



This cloth insignia, known as a "chit," assisted Allied airmen downed in enemy occupied China. The writing on the back offered a reward for delivering the serviceman safely to Allied forces. OSS personnel often carried such chits when serving in enemy-occupied territory.

History in the "Raw"

by Troy J. Sacquety

The historians on the USASOC History staff often encounter intriguing SOF photos, documents, and memorabilia that require more research and cross-referencing before an article can be proposed. Many fascinating photographs that detail lesser-known aspects of ARSOF history are part of the closed collections. We wanted to share some of these "raw" historical materials. This is designed to prompt more veterans and family members to let the *Veritas* staff scan their photographs and records. This presentation of "raw" history explains a post-WWII intelligence unit, the Strategic Services Unit (SSU). These photographs illustrate a little-known intelligence mission after Japan surrendered. *Thank you, John S. DiBlasi.*

When President Harry S. Truman dissolved the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) on 1 October 1945, its operational personnel were transferred to the SSU, a newly created unit in the War Department. The SSU inherited the remaining OSS missions still in the field. One intelligence team was on the former Japanese colony of Formosa, now known as Taiwan. As part of the Japanese surrender, Formosa was transferred to



Formosa
Mission Patch

Nationalist China. Japanese civilians and soldiers on Formosa had to be shipped back to Japan. The task of the Formosa Mission was to monitor the repatriation of the surrendered Japanese military.

The repatriation of disarmed soldiers and civilians to Japan and the return of foreign "slave" laborers to their home countries was an enormous task not completed until 1949. On Formosa alone, 479,050 soldiers and civilians had to be transported back to Japan.¹ The relocations were effected by the Shipping Control Authority for the Japanese Merchant Marine (SCAJAP), which used

Cpl. John S. DiBlasi in 1945. He originally joined the Army Air Forces before volunteering for OSS. Because he had earned a radio license before the war, the OSS Communications Branch was a natural fit.



The 5329th Air Ground Forces Resourced Technical Staff (AGFRTS) was a joint OSS/14th U.S. Army Air Force intelligence organization. The 14th tied its lineage directly to Major General Clair L. Chennault's original "Flying Tigers," the American Volunteer Group, which gained fame early in the war.



When they had time off, the personnel of the Formosa Mission explored the island's rugged hills. Visiting the foul-smelling hot sulfur springs was common.



Ex-Kempeitai (Japanese military police) served as guards for the Formosa Mission to forestall thievery.

demilitarized Japanese warships and decommissioned U.S. Liberty cargo ships and LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) manned by Japanese seamen. By 12 April 1946, the repatriations from Formosa were essentially finished.²

The Formosa Mission was a five-man SSU team led by a major. The commander coordinated with the Japanese and Chinese authorities to track the number of soldiers repatriated daily. Its radio station, call sign "RAM," reported this information to SSU headquarters. Radioman Corporal John S. DiBlasi, detailed to the OSS/SSU from the U.S. Army Air Forces, sent those messages to Washington. The radio station was in the mission headquarters, an appropriated, functioning Geisha house.³ Cpl. DiBlasi was assigned to the Formosa Mission to accrue overseas points.

During the war, he had served as a radio operator with OSS/China on the SALEM Mission (Station PWF). SALEM was one of the teams supporting the joint OSS/14th Army Air Forces organization, the 5329th Air Ground Forces Resources Technical Staff (AGFRTS), popularly known as "Agfighters." Their mission was to supply tactical air and ground intelligence to the 14th Air Force. Because the



LT William Lawson (l) and DiBlasi (r) stand by the SSU Formosa Mission jeep.

area of operations for the 14th Air Force was enormous, the OSS established networks of agents to supply target data. AGFRTS was so successful that its initial mission kept being expanded. From deep in enemy controlled territory, the organization provided weather reports and bomb damage assessments, monitored Japanese shipping, and operated an escape and evasion network for downed airmen. In February 1945 the OSS assumed control of AGFRTS. The organization grew to include most OSS branches, including propaganda, counter-intelligence, and intelligence analysis.⁴ When the war ended, Cpl. DiBlasi had not earned enough "points" to come home yet. He volunteered for the Formosa Mission. This enabled a friend who did have enough points to return to the States.⁵ As the repatriation effort in Formosa was ending, the SSU morphed into another element.

