



No Substitute for Kindness

THE STORY OF MAY AND STANLEY SMITH

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Personal History
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Contents

Foreword vii

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction xi

ONE	<i>Stanley Smith's Beginnings</i>	1	NINE	<i>Trading in Postwar Hong Kong</i>	109	
	TWO	<i>School Days</i>	11	TEN	<i>From Merchants to Miners</i>	123
	THREE	<i>The Wandering Years</i>	27	ELEVEN	<i>A New Approach to Human Resources</i>	139
	FOUR	<i>Sydney to Singapore</i>	39	TWELVE	<i>A Pair of Shrewd and Well-Connected Entrepreneurs</i>	145
	FIVE	<i>Secret Agent in Singapore</i>	49	THIRTEEN	<i>Home in Singapore</i>	151
	SIX	<i>Decamping to Chungking</i>	57	FOURTEEN	<i>Cold War to Cold Feet: Leaving Singapore</i>	161
SEVEN	<i>A Privileged Girl in Troubled Times</i>	75	FIFTEEN	<i>The End of a Good Run</i>	173	
	EIGHT	<i>The Final War Years</i>	93	SIXTEEN	<i>Life Without Stanley</i>	189

Epilogue 199

Endnotes 203

Selected Bibliography 223

Image Credits 229

Index 231

Foreword

Telling the story of Stanley and May Smith is like putting together an old jigsaw puzzle, one whose pieces have been tossed high in the sky and scattered far and wide around the globe, with some key bits lost forever along the way. The image that emerges is inevitably incomplete.

Stanley and May Smith were an extremely private couple who preferred staying out of the spotlight and actively discouraged public recognition and attention. They also didn't believe in keeping letters or preserving documents and files. In fact, Stanley was known for having his business and personal papers and correspondence periodically tossed into bonfires. As a result, not much about their lives that might have been recorded in writing remains to this day.

When Stanley Smith died, suddenly and unexpectedly at age 61, he left no written account of his life. In searching for clues about his life, we found several telegrams and memorandums that Stanley wrote during World War Two as well as two sets of letters he sent to

two men who became his friends late in life. The first is a batch of handwritten letters sent over the course of his last 11 years to the headmaster of the private grammar school he attended in Australia. The second is a portion of the correspondence between Stanley and Sir George Taylor, then director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

May survived Stanley by 38 years, living to age 83. But other than three letters that she wrote to Taylor after Stanley's death, nothing she might have ever written has been found.

May and Stanley had no children together, and Stanley's daughter from his first marriage died in 1991. Stanley's only grandchild was born after he passed away. Almost everyone who knew the couple is now also deceased. As a result, this portrait of Stanley and May Smith has been pieced together bit by bit, drawn from interviews and correspondence with the few surviving people who knew them, the letters they wrote that have been saved, archival documents, newspaper articles,

books, and other written accounts in which the Smiths (mainly Stanley) are mentioned.

Researching May Smith's life presented an especially difficult challenge. She was born in China in 1922, a time of great political and societal upheaval, and records from that era are usually inaccessible or nonexistent. In her day-to-day life, May didn't talk much about her past. Thus little about her could be ascertained. Fortunately, we were able to find out which schools she attended, and that helped lead us to one schoolmate who knew and remembered her and to documents that were helpful in shedding some light on her life.

Stanley Smith was a raconteur, and he enjoyed entertaining people with tales of his past; but he was guarded about revealing too much about himself, a tendency that most likely became deeply engrained while serving as a secret agent for the British in Singapore during World War Two. Beyond that, Stanley apparently enjoyed telling stories that he created out of whole cloth in jest to amuse his audience. And because he cultivated a larger-than-life, somewhat mysterious reputation among his colleagues, stories that have been passed along about Stanley often cannot be substantiated. We have tried when possible to corroborate pub-

lished accounts and stories recalled by interviewees. When recounting stories that are possibly fabrications of someone's fertile mind, we advise the reader of their uncertain status.

The research for this book took place on three different continents with the assistance of a group of dedicated and skillful researchers and historians (see Acknowledgments). The various members of the research team found clues about the Smiths in archival documents and scholarly articles and books, as well as in a few memoirs, written in past decades (listed in Selected Bibliography). Many of these sources offer just a glimpse of May or Stanley Smith, one or two small pieces of the puzzle. Some do not mention them at all but simply explain the cultures they belonged to and the times in which they lived.

We hope the result of our efforts will shed some light on the lives and times of May and Stanley Smith, a couple whose generosity continues to reach far and touch many.

Ruth M. Collins, Administrator and Trustee
Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust
May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust

Acknowledgments

Researching and writing *No Substitute for Kindness: The Story of May and Stanley Smith* was truly a collaborative effort. Four individuals graciously shared their memories of May and/or Stanley Smith, and a resourceful team of eight historians and researchers devoted many hours to searching public records and digital databases, trawling through World War Two archives, deciphering photocopies of handwritten letters, and scanning history books for mentions of the publicity-shy couple and for insights into the times in which they lived. We also received helpful information from Stanley Smith's alma mater, the Anglican Church Grammar School (Churchie) of Brisbane, and May Smith's alma mater, the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

We were fortunate to be able to interview in person three individuals who actually knew May and/or Stanley. Alex de Brie, the grandson of Stanley Smith, was born after his grandfather died, but he vividly re-

members his step-grandmother, May. Alex also provided us with a collection of letters and other relevant documents that were passed along to him by his late mother, Barbara. Ronald Gibbs, who was hired as a bookkeeper and accountant by Stanley Smith in 1961 and who served as co-executor of Stanley's estate and currently serves as a trustee of the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust, was interviewed twice—once in person and another time over the phone—about his memories of both Stanley and May. He is the only person we could find who knew both Stanley and May. Ruth Collins, administrator and a trustee of the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust and the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the granddaughter of the Smiths' chief financial adviser, John Collins, Sr., shared her memories of May. She also transcribed dozens of letters handwritten by Stanley Smith to the headmaster of his alma mater, Churchie. John Bamforth, who along with his late wife, Enid, cared

for May in her later years, provided his memories of May in four lengthy handwritten letters.

To learn more about the Smiths' backgrounds, we recruited a group of talented and resourceful historians who searched archives all over the world to unearth stories about the couple. Yvonne Perkins, a historian based in Sydney, Australia, and writer of the blog *Stumbling Through the Past*, focused on Stanley Smith's childhood and early years in Brisbane up through his years in Australia's Outback. Australian historian and former journalist Jacqui Murray, author of *Watching the Sun Rise: Australian Reporting of Japan 1931 to the Fall of Singapore*, focused on Stanley's time in the Outback, his career with Gordon and Gotch, his recruitment as an agent for Britain's Secret Operations Executive in Singapore in 1941, his tenure with Britain's Ministry of Information in Chungking during World War Two, and his business ventures in postwar Hong Kong. Murray developed the narrative account of Smith's life from the late 1930s through 1946 and helped develop the account of May's background as well. British historian Jonathan Cole, a document services adviser at The National Archives, UK, searched the "MOI in China" archives for mentions of Stanley Smith and synthesized

his findings. University of Bristol graduate student Meredith Inman also researched Smith's time with the MOI in China.

Cathy Shue, of Santa Rosa, California, tapped into her contacts in China to track down against all odds May (Wong) Smith's school records. Jin Feng, professor of Chinese at Grinnell College and the author of *The Making of a Family Saga: Ginling College*, focused on May's family background and experiences as a student in the prewar era. Feng's research was conducted while on sabbatical in China during the summer of 2016.

Nicholas J. White, a professor in the school of Humanities and Social Science at Liverpool John Moores University in England and the author of *Business, Government, and the End of Empire: Malaya, 1942–1957*, focused on Smith and Galvin's acquisition of mining rights in Malaya and the history of Eastern Metals and Mining Co. (EMMCO).

Without the help of each one of these talented, resourceful historians, the story of May and Stanley Smith could not have been told. We thank them for their professionalism, their time, and their good cheer.

Susan Milstein
Andi Reese Brady
Personal History Productions LLC
Santa Rosa, California
September 2016

Introduction

In early 1957, Harry Roberts, the bespectacled, bookish headmaster of the Church of England Grammar School, in Brisbane, Australia, received some happy news: a donation of £20,000—roughly \$450,000 in U.S. dollars in 2016—had been made to the school's building fund. The eye-catching amount of the gift—a sizeable sum from one individual for the school in those days—was surprising enough. Even more remarkable was the identity of the check writer himself.¹

The donation had come from someone named Stanley Herbert Smith—a name that rang no bells for Headmaster Roberts. Stanley had, in fact, been a student at the school, but prior to Roberts's tenure as headmaster. Enrolling with a state scholarship in July 1921, at age 14, Stanley was among the 160 pupils that year at the all-boys school, affectionately nicknamed "Churchie" by its attendees.² But formal education held little attraction for Stanley, and he left Churchie two years later to work as a jackaroo—an Australian cow-

boy—at a cattle station in the Australian Bush. In the intervening 34 years, Stanley hadn't kept up much with his fellow "Old Boys," as Churchie's alums are known, and few knew the heights to which Stanley's far-ranging path had taken him.

By the time Stanley wrote his first check to his alma mater, he already had amassed a multi-million-dollar private fortune, earned through a string of international companies that he and his partner, John A. T. Galvin, had started in the years immediately following the end of World War Two. In fact, by the late 1950s Stanley had already achieved so much financial success that he was able to donate game-changing sums to any cause he deemed worthy. He employed a team of investment advisers, whom he called "my counsellors," to evaluate the merits of various causes because, as he explained, the range of solicitations he received had become "beyond my ability to cope."³

"I like to think I am lucky to be able to give money

in lieu of constructive help of another kind,” Stanley wrote in a letter to Headmaster Roberts. “A man who succeeds in world commerce as I have is no fool and above all he pretty soon learns that his wealth is something lent to him during his life; he can’t take it with him!! It’s no virtue then to give it away.”⁴

Stanley made his fortune in a stunningly short span of time. He certainly was not penniless when he left Australia for Singapore in 1941, purportedly to investigate business prospects for a leading Australian news agency. But as a salaried man with a wife and young daughter, his financial resources undoubtedly were quite limited. During the war years he served as an operative in a secret anti-Japanese propaganda and intelligence mission orchestrated by the British in Singapore and later as the head of Britain’s propaganda campaign in China. It was after the war, however, that his fortunes changed quickly and dramatically. That’s when Stanley and Galvin employed their connections, foresight, and formidable energy to pursue an astonishing array of international business and investment opportunities in the Far East. The various companies that Stanley started with Galvin, along with Stanley’s later personal investments, provided him with personal wealth that

not only allowed him to become his alma mater’s largest philanthropist, but also led to the creation of six charitable trusts.

Stanley lived only 11 years after mailing his first donation to Churchie’s building fund. Before he died in 1968, he sent several more ample gifts to his alma mater and supported many other educational and research projects. He initiated plans to establish a foundation specifically to support horticultural projects and research, an area of knowledge that fascinated him and consumed many of his leisure hours. After his death Stanley’s wife, May, with his daughter, Barbara, established the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust, fulfilling Stanley’s vision. Both trusts continue to this day.

But who were May and Stanley Smith? What were the relationships, experiences, and events that shaped them as individuals? How did they build their wealth? How do their legacies live on through the charitable trusts established by them or in their honor? To tell their stories, we return to the places where Stanley and May began their lives and examine the paths they each followed.

The Spellings of Chinese Names

Throughout this book are many proper Chinese names. The editors debated whether to use the older Wade-Giles system of transliteration or the newer pinyin system, which in China has replaced the Wade-Giles system. Finally, it was decided that Wade-Giles spellings were in widespread use during the times when most of the events covered in the book took place and may be more familiar to readers. Thus the Wade-Giles spellings have been used, although the pinyin is listed, in parentheses, following the first occurrence of a name.

Governmental Organizations Used in the Wartime Chapters

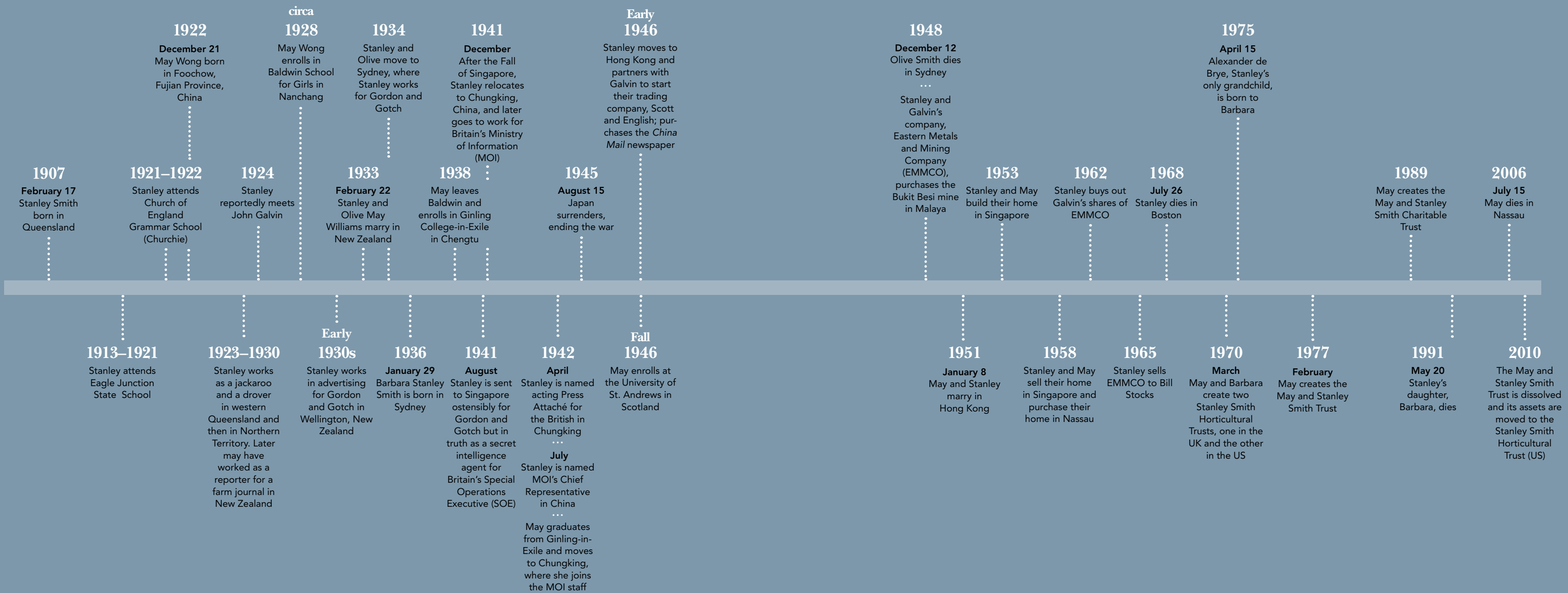
MOI: Ministry of Information

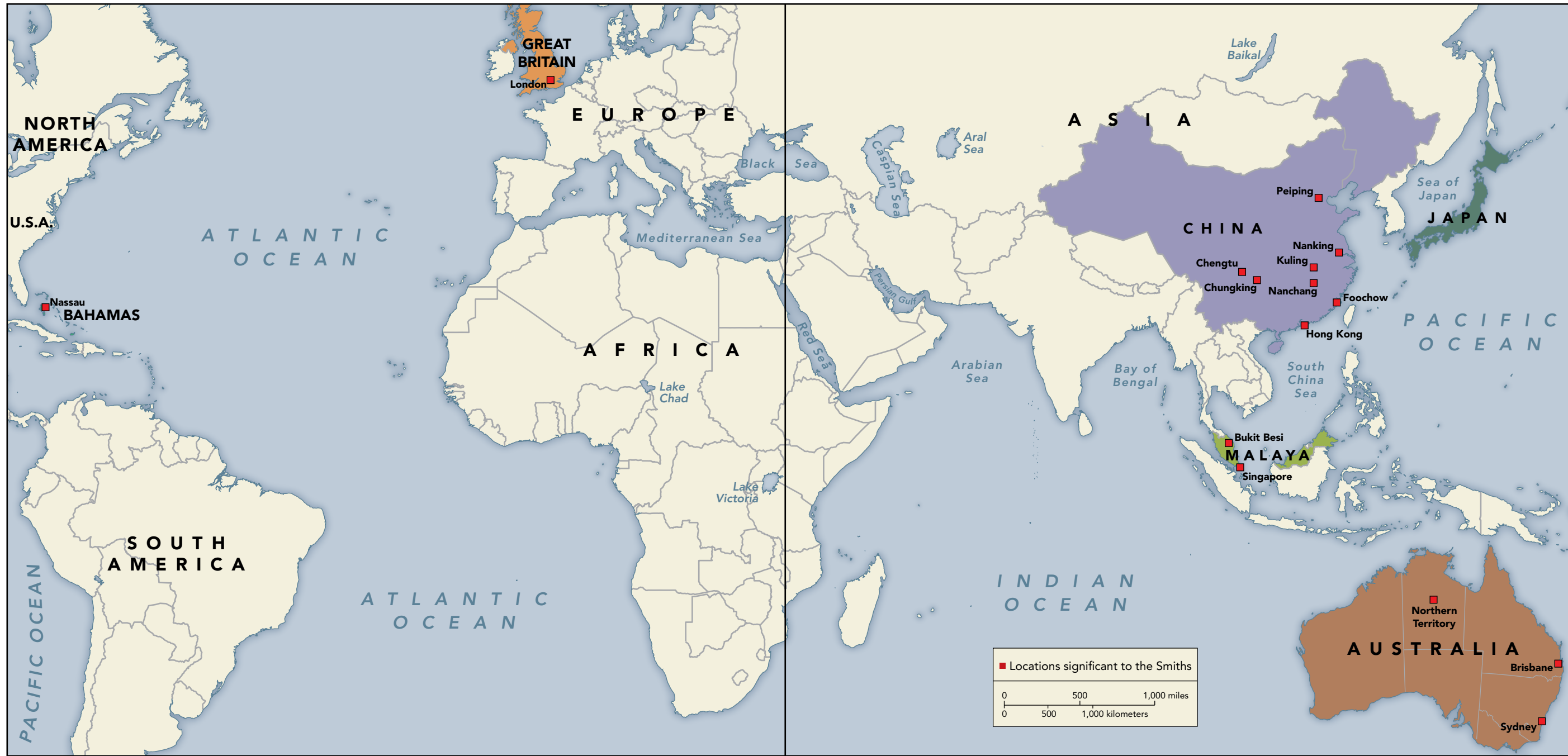
SOE: Special Operations Executive

Oriental Mission: part of the SOE

FEB: Far Eastern Bureau (part of the MOI)

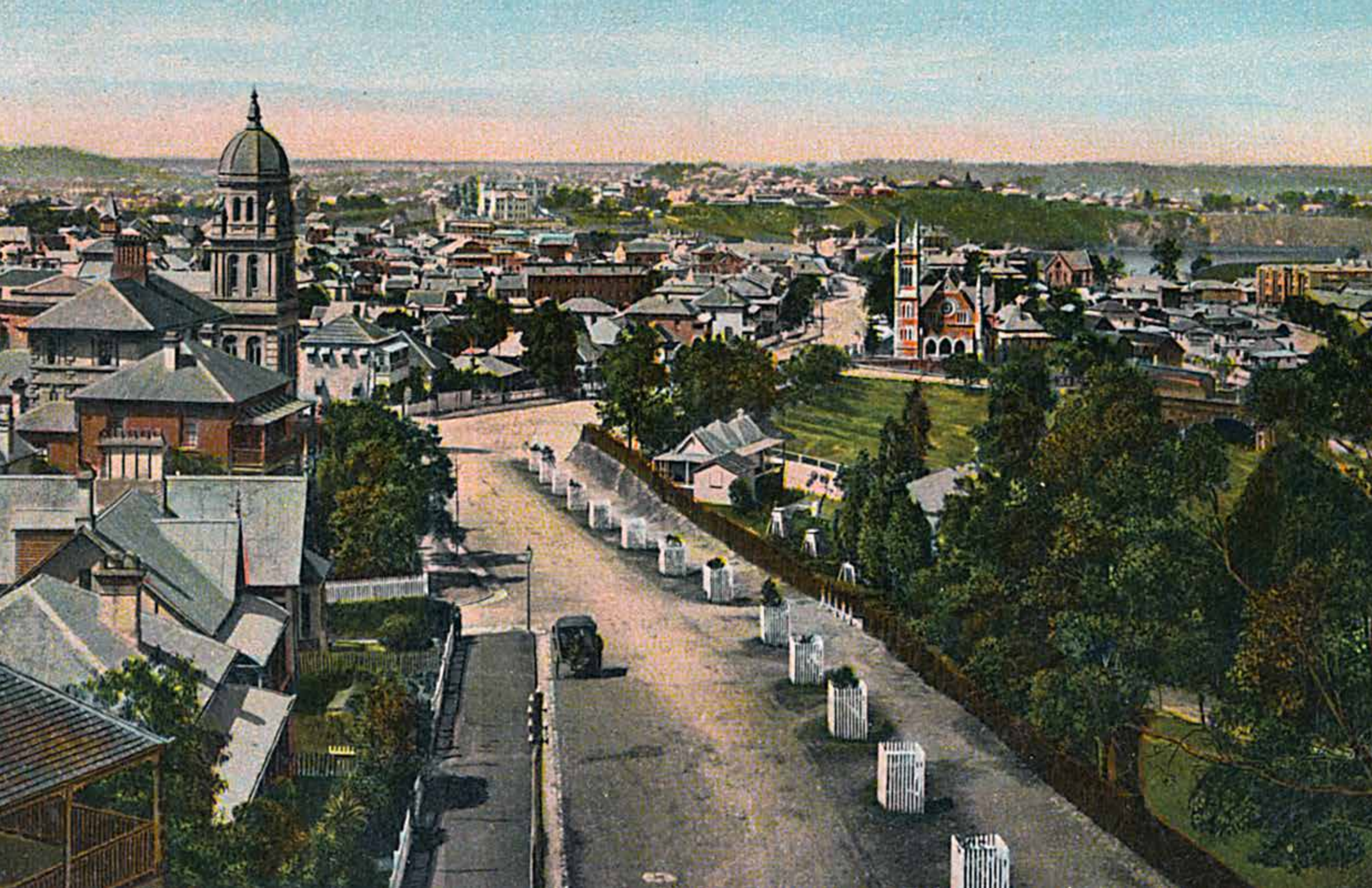
MEW: Ministry of Economic Warfare





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CHAPTER ONE

Stanley Smith's Beginnings

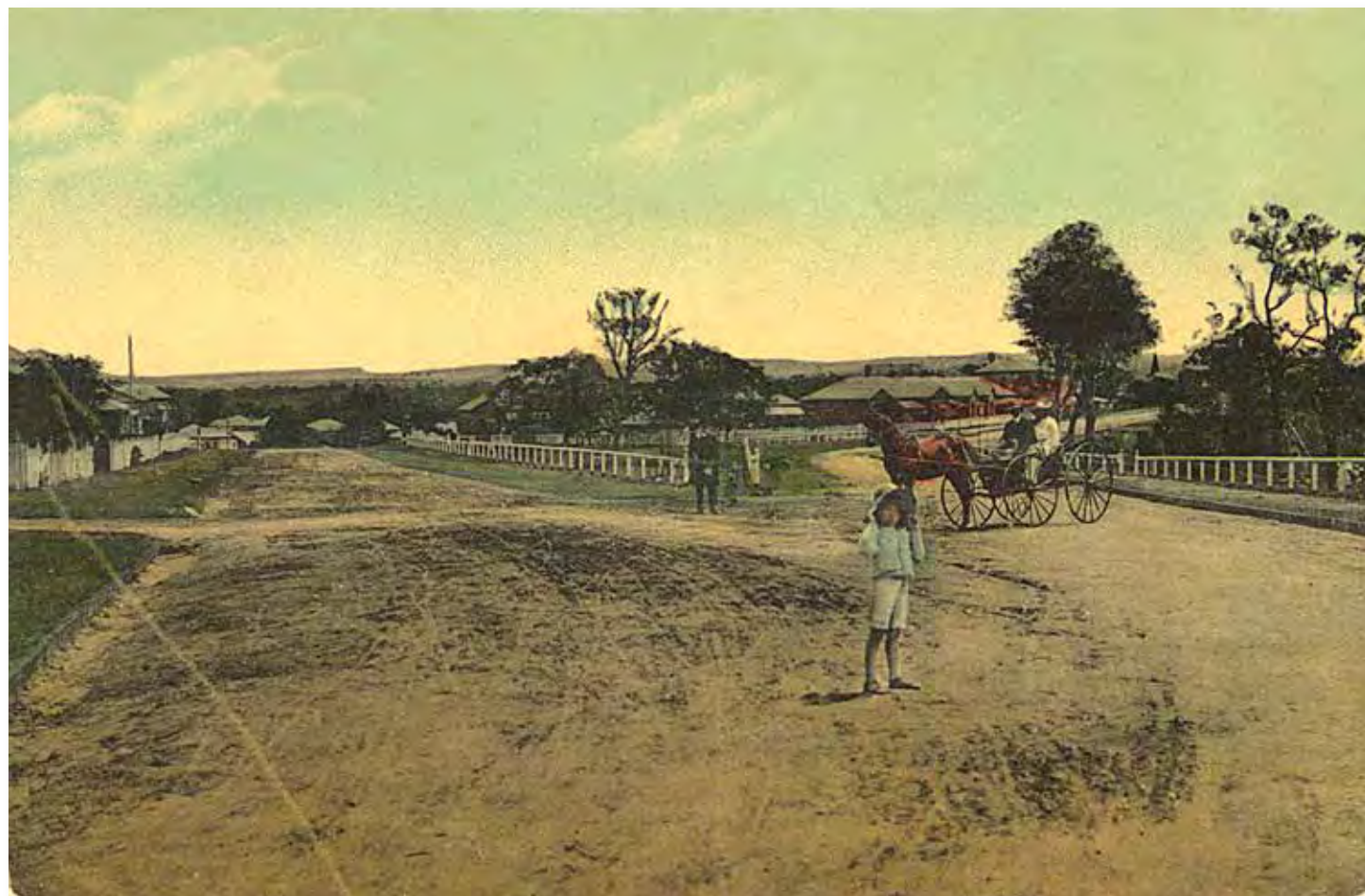
Rebecca Anbjor Smith knew that her third child would be born in the dog days of Australia's hot, humid summer. As her due date approached, she was fortunate to be able to head to her parents' spacious home in a nearby seaside town, where her mother, who was a midwife, could help deliver the baby. It was February 1907, and the small community of Sandgate, where her parents lived, was busy with people fleeing the oppressive heat of the nearby urban center of Brisbane, capital of the vast northern state of Queensland. Breezes from Moreton Bay eased the discomfort of the high temperatures of the subtropical summer. Children played on the sandy beach, and adults in their Edwardian dress promenaded along the pier. Hats worn by all shielded their del-

icate European skin from the fierce rays of the Queensland sun.¹

Across the main promenade, which ran along the town's fashionable beach, stood Mary and John Beck's airy, eight-bedroom home. It was there that their daughter Rebecca gave birth to her only son, Stanley Herbert Smith, on February 17, just two days before her 32nd birthday.² In those days birth was women's business. Like most fathers of the time, Stanley's father, Walter Herbert Smith, would have waited expectantly for his mother-in-law to tell him the news.

The town of Sandgate was only 12½ miles from the center of Brisbane and was easy to get to since the railway line between the two places had opened a couple of decades earlier. Soon Stanley and his

◀ View across Brisbane, about 1907.



Sandgate, 1907, the year Stanley was born.

mother returned to the family home in the desirable Brisbane suburb of Clayfield, joining his father and his sisters, two-year-old Irene and eight-year-old Thelma.³

Stanley was born into a prosperous, upwardly mobile family. His father worked in the newspaper business, having entered the field after growing up in Brisbane and attending a local state primary school. By the time he was 17, Walter Smith was managing a weekly newspaper under the editorship of a man who went on to become a senator in Australia's Federal Parliament. Walter subsequently held a variety of jobs before securing the position of manager of the *Telegraph*, a major daily newspaper in Brisbane. He took

over that job just two years before his son, Stanley, was born. Walter was also a professional accountant and served as the *Telegraph's* company secretary during his long employment there.⁴

While Stanley's father was focusing on his career at the newspaper, his mother, who had immigrated to Brisbane from England at age 10 with her impoverished parents and younger sister, was occupied in her roles as the mother of three children and the wife of a prominent businessman. The latter entailed



The *Telegraph* office, Brisbane, 1925.

spending much of her time visiting other women in her social circle at their homes and receiving guests at her home.

When Stanley was a toddler, the family moved from their home on Bayview Terrace to a house called Escarene, at the corner of Franz Road and Bowley Street, also in Clayfield.⁵ During Stanley's childhood, house numbers were not used in the Clayfield area. Houses either were named or identified by their relationship to a geographic point, such as a street corner or a public building.

Clayfield—probably named for the property of the soil⁶—was a new suburb, having only

been developed in the five years before Stanley was born. Like much of Brisbane, Clayfield is hilly. The wealthiest residents have always preferred to live on the tops of the hills to catch the refreshing breeze coming from the northeast. In the early twentieth century, Clayfield was known for the large, gorgeous gardens of many of the houses, unlike the crowded terraces of inner Brisbane. It was lauded as a "healthy" place to live because of its low population density and the fact that houses were raised from the ground. In Brisbane's wet environment,

raised houses were less likely to flood or suffer from dampness. The houses were generally surrounded by verandas, which shaded the inside of the house from the searing summer sun. Houses of this era generally had outhouses rather than indoor toilets. Just beyond Clayfield lay pineapple plantations and dairy farms.

The horse was still the main vehicle of personal transport when Stanley was born, but the newly introduced electric streetcar was popular. A trip from Clayfield to Brisbane's central business district on a streetcar was just 30 minutes. Wealthier people could keep a horse on their premises, and Walter Smith kept at least one horse at the Escarene house.⁷

When Stanley was about four years old, the family moved yet again. Their new house was on Heussler Street in the adjoining suburb of Albion. Theirs was the third house from the top of the hill, and the Smiths gave it the name "Warrawee." This most likely was the first house Stanley would have remembered living in, and it remained the family's residence until after he left home in his teens.⁸ (Heussler Street was renamed Marsden Street during World War One when anti-German sentiment led to the renaming of places with German names throughout Australia.)

Boomtown Brisbane

Australia was a young nation at the time of Stanley Smith's birth. Just six years earlier, on January 1, 1901, the six separate British colonies—New South Wales,

Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia—became states of the newly created Commonwealth of Australia, a self-ruling dominion of the British Empire. The new nation had been formed peacefully, thanks in part to a series of Federation Conventions, during which the national Constitution was drafted, and to referendums held in each colony, which allowed citizens to vote their approval. The nascent federal government assumed responsibility for matters such as defense and immigration, while state governments continued managing matters that most affected the lives of ordinary people, such as health and education. For most residents of Brisbane, life after Federation continued in much the same way it had before.

At the time of Stanley's birth, Brisbane was a growing city of 132,000 residents. Its population had increased by 10 percent since the turn of the century. As a hub of commerce in the southeastern corner of Queensland, Brisbane's port was bustling with the movement of goods in and out of the south of the state. The city was home to most of the state of Queensland's clothing and footwear industry, a large sugar refinery, and over 500 small manufacturers.⁹ As the seat of the state's government, the public sector also employed many Brisbane residents. But in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth century, Australia was in the grips of a crippling drought, which severely affected the state's dominant rural industries.¹⁰ By the time Stanley was born, the Brisbane economy was only just

recovering from the depression that had followed the drought.

Stanley and his siblings, however, were part of a booming young population in a young, forward-looking nation. By the time Stanley was four years old in 1911, the national census showed that 33 percent of Queenslanders were 14 years of age or younger and 46 percent of the population was under 21.¹¹

Hailing from England's Coal-Mining Country

Stanley was like many Queensland children in having at least one parent born outside Australia. Stanley's mother, Rebecca, and her parents, Mary and John Beck, and younger sister, Bertha, had been among the thousands of families who migrated from around the world to Brisbane in the 1880s, contributing to a remarkable increase in the state's population.¹² Queensland at the turn of the twentieth century has been described as a "multi-ethnic" state compared to the other Australian states.¹³ Indeed, Brisbane did have many residents from Germany, Russia, and Greece; yet the single largest group of immigrants was still coming from Great Britain and Ireland. Around 20 percent of the population of Queensland in 1911 had been born in the United Kingdom.¹⁴

Stanley's mother's parents, the Becks, came from humble origins in England's northern county of Cum-

berland near the Scottish border. Rebecca's father, John Beck, had lived his early years with his grandmother, who was a pauper, and his unmarried mother, siblings, and cousins.¹⁵ By the time he and Mary were married in 1873, John Beck had become a tailor. John and Mary Beck were living in the small northern English coal-mining town of Aspatria, when Rebecca (called "Ann" by her family) was born in 1875. The Becks' second child, Bertha, followed two years later.¹⁶

In Aspatria, John Beck struggled to meet his family's needs, and by the time Rebecca was six, the family had moved to the county of Lancashire, according to the census of 1881. In fact, on census night John Beck was by himself in the house he rented on the edge of the industrial metropolis of Manchester. His housing was subsidized by the government.

Eventually, the Becks made plans to leave England altogether. Like migrants throughout the ages, they probably chose to risk leaving their homeland in the hopes of finding better opportunities elsewhere for themselves and their children.¹⁷

Rebecca was 10 years old in September 1885 when she and her parents and eight-year-old Bertha, traveled south to London, where they boarded the steamship *Bulimba* for a 57-day journey. The family endured a storm in the English Channel, the heat of the Red Sea, and the humidity of the tropics as the ship navigated its way to what we now call Indonesia before steaming down the Queensland coast, dropping passengers off at various towns until it berthed at the Eagle Wharf in Brisbane.¹⁸

The Beck family was part of the biggest influx of Europeans into Queensland in the nineteenth century. In the period from 1881 to 1885, over 80,000 immigrants arrived in the north Australian colony, the overwhelming majority from Britain. Immigrants were still coming 25 years later when Stanley was born, but by comparison the net immigration in the five years from 1906 to 1911 had reduced substantially to some 20,000 newcomers.¹⁹

The 1880s saw many struggling people leave the British Isles for the New World, whether that was Canada, the United States, New Zealand, or Australia. North America was the preferred destination mainly because the journey was shorter. The Australasian colonies had to offer something extra to entice prospective immigrants to the other end of the earth, and that often came in the form of government assistance to cover the expenses of the journey.

The Beck family were “bounty” immigrants, which meant that the Queensland government subsidized their travel expenses. They only had to pay a maximum of £7 10s. per adult and £4 15s. per child (about \$900 per adult and \$500 per child in today’s dollars). The Queensland authorities expected that these fares would prove competitive with the costs of traveling to North America. Despite the substantial subsidy, which amounted to over half the price of a third-class ticket, the emigration to Queensland would have been financially taxing for the Beck family.²⁰

During this era, the Queensland colonial government was actively seeking immigrants. The British regarded most of Australia as undeveloped, despite the fact that the indigenous people of Queensland had lived on the land for eons. The Queensland colonial government, therefore, encouraged British people to immigrate so the newcomers could develop the land and convert it to European-style agriculture.

Although Stanley’s grandfather John Beck had identified himself in England as a tailor, the shipping documents declared that he was a gardener. When he appears again in documents at the turn of the century in Queensland, he has resumed his trade of tailoring. It is probable that John Beck told the shipping authorities he was a gardener in order to qualify for assistance because the Queensland government was not seeking tailors.²¹

The family would have been welcomed by the Queensland government for another reason—three of the four members were female. In the year the Beck family arrived, there were 143.9 males for every 100 females in the colony. The immigrants had been predominately male for many years, and in 1885, there were almost twice as many male immigrants as female immigrants.²² This was a problem that had existed from early times in the Australian colonies, and from the middle of the century various schemes had been devised to bring respectable women to Australia to address the imbalance.²³



Downtown Brisbane, 1911, when Stanley would have been four years old.

Marrying a Queensland Man

Twelve years after the Becks arrived in Brisbane, Rebecca Beck married Walter Herbert Smith. The bride was 22, the bridegroom, 21. By then the fortunes of the Beck family had somehow improved markedly. The wedding was held in the Becks' beachfront home in Sandgate. Rebecca's wedding received a detailed write-up in a local newspaper. Her wedding gown reportedly had a train and was made from "white liberty silk" and decorated with silk and "ruffles of chiffon." The day was marred by flooding that affected the railroad line. As a result, many guests were unable to attend. Walter had organized five young girls from his family to carry Rebecca's long bridal train, but they could not be there. All the same, it was noted that Walter gave each of these girls a gold brooch and his bride a "handsome gold watch." Rebecca's mother presented the couple with a set of house and table linen.²⁴

How Stanley's parents first met is unknown. His father, Walter, was the third of nine children of a respected postmaster, Eli Elijah Smith, and his first wife, Sarah Adele (née Sawyer) Smith. At the time of Walter's birth in 1876, the family was living in the rich and expanding agricultural district of the Darling Downs, about 140 miles by road west of Brisbane.²⁵ A job transfer later led Eli Elijah to move his family to Brisbane, where Eli Elijah himself had been born and raised. Eli's father, John

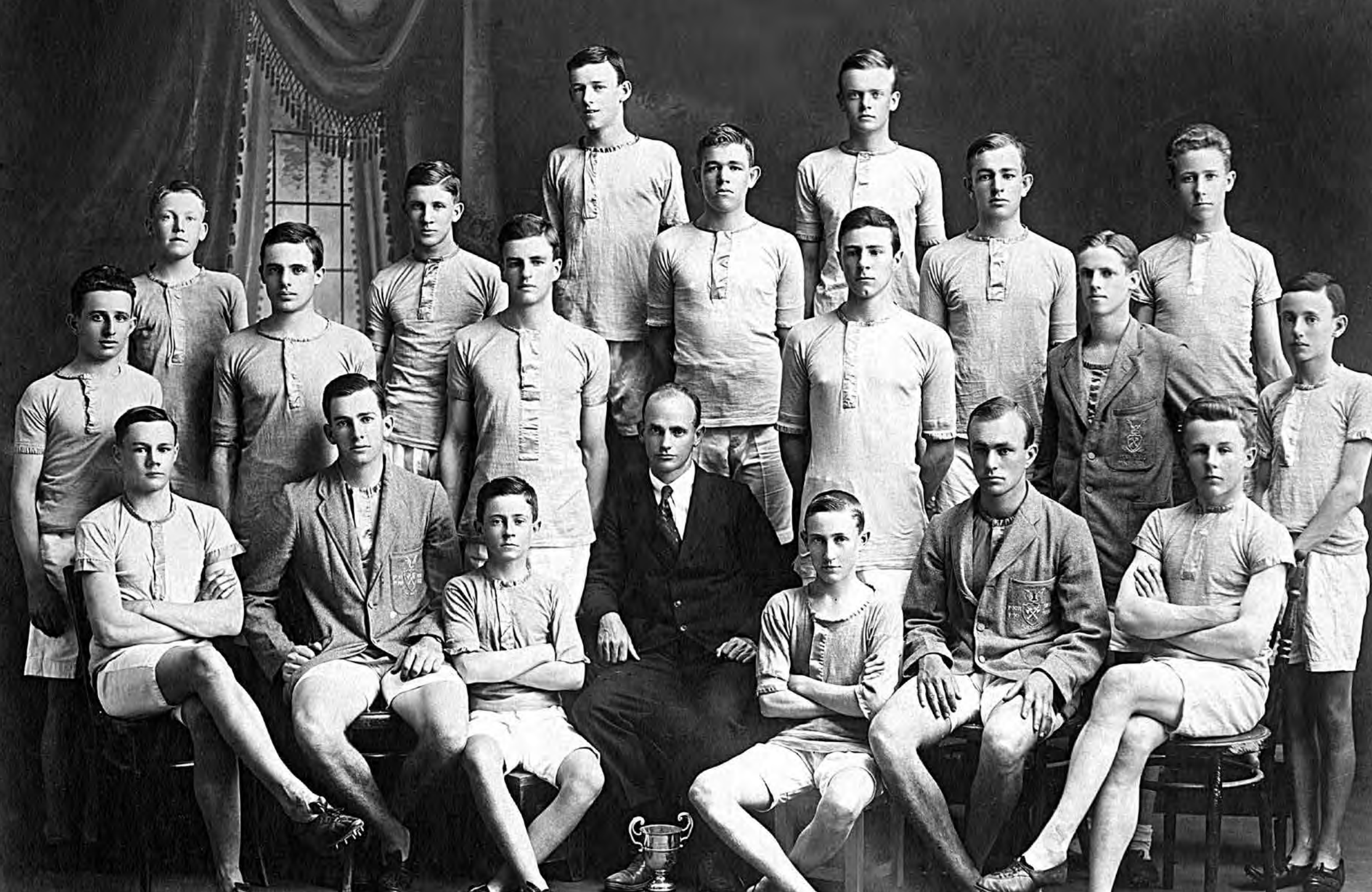
Patient Smith, was a tinsmith born in England who had moved to Sydney in 1836. He was among the earliest group of free European migrants to settle in the Brisbane area.²⁶

Interestingly, Eli Elijah's mother, Jane (née James) Smith, was the daughter of Samuel James, who arrived in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, in 1802 from England aboard the convict ship the *Perseus*.²⁷ The British had been transporting convicts to the American colonies, but that stopped after the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, and the British prison population then soared. Consequently, the British created the settlement at Sydney in 1788 as a penal colony and started regularly transporting their convicts to New South Wales.

Genealogical records show that Stanley's great-great-grandfather, Samuel James, was arrested and jailed at age 13 in Essex, England, for allegedly stealing six shillings and a £10 Bank of England note from a private home. Brought to trial at age 14, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced "to be hanged by the neck until he be dead." His sentence was later commuted, and he was sent to New South Wales at age 17.²⁸ There, he became a police constable and a farmer. He married in 1808 at age 24 and fathered Stanley Smith's paternal great-grandmother, Jane. Samuel James died at age 71 in 1855 in New South Wales.²⁹ It's quite possible that neither Stanley nor his father ever knew about

Samuel James' convict past. Australian families of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often felt uncomfortable about openly admitting to the mark of what was known as the "convict stain." They typically avoided talking about it.

What is known is that Walter's mother died when he was 15. His father remarried and had more children. Walter attended school in the Brisbane suburb of Kangaroo Point. He was living and working there at the time of his well-publicized marriage to Rebecca.³⁰



CHAPTER TWO

School Days

Stanley began his formal education at Eagle Junction State School, the same public primary school his sisters attended. In fact, when his oldest sister, Thelma, enrolled there in 1906, the Smith family was living in Clayfield just down the street from the school. Although there were a few private schools nearby that the Smith children could have attended, Eagle Junction had a good reputation, and during this era most children in Queensland attended public schools.¹

Stanley's primary school enrollment records are missing, but he most likely would have started at Eagle Junction in 1913 when he was six. His classmates would have almost all been of European descent but from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The enrollment register from Eagle Junction during those years shows children whose fathers were laborers and tradesmen, such as carpenters and cabinet makers, as well as solicitors, engineers, and managers.²

Stanley's school years coincided with a time of violence and disruption caused by the Great War, as World War One was then called, which ravaged the world between 1914 and 1918. While there was fighting between Australian and German forces to the north of Queensland in the German colony of New Guinea at the beginning of the war, World War One was mostly fought thousands of miles from Australia. Yet it had a significant effect on the lives and psyches of Australians.

World War One was a war of empires,

◀ Churchie's First XIII Track & Field Team, which won the school's first Track & Field Premiership, in 1923. (Stanley is pictured top row, on right.)

A "Sock the Kaiser" patriotic fundraiser, about 1913.



and when the British entered the war they made the decision on behalf of the entire British Empire, including the Commonwealth of Australia. In the early years of the war, Australians enthusiastically enlisted to defend the King and Empire. The Commonwealth of Australia was not yet 14 years old, and allegiance to the

new nation was still developing. The majority of Australians still considered themselves proud members of the British Empire.³

The Australian general in charge of organizing volunteers successfully argued with the British authorities for the Australian troops to remain in distinct units



▲ Australians enlisted in World War One practicing drills.

► An enthusiastic crowd gathers in Brisbane to see off a fleet sailing to fight overseas, 1913.

rather than being merged into British army units; however, the British were in charge of the overall command of the Empire's forces. The Australian army units were



organized at the state level, which meant that for much of the war most soldiers only served and lived with men from their state.⁴



Large Brisbane crowd at fundraising rally during World War One.

As the war dragged on, families in Australia endured years of worry, concerned about whether their soldier relatives would ever return home. Although it's unknown whether the Smiths had family members in the military at the time, Stanley undoubtedly would have had many school friends with close relatives in the war, and some of them would have been killed. Certainly,

he would have heard at school about former Eagle Junction students who were in the conflict.

