

Treachery at Chosin

by

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It is quite possible that the Chinese attack at Chosin, and along the Chongchon in western Korea, was greatly aided by information supplied by a quadrumvirate of British spies: Donald Maclean, Harold Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, and Anthony Blunt, four of the most notorious British traitors of all time all of whom had been recruited as Communist agents while as school at Cambridge in the early 1930s.

Somewhere deep in the concrete bowels of the CIA at Langley, Virginia, is a file assessing the incalculable damage they did to the U.N. effort in the Korean War. What they cost in lives cannot even be guessed at. That real story is not likely to be released in our time, if ever. But there is certainty that the three, individually or in concert, passed on a great deal of secret material to the Soviets. There is also evidence some of that information was passed on to the Chinese who used it to plan their operations against UNC forces advancing into North Korea in the fall and early winter of 1950.

Great care was taken during the earliest days of the Korean War to keep the British fully informed. It was a way of presenting the war as an allied effort. The senior British representative in Washington, Air Marshal Tedder, received special, private, briefings from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Bradley. One British officer had a special pass to the secret war room at the Pentagon. In the Far East MacArthur provided the British representative with private briefings. Beginning in July, 1950, reports from these sources began pouring into the American Department of the British Foreign Office in London. Those originating in the Far East were sent to the American Department as information copies. One of the most informative documents was the daily Far Eastern Command situation/intelligence report (SITINTREP) which reported the location, mission and situation of all UN forces down to battalion size, as well as the available information on enemy strength, dispositions and actions.

Philby arrived in Washington, D. C. in October of 1949 as the MI6 (Britain's secret intelligence service) resident in Washington. Information available to him would have included information on the discussions within the Joint Chiefs and the National Security Council and other sensitive information. In addition to his general liaison duties he had two tasks. One was co-directing an effort together with the CIA to de-stabilize the communist regime in Albania. His other principal duty was to coordinate with the FBI in helping them in their search for "Homer," an unknown spy who had worked in the British Embassy in Washington in 1946. Unknown to the FBI but known to Philby was that "Homer" was actually Maclean.

In view of Philby's very close relationship with top CIA officials he could not help but have been aware of the CIA's view that there was no evidence to suggest large scale Chinese intervention. And, as a routine matter, he probably had access to daily action reports from the Far East. It was learned, later, that Philby had a secret photo lab in his basement wherein he made copies of information to be forwarded to the Soviets. Given his contacts and his position in the embassy he was in a position to provide the Soviets, and their Chinese allies, information on the U.S. buildup, on the debate on U.S. strategy after Inchon, and U.S. ignorance of the Chinese intervention.

Guy Burgess arrived in Washington, D. C. in July of 1950. Burgess was a dissolute alcoholic and homosexual whose behavior had become notorious throughout the British foreign service. Embassy officials objected strongly to his posting to Washington but were told they had to accept it.

What part Burgess played is not clear. At least one senior official of the embassy gave up attempting to get Burgess involved in his department. But there is evidence that early on Burgess had access to sensitive reports coming from the British Embassy in Beijing. Since Burgess was given an office in the central part of the chancery where other high level officials worked there is little doubt that either formally or informally he had access to the most vital information.

Maclean, who assumed his duties as head of the American desk in the British foreign office in London on November 1, 1950, also had serious behavior problems. He had been sent home from Cairo because of his outrageous drinking and behavior and had spent some six months on medical leave undergoing counseling. He was returned to duty in November not because he had improved but only because his medical leave was about to expire. Thus Maclean, from November 1, 1950, had access to everything pertaining to Korea including the location and movement of U.N. forces and the fact that the Far Eastern Command was not aware of the huge scale of the Chinese intervention or the location of Chinese forces.

Burgess' behavior eventually caused him to be sent home from Washington, arriving in London in early May, 1951. Not long afterward both he and Maclean became aware that they were under investigation, warned by some "Third Man" who was always assumed to be Philby. Both secretly fled England and remained out of sight until they turned up in Moscow some two years later.

Although Maclean is said to have given the Soviets everything of importance that he saw, there is no publicly available review of the information to which Maclean had access. When the news of Maclean's disappearance became public in early June, 1951, the British Foreign Office issued a statement saying the American Department dealt "principally with Latin American affairs." Issues regarding the U. S. were limited to tourism and the welfare of British citizen in America. On the other hand Robert Cecil who had been Maclean's principal assistant in the American department said that Maclean had "access to most of the important telegrams passing between the Foreign Office and posts abroad, as well as a selection of cabinet papers" some of which Cecil found locked in Maclean's file cabinet after he fled to Russia.

