

I - 45.

The Fighting Chinese -- The East and West Association -
40 East 49th Street, New York, New York, April 9, 1943 -
10 pp.

I-45

47

FROM: The East and West Association
40 East 49th Street
New York, New York
Plaza 5-0843

April 9, 1943 HDB:LEP

MEMORANDUM

THE FIGHTING CHINESE
Agnes Smedley

Why has China, a poor country unprepared for war, been able to fight for nearly six years against the Japanese who prepared for forty years for the conquest.....first of China, then of all Asia? China's long, unequal struggle is considered something of a miracle, and, since Pearl Harbor, some people have been filled with awe by it. There is nothing magical about this, however. The Chinese learned early that this war could not be won by strength of arms alone. As Edith Cavell once said: "Patriotism is not enough", and so the Chinese say, "Military might is not enough". China decided to strengthen human spirit, enlighten the minds of its people, and wed these to its guns.

Thus, when the Japanese struck at Marco Polo Bridge near Peiping on the night of July 7, 1937, most foreigners in China believed their boast that Japan could conquer China with five divisions within a period of three months. And then, when the Japanese occupied Nanking in December of the same year, almost all foreign military men, diplomats, business men and missionaries in China, thought the Japanese would at last succeed. The German Military advisers attached to the Chinese Government declared that, had the Japanese followed up the decimated Chinese armies at that time and completed their annihilation, China would have been conquered.

However, the Japanese stopped to slaughter the population of Nanking, looting in a manner that put Ghengis Khan to shame. They did the same whenever they conquered along the coast and the Yangtze river valley.

Incidentally, they aroused the national and racial consciousness of even the most backward Chinese who, up to then, knew nothing of the Japanese. So widespread was this consciousness that we may say the Japanese could not have conquered China even if they had totally decimated its main armies.

When the Japanese occupied Hankow in October, 1938, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek issued a call to the Chinese people in the rear of the Japanese armies of occupation to rise to the last man, woman and child and fight with any weapons they could command. He also called on Chinese living in Japanese-occupied cities to remain loyal to their country, never to betray it by aiding the enemy; but to do all they could against the Japanese.

Generalissimo Chiang's proclamation was of historic importance. At that date, the Japanese army of occupation was stretched out, long and thin, along all China's main rivers and most of its railways. The Japanese had occupied most of the main cities, and had either totally destroyed or captured Chinese industrial establishments.

However, the main base of Chinese economy lies in its small towns and villages. In the rear of the Japanese armies, and around and about them, was a vast territory with thousands of villages which the enemy did not have the manpower to occupy and garrison. This vast territory was to become a base of resistance. The Japanese rear was to be turned into a Chinese front.

From that time, the Chinese armies adopted three methods of fighting: they combined regular frontal, or positional warfare, with guerrilla and mobile warfare. And all armed forces were expected to introduce political training to their soldiers. For the Chinese Government

realized that the war was going to be long and bitter and that only politically-educated, ~~convincing~~ convincing armies, could hold out.

There are two different systems of political training in the Chinese armies. One is that of the regular national armies, all following a pattern. The underlying theory of their teaching is nationalism, based on the teachings of the late Dr. Sun Yat-sen: ~~that is, national independence, democracy and improvement in the living conditions of the people.~~

The second system of political training is that followed by the Communist armies which are known as the 18th Group Army and the New Fourth Army, today combined under one command. While they accept the Three Peoples Principles of Sun Yat-sen, they interpret it differently. They have tried to realize not only national independence but also to develop democracy and improve the livelihood of the people simultaneously.

For purposes of simplification, we may take two specific armies to see the work done. One shall be the 173rd Division of the 11th Group Army, a regular nationalist army which originated in Kwangsi Province in the south. This army has fought on most of the main battlefields since the war began. The 173rd Division was kind of a sacrifice division which often covered the retreat of other Chinese armies. It had been all but decimated a number of times, but had been repeatedly replenished.

The pattern of political work of this division followed the general lines of other armies. There was a divisional political director with a staff, and each regiment had one director and one assistant. Each Monday morning the troops gather in a meeting at dawn, where the military commander ^{political} or director, makes a report on the national situation. The troops always bow three times in memory of Sun Yat-sen, and Dr. Sun's last will and testament

is always read. This last will declares that the Chinese revolution is not yet completed and men must fight on until it is; China is urged to ally itself with foreign nations which are friendly to it and treat it as an equal.