Schoolchildren like those at Eagle Junction were enlisted in the war effort. Girls did handiwork, such as making pillowcases for the Red Cross, presumably for use in hospitals.⁵ And schools held fundraisers to raise money for one cause or another. Early in the war,

for instance, one group of students raised money for a fund that provided blankets for soldiers. In another effort, lauded by one of Brisbane's major newspapers as an "excellent example," students raised a total of £6, which they sent as pennies and other coins to the organizers of the blanket drive.⁶ If nothing else, the efforts inspired patriotism among the youth.

Steeped in Messages of Bravery and Patriotism

Stanley was eight years old when the shocking news of Gallipoli swept through Australia. On April 25, 1915, Allied troops, including many Australians, had landed on the hilly shores of the Gallipoli Peninsula and engaged in catastrophic combat with the Ottoman Army. The landing at Gallipoli produced tales of heroic deeds that made the Australian public proud. But the planning of this attack was deeply flawed, and the Allied troops faced tremendous fire from Ottoman troops stationed on top of hills, firing at the soldiers landing on the beach below. It is estimated that over 600 Australians were killed in the first five days on the shores of Gallipoli. The casualty notices in Australian newspapers deeply disturbed people at home.⁷ The Australians were fighting with New Zealanders, British, French, British Indian, and French African troops.

The following year, on the anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli, when Stanley was nine, all of Australia

commemorated the troops' valor and sacrifice during the first annual Anzac Day, named with the acronym for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.⁸ Stanley would have been among the students who gathered in every school throughout Queensland that day for an all-school assembly to mark the day. From that year on, Stanley would have stood with his fellow students every Anzac Day at whatever school he attended to be reminded of a war that painfully affected people he knew. The names, brave deeds, and good qualities of former students and teachers killed during the war were shared with the students at school assemblies.⁹

The war left Australia and its citizens deeply scarred and was followed by an era of unparalleled economic and social stress. More than half of all eligible men aged 18 to 35 had enlisted for war service—a total of 416,809 of a population of about four million. More than 60,000 died, and by 1931 more than 283,300 disabled soldiers, war widows, and others were receiving war pensions.¹⁰

Newspaper articles from the war years reveal the ideals and values widely promoted during Stanley's youth, and which likely influenced him. The *Brisbane Courier* reported on a wartime "patriotic display" by schoolchildren from around Brisbane, including those from Eagle Junction State School. The 5,000-some children who performed were described by the newspaper as "bright of face, sturdy of limb, well clad and healthy." The writer lauded the children's performance as "a spectacle to make the heart beat quicker with pride of

the grand old race to which they belonged.” Children were seen as the great hope for Queensland’s future development. In an era fraught with tremendous anxiety about the enfeebling effects of urban and industrial life and in which soldiers were required to exhibit physical prowess, Queensland children were encouraged to exercise their bodies in the fresh air.¹¹ Thus sports were an important element in school life. Students at Eagle Junction State School swam and played rugby. Perhaps Stanley developed his love of sports, which blossomed during secondary school, at Eagle Junction State School.

Pressure to Excel

During the war years Brisbane’s population continued growing, and enrollments at Eagle Junction State School climbed, largely due to the school’s reputation for excellence. Overcrowding became a major problem. Parents complained that some classes had to be taught on verandas, in sheds, and under the raised school buildings because of a serious shortage of classroom space. Worse still, Brisbane’s periodic torrential rain often washed away large quantities of soil from the playground and eroded the sidewalk next to the school. The feet of the nearly 1,000 children who attended the school would have further muddied the small school grounds. Boys like Stanley had to navigate through silt and water that pooled around the toilets,



Eagle Junction State School’s open-air annex, December 1919.

and the school’s janitors despaired over the endless job of cleaning mud from the floor of that shed. The Queensland Minister for Education received several visits from delegations representing the school pleading for the problems to be fixed.¹²

Despite these serious issues, parents continued enrolling their children at the much-acclaimed school. At Eagle Junction Stanley studied under head teacher David John Bell, whom he praised years later in a letter to Churchie Headmaster Roberts. Bell will “always be my ideal. Stern, friendly, and, above all, a teacher,” Stanley wrote.¹³

Bell was in charge of the school at a time when Eagle Junction students achieved remarkable success in the prestigious state scholarship examinations. During this era, most students left school at age 14, permanently ending their formal education. Secondary schooling was still optional, although it was increasingly desired by parents and students. But the Queensland government did not provide enough public high schools to meet the rising demand. To address this scarcity, the government offered scholarships for private schools to higher-achieving students.

If students wished to further their education, they had to pass an exam. When Stanley was finishing primary school, all students who achieved a score of 50 percent or more on the exam were assured a place in a secondary school. Further, they were awarded a scholarship that covered most of the cost of attending a private school. Students could choose which secondary school they attended from a list of schools approved by the Department of Public Instruction.¹⁴ Most of those who did not pass the examinations sought employment.¹⁵

Eagle Junction students were among the top scorers in Queensland on the scholarship exam during Stanley’s years there. In 1918, five of the top 10 scores were achieved by students from the school, including the top three in the state. “[T]his is the first time in the history of Queensland that a single school has succeeded in gaining the first three places,” declared the *Telegraph* newspaper at the time. If 11-year-old Stanley was at school that day, he would have been in the crowd

of over 900 students applauding when fellow student E. J. F. Wood received the award for top score in the state. The students were delighted when a school official told them that to mark the occasion, all Eagle Junction students would receive a holiday from school the next day, “an announcement that was vociferously greeted,” wrote the reporter for the *Telegraph*. The event closed with the singing of the national anthem and “cheers for the ‘boys at the front.’”¹⁶ The war was always at the forefront of the minds of Brisbane residents during those years.

As Stanley was nearing the end of his primary school days, he surely would have realized that his parents, his teachers, and most everyone in the community held high expectations for performance on the scholarship exams. Not all students took the exams—they had to be nominated by the head teacher at their school. But Stanley was among the nominees at Eagle Junction.

When he sat for the scholarship exams in 1921, candidates were required to be under 14 years of age at the end of the prior calendar year.¹⁷ Stanley, like many other candidates, was 13 when he sat for the exams. The candidates were tested on their knowledge in five subjects: English, arithmetic and mensuration (geometry), geography, history, and a miscellaneous paper.¹⁸

Approximately 2,500 Queensland students took the exams over the course of three days in April. Once the exams were completed, the students and their parents had a long wait for results.¹⁹ Finally, on June 15, 1921, newspapers published the names of scholarship

winner, including the name of Stanley Herbert Smith.²⁰ Stanley achieved a score of 62 percent across all sections of the examination. He received his worst result on his English exam, barely scraping by with a score of 51 percent.²¹

Less than half the students earned passing scores.²² But once again Eagle Junction State School stood out—it had produced the top three scorers for 1921.²³

Choosing Churchie

In 1921, only 17 percent of secondary school-age Queenslanders attended high school.²⁴ That made Stanley part of an elite group.

The list of high schools from which students in Stanley's year could choose comprised a mix of state, Catholic, and other parochial and secular private schools. Since Stanley's family was Protestant, his parents would not have considered sending him to a Catholic school, especially in this era of bitter sectarian rancor. But there were other options. Brisbane Boy's Grammar School was the most prestigious secondary school in the area. Brisbane State High School was still relatively new. There were also some private colleges in the Clayfield area that Stanley could have attended even at his age and level of schooling. However, his parents chose to send Stanley to the all-boys Church of England Grammar School, or Churchie as it became commonly known. By then, Churchie had

become a popular school among the affluent and "class-conscious" families of Brisbane.²⁵

According to Churchie's former historian, James Mason, Stanley was the only Eagle Junction student in his year who chose to continue his education at Churchie.²⁶ Why Stanley and his parents chose Churchie over other options is not known. Perhaps they liked that Churchie was operated under the auspices of the Church of England. (Now the Anglican Church of Australia, it is known in the United States as the Episcopal Church.) It is possible that Stanley's parents wished him to have some religious instruction during his high school years, perhaps reflecting the lingering influence of Stanley's father's upbringing.

Stanley's paternal grandfather, Eli Elijah Smith, was born into a religious family, as his given name suggests.²⁷ Eli Elijah was baptized in 1847 by the first Church of England priest in Brisbane.²⁸ Eli Elijah's father, John Patient Smith, was known as "Patience Smith." He was a temperance campaigner who did voluntary work for the church in the early days of Brisbane.²⁹ Stanley's parents may have felt a familial allegiance to the Anglican Church, which might have swayed their choice of a school for their son.

Queensland's grammar schools were, and still are, somewhat similar to private college prep junior high and high schools in the United States. When the schools were first established in Queensland, they drew on the tradition of England's grammar schools, delivering an academic curriculum that emphasized mathematics



Churchie School House, 1922.

and the classics as well as the development of character through sports. Education in a grammar school was useful if a student had ambitions to work for the government, study for a profession, or attend a university.³⁰

Stanley once recalled that his father took great pride in having provided his children with what he considered to be a "good" education. "The concept of a 'good school' in [Queensland] in the '20s was very largely snobbish and in a vague sort of way the belief was that if you went to a 'good school' you were 'well educated,'" Stanley wrote in a January 14, 1958, letter to a Churchie headmaster, Harry Roberts, with whom he had an ongoing correspondence from the 1950s through the 1970s. "How often I heard my self-made father boast that he gave his kids a good education I couldn't remember. Utter damn nonsense, but he, like most of the nonprofessional successful business men, truly considered that



Churchie, 1923.

anything beyond state school was good enough to be advertised as a 'good education brand.'"³¹

More the Athlete Than the Scholar

By the time Stanley enrolled at Churchie, the relatively young school had begun building a reputation in Brisbane for excellence. The school had been founded nine years earlier by William Perry French Morris, an austere, zealous Anglican priest who designed a curriculum and daily program grounded in Church of England principles "with a reverence for English traditions and history."³²

Morris opened his all-boys school in a stately, colonial-style private home in suburban Brisbane in 1912—two years before the start of World War One—with just three pupils. Launched in an era when the Church of England in Queensland was resisting taking on the financial burden of running schools, Morris’s school at first was privately supported and run on a shoestring. But Morris was a visionary, and he set out with determination to create a top-notch school that would be at the forefront of Church of England education in Australia. His mission was to turn out “men of character evincing certain qualities: gentleness, courtesy, chivalry, courage, honour, a sense of duty, mercy, and patience.”³³

Inspiring his young pupils with riveting tales of Viking adventurers and Anzac warriors and encouraging their achievement in the classroom as well as on the playing field, the headmaster strived to instill in them “an excitement about life itself.” His hope and expectation was that his students would go on to become leaders in the outside world.

Within three years of the school’s creation, the lo-



Churchie founder and first headmaster William Perry French Morris, with his dog, Buff, 1940.

cal Church of England hierarchy recognized Morris’s achievement and future promise by officially bringing his school under the auspices of the diocese and renaming it the Church of England Grammar School for Boys (CEGS). The school’s students soon came up with the enduring nickname “Churchie.”

By the time Stanley arrived at Churchie as a day student in 1921, the school had relocated to a 34-acre bucolic site, acquired in 1916, in East Brisbane along the banks of Norman Creek. The picturesque campus, blown by northeasterly breezes, supported a small herd of cattle that roamed the grounds and supplied milk for the staff and students. A flock of chickens provided eggs. A portion of the land had been ploughed, drained, and rolled to create expansive playing fields. There were also classrooms, a laboratory, and a dormitory.

Headmaster Morris, dubbed “the Boss” by his pupils, was a strict disciplinarian. He addressed his young charges only by their surnames, “in the case of brothers, adding secundus or tertius” [Latin for “sec-

ond” or “third”], wrote author John Cole in his comprehensive history of the school, *The Making of Men*. Infractions of the rules often resulted in punishment by caning, administered by the headmaster himself.³⁴

Morris recruited a staff of well-trained teachers, and each year his school attracted more and more pupils, more than a quarter of whom were boarders. By 1923, 175 boys were enrolled at the school.³⁵ The day students, including Stanley, commuted to the campus from all over Brisbane by train, tram, or foot. Stanley most likely traveled from his home on Marsden Street by train and tram.³⁶

To boost enrollment, Morris kept tuition and boarding fees low enough to accommodate the budgets of families from most levels of Brisbane society.³⁷ Students included the sons of doctors, solicitors, and accountants along with sons of ordinary workingmen and country farmers, some of whom were there on scholarship.

Stanley attended Churchie as a scholarship student, which meant that his tuition was completely covered by the government.³⁸ In Stanley’s era, tuition for day students who were not scholarship holders was £5 a quarter. Some students from lower-income families also received an allowance of £12 12 shillings a quarter if they were living at home. That would help cover other school-related expenses parents had to pay. Stanley’s parents had to pay 14 shillings and 6 pennies each quarter to cover Stanley’s use of the school’s books and stationery. They also had to buy his school uniform and to pay 2 shillings and 6 pennies for every sport Stanley played.³⁹

The boys at Churchie spent many hours each day in the classroom studying divinity, Latin, Greek, French, English, algebra, geometry, chemistry, physics, and—in a concession to the pragmatists—bookkeeping.⁴⁰ Since Headmaster Morris believed that sports and physical activity were as valuable as academics in building character, the boys also spent part of each day rowing on the creek and playing cricket and rugby on the Oval. As Cole wrote, “Morris sent his boys to the playing-fields to stimulate their growth, strengthen their muscles, and hone their nerves in strenuous situations.”⁴¹ This was consistent with the educational tradition established in the well-known public schools in England, which Australian schools such as Churchie followed.⁴²

Stanley’s academic achievements at Churchie were, in Headmaster Roberts words, “minimal,” but he was recognized for his athletic prowess. He played for the school’s rugby team and was a member of the school’s 1923 Athletics Team. A photo of the school’s 1923 First XIII team (“First XIII” designated it as the top ranking senior Rugby team in the school) shows Stanley standing in the center of the group, a bit shorter than some of his teammates but with upright posture, muscular shoulders, and a determined, confident countenance. As Headmaster Roberts wrote in his unpublished memoir: “It may be reasonably easy to get into the 1st XV [a top ranking senior Rugby team] of a school that is rather small, of course, but success in Rugby Football, a game of violent physical contact, by a boy of 15 suggests considerable courage and self-assurance. The

vigor and independence of [Stanley's] later days obviously were now showing themselves."⁴³

In his first month at Churchie, Stanley passed his "Viking" swimming test. The ability to swim well was regarded as important at the school. When the school moved to its East Brisbane location, all boys were required to complete a swim of 120 yards in Norman Creek, which ran along the edge of the school grounds. That Stanley passed this test so soon after starting at the school shows that he was a proficient swimmer by the time he was 14.⁴⁴ This is not surprising because he likely had plenty of opportunity to learn to swim as a child since his grandparents lived next to the beach in Sandgate.

Stanley was also a successful participant in school athletics tournaments. In his first year at Churchie, he represented the school at the interschool tournament, the Great Public Schools Association's (GPS) Track and Field Competition. This was after he had won the half-mile handicap and the 100-yard sprint for boys under 15 in Churchie's Track and Field Competition.⁴⁵ He went on to represent the school in the next two years at the GPS competitions and was a member of the team that won Churchie its first-ever GPS Track and Field Competition in 1923.⁴⁶

Stanley sang in Churchie's chorus, which, at the beginning of December 1922, performed its rendition of the Eton Boating Song in the school's first concert to raise funds to build a school chapel. "[T]he audience joined in, which made it very effective, especially as the boys gave it all the dash and enthusiasm of real oars-

men while at the same time preserving the rhythm," reported the school magazine.⁴⁷

Bit of a Larrikin

A contemporary of Stanley's at Churchie remembered him years later as initially "nervous and rather reticent," though also "perky and energetic" among his classmates. The impression of him that emerges is that of a shy young man who may have needed some time to warm to people before loosening up around them. Another former schoolmate, quoted in a news story at the time of one of Stanley's generous donations to Churchie, described Stanley as a "bit of a larrikin"—an Australian term. Larrikins were rough and rowdy young men who often had a keen sense of humor and mocked pretentiousness. When Headmaster Roberts relayed the description to Stanley, he jokingly quarelled only with the word "bit."⁴⁸

In handwritten letters to Roberts, penned some 30 years after leaving Churchie, Stanley confided that he was not one of Morris's "admirers" and claimed he had not been seduced by the headmaster's heroic tales and his romantic ideas of the virtues of manly toughness. "The school itself talked a lot about character building, leadership, taking our place in life and all those . . . bromides that smack of the genteel . . . the old snob type schools of England," Stanley wrote in January 1958.



The Churchie First XIII Rugby Team, 1923. (Stanley is in the middle row, third from right.)

Stanley's comments imply that he empathized with the typical larrikin dislike of the class system of the "mother country." Larrikins were generally young men from the working classes who had the minimum schooling required by law and finished their education in the school of hard knocks. They shared an egalitarian ethos and a propensity to question authority. While Stanley did not come from the typical larrikin background, he clearly shared some of the sentiments.

As Roberts acknowledged in his memoir, the carefully designed curriculum at Churchie failed "to capture [Stanley's] boyhood imagination and channel his intellectual powers." According to Roberts, the only faculty member who left a positive lasting impression on Stanley was Fred Paterson, an Oxford graduate in theology who had been so disturbed by post-World War One social conditions in Europe that he returned to Australia an avowed communist. He joined Churchie's staff in 1923 and delighted his students, including Stanley, with his fresh, playful approach to teaching and his keen, thought-provoking political insights.⁴⁹ Paterson left Churchie after just one year to pursue a career in law and later became the first communist ever elected to an Australian legislature.⁵⁰

The scholarships awarded by the government for secondary school lasted for two and a half years. They could be extended for two more years if the student passed a further public examination, but Stanley had lost interest in completing his secondary education.⁵¹ He left Churchie at the end of 1923, a decision he would come to regret. In his later years, he became an

ardent proponent of higher education, and in his letters to Roberts, he lamented that no desire to stay in school and continue on to a university had been ignited in him while at Churchie, and he laid the blame on the school itself.

"When I was at CEGS . . . nobody ever mentioned the university to us," he wrote to Roberts in January 1958. "Some boys did of course go on but the rest of us never really knew why or how." He complained that nobody at Churchie ever explained the value of higher education or ever took the boys to visit a university and "not a darn thing was done to stir our imaginations." He argued that it was the responsibility of the school and not the students' parents to make the youngsters "pant" for higher education. "[I]n a country where so few of the parents have been educated beyond a sojourn at a secondary school it seems now in retrospect that it's unwise to leave such important matters to uneducated parents," Stanley wrote. "Children with uneducated parents need to be excited at the thought of being able to earn a university degree." By the time he realized the importance of obtaining higher education, Stanley wrote, "I was too far on in life."⁵²

Stanley Smith's departure from Churchie probably disappointed Headmaster Morris. He took pride in his record of keeping a higher percentage of his students in school longer and sending more on to university than was the record in other Brisbane schools. But Stanley was not the only Churchie boy to leave school early. When Stanley entered in 1921 as essentially a high school freshman, there were 30 students in his

grade. The class above his had 29 students. The class above that had 15 students, and the "senior" class had only eight students.⁵³ By staying in school until age 16, Stanley clearly beat the average.

For Stanley, the next stop was not a position in an office in a bustling city but atop the back of a horse, wrangling cattle in the vast, isolated, parched area known in Australia as the Outback. The first job he found after leaving school was as a *jackaroo*, the all-embracing Australian term for a young cowboy, ranch hand, and roustabout.

Perhaps his idea to head to the Outback to find work as a jackaroo came from Headmaster Morris himself, who, according to Cole, "impressed his boys as being something of a misplaced 'bushie.'" Morris sometimes remarked, "How I wish I was the brother working cattle"—a reference to his brother, Arthur, who leased a grazing station," Cole wrote. "Even the less perceptive boys quickly realised that their headmaster was most relaxed when away from the streets and lights of the town."⁵⁴

Although Stanley left Churchie uninspired to seek further schooling, his time there apparently had not deflated his sense of curiosity about the world or his ambition to make something of his life. As Headmaster Roberts later commented about Stanley's time at Churchie: "His was a story of minimal academic work and many peccadilloes of the harmless schoolboy variety, but his mind was alert and his energy boundless—two foundations vital to successful careers."⁵⁵



Henry Emmanuel Roberts, a Churchie headmaster years after Stanley attended. Roberts and Stanley had a long-running correspondence beginning in the 1950s.

CHAPTER THREE

The Wandering Years

When Stanley left home at age 16, he likely was seeking not just new horizons, but also escape from a troubled home life. According to one story, recounted in an anonymously written account of Stanley's life compiled years after his death, Stanley took off from Brisbane because he found his parents' bickering too difficult to bear.¹ This explanation is plausible since public records reveal that when Stanley was in his early twenties, his mother moved out of the home she had shared with his father. In August 1929, Rebecca and her unmarried daughter, Thelma, were living nearby on Oriel Road in the neighboring suburb of Ascot while Walter continued to live at Marsden Street.²

Just two years earlier, on December 2, 1926, Rebecca and Walter had celebrated the marriage of their younger daughter, Irene, to Clive Mellor, an accountant from Bundaberg. The marriage was well recorded in the local newspaper. Short articles about the pre-wedding tea and the wedding breakfast, held in the rooftop garden at the prestigious National Hotel, included elaborate descriptions of the floral decorations, the musical accompaniments, and the bride's "frock of cream silk lace over ivory mariette," with a "veil of silk tulle, arranged with silver ribbon, and a knot of orange blossoms."³ The festivities were, by all accounts, joyous occasions, but cracks may already have been appearing in the façade of this status-conscious Brisbane family.

Sometime within the next two years, Rebecca left Walter. Then, in December 1931, the *Telegraph* announced it was replacing Walter with a new general manager. "This will relieve the pressure on Mr. W. H. Smith," the newspaper diplomatically explained. Walter stayed on at the newspaper, concentrating solely on his company secretarial role.⁴ Four years later, in 1935, he was appointed circulation manager at the newspaper.⁵

In future years, Walter continued to pop up in the pages of the newspaper from time to time. For instance, he was listed among the attendees at the funeral of a prominent citizen and also in an item announcing his election as honorary auditor of the Press Institute of Queensland.⁶ But the last notice about Rebecca's life in the newspaper's society pages appears to have been in 1930. She apparently had retired from the public social scene.

Miles Away in the Outback

While Stanley's parents were coping with the upsets in their lives, Stanley himself was miles and miles away, forging his own path in the wider world. During the years stretching from 1923 into the 1930s, Stanley moved from place to place and job to job, usually by choice, not of necessity. It is not known whether Stanley kept in touch with his family during these years, whether he visited them, or how much he knew about their difficulties. Their sole means of communication would have

been through handwritten letters, none of which have surfaced, if they ever existed.

The stories about Stanley's early years are many and varied, but all portray him as a restless young man in search of independence and adventure, if not money. Stanley was clearly not destined for the confining halls of a university or for a humdrum existence pumping gas or clerking in an office. Larrikins like him valued practical experience and street credibility over book learning and patiently climbing the rungs of some corporate ladder.⁷ From the moment he left home, he demonstrated the initiative and boldness that would later mark him as a man apart. He did not shy away from hard work, physical discomfort, or from the challenge of the new and unknown, traits that would prove advantageous during war and afterward. Rather, as one of his earliest choices demonstrated, Stanley deliberately chose to place himself in arduous situations.

All accounts agree that soon after he left Churchie and his family home, Stanley headed first toward western Queensland and then into the Northern Territory. It was in this big, harsh country, known as the Outback, that Stanley found work first as a jackaroo, living on a remote cattle ranch (known in Australia as a cattle station) with the ranch manager and his wife while earning his keep.⁸

The harsh landscape into which Stanley traveled captured the imagination of many Australian young men in the early years of the new nation, drawing them



Two jackaroos confer near a horse, 1928.

like a magnet away from the densely populated coastal cities and surrounding suburbs. Australian boys were raised on adventure stories of tough, strong men proving themselves in the wilderness and in battle.⁹ Confronting a daunting physical challenge was promoted as the path to manhood. Stanley's generation had been too young to prove themselves at war, but the battle against the elements in the natural world beckoned. And few places in the world could provide a better backdrop for this man vs. environment contest than Australia's sprawling, rugged Bush, as its countryside is called.

While Australia is similar in size to mainland USA, it has many fewer states—just six, with three additional “territories.” As a result, the state of Queensland is huge—seven times the size of Great Britain and more than two and a half times the size of Texas. And the Northern Territory is around twice the size of Texas. The interiors of both regions were, and remain today, sparsely populated and subject to the vagaries of severe climates with little arable land. The poor grazing conditions gave rise to very big ranches, or stations, where just a few animals grazed each acre.

The size and remoteness of these cattle stations defined the Outback lifestyle, and life in the 1920s was indeed very isolated. Outback folk prided themselves on their self-reliance and resilience. Country towns grew up along supply and stock routes serving travelers and ranchers, but because of the huge distances involved and the poor quality of the dirt roads, most

ranches were also largely self-sufficient. Travel was still mainly by horse. Trucks had started to appear but did not become a regular feature on Outback roads until a decade or so later. Mail and supplies were delivered by horse and cart or occasionally by motortruck. The district priest visited every so often, usually on horseback. And every now and then, a brave traveling salesman would pass through.

The ranches ranged in size from several hundred to several thousands of square miles, and their homestead headquarters could look like small villages. The biggest and wealthiest had their own cookhouse, butcher's shed, storehouse, shop, school, and workers' accommodations, all clustered around the main homestead house. The main house itself was typically a large wooden building surrounded by wide verandas under an iron roof. Shafts sunk deep underground into what is known as the Great Artesian Basin provided an essential and reliable supply of water, which usually allowed the development of kitchen gardens and sometimes even ornamental gardens. During Stanley's Outback days in the 1920s, however, inland Queensland was plagued by a series of droughts. Land that was already dry became parched and cracked, and the pastoral economy suffered.

It was a tough environment in which to live and earn a living, especially for a private-school lad fresh from the city. Stanley's uncalloused hands and lack of experience probably would not have mattered to the station manager who hired him; Stanley was young and



Scrubland of the Northern Territory, 1928.

athletic and thoroughly capable of hard manual labor. But life at the cattle station undoubtedly would have required some getting used to.

Jackaroos were rarely shown much indulgence in what was a traditional male environment. They were expected to learn on the job and learn quickly. They had to become adept at riding a horse and at working with a dog to herd animals. They had to mend broken

equipment, fix fences surrounding the homestead or much farther afield, and help the station's cook.¹⁰

They often spent months in the saddle, riding the outer boundaries of the ranch, checking fences and water supplies, rounding up and branding cattle, driving herds, and keeping rustlers at bay. Just riding along the perimeters of these huge properties could take weeks, let alone the extra time required to fix problems.

Grassy plain, Northern Territory, 1925.



They might occasionally stay in what were known as “out stations,” typically rustic huts. But more often than not they made camp in the Bush. If they were lucky, they camped near a creek where they slept under the stars on what jackaroos call a “swag” and American cowboys know as a bed roll.

Excessive chatter did not endear a man to his companions in the Bush. “The jackaroo’s place is to keep his eyes open, notice for himself, and think before he asks a question,” explained a letter writer to a Brisbane newspaper.¹¹ Keeping his own counsel probably came quite naturally for Stanley, who tended to be reserved.

Riding the Long-Distance Stock Routes

As Stanley told the story, not long after starting as a jackaroo, he began yearning for more money than he was earning. “I got fed up after a while because I was only getting 17s. [shillings] a week, and I didn’t think that was quite enough money,” Stanley told a reporter for the British newspaper the *Sketch* in 1955. “So I went droving—you know, ‘Overlanders’ stuff. Sixteen hours a day in the saddle for £1 a week. I rode with cattle across the Northern Territory several times.”¹²

As a drover, Stanley would have shepherded large



Drovers with cattle, Northern Territory, late 1920s.

herds along Australia’s long-distance stock routes to get the cattle to market or to find grass in times of drought. The great cattle drives that saw huge herds of stock driven thousands of miles across country have now passed into history. They have become part of Australian folklore. Even before their passing, however, they had become the stuff of poetry, literature, music, and films such as *The Overlanders*—a 1946 British movie—to which Stanley alluded in the *Sketch* interview. The men, and a few women, who went droving on these epic journeys are even today regarded with awe for their skill as riders, their knowledge of the Bush,

and above all, their rugged individuality, tenacity, and courage. The life of an Australian stockman, and particularly the life of a drover, was an isolated one. The men might be alone with their large herd of cattle and dogs for weeks on end. They spent many nights camping under the stars. Quiet and solitude accompanied the men. Introspection and reading, perhaps some writing, would fill the drover’s hours while away from the homestead.¹³

The Australian Bush poets, who so aptly captured the drovers’ experience, were popular in both city and country. In an era when Australians were being told to

hide their accent by adopting the manner of speech of upper-middle-class England, the residents of the new nation enjoyed hearing stories in verse, drawing on the language and experiences of the men of the Bush. The antics of fictitious characters such as the drover Saltbush Bill were published in popular magazines and newspapers and widely read. An excerpt from “Saltbush Bill” reads

*Now is the law of the Overland that all in the West
obey—
A man must cover with traveling sheep a six-mile stage
a day;
But this is the law which the drovers make, right easily
understood,
They travel their stage where the grass is bad, but they
camp where the grass is good;
They camp, and they ravage the squatter’s grass till never
a blade remains.
Then they drift away as the white clouds drift on the edge
of the saltbush plains*

BANJO PATERSON¹⁴

As in America so in Australia—it was every little boy’s dream to become a cowboy. Few found the fortitude to do so. Stanley was one who did, and it speaks volumes for the character of a man who had no fear of challenges—even under the most arduous of conditions. Moreover, his attitude to money, and willingness

to do what it took to improve a poor paycheck, were also pointers to the future. Even as a teenager, Stanley was showing signs of being made of stern stuff.

Meeting Galvin

It was during the mid-1920s that Stanley may have first met his future business partner, John A. T. Galvin, the man who would change his life forever. Though the story cannot be confirmed, one account claims that Stanley first met Galvin, a Tasmanian about his age, in Sydney, in 1924, and that the two took off together for the Northern Territory. As the story goes, the two intrepid teenagers started walking across Australia together, but how far they got, no one knows. According to the teller, they took jobs together as drovers’ assistants and boundary riders.¹⁵ Supposedly, Stanley and Galvin were involved in several early moneymaking ventures, including selling exotic birds that sailors brought back from their voyages. “Nobody knows now whether the business was profitable or not, but it was the first evidence of an interest in finches which was to stay with Stanley for the rest of his life,” according to the anonymous author of the unpublished account of Stanley’s life.¹⁶

Galvin came from less fortunate circumstances than Stanley. Born in 1908 into a large, struggling family in Hobart, in Tasmania, he attended the local Chris-

tian Brothers school, St. Virgils, where the Brothers may have allowed him to continue his studies despite problems with nonpayment of fees. Like Stanley, Galvin remembered his school days with a deep gratitude that later converted to deep pockets for school building projects, and he is today honored as a generous “Old Boy” benefactor. And again as with Stanley, Galvin early in life demonstrated personal bravery. He is credited, at age 12, in 1921, with rescuing another boy from drowning in Hobart’s mighty Derwent River.¹⁷

According to a 1962 newspaper report, Galvin’s family moved to Melbourne where, at age 15, Galvin became a messenger boy in the Price-Berry advertising agency. He remained there for about three years, when he went to New Zealand. Galvin has been described as a “bright, hard-working boy” with “dynamic drive and nerve.”¹⁸ Journalist Lachie McDonald remembered Galvin as short and dark, lively, full of nervous energy, and with the “quick wit of a thrusting salesman.” The historian Barbara Winter described him as “shrewd, energetic, courageous, generous and a bit of a scamp” but also as “reticent and mysterious.”¹⁹

Whether this pair of future merchant adventurers actually met in the Outback in their teens or later, when they both were working in advertising sales, is uncertain. However, during his wandering days in the Outback, Stanley surely would have met all kinds of men of various origins, from “new chum” English arrivals, trying their hand at life on the land, to Chinese cooks

descended from families who had arrived during the various Australian gold rushes, to Australian Aboriginal stockmen, whose low-paid labor and skills were indispensable on the huge cattle stations of northern Australia.²⁰ Stanley would have been challenged at every turn, whether through differences of culture, physical discomfort, or bearing witness to violent racist talk and injustices of all sorts. Surely his experiences impressed him, altered his worldview, and whetted his appetite for further travel and adventure.

Lost Traces of Days in Journalism

In his interview with the journalist from the *Sketch* in 1955, Stanley recounted that after his experience in the Outback, he “became a journalist as my father was before me. I worked in Australia and America.” Stories have been passed along about Stanley’s purported brief career in journalism, but none could be substantiated. One account has him working as a reporter for Sydney’s *Sun* newspaper when he was just 17—which seems unlikely. No teenager fresh out of school became a journalist on a big-city newspaper such as the *Sun* without spending years in more junior roles such as copy boys. According to another unconfirmed story, Stanley journeyed in the early 1930s to New Zealand, where he managed to land a job with New Zealand’s top-rated farm journal, the *Dairy Exporter*. (He possibly

roomed with Galvin during this time.) He also supposedly later secured a position as a consultant for New Zealand Newspapers chief Sir Cecil Leys.²¹ Searches of journalism archives from the era produced no citing of a Stanley Smith byline or any other trace of his supposed career as a journalist, although the evidence possibly could have been lost to time.

If Stanley did try to make a go of a career in journalism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, his timing was unfortunate. The Depression saw 48 New Zealand newspapers close in the 10 years following 1931. Dozens more closed in Australia. This put enormous pressure on employment in both journalism and advertising.²² And yet Stanley most certainly did manage to find work in the world of advertising and apparently quickly built a career in the field with some success.

According to one account, Stanley was “an advertising man in Adelaide and Sydney newspaper offices.” Another reminiscence stated that in 1926 he was hired as an advertising salesman at the Fordyce Wheeler agency in Sydney, where he worked alongside Galvin. From there, the story goes, the duo moved on together to the advertising department of the much larger Gordon and Gotch media company. Another account, this one from the headmaster of Stanley’s old school, Churchie, recounts that after his days as a jackaroo and drover, Stanley returned to Brisbane to work for Gordon and Gotch.²³

Questions linger about where Stanley was based

and whom he worked for as he was launching his career in advertising. What seems certain, however, is that he entered the field sometime after returning from the Outback. He either met or re-met Galvin, and the two of them wound up working together at Gordon and Gotch. From that point on, their lives remained intertwined for the next 30-some years.

First Marriage

Despite the hazy history of Stanley’s whereabouts and working life after returning from his Outback adventure, there is no doubt that by 1933 he was living in New Zealand. The evidence survives in the form of an official document: a marriage certificate. On February 22, 1933, Stanley, age 26, married Olive May Williams, age 28, in the historic St. Peter’s Church in Wellington, New Zealand’s capital city. On the certificate, Stanley gave his occupation as “advertising manager” and his residence as Wellington. Like Stanley, Olive was a Queenslander, and she gave her residence as Brisbane. She was, however, born in the western town of Mitchell. About 365 miles west of Brisbane, Mitchell was one of those towns that had grown up as a rest stop for travelers and a service center for surrounding sheep and cattle ranches. The town sprawled along unusually broad but also very dusty streets. These were lined with the usual shops, hotels, and other amenities along with traditional

western-style wooden houses with wide verandas and metal roofs. Alice Street, on which Olive’s family home was situated, was long and straight, coming finally to an end at the banks of the Maranoa River, part of a huge inland river system that not only helped to keep Outback ranches watered, but also allowed for the movement of stock across vast areas of inland Australia.²⁴

Where and how Stanley met Olive is unknown. He may have met her during his time as a jackaroo or as

a drover in Mitchell. Or perhaps they met in Brisbane. All that can be known for sure is that Olive joined Stanley in New Zealand, where they were wed.

The couple did not remain long in New Zealand. In 1934, they returned to Australia to live in Sydney, which, while not the capital city of Australia, was the nation’s first and biggest city and an excellent base for a young, ambitious man in search of career opportunities.



CHAPTER FOUR

Sydney to Singapore

Sunny Sydney in the mid-1930s had much in common with San Francisco of a decade or so earlier. Like California's city on the Bay, Sydney also looked out across the vast Pacific Ocean and owed its early development to one of the world's best harbors and a later gold rush. And like San Francisco, Sydney had its characters. It was a city with two faces. One face was brash, bold, and cheerfully shady; the other played by the rules of "the Establishment." Sydney was home to some of the nation's biggest companies and, in keeping with its harbor-side origins, also headquarters to Australian branches of international companies. It was in this commercial Establishment sector of Sydney that Stanley Smith made his mark—as New South Wales advertising manager for Gordon and Gotch.¹

Gordon and Gotch was an exciting company to be a part of in the 1930s. With its state headquarters in an ornate, High Victorian-style building on Sydney's old Barrack Street, this highly successful company was very much a respected and trusted member of the Sydney Establishment. At the same time, Gordon and Gotch also was widely regarded as one of Australia's most progressive and forward-thinking companies. Billing itself as "The World's Press Agency," the company was wholesaler and distribution agent for many international newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals and printed materials and an international advertising agent for both Australian and overseas companies.

The company was the biggest distributor of books, manuals, magazines, and



Downtown Sydney in the 1930s.



The building that housed Gordon and Gotch in Sydney. Located on Barrack Street, the seven-story building was built in 1892.

comics in Australia and New Zealand as well as a publisher in its own right. It even sold printing presses and newsprint. And it owned a network of bookshops and newsstands in both countries. Through its import/export activities, Gordon and Gotch had contacts around the globe and set national trends by importing modern books, magazines, and comic books from America into relatively more conservative Australia. In its

heyday the company was every bit as influential in Australia and New Zealand as the giants of computing technologies were in the late twentieth century.²

In financial terms, the company was a well-managed and highly regarded “blue chip” stock. Even at the height of the Great Depression, Gordon and Gotch still made a profit. After the recovery, revenue and stock prices rose rapidly with no signs of abating.³

In terms of status and financial security, Stanley had chosen well by joining the prestigious, growing Gordon and Gotch, and his career, despite its erratic start, was showing great promise. While still in his 20s, he had already been promoted to a trusted position in the company.⁴ Higher-ups in the company obviously were impressed with his performance and potential.



Sydney Harbour Bridge, 1930s.

Starting a Family in Sydney's Suburbs

Upon arriving in Sydney, Stanley and Olive chose to live in the newly desirable suburbs on what was known as the North Shore. The opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge just two years earlier, in 1932, had paved the way for the rapid development of the suburbs on the harbor's northern shore, where more land allowed for

bigger houses and bungalows with gardens. Before the bridge was erected, access to Sydney's central business district, located on the harbor's southern shore, had been difficult for residents of the North Shore and even dangerous in bad weather when ferry services were disrupted.

Olive and Stanley first set up home in Cremorne before moving into an apartment in the adjoining suburb of Neutral Bay. Before long the couple became a family. On January 29, 1936, Olive gave birth to a baby girl who was named Barbara Stanley Smith. As the 1930s drew to a close, Stanley and Olive appeared to be settling into a more mature phase of life. Stanley had presumably left his wandering years behind him.

A year or so after their daughter was born, the



Stanley, possibly taken during his employment in Sydney.

Smiths moved to the semirural suburb of Greenwich, on the northwestern side of the bridge, which today is also known as Lane Cove.⁵ In those early days, just

a few years after the opening of the bridge, housing in Greenwich was still relatively inexpensive compared with the suburbs closer to town. Moreover, the locale was considered healthier given its distance from the eastern inner-city slums that sprawled along the opposite shore. Yet commuting to the central business district from Greenwich was manageable by ferry or automobile.

Apparently comfortable in their suburban life, the Smiths surely had no inkling of the disruptions soon to occur. But big changes already were coming, because while Olive was caring for their young daughter and Stanley was dutifully commuting to the downtown offices of Gordon and Gotch, an old friend of Stanley's was in Australia's capital city of Canberra, negotiating a top secret plan involving international travel and clandestine intrigue that soon would lure Stanley away from his family, his home, and his quiet existence.

Called to Service in Singapore, 1941

The year 1941 was the great turning point in Stanley Smith's life. Australia, as a member of the British Empire, had been at war since September 1939, but as a family man in his early 30s, Stanley had been under no pressure to join the military or to participate in the war in any capacity. All that, however, was about to change.

In August 1941, a series of announcements appeared in Australian newspapers about Gordon

and Gotch and Stanley Smith. Those announcements reported that the company was expanding its operations into Singapore as well as into Asia more generally, and that the man who would be spearheading this expansion was the company's New South Wales state advertising manager, Stanley Smith.⁶

The *Telegraph* in Stanley's hometown of Brisbane, where his father still worked, carried a longer article than other newspapers. It explained that Stanley would be going to the Malay States and, over the next few months, touring much of Southeast Asia as well as China to "establish suitable trading contacts." Moreover, the "complete organization of the new company" would be in Mr. Smith's hands. To round out the importance of this lofty elevation of one of Brisbane's own, the newspaper also mentioned that he was the son of "Mr and Mrs W H Smith of Clayfield," which was not a strictly accurate reflection of the state of his parents' marriage.⁷

That, however, was the least of the deception. On the surface of things, the expansion of Gordon and Gotch into Asia appeared to be a significant milestone in the development of a well-established company that had previously shown no interest in growth beyond New Zealand. It also appeared to be a prestigious promotion for Stanley given his relatively young age. (He was 34 at the time.) But what was printed in the newspapers was in fact not at all what was really going on.

At the time, the Australian media was so convincingly downplaying the threat posed by Imperial Japan

that most Australians probably would not have questioned why a growing company would plan to expand in the Far East in 1941. In retrospect, the expansion plan seems at best ill advised.⁸ In truth, however, Gordon and Gotch had no real plans to seek new business in the Far East, and Stanley Smith was heading to Singapore not as a rainmaker for his employer but rather as a secret agent in a complicated, covert propaganda scheme devised by British intelligence masterminds to further the Empire's convoluted international aims.

Almost overnight Stanley found himself catapulted into an adventure straight out of the many books and comics that his company sold. The first step of his foray was onto a Qantas Empire flying boat to Singapore out of Sydney's first international airport, a chic art-deco terminal at Rose Base on Sydney's harbor. Travel on flying boats, known as Clippers in the United States, was extremely luxurious. All passengers flew first class, and despite some stripping back of features due to wartime austerity, the onboard accommodations were impressive. Passengers relaxed in comfy reclining seats while enjoying bar service and a delectably prepared in-flight meal on fine china with silver cutlery served by white-coated stewards. If they needed to stretch their legs, passengers could stroll along the flying boat's promenade deck and peer up into the heavens and to the sea below through huge windows. This method of travel was a thrill in itself. Even in wartime the aircraft still followed the old schedule of three overnight stopovers featuring opulent accommodations.⁹

Upon arrival in Singapore, Stanley again found himself in much more glamorous surroundings than those he had left behind in Sydney. He was allocated a luxurious apartment and an office in the brand-new Cathay Building, British Malaya's first skyscraper. Completed in August 1941 at a cost of one million dollars, the art-deco, ultra-modern Cathay Building had 16 stories and was the tallest building in Southeast Asia. Designed as a posh apartment complex, every unit had a refrigerator and a balcony. No sooner had construction been completed than the entire building, including the very sophisticated air-conditioned Cathay Cinema at the front of the building, was requisitioned by Singapore's British administration and rented to various military and government agencies—including an alphabet soup of Britain's often rivalrous propaganda agencies. These included the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation, the Far Eastern Bureau (FEB) of the Ministry of Information (MOI), the Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW), and the Special Operations Executive (SOE)—the secret organization for which Stanley would actually find himself, and Gordon and Gotch, working. Also located in offices close by SOE were the British Intelligence Services MI5 and MI6.¹⁰

As Stanley would also soon discover, his office and apartment were just the tip of a lifestyle that would provide this former jackaroo and other men, such as his old friend John Galvin, perks including their own cooks, houseboys, and, in time, even chauffeurs. It was



The Cathay Building, the first skyscraper in Singapore, in the 1940s, when Stanley would have worked there.

light-years away from the old Victorian office building and suburban life Stanley had left behind in Sydney.

Recruiting for the Covert “Oriental Mission”

The plan that led to Stanley's down-the-rabbit-hole departure from his previous existence was put in motion

in mid-1941 when Galvin briefly returned to Australia on a clandestine mission. Galvin by then was working as a secret agent for Britain's SOE in Singapore. He was sent home to recruit two reputable companies with links to international news agencies to assist in a complicated, covert propaganda effort.

