

Chinatown Goes Picketing (1938)

Lim P. Lee

Although China did not formally declare war against Japan until 1937, the War of Resistance informally began in 1931 after Japan attacked Mukden and occupied northeastern China. Almost immediately, Chinese Americans across the country put aside their differences and did what they could to help save China. During the next fourteen years of war in China, they donated their hard-earned savings, boycotted Japanese products, participated in protest parades and rallies, and supported the training of Chinese American pilots for the Chinese air force.

Written by social worker Lim P. Lee for the *Chinese Digest*,¹ the following detailed account of a successful picket protesting the shipping of scrap iron to Japan provides insight into the Chinese community's patriotic fervor and united stance on behalf of the war effort in China. Everyone—young and old, men and women, the political right and left, Christian and secular groups—participated. Highly organized and determined to make their point, the pickets succeeded in gaining the support of the longshoremen and calling national attention to the need for an embargo of war materials to Japan.

San Francisco's waterfront has been the scene of many labor wars but it was only last month that the Sino-Japanese war was carried to its Embarcadero. The "zero hour" was 11 A.M., Dec. 16, and the "strategic withdrawal" was 2 P.M., Dec. 20, 1938, and what *did* happen has attracted nation-wide attention and is a story worth re-telling.

By the "grapevine method"—the most effective [form of] communication

1. A social worker, journalist, and later postmaster of San Francisco, Lim P. Lee (1910–2002) wrote about social issues in the Chinese American community through his "Sociological Data" page in the *Chinese Digest*, a newspaper intended for second-generation Chinese Americans that was published from 1935 to 1940.



Chinese pickets at the San Francisco waterfront, 1938. (Courtesy of Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco)

in Chinatown—Chinatownians heard that "something will happen" at the waterfront on Dec. 16, and all interested in picket duty for the good of China were to meet at 10:30 A.M. at the corner of Stockton and Clay streets. By 11:00 more than 200 volunteers answered the call to the colors. Singing, yelling, and cheering, they were carted down by trucks to Pier 45. There they were met by [European] Americans, Greeks, Jews, and other volunteers of many nationalities, 300 in number, 100 more than the Chinese forces. Lying on Pier 45 was a Greek tramp freighter, the *S. S. Spyros*, loading implements of death—scrap iron for the bombs of Japan! I. Bib Tolins, the director of the United Committee for the Boycott of Japanese Goods, held a short strategy meeting, and the demonstration was on!

Lieutenant Governor-elect Ellis Patterson of California, a true liberal and a statesman—if there ever was one—fired the opening gun, saying: "Speeches have been made, the press has denounced the shipment of war materials to Japan, all progressives have expressed themselves for democracy against the aggressor, but you are doing something about it! Congress is about to meet. . . . *Pressure your Congressmen*, that they must ask Congress to put through an embargo on aggressor nations and declare Japan to be an aggressor."

When the American longshoremen started for lunch, the pickets very courteously but firmly pleaded, "Longshoremen, be with us! Longshoremen, be with us." Smilingly and good-naturedly the pickets continued until 1:00 P.M., then asked among themselves: "Will the longshoremen return to

work?" A few did, but the majority of them honored the Chinese picket lines, and the few that worked were so ashamed that they dropped their hooks shortly and joined their comrades. "Victory! Victory!" the call was shouted through Chinatown and the pickets began to arrive in trucks, in street-cars, in automobiles. The radio and the press flashed the news to the nation:—Chinese pickets tied up scrap iron to Japan and American longshoremen refused to load implements of destruction! This lasted until 5 P.M.

By the time the news was flashed back to Chinatown, pigs were being roasted for the nourishment of the Chinese pickets and American sympathizers. Soda pop, coffee, hot tea, sandwiches, oranges, Chinese buns were streaming toward the waterfront to feed the pickets and the longshoremen. Chinese came in from Stockton and valley towns; they marched in from Palo Alto and Peninsula cities; and thousands poured in from the Bay Area till the climax of the picketing numbered 5,000 strong and more!

