

THUNDER OUT OF CHINA

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A Note to the Reader

THIS book is the product of two minds, and almost all the chapters are the result of the closest collaboration between the two authors. Sometimes only one of us was present to observe and report the events noted, and in such cases the first person singular in a few chapters refers to Theodore H. White.

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We wish further to acknowledge our thanks to Time Incorporated for permission to reproduce material and portions of dispatches that we sent to them in our capacity as staff correspondents. The opinions and conclusions of this book are, however, the opinions and conclusions of the two authors and in no sense reflect the policy or opinions of Time Incorporated. We also thank the Associated Press for permission to reproduce its first dispatch announcing the attack on Pearl Harbor.

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T. H. W. and A. J.

August 15, 1946

Introduction

NO LAST shot was fired in this war; there was no last stand, no last day dividing peace from strife. Half a dozen radio stations scattered about the face of the globe crackled sparks of electricity from capital to capital and into millions of humble homes; peace came through the air and was simultaneous over all the face of the earth. The great ceremony on the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay was anticlimax, an obsolete rite performed with primitive ceremony for a peace that had not come and a war that had not ended.

The greatest fleet in the world lay amidst the greatest ruins in the world under a dark and cheerless canopy of clouds. The U.S.S. *Iowa* was on one side of the *Missouri*, the U.S.S. *South Dakota* on the other. A tattered flag with thirty-one stars was hung on one of the turrets of the battleship—the flag of the infant republic, which Commodore Perry brought with him to the same bay almost a hundred years before. Above the mainmast fluttered the battle flag of the Union of today. The deck was crowded with the apostles of the American genius—the technicians. There were technicians of heavy bombardment, technicians of tactical bombardment, technicians of amphibious landings, technicians of carrier-borne war. These men were artists at the craft of slaughter, trained to perfection by four years of war. The ship itself was the apotheosis of all American skills, from the cobweb of radar at the foretop above to the gray slabs of armor, carefully compounded of secret and mysterious alloys, below. It was an American show. There were a Russian with a red band about his cap and a Tass newsreel man who insisted on crawling in among the main actors to get his shots; there was a Canadian general

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who flubbed his part and signed on the wrong line; there was a carefully tailored Chinese general who had spent the war in Chungking, where he disposed tired divisions on paper about a continental map. These too were technicians, but they were lost in the serried ranks of American khaki and white. The victory in the Pacific had been a severely technical victory, and, as befitted the world's greatest masters of technique, we overawed all others.

The Japanese supplied the one touch of humanity. Half a dozen Japanese were piped over the side of the *Missouri*, but for the purposes of history and in every man's memory there were only two—the general, Umezu, and the statesman, Shigemitsu. Umezu was dressed in parade uniform, all his ribbons glistening, his eyes blank, but you could see the brown pockmarks on his cheeks swelling and falling in emotion. Shigemitsu was dressed in a tall silk hat and a formal morning coat as if he were attending a wedding or a funeral. He had a wooden leg, and he limped along the deck; when he began to clamber to the veranda deck where the peace was to be signed, he clutched the ropes and struggled up with infinite pain and discomfort. With savage satisfaction everyone watched Shigemitsu struggling up the steps; no American offered a hand to help the crippled old man.

Shigemitsu and Umezu were brought forward, and after a few carefully chosen words beautifully spoken by General MacArthur, they signed their names to a document marking an end to the Japanese Empire. Now Shigemitsu and Umezu were both technicians; if anyone had asked them why they had lost, why they were being forced to sign an end to all their world, they would have advanced a dozen cogent reasons wrapped up in figures on tonnages, metals, guns, divisions, alliances, and ill-timed decisions. All their reasons would have been valid to specialists. Probably neither Shigemitsu nor Umezu ever entertained for a moment the thought that they might have lost because what they had conceived was so hideously wicked that it generated its own defeat. When they had signed, the generals and admirals of all the other nations put their signatures to the document, and peace, if peace it was, had come.