By 1941 Galvin had already spent about four years in the Far East. When he first left Australia for China in 1937, he joined the reporting staff of the English-language *China Mail* newspaper, based in Hong Kong. He traveled widely in China and apparently managed to interview both Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek. Fortunately, he appears to have developed what was an unusually cordial relationship with Chiang, given the Chinese Generalissimo's distrust of foreigners.¹¹

In 1940, Galvin was recruited by the British Ministry of Information's Far Eastern Bureau (FEB) in Hong Kong. The FEB was one of several propaganda organizations created by the British in the buildup to the war. The operatives in these various organizations often found themselves “overlapping in the field and competing for the same resources,” according to historian Richard Aldrich.¹² Even within the various organizations, confusion often arose because the goals of the missions kept shifting.

In its early years, the Ministry of Information's Far Eastern Bureau's job was to spread news and information in China about Britain's strength as China's ally, to rally support for the British, and to generate anti-

Japanese sentiment. Britain's top aim was to keep China committed to fighting the Japanese, despite the devastating toll on its population. But as time moved on, more goals were added to its mission, and its activities became increasingly complicated and oblique.

The propaganda war was about the only war that the British could wage in the Far East in 1940, since after the fall of France to the Nazis, Britain actually had no capacity to fight on another front. Britain needed closer cooperation with, and more military hardware from, the ostensibly neutral United States. Despite the close personal relationship between British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the mood in America was largely isolationist. Thus Britain had added yet another propaganda aim: it also needed to sway American public opinion. By mid-1941, Britain's effort to persuade the U.S. to enter the war had become almost as important as Britain's propaganda campaigns in Asia. And this was one of the tasks to which Galvin was assigned—and for which he in turn recruited Stanley's employer, Gordon and Gotch, and Stanley himself.¹³

When MOI's Far Eastern Bureau moved from Hong Kong to Singapore in 1940, Galvin went with it. The following year, in 1941, he was recruited to join a more covert propaganda organization, one whose mission was secret, such that even some of Galvin's British and Australian civil service superiors would have no real understanding of what he was actually up to. According

to a secret communiqué sent in 1941 to Viscount Halifax, the British Ambassador to the United States, the British proposed creating a “secret bureau” in Singapore to organize clandestine activities in the Far East, including “covert propaganda as distinct from overt propaganda controlled by the Ministry of Information.”¹⁴

Eventually, the covert unit that Galvin—and later Stanley—joined became known simply as the Oriental Mission and operated under the auspices of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Formed in 1940, the SOE’s main mission at first was to foster and support resistance action in enemy territory. In the Far East, SOE agents were trained and authorized to encourage, incite, and conduct acts of espionage and sabotage in Japanese-held areas. In a world now accustomed to the outrageous exploits of James Bond, it is perhaps difficult to imagine the SOE being described in 1941 as “unique” and “very modern” and engaged in what was then regarded as an “unorthodox, irregular” type of war. At the time, however, SOE’s tactics were novel. To train its agents in the black arts of espionage, sabotage, and other subversive activities, SOE set up a special school in Singapore in July 1941.¹⁵

The Oriental Mission was also assigned to disseminate what was known as “black” propaganda. While no propaganda can ever be regarded as reliable, black propaganda was a particularly insidious form since it was devised to deceive friend and foe alike by appearing to be reliable. A particular type favored by SOE operatives was to place seemingly accurate but actually

false news stories in Allied media in the hope that enemy agents would accept the stories as truthful and relay them back to their governments. The problem was that black propaganda also deceived friendly populations.

Galvin initially was to be employed by the Oriental Mission “in connection with the printing, publishing and circulating of subversive pamphlets.”¹⁶ But that was just part of a myriad of clandestine activities that he handled, including using his journalism and advertising contacts to expand SOE’s covert propaganda operation.

When Galvin headed back to Australia in 1941, his objective was to recruit two reputable companies linked to international news agencies—the *Sydney Morning Herald* and Gordon and Gotch—to assist the SOE with its propaganda operation. Galvin gained entree to the two agencies through recommendations from Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, who had been apprised of the plan by his chief air marshal.¹⁷

Given Gordon and Gotch’s worldwide media reach, especially in the United States, the company was an obvious choice. And since Stanley Smith worked at Gordon and Gotch, it is entirely possible that Galvin specifically requested or recommended that his old friend be assigned as Gordon and Gotch’s man in Singapore.

The other organization, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was to assign correspondents to major Asian cities, including Singapore, Hong Kong, and Chungking. The correspondents would write articles for the *Sydney*

Morning Herald, aimed at swaying public opinion, and those articles eventually would be picked up by North American news agencies and would find their way onto the front pages of newspapers throughout America and beyond. As those who have made a study of World War Two and its propaganda have noted, this was an

era in which journalists moved “effortlessly” between journalism duties and secret services activities.¹⁸

In time Stanley, largely through Galvin, became involved in a myriad of British intelligence operations that were so labyrinthine that agents learned to keep secrets even from each other.



CHAPTER FIVE

Secret Agent in Singapore

When Stanley left Australia in 1941, he left a great deal more than a wife, a daughter, and a home behind. He left his identity and an entire way of life. Never again would he be Stanley Smith the advertising executive. When he stepped into his new office in Singapore, he was taking on a new life, a new role, a new persona. He was entering a wartime cloak-and-dagger world where nothing was ever quite what it seemed. It was a world in which he and his secret service colleagues were subject to the British Official Secrets Act and were bound, quite literally on pain of death by hanging, never to speak or write of their covert activities. By the start of World War Two in Europe, this Act had become a well-defined and well-understood part of

British public service and military culture. It was the stuff of the novels on which British Empire schoolboys were raised. There were many variations on the wartime posters that warned in bold letters, “Loose Lips Might Sink Ships.” Everyone was familiar with the notion that secrets protected the realm. And perhaps because Stanley had to abide by that oath of secrecy, for the rest of his life whenever he was asked publicly what he did during the war, he would invariably stick to the official story and say that he’d been the representative of Britain’s Ministry of Information (MOI) in China and first secretary in the British Embassy in Chungking, rarely if ever mentioning his clandestine activities for Britain’s ultra-secret Special Operations Executive (SOE).



Singapore just before World War Two.

When Stanley arrived in Singapore in late August/early September of 1941, the British Crown colony of Singapore was living on borrowed time in much the same way Hawaii was and for much the same reason. People in both places wrongly assumed that an attack by the Japanese, although possible, was still avoidable. The bombings in December would prove them wrong. Unlike Hawaii, Singapore would be occupied by the Japanese and therefore would suffer a great deal more, and for much longer. The realization that there was a threat from Japan would come too late to save Singapore. However, when Stanley arrived three months before the bombings, he would have found a Far Eastern British colony that regarded the war in Europe as too far away to be of any concern and where expatriates were still enjoying a carefree and lavish imperial lifestyle of a type they could never have dreamed of in Britain or Australia. It was a lifestyle to which Stanley apparently became quickly accustomed and one that, after the war, he soon resumed.

Like other new arrivals, Stanley stayed initially at the opulent Raffles Hotel and no doubt enjoyed dinners either there or in the flat of friend John Galvin, who now had his own Chinese cook.¹ Stanley then moved into his new apartment in the deluxe Cathay, a high-rise building that also housed his air-conditioned office. There he had his own English-speaking Chinese stenographer/secretary, as befitted a man involved in an operation that circled the globe.

As an agent of the SOE's Oriental Mission, Stanley

was now working in an environment for which his father had hoped an elite private-school education might equip him—with men who were movers and shakers, men who were leaders in their fields. His immediate superior in the Oriental Mission was Professor Sir George Sansom, a British career diplomat held in high regard as the world's leading authority on Japan. Above Sansom, and in overall charge of the mission, was Valentine St. John Killery, former Managing Director of ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) China, who was ostensibly employed by the British Ministry of Economic Warfare but went by the SOE code name O.100.² Also in the office was one of Australia's most senior and respected journalists, C. E. (Ted) Sayers. As Press Liaison Officer for SOE's Oriental Mission, Sayers, among other things, hosted and briefed journalists and other potentially useful men who passed through Singapore.³ All were involved in the "great game," that competition among world powers for territory and influence, a competition that inevitably involved methods of deceit and deception that are the handmaidens of war. In the case of SOE's Oriental Mission, however, Stanley found himself caught up in a game in which the objectives were too numerous and never entirely clear. In the words of Guy Wint, an Oxford scholar involved in the early planning of the Oriental Mission, the project was "rather nebulous."⁴ Stanley must have initially scrambled to gain his footing and make sense of the bewilderingly complex situation in which he found himself.

On one level, the Oriental Mission's job was to

wage psychological warfare against Japan—to instill fear, mistrust, and doubt in the Japanese about the wisdom of waging war against the combined might of Britain and America. This was the objective for which Professor Sansom had been recruited. On the basis of his intimate knowledge of the Japanese, their mores, and their culture, secret service planners in London regarded Sansom as “outstandingly suitable” to take “general charge of the propaganda side of the work” for the Oriental Mission. They had lured the recently retired diplomat from a lecturing position at Columbia University to join the mission.⁵

The instruments used by Oriental Mission operatives were a worldwide whispering campaign, and radio, film, and print propaganda as well as leaflets, dropped by balloon if necessary, wherever Japanese people could be reached. The propaganda message to the Japanese emphasized the indomitable British and American alliance; the superiority of their modern naval and air power; and, last but not least, the impregnability of Singapore as an imperial island fortress. The propaganda did not have to be true, it just had to appear to be true and, preferably, be distributed by trustworthy sources.⁶ And that, seemingly, was where Stanley came in.

Stanley appears to have been recruited to secretly use his Gordon and Gotch expertise and contacts to establish links between news organizations, such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and international news distribution networks, particularly those that operated in the

United States. It was through his connections that news articles, deliberately manipulated to advance Great Britain’s political aims, were to be circulated to Americans and other people throughout the world.

In actuality, however, Stanley appears to have been drawn into something altogether different. While his Gordon and Gotch contacts undoubtedly had some value, the British already had two very successful covert news agencies up and running. One was Britnova Ltd. in London, set up by the British secret intelligence agency MI6 as a commercial news agency; the other was its New York counterpart, the flourishing Overseas News Agency (ONA). This New York agency was big and well respected. It had not only strong relationships with a string of influential newspapers such as the *Baltimore Sun*, *Herald Tribune*, and *New York Post*, but also its own radio station, WRUL. This system, in combination with other news agencies such as the hugely influential North American News Association syndicate (NANA), allowed the British to plant in the U.S. media stories seemingly “home grown” and, therefore, above suspicion.⁷ Stanley may have spent some time planting and disseminating fake news stories and producing propaganda in Singapore, but it seems that he soon was pointed in a different direction entirely and didn’t remain deskbound very long.

For Oriental Mission activities were not just about spreading propaganda but also about intelligence gathering—an operation carried out under an *additional*

layer of deep cover. Stanley may have helped set up international contacts for the propaganda operation, but that task apparently was either completed relatively quickly or transferred to the largely unsuspecting Australian journalist Sayers.⁸ After that, Stanley also appears to have been employed in intelligence gathering by Galvin. Both men most likely were, according to Lady Katharine Sansom, wife of Sir George Sansom, among those SOE agents “continually sent to take a look around the neighbouring countries.”

According to Lady Sansom:

*The job was to collect accurate information about events and psychological movements in Malaya, South China, Thailand, Burma, and of course Singapore Island itself. Working on these “Special Operations” was a group of men, most of whom were already known to us, and included several who had studied Japanese in Tokyo. Up in Chungking, now the Chinese capital since the Japanese sacking of Nanking, there were Embassy Secretaries who continually flew over the Burma Road, known as the Hump, to bring information down to the Mission; and various other members in scattered cities would also drop in.*⁹

Although Lady Sansom does not mention Stanley here by name, he no doubt was sent out on these intelligence gathering missions and perhaps even on some guerrilla operations. According to an anonymous writer

who attempted to compile Stanley’s life story after the war, Stanley established and headed up “his own underground information network” while based in Singapore.¹⁰ And Stanley himself shared a bit about some of his covert exploits when he met with the mild-mannered, somewhat naïve Australian ambassador, Sir Frederic Eggleston, in Chungking in early 1942. As Eggleston recorded, “[Stanley Smith] spent the night and told me that he had been engaged in passing counterfeit money to the Japanese and he also said that he had infected the tobacco crops in Thailand with some rust or other.”¹¹

Could the stories Eggleston claims Stanley told him be true? The answer is: quite possibly yes.

Although Stanley’s specific activities as an SOE secret agent are hard to pin down, British agents were involved in the Japanese counterfeit currency market.¹² The SOE earned millions during the war in secret missions that involved smuggling luxury items, trading wartime goods, and manipulating currency on the Chinese black market. The proceeds were used by the British to finance their operations and organizations in China.¹³ Furthermore, it also is conceivable that Stanley engaged in covert missions such as infecting tobacco crops in Thailand. Other sources also report that Stanley spent time in Thailand. Dorothy Jenner, a columnist for the Sydney newspaper *Truth*, who wrote under the pen name Andrea, told the story in a July 1954 column of how she met Stanley Smith in 1941 when they were both staying at the posh Oriental Hotel in Bangkok.

As former war correspondent Jenner recalled it, Stanley was “on an intensive survey of Northern Siam [Thailand’s former name]” for his employer, Gordon and Gotch. She may have believed his cover story, but more likely she was well aware of what he was really doing in Thailand and discretely chose not to print it. “He was very kind to me: sparing much of his time to show me the sights,” Jenner wrote. “I guess he realised [*sic*] that the hourglass was running out.” Jenner went on to recall that Stanley fell ill with malaria, and she nursed him until she left for Burma.¹⁴

Stanley likely traveled extensively in the region after arriving in the Far East. According to the anonymous author of the unpublished manuscript about his life, Stanley was in Singapore when it fell to the Japanese on February 15, 1942, and was one of the last foreign nationals to leave. This source recounts that Stanley then traveled to Bangkok and that he was also in Bangkok when it was bombed by the Japanese.¹⁵

If this was the case, Stanley may have gone to Thailand several different times. Thailand was an area in which the SOE, and its guerrilla forces, were busy both before and after Japan’s invasion. It was a murky area of somewhat confused Allied agency operations and, as academic E. Bruce Reynolds has noted, subject to “myriad plots and sub plots.”¹⁶ Had Stanley been in Thailand during this time, he surely would have had quite a story to tell. But, if so, it’s a story he apparently took with him to his grave.

Although the Oriental Mission’s intelligence gathering and guerrilla activities were kept secret from some members of the Mission’s propaganda staff in its Singapore offices, it certainly did not take the Mission’s Press Liaison Officer, Ted Sayers, long to recognize that he was not working with professional journalists. While Sayers never really understood what Stanley and Galvin were actually doing, he did conclude within weeks of arriving in Singapore that they were not what they claimed to be. “I am,” Sayers moaned in mid-September, “the only worthwhile working journalist.”¹⁷ Within two weeks of his arrival in Singapore, Sayers was given an expanded role, which appears to have included some of the work originally anticipated by Stanley.¹⁸

Stanley’s service in the Oriental Mission seems to have been much more active and hands-on than he had perhaps anticipated when approached by Galvin back in sunny Sydney. But it is difficult to confirm exactly what Stanley accomplished as an SOE agent. Bound to secrecy, he offered almost no clues; and very few traces of Stanley can be found in general histories of SOE activities during the war. His activities may have been recorded in top secret SOE telegrams and memoranda, but many original SOE documents were lost or destroyed after the war. Those that survived are housed at the British National Archives at Kew in England, and although many are now publicly available, some documents are still classified, especially when top secret operations are discussed.¹⁹ Details of Stanley’s wartime

experiences might be buried among the reams of SOE files, which are filled with obscure official telegrams, reports, and memos, and in which operatives are referred to not by their names but by their assigned numbers.²⁰

In any event, his time with the Oriental Mission lasted no more than four or five months. That mysterious chapter of his life would end soon after Japanese bombs fell throughout the Far East in December 1941.



CHAPTER SIX

Decamping to Chungking

The day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the staff at SOE's offices in Singapore began burning sensitive papers. Despite the propaganda that SOE had been pumping out about impenetrable "Fortress Singapore," the truth of Singapore's vulnerability could no longer be evaded. Hours after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, it also attacked the U.S.-held Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island, as well as the British Empire in Malaya, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The whole of East Asia was soon at war. British and other western colonies and territories began falling like ninepins before a rapid and very powerful Japanese onslaught. As Japanese ground troops advanced toward Singapore, SOE agents secretly started making preparations for defeat.

There and elsewhere all over Asia, British and other Allied civilian personnel be-

gan evacuating in anticipation of a Japanese takeover. In Singapore, the SOE was trying to prepare those agents it planned to leave behind to continue working clandestinely against the Japanese. It was a time of frantic activity and uncertainty. Amid the frenzy, Stanley apparently continued rushing between Singapore, Malaya, Burma, Thailand, India, and China, working on special operations and intelligence gathering.¹

Then in January 1942 Stanley was handed a new assignment. According to documents housed at the British National Archives, he was named to a small team of SOE agents charged with building a new, robust propaganda operation in Chungking (Chongqing), the Kuomintang's wartime capital, to bolster British prestige in China.²

The Japanese attacks had brought about a rapid change in British propaganda

◀ A street scene in Chungking, about 1940.

priorities. Trying to sway public opinion in Japan instantly became moot. And with the United States fully engaged in the Pacific War, the British no longer needed to direct scarce manpower and resources to influencing American opinion. China was now a top priority.

SOE's Oriental Mission in Singapore was disbanded. And suddenly the insignificant and somewhat neglected British propaganda unit in Chungking became "far and away the most important centre in the Far East" and required "urgent expansion."³ The new propaganda priority was to keep Chinese attention, and in particular Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang, focused on the war against Japan. For as the British and its allies realized, without unflagging Chinese resistance, "Japan's imperial ambitions would have been much easier to fulfill."⁴

Britain had always pursued a policy of trying to persuade China's warring factions—Chiang's Nationalists and Mao Tse-tung's Communists—to stay committed to fighting the Japanese rather than each other. This was spelled out in top secret planning documents in 1941, which also revealed that to some extent Britain shared the Kuomintang's fears that in the long run China's Communists would prove a greater threat than the Japanese.⁵ With Britain firmly on the side of the Kuomintang, the task now fell to Britain's propagandists to persuade the Chinese that allying themselves with the British in the war against Japan was in their best interests and would lead after the war to material advantages and financial support.⁶

As one British intelligence official put it in early 1942:

The Chinese people (400 to 500 millions) have had insubstantial encouragement from us in the past and many disappointments. They should be made to feel that their families can only be saved from obscure poverty through the maintenance of the A.B.C.D. [America, Britain, China, Dutch] front against Japan and that we have a good world to offer them after the war.⁷

Britain, however, also had an economic agenda. Many British companies had a substantial stake in colonial Hong Kong. When the island mercantile hub fell to the Japanese on Christmas Day 1941, commerce was suddenly disrupted. The only hope of restoring British trade in the Far East hinged on winning Hong Kong back. In fact, some historians have suggested that regaining the island for Britain and British businesses was the real motivation for much SOE wartime activity in China.

According to one of these historians, Richard Aldrich: "In the long term, the SOE hoped to prepare the ground for a British return to Hong Kong. The SOE were thus prepared to cooperate with anyone who would help to establish a foothold in the adjacent South East region of China."⁸ In reality, this long-term planning could only be done from Chungking, the inland capital of Free China.

The British recognized that maintaining China's allegiance and ultimately regaining Hong Kong would

require a highly effective propaganda campaign. The problem was that Japan's sudden and undeclared act of war had also caught British propaganda organizations off guard. They were completely unprepared to quickly expand their operations in Chungking, or anywhere else for that matter. They had few China experts in London and only a handful at their biggest Far Eastern post—SOE's Oriental Mission in Singapore.

Even before the Japanese attacks in December 1941, British intelligence officials had acknowledged that their organizations in Chungking were "entirely inadequate" to "make the British case" to the men in Chungking "who shape China's present policy and [to] the young men who will shape future policies."⁹ The British Press Attaché, W. Gordon Harmon, who had been in charge of Britain's small and limited propaganda operation in Chungking up to 1941, was very sick with typhus and incapable of performing his duties. Finding qualified civilians to send to Chungking to replace him, and to expand the propaganda campaign, was no easy task.

Chungking was known as a very tough posting with few resources and a lot of "unhappy foreigners."¹⁰ It was the post that nobody wanted. Only the hardest and most resourceful individuals could be entrusted with the task of putting together the new propaganda outfit. Sir George Sansom, chief of SOE's Oriental Mission, decided that the forceful Australian, John Galvin, was the best man for the job. In September 1941, Galvin was released from the Oriental Mission to the Ministry of Information (MOI) as a "publicity consultant."¹¹



Stanley Smith, British Ministry of Information Representative, Chungking, 1945.

(In other accounts, he is referred to as an "efficiency expert.")¹² Also assigned to the propaganda-planning team were two other SOE agents from the Singapore staff: respected Chinese expert Findlay Andrew and another resilient Australian—Stanley Smith.¹³



◀ Westerners arrive and are carried into Chungking in sedan chairs, 1941. ▲ Chinese children at play. ▶ View of Chungking and the Jialing River, 1941.

Most Bombed City in the World

When Stanley arrived in Chungking in early 1942, he found himself in a bombed-out, rubble-strewn scene in which people were short on food and other basic commodities and were coping the best they could in overcrowded, makeshift premises badly in need of repair.¹⁴ He no doubt quickly understood why Chungking was considered a hardship post among British civil servants. As a center of operations for a major new Far East propaganda offensive, it really was not fit for purpose.

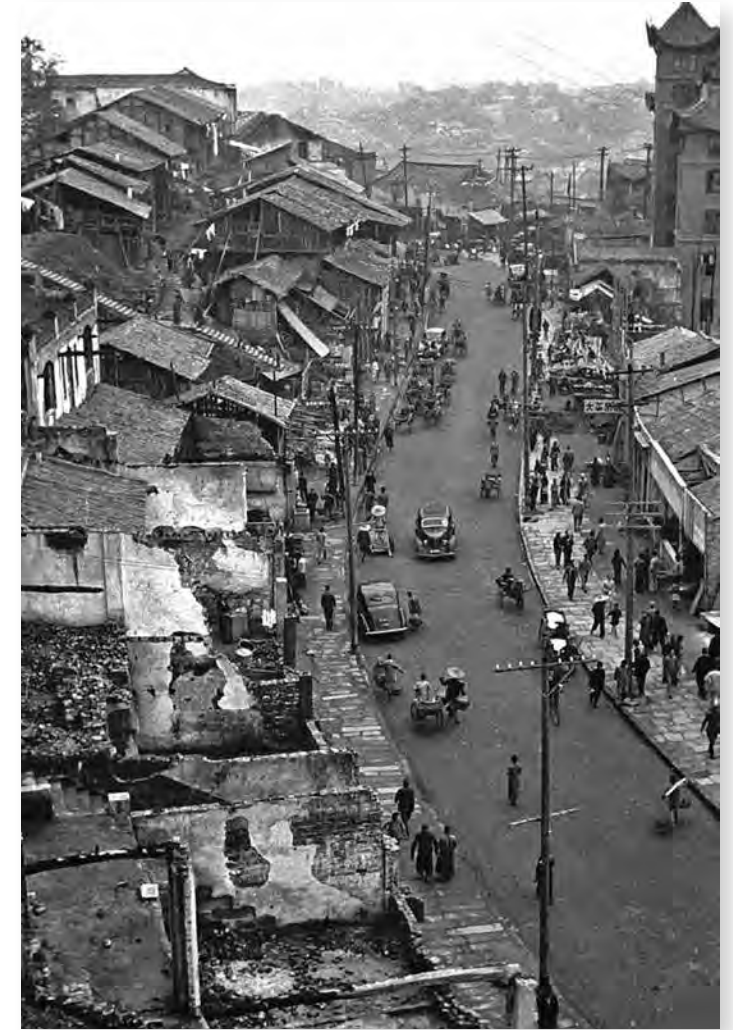
Before 1937, Chungking had been an unremarkable Szechuan river market town of traditional Chinese

buildings built on a peninsula between the Yangtze and Chialing (Jialing) rivers and surrounded by hills. After the Kuomintang relocated its capital from Nanking to Chungking in 1937, Chungking was subjected to repeated Japanese bombing campaigns. In fact, Chungking held the distinction in that era as the world's most bombed city. Between 1938 and 1942, virtually all historic monuments and temples were damaged or destroyed. By the time Stanley arrived, the Japanese had scaled back their bombing raids, but the evidence of their earlier efforts lay all around. There were few buildings still standing and intact. Most of the rest were missing walls and had roofs that leaked in the torrential rains of the monsoon season. The city was crowded

with refugees who had fled from areas that the Japanese had invaded.¹⁵ Many ordinary folk were still living in caves tunneled into the surrounding hillsides or underground. According to one report, Chungking was a “vast, sprawling slum of jerry built houses” with the “worst climate in the world”—cloaked as it was in fog for seven months of the year and subject to “blistering heat” for the other five. It also bred diseases such as typhus and cholera.¹⁶

The problems facing Stanley and his colleagues were enormous and might have felled other men. Perhaps at this point in his career Stanley's earlier life experiences of hardship and the toughness required for survival in Australia's harsh Outback stood him in good stead.

Beyond the lack of adequate resources, Stanley found himself in a city where the British were increasingly less welcome. China's Nationalist leader Chiang saw the British as imperialists who looked down their noses at the Chinese and regarded China merely as a source of profits.¹⁷ The harsh reality was that in 1942 Britain had nothing to offer the Chinese in exchange for their cooperation and allegiance. As those involved in the early planning of SOE activity in China admitted in an internal memorandum, there were “strict limits on the concrete assistance” that could be given Chungking. Their so-called Chinese scheme, the British acknowledged, was largely “a political one,” because Britain had no spare armaments or supplies to offer the Chinese. While they could (and did) share valuable



A bombed-out street in Chungking, November 1941.

information and provide support and encouragement, in reality they had nothing more to offer to win over the Chinese other than the message that the British were good friends to have on their side. To be persuasive, that message would have to be carefully crafted and skillfully delivered.¹⁸

By the time Stanley arrived in Chungking, Chiang was becoming increasingly annoyed with Britain. A war of words was heating up over who was to blame for the loss of first Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1941 and then Singapore in mid-February 1942. He was also irritated by interference in China by British undercover operatives. Chiang had firmly indicated that British intelligence agencies and agents were not welcome in his wartime capital of Chungking. When that warning was ignored, Chiang expelled an SOE guerrilla unit.¹⁹ Relations reached their lowest public point when Madame Chiang criticized Britain in an article in the *New York Times* in April 1942. Britain's scorn of so-called Chinese weakness was unwarranted, wrote China's irate First Lady. Britain, not China, was to blame for the loss of Hong Kong and Singapore.²⁰ It was a public relations nightmare.

A Place to Hang Their Hats

To jumpstart its new China propaganda plan, the planning team was given a budget of £45,000 for three months, from January to March 1942, by MOI chiefs

in London.²¹ Before they could begin their work in earnest, however, the team members needed to find places in Chungking to hang their hats where the chances of them being tossed out of the country by the Kuomintang would be minimized. Given that Chiang was hardly likely to welcome another SOE operation, Galvin tried to secure more acceptable official positions as covers for himself and Stanley. He thought if he and Stanley could join the staff of the Australian Embassy at Chungking, they would be able to remain in the city to continue their propaganda and intelligence work undisturbed. The scheme had the backing of the British ambassador, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr. It appeared entirely logical given growing Chinese antagonism toward Britain and the apparent popularity of the Australian ambassador in Chungking. No sooner was the scheme about to be implemented, however, than the timorous ambassador took fright.

This was the scholarly Sir Frederic Eggleston, an Australian lawyer, politician, public servant, author, and conversationalist. A large, mild-mannered man prone to gout, Eggleston was more at home with books than spies. During his time in Chungking he developed excellent relationships with Chinese intellectuals, academics, educationists, and artists. According to British intelligence officer and writer Robert Payne, Eggleston was also the most popular of all the foreign diplomats, especially with Chiang.²² However, since Eggleston preferred spending his time living “quietly in his great house” in Chungking, he appears to have been rarely

seen by the Generalissimo or anyone else who did not make his way to that great house.²³ Apart from his lack of experience in diplomatic service, Eggleston also appears to have been somewhat naïve about the realities of embassies and their secret services, especially during wartime.

In early 1942 British Ambassador Kerr, who had been privy to SOE's Far East mission almost since its inception, asked Eggleston to take Stanley and/or Galvin as Australian Embassy staff “to give them cover” as they “would do secret service work.” According to Eggleston, Galvin was “high up in the secret service in India.”²⁴ (Exactly how high up Galvin actually was in the SOE hierarchy is not clear. The various stories about Galvin's and Stanley's wartime roles and ranks are confused and confusing.)

When Eggleston met with Galvin in Chungking, Galvin told the Australian diplomat that he, in fact, did not want to join the Embassy's staff but was “very anxious” that Stanley should be given that cover. Eggleston later hosted Stanley at his home, and it was on that occasion that Stanley confided in him that as a secret agent he had passed counterfeit money to the Japanese and infected tobacco crops in Thailand. As Eggleston recounted, “This latter project alarmed me and I decided to have nothing to do with Stanley . . .”²⁵

Having been rejected by the fainthearted Eggleston, Galvin and Stanley were left to find other covers for themselves. Fortunately, the third member of their team—Findlay Andrew—led them to a solution. A for-

mer missionary born in China to British missionary parents, Andrew was an internationally acknowledged expert on China, its people, and its culture. He had spent many years with the prominent trading company Butterfield and Swire and was very well regarded by Chiang Kai-shek. This was an important consideration as personal relationships counted for a great deal in China. Andrew was also a trusted British intelligence agent of long standing. In late 1941 he moved to Chungking as the SOE's eyes and ears. His cover was a position as adviser to the local Institute of International Relations, which was actually a Kuomintang intelligence and propaganda outfit that received part of its funding from the SOE in exchange for intelligence sharing. In 1942 the institute appointed two more “advisers”—Galvin and Stanley. To further conceal their true purpose, Stanley and Galvin also were named members of a newly formed Research and Investment Institute.²⁶ With their covers secured, they now were set to focus on the real work with which they'd been tasked.

Getting to Work

Along with his institute position, Findlay Andrew was also appointed by the Ministry of Information (MOI) as temporary press attaché at the British Embassy in Chungking. Prior to 1942, the press attaché and his meager staff were solely responsible for disseminating British propaganda in China, almost all of which was actually

produced in Delhi and London. Clearly, the propaganda operation would now need to be beefed up. The question was which British agency would run the show?

At this point in the war, Britain's tangle of competing intelligence and propaganda agencies was being restructured, and there was a great deal of jockeying between organizations and individuals operating in the Far East. China had traditionally been MOI territory, and that agency had its own plans for propaganda that did not include SOE. SOE and MOI initially toyed with the idea of a sort of "shared custody" of the propaganda unit in China, with half the staff supplied and answerable to SOE and the other half to MOI.²⁷ In the end, however, it was determined that MOI, rather than SOE, would be in charge of Britain's new propaganda campaign. Galvin would serve as acting director of MOI's Far Eastern operations.²⁸ Stanley initially was assigned the position of MOI's director of publicity, responsible for general literature, films, and radio. He was also one of two assistant press attachés answerable to Andrew, who as temporary press attaché, was in charge of a team of about two dozen people.²⁹

New staff members soon began trickling into Chungking to join the growing unit, which was to focus on overt propaganda efforts, leaving the covert operations to others.³⁰ A telegram sent from MOI headquarters in London to Andrew and Galvin in Chungking in February 1942 congratulated them on "the energetic progress" they had made in the reorganization of the propaganda activities in China. It also made clear that these activities would "come under Press Attaché Chung-



Stanley standing with a group (possibly staffers from MOI in Chungking).

king, under direct instructions from [MOI headquarters] London, in consultation with the Ambassador."³¹

One of Stanley's and Galvin's first tasks in Chungking was to aid and debrief a large group of military and civilian personnel who had escaped from Hong Kong, in motorboats, under Japanese gunfire, after Hong Kong's capitulation on Christmas Day 1941. The group of escapees had made their way to mainland China. Among the group was David MacDougall, head of MOI's Hong Kong office.³²

MacDougall and his fellow escapees' overland getaway was harrowing and dangerous. Stanley and Galvin made sure the story of the daring escape, especially its meticulous planning and the heroism of the participants, made good news headlines in Allied newspapers



▲ Stanley (center, in hat) at a picnic with several Chinese men. ► Stanley poses with a group of Chinese women.



around the world at a time when Japan appeared to be marching unhindered through Asia.

Galvin had pegged MacDougall to take over as press attaché from Andrew upon his arrival in Chungking. But during the escape, MacDougall had taken a Japanese bullet in one shoulder, and not even the "best hospital in China"—the Canadian-run West China Union University Hospital in Chengtu—could remove it.³³ MacDougall opted to go home to Britain, get the bullet removed, rest, and recuperate. But his and Stanley's and Galvin's paths would cross again after the war in mutually beneficial ways.

As plans for Britain's new propaganda campaign

in China evolved back in the halls of government in London, the three members of the propaganda planning team in Chungking soon found themselves headed off in different directions. In mid-1942 Galvin was summoned to London, where he became MOI adviser on the Far East. He later was sent to MOI's Far Eastern Bureau in New Delhi. Meanwhile, Andrew left his position as temporary press attaché and returned to SOE duties associated with the Institute of International Relations in Chungking. That was where the British government, desperate for intelligence in what was now a somewhat hostile Free China, wanted him. With no one else apparently willing or able to take over

Andrew's post, Stanley surfaced out of the chaos in the role of acting press attaché in April 1942.³⁴ A month or so later, the staff was reorganized yet again, and Stanley was elevated to a newly created position as Chief MOI Representative in charge of Chinese operations. The press attaché position was filled by another man, Erik Watts.³⁵

Stanley's appointment, seemingly from nowhere, took even the London-based head of MOI's Far East Section, John de la Valette, by surprise. He apparently had not even *heard* of Stanley Smith.³⁶ Yet just three months later, in July 1942, de la Valette confirmed Stanley's appointment as MOI's chief representative in China. Not only that, but because of Chungking's dangerous situation with the Japanese front line just 50 miles away, Stanley was also accorded the rank of Counsellor on the British Diplomatic List to provide him with diplomatic immunity. Stanley was now in charge of a self-contained unit that was theoretically responsible to the Director of the Far Eastern Bureau (FEB) based in New Delhi but actually received its directives and guidance direct from MOI headquarters in London.³⁷

The MOI's newly appointed FEB Director, P. D. Butler, was not happy with Stanley's appointment. His reaction provides a taste of the type of British establishment opposition that men such as Stanley and Galvin encountered when trying to get things moving. Over the next few months Butler developed a series of outlandish plans to get Stanley out of the Chungking job. This included deriding Stanley and his lack of journal-

ism expertise to his superiors. Butler was not a journalist. He was an elderly British career diplomat, and he used his diplomatic experience to go straight to the top. Stanley was "certainly not ideal head," Butler wrote to a fellow career diplomat who had recently served in India, Lord Samuel Hood. Hood was at that time a senior MOI officer in London working directly for the Information Minister, Brendan Bracken. Butler made sure his letter was also copied to British Ambassador to China Sir Horace Seymour, in Chungking. (Seymour replaced Kerr as ambassador in January 1942.) The problem, as even Butler himself acknowledged, was that MOI Far East was very short of journalists. Still, he wasn't backing down.³⁸

From his office in New Delhi, Butler headed for Chungking to confront Stanley in person and to remove him from the post.³⁹ According to Butler's deputy, Ted Sayers, Butler returned a "muddle-headed old fool" over-awed by the "forcefulness" of Smith's character.⁴⁰ After that Butler wanted no overt interference from the FEB in Stanley's work.⁴¹ But that did not mean he had given up on efforts to keep Stanley on a short leash. Butler next proposed to MOI headquarters in London that two embassy representatives be appointed to his staff in Delhi to oversee MOI's China operation. According to his proposal, these representatives would take turns visiting MOI's offices in China to advise Stanley and check up on the propaganda campaign and then report back to Butler to keep him in closer touch with that country. This proposal apparently went no-



Two views of what is probably a room at the Chungking office.

where, and within a year Butler was relieved of his MOI post in India,⁴² and Stanley was finally free to focus on his formidable assignment without constantly having to look over his shoulder—at least for a while.

Stanley remained head of MOI operations in China for the next four years. While his background in journalism and management may not have been strong, he could think on his feet and cope with challenging conditions. Not only that, but it appears his London masters had less knowledge of China, its problems, and its challenges than they were apt to admit. Stanley Smith was a man who made the most of opportunity when it came his way, but Chungking was an extremely

difficult and challenging posting that would require all his hard-earned experience of life and its hardships.

Building an Efficient Propaganda Machine

In his new job Stanley likely realized from the get-go that he was going to have a tall order to fill. He was charged with revamping and expanding a weak, understaffed propaganda organization that had been lurching from crisis to crisis, entirely overwhelmed and



An office scene, possibly at the Ministry of Information in Chungking.

inadequate to meet the task at hand. David MacDougall, then head of MOI in Hong Kong, wrote a confidential report on November 6, 1941, a month prior to his escape, assessing the state of MOI's Chungking propaganda operation for his London chiefs:

[Propaganda] material is arriving regularly from London, Singapore, and Hong Kong in increased quantities; no one has time to check and list what is received or what is sent out. . . . no one has time to make or keep files or to ensure that each letter [received] is dealt with and answered. Numbers of films are being received but no one

has been able to compile an accurate list or to devise a system capable of keeping track of the various reels or of ensuring their most advantageous distribution . . .

There can have been few occasions when a new organisation has been called on to find its feet in more fantastically difficult conditions. Any day in summer twelve to sixteen hours out of the twenty-four may have to be spent in dugouts; records, files, offices and quarters may vanish (and frequently have vanished) overnight. Communications and mails grow daily more impossible. It is not quite clear to an outsider exactly how the staff has managed to carry on; but somehow they have contrived to keep the office going and no praise is too high for that environment.⁴³

Five months after MacDougall wrote his alarming review, the job of turning around this dismal situation fell to Stanley, a 35-year-old advertising manager and rookie secret service agent who had little to no prior experience as a journalist or a manager.⁴⁴ As Stanley explained in a memo to his MOI higher-ups, he started “from somewhere near scratch” and “without any previous experience of Government departments,” working “under the most difficult and primitive circumstances.”⁴⁵ Yet he dutifully took command of the overburdened, war-weary staff of British civil servants and Chinese employees and set his sights on scaling up to create an efficient and eventually self-supporting “propaganda machine”⁴⁶ that could meet the department’s long list of ambitious objectives. He was



▲ Stanley with local workers. ▼ Two laborers haul rock through the streets of Chungking, 1941.



Chungking street scene, 1941 or 1942.

in charge of a team that grew first to 150 and eventually to 200 people, working out of headquarters in Chungking with branch offices in Kunming and Chengtu, and later also briefly in Kweilin. Records show that Stanley’s annual salary of £1700 was higher than anyone else’s on the MOI staff in China, a reflection of the responsibility attached to the new post.⁴⁷

Chungking by then was no backwater. Major news organizations had resident correspondents assigned to the wartime capital. Scores of others came and went. All were looking for copy, and doubtless Stanley and his staff fed them what they thought would be useful to the British interest. Beyond courting journalists, Stanley’s

staff was responsible for disseminating an enormous amount of propaganda material, including news bulletins, pamphlets, posters, filmstrips, slideshows, films, and radio broadcasts. Much of the material destined for distribution in China was still produced by MOI staff in New Delhi and in London, but Stanley's staff also included writers, editors, broadcast journalists, and filmmakers who were responsible for producing effectively worded articles and pamphlets and editing newsreels and feature films on location. The carefully targeted aim, according to Stanley's London chiefs, was to "influence the ruling and influential circles in China" so that "our propaganda percolates down to the masses." Stanley's staff was instructed to steer clear of "entanglement in Chinese internal politics."⁴⁸ Chinese leadership also didn't want any surprises in the propaganda Stanley's unit put out. To that end, the staff was to collaborate with Chinese authorities on all propaganda dispensed in Free China as well as in Japanese-occupied territories.⁴⁹

A secret MOI document, dated February 2, 1943, lays out the "Plan for Propaganda to China" and lists a wide range of assignments that were to be completed under Stanley's direction according to a demanding timetable.⁵⁰ Included on the list were

- Regular broadcasts on XGOY radio in Chungking, and regular rebroadcasts of the BBC from Chengtu
- Production and dissemination of 400 articles

per month, published in British and Chinese periodicals

- Daily bulletins written and printed in English (circulation of 10,000)
- "Information please" pamphlets written in Chinese (circulation of 21,000)
- Production of the photo supplement *Weekly* in Chinese (circulation of 21,000)
- Production of a weekly Chinese newsletter (circulation of 60,000)
- Digests of British newspapers in English (circulation of 12,500), designed to reach "the better-educated classes and English-speaking Chinese generally."
- Production of the bilingual Students' *Sino-British Weekly* (circulation of 10,000)—targeted at middle school students
- "International Series" weekly in Chinese (circ. 20,000)

Additionally, Stanley's staff was to support Chinese student aid and general relief organizations monetarily and with publicity as a way of "demonstrating to the Chinese the interest and sympathy of the British people for their country."⁵¹ An initial budget of £120,000 was approved for the propaganda unit. (The operation also earned revenue through sales of books and publications and movie theater tickets.)⁵²

To meet the high-reaching objectives set for the department, the staff needed to expand. Stanley con-

tinued filling vacancies and new positions. The new recruits came from other British agencies and embassies in Singapore, Hong Kong, Calcutta, Burma, and London. After visiting Chungking in May 1942, a MOI higher-up in London reported that in April and May, MOI's China unit had added an accountant/office manager, film and radio technicians, stenographers, writers, print and radio journalists, and other office workers.⁵³

Despite their far-reaching expectations for the Chungking operation, MOI higher-ups in London quickly started to complain about what they called "excessive" salaries in China and continued to complain for the rest of the years of the unit's operation. Stanley was forced to explain that conditions in Chungking were like nowhere else. European food prices were 64 times higher than they had been at the start of the Sino-Japanese war. By September 1942, prices were twice what they had been at the start of the year.⁵⁴

In addition to mollifying his superiors in London about MOI salaries, Stanley had to act quickly to keep the Chinese operation from slipping back into the pattern of never-ending crises and the resultant inertia and illnesses that had earlier plagued the Chungking unit.⁵⁵ It was at this point that Stanley fully demonstrated managerial abilities not only to cope with a range of crises but also to operate effectively across a range of issues simultaneously and over an extended period.

The bulk of his time through 1942 into spring 1943 was devoted to operational and administrative problems, which, he reported, "were part and parcel of a

growing machine."⁵⁶ His approach was a preview of the enlightened management style he would employ to great effect after the war while running his mining companies. Stanley's solution for dealing with the salary, cost of living, and health and morale challenges facing his staff was to set up a form of "company town" in Chungking, with the local MOI organization supplying as much staff food and accommodation as possible through a hostel system.

Since decent housing was in short supply, some of the new hires took rooms in Chungking's sole hotel while they sought lodging. To accommodate the staff, the MOI rented two houses in Chungking. (Stanley, however, was not living in the staff houses, and had made his own arrangements, according to an MOI report.) European staff members received two meals a day. Chinese staff lived as boarders in fully catered hostels. Stanley even found a novel way to use the MOI office itself to great advantage. The office happened to be located in a former restaurant. Stanley discovered that the Chinese were fond of feasts, so he ensured that most MOI publicity events and entertaining were done as feasts in the office, where all necessary cooking equipment was close at hand. Moreover, to further help keep costs down, he did as much entertaining as possible in his own residence, where he had proudly installed what was apparently a very rare refrigerator. Stanley also set up a system he referred to as "messes" at which staff could buy scarce food and medical supplies at cost plus 10 percent every month. Very little was left



(above and facing page) Stanley at a party at the British Embassy in Chungking.

to chance. As Stanley explained in a briefing paper sent to London in 1943, the food items, which were usually tinned, were carefully chosen for their high vita-

min and/or fat content to supplement locally available foodstuffs to help prevent sickness and disease among the staff.⁵⁷ Even with these in-kind benefits, Stanley was forced to pay his staff cost-of-living allowances so they could make ends meet.⁵⁸

Still, the poor conditions made life for his staffers often miserable and at times unbearable. "People who have never lived under conditions now existing in Chungking may find it hard to appreciate the grave discomfort our staff has to put up with," MOI staff member Morton Smith wrote to a superior in London on July 17, 1942. "Reports indicate tinned foods, butter, coffee, alcoholic drinks, etc are unprocurable. Flies, mosquitoes, disease and dirt abound and most houses are more or less damaged. The Staff must therefore return home after a long days work and eat and rest uncomfortably so I do feel it is our duty to do all we can to make life more comfortable for them."⁵⁹

Among the MOI staffers contending with the various hardships of life in wartime Chungking was a lovely, petite, young Chinese woman with big shining eyes, delicate features, and a "delightful, shy smile," who would enchant those who met her throughout her long life.⁶⁰ Her name was May Wong. In future years, however, she would be known by another name: Mrs. Stanley H. Smith.



