdoor condi-

---

<sup>15</sup>Letter of 2 July 1942, *FRUS*, 1942, p. 624.

<sup>16</sup>Memo to General Strong, August 1942, in Millard Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution Archives (hereinafter cited as Goodfellow Papers), OSS Memoranda, Box 4.

<sup>17</sup>Background Report, 30 September 1943, in National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter cited as NARA), OSS RG226, Box 200.

<sup>18</sup>Letter of Eric Teichman to Foreign Office, 3 September 1943, in India Office Library and Records, London (hereinafter cited as IOL), L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>19</sup>Tung, *A Portrait of Lost Tibet*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>MacLeish letter to Donovan, 27 January 1942, in NARA, RG226, Box 712.

<sup>21</sup>Tung, *A Portrait of Lost Tibet*, pp. 5-6.

tions."<sup>22</sup> It was a section of "Special Activities"<sup>23</sup> under the control of Major (later Colonel) M. Preston Goodfellow, the deputy director of the OSS, that dispatched Captain Tolstoy and 2nd. Lieutenant Dolan to Tibet, and it was to Goodfellow that the mission reported during its journey.<sup>24</sup>

President Roosevelt gave oral authorization to the Tibet mission, code-named F.E.2, on 12 May 1942.<sup>25</sup> It was not until a month later, on 13 June, that the OSS was officially brought into being, created out of the Office of Coordinator of Information and placed under the military authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Having already received Presidential endorsement, the Tibet Mission did not therefore need the consent of the Joint Chiefs. Had the mission required the endorsement of the Joint Chiefs, it might never have been launched. Certainly the State Department did not approve of the mission, but it was unable to halt it.<sup>26</sup>

On 2 July, Colonel Donovan wrote to Cordell Hull asking that the State Department "expedite the obtaining of a permit from the British authorities in India for Iliia Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan to enter Tibet." Donovan also requested that Tolstoy and Dolan "be allowed freedom of travel in Tibet in so far as the British are able to grant it without the necessity of returning to India."<sup>27</sup>

While the British authorities in India had been asked to assist in gaining Tolstoy and Dolan permission to enter Tibet, the OSS, unknown to the British, had already requested the Tibetan government through Dr. Kung Ch'ing-tsung (the Chinese representative in Lhasa), for permission for two American citizens to transit Tibet from India to China.

In June 1942, Dr. Kung made his request to the Tibetan government. The Tibetans, determined to protect their autonomy, denied the request.<sup>28</sup> Two months later, Frank Ludlow, the British representative in Lhasa, asked the Tibetan Foreign Office to permit two Americans to visit Lhasa with a letter from President Roosevelt. The Tibetans responded by asking if they wanted to proceed onwards from Tibet to China. Ludlow "deemed it expedient to profess ignorance of any such intention," believing that the Tibetans were unlikely to approve any such request.<sup>29</sup> The Tibetans then asked if these two Americans were the same two for whom Dr. Kung had sought approval in June. Ludlow replied that he did not think they were the same,

<sup>22</sup>*War Report of the OSS*, pp. 82 and 211.

<sup>23</sup>SA/G, Special Activities/Goodfellow.

<sup>24</sup>*War Report of the OSS*, p. 26.

<sup>25</sup>Hoffman to Miss Cooley, "For File," 2 April 1943, in NARA, RG226, Box 200.

<sup>26</sup>Foreign Office memorandum of 11 October 1943, Public Record Office, London, FO371/35759.

<sup>27</sup>*FRUS*, 1942, p. 624.

<sup>28</sup>Letter of Ludlow to Gould, 21 January 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>29</sup>Letter of Ludlow to Government of India, New Delhi, 20 August 1942, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

and New Delhi confirmed that this was very unlikely.<sup>30</sup> In early September, Ludlow was told unofficially that the Tibetan Government had approved the visit of Tolstoy and Dolan to Lhasa.<sup>31</sup>

The Government of India had succeeded where China had failed. The fact that the Chinese government was unable to obtain visas from the Tibetans to allow two citizens of China's most powerful ally to enter Tibet showed the impotence of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet and the reality of Tibetan autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, plans for the mission were continuing, well in advance of receipt of permission to enter Tibet. In order to conceal their real status from the outside world, Tolstoy and Dolan were to travel ostensibly on official business for the Department of Agriculture.<sup>33</sup> "It will be appreciated" wrote Goodfellow, "if this matter will be kept secret."<sup>34</sup>

