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Recollections of the Veterans of the World War II

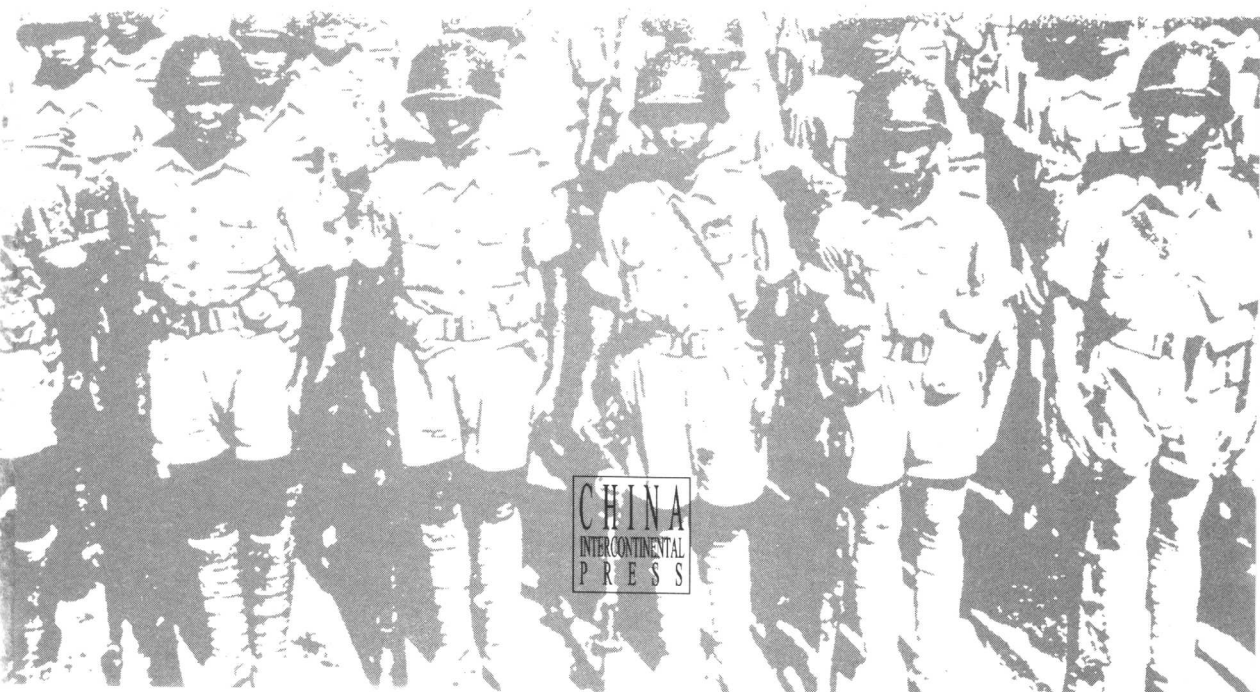
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# the **Under Same Army Flag**



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# **Under the Same Army Flag**



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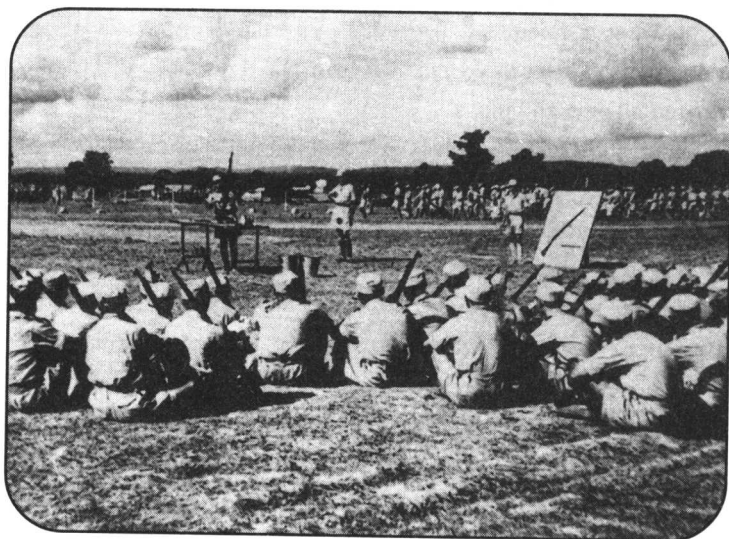
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# Army Life in India