CHAPTER SEVEN

A Privileged Girl in Troubled Times

The MOI staff in Chungking ran the gamut from journalists, translators, and accountants to stenographers, drivers, and messengers.¹ Their names and positions are listed on a staff roster found in the MOI files at the National Archives. Midway down the roster are the names of three editorial assistants, one of whom was a Miss M. Wong.²

Presumably, Miss M. Wong is May Wong.³ In 1942 May was just 20 years old and, like most everyone else on Stanley's staff, she had arrived at her MOI job after following a convoluted path during tumultuous times.

May was the child of a relatively prosperous and well-connected family, but her family's privileges could not shield her from the upheavals and chaos that racked

China during her youth. By the time she joined the Ministry of Information staff in Chungking, she already had survived revolution, Japanese bombings and invasion, and untold hardship as a refugee fleeing on foot across her own country.

May was born into troubled times and from her very earliest years was never far from violent conflict. Her birth came just nine years after the forced abdication of China's last emperor. She was four years old in 1927 when the Kuomintang violently ended its alliance with China's Communists, and just 14 when Japan invaded China in 1937.⁴ In May's early years, her parents were able to protect her from much that was going on in the country around her. Her beautiful Chinese name may have reflected the high hopes her mother and

May enjoying a picnic, with Stanley nearby, on the right.



father had for her before China fell prey to foreign invasion and civil war. Meaning “azure clouds,” it was variously written as Pik-hsia, Bik-hsia, or Beh-hsia in colonial and mission school documentation. It was Bixia in the standardized pinyin used in China today.

May was born on December 21, 1922, in the port city of Foochow (Fuzhou), in Fujian Province, one of the first areas of China that was opened to foreign residents and Christian missionaries.⁵ She had at least one older brother and one older sister.⁶

Her father, Sing-hu Wong (Xinfu Wang), was a successful businessman known to Westerners as Henry Wang (also spelled Wong). Her mother was known as Peach Hui, according to John Bamforth, a man who helped care for May in her later years.⁷ Peach Hui was described as a very “capable” woman in a Chinese book that chronicled the life of Chen Sanli, a retired Ching (Qing) official and poet who rented a house from Henry Wong in 1931.⁸ Beyond that one fleeting mention, no other information seems to

have survived about May’s mother. Her name, unsurprisingly, is not recorded in official documents in China, which had a long prewar tradition of patriarchal rule and where marriage was a contract between families, not individuals, with the object of sealing relationships and producing sons, particularly a male heir.

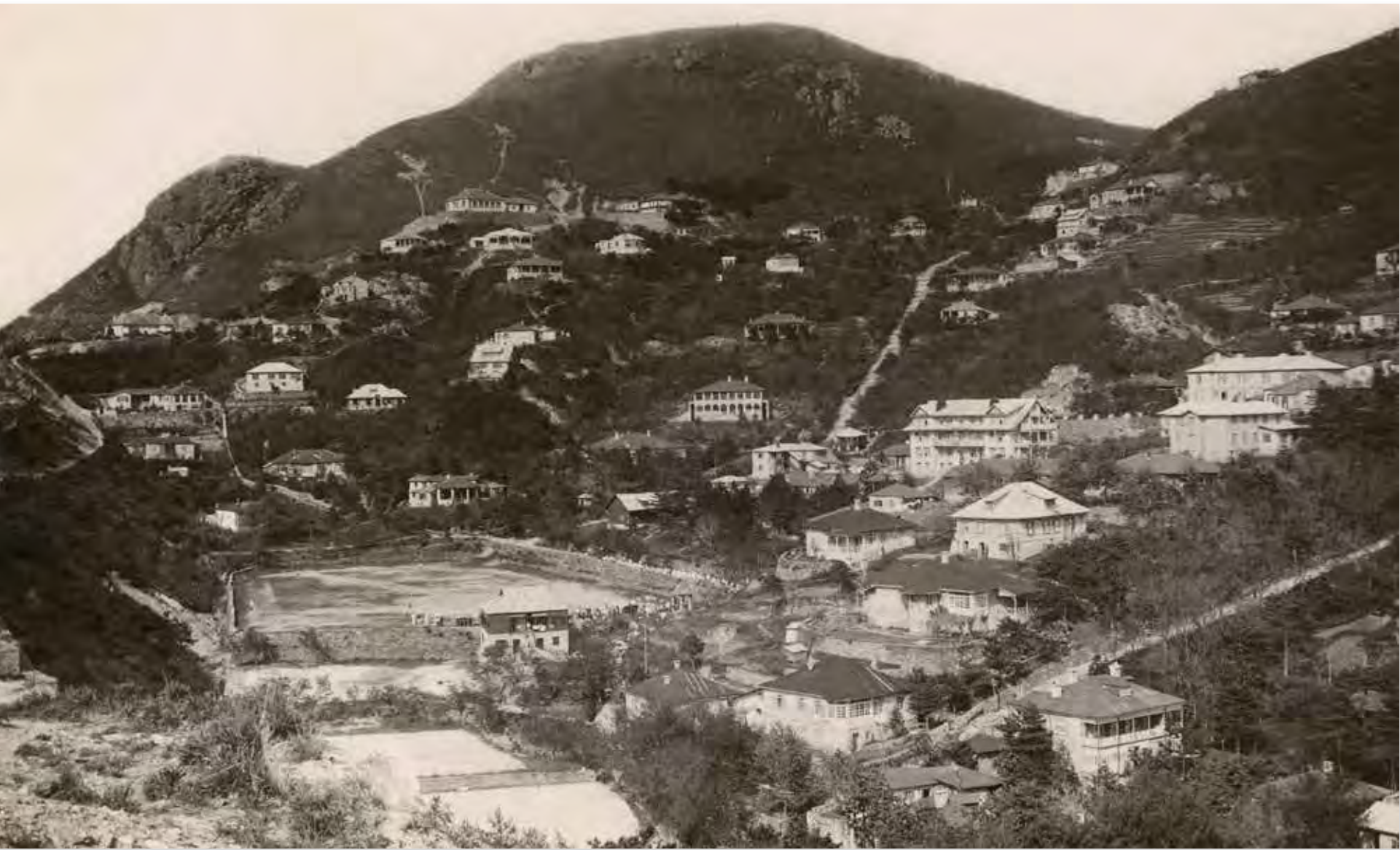
Connections in High Places

It is unclear where May spent her early childhood. Given that she was born in Foochow, where her father apparently had business interests, it seems probable that she spent some time there. It also seems likely that she spent at least the summer months in a lovely mountain resort town, founded in the late nineteenth century as a planned community. This was picturesque Kuling (Guling), and May’s father owned properties there. Kuling is perched at 4,836 feet above a wide valley in the Mount Lu tourist district of Kiukiang (Jiujiang) in Chiang-hsi (Jiangxi) Province. Long famed for its beauty on scrolls and in poetry, Kuling is surrounded by mountains on three sides, which makes it cool in the summer, unlike the plains below.

Kuling was established in 1895 by English Methodist missionary Edward Selby Little as a sanitarium and

► Mount Lu’s beauty has been recognized for centuries. Ming dynasty painter Shen Zhou (b. 1427) depicted it in his hanging scroll *Lofty Mount Lu*.





An aerial view of Kuling, 1925.

summer hill station resort for European and American missionaries in southern China. Little rented the land from China's last imperial court, the Ching (Qing), for a nominal annual fee for 999 years; so from 1896 to 1935 Kuling was effectively a foreign concession run by a council of missionaries and other foreign residents. It developed into a modern town boasting not only fresh air and breath-taking scenery but also electricity, well-lit paths, and a modern road connecting its tourist district with the city of Kiukiang (Jiujiang), a Yangtze River treaty port.

Kuling became an extremely popular summer resort for foreigners. It offered a pleasant alternative to suffocating heat, mosquitoes, and infectious diseases such as malaria. By 1928, when May was six years old, Kuling was being billed as China's "premier health resort" and had more than 700 villas, of which 518 belonged to international residents and 194 to Chinese. Even Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek had a villa there, and he later made Kuling his summer capital. A separate Chinese "quarter" with a range of shops also grew up to the west of the "foreign concession," and by 1931 about 9,000 Chinese and 1,700 international residents lived in Kuling year-round while a further 2,000 summered there.⁹

May's father owned properties in the Chinese quarter of Kuling and in 1931 rented out one of his modern, Western-style houses to Chen Sanli, the retired Ching official and poet who was, unexpectedly, able to shed a little light on May's family circumstances since Henry and Peach Hui are mentioned briefly in

the book chronicling his life.¹⁰ Little is known about Henry Wong's background other than that he was born in Foochow in 1895. Oddly, however, a note in the book about Chen, explaining how he came to live in one of Henry's houses, mentions that landlord Henry started as an English teacher at the Kiukiang No.3 Middle School. The note also goes on to say that he worked as a sales representative for Mobil Oil and sold kerosene, and also ran a shop that sold soy sauce and pickles "[a]nd thus made a fortune."¹¹ In addition, a history of the tobacco industry in Jiangxi Province lists Henry as the owner of tobacco shops in Kiukiang and notes that his shops exported tobacco to Japan.¹² Henry, apparently, was an industrious man who juggled a gamut of business ventures.

Exactly what position Henry held in the Mobil Oil company is not clear. Some accounts refer to Henry as the "general manager" or a "senior executive" of Shell Oil.¹³ This was entirely possible even if mistakes in translation tend to confuse his exact role. In the early twentieth century, Shell, Mobil, and other foreign oil interests created a joint marketing company, the Asiatic Petroleum Company (APC), employing between 6,000 and 7,000 Chinese throughout the nation by the 1920s.¹⁴ The joint company's oil was distributed from the ports down to the village level through a complicated multilevel arrangement facilitated by agencies, subagencies, and retailers. Agencies were often owned by a single wealthy individual, or sometimes jointly owned by several merchants. Some agency owners often simultaneously traded many commodities, oil

being one of them. Given these circumstances, there is no reason why May's father could not have been a "general manager" or "senior executive" of a Shell or Mobil outfit, along with his various other business enterprises.

Henry certainly had connections in high places, including in Kuling, where members of the upper echelons of the Republic of China owned or rented summer homes. In December 1935, well before Edward Selby Little's 999-year lease was up, Kuling returned to Chinese jurisdiction and became the republic's summer capital. During this era, Henry served on the Mount Lu Consultant Council representing local property owners. Serving on the council along with him were Madame Chiang Kai-shek as well as Cheng Shunyuan, who was Kiukiang branch manager of the Shanghai Bank, and Shen Chang-geng, a prosperous businessman with shadowy connections to Shanghai's organized crime. Also on the council were the principal of the local American school and a British engineer who helped design Kuling.¹⁵ (The little community of Kuling fell to Japanese conquest and military occupation in early 1939, by which time most missionaries and high-profile Chinese political and business leaders had already left.)¹⁶

Henry was also a good friend of Lin Sen, who served as the President of the Republic of China from 1931 to 1943 and at one point headed the Customs Office in Kiukiang. (In fact, according to an anonymous author who attempted to write a biography of Stanley Smith, Lin Sen was May's godfather.)¹⁷ Like Henry, Lin Sen was from Foochow, where he had attended the Anglo-Chinese College (Yinghua shuyuan).¹⁸ Given

that Henry was fluent in English, he also might have been educated in one of Foochow's mission schools, perhaps even at the same college as Lin Sen.

The Baldwin Years

When May reached school age, her parents sent her to the Baldwin School for Girls (Baoling nūzhong), a Methodist missionary boarding school in Nanchang, about 80 miles south of Kuling.¹⁹

Baldwin ran from kindergarten through high school and produced some of China's earliest and most famous female scientists, translators, educators, doctors, and artists. The school still stands today. It now is the No. 10 High School of Nanchang, but the original Baldwin motto—"Not to be ministered unto but to minister"—remains, carved into the stone lintel.²⁰

There appears to be no remaining record of when May started at Baldwin, but she probably enrolled at a young age, maybe even as young as six or seven years old. She boarded and studied there until 1938, not long after the Sino-Japanese War erupted.²¹

Why May's parents chose to send her to Baldwin is not known. May's parents were Methodists, according to John Bamforth, but he said he got the impression from May that they were not "particularly religious."²² Still, it was not uncommon for Chinese elites, even those without Christian affiliations, to have attended mission schools and to send their children to mission schools. In particular, all-girls mission schools were

believed to be safe locations where students would be carefully chaperoned while receiving moral, social, and other instruction that produced young ladies ready to take their place in a modernizing China.²³ In an era of revolutionary and nationalist fervor, May's parents may have been impressed by Baldwin's forward-thinking approach to preparing young women for their futures in a new China.

What made Baldwin different from other schooling options for Chinese girls in the 1930s was the enduring influence of the remarkable missionary educator Welthy Blakesley Honsinger. As headmistress of Baldwin between 1906 and 1917, the American-born and educated Honsinger promoted the idea that education was a "means of broadening and bettering life on earth."²⁴ She believed that education was the key to forging a valuable role for women in the creation of a new China. Under Honsinger's leadership, Baldwin girls were encouraged to develop their minds and were allowed to express nationalist and even revolutionary zeal on campus. Honsinger's open-minded, socially progressive attitude continued to define Baldwin years after her tenure as headmistress ended.²⁵

The Baldwin School was built on a hill in its own compound, located outside the walls that surrounded the old inland community of Nanchang. In the mid-1920s, Myra L. McDade, a Baldwin faculty member, described Nanchang as a city largely contained behind seven and a half miles of walls with seven huge gates and only one building rising above two stories.²⁶ Ten years later the city had changed a great deal. By

1935, when May would have been a pupil looking at Nanchang from the hill above, the city had wide boulevards, a chain of ornamental lakes, and a central park. Moreover, a new hotel and many new homes had been built outside the old city walls, particularly around the Baldwin School compound. By today's standards Nanchang, with a population of 300,000, would not have been considered a big city. But the number of its inhabitants swelled to around one million after the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 forced people to flee from occupied cities such as Nanking and Shanghai to what they hoped would be safer places.²⁷

Alumnae recall Baldwin's beautiful buildings and gardens, superior classrooms and laboratories, and residential facilities. They also fondly remember their classmates, many of whom came from privileged families.²⁸ Baldwin had a reputation for educating "ladies." Students were carefully chaperoned, and obedience to strict rules was expected. Students were taught to mind their manners, never to swear, and to be respectful. As with most boarding schools of the time, boarders were not allowed to leave campus except on holidays, and all personal correspondence was opened by teachers for inspection.²⁹ Yet despite what might appear to have been a restrictive, institutional environment, Bamforth recalled that May gave him the impression she had been happy at the school.³⁰

Before 1931, religious worship and education were woven into the fabric of every Baldwin student's daily life. Bible studies, daily attendance at morning and evening chapel, and Sunday worship were mandatory.

After 1931, religion was downplayed at Baldwin following a government decree that religion and education be separated. Under the Kuomintang's "Restoration of Educational Rights," bible studies and other religious activities became optional and a matter of personal choice. (That edict was amended in 1938 after Christian missionaries saved hundreds of thousands of Chinese from death at the hands of Japanese invaders.) No matter what policy changes occurred, however, Baldwin always held its students to high academic standards. One failure could deny a student her diploma unless she retook and passed the exam. Two failures in an academic year would automatically hold her back a year.

During the 1930s, as the political and economic unrest engulfing China rippled into Baldwin's secluded compound, the school confronted new challenges. Declining enrollment was the first hurdle. In 1930, the school had around 232 pupils. In 1935, enrollment fell to around 174 because of what mission administrators described as the "usual" problems with nonpayment of fees.³¹ As the conflict between the Nationalists and Communists dragged on, more and more Chinese families were displaced from their homes and lost their livelihoods, making it difficult if not impossible to come up with tuition and fees to send their daughters to boarding schools.

Baldwin's problems worsened in 1937 when Nanchang became a target of Japanese attacks aimed at destroying the nearby Nationalist air force base. The first of many air attacks by Japanese aircraft on the base

took place on August 15, 1937. That attack also caused widespread destruction in other parts of Nanchang and panic among local residents. The bombings must have been terrifying for many young Baldwin students, including the teenage May, who had just turned 14 the previous December.

In the months that followed, the bombings became less frequent, but there were quite a number of dogfights between Chinese and Japanese fighters in the sky above Nanchang. This doubtless forced students and staff to repeatedly take shelter in the school's basements, not only disrupting classes and routines but also causing tension and anxiety. Despite these problems, in 1938 enrollment at the school rose to 265, perhaps a result of the growing number of war refugees flooding into Nanchang.³²

Some time in 1938, May most likely returned to her family's home in Kuling. Worried Baldwin administrators had shortened the 1937–1938 school year to 33 weeks in the face of the threat of a full-scale Japanese attack on Nanchang. Despite the fact that the sound of air raid alarms could be heard in the distance, Kuling would still have provided a relatively restful haven. Certainly it did not deter China's First Lady, Madame Chiang, from calling together in Kuling 54 women leaders from 13 Chinese provinces. This National Conference of Chinese Women was the first of its kind in China and ran for five days. Its purpose was to gather firsthand information about conditions across the nation and figure out how women could more effec-

tively serve their country. Among the delegates was Dr. Wu Yi-fang, president of Ginling College, who may have stayed with Li Che-chin (Li Dze-djin), a fellow Ginling graduate and teaching colleague who owned a house in Kuling with her three sisters. There was another Kuling-Ginling connection as well: Madame Chiang was an enthusiastic supporter of Ginling. She frequently attended college events, and in 1933 she and her sisters paid for a new college building.³³ It may have been during this crucial period in July or August of 1938, shortly before the Japanese overran Kuling, that May's parents made the decision to send their youngest daughter to college rather than back to Baldwin, given the previous year's bombings of Nanchang and the threat of future bombings and possible invasion.

On to Ginling College

In the fall of 1938, fifteen-year-old May Wong enrolled as a freshman at Ginling College. She was very young to be starting college, but perhaps her parents felt she would be safer at Ginling while the war ground on. Ginling College's usual campus was in Nanking (Nanjing), but remaining there became untenable after the Japanese Imperial Army's horrific massacre, which started in December 1937. During the six-week-long massacre, Ginling College harbored more than 10,000 women and children trying to hide from Japanese soldiers. Even before the massacre, various groups of Ginling

College administrators, educators, and students had evacuated to seemingly safer locales, leaving behind a small number of staff members and students who were joined by refugees during and after the massacre. The arduous journey to another campus in west China took six weeks of travel on foot and by steamer ship.

When May enrolled, Ginling-in-Exile was based far to the west, in Chengtu (Chengdu), in Szechuan (Sichuan) Province. It was more than 900 miles from Nanchang and Kuling. Ginling was allotted space on the campus of West China Union University and initially shared facilities and resources with several other homeless educational institutions. Apart from Ginling, these were the University of Nanking, Shantung Christian University (Qilu daxue), and the Medical School of Central University (Zhongyang daxue). After 1942, Yenching University from Beijing brought the total to six. By the time May arrived in Chengtu, however, Ginling had at least built its own dormitory for its female students.³⁴

Ginling-in-Exile's wartime sobriquet was "heaven on earth." Ginling students were regarded by students evacuated to other hinterland cities—such as Chungking (designated "Earth") and Kunming ("Hell")—as the most fortunate. Ginling's building, with its classical Chinese architectural elements on the exterior and modern conveniences inside, impressed visiting educators and dignitaries. Ginling's dining hall was also known as the best run and most economical of all the colleges. Students were allowed to suggest menu



- ▲ After a difficult trek from Nanking on foot and by steamer, Ginling College students and teachers arrive in Chengtu.
- Gingling students on their three-month trek to a safer locale.
- ▼ Ginling-in-Exile wartime dormitory, 1940.



items. For breakfast students were served rice porridge, steam buns, roasted peanuts, and a variety of pickled vegetables, sometimes even with an egg. For lunch and dinner they were guaranteed four dishes, including meat and vegetables, both rarities in wartime. The annual physical checkup and supplemental meal system for students with health problems somehow continued despite material deprivations as the war ground on.

Some Ginling alumnae also fondly recalled what they designated the “Ten Scenes”: plum blossoms near one dorm, roses surrounding another, a willow-lined alley, a bell tower, a Western-style restaurant called “Tip Top,” a noodle shop that sold authentic spicy Szechuan noodles, the gym constantly shaken up by tap dancers, and Music Department rehearsals on the lawn beside grazing cows. They describe a wide variety of cultural and athletic options: drama, the English club, speech contests in Chinese and English, American Hollywood and British movies in town, and basketball and volleyball matches that attracted large numbers of spectators. The Ginling team invariably won. Fans of Szechuan cuisine imbibed its cultural heritage while drinking tea and eating snacks with classmates in Chengtu teahouses, while dances at missionary homes introduced more adventurous students to Western food, music, and interactions with foreigners. Apart from those few students

who did regularly attend dances with foreigners, most mastered ballroom dancing by means of peer instruction. Some alumnae also recall a lively dating scene. Ginling women, they recalled with pride, even created a new usage for the English word “local” that meant “dating.” (“Local” was a homophone for the word in the local dialect, *laoke*, meaning “to talk, chat.”³⁵)



Ginling P.E. students on the field, 1940.

Under normal circumstances May’s academic progression from Baldwin to Ginling would have been natural. Baldwin was one of the main feeder schools for Ginling. The college had opened as a Christian missionary institution for women in September 1915 and was the first Chinese women’s college to confer bache-

lor degrees. From 1928, the college was led by one of its own. This was the redoubtable Dr. Wu Yi-fang, the first Chinese woman to head up a university.³⁶ Wu was born into an intellectual family in Hubei Province in 1893, began studying at Ginling in 1916, and was one of its first five graduates. In 1921, she traveled to America for further study. After receiving a doctorate in biology from the University of Michigan, Wu returned to China in 1928 and was appointed president of Ginling, a post she held for the next 23 years. She was president during May’s years at Ginling. Under Wu, Ginling became the cradle of China’s earliest generation of female intelligentsia.³⁷



Ginling-in-Exile College dining hall, Chengtu, Szechuan, China, circa 1938–1945.

84 NO SUBSTITUTE FOR KINDNESS



Ginling faculty at Chengtu. Dr. Wu stands at the far left.

May entered Ginling after already having had her sheltered childhood rudely shattered by war. Doubtless, the bombing of Nanchang during 1937 and 1938 had been very distressing for this privileged young girl. It couldn't have been easy for her to say goodbye to her family in the fall of 1938 to travel to a faraway place to start college amid the uncertainties of the war. But perhaps she was relieved to head to Chengtu instead of returning to Nanchang, which as it turned out was the



Ginling faculty members in the court of the new dormitory in Chengtu, 1940.

site of a Japanese ground offensive in the fall of 1938. And May quite possibly might have had to leave Kuling in a hurry since by July 1938 Japan was threatening an intensive bombardment of the summer resort town and urging foreign consuls to evacuate their nationals.³⁸ It is possible that May might not have had to make the trip to Chengtu solo; she may have traveled there in the company of members of the Ginling staff who were in Kuling during the summer. Given her father's connec-

tions in the Nationalist government, it is likely that her family got wind of the Japanese military movements earlier on and left Kuling before the assault began.

During her time at Ginling, May was good-natured and vivacious, a smart and “sweet girl,” according to Helena Yu (Ginling '44), an English major two years behind her. Now in her 90s and living in California, Yu was asked to share her recollections of May in an interview in April 2016. She recalled seeing May at dances with both Chinese and foreign guests. She also remembered the gossip about May that spread through their Ginling dorm. Some talked of May's privileged family background and her connections to people in power. Some said May was Lin Sen's goddaughter. Others claimed she was an orphan. Yu's own impression was that May came from a prestigious upper-class family.

May began college as an English major. Despite the war, Ginling still offered a full curriculum and maintained high standards. Because of the exceptional circumstances, Ginling in October 1938 organized a special one-month program for its freshmen class, which May would have participated in. The first week was devoted to lectures about the state of the nation, the world, and the students' role in the war against Japan. Freshman academic levels and physical fitness were also tested. The second and third weeks looked at education, culture, economy, society, health, recreation, and rural service. There were visits to local cultural, educational, and religious institutions, a visit to the theater, and another to a rural village. The fourth week focused

on student “character training” and the cultivation of qualities valued by the faculty: the ability to listen carefully to instructions, promptness, politeness, and an inquiring mind. Students were tested in how quickly and efficiently they could pack a suitcase, their promptness, and their etiquette. There were mock parties at which the students took turns acting as hostesses and guests to hone their skills. They even watched a realistic skit about a murder to develop their observation skills in an emergency. A few minutes into the skit, the students were questioned about the staged crime and asked to provide clues for tracking down the murder suspect.³⁹

Conditions at Ginling-in-Exile were, of course, far from ideal. Like other wartime institutions, Ginling had to accommodate more students than had been anticipated, which was demanded by government policy. Colleges-in-exile were expected to provide a home for refugee students from occupied areas of China, and that exacerbated overcrowding. In 1940, for example, the college had a 30 percent increase in enrollment, beginning its fourth refugee year with 199 students.⁴⁰ Yet sharing West China Union University's campus and facilities with other colleges helped Ginling maintain a solid curriculum.⁴¹ May, for example, took a course in Shakespeare taught by Dr. William Fenn of the University of Nanking. He held students to high standards, and Ginling English majors, including those in May's class, worked hard for his course.⁴² Another upside was that they got to practice English with professors' children, including Fenn's daughters.⁴³



Traveling into the countryside near Chengtu in 1940, a Ginling student, who would've known May, slakes her thirst by a drink from a piece of sugarcane. Ginling students did community service work in the countryside, traveling by foot or rickshaw.



▲ A group photo of Ginling-in-Exile students in their practical class. Chengtu, Szechuan, China, 1938–1943.
▼ Geology class, 1941.



The Ginling dorm building was still under construction when some of May's classmates arrived, and those first students had to sleep on the floor. By the time May arrived, the residential facility was probably almost ready, even if electricity took a few more weeks to connect. After the new structure was finished, May and her fellow students lived in the two-story U-shaped building along with Ginling president Wu, female faculty members, and the college's matron. Students lived in the two wings and staff upstairs in the midsection with the dining, common, and administration rooms below.⁴⁴ Four students slept in each small dorm room in bunk beds. They each had a small table, a shelf, and a small closet. Because of the cramped and sometimes very cold state of the dorm rooms, most students studied in the library.⁴⁵ One of May's classmates and a fellow English major, Che Shufeng, left a record describing conditions:

People who stay in their rooms to study are unfortunate because our bedrooms are bitterly cold in winter. The cold night air wedges through the cracks of the wooden walls. If you sit there for half an hour your toes are numbed. Therefore the best way to keep warm is to sit in bed and study. Our dining room is too small for nearly two hundred people, especially when we are in our winter clothes. There are thirty tables arranged together with only about five inches for passage. When all the tables are full, one must turn sideways to get through and we are glad to be no bigger than we are.⁴⁶

Crowding in dorms, the dining room, and library brought bedbugs, mice, and illness. There was one bathroom, but no shower. The bathroom was divided into separate stalls, each containing a ceramic basin. On specific days every week the kitchen staff hauled buckets of hot water and poured the water into the basins, but the students found their "sponge baths" inconvenient and unhygienic.⁴⁷

Some students suffered from malnutrition and tuberculosis, and petty thefts resulted in several dismissals. More seriously, the students' prolonged separation from their families, coupled with their impoverished conditions and the palpable dangers from an ongoing war, caused many to lapse into severe depression.⁴⁸

The girls were isolated on their remote campus as travel was becoming more and more difficult. By 1940, routes and means of transportation were limited throughout China, especially to a region as far off the beaten track as Chengtu.⁴⁹ Ginling religion and philosophy professor Eva Dykes Spicer, an Englishwoman and Oxford graduate, arrived at Chengtu in the fall of 1938, around the same time as May. Spicer, who had taught at Ginling in Nanking since 1923, found the remoteness of Chengtu a real shock. More worrying, as time went on, she also observed a widespread lowering of morale.⁵⁰

The Japanese military found that Chengtu was not as unreachable as the Chinese had hoped. The sound of air sirens would have been familiar to May from the very start of her time at Ginling-in-Exile. And then in



◀ Students and teachers at Ginling-in-Exile made do. Here they use dried rice straw to fill their mattresses.

▲ The Ginling-in-Exile washroom. Even in difficult circumstances, girls were expected to be organized and tidy.

June 1939, the campus came under direct attack from Japanese bombers. When students and staff emerged from dugouts, they found two unexploded bombs—one in front of the library and one behind it. Thereafter, Ginling experienced regular air raids. By 1941, the campus was being bombed every day around noon, which, in a masterful understatement, one faculty member, Florence A. Kirk, described as “a serious problem.”⁵¹ The noted Chinese and Japanese scholar Professor Edward Gulick, of Wellesley College, who in 1937–1939 was part of the Yale-in-China teaching program in Hunan, was passing through Szechuan when he heard that quite a few Ginling students had committed suicide:

“I later heard that many students couldn’t stand the strain of inadequate food, air-raid interruptions, increased incidence of TB, and inflation, and that there were numerous student deaths, often by suicide.”⁵² Alice Chong, a Hawaiian-born Ginling English teacher who had led a group of students from Shanghai to Chengtu in 1938, also wrote home, distressed over student suicides.⁵³

May appears to have been among those students who were badly affected by the conditions and bomb-

ings and who suffered during her years at Ginling-in-Exile. Her college transcripts reflect the toll the situation seemed to take on her over time. In her first year at Ginling, her grades were remarkably good, especially for one so young. In her first semester she scored an impressive 91 percent for English and 85 percent for Logic; oddly, Chinese was her worst academic subject, with a score of just 69 percent. Thereafter, however, her grades fell inexorably with each passing year. Her four-year college records show that she even once failed English. This was Ginling’s dreaded English Comprehensive Test, English 250, which required a pass in the second semester of the second year. May retook it and passed. In her final year, May, the bright young student who had started out so well, was ranked 24 out of 25 students of her class.⁵⁴ The instructor for her Conduct and Behavior course noted that she was “good at making friends, clever but not very diligent.”⁵⁵ She quite possibly had been traumatized by her experiences in Chengtu and unable to focus on her studies. By the time she left after four years of study in 1942, she was

just 19. She had been away from home for a very long time, coping the best she could under very difficult circumstances. Doubtless she was lonely, tired, and in very great need of safety and security.

After graduation from Ginling, 19-year-old May gathered her strength, her courage, and her determination and made her way to Free China’s wartime capital, Chungking, almost 200 miles away. It was not an easy journey. According to John Bamforth, her later caregiver, May walked a lot of the way, “sometimes under bombardment.”⁵⁶ In Chungking, her fluency in English got her work as a secretary, which eventually led to her employment in the offices of the British Ministry of Information. And that’s where she was when the roster was compiled listing her as a member of the editorial staff under the direction of MOI Representative Stanley H. Smith. By then, she had most likely been emotionally wounded by her wartime experiences. But there can be no doubt that she was very brave and, as time would show, very loyal.



CHAPTER EIGHT

The Final War Years

By 1943, Stanley was riding high. He by then had built his staff in Chungking up to more than 150 and put together the equivalent of a foreign-language newsroom, a radio network, and a film department. It was quite an accomplishment, particularly in an isolated and war-ravaged Chinese city packed with politicians and foreign diplomats where resources were scarce and tensions inevitably high.

Even London was impressed by Stanley's achievements. An internal report from MOI headquarters, dated September 1943, noted that under Stanley's leadership its formerly anemic propaganda operation in China had been transformed "after a year of extremely arduous preparatory work" into "an efficient working machine, capable of handling and developing a very large body of

material."¹ This was high praise indeed for a man who a year earlier had been a relative unknown. His superiors had been forced to face the reality that not only were experienced "China hands"—journalists with expert knowledge of China—unwilling to work in Chungking, but it was even extremely difficult to find experts with specialist knowledge of China to work at MOI headquarters in London. Given the circumstances, his higher-ups were fortunate to have someone as competent and hardworking as Stanley at the helm in Chungking.

Day to day, however, his job continued to be a slog. Filling vacancies remained challenging, and most new staff members had to be trained in what he described to his London chiefs as "the work and things Chinese."² Simple orders for supplies and

◀ Stanley (second from left) with officials in Beiping (Beijing), December 1945.



Stanley Smith, British Ministry of Information Representative, at the British Embassy in Chungking, 1945.

items as crucial as paper took the MOI more than six months to process. And containing costs became increasingly difficult as local prices soared amid “inflation unequalled in modern history.”³ But Stanley persevered, working seven days a week and rarely going to bed before 2 or 3 am, “making do” with what he had and devising inventive solutions to keep the wheels of the operation whirring.⁴

The closure of the Burma Road, the Allies’ supply route linking Burma to the southwest of China, had created another problem—no longer could Stanley rely on as many propaganda materials coming in from India and London. The China operation had to find its own ways of printing materials for distribution; otherwise, the cost of air transport would take up Stanley’s entire cargo budget. Moreover, although the MOI did have four trucks that once plied the Burma Road, they could not be used to distribute materials within China because scarce fuel supplies meant they needed to be held in reserve in case of emergencies such as evacuation.⁵ So Stanley was forced to find alternatives—which he quickly did. With an eye on costs and the best deals available, Stanley made arrangements with a local printer in Kunming and the Canadian Mission Press in Chengtu. He also opened a new office in what he regarded as the “strategically important university centre” of Kweilin, to the south. His ulterior motive was to get propaganda materials “down to the Hong Kong border, if not to Hong Kong itself.” Unfortunately, because of Japanese penetration deep-

er into China, the Kweilin experiment could not be sustained, and after one temporary closure the office was shut down permanently in 1944.⁶ Despite this setback, Stanley’s unit managed to distribute materials including books, magazines, brochures, and posters as well as documentary and entertainment films and radio broadcasts in Free China throughout the remaining years of the war.

Interestingly, despite his huge workload and responsibilities during what must have been a time of frantic activity, Stanley still found time to travel within China to personally investigate opportunities for MOI expansion. This included cultivating contacts among academics who would obviously be useful for radio talks and press articles but also helpful in more effectively targeting propaganda to a Chinese audience.⁷

Averting an Attempted Expulsion

In mid-March 1943, Stanley took a break from his duties in Chungking to travel first to India and then to London for several months on what must have been the trip of a lifetime. After 12 demanding months in his MOI post, he doubtless welcomed the chance to step off the ceaseless treadmill and leave China for a while. The war had presented him with new challenges, enabled him to develop new skills, and provided him with a host of new opportunities. Not the least of these was travel to exotic destinations with unfamiliar cultures.



Stanley (second from left) stands with the mayor of Peiping (now Beijing) and others, December 26, 1945.

And now he was on his way to his first known trip to London, which, for Australians in the first half of the twentieth century, was the heart of Empire, the capital of Mother England.

Among his duties abroad was to ensure that an exhibition of Chinese art arrived safely to London. The traveling Chinese art exhibit had been authorized by the Kuomintang as a means of educating the Allies about the culture and plight of the Chinese people. A similar exhibit had been sent the previous year to New York, where it was shown in the Museum of Modern Art.⁸ Shepherding the Chinese exhibit to London would have pleased Stanley since he had a genuine interest in cultural and scholarly exchange between China and the West. Plus, his MOI portfolio involved educating the British about China as well as promoting Britain among the Chinese.⁹

After leaving Chungking, Stanley headed first to Calcutta and then to New Delhi, where he conferred with his colleagues in MOI's Far Eastern Bureau for about two weeks before traveling to London.

While Stanley was preparing for his trip, MOI's New Delhi office had arranged a temporary replacement for him in Chungking for part of the time he was to be away. His stand-in was Ted Sayers, the Australian journalist who had worked with him in SOE's Oriental Mission in Singapore in late 1941. Sayers also had moved from SOE to MOI, and he was now deputy director of MOI's far Eastern Bureau in Delhi. Sayers was an avid diarist, and his meticulous diary chronicles both his most in-



Stanley, in Peiping, November 1945.

imate thoughts and the tiniest of details about his life and work. From it, we have his record of the period he filled in for Stanley.

Sayers at first resisted leaving the relative comforts of his station in colonial British India for temporary service in isolated Chungking. While Stanley understood China's international importance and regarded the Chungking post as a challenge worth tackling, Sayers saw it as a backwater that would do nothing

to impress his superiors or advance his postwar journalism career in Australia. He was furious when he discovered that Stanley was paid more than he was. But during negotiations over a new salary package, Sayers finally agreed to go to Chungking to fill in for Stanley. He believed his job was to make changes, and once there he promptly joined what appears to have been a concerted effort to remove Stanley from his higher-ranking post.¹⁰

In Chungking, Sayers found himself in an alien world for which he was totally unprepared. This was



Stanley (front, far right), Churchill's representative Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart (front, fourth from left), and others, including the mayor of Peiping, December 26, 1945.

not a British colony. It instead was the capital of an independent nation where foreigners stayed as guests, and organizations such as the MOI operated with the goodwill and tolerance of the Chinese government.

Within days of his arrival, Sayers was invited to lunch by Australian Ambassador Eggleston. Apparently, Eggleston had never moved beyond his initial negative impressions of Stanley. For at that first lunch meeting with Sayers, Eggleston wasted no time in ex-

pressing his grievances about Stanley's administration, which he viewed with distaste and regarded as financially wasteful. Eggleston also immediately drew Sayer's attention to allegations of smuggling among Stanley's staff.¹¹

Smuggling and black market dealings were commonplace in wartime China since most official trade with other nations had been disrupted. Although trading with the enemy (Japan) was strictly prohibited, and technically punishable by death, it happened. Moreover, buying and selling watches, electronics, jewelry,



The Chinese ambassador to Britain, Dr. V. K. Wellington Koo, and Madame Koo open the Chinese Art Exhibit at the Royal Watercolour Society's galleries. More than 31 Chinese artists' works were shown for the first time in Britain, October 12, 1943.

clothing, and other items that had been smuggled into China during the war from other countries, including Japan, was arguably a necessary means of survival—a means that was at times even authorized by high-placed British government officials.¹² Nonetheless, the activities struck Sayers as not only unorthodox but illicit and immoral. His ears pricked, he determined to put an end to smuggling and other questionable trading activities among Stanley's staff. During the rest of his time in China, that remained one of Sayer's chief preoccupations



The Chinese ambassador to Britain, Dr. V. K. Wellington Koo, speaking at the Chinese Art Exhibit at the Royal Watercolour Society's galleries, on Conduit Street, London.

as he traveled between MOI's offices in Chungking, Kunming, Chengtu, and Kweilin.¹³

Eggleston had shown Sayers a letter intercepted in India, written by Thomas Chubb. Chubb was a general assistant in the MOI's Kunming office. In the intercepted letter Chubb boasted of having made \$500,000 in black market trading in just six months and was asking about other goods, especially watches, which could be smuggled to him to sell in China.¹⁴

Sayers went on the warpath and, after just two weeks

in China, decided to confront Chubb in person. He hopped a plane to Kunming, apparently unaware that the town had developed a well-known reputation as southern China's smuggling and black market capital. Sayers was enraged when he discovered that Chubb, and others, had been using the department's mailbag for smuggling. He was soon asking for Chubb's resignation and making recommendations about other China-based staff.¹⁵

He also continued working behind the scenes to undermine Stanley. Sayers had become deeply suspicious when he discovered that Stanley was sending his entire salary to his (first) wife, Olive, in Australia. In the privacy of his diary, Sayers mused about how Stanley could afford to do that, especially given the high costs of daily living in wartime China, and about how deeply involved Stanley might be in the black market.¹⁶

Stanley apparently made no secret of the fact that he had relied on the black market and, moreover, that he had used it for official purposes. In later years, when his business associates were interviewed for a book, which was never completed, about Stanley's life, several recalled that Stanley had told them how he acquired shortwave radios, capable of picking up Allied broadcasts, to drop into Japanese-held areas of China while setting up the Chungking operation. According to the biographer who conducted the interviews, "time after time [Stanley] cabled London and elsewhere with his request. But it was to no avail. Eventually, he devised other means." These "other means" involved buying Japanese-made radios from local smugglers.¹⁷

Although Stanley at times may have trod a fine

line, by relying on the black market smuggling trade in China, he managed to keep the costs of his operation down and its output high. For as it turned out, many of the commodities and equipment that his staff needed were either prohibitively expensive or virtually impossible to come by through official channels but were readily procurable on the black market. Sayers discovered this for himself when he traveled to the provincial capital of Chengtu to visit MOI's satellite office. Chengtu was a major hub for smuggling activity and for profiteering from illicit wares. And as a black market trading center, it was famous in China for dealing in Japanese goods. Even the regular shops, a shocked Sayers recorded in his diary, were full of Japanese items that had been smuggled into China from Japanese-occupied Shanghai.¹⁸

Sayers appears not to have understood that there were excellent sources of Japanese goods right in Chungking to which Stanley probably also had access. One source was his former colleague, Findlay Andrew, and Andrew's Chinese colleagues at the SOE-subsidized Institute of International Relations. As part of its intelligence gathering activities, the institute ran a vast network of Chinese merchants throughout Japanese-occupied China, selling Japanese goods. These merchants apparently even managed to travel fairly freely between China and Japan throughout the war.¹⁹

The well-intentioned Sayers saw only that some MOI business was not being done according to the highest standards of correctness. As far as he was concerned, MOI staff, even its Chinese staff, were being corrupted by what he regarded as "immoral" standards.

Sayer's next move doubtless upset Stanley as much as it must have upset Stanley's staff. First Sayers sent out a "stiff letter" to all staff about smuggling, which he hoped would put a "complete stop on happenings of this sort." Then he also decided personally to put a stop to one of Stanley's innovations designed to save the MOI money on salaries and keep his staff happier at the same time. This was a scheme that enabled staff to place orders for essential clothing in India. One staffer, a radio operator named Ted Martin, had even told Sayers that if he could not be given a salary raise he would be quite happy to receive more clothing from India for resale on the black market. Sayers decided to end the scheme on the basis that it was clearly corrupt.²⁰

Less than 48 hours later, British Ambassador Seymour let Sayers know that he had financed a party for embassy staff by selling imported powdered milk on the black market. A horrified Sayers failed to take the hint, seeing the information as further evidence of the insidious nature of widespread corruption.²¹

Within weeks, however, Sayers began to see things differently as he was forced to run an office in a country under siege. He was also learning that Chungking really was a hardship post, especially when he collapsed, seriously ill, after little more than one month in that city. On October 2, 1943, Sayers was evacuated to the Canadian missionary hospital in Chengtu, where he remained for most of the month to be treated for pleurisy. He returned to Chungking for just a few days before departing for Delhi in early November. While in Chungking, Sayers sold every spare item he had—at a handsome profit.²²

Meanwhile, despite rumors circulating around the Far Eastern Bureau's office in India that Stanley's career with the MOI was about to be cut short, he appeared to be enjoying a favorable reception in London. Sayers was baffled when news reached him that far from being shown the door, Stanley and his pal Galvin had dined with London "big shots." These included Lord Samuel Hood and Sir Edmund Hall-Patch, both of the Foreign Office but with considerable influence over the MOI. Also at the VIP dinner were Sir Otto Niemeyer, who was a senior Bank of England director, and Dr. George Kung-chao Yeh, director of the Ministry of Propaganda at China's London Embassy.²³

This event alone should have been enough to indicate that both Stanley and Galvin were either held in high regard and/or had important information to discuss with high-ranking government officials. In fact, far from being nonentities, both men were viewed with considerable respect as advisers and consultants on Far Eastern matters and were sorely missed by MOI headquarters in London when they left to return to their Eastern posts—Stanley to China and Galvin to India.²⁴ With war on so many fronts—Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East—the MOI was struggling to come to terms with all its areas of responsibility. It still remained woefully short of Chinese expertise owing to ongoing difficulties trying to recruit China specialists.²⁵

Stanley ended up spending more than five months away from his Chungking office, from April to late September or early October. It appears to have been a critical period of reorganization and reform of the

MOI's Far Eastern operation in London during which it went from being a small "section" to a larger "division" within the MOI. China also took on even greater importance and Stanley, greater responsibility. At a meeting in London on August 13, 1943, Stanley learned that his budget was to increase dramatically, jumping to £358,910 for just six months of 1944.²⁶ It was a significant vote of confidence in his abilities as an administrator.