The State Department drafted a letter for the President's signature to be carried by Tolstoy to the Dalai Lama. It was, said Hull to be "addressed to the Dalai Lama in his capacity of religious leader of Tibet, rather than in his capacity of secular leader of Tibet, thus avoiding giving any possible offense to the Chinese Government which includes Tibet in the territory of the Republic of China."<sup>35</sup>

On 8 August 1942 they arrived in New Delhi<sup>36</sup> and reported to General Joseph W. Stilwell at his headquarters in the Imperial Hotel.<sup>37</sup> As luck would have it, Stilwell had arrived in the city very shortly after Tolstoy and Dolan. The two were called in "and had a good talk and blessing."<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup>Letter of Ludlow to Government of India, New Delhi, 25 August 1942, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>31</sup>Ludlow to Government of India, Lhasa Letter for week ending 6 September 1942, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4201.

<sup>32</sup>Article Two of the Convention signed in Simla in 1914 by Great Britain and Tibet, and initialed by China, stated that the British and Chinese governments recognized that Tibet was under the suzerainty of China, but then went on to state that the two governments also recognized the autonomy of "Outer Tibet." Equally confusing was that "Outer Tibet" was the core of Tibet, centered on Lhasa, while "Inner Tibet" referred to the peripheral areas of the country. The text of the Convention is printed in Richardson, *Tibet and Its History*, pp. 283-87.

<sup>33</sup>OSS memo of 22 May 1942. Document provided to author by the Central Intelligence Agency (hereinafter cited as CIA).

<sup>34</sup>Letter of Goodfellow to Shipley, 2 July 1942, in Goodfellow Papers, Box 2, U. S. Dept. of State, Passport.

<sup>35</sup>Hull to Roosevelt, 3 July 1942, in *FRUS*, 1942, p. 625. The text of the letter to the Dalai Lama is also printed.

<sup>36</sup>Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA.

<sup>37</sup>Iliia Tolstoy, "Across Tibet from India to China," *National Geographic Magazine* 90 (1946): 169.

<sup>38</sup>Letter of Tolstoy to Goodfellow, 10 August 1942, in Goodfellow Papers, Box 2, Tolstoy folder.



All seemed to be falling into place and “everywhere,” wrote Tolstoy, “we have received grand cooperation and encouragement. It made us feel that much more determined.”<sup>39</sup> From Delhi, a train took the Americans to Calcutta. At the Great Eastern Hotel, the best in the city, Tolstoy penned a note to Goodfellow, “before we jump off,” saying “we will try our best to go all way [*sic*], but expect some opposition.”<sup>40</sup> Another train carried them to Siliguri, some twenty miles south of Darjeeling in the foothills of the Himalayas. There they hired an English-speaking Tibetan as interpreter and guide for the journey to Lhasa. A number of rather old Ford touring cars carried the party and its equipment from Siliguri on the seventy mile road to Gangtok, Sikkim, where Sir Basil Gould, British political officer in Sikkim, hosted them at the Residency.<sup>41</sup> It was now October, and they departed on the 22nd of that month on the more difficult stage of the route from Gangtok to Lhasa.<sup>42</sup>

Gould, like the India Office, had been concerned about the forthcoming visit of the two Americans. In a letter to England dated 28 September, he remarked, “my next visitors are two Americans, Brooke and Dolan [*sic*], who are going to Lhasa with presents from President Roosevelt. How genuine their ostensible purpose is I don’t know. The thing was pushed through rather informally and quickly.”<sup>43</sup>

Colonel Goodfellow observed that the mission’s departure for Tibet “represented the first time in history that American Army officers had undertaken this route to Lhasa.”<sup>44</sup> The party was now composed of five individuals—Tolstoy and Dolan, plus Rai Sahib Sonnam, the British trade agent in Yatung (the first town on the Tibetan side of the border), a cook, and a Lepcha servant, together with a number of transport handlers for the mules and yaks that made up the pack train. Also included as a mascot was a Tibetan terrier called “Miss Tick.” Crossing the Himalayas via the Natu La (pass) at 13,500 feet into Tibet, they were occasionally enveloped in cloud. Finally Tolstoy and Dolan arrived on 12 December 1942 at their destination of Lhasa, the “Forbidden City.”<sup>45</sup>

Along the route to Lhasa, “details...were accurately recorded . . . of . . . a full and definite survey of flora, fauna, terrain, climate weather, geographical conditions, altitudes, trails, mapping of portions of unexplored territory, grade and other related

---

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Letter of Tolstoy to Goodfellow, 29 September 1942, in Goodfellow Papers, Box 2, Folder: Tolstoy, Ilya 1942-43.