By mid-1946, SSU had been folded into a new organization, the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), which became the CIA with the passage of the National Defense Act of 1947. Since Army SOF roots are intertwined with the OSS veterans that made up early Special Forces, it is appropriate to consider the SSU a legacy unit. The SSU performed an important interim mission in the turbulent post-war period that triggered the Cold War. ♣

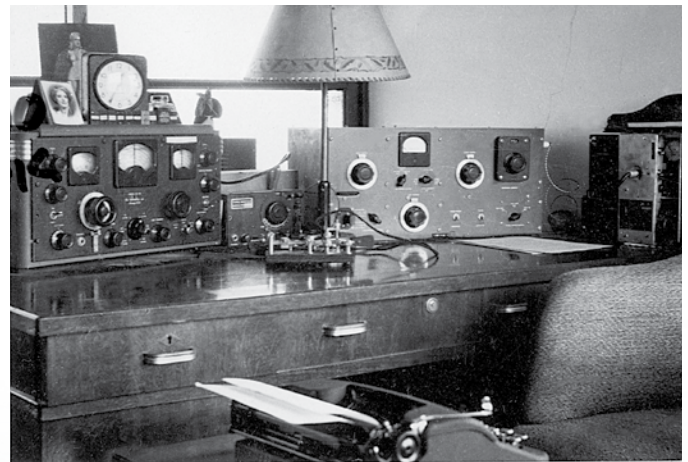


Staff personnel at station PWF at SALEM collected and reported intelligence on Japanese shipping, targets, and troop movements by radio to Kunming, China, for action by the 14th Air Force and U.S. Pacific Fleet.

The role of the Formosa Mission was to monitor the repatriation of Japanese soldiers. More than 479,000 soldiers and civilians were returned to Japan by mid-1946.