In mid-August Stanley crossed the Atlantic in a plane with the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Anthony Eden, to the top secret meeting in Canada code-named "Quadrant." Stanley was one of two press officers assigned to Eden and was awarded the British rank of Minister, an honorary, and usually temporary, appointment to confer a senior rank and privileges to help the recipient operate more easily in demanding circumstances. The summit later became known as the Quebec Conference. It was the pivotal meeting held between August 17 and 24, 1943, at which President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill first sat down to plan Operation Overlord, the invasion of France in 1944. Clearly, Stanley was no ordinary foot soldier from some far distant outpost. This was a demonstration of the trust and faith, at the very highest level, which the British government had in him. The event was the highlight of Stanley's war service and one that he would recall with pride, without divulging any details, in later years.²⁷

It was certainly not something about which he

could gossip with Sayers when he visited him in his Chengtu hospital bed in late October before sending him back to India a week later.²⁸ Stanley himself was somewhat impatient with illness. He regarded the local diseases as a "condition rather than a deterrent" of working in Chungking and prided himself on continuing to work even at times when he was ill and feverish.²⁹

In the end, Sayers's zealous shots against Stanley came to naught. In fact, the British minister to Chungking, G. A. Wallinger, wrote a letter to Sayers on January 31, 1944, praising Stanley's achievement in "keeping his flock to the path" and presenting "the British case and the British way and [avoiding] any semblance of interfering in any manner in matters Chinese."³⁰

Stanley's standing in London garnered him the support that he sorely needed when he was attacked in the British Parliament in May 1944 by a junior politician who rashly described the MOI's staff in China as "Shanghai merchants in uniform . . . standing at the world's longest bar." It was a ridiculous claim for any British politician to air in public and certainly one that could not have helped Britain's reputation in Free China, where suspicions about postwar British ambitions ran deep. For Stanley, however, it was enough that the Minister for Information, Brendan Bracken, sprang straight to his defense. "I hear splendid reports of the way you are handling your most difficult job," the Minister telegraphed in June 1944. "It is a great advantage to have a man of such toughness and

resource in charge of our affairs in China. I congratulate you on what you are doing."³¹

An elated Stanley wrote back telling Bracken he was "as proud and as happy as a dog with ten tails" to have received the complimentary telegraph. He grabbed the opportunity to share his view of the importance of Britain's involvement "in this out of the way place with all its peculiarities" and to offer his hopes for Britain's active role in the future of the Far East:

I constantly remind myself that four-fifths of our Empire is directly concerned with the Orient, and while as a sort of human barbed wire cutter I may have my uses, before every chair in the Cabinet turns to the Far East you will need some good men out this way to complement my "toughness and resource"—send sons of pirates and Elizabethan reactionaries, full of proud blood and good sense with enough acumen to realise the worthwhileness of this area; for it is apparent to me that while we can win this war we can still lose our place in the Orient and with it the potential trade riches.³²

The Strain Takes a Toll

Stanley had returned to Chungking in the fall of 1943 determined to develop and put into action MOI's plans to expand his organization for the duration of the war. Optimistically, he hoped that he could delegate to top staffers some of the "onerous" details that previously

had landed on his desk, allowing him to carve out time to "think and plan."³³ But it soon became evident that the daily burdens of his job were no lighter and in fact "much worse" than prior to his trip. Several key staff members left China to move to other posts in London and elsewhere. Others were lost to illness, leaving Stanley to get by with a staff full of holes.³⁴ In a June 30, 1944, letter to MOI headquarters in London, he explained his situation:

Over two years now it has been someone coming, someone going . . . training the ones that arrive, patching and making do awaiting arrivals, and with all keeping up output of material. With few exceptions have I had people fully qualified and/or temperamentally suited to fill their allotted posts and the delegation of authority has been difficult, in fact, almost impossible.³⁵

Although his higher-ups in London had warned him that "there were too many people with direct access" to him, he had no buffers. "Most things from the ordering of a toothbrush to the purchase of a million dollars worth of paper have come to me for consideration, generally before the pros and cons have been weighed," he wrote in an October 1944 missive to his top staff in Chungking. "The result has been that I have been continuously snowed under with detail and have not been able to plan as I should." By this point, he was losing hope of ever being able to turn the situation around. As he told his top staff, "it must be admitted we

have fallen into the way of 'making do,' feeling that it was highly improbable [that] perfection of efficient operation would ever be attained."³⁶

His grueling schedule and his pressure-cooker job by then had taken an undeniable toll on his health. Although in the past he'd been able to keep working, even through illness, in the spring of 1944 he had contracted a case of typhus, "which has taken the wind out of my sails and left me with a decided rattle," he disclosed in a telegram to London. The Embassy doctor had recommended three months' rest, but Stanley refused to take a break. "I felt I was needed here even at half-strength," he explained. "I preferred not to go and compromised with both the Ambassador and the Doctor by promising 'to go slow.'" Yet, he admitted, he had reached the end of his "physical tether." Although he hoped his admissions would not be interpreted as "a squeal," he implored London to send him a finance officer.³⁷

His London chiefs apparently did not agree that he needed a finance officer, but in October 1944, they in-



Stanley in a *changshan*, a traditional Chinese man's robe.

show that in early 1945, his London higher-ups were trying to arrange to replace him with a journalist working in China. A January 25, 1945, letter reveals that arrangements were in the works to transfer him to a post at the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in Chicago. (The BIS was an international bank operated by the central banks of a number Allied countries, including Britain and the U.S.) "Smith has rendered

formed him that an administrative assistant had been recruited and would join his staff in Chungking within the month.³⁸ Stanley shared the news with his top staff in a heartfelt and appreciative memo, full of hope that the addition to the staff would herald "the end of our rather primitive, if sometimes effective, organization[,] " which would be replaced "by a more orthodox establishment." Finally, he would have "some of the freedom which I have sought for two and a half years. I mean freedom to think and plan."³⁹

Whether the new administrative assistant fulfilled his promise is not clear, but Stanley apparently continued to struggle because MOI documents

good service in China and has controlled a large organization for the Ministry [in Chungking]. After more than two years he is beginning to feel a strain in health and it is advisable to find him another post," the letter states. "His temperament would fit him admirably for B.I.S. work in Chicago and I think he would be liked and respected by his American contacts," the letter concluded, adding that one of Stanley's MOI superiors was planning a trip to the U.S. in February 1945 to discuss the transfer.⁴⁰

The transfer, however, never took place. Instead, after three and a half years abroad, a weary Stanley was granted home leave. By mid-February he was in Calcutta trying to hop a flight to Australia. Getting out of Chungking had been a nightmare, and Stanley had spent a tortuous 13 days on the road traveling from Chungking to Kunming.⁴¹

Stanley spent three months in Australia, and it appears that he may have been trying to get Olive to join him in China, especially after VE Day (Victory in Europe Day) on May 8, 1945. Certainly when he returned to India in mid-May, Stanley gave Sayers the impression that Olive had agreed to join him. Sayers discussed with Galvin the news that Stanley's wife was going to travel to Chungking at MOI expense, and Galvin suggested to Sayers that he should do likewise and apply for his wife's passage to India to be paid for by the MOI.⁴² In the end, however, it appears nothing came of Stanley's plan to have Olive join him in Chungking.

When the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiro-

shima and Nagasaki in August 1945, and Japan surrendered in September, Stanley was still in his MOI post. He stayed on for another six months after the war's end to wind down MOI's Chungking operation and assist in the transition of its publicity responsibilities to peacetime posts in newly liberated centers such as Peking, Canton, Tientsin, and, above all, Shanghai.⁴³

During the winding down, Stanley traveled in China with British dignitaries, including Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, the heroic British Army officer who was sent to China as Churchill's personal representative in 1943. In November 1945, Stanley and de Wiart held a reception for the press in Shanghai at which Stanley explained that China's export trade to Britain could resume as soon as its shipping industry was restored and its currency stabilized. He told reporters from the Shanghai dailies: "As soon as these two conditions have been remedied . . . and as soon as Europe ceases to receive priority attention from the British Government, there is every hope that trade, anxiously desired by Great Britain, will resume again between the two countries."⁴⁴

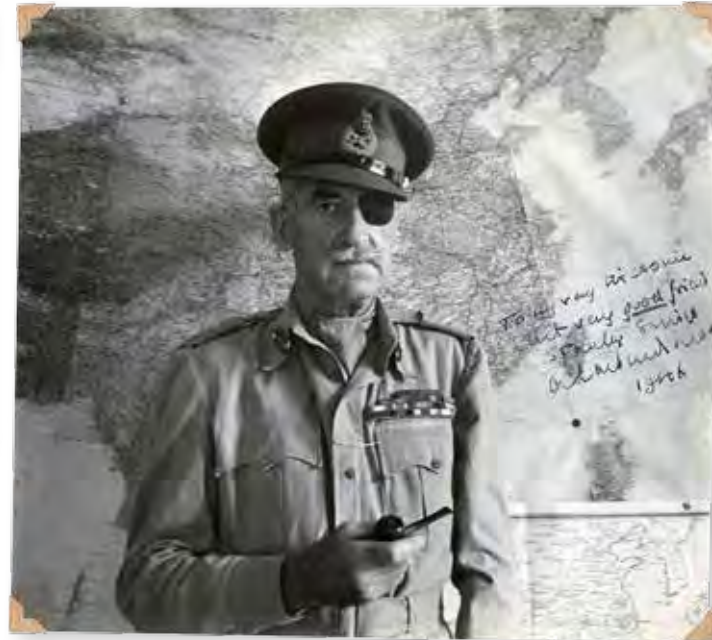
On January 20, 1946, Stanley wrote a memo to London stating that he had discussed the future of British propaganda in China with British Ambassador Seymour and had suggested that responsibilities for publicity be transferred to a Chinese-speaking press attaché based in Nanking.⁴⁵ That same month, the Far East Division of the MOI ceased to exist, and its functions were taken over by the Foreign Office based in Shanghai.⁴⁶ With his service to the Empire completed, Stanley headed to



Stanley with a soldier. (Though the weather is warm, notice the fur coat the soldier is carrying.)

Hong Kong to restart his life as a private citizen. At age 38, he was still a young man, but in terms of abilities, experience, and confidence, he'd matured markedly in the previous four years.

As for so many of his generation, World War Two had been the pivotal experience in Stanley's life. Unlike other Australians at this time, Stanley had not carried a gun, a kit bag, or a ration pack. He instead had been tasked with running a mission aimed at swaying perceptions, opinions, and beliefs—a mission that might not have been as crucial to winning the war as was Allied military might but that nonetheless arguably played a role in the Allies' victory and in protecting



Adrian de Wiart, Churchill's personal representative in Chungking, who inscribed the photo, "To my very tiresome but very good friend Stanley Smith," 1945.

British interests in the long run. He ended his service a much more capable, savvy, and seasoned man than the one who had arrived on the exotic tropical colonial island of Singapore in late 1941 not sure what to expect or what was to be expected of him. His eyes had been opened and his mind sharpened. Nothing could ever be the same again. He now was ready to take full



Stanley, British Ministry of Information Representative, at the British Embassy in Chungking, with Sir Horace Seymour, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to China from 1942 to 1946. Pictured here in 1945.

advantage of the knowledge, insights, and skills he had acquired in a place he saw as full of "potential trade riches."⁴⁷ And as foreign traders and merchants began flooding into Hong Kong and Singapore from all over

the world, waiting for the moment when trade in the Far East would resume, Stanley would make sure that he positioned himself as near to the head of line as possible.



CHAPTER NINE

Trading in Postwar Hong Kong

On September 9, 1946, a new company appeared on the Hong Kong business register. This company was Scott and English Limited, and Stanley Smith was its managing director.¹ No address was given for the company, just Hong Kong Post Office box number 1555. One month earlier, on August 1, 1946, a front-page headline in Singapore's *Straits Times* newspaper had announced that talks to reestablish trade with Japan were taking place in Tokyo. Leading these talks was "Mr John Galvin of Hong Kong," representing Singapore, the Malayan Union, Hong Kong, Burma, Ceylon, and British North Borneo. This was clearly an exceptionally important undertaking.

In 1947, Scott and English was elected to the newly reactivated Hong Kong Cham-

ber of Commerce. The election of Scott and English to membership was recorded in the chamber's first postwar report. That same report also noted that Galvin was an official with the British Colonial Government of Hong Kong's Department of Supplies, Trade and Industry, which was the "principal trading organization in the colony." The department had "strict controls" over trade and prices.² One year after the war's sudden end, Galvin had emerged as a mover and shaker in Hong Kong's government and business world while his business partner, Stanley, was standing ready with a new company to take advantage of whatever deals might be in the offing.

Postwar Hong Kong was a small island world in which entrepreneurial opportunities abounded, and shared wartime

◀ A painting of the Smiths' Hong Kong home in Repulse Bay.

experiences and contacts counted for a great deal. Stanley and Galvin had cultivated a lot of useful connections during the war, and in its aftermath, they put to use their valuable contacts and their storehouses of information and insights. It appears, in hindsight, that these two Australians had chosen the right place at exactly the right moment in history to launch their business. At the time, they of course couldn't see the enormous fortunes that awaited them in the future, but they apparently knew where to look for opportunities in their fast-changing world. And they set out determined to seize those opportunities wherever they saw them. As time would show, choosing the newly reclaimed British colony of Hong Kong as their base of operations was a masterstroke.

In the words of social historian Roger W. Buckley, there was "nothing very glorious about the return of Hong Kong to British rule." It was, he wrote, "an improvised scramble." Like everyone else, the British were caught a bit off base by Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945. Despite American pressure to let go of its former colonies in the Far East, Britain was determined to get Hong Kong back.

So desperate were they to regain control of Hong Kong ahead of either Chiang's Nationalists or Mao's Communists that the former colonial secretary, Franklin Gimson, declared himself Acting Governor of Hong Kong on August 16 from inside a camp where he was still being held a prisoner of war.³ Although frail, malnourished, and ill, Gimson "reclaimed British sover-

eighty over Hong Kong by sheer courage, stamina and dedication."⁴ It took Gimson just another week to talk his way out of the camp and the Japanese into surrendering control of Hong Kong to him. He and a small group of former British officials then quickly established a headquarters for their provisional government. Gimson also gained access to the radio station, which he used to broadcast an urgent plea to Chungking for military backup. Meanwhile, in Chungking, the British Ambassador to China, Sir Horace Seymour, was trying to deal with an increasingly outraged Nationalist government. Gimson did not know that London, fretting that the British would be beaten to Hong Kong by Chiang's forces, had already ordered a flotilla of British Pacific Fleet warships to the colony. The fleet arrived on August 30. On September 1, fleet commander Rear Admiral Cecil Harcourt, acting on British government orders, placed Hong Kong under military control with himself as governor, replacing Gimson. On September 7, a new government team arrived at top speed from London and very soon after that, so too did John Galvin.⁵

Fortuitously, the top administrator of the new colonial government team in Hong Kong was a former MOI colleague of Stanley's and Galvin's—David MacDougall. Stanley and Galvin had come to MacDougall's aid in Chungking in January 1942 when MacDougall arrived there after escaping Hong Kong during the Japanese takeover.⁶ Now MacDougall was back in Hong Kong, in charge of implementing the plan for the post-

war administration of Hong Kong, a plan that he had spent the previous six months developing for the British Colonial Office in London.⁷

Stanley and Galvin, likewise, had postwar plans that involved Hong Kong. And having their old wartime colleague MacDougall in charge of the government there undoubtedly would prove helpful.

"Sheer opportunism, I suppose you'd call it"

At the war's end, Hong Kong was a civic and economic mess. Almost everything was in short supply, including basic necessities such as rice, needed to feed its residents, and blankets, needed to keep them warm. Most of Hong Kong's once great corporations and factories lay in ruins. An official survey showed 90% of the rubber factories, 75% of the knitting, 50% of the weaving, all of the paint, and 50% of the vacuum flask factories had been destroyed. The traders and foreigners who had been doing business in the colony before the Japanese takeover wanted to get back to business as quickly as possible.⁸

Stanley and Galvin saw the moneymaking opportunities all around them and quickly jumped into various joint business ventures. As Stanley, in 1955, told the *Sketch*, the swanky British illustrated weekly that reported on high society and the super rich: "After the war, I sort of descended on the Far East. Sheer

opportunism, I suppose you'd call it."⁹ One of their first moves was to purchase a small, virtually defunct wool-broking firm in Sydney named Scott and English to use as a vehicle for their "buy-anything, sell-anything" trading activities.¹⁰ According to one source, the sea captain Clough Blair, Stanley and Galvin operated out of a Hong Kong hotel room in the immediate postwar period, trading American Army surplus goods around China.¹¹ It is entirely possible. A hotel room makes sense, especially if it was in the centrally located and very convenient Peninsula Hotel, the postwar favorite of British officers, government officials, and businessmen. Another source who knew both men well, the Australian journalist Lachie McDonald, wrote: "Hardly had the guns fallen silent than Galvin was bidding everywhere for surplus war-service blankets and rushing them into China. The inflated currency from their profitable sale went across the Hong Kong border into banks which for a time offered exchange rates that gave traders an extra profit by turning Chinese notes into 'hard' currency. A sort of double-dip for the early traders."¹²

In 1946, Stanley and Galvin bought Hong Kong's oldest English-language newspaper, the *China Mail*.¹³ The newspaper purchase made sense given Stanley's background in advertising and Galvin's in journalism, but a key Scott and English employee, David Belton, said that Stanley and Galvin bought the newspaper expressly so that they would have the press credentials needed to get into Japan in the days before traders were officially allowed back in.¹⁴ At that point,

Japan was under the control of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP). The title SCAP originally referred to just one man, America's General Douglas MacArthur, who was appointed Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers to rule Japan after the war. Because of both the force of MacArthur's personality and his absolute power over Japan—and everything and everyone who had anything to do with Japan—SCAP came to mean Allied-occupied Japan. For the first couple of years after the war SCAP could, and did, close Japan off to everyone except military and civilian officials and journalists. Under these circumstances a newspaper might have proven useful.

One account states that Stanley paid \$350,000 for the *China Mail*,¹⁵ but an Australian newspaper claimed the purchase price was “£20,000 or £30,000.”¹⁶ Whatever the case, in postwar Hong Kong these were fabulous sums and certainly much more than \$1 million today. Such a large transaction in 1946 also suggests that Stanley and Galvin had either made a lot of money during the war or had access to a lot of money shortly after it ended. Their investment seems to have paid off, since owning the newspaper helped them lay the groundwork for the establishment of Scott and English's Tokyo office, according to Belton, who worked in the Sydney branch of Scott and English from late 1948. He said that the partners were ready to launch their Japanese branch “just as soon as the SCAP regulations were relaxed to permit the entry of ‘Foreign

Traders’ as we were officially dubbed! This was a typical example of the vision, foresight and energy of Stanley and John!”¹⁷

Lachie McDonald wrote of meeting up with Galvin in a postwar Tokyo “crawling with . . . carpet-baggers,” where Galvin got ahead of the competition by ingratiating himself with key SCAP officers and advisers at General MacArthur's headquarters. He did this, McDonald recalled, by racing back to Hong Kong where he filled a transport plane full of “trade goods for show purposes only . . . scarce and valuable items such as Scotch whiskey which was of great appeal.”¹⁸

Tokyo was a somewhat wild place in the immediate aftermath of the war. It was a place where deals could be done on the fly and where a lot of people were in a hurry to make their mark. The Imperial Hotel in downtown Tokyo was the spot where everyone who was anyone stayed, did their deals, and, particularly in the case of journalists, gathered information. Since most of the hotel's rooms were reserved for senior American military personnel, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed hotel became known during the Occupation as “Little America.”

Donning their journalism hats, Stanley and Galvin probably spent time at the Imperial Hotel but they more likely stayed at No. 1 Shimbun Alley. This was the newly formed Tokyo Correspondents Club located in a five-story building a short walk from the Imperial Hotel. The club earned its nickname, meaning Number One Newspaper Alley, from its wild reputation in

the immediate postwar era. Drinks were “plentiful and cheap,” and drunken brawls were frequent. There were even occasions when “firearms were discharged in the lounge.”¹⁹

With Galvin apparently getting along well with SCAP, the scene was set for Scott and English to expand beyond what McDonald called “buy-anything, sell anything” trade. And getting money to finance their ventures, it appears, was no object. Joe Lever, a banker with the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) and head of its office in Hong Kong in 1950, recounted that Sir Arthur Morse, chief executive of HSBC, “knew [Stanley and Galvin] both quite well and respected their ability,” so he gave them the necessary money to start up their Scott and English business in Japan. At first Scott and English was engaged in swapping surplus Japanese rails for surplus Australian army blankets.²⁰ HSBC was unusual because it was Hong Kong-based, not London-based, and had a long tradition of financing intra-Asian rather than Europe-Asia trade flows. These were exactly the types of projects that Stanley and Galvin were operating.²¹

Trading with a Former Enemy

While Hong Kong's colonial administrators were preoccupied with restoring essential services, reinstating communications, and reestablishing law and order, they were also keen to rebuild confidence in, and



The Tokyo Imperial Hotel, known post-World War Two as “Little America” because so many Americans gathered there.

reestablish authority over, currency trading. The Hong Kong dollar, especially, had been damaged, undermined by Japanese counterfeiting. And it was still subject to black market manipulation.²² The colonial administrators were well aware that Hong Kong had been founded on trade. And if the colony was to not just survive but also to thrive, it would need to reinvigorate its currency and commodities markets as quickly as possible.

As early as October 1946, Galvin got himself named to a position in the colonial government that gave him authority for negotiating with SCAP on behalf of the Hong Kong administration over labyrinthine currency and exchange rate deals for payments for goods traded. The following year, when SCAP announced that Japan would be reopened to private trade on August 15, 1947, Galvin was appointed Official Agent of the Hong Kong Government in Japan.²³ How exactly Galvin had secured these key posts remains a mystery, but his connections with MacDougall and other war-time colleagues certainly may have helped.

Soon after the war's end, the British concluded that mainland China was no longer viable as a major trading base. Britain's former concession in Shanghai had been lost during the war, and the whole of China faced an uncertain future with civil war erupting between Nationalists and Communists. Having decided to cut their Chinese losses, the British realized that Hong Kong could only survive in the short term if they, ironically, quickly started trading with their former enemy—Japan. As the closest trading partner and the country with the biggest capacity for trade, SCAP-occupied Japan was the most powerful force in the region.

Meanwhile, in Japan, SCAP administrators immediately began worrying about the possibility of a future Communist takeover. The defeated country lay in ruin, and its people were starving and in rags. An active Communist Party had enjoyed moderate support in Ja-

pan in the early 1920s before the country fell under the control of far-right nationalists and the military. In 1946, with the nations of Eastern Europe reeling under the weight of Russian forces, China in the grip of civil war, and a Communist insurgency gaining support in Malaya, there was good reason to worry about Japan's future. Lachie McDonald, who spent time there as a foreign correspondent, told of hundreds of thousands of unemployed Japanese roaming city streets and country roads, many of them former soldiers with the experience "to incite revolt . . . unless industry, commerce and agriculture could sweep them quickly into work."²⁴ General MacArthur, the head of SCAP, believed that reviving trade and rebuilding a strong economy would secure Japan as a North Asian defense base and would serve as a rampart against Communism.²⁵

These were concerns, ideas, and goals that Stanley and Galvin shared.²⁶ As Scott and English employee David Belton explained, both Stanley and Galvin were "far from endeared" toward Japan given their own war-time experiences, but, "as idealists and realists," they appreciated "the danger of Russian induced Communism becoming dominant in run down Japan."²⁷ They also realized early on that Japan under MacArthur "was going to be rehabilitated in democratic form," according to Belton, and that the "trading potential would be almost unlimited." They set their sights on being "first up and best dressed in Japan—and before the old brigade of pre-war British traders—Jardines, Dodwell, Swire etc got themselves sorted out again."²⁸

Cornering Australia's Wool Market

An important first step in the rehabilitation of Japan's economy was to get its war-ruined textile and woolen mills back to work. By the fall of 1947, Scott and English was a well-established importer of Japanese textiles to supply a population in Hong Kong hungry for items such as blankets and clothing.²⁹ Then, Stanley also saw an opportunity to become not only customers of Japan's textile industry but also its suppliers.

SCAP was trying to get hold of more raw wool for Japan's textile mills, and the logical place to get it was from Australia. Australian politicians, however, resisted trading with Japan. They were well aware of the depth of bitterness Australians felt toward an enemy that had ill-treated so many Australian prisoners of war. In fact, in 1946, as SCAP was trying to negotiate a wool deal with Australia, Japan's American occupation force became so annoyed with Australian intransigence that they lodged an official complaint with the American State Department. But the Australian politicians stuck to their position, telling SCAP no way would they deal directly with the Japanese government. Not only that, but Australia also wanted any deal that SCAP offered on behalf of the Japanese to be kept secret from the Australian public. Since this would be the first time SCAP had been forced to do business with another nation behind the Japanese government's back, embarrassed SCAP administrators in turn asked the Australians not to publicize any arrangement between themselves

and Australia because doing so could in turn damage SCAP's relations with other governments.³⁰ Meanwhile, Stanley and Galvin came up with a work-around plan that would spare the Australians a public backlash and SCAP possible embarrassment. It was a plan that also would really put Stanley and Galvin's company on the international business map—Scott and English would import Australian wool to Hong Kong for re-export to Japan.

In February 1948, Scott and English did a deal with SCAP to supply £1 million of Australian wool on the proviso that the company would buy Japanese woolen textiles of equal value. It all fitted with the deal Galvin had set up with Japan, which gave Stanley and him "a license to export goods from Japan and pay for them with imports."³¹ Given the shortage of textiles in Hong Kong, the new wool contract also seemed like a good deal. Turns out it was a very good deal. The deal only went through because the Australian government liked the idea of exporting Australian wool to Hong Kong without the public suspecting that it was actually going to Japan. Trouble was, things didn't quite turn out the way they were intended to.

News of the deal somehow leaked, and Australian wool brokers and farmers cried foul. The deal was delayed several times until finally, in June 1948, it was allowed to go ahead. But that was on the understanding that Scott and English would in the future be one of three Australian wool brokers permitted to buy Australian wool for export to Japan.³² Scott and English was

now part of a privileged cartel with exclusive rights to the lucrative wool trade between Australia and Japan. Not only did Stanley and Galvin stand to earn substantial profits, but they also were helping their homeland. “They were proudly patriotic Australians and wanted to see Australia prosper,” recalled Belton.³³ And so, it appeared, matters had been resolved. But they hadn’t.

The Australian government, ever mindful of Australian public opinion, was restricting the quality of the wool exported to Japan to more inferior grades. Again Scott and English appears to have found a way around the problem.

In February 1949, the Australian press was printing angry articles about “black market” wool exports. The normally staid *Sydney Morning Herald* thundered that “Australia’s greatest success in postwar trade with the East had been in supplying black-market wool to Japan, through Hong Kong.” Officials explained it all away as relatively small-time “trader to trader” exports, which were not illegal.³⁴ The next year, in 1950, yet another newspaper article concluded that Scott and English “do seem to have a monopoly of trade with Japan.”³⁵ Despite the questions raised in the press, the profits Scott and English made trading Australian wool and selling Japanese textiles became, according to one of Stanley’s acquaintances, “the basis of his fortune.”³⁶ It was, according to McDonald, “the coup that really started them on the way to wealth.”³⁷ And as Scott and English was expanding, Stanley and Galvin were trav-

eling far and wide in pursuit of opportunity and hiring new staff and experts as they were needed.³⁸ From this point on, the growth of Scott and English, Lachie McDonald observed firsthand, “was spectacular.”³⁹

According to their employee Belton, Stanley and Galvin opened subsidiaries of their trading company in Sydney, Singapore, and Tokyo.⁴⁰ Beyond monopolizing the market in Australian wool exports to Japan, the partners also bought and sold ships and shipping lines, traded in various war surplus commodities, and supplied Australian timber to American military bases throughout the Pacific, among other ventures. As Belton recalled, “the period from 1948 through to around 1954 was the most active for the S[cott]&E[nglish] group of trading companies and the shipping companies. Agencies were held for the Burmese Government, Pakistan’s largest jute producer, copper mines in South America, and a whole raft of interesting and valuable commodities somewhat unique to Eastern commerce.”⁴¹

Launching their trading enterprises unquestionably required lots of hard work, patience, perseverance, and long days on the road. But the real key to Stanley and Galvin’s success as partners, according to McDonald, came from the two men’s complementary talents. It was “the genius and research of Smith, the studious partner and mastermind who remained largely in the background” combined with the “flair of Galvin, the go-getting front man” that “left all opposition flat-footed when it came to helping” SCAP solve what



Stanley and May.

“seemed almost insuperable problems.”⁴² Likewise, Belton observed a general understanding between the two men that Stanley would be primarily responsible for finance and administration while John Galvin would attend to sales and promotion of new ventures.⁴³ The arrangement seemed to work to both their advantages. “Everything they touched, . . . all forms of business resting beneath the heading ‘I’s and E’s,’ turned to gold,” wrote Australian columnist Dorothy Jenner in her “Andrea’s Page” column in the Sydney newspaper the *Truth*. “Smith became a multi-millionaire.”⁴⁴

Ending One Marriage and Starting Another

During this active postwar period, while Stanley and Galvin were establishing themselves in business, Stanley also was going through big changes in his personal life.

In June 1946, he flew to Australia on a Scott and English buying trip. But instead of returning to his and Olive’s home in Greenwich, where she and their daughter, Barbara, had remained throughout the war, Stanley checked into the upscale Hotel Australia in Sydney. According to Olive’s deposition in their subsequent divorce case, Stanley did not want to return to the home or the marriage. Instead, he suggested that she sell the house and that they divide the profits 50-50. Olive held onto the house, but she filed for divorce.⁴⁵ Stanley was served with divorce papers on September 20, 1948, at the Hotel Australia.⁴⁶ He did not contest the divorce, but before it could be completed, Olive died at age 43, two months after falling ill. According to her death certificate, her cause of death on December 12, 1948, was lung cancer.⁴⁷ In her will she named two Sydney women as 12-year-old Barbara’s guardians and as executors of her estate, which went to Barbara.

By the time his marriage to Olive was ending, Stanley quite possibly already had fallen in love with May Wong, the effervescent young Chinese woman who had worked for him at MOI’s office in Chungking. The

story of how Stanley and May first became romantically linked has been lost to time. After the war, Stanley may have encouraged May to leave China to pursue her education abroad. In the fall of 1946, May left China and traveled to Fife, Scotland, where she enrolled as a student at the University of St. Andrews. How she arranged to enroll at St. Andrews and how she paid for her travel as well as her tuition and room and board at the university is unknown. Her professors at St. Andrews would later remember her as a person who had suffered during the war and who needed assistance. “As a refugee, she had very little in the way of resources,” according to retired St. Andrews Professor John Beath, current chair of the board of trustees of the May Wong Smith Trust, created in 1972 to benefit St. Leonard’s College at the University of St. Andrews and the college’s students.⁴⁸

At the start of the 1946–47 academic year, May enrolled in an undergraduate master’s of art degree program and registered to take classes in moral philosophy, political science, and economics. She studied economics under Professor James Nisbet, and for the rest of her life, she always remembered how kind Nisbet and his wife were to her. “Professor and Mrs. Nisbet took a close interest in her well-being,” Beath said. In fact, Professor Nisbet provided May with some financial assistance while she was at St. Andrews.⁴⁹ The university has no record of May completing her classes and has no matriculation record for her in the following year or any record of her in its list of graduates.⁵⁰ She most likely left the university to return to Hong Kong some-

time in 1947, where, according to one source, she was hired by Stanley as a translator in what was now no doubt a very busy Scott and English office.⁵¹

Why May left St. Andrews after just one year or less is another unanswered question. “Perhaps it was for financial hardship reasons—which might explain why the Trust here is set up to provide financial support to students whose studies might be affected by unexpected financial problems that are no fault of their own,” Beath said.⁵²

What is known is that on Monday, January 8, 1951, Stanley Herbert Smith, age 43, and May Wong, age 28, were married at the Registrar’s Office in Hong Kong. On their marriage certificate, Stanley is listed as a widower and May as a spinster. Stanley’s profession is listed as “publisher,” and his address as 10 South Bay Road, Hong Kong.⁵³ By the time they married, they already had been living together for at least two years in Stanley’s lovely old Spanish-style villa overlooking Repulse Bay in Hong Kong, apparently while they were waiting for Stanley’s divorce from Olive to become final.⁵⁴ In the *Sketch* piece of 1955, Stanley explained that May’s family was less than thrilled with her choice of a husband. “Chinese families don’t like their daughters marrying foreigners, and so I had that difficulty to overcome,” Smith told reporter Judy Fallon. “But what May’s mother really objected to was that we were going to live in Hong Kong.” May went on to add, “[My mother] said to me, ‘On top of everything, when you live in Hongkong, you’ll be a Colonial.’”⁵⁵



Stanley and May stand with another couple.

By the time that May and Stanley exchanged their vows, May appears to have already lost contact with everyone in her Chinese family. After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, China became practically cutoff from the Western world and remained so for decades. Throughout those years, communication between residents of China and their relatives outside the country were strictly monitored, and visits were nearly impossible. John Bamforth, May's caretaker in her later years, said May gave him the impression that her family "came to terms with the revolution as they had no choice." Bamforth said that May's brother was in Communist China's Army and her sister was married to an Army officer. "I am sure May did not have any contact with them," Bamforth said. "That would suit both sides for obvious reasons. Mao Tse Tung was very unforgiving."⁵⁶

Although Great Britain formally recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950, relations between the two countries remained fraught, especially over the status of Hong Kong, where May and Stanley were living. It was not until 1972 that the PRC fully rec-

ognized the United Kingdom and started an exchange of ambassadors. Tensions between China and the U.S. started to ease in 1972 when President Richard Nixon visited China. Then in 1978, President Jimmy Carter announced the diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China. The normalization of U.S.-China relations started on January 1, 1979. By then, however, May's parents had both died. According to Bamforth, May's mother died in 1973 and her father in 1975.⁵⁷ How and where they died is not known. This was during China's Cultural Revolution, when conditions and communication were particularly difficult.

Although losing contact with her parents and siblings must have been painful, May had many friends in Hong Kong and was active socially, according to Bamforth. Her top priority always was serving as Stanley's hostess and supporting him in all his endeavors.⁵⁸ Given the busyness of Stanley's life in the first decade of their marriage, May certainly would have had her work cut out for her, especially after Stanley dived into the next and most lucrative venture of his life.



The Smiths' Hong Kong home, which featured white stucco with white accents, in 1969.



CHAPTER TEN

From Merchants to Miners

In the late 1940s, as the rewards from Scott and English's general trading "became less attractive,"¹ Stanley and Galvin came up with a new moneymaking scheme. This was to buy an iron ore mine on the isolated east coast of British-controlled Malaya (today's West or Peninsular Malaysia). The Bukit Besi mine, as it was known, had sat dormant since the end of the war, with hundreds of thousands of tons of accumulated stocks of ore abandoned at the mine and at the nearest port, ready to be shipped.² And just waiting in the wings was a customer ravenous for iron ore, a customer with whom Stanley and Galvin already were well acquainted: Japan. The defeated nation, which was rebuilding under Allied occupation, desperately needed a source of iron ore to revive its heavy industry. Japan would need 500,000 tons of ore by 1948 to feed its

reconstructing steel mills. This was expected to rise significantly to two to three million tons a year after 1949.³ As Stanley and Galvin saw it, if they could buy the Bukit Besi mine and get it up and running again, Japan surely would buy most, if not all, the ore the mine could produce.

Investing in the Bukit Besi mine was a gamble, but it was a gamble that later would look more like a stroke of genius. Stanley and Galvin's Malayan mining venture would quickly prove more lucrative than all their other ventures put together and would, in the words of Australian war correspondent Lachie McDonald, "set them on course for incredible wealth . . . beyond their wildest dreams."⁴

Within a relatively short time, Stanley and Galvin's iron mines would become the centerpiece of their commercial empire as

well as one of the largest enterprises in postwar Malaya. Quite quickly, their mines also would make them very rich. By 1965, Stanley and Galvin together had “amassed an estimated \$375 million in U.S. dollars,” according to Singapore’s leading newspaper, the *Straits Times*.⁵ Stanley and Galvin’s fortunes from Malayan mining were all the more extraordinary when compared to the much more modest wealth amassed by leading British contemporaries from the business world operating in the Far East. Sir John Hay, the uncrowned king from the 1930s to the 1960s of Malaya’s foremost industry, rubber, left £530,000 (about \$1.4 million in U.S. dollars) at his death in 1964.⁶ Sir John Hobhouse, head of Liverpool’s Blue Funnel shipping line in the 1950s, which carried much of Malaya’s rubber to western markets, left £133,680 (approximately \$373,000 in U.S. dollars) in 1961.⁷ Even Far Eastern bankers achieved wealth nowhere near Stanley and Galvin: Sir Arthur Morse, chief executive of HSBC from 1941 to 1953, who was instrumental in financing Stanley and Galvin’s projects, left an estate of £321,610 in 1967 (just under \$900,000 in U.S. dollars).⁸ To their credit, Stanley and Galvin recognized Malayan iron ore mining as the investment opportunity of a lifetime.

Buying Bukit Besi

The Bukit Besi mine was located 21 miles inland from the port of Dungun in the sultanate of Terengganu

(formerly Trengganu), about midway up the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, a “rugged and somewhat backward” area, as McDonald described it.⁹ The mine had been first developed in the 1920s by Japanese entrepreneurs and engineers seeking supplies for their country’s burgeoning iron and steel complex. Although the Malay states were British protectorates at the time, the British tolerated Japanese involvement in the mine because at that point Japan and Britain were allies. The Japanese operation might also have been allowed simply because British companies were too busy exploiting Malaya’s tin and rubber resources to worry about giving Japan access to the colony’s ore.

By the late 1930s, the Japanese were producing over one million tons of iron ore per year at Bukit Besi. But as war between Japan and the British Empire approached in 1940 and 1941, Britain placed restrictions on supplying raw materials to Japan. After the Japanese invaded Malaya in late 1941, shipping ground to a halt, disrupting supply lines and making it virtually impossible for the ore to be exported. The Japanese set up an operation in Malaya to run local blast furnaces and produce pig iron and steel on the spot, but they were only able to use a fraction of the ore capable of being produced at Bukit Besi. As a result, mining was drastically curtailed for the remainder of the war. In fact, only about 13,000 tons of iron ore was mined in Malaya as a whole in 1945.¹⁰

After the Japanese surrendered in 1945, ending the war, the British colonial authorities took possession of



Some mined earth went uphill, some downhill. The mine at Bukit Besi stressed good housekeeping.

Bukit Besi. Since they were determined never to allow the prewar Japanese owners back into Malaya, the mining concession was up for sale.

Stanley had first learned about Bukit Besi while he was in Malaya engaged in covert propaganda activities just before the Japanese invasion in December 1941.¹¹ After the war, while he and Galvin were in Japan on business, they “had access to information that showed that there were some very large iron ore deposits in the

East coast of Malaya,” according to HSBC banker Joe Lever.¹²

Having no background in mining themselves, Stanley and Galvin teamed up with Emil Ott, a Swiss arms dealer whom Galvin had met before the war. Postwar, Ott and a couple of partners had leased mining operations on the island of Hainan (off the coast of southern China) and were producing ore for sale to Japan by 1948.¹³ But China’s Nationalist administrators

cancelled the lease. When Galvin suggested a re-deployment of Ott's mining equipment and expertise to Southeast Asia, Ott and his associates "jumped at the chance," according to John Collins, Sr., who worked for Ott's group of companies in New York.¹⁴ To pursue the Malayan mine deal, Ott formed a new company: Eastern Mining and Metals Co. Ltd. (EMMCO), which was registered in the Federation of Malaya in 1948.¹⁵ Stanley and Galvin joined EMMCO first as key employees and later became owners.

No doubt relying on the connections they had made during and after the war to open the right doors, Stanley and Galvin, in May 1948, negotiated the purchase of the 450,000-ton iron ore stockpile and the mine at Bukit Besi. On behalf of Ott's company, they negotiated with British Malaya's government-run Custodian of Enemy Property in Kuala Lumpur. Another firm, backed by unnamed U.S. principals, was also interested in purchasing Bukit Besi, but the Custodian decided to sell both the stockpile and the mine to Ott's outfit.¹⁶ According to an April 7, 1948, Custodian memorandum, Ott's company was chosen because it possessed the "necessary men with experience, shipping facilities and access to the necessary modern equipment."¹⁷

EMMCO got the mine at a bargain basement price. According to government sources, the price for the stocks and the mine was just \$2 million in Malayan dollars (approximately \$940,000 in U.S. dollars). EMMCO was not able to raise the cash to cover the entire purchase upfront, but Sir Arthur Morse, chief ex-

ecutive of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), arranged financing for EMMCO so that the stockpiled ore could be transported and sold before the monsoon in autumn 1948.¹⁸ Morse "knew [Stanley and Galvin] both quite well and respected their ability so he gave them a lot of money to purchase these mining rights," Lever, the HSBC banker, said.¹⁹ The proceeds from the sale of the stocks plus the proceeds Stanley and Galvin earned from selling their newspaper, *China Mail*, to the *South China Morning Post* went toward the cost of Bukit Besi.²⁰ The balance owed to the Custodian was paid over the next three years from the proceeds from the sale of newly mined ore. By July 31, 1951, EMMCO owned Bukit Besi free and clear.²¹

Reviving the Mine

Stanley and Galvin found reviving Bukit Besi a relatively easy task.²² The mine had survived the war undamaged. The 17-mile narrow gauge railway that the Japanese had built to transport the ore to the port at Dungun, though rusted and overgrown by jungle, was in "good order," according to a Malayan government inspection in September 1947. There were some 37 steam and 17 diesel locomotives on the property and about 3,000 railway wagons; those not being used merely required "overhauling." Although the machinery was "mostly worn," the mine was fully equipped with

its own diesel-electric power station and workshops, which included general engineering, railway repair, and pattern shops, plus molding sheds and sawmills. British Malaya's government-run Custodian of Enemy Property had been maintaining the buildings and workshops and overhauling the machinery, while the power plant and railway had been kept "to some extent in running order." Production at full tilt of 60,000–70,000 tons per month was expected to be possible within nine to twelve months of reopening.²³

In 1948, EMMCO made the first shipments of 50,000 tons, from the Japanese stockpile at Dungun. That was followed by 600,000 tons in 1949, the year in which new production also came on line. In 1950, the mine produced nearly 500,000 tons of ore, and by the end of 1951 Bukit Besi was shipping between 4,000 and 5,000 tons daily on what the *Straits Times* dubbed "Malaya's busiest trains." There was a train every 20 minutes for 20 hours of the day. Five hours after the red iron ore was bored, it was being loaded. Except for the four hours after midnight, the trains ran backward and forward around the clock. During the monsoons the ore was stockpiled on the shore.²⁴

Stanley and Galvin soon made themselves indispensable to Ott and began exercising more and more financial and managerial influence in the mining enterprise.²⁵ Through its Tokyo branch, Scott and English marketed and sold the ore, including negotiating contracts with the Allied forces overseeing the rebuilding of Japan.²⁶ Given a general shortage of shipping ves-



Earthmoving equipment excavates at the mine.

sels bound for Japan in the wake of the Pacific War, Stanley and Galvin also established the Hong Kong & Eastern Shipping Company (HESCO) to transport the earliest shipments of ore from Terengganu. HESCO addressed a need: Japanese vessels and crews were not yet welcome in Malayan waters, and established British shipping agents at Singapore were not interested in chartering for "unprofitable loads."²⁷ Stanley and Galvin's company stepped in to fill the void.

Since they transported his ore and controlled his market for it, Ott made Stanley and Galvin directors of EMMCO—and it was not long before he agreed to



Eastern Mining's office at Sura, Dungun.

make a quick profit and sell the whole company to them.²⁸ By 1953, Stanley was listed as both chairman and managing director of EMMCO on the firm's letterhead.²⁹ Ott continued as a director.

