Olive Yang, aged 28-29[1]

Olive Yang (b. Yang Kyin Hsiu) was born in Kokang, a semi-autonomous territory in the Shan States of British Burma, on 24 June, 1927, making them twenty-one years of age at the setting of this book. Kokang is a roughly Luxembourg-sized semi-autonomous territory in what today is Burma's Shan State, itself representing about a quarter of Burma's territory, and mostly home to the Shan people, though there are many minorities, including the Lahu, Wa, and Kokang Chinese, among others. Kokang is sandwiched between the Salween River to the west, Yunnan province in China to the east, with another semi-autonomous region, Wa State, to the south. The region is mostly occupied by Han Chinese,[2] is heavily mountainous, and alkaline soils prevent the growing of most crops, except opium, which flourishes.[3] Olive's father was the local chief controlling Kokang. Born the second daughter of the ruler, they would have grown up in relative privilege.[4]

At the age of six, Olive was subjected to the Chinese practice of foot-binding, something which was banned in China, though still practised in remote, provincial areas. Olive had seen their older sister suffer the procedure, which requires the breaking of bones in the feet and tight binding to remould their shape. Women who've undergone this find it hard to walk, and Olive is said to have rebuffed the idea, needing their feet to ride. They fought, and untied the bindings at every available chance. Eventually their parents relented and didn't force the issue, though Olive's feet never fully healed and remained deformed for the rest of their life. Olive's younger sisters were not subjected to the practice.

At the age of ten, Olive attended the Catholic Guardian Angel's Convent School in Lashio, the largest city in Shan State, about two hundred kilometres south of Kokang's capital of Laukkai. The nuns gave all pupils a Catholic name; the ruler's second daughter was named for Sicilian noblewoman Santa Oliva di Palermo (448-463), and thus Kyin Hsiu became Olive.

Olive was rebellious and restless. Told to make friends with the girls, they never quite fit in. They smoked, wore pants, and had short hair. Teased by the other girls, they brought a pistol

1 Yang family private collection, dated 1956. Paluch, pp 121. Photo enhanced.
2 Paluch, pp 18.
3 Winn, pps 26-27.
4 Paluch, pp 33.

to school to command respect, which got them an immediate expulsion, and Olive was forced to finish their schooling in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan.[5]

Jean was the daughter of a Scottish missionary, living in Kunming, Yunnan, and working at a the bank branch which housed the Yang family wealth. Olive and Jean first met in 1944, and Olive fell head over heels in love. So too did their brother Jimmy, who met Jean some time later, and invited her to visit Kokang.[6] During the stay, the Civil War flared up and Jean's mother sent word they needed to return to Scotland. At this point, Jimmy proposed marriage, breaking Olive's heart in the process.[7] It is unclear if Olive and Jean were ever actually romantically engaged, or if this was merely an infatuation on Olive's part.

In 1947, Olive was wed in an arranged marriage to Duan Chaowen, from the prominent Duan family east of the Salween River,[8] a prospect they refused to go along with until bought off with a couple of guns from their mother as a bribe. By custom, the marriage contract obliged Olive to produce an heir for Chaowen, and the marriage could not be broken lest the Yangs be forced to pay back the dowry ninefold. A loophole, however, allowed the marriage to be annulled after five years if no children were forthcoming. Olive was revolted at the thought of pregnancy, motherhood, and carnality with Chaowen, so they resisted fiercely, coming up with a plethora of excuses to avoid consummation, and even threatening their husband with violence, including brandishing their new guns.[9] However, the Duan family plotted to bring Olive in line, and, with a conspiracy amongst his family, Chaowen maritally raped Olive in 1949.

That same year, Olive's father died, and their eldest brother Edward succeeded him.[10] Banditry had increased in Kokang, and Edward and Jimmy began to organize a militia to restore law and order.

