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ARMY LIFE: TIME OVERSEAS 1944 to 1946

*“Elephants a’pilin’ teak
In the sludgy, squidgy creek
Where the silence ‘ung so ‘eavy you was ‘arf afraid to speak!
On the road to Mandalay...”*

KIPLING

As the troops boarded ship at the Los Angeles staging area to begin their journey overseas, representatives of the Lucky Strike Tobacco Company were on hand to present, to each soldier, a free carton of cigarettes. The journey from Los

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Angeles to India would take about six weeks. Because of Japanese submarines in the Pacific, the ship that José sailed on (the SS Mariposa) was obliged to zigzag and take an extremely circuitous route. They traveled in darkness at night, and were allowed no music nor entertainment of any sort. It was so crowded on board that there was no room for calisthenics during the six weeks they were at sea. It was said that there were four female nurses on the ship, but neither José nor anyone else there ever saw them.

About three thousand were on board, and they all ate and slept in shifts. The dining room could handle only about five hundred at a time, and it remained in continuous use. While one shift was finishing breakfast, the next group began arriving for dinner. Officers received three meals a day, but enlisted men got only two, breakfast and dinner. The food was atrocious. It was so bad that José's captain, Robert Armstrong, decided to look into the situation. He changed from his captain's uniform into that of a private, and came to eat with his men. He was so shocked with what he found that he went to the ship's captain to complain about the quality of the meals. Despite his protests, no changes were ever made. The only nice thing regarding food here was that there was a PX on board, where candy was sold. The candy came in packages of forty or fifty bars each, which was the only way that it could be purchased. This caused a problem for those who bought any, namely, how to hide it so that it wouldn't be pilfered. In the congested conditions that existed on board, this proved difficult.

Each soldier's bunk was allotted to him for twelve hours only, after which another soldier came to use it. The heat on the ship was intense. To escape it, the soldiers would often sleep outdoors on the floor of the deck. There were no lights, no sounds and, most of the time, the sea remained completely still. All of this added a sense of tremendous loneliness and isolation, which contributed even further to the anxiety that everyone already felt. The mood was one of profound depression, especially when they were out on deck at night.

Bathing was also a problem. The men had to wash with salt water. Making suds from this sometimes proved extremely difficult. Occasionally, they would get special hard-water (or potassium) soap that created suds. To wash their clothes, groups would get together and place their individual laundry items into a common duffel bag. This would then be lowered by a long rope and suspended into the ocean, where it trailed in the ship's wake. They were permitted to follow this procedure, however, only at certain specified hours. They were also limited to the number of bags which could be hung over the side, because too many

of these at one time could impede the progress of the ship. (There was a small laundry on board, but this was limited to use by officers only.)

Everyone was required to wear a life jacket twenty-four hours a day, and this made sleeping even more uncomfortable. Once, they spotted a Japanese submarine nearby but, when some Australian planes came circling overhead, the submarine disappeared. Nevertheless, the planes continued to follow the ship for two more days, but nothing ever came of the incident.

The ship made only one stop. This was at the port of Freemantle, ten miles away from the city of Perth, Australia. There, just a few blocks away from the docks, stood very large pink houses with all their windows and doors protected by steel bars. Outside the houses, many armed, but non-uniformed, guards stood watch. When the soldiers asked about this, they were told that these places comprised the “red light district,” and that the bars, as well as the guards, had been placed there to prevent any of the girls inside from escaping. The three thousand soldiers on board all got leave from the ship to spend a few hours on land. Then, the SS Mariposa set sail again, this time directly for India.

Immediately before having left the Los Angeles staging area to board ship, José and three physicians had been assigned to examine the soldiers. (The troops alluded to this as a “short-arm” inspection.) At that time, everyone, without exception, had been pronounced free of venereal disease. Four days out of Freemantle, however, a number of men began to complain of not being able to urinate. As the number of complaints steadily increased, the physicians began to suspect that they had an outbreak of gonorrhea on their hands. Too many of the soldiers were infected for the doctors to handle them individually with the supplies available. A hurried conference was called, and it was decided to put the only antibiotic known at the time (sulfanilamide) into the jello dessert served at mealtime. (An extremely sweet flavor of jello was deliberately selected to mask the taste of the antibiotic.) By the time that the ship arrived in Bombay, most of the problems involving gonorrhea had disappeared.

¹ Ravdin would later become the vice president of the University of Pennsylvania. He was also one of the team of physicians who, in 1956, would operate on President Dwight D. Eisenhower for ileitis.

² Mitchell would later become dean of the medical school at the University of Pennsylvania.

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They sailed into the port of Bombay in late April, 1944. From a distance, while still at sea, they could smell India. It was a smell that never left their nostrils, or their conscious awareness, for the almost-three-year period that José remained stationed there. What predominated was the stench of burning cow dung. The population in many parts of the country used this material to create small patties, which were then stored in piles and, in some areas, left to dry, attached onto walls outside the houses. These patties were then removed, one by one as needed, and burned as fuel in the cooking that was done outside on the streets. In small villages, especially, fresh cow dung was also used as a disinfectant by smearing it all over the walls of the rooms inside the houses.

José's unit remained in Bombay for several days, during which time a memorable incident occurred. Moored in the harbor were several boats and barges, side by side. One small boat was loaded with a large quantity of gold bars (the British had decided to take as much gold as possible out of India during the war and store it elsewhere for safe-keeping). An even larger boat next to this one was laden with ammunition. Alongside of the ammunition boat and, moored close to it, floated an enormous barge filled with garbage; this was being readied to sail out into deeper waters to dump the refuse into the sea. Something in the



**A street in Calcutta
(notice the patties of
cow dung drying on
the wall prior to their
use as fuel).**

garbage on this barge suddenly caught fire. The ammunition boat next to it quickly burst into flames and exploded. In turn, this explosion rapidly tore into the boat containing the gold. Suddenly, gold bars went flying into the sky and came raining down on the city of Bombay. Pandemonium broke loose. People in the streets were being hit by the gold missiles, and those who weren't hit grabbed as much gold as they could. The Indian police rushed in to help, and British and American troops also had to be called to the rescue.

It was immediately after this that José's unit left by railroad for Calcutta. They traveled in cattle-cars. The trip lasted about one week, and the train ride itself was memorable. José saw hordes of natives climb onto the roof-tops of civilian railroad cars and ride there without paying for the journey. Each car, both civilian and military, had, in one corner, a lavatory. This consisted of a hole in the floor about four inches in diameter which lay between two bricks, one on each side of the hole, these intended as foot-rests. No real partition divided this space from the rest of the cattle-car for privacy, nor was there any water or toilet paper available.

Calcutta itself proved to be a study in contrasts. Numerous temples adorned the city. Some of these were of such opulence and splendor as to boggle the imagination. Designed in shapes of incredible grandeur, many were constructed of white marble and laced with magnificent gardens. Some were adorned in the most intricate manner. The Jain Temple, for example, was fronted by outdoor staircases lavishly encrusted with expanses of beautifully colored stones. These were inlaid into the risers of the stairs, and the stones, themselves of many colors, were artistically arranged into patterns of great beauty. Often, the walls separating the temples from the surrounding streets had, on their exterior sides, mud and baked globs of cow-dung which were attached to their surfaces for future use as fuel. Meanwhile, milling around amid the splendor of the gardens themselves, were throngs of beggars, most of them emaciated stick figures, appearing to consist of nothing but skin, bones, and a diaper-like cloth shielding their loins. Unendingly, they extended skinny, outstretched hands, crying, "Baksheesh! Baksheesh!" (Alms! Alms!).

José saw burning ghats along the Ganges River. Here, bodies of the dead were publicly incinerated to the accompaniment of wailing, while swarms of vultures circled overhead. These birds were particularly intrusive and bellicose in this area. On one occasion, José was eating outdoors with a small group of his fellow-soldiers, when a vulture suddenly swooped down and snatched the food

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right out of his hands.

