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She Saw China Suffer

Missouri-Born Woman Spent Two Years With Troops



AGNES SMEDLEY is shown looking at a copy of a Chinese guerilla army "wall newspaper," a type of publication seen frequently at the battlefronts.

By RICHARD N. COWELL,
Globe-Democrat Washington
Bureau.

WASHINGTON, April 20.—"It's no soft war in China, where the battle cry is give everything!"

A Missouri-born woman who spent two years with Chinese troops at various fighting fronts was speaking. And when nervously-electric Agnes Smedley talks about the Far East, her intensity and sincerity grip your attention.

Bobbed-haired, fiftyish Miss Smedley is back in this country with one burning desire: to enkindle America's interest in China's problems and to make clear how our nation's fate is at least partially wrapped up in China's.

"Let me illustrate that give-everything idea," continued Miss Smedley, "with an incident I shall never forget.

"I had returned after two years with the Chinese Red Cross Medical Corps to a wartorn area where suffering and privation loomed on all sides. I discovered an 11-year-old Chinese boy, orphaned and half starved. I arranged with authorities to adopt him and have him sent to school in the interior.

"But he wouldn't have any of it. Although he looked more like a boy 9 than 11, he proudly rejected my pleadings. This is what he said:

"You may adopt me if you like after the final victory. Right now China needs every man at the front!

"That's what I mean by giving everything."

resses in English. I made many friends I was to value greatly later on.

"I went to Denmark and wrote my first book—an autobiography called 'Daughter of the Earth.' It had been translated into 13 languages, including Chinese and Japanese."

This volume was the first of five the Missouri-born author has produced. The three others concerned China and the fifth, to be published late this summer by Alfred Knopf under the title "The Battle Hymn of China," is a narrative based on her life on the battlefronts.

AN ANTI-FASCIST

Miss Smedley went to the Far East in 1928 as correspondent for the liberal newspaper Frankfurter Zeitung. An ardent anti-Fascist, she lost her position when Hitler came into power. She became a special writer for the Manchester Guardian until China got into war.

"I joined the Chinese Red Cross Medical Corps," she recalled, "as an unpaid volunteer and worked with the troops on several fronts. For a while I was with the Eighth Route Army, traveling on foot and on horseback. At other times, I was with guerrilla forces.

"Shell-shock—we were under almost constant artillery fire and aerial bombings—plus severe malaria and a wrenched back suffered when I was thrown by a horse forced me to leave the front. I had been carried on a stretcher

from one area to another until they finally got me to an interior base."

Illness compelled her to leave the Far East and return to this country in 1941. Before leaving, she turned over all the royalties from her earlier books to China's use, she said. Her latest volume was finished after her return to California. It took a year to write it. She has material enough for two more volumes if the "Battle Hymn" sells well.

"What I'm trying to do by writing and by lecturing to American audiences," Miss Smedley explained, "is not only to tell China's heroic story, but to make people here realize how the futures of China and our own republic are closely tied together as a result of the current war."

Much that Miss Smedley has seen and learned in China cannot now be discussed in public nor printed. "I don't know how much longer China can carry on unless we get war supplies to her," she commented. We lost face because of Pearl Harbor, but we've regained it," she went on. "However, the Chinese still look to us to deliver arms, not promises.

'A LONG, HARD FIGHT'

"Japan is a powerful foe. More and more it's becoming clear that we have a long, hard fight ahead in the Pacific. Time may not be on our side, only—I hope we don't delay too long to hit the Japs hard.

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BORN ON A FARM

Agnes Smedley is an author right out of the good earth of Missouri—another Pearl Buck. She was born on a farm near Osgood, in Sullivan County.

"It was a poor farm and we left when I was quite young to go to Colorado," she related. "We lived in Trinidad in the coal-mining area and I worked in the mines myself while I was going to school. I wanted an education desperately, and when I'd saved a little money I guess you'd say I 'ran off' to Tempe, Ariz., and got a job as a waitress while I attended the Teachers' College.

"It was a slow process—this getting an education without any money—and I wanted to speed it up. So I went to Phoenix and took a course in typewriting. Armed with this new skill, I went to San Diego and typed my way through the State College there. After graduation I taught a while, then went to the University of California to study journalism.

"Next came the urge to go to New York. I tackled Manhattan, got a magazine job and continued my studies in New York University night classes. It was a tough siege.

STEWARDESS ON BOAT

"A learned and kind professor—now dead—stimulated my interest in travel further by his enthralling lectures on Asiatic history. The urge to see the world became irresistible. A job on a boat as stewardess started me round the world.

"I quit the boat when we got to France, lived there and in Danzig while, then went to Berlin where studied more Asiatic history and taught English at the University of Berlin. Outside class-rooms I did fun coaching actors and act-

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"Russia can't fight Japan and save the United Nations in Europe at the same time. Russia already is helping in the Pacific by keeping about 450,000 crack Japanese troops demobilized on the Manchurian front who, otherwise, might be freed to attempt a thrust at Alaska."

Miss Smedley has met China's leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and admires him. She feels Mme. Chiang's tour of America has helped China's cause.

Here in the capital, Miss Smedley has held conferences with State Department officials concerned with finding the best methods to extend assistance to China.

While regaining her health at a friend's upstate New York farm, Miss Smedley resumed "some of the farm duties I had as a child in Missouri. I've been candling eggs, helping out during the farm labor shortage."

Soon she will start on a lecture tour and she hopes the agency handling it will arrange for an appearance in St. Louis or some other Missouri city, "because I haven't been back to my native state in a long time." She has been booked into Chicago May 13.

MET M. U. GRADUATES

In the Far East, Miss Smedley met several University of Missouri graduates who have achieved distinction in the writing field, including Edgar Snow; John Morris and J. B. Powell, the editor who returned recently on the Gripsholm, exchange ship, after suffering the loss of his feet from an infection that developed while he was in a Jap prison camp.

In New York, where Powell is recuperating, she said she recently "got a big thrill out of taking Mr. Powell to see the play, 'The Patriots'."

Most encouraging to her, Miss Smedley says, is the interest American youth displays in China.

"The world these young Americans will inherit will offer the United States a wonderful opportunity for leadership. It will be up to today's youngsters to take advantage of it. I hope they meet the challenge with the same courage of the little Chinese 11-year-old who felt he was needed at the front.