YET MORE THOUGHTS ON HAN SUYIN’S
A MANY SPLENDOURED THING:
A TRIBUTE TO IAN MORRISON

PETER HALLIDAY

[From the author: This Note is a sequel to that which appeared in Vol. 40, pp. 255-266. It now appears that there is a significant error in the earlier Note. My original research indicated that Mr. Morrison and Ms. Han used to meet at a pavilion behind the former site of the Foreign Correspondents’ Club at 41A, Conduit Road. This does not now appear to be the case, one reason being that the FCC did not move to this location until 1951, a year after Mr. Morrison’s death. Their favourite meeting place appears to have been as in the book; at ‘Lovers Lane’ (Conduit Path), behind Queen Mary Hospital. The confusion seems to have arisen from the fact that parts of the motion picture Love is a Many Splendored Thing were filmed at the FCC and on the steps leading up to the pavilion.

Other corrigenda are as follows:

- Ms. Han’s first husband was Tang Pao Huang
- Ms. Han was principally employed in the Casualty Department of Queen Mary Hospital and was not a paediatrician
- Ms. Han met Mr. Ruthnaswamy in Nepal in 1956
• Ms. Han did not practice medicine in China in the 1950s or at any other time
• Ms. Leon Comber was a superintendent (not assistant superintendent) with the Malayan police, and acted as assistant commissioner

On the morning of Sunday, 25 June, 1950, communist forces from North Korea crossed the border into South Korea. The next day, on 26 June, President Harry S. Truman ordered American air and naval forces to go to the assistance of South Korea, and Clement Attlee in the House of Commons expressed support for Mr. Truman’s actions.

On 27 June, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution recommending that all members of the UN ‘furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to meet the armed attack.’ The Korean War had begun.

The unexpected outbreak of the Korean War took all newspapers by surprise but The Times had Ian Ernest McLeavy Morrison, a member of its staff, in the Far East at that time. By August of that year he would be dead.

Born in Beijing on 31 May 1913, he was the son of the famous Australian journalist, Dr. George Ernest Morrison (4 February 1862 - 29 May 1920) and a New Zealander Jennie Wark Robin (1889 - 20 June 1923), Dr. Morrison’s former secretary who he had married in 1912. Dr. Morrison was known as “China Morrison” and was himself a correspondent for The Times during 1897-1912 and later political adviser to the Chinese Government.

His brother, Alastair Gwynne Morrison was born on 24 August 1915. He ultimately joined the Diplomatic
Service and was posted to the British Consulate in Beijing. He was interned by the Japanese during World War II but was then exchanged for Japanese diplomatic staff and made his way to India. He spent the War serving in various capacities with the Indian Army. In 1940, he met the German photographer Hedda Hammer and they married in Beijing in 1946. Due to the increasing instability of the political situation in China, they left Beijing soon after. The Morrisons spent six months in Hong Kong before relocating to Sarawak, in the north-west of the island of Borneo, where Alastair was appointed to the British Colonial Service and later became a district officer. Throughout her 20-year residence in Sarawak, Hedda accompanied Alastair on all his official journeys and made numerous independent photographic tours. From 1960 to 1966 Hedda was employed by the Sarawak government to work part-time in the photographic section of the Information Office in Kuching. Her duties included taking photographs, establishing a photographic library and training government photographers. Hedda wrote two major books on Sarawak, *Sarawak* (1957) and *Life in a Longhouse* (1962).


Mr. Morrison's other brother, Colin Morrison was born in April 1917. He joined the Administrative Service in Hong Kong and was also a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, which held out valiently for 17 days against the Japanese in December 1941. He was interned by the Japanese at the Shamshuipo camp for the
Ian Morrison was educated at Winchester and Trinity College, Cambridge. He then became Professor of English at the Hokkaido Imperial University in Sapporo, Japan, where he remained until 1937. An interest in diplomacy and politics led him to accepting the position of private secretary to Sir Robert Craigie, then British Ambassador in Tokyo, a position he held from 1937 until 1939. Eager to further his knowledge of Asian affairs, he then became representative of the British and Chinese Corporation in Shanghai until October 1941. This was followed by a short stint as deputy director of the Far Eastern Bureau of the Ministry of Information in Singapore.

In December 1941, two days after the Japanese launched their attack on Pearl Harbor and began their conquest of the countries in the area, Mr. Morrison was appointed a war
correspondent for *The Times* in southeast Asia, having previously supplied articles to the paper on a freelance basis. One of the last to escape the invading Japanese, he reported the retreat along the Malay Peninsula and the last stand and surrender of the British garrison in Singapore on 15 February, 1942.

