

Wingate's Triumph after



Death

Concluding a WAR ADVENTURE IN BURMA

By LOWELL THOMAS

A Japanese shell ignited a flame thrower on the back of a mule. The maddened animal plunged wildly, spurting fire

Under command of General Orde Charles Wingate, the first completely airborne invasion in history was launched in March, 1944. Planned at the Roosevelt-Churchill conference at Quebec the year before, its objective was to land troops behind Japanese lines in Burma. These troops were to slash at communications of Japanese forces facing the Chinese-American Army, under General Joseph Stilwell in northern Burma. Taking off from Lalaghat, India, Air Commandos landed at Broadway, an air strip secretly built 165 miles inside Jap held territory. Another field, Piccadilly, had been found by the foe and booby-trapped. Troops and supplies were landed at Broadway in gliders, an invasion method proposed by two Americans, Colonels Philip Cochran and John Alison, who organized and commanded the huge glider operation. Young U.S. airmen, flying bombers, fighters and gliders, made the invasion possible. Although many gliders crashed in landing, a stronghold was established before the foe could counterattack in force. But much hard fighting with a wily enemy lay ahead

III

BRICADIER MICHAEL CALVERT, commander of the Chindits who were landed at Jungle Broadway, 165 miles behind the Japanese lines in central Burma by the Air Commandos, found a strategic hill 27 miles west of the field. It overlooked the enemy's railroad and highway supply line. "Mad Mike" Calvert and Squadron Leader Robert Thompson stormed the slope with hand grenades in a two-man attack that blasted an established Jap defense force.

The Chindits, named after the mythological Chinthee, the Burmese griffin, dug in, turning the hill into a fortress which cut the main life line of Japanese forces facing General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell's Chinese-American Army to the north. Troops, supplies, arms—and mules—flown to Broadway streamed through the jungle to this Mawlu-Henu roadblock. Twenty-five hundred men were established in a powerful stronghold, with trenches, entanglements of barbed wire and fields of land mines. This, the major campaign of the first all-airborne invasion in history, was victorious despite bitter counterattacks.

The night after Burma D day, March 5, 1944, Air Commando gliders under Colonel Philip Cochran, struck out to seize a second base behind the Japanese lines. Broadway, the first base, was taken despite a series of landing crashes and 17 gliders lost in the jungle en route to the invasion clearing.

Flushed with the success of Broadway, General Orde Charles Wingate, the brilliant, eccentric Chindit commander, told Cochran, "We must press our luck." They selected as secondary base a clearing 50 miles south of Broadway and named it Chowringhee, after Calcutta's main street, in honor of the Indian troops in Wingate's brigades.

Lieutenant Colonel Clinton B. Gaty, who had not

slept the previous night while he directed the glider take-offs in the initial invasion, was told to get a couple of hours' rest, then take command of the Chowringhee operation. Replying, "There's a war on, ain't there?" he washed up, shaved off a beard to look decent enough to command a base and hurried to the task of assembling his force.

The first glider in at Chowringhee was piloted by a husky young fellow, growing bald, who had been a boy idol of Hollywood—Jackie Coogan, "The Kid." He had been married and divorced from Betty Grable before going into the glider troops. He was a first-rate glider pilot and did a fine job, which had a troublesome aftermath. News reports mistakenly had Coogan leading the first, not the second invasion. The pilots were incensed at this diversion of credit from their leader, Major William H. Taylor, Jr. Flight Officer John L. Coogan, through no fault of his own, was transferred out of the Air Commandos as a morale measure.

The 12-glider force for Chowringhee had been too small and Gaty reported by radio he needed more airstrip construction equipment. Four more gliders were sent to him from the invasion base at Lalaghat, in the Imphal Valley of India. Another carried a bulldozer over from Broadway—sky transport from one newly seized base to another.

The Chindit commander at Chowringhee was British Brigadier W. D. A. (Joe) Lentaigne, who always took his false teeth out when he went into battle. From this base Lentaigne led his column to the Irrawaddy, which was crossed in boats brought by glider to a sandbank of the river. With the base in action, gliders were taken out by "snatch" pickup. Four Burma traitors taken prisoner found themselves tied in a glider and whisked off into the air. Lentaigne's Chindits blew up the Irrawaddy Valley railroad line, ambushed parties of Japs, shot up trucks and captured enemy supplies, harrying communications with the enemy's north Burma base at Bhamo.