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# The First Man to Join the Army in Chongqing

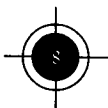
by Deng Shuyi

(A private of the 5<sup>th</sup> Independent Combat Vehicle Battalion, Chinese Army in India)

**M**y native town is Wuhan, Hubei Province, which was occupied by the Japanese in 1938. After that, my family moved to Chongqing (Peidu). Financially, we were better off than most, as my father was the owner of Wuhan Yuhua Textile Factory. However, in wartime, there was no security for anyone. Chongqing was also under Japanese air attacks. During the massive bombings of May 3 and May 4, everyone in my aunt's family was killed, except my oldest cousin, who then moved in with us to mourn. I had led a sheltered family life, and I had never seen people die, but I will never forget the grieving tears coming down my cousin's face! There was no security, even hiding inside air-raid shelters. One time, Japanese airplanes flew overhead so long that many people in the air-raid shelter suffocated to death. I heard from the family servant that when people went in to collect the bodies, gold watch and jewelry alone filled up several baskets! They buried the bodies by the river; but it flooded, and the bodies floated all over the place!

I was a junior high school student in Boxue Secondary School located on the south bank of Chongqing. The family business often became a target of Japanese bombing. Where could we go if Chongqing could not hold out against the Japanese? The other unconquered parts of China could not hold and feed all these people.

In December 1943, I went with my best friend, Lu Leli, who had come from the occupied northern region, to see his uncle. His uncle was a lieutenant general, division chief of the Nationalist (KMT) Military Medical Division. We went straight from there to the enlistment office. We explained our intention to the guard and asked to see an officer. A colonel received us. After talking with us, he took out a notebook asking us to register first. I put down my name before my friend did, thus becoming the first student registered in Peidu to join the





Student soldiers.

army.

At that time, China was not yet urging students to join the army. Students were considered the backbone of the country, who, after the war, would be the ones to rebuild and restore the dignity of China in the world. However, the country was already on the verge of life or death. So soon after, the newspaper headlines came out calling students to join the army. Following the call, a wave of “casting aside the pen and joining the army” quickly swept across the entire hilly city. My mother didn’t stop crying at my news; my father and the dean at my school came often to dissuade me. However, my heart was set on going to India.

In January 1944, we finally set off. At Kunming Airport, the American army gave us a second physical checkup. The doctors were all very kind. Each of us was given a form for the physicals. When you passed one item, a check would be marked in that box. I caught an eye infection on the road, so my eyes were all red. I was sure that it wouldn’t pass. What could I do? I couldn’t go back now! I turned around and ran out, found a stationery store, and quickly marked

each box on the form. Coming back to the airport, the physical was nearly over. Just when I was worried about what to do next, some students who already passed came out happily. I saw a blue stamp on their arms indicating that they were qualified. Using my wits, I grabbed one of them and put my arm firmly against his. Well, I became qualified, too! Even though the stamp was reversed, nobody paid any attention. So, I was allowed on the airplane.

Arriving in India, I was with assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Independent Combat Vehicle Battalion of the Chinese Army in India to receive military training at Ramgarh in the state of Bihar. Of all my training, the most interesting was the 12-week course on wireless radio at the communication school. Students in the class came from different Battalions with various education backgrounds. Most of us didn't know English at all, so we had to start from ABC. After the first class, the American teacher turned over this tough job to the interpretation officer. After the second class, the interpretation officer "quit" too, and, seeing that my English was ok, he simply turned it over to me!

I worked hard for 10 days, and it finally showed some results. The students, who didn't know any English, could now understand simple English words! Now our class could move on more smoothly. Because of this episode, the two

Deng Shuyi in India.



