

BURMA SURGEON

GORDON S. SEAGRAVE

LIEUT. COLONEL, M.C.

UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES IN
CHINA, BURMA, INDIA

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BURMA SURGEON





Dr. Gordon Seagrave Attending Wounded Chinese Soldier

Paul Guillumette, Inc.

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A WARTIME BOOK

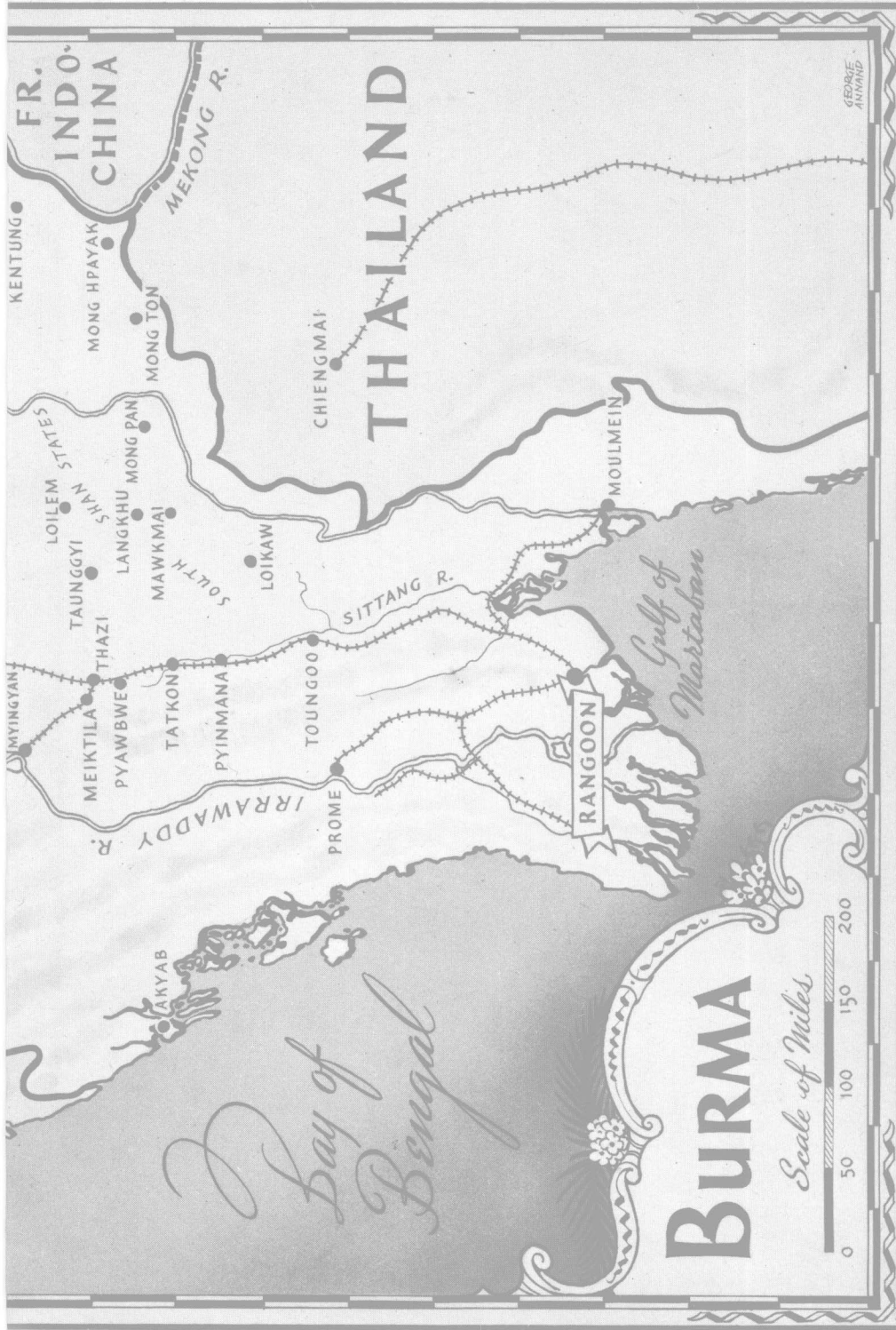
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TO
"TINY"

