

The Story of Bill Chong



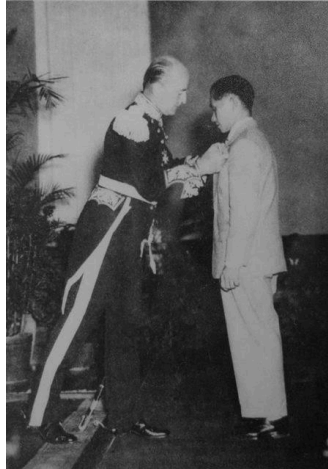
Bill Chong (William Gun Chong 鄭根) in 1943.

Born: 16 July 1916, Vancouver. Nationality: Chinese Canadian. Occupation: Trader.
Duration of Service in BAAG: 1 May 42 – 31 Oct 45

Citation for meritorious service in dangerous operations:

“This man left Hongkong after the capitulation and made his way to Kukong where he volunteered his services to the BAAG in any capacity. At that time, the British Red Cross urgently required medical supplies to be sent to various Chinese hospitals in areas likely to be cut off by the enemy and Wm. Chong was given the dangerous task of taking the supplies through. It involved a journey of some hundreds of miles, much of it through bandit-infested or enemy-patrolled areas, and he completed the mission successfully and returned within two months. He was later posted to our forward area at Samfou and on a number of occasions made the journey in and out to Macao through puppet and enemy controlled areas. Twice he was captured by puppets but each time got away without loss of reports he was carrying. It was mainly through his bravery and good work in this field that we were able to set up the safe routes out of Macao which later were used in bringing out a number of Europeans and American evaders to safety.”

(Signed) L.T. Ride,
Colonel Commandant BAAG.



Bill Chong receiving British Empire Medal
from Gov. Sir Alexander Grantham at Government House in 1946.

Bill Chong has described many of his experiences in his own words on audio-tape made by Elizabeth Ride. This is an example. One of the first tasks given to him was to make his way down to Macau and find a way to contact the beleaguered British Consul in Macau, Mr J.P. Reeves, and deliver a handwritten message from Col. Ride. After describing the difficulty of getting into semi-occupied Macau by teaming up with a band of smugglers, he took lodgings in a small hotel:

“...The hotel was called the Macau Hotel, it's still there. As I got in there I washed up, I said I'm going to have a look where the British Consul's office is, so I start walking and I found out where the British Consul is 'Oh, up there'. So I went up. When I got there, there were two houses. So on the flat land I walked the street, I looked down, one house Japanese, one house British. They were both consulates, the British consulate and the Japanese consulate. And then I thought well, that's easy but when I looked carefully, I thought – not so easy. The Japanese had a lot of Gendarmes, Chinese guards not Japanese, they were dressed in black – black... black head, black suit, black shoes, and under the shirt about a couple of inches they had a weapon, they wanted you to see it, that means they're tough, they got weapons. I looked. I only saw two, and then I saw two more coming up at the back and then another two coming that side – I said 'how many they got?' So, I said if I go into the British consulate... The front door actually is not open, not in business, I've got to go in the back. But like that I'd probably get arrested, this guy would stop me or something. So I sat there for a while, had a smoke, then back to my hotel room. I said 'what am I going to do?'

I got an idea. I borrowed wooden clogs, they were left there free for people who went to take a shower. I didn't shave, I didn't brush my hair, I put some dirt on my face and my feet, I rolled up my sleeves, I wore wooden clogs, my feet were dirty, and I kept on walking to a grocery in the main street. I went into the grocers and said 'I want to buy some groceries'. He said 'yeah, you can buy whatever you want'. I said 'will you make me a bill?' He said, 'yes if you pay'. I said 'can you make the bill to the

British Consul?’ He said ‘yeah, we make any bill – you pay’. ‘How about you give me a box?’. ‘You pay fifty cents for the box’. I paid fifty cents, picked up some biscuits, some soap, some coffee, things like that, put them into the box. He made the bill to the British Consul. Then I put this box on my shoulder and carried it.

In Macau all the roads are stone, cobble stones, and there at the consulate there are a lot. With the clogs I made a lot of noise. Like a dumb boy I smoked and looked around like I'm half lost. I walked by them, they didn't stop me. I walked up to the British Consulate round the back. But who would stop me at the British Consulate? – the house boy. I knocked on the door. 'What do you want?'... So I banged the door again and the cook came out – two, the cook and the boy... 'You got the bill? Leave it.' 'No, my boss told me to see Mr. Reeves.' So – they won't let me in. I made a lot of fuss with these guys, and I kicked the door, and then somebody opened the back door and looked out.