Also in 1949, the Chinese Civil War came to an end. Most of the Republican forces fled, alongside Chiang Kai-shek, to Taiwan, however, a sizable force, pinned down in Yunnan, fled over the border into northern Burma and Thailand. Indeed, the Yunnanese county bordering Kokang was one of the last Republican holdouts to fall to the communists.[11] These forces, under the overall command of Lieutenant-General Li Mi,[12] were officially known as the Yunnan Province Anti-Communist National Salvation Army, or, alternately became known as Chinese Irregular Forces, Exiles, the Secret Army, or the KMT in Burma. They numbered approximately 5,400, the bulk fleeing into northern Laos, while 1,500 crossed into Upper Burma.[13] A portion of this army, numbering only five hundred, led by twenty-three-year-old[14] General Li Wenhuan, advised Edward on the communist threat, and Edward allowed these refugees to stay.[15] More stragglers would trickle across the border in the coming years, which were

5 Ibid., pps 40-43.
6 Ibid., pp 61.
7 Ibid., pp 63.
8 Ibid., pp 62.
9 Ibid., pps 65-66.
10 Ibid., pps 69-70.
11 Ibid, pp 71.
12 Gibson, pp 24.
13 Ibid., pp 1.
14 Ibid., pp 65.
15 Paluch, pp 71.

absorbed into the Secret Army.[16] Alliances were also made with local insurgents, including ethnic Wa and Karen rebels, who have been in rebellion against, or had a rocky relationship with Rangoon for decades.

With the combination of their father's death, a pregnancy that resulted from the rape, and the chaotic militia situation, Olive stole away under cover of night, fleeing the Duan family, and declaring themself divorced. They got away with the assistance of a local mercenary by the name of Fat Huang, who wielded a mace and made a living for himself as a highway robber. Huang had once been recruited by Olive's father in response to the recent banditry. Riding back into Kokang, they were ready to pledge their service to General Li Mi and resist cross-border raids trying to agitate for a communist revolution in Burma.[17]

Olive's only child, a son named Jeep (Sinicized as Jipu), named for the American vehicle which Olive had once bought off the black market in Kunming, and had confiscated by British consular officials, was born in 1950. Olive refused to breastfeed, and Jeep was soothed and mostly cared for by an attendant, Olive frequently absent from his life. When Olive reestablished themself in Kokang, following Jeep's birth, shoulder-length hair had been cut short, their breasts were bound, and they wore men's fatigues.

Olive and Fat Huang rode throughout Shan State seeking recruits. They were recruiting mostly bandits. Olive formed part of a sort of tripartite with Fat Huang and someone known only as the Ponytailed Bandit, because he had a long ponytail that went to his waist, allegedly to protect him from evil spirits. He controlled about forty men, and the three of them joined forces together.[18]

Edward relocated to the Lashio, Shan State, to take up a position on a council designed to represent Shan ethnic leaders.[19] Jimmy had been selected as MP and relocated to Rangoon.[20] Olive, diving headlong into the anti-communist resistance, began recruiting anyone they could find.[21] With promises of American guns, they guaranteed Secret Army leaders they could provide men.[22] This evolved into the Kokang *Ka-kwe-ye* (KKY), or Local Defence Force, an irregular militia force[23] comprised mostly of bandits and rebels.[24] With Edward away, Kokang was left in the hands of his deputies, which allowed headstrong Olive to dominate and intimidate, essentially usurping control for themself and their band of brigands.[25]

Just across the border in China, loud speakers blasted communist slogans. Meanwhile, China was short on supplies. A lucrative black market sprung up, smuggling contraband into Yunnan, and tidbits of information out. Olive infiltrated many times, gathering intelligence and relaying secret messages to KMT loyalists. They also messed with the communists, smuggling soap laced with itching powder, or pea flour cut with laxatives.[26]

16 Ibid., pp 89.
17 Ibid., pps 71-72.
18 Ibid., pps 88-90.
19 Ibid., pps 62-63.
20 Yawnghwe, pp 229.
21 Paluch, pp 72.
22 Ibid., pp 90.
23 Yawnghwe, pp 119.
24 Ibid., pp 90.
25 Paluch, pps 122-123,
26 Ibid., pp 125.

Li Mi, confirmed by Chiang Kai-shek as governor-in-exile of Yunnan, devised multiple invasion attempts to retake the province. However, Chiang did not approve the funding he'd requested, some $250,000. He would need to fund these attempts privately.[27]

Back in 1937, Major Claire Lee Chennault retired from the US Army Air Corps, and took an aeronautical contract position under Chiang Kai-shek. With the onset of World War 2, he found himself as General Chiang's chief air adviser. The Chinese Air Force found itself lacking in aircraft and qualified pilots, so, on Chiang's prompting, Chennault made a deal in the United States to supply both aircraft and a volunteer fighting force. This became the so-called Flying Tigers, which ran aerial bombardment runs over Burma and southern China.

