

THE 36TH EAGLE

ONE MAN'S STAND AGAINST CHINA'S
INVASION OF AUSTRALIA

JEFF MULLER

CHAPTER 1

22 JUNE 2026

On the cold and rainy winter night, the four-lane highway leading past the village of Heatherbrae was deserted but for two old Toyota HiAce vans travelling close together. The three occupants of the leading vehicle were squeezed together on its sagging bench seat. For some time, the only sounds had been the swish of wet tyres, the drone of the tired engine, and the slap of worn-out windscreen wipers. Their faces were briefly picked out by street lighting as Weng Wei steered his once-white but now dirty grey van off the highway. The second nondescript van obediently followed.

The industrial businesses in Masonite Road were shut, but carpark lighting and LED advertising signs illuminated both sides of the road. Past this small commercial zone, the road narrowed, and the vehicles entered a thin forest. Soon, trees gave way to open pastures. All Weng could see were fences on each side, barely visible in the weak headlights. Now, the faces of his two passengers were lit only by the soft glow of an iPad held by the one seated in the middle. Tang Xin peered at the moving map on

the tablet, which he held inches from his nose.

He jabbed a finger at the screen. ‘Jimmy, it’s just around the bend... slow down, slow down, here it is! Just as well we have this device, or we would’ve missed it altogether.’ He lifted the tablet so Weng could see its screen.

‘I’ve told you before, don’t call me Jimmy.’ Weng scowled as he braked for the turn. ‘That’s only for stupid Australians at the university who can’t pronounce my real name.’

Tang laughed. ‘You made such a poor student, *Jimmy* – it’s surprising you weren’t kicked out of the course weeks ago.’

‘Cut out the jokes and concentrate on navigation, Tang. You seem to forget who’s in charge of this operation,’ Weng spat.

The two vans turned off the sealed road, cautiously nosing through a water-filled ditch and onto a muddy, unnamed track. Headlights off, they crawled along in the dim glow of their parking lights alone. Weng could only make out low scrub on either side and the occasional discarded drink can reflecting the sparse light. The rain had eased to a light shower, but that was enough to make him struggle to see past the defunct wipers that just smeared his windscreen.

The vehicles crept along the ruler-straight track for precisely six kilometres. Weng cursed as his van slid and lurched through several low spots, where the mud was thick and black. He could hear it spraying into the wheel wells, and constantly feared the vehicle might bog down.

‘*Diu!* They give us an old van with old wipers and worn-out tyres, but it’ll be us to blame if we break down or get stuck.’

‘No, they’ll blame just you, the leader,’ Tang said with a giggle, drawing only a grunt from Weng.

Minutes later, both vans drew to a stop when Tang’s electronic

map showed that they had reached their destination. Engines and all lights were switched off. The occupants, four male and two female, exited quietly and congregated at the rear door of the lead van. They all wore tight-fitting black windcheaters, trousers, balaclavas and running shoes, so they were barely visible even to each other. Without uttering a word, Weng began hauling out six matt-black rucksacks from his van, one for each dark figure. When they had all awkwardly hoisted the heavy bags onto their backs, he passed each person a torch and a handheld GPS receiver.

‘Remember,’ he whispered, ‘only use the torches if you must.’

‘What are you worried about?’ said Tang loudly. ‘There’s nobody around for at least a kilometre!’

‘Whisper, idiot,’ Weng hissed. ‘We can’t be too careful. Now follow me, and stay silent.’

The six melted into the darkness, heading due east. Fine raindrops coalesced on Weng’s face and ran down his neck, and dew on the low foliage soon penetrated his boots to soak his socks. However, he was too anxious about the mission to register any discomfort.

After tramping 600 metres through thin, waist-high bushes, they bumped into an ordinary five-strand farm fence, which they slipped through with ease. The going was much easier on the other side of the fence, as the ground had been cleared of bushes, the grass cut to ankle-height. Within a minute, they were standing on the unlit western end of the runway shared by RAAF Williamtown and Newcastle’s civil airport.

Weng wiped water droplets from his eyelashes and peered towards the distant eastern end of Runway 21. He could see no movement, and there was no sound other than his own heavy breathing. At the far end of the runway, on the right-hand side,

he could see the bright glow of Newcastle Airport, though no more flights were scheduled for the night. On the left, he could just see the much dimmer lighting of the RAAF base.