With Lentaigne's brigade on the march, Chowringhee was completely evacuated. Wingate, Cochran recalls, seemed to have an intuition. "Phil," he said, "you're through with it. Evacuate." They did, that night, and the next (Continued on page 73)



U.S.A.F. PHOTO

After Wingate (left) was killed, the Chindit command was given to Brigadier W. D. A. Lentaigne

ILLUSTRATED BY BIRNEY LETTICK

The Actress Nobody

They call her "The Mysterious Jean Arthur" and it's not hard to see why. The

IT IS easy to understand how the doorman failed to recognize glamorous movie star Jean Arthur when she arrived at New York's Imperial Theatre one day last spring. Because she was about to rehearse her role as Peter Pan, her long blond bob had become brown hair, cut boy-style; she wore no make-up, and her slim figure was dressed in shirt and slacks. Mistaking her for a stage-struck kid, the doorman curtly ordered her away from the theater.

But it is difficult to understand what happened next: Instead of explaining who she was, Miss Arthur looked frightened and obediently started to hurry off. Only the swift intervention of the play's producer, Peter Lawrence, saved the day. He rushed after her and ushered her protectively into the theater—leaving the astounded doorman to splutter, "Why didn't she speak up? Why didn't she say she was the star of the show? I ask you—why?"

He was voicing the mystified confusion of hundreds of people who have come in contact with Jean Arthur over the years. By this time called "the Arthurian legend" because of her unpredictable way of behaving and her insistence on privacy, she has posed for photographers so rarely that she can count the times on her fingers. For 20-odd years she has politely refused to be interviewed by magazine writers, and her newspaper interviews are as rare as six-leaf clovers.

Often compared with Greta Garbo in her desire to keep out of the limelight, in many respects she is even more remote than the secretive Swede; at least Garbo, huddled under a big-brimmed hat, has been photographed repeatedly in smart restaurants. Jean Arthur, however, seems to vanish like a wisp of fog whenever she leaves the stage or screen. Often she has been known to pelt three blocks at a dead run to avoid autograph hounds pounding along behind her.

"To theater people, she is the most fascinating mystery in the entire entertainment world," says playwright-director Garson Kanin. "All of us grant that she is an extraordinarily talented actress. But when she's not acting, who is she, what is she?"

As the New York critics settled down at Peter Pan's opening night last April, to view Jean Arthur's first stage appearance in 16 years, they opened their programs and found a typically puzzling Arthurian touch. Although it is customary for the star of a play to have a lengthy biography, the program contained only four enigmatic sentences about her: "Miss Arthur is one of the best-known actresses on the American screen. Her present contract with Paramount Studios permits her to do plays and pictures independently of this studio. Her favorite picture of all time is Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, and she is glad to have been a part of it. She feels the same way about Peter Pan, the play."

"Well, I see we just drew another blank on the Arthur mystery," one critic told another. But the next day they all gave her rave notices. Peter Pan was established as a solid hit.

Yet in August, four months after that triumphant opening night, she stood Broadway on its ear with an apparently inexplicable Arthurian antic. She suddenly telephoned the producer one Friday afternoon that she wasn't going to act that night. "I'm tired," she said, "and I need a rest. I think I'll go to the beach for a few weeks." Since this decision affected 85 members of the company, as well as audiences who had bought tickets in order to see Miss Arthur in person, Lawrence and his coproducer, R. L. Stevens, rose into the air like Roman candles. They came down in the office of Equity, the actors' union, demanding that her contract be canceled. It was. Instantly the New York drama pages were filled with the astonishing news that Jean Arthur, the star of a smash-hit play, was no longer connected with it.

Her next move was even more unpredictable.

Throwing aside her famous mantle of shyness, she began to fight to get back into the play. She sent telegrams protesting the producers' action to Equity and the New York Times; she invited the entire cast to her home to convince them that she actually was in a state of exhaustion—and she dragged her lawyer, Morris Ernst, back from a vacation trip to battle by her side. The entire series of skirmishes took only three days; at the end of that time, she was re-established as the star of Peter Pan. Also, she had won her right for an immediate two-week vacation.

"Half the trouble is that she's naïve," says a personal friend, I. A. Wyner. "She really was worn out, and Dr. William Gardner really had ordered her to rest. But she related this in such weak language that nobody in show business believed her. Naturally, they were all infuriated. Now I think everyone sees her badly expressed point."

Her present contract may be canceled by either Jean or the producer on four weeks' notice. But both Lawrence and Jean (who has a \$25,000 interest in the show) state emphatically that they don't intend to do any such thing.

Backstage, Jean has baffled the company as much as she has confused Broadwayites. She conducts herself more like a minor player than like the star of the show. Stage manager Mortimer Halpern still recalls with astonishment how, during rehearsals, he found her cowering behind a group of stagehands, helplessly trying to figure out how to get past them to the stage. "You simply tap them on the arm and say, 'Pardon me,'" Halpern explained.

"But I hate to bother them," Jean said tremulously. From then on, Halpern issued orders for all hands to leave a path cleared between her dressing room and the stage.