Upon arriving in Calcutta, José's troop was taken to a nearby camp called Konchrampara. This was located directly north of Dum-Dum, a village containing an RAF airport that had been established by the British. On the four or five trips that José would later make by army plane from the east of the country to Calcutta in order to pick up supplies, this was the airport at which he would have to arrive. Dum-Dum was also a large ammunition center, famous for the creation of the dum-dum bullet. The dum-dum was known as the killer type bullet, severely damaging and shattering to its target as it exploded. Soft-nosed, steel-jacketed, and created with a narrow hole drilled into its tip, it was also called "hollow" bullet, and it continued to remain illegal in the United States for a very long time.

José's unit remained in Camp Konchrampara for one or two weeks. Konchrampara was a most unpleasant place, with mud everywhere and canals of water all over. José and many other soldiers sometimes even found snakes in their beds. When it rained, some of the tents housing the soldiers would simply fold and collapse. There were no laundry facilities, but the soldiers could hire natives, whom they would pay out of their own pockets, to attend to these tasks. These bearers, as they were referred to, would take the dirty clothes down to the river where they would soak them in the muddy waters and then beat them against the rocks. For this reason, the soldiers' clothing during this period (and indeed whenever bearers were involved in their care) lasted only for a very short time.

A bearer's job was to attend to his soldier's needs. He would usually bring the soldier hot tea and a banana as breakfast in bed. He would also deliver heated water for shaving, and he would sometimes even help the soldier get into his army uniform in the morning. By the same token, the bearer would steal all that he possibly could. Bearers were available for hire only near the big cities, but were rarely available in the jungle area, where José was stationed during most of his time in India. In addition to the bearers, José also had, at his disposal, about twelve laborers to help on some occasions, especially in the digging of drainage-ditches.

From Konchrampara, José's troop traveled in six-by-six Studebaker trucks to Ledo, Assam. This was a five-day trip. In Ledo, they joined the Twentieth General Hospital. The Twentieth General was an enormous medical organization composed of physicians, nurses, administrative staff, and secretaries who had all been transferred directly to India from the Hospital of the University of

Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Colonel Isadore Ravdin¹ was its commanding officer, and Lieutenant-Colonel M. Mitchell was the Chief of Staff.² This whole area of Assam came to be called "Little Philadelphia." It even received miniaturized copies of *The Evening Bulletin*, *The Record*, *The Inquirer*, and *The Public Ledger*, which were Philadelphia's leading newspapers at the time. The main center of Twentieth General Hospital was located on the outskirts of the village of Ledo, from which point General Stilwell had started to build, through the mountains, the famous Ledo Road (also known as the Stilwell Road) connecting India and Burma with China. At that time, the entire east coast of China was occupied by the enemy, and it was impossible to get supplies through. Until the Ledo Road was completed, flights in and out of Assam, both to the east and the north, had to be made by plane over extremely mountainous territory which was referred to as the Hump. A great number of planes crashed on those flights.

As the troops first arrived at their camp in Assam near the China-Burma border, they were welcomed by music and messages from the enemy blaring out over loudspeakers from across the jungle. This welcome startled the soldiers because, in an area that was supposed to be secret, these Japanese voices not only enumerated individual names of the incoming American soldiers, but also informed them that their wives and girlfriends back home had forgotten them and were already involved in other romances. It was usually at night during the two and a half years while José was stationed in this area, that the Japanese would install speakers nearby or, when they could, actually inside US held ground. Then they would play music and broadcast propaganda to demoralize the American soldiers. Speeches by the infamous Tokyo Rose were among those that José sometimes heard.

The location was a jungle area. Ledo served as the main headquarters. From here, the troops would eventually make trips fifty to one hundred miles away, to places like Dibrugarh (a reasonably large city where a variety of goods could be bought), and to the recently liberated towns of Mitchyna, Banmauk, Namhkam and Shinbwiyang, the latter two near the Chinese border. Later on, José's unit had a small forward laboratory in Shinbwiyang, which his fellow soldier Stump usually headed. (Stump, although he had not yet graduated from college at the time of his induction into military service, had already been in training to attend pharmacy school and, although he was personally of a rebellious nature, he *did* work very hard at his microscope at the laboratory in Shinbwiyang.)

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Stump's real name was Charles Feingold. He came from Richmond, Virginia, and he was known to everybody as Stump because he was so short. José had first met Stump in Atlanta. After that, the two of them had been stationed together for the rest of the war years. Stump had been a disaster from day one. Throughout their time together, José had been his sergeant, but José could seldom get Stump to follow any directions, either José's or those given by others in command. Stump seemed to be a born rebel, and his favorite pastime was to lie down and do nothing. He argued with almost everybody about everything, and he continuously answered back. As far back as José remembers ever knowing him, Stump had managed to irritate others, sometimes to the point of distraction. José recalls how, one night in New Orleans, as he was coming out of his quarters alone, two soldiers suddenly sprang out of the darkness to grab him, ready to beat José up. One of them suddenly shouted, "Hey, that's not him! It's the other Jew!" (referring to Stump). At this point, they released José's arms and fled.

It was towards the later part of the war that Stump received a devastating blow to his personal life, as well as to his ego. Stump and José were stationed in a small outpost of ten men, in a remote part of the Burma jungle. The outpost was one of many Malaria Survey Units located along the most forsaken part of the border with India. One man from their tent had recently been sent home because of illness and, several weeks later, a replacement finally arrived. This fellow happened to be from Philadelphia, and his name was Danny Finklestein. Danny was bombastic and a smooth talker. He entered the tent already wise-cracking, regaling everyone with his latest adventures stateside. Danny had just arrived in the China-Burma-India area, and his last station back in the United States had been Richmond, Virginia. Upon hearing this, Stump's attention perked up. Without disclosing that Richmond was also his own home town, Stump began to question Danny about the latest news from there.

"The last thing I did in Richmond before shipping out," drawled Finklestein smugly, "was to go to the USO there. Boy, what a place! And what girls! Talk about Southern hospitality! Richmond is the greatest! I dated a terrific girl there," and then he proceeded to describe, in minute detail, his amorous adventures, taking pains to let it be known that he had "scored" with the young lady. Danny made it clear that, although they had had a wonderful time together, he had no intention of ever seeing the girl again. Finally he mentioned her name. Stump was flabbergasted. The girl turned out to be none other than his own fiancée! This disclosure completely devastated Stump, and he never seemed to

fully recover. He remained crestfallen and dejected throughout the rest of his time in the army, behaving even more morosely than before. José eventually heard that Stump never did marry this girl, and that when Stump finally did get married, years later, it would be, by his own admission, with less enthusiasm than one would expect for what should have been among the happy milestones of his life.

Namkahan, near the border with China, was the location of Colonel Wingate's headquarters. (Wingate was the famous "Burma Surgeon.") About half a mile down the road from these headquarters was a small outdoor stand. Here, José would sometimes stop to buy candy, chewing gum, and cigarettes. He smoked heavily in those days, sometimes as many as three packs a day. The price of cigarettes at that time was subsidized. A pack, then, cost five cents. José sometimes recounted later how his fingertips used to be yellow from smoking so much. It would not be until he lived in Denmark, some twelve years later, that José would finally quit smoking entirely. This would be because of the exorbitant prices of American cigarettes there, with other tobaccos available in the area proving unpleasant enough to warrant avoiding them completely.

The small stand at the roadside in Burma where José had bought his cigarettes during the war was run by a middle-aged man whom, oddly enough, José would meet again in Philadelphia in the early 1970's. This Burmese fellow would, in the seventies, be operating a restaurant on North Tenth Street in Chinatown. This he would name The Mandalay. José, while once eating with his family at the Mandalay, would suddenly recognize the owner and realize where he had seen him before. He would then approach the man and introduce himself, to the man's surprise, as the former soldier who had once been his customer in Burma. José then promised to bring his CBI photo album with him the next time he came to the restaurant. This he did and, at that time, he and the owner spent a pleasant half-hour going over photos together and reminiscing about their days during the war in Burma. On José's last visit to The Mandalay some months later, however, he found a sign posted on the door, stating "Restaurant Closed Due To Illness Of The Owner." The place then shut down completely, and José never was able to find out what had become of the Burmese man or his family. But he was happy that he had been able to bring a little cheer into the life of a man who had, late in his life, settled so far away from his native country.

