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The Chinese Soldier

Broadcast by the BISHOP OF VICTORIA,
HONG KONG, on July 7

IN Britain we have not yet completed our third year of war. But China begins today her sixth year, and remember she did not begin as we did with six months of phoney war. In the first four months alone Peking, Tientsin, Shanghai and the new capital, Nanking, had all gone, 500,000 of her soldiers had been killed or wounded, and half a hundred million people were on the move from their homes in search of safety in the hidden villages of China or in the Far Western Provinces.

About this time Madame Chiang Kai-shek stood one evening on a hill looking down on the wide Yangtze valley, watching the men and women at work in the fields, the busy boats, the tireless load carriers. 'Don't you think', she said, 'it is our common people who make China unconquerable?' Madame Chiang used a Chinese word which



Chinese peasants irrigating their soil by a primitive water-wheel which they work with their feet. 'For these men soldiering is a strange adventure, something that must pass and one day be over and they can go back to the old village and the old people, to wife and children, ox and furrow once again'

Popper



Nurses, enlisted by Madame Chiang Kai-shek, dressing wounds in a Chinese military hospital. In the first four months of the war with Japan 500,000 Chinese soldiers were killed or wounded: and in addition the army suffers severely from dysentery and malaria

Muir

means much more than our English term, the common people. In Cantonese we have a rather different term for the ordinary man—we call him *siu-yan*, the man with little. It is the men with little possessions or none, with little wealth or none, with little but their lives to give for their country, the millions of China, who are today still fighting against the invading armies of Japan.

I know the feel of the quiet villages these Chinese soldiers come from—the homes and fields which are always in their hearts and minds as they march or fight or lie in hospital. I know the damp feel of the first morning light when you rouse the bullock and with the plough over your shoulder lead him by the nose, slow, but oh so sure, to the wet mud of the rice fields. I know, because I also keep pigs, what it means when they farrow well and the baskets of manure pile up—so that the rice will not grow yellow and frail but strong and green and vigorous. I can see now the smooth jerking swing of the pole and the two baskets full of yellow grain as they



Women harvesting rape. The girl in the middle is threshing by treading the plants with her feet, and the elder women then collect the separated seed

Pictorial Press



Nganning, near Yunnan, one of the quiet villages these Chinese soldiers come from—the homes and fields which are always in their hearts and minds as they march or fight or lie in hospital'.

Popper

For these men soldiering is a strange adventure, something that must pass and one day be over and they can go back to the old village and the old people, to wife and children, ox and furrow once again. I have seen these men, these men with so little, fighting against the Japanese, and realised that as soldiers they are still men with little. The Japanese are men with much, in technical equipment, aeroplanes, machine-guns, transport; even in their physique and their self-confident efficiency, they are men with much. As soldiers the Chinese *siu-yan* remain *siu-yan* still—men who fight with little, as they have always lived with little. 'Men against the skies' they have been called. Yes, the skies in one sense have been against them, but in another the skies are always on their side. Heaven rewards those whose cause is just. And these *siu-yan*, these men with little, whose lives have been spent with oxen and ploughs and all the quiet immensity of nature around them, have a confidence of their own. They have lived through flood and drought, they have seen disease kill all the cattle in a county, but the fields have remained and the changing seasons have gone on, and somehow they have come through. Their confidence is less self-conscious, less arrogant, than the Japanese. As they yield to misfortune in their fields, so, often they give way before the vigour and arrogance of the Japanese attack. Yet somehow often their very giving way leads to victory. Japanese soldiers have told us how bewildered they are by it. 'The Chinese soldiers', they say, 'do not fight fair. It's like fighting against the mist'.