TO
BILL, PAUL, and TUN SHEIN
TED and BASAW
"UNCLE" GRINDLAY and MAJOR "BEAR"
and even
with my wholehearted admiration

TO
"GRANDDADDY JOE"



FR.
INDO-
CHINA

KENTUNG

MONG HPAYAK

MONG TON

LANGKHU MONG PAN

MAWKMAI

LOIKAW

CHIANGMAI

THAILAND

MOULMEIN

SITTANG R.

Gulf of
Martaban

RANGOON

PROME

TOUNGOO

PYINMANA

TATKON

PYAWBWE

MEIKTILA

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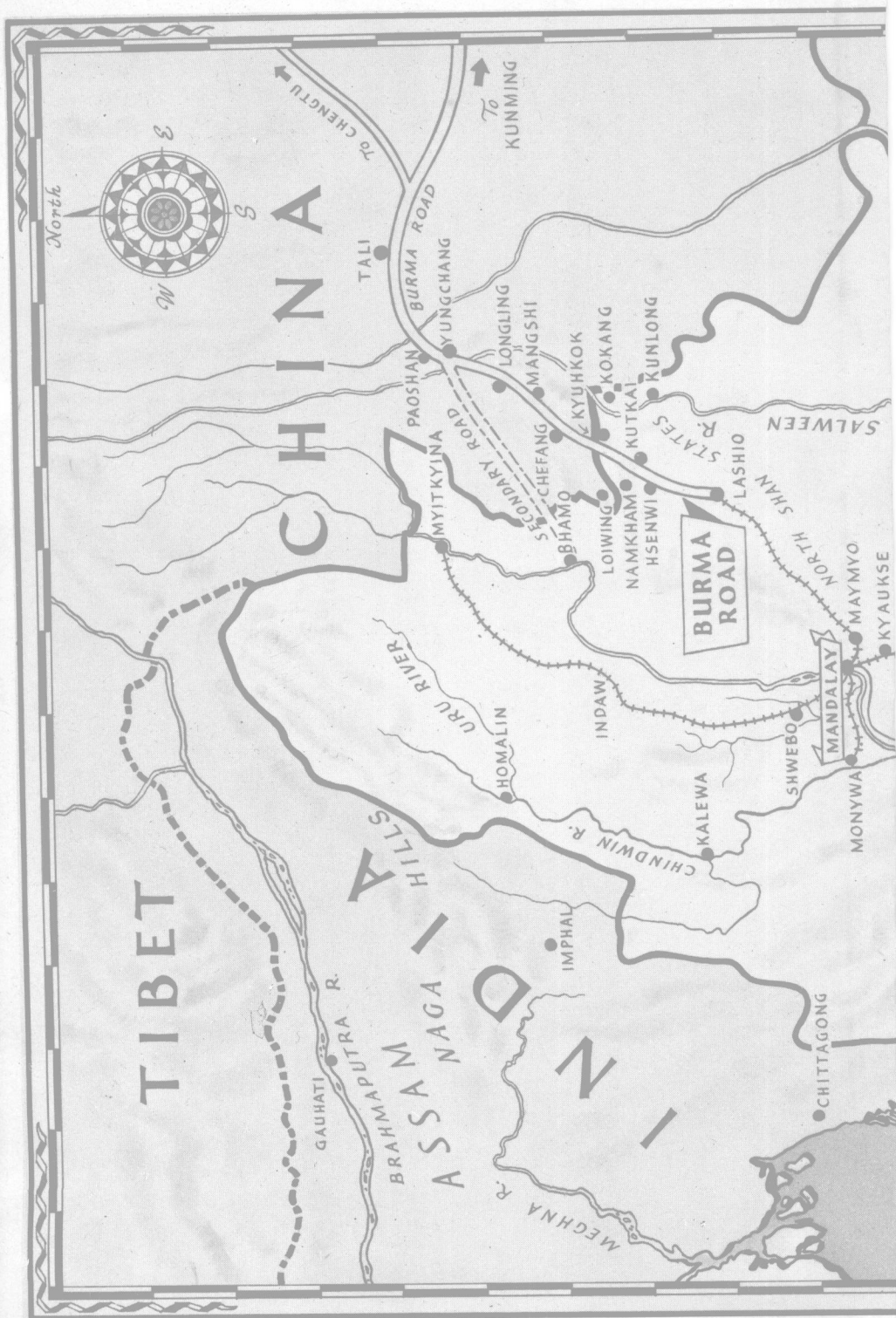
Bay of
Bengal