In Assam, José once saw Dean Rusk, the man who would later become Secretary of State under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. During the war years, it was believed that Rusk was present in the region in an OSS capacity; that is to

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say, he worked for the organization which was later to become known as the CIA. Several other well-known people were also stationed in the area. Among these were the son of the mayor of Milwaukee, as well as Steve Cockran (who later created the comic strip *Terry and The Pirates*) and the Hollywood stars Pat O'Brien, Jinx Falkenberg, and Paulette Goddard; all of the latter came to entertain the troops. On one occasion, Noel Coward was expected to arrive with some female entertainers. There had been no entertainment in the area for many months, and a huge audience of soldiers gathered, all full of excitement and anticipation at finally being able to see a show. Coward finally appeared on stage, alone, arriving several hours late. The soldiers began calling out, "Where are the girls? You promised us girls!" The din got louder and louder, and Coward finally responded with a lame apology, lightly bantering, "I'm sure you would prefer dirty jokes to girls!" At this, he was loudly booed off the stage, and MPs had to rush in to quell what almost turned into a riot.

On a few different occasions, José got into difficulties with some of the top officials and famous names in the military. Once, General Stilwell, never known for his calm or politeness of rhetoric, roundly cursed José. When the blood smears of some of the soldiers, whom José was examining and who had been skipping their required anti-malarial medication (atabrine), turned out to be positive, José quickly requested that these men be sent immediately to a hospital, well back from the front lines. Dozens of such cases were involved. Stilwell, meanwhile, was planning to use some of these men in an impending military operation. Upon finding himself suddenly with a reduced force, he wanted to know who the "stupid son of a bitch" was who was sending so many of his soldiers away from the front.

Another time, José was called "an idiot" by a chicken colonel. It turned out that, in working with his microscope, José, without realizing it, was focusing it in such a way that the lens acted like a mirror, reflecting the sunlight. This was equivalent to sending a message or signal to the enemy about the company's precise location and position.

On still another occasion, early on during José's time in Burma, a soldier came to see him, complaining that his urine was pink. This occurred shortly before the fellow was due to go into battle. José insisted that the man urinate in his presence and, indeed, the urine did turn out to be pink. He told the soldier that he was going to take his temperature and, when José returned with the thermometer and inserted it into the soldier's mouth a few moments later, he found

that it registered an extremely high fever. Frightened, José promptly called for a small plane, a piper-cub (then the only type of ambulance available at the front), and he had the soldier evacuated to a hospital. Soon afterwards, the telephone rang. An irate physician in charge at the hospital wanted to know the specific details of what had happened. When José described the situation to him, the officer shouted into the telephone, "You fool! The pink urine was probably the result of eating enormous quantities of beets for several days!"

"But what about the high fever?" stammered José, completely taken aback. "His temperature was close to one hundred and two degrees!"

"Didn't you leave him alone while you went to get the thermometer?" the officer demanded angrily. "He probably rinsed his mouth in hot water before you stuck the thermometer in!"

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A great deal of bartering and trading went on among the soldiers. In the face of adversity, scantiness of supplies, and shortages of materials, it was amazing how much could be accomplished through resourcefulness. José, having a laboratory, found himself in great demand for alcohol. The men would steal it and mix it with canned grapefruit juice to make cocktails. Once, when José approached General Ravdin (recently promoted from Colonel) with a special request for more laboratory supplies, the conspicuous depletion of alcohol on his list immediately caught the General's eye.

"How do you account for this?" Ravdin fumed at him.

After a moment's thought, José responded in a shaky voice with a question of his own, "Evaporation, Sir?"

Ravdin regarded José for a moment with raised eyebrows and then, without further comment, continued his perusal of the list.

Ledo was a lonely and primitive place. All around the area lay tea gardens where women worked continuously. Some even gave birth in the gardens and then, immediately, returned to their tasks. Once, during his stay there, José went on an inspection tour of a river about fifty miles from Ledo. Wearing his red cross on his arm-band, he was walking down a road when an old native man sudden-

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ly appeared, jabbering in a dialect that José was unable to understand. He grabbed José's arm and frantically dragged him back into the jungle, over to a small hut, half-hidden there. Inside, a fourteen-year-old girl was giving birth. José was the only medic in the vicinity and, with great nervousness, he finally, and successfully, helped deliver the baby. There was a small coal mine nearby that was operated completely by women. The natives in the area chewed betel nut gum, which was as addictive as morphine. The betel nut gum not only made their teeth and gums a bright red, but it colored their saliva, as well, and they spat continuously.

In the northern part of Burma, José remembers seeing elephants pulling logs in the steaming teakwood forests. A team of natives would work with the animals. They would harness, onto every elephant, sometimes heavy ropes but, more usually, bulky metal chains, and then, with one man atop each animal, another would prod the beast with a stick so that the elephant would drag, through the deep mud, two or three heavy logs toward the stream. There, at the dirty water's edge, another native would unchain the logs, which would plop into the water and drift downstream toward the lumber plant. Then, the process would repeat itself over and over again. At the end of the day, the natives would force the elephants, all covered with mud, into the water to bathe.

José had been assigned to the Malaria Survey Unit. By the time that he had arrived in Burma, malaria had already incapacitated more soldiers than had been eliminated in combat. The monsoon season was just beginning, and the place was hot, filthy, humid, and overrun by mosquitoes. Soldiers roomed in bashas, small bamboo huts in the jungle which housed about ten to fifteen persons each. The bamboo cots, on which they all had to sleep, were each constructed of a square wooden frame with canvas slats for body support. Each cot was overhung with mosquito netting. Leeches were another problem. Sometimes, José would find that these had congregated inside his boots during his walks, and his feet would be bloody as he took off his shoes and pulled the leeches, one by one, off of his feet.

Most of the time, José was in charge of a detachment consisting of ten men. They were a motley crew. Stump was one of them, and his rebellious nature has already been described. Also in the unit were two fellows with prison records, Manfra and Lodico. Manfra, in his mid-to-late thirties, had been serving time for a job he had done in the Paterson, New Jersey area. There, he had been hired out as a truck driver for some fabric companies who wanted to dispose illegally of

bolts of material and, then, claim the insurance money for their losses. Manfra would drive to the outskirts of a town, where he would remove and strew around enough bales of fabric (usually silk thread) to indicate what the contents of his truck had been. Next, he and a partner would transfer what remained (the bulk of the thread) onto a second truck. Then, they would set the first vehicle on fire, and drive off with the rest of the material intact. In this way, the company would then claim insurance money for the entire cargo.

The other fellow with the prison record, Lodico, had been arrested and imprisoned for molesting young children. He was about thirty-five years old, sandy-haired with watery blue eyes, and entirely untrustworthy. At one point during their time in Burma, Lodico managed to let his family know that if he could get a notification from the American Red Cross indicating a family crisis, he could be given permission to fly stateside. This, Lodico finally managed to do but, mysteriously, he returned to the unit quite soon and much in advance of the time that he was due back.

Lodico was the only one ever to be kicked out of the Malaria Survey Unit. His job with the group was that of truck driver but, in general, he was an extremely poor worker. Lodico never did what he was supposed to, and he continuously lost equipment. They always suspected, when things disappeared (which they did quite frequently) that Lodico had been involved. The commanding officer finally got fed up with him and had Lodico reassigned, this time as an armed guard to a nearby military hospital. Months later, Lodico's replacement, a soldier from the Philadelphia area, arrived. This turned out to be the brother of a fellow whom José would meet later, working towards a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania, and who would eventually open a hardware store in the Pennsylvania Dutch area. This soldier's name was Limebach. During his stay with the Malaria Survey Unit, it was very hard to get Limebach to do any work, and he rarely ever even left his bunk.

José's commanding officer was a lean, six-foot-six stringbean of a man. His name was Robert Armstrong, and he hailed from New England. Ten or twelve malaria teams had been trained simultaneously in New Orleans, and it was only at the very last minute, before shipping overseas, that officers had finally been introduced to their own units for the very first time. Armstrong (or "Timber," as everyone came to refer to him behind his back) had joined the group only days before leaving New Orleans to travel to Los Angeles and the China-Burma-India Theater of War.