This victory had been an American victory, one achieved by an

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overwhelming weight of metal, guns, and superior technique, which had crushed Japan utterly and completely. But there was no indication at the moment of victory on the *Missouri*, or in the days of defeat before the victory, or in the days of exuberance after it, that America understood the war she had been fighting in the Pacific. We had been threatened out of the darkness of the Orient; we had recognized the threat as something indescribably malevolent and had fashioned a steamroller that crushed it to extinction. But we had never stopped to inquire from what sources the threat had been generated.

America's war had cut blindly across the course of the greatest revolution in the history of mankind, the revolution of Asia. We had temporarily lanced one of the pressure heads and released some of the tension by an enormous letting of blood. But the basic tensions and underlying pressures were still there, accumulating for new crises. Peace did not follow victory. All through Asia men continued to kill each other; they continue to do so today and will be doing so for a long time to come.

In Asia there are over a billion people who are tired of the world as it is; they live literally in such terrible bondage that they have nothing to lose but their chains. They are so cramped by ignorance and poverty that to write down a description of their daily life would make an American reader disbelieve the printed word. In India a human being has an average life expectancy of twenty-seven years. In China half the people die before they reach the age of thirty. Everywhere in Asia life is infused with a few terrible certainties—hunger, indignity, and violence. In war and peace, in famine and in glut, a dead human body is a common sight on open highway or city street. In Shanghai collecting the lifeless bodies of child laborers at factory gates in the morning is a routine affair. The beating, whipping, torture, and humiliation of the villagers of Asia by officials and gendarmes is part of the substance of government authority. These people live by the sweat of their brow; they live on what they can scratch out of exhausted soils by the most primitive methods with the most savage investment of their sinew and strength. When the weather turns against them, nothing can save them from death by hunger. Less than a thousand years ago Europe lived this way; then Europe

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revolted against the old system in a series of bloody wars that lifted it generation by generation to what we regard as civilization. The people of Asia are now going through the same process.

History books devote too much of their attention to the study of successful revolutions. When huge masses of people erupt out of misery, in bloodshed and violence, to make their lives better, they are usually greeted by the horror and vituperation of contemporary historians. Only time makes such uprisings respectable. When uprisings fail and a superficial stability is re-established, the stability is regarded as something fine and gratifying. Beneath such stability, however, the miseries, tensions, pressures, and fears of the abortive revolution continue, growing inward in a tortured pattern of violence. The people's suppressed passions are seduced by false slogans and phrases, and they are easily led into disastrous adventures against the peace of the entire world. This is what happened in Japan.

The war we fought against Japan was a war against the end result of a revolution that had failed. A hundred years ago the impact of the West on China and Japan started the wheels of revolution turning. For generations it was customary to think that Japan had made a successful transition into the modern world and that China had failed. That was wrong; Japan's revolution failed within fifteen years of Perry's arrival in Tokyo Bay. It was seized by the feudal, reactionary-minded leaders of Japan's Middle Ages, and its energies were twisted into the structure of the Japanese Empire as we knew it in 1941—a society that could not solve its own problems except by aggression against the world, an aggression in which it was doomed. Out of the misery latent in the villages of Japan and the regimentation of her workers, the leaders of Japan bred disaster for everyone. The very chaos that has persisted in China for a hundred years has proved that the revolutionary surge of the Chinese people against their ancient unhappiness is too strong for any group to control and distort.

The war Japan fought against us was one in which the Japanese were beaten from the outset. They were led by military technicians who had only a jungle understanding of politics; they were defeated by superior military technicians who had as little understanding of

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politics but incomparably greater treasure in steel and science. By defeating Japan, however, we did not make peace. The same revolutionary forces that miscarried in Japan are still operating everywhere else in Asia. Throughout that continent men are still trying to free themselves from their past of hunger and suffering.

The forces of change are working more critically and more explosively in China than anywhere else on the entire continent. The peace of Asia and our own future security depend on our understanding how powerful these forces are, what creates them, and what holds them back. Except for General Joseph Stilwell, no Allied military commander seems to have understood that this was the fundamental problem of the war in the Orient. Stilwell had no ideology—but he understood that in fighting the war we were outlining the peace at the same time. He understood that both victory and peace rested on the measure with which the strength of the people could be freed from feudal restraints. He arrived at his policy empirically by exposure to Chinese life in the field; it was not supported by the American government, and he was relieved of command; but his relief from command is a mark of greater glory than any he won on the field of battle.

