

Downey: A CIA Agent in From the Cold

Recruit on Double Mission Over China When Captured in 1952

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There were 30 of them there that day in 1951, 30 graduating Yale seniors all drawn to a small room on the New Haven campus by a recruitment notice on the bulletin board. One of them remembers that the notice was next to one put there by Procter & Gamble.

They were met by a middle-aged man dressed in the Ivy League flannels of the day, noteworthy for nothing except that he smoked a pipe and wore the Yale tie. He told the seniors that he's been a member of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) during World War II and had operated behind German lines all during the Allied advance across Europe. He said he was now with the Central Intelligence Agency, which was then so new that

none of the Yale seniors had heard of it.

The recruiter said he was at Yale to bring qualified bright young men into the CIA, which needed to grow because of the Chinese intervention into the Korean War. He said little about what qualified bright young men could expect in the CIA, leading several of the Yale seniors to press him on what they might have to do.

"Well, this is purely hypothetical," the recruiter said, "but we might expect you to parachute into China to help set up a communications apparatus, sort of get things started."

Hypothetical as it might have been at the time, that is almost what Jack Downey was doing in 1952 when he was captured by the Chinese in the foothills of the Manchurian mountains. Downey refused to discuss his mission

when he was released two weeks ago after 20 years in a Chinese prison, but reliable sources say he was on a double mission that fateful day when his C-47 aircraft was shot down by small arms fire inside China.

For years, the United States had disavowed Downey's mission and whereabouts the day he was caught.

Downey's friends say he could have been released as early as 1955 if the United States had only acknowledged that he was a CIA agent. His friends call him a victim of the Cold War, a victim of the China Lobby that kept the United States friendly with Chiang Kai-shek and a victim of the virulent anti-Communism of the '50s and '60s.

See DOWNEY, A7, Col. 1

DOWNEY, From A1

been that Downey was a Defense Department employe, on an authorized flight from Seoul to Tokyo the day his plane was lost.

Downey had been a CIA agent for more than a year, one of a dozen Yale graduates who had been recruited off the campus that day in 1951. He was participating in a tradition that grew through the fifties and on into the sixties, when Yale men tended to dominate the ranks of the CIA.

Downey was stationed by the CIA in Japan, where he trained Taiwanese from Chiang Kai-shek's isolated island in the arts and crafts of the profession he'd been taught in Washington. Downey was considered one of the best young agents in the Far East. He was strong, durable, quickminded and a born leader of men.

That leadership was obvious even in Downey's early CIA days. His class of 40 was asked at the end of their training which man in the class they'd like to lead them or be with them in trouble spots. Thirty-one of the 40 chose Downey.

Most of that class wound up in South Korea or Japan, where they trained South Koreans and Taiwanese in espionage. The work was routine, but it had its moments of danger. One agent (also a Yale classmate of Downey's) remembers going aground in the fog off the coast of North Korea, where his "fishing junk" was dropping Korean agents into the north.

"We though we were aground on an uninhabited island, where we'd be safe until the tide lifted us off," he said. "Then the fog began to lift and we discovered we were less than 100 yards from the main railroad line that moved men and supplies down from Vladivostok."

Nobody but Downey knows how many missions he flew over China, but the men who knew him in the CIA assume he'd been there more than once. One former agent said there was never any need for Downey to be on the

plane. He said that while Downey didn't defy regulations, he overstepped his participation in the mission by being on the plane.

"Jack flew with his men because he liked them and wanted to be with them when they jumped," the one-time agent said. "That was one reason he was there. The other one, I guess, was that it was a lovely moonlit night and Jack just wanted to see China."

The mission Downey flew is believed to have been a double one. It is understood the C-47 was to pick up a Taiwa-

nese agent who was already inside China. The plane was then to continue on to the mountains of Manchuria and parachute seven other Taiwanese into China to set up a communications base.

Downey's plane never made it to the mountains. Sources said the Chinese arrested the Taiwanese agent Downey was supposed to pick up before Downey's plane left for China. Sources also said the Chinese intercepted radio messages inbound to the Taiwanese agent, which alerted them to the time and place of the pick-up.

When Downey's plane flew into China, men and weapons were waiting for it. The C-47 is understood to have come in low and slow over the spot designated for the pickup when Chinese troops opened fire on the plane.

The C-47 crash-landed in a Manchurian field, which explains how Downey is said to have walked away from the wreckage. All eleven people on board survived the crash. Besides Downey, there was CIA Agent Richard Fecteau,

two Taiwanese pilots and the seven Taiwanese agents who were to be parachuted into the mountains.

The seven agents were executed by the Chinese. The two pilots may also have been shot, though there is a possibility they are still in a Chinese prison. Fecteau was sentenced to 20 years in prison, Downey to life. The different sentences were given because Downey was the mission chief, Fecteau a subordinate.

Downey has said he spent the first 10 months of imprisonment in leg irons. Harvard University Law Professor Jerome A. Cohen, a classmate of Downey's at Yale and today a specialist in Chinese law, said there was nothing unusual about Downey's treatment.