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Timber had gotten married in Los Angeles the day before shipping out, and José, along with the forty or fifty other soldiers from the four or five malaria research teams that had been organized (some destined to go to China, others to Burma, still others to India) had all attended the wedding. Soon after the bride, a girl named Carole, arrived in Los Angeles by train, a short ceremony took place. After this, everyone went together to a small restaurant for dinner. The next morning, after a honeymoon of only one night, Timber shipped out on the SS Mariposa with the rest of the group. Nine months to the day later, in Burma, Timber received a note from the American Red Cross informing him that he had become a father.

On the boat going over to Burma, Timber had exerted an effort, although an unsuccessful one, on the behalf of his team, by going to the ship's captain and objecting to the quality of the food being served to the enlisted fellows. After that, however, he turned nasty and seemed to deliberately make things harder for everyone. He justified this as "training the troops." Timber never again extended any gesture to either help, praise, or encourage any of his soldiers. In the two years that they spent in Burma, he never had a good word to say about anybody. There were many occasions when he could have waited for trucks or cars to come to help his soldiers deliver their heavy facilities, but he vehemently refused to do so. Instead, he always insisted that his men should carry the equipment on foot through jungle mud and numerous so-called shortcuts, which he himself improvised.

Neither did Timber ever do anything to make things more pleasant or comfortable in the living conditions of his troops. José, as well as the others, did a great deal of trading with men of other divisions to obtain a few niceties for themselves. When radios became available, Timber made no effort to see that his men ever got any. He refused to permit his team to throw anything away, even though an item would sometimes get in the way of other operations. Timber's main admitted purpose, and one towards which he exerted most of his efforts, was to save money for the army. To accomplish this, the team used British rather than American army clothing whenever possible.

During some seasons, mornings were exceedingly cold but, although there were stoves stored unused in the warehouses nearby, Timber refused to authorize their use or to give permission for them even to be unpacked. As an officer, he himself rated and slept on a bed with a spring and mattress. Yet he keenly approved of the fact that his men had to sleep on crude, uncomfortable wooden

frames, with their bodies supported only by coarse ropes which were covered by a single blanket and no mattress. This, he claimed, would develop their resistance to adversity. Meanwhile, it was either Lodico or Manfra who accidentally discovered that, in an army warehouse nearby, several iron beds with springs were lying stored and unused. One evening, they organized a secret raid at midnight and transported the beds into the bashas. The next morning, Timber was livid with anger. He wanted them to return the beds. (By refusing to use equipment, he snapped angrily, he could see to it that everything would last longer and not wear out.) However, had Timber returned the beds, he would have been admitting that he himself, as unit commander, had been careless, in that he had failed to have his trucks guarded properly. Thus, he could have been blamed for lack of responsibility, especially since it was his own men and his trucks which had been used during the episode. This is what finally saved the situation for the soldiers and resulted in their keeping the beds. Nothing of the incident was ever reported.

Despite their personal idiosyncrasies, most of the men worked hard, but Timber never put in a good word for any of them, nor did he ever have anyone promoted or given a citation. Later, towards the end of the war, José again met many of the soldiers from other Malaria Survey units, men who had started out with his own group on the SS Mariposa from Los Angeles in 1944. José now found out that just about every one of them had received medals, promotions, commendations, and other awards during the two years that had since gone by. The soldiers in Timber's group, however, received none of these honors. When José tried to discuss this with Timber, the only reply that he got was, "Well, of course, these other fellows were stationed deep in China. Their territory was much more dangerous than Assam!"

Timber was resented by everyone. He was anti-social and introverted. His nasty disposition, stubbornness, and letter-of-the-law attitude were virtually impossible to reason with. He was very puritanical in his outlook and he remained a stickler for reporting every detail and minor infraction to the authorities. Timber continuously gloried in trying to save the army pennies while huge sums went to waste. He continuously spoke disparagingly to his men about Rhem, the lieutenant who was working with the team. This seemed unethical to José, since Rhem was Timber's colleague and fellow officer, and their differences, José felt, should have been settled in private.

Rhem came from a rather distinguished family. His father, a well-known entomologist, had been on the Board of Trustees at Philadelphia's Academy of

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Natural Sciences. Rhem was a biologist with special training in entomology. A red-headed fellow, he was a decent chap, an extremely social type with whom one could talk freely. While Timber never even bothered to collect his own allotment of beer or liquor rations, allowing them to lapse without ever using them, Rhem, by contrast, would occasionally slip his own liquor to the soldiers. The enlisted men felt comfortable with him, and he with them. Later during their stay in Assam, Rhem took to walking around outside the tents naked, except that, on an occasionally excessively sunny day, he would sometimes don a hat to provide shade for his eyes.

Timber was technically very competent at spraying for mosquitoes. He had been trained in entomology (at the time, Timber had a B.S. in biology), and his plan, when the war was over, was to operate an insect-exterminating company of his own. Fortunately, he allowed José to run the outfit's laboratory with one hundred percent authority and with no interference. For this, José remained extremely grateful.

The job of the Malaria Survey Unit was, mainly, to collect and study several varieties of mosquitoes from different areas, to spray the numerous swamps around the region, and to treat, not only the soldiers, but the natives, as well, for malaria and other tropical and infectious diseases. One of José's duties was to visit each camp in the area to make sure that the troops were taking their atabrine (anti-malarial pills). General Stilwell had ordered everyone to take one tablet each day, with a court-martial for any soldier failing to take his medication. Although atabrine gives the body a yellowish tinge and its presence can be suspected because of this, José nevertheless was ordered to develop a laboratory test which would scientifically ascertain whether or not an individual was taking his atabrine. He eventually found that, by just spreading the fingers apart and checking the flap between the second and third fingers for yellow coloration, he could verify the presence of atabrine better than could any chemical test they had at the time.

Radio Saigon (the Japanese Headquarters for the area) began announcing, over the radio, that those who took atabrine would become impotent. Now, huge numbers of soldiers, hearing and believing this rumor, refused to take their medication. This was the main reason for José's daily inspections. He would order the units to line up. Then, while they stood there with their mouths open, José would watch while their sergeant, first, popped a tablet into each of their mouths and, then, handed each a glass of water with which to wash it down. Despite these

precautions, some of the men learned to catch the tablet under their tongues and, later, spit it out. When José checked the garbage cans, he would find dozens of the bright yellow pills discarded there. In this way, he knew that many of the troops were deliberately avoiding their medication.

The amount of atabrine decided upon by those in command was enough to act only as an attenuator of malaria. That is to say, it masked the symptoms enough so that a soldier could still be capable of going into battle, yet it was not sufficiently strong to actually cure the disease. A malaria attack gives three or four days of high fever, followed by a day of chills, and all of this occurs in a repeating cycle, thus incapacitating the victim and preventing him from being useful on the battlefield. Quinine would have been the ideal medication to use, but this was in great shortage and José, in his laboratory, had only a very tiny amount of it, all of which was specifically designated to be used only for research.

Another of José's jobs was to take finger blood samples at all times and, in this way, to check for malaria. When other diseases, like gastrointestinal disturbances, appeared in the region, José had to investigate why they had appeared, and attempt to pinpoint what had caused their presence. Another prevalent disease which required attention from the medical team was suchi-gamushi fever (ricketsial typhus). Occasionally, they also found elephantiasis, shistosomiasis, and dange fever in the area, but these were rare.

The Malaria Survey Unit had to decide exactly where to spray and how to protect the troops. The most important accomplishment of their research turned out to be the development of mosquito repellents. They developed what became the best-known repellents at the time. (The repellent which had previously been used was Citronella oil, but this proved ineffective in the CBI area.) José and his team participated in the development of dimethylphthalate oil, which proved exceedingly effective against the region's insects. They developed a preparation of this, combining a mixture of solvents and the repellent, in which they soaked the soldiers' uniforms. After the uniforms were dried, they could be washed four or five times, with the insect repellent still remaining active and effective. Thus, they found that, by giving each soldier a bottle of mosquito repellent to smear on his face, neck, arms, and ankles, they could ensure that he would be completely covered and protected. They were ecstatic when they discovered that their repellent also worked against leeches, which were another real problem in the area.