BURMA

Scale of Miles



GEORGE
ARMAND



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Illustrations

DR. GORDON SEAGRAVE ATTENDING WOUNDED CHINESE SOLDIER *Frontispiece*

MAP OF BURMA *Facing Contents*

Between pages 128-129

THE BAZAAR—NAMKHAM

THE HOSPITAL—NAMKHAM

DR. AND MRS. SEAGRAVE WITH THEIR TWO YOUNG BOYS

SCENES ON THE BURMA ROAD

SALWEEN RIVER GORGE

BRIDGE OVER THE SALWEEN

DANCING NURSES IN BURMESE COURT DRESS

SHAN NURSES IN MEN'S CLOTHING FOR THE "SWORD DANCE"

CHIT SEIN "MISS BURMA, 1942"

KAREN NURSES AND DR. BA SAW

AFTER THE BOMBING—LOIWING

AIRPLANE FACTORY AFTER THE BOMBING—LOIWING

DR. SEAGRAVE AT EMERGENCY HOSPITAL ON THE TOUNGOO FRONT

NURSES DOING HOSPITAL LAUNDRY

DOCTOR AND NURSES

DR. SEAGRAVE OPERATING DURING THE BATTLE OF BURMA

THE DOCTOR'S JEEP

GENERAL STILWELL AND GENERAL SIBERT

MAKING RAFT SHELTERS ON THE RETREAT

DR. SEAGRAVE LEADING THE UNIT THROUGH THE JUNGLE

REST ON THE RETREAT WITH STILWELL

Prologue

Rangoon, 1902—I was about five years old. A great hulking Irishman stamped up the steps to the huge verandah of the house my great-grandfather had built to live in when, after the second Burmese War, the British took over all of Lower Burma as far north as Toungoo. It was a huge house but it shook under the Irishman's footsteps. I came out to explore. The Irishman apparently loved children. He sat me on his lap and told me stories of wild jungles and great deeds: about service in the Royal Irish Constabulary as a young man; about his later adventures in Canada in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police; about stray rifle bullets that whizzed past him as he sat in his bungalow in the Shan States and that bored through the side of his bookcase; about the day his horse ran around the corner of a jungle path and almost plunged into a wild elephant, bucked and threw him to the ground; about walking sixty miles with both bones of his arm broken to find the nearest doctor. Then he grasped the top of a heavy dining-room chair in his teeth and swung it up over his head. I was fascinated! I tried it out on my tiny nursery chair, but it didn't work; my teeth couldn't have been much better then than they are now. Then he asked me for a glass of water to quench his thirst, and drank it down—standing on his head. I was completely overwhelmed!

After he had gone I asked my mother who the big chap was.

"He is Doctor Robert Harper, a medical missionary at Namkham on the border between the Northern Shan States and China."

That made it still more romantic.

"When I grow up I'm going to be a medical missionary in the Shan States," I declared.

Mother didn't say anything. The vaporizings of a five-year-old didn't worry her. After a few years her only son would undoubtedly become an evangelistic missionary to the Karens of Lower Burma like his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and a smattering of uncles and aunts, great-aunts, and what not had been before him. Blood would tell.

Perhaps blood would have told if the Karens hadn't taken their new national religion so seriously. To them religion meant going to church on Sunday in a big way. Their chapel next door boasted the largest bell purchasable in America and they rang it twice for each service. Half-past five every Sunday morning it woke them up. Fifteen minutes later it told them to hurry along for the morning prayer service. At six o'clock it warned stragglers that the service was beginning. At seven the women had a special meeting to pray for the souls of their errant males. Then breakfast, then Sunday school, then the main service, followed by assorted Christian Endeavor meetings till nine o'clock at night.