The six black-clad figures trotted along the middle of the runway towards the lights, following barely visible centreline markings, before branching off onto a taxiway that led towards the RAAF side of the field, where two squadrons resided: 34 Squadron flew BAE Hawk trainers, and 76 Squadron flew the frontline F-35 fighters. Although it was ostensibly a simple job to place a small but powerful bomb into the tailpipe of each of the thirty-eight F-35 jets and twenty-four Hawks that sat in rows under the revetments, Weng's legs shook when he stopped for a breather. If his team was discovered, they would spend years in an Australian military prison. China would claim to have no knowledge of them or their mission. When eventually sent back to China, they would likely face swift execution, as failure was not acceptable in the clandestine operations of the PLA.

They found the dimly lit revetments just as aerial photos, courtesy of Google Earth, had predicted. There were seven of the open-sided buildings, the smallest of which could accommodate five aircraft, the largest ten. Electronic security appeared non-existent, just as they had been briefed to expect. All six saboteurs looked out for the lone watchman they knew should be patrolling somewhere.

They split up in the darkness, each seeking the individual targets marked on their GPS screen. One had been assigned aircraft in two separate revetments, but became confused when crossing from one row to another, and placed bombs in Hawk trainers that had already been attended to by a teammate, missing a row entirely.

Tang Xin was the youngest in the team, and the most cavalier. Not once had he shown any fear or hesitation. His colleagues considered him something of a loose cannon, and privately thought that if something was to go wrong, it would be Tang who caused it.

As he approached the first aircraft in his assigned row of F-35 fighters, he stopped briefly to admire the deadly machine. He'd never been this close to a real military jet before, as they'd used fibreglass mock-ups in training. He appreciated the purposeful look of the aircraft, with its matt dark grey paint, low-visibility national markings, and stubby underwing weapon pods. Vinyl covers plugged the twin air intakes, pitot tubes, and other vents. Tags on each cover twisted in the slight wind. He walked the length of the F-35, ducking under its wing, where he saw that the large tailpipe was also fitted with a plug. For a moment, he feared that his short stature would prevent him from placing the bomb as instructed. However, he found he could just reach just high enough to dislodge the cover and slide the small bomb into the exhaust.

In minutes, striding confidently between each fighter in the row, he had sabotaged ten F-35s, and with his remaining bombs could seek targets of opportunity. Smiling to himself, he calculated that those ten aircraft had cost the Australian taxpayers more than two billion dollars. They would not be so valuable for much longer.

Tang left the soft lighting of the shelters and crossed a wide, unlit expanse of concrete towards a row of five gigantic hangars. Each held aircraft undergoing maintenance, and at first sight, appeared to be closed and in total darkness. However, he noticed light spilling from one huge sliding door that was not completely

shut. He stealthily approached the opening, then slipped through to hide behind a yellow-painted work platform that sat just inside. There were three F-35 fighters on his side of the cavernous hangar, and two Hawk trainers on the opposite side.

He froze at the sound of soft voices, but quickly realised it was coming from a portable radio on a shelf at that far side, just behind one of the jets. A blue-uniformed guard sat at a small table under the shelf, hunched over a take-away food carton and feeding scraps from it to a German shepherd that sat attentively at his feet.

Tang crouched motionless for a minute or two to allow his heartbeat to return to normal. He could hardly believe his ears: the radio was broadcasting the national news, and he clearly heard the announcer reading the lead story.

‘The demands voiced by Chinese leader Zhang Wei to Prime Minister Roger Quick, regarding the independent operation of Chinese-owned farms and businesses in Australia, are heightening tensions between the two governments. Our PM has branded the demands as outrageous, and has asked the Chinese leader to withdraw them immediately. Concerns have been raised that China may force the issue by further restricting Australia’s export of minerals and agricultural products.’

Little do they know those tensions are about to multiply! Tang thought, with a silent laugh.

With both patrolman and dog preoccupied, Tang thought it was safe to move. He crept from aircraft to aircraft on his side of the hangar, depositing a bomb in each F-35 tailpipe, three in all. He did not dare approach the two Hawks on the opposite side, as they were much too near the resting patrolman. Tang noiselessly exited the hangar the way he’d come in, melting into the darkness.

He still had four bombs left, and time was running short, so he put half under a large fuel truck parked near the hangar, and the last two in the engines of a small executive jet stationed nearby.