<sup>41</sup>Tolstoy, “Across Tibet,” pp. 169-70.

<sup>42</sup>Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA.

<sup>43</sup>Letter of B. J. Gould, Gangtok, 28 September 1942, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>44</sup>Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA.

<sup>45</sup>Tolstoy, “Across Tibet,” pp. 170, 182 and 198; Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, p. 2, CIA.

items which are vital to engineering consideration in the contemplation of practical road building."<sup>46</sup>

The instructions given to the mission were that it was to proceed from Lhasa to report to General Stilwell in Chungking without returning to India. This required that the Tibetan authorities permit firstly, that the mission be allowed to reach Lhasa, and secondly, that it then be authorized to continue on from Lhasa to China. While permission to visit Lhasa had been granted while Tolstoy and Dolan were in New Delhi, the question of their route on leaving Lhasa was not to be definitively settled until after they arrived there.

### **The Mission in Lhasa**

Among those greeting the mission just before its entry into the city was a small delegation composed of Frank Ludlow, his wireless operator Reginald Fox and Dr. Kung. Tolstoy and Dolan stayed at the home of Frank Ludlow, and by custom they paid no visits to Tibetan officials until after an audience with the Dalai Lama had been arranged. This took place in the Potala Palace on 20 December, eight days after they first reached Lhasa.<sup>47</sup>

It was a purely ceremonial occasion, befitting the youth of the Tibetan leader. The fourteenth Dalai Lama had been "discovered" in 1939 and officially installed in Lhasa in February 1940 at the age of four. He was seven years old at the time of his meeting with Tolstoy and Dolan, the first official representatives of the American Government ever to meet with a Dalai Lama. Until the young leader reached the age of eighteen, his authority was conferred upon a regent, who was also present at the meeting, as was the father of the Dalai Lama.<sup>48</sup>

Of the child Dalai Lama, Tolstoy wrote that "we were immediately impressed by his young but stern face and not at all frail constitution. His cheeks were healthily pink." After a brief exchange of pleasantries, Tolstoy presented the Dalai Lama with a casket containing President Roosevelt's letter, "the first time in history that direct communication had been made by a President of the United States with the Dalai Lama of Tibet."<sup>49</sup> Dolan then gave the Dalai Lama an autographed photograph of President Roosevelt, following which the mission's servants presented him (via a major-domo) with a "gold chronographic watch" showing the phases of the moon and the days of the week as a gift from the president, and a silver model of a ship as a present from Tolstoy and Dolan. Gifts were also given by the mission to the re-

---

<sup>46</sup>Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, p. 2, CIA. This is part of the recommendation from Goodfellow to the adjutant general urging the awarding of the Legion of Merit to Brooke Dolan.

<sup>47</sup>Tolstoy, "Across Tibet," pp. 199-206.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 208-09.

gent.<sup>50</sup> Ludlow sneered that these presents for the Dalai Lama and others “were neither well chosen, nor of that costliness and magnificence which Tibetan officials might reasonably have expected from the envoys of the ruler of a great and powerful nation.”<sup>51</sup> Goodfellow, however, described them as “rare and intriguing.”<sup>52</sup>

Now that the mission was safely in Lhasa, the question of their onward route came to the fore. In order to secure permission for Tolstoy and Dolan to come to Lhasa, Ludlow had already given a guarantee to the Tibetans that they would not attempt to proceed from Tibet to China, but would return directly to India.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, Ludlow was incensed when he asked Tolstoy shortly after his arrival in Lhasa, if he and Dolan were the same two who had applied in June 1942 via Dr. Kung to go on to China, and had been refused, and Tolstoy told him that “although he never applied for permission himself, he now seems to think that there is a possibility that the American representative in Chungking may have done so, without his knowledge or consent.”<sup>54</sup> This prevarication infuriated Ludlow who wrote later, after the mission had left Lhasa, that “what astounded me most was his [Tolstoy’s] calm admission one day that he and Dolan were the same two Americans for whom the Chinese government had failed to obtain permission for their journey through Tibet to China.”<sup>55</sup> Ludlow had denied to Dr. Kung that this was the case, and now had to admit that he was wrong.<sup>56</sup>