"All criminals were treated the same way in the People's Republic of China," Cohen said. "They socked it to you from the start, then became lenient as you reformed, as you told the truth and as you repented about the truth."

Downey said he told his captors everything he knew in those first 10 months. He was quoted by newsmen interviewing him last week at a hospital in New Britain, Conn., where his mother is recuperating from a stroke: "I would say I revealed about every bit of information I had."

When he'd told the Chinese the details of his work, Downey was taken out of leg irons. But he was kept in solitary confinement for another 14 months, during which time he was not allowed to talk to anybody but his captors. Even that conversation was limited to chats with the jailer who supervised his 30 minutes of courtyard exercise every day.

Downey and Fecteau were moved out of solitary in a rural prison and into Peking's Grass Basket Prison in December 1954. There, they were put in with the crew of a B-29 that had

been shot down over North Korea. They were also tried and convicted of espionage by a Chinese military tribunal, which announced the conviction to the world.

"We were elated at the conviction," remembers one of Downey's classmates who had gone into the CIA with him. "We'd never heard of his capture. We'd all given Jack up for dead."

The Korean War ended before the Chinese announced Downey's capture and conviction. When it ended, negotiations began between the United States and the People's Republic of China to arrange a prisoner exchange. A list of prisoners was swapped in Geneva in April 1954.

The United States listed 129 Chinese it had detained, mostly scientists and economists who'd been teaching or working in the United States. The People's Republic listed 40 Americans, including the fliers Downey and Fecteau who were in Peking. Downey and Fecteau were not on the list.

"They weren't on the list because John Foster Dulles would not admit they worked for the CIA," said Harvard Law Professor Jerome Chen, Downey's Yale classmate who was later to become a force behind his release. "We never admitted he was missing so they never admitted he was captured."



Associated Press

JOHN DOWNEY
... CIA recruit

When the Chinese announced that they were holding Downey and Fecteau, Secretary of State Dulles refused to budge. The story that the State Department issued in 1954 was the story they stuck to until early this year. Downey and Fecteau worked for the U.S. Army. Their plane had gone off course between Korea and Japan and ended up over Manchuria.

The fliers who were in the Peking prison with Downey and Fecteau were released by the Chinese in August, 1955. Downey and Fecteau stayed behind, victims of the growing Cold War between China and the United States.

A witness to this is one of the fliers who met Downey and Fecteau in prison, a man named Steven Kiba, who teaches Spanish in a high school in Norton, Ohio.

"I asked a Chinese commissar if Downey and Fecteau would go home when we went home," Kiba said, "and he told me, 'The only way they will ever get out will be for your government to admit they are CIA agents.'"

Kiba said he told this to the CIA when he was released. He said he passed along a message from Fecteau that the Chinese were aware of his and Downey's attempt to set up a CIA spy ring under the code name "Operation Samurai."

"The CIA man told me to forget it, forget about the whole period with Downey and Fecteau," Kiba said. "They said as far as they were concerned it never happened. They said it looked pretty hopeless for them and seemed to indicate they would never get out."

Harvard Law Professor Cohen is one who insists the Chinese tried to maintain some kind of contact with the United States over the Downey and Fecteau cases from 1954 to 1957. He said China tried to regularize relations with the United States during this period, but that the United States rejected China's moves because the United States did not want to undermine its relations with Chiang Kai-shek.

China made a last attempt at recon-

ciliation in 1957, when Premier Chou En-lai offered to repatriate Downey and Fecteau if the United States would allow American newsmen to visit China. Dulles refused, declaring that if the United States were to let that happen it would be giving its approval to a regime that "practiced and trafficked in evil."

Downey and Fecteau were finally released when President Nixon chose to acknowledge their roles as CIA agents. He did it at a press conference just before presidential assistant Henry A. Kissinger left on one of his trips to China. He did it in answer to the last question asked at the press conference, in a way that convinced Downey's friends that the question was planted and the answer rehearsed.

Jack Downey emerged from his 20 years in prison looking and acting like a man who'd never been in prison, almost a symbol of the detente that now exists between the United States and China. Downey had two recreations in prison, reading and exercising. Together, they saved his sanity.

He came out of prison speaking Chinese and able to read and write Russian, which he learned from Russian cellmates and from the Russian novels his Chinese captors let him have. His friends say he is in excellent physical shape at the age of 42. He can run 10 miles, do 100 pushups and as many as 50 chinups. His weight is 190 pounds, a little less than it was when he wrestled and played varsity football for Yale.

Jack Downey is the last of the Yale class of 1951 to come in from the Cold War between the U.S. and China, almost a symbol of the last 20 years. The others who went into the CIA when the Korean War looked like an American disaster all left years ago. One is a freelance photographer in New York, another in an Asian scholar at Yale, a third runs a hostelry mill and a fourth a lobster-tail business in the Solomon Islands.

"We all got bored and disillusioned," one of them said the other day. "The bureaucracy, the paper work and the politicking got too stifling. That, and the times changed. So did we change."