After Singapore, Mr. Morrison went to Java before following the campaigns in the South West Pacific under General MacArthur, and later in Southeast Asia under Admiral Mountbatten.

Mr. Morrison was a courageous correspondent who never thought twice about entering a dangerous situation to get a good story. During the Second World War he spent a lot of time reporting from the front and shared the soldiers' life in the jungle. He regularly hitch-hiked on Australian or American army transport planes in order to follow the action and provide authentic accounts of the fighting with the Japanese. He often came close to death. In late November 1942 he was slightly injured during an air raid on the Buna front in Papua, and in December 1943 he was involved in a plane crash which resulted in head wounds and fractured vertebrae. This is how he telegraphed the paper:

‘Regret involved in airplane accident enroute obtain eyewitness operational full stop hospitalised injuries seriouser than yestertime hope recover soon Dickson Brown newschronicler kindly consented cover next three days thereafter Curthoys sorry disappoint you good story – Morrison’

His injuries on that occasion kept him out of action until July 1944, when he returned to cover the South East Area Command. He was not out of trouble for long. On 10 December 1945, while reporting from Batavia (now Jakarta) covering a local campaign he was again wounded and cabled the paper:

‘Left hospital today. Thumb, in which fragments of Dutch bullet are lodged, will take at least a fortnight to

*Ian Morrison and family, circa 1930*
heal up, but hope to resume filing about Thursday. Another bullet grazed side without doing any damage.1

After the Second World War he spent some months in India reporting the growing agitation for independence and spent six months travelling in China in 1948, reporting the progress of the Chinese civil war for The Times. In between specific assignments he was stationed in Singapore, where he lived with his Czech wife, Maria, and their two children.

On Thursday, 29 June 1950, a few days after the outbreak of the war in Korea, Mr. Morrison was telegraphed by The Times and asked if he would be willing to cover the war for the paper. He never hesitated. He flew to Hong Kong on Sunday 2 July and spent the night with Han Suyin. The following day he bade farewell to Han Suyin and flew to Tokyo, and thence to Korea. Han Suyin never saw him again. His first report was published in the paper on July 10. On Saturday, August 12 he was killed, along with Colonel M. K. Unni Nayar, and Christopher Buckley.
Nayar had been a journalist on the *The Statesman Calcutta* before the outbreak of the Second World War. He was appointed a temporary delegate to the United Nations Commission in Korea, replacing another Indian member who was ill, and was in Korea only a few weeks before he was killed. Buckley was 47 and married with no children. He had begun life as a schoolmaster and then turned to freelance journalism. He had joined *The Daily Telegraph* shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War.

*The Times* was informed of Mr. Morrison’s death on the same day by Reuters agency, and on August 15 the British Legation in Korea provided a more detailed account of the events leading up to the tragedy:

‘I have the honour to report on the tragic accident on the 12th August, which led to the deaths of Colonel M. K. Unni Nayar, the Indian delegate on the United Nations Commission on Korea, and the two British War Correspondents, Mr. Christopher Buckley, of the Daily Telegraph and Mr. Morrison of the “Times”, in so far as the facts are known to me. A South Korean engineer officer also met his death at the same time.’

‘At about 2.30 p.m., I saw Colonel Nayar off from my house in one of the United Nations Commission’s Jeeps. He said that he was going up to the Republican First Division Sector in the Waegwan area. At that time, he was alone. He must have proceeded to the Press billets to pick up the two correspondents.’ I understand that a North Korean tank was lying knocked out in front of the South Korean line and it is surmised that the party were going forward to
inspect it, when the Jeep struck the fatal mine. The South Korean Forces were withdrawing at the time in conformity with a general shortening of the front. There were no witnesses of the accident, which is presumed to have occurred between 4.30 and 5.00 p.m.‘

Waegwan area, photo taken 7 August 1950

‘I first heard of the tragic affair at approximately 6.30 p.m., or soon after it was discovered, when I was told that Colonel Nayar and one war correspondent had been killed and a second correspondent seriously wounded. It was not until about 8 p.m. that I could definitely establish the identity of the two correspondents, whereupon I immediately got into touch with His Majesty’s Embassy in Tokyo by telephone. Colonel Nayar and Mr. Morrison must have been killed instantaneously. Mr. Buckley was brought to the Arms Hospital at Taegu at 8 p.m., at which time he was unconscious. He died five minutes later. The doctors think that he could never have regained consciousness from the time of the accident and, indeed, I have confirmation from the stretcher bearer to that effect. During the interval, the injured man and the two bodies were at a forward clearance station or in the ambulances.’