The second biggest accomplishment of the team was achieved in 1944, when they received, from England, the first shipment of DDT. They developed a

formulation of how to spray this in the local villages and, then, compared these areas to the adjacent villages which had been sprayed with other materials *not* containing DDT. It was amazing that, five or six weeks after the spraying, all insects in the huts which had been treated with DDT were either gone or found dead. What was not known at the time, however, was that some insects would eventually acquire a resistance to DDT, and that certain strains would actually learn to thrive on it as food. It was also discovered, later, that birds feeding upon dead insects which had eaten DDT would then lay eggs which were exceedingly thin-shelled, and that most of these eggs would not survive. So, after a while, the birds disappeared from the area. This would not be understood, however, until some fifteen years later.

One of José's experiments involved trying to pinpoint the distance that a mosquito carrying malaria could travel. By determining this, he would be able to decide over how wide a range of land the planes should spray DDT. José devised a system where he would place a tiny drop of white India ink on the thorax of a mosquito so that its flight pattern could then be tagged after its capture elsewhere. What he soon came to realize proved to be an interesting lesson in measurement. The weight of a drop of India ink, it turned out, was so heavy in proportion to the weight of the mosquito, that it completely altered the flight pattern and distorted any conclusions that could be drawn from the experiment.

José had several interesting experiences relating to his work. At one point, an epidemic of smallpox broke out in the region. José was one of those asked to vaccinate the natives and other personnel of his lab, but there were two British soldiers who claimed exemption from this because of their religious beliefs. Since both were Englishmen and, as such, did not fall under José's chain of command, he was unable to enforce the order to vaccinate them. José cajoled, reasoned, and argued at great length with each of them, but to no avail. Distraught, he sought counsel from some of the officers. One had some practical advice for him.

"Assign them to a particular job," the officer suggested, "and then, you incite a small fight. Next, have the British MPs, who are on hand (and whom you've alerted in advance), arrest the fellows and throw them into American brigs. Here, they'll fall under your jurisdiction. At that point, you'll have no trouble. Now you'll have the right to vaccinate them, and you'll do this without any problem. Then, you let them go."

José was troubled, not only by the deception that this would involve but, also, by the infringement upon the personal choice that he felt was the innate

right of each individual. While he was turning the matter over in his mind, one of the soldiers developed smallpox. José never forgave himself for his own indecision, and for his delay in taking action. He still continues to ponder whether his action or, rather, his lack of action, was ethically right or wrong.

Once, he was sent with a small team far into a remote area deep in the Naga region. They traveled for two days by jeep, then switched to mules and, finally, continued the rest of the way on foot. Eventually, they arrived at an isolated village, one that was extremely primitive. The tiny community was composed entirely of semi-cylindrical huts poised high upon stilts. Its inhabitants spoke a strange dialect which a first interpreter, traveling with the team, had to translate into Hindustani for the benefit of the Indian scientists. Then, a second interpreter would translate the Hindustani into English for the rest of the team.

These Nagas were an odd-looking group. The teeth of each inhabitant had been filed into triangular shapes, making their smiles somewhat grotesque. The chieftain welcomed the team heartily. After the visitors had accomplished the presentation of gifts and medications to the natives, and the drawing of blood samples had been completed, the chieftain led the visitors to a hut where a rice curry dinner was served. At the conclusion of the meal, the chief, his eyes twinkling, gave a mischievous smile and beckoned José to follow him up into his own private bamboo hut. This stood higher than the surrounding dwellings, and they both had to climb with great effort up the cumbersome, somewhat shaky stilts supporting the lodging. Then, stooping to part the curtains at the top of the ladder, the chief, with José immediately behind him, crawled into a small room behind the curtains. After José entered, and his eyes slowly grew accustomed to the dim light inside, he gasped in disbelief. There, in this remote corner of India, hidden away from civilization and from the rest of the world, the semi-cylindrical wall inside the primitive dwelling was completely lined with photographs of Varga pin-up girls from *Esquire*!

When José returned from this expedition, he wrote a letter to Josy describing this strange experience. By the time she received the letter, some five weeks later, it had acquired the appearance of a piece of origami. Each page was torn in many places, interspersed with numerous holes. These had been cut out by a censor's scissors, undoubtedly to prevent what the censor must have thought would prove a disclosure of the group's whereabouts, thus, endangering their safety. In the meantime, when José had first turned in his report to General Stilwell's headquarters, a news correspondent present there had gotten hold of the story and

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had it published in *Time*. Josy, back in the United States, happened to have read the article in the magazine and, when she finally received José's letter, she immediately realized, despite the censor's snipping, in what location José must have been traveling.

On another occasion, José was sent, along with a team, to a different, extremely remote area of the Naga hills. The purpose was, again, to take blood samples from the natives for the study of malaria, its incidence and its type in that region. This particular tribe of Nagas was a group of head-hunters. They decapitated their enemies and shrank the heads, which they would then display as tro-



José (left) with a *toga* (holy man) and Charles Feingold ("Stump") in New Delhi.

phies upon poles. The region lay far from the sea, and salt was an extremely scarce commodity, highly prized there. Natives could often be seen licking their own arms and legs in order to recover salt from their perspiration. These Nagas spoke a dialect so far removed from other languages of the territory that, again, several translators had to accompany the medical group.

The duties of the team were divided. On this trip, José's specific task was to obtain blood samples from the children of the tribe. While the rest of his group went off into different parts of the area, each to perform various separate duties, such as gathering insects, mapping the region, collecting stools, etc., José lined up the Naga children. He gave each one a tiny clump of salt as an incentive. Then, he proceeded to draw a few drops of blood from either their fingers or their earlobes. After José had already finished with most of the children, he finally came to a small infant, held in the arms of a beautiful young woman. What immediately caught his eye was that the mother was wearing the most exotic pair of earrings that he had ever seen. They were shaped in arcs about four inches long. They pierced her earlobes at a diameter of about half an inch, and they were fashioned completely from ivory.

José immediately decided to barter for the earrings. Drawing two cartons of Chesterfield cigarettes out of his pack, he extended them to the young woman and, then, pointed to her ears. She nodded her head vigorously in assent. José at once handed her both cartons of cigarettes, which she accepted and promptly inserted into her bodice. José then reached out for her earrings. At this point, however, the young woman suddenly began to shriek. Immediately, from out of nowhere, swarms of villagers descended, grabbing José, pinning his arms behind him and raising machetes to his throat.

The commotion brought several of his teammates running to the scene. One of them who, despite being himself an Indian, was unable to communicate in the dialect native to the region, ran off in search of the other interpreters. Meanwhile, José was kept immobilized, with the shouting angry crowd jumping up and down around him, while the young woman, hugging her baby, continued to point accusingly at him and hurl a stream of invective, all in the local dialect. A second interpreter eventually arrived, and a long discussion ensued, passing from the region's Naga dialect to Hindustani, next to English, and then back and forth again. The young woman agitatedly claimed that José had tried to rape her. He, on the other hand, strove to describe, as clearly as possible under the circumstances, that he had only been bartering for her earrings, and that she had nod-

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ded in agreement to him, apparently accepting his two cartons of cigarettes as part of the bargain. Throughout all of this, José's arms were never freed, and the knives never left the region of his throat.

Eventually, an agreement was reached. The girl received a two-kilo bag of salt. Then, José was told that he would be allowed to leave the village, with the understanding that he would never set foot in that part of the world again. If he were ever to break the agreement, they gave him to understand, his head would become their next trophy. At this point, all of the children in the village were called to come gather around José and study his face, memorizing its every feature. This was done so that if he ever did come back, no matter how long afterwards, they would all be sure to recognize him. José and his group were then permitted to depart, without the earrings, it may be added, and José knows that, much as he likes to travel, there is one spot in the world where he is prohibited from ever visiting again.

