In many languages and various forms—jacket patches, cards, letters—they were official IOUs to those who helped downed fliers.

Blood Chit

REMEMBER those photos of Lt. Gen. Claire L. Chennault's Flying Tigers, having cloth patches depicting the Chinese flag and some Chinese lettering sewn onto their flight suits and A-2 jackets? Those pieces of fabric were known as rescue patches, later called "blood chits." They identified the wearers as Americans helping China fight the Japanese and requested the Chinese people to assist them. They represented a pass to safety for those who crashed or bailed out in areas occupied by the enemy.

Blood chits were not only cloth patches. They also were cards or sometimes letters with a promise of

By C.V. Glines


ARABIC
PERSIAN
GERMAN
JOHN
SMSGT
GERMAN
RUSSIAN
PHRASE BOOK
DECEMBER 4, 1943

The American Volunteer Group "Flying Tigers" wore this type of rescue patch in December 1941. The Chinese text asks for help for an American who has come to China to fight the Japanese. The red seal is the "chop" of the Chinese aeronautical commission.

to anyone who would assist a downed flier. In the early days of World War II, the British routinely issued blood chits to their aircrews, including several types in 1940 to fliers in Ethiopia. When the US entered the war, the American air services adopted the practice and they were eventually issued in all theaters of combat operations by all the western Allies. Blood chits were duly honored and the helpers were rewarded with money or gifts. Later, chits were printed in nearly 50 languages, including many European, North African, and Asian tongues. Not all of them contained the same statements, but all were bona fide government IOUs promising to reward those who assisted Allied airmen.

The concept of using chits did not originate with Chennault's units in China. Royal Air Force units serving in India and Mesopotamia during and after World War I were the first to use them in a systematic way. Originally called "ransom notes," these were cards or certificates given to pilots and observers. They were written in Urdu, Farsi, Pashto, Arabic, and other local languages. They were sometimes handwritten and promised considerable monetary rewards for the safe return of airmen to the nearest British outpost. Blood chits were often issued along with phrase cards containing short phonetic or written Arabic phrases. All legitimate chits presented for reward were promptly paid in cash or "in kind."

A Debt Is Owed

When Chennault became an advisor to China's air force in 1937, foreign pilots were issued the rescue patches called "hu chao." They bore the Chinese Nationalist flag, the chop of the Chinese air force headquarters, and Chinese lettering that read: "This foreign person has come to China to help in the war effort. Soldiers and civilians, one and all, should rescue, protect, and provide him medical care," implying that a debt was owed to anyone who helped save an Allied airman from capture by the Japanese. The rescue patches issued to the Americans in the Flying Tigers in 1941 were identical except that the chop was that of the Chinese aeronautical commission.

Robert E. Baldwin and Thomas W. McGarry, authors of the book *Last Hope: The Blood Chit Story,* noted that the lack of literacy among much of China's rural population often presented a problem in reading the Chinese characters. Ken Jernstedt, former Flying Tigers member, noted that the majority of the peasants were illiterate, and the residents of the next valley over the mountains from Kunming were not even aware of the existence of oceans, let alone what an American or Japanese person looked like.

(Baldwin is the director of the International Blood Chit Museum in Berkeley, Calif., dedicated to "the preservation of the artifacts and documentary history of the Escape and Evasion efforts of the United States, Britain, and the Commonwealth nations." Baldwin provides consultation and lends escape and evasion artifacts to other museums for temporary exhibit.)

The realization of the need for more detailed communication between downed airmen and native peoples led to the publication of small Pointie Talkie booklets. These were first made by US and British escape and evasion agencies in Asia.

Printed in English and the languages most likely to be needed, phrases, questions, and answers were listed side by side in both languages so an airman could point to a question and a native could point to an answer. Some had colorful illustrations to use with natives who could not read. These would identify a downed crew member as an Allied flier and show that he desired assistance in returning to American or Allied hands and assure the rescuer he would be generously rewarded for his aid.

Phrase books were also issued to flight crews for countries they were likely to fly over. As the war progressed, the Office of War Information produced thousands of leaflets, dropped by aircraft, that instructed the indigenous population in some of the war theaters how to assist Allied crew members.

Money Bags

There was no better incentive to provide help than for a downed crewman to produce some currency or coins on the spot. Small pouches containing paper money and silver and gold coins were issued before each mission to American, Australian, and Dutch airmen operating over the Netherlands East Indies. They were to be opened only when the

user was forced down and needed the contents to gain assistance and reward his helpers.

Other NEI kits contained blood chits, glossaries, letters to village chieftains, and promissory notes to be filled in by the airman with name, rank, serial number, and description of the assistance he received. In areas where money was not used, barter kits were provided that contained small objects like pearl buttons, razor blades, twist tobacco, safety pins, and plastic trinkets. Emergency Currency Certificates, called "guerrilla currency," promising payment when the war was over, were among the currencies included in survival kits for operations in the Philippines.

Evasion kits issued to Army Air Forces and Navy crews in the Pacific became more sophisticated as the war progressed. Robert S. McCarter, a P-51 pilot in Fifth Air Force recalled: "The escape kit was carried only on long missions and was given back to the personal equipment officer afterwards. I first used the kit in early 1945 when we were based in Luzon. This was for missions to Hong Kong or to Formosa. ...

"The kit contained a silk blood chit with the American flag and another silk chit with the Chinese flag. There were three paper items: one is a picture of a downed flier facing a Chinese coolie and showing his open flight jacket with the chit of the American flag; another shows the insignia of the Fifth, Thirteenth, and CBI air forces surrounding a paragraph written in Chinese; the third is a typewritten sheet of 10 questions in English and Chinese. These items were folded and placed in a clear plastic packet. In addition to the above, my packet contained two cloth maps of the area we were to cover."