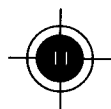


American teachers got to know me well. They were both sergeants in their 20s; William Slider had a full beard; Henry Camp was quite tall. As a reward for teaching English, the bearded Sergeant gave me two boxes of Pall Mall filter tip cigarettes, and we became friends. At breaks, we often sat together chatting. My English was rather basic, but with hand gestures, we could manage to carry on a conversation. We all hoped the war would end soon. We both joined the army as students, but his pay was over \$100 a month and any leftover could be sent home; mine was only 24 rupees (\$6.00), and I sometimes needed help from home. American soldiers all complained about spending money. Almost every one of them was fond of drinking. Sometimes for a bottle of brandy, they would trade their rifles. To control their alcohol consumption, the army gave each soldier a small notebook with allocated "purchasing points." Certain commodities, such as alcohol, required points. Each time the allocated item was purchased, points would be deducted and recorded in the notebook. For example, if the total points in a month were 100, a bottle of brandy would cost 40-50 points. That being the case, nearly all American soldiers needed to get wine from other channels, buying from local Indians, or from Chinese soldiers (Chinese soldiers had no alcohol limit). For Americans, there was no fun without alcohol.

I remember that Henry always knew the most tricks. By the later part of our field practice, besides learning to receive and transmit radio messages, we had also learned several card tricks from him. At first, I couldn't see how he did it for the life of me. After some hints, I realized that you just needed to be fast with your hands. His masterpiece was to hide 6 of spades and 7 of clubs, and then give the audience 7 of spades and 6 of clubs. Then he had the audience put them back in the stack, and shuffled over several times. Finally, he took out the two hidden cards, the 6 of spades and the 7 of clubs. The viewers were all speechless!

At the end of the training, we exchanged contact information. Unfortunately, I lost it later on the road. What a shame!

In our spare time, we often went in groups of two or three to a small shopping street about 10 km away. If a car came by, we tried to hitch a lift; otherwise we just went on foot. Sometimes, as we were walking, a car would pull up in front of us. The American friends in the car would say, "Hello. Can I help

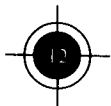


you? Where are you going?" Knowing that we didn't have to walk any further, we replied in joy, "We are going to the market!" The driver would shrug his shoulders, "Okay! Get in!" We all jumped into the car while whistling.

By late spring of 1945, led by an American captain, we went to Calcutta to get a new car. Over there we stayed in an American barrack, eating with them from the same pot. Chinese soldiers were accustomed to using one big bowl and a tablespoon to eat, but this wasn't suitable for American food. Imagine putting beef stew, chicken, salad and ice cream all in one bowl! Yuck! To accommodate our customs, they allowed us to get our food with several helpings.

Beyond our different customs in daily life, our cultural differences resulted in minor misunderstandings. In the summer of 1945, when we set off for home, the army paired one Chinese and one American soldier in each truck, driving in turns. My partner was an African American guy from Indiana, who, a year older than me, was also a high school student before the war. In spite of my limited English and the few Chinese words he knew of, we managed to talk quite pleasantly with the help of hand gestures. He told me that he wanted to be a scientist in the future. Since it was still quite an effort to talk, we simply sang songs, "Old Man River;" "Old Folks at Home;" "Mississippi River;" and the like. Although our duet wasn't quite in harmony, we still enjoyed it. One day, after listening to him singing a song in a deep voice, I started singing Foster's classic, "Old Black Joe." When I came to "I hear their gentle voices calling 'Old black Joe,'" he suddenly shouted, "Shut up!" staring at me angrily. I had no idea what was wrong, but seeing him so angry, I kept apologizing. Finally he calmed down, and then lectured me sternly, that I shouldn't insult African Americans. After that, he kept a blank face and never spoke to me again. When our team got to Kunming, he coldly said good-bye to me. To this day, I still can't figure out why he was angry. "Old Black Joe" is a song sang by African Americans. I searched my brain inside out and couldn't understand why it was insulting to them. I really hope to be able to see that African American friend again so we can clear that misunderstanding.