Then an ultimatum was issued to the pickets on Dec. 19, at 12:00 noon. The committee of the United Chinese Societies met with the representatives of the Waterfront Employers' Association, and the labor relations committee of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, Local 1-10, met with the same representatives of the shipowners, and through their president, Mr. Almon E. Roth, the ultimatum was issued: the Chinese must remove the picket lines, the longshoremen must go back to work, or the shipping of San Francisco and the West Coast would be tied up as a consequence of the failure to accept the dictate of the Waterfront Employers' Association. However, Mr. Roth expressed "personal sympathies" for China, but as a business principle, commerce in San Francisco cannot be interrupted. (Even such commerce that goes to Japan to become bombs to be rained on innocent Chinese civilians, women, and children must go on as a matter of "business principle.")

The longshoremen met the same evening, and Mr. B. S. Fong, president of the China War Relief Association of America and chairman of the committee representing the United Chinese Societies, pleaded with the longshoremen to respect the picket lines. Dr. Le Shan Peng, secretary of the National Committee of China's YMCA and director of Hankow's six refugee camps, gave an impassioned plea for the longshoremen to stand by China. After the Chinese representatives left, the longshoremen voted not to cross the picket lines even if there were one Chinese picket on duty. However, they instructed their officials to negotiate with the Chinese for an amicable solution but specifically told their officials "not to let the Chinese down."

The emergency council of the United Chinese Societies was summoned for a night session, and a committee of eleven was empowered to negotiate with the longshoremen for an "amicable solution." The committee met with the officials of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union at 12 noon on Dec. 20. Mr. Henry Schmidt, spokesman for the longshore-

men, told the Chinese representatives that the C.I.O. Council had passed a resolution to instruct the secretary to call all labor, fraternal, civilian and religious organizations for a coastwide conference to study and promote the embargo on all materials to Japan. Thus the demonstration the Chinese staged has served the purpose of calling the attention of the American public to the seriousness of the embargo question, and that the conference should be called immediately. The picketing of the S. S. *Spyros* was borne solely by the longshoremen, and they had voted to stand by the Chinese as long as they continued picketing in spite of the threat of the closing of the San Francisco port and the tie-up of West Coast shipping. But the more important issue was to get the American people to act together, and that the longshoremen pledged to do.

Mr. B. S. Fong spoke for the Chinese committee, expressing the heartfelt thanks of the Chinese people to the longshoremen in honoring the picket lines. The wages that the longshoremen lost far exceeded in value the cargo that could be lost by the shipowners, but the Chinese people had found out who their true friends were. The Chinese pickets were withdrawn at 2 P.M. Dec. 20, and marched en masse to the Waterfront Employers' Association and protested their mercenary action. Then they circled to the longshoremen's headquarters to express the appreciation of the Chinese people. Thus ended the Sino-Japanese war on San Francisco's waterfront. Then 5,000 marched in a mile-long parade through downtown San Francisco and back to Chinatown, where a mass meeting was held and a national campaign for an embargo on war materials for Japan was launched!

SOURCE: *Chinese Digest*, January 1939, pp. 10-11.

OTHER REFERENCES

- Him Mark Lai, "Roles Played by the Chinese in America during China's Resistance to Japanese Aggression and during World War II," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 1997, pp. 75-128.
- Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

and discuss with us the form, meaning, and sound of Chinese characters. One really cannot help but admire him for his thirst for learning.

In school, Robeson had proven himself a dedicated student. He was admitted into one of the oldest American universities, Rutgers, and later earned his law degree with highest honors [from Columbia University]. A star athlete as well, he was ranked among the top sixteen American football players.⁸ After graduation, he could have practiced law; however, the chance discovery that he could sing made him realize that he could use his voice to awaken his people and thus serve them in another way.⁹

The greatness of Robeson is due not only to his talent in singing, but also to the way that he uses his voice to fight for black people and all oppressed people in the world, and to challenge American imperialism. Today, Robeson has become the most courageous and progressive warrior in the United States. Neither the threats issued by the Committee on Un-American Activities nor the disturbances created by reactionary veterans could silence his heroic voice.¹⁰ Robeson is not only a singer respected by all Americans, but also a singer esteemed by people all over the world.