My parents were very lenient. The only service I had to go to was at ten o'clock. Now a good Karen preacher almost always begins his sermons with the lapse from grace of Adam—it being Eve's fault, of course. An outline of the more dramatic sins of the poor Israelites follows, and then, after people have subsided into coma, he ends up with a little intricate exegesis of some of St. Paul's more difficult remarks.

I used to sit by my mother's side in the choir. All the Vintons who were missionaries to the Karens were musical, and so were the Karens. My father didn't have the Vinton voice, but he could wield a mean bass when he sat beside my uncle Vinton who was a basso profundo. My uncle Vinton's voice would come from his toes, some six feet two below his pith helmet, and fairly shock

the natives. Those anthems were grand. Karen singing has even been known to convert a hard-boiled captain in the Medical Corps of the modern United States Army!

My father preached some of the most convincing, simply worded sermons I ever heard in English or Karen, and his prayers were poetry. But one day after a long-winded Karen sermon he stood up and prayed. I had been hoping for the best when the preacher sat down. This was too much, even if it was my father who was praying. I rolled the paper boat, which I had been making, into a wad and threw it at him in disgust. I hadn't meant to, but I hit him squarely on the cheek. The means I took to bring the meeting to a close were effective—very! So effective it still hurts me to sit down when I think of it.

My father never spanked me enough. If I'd been spanked as often as I deserved, I probably would never have grown to manhood.

I had three sisters, all older than I. Now that isn't right. If parents are going to divide their children eccentrically with regard to sex, the oddly-sexed one should be the eldest so that he will have some chance to lick the others when they gang up on him. That's what I did. I had three sons and one daughter, so I fathered the daughter first, and she can still hold her own though the eldest boy is about a foot taller than she is. But I had good training, taking on those three older sisters. I eventually stood up to my mother and dad and told them I was going to be a *medical* missionary—and made them like it.

Some time that same year a little girl was learning to toddle around in the not-very-famous city of Carlinville, Illinois, where her civil-engineer father was taking on more jobs than he could handle. She must have been "Tiny" then, and I bet she was cute. When I first saw her, some seventeen years later, she was, at least in my eyes, the glamor girl to end all glamor girls.

1909—The Atlantic was in a turmoil. I ate a ham sandwich as we pulled out of Southampton and my next meal—to stay down—was a banana as we passed the Statue of Liberty.

We settled down in the great and glorious university town of Granville, Ohio. Unfortunately, our house was surrounded by a yard sufficiently large for us to have a big garden. The fact that the garden was one mass of rocks didn't seem to matter to my father. Any future missionary, said he, should know how to lay his hand to anything. The more difficult and nasty jobs you could learn to handle, the better missionary you would be. So that was when I first learned to gather rocks. It was then, too, that I first learned how to handle women. My three sisters each had household jobs they had to do in rotation. One had to cook, one had to sweep, one had to do the washing. I had the garden. I bargained with Grace to do our jobs together, she to help me in the garden, and I to help her in the house. So I hitched her to the cultivator and made her drag that plough while I pushed—if and when we hit a rock!

On my part I learned to cook, wash the dishes, sweep, do the laundry, and, all in all, become the ideal bridegroom.

I liked to rotate crops. One year I raised so many potatoes that we didn't have enough room in the cellar to store our winter coal. Another year I raised so many beans that the grocery stores were filled with them, and the price of beans on the Granville Stock Exchange crashed. That was the year appendicitis and tympanites became so fashionable in central Ohio.

Mother thought I was getting off too easily, so we began raising chickens for the market. Everyone helped me raise them, but I was the Lord High Executioner. I don't like chicken yet unless it is a strange chicken that has been butchered far, far away. The ducks and geese were worse. Without a sound they could stretch out their necks on the chopping block. I am still unable to do an amputation without a sob.

But it wasn't all easy. Granville knew about missionary chil-