I said: 'I want to see Mr Reeves, he wants to buy Snow White Soap.' He said: '*What* kind of soap?' I said: 'Snow White. You know – Snow White'. The cook and the boy – they didn't know what Snow White was. After the third time he said: 'Let him in.' So I went in. He made me sit down, he locked the door, he took out a pistol, a .22, rusty. I said: 'Sir. [unintelligible] with that'. He said 'I've got no protection. The police don't protect me. The Japanese are all around. If I go out I'll get killed, I don't dare.' The only time he went out was when Dr Gosano came with another chap to pick him up to go for a ride or go to the hospital or something. Then he went back, he never went out. So I told him I was from Doc Ride, he sent me. I gave him the letter.

To the British Consul, Rangoon/
My dear Genl, I have been appointed by the Military Attache
Sept 27th Embassy to work in a liaison office, and am to make
contact with you and obtain if possible any new intelligence
you may have. I think you can trust the bearer of this note -
Mr. William Chang (Pleasantman) and the names will be carefully
kept as confidential as any you wish to be kept. I am going to
Chungking. (On request, I would like you and the wife to come
to establish the identity) Any letters or messages that you
send me you give to him with the understanding that I shall see to the
rest. There has been much talk to attempt to set up a
permanent service between Rangoon and Chungking, may help
you to render aid at any and all times. I am
perhaps already known to Mr. Wright of the Consulate, I wish
to go through safely. He likes me, and I have been to work for
a while also to get the services of the former as well. Understand
that you are having great difficulty in getting money through to
Rangoon. He has been recommended to Chungking if they agree to
shall attempt to supply you through my intermediation. I suggest
if you can discuss with Mr. Wright you know better. He type
of the you will write to him. We can put your suggestions into
operation as soon as he returns. Have to be successful
before I can do this. With. At. L. 25.11.19
Yours sincerely, Genl. William Chang - the employment of the British
Army in China has been much talked of recently, get some sense
into it - power to British Subjects of the Chinese race who may be helpful
to reach into China. At. L. 25.11.19.

To The British Consul, Macao/
My dear Reeves/ I have been appointed by the Military Attaché to HBM Embassy to work in S China and one of my aims is to make contact with you and obtain if possible any news or intelligence you may have of HK. You can trust the bearer of this note - Mr. William Chong (he answers best to the name of Bill) explicitly with any communication you may wish to be sent through to Chungking. (On request he will show you another note from me to establish his identity.) Any letters or messages whatsoever that you give to him will be delivered to me and I shall see to the rest. Chong has been instructed to attempt to set up a permanent service between Macao and Kweilin and any help you can render him at your end will be invaluable. You perhaps already know that both Wright's and McCaskie's parties got through safely. The latter is being sent down to work for me and I hope also to get the services of the former as well. I understand that you are having great difficulty in getting money through to Macao. This has been communicated to Chungking and if they agree we shall attempt to supply you through my organisation. The question of codes you can discuss with Chong for you know better the type of thing you will wish to send. We can put your suggestions into operation as soon as he returns. Here's to the successful forging of this link. LTR. Lt.Col. 25(vi)42

He read it, then said 'OK, you better go. In two days you go and see a Dr Gosano'. He didn't give me the address, but I thought I could find him.

So I picked up the box, took the box, tried to look dumb, rolled a Chinese type cigarette, and I walked, they didn't even look at me, lots of noise with my wooden clogs, I walked and then looked back, they didn't even follow me, so I kept on walking. But I did [unintelligible] in case they looked to see whether I was a phony.

I went back, gave back the box and got my refund, but they said 'No, you've got to buy something.' So I looked around the shop, bought some biscuits, hadn't seen biscuits for a long time – I bought two packets of biscuits, two packets of cigarettes, put them in the bag, looked around to see nobody followed me, then I left the shop and slowly walked away. When I turned around in the back street I went for a big lunch – I had earned a lunch. I was very happy. I ordered a beer. Then I went back to my room, had a sleep.

Two days later I bandaged my arm and went to see Dr Gosano. He said everything Mr Reeves tells Gosano he will pass it on to me. So I had established the connection..."

[Source of the following text:

<https://historycollection.com/agent-50-the-heroic-spy-who-saved-hundreds-from-japanese-clutches-in-wwii/3/>]

Adventures Behind Enemy Lines

After completing his mission in Macao and reporting back to BAAG, Bill Chong was sent on further missions. Some involved scouting and reporting back on Japanese troop movements, and others entailed helping downed Allied pilots and air crews make it to the safety of Allied lines. Equally hazardous were his missions of mercy, delivering desperately needed medicines to BAAG outposts and resistance cells behind Japanese

lines. It was physically exhausting work, travelling the war torn countryside on foot, sometimes covering up to 50 miles in a single day, then sleeping on the bare ground. He wore disguises, and affected a limp as cover for the use of a walking stick: it had a hollowed out compartment, in which he secreted intelligence documents or hid medicines.