The National Hymn is always sung at these Monday morning ceremonies, but it is too funeral to be popular. The most popular song, loved by every army of the country, is the inspiring "Chee Lai", March of the Volunteers.

As a visiting foreign friend, I was asked to deliver lectures before classes of "political soldiers". These were unusual classes as no other army had such an institution. Soldiers who could read and write tolerably well were drawn from the ranks and put through a six week course and then returned to the ranks as fighters with the added duty of educating their comrades. They even taught soldiers to read and write. I often saw them sitting on the ground with a squad of men. Each had a stick in his hand with which he traced Chinese words or figures in the dust. Paper and pencils were rare indeed and could not be wasted for mere practice. They even whittled Chinese words out of bamboo.

One regiment of the 173rd Division was remarkable. It was the only regiment of an entire former division. All the rest had been killed. Their military education had been on the battlefield. These boys, seething with energy, had started their own regimental magazine, called the White Bayonet. This remarkable publication was published right in the front line trenches at first. It bore the marks of war at white heat. Soldier's diaries, essays, songs and poems of every kind were published in it.

Another activity of this division was so-called "Enemy Work", which was concerned with propaganda among the enemy. This work was entrusted to ^{members of} ~~volunteers~~ ^{Volunteers} from the Korean Army who knew Japanese. If the

Chinese and Japanese trenches were not too far apart, the Koreans would shout through a megaphone to the enemy. Another method of getting their material to the enemy was to have peasants carry vegetables into Japanese garrison points and leave propaganda pamphlets where the soldiers could find them. The Koreans would tie bundles of leaflets around stones and hurl them into Japanese positions, and one of them even used a bow and arrow.

So much for the work of the 173rd Division. Now for the work of the New Fourth Army, a Communist army fighting in the Lower Yangtze River Valley at the time I was with it. The general training camp of this army was a combined military-political training institution with courses that lasted from six months to a year. There was a constant stream of men and women pouring through this camp, and even after men left to take up their duties in the field, their studies continued.

While I was there, 80 women were studying. They dressed and lived like the soldiers, but were housed in a nearby village where there were no men. There was also a Youth Corps of about a hundred boys under 15 years of age. Some were war orphans, some sons of men in the Army, some from poor peasant families. Their course of training was never less than a year with emphasis on common education though everything was connected with the war. Like every other person in the Training Camp, they had to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the Japanese language.

After education from the training camp, some of the educated men and women were asked to join the Army Medical School to be prepared for medical work. This army was fortunate in having eleven qualified doctors, three of them experienced surgeons. There were also twenty qualified women nurses. So, for an army of 40,000 men, there were 31 qualified men and women. This may sound woefully inadequate, but in China it was a wonder.

There was no kind of labor the doctors did not perform. They even wrote their own text-books. One of their greatest needs was for a human skeleton, but they couldn't get one. For weeks I watched a drama develop around this problem. It began one midnight in the hospital where I lived. The army had just bought the first radio which enabled us to receive broadcasts, and I volunteered to take down international news broadcasts for a daily army radio news bulletin. On the first night after the instrument was connected with batteries, I turned the dial. The sound of a bell came over the air, and then a voice spoke in English, saying: "This is London calling". A symphony was announced and while the music flooded the room, a surgeon and the only woman physician in the Army entered the room. They paid no attention to the music, but spoke in conspirational tones. The surgeon said he had decided to get a human skeleton for teaching material. He said he was going out that night and dig up some graves, and he would continue to do so until he found a good skeleton.

It had to be done in the deep night in the deepest secrecy or the hospital would have the countryside on its neck. The surgeon asked the woman if she were afraid to go with him to rob graves. The woman lifted her chin defiantly and asked him if he thought she was afraid of digging up graves merely because she was a woman. No, she said, she would not go with him, but she would take a shovel and a sack and go dig up her own graves. She challenged the surgeon to a competition in body-snatching. The one who brought back the first good skeleton was to be the winner. The loser would give the victor a dinner.