* * *

José remembers the visit of Britain's Lord Louis Montbatten to the Margherita area, near where José was stationed. Brother of the king, Montbatten was the Supreme Allied Commander for the East Asia Theater of Operations, and he came to Assam completely unexpectedly. Montbatten had been visiting Ceylon. As he was riding in an open jeep there, a minor accident had occurred. A shaft of bamboo, which had been sticking out from the shrubbery at the side of the road, suddenly pierced Montbatten's eye. A hurried conference was called. It was discovered that the only ophthalmological surgeon in the area was Captain Scheie, stationed at the Twentieth General Hospital in Ledo. Montbatten, the bamboo shaft (now trimmed but still lodged in his eye), was loaded onto a military plane. Accompanied by a fighter escort, they flew him to Assam.

José was one of those assigned to meet the incoming plane at the Ledo airport. Since Japanese infiltrators were continuously to be found in the area, two ambulances and two medical teams had been sent for security, to confuse any attempts that might be made on Montbatten's life. From the airport, Montbatten was driven to Scheie's operating room where, after a thorough examination,

Scheie made a decision that was to save Montbatten's eye and, also, to change Scheie's own personal destiny. That decision was to do nothing.

Scheie ordered Montbatten to be placed in a dark room where he would rest until the bamboo shoot, on its own, had worked its way out of his eye. This took about four or five days but, when it finally occurred, the eye was saved. Montbatten's gratitude was boundless. The next time that José encountered Captain Scheie, which was about two months later, the captain had already been made a colonel. By the end of the war, about one year after that, Scheie was discharged from the army as a brigadier general and, when he eventually died some forty years later, it would be as a major general.

A few years after the war, the acclaimed Scheie Eye Institute was opened in Philadelphia. Lord Montbatten was one of its main backers, and he, personally, attended the inaugurating ceremony. In later years, during one of José's visits to the institute as a patient, he encountered Dr. Scheie again. José reminded the former captain of their contact during the war in Burma, and congratulated Scheie upon the opening of his institute. Scheie acknowledged that, indeed, he remembered José very well and, as to the congratulatory remarks, he responded with thanks and a smile, summing up the situation with the words, "Grateful patient!"

* * *

José made four or five trips between the Ledo and Calcutta areas to bring supplies back to his station. On one ride between Chabua and Dum-Dum, he and an army nurse were the only passengers on the small military plane. Soon after take-off, the pilot invited the nurse to come visit him in the front cabin. Here, the pilot allowed her to fly the plane for him. Before long, the aircraft began to spin and loop crazily in dizzying circles and in numerous elaborate directions. This continued for a good part of the trip. When the nurse finally returned to her seat, she commented on what a nice shade of green José had turned during her absence.

Once, a military plane with twenty army nurses aboard, crashed on the

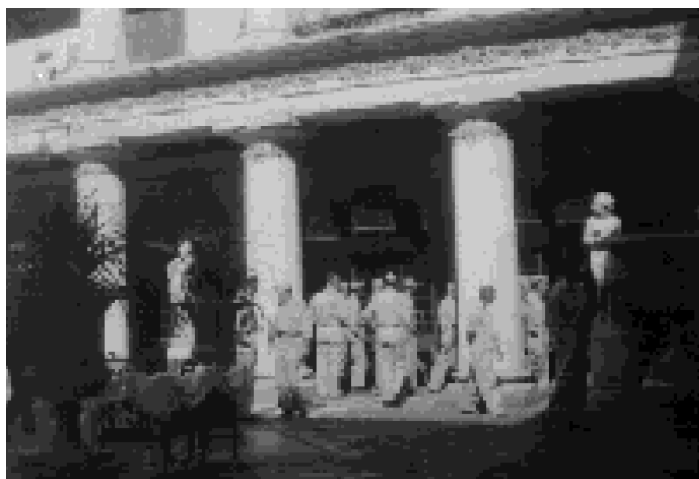
³This will be described in Volume 3 of the present account.

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way to a dance at a British base. José and several others were sent to bring the bodies back. On the site of the crash, they found beer cans and liquor bottles liberally strewn among the wreckage. It was a devastating scene, and one that José never was able to forget.

Another time, during the transporting of medical equipment, and while a battle was raging nearby, José found that his trucks had somehow gotten separated from those of the other units. The ongoing fighting involved a ground attack in the area between the two cities of Kohima and Imphal. As José got out of his truck to look around, he turned a corner and, in the smoke and confusion there, he suddenly walked face-to-face into a fierce-looking Oriental carrying a raised gun. To José's intense relief, the man turned out to be, not Japanese, as José had at first assumed, but Chinese and, therefore, an ally. Despite the lack of verbal communication in a mutual language, this fellow was able to help conduct José back to safety amid the gunfire.

Air raids occurred quite regularly and, on one occasion, when the sirens went wailing, announcing an on-coming raid, José dropped what he was doing and raced toward the trenches which had been dug in the jungle. Here, soldiers could hide until Japanese planes had finished passing overhead. This time, José, in running to gain the shelter, accidentally stepped on one end of a rifle which somebody else had dropped and left lying on the ground. As his foot landed on one end, the opposite end of the rifle bounced up and hit him in the jaw, cracking four of his teeth. There was no time to do anything but keep running and, then, to remain hiding until the end of the air-raid. Afterwards, José went to the army



**Entrance to the estate
of Lord Ezra in
Calcutta.**

hospital where, having no experienced endodontist on duty, they pulled out all four of his broken teeth without attempting to salvage any of them. It was not until after the war, a couple years later, that José was able to get adequate dental care. He had previously had dental problems, both in Mexico and in Philadelphia before joining the army but, after this incident, his mouth was never the same. He continued to experience numerous dental complications, some of which might have been avoided, or at least minimized, had this incident in Burma been handled differently.

In this region of the CBI, the Red Cross armbands, which military people in the medical corps wore, proved to be handicaps rather than assurances of safe-conduct. Several rules of war demanded by the Geneva Convention seemed to fail in Assam and, before long, the enemy took to using red crosses as shooting targets. After several medics and a few nurses had been shot in this way, an order went out to stop wearing the red crosses altogether.

The Americans had many problems with radio and telephone conversations because the Japanese were tapping the lines. Then, one colonel hit upon a brilliant strategy which succeeded in outwitting the enemy. He discovered, in his units, two American Indians of the Navaho tribe who were cousins. Assigning them each to separate outfits, stationed well distant from one another, the colonel then had them relay the messages back and forth to each other, speaking only in their own native Navaho dialect. This the Japanese, completely nonplused, were unable to decipher and so, in this area of operations and in this respect, at least, the enemy was outmaneuvered rather early on.

There were times, especially in 1944, when José's unit was completely isolated during some of the Japanese raids which surrounded the region. No food at all was incoming, sometimes for two or three weeks at a time. Occasionally, British planes would drop packages to those below. These bundles usually contained hardtack, a staple used especially by the British navy. Upon closer inspection, the soldiers found many of these packages labeled "Unfit For Human Consumption After 1936"!

Sometimes, American planes also made their way over the area. They would drop sandwiches and other foods to the troops below. Years later, in 1960, when José was already living in Havertown, the house next door to his was sold to a couple named Carl and Evie Miller. These people knocked on the door one day and introduced themselves, explaining that they were interested in seeing

⁴ At that time, one rupee was worth seventeen cents in American money.

how José and Josy had decorated their home, since it appeared, except for one additional bedroom, to be similar in layout to their own. José invited them inside. He and Josy then escorted them through the house, room by room. When they came to the study, Carl spotted, up on the highest shelf, a poster containing the CBI insignia. In disbelief, he shouted, “Lantzman!” (the Jewish word meaning, approximately, compatriot or buddy). Grabbing José in a bear-hug, he clasped him close to his breast. Carl, too, it turned out, had served in the China-Burma-India theater during World War II. It seemed that he had been one of the American pilots who had dropped the sandwiches to the stranded ground troops below, one of whom had been José.