By this stage Bukit Besi was proving even more lucrative than Stanley and Galvin could ever have anticipated. By chance in 1952, EMMCO had discovered on its railway line an additional iron ore deposit with proved reserves of 30 million tons.³⁰ This new supply was expected to be exhausted by 1962, but in 1959 fortune once again smiled on these merchant adventurers when more new reserves were found, prolonging the life of the Terengganu mine to 1970. Their original in-

tention had been a phased withdrawal from Bukit Besi to a new development in the south of Pahang state, but now the two mines would be worked independently and simultaneously.³¹

Modernizing Operations

Despite having been underused and nearly dormant for much of the war, the railway had required little repair, and Japanese engines—some old, others recently purchased from Japan—still pulled the Japanese tipper wagons along the original line. The mine superintendent still lived in the house built for his Japanese equivalent, and the club and rest house were also on their original sites. Outside the schoolhouse, there even remained “a fine little statue of a Japanese peasant boy carrying a load of wood on his back and studying a book as he walks,” observed Malaya's leading journalist, Harry Miller, on a visit to Bukit Besi in October 1954. But though the railway and buildings required little upgrade, the methods of mining had substantially changed since Miller's previous visit before the war. For instance, the Nippon Mining Company had previously relied on highly labor-intensive extraction, with 5,000 workers blasting and using *changkols* (hoe-like tools), digging the ore out of the hill, and manhandling it into the railway wagons. Stanley and Galvin made Bukit Besi more productive and cost-effective by modernizing, introducing the “latest [and largest] equipment.”³²

By 1954 Bukit Besi had become a highly mechanized operation. The operational changes, along with the increased output from new finds, allowed annual production to increase 50 percent above prewar Japanese levels. Harry Miller marveled at this streamlined process:

*excavators and shovels take five-ton bites out of the 1,200 foot high hill . . . ore is dumped into 200 hp diesel-engine trucks for transport to a crusher which breaks it up, and then drops it on to a 300-yard long conveyor belt. This pours the crushed ore into a line of tipper wagons. Then a Japanese engine draws the wagons 21 miles to Dungun. Here the [25] wagons unload on to another conveyor belt which moves 200 yards out to sea over a specially built jetty, where the ore is transferred into lighters . . . Only when the ore is loaded into Japanese and other ships of all nations lying [two miles] out to sea is it handled for the first time since it was dug out inland.*³³

Kept in storage at Bukit Besi were spare parts worth \$3.5 million in Malayan dollars (around \$1.2 million in U.S. dollars) to service this automated system. Another EMMCO innovation was that ore was no longer sent via rail to the Dungun estuary but instead to a jetty at Kampong Sura, about one and a half miles from the river. This allowed the oceangoing ships to anchor closer to the shore than had been the prewar practice.³⁴

Lachie McDonald was profoundly impressed and recalled operations in lyrical language:

*the shoreline was heaped with iron ore, red in the sun. The hill behind me had lost its top to huge earth-moving machines . . . They kept feeding chunks of rust-colored earth into chutes down which it crashed in almost endless cascades to form other shoreline piles of iron ore awaiting shipment to Japan which postwar was almost completely cut off from other supplies. In the blue China Sea beyond white beaches of fine sand . . . were ships waiting to load. Dozens of them, old freighters and others converted to ore carriers, some still earning the scars of wartime. From daylight to dark, the raw stuff kept rattling down the chutes and the ships took turns moving in to load.*³⁵

Because of monsoons, loading was seasonal. During the dry months, round-the-clock labor was necessary to maximize shipments. By 1954, 6,000 tons daily was being shifted in 28 trainloads per day, six days a week and seven days a week at the ship-loading jetty at Kampong Sura.³⁶ Robert Cathcart, an American lawyer who first met Stanley in 1956 in Singapore, explained that “there was no protecting harbor for the ships, [so] everything had to come to an end on October 1st with the arrival of the Monsoon.”³⁷

By 1954, the “self-contained and independent” 400-acre township of Bukit Besi supported a population of 3,000 people. Apart from mining, there were locomotive workshops; a foundry and pattern maker; a sawmill, which turned out timber for export overseas and railroad ties; carpentry sheds; a large power house; blacksmiths' shops; and even chemical laboratories.³⁸



(from left) At the Sura terminus, ore wagons were dumped. Then the ore went seaward to ships or landward into stockpiles.

The 200-ton loads were towed a mile to a ship.

Expanding Operations with the Rompin Project

By the early 1960s, Bukit Besi was the largest mining complex in Malaya, but even so, it was insufficient to absorb all Stanley and Galvin’s entrepreneurial energy.³⁹ Not expecting Bukit Besi to be capable of sustaining bulk tonnages past 1962, by the early 1950s Stanley and Galvin were planning an even more audacious project in the sultanate of Pahang, on Malaya’s east coast to the south of Terengganu. This was at Bukit Ibam, another giant hill of hematite standing 770 feet

above sea level. The site was predicted to contain 30 million tons of iron ore with an expected annual output of three to four million tons. Though prospected by the Japanese in the years between World War One and World War Two, no mining had ever taken place there. So, in contrast to Bukit Besi, the Rompin project (as it became known) would require building both a transport and extraction infrastructure from scratch.⁴⁰

Stanley and Galvin’s Rompin development project won the support of top American decision-makers determined, through the 1950s, to continue building Japan up as a key ally and bulwark against communism

(from the Department of Defense, the SCAP administration, and the Mutual Security Agency) in Japan, Singapore, and Washington. From as early as 1952, they had White House backing to “Get Rompin into production.”⁴² So important was the project to the Truman administration that Kenneth Morrow, the head of a special SCAP mission, spotlighted Rompin as an example of how Japanese industrial techniques and Southeast Asia development, fueled by U.S. foreign aid, could work.⁴³

By 1960, Rompin was starting to take shape. In September, Stanley excitedly wrote to his former headmaster at Churchie, Harry Roberts, from his home in Hong Kong: “I have a great new project afoot in Malaya. Sixty miles of railway through swamps and jungle, two new towns and that sort of thing! It is a 12 million pounds project . . . This will be the biggest single enterprise in S.E. Asia on completion in 61/62 and will produce 2M tons of high-grade iron ore for export.”⁴⁴ With a 21-year mining lease covering 3,000 acres, and with prospecting rights for a further 4,000 acres, Rompin was finally opened by the Sultan of Pahang at Bukit Ibam in July 1962, and the first shipment of 10,000 tons to Japan commenced. The project supported a population of 6,000 at the mine alone.

Bukit Ibam was located about 120 miles up a winding, twisting river (nine miles of which ran through deep jungle). The Rompin Mining Company, a subsidiary of EMMCO, addressed that challenge by constructing the railway that Stanley described to Roberts, which

in the Far East. This was a goal shared by Smith and Galvin. Importing crucial raw material supplies into Japan from projects such as Rompin, from pro-western Southeast Asia rather than communist China, was key to this goal.⁴¹

Smith and Galvin met with influential U.S. officials



◀ The Bukit Besi machine shop. ▲ Spare parts were kept in inventory to protect the 15,000-mile supply lines. ▶ Equipment wear and tear were the biggest cost at Bukit Besi.

◀ The engineering section predicted progress. ▲ A laboratory technician checked for quality. ▶ Thousands of analyses were done daily.

slashed the distance to the port at Kuala Rompin by 60 miles. This was a huge feat. By the summer of 1961, 1,000 workers were forcing rail lines through some of the thickest jungles in Malaya, blasting rocks and trees, and building 200 bridges, totaling 14,000 feet, over swamps and streams.

On top of this, at the company's shipping installation at the mouth of the Rompin River was a 200-acre stockpile area and port facilities with workers' housing, a school, and a hospital. From the port, 25 lighters and eight tugboats, built in Hong Kong and run by Stanley and Galvin's shipping and stevedoring compa-

nies, carried the ore four miles out to sea to be loaded on to deep-sea vessels. Even before the first railroad ties were laid, Stanley and Galvin spent \$2.5 million in Malayan dollars (over \$800,000 in U.S. dollars) on prospecting and testing the ore. The equipment to build the railway, much of which was used later in mining, cost \$11 million in Malayan dollars (\$3.6 million in U.S. dollars) alone.⁴⁵ Their investments more than paid off: according to David Belton, the Scott and English employee, within two years of opening, Rompin was producing at its optimum of three million tons annually.⁴⁶

EMMCO's Biggest Customer

With Rompin underway, EMMCO jumped into other mining ventures, albeit on a more modest scale than either Bukit Besi or Rompin. Stanley and Galvin started the Tambun Mining Company, with capital of \$1.5 million in Malayan dollars (about \$500,000 in U.S. dollars), to work iron ore deposits in the west coast state of Perak. The Tambun deposits, like Bukit Besi, had been worked prewar by a Japanese firm. From the end of 1956, the new EMMCO subsidiary mined a 44-acre site leased from the state government. By

1957-58, Tambun had a monthly output of 11,500 tons and an annual production of 200,000 tons. Tambun required construction of another railway track two miles long.⁴⁷ Back in Pahang, EMMCO also developed the Jerantut mine at Bendun, which went into operation around 1963.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Bukit Besi proved the gift that just kept on giving, with another EMMCO subsidiary, Trengganu Minerals Ltd., in operation by 1965, mining a "very valuable" tin deposit, to the delight of Stanley and Galvin's financiers, HSBC.⁴⁹

Japan was always EMMCO's biggest customer, but it was not its only customer. Galvin reported to the



(from left) Ore being scrubbed, rinsed, and loaded onto railcars.

A Boon to Malaya's Economy and Workers

Stanley and Galvin's development projects were much valued by Malayan nationals, who increasingly were demanding a say in their government as the end of empire unfolded. The federal government in Kuala Lumpur regarded Rompin as "of [the] greatest importance to the economically backward state of Pahang"⁵⁶ with positive trickle-down effects "for other economic development in south Pahang."⁵⁷ Bukit Besi had set a great precedent. According to McDonald, Stanley and Galvin's mining company "was to transform Dungun, strengthen the finances of Kuala Trengganu [the state capital] plus wider Malaya."⁵⁸ Between 1948 and 1953, EMMCO paid \$6 million in Malayan dollars (about \$2 million in U.S. dollars) in federal income tax plus \$5 million in Malayan dollars (around \$1.7 million in U.S. dollars) to the Terengganu government in export duties and royalties. In fact, Bukit Besi royalties brought Terengganu State more than half its total locally raised revenue.⁵⁹ From 1952 to 1958, the Terengganu government earned \$16 million in Malayan dollars (over \$5 million in U.S. dollars) in royalties from the Dungun concession and by the early 1960s was earning some \$5 million in Malayan dollars (about \$1.7 million in U.S. dollars) in royalties from Bukit Besi every year.⁶⁰ An additional bonus point in Stanley and Galvin's favor was the employment opportunities provided by their min-

ing enterprises—the annual payroll at Bukit Besi was \$3 million in Malayan dollars (about \$1 million in U.S. dollars), and Rompin would become one of the largest single employers of labor in the peninsula.⁶¹

By providing dependable livelihoods and pumping up the public coffers, EMMCO also effectively undercut the political power of Malayan communists during the transition to independence. "[U]ltimate success in defeating the terrorists depends as much upon social and economic development as upon police and military operations," wrote Britain's Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton to Chancellor of the Exchequer Rab Butler in July 1953.⁶²

Stanley and Galvin's human resources policies in their mining enclaves were certainly more progressive and enlightened than the longer-established British plantation and mining companies.⁶³ Economically disadvantaged Malays especially valued the job opportunities and support provided by EMMCO. In a country preparing for political independence, the mining jobs were considered preferable to rice-growing and fishing. Smith and Galvin employed the *bumiputera* ("sons of the soil") in large numbers, arguing that modern industrial enterprises could use Malay workers as long as they were educated and encouraged through adequate training. A visitor to Bukit Besi in May 1957 reported admiringly to the *Straits Times* on EMMCO's groundbreaking employment policies: "In western Malaya they say that Malays won't work. Do they know that the biggest iron mine in Asia is being worked with Malay labour?"⁶⁴

Colonial Office in London in October 1952 that EMMCO had sent 70,000 tons of ore to the UK in 1952 and had contracted for another 200,000 tons for the following year (and was also negotiating a 300,000 ton contract with Germany). That said, in 1953 alone Bukit Besi was expected to deliver 1 million tons to Japan.⁵⁰

Although Japan was able to buy some ore from China and other countries, these supplies were limited. Moreover, trade with China became increasingly politically problematic. As a result, after 1955, Malaya became the largest supplier of iron ore to Japan. In 1960, almost all of the 5.5 million tons of iron ore shipped from the peninsula was destined for Japan.

Moreover, HSBC research found that "the projected future of the Japanese steel industry was based on a certain amount of ore being bought from Malaya."⁵¹ In 1961, Malayan ore exports to Japan reached a record 6.7 million tons.⁵² Much of this relied upon Stanley and Galvin's enterprises. By 1953, EMMCO was exporting one million tons of iron ore to Japan from Bukit Besi. New finds in Terengganu saw that figure double 10 years later.⁵³ Including all mining operations, EMMCO was exporting some 5 million tons per year after 1962, 90 percent of it destined for Japan.⁵⁴ This made Galvin and Stanley's stable of companies the largest source of iron ore for Japan in the postwar era.⁵⁵

Around 3,000 Malays were employed at Bukit Besi by 1952, constituting about 80 percent of its workforce. This made EMMCO the largest employer of Malay labor outside government service. Nor were Malays merely given menial, low-paid jobs: they were employed throughout the mining operations, even in executive posts. By 1957, Bukit Besi could boast the only Malay mining engineer in the peninsula.⁶⁵ He was fully qualified and commanded the same pay as a European. Even more radical for the time, one of the two welfare officers at Bukit Besi was a Malay woman from Singapore, Hafsa binte Abdul Jalil.⁶⁶ By 1965, EMMCO also boasted a Malay director, Abdul Halim Hasip.⁶⁷

Reserving desirable employment opportunities for Malays was not only a sound business practice but also smoothed the way for Stanley and Galvin politically. As Galvin explained to British Colonial Office officials in 1952, their hiring practices impressed the Malay-dominated Terengganu government, and this local goodwill was valued so much that EMMCO persisted in employing Malays at the managerial level despite this being a “self-defeating policy.” Self-defeating because those Malays who got to executive positions invariably left for senior posts in the state administration with higher wages and cushy pensions.⁶⁸

So keen was the colonial government in Kuala Lumpur to get the Rompin project underway that it even lent EMMCO all the prewar Japanese prospecting records. This “development-first” attitude, as historian Junko Tomaru dubs it, meant that governments



▲ Workmen ride to work at the Bukit Besi mine.

▼ Progress was carefully measured.



Fertilizer was the main explosive in blast holes.

in London and in Kuala Lumpur countenanced some bending of trade regulations to help Stanley and Galvin get on with the job at Rompin.⁶⁹ For instance, the UK Treasury and the Bank of England allowed EMMCO to do a barter deal with Japan whereby the company swapped \$10 million in U.S. dollars' worth of Japanese steel, plant, and equipment for Malayan ore, even though the swap might have given the Japanese industrialists a competitive edge over British industry.⁷⁰ Among other things, this deal made possible the order of four 1,000-horsepower Hitachi diesel electric locomotives and a fleet of ore wagons from Japan, which could not be competitively sourced from Britain or any other part of the Empire-Commonwealth.⁷¹

What also helped Stanley and Galvin in their dealings with imperial and colonial governments was a

strong desire to diversify the Malayan economy and reduce Malaya's dependence upon rubber and tin, whose export prices were far more volatile than iron ore's.⁷²

The symbiosis between Stanley and Galvin and the Malayan government was probably greater post-independence than under colonial rule. For example, after independence in 1957, the government built a road from the mine to the existing road to Singapore. That greatly benefitted the mine and its staff. To improve communications, the government upgraded Bukit Ibam's telephone connection with the Federation system. On the opening of the Rompin mine, the Minister of Commerce and Industry in Kuala Lumpur, Mohd Khir Johari, celebrated “the biggest capital investment in Malaya since *merdeka* [independence]. Also the largest development project by a commercial company.” Minister Johari continued, “The mine was opened in true pioneer spirit. I am really pleased.”⁷³ His enthusiasm was hardly surprising since the state government expected to receive royalties of not less than \$22 million in Malayan dollars (over \$7.25 million in U.S. dollars) in the first five years of Bukit Ibam's operations. The Rompin project would employ about 2,000 people, about 80 percent of them Malays. Stanley and Galvin's enterprise also provided numerous social benefits for workers and their families including a Malay school, an English school, and a modern hospital.⁷⁴



CHAPTER ELEVEN

A New Approach to Human Resources

Another key to Stanley and Galvin's business success was their human resources strategy, an approach that Stanley most likely first developed while supervising his MOI staff in Chungking during the war. As mining operators, he and Galvin were generous to their staff and believed that happy workers were productive workers. This meant providing good terms even for those employees who didn't work out, as Stanley professed to his old headmaster in April 1958:

In all my companies the most utter stinker who is fired or who leaves us gets a cheer up letter within a month of his leaving and it's not done for a commercial purpose. It's an act of studied kindness at a time when the fellow's emotional works are swirling like the interior of a modern washing machine. . . .

The poor wretch may be a near alcoholic, a twisted personality in fact anything but normal and the letter helps in his future life. . . . [T]here is no substitute in life for kindness.¹

This enlightened approach earned them the loyalty of a highly skilled and dedicated staff. The predominantly Australian executive staff—engineers, geologists, and chemists—enjoyed free accommodation for themselves and their families in “well-built and furnished Company Houses.” Lighting, water, medical attention, and air travel at the start and end of their contracts were also provided gratis by EMMCO. There were generous paid vacations and free primary schooling “to Australian standards.”² The perquisites and salaries compensated for what journalist Harry Miller

◀ Students at the the school at Bukit Besi that EMMCO ran for Malay children.



The bar at the club offered relief from the hot weather.

called the “hard and isolated” life at Bukit Besi.³ One example of Stanley’s generosity to his employees was his hosting of a wedding reception in 1954 at the luxurious Raffles Hotel in Singapore for John Winterflood, the assistant mine superintendent of EMMCO. At the party, guests were served caviar, foie gras, smoked salmon, oysters, and champagne; and Stanley even gave the bride away.⁴

Unlike so many other colonial enterprises, it wasn’t just the expatriates who were treated well by Stanley and Galvin’s companies. A sense of paternalism extended right down the work chain, and Galvin boasted to the Colonial Office in 1952 that EMMCO were “model employers” who had never lost a day’s work through



The pool was open to all.

a strike or other labor trouble at Bukit Besi because they paid high wages and provided liberal medical and health services. Even when commodity prices dropped at the end of the Korean War boom, Stanley and Galvin did not cut wage rates as did the tin and rubber companies.⁵ By 1951, the hospital at Bukit Besi boasted the best X-ray equipment on the east coast, and a *Straits Times* reporter was particularly impressed by the European and Eurasian supervisors who knew their workers’ names. “A tour of inspection with any of these is constantly interrupted by inquiries about Abdul’s boy at school, Mat’s wife in hospital and Krishna’s bandaged hand,” the reporter observed.⁶

Harry Miller in 1954 confirmed that, just like the



The village market.



A surgeon at work.

expatriate staff, the Asian workers and their families received free housing, light, and water—and high wages. Social security extended from the cradle to the grave: “Expectant mothers get free pre-natal care. Cinemas are free. Bereaved families do not pay for coffins.”⁷

The Malay school at Bukit Besi had an enrollment of 350, and the English school took 30 pupils, both European and Asian. The teachers were paid by the company. Typical of Stanley and Galvin’s progressive outlook was a plan to combine the two schools into a “national,” multiracial institution. Also, the company sent two Terengganu boys annually to a four-year course at the Technical College in Kuala Lumpur, and plans were afoot in 1954 to send 10 boys from Bukit Besi itself to the trade school in the federal capital for three-year engineering courses.

A welfare advisory committee, meanwhile, composed of employees and management, met regularly to discuss how amenities could be improved. This led to the establishment of a junior club for the younger staff, whose members were not comfortable mixing with senior personnel. Night workers were treated to free coffee. Women and girls were not overlooked either. Che Hafsah, the female Malay welfare officer, ran a Brownie troop, encouraged the flourishing Women’s Institute, and was planning a day care center for female workers’ children.⁸ This welfare provision would be replicated at Rompin (and likely at Tambun and Jerantut too).

Ordinary employees were also generously rewarded for their loyalty. For example, in the Malayan tradition of giving (cash gifts concealed in colored and

decorative packets), about 130 staff members who had worked for EMMCO for five years received a total of \$2,400 in Malayan dollars (about \$800 in U.S. dollars) in December 1957, perhaps as a payment for their long and loyal service.⁹ Clearly, Stanley and Galvin were determined to be philanthropic and ethical, welfare-oriented employers.

Beyond generously compensating their employees, Stanley and Galvin also attempted to make the Dungun concession self-sufficient in food production in an effort to reduce the cost of living for the 6,000 employees and their 20,000–30,000 dependents. Chiming with Stanley's own enthusiasm for horticulture and agriculture, this involved employing the eminent professor Frank Dickinson in 1953 and tasking him with increasing food production. Stanley and Dickinson had met and become friends during the war in Chengtu where Dickinson was a professor of agriculture at West China Union University. Dickinson later had been sent on missions by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The septuagenarian Dickinson had been awarded the prestigious "Cloud and Banner" decoration by Chiang Kai-shek's government in recognition of his services to the nation, the first ever to go to a non-Chinese. In Malaya Dickinson continued his pioneering experimental work, which included cross-breeding local cattle and poultry with imported pedigrees, introducing goats and rabbits from Australia and New Zealand, respectively, and growing grasses on 80 acres of reclaimed jungle to feed the burgeoning livestock. These efforts were watched keenly by government agricultural and veter-

inary officers in a country whose export-oriented economy had always struggled to produce sufficient food.¹⁰ Dickinson's agricultural program seems to have been defeated, however, by the high rainfall (200 inches per year) and the toxic nature of the iron tailings, a waste by-product of the mining operation.

Frank Dickinson's hiring reveals another key element in Stanley and Galvin's human resources strategy: they always sought out the very best experts to fill their executive positions. "One of [the] very basic principles in industry," as Stanley explained in a letter to Churchie Headmaster Roberts in January 1958, was "to find always the best trained and experienced experts to fight specialized problems. I've seldom made the mistake of substituting my general awareness for genuine expertise."¹¹ His was a management philosophy based on "delegation of almost 100% complete authority in each country of operation."¹² Many of those who worked with Stanley observed that he was "a good judge of people, and he had a rare ability to delegate. He stayed in Malaya only until he was sure he had the right person in every job," according to the anonymously authored account of his life written after his death.¹³ As Stanley elaborated to Roberts, "One of the hardest things I've found in my life is to show enough of the right kind of intelligence to keep my nose far enough away from the grindstone to be able to see the stone and what's being ground."¹⁴ This was doubtless one of the lessons Stanley took from his challenging years heading up a big operation under difficult circumstances in wartime Chungking.

Typical of Stanley's postwar strategy was the hiring

of James (Jim) McHugh, previously the head of the Malayan government's public relations department, as general manager of EMMCO and subsequently as managing director at Rompin. McHugh was an engineer by training, but what made him an extra special asset for EMMCO was his deep knowledge of matters Malayan and his renowned expertise in Malay culture and linguistics.¹⁵ Moreover, McHugh was one of Stanley and Galvin's wartime secret service contacts; he had been in charge of Psychological Warfare (Malaya) in Lord Mountbatten's South East Asia Command at the end of World War Two. During the reoccupation of Malaya, McHugh set up the government information service under the British Military Administration.¹⁶ Indeed, in Stanley's view, McHugh was the "best Malayan scholar who ever lived."¹⁷ Well acquainted with the Malay elite, in particular Dato Onn bin Jaafar, first head of the leading Malay nationalist party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), McHugh was a crucial adviser and go-between for EMMCO. "Malay rulers and villagers alike respected [McHugh] for his deep understanding of their beliefs and customs and his knowledge of their language," Lachie McDonald wrote.¹⁸

Stanley and Galvin were in a good position to lure experts to their staff during Malaya's transition toward independence. They were able to draw from the pool of expatriate public servants who were happy to remain working in Malaya but who were faced with early retirement as government posts were awarded to Asians. For example, the chief engineer in charge of the Rompin railway operation was G. M. Wheat, former head of

the Malayan Railways.¹⁹ And J. L. W. Cole, an electrical engineer with EMMCO in early 1957, formerly worked at Malaya's Central Electricity Board.²⁰ The European welfare officer at Bukit Besi, R. Shuttleworth, was a veteran of the Malayan prisons service.²¹

While EMMCO was able to hire the right employees for key positions, they paid them with salaries and perquisites, not with significant stock options or any type of ownership. "All these companies were essentially private . . . with Stanley Smith and John Galvin equal partner owners," Belton wrote. "They allocated non-tradable dividend earnings [and] minor shareholdings to the senior executives they appointed to operate the various companies."²² EMMCO was run as a closed corporation that did not issue public statements. "The partners liked to keep their operations secret," McDonald said. "They believed in working for themselves rather than shareholders," thus facilitating "quick decisions."²³ The British rubber and tin firms in Malaya tended to be publicly traded companies on the London or Singapore stock markets, but Stanley and Galvin did not wish to dissipate control or profits to shareholders. They preferred to use loans to finance expansion rather than going to the stock exchanges (or, indeed, using their own resources). Smith and Galvin also dispensed with the traditional network of secretaries, brokers, agents, and other intermediaries—all of which were typical of the Malayan business scene—to concentrate profits in their own hands. While Galvin concentrated on selling the mines' ores, "Smith lived in Malaya and ran [them]."²⁴



CHAPTER TWELVE

A Pair of Shrewd and Well-Connected Entrepreneurs

Stanley and Galvin were clearly in the right place at the right time when they launched their mining enterprise. But the business didn't just fall into their laps. For one thing, they had shrewdly nurtured their wartime intelligence connections and postwar trading networks, which allowed the pair to establish solid and lasting contacts. One useful contact was Sir Edmund Hall-Patch, a senior civil servant in the British Foreign Office. Galvin and Hall-Patch had met while Hall-Patch was serving as the UK government's financial commissioner in the Far East in 1940, and their connection continued after Hall-Patch moved to the Treasury in London in 1941. In fact, Stanley and Galvin had dined with Hall-Patch in London during the war when Stanley was on leave from China.

In September 1951, Galvin and Stanley were in London again, this time to seek the go-ahead to expand their mining operations in colonial Malaya. Hall-Patch helped them out by writing a letter of introduction to His Majesty's Treasury. He described Galvin as a "very remarkable person" who "talks with the strongest cockney accent of any Australian I know and looks rather like a seedy commercial traveller." The man's business methods were "not always of the most orthodox character," but in the six years since the end of the Second World War he had emerged as "one of the most powerful single forces in commerce in the Far East."¹ (Interestingly, although the UK National Archives recently released the Treasury file containing Hall-Patch's 1951 letter under a Freedom of Information

◀ A view of Parliament and Big Ben. Periodically, Stanley visited London for business.

request, one paragraph of the letter is still redacted, presumably because it refers to Hall-Patch's knowledge of Galvin and Stanley's wartime intelligence work. The ongoing redactions, at the behest of the UK Security and Intelligence Service, suggest that Galvin may have continued in an espionage role after the war.)²

Another valuable contact among British key civil servants was Sir Archibald Rowlands. During the war, Rowlands had become acquainted with Stanley and Galvin while working as adviser to the Viceroy of India, Lord Wavell.³ By 1953, Rowlands was acting as EMMCO's representative in London. Rowlands had recently retired as the top civil servant in the Ministry of Supply, "one of the central administrative units of the postwar UK economy."⁴ Rowlands would serve as an informal channel in negotiations with the British government on the Rompin project.⁵ Michael Beecham, who managed Stanley and Galvin's equipment and ship purchases in London, confirmed that Stanley "had become good friends" with Rowlands "in the Far East during the war." So much so that around 1951, Stanley asked Beecham to deliver a bottle of whiskey to Rowlands. Beecham dissuaded Stanley, however, informing him that there was a bribery scandal currently in the news involving a "Sydney Stanley" who'd been indicted for bribing officials at the Ministry of Supply. According to Beecham, he asked Stanley, "With all this hooahg going on about bribing people at the Ministry of Supply, do you really want me to walk in there, bold as brass, with a bottle of whiskey for the head of the

whole thing?" Stanley replied, "All right, Mike. I see the point. You have it." So Beecham and Stanley consumed a "good measure" of the spirit themselves!⁶

Even after their Malayan mining operations were well established and yielding enormous profits, Stanley and Galvin continued turning to people they had first met during the war years for their help and expertise, such as EMMCO general manager Jim McHugh. Many more of their contacts continued opening doors and smoothing the way for the partners.

*"It's just downright amazing
how often you can win
if you keep trying"*

Building and sustaining these alliances and getting the wheels of finance and government turning involved endless hard work and persistence. From the sound of it, Stanley and Galvin ran themselves ragged in the early years of their partnership as they were flying all over the world to make deals, lobby public servants, buy and sell commodities, open offices, and enter new ventures. They were "ceaselessly on the move here, there, and everywhere around the world initiating new contracts, organizing their execution, recruiting managerial level staff to cope with the expanding activities and generally coordinating/integrating group efficiency," David Belton recalled.⁷ Lachie McDonald

confirmed that "both of them were constantly on the move in Asia or between Asian capitals and Washington or London, where they went for the development finance they needed."⁸

At one point, according to a 1950 news story, Galvin "collapsed under the pressure in Tokio [*sic*], and in an American military hospital was given only 24 hours to live. His wife raced from Switzerland (where she was living) to Tokio, where she was a guest in the British Embassy compound; and Galvin recovered."⁹ According to McDonald, Galvin had suffered a heart attack in 1948, requiring him to leave Japan in an oxygen tent.¹⁰ Stanley likewise suffered health problems. "For years I worked day and night and wore myself to a frazzle," he recalled in a 1958 letter.¹¹ By the time Galvin recovered from his cardiac occurrence, Stanley also had had a heart attack while in Hong Kong. McDonald recalled that one early morning in 1948, when he and his wife, Dorothy, were staying at the Old Gloucester Hotel in Hong Kong, a visitor knocked at their door. "A small and lovely Chinese girl announced herself charmingly as, 'I belong to Stanley Smith. I am May.'" (They weren't married yet but apparently were living together while Stanley waited for his divorce from his first wife to become final.) She explained that Stanley wanted to see them but couldn't leave his Repulse Bay home because he, too, was "recovering from a heart attack." The McDonalds were picked up by Stanley's driver and driven to the house, where they found Stanley "impatient about restraints on his activities but

still receiving and sending business cables to what he called 'assets' beyond the colony."¹²

Stanley knew that dogged determination paid off. "It's all a competition. You win or you lose but it's just downright amazing how often you can win if you keep trying. I've had enough personal experience of the rewards of application plus persistence," Stanley wrote to Headmaster Roberts in October 1958.¹³

Persistence was required because, in the Rompin project particularly, Stanley and Galvin came up against a brick wall of British bureaucracy.

Despite sharing anti-communist, pro-development objectives with the British, Stanley and Galvin often received short shrift from snobbish and suspicious officials both in London and on the ground in Malaya. The pair—loyal to Great Britain—consulted His Majesty's Government as well as the iron and steel firms in the UK during September 1951 "out of patriotic motives."¹⁴ Their subsequent dismissive treatment by British bureaucrats must have been deeply disappointing and demoralizing. As Hall-Patch's caution not to be "put off" by Galvin's diction and demeanor reveals, the patrician public school and Oxbridge-educated officials, with their upper-class accents and general disdain for the grubby world of commerce, were poles apart from the two "colonials," self-made ex-jackaroos with degrees from the "University of Life." On a visit to the Colonial Office in October 1952, when Galvin was accompanied by Michael Beecham, a civil servant recorded: "Knowing Mr. Galvin, I can hardly think that

Mr. Beecham's Old Etonian tie was intended to add an air of responsibility. I noticed that Mr. Galvin's language had lost none of its picturesqueness during the ten years I last saw him."¹⁵

Stanley would have found this world particularly alien given his disdain for the English-style class structure, which he had confronted—and rejected—at his old school in Brisbane. As historian John Darwin has argued, notwithstanding the “Britannic nationalism” and “Greater Britain” sentiments still prevalent among Australians in the 1950s, “the overseas British generally had little sympathy for what they regarded as an over-rigid class system at home.”¹⁶ Stanley's reverse snobbery had been noticed by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) staffers during his time as MOI representative in Chungking during the war, when Smith developed a reputation for being “anti-culture and anti-BBC.”¹⁷ His aversion to high-society pretentiousness apparently persisted throughout his life. When May and Stanley attended an HSBC dinner in the summer of 1965, he said it was the first time he had ever dressed in white tie and tails “despite three years in the British embassy in wartime Chungking and attendance at the 1943 Quebec conference with rank of minister.” Stanley also felt somewhat out of place as the “only bare breast” at the party on account of not having “a single decoration.” “This social game is tough,” he confided to McDonald.¹⁸

Stanley and Galvin's ambition and talents did not go unnoticed by their British associates. For instance, Britain's Trade Commissioner in Malaya, K. E. Mac-

kenzie, recognized that Stanley and Galvin had “considerable drive and ability,” while a UK Treasury official found Galvin “eccentric” but with “marked business gifts.”¹⁹ Still, EMMCO's “get rich quick” mentality and “sharp” business practices were disapproved of by colonial officials.²⁰

And while British bureaucrats had been more than happy to make use of Stanley and Galvin's unorthodox commercial talents in wartime, this did not necessarily extend to peacetime. The addition of Rowlands and a former HSBC manager in Singapore, Charles Edwards, to the EMMCO board inspired “confidence in the future of EMMCO” and was “to some extent a guarantee that the industry will be developed satisfactorily and in a way which should bring lasting benefit to Malaya.”²¹ But from the UK Commissioner-General's Office in Singapore, a civil servant wrote the Foreign Office in London in August 1953: “Eastern Mining and Metals have not yet proved themselves to be the sort of company to whom a prudent government would lightheartedly entrust the whole of its iron ore development.”²²

There was particular distrust of Galvin's “strong American connections and inclinations,” epitomized by his decision to set up home in California as soon as he'd become wealthy. (Galvin moved to California from Singapore in 1948.) The “only director with a technical knowledge of mining” was a Californian, John Tilia, who acted as chief geologist, while EMMCO's consulting engineer and the manager of the Rompin mine in 1953 were also Americans. Further, the “tendency to

adopt American methods and to look to the USA for machinery and other equipment” was disliked by the colonial regime.²³

At one point, British colonial officials directly intervened to block EMMCO from further expanding its operations in Malaya. At a meeting of Colonial Office and Malayan government officials in London in November 1953, General Gerald Templar, the High Commissioner and Director of Operations, had said he was “opposed to EMMCO having a monopoly of iron ore production of the Federation.” The Colonial Office was in agreement, and one London official “had no more confidence in Mr. Galvin” than the General. EMMCO's plans were “always changing.”²⁴ Malaya's last British High Commissioner from 1954 to 1957, Sir Donald MacGillivray, seems to have been particularly against Stanley and Galvin because he saw them not just as self-made men but as interlopers.²⁵

When word got out that Stanley and Galvin were talking with the son of the Sultan of Kelantan about

forming a partnership to resuscitate the iron mine at Temangan in the sultanate of Kelantan, colonial and British officials sprung into action. The Colonial Office and the UK diplomats in Tokyo sought out two British firms—Andrew Weir and Boustead & Co.—whom they deemed “highly reputable,” in contrast to EMMCO, to exploit the Temangan concession.²⁶ The intervention apparently worked, and in the end, Weir and Boustead formed a partnership with a Japanese mining company and the Kelantan government and secured a 15-year lease in 1954.²⁷ EMMCO never seems to have gotten a foothold in Kelantan.

Despite the prejudices and obstacles that the Australian partners encountered, however, Stanley and Galvin had built up enough goodwill with key wartime contacts to allow them to achieve great success as miners in Malaya in the 1950s and early 1960s. But world events and personal matters would soon conspire to alter the trajectory of their future lives.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Home in Singapore

Throughout the years that Stanley was racing all over the planet building his and Galvin's enterprise and their fortunes, May was standing by, waiting for Stanley to take her along on one of his many trips or for him to head home for much-needed rest and rejuvenation. After acquiring Bukit Besi, Stanley began spending much of his time in Malaya, and the Smiths needed a home that required a shorter commute than the arduous 1,400 miles from Terengganu to Hong Kong.

In 1953, the Smiths built a luxurious, contemporary house in Singapore, about 300 miles south of Bukit Besi. From their new residence, Stanley could more closely monitor the mining operations' development and management.¹ "The house is

entirely air-conditioned—perhaps the only one in Singapore," Stanley told Judy Fallon, the reporter from the *Sketch*, when she interviewed May and him in 1955. Jutting out over the front lawn of the house was an unusual pier-like structure. "[O]ccasionally you get tired of air-conditioning," Stanley explained, "so we built the pier so that we can sit out there in the evenings." On the grounds of the Smiths' home were several special features including an artificial lake stocked with fish, which often ended up on their dinner plates, a swimming pool, and a large aviary populated with exotic finches. Stanley came up with the idea of building a shaded viewing platform inside the aviary so he could sit and watch his birds from an elevated perch. At one point, his aviary

was home to more than a thousand species of finches.² Along with his growing collection of exotic birds, Stanley acquired an extensive and extremely valuable library of books on the subject. He also began collecting and cultivating orchids, a hobby that would become even more important to him in later years.³

Lachie McDonald visited the Smiths in Singapore in the late 1950s and spent some time relaxing with Stanley on the platform inside the aviary from where they observed “gaily coloured tropical birds darting from sunlight to the shade of sheltering trees and shrubs.” Seated comfortably among his birds, Stanley whiled away hours, alternating between admiring his birds and studying reports, shuffling notes, and dictating messages. “It seemed to me to be an ideal way to conduct what obviously was profitable business,” McDonald noted.⁴

Noticing a .410 shotgun by Stanley’s side, McDonald asked what the weapon was for. Stanley explained that birds of prey—specifically a local breed of sparrow hawks—would from time to time dive-bomb into his aviary’s netting. “I help them on their way with a bang . . . because they upset my birds,” Stanley said.⁵

In a letter to Headmaster Roberts, Stanley laid out his preferred daily schedule while at home in Singapore: “The ideal in S’pore is to rise at 6:30 and do what you want to do before noon. Lunch at 12:30. Sleep till 3. Shower, tea and take a car drive or visit somebody. Dinner at 7 to 7:30 and bed by 10:30. That was my formulae and I cleared business for the day at 1 o’clock.

No conferences at home, business phone calls taboo etc.”⁶ Despite his abbreviated workday and his distance from company headquarters, Stanley still somehow maintained “an astute eye” on his companies’ operations and on his managers’ job performance, according to David Belton: “[Stanley] took a personal and very considerate interest in performance and circumstances of individual staff, generously acknowledging achievements of merit and letting people know his disapproval on occasions that so warranted [*sic*].”⁷

A Love of Birds and Plants

How and when Stanley first became interested in birds and horticulture is yet another of the many unanswered questions about the man. If there is any truth to a story about his and Galvin’s early venture selling exotic birds in Outback Australia, perhaps that might explain his affinity for the feathered species.

His passion for beautiful, exotic plants may have been ignited during his childhood in suburban Brisbane, where the subtropical climate was ideal for spending time outside and where gardening was a popular activity. Homeowners in the suburb of Clayfield often had spacious, lush gardens and sometimes entered competitions to determine whose flowers were the most beautiful and unusual. Stanley may have been first struck with the alluring beauty of orchids while visiting the Brisbane Botanic Gardens, a popular picnic-

ing destination for local residents situated on 42 acres along the Brisbane River. A 1923 book about Brisbane described the orchids in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens as “especially fine.”⁸ Stanley mentioned in a 1965 letter to Sir George Taylor, then director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, at Kew, in London, that as a child he had visited the Brisbane Botanic Gardens.⁹ He obviously had fond memories of the gardens because in his letter, he wrote that when he had last visited the garden, in about 1957, he was dismayed to see it had gone downhill. “[T]he place was shocking—parakeets, kangaroos and candy wrappers,”¹⁰ he groused—an indication that his memories of the garden were of a more pristine type of public space.

Throughout his life, Stanley maintained a particular interest in plants native to Australia. In another letter to Taylor, he even offered advice on how the Australian plants at Kew could be better cared for. He suggested that a special area be designated “for growing the dry tropics or subtropics such as stuff from Queensland or the Caribbean, Florida, etc.” He commented that many of the tropical and subtropical plants at Kew grew in nature under drier conditions. “Incidentally,” he added, “you could grow most Australian epiphytic orchids in the Aust. house on existing trees and shrubs and why not? They would look well.”¹¹

When Stanley was a boy, orchid collecting was a hobby of the rich, since considerable wealth was needed to build and maintain the greenhouses required to successfully care for orchids and to travel to the remote

locations where the rarest species could be found in nature. Some collectors became so obsessed with orchids that they were said to have been afflicted with a sort of mania known as orchidelirium. “There is something very appealing about these flowers to the human psyche,” Tom Mirenda, orchid specialist at the Smithsonian Museum, explains. “You look at an orchid and it looks back at you. They seem to have a face, like a human.”¹² Only later in the twenty-first century came the scientific breakthroughs that now allow orchids to be easily and inexpensively propagated and cloned at a cost affordable to most people.

Stanley may very well have been infected with orchidelirium early in life, but he probably was not able to start collecting orchids himself until he bought his own homes in Hong Kong and Singapore. Once he got going as a collector, however, orchids, and horticulture in general, clearly became his paramount interest in life if not his obsession. He was known to make special trips to out-of-the-way places to search for rare specimens. Robert Cathcart, who met Stanley in Singapore in 1956 and worked as the Smiths’ attorney for many years, said he once accompanied Stanley on an orchid-buying trip to Guatemala, Panama, and Jamaica.

Collecting and cultivating orchids was a project that Stanley engaged in without May’s involvement, however. “She liked pretty flowers on the dining room table,” their accountant Gibbs recalled, but she wasn’t interested in reading about horticulture or spending her days pruning and digging in dirt. As her later caregiver

John Bamforth recalled, “May did like a beautiful garden but she was not a specialist as Stanley had been.”¹³

Traveling the World

As much as Stanley enjoyed spending time at home with his orchids and birds and books, throughout the late 1950s he kept up a rigorous schedule of travel for work. Even after 1958, when he began curtailing his direct involvement in EMMCO’s mining ventures, he and May continued traveling the world for business and pleasure well into the early 1960s. And when Stanley and May traveled, they traveled in style. Letters that Stanley sent were handwritten in pen on stationery from hotels including The Royal Hawaiian in Honolulu, The Plaza overlooking Central Park in New York City, the Storch in Zürich, and the Mark Hopkins on Nob Hill in San Francisco as well as from his homes in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Nassau. In a letter to Headmaster Roberts dated January 14, 1958, Stanley recounted how he and May had recently visited New York City, most of the Caribbean islands, Venezuela—“where I visited some mining leases we have on the Orinoco”—Honolulu, and Europe. “Never a dull moment,” he wrote. As time went by, his ability and willingness to rely on his staff to run his businesses, manage his households, oversee his investments, and provide him with the information and advice he needed to make important decisions freed him to enjoy his far-flung adventures.



May on the grounds of the Royal Palace in Thailand.



◀ May and ▶ Stanley on the grounds of the Royal Palace in Thailand.



May.

The Missing Host

Along with relying on trusted employees to run his businesses, Stanley also had delegated to others the care and supervision of his daughter, Barbara. As a young girl living in Sydney with her mother, Olive, Barbara had attended Neutral Bay Intermediate Girls School and later Sydney Church of England Girls Grammar School.¹⁴ In 1949, following her mother's death in December of the previous year, Barbara, at age 13, was sent to Westonbirt School, an exclusive girls' boarding school in Gloucestershire, England.¹⁵ When she finished school in 1954 at age 18, Stanley hosted an extravagant coming-out party in her honor at the old Stoll theater in London. Among the 600 guests were various marquesses, earls, barons, knights, and famous movie stars (including Marlene Dietrich and Douglas Fairbanks), some of whom readily acknowledged to news reporters at the event that they actually had never before met Barbara Smith or her father. "Friends of friends," Barbara explained when asked about the haut monde guest list.¹⁶ The party made headlines in London, Australia, and Singapore. The 2,600-seat theater was converted into an Edwardian ballroom with a raised parquet dance floor installed on scaffolding over the theater seats. The ballroom was decorated with thousands of roses, gladioli, and lilies. Pink champagne was poured for guests at one end of the huge ballroom while white champagne was served at the other end.



Barbara Smith (wearing gloves) greeting her guests at her lavish coming-out party, London, 1954.



A youthful Barbara in a ball gown.

Barbara's guests dined on caviar, salmon, turkey, lamb, and lobster.¹⁷ According to the *London Star*, "the 700 bottles of champagne ran out at 2 am and the catering manager sent a taxi across London for more." The party went on till dawn.¹⁸

Missing from the party, however, were the debutante's father and stepmother. Galvin, who filled in as host at the party, told reporters that Stanley was in Tokyo "clinching a big deal."¹⁹ In truth, however, the sumptuous party probably was not a scene in which Stanley and May would have felt comfortable. Surely Stanley would not have appreciated the attention the party garnered from gossip columnists and daily news photographers. He certainly wasn't pleased by the calls he received from Singapore-based newspaper correspondents who had been instructed by their bosses in London to track down the Australian millionaire who had missed his own daughter's coming-out party. Stanley reportedly made no effort to hide his exasperation from the prying reporters, who only wanted him to tell them how much he was really worth.²⁰

Despite his qualms about talking with the press, the following year, during a visit to England, Stanley surprisingly agreed to sit for an interview with Judy Fallon from the society weekly the *Sketch* and even to be photographed with May for the article. Stanley apparently made a vain attempt to dissuade Fallon from pursuing the interview, telling her, "there isn't a story"; but in the end he and May welcomed the reporter into their

London hotel suite, offered her a cup of coffee, and shared quite a bit about their lives.²¹ The resulting profile provides a rare, vivid snapshot of Stanley and May a few years into their marriage.