The fictionalized Chennault I reference herein has been gender-swapped.

On paper, Chennault owned an aerial freight company. After the war, and after the Chinese Civil War, this company, registered in Taiwan, was co-owned by the CIA, and used as a front to smuggle weapons to Li Mi's Secret Army.[28] North Korea had steamrolled into the South on 25 June, 1950, and China had sent 'volunteers' to counter UN forces in October. The CIA had a vested interest in opening a second front in southern Yunnan, and saw the Secret Army as their chance. Li Mi, with approval from Chiang, and armed by the CIA in a plot codenamed Operation Paper,[29] staged three separate invasions of Yunnan in the early '50s, paying for the weapons with the only resource northern Burma and Thailand had: opium.

In addition to Fat Huang, Olive had other lieutenants, among them Lo Hsing Han, who followed them around like a lapdog and supplied them with cigarettes on demand. Lo Hsing Han was a Kokangese whose father served with the Secret Army. On paper, brigands like Lo, Fat Huang and the Ponytailed Bandit were meant to be KKY deputies—Edward's sworn men—but everyone knew they were Olive's henchmen, and thus the group came to be known colloquially as Olive's Boys.[30] Fat Huang, Lo Hsing Han, and other KKY militiamen would ride throughout the countryside, collecting taxes in the form of opium, or food and livestock if farmers were unable to meet the quotas.[31]

Mule carts were loaded up in Kokang and marched the arduous route to the Secret Army headquarters in Mong Hsat, Shan State, and delivered to General Li Wenhuan. One such shipment consisted of four hundred and sixty-three mules and three hundred men. The Yang family seal allowed it to pass through any checkpoints without scrutiny. Li Wenhuan, who prized Kokangese opium for its quality, had his own porters then ferry it into Thailand, where a Taiwanese intelligence officer by the name of Mr. Ho had it shipped by air to Bangkok, including using Flying Tiger airmen, the return flight bringing CIA weapons.[32] By the middle 1950s, Burmese opium production had increased as much as twentyfold, to an estimated three hundred to six hundred tons.[33]

The first of Li Mi's invasions, despite a military-style parade held in Mong Hsat (which Olive may—though likely did not—attend), was not intended by Li Mi to be a *reconquista*, but rather

27 Gibson, pp 33.
28 Ibid., pp 51.
29 Ibid., pp 60.
30 Paluch, pp 117.
31 Ibid., pp 120.
32 Ibid., pp 123.
33 Lintner, Opium Trade, pp 8.

a show of commitment to get the guns from the CIA. When Olive learned of this, they were apoplectic with rage. In one apocryphal tale, they mounted up that night and rode eighty kilometres straight into Thailand, where they seduced Li's wife with flattery and a cowrie shell comb.[34]

In late 1952, Olive was detained by border security, and transferred to Obo Prison in Mandalay. Rangoon, antagonistic towards the Secret Army squatting on Burmese land, had intercepted a letter, signed by Li Wenhuan and a Wa insurgent, as receipt of a weapons shipment by the CIA, which was linked to Olive. A counterinsurgency by the Burmese Army commenced, aided by Edward, who was trying to reestablish his authority in Kokang. Lo Hsing Han set a strategic fire along the Salween River, and Olive's Boys, along with a thousand of Li's men, fled down towards Savage Mountain in Wa State, clashing with Chinese communist insurgents along the way. Kokang returned to Edward's control, and he and Jimmy submitted a report to parliament about the Secret Army invasion of Burma, which brought to light details on Olive's collusion. Burma took this report and submitted it to the United Nations Security Council, raising complaints about the continued KMT presence in their hinterlands. The UN adopted a resolution condemning the KMT in Burma. Though many in the Secret Army were named, Olive was the only Burmese citizen singled out in the report.[35] The US washed its hands of the whole mess, and four-party talks between the US, ROC, Thailand and Burma arranged for Secret Army repatriation to Taiwan in 1953, including the recall of General Li Mi. Around 6,000 troops, however, stayed behind of their own volition, scattered and disorganized,[36] among them General Li Wenhuan. By now, Li Wenhuan had set up his own fief in Chiang Mai province, controlling the narrow defiles leading through the mountains on the border, giving him an absolute monopoly on opium coming from the unpoliceable, poppy-rich regions of Upper Burma and the gateway to rich, western markets via Thailand.[37] Lo Hsing Han and other smugglers continued to supply Li Wenhuan as Olive served their time in Obo.