SOURCE: *China Daily News*, July 13, 14, 15, and 17, 1950. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

OTHER REFERENCES

- Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).
 Him Mark Lai, "To Bring Forth a New China, to Build a Better America: The Chinese Marxist Left in America to the 1960s," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 1992, pp. 3-82.
 Jeffrey Stewart, ed., *Paul Robeson: Artist and Citizen* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
 Renqiu Yu, *To Save China, to Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

8. Robeson was named first on the roster of the All-American college team at Rutgers and played professional football for the Akron Pros and the Milwaukee Badgers to support himself through law school.

9. Robeson also quit law because the white secretaries in the law firm refused to take dictation from him, a black man.

10. During the McCarthy period, Robeson was hounded by the Committee on Un-American Activities because of his outspoken views on racism and his high regard for the Soviet Union and the new China. He was harassed, stopped from traveling and speaking abroad, and so discredited that African American organizations and white American fans turned against him. On August 27, 1949, a demonstration by veterans' organizations before a scheduled concert in Peekskill, New York, culminated in a riot that left 140 persons seriously injured.

The Founding of McGehee Chinese School (1944)

Jew Baak Ming

As the Chinese population dispersed throughout the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, communities developed with attendant business, political, social, and educational institutions along the Pacific Coast, in the Midwest, along the Eastern seaboard, and throughout the South. Between World Wars I and II, a significant number of Chinese settled in rural Mississippi and Arkansas, primarily operating grocery stores that served black customers. As family life took root, parents became concerned about the Chinese education of their children.

In 1939 the Chinese community in Arkansas, consisting of approximately four hundred residents, established a Chinese language school in McGehee in the southeast corner of the state. The following history of this Chinese school is taken from the annual report of the Arkansas Chinese Association, which was founded in 1943 to promote the welfare of the local Chinese and to help with the war effort in China. Although short lived—McGehee Chinese School closed within two years because of World War II—its existence demonstrates the strong commitment that Chinese immigrants have always had to instill Chinese culture in the next generation.

A decade ago, many of the married Memphis Chinese, concerned with their children's education and well-being, began moving to Arkansas. Those who believed strongly in education noticed that just in the southeast corner of Arkansas there were already forty to fifty school-aged Chinese children. As there were no Chinese schools, however, any attempt to instill Chinese culture was difficult. Within the family, parents were busy working and had no time to attend to the task, and the children were in danger of becoming corrupted by the immoral customs of American society.

In the spring of 1939, Messrs. Jew Ji Faan, Jau Fung Gui, Ho Man Gwong, Go Hap Yuen, Yu Gau San, Jew Cheuk Faan, and Lam Yam Yin proposed unanimously to establish a Chinese school. A school board was formed for

that purpose, with Mr. Ho Man Gwong as the board president, Messrs. Jew Ji Faan and Jau Fung Gui as directors to assist with all the planning. The town of McGehee was chosen for the school site because it was centrally located and easily reached by transportation from anywhere—be it north, south, east, or west—within a radius of sixty miles. The operating expenses came from the Chinese community. The first fundraising campaign netted around U.S. \$1,000. Normally the Chinese students would attend American school, so [Chinese] classes were held only once a week on Sunday. That was because the Arkansas Chinese were not concentrated in one area and it was difficult to hold classes at night. The regular teachers were zealous volunteers from the community who had a certain level of Chinese education. During summer vacation, however, professional teachers were hired to teach full time, and their salaries were solicited from the students.

The school was named the McGehee Chinese School. The school building—a spacious store located at the edge of town—was rented, renovated, and the interior painted white. The desks and chairs were donated by Mr. Yu Gau San, games and classroom supplies by Mr. Jew Ji Faan, and maps and other classroom reference books by Mr. Jau Fung Gui. Mr. Ho Man Gwong undertook to do all the installations and setting up in the school. As a result, the school was well equipped and the building neat and clean.