These two doctors dug up graves for weeks before they found a desirable skeleton. One night well past midnight as I sat before the radio, the woman doctor came in, dirty and covered with mud. She

mysteriously beckoned to me and I went out into the courtyard and saw a sackful of bones. When the surgeon came in, she led him to the bones. He looked them over critically, then graciously admitted his defeat. He promised to give her a dinner. The bones were strung together with wires and hung on a bamboo frame and the first human skeleton made its appearance in the Medical Training school.

Several movements were started in this camp. One was a movement for democracy. Another was the commemoration of Florence Nightingale's birth. This was an annual affair and even if the soldiers got only a smattering of knowledge from it, still it was important. After Nightingale Day, for instance, I heard two soldiers arguing. One said Nightingale discovered the mosquito that caused malaria. Another said she founded the International Red Cross. Nonsense, retorted the other, the founder of the International Red Cross was that American woman, standing over there --- which was myself!

In some instances, however, knowledge in this Army was broad and deep, but the difficulties were enormous. When the Japanese sit on your tail year in and year out, you can't do all you wish. But the Chinese are an intelligent and creative people, even if many of them do not have our standards of literacy. Bitter necessity has been their harsh teacher. Their training was often disrupted by big Japanese offensives, during which military commanders studying in the Army Training Camp had to leave immediately for the front. These commanders were nearly all peasants who had never before had an opportunity to study. They had been recalled to the Camp for study because they were exhausted and under-nourished from years in the field. Many had tuberculosis. They were grim, thin men, as dour as the winter skies. They approached learning as they approached the Japanese -- with the determination to conquer.

This account of political work in the New Fourth Army does not cover many aspects of its activities. For instance, there are many short-term training classes which regiments at the front conduct for civilians who are taught methods of mass organization, espionage, and guerrilla tactics.

In this connection, I had an opportunity to see the extent to which the common people were being trained for guerrilla warfare. A regiment of guerrilla soldiers was conducting a mobile civilian training course in territory just a few miles north of the Japanese-occupied city of Hankow. When they were not fighting, the guerrilla commanders lectured on various aspects of this particular type of fighting.

One night I went into a night discussion class, which was presided over by a young woman who had been a teacher before the war. Like all women doing war work in the fighting zones, she was in regular military uniform. She sat at the head of a long rough table around which was grouped about twenty civilians. Fifteen were men and the rest women.

Just as I came in, the class was standing up, their heads bowed, their caps held in their hands. They stood this way for three minutes in memory of fifteen guerrilla soldiers who had been killed in battle two days before.

The ceremony completed, a former foundry worker in Shanghai, took the floor. He said that the first use of guerrilla warfare was to turn the enemy rear into a Chinese front. Politically, he said, one duty of guerrillas was to get in the rear of the enemy and do political work by telling the people that China is still defending the country, give them national news and encouragement so they will not tolerate any form of submission to the enemy.

A young peasant followed with this information: "Another use of guerrilla warfare is to handicap the advance of the enemy by hanging onto his tail. We must confuse the enemy by every means. For instance, we can go up to a Japanese garrison at night and either fire a couple of shots, or set off some firecrackers in a gasoline or kerosene tin can. This sounds like machine gun fire and the Japanese always open up with their guns, firing into the darkness all night long. We repeat this trick for a number of nights until the Japanese get used to it and think we are merely fooling. They pay no attention to us and go to sleep. It is just at this moment that we must fall upon the enemy garrison, and, if it is not too large, wipe it out. We must take their arms and ammunition and arm ourselves with them. Our first aim is always to break enemy military tactics and keep as many of them as possible in their rear garrisons so they cannot throw their full force against our regular armies on the main fronts. We harass them by every means and draw their fire on ourselves."

This discussion went on for nearly two hours and finally a young peasant woman spoke. She faltered in embarrassment, but overcame her shyness and said that the regular Chinese armies often lost rifles and even machine guns in retreat. Wounded, sick, or exhausted soldiers often dropped their guns and ammunition during escape. Civilians ^{retreat} women and children in particular ^{she} said, must make every effort to gather up such guns and ammunition and ~~hide~~ or bury them if they do not know how to use them.

The enemy, this woman continued, loots rice ^{granaries} ~~granaries~~, kills pigs, chickens and cattle. The civilians must therefore be led to evacuate everything to places of safety, so the enemy can get nothing to eat and have nothing to use. Civilians must allow nothing to remain for them. "Instead of starving us out, we must starve them out," she said. "We must