‘I made arrangements for the funeral of the two British subjects at 6 p.m. the following day. I asked the Chief of Staff, United States Eighth Army, to provide simple military honours, which he was most ready to do. The burial took place at 6 p.m. in the private cemetery of the American Presbyterian Mission in Taegu.

Ian Morrison’s burial service, 13 August, 1950
in whose compound His Majesty's Legation and the United States Embassy are situated. An American guard of honour fired a salute and the Last Post was sounded. Members of the press corps acted as pall-bearers.'

Mr. Morrison's last report for the paper was published on the same day as his death on 12 August 1950. He was 37 when he was killed.

The Freedom Forum Journalists Memorial lists Mr. Morrison thus:

IAN MORRISON
News Organization: THE TIMES
Killed 1950
Location: South Korea
Bio:
Killed Aug. 12 when a land mine blew up under his jeep. He was his newspaper's chief correspondent for southwest Asia. During World War II he covered the Pacific, surviving two plane crashes. At various times he suffered from dengue fever, tropical ulcers, amoebic dysentery and malaria. He was also wounded twice covering combat action, in 1943 and 1945. Morrison was 37.
In researching the original *Note*, I came to a profound admiration for Ian Morrison. His newspaper reporting was erudite and he demonstrated a perceptive understanding of the issues involved. His two books; *Malayan Postscript* (1942) and *This War Against Japan* (1943) were equally perceptive. By all accounts the picture that Han Suyin painted of him in *A Many Splendoured Thing*; as being a gentle, kind and understanding man, is borne out by the facts. Alastair describes him as ‘...a cultivated and gentle man and no swashbuckler but (he) had an insatiable curiosity about events in Asia.' Accordingly, I offer this tribute to his memory. R.I.P.

REFERENCES


Pearl, Cyril (1967). *Morrison of Peking*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson Ltd.

NOTES

1 http://www.fcechk.org/archives/archives_historyconduit.htm


3 Source: Alastair Morrison, personal communication and *The Road to Peking*, p. 151

4 All images, unless otherwise stated, courtesy of *The Times of London*.

5 Ian and Maria met in Shanghai and were married, in Hong Kong, in 1941. Maria was Steffi’s sister (Colin’s subsequent wife) They first home was at the Cathay Building, in Singapore. After the War, they returned to Singapore and lived in Gallop Road. According to Alastair, the marriage was not a happy one (*The Road to Peking*, p. 151). After her husband’s death, Mrs. Morrison and the children (who were seven and five at the time of his death) appear to have stayed on in Singapore, at any rate for a while, and then moved to Australia. According to Alastair Morrison, Maria ‘died long ago.’ The son, Nicholas (?), lives in the U.K. and visited Alastair in Canberra on his eighty seventh birthday.
in August 2002.

The North Koreans quickly crushed South Korean defences at the 38th parallel. The main North Korean attack force next moved down the west side of the peninsula toward Seoul, the South Korean capital, thirty-five miles below the parallel, and entered the city on June 28. Secondary thrusts down the peninsula’s centre and down the east coast kept pace with the main drive. The South Koreans withdrew in disorder; those troops driven out of Seoul forced to abandon most of their equipment because the bridges over the Han River at the south edge of the city were prematurely demolished. The North Koreans halted after capturing Seoul, but only briefly to regroup before crossing the Han.

When MacArthur received word to commit ground units, the main North Korean force had already crossed the Han River. By July 3, a westward enemy attack had captured a major airfield at Kimpo and the Yellow Sea port of Inch’on. Troops attacking south repaired a bridge so that tanks could cross the Han and moved into the town of Suwon, twenty-five miles below Seoul, on the 4th.

The speed of the North Korean drive coupled with the unreadiness of American forces compelled MacArthur to disregard the principle of mass and commit units piecemeal to trade space for time. Where to open a delaying action was clear, for there were few good roads in the profusion of mountains making up the Korean peninsula, and the best of these below Seoul, running on a gentle diagonal through Suwon, Osan, Taegon, and Taegu to the port of Pusan in the southeast, was the obvious main axis of North Korean advance. At MacArthur’s order, two rifle companies, an artillery battery, and a few other supporting units of the 24th Division moved into a defensive position astride the main road near Osan, ten miles below Suwon, by dawn on July 5.