In the summer of 1940, Mrs. Ng Yiu Ming, who formerly taught at Greenville Chinese School, was formally hired. A teacher for many years in China and fluent in both the Cantonese and Mandarin dialects, Mrs. Ng was a very effective teacher, and extremely patient with her many students. Every day the students came to school, those living far away traveling a round trip of about one hundred miles. Lunch took place at Mr. Ho Man Gwong's, at a nominal price. Despite the hot summer weather, the students never flagged in their enthusiasm for learning. Often there were various kinds of sports meets and artistic and cultural competitions. The Student Council was very efficient, and all the events ran smoothly and orderly. Every year there was a picnic. It was a social event to which the entire community was invited.

This writer was a volunteer teacher at one time, and also assisted in the planning of the McGehee school. I felt that interest in the school among the Chinese community was very high. In 1941, there were plans to introduce improvements, to do away with tuition and textbook fees, and to construct a school building and dormitory. Unfortunately, after Pearl Harbor, the people in charge either enlisted for service or moved away. Moreover, there was a strict government ration on gas and rubber tires. The operation of the school therefore came to a halt. All the school supplies, equipment, textbooks, and \$160 in funds were entrusted to the custody of Mr. Jau Fung Gui. As for the future organization and management of the school, I hope the Chinese community and the various board members and association mem-

bers [of the Arkansas Chinese Association] will work together to draw up a comprehensive plan.

Evidently, another Chinese school was not started in Arkansas until 1995, at which time the Chinese population had grown to over two thousand with the influx of immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. That same year, there was reportedly a total of 634 Chinese schools in the United States.

SOURCE: *Annual Report of the Arkansas Chinese Association*, 1944, pp. 24-25. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

OTHER REFERENCES

- Him Mark Lai, "Chinese Schools in America," in *Becoming Chinese American: A History of Communities and Institutions* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Alta Mira Press, 2004), pp. 271-362.
- Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, "The Chinese in Arkansas," *Amerasia Journal* 8, no. 1 (1981): 1-18.

"There but for the grace of God go I"

*The Story of a POW
Survivor in World War II (2002)*

Eddie Fung

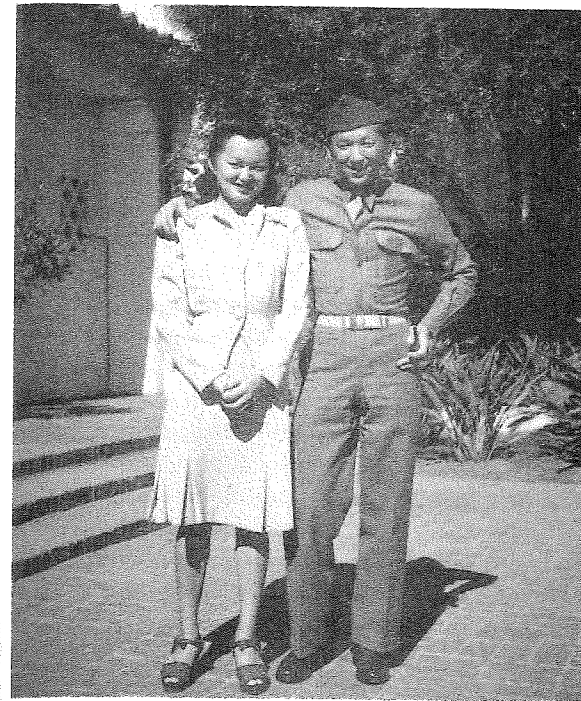
Approximately twelve thousand Chinese Americans served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II. We know of only one who was captured by the Japanese in the Pacific campaign and put to work on the Burma-Siam Death Railway, made famous by the film *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Eddie Fung was among the 61,000 Allied prisoners of war and 250,000 Asian civilian laborers used to build the railway that stretched 262 miles through the tropical jungles of Burma and Thailand. Working under brutal slave labor conditions, the men completed the railroad in a record 14 months at the cost of 16,000 POW and 70,000 Asian lives. Fung was one of the lucky survivors.