Ludlow went on to explain why, in his opinion, the Tibetans did decide to allow the mission to continue on to China, when only a few weeks earlier they had insisted they return to India. The reason said Ludlow, had nothing to do with any influence brought to bear by himself, as he had refused Tolstoy’s request to try and persuade the Tibetan Foreign Office to change its mind. The abrupt reversal was due to the fact that Tolstoy told the Tibetans that the Government of the United States had ordered the mission to proceed to China. The Tibetans then acquiesced because they hoped in return for American support in their struggle for independence. Fostering this hope, Tolstoy said that he had made a recommendation to the his government that Tibet be represented at the post-war peace conference, although he admitted privately to Ludlow that his government was unlikely to approve this recommendation. He also promised American help with wireless communication in Tibet and assistance with the design and manufacture of a Tibetan typewriter. In addition, he

---

<sup>50</sup>A photograph of the gifts, reproduced by courtesy of the U. S. National Archives, is in Goldstein, *History of Modern Tibet*, p. 393. See also *FRUS*, 1943, p. 623.

<sup>51</sup>Ludlow to Gould, 4 April 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>52</sup>Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA.

<sup>53</sup>Letter of Ludlow to Gould, 21 January 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>Memorandum No. 3 (5)-L-43, from Ludlow to the Political Officer, Gangtok, Sikkim, 4 April 1943, Public Record Office, London.

<sup>56</sup>Letter of Ludlow to Gould, 4 April 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

visited powerful monasteries such as Drepung and Sera and made cash donations to them.<sup>57</sup> In short, said Ludlow, "it was evident from the moment they arrived that the American's object was to obtain the Tibetan Government's permission to proceed to Jyekundo."<sup>58</sup>

Tibetan approval for the mission to proceed to China via Jyekundo was received in a letter from the Tibetan Foreign Office on 17 February 1943. The letter noted that "you promised to return to India if the Tibetan Government does not want you to go to China. Now you said that you have received a telegram from the American Government saying that you must go to Kansu Country [*sic*] of Lanchow, and ask Tibetan Government to allow you to go straight to China."<sup>59</sup> Tolstoy had been a little duplicitous. While such a telegram may have been received, it would have done nothing to change the mission orders, which from the start had been to proceed from Lhasa to Chungking.

The Foreign Office continued, "this is the first time that friendly relations were established between Tibet and the U.S.A. and Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt also has sent letter and presents to the Dalai Lama." Accordingly, "the Tibetan Government allows you to go through and will not set a precedent which other foreigners can claim. So according to your wishes, you and your servants can proceed via Nagchu to Jyekundo and up to [the town of] Sining." Letters for President Roosevelt from the regent and the Dalai Lama were given to the mission.<sup>60</sup>

The change of heart was due to the diplomacy and promises made by Tolstoy. The letter from President Roosevelt and the presents brought by the mission also played a part, because they represented an official link with America, continuing the unofficial contacts made by Srydam Cutting in the 1930s.

Although the Government of India saw Tibet as an independent buffer state, it was not prepared to antagonize China by endorsing the notion of independent Tibetan representation at a peace conference. Unfortunately, Ludlow told the Tibetans that personally he approved of Tolstoy's idea. He was roundly castigated for doing so, for Britain feared that if this became known, China might invade Tibet.<sup>61</sup> The viceroy (Lord Linlithgow) wrote to London that "I regard with apprehension amateur efforts of two Americans who have recently been in Lhasa," commenting that

---

<sup>57</sup>Tolstoy and Dolan also paid their respects to the lamas at Ganden monastery near Lhasa, and made a cash gift. The monastery gave them a receipt for the money, which (in translation) reads "Received from two American officers 400 Rs. Many thanks. All the monks are praying for America. Long life to the American king." NARA, RG226, Box 644.

<sup>58</sup>Memorandum of Ludlow to Gould, 4 April 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>59</sup>FRUS, 1943, p. 622.

<sup>60</sup>Translations of the letters, which were given to the State Department on 6 April 1944, are in FRUS, 1943, pp. 622-23.

<sup>61</sup>Ludlow to Gould, 4 April 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

the idea that Tibet should be at the peace conference “seems to me strangely inept.” After acknowledging that Ludlow had supported this plan, the viceroy noted, “I am taking steps to inform him of the un-wisdom of his action.”<sup>62</sup> “It is a great pity,” commented the Government of India, “that Mr. Ludlow allowed himself to be so led up the garden path: but Capt. Tolstoy is certainly a man who means to get what he wants by whatever means.”<sup>63</sup> Ludlow was forced to agree that Tolstoy’s overtures to the Tibetans had had the desired effect on the mission’s itinerary: “On the whole he (Tolstoy) succeeded remarkably well.”<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

The mission, assisted by four servants, left Lhasa on 19 March 1943. Their destination was Chungking via Lanchow, the capital of Kansu province.