Coming out of Suwon in a heavy rain, a North Korean division supported by thirty-three tanks reached and with barely a pause attacked the Americans around 8:00 a.m. on the 5th. The rain cancelled air support, communications broke down, and the task force was, under any circumstances, too small to prevent North Korean infantry from flowing around both its flanks. By mid-afternoon, the task force was pushed into a disorganised retreat with over 150 casualties and the loss of all equipment save small arms.

The next three delaying actions, though fought by larger forces, had similar results. In each case, North Korean armour or infantry assaults against the front of the American position were accompanied by an infantry double envelopment.
By July 15, the 24th Division was forced back on Taejon, sixty miles below Osan, where it initially took position along the Kum River above the town. Clumps of South Korean troops by then were strung out west and east of the division to help delay the North Koreans.

While pushing the 24th Division below Taejon, the main North Korean force split, one division moving south to the coast, then turning east along the lower coastline. The remainder of the force continued southeast beyond Taejon toward Taegu. Southward advances by the secondary attack forces in the central and eastern sectors matched the main thrust, all clearly aimed to converge on Pusan. North Korean supply lines grew long in the advance, and less and less tenable under heavy United Nations Command (UNC) air attacks. The U.S. Far Eastern Air Force meanwhile achieved air superiority, indeed air supremacy, and UNC warships wiped out North Korean naval craft.

Alarmed by the rapid loss of ground, Walker ordered a stand along a 140-mile line arching from the Korea Strait to the Sea of Japan west and north of Pusan. His U.S. divisions occupied the western arc, basing their position on the Naktong River. South Korean forces, reorganized by American military advisers into two corps headquarters and five divisions, defended the northern segment. A long line and few troops kept positions thin in this "Pusan Perimeter." This line was, essentially, the front on August 12, the day that Mr. Morrison was killed.

Mr. Morrison's movements in Korea before his death are unknown. Seoul had fallen several days before his arrival, so he would have been forced to arrive in the south of the country, perhaps at Taegu. One assumes he spent the next five weeks, or so, behind the retreating UNC frontline.

7 'Morrison, a Daily Telegraph correspondent, and a great friend of mine, Uni Nair (sic), acting as a UN observer, were all killed together. I have always been convinced that Nair probably got them all into trouble. He was notably fearless. While with the Indian army in Italy during WW2, as a PR officer, he thoroughly enjoyed taking visitors into particularly dangerous sectors where their jeep attracted hostile fire. Towards the end of the war, in Burma, he volunteered without training to jump with paratroops in the drop on the outskirts of Rangoon.

'Nair was fond of palm reading. My own, that I would reach a ripe old age, turned out pretty true. But if we asked Uni what sort of future he read in his own palm he always said, after a pause, "A short life and a merry one."' (Russell Spurr – personal communication with the author)

http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/AMH/AMH-25.htm


'STRIX' in The Spectator on August 18, 1950, reported Morrison's death thus: 'Although he was only 37 when he was killed last Saturday, I think Ian Morrison was what is generally understood by a great man, and I am quite sure that he would have been remembered as one had he lived. It was not merely that he was an extremely enterprising and clear-headed correspondent with very mature political judgement. His character had a sort of translucent quality, so that behind his diffident manner and his boyish appearance people of all races recognised in him a man to be liked and trusted. He had an almost feminine blend of sympathy and intuition, yet he was tougher and more single minded in his purposes than colleagues who looked much more like thrusters. Everybody liked him, at all levels; he was becoming a legend in Eastern Asia, and no single individual did more in the last ten years for what remains of our prestige there. When I heard of his death I remembered that last year, near the borders of Tibet, I had been given a letter to deliver to him, but our arrangements for a rendezvous had failed, and I still had the letter somewhere. I found it in a drawer. It is a dull letter, from a little engineer called Hsu who wrote from the Sining Electrical Works, Tsinghai Province. It begins: 'Dear Mr. Morrison, I often think of you since you went away. I do not forget you at all...' People have long memories in Asia, and Ian Morrison will not quickly forfeit the place that he won in them. Christopher Buckley was a very good man, too.' [Hon. Ed.'s note: The use of the phrase 'little engineer' does much to explain the reason for the earlier '...what remains of our prestige there.']

Reproduced at Annex 1


The Road to Peking, p. 156.
Annex

Ian Morrison’s Last Dispatch

POHANG IN HANDS OF NORTH KOREANS

TOWN IN FLAMES

From Our Special Correspondent

8TH ARMY HEADQUARTERS, AUG. 11

A serious situation has developed at Pohang on the east coast. North Korean forces who for several days past were known to be working their way south through mountainous country inland from the coast, and who yesterday were reported at a point seven miles north-west of Pohang, attacked the town early this morning and are there threatening the airfield five miles to the south-east. Fires are burning in the town and it may become necessary to evacuate the airfield.