Born in 1922 in San Francisco Chinatown, Fung was the seventh child in a family of eight children. His father was a watchmaker and jeweler; his mother was a housewife and seamstress. Early on, Eddie resented the restrictions of Chinatown life and developed an interest in horses. At the age of sixteen, he ran away to Midland, Texas, to become a cowboy. It was while he was working as a cattle ranch hand that he decided to volunteer for the Texas National Guard, which later became known as the Lost Battalion after it was captured by the Japanese in Java on March 8, 1942.

In the following interview with Judy Yung, Eddie Fung, a small but solidly built man, recalls with sharp clarity and a poignant sense of humor what it was like working on the Burma-Siam railroad and how he was able to survive forty-two months of humiliation and brutality as a POW of the Japanese. This is a story about service to one's country, loyalty to one's comrades, the basic instincts of survival, and the recovery of one's ethnic identity.

"I'M GOING TO BE A SOLDIER!"

When the army came to the ranch in the early forties to buy horses, we had the horses all groomed. After they picked the horses, they started telling



Eddie Fung with
his sister Grace after
the war. (Courtesy
of Eddie Fung)

me about the army. Of course, they were talking from the officer's point of view. Said all they did was play polo. They asked me if I wanted to be a houseboy. I said, "No, I don't think so." But then I decided, "Holy smoke, that's another place where I can be around horses. I can join the cavalry." So I went up to the army recruiting station and asked them if I could join up. He said, "You have to take the physical and the I.Q. test." So I went through all that. And he said, "You have to get your parents' permission." (Back in those days, the required age was twenty-one; I was only seventeen.) So I gave my mother as a reference. The recruiting sergeant came back and said, "Your mom said definitely, she does not want her son to be a soldier." When I found out I couldn't be a soldier, naturally, I'm going to be a soldier. So when the sergeant said, "Really, you don't want to be in the army, do you?" I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "I'll tell you what. There's a National Guard Armory in town. All you have to do is go there and they'll sign you up regardless of your age. By November you'll be in the army because the National Guard will be federalized."

After basic training at Lubbock and Camp Bowie in Texas, Fung found himself part of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, 36th Division, aboard the USS Repub-

lic, heading toward Pearl Harbor for a destination with the code name "PLUM" on November 21, 1941.

"CAPTURED BY THE JAPANESE"

The Pensacola convoy of eight thousand men was supposed to be reinforcement and supplies for the Philippines. But after Pearl Harbor was bombed, we were instructed to head south to avoid the Japanese. Then the news came that Cavite Naval Yard [in the Philippines] had been bombed out, so there was no point in the convoy going there because you couldn't unload. They decided to divert the whole convoy to Brisbane, Australia. So we landed in Brisbane on the 22nd of December, just before Christmas in '41. Then on January 1, our battalion of artillery was sent to Java, or Indonesia as they call it. We landed in Soerabaja on January 11, '42. For a while, we were taking care of the 19th Bombardment Group aircraft, doing anything to help—gas up the airplane, take care of the armament, load 50-caliber belts and bombs.

Then the Japanese led a three-prong attack to take Java from both ends of the island. It was the largest amphibious operation at this point of the war and the Allied forces on the island were no match. Our entire Asiatic fleet had been destroyed in the Battle of the Java Seas and we had had no air control to begin with. For seven days we basically provided fire support for the Australian troops. The navy was put under Dutch command, and that was one of the reasons why they had so much trouble, because communications was lousy and they had never worked together. We were fighting up in the area west of Batavia (near Jakarta) for two days and were chased back. Then March 8, orders were sent out by the Dutch commander that all troops were to surrender. Of the 906 American soldiers and sailors who were captured by the Japanese, 668 were sent to Burma to help build the railway.

Have you ever heard the term "hellships"? The Japanese can squeeze more men into a confined space than anyone in the world. I swear to God, our group of 191 Americans was squeezed into a hold no larger than this room [approximately 30 × 30 feet]. You couldn't even breathe! The first night on the way to Singapore wasn't bad, but from Singapore to Rangoon . . . To this day, people see me running around in a T-shirt and they ask me, "Aren't you ever cold?" "No," I said, because all I have to do is think back to October of '42. We spent three days in the harbor of Singapore below the water line, in the hold of the ship, which had hauled rice as the last cargo. And the cargo before that was horses. So we had horse manure and rice fermenting, and we were sweating until we were dry and dehydrated. Water was in short supply and I broke out in a heat rash. I swore to God, if I ever got out of there, I would never, never complain about heat again. [It was so crowded that the men had to take turns sitting, squatting, standing or laying down while suffering from seasickness, dysentery, and malaria.]

