VI - 73 D - 44. "Agnes Smedley Calls Commando Raids Theatrical and Predicts Resentment Over Appointment" (Mountbatten as supreme allied commander in southeastern Asia). unidentified new clip.

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Disapp ves of Mountbatten

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Agnes Smedley Calls Commando Raids Theatrical and Predicts Resentment Over Appointment

To the New York Herald Tribune:

I have read your condensed biographical note about Lord Louis Francis Albert Victor Nicholas Mountbatten, the new supreme Allied commander in southeastern Asia, who will, among other things, command the coming Burma campaign. Apart from the spectacular and somewhat theatrical Commando raids led by Lord Mountbatten, I note your biographical information about the gentleman: that he "kept his serious interests so secret that he was best known as a night-club playboy," that he has had ships sunk or damaged under him since the war began, and that the only injury he has received came from the bite of a goat while he was visiting an American warship.

A terrible howl of protest may go up because I, a civilian, dare raise a voice of protest about a military appointment. Yet I dare do this because I have lived in Asia for years, and the problem of Asia is not merely military, but primarily political. Perhaps some members of the ruling class of Britain wish one of their favorite old-school-tie sons to be glamourized during the war; and perhaps British rubber, tin, oil and shipping interests will sleep better if a lord is supreme commander in Burma. But from the viewpoint of the Chinese armies who will fight in Burma, from the viewpoint of the Americans, and from the viewpoint of the actualities in Burma, I consider Mountbatten's appointment as a political one in the interests of the British only. I wonder if Australian and New Zealand soldiers, or even the common British soldiers, will welcome the appointment.

Any one with the slightest knowledge of Burma and the Far East will know that Burma was lost to the Allied nations because of political factors. Even the books written on the previous Burma campaign, such as Belden's "Retreat With Stilwell," recorded these facts. The Burmese people hate the British; and Burmese civilians even killed Chinese soldiers in Burma because they were fighting for the British. We don't like it, but thousands of Burmese students rallied to the Japanese and fought in the "Burma Freedom Army" because the Japanese had learned enough political warfare from the Chinese to fight under the slogan of "Freedom for Burma" and "Down with the British!" The Japanese, of course, merely take the place of the British, but they have perhaps learned enough from China to avoid some of their murderous mistakes in that country. We have no reason to believe that the Burmese will not fight as they fought before. And we must not forget that the Japanese could never have conquered Burma without the help of the Burmese people who believed Japanese slogans against white-man imperialism. It is not enough to have an American, General Joseph Stilwell, as Lord Mountbatten's subordinate commander.

The only commanders of experience and with political appeal for Burmese are the Chinese. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek would be the natural commander of southeastern Asia to meet such a need. If we say that he is too busy with the China theater of war we must also consider the recapture of the Burma Road as the primary concern of China. And Generalissimo Chiang has many brilliant and experienced field commanders who could do a much better job than Lord Mountbatten. To my mind comes the name, for instance, of General Li Chung-jen, under whose command the Japanese suffered their first major defeat in China, in the battle of Taierchwang in the early summer of 1938. General Li has since commanded the 5th War Zone, and it is not his fault if he has not had enough weapons and other war materials to inflict more major defeats on the Japanese. There are many other Chinese generals of like integrity, experience and high ability also.

If it is "Commando," or guerrilla commanders we need, then China has them by the hundreds—men who have had years of experience and much greater success than Lord Mountbatten can show. To my mind, here, come the intrepid commanders of the 8th Route Army. For instance, take General Peng Teh-hwei, the tough, brilliant vice-commander of the 8th Route Army. But here political prejudices will enter in, for General Peng is a Communist. To us it should not matter what a man's politics are, be they red, white or green. General Peng and many other of his colleagues have inflicted fearful losses on the Japanese since the war began. To Peng's ability and experience must be added the fact that he is a Chinese and that he is not a British Lord, whom the Burmese hate.

If Chinese were in command of the entire Burma front, their very names and presence would wipe the political ground out from under the feet of the Japanese. I do not care at all how glamorous the Commando reputation of Lord Mountbatten may be to members of the British ruling class, still I doubt if either Chinese or American troops will care to fight and die for his glamour. The Chinese will fight, as will the Americans, to open the Burma Road, for that is life for China. And they may take a little solace in the fact that an American commander will be in the field. But if we think that any Chinese, of any army or station in life, trusts or likes the British, we are making a disastrous mistake. It will not impress Chinese soldiers, Americans, Australians or New Zealanders, or perhaps even common British soldiers, that Lord Louis Francis Albert Victor Nicholas Mountbatten's wife, the former Edwina Cynthia Ashley, is one of Britain's wealthiest heiresses. Nor will Allied soldiers give one double-damn that Lord Mountbatten is an excellent polo player and that he wrote a book on polo.

I rather imagine that the Japanese are laughing and waiting for the British lord. As for myself, I am simply disgusted and mad. And if I, a civilian American, feel like this, I can well imagine what the Chinese are thinking—and this despite any polite remarks they might make about this appointment.

AGNES SMEDLEY.

New York, Sept. 6, 1943.

Hoot & Jeffers "peek in" why Eisenhower & Stilwell "Glimpsed"

VI-73D-45

War Correspondent Lectures On China

Guest speaker at convocation this morning was Agnes Smedley, war correspondent and author who has spent many years in China.

Miss Smedley related her numerous experiences during the twelve years she spent in China, where she fought alongside the Chinese for Chinese independence, democracy, and improvement in the people's livelihood. She is the author of "Daughter of Earth", "China Fights Back", and "The Battle Hymn of China".

Massachusetts Guardian Oct 7-1943