Dean Rusk, later Secretary of State, and who was assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern Affairs during the Korean War, said that, "It can be assumed, 1) anything we in our government knew about Korea would have been known at the British Embassy and 2) that officers in the embassy of the rank of [Maclean, Philby and Burgess] would have known what the British Embassy knew." And Dean Acheson, who was Secretary of State at the time Maclean absconded exclaimed to an aide, "That sonofabitch knew everything!"

Verne Newton, who carefully researched the British Foreign Office records for his book *The Cambridge Spies*, concluded that the British Foreign Office files had been purged to conceal the extent of Maclean's access. By a careful review of cables and telegrams to other branches of the Foreign Office which were sent as information copies to the American Department, Newton concluded that Maclean had access to all information across the board concerning the Korean War.

Both the FBI and the CIA have refused to release any information on their investigation or their damage assessment. In researching this I submitted a Freedom of Information request to the FBI requesting what information they had on Philby, Maclean and Burgess. I received a large case filled with, mostly, newspaper clipping and a few field reports. But, hidden among them was a one page memorandum from a colonel in Army G-2 which appeared to be a thorough damage assessment. It was a print from a microfilm, very blurred and difficult to read. I got in touch somehow with a woman at the FBI whose name I don't remember and asked her if she could provide a more clear copy. She said she could but would I send the copy I had so they could find the original. Foolishly I did and never heard from her again and never got my copy of the memo back. After some time I called the FBI. They had never heard of that particular person.

Historians of the Korean War have been reluctant to attribute any of the Chinese decisions and plans to information provided by espionage. In the past fifteen years a good deal of information has come both from Russian archives, and from China in the form of histories and memoirs of major participants. Comparing some of the messages and decisions made by the Chinese with the movements and dispositions of UN Command forces at various times it is obvious that the relatively crude Chinese Communist army had a source which provided very good information on the location and movement of UNC units. While it is circumstantial and may have come from other sources, here are some of the

incidents which, if known that the time, would have incited raging paranoia in the mind of any responsible counter-intelligence officer.

Mao Telegrams No. 21 - October 14 - Mao reports on the Korea situation:

(1) The American First, Second and 24th Division, British 25th Brigade and the puppet [Korean] First Division are concentrating in the Kaesong - Kumchon area along the 38th Parallel north of Seoul to prepare an attack on Pyongyang. According to today's dispatch, American Second division is planning to move to and be stationed near Kumchon. Given the above mentioned information, it seems that the Americans have made no final decision on whether or not to attack Pyongyang, or when to make the attack.

(2) The puppet Capital Division and third division have arrived at Wonsan. Their Sixth, Seventh and Eighth divisions are gradually moving toward areas around Wonsan to receive supplies by sea.

(3) American First Marine Division remains in Seoul. American 25th Division is stationed along the Taejon - Suwon line. American Seventh Division lies along the Taegu - Pusan line. The Headquarters of American Eighth Army is located at Taejon. Two puppet divisions are located in various parts of the South.

The Eighth Army's order for the attack north had designated the Kaesong area as the assembly area for I Corps composed of the 1st Cavalry Division, the 24th Division, the 1st ROK Division and the British Brigade. Wonsan had been secured by the 3rd ROK Division on the 11th, and the Eighth Army CP had opened in Seoul on the 12th so it appears that Mao's information was two days out of date, Mao's information seems to have come from the daily telecon of the 12th.

Burgess would have had access to the daily telecon which, in most cases, carried only a Secret classification and was widely distributed.

Mao Telegrams 23,33,36,37,43 and 45 - October 21 through 25

With Chinese forces still out of contact Mao provides Peng with a daily report of the movement of the 6th, 7th and 8th ROK Divisions as they move from Chorwon toward Tokchon, then Huichon and Onjong. He also provides Peng with the location of the 1st Marine Division and the advanced elements of the Eighth Army

Some of this information appears to have come from the headquarters of the ROK Army. The remainder either from Burgess or Philby since Mclean is not yet in position in the British Foreign Office.

Mao Telegram 6 - October 30 - Mao to Peng Dehuai:

The other side only knows vaguely we have 40,000 to 60,000

Not until November 8th did Willoughby estimate as many as 40,000 Chinese troops (actually 51,600 was his estimate for that day) and did not reach an overall estimate of 70,000 until the 13th. Thereafter his estimates varied around that figure. The most Tarkenton (G-2 of the Eighth Army) estimated in front of the 8th Army was 48,000, and he didn't reach that figure until 22 November. So Mao's figure had to have come from some source on the UN side, unless the figures in his "Telegrams" had been altered at some later day.