For the mission, this was a much rougher segment of the journey than that from Gangtok to Lhasa, where a British government bungalow had been available at every rest stop. The mission supplies now consisted of the “barest necessities,” including “sugar, rice, dried fruit, flour, yak butter and milk, barley, dried cabbage and tomatoes.”<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, despite some hardships, Tolstoy and Dolan both arrived safely to a warm welcome in Jyekundo on 15 May, after fifty-seven nights on the road from Lhasa.

A message was sent by wireless from Jyekundo to General Stilwell in Chungking notifying him of the mission’s arrival. Tolstoy and Dolan then moved off, heading northeast across the Yangtze river in the direction of Sining. Dolan knew the territory from his earlier expeditions in the area. Arriving in Sining, they hired a truck to take them to Lanchow, which they reached on 4 July 1943. A congratulatory telegram arrived from Stilwell, ordering them to report to Chungking.<sup>66</sup> They returned to the United States in late 1943.<sup>67</sup>

According to Goodfellow, what the mission did on this part of the route was to make notes about the weather, record altitudes, map the topography, survey and photograph possible sites for airfields, and record other information on the area relating to “its possible use for military transport and air base facilities.”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup>Secret telegram, Viceroy in New Delhi to Secretary of State for India, 3 May 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>63</sup>Government of India minutes, 23 June 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>64</sup>Ludlow to Gould, 4 April 1943, in IOL, L/P & S/12/4229.

<sup>65</sup>Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA.

<sup>66</sup>Tolstoy, “Across Tibet,” pp. 220-22; Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA.

<sup>67</sup>One report says that this was December 1943 (Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA).

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

On the completion of their mission, Tolstoy and Dolan issued several reports summarizing the results of the expedition. The reports were remarkable for their concentration on long range engineering projects and airfield use. One report referred to the feasibility of building a motor road from Gangtok to Lhasa, able to carry two-ton trucks, in two years with available native labor, without "difficult engineering problems."<sup>69</sup> It went on to say that a road could also be built from Jyekundo to Lhasa in two years, "given an ideal setup including Tibetan cooperation,"<sup>70</sup> and noted that the Chinese planned to complete the motor road from Sining to Jyekundo by late 1943. Tolstoy and Dolan expressed doubt, however, as to whether this latter road would actually be completed on time. Overall, they concluded that there were no major impediments to the construction of a motorable road from Gangtok to Jyekundo, a distance of approximately 1,340 miles "if qualified men are employed."<sup>71</sup> Another report gave details on the suitability of airfield construction sites on the Tuna plain (north of Gangtok), near Lhasa, and between Lhasa and Jyekundo.<sup>72</sup>

But with Allied military successes, and the re-opening of the Ledo Road, it was not surprising that these long-term construction projects were never undertaken. Two years to build a trans-Tibet road was not fast enough to assist the war effort, and the cooperation of the Tibetans was extremely unlikely. As the road report stated, "the present Tibetan Government is most unfavorably minded toward any opening of Tibet, and toward motor vehicles as modern and un-Tibetan. We did not broach the subject of a trans-Tibet motor road. . . . We are not connected with a road project at all to the Tibetan mind."<sup>73</sup>

The OSS therefore concluded that "the proposed routes, though not overly practical in normal times, were nevertheless entirely feasible from a military point of view, during adverse times or periods of stress. Likewise, the sites located for the proposed airfields could have been developed had need for their use been imperative." Circumstances, however, "precluded the active and material use of the information obtained and submitted by the mission."<sup>74</sup>

The mission nevertheless fulfilled what most observers would agree was its primary objective, the surveying of Tibet as a possible transit area for the delivery of war supplies to the Chinese from India.

---

<sup>69</sup>Routes from India to China Traversed by Capt. Tolstoy and Lt. Dolan, Motor Road Possibilities, dated 25 July 1943, in NARA, RG 226, Box 226, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>72</sup>Report of Airfields and Airfield Sites, dated 25 July 1943, in NARA, RG 226, Box 226.

<sup>73</sup>Routes from India to China Traversed by Capt. Tolstoy and Lt. Dolan, Motor Road Possibilities, dated 25 July 1943, in NARA, RG 226, Box 226, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup>Goodfellow to Adjutant General, 7 June 1945, CIA.