

REPRESENTATIONS REGARDING RELEASE OF MAJOR
ROBERT B. RIGG AND CAPTAIN JOHN W. COLLINS, AS-
SISTANT MILITARY ATTACHÉS IN CHINA, CAPTURED
BY CHINESE COMMUNIST ARMED FORCES IN MAN-
CHURIA

121.5493/3-147: Telegram

*The Minister-Counselor of Embassy in China (Butterworth) to the
Secretary of State*

NANKING, March 1, 1947—9 p. m.
[Received March 1—12: 52 p. m.]

408. This for Military Attaché.¹ Following from Changchun:²
“78, March 1, 3 p. m. Major Rigg and Capt. Collins (Assistant
Military Attachés) were captured this morning by Communists about
4 a. m., east of Chialun. Am contacting our military and will report
details later.”

BUTTERWORTH

893.00/3-247: Telegram

*The Minister-Counselor of Embassy in China (Butterworth) to the
Secretary of State*

NANKING, March 2, 1947—7 p. m.
[Received March 2—3: 05 p. m.]

418. Pending the receipt of a detailed report from Changchun on
the capture by the Communists of Assistant Military Attachés Rigg
and Collins (ReEmbtel 408), the Embassy decided not to make repre-
sentations to Nanking Communist representatives since it was hoped
that there might be circumstances which would facilitate their early
release thru local action. It was considered undesirable, on the basis
of present scanty information to involve Yen an³ in the case of which
it was most probably completely unaware. Any reference to Yen an
would almost certainly have provoked consequences likely to delay
settlement.

This morning the Embassy heard on the radio the War Depart-
ment's announcement, the reasons for which are obscure. In these

¹ Brig. Gen. Robert H. Soule.

² O. Edmund Clubb was Consul General at Changchun.

³ Shensi location of Chinese Communist Party headquarters.

circumstances, I took up the matter with Wang Ping-nan,⁴ and asked him to request Yen an to issue instructions for the immediate release of Rigg and Collins. He agreed to communicate with Yen an forthwith.

Colonel Dau, Ex. Officer MA,⁵ is flying to Changchun March 3.

BUTTERWORTH

893.00/3-547 : Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, March 5, 1947—8 a. m.

[Received March 5—5:20 a. m.]

445. Embassy has had following instruction sent to senior U. S. officer Yen an Liaison Group:⁶

“On Sunday, 2 March 1947, Mr. Wang Ping-nan of the local Communist delegation agreed to notify Yen an that Communist troops had captured Major Rigg and Captain Collins (two American Assistant Military Attachés in Changchun) in the vicinity of Changchun. He also agreed to request on behalf of American Embassy that they be released. On 3 March Mr. Tung Pi-wu⁷ was informed by the Embassy that Rigg and Collins were reported to be at Chiutai, 20 kilometers NE of Changchun, and that they were believed to have been captured by Chi Hei Tsung Tei column, also known as Kirin-Heilung-chiang column. The Embassy requested Tung Pi-wu to pass the info to Yen an for its assistance in effecting the release of the two Americans.

The Embassy wishes you to follow the matter energetically with a view to effecting immediate release. Embassy most anxious that few remaining days of direct contact with Yen an be exploited to complete arrangements for the release. Colonel Dau of Military Attaché office in Nanking and Mr. Clubb, American Consul [General] in Changchun, are now in Changchun endeavoring to arrange locally for the release. Embassy also wishes to be informed of any action taken or contemplated by Yen an in the matter.”

STUART

893.00/3-547 : Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, March 5, 1947—3 p. m.

[Received March 5—4:55 a. m.]

450. Following reply is from senior officer, Yen an Liaison group in answer to instruction reproduced in Embtel 445, March 5, 8 a. m.:

⁴ Spokesman of the Chinese Communist Party delegation at Nanking.

⁵ Col. Frederick J. Dau, Assistant Military Attaché and Executive Officer in the Office of the Military Attaché.

⁶ Col. John K. Sells, U. S. Army.

⁷ Head of the Chinese Communist Party delegation at Nanking.

“The release of Major Rigg and Captain Collins has been taken up with Yang Shang-yun, Secretary General, 18th Group Army, acting for General Chu Teh.⁸ I am informed by Yang Shang-yun of the following: (1) That there are 3, not 2, officers in custody; (2) General Chu Teh has already issued orders to Lin Piao⁹ to safeguard the 3 persons; (3) General Chu Teh has already sent a radio to Lin Piao to find out circumstances of their capture; (4) Because Yen-an headquarters has not yet been fully informed, General Chu Teh will take action on this matter, in addition to that indicated in the preceding two sentences, after he has received detailed report from Manchurian headquarters. I will follow the matter energetically and will keep you informed.”

