

THE SCALPEL, THE SWORD

Ted Allan and
Sydney Gordon

The Story of Dr Norman Bethune



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING

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THE STORY OF DR NORMAN BETHUNE

by

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and

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Foreign Languages Press

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

手术刀和剑 / (加) 阿兰 (Allen, T.), (加) 戈登 (Gordon, S.) 著.
- 北京: 外文出版社, 2004
(中国之光)
ISBN 7-119-03548-7

I. 手… II. ①阿…②戈… III. 白求恩, N. (1890~1939)
- 传记 - 英文 IV. K837.116.2
中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2003) 第 117588 号

外文出版社网址:

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

外文出版社电子信箱:

info@flp.com.cn

sales@flp.com.cn

中国之光丛书

手术刀和剑

作 者 (加) 阿兰 (Allen, T.), (加) 戈登 (Gordon, S.)

责任编辑 蔚文英

封面设计 蔡 荣

印刷监制 冯 浩

出版发行 外文出版社

社 址 北京市百万庄大街 24 号 邮政编码 100037

电 话 (010) 68996121 / 68996117 (编辑部)
(010) 68329514 / 68327211 (推广发行部)

印 刷 三河市汇鑫印务有限公司

开 本 小 16 开

印 数 1000 册

版 次 2004 年第 1 版第 1 次印刷

装 别 精装

书 号 ISBN 7-119-03548-7 / Z·707 (外)

定 价 80.00 元

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THE SCALPEL, THE SWORD

The Story of Dr Norman Bethune

First published by Robert Hale Limited, London, UK, 1954.

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info@flp.com.cn

sales@flp.com.cn

ISBN 7-119-03548-7

Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2004

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

PREFACE

Huang Hua

It is a great honor for me to write a preface for the new, PFS (China Society for People's Friendship Studies) 50-book series under the general title of *Light on China*. All these books were written in English by journalistic and other eyewitnesses of the events described. I have read many of them over the seven decades since my student days at Yenching University. With some of the outstanding authors in this series I have ties of personal friendship, mutual regard, and warm memories dating from before the Chinese people's Liberation in 1949.

Looking back and forward, I am convinced that China is pursuing the right course in building a strong and prosperous country in a rapidly changing world with its complex and sometimes volatile developments.

The books in this series cover a span of some 150 years, from the mid 19th to the early 21st century. The numerous events in China, the sufferings and struggles of the Chinese people, their history and culture, and their dreams and aspirations were written by

foreign observers animated by the spirit of friendship, equality and cooperation. Owing to copyright matters and other difficulties, not all eligible books have as yet been included.

The founder of the first Chinese republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen wrote in his Testament in 1925, "For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of the people's revolution with but one end in view: the elevation of China to a position of freedom and equality among the nations. My experiences during those forty years have convinced me that to attain this goal we must bring about an awakening of our own people and ally ourselves in common struggle with those people of the world who regard us as equals."

Chairman Mao Zedong declared, at the triumphal founding of the People's Republic in 1949, "The Chinese people have stood up." Today, having passed its 53rd anniversary, we see the vast forward strides that have been taken, and note that many more remain to be made.

Many foreign observers have traced and reported the real historical movement of modern China, that is: from humiliation — through struggle — to victory. Seeking understanding and friendship with the Chinese people, their insight and perspective were in basic harmony with the real developments in China. But there have been others who viewed China and the Chinese people through glasses tinted by hostile prejudice or ignorance and have invariably made irrelevant observations that could not stand the test of time. This needs to be better understood by young people and students, at home and abroad. The PFS series *Light on China* can help them gain an overview of what went before, is happening now, and will

emerge in the future.

Young students in China can additionally benefit from these works by seeing how foreign journalists and authors use fluent English to record and present historical, philosophical, and socio-political issues and choices in China. For millions of students in China, English has become a compulsory second language. These texts will also have many-sided usefulness in conveying knowledge of our country to other peoples.

Students abroad, on their part, may be helped by the example of warm, direct accounts and impressions of China presented by their elders in the language that most readily reaches them.

Above all, this timely and needed series should help build bridges of friendship and mutual understanding. Good books long out of print will be brought back to strengthen the edifice.

My hearty thanks and congratulations go first to ex-Premier Zhu Rongji, who has been an effective supporter of this new, PFS series. They go to all engaged in this worthy project, the Foreign Languages Press, our China Society for People's Friendship Studies, and others who have given their efforts and cooperation.

Chairman Mao Zedong has written: "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently. The world rolls on, time presses. Ten thousand years are too long. Seize the day, seize the hour."

The hour has come for making these books available to young people in China and abroad whose destiny is to build a better world together. Let this series add a small brick to that structure.