This book is a partial story of the China war; only a Chinese can write the true history of his people. The story of the China war is the story of the tragedy of Chiang K'ai-shek, a man who misunderstood the war as badly as the Japanese or the Allied technicians of victory. Chiang could not understand the revolution whose creature he was except as something fearful and terrible that had to be crushed. He had every favoring grace on his side—the support of powerful allies, the cause of justice, and in the beginning the wholehearted and enthusiastic support of all his people. The people whom he led felt instinctively that this war against Japan was a war against the entire rotten fabric of time-worn misery. When Chiang tried to fight the Japanese and preserve the old fabric at the same time, he was not only unable to defeat the Japanese but powerless to preserve his own authority. His historic enemies, the Communists, grew from an army of 85,000 to an army of a million, from the governors of 1,500,000 peasants to the masters of 90,000,000. The Communists used no magic;

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they knew the changes the people wanted, and they sponsored these changes. Both parties lied, cheated, and broke agreements; but the Communists had the people with them, and with the people they made their own new justice. When the might of American technique moved to support Chiang K'ai-shek in the final year of the war, not even America could recapture for him the power that had been his in the first glorious year of the war of national resistance.

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Thunder Out of China

Chapter 1

Chungking, a Point in Time

CHUNGKING, China's wartime capital, is marked on no man's map. The place labeled Chungking is a sleepy town perched on a cliff that rises through the mists above the Yangtze River to the sky; so long as the waters of the Yangtze flow down to the Pacific, that river town will remain. The Chungking of history was a point in time, a temporal bivouac with an extrageographical meaning, like Munich or Versailles. It was an episode shared by hundreds of thousands of people who had gathered in the shadow of its walls out of a faith in China's greatness and an overwhelming passion to hold the land against the Japanese. Men great and small, noble and corrupt, brave and cowardly, convened there for a brief moment; they are all gone home now. London, Paris, Moscow, and Washington are great cities still, centers of command and decision; the same great names live on in them, the same friends meet at old familiar rendezvous. But Chungking was a function of war alone, a point in time; it is dead, and the great hopes and lofty promises with which it once kindled all China are dead with it.

History made Chungking the capital of China at war because by tradition, logic, and compulsion there was no other choice. For centuries it had been famous as the key city of the key province of the hinterland. The Yangtze, the great river of China, is pinched almost in two by the narrow rock gorges that separate central China from the interior; Chungking is the first large city above the gorges, a bastion that frowns on any attempt to force entrance into the west by river. Commercially and politically it dominates the province of Szechwan, which in turn dominates all western China. Szechwan—

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Four Rivers—is a huge triangle of land, larger in area and population than France or Britain. It has lived behind its forbidding mountain barriers as a law unto itself throughout Chinese history. In winter the province is moist and chilly, in summer warm and humid. Some of the richest mineral resources and some of the most fertile land in China lie within its mountains. Everything grows in Szechwan and grows well—sugar, wheat, rice, oranges, azaleas, poppies, vegetables. The Chinese have a saying that whatever grows anywhere in China grows better in Szechwan.

Its remoteness and self-sufficiency set the province apart from the main stream of national events. It figures in legend and history as a mystic land far back of beyond. Actually Szechwan fulfilled by its backwardness its most important function; its people were usually the last in Chinese history to give allegiance to each new dynasty, the hardest to administer from Peking, the reservoir of strength in successive revolts against alien rule, an anchor against disaster. It was, for example, from Szechwan that the republican revolution against the Manchus burst into central China in 1911, caught the attention of the world, and touched off the generation of change out of which modern China was born. But afterward Szechwan, unnoticed, went its own way for twenty-five long years; it did not pursue the revolution but dissolved into anarchy. The troops of its war lords, trailing disease and terror from valley to valley, laid it waste. As the old system of government withered away, the war lords assumed complete sway over the lives of the peasants and fought among themselves wars that were as comic and barbarous as any ever recorded. The war lords were colorful figures; they lived joyfully with many concubines in great mansions, waxed fat on the opium trade, extorted taxes from the peasantry sometimes fifty years in advance, wrung land from the original owners to add to their own estates. In the process they became great manorial barons, full of wealth and pride.