Burma would continue to wage offensives against these stateless bandits running opium and consorting with their ethnic rebels, coming to a head in 1961, when the Burmese army shot down a plane resupplying the remnants of the Secret Army, operating under KMT orders from Taipei, and supplying American-made weapons. This sparked a diplomatic incident, and Washington put immense pressure on Taipei for a second repatriation, which occurred between March and April that year. Li Wenhuan retained a small corps of troops, numbering in the hundreds and scattered across Burma, Thailand and Laos, which now gave up all pretences of Yunnanese liberation and stuck to trafficking opium.[38]

Olive served a year and a half in Obo Prison. According to their sister, Olive was in heaven, surrounded by beautiful women. Olive seduced the warden, a woman named Daw Htay Htay, described as fat, plain, and partially blind, and requested a gift, which the warden dutifully smuggled in: a strap-on dildo (described as an artificial penis on a belt, made of teak). Daw Htay Htay was the first women who ever loved Olive, the two moved in together, in a

34 Paluch, pp 95.
35 Ibid., pps 132-135.
36 McCoy, pp 174.
37 Winn, pp 70.
38 Gibson, pps 205-209.

Mandalay house Olive owned, after their release.[39]

In 1957, retired British judge Gerald Sparrow, who served on the International Court in Bangkok (overseeing cases involving non-Thais) from 1930 into the '50s, published the book *Opium Venture*, a *roman à clef* featuring himself being reassigned to Chiang Mai, and accepting an invitation to the court of a beautiful and sensuous Burmese opium kingpin, who he calls the Salem Princess. He set the story in 1931 (Olive would have been four years old), and said in a foreword that the story is as true to the facts of his actual experience as British libel laws would allow. He also claimed the Salem Princess took two husbands, had a daughter, and had died as of the writing of the book.[40] Despite what he wrote in his foreword, Sparrow never, in fact, met any sensuous opium princess. Rather, he was told these salacious stories, some twenty years after the setting of the book, by Mr. Ho, who was brokering opium shipments between Li Wenhuan and Bangkok, operating on both sides of Thai law, and tied in with the criminal underworld and the CIA.[41] Nowhere in the book is Olive's name mentioned, yet the association stuck, and Olive's family and network were well aware of Sparrow's book.[42]

Kokang and neighbouring Wa State were still a quagmire. The CIA had selected sites along the Chinese border to set up radio antennae to intercept radio chatter.[43] Olive's boys continued running opium to Li Wenhuan in the rugged mountains of Chiang Mai province. Communist subversives got into clashes with locals, and, in 1955, a group of Wa tribal leaders pledged their allegiance to China, allowing in Chinese troops to build roads.[44]

Olive went back and forth between Kokang and Rangoon, cutting through red tape to get travel permits. On one trip, they delivered Kokang's first movie projector, including a bunch of anti-communist films created by the CIA's psychological warfare department. This is where a local student got the nickname Gregory Peck—watching the 1954 Peck film *Purple Plain* on a CIA movie projector. Peck would go on to become one of Edward's generals. I have depicted him here as being older, and receiving the name from an earlier Peck film. Olive ran cabaret shows in various Rangoon gambling dens. At a newly-built middle school for girls in Kokang, they organized leafleting campaigns with the students to spread awareness about girls' education and enrol more students, allegedly with the ulterior motive to recruit new girlfriends.[45]