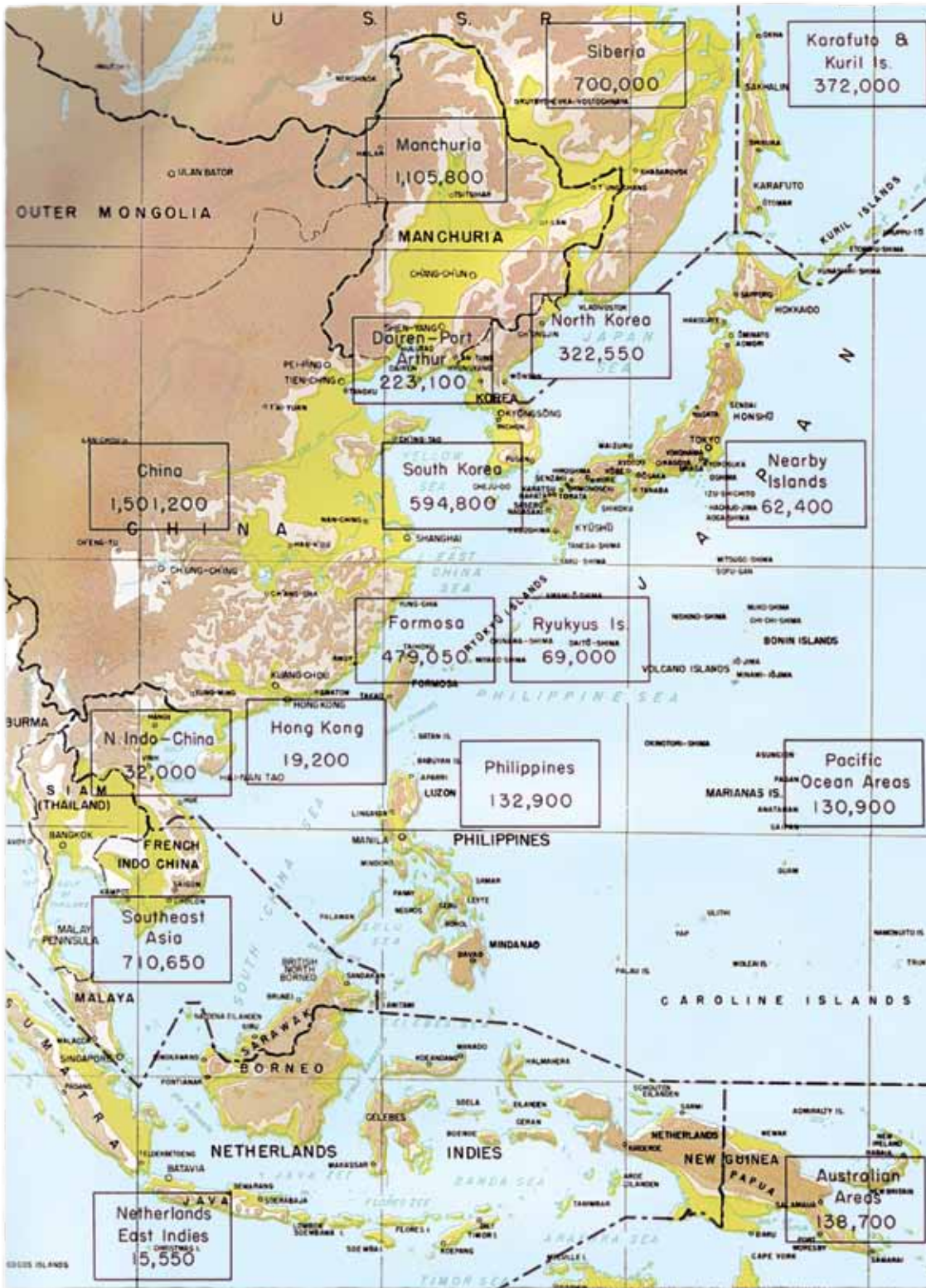
Since the headquarters of the Formosa Mission was an appropriated Japanese *Geisha* house, they received a lot of high-level Allied "visitors."



Station RAM's radio setup.

When DiBlasi arrived on Formosa, evidence of the Japanese military was everywhere. These Japanese fighter planes, likely *Mitsubishi* A6M "Zeros," were corroding on an airfield. Had the war continued, they likely would have become *Kamikazes*. Many *Kamikaze* airplanes crashed into the U.S. fleet during the battle for Okinawa. They caused 5,000 U.S. Navy deaths.





After Japan surrendered in August 1945, the colossal effort to repatriate soldiers and civilians back to their homelands remained. This included getting Japanese troops and civilians back to Japan, as well as getting “guest” laborers in Japan back to their countries of origin. The numbers were hard to fathom; 5,103,300 needed to get to Japan and 1,152,650 foreign nationals in Japan had to get back to their home countries. A post-war U.S. Army history summed it up as a “a waterborne migration in scope without parallel in history,” in which the only uncompleted aspect was the repatriation of more than 1,300,000 Japanese estimated to be held by the Soviets at the time. This map, from the *Reports of General MacArthur: MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase: Volume I Supplement*, gives an idea of the sheer magnitude of people involved in the repatriation effort.



DiBlasi at his radio while with the OSS in China.

An OSS radio operator transcribes an incoming Morse Code message on a typewriter. He then decoded the text to read the message.



Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and Special Operations units in Vietnam.