Dressed for the interview in a two-piece gray flannel suit and white shirt and "a belt, not braces," Stanley was described in the article as a "tall, rangy, blue-eyed and fair-haired man" with "a twinkle in his eye" and "looking younger than his forty-eight years." May, who was referred to in the headline as Stanley's "exquisite little Chinese wife," was dressed in an elegant ankle-length black silk dress with a high collar and embroidered slit hemmed to her knee. "She is tiny, and looks even smaller beside her tall husband. She has huge, shining brown eyes, a delicate pointed face, and a delightful, shy smile," Fallon wrote.

In the interview, Stanley and May apparently let down their guard and were unordinarily forthcoming. Stanley reminisced a bit about his days in the Outback, his wartime service for the British Ministry of Information, and his experiences after the war as a merchant adventurer. (He pointedly did not, however, offer even a hint about his stint as a British secret agent based in Singapore.) May shared her mother's reaction to the news that she was marrying a foreigner and moving to Hong Kong. Stanley described their homes in Hong Kong and Singapore and told a bit about their recent travels. And yet despite their uncharacteristic openness, at the end of the interview, as Stanley was showing Judy Fallon to the door of his hotel suite, his parting words, most likely said in jest and with a twinkle in his eye, were: "I told you you wouldn't get a story."



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Cold War to Cold Feet: Leaving Singapore

In the late 1950s, as Singapore was moving toward self-government and independence from Britain, Stanley got cold feet about the possibility of the new country turning to communism, and he began devising an exit strategy. He wrote Headmaster Roberts in April 1958, “Singapore is headed toward freedom and communism. I am so certain of this that I’m closing the H[ead] O[ffice] of our mining [companies] there, selling the building and domestic dwellings and packing what’s left after reorganization, to Malaya.” He had “come out intact profitwise and capitalwise” but was tired of playing “hide and seek with the Commos in about ten far eastern countries.”¹ Four months later, in a subsequent letter to Roberts, dated August 1958 and handwritten on stationery from

San Francisco’s Mark Hopkins Hotel, Stanley elaborated on his reasons for wanting to leave Singapore: “Maybe I am wrong[,] but red or just red herring I don’t like the local politics.” An independent Singapore was also likely to lead to “double taxation” for his businesses.² (Since EMMCO’s headquarters was in Singapore but the company was registered on the mainland in the Federation of Malaya, an independent Singapore would have required EMMCO to pay taxes in both countries.)

This might seem an extraordinary misjudgment since Singapore today is known as a bastion of international capitalism rather than communism. It didn’t look that way in 1959, however. Elections loomed for self-government, and they seemed likely to be won by the left-wing People’s Action

◀ The Smiths’ home in Nassau, which they named “Bukit Tembusu,” sat on seven carefully planned and immaculately tended acres.

Party, which contained a large pro-Communist wing. Stanley was not alone in his reaction to the changing political scene. Most firms that operated both in Singapore and on the Malayan mainland split their businesses into separate Singapore- and Kuala Lumpur-registered companies during 1958 and 1959 to protect their assets from possibly being confiscated and nationalized by Singapore's new government.³

Singapore wasn't their only concern, however. Business owners like Stanley and Galvin feared for the Malayan mainland's future as well. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Malayan mainland was also an uncertain, or "fluid," entity, as Stanley described it.⁴ The independent government in Kuala Lumpur was happy to use foreign businesses to its advantage. For instance, foreign investment and technical skills helped the government provide employment, especially for Malays; generate revenue streams for social and economic development; and maintain security services. But this open attitude toward foreign capital was pretty unique in Southeast Asia and was not expected to last. There was much angst among foreign investors that with the British colonial administration gone, the country would descend into violence and radical leftist politics. And in Malay-majority areas like Terengganu and Pahang, the radical politics would be tinged with Islamic revivalism. None of these developments was likely to be favorable to foreign-controlled big business. The effects of such an outcome might particularly affect businesses such as EMMCO since some Malaysians believed industries such

as mining exploited both labor and natural resources and also drained profits from the country. Indeed, by 1958 EMMCO was getting flak from the left-wing Malay party Terengganu Parti Rakyat (People's Party), which complained to the state government about EMMCO's laying off of workers, or "sackings," during the monsoon season.⁵

To date, Stanley and Galvin's employees and mines had not faced any direct security threat from the communist jungle fighters at Rompin or Dungun. In fact, in 1950 the government had guaranteed security at Rompin.⁶ However, the changing political situation was just cause for security concerns given the ongoing destabilization caused by what the British called the Malayan Emergency and what the Malayan communists called the Anti-British National Liberation War. As is the case with wars fought for power, a simple explanation is elusive. At its core, however, the war was a fight for control between Commonwealth forces and the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA; the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party).

Stanley and Galvin were highly wary of the potential threat from the Malayan Communist Party. EMMCO had restricted the recruiting of Chinese laborers at Bukit Besi in a deliberate policy to avoid communist trouble. EMMCO did hire 200 Chinese tuners and fitters recruited from Singapore, but they were cleared by the Singapore police, and as soon as one of them caused any trouble, they were shipped back to Singapore. Meanwhile, Stanley and Galvin's plans to sell

Malayan timber to the U.S. military in the Pacific were interrupted when the Malayan government forbade workers from taking food into the jungle (in case this was passed on to the MRLA guerrillas).⁷ Without a means to feed their workforce, they had to scrap the enterprise.

Beyond his concerns about the future of Singapore and mainland Malaya, Stanley also was discouraged by communist expansion into other countries. He was not convinced that the U.S. would be able to halt the spread of communism. He characterized U.S. democracy as overly influenced by lobbying groups and as "weak" and "wicked" in a letter to Roberts in the fall of 1958. "In international affairs I'm for might," he wrote. "America has everything but aggression. . . . she could have rounded Russia. . . . but Russia for the last few years has called the shots." The U.S.'s inability to prevent communist victory in China in the late 1940s was not a good precedent for the rest of Asia: "An aggressive militant minority cut through the corrupt nationalists despite U.S. military aid. Half-way through the civil war the Commos were winning with the U.S. arms they captured or bought off the Nationalists. Mao picked up a fair bit of Jap [*sic*] stuff when . . . [the Japanese] . . . laid down their arms but he had no aid from Stalin until he had conquered the mainland of China."⁸ Stanley had presciently predicted in a letter to Roberts in April 1958 that "Communist China . . . today is just a talking piece in world affairs but twenty years from now China will be among the great pow-

ers."⁹ This was hardly a good prospect for the free markets—and for Stanley and Galvin's businesses—"on the outskirts of Communist China."¹⁰

Finding Shelter in Calmer Seas: Home in Nassau

Stanley's fears about the future of the Far East led him to search for a quieter, more predictable corner of the world where he and May could put down roots next. In a letter to Roberts, dated April 21, 1958, and written on stationery from The Plaza hotel in New York City, Stanley shared his latest news: "May and I have bought a house in Nassau Bahamas with seven acres of land. We propose now to go to U.K. on the Liz on May 14 from here and return to Nassau in Oct or Nov." Confident that the management he'd put in place to oversee his mining companies was competent and trustworthy, Stanley established what turned out to be his final home.¹¹

Beyond its comparatively serene politics and its gorgeous weather, sandy beaches, and exquisite fauna and flora, the island nation of the Bahamas offered another attractive feature: its residents paid no personal income tax. Like affluent people throughout the world, Stanley always sought ways to retain as much control over his wealth as was legally possible. In a June 28, 1959, letter to Roberts, Stanley explained the tax benefits

that residents of the Bahamas enjoyed: “There is no income tax in the Bahamas and only 4% inheritance tax on personal property. Between the wars a lot of British people attempted to settle in the Bahamas so that their estates dodged U.K. probate. Only in a proportion of cases did the idea work. Being tax free doesn’t mean a thing. Only residents can earn here and non-residents pay their tax where they earn their money.” Stanley made sure he and May qualified as residents. Stanley also was “keen on avoiding income tax” for others. Ronald Gibbs, Stanley’s accountant, recalled that Stanley preferred expressing appreciation for his employees with special perquisites rather than by raising their pay because “salary was taxable and perks weren’t.”¹²

Stanley was widely admired for his generosity. Not only did he take good care of his employees, but he was also exceedingly helpful to his friends and supportive of causes he believed in. By the latter 1950s he already had started sending sizeable donations to Churchie’s building fund, and he mentioned in his January 4, 1957, letter to Roberts that he also had contributed “to a variety of educational and research projects.” One of those projects was a scholarship for Australian students who were pursuing postgraduate studies in Japan. Named the Saionji Memorial Scholarship, it was created in memory of a Japanese prince who opposed the militarization of Japan.¹³ In another project, he and Galvin funded the publication of the latter volumes of Sir George Sansom’s scholarly *History of Japan*. In fact,

Sansom moved with Galvin’s help to Palo Alto, California, where he had easy access to Stanford University and the resources he needed to complete his seminal *History of Japan*. “[W]e lived,” Lady Sansom later recalled, “in great comfort at Stanford for nine years owing to the generosity of these two men.”¹⁴ Stanley and Galvin also supported research into tropical diseases in Papua New Guinea and sponsored then-emerging artist Leonard Long on painting commissions through Malaya, Hong Kong, and Japan.¹⁵

He was more than eager to help out those he considered friends. In his letters to Roberts and Sir George Taylor, he routinely offered to pick up the tab for their travel throughout the world. Clearly, Stanley wasn’t opposed to sharing his fortune. He simply preferred choosing the beneficiaries himself.

Indulging His Passion

In the late 1950s, as he began stepping back from day-to-day involvement in his mining operations, Stanley was able to spend less time in Malaya and more at his new home in Nassau, where he was free to focus on his “first interest”¹⁶—his garden and exotic plant collection. The house that he and May purchased on the island of New Providence, which they named Bukit Tembusu, supposedly had been built by the attorney who prosecuted Al Capone.¹⁷ Surrounding the property was a

wall ten feet high and three feet thick.¹⁸ The expansive grounds within the confines of the wall provided the perfect spot for Stanley to cultivate his beloved orchids and other unusual plants. He chartered a Boeing 707 to transport his entire orchid collection—consisting of about 3,000 plants¹⁹—from Singapore to Nassau, and built a 120,000-gallon rain water reservoir and a steel greenhouse, measuring 100' x 40' x 8' with a fiberglass roof, for housing the more exotic and delicate specimens.²⁰ Six to eight new wells had to be dug on the property to provide the water needed for the orchids.²¹ With assistance from a staff of six to eight gardeners, he threw himself into the project of augmenting his plant collection, acquiring, cultivating, and hybridizing orchids and overseeing the tending of his beds. “I seldom leave my seven acres except for say a haircut or an unusual situation arising in the office,” he wrote to Roberts in a letter dated June 28, 1959. “I do know I have never worked so hard in all my life and that my garden is beginning to take shape.” Stanley’s obsession was well known to everyone in his life. David Belton recalled that on Stanley’s rare visits to Tokyo, “he would ‘escape’ to the gardens of Japanese experts, with me in tow, and I would end up having to organize the purchase and shipment of all manner of plants, container pots, implements and materials to the Bahamas.”²²

Stanley eventually built up a collection of over a million plants and became an expert on the subject. He took courses in botany and, in his travels around

the world, made sure to carve out time to look for specimens and meet other orchid experts and horticulturists. He became widely recognized for his expertise and was invited to judge at orchid shows in London.²³ In 1965, he was introduced to Sir George Taylor, the director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, and the two men began a warm, encouraging, and lively correspondence, through which they developed mutual respect and a friendship. In their letters to each other, the two men shared knowledge and tips about plants as well as details about their lives and ideas for furthering Kew and its mission.

Stanley and Taylor also regularly sent each other hard-to-come-by seeds and plant specimens. “If you have any of those double coconuts from the Seychelles going begging, do you think I might scrounge one?” Stanley wrote to Taylor in November 1965. “I would also like to beg a few pieces of the very small types of maidenhair fern.” In July 1968, Taylor wrote to Stanley: “Two quite splendid plants of *Adenium coetanium* arrived in first class shape from Singapore. They are a wonderful adornment in our big succulent house—thank you very much indeed. A lot of stuff went off to you yesterday and I hope that it reaches you in the same excellent condition as the *Adeniums* from Singapore to Kew.”²⁴

In his first few years after moving to Nassau, Stanley attempted to balance his orchid obsession with limited oversight, mostly from afar, of his mining ventures. “It’s all a bit nomadic but I have an office in Nassau and



Sir George Taylor, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and Stanley.

from there can look after enough of business to sustain my self respect," he wrote to Roberts in 1958. He managed the situation, he explained in a December 16, 1960, letter to Roberts, "by the delegation of almost 100% complete authority in each country of operation. I spend about four hours a day with my mail but I can skip it all any time I care to."

Building St. James's Place, 1958–1960

The same year that Stanley and May purchased their home in Nassau, Stanley embarked on another challenging project: designing and building an eight-story modern luxury residential building at 26 St. James's Place, overlooking Green Park, in London. Stanley's daughter, Barbara, was a student at the University of London studying archaeology, and Stanley and May typically visited her for several weeks each summer, usually checking into a suite in a well-appointed hotel. Stanley at some point had purchased a farm in Suffolk, England, but he kept that as an investment property; he and May never lived there. Having their own deluxe flat in London certainly would make life more convenient and comfortable during their summertime visits. Stanley also probably recognized the St. James's Place building as an excellent long-term investment.

Michael Beecham, who acted as Stanley's real estate agent in London, said he was looking for land to purchase for Stanley and found the bombed-out plot at St. James's Place, which had sat vacant since the war.²⁵ In 1958 Stanley hired the noted British architect Denys Lasdun to design the block of flats at 26 St. James's Place. The building was awarded the RIBA London Architecture Bronze Medal in 1960 and even today is regarded as a standout example of postwar architecture.

When the building was completed, Stanley and May moved into the penthouse, and Barbara was given



The luxurious eight-story 26 St. James's Place, London, which Stanley designed with noted British architect Denys Lasdun, photographed in 1960.

May.



Boyton Manor, the Fane home, in Wiltshire, England.

the two-story flat below them. The other flats were leased, and Galvin took one for himself and his family.

In December 1960, Barbara, then age 24, married Edmund H. Fane, also 24, in Westminster, Middlesex. As a wedding gift Stanley bought the couple Boyton Manor, an estate in Wiltshire that had once been owned by Edmund's family. "Unfortunately, the Fanes had lost

the house in previous generations and Edmund kind of wanted it back, so Stanley bought it for them," Alex de Brye, Barbara's son from her second marriage, said in an interview in January 2016. From then on, Barbara split her time between Boyton Manor and her London flat.²⁶

Barbara at 26 St. James's Place. Note the toucan in the large birdcage on the right.



Stanley with his son-in-law, Edmund Fane, relaxing at 26 St. James's Place.



Barbara and Edmund.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The End of a Good Run

Galvin and Stanley were still equal business partners in 1960, but their personal lives had moved in dramatically different directions. While Stanley was quietly tending his orchids in Nassau and assiduously avoiding public attention, Galvin was sponsoring an equestrian team to compete in the Olympic games, hosting lavish affairs for hunt clubs on his sprawling California ranch, and regularly making the society pages of San Francisco's dailies.

After leaving Singapore in 1948 to move to California, Galvin had lived for a time in Marin County and at the posh Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco before purchasing an estate in 1952 in the upscale town of Woodside, south of San Francisco, where he lived for several years with his wife and their five children.¹ Al-

though his and Stanley's companies were not incorporated in the U.S., they set up an office in downtown San Francisco, which was run by their top investments adviser and manager, John Collins, Sr. As the profits from their shipping enterprises and the Malayan mines rolled into Stanley's and Galvin's separate personal accounts, Galvin invested his split mostly in California real estate. Galvin's holdings in San Francisco included a 16-story office building and the late Templeton Crocker's elaborate Russian Hill penthouse. He also owned 75 acres of ranch land in Lassen and Modoc counties and a cattle ranch between the towns of Sonoma and Petaluma, among other properties.

In Woodside, Galvin's extravagant gifts to charity and community projects, such as

◀ May and Stanley enjoying time together.

the free ballet school he opened in the family's mansion for neighborhood children, sparked press coverage and public attention. His rapacious real estate acquisitions also made a splash. In 1956 Galvin purchased the 35,000-acre San Fernando Rey ranch in the upper Santa Ynez Valley, and two years later he and his family left Woodside to move to the ranch. Horse stables and an elaborate indoor training track were built on the ranch, and the U.S. equestrian team for the 1960 Olympics trained there. (Galvin's eldest daughter, Patricia Galvin de la Tour d'Auvergne, competed in dressage in the 1960 and 1964 summer Olympics.)² The Galvins entertained international guests, including the young members of pony clubs from New South Wales and Victoria along with their adult chaperones.

Then suddenly, Galvin's rosy skies darkened. In late 1962, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service filed liens against Galvin's properties for unpaid income taxes and penalties totaling \$21.5 million from 1954 to 1957. The case was at that time the largest the IRS had ever filed against an individual regarding personal income. Galvin's attorney contended that Galvin, as a citizen of the British Commonwealth, whose earnings came from foreign transactions, didn't "owe the government a sou."³ But the IRS countered that he was a de facto U.S. resident during the years when his earnings flowed into the U.S. from the Far East.⁴ (Stanley also purchased investment properties in California, but he never lived in the U.S. and so dodged problems with the IRS.)⁵



John Galvin with his wife and daughter on a street in Dublin, Ireland.

The case against Galvin generated widespread publicity—this time surely unwelcomed. United Press International reporter Frank H. Bartholomew wrote a two-part series about Galvin that was reprinted in many newspapers throughout the world. *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines also ran pieces about his IRS woes. Although Stanley was not mentioned in Bartholomew's pieces, the ubiquitous headlines about his business partner surely were an embarrassment. Still, in a 1965 letter to his and Galvin's mutual friend, journalist Lachie McDonald, Stanley wrote, "John Galvin and his trusts will probably lose \$US20 million to the bastards (US tax

people) but he has a bush philosophy and shrugs it away as being 'only money.'"⁶

Galvin ended up settling his IRS case for \$12 million in 1965. By then he had given up on California and had moved with his family to Ireland.⁷

"I don't need any more of this": Splitting from Galvin and Selling Out to Stocks

Around the time that Galvin was tangling with the IRS, Stanley began considering dissolving their partnership. "I think Stanley decided that he had had enough of Galvin and all his shenanigans," Ronald Gibbs, Stanley's personal accountant from 1961 to 1968, recalled.⁸ Stanley and Galvin's employee David Belton confirmed that in the early 1960s the relationship between the two partners "cooled considerably, probably as a result of Galvin's indiscretions and inclination to flamboyancy."⁹

In 1962 Stanley bought out Galvin's share of their jointly held companies for \$12 million.¹⁰ Around the same time, Stanley persuaded an Australian named W. S. (Bill) Stocks, a wartime wing commander in the Australian Air Force and former vice-president of General Electric, to take over as financial comptroller of the group of Smith's Far East companies. Then, in 1965, Smith sold all his shares to Stocks for \$13 million.¹¹ That year EMMCO's senior management was reorganized: Jack Harris, the former mining superin-

tendent at Dungun and the first American to receive a *datoship* (the Malay equivalent of a knighthood) from the Sultan of Terengganu in 1957, replaced Stanley as chairman of EMMCO, Rompin Mining, and Trengganu Minerals. John A. Lewis, Stanley's brother-in-law and "a very good engineer," and Gavan Newman became joint managing directors.¹²

By the time he sold his shares to Stocks, Stanley was feeling worn out from his years of hard living on the road. "He said he was tired. His health wasn't good, and he didn't need all that anxiety. He was looking to get out of it," Gibbs recalled. He said Stanley told him, "I don't need any more of this."¹³

Gibbs said the terms of the sale were extremely favorable for Stocks. "I remember we created a bill of sale and we—we being business manager John Collins, Sr., and I—thought it was extremely generous to Stocks," Gibbs said. "Stocks was to pay Stanley out of the dividends he received from the mining operations. And if everything went belly-up, then Stocks didn't have any obligation to pay Stanley beyond what he was earning. So it was more like a gift, really. But I guess Stanley had provided for May and Barbara and he had enough money . . . so that was the deal." Gibbs said that when Stanley died, Stocks was still making payments to Stanley on his debt.¹⁴

Stanley's well-timed decision to sell out to Stocks also may well have been influenced by inauspicious political developments in the Far East. Singapore's radicalism had been contained in 1963 when it joined with

Malaya, Sarawak, and North Borneo (Sabah) to form the new country of Malaysia. But after Singapore split from the new nation in August 1965, expatriates widely assumed that the tiny island republic of Singapore would gravitate toward Communist China, especially as Singapore's near neighbor Indonesia seemed to be coming more and more under Beijing's influence. Moreover, what was left of Malaysia—Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak—was also not expected to hold together indefinitely, and interracial tension between Malay and Chinese inhabitants was a concern, as was the spread of Indonesian influence.¹⁵

An entrepreneur as research savvy as Stanley must also have been aware that Malaya's time as a major source of Japan's iron ore was finished. From 1955 to 1965 the peninsula had been the leading supplier of iron ore to Japan.¹⁶ But the heyday was over by the later 1960s as Malaya's finite resource reached depletion. Meanwhile, the Japanese steel behemoths found other sources of ore. By 1970, Malaysia as a supplier to Japan was in sixth place.¹⁷ As late as 1973, HSBC's Kuala Lumpur Benteng branch continued to list EMMCO as one of its largest clients.¹⁸ But the Bukit Besi and Rompin mines had both closed in 1970. Given the legacy of well-paid employment and generous health and other welfare provisions that Galvin and Stanley had provided, the people and governments of Terengganu and Pahang understandably deeply regretted the demise of the mining operations.¹⁹

Escaping the Pressures

After dissolving his partnership with Galvin and then selling out to Stocks, Stanley was finally able to settle more deeply into the unhurried tranquility of life in Nassau. No longer did he need to leave his beautiful garden and comfortable island home other than for pleasure trips. And there continued to be quite a few of those. Stanley and May returned to their bungalow in Hong Kong from time to time, where they saw old friends and business associates. He and May also embarked on annual trips to Europe and North and Central America. Together they headed to New York City for the World's Fair in 1965 and to Montreal for the International and Universal Exposition in October of 1967.²⁰ "Expo is good—very good," Stanley wrote to Sir George Taylor on October 9, 1967, "and I'm glad I didn't miss it." They sailed by ocean liner to Europe, spending time in their London penthouse and in their favorite hotel in Zürich—the Storchen.

In 1967 they also embarked on what may have been their only trip together to Australia. Their brief visit to Stanley's alma mater, Churchie, was captured by a motion picture photographer. A 45-second fragment of that film offers a fleeting glimpse of the couple: a slim, smiling May, dressed in an elegant two-piece, off-white suit and black high heels with a matching handbag, strolls around the campus with Stanley, looking older and a bit ruffled but still fairly trim in his blue



Frames from a video shot while Stanley and May walk on the Churchie grounds with Headmaster Roberts.

suit, white dress shirt, and dark tie. His hair by then was gray and thinning, but he certainly doesn't look like a person with a year or less left in life.

Stanley by that point had made several large donations to Churchie's building fund, and even though he had eschewed public acknowledgment of his generosity, he was something of a celebrity in Churchie circles. Everyone affiliated in any capacity with the school would have known him by name as its biggest benefactor. Roberts, who was nearing the end of his tenure as headmaster, had wanted to greet Stanley and May with the public welcome and recog-

nition he thought the couple deserved. But as Roberts recalled in his unpublished memoir, Stanley "insisted on visiting us incognito and could not be persuaded to do any of the usual formal things—talk to the School, meet the staff and so forth. He said he wanted only to see the School and talk with his friend, Elder Hunter [a



Stanley and May, October 1967.

fellow classmate], and me. So we wandered and chatted, meeting only the occasional passerby."²¹

Whether motivated by modesty or shyness or an acquired aversion to public attention, Stanley clearly did not want a fuss made over him. "I have never allowed myself to be put into a position where I had to take a bow," Stanley had previously written to Roberts. His reluctance to be publicly thanked would not have surprised Roberts by then since Stanley had already declined the school's offer to put his name on a building he had funded. He also had once in a letter revealed



▲ May and Stanley relaxing at home in Nassau home, 1967. ► Barbara with her first husband, Edmund Fane, 1967.



Glenmore, the Smiths' cottage in Nassau, 1967.



The *Emgent* in its slip.

his annoyance to Roberts after learning he was named in a school publication as a Churchie benefactor. As was his preference, he and May visited Churchie briefly and quietly, slipping away with hardly a notice.

In between their various trips abroad, May and Stanley spent most of their time at home in Nassau,

* One of those visitors was Helena Yu, May's schoolmate from Ginling College. When Yu told May that Typhoon Gloria, in 1963, had virtually leveled Ginling Middle School in Taiwan, established after Ginling College was disbanded and absorbed into Nanjing Normal

sometimes casually entertaining small groups of visitors from around the world.* Barbara and her first husband, Edmund Fane, visited occasionally, as did Stanley's sisters and their families from Australia, along with other friends. To accommodate out-of-town visitors, the Smiths purchased a cottage a couple of

University in 1952, May visited the school and donated rebuilding funds. Ginling Middle School used her donation to build a new faculty and staff dorm and named the building "Beh-hsia," after May's Chinese name.

miles down the road. They called their guest cottage Glenmore. They also sometimes booked their guests in one of the island's luxurious hotels. One of the Smiths' guests, fellow orchid collector David Bennett, Jr., enjoyed several vacations in the guest cottage with his wife, Aurora, and their four sons. On their first trip, Bennett and his family "had a perfectly happy time water skiing, sailing the sunfish, snorkeling around Paradise Island for lobster and seeing the Nassau nightlife after sundown." Stanley thoughtfully hired a woman to clean the cottage, prepare meals for the Bennetts, and wash and iron their clothes. He also arranged for the

Bennetts to borrow a station wagon and for Bennett's 18-year-old son to drive Stanley's "bright red, two-seater MG sports car" around the island.²²

In anticipation of his move to the Bahamas, Stanley had had a 60-foot yacht specially built for him in England for cruising in Caribbean waters. In a letter to Roberts, he had proudly described the boat, named the *Emgent*, as having "two 300 H.P. Cummins diesel engines and a cruising range of 1500 miles." Stanley hired a captain to operate the *Emgent*, and he enjoyed



Stanley and Barbara, October 1967.

taking trips out to sea, according to his attorney, Robert Cathcart.²³ Even when he was not up to going out to sea himself, Stanley sometimes would arrange for the captain, George Thompson Merini, to take guests out to sea for weeks at a time. David Bennett, who took several trips on the *Emgent* with Merini but without Stanley, recalled that the yacht was “sumptuously furnished and fully provisioned.”²⁴

In Nassau, May and Stanley made new acquaintances and socialized from time to time with various neighbors and new friends.²⁵ “We’ve done the rounds and v. much approve the types we’ve met,” Stanley wrote in a



Barbara (left) with Gerard Clinton, first husband Edmund Fane, and Nicola (Nicky) Clinton.

letter to Roberts not long after he and May moved into their Nassau home.

When he had time to himself, Stanley studied botany and read horticulture journals, wrote letters in his distinctive longhand scrawl, and oversaw the care of his garden and orchid collection, from which he derived great pride and satisfaction. “Too bad we are so far off the beaten track because this collection is too much for the few people in Nassau who have stomach for beauty,” he wrote to Taylor on April 16, 1968.

By this point, Stanley’s interest in horticulture had become the main focus of his life, and his activities in the field extended far beyond building his own impressive collection. Through his correspondence with Taylor and other botanists and horticulturists, Stanley kept abreast of interesting botanical projects throughout



◀ The Queen’s Garden, whose creation Stanley funded, at Kew Gardens, London. Kew Gardens houses the largest and most diverse botanical collections in the world.



▲ The Queen’s Garden.
 ◀ The plants in the Queen’s Garden are those grown exclusively in Britain before and during the seventeenth century.



(from left) May, John Collins, Sr., Bev Gibbs, daughter Gail Gibbs, Stanley, Ron Gibbs, Jr., and Ron Gibbs, Sr.

the world, and he used his wealth to support a long list of projects. “Fact is in the last 10 years I have helped any horticultural project that raised its head and made sense,” he wrote to Taylor on May 22, 1968. “I am rich and I like doing these things. . . . But I generally give more than money. I pump a bit of enthusiasm into other people’s ideas as well as my own.”

In about 1962, Stanley provided the funding to create the New Guinea Biological Foundation, which purchased a 4,000-acre plantation on Bougainville. He underwrote the foundation’s project developing commercial crops to produce revenue for research. Also in the 1960s, he paid for the publishing of books on botany in Australia and supported the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust on Mt. Egmont in New Zealand. In Hawaii, he contributed to the National Tropical Botanical Garden and made contributions to the horticulture department at the University of Hawaii. Back home in Nassau, he sponsored the creation of a National Bougainvillea Garden.

Stanley also funded a variety of projects at Kew, including the creation of the Queen’s Garden. He established a fund for research scientists to travel in England and abroad and to sponsor scientific symposia in England. In Costa Rica, he funded the building of the Organisation for Tropical Studies’ botanical and scientific observation post.

Per his preference, rarely was his name publicized in connection with the various projects he supported. Harold Fletcher, the 11th Regius Keeper of the Royal

Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, had suggested that the exhibition hall that Stanley funded be named for him, but Stanley refused. He would not even allow his name to be mentioned publicly in connection with the hall, which was simply named Plant Exhibition Hall.²⁶

Winding Down

By the mid-1960s, Stanley’s energy and stamina were waning. Years of arduous international travel, relentless business dealings, and harsh living had taken a toll on his health. He had given up drinking years earlier and had to watch what he ate. Still, he was suffering from heart disease and various other ailments. In a letter to Taylor, dated April 13, 1966, and sent from the Royal Hawaiian, Stanley mentioned that May had gone on to Hong Kong while he had stayed behind in Hawaii because “long flights tickle up my ticker,” an apparent reference to his cardiac problems.²⁷

Stanley had always been kind, charming, and gracious, naturally putting people at ease. Even in his later years, his eyes still twinkled mischievously as he joked with people, entertaining them with his many stories, the veracity of which often was in question. But when he became frustrated or annoyed about something, he could get “very grumpy,” as Gibbs recalled.²⁸ Perhaps contending with his various infirmities and restrictions was the source of his uncharacteristic irritability.

Gibbs said that during the last few years of his life,

Stanley rarely went out on the yacht. “Stanley always said, ‘Well, maybe some year when you come we can sail over to Bimini,’” Gibbs recalled. “That never happened. I don’t remember Stanley being on the boat.”²⁹

After his first trip to Nassau to meet Stanley and May in the winter of 1961, when he was first hired as Stanley’s personal bookkeeper and tax accountant, Gibbs met with Stanley two or three times a year, usually at the Smiths’ home in Nassau. Stanley frequently asked Gibbs to bring him some Alaskan black cod, a fish that wasn’t available in the Bahamas. Gibbs would board the plane from Vancouver with enough black cod “for a couple of meals” packed among his belongings. “That was one of my jobs,” Gibbs recalled. “I could put it in the fridge on the plane and it survived.”

Stanley and May invited Gibbs to return to Nassau every winter with his wife and children for a couple weeks’ vacation and to stay in their guest cottage. The Gibbs children at first mistook May for a child rather than the grown woman she was. Because she was so petite and fresh-faced, the children seemed drawn to her. Gibbs said after returning to the guest cottage from lunch with the Smiths at their house, his six-year-old daughter asked when that “little girl” could come and play with her. May Smith, then in her 40s, was the “little girl” the Gibbs’ daughter was referring to.

During those trips, while his wife and children played at the beach, Gibbs would meet alone with Stanley to review his investments and talk about tax planning. May never participated in those business

conversations, Gibbs recalled. “May was always in the background, serving coffee and making sure that Stanley was comfortable,” he said.

By that point, Stanley had pooled his non-real estate assets into a diversified portfolio of stocks and bonds, and the dividends he continued receiving from the mining companies flowed into his investment accounts. Stanley relied on Gibbs and John Collins, Sr., to manage his investments and maintain the bookkeeping records. “He just liked having a report and making sure that everything was going well,” Gibbs recalled. Stanley didn’t have an office or even a filing cabinet at the Nassau house. “I don’t even think he had a desk,” Gibbs said. “We would sit there, and I’d get out my files and he’d have an envelope full of correspondence.”³⁰ At the conclusion of those meetings, Stanley routinely had Gibbs start a bonfire and burn his written correspondence, bank statements, and other documents that had piled up. “He relied on his memory,” Gibbs said. “And of course he didn’t want any records that could come back to haunt him.”³¹

Taking Care of May and Barbara

One day, while Stanley was going over his finances with Gibbs at home in Nassau, he asked Gibbs to set up a separate investment company in May’s name so that she would have a source of independent income. Always the jokester, Stanley broached the matter in his

typical playful manner. As Gibbs recalled it, “Stanley said, ‘May has been very good. She brings us coffee every day. We should do something to recognize her good works.’” What he proposed was to transfer \$1 million out of his investments to create an investment company in May’s name. The company was named May Securities Limited. Stanley set up a similar investment company for Barbara.³²

For some reason, Stanley wanted Gibbs to be the one to tell May about the company he had had him set up for her. “She seemed very grateful,” Gibbs said, but May had no questions and wasn’t interested in discussing the matter further. “I don’t think she was much interested,” he said. “I think she probably thought it was a bit of a burden, and she was quite happy to just be the silent shareholder.”³³ May’s entire focus in life seemed to be on Stanley’s welfare. “She was interested [only] in Stanley,” Gibbs said. “He was her whole life.”

Planning His Legacy

Along with making plans for May’s and Barbara’s future financial security, Stanley also began setting into motion plans for his philanthropic legacy. In his June 19, 1960, letter to Roberts, Stanley talked about forming a foundation to pass on “a goodly part of my personal fortune” to advance higher education in “however the trustees decide.” He intended to create the foundation during his lifetime and allow the fund to grow and be

come operative about 10 years after his death. Eight months later, in another letter to Roberts, he talked about his specific desire to contribute to the future of botanical research. “I don’t doubt they have plenty of things that need research funds for other than orchids,” he wrote in his February 1, 1961, letter, “but my experience has been that botanic research goes hand in hand with agrarian advances and Bastow is right. There are far more thrilling discoveries afoot than bombs of any kind!” (The “Bastow” to whom Stanley was referring most likely was Henry Robert Bastow, an Australian architect and renowned designer of school buildings.)

During various meetings with Gibbs, Stanley talked about his idea for creating a horticultural foundation, specifying that he wanted his friend Sir George Taylor to take the lead in identifying worthy causes for the foundation’s funds. By the mid-1960s, Taylor had started talking about retiring from his position at Kew, and Stanley, in his inimitable light-hearted way, told Gibbs “he wanted to set up this horticultural trust to keep George out of the pub.”

In a November 23, 1965, letter to Taylor, Stanley first broached the idea of creating a foundation to support horticulture projects and research. “I had in mind kicking off with half a million £ [*sic*] and building the fund to a million from my own resources but if we can get others to kick in fine!” he wrote. “Although a lot is not clear to me yet in the formative state, I think its [*sic*] basic in my plans that I ask you and Maurice

[L. Maurice Mason, an English landowner, farmer, and gardener] to be Trustees if that's the word. Don't spit in my eye at this stage but if you have any ideas you might let me have 'em or store them up till we can meet again."³⁴ Taylor responded the following week: "Your proposal to set up some sort of trust to encourage horticultural research and activities on an international basis, and to allocate as a start half a million pounds for this purpose quite staggers me."³⁵ Though the idea of such a well-endowed trust devoted exclusively to horticulture had set Taylor's mind spinning with "ideas and notions" for how the money could be used, he urged Stanley to proceed slowly and deliberately: "A project of this importance and size needs very very careful thought to ensure that from the beginning it goes on the right lines." He offered to help in any way he could.

A few weeks later, Stanley shared more thoughts about the horticultural trust with Taylor. In a letter written on December 10, he wrote, "One idea I had you could mull over with M. [Maurice Mason] is a 'tropical Kew in Australia' with a suitable location in Qld [Queensland] where both lowland and highland conditions exist in close proximity. Australia and the U.K. are obviously Keen for Empire Ties and what Not [*sic*], so positively this idea would seem on. . . . Plenty of time to think about this and other ideas."³⁶

Thus by the mid-1960s, plans for the creation of the horticultural foundation already were in the works and enthusiasm was building. But Stanley, sadly, wouldn't live to see his idea actually take form.

Stanley's Death

Throughout the last six months of his life, Stanley was afflicted with abdominal problems so severe that they often forced him to take to bed. In a letter to Taylor, he indicated that he'd been contending with "tummy" problems for many years. "We had a quiet Xmas as usual but this time I was in bed with my tummy when that flared up to protest my 1967 way of life," he wrote on January 2, 1968. "It's a thirty year old pal that keeps me out of all sorts of trouble." A month later, on February 12, 1968, he again wrote to Taylor saying he was in bed "to try to heal this damn ulcer with diet and rest." Four months later, on June 20, he wrote to Taylor that he was still ill and in bed: "I am an invalid and need care and REST."

On July 9, Stanley wrote to Taylor that he had been hospitalized for acute bladder inflammation and was at home awaiting a call from Dr. Kenneth Warren at the Lahey Clinic in Boston to find out whether he was a candidate for surgery. "He's the bloke who did Anthony Eden [former British Prime Minister] and is said to be No. 1," Stanley wrote. He made no effort to downplay how bad he was feeling: "I feel very weak and washed out so I must rest and hope that call to go to Boston doesn't come too soon because I need the strength to get there."

On July 13, 1968, Stanley wrote to Headmaster Roberts, telling him that he was waiting to leave for the Lahey Clinic in Boston for what he expected to be routine gall bladder surgery. He ended the letter, "Our best to Hilda

and thanks for your kind words. Bye, Stanley." It was the 50th letter he'd written to Roberts over the course of the preceding 11 years. He probably assumed his and Roberts's correspondence, which had given Stanley "one of the finest satisfactions" in his life,³⁷ would continue for many years in the future. But that was not to be.

Stanley and May traveled to Boston the following week, and he underwent gall bladder surgery on July 24. The surgery was successful, and Stanley initially appeared to be doing well. But two days later, on July 26, 1968, he died.³⁸ He was 61.

A few days after Stanley died, fellow orchid collector David Bennett and his family flew to Nassau for what they expected to be their third visit with the Smiths. They were met at the airport by Captain Merini, who broke the sad news to them about Stanley. May had sent instructions that the Bennetts were to continue with their vacation as planned. "It was fabulous as always cruising and fishing in the Cays," Bennett recalled, "but we all felt Stanley's absence."³⁹



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Life Without Stanley

Stanley's death devastated May. It was "the saddest time of my life," she confided to Sir George Taylor in a handwritten letter she sent from Hong Kong the following September. "Stanley's death was so sudden and unexpected that I was shattered and brokenhearted beyond words," she wrote. "In spirit I died with him for he was all that I had lived for."¹ In the 17 years since they had married, May had grown to rely on Stanley in countless ways, and her role as his wife, hostess, and traveling companion had eclipsed all other aspects of her identity. Now, at age 46, she had to figure out how to continue on without him.

During the first weeks after losing Stanley, May's own health suffered. But by following her doctor's prescription of a daily swim in the ocean and with time, she soon rallied.

When Barbara visited her in Nassau three months after Stanley's death, she found May "in very good order." Just months before losing her father, Barbara had suffered another devastating loss. In January 1968, her husband had died of cancer at age 31. Joined in grief, the two women spent their afternoons together at the beach.²

May kept the house in Nassau as her primary residence, and with the help of the gardening staff, she attempted to maintain Stanley's prized orchid collection. "I am going to learn all about them," she wrote to Taylor. "Through orchids I can be thinking about Stanley in peace and beauty for the rest of my life."³ In truth, however, May had never loved the house in Nassau, which had been built in the shadow of a hillside and at times could be dark and

gloomy.⁴ She confided in a letter to Taylor that living in the Nassau home without Stanley made her feel lonely.⁵ “I think it got on May’s nerves after Stanley passed away,” John Bamforth, her caretaker, wrote. Summers in Nassau were often unbearably hot and humid, and there was always the risk of hurricanes. Whenever she could, she’d fly off to spend time at her home in Hong Kong, which she typically visited each autumn and around the Christmas season, or to her penthouse in London, a destination she especially enjoyed in spring when the flowers were in bloom.⁶ Hong Kong was her favorite place. “Our bungalow here is simple and barely adequate,” she wrote to Taylor, “but the setting . . . is the most beautiful in the world.”⁷ While she was away from Nassau, the gardeners carefully tended to the orchids, and her house staff received visitors from around the world who wanted to see Stanley’s collection. “All my neighbors and friends have written to tell me that Isaac and his men have been keeping the garden looking beautiful all the time,” May wrote to Taylor from Hong Kong on February 18, 1970. “The orchids must have liked the rain water and fertilizer Stanley provided because there are plenty of blooms the year round.”

Several times a year May traveled to San Francisco to meet with her lawyer, Robert Cathcart, and her business advisers and co-executors of Stanley’s estate, John Collins, Sr., and Ronald Gibbs. The meetings invariably were more social than business-oriented since May wasn’t interested in delving in any great detail into

her finances and investments. She apparently trusted her advisers to act in her best interests and was more than willing to leave most of the decisions to them. “She was always saying, ‘Thank you. I’m so grateful for everything you do,’” Gibbs recalled. Although she tried putting on a cheerful face, Gibbs had the sense that May was somewhat adrift without Stanley. “I don’t know if the people she and Stanley associated with were any longer involved in her life,” he said.⁸

May did have some projects close to her heart with which she moved forward on her own. Not long after Stanley died, May made a \$620,000 donation in his memory to the University of Hong Kong, which paid for the building of the Stanley Smith Swimming Pool. The pool was large enough to accommodate 100 swimmers at a time, and the aquatic complex included changing rooms, showers, and toilets along with a filtration and heating system allowing for year-round use. May, along with Barbara and Stanley’s sister Thelma Lewis, were in the audience for the opening ceremony.⁹

In the early 1970s, May also got back in touch with her St. Andrews economics professor, James Nisbet, to ask for his help in establishing a fund to assist students experiencing financial hardship while enrolled at the university.¹⁰ She in part wanted to thank Nesbit for the kindness he and his wife had shown her while she was enrolled at St. Andrews in 1946 and for the financial support Nisbet had arranged for her.¹¹

In 1972 Nisbet created the May Wong Smith Trust,

funded with May’s initial gift. The purpose of the trust was to provide prizes to outstanding University of St. Andrews students, financial support for students experiencing difficulties, and fellowships and scholarships for studying economics. To this day the May Wong Smith Trust continues to support students at St. Andrews.

Creating the Charitable Trusts

In the wake of Stanley’s death, May and Barbara together moved ahead with plans to establish the horticultural foundation that Stanley had been envisioning. Two months after Stanley’s death, May wrote to Taylor about her and Barbara’s intentions: “The money is reserved for it and you and John Collins have to get together sometime to discuss where it is going to be.” Taylor responded: “It will be an honour and a great privilege to help in promoting the ideas that he had in mind and about which he talked to me a great deal. For me the prospect of continuing Stanley’s work and encouragement of horticulture is enormously satisfying and I can only say that I am most grateful and will do everything possible to justify your and his confidence.”

Although Stanley had always shunned publicity, after his death May and Barbara felt there was no longer a need to conceal his benefactions, and they decided that the horticultural foundation would be named for him. Stanley’s estate, valued between \$60 and \$70 mil-

lion, had been divided equally between Barbara and May, according to Gibbs.

The two women agreed to each allocate about \$1.6 million from the money they had inherited from Stanley to fund the foundation.