By 3 a.m., Tang had found his way back to the vans. He was the last to return, and he found his colleagues quietly but excitedly congratulating each other. He noticed that some were visibly shaking, and wondered if it was from the cold, the excitement, or a combination of both. As he dropped his empty rucksack by the lead van, he laughed out loud. ‘That was just too easy! One stupid guard and one lazy dog to patrol a whole airbase. What a pity we can’t stay to watch the fireworks.’

‘Quiet, Tang, don’t be a fool,’ Weng hissed. ‘Let’s just pack up and get back on the highway. We don’t want to be discovered now.’

In less than three hours, they were changing into fresh clothes in their rented flats near Sydney University, 200 km south of RAAF Williamtown. By 6 a.m., they had checked in at Sydney Airport for a 9 a.m. China Southern flight direct to Guangzhou. Their two vans had been abandoned in the public carpark.

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At the two RAAF training bases in Pearce, Western Australia, and Sale, Victoria, other groups of Chinese ‘students’ placed bombs in Hawk trainers. In Katherine, Northern Territory, a team infiltrated the RAAF side of the airfield, where Australia’s second F-35 squadron resided. The F/A-18 Super Hornets at Queensland’s Amberley RAAF base were targeted by another group. Specialist divers from the PLA Navy hid limpet mines in the Australian Navy facilities in Sydney Harbour, Jarvis Bay, and Fremantle.

The only significant Australian Air Force or Navy base to not be successfully sabotaged was the maritime patrol squadron in Edinburgh, South Australia. A single van with three students on board attempted to evade a routine breathalyser roadblock near the base. After a short pursuit, the van was forced to stop. Suspecting a drug delivery due to the three rucksacks in the rear of the van, a police constable held it and its occupants while awaiting the drug squad.

At precisely 4 a.m. on 22 June 2026, a single phone call was made by Weng Wei. That call triggered the explosion of one hundred and ten small bombs and another forty limpet mines. Each bomb was powerful enough to destroy an aircraft, and each mine powerful enough to damage a ship. The last twenty bombs exploded in the van near Edinburgh, vaporising the three students, fatally injuring the police constable and destroying his patrol car.

At Williamstown Airfield, half of Australia's frontline fighter force and half of its jet training fleet exploded simultaneously. Tonnes of fuel from a ruptured tanker added to the conflagration that followed. Only two Hawks in the deep maintenance hangar and a row of them under a revetment were not destroyed. It was a similar story at Pearce, Sale, Katherine and Amberley.

In all, approximately twenty billion dollars' worth of defence assets had been destroyed or rendered inoperative by some forty young Chinese agents staying in Australia on student visas. Apart from the Boeing maritime patrol jets at Edinburgh, the country was left with no air defence and just one of its six ageing Collins Class submarines in seaworthy condition.

Australia didn't know it yet, but the battle for the nation had begun.

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Nine thousand kilometres to the north, Commander Huang Bai of the People's Liberation Army Naval Air Force ran a finger between his perspiring skin and the stiff collar of his freshly pressed white shirt. Even in the air-conditioned back of the Hongqi LS8 limousine, it seemed hot and humid, and he feared he might stain the dark blue uniform perfectly tailored to his figure. He touched the knot of his tie and tugged at his shirt cuffs, ensuring that the correct amount of white sleeve showed below the twin yellow strips on his coat sleeves. He chided himself for being so nervous.

'I do have good reason, though,' he murmured to himself. 'It isn't every day that one is summoned to meet Admiral Shen Jun.'

For the hundredth time, he pondered why the summons had come, and what ramifications were in store for him. He knew they could be very good, or they could be very bad; anything in between was unlikely. Gloomily, he thought the latter scenario more probable.

Huang Bai, the son of a peasant farmer, had joined the PLANAF as a lowly cadet at the age of nineteen. It had soon become obvious that he was a natural pilot. He'd handled the training aircraft with confidence from day one, and won every mock battle during advanced training, even against his far more experienced instructors. Moreover, he had an innate ability to impart his new skills to less talented classmates. He'd progressed through the ranks with unprecedented speed, and was now, at twenty-eight, in charge of the Chinese equivalent to the USA's Top Gun fighter pilot school and the three elite squadrons it had so far produced. He had smooth and hairless skin, a small, firm

mouth, high cheekbones, a narrow nose and thin eyebrows. His black hair was cut even shorter than the military demanded.