Endnotes

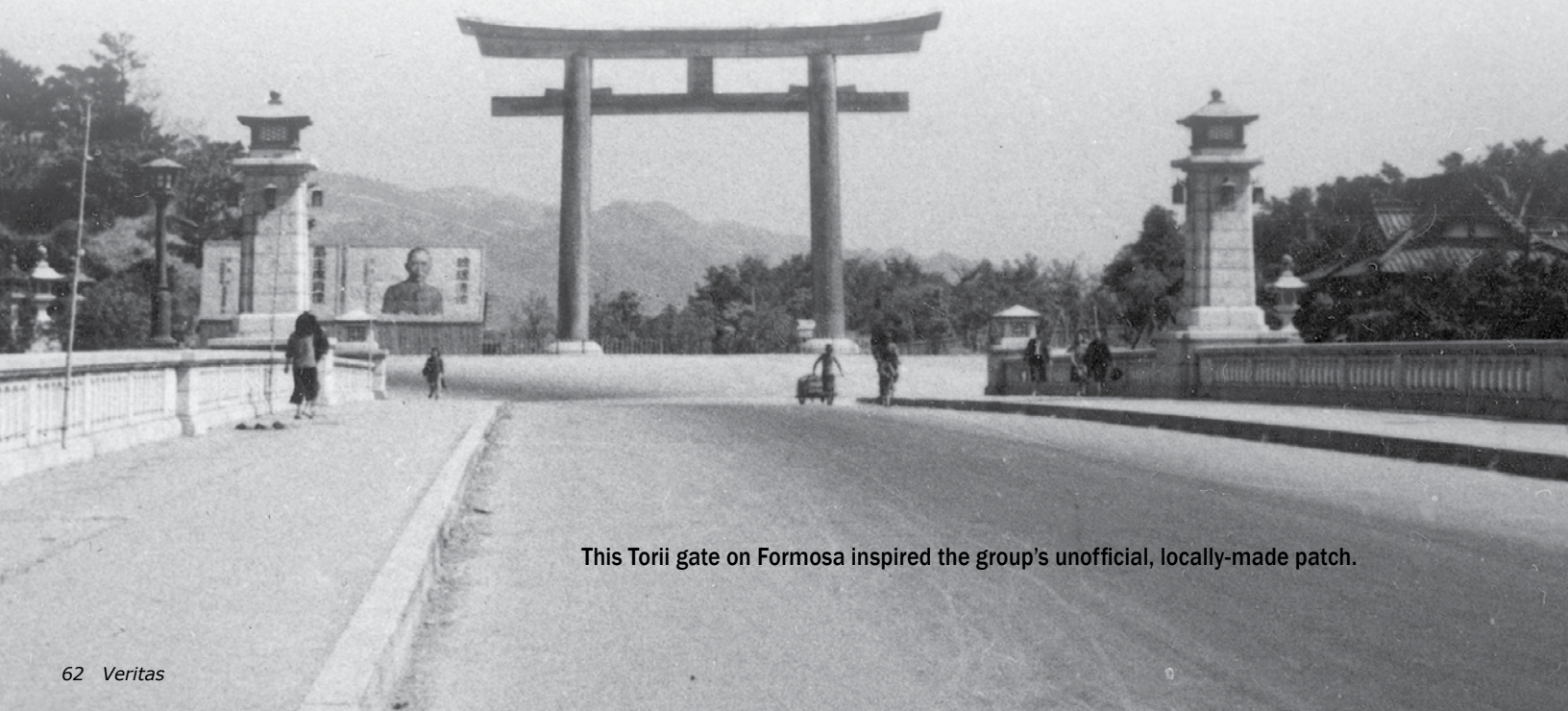
- 1 GEN Douglas A. MacArthur's General Staff, *Reports of General MacArthur: MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase; Volume I Supplement* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1996), 170.
- 2 GEN MacArthur's Staff, *Reports of General MacArthur: MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase; Volume I Supplement*, 154-155.
- 3 John S. DiBlasi, telephone interviewed by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 12 February 2008, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 4 Kermit Roosevelt, *The War Report of the OSS: The Overseas Targets* (Washington D.C.: Carrollton Press, 1976), 428-430.
- 5 John S. DiBlasi, "Military History of John S. DiBlasi," 13 August 1998, copy in the USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



The SSU Formosa Mission was based in an appropriated Geisha house. Japanese culture predominated in Formosa which had been a colony since 1895.



The Formosa Mission hosted many visitors eager to relax and watch the Geisha dancers.



This Torii gate on Formosa inspired the group's unofficial, locally-made patch.