The work was also mentally exhausting. On one occasion, he and a guide were discovered hiding from a Japanese patrol. Their captors beat them bloody, then forced them to dig their own graves, and asked whether they would rather be shot or beheaded. Bill figured the jig was finally up, and asked to be shot, but the duo were spared at the last minute when the guide showed the Japanese the personal card of a retired Japanese intelligence officer, and convinced them that he was one of his agents.

On another occasion, he was swept up in a random Japanese roundup, and locked up with others in the hold of a rickety fishing boat, that was then set adrift on the ocean. He survived when somebody discovered a rotten plank, kicked it out, crawled through the hole, then opened the hatch from the outside and released the rest of the prisoners. Another close brush came when he was held by collaborationist Chinese bandits, but he convinced them to let him go in exchange for medicine for their ailing leader.

The exact number of escapees rescued by Bill Chong is unknown, and probably unknowable. However, there were many who owed their freedom, or even their lives, to Agent 50. As he put it: "According to some newspapers, I rescued 1,863 people. That is not true. I never rescued that many people. A few hundred, yes. I didn't keep a record. Where would I keep a record? I didn't want to be caught [with papers] saying on this day I brought so many people. Even our head office didn't keep a record, because everybody was busy, nobody had time. I brought them back, put them on the plane, that was my job."

In 1946, Bill Chong was decorated by Hong Kong's governor, and became the only Chinese-Canadian ever awarded the British Empire Medal. He was asked to stay on as an agent, and he agreed. He worked for British intelligence, operating out of Hong Kong and carrying out missions into communist China, until he retired in 1976. He returned to Canada, but nobody knew of his background until somebody noticed a photo of him receiving an award from Hong Kong's governor. He was talked into joining a veteran's organization, and after word of his exploits spread, he became the subject of a CBC documentary. He died in 2006, at age 95.

Additional: Bill describes his last mission on audio tape (condensed)

“... .. They cut my holiday short. I had two weeks holiday - only five days later: I said ‘Again? I’ve only had five days’. They said ‘You go and see the Commandant.’ Your father was very nice. ‘Sorry Bill, but they want our best man and that would be you. I’m sorry. If you don’t want to go you don’t have to.’ I said ‘OK, Sir. I’ll go’.

Every time, he said that. And the last time, do you know what he did to me? He specially asked me to go back after 8.30, after dinner. He took me out for a walk, we walked at the back of the barracks. He was six foot something, I only five foot four. ... [unclear]... ‘You’ll have one final job – we’ll let you know when.’ Leading the American invasion from behind my village, so I would go back to my village – ... [unclear] the condition: find out everything, the roads, the beach, and everything. You

Your Dad told me this was my last job. I want you to lead the American Marines in the invasion behind the Japanese – you know the Japanese had all the Kwangtung Province. Your father said ‘At the right time I will let you know, Bill, how you will recognize the landing’. Apparently they had some kind of light, maybe infra-red, I’m not sure. He said ‘I haven’t got one yet but they will give you one.’ I would see the light coming on the [unclear] and I would lead them all the way behind the Japanese lines.’

It was behind my village. We had the main river coming from China with a nice sandy beach – they could come in and land and I would wait for them with this light of some kind.

Your father said to me ‘Bill, we have two kinds of pills’ – I know what they are. One is the kind of pill that could keep me awake for 24 hours. If I was chased by the Japanese, they have got to go to sleep, I can go 24 hours without sleeping and they won’t catch me. The other one is a cyanide pill. I said that’s dangerous – if I don’t take it I might drop it, somebody could pick it up, I’d kill somebody. So I said I don’t want to take any pill. The after-effect of that pill you don’t sleep, you’re very tired, you make up for that 24 hours, so I can’t stop, I’ve still got to get [unclear] He said ‘Bill, you’ve made the right choice,. I hope you don’t come to the point where you have to use any pill’. But come back, Bill’. He was so marvelous, just him and me, we were walking like a father and son. He offered me a cigarette, I said ‘No, Sir, I don’t smoke’ [Bill laughs]. Yeah. He was such a wonderful human. I never found anybody like him. And he was always so gentle, so kind, said ‘Are you ready for this job? If you don’t want to do it, you don’t have to do it. It’s voluntary. We ask you because we know you are one of our best agents’.

... ..”

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