They romantically pursued another 'warlady', Louisa Benson, a Jewish-Karen woman, later to be a player in with the Karen Insurgency, but, at the time, was a few years off from armed insurrection. In 1959, eighteen-year-old Benson was crowned Miss Burma in the country's first nationwide beauty contest. Despite the fact that popular histories sometimes link them romantically, there's no indication any intimate relationship actually took place. Rather, it was Olive's brother Kenneth who stole Louisa's affections. Spurned by Louisa, Olive flew into a rage, threatening Kenneth with a pistol and demanding he come out from cowering behind a table to face them "like a man". Their sister-in-law Jean, empathetic towards Olive, consoled

39 Paluch, pps 136-138.
40 Sparrow, "A Note to the Reader".
41 Paluch, pps 159-162.
42 Ibid., pps 143-144.
43 Winn, pps 73-74.
44 Paluch, pp 153.
45 Ibid., pp 165.

them and made introductions to another contestant in that beauty competition, who Jean felt would be a better match, this being future A-list actress Wah Wah Win Shwe, then aged fifteen (Olive, at this point, was thirty-two). Wah Wah does not make an appearance in this book; any appearances in future instalments will see her aged up appropriately.

Some months later, Wah Wah was offered a part in the film *Mind* (1960), allegedly because Olive had threatened the director into giving Wah Wah the part. Olive then took on the role of driver, ferrying the young celebrity to and from set in a yellow Chevrolet.[46]

General Ne Win, chief of the Burmese military, seized power in a coup in 1962, sparking a period of military rule, punctuated by a brief interregnum of democracy, which continues unto modern day. He quickly began crackdowns of rival power sources. This included members of parliament, among their number Jimmy Yang, MP for Kokang, who was harassed by the police.[47] Jimmy later returned to Kokang and attempted to organize a resistance force, though, after defections, was forced to flee to General Li's camp in Thailand using his network of smugglers.[48]

Ne Win also went after Olive. As one legend goes, Ne Win was infatuated with the beautiful Wah Wah Win Shwe, who declined his advances. Ne Win, believing he was in competition with warlady and gangster Olive, had them arrested and disappeared into Insein Prison in Rangoon, the most notorious prison in the country. The general was probably more concerned with Olive's ties to the Kokang KKY, and the still-powerful remnants of the KMT, and the fact that Olive had secreted away their brother Jimmy to Kokang, where he was then organizing a rebellion.

In any event, Olive had made arrangements for this eventuality. Protecting their assets, they planned first to marry Wah Wah, ensuring Olive's Rangoon house was jointly owned. When told same-sex marriage was against the law, Olive replied that the law had never stopped them before, but had to give in to practicality and settle for merely signing the house over to Wah Wah.[49]

Wah Wah Win Shwe denies to this day any relationship ever happened with Olive Yang, and, in fact, made this claim from the very property Olive had signed over to her, which Wah Wah still owns, never having returned it after Olive's release from Insein.[50]

Insein Prison is the most notorious and brutal penal institution in Burma, infamous throughout the world for its human rights violations, overcrowding, and corruption. Built by the British in the 1880s to be a perfect panopticon, the facility is now the primary correctional institution for Rangoon,[51] and has been the site of several inmate hunger strikes,[52] a bombing,[53] and mass shootings of prisoners.[54] Inmates report being denied medical

46 Ibid., pps 164-165.
47 Ibid., pp 188.
48 Ibid., pps 190-192.
49 Ibid., pps 188-189.
50 Ibid., pps 139-142.
51 Snow, *Frontier Myanmar.*
52 KHRG.
53 Han Thit, *Myanmar Now.*
54 Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2008, pp 34.

treatment, beaten, and having dogs sicced on them.[55] Aung San Suu Kyi was confined there during periods of arrest in the 2000s.[56]

Olive was confined here for five years from 1963-68,[57] and this was not the relatively lax sentence they served in Mandalay. They were put in solitary confinement for a period of time, then dragged out into the prison yard and brutally and repeatedly raped by a guard, allegedly a direct order from Ne Win, for other inmates to witness. The guard berated Olive repeatedly, belittling them as not a 'real man', and that the rapes were what 'real men' do.