As it turned out, in 1970, two “sister” Stanley Smith Horticultural Trusts were established, with equal endowments, one in the UK (funded by Barbara) and the other in the United States (funded by May). They were jointly administered in the UK by Taylor but overseen by separate boards of trustees, although some of the trustees served on both boards. According to the original trust instrument for the U.S. trust, dated March 16, 1970, the trusts were created “to advance the science of horticulture and research in any branch of horticulture and the publication of the results of such research.” The trustees could “(a) assist in the creation, development, preservation and maintenance of gardens accessible to the public (b) promote the cultivation and wide distribution of plants having important horticultural value (c) promote the cultivation of new plants [and] (d) assist in the publication of books or other works relating to the science of horticulture.”¹² “Any project connected with horticulture, and particularly those with an educational bias, will be considered,” stated the press release announcing the foundation’s creation.¹³

In February 1977 May created a second foundation, named the May and Stanley Smith Trust, to provide direct services for vulnerable populations, in particular

orphans and neglected children, physically disabled children, blind people, and the elderly. The fund was created with gifts totaling \$1 million and made grants of up to \$6,000. The trustees were given broad authority to determine the kinds of projects that were funded, but in accordance with May's wishes, the document creating the trust specified that possible beneficiaries would include

- orphanages in London, Hong Kong, and Sydney and nongovernmental programs assisting orphans and neglected children in California and Vancouver
- residential care programs for the elderly in St. Andrews, Scotland, Sydney, Vancouver, and Nassau
- programs for physically disabled children in Duchess of Kent Orthopedic Hospital for Children in Sandy Bay, Hong Kong

Although the idea to create the charitable foundation probably came from May's tax and legal advisers as part of her estate-planning strategy, May on her own decided that she wanted to help people less fortunate than herself. "She was a soft-hearted person," said Ruth Collins, the current trust administrator and a trustee of the Smiths' foundations. (Her grandfather, John Collins, Sr., was the original administrator of the Smiths' foundations. Ruth Collins took over from Dale Matheny, who succeeded her grandfather as adminis-

trator.) "My grandfather used to talk about how he'd walk to lunch with May and she'd stop at every homeless person on the street and want to give them money. Those were populations that appealed to her as ones that were in need of support."

In 1989 May created a third charitable foundation, named the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust. Established with her initial gift of \$136 million, this larger foundation aimed to serve the same populations as the smaller trust but was able to make larger grants.

The three separate trusts operated alongside each other until the Great Recession of 2008. When the stock market crashed, the investments of the three trusts took a substantial hit in value, and in 2010 the trustees decided to move the \$5.5 million remaining in the smaller charitable trust into the horticulture trust to boost its assets. The smaller general trust was subsequently closed. In its nearly 34 years of operation, the smaller trust had awarded 1,696 grants totaling \$7.9 million to 551 small organizations helping to improve the quality of life for children, elders, disabled or critically ill people, and disadvantaged adults and families.

Although Gibbs had never talked with Stanley about his philanthropic interests beyond horticulture projects and research, he said he believes Stanley would have been happy to know that his wealth was being used to help others since he had a "generous nature." "It was just sort of the way he was," he said. "He'd been very blessed financially in his life, and I think it was part of his persona to help the needy."¹⁴

Memories of May

As time passed, May seemed to adjust to life without Stanley, and her naturally upbeat, effervescent self re-emerged. "Whenever we met, she always seemed to be quite happy and unburdened," Gibbs recalled. "Although it's hard to know because she was so quiet; it could have been part of her façade."

Ruth Collins, who was a young girl when she first met May, recalled with fondness May's visits to her home in the small town of Nicasio in Marin County in the 1970s. Ruth's father, John Collins, Jr., by then was assisting his father in handling May's financial affairs and investments. "Whenever Mrs. Smith came to town, my parents would let us stay home from school and we'd go into San Francisco to have lunch with her at the Clift Hotel, where she always stayed," Ruth recalled. "She was a petite woman, always smiling and cheerful, very generous. She was bubbly and excited about whatever we had planned to do that day."

May would always arrive at the Collins home with a gift of a big box of chocolates, which Ruth and her sister and brothers gladly anticipated. "She spoke with a little accent," Ruth recalled. "It didn't impede our ability to understand her. It was just charming."¹⁵

By 1976 May had hired a British woman named Enid Bamforth to help her oversee the staff and management of her Hong Kong home during her long absences. May had met Enid and John Bamforth in Nassau in 1975, just as the Bamforths were preparing

to relocate from Nassau to Hong Kong. May and Enid hit it off immediately, according to John Bamforth. May's command of English was excellent, but Enid was fluent in Cantonese, and the two women conversed in May's first language. The next time May traveled to Hong Kong, she invited the Bamforths to Repulse Bay, and after that they visited her at "Number 10" many more times. Gradually, May began asking Enid to look after things for her in Hong Kong when she wasn't there. "Enid looked after South Bay Road, paid the staff, arranged repairs and decorations, etc., and also arranged for the entertainment of visitors when May wasn't there," Bamforth wrote. Mit Singh, who worked as the driver and gardener and general helper, "regarded himself as May's number one and he would do anything for her," Bamforth recalled. There were two other house servants and a cook, he added.¹⁶ Beyond managing the running of the household and entertaining May's guests when she was not there, Enid even chaperoned May's friends on trips to China on several occasions.

Bamforth recalled that when he and Enid met May, seven years after Stanley's death, "she was her own person and was getting along with her own life. Her grief at losing Stanley was private and did not intrude on her life," he wrote.¹⁷ She had a lively, friendly personality and had many friends in far-flung places, whom she enjoyed visiting and entertaining when they visited her. "May liked moving round the world where her many friends lived," Bamforth said. "[S]he seemed to spend

her time entertaining and being entertained.” She dressed immaculately in Chinese fashions “at all times,” and she entertained lavishly at the prestigious Nautilus Club near her home on South Bay Road in Repulse Bay. The club was started by May’s Repulse Bay neighbor and close friend, Sir Kenneth Fung Ping-fan, and his wife, Ivy Kan Shiu-han.¹⁸ “We went there many times [with May], notably to some fabulous Christmas and New Year parties,” Bamforth recalled. May had other good friends living nearby in Hong Kong, including Lady May Ride, the widow of Sir Lindsay Ride, an Australian surgeon and World War Two veteran, who was a vice chancellor of the University of Hong Kong. Also, Stanley’s relatives the Mellors visited from Australia many times.¹⁹ “May was a very generous hostess and nothing was too much trouble for her,” Bamforth recalled. “She loved organizing meals, trips, and other activities.”²⁰

May did not talk much about her early years in China and was still not in touch with anyone in her family, Bamforth recalled. “May would never go to China,” he said. “She feared for her safety if she crossed the border.”²¹

Granny May

Five or six years after losing both her first husband and her father, Barbara met and married Count Jacques de Brie, a Parisian banker. Their son, Alex de Brie, was born on April 15, 1975. Even after their son was born,

Barbara and Jacques maintained separate residences. Jacques continued living and working in Paris, while Barbara split her time between her manor house in Wiltshire and her flat in the St. James’s Place building. The same year that Alex was born, she also purchased a small boutique winery—Hanzell—in Sonoma, California. Barbara spent every August with Alex in her comfortable, airy home on the winery’s grounds for the rest of her short life.

Barbara died on May 20, 1991, in England, at age 55, several months after learning she had cancer. At the time, Alex was 16 and a student at Millfield School. “When my mom died the newspapers got ahold of the story of a 16-year-old inheriting a lot of money, and I was on the front page of every newspaper in London that day,” he recalled in an interview in 2016. “They made a big deal out of it. The world’s press turned up at Millfield School.” The attention was not only unwelcome but also disruptive and disturbing.

Alex has spent his entire adult life overseeing the management of the estate he inherited from his mother and from his grandfather, who didn’t live long enough to meet him. But Alex has fond memories from his early years of sweet “Granny May,” as he called her.

“She bought my dog for me for my fourth birthday,” Alex said. “And she bought me a blue UFO battery-operated thing that I could sit in and whiz around the house. She was a pretty cool granny.”

Alex remembers climbing the stairs as a young boy from his and his mother’s flat at 26 St. James’s Place



Barbara, Maggy de Brie (Barbara’s mother-in-law), and May in Boyton Manor, about 1980.

up to the penthouse to visit Granny May. He was usually accompanied to the penthouse by either May’s chef, known as Chan, who helped look after her after Stanley’s death, or by John Martin, Barbara’s chauffeur. “He had been Stanley’s chauffeur for many years, and when Stanley died he looked after mom for many years,” Alex recalled.

When young Alex reached the front door to May’s penthouse, he had to be careful to tiptoe around the carpet in front of the door so as not to set off the burglar alarm. “We’d get to the door and here was this tiny

little woman. By age seven I was almost the same height as her,” Alex said. May was always dressed in a gorgeous silk Chinese-style outfit topped with an eiderdown housecoat. “First, she’d give me a hug, and then we’d sit down together,” Alex said. The views through the large windows in May’s penthouse of Green Park and Spencer House were spectacular. A pair of doors led to a small outside terrace where May and Alex sometimes would stroll around together while she asked him questions about school and his life. “She never left the building from what I understand,” Alex said. “She led a quiet life.”

May’s Decline

In the mid- to late 1980s, May’s health began deteriorating, and she was showing early signs of dementia. She was admitted to Princess Grace Hospital in London in about 1990, and when she was released, Enid Bamforth arranged full-time care for her in her London penthouse. When those arrangements proved unsustainable, Enid and John Bamforth were hired as May’s caretakers. They first moved with her to a private hotel in the spa town of Harrogate in North Yorkshire, England. The houses in Hong Kong and Nassau were sold in the early 1990s, and then in January 1991 the Bamforths moved with May to the island of Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands off the Normandy coast, which is popular among high earners due to its favorable



Barbara de Brye with newborn Alex.

tax laws. (John Bamforth recalled that May's financial adviser, John Collins, Sr., was concerned about the taxes May would have had to pay as a resident of England.)²²

Enid Bamforth purchased a home overlooking the sea on May's behalf in the exclusive Fort George development on the island, which could accommodate her, her husband, John, and May, plus other staff. "We stayed in a hotel initially until Enid had renovated the

premises she had bought," John Bamforth recalled. The Bamforths continued caring for May for the next 15 years, until 2005. Bamforth said his job was to take May on short walks twice a day and on outings to church and for meals in restaurants and drives around the island—"which she thoroughly enjoyed."

During the first 10 years they cared for her, the Bamforths took May on trips to visit Stanley's sister's family, the Mellors, in Sydney, and they also traveled to Zürich, San Francisco, Hawaii, Malaysia, and Rome. They took two trips to Edmonton and were there to celebrate the millennium. In the winter they traveled to Nassau, where May was still a member of the Lyford Cay Club. Some of the trips were less than successful, Bamforth recalled, due to May's failing health. They continued traveling with May up until 2000, when her worsening condition precluded further overseas travel.

Between 1990 and 2005, the Bamforths were with May continuously except when they took a break one summer to visit family in Edmonton. "While we were away the house was run by our housekeeper, Enid's cousin Mary," Bamforth recalled.

Alex recalled that his only visit to May at her home in Guernsey was not a happy experience. (His mother had died by then.) May's dementia had taken an obvious toll on her. She was having trouble communicating clearly, and Alex had to rely on the Bamforths as his interpreters. "I found talking with her to be very difficult," Alex said.

By 2005, the Bamforths were no longer able to care



Alex and Barbara de Brye, 1977.

for May due to Enid's own declining health. By then, according to John Bamforth, May's dementia had progressed to the point where she "only recognized Enid and otherwise lived in a world of her own." Her business advisers decided to move her from Guernsey to a house they purchased and staffed for her in Lyford Cay in Nassau. May died in Nassau on July 15, 2006. In keeping with her wishes, \$65 million from her personal estate was contributed to the May and Stanley Charitable Trust after her death.

Epilogue

The legacies of May (Wong) and Stanley Smith live on today through the work of several charitable trusts established by them or in their honor: in the United States, the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust; and in the United Kingdom, the Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust, the May Wong Smith Trust, and the de Brie Charitable Trust. Collectively, these trusts steward approximately \$430 million to benefit charitable causes in perpetuity.

The Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust

The U.S. horticultural trust was established by May Smith and continues to support the types of projects that interested Stanley during his lifetime. Grants support education and research in ornamental horticul-

ture, primarily in North and South America. Specifically, the trust is interested in funding organizations pursuing the following activities:

- the advancement of research in ornamental horticulture and the publication of the results of such research
- the creation, development, preservation, and maintenance of gardens accessible to the public for educational purposes
- the promotion of the environmentally responsible introduction, cultivation, and distribution of plants that have ornamental horticultural value
- the publication of books or other works relating to ornamental horticulture
- the development of informal and/or formal educational activities that further ornamental horticulture

From its creation in 1970 through 2016, the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust awarded 1,333 grants totaling \$19 million. The value of the endowment in December 2016 was \$15 million.

The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust

The UK horticultural trust was created in 1970 by Stanley's daughter, in his memory, to support the development of the art and science of horticulture. The main guiding principle of the trust's activities is improvement in horticulture for the general public. The objectives of the trust are

- to promote horticulture
- to promote the conservation of the physical and natural environment by promoting biological diversity
- to promote the creation, development, preservation, and maintenance of gardens (with preference normally, but not exclusively, given to gardens accessible to the public)
- the advancement of horticultural education

Through its 2016 fiscal year, the trust had awarded a total of \$3.5 million in grants, primarily to projects in Britain, but also abroad. The endowment in 2016 was valued at \$4.7 million.

The de Brye Charitable Trust

Founded in the United Kingdom by Barbara de Brye in 1982 as the Stanley Smith General Charitable Trust, the de Brye Charitable Trust supports the care and housing of the aged, orphans and neglected children, physically disabled children, and the blind, as well as other charitable interests of the de Brye family. The endowment had a value of \$3.3 million at the end of its 2016 fiscal year.

The May Wong Smith Trust

Established in 1972 with a gift from May Smith, this trust supports St. Leonard's College at the University of St. Andrews as well as the welfare of the university's students through fellowships, scholarships, academic prizes, and financial assistance. The trust received additional contributions from the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust over the years, and its value at the end of its 2016 fiscal year was \$548,000.

The May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust

Created by May Smith in 1989, the charitable trust strives to improve the lives of members of vulnerable populations, including those that were of particular

concern to her. The trust is interested in supporting organizations that promote the dignity, agency, and self-sufficiency of individuals within its focus populations and that strive to achieve a lasting difference in the lives of the people they serve. Under its 2014–2018 Strategic Plan, the trust supports organizations in the western region of the United States and in British Columbia, Canada, that serve four specific groups of people:

- foster youth
- veterans
- adults with disabilities
- elders

Within each of these focused program areas, funding is directed in alignment with strategies that enrich the quality of life, promote self-sufficiency, and assist individuals in achieving their highest potential. The trust's grantmaking supports both direct services and projects that involve changing policies and systems in order to benefit a greater number of people. Between 1989 and 2016, the trust awarded 5,660 grants totaling \$255 million. Its endowment at the end of 2016 had a value of \$400 million.

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"I think the Smiths would be very pleased with the grants awarded, particularly Mrs. Smith," said Ruth Collins. "She's the one who designated the vulnerable populations she wanted to help, and I think she'd be pleased to see the areas in which the trust is active."

Collins said she thinks the Smiths also would approve of the low public profile that the trusts strive for. "That is a value of the Smiths that we've tried to carry forward," Collins said. "We have to have some field recognition in order to attract the organizations that need our funding and to collaborate with other funders. But we always try to keep the focus on the grantee and the work being accomplished by them. Because really we are just providing the resources that they can then use to do their work."

Surely the Smiths would be impressed with the diverse and beneficial projects their wealth has funded. As Stanley once wrote to Headmaster Roberts, "I do get some pleasure out of this ability to give, particularly to something where people are really slogging at it in the face of great adversity, to do some good in the world."

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Video of May and Stanley Smith visiting Churchie.

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Index

Italic page numbers refer to photographs or the timeline.

The following abbreviations are used in subheadings:

Churchie: Church of England Grammar School
EMMCO: Eastern Metals and Mining Company
FEB: Ministry of Information's Far Eastern Bureau
HESCO: Hong Kong & Eastern Shipping Company

HSBC: Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation

JATG: John A. T. Galvin
MOI: Ministry of Information
SHS: Stanley Herbert Smith
SOE: Special Operations Executive

- Andrew, Findlay, 59, 63, 64
returns to SOE duties, 65
as source of Japanese goods in Chungking, 100
- Anglican Church Grammar School. *see* Church of England Grammar School
- Anti-British National Liberation War, 162
- Australians, 9, 11, 30
accents of, 33–34, 145
attitudes toward England of, 97, 148
attitudes toward Japan of, 43, 115, 117
- World War One participation of, 12–13, 13, 15, 106
- Baldwin School for Girls, 80–82
- Bamforth, Enid, 193, 195
- Bamforth, John, 76, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197
- Beck, Bertha, 5
- Beck, John, 1, 5, 6
- Beck, Mary, 1, 5
- Beck, Rebecca, 1, 5, 8, 9, 27, 28
- Beck family, 6, 8
- Beecham, Michael, 146, 147, 148, 166
- Bell, David John, 16–17
- Belton, David, 112, 165
- Bracken, Brendan, 66, 102, 103
- Brisbane, Australia, 1, 3, 7, 13, 14
demographics of, 5
gardening in, 153
map, *xvii*
population growth of, 16
SHS's childhood home in, 3–4
- Brisbane Botanic Gardens, 152–153
- British Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW), vii, 44, 51
- British Ministry of Information (MOI), *xiv*, 94, 97, 99, 100, 101

appoints Andrew Findlay, 61, 63
 appoints SHS Chief Representative of Chinese operations, 66, 67
 approves of SHS's leadership in Chungking, 93
 China propaganda plan of, 62, 64, 68, 70
 Chungking staff of, 73, 75
 complains of excess costs of China operation, 71
 FEB of moved to Singapore, 45
 JATG becomes Far East adviser of, 65
 JATG released from, 59
 May Wong employed by, 75, 91
 office in Chungking, 68, 118
 office in Singapore, 44
 operates with goodwill and tolerance of Chinese government, 98
 propaganda controlled by, 46
 reorganization of Far Eastern operation in London of, 102
 SHS investigates opportunities for in China, 95
 SHS winds down Chungking operation of, 105
 SHS's cover as representative of, 49
 SHS's plans to expand in Chungking, 103
 SHS's wartime service for, 69, 105, 139, 148, 159
 timeline, *xiv*
 British Ministry of Information's Far Eastern Bureau (FEB), 45, 65, 66, 97, 101
 office in Singapore, vii, 44
 British Ministry of Supply, 146

British Official Secrets Act, 49
 Britnova Ltd., 52
 Bukit Besi iron mine, *xv*, 123, 125, 127, 130
 blasting at, 137
 British colonial authorities take possession of, 125
 closes, 176
 EMMCO restricts Chinese laborer recruitment at, 162
 employees of, 136, 140
 engineering section of, 133
 European welfare officer at, 143
 facilities of, 140, 141
 as largest mining complex in Malaya, 130
 loads of towed, 131
 lucriveness of, 128, 133, 135
 machine shop of, 132
 Malay school at, 141
 map, *xvii*
 measuring progress of, 136
 mechanization of, 129
 office of, 128
 ore production and processing of, 127, 134, 134
 school at, 138
 SHS and JATG acquire, 124, 126, 151
 Butler, P. D., 66, 67
 Butler, Rab, 135
 Carter, Jimmy, 120
 CEGS. *see* Church of England Grammar School
 Chiang, Kai-shek, 58, 61, 62, 63, 142

forces of, 110
 JATG interviews, 45
 makes Kuling his summer capital, 79
 Chiang, Kai-shek, Madame, 80, 82, 83
China Mail, *xiv*, 45, 111, 112, 126
 Chubb, Thomas, 99–100
 Chungking, China, 56, 57, 60, 67, 68, 69
 British intelligence not welcome in, 62
 British propaganda unit in, 57–59, 68, 71, 75, 97–98
 as Chinese capital, 53
 conditions in, 60–61, 73, 101–102
 Japanese front line 50 miles away from, 66
 map, *xviii*
 May Wong goes to, 91
 Nationalist government in, 110
 SHS's work in, 63, 64, 67, 69, 93, 100, 103, 105, 142
 timeline, *xiv*
 Church of England Grammar School, 10, 19, 20
 athletics of, 11, 22, 23
 curriculum of, 21, 24
 SHS and May Wong visit, 176–177, 177
 SHS attends, xi, *xiv*, 18, 21
 SHS donates to, xi, xii, 164, 177, 178
 SHS leaves, 25, 28
 teachers of, 16, 19, 20, 25
 Churchie. *see* Church of England Grammar School
 Churchill, Winston, 45, 102
 Clinton, Gerard, 180

Clinton, Nicola, 180
 Cold War, 161
 Collins, John, Jr., 193
 Collins, John, Sr., 175, 182, 184, 191, 192
 as co-executor of SHS's estate, 190
 handles May Wong's financial affairs, 193, 196
 SHS and JATG's top investment manager, 173
 works for Emil Ott's companies, 126
 Collins, Ruth, 192, 193, 201
 de Brye, Alexander, *xv*, 169, 194, 195
 with Barbara Stanley Smith, 196, 197
 de Brye, Barbara. *see* Smith, Barbara Stanley
 de Brye Charitable Trust, 200
 de Brye, Jacques, 194
 de la Valette, John, 66
 de Wiart, Adrian Carton, 98, 105, 106
 Dickinson, Frank, 142
 drovers, *xiv*, 26, 32, 33, 33, 34
 Eagle Junction State School, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
 SHS attends, 11
 timeline, *xiv*
 Eastern Metals and Mining Company (EMMCO), *xv*, 127, 146, 176, 215n
 barter with Japan, 137
 blocked from expanding Malaya operations, 149
 employee treatment of, 142, 162
 executive staff's perquisites of, 139, 140, 143

formed, 126
 "get rich quick" mentality of, 148
 innovations of, 129
 as largest employer of Malay labor outside government service, 136
 mining ventures of, 133, 134
 Rompin Mining Company is subsidiary of, 131
 SHS's involvement in, 128, 154, 175
 taxes required of, 161
 undercuts power of Malayan communists, 135
 Eden, Anthony, 102, 186
 Eggleston, Frederic, 53, 62, 63, 98, 99
 EMMCO. *see* Eastern Metals and Mining Company (EMMCO)
 Fane, Barbara. *see* Smith, Barbara Stanley
 Fane, Edmund H., 171, 178, 178, 180
 marries Barbara Stanley Smith, 169
 Far Eastern Bureau. *see* British Ministry of Information's Far Eastern Bureau (FEB)
 FEB. *see* British Ministry of Information's Far Eastern Bureau (FEB)
 Galvin, John A. T., *xiv*, *xv*, 215n14
 as acting director of MOI's Far Eastern operations, 64
 aid to Malay school of, 141
 appointed Official Agent of Hong Kong Government in Japan, 114
 business ventures
 attends to sales and promotion, 118

Bukit Besi mine, 126–127, 128–129, 130
China Mail, 112, 126
 development projects, 135
 effects of Communist China on, 163
 EMMCO, 126, 127, 128
 in Far East, xii
 HESCO, 127
 human resources strategies, 136, 139–140, 142–143
 intra-Asian trade, 113
 in Japan, 125
 mining companies, x, 127, 130–131, 134, 145
 moneymaking schemes, 123
 partnership with SHS ends, 175–176
 postwar business plans with SHS, 111
 Rompin Mining Company, 130–132, 137
 selling exotic birds, 152
 selling Malayan timber to U.S. military in Pacific, 162–163
 shipping and stevedoring companies, 132
 SHS's business partner, xi
 Tambun Mining Company, 133
 wool exports to Japan, 115
 drive and abilities of, 148
 in Dublin, Ireland, 174
 encounters British Establishment opposition, 66
 FEB recruits, 45–46

- feels threatened by Malayan Communist Party, 162
 hosts Barbara Stanley Smith's coming-out party, 158
 as important in Hong Kong's government and business world, 109–110
 intelligence work of, 146
 involves SHS in British intelligence operations, 47, 53
 leases London flat, 169
 lifestyle of, 44
 meets SHS, 34–35
 as MOI adviser on Far East, 65
 official position of, 62
 philanthropy of, 164
 possibly rooms with SHS, 36
 released to MOI, 59
 respected as Far Eastern consultant, 101
 secret agent for British intelligence, 45
 seeks cover position, 63
 seen as interloper in Malaya, 149
 in Singapore, 51, 54
 sponsors Olympic equestrian team, 173
 strong American connections of, 148
 suffers heart attack, 147
 on traveling at MOI expense, 105
 wealth of, 124
- Gibbs, Ronald, 153, 164, 175, 182, 185
 as co-executor of SHS's estate, 190
 SHS and May Wong invite to Nassau, 184
- Gimson, Franklin, 110
- Ginling College, *xiv*, 84, 85, 86, 88, 90
- conditions at, 87
 dating scene at, 85
 description of, 84
 dorm building of constructed, 89
 experiences air raids, 90
 May Wong attends, 83, 86, 91
 May Wong contributes to, 178n
- Gordon and Gotch, *xiv*, 39, 40, 44, 54
 expansion of into Asia, 43
 import/export activities of, 41
 JATG recruits, 45, 46
 SHS and JATG join advertising department of, 36
 SHS works for, 42
 use of SHS's contacts at, 52
- Hall-Patch, Edmund, 101, 145–147
- Harmon, W. Gordon, 59
- Hong Kong, *xiv*, *xv*, 106, 192, 194, 195
 British companies have stake in, 58
 capitulation to Japan of, 62, 64
China Mail based in, 45
 currency trading in, 113
 foreign traders and merchants flood into, 107
 Japan attacks, 57
 JATG appointed Official Agent of Government of, 114
 map, *xvii*
 May Wong goes to, 119, 183, 190, 193
 postwar conditions of, 111
 propaganda materials from, 68
 returns to British rule, 110
 Scott and English import Australian wool to, 115, 117
- Scott and English Limited established in, 109
- SHS and JATG choose as base of operations, 110
- SHS and JATG's ships built in, 132
- SHS and May Wong's home in, 108, 121, 153, 154, 159, 164, 176
- SHS tries to send propaganda to, 95
 status of, 120
- Hong Kong & Eastern Shipping Company (HESCO), 127
- Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), 126, 133, 134, 148, 176
 finances SHS and JATG's ventures, 113, 124
- Hood, Samuel, 66, 101
- Hui, Peach, 76, 79, 120
- jackaroos, *xi*, *xiv*, 25, 28, 29, 31–32
- James, Jane, 8
- James, Samuel, 8–9
- Jenner, Dorothy, 53, 54, 118
- Jerantut mine, 133, 141
- Kerr, Archibald Clark, 62, 63, 66
- Killery, Valentine St. John, 51
- Koo, V. K. Wellington, 99
- Korean War, 140
- Kuling, China, *xvii*, 77, 78, 79, 80, 83
 Wong family forced to leave, 86, 87
 Wong family home in, 82
- Kuomintang, 57, 62, 63, 82, 97
 ends alliance with China's Communists, 75
- Oriental Mission targets, 58
 relocates capital to Chungking, 60
- Lasdun, Denys, 166
- Lewis, Thelma. *see* Smith, Thelma
- Li, Che-chin, 83
- Lin, Sen, 80, 87
- London, UK, *xvi*, 99, 144, 144, 145
 Barbara Smith's coming-out party in, 156
 map, *xvi*
 May Wong admitted to hospital in, 195
 May Wong spends time in, 190
 MOI headquarters are in, 66, 93
 philanthropy to orphanages in, 192
 propaganda to disseminate in China created in, 63–64, 68, 70
 Queen's Garden, Kew Gardens in, 181
 secret service planners in, 52
 SHS and JATG go to, 145, 147
 SHS and JATG's equipment and ship purchases in, 146
 SHS and May Wong's home in, 167, 167, 176
 SHS builds residential building in, 166
 SHS enjoys favorable reception in, 101
 SHS travels to, 95, 97, 102
- MacArthur, Douglas, 112, 114
- MacDougall, David, 64, 65, 68, 110, 111, 114
- Malaya, 145, 147, 148, 149, 161
 becomes part of Malaysia, 176
 Cathay Building in, 44
 Communist insurgency gains support in, 114
 Custodian of Enemy Property in, 127
 economy of, 135, 137
 employment in, 136
 Frank Dickinson's work in, 142
 Japan attacks British Empire in, 57
 Japanese vessels not welcome in waters of, 128
 jungles in, 132
 as largest supplier of iron ore to Japan, 134
 map, *xvii*
 reoccupation of, 143
 SHS and JATG's mining venture in, 123–126, 130, 146, 173
 SHS's concerns about future of, 162, 163
 SHS's intelligence gathering in, 53
 SHS's railway project in, 131–132
 SHS's time spent in, 142, 151, 164
 tax revenue paid to, 135
 timeline, *xv*
 traditions of, 141
- Mao, Tse-tung, 45, 58, 110, 120, 163
- May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, *xii*, *xv*, 191, 192, 199, 200–201
- May Securities Limited, 185
- May Wong Smith Trust, 119, 190–191, 199, 200
- McDonald, Lachie, 112, 113–114, 117, 123, 129
 meets May Wong, 147
 visits SHS and May Wong, 152
- McHugh, James, 143, 146
- Mellor, Clive, 27
- MEW. *see* British Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW)
- MI6, 44, 52
- Ministry of Information. *see* British Ministry of Information (MOI)
- MOI. *see* British Ministry of Information (MOI)
- Morris, William Perry French, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25
 founds Church of England Grammar School, 19–20
- Morse, Arthur, 113, 124, 126
- Nassau, Bahamas, 154, 187, 192, 193, 196
 Barbara Stanley Smith visits May Wong in, 189
 map, *xvi*
 May Wong dies in, 197
 May Wong is lonely in, 190
 no personal income taxes in, 164
 Ronald Gibbs visits SHS and May Wong in, 184
 SHS and May Wong's home in, 160, 163–166, 173, 176, 178, 179, 180, 183
 SHS and May Wong's home in is sold, 195
 timeline, *xv*

- Nisbet, James, 119, 190
 Nixon, Richard, 120
 North American News Association syndicate (NANA), 52
 Northern Territory, Australia, *xiv*, *xvii*, 31, 32, 34
 drovers in, 27, 33
 SHS goes to, 28
 SHS's works in, 32
 size of, 30
- Oriental Mission, vii, 44, 51, 52, 97
 activities of, 46, 54
 disbanded, 58
 JATG released from, 59
 SHS's time with, 55
- Ott, Emil, 125–126, 127, 128, 215n14
 Overseas News Agency (ONA), 52
- Pacific War, 58, 87, 127
 Paterson, Fred, 24
- Queensland, Australia, *xiv*, 4, 16, 36, 186
 Beck family immigrates to, 6
 Church of England in, 20
 demographics of, 5
 plants of, 153
 schools in, 11, 17, 18–19
 SHS born in, 1
 SHS travels in, 28
 size of, 30
- Repulse Bay, Hong Kong, 109, 119, 147, 193, 194
- Roberts, Henry Emmanuel, xi, 23, 25, 177
 correspondence from SHS
 Bahamas, 180
 charitable donations, 164, 201
 China, 163
 education, 19
 human resources strategy, 142
 Malay project, 131
 persistence, 147
 SHS's character, 22
 SHS's daily schedule, 152
 SHS's desire for anonymity, 178
 SHS's garden, 165
 SHS's legacy, 185
 SHS's mining business, 166
 SHS's surgery, 186, 187
 SHS's time at Churchie, 16
 SHS's travels, 154
 SHS's yacht, 179
 Singapore, 161
 wealth, xii
 on SHS's time at Churchie, 21, 24
 Rompin Mining Company, 130–132, 133, 135–136, 137, 141, 143
 closes, 176
 managers of are Americans, 148
 negotiations with British government on, 146–147
 security threats to, 162
 SHS replaced as chair of, 175
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 45, 102
 Rowlands, Archibald, 144, 146
 Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, 183
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, vii, 153, 165, 181
- Sandgate, Queensland, 1, 2, 8, 22
 Sansom, George, 51, 52, 59, 164
 Sansom, Katharine, 53, 164
 Sawyer, Sarah Adele, 8
 Sayers, C. E. (Ted), 51, 53, 54, 66, 105
 as deputy director of FEB in Delhi, 97–99
 tries to undermine SHS, 100–102
 Scott and English Limited, *xiv*, 109, 111, 112, 118, 119
 declines, 123
 expansion of, 113
 has exclusive rights to Australia-Japan wool trade, 115–117
 markets and sells ore, 127
 Seymour, Horace, 66, 101, 105, 107, 110
 Singapore, *xv*, *xvii*, 50, 52, 163, 175
 Cathay Building in, 44
 falls to Japan, *xiv*, 57, 62
 foreign traders and merchants flood into, 107
 Gordon and Gotch expanding operations into, 43
 JATG represents in talks with Japan, 109
 JATG works for SOE in, 45, 46
 moves toward independence from Britain, 161
 Oriental Mission in, 58, 59
 political developments in, 175–176
 Raffles Hotel in, 48, 140
- SHS and JATG open Scott and English in, 117
 SHS and May Wong's home in, 151, 153, 154
 SHS as secret agent for British in, viii, xii, 49, 53, 106, 159
 SHS in at fall to Japanese of, 54
 SHS transports orchid collection from to Nassau, 165
 SHS's concerns about future of, 162
 SHS's life in, 44, 152
 splits from Malaysia, 176
 Sino-Japanese War, vii, 68, 71, 80
 Smith, Barbara Stanley, *xiv*, *xv*, 158, 171, 190
 with Alexander de Bbye, 196, 197
 birth of, 41
 at coming-out party, 157
 death of, vii, 194
 with Edmund H. Fane, 178
 establishes trusts in SHS's name, xii, 191
 founds Bbye Charitable Trust, 200
 home in Wiltshire, UK, 169
 in London, UK, 170
 marries Edmund H. Fane, 169
 marries Jacques de Bbye, 194
 with May Wong, 195
 with SHS, 180
 SHS provides for after his death, 175
 SHS sets up investment company for, 185
 SHS visits, 166
 upbringing of, 156
- visits in Nassau, 178, 189
 wartime residence of, 118
 Smith, Eli Elijah, 8, 18
 Smith, Irene, 3, 27, 196
 Smith, John Patient, 8, 18
 Smith, May. *see* Wong, May
 Smith, Olive May. *see* Williams, Olive May
 Smith, Rebecca. *see* Beck, Rebecca
 Smith, Stanley Herbert
 attacked in Parliament, 102
 birth of, 1
 characteristics
 athletic, 31
 attitudes toward money, 34
 capable, savvy, and seasoned, 106
 impatient with illness, 102
 mastermind, 117
 perseverance, 95
 persistence, 147
 reverse snobbery, 148
 childhood, 3
 Communist expansion discourages, 163
 daily schedule of, 152
 deals with imperial and colonial governments, 137
 death of, vii, 187
 education
 Churchie, 18–19, 20, 22, 24
 Eagle Junction State School, 11
 nominated to take scholarship exams, 17
 employment and business ventures
- advertising, 36, 39
 awarded British rank of Minister, 102
 builds railroad, 131–132
 Bukit Besi iron mine, 123–124, 126–129
 business office in San Francisco, U.S., 173
 challenged by British bureaucracy, 147–149
China Mail, 111, 112, 126
 chooses arduous situations, 28
 closes Singapore offices, 161
 colleague David MacDougall, 110–111, 114
 connections used for, 145, 146
 considers dissolving partnership with JATG, 175
 drover, 32–33
 early moneymaking ventures, 34
 EMMCO, 126, 127, 128
 first secretary in British Embassy in Chungking, 49
 Gordon and Gotch, 39, 41, 42–43
 granted home leave, 105
 HESCO, 127
 human resources strategies, 135, 136, 139–141, 142–143
 iron ore, 134
 jackaroo, 25, 28
 Jerantut mine, 133
 journalist, 35–36
 limits oversight of mining ventures, 165–166

- MOI, 49, 148
 opens company subsidiaries in Sydney, Singapore, and Tokyo, 117
 plans to go into trade, 107
 plans to sell Malaysian timber to U.S. military in Pacific, 162–163
 plans to trade with Japan, 114
 postwar trading networks for, 145
 provides social benefits for workers and their families, 137
 purchases Sussex, UK farm as investment property, 166
 Rompin Mining Company, 130–132, 133, 135–137, 141, 143, 146–147, 162, 175
 Scott and English Limited, 109, 111, 113, 115, 117, 127
 shipping and stevedoring companies, 132
 Tambun Mining Company, 133
 Trengganu Minerals Ltd., 133
- espionage
 challenges in Chungking office, 103
 covers as Institute of International Relations adviser, 63
 given rank of Counsellor on British Diplomatic List, 66
 intelligence gathering, 47, 52–53, 57
 JATG recruits, 45, 46
 MOI, 64, 66, 67–68, 71, 93, 105
 oath of secrecy, 49
 Oriental Mission, 46, 51, 54–55
- Press Attaché in Chungking, 66
 Press Attaché to Findlay Andrew, 64
 propaganda operations, 52, 57–59, 61, 62, 69–70, 93, 95, 125
 relies on black market, 100
 Research and Investment Institute member, 63
 secret agent for British intelligence, viii, 43, 53, 63, 159
 secret anti-Japanese operative, xii
 SOE, 49, 53
- family
 daughter born, 41
 meets May Wong, 73
 parents' relationship, 27, 28
- friends, 180
 meets JATG, 34, 35
 at school, 14
- health, 175
 abdominal problems, 186
 gall bladder surgery, 187
 heart attack, 147
 heart disease, 183
 typhus, 102
 waning stamina, 183
- hobbies and interests
 appetite for adventure, 35
 birds, 34, 151–152
 books, 152
 botany, 180
 cultural and scholarly exchange between China and West, 97
 designs and builds London luxury residential building, 166
 higher education, 24
- horticulture, 152, 153, 180
 orchids, 152, 153, 165, 180
 sports, 16
 yachting, 179–180
- legacy, 199–201
 lifestyle, 44, 51
 marriage
 May Wong, 119
 Olive May Williams, 36
 Olive May Williams sues for divorce, 118
- personality
 alert mind, 25
 kind, charming, and gracious, 183
 “larrikin,” 22
 playful, 185
 reserved, 32
- philanthropy
 Churchie, 177
 considers creating foundations and trusts, 185–186
 Costa Rica Organisation for Tropical Studies' botanical and scientific observation post, 183
 funds publication of books on botany, 183
 funds publication of *History of Japan*, 164
 Nassau National Bougainvillea Garden, 183
 National Tropical Botanical Garden, 183
 New Guinea Biological Foundation, 183
 Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust, 183
- Queen's Garden, Kew, UK, 183
 Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Plant Exhibition Hall, 183
 Saionji Memorial Scholarship, 164
 University of Hawaii horticulture department, 183
- photographs, 42, 64, 65, 69, 72, 73, 76, 92, 94, 106, 107, 182
 with Barbara Stanley Smith, 171, 180
 at Churchie, 177
 with George Taylor, 166
 with May Wong, 116, 118, 172, 178, 189
 as MOI representative, 59
 in Peiping, China, 96, 97, 98
 with Rugby Team, 23
 at Thai Royal Palace, 155
 with Track and Field Team, 10
 wearing a *changshan*, 104
- physical description of, 159
- residences
 Australia, 105
 Cathay apartments, 51
 Greenwich, Sydney, Australia, 42
 Hong Kong, 105–106, 109, 119, 120, 131, 147
 London, UK, 166
 Malaya, 151
 Nassau, Bahamas, 163, 164–165, 178
 Raffles Hotel, 51
 Singapore, 44, 50, 151
 Sydney, Australia, 41
 Tokyo, Japan, 112
- Wellington, New Zealand, 36
- talents
 athletics, 21–22
 managerial abilities, 71
 respected as adviser and consultant, 101
 storyteller, viii
- timeline, *xiv*, *xv*
- travels
 Asia, 146–147
 Australia, 176
 Central America, 176
 China, 105
 Europe, 154, 176
 Far East, 54
 Hong Kong, 176
 India, 95, 97, 105
 London, UK, 97, 101, 146–147, 166
 Malaya, 125
 Thailand, 54, 57, 155
 Tokyo, Japan, 165
 United States, 154
 Venezuela, 154
 Washington, DC, 146–147
 wealth of, xi, 118, 124
- Smith, Thelma, 3, 11, 27, 190
 Smith, Walter Herbert, 1, 3, 4
 demoted, 28
 marries Rebecca Beck, 8
 parents of, 9
 Rebecca Beck leaves, 28
 residence of, 27
- SOE. *see* Special Operations Executive (SOE)
- Special Operations Executive (SOE), *xiv*, 45, 51, 55, 65
 activity in China of, 61
 agents of, 53
 Chiang Kai-shek expels guerrilla unit of, 62
 does not take role in China propaganda, 64
 Far East mission of, 63
 mission of, 46
 office in Singapore, vii, 44
 Oriental Mission in Singapore of, 58, 59, 97
 propaganda of, 57
 SHS rarely mentions his clandestine activities for, 49
 subsidizes Institute of International Relations, 100
 in Thailand, 54
- Stanley Smith Horticultural Trusts, xii, *xv*, 191
 Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust, 200
 Stanley Smith (U.S.) Horticultural Trust, 199–200
- Stocks, Bill, *xv*, 175, 176
- Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), 112–114, 115, 117, 131
- Sydney, Australia, 36, 39, 156, 192, 196
 downtown, 38
 established as penal colony, 8
 Gordon and Gotch in, 40
 Harbour Bridge in, 41
 map, *xviii*

SHS and JATG meet in, 34
timeline, *xiv, xv*

Tambun Mining Company, 133, 141

Taylor, George, vii, 153, 164, 165, 166
correspondence to from May, 189,
190, 191

correspondence to from SHS, 176,
180, 183

SHS wants to involve in horticulture
fund, 185–186

Tokyo Imperial Hotel, 113

Trengganu Minerals Ltd, 133

Watts, Erik, 66

Williams, Olive May, *xiv, xv*, 42, 105, 156

marries SHS, 36, 37

moves to Sydney, 41

plans to divorce SHS, 118

SHS supports, 100

Wong, May, vii

attends HSBC dinner with SHS, 148

birth of, viii, 76

characteristics and personality

effervescent, 118

good at making friends, 91

good-natured and vivacious, 87

lively, friendly, 193

soft-hearted, 192

spoke with a little accent, 193

upbeat, effervescent, 193

childhood, 75–77, 79

affected by war, 90

upheavals and chaos during, 75

death of, 197

education

Baldwin School for Girls, 80–82

Ginling College, 83–87, 89, 91

University of St. Andrews, 119

employment

MOI, 73, 75

Scott and English Limited, 119

family

Alexander de Bbye, 194–195

are prosperous and well-connect-
ed, 75

disapprove of marriage to SHS,
119

loses contact with, 120

friends, 180, 194

in Hong Kong, 120, 194

James Nisbet, 119, 190

Lachie and Dorothy McDonald,
147

in Nassau, 180

health

declines, 195–196

dementia, 195

suffers, 189

hires Enid and John Bamforth, 193

interest in horticulture, 153

legacy of, 199–201

marriage

becomes romantically involved
with SHS, 118–119

effect of SHS's death on, 189

living with SHS, 147

to SHS, 119

philanthropy, 190–191

donates to Ginling Middle School,
178n

establishes trusts in SHS's name,
xii, 192

May and Stanley Charitable Trust,
197

May and Stanley Smith Charitable
Trust, 192

May and Stanley Smith Trust, 191–
192

Stanley Smith Horticultural
Trusts, 191

University of Hong Kong, Stanley
Smith Swimming Pool, 190

University of St. Andrews, May

Wong Smith Trust, 190–191

photographs, 156, 168, 173, 182

with Barbara Stanley Smith, 195

Boyton Manor, 195

on Churchie grounds, 177

at MOI picnic, 76

at Nassau home, 178

with SHS, 116, 118, 172, 178, 189

at Thai Royal Palace, 154, 155

physical description, 159, 184

residences

Chengtu, China, 83

Chungking, China, 91

Foochow, China, 77

Guernsey, UK, 195

Hong Kong, 120

Kuling, China, 77, 82

London, UK, 166

Nanchang, China, 81

Nassau, Bahamas, 163–164, 178,
189, 197

Singapore, 151

SHS provides for after his death, 175

SHS sets up investment company for,
184–185

Sketch interviews, 158–159

timeline, *xiv, xv*

travels

Australia, 176

Boston, U.S., 187

Central America, 176

Europe, 154, 176

Fife, Scotland, 119

Hong Kong, 119, 176, 183, 190,
193

London, UK, 166, 190

Marin County, U.S., 193

Nassau, Bahamas, 196

San Francisco, U.S., 190

Sydney, Australia, 196

Thailand, 154, 155

United States, 154

Venezuela, 154

visits Barbara in London, 166

visits Churchie, 177–178

waits for SHS, 151

Wong, Sing-hu (Henry), 76, 79–80, 120

Wood, E. J. F., 17

World War One, 13, 14, 15, 24

anti-German sentiment during, 4

SHS's school years disrupted by, 11

World War Two, vii, 47, 49, 106, 143. *see*

also Pacific War

SHS secret agent during, viii

SHS starts companies immediately
after, xi

Wu, Yi-fang, 83, 85, 86, 89, 211n