STUART

121.5493/3-747: Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, March 7, 1947—4 p. m.

[Received March 8—2: 10 a. m.]

482. General Chou En-lai,¹⁰ in a message to the Embassy regarding Communist repatriation,¹¹ included following paragraph (reference Embassy's telegram 450, March 5):

“Regarding the two American officers, Major Rigg and Captain Collins, who were captured at Kiutai near Changchun, together with Kuomintang officers, urgent radio has been sent to the Northeastern Democratic Joint Army Headquarters demanding information and appropriate measures will be taken. According to my information, another American officer was captured near Tungliao in Manchuria. I wish to know whether you are informed about this or not. There is no question about the personal safety of all three officers. This is being passed on to you for your information.

The following is Embassy's reply:

“With regard to the capture of Major Rigg and Captain Collins, the report of the capture of a third American officer near Tungliao is believed to be in error. Your assurance of the personal safety of Major Rigg and Captain Collins is appreciated. It is hoped that urgent action has been taken to effect the immediate release of these two officers who have been in Communist hands now for 1 week. Will you please advise when their release may be expected?”

STUART

⁸ Commander in Chief of the Chinese Communist armies.

⁹ Commander of Chinese Communist armies in Manchuria.

¹⁰ Head of the Chinese Communist Party delegation during the 1946 negotiations with General Marshall and the Chinese Government.

¹¹ For correspondence on this subject, see *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. x, pp. 705 ff.

121.5493/3-1147 : Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, March 11, 1947—7 p. m.

[Received March 12—2:28 a. m.]

529. [To Consul General Clubb at Changchun.] Yen-an Liaison Group withdrawn to Nanking today. Prior to [its] withdrawal, General Yeh Chien-ying¹² stated that Rigg and Collins were now en route Harbin and that General Chu Teh had ordered General Lin Piao to release them upon arrival Harbin.

Yenan and Harbin radio stations will broadcast for the next 5 days the date of their departure from Harbin, route to be followed, ETA¹³ at point of contact between Communists and National Government forces. Separate clear operational message has been sent instructing USIS¹⁴ to monitor Harbin and that you forward to Embassy any information on release Rigg and Collins obtained from Harbin broadcasts.

It will be your responsibility to pass necessary information to [appropriate Government]¹⁵ Military Headquarters to permit safe reception Rigg and Collins at point of contact. It is desired that, if possible, you or Cowen¹⁶ be present at point of transfer to receive Rigg and Collins. Close liaison should be maintained with North-east China Command and they requested take appropriate action to assure protection and prompt transportation Rigg and Collins to Changchun.

Sent Changchun 27.

STUART

121.5493/4-447 : Telegram

The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in China (Stuart)

WASHINGTON, April 4, 1947—8 p. m.

403. War Dept expresses concern safety Rigg [and] Collins and urges consideration whether any unexplored method approach might help secure their release. Dept has full confidence your judgment re handling this matter but desires be in position assure War Dept that all practicable steps are being taken. Accordingly if current attempt utilize UNRRA¹⁷ convoy should involve undue delay or bring unsat-

¹² Recently returned to Yen-an from Peiping where he had been Chinese Communist Party Commissioner at Executive Headquarters.

¹³ Estimated time of arrival.

¹⁴ United States Information Service.

¹⁵ Bracketed insertion on basis of copy of telegram in Embassy files.

¹⁶ Lt. Col. Edward T. Cowen, Assistant Military Attaché in China.

¹⁷ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

isfactory result¹⁸ please consider and report possibility other means communication with CCP.¹⁹ At present no additional channels occur to us other than through British should they soon despatch their Consul [to] Harbin or through Soviet ConGen [at] Harbin via Soviet Embassy [in] Nanking.

ACHESON

121.5493/4-947 : Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, April 9, 1947—noon.

[Received April 9—6:03 a. m.]

766. Deptel 403, April 4, 8 p. m. was received just as the Embassy was about to send its 752, April 6, 10 a. m. (number cancelled) pointing out that despite its attempts to explore all possible channels to secure the release of Major Robert Rigg and Captain John Collins, such efforts had so far seemingly proven unavailing and suggesting as the only remaining alternative that the Soviet Embassy in Nanking request the Soviet Consul General at Harbin to transmit a message to the appropriate Chinese Communist authorities in Manchuria with the view of the establishment of some new channel of communication whereby the Communists might comply with their commitment to release Rigg and Collins immediately.