Around Thanksgiving, 1944, a plane was chartered in Philadelphia to head for the CBI. A South Broad Street restaurant, Lew Tendler’s, in cooperation with several veterans’ organizations, ordered delivery of Thanksgiving foodstuffs to “Little Philadelphia” in Ledo. To be distributed among the troops, along with turkeys, were fresh onions, tomatoes, and other produce which (the onions especially) José appreciated even more than the turkey.

Regulations read that, every six months, a soldier was entitled to leave the front and go to a rest camp for five days. One year after their arrival at the front lines, José and Stump finally got their first such leave. Paying their own way to travel by train, they left together for Darjeeling, a beautiful rest area in the scenic Himalaya Mountains. Here, they found an army camp that put them up for a week. An Indian film was being shot in Darjeeling, and José became friendly with the members of the crew. The main actress, Ramola, was an Indian beauty whose family was staying with her there. They all invited José to have dinner with them one night, and he discovered, to his amazement, that they were Jewish.

A year later, during April of 1945, José read a bulletin board notice announcing that Lord Ezra, a wealthy textile manufacturer in Calcutta, was issuing an open invitation to all Jewish military personnel at the front lines to attend a Passover Seder in his home. José decided that he would go to the seder. He obtained a two-day leave for religious reasons, and he got to the airport in Ledo. Here, he had to wait until a military plane was leaving for Calcutta. At last, in the late afternoon, he was able to hitchhike a ride on one of these planes. He arrived in Calcutta shortly after six o’clock and hired a taxi to drive him to the estate of Lord Ezra. The driver soon got lost, and it was well after seven by the time they finally arrived.

The seder was already in progress. Rows of long tables had been set up in an enormous room, with soldiers, most of them British, lined up sitting there.

Somebody found an empty place for José next to a British captain, and he joined the ceremonies. When everything was over, the British captain, who had become rather friendly with José during the meal, asked if they might spend some time together. When José explained that he soon had to catch a plane back to Ledo, the captain suggested, "Well, I have a company car. Let me at least drive you to the airport, and I can show you something of Calcutta on the way." José happily



José (right) and Fred Friendly in Myitkyina, Burma in 1945 after a lecture to the troops concerning the surrender of Germany.

accepted, and the two spent another hour or so riding through the streets of the city, chatting while they observed some unusual sights. The captain then deposited José at the army airport and said good-bye to him. Twenty-eight years later, José and the British captain were to meet again under rather strange and unexpected circumstances that neither could have predicted on that day in 1945.³

* * *

India was a country of wonders for the visitor, and many got “taken” or cheated there. José remembers one soldier bragging to him about how he had bought a large ruby in a bazaar for the equivalent of one hundred American dollars, and that it had been a steal even at that price. When José expressed doubt about the worth of the gem, reminding the soldier that, at the airport, some natives had recently been caught chipping away at the red glass lights on the runways and selling these fragments as jewels, the soldier promptly brought out his own enormous red stone for inspection. He confidently insisted that José test it for authenticity in the laboratory.

“The only way that I can do that,” explained José, reluctantly, “would be to immerse it in a strong acid and, if it is not a true ruby, it will disintegrate at once.”

Despite José’s repeated warnings, hesitation, and desisting, the soldier kept insisting that José proceed with the experiment. When, at last, José unwillingly went ahead with the analysis, the so-called ruby disintegrated before their very eyes.

Towards the end of the war, one of the many noted correspondents who came to visit the area was Fred Friendly. He was already a respected journalist and, soon after the war, he would become chief assistant to Edward R. Murrow, the prestigious television commentator who first rose to fame with his reporting on the German bombardment of London. During the one to two weeks that Friendly spent in Assam, José and a driver were both assigned the duty of escorting him to visit some out-of-the-way areas that José knew in North Burma, where US troops were stationed.

On one such stop, they found a small infantry company with a major in charge. The major kept insisting that Friendly accept a case of Scotch as a token of friendship. Friendly adamantly refused and, when José questioned him about this, Friendly replied, “You don’t know what he wants from us.” Sure enough, a little later, when they were all eating together, the major’s motive came out. He explained what a good idea it would be if Friendly could mention both the

major's name and the name of the outfit in his next dispatch. Friendly and José also got offers of uniforms and special cases of canned peaches as they traveled, but they never accepted any of these.

José grew intensely disillusioned about several of the attitudes and some of the behavior that he observed among the natives of India and Burma. At one railroad end, in a small village near Kohima, some supplies had arrived for José's unit. When he came there with his crew to pick them up, the Indian in charge refused to give him the materials.

"Here are the papers," José announced to the man, handing him the required documents. The fellow shook his head in refusal.

"But these are medical materials," explained José, "and they're badly needed at the front right away."

"There's nobody here to load the trucks," came the response. José, glancing around, observed about a dozen laborers sitting idly on the loading platform.

"What about those men?" he persisted.

"It's a Muslim holiday," came the answer.

"But these materials are for defending your country!" José reasoned with him. "The Japanese are your enemy, too. They've been destroying India, and the supplies will help you as well as us!"

There was no response. In desperation, José telephoned back to headquarters in Ledo.

"The supplies are all here," he explained to the officer on the phone, "but the fellow in charge refuses to allow his men to load our trucks."

"He wants a bribe," came the reply. "Give him one thousand rupees!"⁴ The speaker abruptly hung up, and José returned to the Indian, offering him the money. The fellow shook his head, refusing to take anything less than ten thousand rupees.

In desperation, José again called Ledo and explained this new turn of events. The officer snapped impatiently, "How much money do you have?"

"Three thousand rupees," José answered.

"Give him all of it," counseled the officer, "and explain to him that that's all you have with you!" This was how the impasse was finally resolved. Upon a command from their leader, the twelve workers seated on the platform all got up for the first time and, now, began to load the supplies onto the trucks.

Another time, closer to Ledo, when the monsoon season was fast approaching, José and a team of American soldiers went to a nearby village with

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sacks of cloth and shovels to donate to the natives so that they could dig ditches and build levees to protect themselves against the on-coming floods. With every monsoon, there came inevitable flooding and destruction, and the army sought to avert some of this damage to the nearby area.

“How much are you going to pay us for this work?” demanded one of the natives.

“Pay you?” José exclaimed, astounded. “This is for your own survival! The army is already donating the shovels and the sacks to help you out!”

“No money, no work!” came the firm reply.

After continued entreaties, all to no avail, José’s unit finally left the materials behind and departed. The natives, he found out later, never used them. Eventually, the flood waters inundated a large part of the area which had remained completely unprotected, and many of the houses there were destroyed.

During one period, an area nearby was plagued with an unusually heavy infestation of rats. Fearing that this might grow out of control, the army hit upon an idea that they thought could help stem the increase in the rat population and also address some of the poverty in the area. They announced that they would pay one rupee for every rat that was brought in to headquarters. Before long, to their horror, they discovered that many of the natives were now breeding rats to earn this reward.

An Indian physician was one of those helping José’s team in their research. This man lived not far away, and he invited the group to his home one evening. His wife greeted them at the door. She appeared to be no more than thirty-four years of age. She was a tiny woman, with her teeth bright crimson, spitting red saliva. She would continuously make herself betel-chews. She would take a green leaf to which she then applied water-soaked powdered lime. On top of this lime paste, she would put some cracked betel nuts. Next, she would make a little bundle of the leaves with these added fixings. All of this the woman would now place into her mouth, moving it to the inside of her cheek. She would begin to slowly suck and chew. Every once in a while, she would spit out red saliva.

The wife called their children out of the house so that her husband could introduce them to his guests. The children got into a line according to age. There were close to twenty of them. (The physician had once confided to José that he had married his wife when she was only fourteen years old and that, after this, they had had one child per year, sometimes twins.) He also told José, sadly, that some of their children had been lost to disease. He began to present the children,

the oldest first. After about six or seven, he began to falter and, by the time he got to the ninth youngster, he couldn't remember any more of their names. His wife, with the assistance of some of the children themselves, had to prompt him.