On November 1st Maclean became director of the American section of the British Foreign Office through which came all information coming from the United States, and from the British liaison officer in Tokyo

Until after the 2nd Phase offensive the Mao Telegrams available don't contain any other information that appears to have been obtained through espionage. However one Chinese history gives the following

estimate of UNC forces in the Chosin area on the 27th of November just before their offensive began:

The Yudam-ni enemy were the U. S. 1st Marine Division's 7th Regiment and 5th Regiment (less one battalion) and two battalions of the 11th Artillery Regiment. The Sinhung-ni enemy were the U. S. 7th Division 32nd Regiment and the 31st Regiment's 3rd Battalion, along with a battalion of division artillery. The Hagaru-ri enemy were the U. S. 1st Marine Division Headquarters, one battalion of the 5th Regiment, and also one tank battalion. The Sachang-ni enemy was the U. S. 3rd Divisions 7th Regiment. Thus the enemy surrounded in the Yudam-ni, Sinhung-ni and Hagaru-ri areas totaled four regiments, one tank battalion and three artillery battalions, over 10,000 men, double our original estimate.

Unit identifications could not have come from front-line Chinese forces, unless they had observers astute enough to identify the tactical markings on vehicles. It appears from this that the Chinese plan had been based on the UNC telecon to Washington of the 25th or 26th of November which would have shown that disposition.

Mao Telegram No. 43 -11 December - Mao to Peng - Secret Information:

U. S. Army Chief of Staff Collins has been instructed to visit Japan and the Korean front...after meeting with MacArthur, Walker and others..Collins believes that the situation of the UN and American forces in Korea has become hopeless...American forces cannot organize a protracted defense because of heavy casualties, loss of equipment and extreme deterioration in morale. He has reported the situation and his opinion to the JCS. He has given instructions to MacArthur ordering him to prepare ships and assemble troops around certain seaports in order to get ready for withdrawal...Seoul is being prepared for a withdrawal.. It will not take long before one can be certain whether the above is correct or not.

Collins returned from Korea on December 8th, briefed his colleagues on the JCS and made this recommendation:

If the UN decision is not to continue an all out effort in Korea and if the Chinese Communist (sic) continue to attack General MacArthur should be directed to take the necessary steps to prevent the destruction of his forces pending final evacuation from Korea.

That same morning he briefed the final meeting of the Truman - Atlee conference on the situation in Korea. The U.S. minutes of that meeting do not provide sufficient detail to tell whether or not he made that same recommendation to the conference. A daily transcript of the proceedings, which may have been in greater detail, was sent to London where it would have crossed Maclean's desk.

The Kum River Line - On December 29th, in discussing decisions to be made on Korea, the JCS sent a message to MacArthur outlining various factors and concluding with:

It seems to us that if you are forced back to positions in the vicinity of the Kum River and a line generally eastward therefrom, and if thereafter the Chinese Communists mass large forces against your positions with an evident capability of forcing us out of Korea, it then would be necessary under these conditions to direct you to commence a withdrawal to Japan.

Mao's 3rd Phase offensive had come to a halt after retaking Seoul and driving the Eighth Army back across to the south side of the Han River. But, on the 28th of January Mao sent the following message:

"Our forces must immediately prepare to launch the 4th Campaign with the purpose of wiping out 20 to 30 thousand enemy forces and advancing to the Taejon - Andong line."

Taejon is on the Kum River line. Did Mao plan the 4th Phase offensive in the knowledge that if he

reached the Taejon-Andong line the UN command forces would withdraw from Korea?

These various examples show that information from some source on the with regular access to the situation of UN forces in Korea helped Mao Zedong and his field commander Peng Dehuai plan the offensives that might cause the UN forces to withdraw from Korea. In general, the information Mao has passed along runs about two days behind the actual events. This is probably about the time it would take for Burgess, Philby or Maclean to send their information to Russia, for the Russians to look it over and decide what to send on the Beijing. Without the information provided by the British spies the Chinese would have had to move forward cautiously to contact and feel out UN forces then deploy for action. This would have forfeited the element of surprise. The outcome could have been quite different.

Notes:

Information from the Mao telegrams comes from:

"Mao's Dispatch of Chinese Troops to Korea: Forty six Telegrams July - October 1950" Translated and annotated by Li Xiaobing, Wang Xi and Chen Jian. *Chinese Historians* Vol. V No. 1 Spring 1992, and;

"Mao's Telegrams During the Korean War October - December, 1950" Translated by Li Xiabin and Glenn Tracy. *Chinese Historians*. Vol. V. No.2 Fall 1992

The telegrams originally appeared in *Mao Zedong's Manuscripts Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China*. Beijing The Central Press of Historical Documents. 1987