Beijing, Autumn 2003

*To those for whom he worked and died;
and more personally, to Julie, Norman and Susan*

AUTHORS' NOTE

THE MATERIAL on which this biography is based was gathered in the course of research that spanned eleven years and followed Dr Bethune's life from Gravenhurst, Ontario, through many of the major cities of Canada and the United States, to Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, the Soviet Union and finally China. We had to acquaint ourselves with Bethune's Canadian background, his medical development, the origins of the Spanish war of 1936-9, the evolution of modern China, the wide interplay of world events which helped shape his life and to which he reacted in his own characteristic manner. Though he won international fame as a thoracic surgeon he was also in varying degrees a painter, poet, soldier, critic, teacher, lecturer, inventor, medical writer and theorist. He lived on many levels, had many careers, was involved with many people and became a stormy petrel of some of the decisive happenings of our era.

One of us worked with him in Spain. The other knew him in Montreal. Both of us followed his career closely until his death. He left behind him so many vivid memoirs, diaries, letters and other writings that it was possible for us to penetrate in to the innermost workings of his mind during the most decisive periods of his life.

In the acknowledgments we have listed many people who have helped to make this book possible. But here, without any invidious comparisons, we feel it necessary to single out a few names for special mention. These include Bethune's mother and brother (the late Mrs Elizabeth Ann Bethune and the

late Malcolm Bethune); Bethune's sister, Mrs Janet Stiles, who supplied us with necessary family data; Frances Campbell Penney, Bethune's former wife, who gave us much valuable information which would otherwise have been unavailable. We are indebted to three people for the fact that the material on Bethune's life in China is so detailed and documented. They are: Madame Sun Yat-sen, who was instrumental in having Bethune's Chinese papers and diaries made available to us; Israel Epstein, author of *The Unfinished Revolution in China*, for his untiring efforts to assemble them; Chou En Fou, whose lengthy chronicle on Bethune (in Chinese) was important corroborative evidence.

Further, this book received the wholehearted co-operation of Bethune's medical colleagues, many of them now world-famous in their respective fields. We refer particularly to his colleagues of McGill University, the Royal Victoria Hospital (Montreal), the University of Toronto, the Sacré Cœur Hospital (Montreal), the Montreal Medico-Chirurgical Society, Trudeau Sanatorium (Saranac Lake, N. Y.), the American Tuberculosis Association, the Canadian Department of Health and Pensions at Ottawa, and the Council of the American Association of Thoracic Surgery. We are also indebted to those of his colleagues who checked the manuscript, but we alone assume all responsibilities for any medical errors.

Readers of the British edition will find particular interest in the fact that Dr Norman Bethune pursued his internship and post-graduate studies in England and Scotland, his ancestral home.

As fellow-Canadians we take pride in presenting to other areas of the Commonwealth the story of a man whose life spanned the world, whose talents were freely given to all men, and who died in the cause of international amity.

THE AUTHORS

Toronto, 1954

PREFACE

IN COMPARISON with the human world of past times, our world is highly complex. Because of its highly developed communications, events in every part of the globe and of human society are closely interconnected. There are no isolated disasters and there is no progress that does not help the progress of all.

This situation is reflected in the minds of men. The contents of men's minds have also become world-wide in scope and complexity. It is not enough for a man, seeking the welfare of his own people and country, to consider his domestic situation in relation to his immediate neighbours. World trends encompass every one of us, and it is by participating in them and contributing to them that we influence our own future. The highest task before men's minds today is to understand, to fight against the forces of regression and death to strengthen and convert into reality the possibilities which our world offers, as no previous world has offered, for a fuller life for all men.

The hero in any age is one who carries out with a surpassing degree of devotion, determination, courage, and skill the main tasks with which his times challenge every man. Today these tasks are world-wide, and the contemporary hero—whether he works at home or in a foreign land—is a world hero, not only in historical retrospect but now.

Norman Bethune was such a hero. He lived, worked and fought in three countries—in Canada, which was his native land; in Spain, where forward-looking men of all nations flocked to fight in the first great people's resis-

tance to the darkness of Nazism and fascism; and in China, where he helped our guerrilla armies to capture and build new bases of national freedom and democracy in territory which the military fascists of Japan fondly hoped they had conquered, and where he helped us forge the mighty peoples' army which finally liberated all China. In a special sense he belongs to the peoples of these three countries. In a larger sense he belongs to all who fight against oppression of nations and of peoples.

Norman Bethune was a doctor, and he fought with and within his profession with the weapons he knew best. He was an expert and a pioneer in his own science—he kept his weapons sharp and fresh. And he devoted his great skill, consciously and consistently, to the vanguards of the struggle against fascism and imperialism. To him fascism was the disease holding a greater evil for mankind than any other, a plague that destroys minds and bodies by tens of millions, and by denying the value of man also denies the value of all the sciences which have arisen to minister to man's health, vigour and growth.