Ne Win cracked down on ethnic conflicts in Shan State with precision. Edward was arrested in Lashio, as were several other Yangs. Lo Hsing Han was snatched up by border agents trying to smuggle an opium shipment to Li Wenhuan. Lo made a deal with the Ne Win regime, however, trading information on the communists to have a blind eye turned to his drug empire, and he continued running opium to Li Wenhuan.[58] Jimmy and another brother, and a couple of Wa rebel leaders, successfully escaped to Thailand, and formed a Shan resistance force, coordinating with the KMT, including flying out to Taipei and meeting with elements of Chiang Kai-shek's inner circle. Various other anti-state actors were active at this time, including various communist factions under the banner of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). Francis Yang, the younger brother who escaped with Jimmy, mounted an invasion of Shan State in 1967, yet was defeated and surrendered. Francis' successor appealed to CPB, who entrenched themselves in Burma's north.[59]

By the time Olive was released in 1968, Lo Hsing Han had completely usurped control of the trafficking network. The Yangs had no more power basis in the region, and the Kokang KKY was little more than an overt cartel. Jimmy was in exile, now reduced to managing a Chiang Mai hotel,[60] Francis had defected to Rangoon, Edward passed away in 1971.

The US had declared the War on Drugs, and Lo Hsing Han was identified as one of the key participants, known to the media as 'the Godfather of Heroin'. International pressure was mounting on the drug problem, and, in 1973, Rangoon began dismantling the KKY program, causing Lo to try and turncoat once more to the Shan rebels. No sooner had an agreement been made, however, than he was arrested by Thai police and extradited to Burma (despite the fact that the two countries has no extradition treaty), where he was facing a death sentence. His arrest fractured the Shan rebel movement, weakening the non-communist factions and allowing the CPB to become dominant.

According to Francis, a deal had been struck: Lo sold everyone out, freely submitted to arrest because he was being protected by the CIA, and had his sentence commuted to seven years after testifying in Rangoon. The entire trafficking network was exposed. The Yangs became *persona non grata*, the family name besmirched by the taint of opium trafficking. Olive, living with Jean and Francis is Rangoon, was arrested once more and spent several months in prison.[61]

55 KHRG.
56 BBC.
57 Paluch, *New York Times*.
58 Paluch, pp 190.
59 Ibid., pp 192.
60 Yawnghwe, pp 229.
61 Paluch, pps 193-195.

By 1970, the CPB, aided by their Chinese purse-holders, controlled large swaths of Kokang and Wa State, along with parts of Shan and Kachin States, and engaged in multiple clashes with the Burmese army. After Mao's death in 1976, Beijing began dialling back the revolutionary zeal, and encouraged their client parties to become more self-reliant. The CPB only became more insular and more radical, launching new offensives, and new campaigns for party discipline. At the same time, as pay cheques from Beijing got lighter, the BCP also began moving away from heroin production, heavily criminalizing it, despite the fact that they controlled eighty percent of Burma's opium fields. Moreover, a rat infestation destroyed much of the wheat harvest, their economy took a downturn, and, in 1989, it came to a head with fractions of the armed forces mutinying, the top cadres fleeing into exile in China.[62]

Rangoon acted swiftly in the face of this mutiny: Olive and Lo, having set aside old hostilities, were sent in as mediators with the new power players. The deal proposed was a facsimile of the old KKY model—peace with Rangoon, and semi-autonomy, with a blind eye to opium cultivation. Olive was also instrumental in these talks, and praised as a Kokang national hero, a kind of elder statesman who shepherded the deal.[63]

Olive Yang died on 12 July, 2017, in the border city of Muse, Shan State, in the home of their stepson, of the Duan clan. They were ninety years old.[64]

Neither Mandarin (the majority language in Kokang) nor Burmese have gendered third-person pronouns, although Burmese first-person pronouns can be different if the speaker is male or female. A grandniece said Olive would use male pronouns and requested to be referred to using the honourific 'uncle', and said, "I guess you could say she was trans, but we didn't really talk about it."[65] Francis, who had denounced Olive for dishonouring the family after Lo Hsing Han's tying of the family name to drug trafficking, made amends later in life, and told Olive he'd gladly call them 'brother'.[66] He also said that Olive never accepted strictures on account of gender, that Olive was a playboy, and that they were, in comparison to the Yang brothers, "a better man than us."[67]

62 Lintner, CPB, pps 39-40.
63 Paluch, pp 197.
64 Ibid., pp 198-199.
65 Ibid., pp 57.
66 Ibid., pp 111.
67 Ibid., pp 109.

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