For several weeks past the South Korean forces based on Pohang have been fighting in and around Yongdok, a small town 25 miles north of Pohang. Their supply line has been the road which runs along the coast. The mountains to the west are some of the steepest in Korea, but they have not deterred the North Koreans from making the obvious outflanking movement. The exact strength of the North Korean force is not known. Three days ago it was reported as two regiments. Probably it consists of a nucleus of regular troops and several hundred guerrilla troops who have long been established in these mountains.

The allied command apparently minimized their threat, because it was only yesterday that reinforcements were hurriedly rushed to this coastal sector. These consisted of South Korean infantry and a small American task force equipped with light tanks. Exactly what happened is still obscure, but the American convoy was ambushed soon after midnight on the main road 15 miles south of Pohang and forced down until dawn. An attack was called for, which eventually drove off the North Koreans, believed to have been a small number of guerrilla troops, and permitted the convoy to continue after considerable delay.

Mustang were still using the airfield up to 5 o'clock this afternoon, and in some cases pilots were firing their guns only two or three minutes after taking off. The North Koreans had moved south of Yongdok, and pilots claimed to have destroyed two tanks, 10 vehicles, and two ammunition cars. Transport aircraft also were still flying into the airfield this evening and bringing out certain essentials such as ground equipment.

According to these arrivals North Korean mortar shells were landing in the general area of the airfield, but it was not under small arms fire. American gunners who have been supporting South Korean infantry in this coastal sector were shelling North Korean positions on the ridge about two miles north of the airfield between the airfield and the port. Large numbers of Korean civilians who had evacuated the town had gathered round the airfield, which is situated close to the shore of the bay, and two ships were standing by offshore in case evacuation should become necessary.

Lieutenant-General Walker, commander of the Eighth Army, and Major-General Partridge, commander of the Fifth Air Force, flew over the area this morning.
FAULTY INTELLIGENCE

Pohang is the only port on the east coast of Korea held by the allied forces capable of taking ships of any size. It was here that the 1st Cavalry Division disembarked with all its equipment early last month. More important than the port is the airfield known as K.3, the best natural airfield possessed by the allies in Korea. Mustangs based here have been giving constant support to ground troops in this coastal sector. Its loss would mean that aircraft henceforth would have to operate either from Taegu, 45 miles to the west, or from Pusan, 60 miles to the south.

This Pohang affair, even if the situation is restored once again, shows up the whole weakness of the allied position in Korea. Intelligence must have been gravely at fault to permit such a situation to develop. Held on the coastal road between Yongdok and Pohang, the North Koreans simply worked their way round the flanks as they have done on many other occasions in the campaign. Both strategically and tactically, the northern command, exploiting the terrain and their superior man-power, have shown considerable skill in avoiding a full-scale frontal battle where superior American fire-power would tell, and in concentrating on feeling out the weak point in the allies' flank and rear.

The Naktong River line, which is being held only with difficulty, guards the western flank of the allied bridgehead in Korea. Across the north there is no such natural barrier, only 50 miles of mountain ridges. Again one is obliged to wonder exactly how large a bridgehead the allies can expect to hold with the forces at their disposal.
OBJECTIVE REACHED

This evening the Eighth Army statement reports that the 35th Regiment of the American task force operating in the south has occupied the high ground east of Chinju, which was the objective of the limited counter-attack launched on Monday. There are reports that Chinju is being evacuated. The Marines have simultaneously occupied the town of Kosong, 17 miles south-west of Masan, against strong North Korean resistance. Pockets of bypassed North Koreans are still giving trouble and are being steadily cleaned up.

This is some of the most encouraging news of the campaign to date, and shows that where numbers are not too desperate the American troops are more than a match for their opponents. It has to be seen, however, in relation to the complete picture.

The statement also reports that the North Korean bridgehead just north of Waegwan, which, although resolutely attacked and reduced in size by the South Korean 1st Division, was never finally liquidated, is again being expanded. The North Koreans have again brought tanks into the bridgehead, which American pilots to-day attacked with unknown results. The pilots report that the North Koreans have built a causeway of sandbags across the river about 18in. under water (a favourite engineering practice of the Russians in the last war) which is difficult for aircraft to knock out.

In spite of continued American counter-attacking no progress has been made in reducing the North Korean bridgehead in the loop of the Nakdong about 30 miles south of Waegwan.

A delayed message from our Special Correspondent in Korea is on page 3.