

I - 4. Article "The Wounded in China" - The Manchester
Guardian Weekly, Friday, December 30, 1938 - 2pp.

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THE WOUNDED IN CHINA

Adventures with the Red Cross

(This is the first of two articles on the plight of the wounded in China; the second will be published next week.)

By Agnes Smedley

Nanchang, December.

It is eight o'clock at night and I am stopping at the Second Receiving Station for the wounded in Nanchang. The hospital staff is busy at work. There are over 800 wounded in this station, and it is one of the two best in the city. There are nine such receiving stations here. The wounded lie in long rows in great rooms in a building formerly a school. The beds are the usual Chinese beds--that is, plain boards nailed together and supported on trestles. On these is a "mattress" made of straw and over this a sheet. Each of the wounded has a big padded quilt given by the Army Medical Service though some 300 have blue quilts presented by the civilians of the city. On the ground floor and above in the rooms on the second floor singing groups of men and women are entertaining the wounded. One group near us consists of two women and an old man. The old man plays the Chinese violin, and one of the women singers is blind. All are simple folk from the common people. They move from ward to ward, singing, some old folk-tunes, but mostly modern patriotic songs. The wounded here are mainly from the Jehan front and are men from the Canton army.

Medical Workers

This receiving station receives and clears, on an average 3,600 wounded a month. The business manager is an old Army medical worker, active and enthusiastic about his work, of which he is justly proud. Yes, he says, the staff works all night if a new lot of wounded come in. There is one superintendent and one assistant, four doctors, twenty nurses, and ten dressers here to do the medical work. The medical and business staff now give a part of their monthly salaries to buy extra food for the severely wounded that come in. The Government has none too much money, and each man must draw in his belt a little.

The secretary of the Kiangsi Anti-Enemy War Service Association here spoke of the work of his organisation. It was organised in August, 1937, and came under the control of the Kuomintang. This kept it restricted, but it was recently reorganised and now includes many patriotic organisations, chief of which are the Mobilisation Committee, the Women's Life Improvement Association, The Women's Voice Society, and the Kiangsi Youth War-Time Regiment. The association has a medical relief corps, which maintains 400 workers as stretcher-bearers at the front, a "collection committee," and a propaganda department that carries on many-sided activities among children, youth, women, merchants, workers, and peasants.

The concrete work of the "collection" department is enlightening. The Government asked it to collect 100,000 padded winter uniforms and 120,000 padded vests. They have collected 80,000 padded vests from the civilian population of the province, which made them, and 16,000 padded uniforms, all for the troops at the front. These come not only from Nanchang but from the various districts in the province where they have branches. They expect to fill their quota within two weeks' time.

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Japanese Wounded

The Red Cross medical unit in one hospital in Nanchang is also taking care of ten wounded Japanese captives. The doctor in charge of them speaks Japanese, as he studied medicine in Japan. The Japanese wounded tell him their troubles. "I don't know why we made this war," one of them complains in his misery. "I came here, but I don't know why. Many factories in Japan have closed and only the war factories work. The life of our women and children is very difficult".

Another speaks of his father. His old father was a soldier in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, and always told his son that war is a terrible thing. "As I bade my old father good-bye," the captive says, "he wept. We are poor, and all things are twice as expensive in our country now."

Another Japanese captive grew up in Kwangtung Province, in South China, and speaks the Cantonese dialect like a Chinese. But when the war began he was recalled for military service. He was recently fighting on the Tchan front and was slightly injured. In the Chinese positions before him he heard the Cantonese dialect, for the Canton troops were fighting there. When he heard them speak he decided that way was an impossible thing, and simply deserted and walked over to them, shouting to them in Cantonese not to shoot. It sounds incredible, but that is the story he tells, and that is the story told by the Cantonese troops from the front.

A Section of China

On our way to the front we came in a truck with ten others. Here the Chinese people were represented. One was a professor from Shantung Province with his wife from Peking. Two were students from Shanghai, one the son of a famous Chinese writer of the old school. One was a peasant girl from Wuhu, on the Yangtze. One was a middle-aged peasant from Kiangsi Province--a peasant guerrilla organizer. One was a little Canton worker; he was our chauffeur, and drove as if the devil were after him instead of in front of us. And one was a high political leader from the Kwangsi army.

It grew dark one night, and in the rain our truck skidded and nearly went over a river bank. A telephone pole alone prevented this, but it was a precarious support. In the drizzling rain and the growing darkness we all began to work. We carried weeds and stones to support a back wheel nearly over the brink, while the chauffeur crawled in the mud under the car and jacked it up. Our peasant companion thought instinctively of a pick, and went to a peasant home to borrow one. With this he began to dig a small trench under the safe rear wheel. The road had a bed of stone and gravel. We all took turns, and of the lot the peasant and the professor showed the most intelligence in digging. The two students were a failure, while my main contribution, after I got covered with mud carrying stones, was to hold a torch-light on the wheel and to run back and forth to see if the telephone pole was bending more over the bank into the river.

We laboured for three hours in one way or another. The trench was a brilliant idea, and when dug the safe wheel sank into it, lifting the endangered opposite wheel and also relieving the telephone pole of its burden. We halted to admire ourselves before we continued work building a bank under the endangered wheel; and when the car roared out on the main road we shouted in joy.

In the middle of the road was the trench we had dug. The Kwangsi political leader shouted that we must level the road again lest other trucks think traitors had been at work mining it. We had the pick, two pieces of board, and our hands. We all got down in the middle of the mud and set to work, some with the pick and boards, others with their bare hands. We levelled and packed the road to its original state. The son of the famous writer was a mass of mud, the professor's hands were covered with clay, my shoes and clothing were splashed with mud, and the other women and men were in like condition. We wiped our hands on the wet grass, and with shouts of joy buzzed off down the road to the front. Such is the spirit of Chinese resistance.