Pursuant to the Dept's suggestion, the Embassy has now taken up this question with the Soviet Embassy informally. Circumstances of the case whereby Rigg and Collins were captured when they became lost northeast of Changchun were explained to the Soviet Embassy, together with an account of the negotiations resulting in Chinese Communists' agreement to instruct General Lin Piao to release Rigg and Collins immediately and the failure of the arrangements to develop fruitfully due to bad atmospheric conditions. It was stated to the Soviet Embassy that since all other efforts of communication had failed and since the Soviet Union is the only govt which maintains representatives in Communist Manchuria, it would be appreciated if the Soviet Consul General at Harbin could be requested to transmit, on behalf of the American Embassy, a message to the appropriate Communist authorities asking them to establish a new channel of communications in order to comply with the Communist commitment for the release of Rigg and Collins.

¹⁸ This referred to the possibility of securing the return of the two officers by means of an UNRRA truck convoy which was carrying supplies from Changchun to Harbin.

¹⁹ Chinese Communist Party.

Soviet Embassy replied that the question is a delicate one from their standpoint and is further complicated by the fact that they have no direct communication with their officials in Communist Manchuria, but that they will be pleased to transmit the American request to Moscow for re-transmission to Harbin, upon receipt of an *aide-mémoire* which has now been delivered.

The following message has been received by the director, UNRRA China office,²⁰ from UNRRA chief regional representative in Manchuria:²¹

“Cable²² despatched to Li Li-san²³ at Harbin March 7 requesting interim care and safe conduct to national lines for Rigg and Collins on basis personal friendship. No reply received as radio communication discontinued. Bodine presently en route Harbin authorized make discreet enquiries, and if possible return Rigg and Collins by UNRRA transportation. Will continue efforts relative your request also on basis of personal regard for Rigg and Collins. Bodine advised to be guided by Clubb in all negotiations.”

STUART

121.5493/4-1447: Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, April 14, 1947.

[Received April 14—1:42 a. m.]

803. Communist radio North Shensi on April 13 broadcast communiqué issued by Headquarters Manchurian United Democratic Army dated April 7 stating that “Major Rigg and Captain Collins, both of U. S. Army and Assistant Military Attachés of American Embassy in China, were caught alive while they were reconnoitering military positions of Manchurian United Democratic Army under cover of Kuomintang troops. This is confirmed by witnesses, material evidence and statements of the accused after careful investigation.”

After protesting strongly against American Government “directly participating in China’s civil war”, Headquarters of Manchurian United Democratic Army warned that American Government would have to be responsible for consequences ensuing from similar acts in

²⁰ Maj. Gen. Glen E. Edgerton.

²¹ Gordon Menzies.

²² Undated telegram drafted by Mr. Clubb for transmittal to General Lin Piao; it asked when the two officers could be released and pointed out that the UNRRA convoy offered “a most excellent and reasonably safe means” for returning them to Changchun. The message was turned over to Cornelius Bodine, who was in charge of the convoy, with the request that it be despatched at the first point in Communist-controlled territory having telegraphic connections with Harbin. (Nanking Embassy Files, Lot F79, 310 Rigg-Collins File)

²³ Chinese Communist political adviser to General Lin Piao.

the future. It stated "in pursuance of spirit of clemency Major Rigg and Captain Collins have been escorted out of territory."

Broadcast then relates circumstances of capture which do not differ materially from information previously available to Embassy. Communiqué states that "close Chiang Kai-shek²⁴-American collaboration can be seen from above facts. That is why when Changchun was panic-stricken Rigg and Collins personally went out to front lines for armed reconnaissance under cover of Kmt gunfire. Communists appeal to American people and world public opinion to halt direct aid by American Government to Chiang Kai-shek for waging civil war."

Sent Department as 803, repeated Changchun as 40.

STUART

121.5493/4-1547: Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING [April 15, 1947.]
[Received April 15—6: 15 a. m.]

812. Embassy has released following press statement today:

A Chinese Communist English-language radio broadcast on April 13 made the following statement concerning Major Robert Rigg and Captain John Collins, Assistant Military Attachés of the American Embassy:

"Major Rigg and Captain Collins, both of United States Army and Assistant Military Attachés of American Embassy in China, were caught alive while they were reconnoitering military positions of Manchurian United Democratic Army under cover of Kuomintang troops."

The Embassy wishes to state that Major Rigg and Captain Collins were merely observing military activities in the country of their assignment in pursuance of the normal functions of military attachés and were acting independently in this capacity.

Major Rigg and Captain Collins were captured by a Chinese Communist patrol in the forenoon of March 1, 1947, while observing military conditions approximately 21 kilometers northeast of Changchun. Subsequently General Chu Teh, Commander-in-Chief of Chinese Communist Forces, and his Chief of Staff, General Yeh Chien-ying, gave categorical assurances on March 11 to the Chief of the American Liaison Group at Yen-an, that orders had been issued to General Lin Piao, Commander-in-Chief of Chinese Communist forces in Manchuria, that Major Rigg and Captain Collins, then stated by General

²⁴ President of the National Government of the Republic of China.