Huang Bai's forthright approach and analytical ability were his strengths, but perhaps also his greatest weaknesses: he stepped on too many toes. *Maybe, he said to himself, just one toe too many, and today I will find myself back at the bottom of a long list of aspiring squadron leaders.* He'd been outspokenly critical of the regular squadrons' training standards, and of the standing orders that kept them restricted to what he considered simple manoeuvres, which didn't stress either man or machine too far. He had a more aggressive approach in combat, utilising the full performance envelope of the fighters he flew. His elite pilots regularly practised twisting simulated dogfights and ultra-low-level bombing, but he'd pushed for increased training time to make them even better.

Intending to minimise costs, his superiors had restricted the number of hours that training pilots could fly each month. Huang Bai felt hamstrung by this, and regularly exceeded the allocation to his three squadrons. Because he got such good results, he'd escaped punishment for this flagrant disobedience. So far, anyway.

Huang Bai had also criticised the decision to equip the navy with locally built fighters, the J-15 and the newer FC-31, as he believed that the Russian-built Sukhoi Su-35 was a superior aircraft. Most recently, he'd derided the design of the navy's new carrier, its pride and joy.

Criticising the Mao Tse Tung was probably my biggest mistake, he thought. It was widely known that Admiral Shen, the commander of the South Sea Fleet, had been a strong backer of the carrier project, and now Huang Bai felt certain that Shen was going to haul him over the coals. Perhaps Huang Bai's negative comments

had been taken as disloyal, or even seditious. The reward for the latter might be an appointment with a quiet courtyard and a bullet to the back of his head. He shivered at the thought.

Huang Bai continued to agonise over the possibilities as the limo crawled from intersection to intersection in the busy Beijing district of Xicheng. Bystanders gawked at the big car, trying to see which famous person was hidden behind the heavily tinted glass. At another time, Huang Bai might've enjoyed the looks of envy, but that was the last thing on his mind now.

The driver turned into the wide and relatively quiet Fuchengmen Street, then pulled over to the curb in front of Number 34. This address covered twin long but narrow two-storey buildings that stretched to the next street. A carpark, dotted with a few ornamental trees in large tubs, separated the two buildings. A lone uniformed naval rating in mottled grey and white camo stood at attention outside the left building's plain entry portico. The driver opened the limo's back door, and Huang Bai momentarily shrank back into the plush leather upholstery. Steeling himself, he climbed out of the car and stalked towards the entry. The driver ran to catch up to him, proffering the white peaked cap that he'd left behind. Embarrassed, he muttered his thanks and continued to the doorway, where the waiting sailor saluted and gestured for Huang Bai to follow him. A wide staircase took them to the second floor. The guard turned left and led Huang Bai past a number of open doorways, through which he could see uniformed secretaries busily working at computers. Halfway along the corridor, the guard stopped outside an unmarked door, told Huang Bai to wait there, and marched back the way he'd come. This end of the hallway was quiet and bare, and there was nowhere to sit.

Twenty minutes later, Huang Bai was finding it difficult to control the trembling in his left leg. He also had an urgent need to go to the bathroom, but dared not leave his post. His discomfort was becoming unbearable when he noticed that he'd somehow scuffed the toe of his polished left shoe. He was about to bend down and rub the offending patch when the door flew open without warning, and he was waved inside by an unsmiling middle-aged woman in a grey sailor's uniform without any marks of rank. Entering, he found himself in a large conference room, its cream walls bare but for one photo of the president. Five padded chairs sat behind a long table, with a single plain wooden kitchen chair in front of it. Huang Bai was acutely aware of the way his footsteps interrupted the silence. The woman pointed to the single chair, then left the room.

Occupying the five padded chairs were five senior PLANAF officers. Huang Bai immediately identified two-star Admiral Shen's craggy face and thin, receding hair, but was surprised by his diminutive size. He also looked considerably older than his widely used portrait, with his lined cheeks almost grey in colour. Huang Bai also recognised the ranks, but not the faces, of the four younger admirals. Two were two-star Vice Admirals, and two were one-star Rear Admirals. Nobody acknowledged him: all five watched him impassively. With this high-level committee, whatever was coming must be extremely serious.

