

## Note to the Author from Ronald Kaulback

**D**uring the war in Burma, the Americans had their equivalent to our SOE [Special Operations Executive] in the OSS (Office of Strategic Services — a cover name), which operated against the Japanese in an area of the Kachin Hills. The overall commander of the Kachin OSS was a Colonel Eifler, an excellent and unconventional officer, who had been a Chicago cop before the war, I was told.

Very early in 1945, one of his young officers in the field sent him a radio message to the effect that several of the Kachin headmen had been particularly helpful, and what could he do to show gratitude in a fitting manner. At that period, the US Army was careful to insert punctuation into its radio signals, as 'prd' (for 'period', full stop), 'cma' (comma) and so on. Colonel Eifler replied, 'Award clothes cma money etc prd', and thought no more about it until, a little later, he flew in to visit this same young officer in one of the very light planes the British called Proctors. I cannot now recall what the US name was. Sitting around their bowl of rice that evening, the YO said: 'Say, Colonel, about those awards. I've awarded clothes and money — and I've awarded the CMA, 22 of them; but what in hell *is* the CMA?' 'Oh!' said Eifler, fixing the YO with his most turtle-like gaze. 'And what did you *say* it was?' 'Well, Colonel, I *said* it was the Citation for Military Assistance.' 'Oh, you did,' replied Eifler. 'It may interest you to know that you have awarded 22 commas! But,' he continued, 'I have never let my officers down yet, and, from this moment, the CMA is born.'

The next day, when he flew back to his headquarters, he called in his executive officers and told them: 'Boys, you will now design the Citation for Military Assistance — and you better make it good!' And make it good they certainly did. It was a noble medal, about two inches in diameter, of heavy silver. On the obverse was the Burmese Peacock, in high relief, and, on the reverse, what I remember as a wreath of wheat stalks, but were probably rice plants, with an inscription in the middle, again in relief, reading 'Citation for Military Assistance. Awarded by the Government of the United States of America to Magwi La' — or whomever it might have been. The medal hung from the neck on a ribbon of green and gold with little silver peacocks on it. Not unnaturally this glorious gong was highly popular in the OSS and quite a number of them were issued.

When the Japanese took Burma in 1942, the Burma Rifles (of which a fair proportion was from the hill tribes) was disbanded. Some of the men made their way to India and served for the rest of the war with the Indian Army, while others returned to their villages, where they served with the OSS or the SOE, as the case might be. Of these, quite a few received the CMA. When the Japanese surrendered, the Burma Rifles were reinstituted, and all ex-riflemen who could be traced were ordered to report to one of several recruiting centres in order to be signed on. There they were drawn up in line to have their names and numbers taken. Some of these men were wearing war ribbons, while others had CMAs in all their beauty dangling over their solar plexi, at which the recruiting officers ordered, 'Not uniform. Take those off!' This caused something of an uproar, those with the CMA complaining bitterly that their fellow tribesmen, who happened to have served outside Burma, were allowed to wear their ribbons, while those who had done their bit with the OSS were stripped of their decorations. This was a baffler for the wretched officers, who told the Kachins they had better wear their CMAs as a temporary measure, while they put the problem up to Army. Army took one look at 'Awarded by the Government of the United States of America', said, 'This is political' and hastily shuffled it on to the Government of Burma. This was not really working as yet, for which they were grateful, and so it passed to the Government of India. These gentlemen realized that they had



no direct dealings with the USA, and sent it to Whitehall without delay, where the Foreign Office took a very grave view of a foreign power issuing decorations to British subjects without prior reference to HM Government and instructed the Ambassador in Washington to make severe representations to the Secretary of State.

And that, unfortunately, is almost the end of my story. England and America must have come to some amicable agreement, in that there was no diplomatic rupture about then as I recall; but the important point, as to whether the CMA was permitted to be worn in uniform, remains unknown to me. When I left Rangoon that political battle was still undecided, and my last connection (if one can call it such) was when I paid a farewell visit to Colonel Eifler, sitting gloomily ruminating at his desk. I said, 'Goodbye,' and then added, 'Oh, and how's the CMA coming along?' That gingered him. He sat bolt upright. 'Kee-rist' he positively snarled. 'To think that a couple of supposedly intelligent governments could make such a fuss over a bunch of commas.'

Early in 1945, when I was OC Tac headquarters Force 136 at 14th Army headquarters (then in Meiktila), Force 136 had some 15,000 Karens fighting for them in the Karen Hills as guerrillas under British officers. At this time, the Japanese were making a big effort to stamp out these guerrillas and were destroying crops and villages and slaughtering the women, children and old men wherever they could. The Karens said that they were prepared to put up with all their sacrifice and would continue to fight for the British as loyally as ever; but what was going to happen to them after the war was over; that the Burmese were already saying that they would get their independence and would possess the whole country from Victoria Point to Putao and, if that were so, then it would be essential for the Karens to make peace now or face possible destruction later. The Burmese, of course, were fully supporting the Japanese at this time. I was in no position to answer the Karens, so I referred the question to the headquarters of Force 136 in Calcutta, who referred it, in their turn, to the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia (Admiral Lord Mountbatten). The reply was as clear as daylight — that under no circumstances would the Karens be

handed over to the Burmese after the war. I passed that on to the Karens, who continued to fight with us as courageously as ever until the war ended. And then the British handed them over to the Burmese.

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