Many tests of various inks and fabrics were conducted on the cloth chits during World War II to make them waterproof and fade proof. Cotton eventually became the recommended material, but this information was lost when wartime records were destroyed in 1945 and rayon acetate continued to be used after World War II until 1961.

One of the important aspects of the American-made blood chits for use in China was their authenticity: They had to include the chop of the Chinese ambassador to the United States to make them official. The chits were made by four companies, and the chop of the ambassador was laboriously stamped on thousands of chits by US military intelligence specialists at the Nationalist Chinese Embassy in Washington.

British and American crews who flew on Operation Frantic shuttle missions over Soviet-controlled territory from Italy and the UK were issued blood chits and language aids in English, Russian, and Eastern European languages. Red Army troops were notorious for being trigger-happy and would often shoot first and then check for identification later. An excerpt from an intelligence briefing cautioned that crews should "be familiar in a general way with the front lines," carry an identification card, and "try to memorize some phrases of Russian." To aid in their identification, some crews were issued arm bands showing the American flag, similar to those used by American troops in the Normandy invasion.

"If down in [a] zone of operations of the Red Army," a mission briefer was instructed to state, "do not arouse suspicion of Red Army troops by any overt action, do not attempt concealment, and do NOT bear arms in your hands. Raise your hands on the approach of Red Army troops. Indicate or display your identification card."

By the Korean War a rayon blood chit was part of UN evasion kits that included items such as a Pointie Talkie, rayon evasion map, compasses, and a burning glass. A combination ID card and blood chit in English, Japanese, and Korean is shown at the bottom.

Prompt Payment Required

A vital factor in the World War II blood chit program was prompt payment when chits were presented by indigenous personnel and their stories authenticated. The awards at first varied among the war theaters and their commanders. Payment of $50 in equivalent local currency for each bona fide chit was eventually established as standard payment for France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, New Guinea, and the Philippines. For reasons not explained, the standard payment in the CBI, Greece, and North Africa was a $100 equivalent.

These payments were in addition to expenses incurred for lodging, food, and transportation of downed airmen. Payments were made by Allied occupying forces in some cases or postponed until the enemy was defeated to prevent retribution against the helpers or their families.

When the war was over, US claims commissions were sent to the European war-torn areas to screen and approve the claims after checking the authenticity of the promissory notes and other types of blood chits that were presented. One summary report shows that 65,000 persons were rewarded for aiding American airmen in Europe. During the Korean War, 95 aircrew men evaded capture and returned to friendly forces, aided in some cases by their blood chits and Pointie Talkies. In World War II cases where persons who assisted evaders had died, the British and US governments rewarded them posthumously with appropriate decorations "commensurate with the services rendered," according to a 1957 report.

Much information regarding payment for chits is still classified to protect those who might suffer grave consequences even today for helping American airmen. According to Baldwin and McGarry, the highest payment ever made was $100,000 in 1993 to the son of a Korean fisherman who in July 1950 aided a B-29 crew to avoid capture by North Korean forces. The payment was based on the established payment in effect at that time, plus more than 40 years of interest.

While the use of blood chits and other escape and evasion materials is commonly associated only with World War II, they have been issued in one form or another often as part of evasion kits to airmen during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Cuban missile crisis, the Gulf War, and operations in Panama, Grenada, Somalia, and Bosnia. The kits generally consist of a blood chit, evasion charts, a compass, and sometimes a Pointie Talkie and currency.

During the Gulf War, a serial number was stamped on each corner of a blood chit, so four helpers could be rewarded for their aid. Central Command's Gulf War Pointie Talkie was a two-sided, waterproof, folded card in four languages. In the background: a third evasion kit item, a chart of Baghdad.

UN Blood Chits

Following World War II, as war planners envisioned future conflicts, blood chits were printed in anticipation of their need. In fact, however, few chits seem to have been issued on a strictly war emergency basis since 1945. For example, blood chits were made for US operations in the Far East before 1950, although special United Nations blood chits were issued during the Korean War. In 1951, a series of three chits was prepared, covering Europe, the Far East, and the Soviet Union and its satellite countries.

Blood chits were printed in 1960 in anticipation of possible operations in Latin America when Cuba nationalized American companies; these were available during the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 and the missile crisis a year later. Meanwhile, blood chits were made for Southeast Asia and the Pacific area in 1961. These were reprinted during the Vietnam War, and dates as late as 1968 appear on them.

Chits for the Gulf War were made in November 1990 for use during Operation Desert Shield/Storm, and these are still being used by aircrews in the Persian Gulf area. These chits have serial numbers in each corner so the corners can be given to four different helpers who can turn them in for rewards.

During World War II the US Army's Military Intelligence Service, Evasion and Escape Section, and the British escape and evasion organizations MI9 and IS9 directed the blood chit program. The Joint Services Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape Agency is the present-day organization responsible for US blood chit policy and for authorizing the production, distribution, and use of blood chits. The JSSA establishes payment limitations and provides or appoints an individual in-theater as its representative to adjudicate all claims. The production of blood chits and evasion charts is accomplished by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency operation in St. Louis.

Although most activities of today's evasion and escape program are classified, the blood chit program is not, although the chits are controlled and accountable items. "We want the world to know that we will pay well to get our people back," Baldwin says, "in the hope that the publicity of rewards will enhance the probability of actually getting them back."

Blood chits have become increasingly valuable as collectibles as these artifacts, available from veterans of past operations, become more scarce. Hundreds of American airmen owe their lives to them. ▪

C.V. Glines's most recent article, "Victory in the Bismarck Sea," appeared in the August 1996 issue. The assistance of R.E. Baldwin on this article is gratefully acknowledged.