The value of the techniques Norman Bethune taught his Chinese students under Japanese gunfire was determined by the purpose for which they were used. Germany and Japan were countries of high technical development, but because they were led by enemies of human progress their science and their skills brought only misfortune to mankind. Fighters for the people have the duty of attaining the highest technical skill, because only in their hands can technique really serve man.

Dr Bethune was the first medical man to bring blood banks to the battlefields, and his transfusions saved the lives of hundreds of fighters for the Spanish Republic. In China he launched and practised the slogan, "Doctors! Go to the wounded! Do not wait for them to come to you." In an environment totally different, and far more backward than that of Spain, he organized a procedure of guerrilla medical service which saved tens of thousands of our best and bravest. His plans and practice were based not only on medical science and experience, but also on military and political study and experience on the fronts of the people's war. Bethune in Spain and China was a pioneer in the battlefield of medicine.

He understood thoroughly the conditions, strategy, tactics and terrain of the struggle, and he knew what could be expected of medical workers who were free men, fighting beside other free men for their homes and their future. The doctors, nurses and orderlies whom he trained learned to regard themselves not only as technical auxiliaries but as front-line soldiers, with tasks as responsible and important as those of the fighting branches.

These things Dr Bethune accomplished amid conditions such as no medical man without a broad understanding of his tasks could possibly have coped with. He accomplished them in mountain villages in the most primitive parts of China, almost without any previous knowledge of the language, of the people among whom he worked, and without any strength in his own tuberculosis-ravaged body apart from his burning conviction and iron will.

His broad world understanding, the sources of power that he drew from it, were the things that give his work more universal meaning for our time than that of other medical heroes who laboured against similar heart-breaking conditions, such as Father Damien or Dr Grenfell in Labrador.

What killed Dr Bethune? Dr Bethune fell in the fight against fascism and reaction to which he had given his passion, skill and strength. The region in which he worked was not only blockaded by the Japanese enemy. It was blockaded also by Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary government which had always been ready to compromise victory rather than fight a people's war. The men whom Bethune fought for were adjudged unworthy not only of arms and ammunition but even of medical supplies to heal their wounded. They died of infections because they could not receive modern antidotes.

Bethune died of septicæmia, the result of operating without rubber gloves and of having no sulfa drugs for treatment.

The International Peace Hospitals which Dr Bethune founded now work under new conditions—China, at last, is free. But after Bethune died his appointed successor, Dr Kisch, who worked beside him in Spain, was prevented by Chiang Kai-shek's blockade from assuming his post. Dr Kotnis of the Indian Medical Units, who finally took up the directorship of one of Dr Bethune's hospitals and valiantly carried on his work, also died at his

post—again because there were no drugs on hand to treat him. Dr Bethune and Dr Kotnis were two among many victims, who, were it not for the blockade, might still be living and fighting in the cause of the world's free peoples.

I am very happy to introduce the life of Dr Norman Bethune to greater numbers of people than have hitherto been able to acquaint themselves with the life of this hero of our time, who symbolizes so nobly the common stake of all people in the fight for freedom. His life, death and heritage have been particularly close to me, not only because of the great services he performed in our peoples' war of national liberation, but also because of my own activity in the China Welfare League of which I am chairman. The League has been directed towards securing support for the Bethune Peace Hospital and Bethune Medical School network that carries on his work and his memory.

The new China will never forget Dr Bethune. He was one of those who helped us become free. His work and his memory will remain with us for ever.

SOONG CHING-LING (MADAME SUN YAT-SEN)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In addition to those mentioned in the Authors' Note, we owe a debt of gratitude to:

Anne M. G. Purves, his paternal aunt, for information of early family life. Doctors G. Nadeau, L. Eloesser and L. Fisher for their reports and obituaries published in the *Journal of Thoracic Surgery*, the *History of Medicine* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Doctors G. McQuitty; T. Crombie; E. W. Archibald; E. Barsky; G. Deshaies; L. Davidson; J. S. L. Browne and J. B.* for letters, anecdotes and medical advice. (However, any medical errors which are found in this book are strictly our own!) The University of Toronto; McGill University; Trudeau Sanatorium; The Royal Victoria Hospital; the Sacré Cœur Hospital; the Herman Kiefer Hospital; the Hospital for Sick Children (London), for their co-operation. Academy of Medicine (New York City), for use of its excellent medical library. Doctors S. S.* and A. H. Aufses (New York City) for demonstrating some of the surgical techniques Bethune taught them, and for their Bethune correspondence. Elizabeth Wallace; Irene Kon; Louis Kon; Marian Scott; Mrs Lincoln Fisher; Hazen Sise; Madame Sun Yat-sen; General Nieh and Doctor Ma-Hai-Teh for their Bethune correspondence. And last, but not least, Kate Allan and Nina Herman for typing and helping to prepare the manuscript for publication.

* Drs J. B. and S. S. have requested anonymity.

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