By the middle 1930's a master war lord named Liu Hsiang had subjugated the others by a combination of guile and force, much as Chiang K'ai-shek had done in unifying the rest of China; when the Japanese struck in 1937, Szechwan was knit together by a network

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of semifeudal alliances securely controlled from Chungking by General Liu. Within this war-lord federation secret societies flourished along the river valleys. The cities reeked of opium; cholera, dysentery, syphilis, and trachoma rotted the health of the people. Industry was almost nonexistent, education was primitive; two so-called colleges and one first-class mission university alone served the province's 50,000,000 people. The peasants of western China worked their fields as their fathers and forefathers had done before them; their horizons reached only as far as the next market town. When Japan attacked China, the war lords of Szechwan gave full allegiance to Chiang K'ai-shek, but to their curious way of thinking this effected merely an alliance between themselves and Chiang against the Japanese, rather than an integration and subordination of their independence to anyone else's command. When the Japanese drove inland, the province accepted the new refugees as exiles and regarded the new national capital, in Chungking, as a guest government.

The city taken over by the Central Government as its house of exile was known even in China as a uniquely unpleasant place. For six months of the year a pall of fog and rain overhangs it and coats its alleys with slime. Chungking stands on a tongue of land licking out into the junction of the Yangtze and Chialing Rivers; the water level swells 60 to 90 feet during flood seasons and yearly wipes out the hopeful fringe of shacks that mushroom along the river's edge. Chungking grew up in service to an economy of thousands of peasant villages; it bought their rice, meat, and silk and provided them with thread, cloth, and kerosene. It was a rural city, and its sounds and smells were those of a great feudal village. The wall of old Chungking encircles the peninsula from its tip at the river junction to the crest of the spiny ridge where the city opens out into the backland. The wall was built, the natives say, about five centuries ago; it stands almost intact today, its nine great gates still channeling traffic. When the bombings of Chungking began in 1939, one of the gates was still barred every evening by the night watchman. Eight of the nine gates opened out on the cliffs overlooking the river, but the ninth gave entrance by land; this was the Tung Yuan Men, the Gate Connecting with Distant Places. The old imperial road used to leave

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Chungking through the Tung-Yuan Men and follow the valleys to Chengtu; thence it lifted over the northern mountains to Sian and continued deviously to Peking. Now the main motor road to western China pierces the walls a hundred yards from Tung Yuan Men, but the beggars still cluster by the shadowy old archway, and the peddlers sell shoelaces and tangerines by its worn steps.

Almost all there was of Chungking before the war lay within the wall. Two hundred thousand people cramped themselves into this meager area. The few rich men in the community, war lords, great bankers, and rich landlords, had private and palatial homes several miles out of town. An air of timelessness brooded over the wall. The encroachment of the twentieth century was only a few decades old when the war against Japan began. The first rickshas had appeared only in 1927; they were a novelty, and so were the two motor roads. A public telephone system came in 1931, a new water system in 1932, and twenty-four-hour electric service in 1935. The first motor vessel had forced its way up the Yangtze at the beginning of the century; few followed it.

A thousand Chungking alleyways darted off down the slopes of the hills from the two main roads; they twisted and tumbled over steps that had been polished smooth by the tramp of centuries of padding straw-sandaled feet. The native Szechwanese lived in these alleys as they had for centuries; they held aloof from the worldly downriver Chinese and were suspicious of them. The alleys were tiny, cut with dark slantwise shadows; on foggy days they were tunnels through the grayness, and some were so narrow that a passerby would catch the drip from the eaves on both sides with his umbrella. Coolies with buckets of water staggered up the slime-encrusted steps to the side alleys that the new water mains could not reach; sewage and garbage were emptied into the same stream from which drinking water was taken. Oil lamps and candles burned in homes at night. When they fell ill, some of the people used the three excellent mission clinics or the hospital, but more of them went to herb doctors who compounded cures for them by esoteric recipes calling for everything from crystals of musk to children's urine. They guarded against infection by tying a live cock to the chest of a corpse to keep away spirits.