Huang Bai caught himself before saluting, which would've been a breach of protocol, as none of the admirals wore their peaked caps, and sat awkwardly on the hard chair. He felt like melting in the silence, and his anxiety rose with every passing second. He didn't know which way to look. Feeling his face reddening, he forced himself to breathe deeply and slowly, focusing on a point

just above Admiral Shen's head. Then Shen spoke in a surprisingly soft voice.

'Commander Huang, your fitness report by Captain Jian Zhi was highly complimentary. He said that you have excelled in training your three elite squadrons, which have achieved a higher standard than any other in the PLANAF. According to your own reports, with which Captain Jian concurred, your squadrons are ready to be assigned to a carrier. Our new supercarrier is also now fully operational. Therefore, this board must decide whether you will continue to command those three squadrons when they embark on the *Mao Tse Tung*.'

This favourable opening caught Huang Bai by surprise. 'It would be a great honour. Thank you, Admiral.' His voice sounded unnatural, even to himself.

Shen shuffled his papers. 'You are under consideration due to your and Captain Jian's reports. But I must emphasise that my colleagues and I must ourselves be convinced that you are the right person for an important assignment – an assignment that is critical not only to our navy, but to our entire nation. So, we have some questions for you. Admiral Wu, would you like to go first?'

Vice Admiral Wu leaned forward and stared at Huang Bai. His jowls and cheeks sagged, as did the corners of his mouth, but his face bore no clue to his attitude. Slowly, he shifted his gaze to the notes on the table in front of him. When he spoke, his tone was harsh and accusatory.

'Commander Huang. You are always agitating for more training funds. Why is that? Do you not think that your superior officers, who ran this navy years before you even left school, have a more intimate knowledge of what is necessary? What makes you think that you can continually ignore time and resource

allocations that apply to everyone?’

Huang Bai swallowed. He would’ve liked to say that his students had only half the flying hours an equivalent American naval pilot would’ve had before being committed to a fighter squadron. But this was not the time to be blunt. He knew that his whole career hinged on the outcome of this meeting.

‘Gentlemen, every graduate of our advanced combat flying course is incredibly capable. I merely wish to hone their skills further with more challenging regimes than the current course can include.’

He hesitated, but as there was no immediate response, he ploughed on.

‘Our aircraft are superb, and are capable of more than our regular navy pilots are trained for, as I have shown with our elite course. An increase in flying hours would enable us to improve training in extreme combat manoeuvres and low-level flying for our elite pilots, and indeed for all navy pilots.’

Huang Bai again looked for some reaction, but all five officers stared back at him stonily. He was about to continue when the second vice admiral drummed his long fingers on the wooden table before breaking the uncomfortable silence.

‘Commander Huang, I am Admiral Liu. You say that our aircraft are superb, yet you are on record criticising the aircraft in your squadrons. You have said that our Shenyang J-15 is inferior to the Russian Sukhoi Su-33 on which it is based. What’s more, you have also claimed that the new Shenyang FC-31 stealth fighter is inferior to its contemporary, the American F-35.’ Scowling, Liu shook a sheaf of papers at Huang Bai.

Perspiration ran down Huang Bai’s face and neck, and his perfectly fitted jacket suddenly felt tight. How could he get out

of this? Although he desperately hoped that his panic wasn't noticeable, he thought it probably was. He decided he had no choice but to express a moderate version of his real beliefs. He tried to make eye contact with Liu, who was fat-faced, dark-skinned and bald, but Liu's heavily tinted glasses made it difficult.

'Yes, Admiral, I have. Our J-15 fighters have had performance and reliability issues, which I have put together a tech team to work on. We hope that, in time, we'll bring them to a standard superior to any other fighters in the world.' Inwardly, Huang Bai cringed. There was little chance of achieving that target anytime soon. 'I have not had the opportunity to fully test the FC-31, but I know that its stealth technology is amazing. Unfortunately, the trade-off is that this technology is an impediment to outright performance, more than I would've expected. Again, I am working with the engineers to overcome this issue, along with some other teething problems.'

The five inquisitors exchanged glances, but no one spoke. After what seemed like hours, one of the rear admirals leaned forward, his bulbous nose reddening, and focused his prominent eyes on Huang Bai. Pointing a shaking finger, he almost shouted: 'Commander Huang, you have also recently criticised the design of our newest carrier, the *Mao Tse Tung*. Do you not realise that it is the culmination of fifty years of research and experimentation by the best naval architects in China? It is the largest aircraft carrier in the world, bigger even than the latest American warships!'

