



Joseph Stilwell

March 19, 1883 - October 12, 1946

San Francisco, California

Joseph Warren Stilwell, the blunt four-star general who led American forces in the China-Burma-India theater in the Second World War and walked out of Burma on foot when the Japanese closed the trap, died in San Francisco on October 12, 1946. He was sixty-three.

He was born on March 19, 1883, in Palatka, Florida, and raised in Yonkers, New York. West Point class of 1904, he taught there, served in the Philippines and China, and learned Chinese well enough to become one of the Army's rare true China hands. Friends and subordinates called him Vinegar Joe for a tongue that spared almost no one, including the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek.

In early 1942, after the Japanese overran Burma, Stilwell refused evacuation by air and led a mixed column of American, Chinese and civilian refugees on a hard march out to India, emerging gaunt and famous. He spent the next two years trying to reopen a land route into China, training Chinese divisions at Ramgarh, and quarreling with Chiang, with Claire Chennault of the Flying Tigers, and with British commanders who doubted his methods. Roosevelt finally recalled him in October 1944 after Chiang demanded his removal.

He later commanded the Tenth Army on Okinawa after Simon Bolivar Buckner's death and briefly headed the Sixth Army. Stomach cancer took him quickly in the autumn of 1946. He was buried at Arlington. The Ledo Road he fought to build was renamed the Stilwell Road, a muddy monument to a general who preferred the hard way when the hard way seemed honest.

Services

Died in San Francisco, CA, October 12, 1946, aged 63. Portrait: U.S. Army photograph (public domain), hosted

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