Fortunately, such misunderstandings were few. More often were the occasions when we were being mischievous. One time, my car had a problem coming down from a mountain. After sliding downhill, it got stuck right in the middle of the road. As I got off to check, I heard an ear-piercing honk. Look-



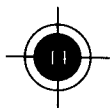


ing back, my car had blocked several American military cars behind us. I then asked the local folks to help me push the car to the roadside. In the meantime, one of the American soldiers couldn't wait and he started swearing in English. Not wanting to be a coward, after I moved the car to the side, I started cursing back in English. The guy immediately turned the car off and walked towards me. I was only 1.72 meter tall, and he must have been 1.9, almost like a big bear! When he stood in front of me, he simply put his right palm on my head and pushed once, I fell over. As soon as I got up, he did it again, and again. After three, four, five times, I felt everything was whirling around me, while the onlookers and the American soldier were all laughing. I seized my one chance to get out, ran back to my car and took out the submachine gun, pointing at him, cartridge loaded. Seeing this, he stood there speechless, and couldn't laugh any more. A minute later, he put up both hands, waving and smiling, and kept saying to me in Chinese, "Very good! Very good!" Feeling that his smile was genuine, I only jabbed at his butt a few times with my gun, and yelled, "Go away!" He immediately ran back to his car as if being granted a pardon. When his car started moving, he even put his head out of the car, waving "bye-bye" at me, with a funny face, and that was the end of the comedic performance.

Another time, my car broke down in the middle of a mountain road. We waited for 3 days with no sign of help. My two assistants and I finally remembered that there was an American auto mechanic shop less than 100 km away. In our delight, we hitched a ride there. Not until I arrived at the door did I realize that my English was inadequate. I stuttered to make a self-introduction and describe our dilemma without an interpreter. It was quite nerve-wracking. When the major, director of the factory, asked me what was wrong with the car, I couldn't make it clear at all. I took him to the side of a similar car, pointing to the gear assembly at the center of the rear axle, "Some gear broke inside....," The Major thought a little and said, "Okay, you may come again tomorrow morning." When I got there the next morning, my assistants were already waiting for me. The car was towed inside, and before long, it was fixed. I thanked him before we left to go back to my unit. From that, I had new understanding of our American friends. They were efficient, less complicated, earnest with work, and easy-going; no red tape or bureaucratic airs. That's exactly what we should learn from them.

In 1945, when the war ended, we set up our barracks about 40 kilometers from Ledo, waiting for our turn to go back to China. Even though we were only at the border of the forest, we still experienced the terror of the primeval jungle. Amid the forest was a small creek about 10 meters long. Not getting sufficient sun light, the water was dark green. Our kitchen squad was set up next to it. On the other side of the creek were rows of towering trees, one after another, interspersed with elephant grass about 3-4 meters tall. It was as dense as a wall! If you looked carefully, you could see big holes in the thick grass. Local people told us that it was an elephant path. The elephants thumped out to reach the water, and would take the same way back. Other animals also came to use this passage for water. All kinds of wild animals would pass by this route to the creek. At first, we were really scared that they would swim across the river to our side, but we didn't want to say it for fear that we might be laughed at. Our squad leader, platoon and Battalion commanders never spoke of this, except to warn us not to get in the water to play. It was said that there were ghosts in it. One soldier with a nickname Little Fujian (from Fujian Province), medium-built, very sturdy, always liked to have fun. Believing himself a good swimmer, one day after lunch, he got in the water. A moment later, he was nowhere to be seen. The creek was calm as usual, as if nothing had happened; one student threw in a log to test, and it sank without even a ripple. Looking carefully, we saw that the log was tangled up in thin waterweeds, which massed around the log. No wonder nothing could float, be it human or any lifeless item. Poor Little Fujian was ensnared in the water by the weeds, and never made it home.

(Compiled by Sun Yanting)







# Army Life in India

by Liu Dingxun

(A private of the Military Police 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Chinese Army in India)

## Ledo – Starting Point of Stilwell Road

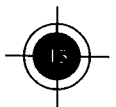
Ledo was our official training base, which was still under construction at the time. We were to build the barracks with our own hands. “That’s a way of training too,” said our deputy Battalion commander.