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They wore grayed towels about their heads, turban fashion, as the relic of forgotten mourning for a folk-hero dead sixteen centuries ago. The women nursed their babies in the open streets as they chatted with their neighbors; they would hold a child over the gutter to relieve himself.

The old streets were full of fine ancient noises—squealing pigs, bawling babies, squawking hens, gossiping women, yelling men, and the eternal singsong chant of coolies carrying their burdens up from the cargo boats at the river's edge to the level of the city itself. The cotton-yardage salesman, laden with wares, advertised them by clacking a rhythmic beat on a block of wood as he walked. The notions dealer carried his goods in a square box on his back and enumerated them loudly. The night-soil collector had a chant all his own. So did the man selling brassware—cat's bells, knives, toothpicks, ear-cleaners, all dangling from a long pole. Shops that refinished cotton quilts provided a sort of bass violin accompaniment as the workers strummed on vibrating thongs that twanged into the cotton, hummed over it, and twanged again.

About this old city in 1939 grew the new wartime capital. Chiang had chosen Chungking for the same geographical reasons that had made it important to every conqueror. Here all the communications of western China gather to a focus. Roads run to the southeast, Yunnan, Chengtu, and the north. The rivers all join in Chungking before they plunge on into the gorges. From Chungking, Chiang could reach more of his fronts with supplies and reinforcements in less time than from any other city that was left to him. Moreover, Chungking had other advantages—its famous winter fog that shrouded the city from Japanese bombers for six months of the year, its cliffs from which were carved the world's most impregnable air-raid shelters.

All through the fall of 1938 and the spring of 1939, driven in flight by the Japanese, government personnel came pouring in, ragtag, bobtail, and aristocracy. Government offices were migrating en masse. They came by bus and sedan, by truck and ricksha, by boat and on foot. Peddlers, shopkeepers, politicians, all ended their march in the

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walled city. The population of 200,000 more than doubled in a few months; within six months after the fall of Hankow in 1938 it was nudging the million mark. The old town burst at the seams. A dizzy spirit of exhilaration coursed through its lanes and alleys. It was as if a county seat of Kentucky mountaineers had suddenly been called on to play host to all the most feverishly dynamic New Yorkers, Texans, and Californians.

New buildings spread like fungus. Szechwan had no steel, so bamboo was sunk for corner poles; few nails, so bamboo strips were tied for joining; little wood, so bamboo was split and interlaced for walls. Then the ramshackle boxes were coated thick with mud and roofed with thatch or tile. And in these huts lived the believers in Free China—officials who could have returned to collaboration and comfort, but who stayed on in Chungking because their country needed them. The town filled with new stores and signboards. Each store proclaimed its origin: Nanking Hat Shop, Hankow Dry Cleaners, Hsueh Candy Store, and Shanghai Garage and Motor Repair Works almost by the dozen. Refugees had their own food tastes, which Szechwanese restaurants could not satisfy, and restaurants, proclaiming each its specialty, followed the refugees up from the coast. In squalid, hastily built sheds you could buy Fukienese-style fish food, Cantonese delicacies, peppery Hunanese chicken, flaky Peking duck. By the middle years of the war, when a luxury group had grown up in Chungking, its tables were almost as good as those of imperial Peking—for those who had the price. All the dialects of China mixed together in Chungking in a weird, happy cacophony of snarls, burrs, drawls, and staccatos. A foreigner who asked directions in halting Mandarin dialect was likely to be answered by a Cantonese who spoke Mandarin even worse. Officials in government bureaus found that it was easier to deal with some of their fellows in writing and that their Szechwanese messenger boys could scarcely understand them.

Chungking seethed and spread. It spilled out of the city wall and reached beyond the suburbs to engulf rice paddies and fields. The government gave the streets new names—Road of the National Republic; Road of People's Livelihood; First, Second, and Third Middle