I have seen these 'men with little' fighting, and I have seen them marching endless miles along the roads in their green cotton clothes and peaked caps, and always behind each company one or two green bamboo stretchers with those whom malaria has laid low that day, being carried along by their comrades. For these men with little, little resistance to disease, little equipment, living very close to the countryside, suffer terribly from malaria and dysentery. In spite of the heroic efforts of the medical services there has never been enough quinine. Only those actually down with malaria may have it. I remember the bombing of a convoy of medical supplies. One truck was blown to pieces and with it a million tablets of quinine. I have seen these men with little in long lines on straw mattresses on the floor of improvised hospitals, and I have seen with thankfulness great drums of cod liver oil from friends in Britain being emptied as the orderlies draw their daily ration for each ward. I have seen in Kwei-yang, the headquarters of the Chinese Red Cross, the beginnings of the orthopaedic work for the thousands who have been disabled. I wish I could take you there to see the enthusiasm and ingenuity of the Chinese doctors who are fighting in this case not death, but that living death that comes from a useless body.

It is these men with so little who begin their sixth year of war

today. What of their leaders, their officers? Sixteen years ago, in 1926, I first met the new Chinese officer. I remember coming back to Shanghai from Canton saying that the cadets from the Whampoa Academy would soon make themselves felt in China. I had not then even heard the name of Chiang Kai-shek, who was responsible for this new quality, but before the year was out he and his fellow comrades of Dr. Sun Yat Sen had led the new armies of the Republic to the Yangtze valley and set up a national government in Nanking. Those days marked the beginning of the end of the old mercenary soldier—the kind of soldier you read of in Pearl Buck's earlier books or in Cronin's *Keys of the Kingdom*. Now a new national ideal and a leader of amazing integrity and power—and the armies of China have become people's armies.

A year ago I saw in Szechwan another cadet school for young men from schools and colleges. These young lads have been spared the hard life-discipline of those who have always been men with little. They have been men with much: education, good food, reasonable health. For them, then, must be the strict and vigorous discipline of the cadet schools: the result, an officer often worthy of his men. In the far north, centred round Yennan, is another army with another discipline, the Eighteenth Group Army—once the Eighth Route Army. They are drawn from the same two cross-sections in Chinese life, but they share together the discipline of the Communist movement. Today these soldiers, who for years were fighting for their lives against the National armies of China, now fight with them against Japan, and have no mean record of heroic encounters and daring guerrilla work to their credit.

An American writer, Agnes Smedley, who lived for three years with the Chinese Armies, sharing their food and their sufferings, their disasters and their triumphs, has told me two stories of men she knew. The first was of a machine-gun crew in a strong post, overpowered and captured by the Japanese. They were tied together and led down to the river bank, their heads were slit open downwards by the sword and their bodies thrown into the river. By a strange miracle one of the crew was not dead. Lying half in and half out of the water he slowly regained consciousness and was able to keep himself alive by an occasional handful of water from the river. He was found by a peasant. From the look of horror on the peasant's face the soldier guessed what his own face must look like. He gave up hope of life when the peasant ran away. But the peasant came back bringing an Italian priest, a little company of Christian village folk and a stretcher. Very tenderly they bound up the soldier's wounds and lifted him on the stretcher, and so took him through the hills to the mission station where other wounded men were being cared for. A week later a party of Japanese soldiers led by an officer came to the place demanding that any Chinese soldier should be handed over to them. The priest took them to his church and showed them over. 'See, it is empty', he said, and so to his school. 'You see, there are no soldiers here'. 'But your house', said the officer, 'I must search your house'. 'Only as my guest can you come into my house', said the priest, 'and I cannot ask you in'. The officer tried to enter. The priest barred the way. 'You must shoot me first', he said. The officer hesitated, fingered his revolver, hesitated again, then drew himself up, bowed and withdrew his men. The priest had saved the lives of thirty of China's sons, men with little, little but their lives to lose. Today on the Yellow River, with a deep jagged scar across his face, the man who told the tale is fighting again for his country.

There was another and an older man who came to the forward dressing station, walking wounded, his head tied up with a field dressing. He sat outside the little farm building on a stool, and waited till the stretchers were empty, the serious cases attended to and his turn should come. Miss Smedley noticed him and offered to renew his bandage, to bring him a drink of hot water. 'Oh, no', he said. 'It is a very little wound, a very little thing; it is for my country'. Then more slowly, his head moving slowly from side to side, 'It's a very little thing, it is for my country'. The moving head stopped and fell forward. He was dead.