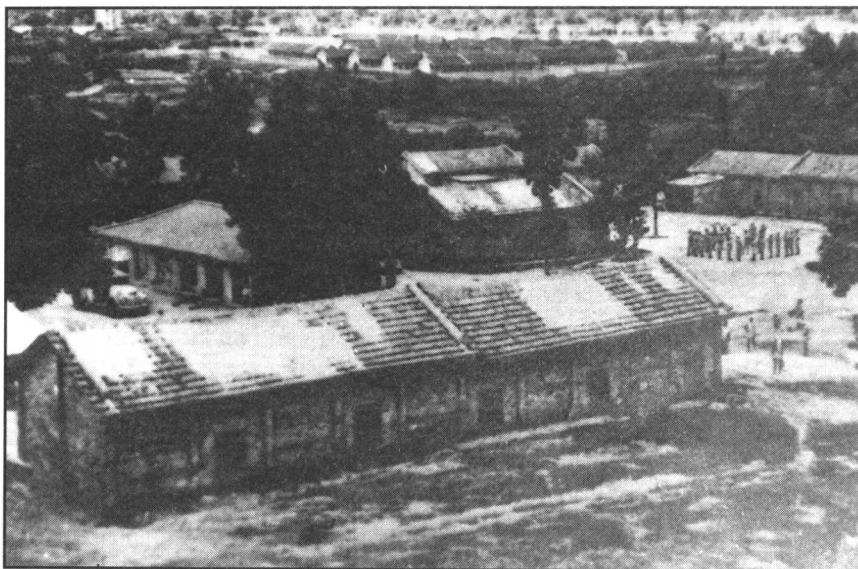
We arrived early in the morning, and Ledo was shrouded in heavy fog. Getting off the truck before the main force, we started working on an area of open ground. Using shovels and drills, we dug into the ground to set up posts; pulled a canvas over on top; tightened it up onto the posts; and finally, enclosed it on four sides with thick curtains. We built two large beds inside each tent and dug ditches around it for drainage. We were to build over 30 tents of similar size and accommodation for the entire Battalion in just a few days. Obviously, it was quite a challenge!

A large piece of equipment operated by an African American soldier came to help us dig a well. Bustling with powerful sound, it dug a deep hole in no time. Setting up a pump, water came running out. We were all amazed at the efficiency it produced. Two bulldozers were also working nearby to level a small hilltop. It knocked off trees and pulled the roots altogether, big or small. It was incredible how powerful these machines were.

Knowing that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was going to work in Ledo, we went to look for all kinds of things from nearby empty barracks, such as vaulting horses, iron bars, basketball stands, semifinished tables and chairs; and shipped them to Ledo. Those were made and left behind by other soldiers in the expedition; and could be put to use instead of making from scratch. Chinese were capable people. They could hand make all kinds of things with whatever was available.

We moved in right after the tents were set up. Two Battalions were transported to the new campsite by trucks. Here, it was no longer as quiet as it was in the jungle. Instead, it was the never-ending noise of the machine humming;





Ramgarh Training Center.

airplane landing and taking off at a nearby airport; cars and trucks passing by on the road; and trains arriving and leaving the rail station. In addition to all of the aforementioned was the noise of the bulldozers and a rock crusher. Together it composed a grand symphony. At night, alongside the sound of machine motors were beams of a huge searchlight constantly moving around. The lamps on the wall of the confinement room being kept on all night; the lights at the train station, green and red; and the headlights of the cars coming and going... Static lights mixed with moving light made it as bright as daytime. Ledo became a nightless city.

Our task was to build a large capacity auditorium and a classroom before the end of the year. It was a huge project and none of us had prior experience in construction. We worked in shifts and had to burn mid-night oil. To everyone's surprise, we did it 10 days ahead of schedule.

## International Military Police

Towards the end of the intensive and rigorous two-month training, we all became physically strong and technically well trained, bursting with energy.