

*WWII. Shanghai. Behind the lines help for down airmen.*

## **The Shanghai Operation**

by Howard Turk

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The

SHANGHAI

OPERATION

HOWARD  
TURK

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**Howard Turk**

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First Edition

## Two

Around the corner on Kiangse Road Nancy hurried past the massive sandstone front of Trinity Cathedral and mixed in with shoppers just beyond the Central Hotel, an old, always busy, businessman's hotel. She stopped at a bookstore's window display to look behind her. No one seemed suspicious. She tried to act the casual shopper even though the cold was eating through her sweater.

She pushed on and turned onto Shantung Road, past dress and shoe shops that used to cater to Westerners and now were to a greater or lesser degree, junk stores and money changers. She passed one telephone booth before she stepped into one outside a pharmacy near Nanking Road. Nancy's hand shook a little as she dropped the coin in the slot and dialed Doctor Lu's number. She had to warn him that their underground group, known as the Honor Line, might be broken.

Mei Ling, the doctor's wife-nurse, answered the telephone, sounding normal, no strain in her voice that Nancy could detect. That was a relief. Nancy was afraid that the *Kempeitai*, the Japanese secret police, might be holding a gun to her head or had taken them away. "This is Cynthia," Nancy said, "I would like to speak to the doctor. I have a pain in my heart." Nancy could hear Mei Ling suck in her breath. It was their code that the Line was in trouble.

In a moment, Lu's deep baritone came on. He sounded concerned, but calm. "I think you should see a specialist on Haiphong Road." The street name meant that she should go to

their radio man and send a certain message. "Then," he said, "come directly to my clinic for a consultation." He paused for a heartbeat and added, "Don't delay. I believe you could have a serious condition."

"Thank you, Doctor. I will do as you say." He hung up, but Nancy didn't. She listened for any sign that the line was tapped. She heard nothing. Maybe, she thought, the group was alright and she was the only one under suspicion. How did it happen? Had she made a mistake? She couldn't think of anything.

As she walked along the crowded sidewalk toward the tram stop, she consoled herself with the thought that she had the organization to help her with money, a safe house, and even with a way out of the city. The Honor Line's primary mission was to smuggle downed American airmen out of Japanese territory. If it came to that, they could do the same for her.

\*

At Nanking Road she pushed her way onto a packed tram heading up town. Nancy hated the trams. Service had been cut back so they were always packed, bodies pressed together, and silent. The loud, cheery pre-war crowds had given way to leaden silence. Informers were everywhere. One had to be very careful in public. And there were men who used the crowded cars to touch young women. In the old days, before the Japanese came, it had been fun to dress—either Western style or in a *Cheomsam* split up the side—as stylishly or daringly as you cared to. Not now. Rapes by

Japanese soldiers meant eyes averted and dull, loose-fitting clothes to hide any hint of curves.

The ride this time was uneventful, just bodies packed together. She got off the tram at Ho Peh Road, and stood on the curb with a crowd waiting to cross the street. Suddenly a Japanese scout car with four men in army uniforms stopped in front of them. The grim-faced men studied the crowd. They were looking for someone. Was it me? Nancy kept her eyes down. The car was a Type 95 military car, she said to herself. It was called the Osaka. Without being obvious, she looked for unit markings, but saw none. That meant that they were *Kempeitai*.

After a few minutes the Japanese moved on, but the little incident had left Nancy shaken. I must do better, she said to herself.

Five minutes later she walked past number 17 Ho Peh Road, on the opposite side of the street, continuing a half block more before she crossed the street and walked back. She had always been extra careful coming here. Doctor Lu demanded it. Without the radio, he had said over and over, they were blind. Their contact with the Americans was at the Oriental Star Watch Repair shop, a tiny store sandwiched between the Sung Chong Canned Provision Company and the Jiao Wah Beauty Parlor.

When she stepped into the incredibly messy shop, she always smiled. Tung Chai, one pudgy cheek smudged with grease, flashed her a big grin and waved from a workbench. The bench and the shelves above it were full of clocks, some intact, others not, ancient phonographs, old table model radios—including an expensive Silvertone—and this time a

partially dismembered Franklin Portable sewing machine. She rarely came to the shop, but the stack of junk seemed to remain the same. How Tung Chai found anything was a mystery to her.