"WORSE THAN BUILDING THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD"

We worked ten days then got a day off, for 10 cents a day. We got one holiday, the Emperor's Birthday on April 29. We got up at four in the morning, had *jook* [rice gruel] with a little ginger and sugar for breakfast, got our tools, marched out to the job site, worked until lunch time, when we got rice and vegetables, and kept working until the work was done. The average was fourteen hours a day. You were lucky if you got six hours of rest. We had the easy stretch of the railroad at the north end because the south end was horrible. Because we were such a small group, roughly two hundred people, we were put in with the Australians, which was a good thing because Australians and Texans got along famously. [The other Allied POWs were British and Dutch.]

We were used as a mobile force, meaning that we went wherever the trouble spot was and we would try to straighten it out. So at the beginning, the civilians were used to cut out the right-of-way—three meters, roughly ten feet. They would clear the jungles, and of course, it grows back almost as fast. Then you have to cut and fill, which is the basic of almost any railroad work. In other words, you want as level a road as possible. You lay down the cross ties and rails on each side. Then you start drilling holes for the spikes. Next, you pound in the spikes. Then there will be a Japanese engineer to measure it's a one-meter track and to make sure the alignment and spacing are correct. Then you would make little rocks from big ones for ballast. That's what holds the cross ties in place. Aside from cut and fill and building bridges, we were used mostly for loading and unloading supplies, like the rails and cross ties. The first time they put a hundred kilos on the backs of some of my Texan friends who were used to hard work as ranchers, they almost died (a kilo is 2.2 pounds). That's when I realized the body can do amazing things. All you have to do is to take care of it.

I don't think anyone who worked on the railroad got off without injuries, because we were down to the G-string [a loin cloth] and our bare feet. In the beginning, we all had clothes, but because of mildew, everything falls apart. We were given no prisoner clothes, no shoes. The centipedes were this long (*motions about one foot long*), and tarantulas were the size of a dinner plate! We also had to look out for snakes and scorpions. It was hot year round. Where we were, we could get 400 to 600 inches of rain during the monsoon season. It was like being under Niagara Falls. The humidity will kill you, if the tropical diseases didn't get you first, because the Japanese refused to provide us with any medicine.

The Japanese never got used to the Americans. The first time we had to unload a bunch of rails—they're about thirty feet long, run seventy pounds to a foot—the Japanese were screaming at us to hurry: until they realized we were trying to be efficient. The engineers would not bother to learn English, because once they got the work layout, they're not around anymore.

The Korean guards would make sure we weren't loafing on the job. Slapping, beatings, and torture were common. We found out after the first two months that they were dead serious about getting this railroad build, so we just went ahead and did it. You learned to work at a rate that does not incur the wrath of the guards. There's no official tea break, but if you need a drink, you go ahead and do it. Just don't linger. It was worse than the Chinese building the transcontinental railroad!

Speedo started in May of '43. That was when they found out they couldn't finish the railroad in one year. So they figured, "Okay, let's speed everything up." No more days off, and they just kept increasing the workload, from 1.5 cubic meters per man per day to 2.2, then to 2.8, and 3.2 meters [1 meter = 39¼ inches]. It didn't matter if it was mud, soft dirt, sand, or rock. The job had to be done before you left for the day. Of course, May is the beginning of the rainy season. So combined with the additional workload and the rainy season, it's more difficult. That was the most intense period of construction. Everybody was under pressure. During the speedo period, they even got sick people up to work, anyone who could walk. I was down to 60 pounds [from 103 pounds at the beginning of the war] and sick with malaria and dysentery, still I had to do hard work every day. You can do almost anything when you're forced to. Sabotage didn't do any good because you knew the job had to be done, but we sabotaged when we could. There was no point in trying to escape. The Japanese had a very cute system that worked in Java. Any Allied soldier was worth \$10 dead and \$1 alive. So there was no fear of natives bringing you in alive. You were worth more dead. The first three Australians who tried to escape were caught and executed.

"THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD GO I"

We had native civilians helping—Malaysians, Indonesians, Thais, Burmese—but they died like flies. You would think they would fare better because they live in that country, but there's one thing they didn't have: organization. We were still a military unit, and we looked after each other. We had basic sanitation, no matter how crummy it was. When we got to a camp, you located your kitchen, you located your latrines, you took care of the simple things that would contribute to your hygiene. The natives never did because they worked as individuals. Another example: our basic ration was one pound of rice per *working* man per day. So if only half of the camp is working, immediately you're on half ration. But everyone shares. It was a perfect socialistic state. When the officers got paid their \$20 per month, they would put \$10 into what we called the Red Cross fund to take care of the people who couldn't work. Without being told, we formed tribes of two, three, or four people to look after one another. If one guy is sick, the other two guys remember to boil drinking water for him and to pick up his rations. Let's say

the worst happens and the three guys are sick; another group will look after their group. And no one keeps score. You do it willingly because "there but for the grace of God go I." Regardless of how we kidded each other about being with the navy, marines, or army, we were an American unit and we knew we had to pull together. You knew that you were not going to be alone.

But then we were lucky; we had Dr. [Henri] Hekking as our camp doctor. He was the one who kept our losses down. In our group of 191 people, we lost only 13 people in the year and a half that we were in the jungles. The other larger group of 470-odd Americans lost 120 men. Dr. Hekking was born and raised in Java, but went to medical school in the Netherlands. The British didn't consider him a qualified medical officer, so here he was, just surplus. Captain Fitzsimmons contributed his wristwatch, and Lieutenant Latimore a pocket watch, and they used the watches as a bribe to the Japanese to get us Dr. Hekking. It turned out that he was magic because he had learned herbal medicine from his grandmother. He would tell us what kind of herbs and eatable greenery to look out for in the jungles.

There's nothing I won't do for Dr. Hekking, like scrounging at nighttime, or what we called "moonlight reconnaissance." One time I stole a hundred pounds of sugar. A friend of mine, Slug Wright, worked in the Japanese kitchen, and he told me, "Watch out, Eddie, they mined the kitchen because they've been losing so much stuff." I decided, no, it doesn't matter, because they got to have a safe way in and out. So all we have to figure out is where they walk. Then I decided, no, there's an easier way. So what I did was untie enough of the vines that held the bamboo walls together so that I could remove the wall and sneak in. Well, one of the things I saw was this hundred-pound sack of sugar. The trick about scrounging is that you have to get in and get out. You don't fool around. So I dragged the hundred pounds out and put the wall back together again. Okay, now, the trick is when you steal something, you can't keep it, because there's no refrigeration, and the Japanese conduct snap searches. So what you do is distribute it. First thing I thought about is Dr. Hekking, because he takes care of the sick people. And sugar is like a treat. So I divided it between Dr. Hekking and the kitchen. Everybody got a taste of it.

I guess the best haul I ever made was a case of quinine. We were working in Kanchanaburi, Japanese headquarters, for about a week. There is a medical officer who had his supplies there. So Dr. Hekking said to me one day, "When you're out on the working party, see if you can scrounge some quinine; I'm almost out." He knew that I was allergic to quinine. He said, "Do what you can, but don't get in trouble." The first day I found where the medical supplies were, and there were four cases of quinine. I didn't know very much about trading with the natives. What I should have done was to steal the quinine, sell it to a native, take the money, and give it to the doc to buy the quinine, so I wouldn't be caught. Instead of that, I got the case of qui-

nine. I took it out bottle by bottle, twenty-four bottles in a wood crate with straw. Then I got the case back in order, put the top back on, minus the quinine, and put the case on the bottom. I figured it will take some time before the Japanese medic gets to the bottom case.

