

VI - 73 C - 16. Smedley, Agnes "Imperialistic Sins in Burma" book review  
of Retreat With Stillwell, by Jack Belden. The Progressive  
Monday, March 29, 1943.

VI-73C-16

# The Progressive's Book

## Imperialistic Sins In Burma

RETREAT WITH STILWELL, by Jack Belden. Alfred Knopf. \$3.

Reviewed by Agnes Smedley

THE laconic title of this book gives little indication of the world tragedy which is unrolled in its brilliant pages. The story covers the first five months of 1942 when the author was with Lt. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, commander-in-chief of two Chinese armies



Stilwell

attempting in vain to stem the flood of Japanese advance in Burma. It is a terrifying story magnificently told.

Here are not only battles of the Allied armies moving from defeat to defeat, and led by impotent or ignorant officers, some of them gentlemen's sons and one of whom jauntily arrived with a V. C. on his chest, expecting this decoration to be enough to halt the Japanese dead in their tracks. Here are desperate American officers and newspaper men, some of whom did not understand why they were being defeated. And here are endless streams of civilian refugees of every race fleeing for their lives through the jungles, thousands of them to die of hunger and disease because a British shipping monopoly had prevented the building of a railway or motor road from Burma to India.

### Sins Came Home To Roost

The book ends with Stilwell's "report to the world" from India:

"The Japs ran us out of Burma. We were licked." This is, in reality, the tale of white man "gangster imperialism" in Asia, so hated by the natives that when the Japanese appeared, 4,000 Burmese patriots assembled in a "Burma Freedom Army" and, though green and untrained, fought with fanatical heroism.

Burmese civilians had themselves tattooed, an ancient symbol of revolt, then went gunning for any white man they could find, and even for the Chinese troops helping the Allied armies. They set fire to every Burmese city or village, and to the great forests, to prevent the Allies from retreating or getting any

You can order any book mentioned in this column—or any other current book or magazine for that matter—from The PROGRESSIVE.

Just send us the name of the book or magazine and remittance of the regularly advertised price. We'll do the rest very promptly. We pay postage!

Subscription rates and book prices will be supplied at your request.

Send your orders to  
The Special Service Department  
The PROGRESSIVE Madison, Wis.

Since this volume appeared, an American organization has refused to help circulate it to our troops because it is critical of one of our Allies. However, the book should be required reading in all American and British educational and military institutions, and civilians should read it and send it on to men in our armed forces. It is the finest and clearest book about the war so far and, as literature, it towers above most books on the market today.

food. The Japanese advanced like an irresistible flood, under slogans of "Free Burma" and "Down with the British." The British replied with "law and order" signs!

All the sins of imperialism came home to roost in Burma, and the tragedy is that British imperialism was merely replaced by a young, virile Japanese imperialism which cleverly played upon the Burmese longing for liberation. Even the Chinese troops were hunted down by the Burmese because they were considered "running dogs of the British."

In the full tide of retreat, the Chinese soldiers looked about them and "laughed irreverently." They alone seemed to know why the Allies were defeated. The Americans, however, merely thanked God that this was not their country, and talked with longing of beer, Coca Cola, and ice cream. The British did not know what had hit them, nor why. Belden knew why, but we are left in the dark about our own Lt. Gen. Stilwell.

### Should Be Required Reading

The last few pages are marred by the author's childish amours in the jungle. Throughout the rest of the volume, however, he has been like a moving picture camera recording every aspect of a tragic historical drama. Woven into scenes of battle and burning are many human interest stories: of two foreigners who hated each other and took pot-shots at each other over their back fences while the world burned; of some Chinese muleteers placidly meandering through the jungle with their mules; and of two old English ladies, one of them 70, who tried to flirt with the American correspondent. On Page 249 Belden gives a kind of blueprint of the military, political, social, and economic causes of defeat.

Two officers express ideas which we of the United Nations should hear if we wish to learn the realities about this war. A Chinese general remarks that "Our mistakes have to be brought into the open so people will know what's wrong." An English general sits disconsolately in the jungle and says the authorities in the rear will not allow any facts with guts in them to be published in the press.