"When she wanted any changes made in the production, she suggested that the whole cast take a vote," marvels Producer Lawrence. "Imagine a star suggesting a vote!" Once she asked Halpern if one of the little boys in the company couldn't say a line differently. "But don't mention it to him if you think it would make him angry," she added. Whenever she came up with ideas that Halpern and Lawrence vetoed, they braced themselves for the usual star-tantrum. Instead, Jean's eyes filled with tears; she told them in gentle sadness, "You just don't understand me." Then she avoided speaking to them for a day or two.

Audience Is Spellbound

However, her tentativeness completely vanishes when she is on stage in the role of Peter Pan. From the moment the great French windows of the Darling nursery whisk open as if by magic and she soars into view as Peter, she is in command. Her slight figure, dressed in baggy green tights and a green leather jacket, capers with the happy abandon of a twelve-year-old boy. She crows out Peter's lines in her husky voice, swoops through the air with gleeful grace, and dominates her make-believe world of flying children, mermaids, pirates, Indians, the tiny fairy Tinkerbell, and the crocodile who swallowed a ticking clock. The famous forty-six-year-old play, now embellished with six songs by Leonard Bernstein, is packed nightly with spellbound children and their equally spellbound parents. To all of them, Jean Arthur is exactly right as the cocky Peter Pan.

Once she lifts the veil of privacy from her personal life, as she did (for the first time) for this reporter, she appears as an intelligent, kindly and essentially simple person who is carrying a heavy burden of self-doubt. "When you consider that she is a world-famous actress, now making at least \$3,000 a week in a smash-hit play, it seems impossible that she could underrate herself. But she does," her friends say. She has no reason to doubt her

attractiveness: She is a small woman, with an excellent figure, blue eyes, and a gaily raucous, infectious laugh. But she is always asking friends, "Don't I look old and tired today?"

In her struggle to gain belief in herself, she recently underwent a two-and-a-half-year psychoanalysis under Dr. Erich Fromm, and friends feel that she emerged from it with more confidence than ever before. She herself says, "I consider it the finest experience I ever had—the most constructive, in fact the only thing that makes sense. I've learned so much about myself, which means that I've learned about others, too. I believe everyone should be analyzed. It should start when you're a young child, and then be repeated in your teens, and then again when you get over the Santa Claus idea of marriage and just want to die." (Her 17-year marriage to Frank Ross ended in divorce this year.)

Her Manhattan home is a quiet, expensive residential hotel in the East Seventies. Here she lives in a green-tinted suite consisting of a bedroom, bath and sitting room. She wasn't happy until she had taken down all the draperies at the windows and replaced them with \$3.98 draperies she bought at a department store. She also rearranged all the furniture—"I always push everything around in a new home," she says—and added to the living room a picture of the poet Keats, some potted plants, a stray alley cat she adopted, and dozens of books. These are a potpourri of works like those of Shelley, Ibsen, Willa Cather, Nehru, Stanislavsky, and such psychology books as Overstreet's *The Mature Mind* and Dr. Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*.

With people she knows and trusts, she is full of impish humor. An early riser, she has often awakened house guests in her former country homes by directing a noisy spray of hose water on their windows soon after sunrise. Recently she went to the theater with an embarrassed friend who was temporarily without his upper plate; she spent all evening teasingly enticing him to say words that would reveal his lack of teeth. She often telephones friends late at night to shout cheerfully, "Were you asleep?"

She has always been a steady visitor to art galleries, lectures and bookstores. She looks on knowledge with genuine excitement, and dips into a dictionary the way most people dip into a bowl of salted nuts. Friends are used to seeing her arrive at their homes with her red leather dictionary tucked under her arm; during the evening, she may refer to it several times.

Newspapers constantly print the story that she never goes anywhere without wearing a mysterious veil. She argues, "I wear veils only because I think they're enchanting—doesn't every woman?" All of her clothes, from her shoes to her slacks, are custom-made and exquisite. "She dresses beautifully—but isn't it just like Jean Arthur to own a black cloth coat that is lined in mink?" asks one woman friend. "She's the only woman in America who'd wear mink where it doesn't show!"

Of her reputation as a mystery woman, Jean says, "I honestly don't know how that reputation started—it's my frank belief that anything mysterious is downright phony. Maybe people say I'm mysterious because I've never been able to lead the usual fashionable life of going to cocktail parties and dinners. But I just don't enjoy them."

Jean Arthur was born Gladys Georgianna Greene in New York City on October 17, 1908. Her mother, the former Johanna Augusta Neilsen, came from Montana and was of (Continued on page 78)

Her shyness suddenly dissolves as she whisks on stage in the Barrie classic. Cocky and assured, she is in command from the very start

Collier's for October 7, 1950