* * *

The war in Europe ended in May of 1945. Then came the rumor that José and his unit would be air-dropped into China in a matter of weeks. Later, José found out that he was to have been part of this diversionary measure which would be aimed at misleading the Japanese. The enemy was to believe that, with this sudden establishment of numerous hospitals and medical units in mainland China, a massive Allied invasion was being planned there while, in reality, the actual target would be Japan, itself. The medical units, José's included, were all packed and ready to go when, on August 6, 1945, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Two days later, with a second bomb fell on Nagasaki, World War II came to an official end. Thus, in the very last minute, plans changed, and José and his unit narrowly escaped being dropped into China.

The malaria units now broke up. Since there were not enough ships to carry home the thousands upon thousands of troops all at one time, each soldier was given a certain number of points, calculated on the basis of his age, length of service, type of duty, amount of time he had served overseas, etc. Based upon the total number of these points, a soldier's order of return to the United States was then determined. Having been one of the youngest in his unit, José had a comparatively low number of points, and he had to wait from August until January of the following year before leaving Assam. (He did not actually reach the United States until the middle of March, 1946.)

During this period in India, José was assigned as a reporter to the army newspaper. It was at this time and, in this capacity, that he got the opportunity to visit other parts of the sub-continent, like the red fort of Delhi, the town of Agra (site of the Taj Mahal), the city of Lahore (home of the British poet Rudyard Kipling), the Shalimar Gardens of Kashmir, the Golden Temple of Calcutta, the jute plant on the outskirts of Calcutta, and other spots usually appearing, later, on the agenda of tourists visiting India. Years later, the *CBI Roundup* would organize

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a trip for veterans and their families to visit Agra and Lahore, and José's friend, David Sklaroff, with his wife Rozzie, would go. José, however, had no desire ever to return to this part of the world again.

In looking back, José concluded that the contribution he and his group had made during their stay in India was considerable. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of all, he felt, was getting mosquito repellents and DDT to work in the area, and learning the most effective way to spray them. A farewell banquet was given, one evening, in Dibrugar to thank some of the Americans for their medical help during the war. Towards the end of the meal, an Indian doctor rose and announced, "I want to propose a toast. To Rabinowitz and his malaria research!



José explaining to the troops on board the ship *Marine Angel* why it was not possible to go ashore due to rioting in Singapore.

You have come to our help. You have rescued thousands of our people from disease. Now, pray answer one question for us. How do you propose to feed them all?"

At the end of the war, in attempting to give out free food to the natives before leaving India, both the British and the Americans found that doing so usually created riots, with dozens of people killed, either when they found out that the food was not to their liking, or when they suspected that somebody else in the crowd had received a bit more of the free handouts than they had.

Disposing of unused food and materials at the end of the war proved to be a tremendous problem. Donating it outright to the natives often resulted in the difficulties just described. There were also problems involving a conflict of religious beliefs. Cattle were plentiful throughout the area but, in India, the cow is considered sacred, and people starved while these beasts roamed the cities and villages completely untouched.

In one of the military warehouses, José found, lying stored there, a large shipment of grape-nuts and other cereals. All of these were packaged in small boxes, each of which contained an individual helping of food. The troops had never seemed to care much for these cereals, and they were going to waste. Parts of North Assam and Burma were dotted with numerous villages which had been converted to Baptism. When a local Baptist missionary happened to hear about the unused cereal, he approached José with the idea of donating it to one of these villages where the inhabitants were near starvation. José was enthusiastic about the idea. The missionary then spoke to the head of one of the communities, a sunni mullah, who also agreed to the plan. José arranged for the boxes of cereals to be loaded onto trucks and, with a couple of helpers and an interpreter, he delivered the shipment to the village. The head mullah was waiting there, with dozens of inhabitants congregated in anticipation. Everything was fine until the mullah saw the boxes. Then, pandemonium broke loose. For preservation, all food packages that were shipped overseas from the United States were automatically covered with an extra coating of yellow wax, which was placed on top of the wax paper already enclosing the container. (This extra coating was applied to maintain the dryness of all materials sent by boat.)

Sniffing at this yellow coating, the mullah cried out, "These were made with pig fat! Take them away!"

José tried to explain, through an interpreter, that the food inside the packages was only cereal, completely untainted by any offending materials, but the

mullah refused to be convinced.

“Your people are starving,” José persisted, “and there is nothing in this food to offend your religious beliefs! It can help to save their lives!”

A near-riot followed, and José and his helpers barely made it safely out of the village. A decision was reached by the army to destroy and, wherever necessary, to dynamite all unused supplies. As one military official put it, “At best, letting the natives keep what we built up would upset the economic balance of the community. We are under orders to leave everything exactly as we originally found it.” Thus, some buildings, laboratories, bashas, and hospital tents, as well as a great deal of left-over medical equipment, food, and clothing were destroyed.

Every item had to be accounted for, described, and listed by an identification number to match what appeared in the Table of Organization. This was a bureaucratic document, sometimes referred to as the “T.O.” One of José’s experiences involved returning a live animal, a bull, in such a way that it would comply with government regulations. This proved so exasperating that José wrote a short story describing the adventure. He titled it “T.O. and the Bull”, and then submitted it, along with photographs, to the army newspaper. The newspaper sent him a letter verifying that they had received the article, photos and all, and explained that, at the moment, they had no room or immediate use for it. They added, however, that they liked the anecdote very much, and that they would print it sometime in the future. Finally in the April, 1994 copy of the *Roundup*, the story finally appeared, photographs and all. Although it carried his own by-line, the story had been somewhat edited by the *Roundup* staff, and they gave José the fictitious name of Teeters in the narrative.

It was also during this period that time began to hang very heavy for those troops who were waiting their turn to go home. Another soldier, a corporal named Bill Lederer, together with José and another Philadelphian named O’Keane, got together and organized a project which they called Foxhole University. Its purpose was to offer, free of charge and on a completely voluntary basis, high-school courses with accreditation in a variety of subjects, to the American soldiers who were waiting to leave India. Many who had never completed high school before the war, and others, merely interested in passing the time in some worthwhile endeavor while anticipating their turn to go home, came to apply. Teachers, based upon their own areas of expertise, were selected from among the ranks. (José taught courses in Spanish to a class of almost forty students.)

Others taught math, history, English, and business skills. The project accomplished a great service. It not only got some of the troops started in the educational training that they would soon undertake as civilians, but it also helped to maintain order, discipline and, to some extent, the mental health of those with nothing else to do, by keeping them occupied while they waited in Ledo and Margharita.

Bill Lederer, who headed the organizing group, hailed from the Shackomaxon area of Philadelphia, the neighborhood located just east of Front Street at Girard Avenue. Bill came from a prominent family that was extremely active in local politics. His brother, Raymond Lederer, would later make headlines as police detective, and Bill, despite having had only a high school education at the time would, eventually, not only put himself through college and law school, but would also, still later, become a judge in the Philadelphia District Courts. Classes at Foxhole University met nightly, and enthusiasm among both students and teachers ran high. José continued to participate in this activity from August 1945 until early January 1946, at which time he finally began his long journey back to the United States.

He left North Burma for Konchrampara, from which point he and his group waited for ships to pick them up. To board ship, the soldiers had to pass through the city of Calcutta, immediately south. Moslems and Hindus were fighting in the area at the time, and the convoys had to get safe-conduct passes from both groups to cross the region during the fighting. When these passes finally arrived, they came with the condition that the American soldiers remain completely unarmed. Not only were the Americans permitted no weapons, but they were not even allowed to wear steel helmets while passing through the area, crouched in open trucks.

Suddenly, on the ride to the wharf, an attack broke out. Although the open trucks were clearly marked with American flags to identify them, rocks came hurtling down from the hillsides, stoning the occupants. The scene quickly turned into one of utter chaos. Armored British Army motorcycles, when they could get through now and then, managed to trickle in to help. The greatest danger, however, came from bricks, which were thrown from the upper regions, and nobody knew where the perpetrators were hiding. One soldier next to José in the truck had his head smashed open by one of these falling bricks, and José spent the rest of the bumpy ride in the wildly careening truck holding the man's head together with his bare hands until they arrived at the dockside. Hospital crews arrived to