Tung looked past Nancy checking the front door. "So Miss Cynthia a rare visit to my humble shop?" Doctor Lu normally had her use a dead drop. They had several hiding places. She would "make a deposit," contact Tung, and he would retrieve the message. Incoming messages were passed in reverse.

It was hard for her not to like Tung and trust him. Even though he had never failed them, Doctor Lu worried about him. He was sure the little man was also involved in some criminal schemes. No one could stay that fat in the city, he reasoned, without something going on. Dealing with the black market was common place because it simply took a lot of money, more it seemed each day, to live. But what if it was something else? That was Lu's worry. Something serious that could attract the attention of the secret police.

Tung swung his chair away from his workbench and stepped to the small counter near the door. He carefully tapped out the foul smelling cigarette that always hung from the side of his mouth, and laid it on an ashtray. He was a very short, untidy, and chubby middle-aged man, who seemed happy even with all the problems of living in an occupied city.

Nancy motioned toward the steps at the back of the shop that led to his sleeping quarters on the second floor. "Anyone here?" Nancy whispered.



Tung shook his head. "Who would be here? Business is terrible. I'm waiting still to marry you."

"Soon," Nancy said, smiling despite it all. She asked him for paper and a pencil and wrote out the short message she had memorized.

"This has high priority," she said quietly. "When can it go?"

To his credit, Tung never asked about the messages she brought to him. He understood that was off limits. He glanced at his watch. "Not too long," he said. "This week my sending time is in an hour. Any message coming in is fifteen minutes later. I will send a signal if you get anything. You want some tea? I have some good Jasmine."

She shook her head and touched his hand. "Tung, I won't be coming to see you anymore. The *Kempeitai* is after me. I don't know how it happened, but I have to hide. I think it's only me. Maybe someone at the office. I don't know." She was talking too much, but it all was just spilling out and she couldn't seem to stop. "I called Doctor Lu to warn him. They are alright. I have to go. Be very careful."

"Always," he said. "You too. The end is in sight. A bad time to die, especially a young girl like you."

\*

On the sidewalk outside the shop, Nancy stood for a moment, glancing to the right as if she were unsure which way to go. A rickshaw man was only a few doors away, but he was leaning back in the leather seat, his eyes closed. Not interested in business for the moment, she thought. Anyway, Nancy decided it was best to walk for a bit before looking for

a rickshaw. Then she looked left and froze for an instant. A man named Deng, one of Doctor Lu's lieutenants, was walking down the street toward her.

"Hello," he said lighting up his face with a smile. "Fancy meeting like this." He tossed his cigarette into the street. "How are you?"

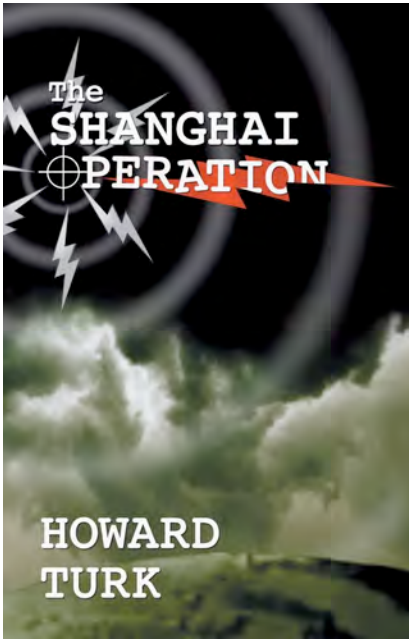
"I'm good," she lied.

"I am too, so far." He paused. "I know the old man doesn't like his troops to socialize, but I wondered if we could have coffee. Just talk. We're in an insane business and it would be wonderful to be able to really talk to someone who understands."

"That would be nice," she said. For an instant she considered it. Wanted to do it. No, Nancy thought, it was a bad idea. And she wasn't sure she trusted him—too handsome and smooth. Even if she hadn't had to get back to Lu's apartment. The doctor's idea of discipline—keeping his people separated as much as possible—had kept the Line alive and his people safe so far. And if it developed into more than coffee, it would really complicate their lives.

She smiled at him. "Thank you. But I have so many things to do. Another time, perhaps. When life is calmer."

He smiled back sadly. "Of course. I understand." Deng pulled out a pack of cigarettes. When she declined, he lit one up, cupping the lighter's flame against the light wind. "Work, work, work," he said snapping the lighter closed. "Perhaps it will be over soon. Then who knows."



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