Huang Bai knew that the Chinese Navy had begun researching carrier design in the 1980s, with the purchase of the UK-built, Royal Australian Navy-operated carrier HMAS *Melbourne* for scrapping. To their amazement, when it had been towed to

Guangzhou, they'd discovered that the Australians had left the steam catapult, the mirror landing aid, and the arrester cable system fully intact. Those systems had been carefully studied by China's naval architects. That ship had been designed during World War Two, when the heaviest fighter aircraft weighed less than eight tonnes, and had take-off speeds of 80 to 90 knots. The Chinese Navy's modern jets had take-off weights of up to 30 tonnes and launch speeds of at least 125 knots, so much development work had been needed. Their first two carriers had been equipped with ski-jump decks, which aided the launching of STOL and VTOL aircraft, but no catapults. This new carrier was their first that would rely on steam catapults to launch its jets.

The Americans had perfected the steam catapult over the past seventy-five years, and had developed carrier aircraft handling into a fine art. Chinese engineers had utilised as much recent information as they'd been able to, but could hardly be expected to have the system perfected straight from the drawing-board.

Huang Bai was aware that he was on extremely dangerous ground, as speaking the truth was not necessarily the best defence. But there was no going back now.

'I do realise that, sir, but I have concerns about our new ship. Its parallel runways limit us to just one landing or take-off per deck at any one time, and landings cannot occur when other aircraft are hooked up to launch. We need time at sea with the new squadrons and supercarrier to work out the most efficient handling procedures.'

Expecting the attack to continue, Huang Bai was surprised when Admiral Shen held up both hands to cut off further discussion.

'Enough,' Shen said. 'We might not agree with Commander

Huang on these particulars, but I think that we can all now see that he does know his job, and is dedicated to improving both the navy's men and its machines.' He glanced sideways at his colleagues. 'Commander Huang has been tasked with producing elite squadrons of naval aviators, and he has done this well, though we can perhaps recommend that he exercises a little more circumspection before speaking on matters above his station in future.' A small smile creased the corner of Admiral Shen's mouth.

He then turned back to face Huang Bai, and instantly became serious again. 'This is top secret, and must not leave this room until further notice. Our illustrious president and his cabinet have decided that in 2027, the People's Republic will retake the land stolen by the Nationals in 1945. Taiwan will again be ours. Meanwhile, we – the South Sea Fleet and People's Liberation Army – are to do a practice run, so to speak, against a relative minnow. This operation will not require the air force or the other naval fleets that are at our disposal. It is ours alone. You will take charge of the air wing on the new carrier *Mao Tse Tung*, and as such will play a major role in the invasion of Australia.'

Huang Bai gasped and sat back. In one short meeting, he'd been put through the wringer by his superiors, then given a dream role in the modern navy's first real test.

'Your rank from today is captain,' Shen said. 'If you are completely successful during the Australian exercise, you will be a natural choice to head the air wings of both the navy and air force in the subjugation of Taiwan.'

Huang Bai could hardly believe what he was hearing. This was almost too good to be true.

'You will now return to your office and prepare to immediately embark on our new supercarrier, where you will work your three

elite squadrons up to combat readiness as quickly as possible.’ Admiral Shen raised a brow at his colleagues. ‘Are we all agreed?’

The four junior admirals murmured to each other, then nodded in turn.

‘Go now,’ Shen said. ‘Do not fail us, Captain Huang.’

Huang Bai rose, stood to attention, and walked stiffly to the door. Once outside, he sprinted to the bathroom at the end of the corridor, almost tripping as he pushed the door open with trembling hands.

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Back in the limousine, Huang Bai allowed himself a grin. He fingered the black epaulets on his jacket, each featuring twin golden stars, and looked at the matching bands on its cuffs. Tomorrow, he would order a brand-new jacket with an extra star and stripe. There were such exciting opportunities ahead – invasion of Australia, and later Taiwan, with the chance to become China’s top-scoring fighter ace of all time, while contributing to his country becoming the largest military, economic, and political power in the world!

Thoughts of the suffering that accompanied any military operation did not enter Huang Bai’s head. China’s forces would sweep all before them, and the enemy was just an obstacle in that path.