Yeh Chien-ying to have been en route to Harbin, were to be released immediately upon their arrival there. At the same time channels of radio communication satisfactory to the Chinese Communist commanders were arranged in order to facilitate the return of Major Rigg and Captain Collins to Changchun.

The Embassy is awaiting further communication from the Chinese Communist authorities who have not yet complied with their commitment to release the two Assistant Military Attachés of this Embassy. End of release.

Sent Dept as 812, repeated Changchun as 41.

STUART

893.00/4-1947: Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, April 19, 1947.

[Received April 19—4:15 a. m.]

845. Following is New China News Agency broadcast from north Shensi April 18:

“Dispatch from Manchuria says: Headquarters of Manchurian United Democratic Army has made decision to escort on April 24 two American officers captured near Changchun to quit the liberated area. Message from this headquarters will be broadcast successively for 5 days beginning from April 18 by north Shensi broadcast station. The message reads:

Message From Headquarters of Chinese Manchurian United
Democratic Army

This headquarters has decided to escort to quit the liberated area two American officers, Major Rigg and Captain Collins, captured on March 1 during battle at Hochipao near Changchun. They will be escorted to quit at 1200 hours on April 24 through Hungfangtze region south of Taolaichao. It is requested that American Consulate in Changchun will send men with credentials to place nearby Hungfangtze (literally red house) to meet them. The men sent there should carry white flags for signal.”

Sent Washington as 845, repeated Changchun as 46, Mukden as 29, Peiping as 64.

STUART

121.5493/4-2447: Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, April 24, 1947—9 p. m.

[Received April 24—7:52 a. m.]

892. Following from Changchun: “Rigg and Collins released at 12:32. Both well. Have returned Changchun”.

The Military Attaché is bringing both Rigg and Collins directly to Nanking for consultation with the Embassy, without prior interviews by anyone. As soon as possible, after questioning in the Embassy, their report will be telegraphed to the Dept.

In view of the increasing public interest in this case, it will be necessary for the Embassy to make them available for a press conference after a period sufficient for the Dept to receive the Embassy's report has elapsed.

Their report to the press will be purely factual and will not in any sense divulge military positions of either party or Central Govt forces, or contain any information which might be construed as propaganda for one side or the other.

STUART

811.221/4-2547: Telegram

The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State

NANKING, April 25, 1947—8 p. m.

[Received April 25—8:36 a. m.]

898. Major Rigg and Captain Collins arrived Nanking this afternoon and made their oral report to the Embassy which may be summarized as follows:

The circumstances of capture were approximately as previously reported. Immediately evacuated to Harbin over a period of 6 days during which time Captain Collins suffered from frozen feet. On arrival Harbin they were placed separately in solitary confinement under heavy guard in a domestic dwelling. This confinement was continued from March 6 to April 9. During this period they were frequently and separately interrogated by a "summary court". This apparently constituted trial but neither officer was informed that it was trial. Li Li-san conducted in part Collins trial and General Wang²⁵ the remainder and Major Rigg's. Officers were initially informed they were prisoners-of-war, subsequently by inference from various statements they were apparently on trial as spies and accused of fighting with the Kuomintang. Trial consisted of typical catch questions aimed in different fashion at each officer. Both officers answered factually, and did not disclose classified information. Officers succeeded in some coordination by surreptitiously exchanging notes left in common toilet. Li Li-san conducted trial in acceptable manner. General Wang used rough tactics, employing verbal abuse, and on several occasions both officers were threatened with torture. Results trial were summarized from Communist point of view in state-

²⁵ Presumably Gen. Huang Yi-feng, former Communist representative on the Communications Group of Executive Headquarters at Peiping.

ments of interrogation which officers were required to sign. On April 9, solitary confinement ended and Li Li-san invited them to lunch and informed them that commitment made by General Chu Teh about their release would be honored; otherwise they had sufficient grounds to hold them. Thereafter, minimum liberty allowed both officers until movement to release point. This movement made by American built weapons carrier and release to ConGen Clubb accomplished without incident.

During whole period no contact was allowed Rigg or Collins with anyone other than guards except for one short shopping tour under ground [*guard?*].

Entire period of capture characterized by hostile attitude on part of guards who, on many occasions, threatened them with bayonets. They also received rough treatment from political commissars attached to military units with which they came in contact. On all occasions American foreign policy was focal point of attack. Food and medical care were adequate.

STUART