I was in charge of the food baskets that day. And as a rule, the guards don't search each and every group going back to camp. It's almost an instinct or intuition, "They're not going to search me." The question was, "Do you bring back four, five bottles at a time, or try to take the whole thing in?" My instinct said, "Do it once. If you're caught, you're caught." If you take it back six bottles at a time, you take four times the chance. So I took all of it in. There was an Australian who was helping me carry the pole. He said, "Eddie, you'll get us killed." I said, "No, they're not going to search us." So I put some bananas on top. And I said, "I'll give you half for helping me carry it in." He said, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "Give it to the doc for the hospital." "Now," he said, "if you're going to do that, I'll help you carry it in." We got it in. So I told the Australian, "You can take half to your doctor if you want." He said, "Let's see what your doctor wants first." He said, "If he's a good bloke, he'll share it with us." And that's what doc did. He shared it with all the other doctors. I wasn't scared, but you know what the Japanese are going to do. Well, besides beating you up, they'll turn you over to the *kempeitai*, which is the Japanese equivalent of the S.S. They're mean! But as far as I was concerned, Doc saved my life twice, so I'm beholden to him. He knows I'll take chances whenever he needs something. In fact, I asked him before I did that, "You want a microscope, they got a microscope in there, and a nice wooden case." He said, "Eddie, I would love that microscope (*sounding exasperated*), but where am I going to hide it?"

"WHAT IT IS TO BE CHINESE"

My worst moment came in May '45. The reason I can remember the month is because May is the beginning of the rainy season, and '45 was, of course, our last year, even though we didn't know it at the time. It wasn't a vision but a feeling that I would never see my mother again, who was still alive when I left, that I would not be able to go home and tell her face to face, "Okay Mom, I understand what you and Pop were trying to tell me, what it is to be Chinese, and how to be a Chinese." I just had the feeling that I wasn't going to get the chance to do that. There was never a time when I was more down, even when I had the dysentery and malaria at the same time. So I lived with the fact that I'm an unfilial son, because as it turned out, my mom died in May. There's two ways that I put it. If there's a heaven and a hell—an afterlife—and wherever they are, my parents will know that I'm trying to live the life they taught me to live. If there isn't an afterlife, I will know that I'm trying to live the way they taught me to live. So either way it will work out.

I came to feel strongly about my ethnic identity when we first got to the jungle, and Captain Fitzsimmons called me in one day and said, "Eddie, I can change your service record so it reads that you're half Chinese." And I said, "Why would we do that, Captain?" He said, "They may not be as rough on a half Chinese." My father had died in 1940, so I told Captain Fitzsimmons, "My father would turn over in his grave if I did that. Let's just take our chances and leave it the way it is." That was when I realized that I am Chinese. There's nothing I can do to change that. Culturally, I'm Chinese. Philosophically, I'm Chinese. But earlier, I had denied it because that was the thing that made Chinatown a ghetto to me. I suddenly realized that regardless of whether you're a prisoner in Chinatown or in a war camp, that doesn't make you any less or any more of a man than what you are. It doesn't matter what the rest of the world thinks, you're still that person. Being a prisoner made me realize that. I had this pathological fear of being a Chinese in the clutches of Japanese hands because I had been brought up to believe that Chinese and Japanese are traditional enemies. It was at that moment I knew that I could not deny who I am. I wasn't extra proud of it. I wasn't ashamed of it. I just knew that's the reality of it. I am Chinese, period.

"GENTLEMEN, THE WAR IS OVER"

Each of us had a different liberation date. Mine is the 19th of August. We knew something strange was going on because we went out three days in a row to work, and each time we were told to go back to camp. The fourth time they called us to the parade grounds at ten o'clock in the morning. The British bugler sounded assembly. That had never happened before. And we just had that feeling, "God, maybe this is it." We were all assembled in the parade ground, and British Warrant Officer Sumson, who was in charge of the camp, announced, "Gentlemen, the war is over and we are free." That was it. Later, we found out about the annihilation orders, that the Japanese were to kill any prisoners who might get in the way of the last-ditch fight.

I haven't had a hard day since that day, because to me, being taken prisoner has been the focal point of my life. I was a snotty-nose kid, just out for adventure, thinking that was all there was to life, not realizing that there's more that you're intended to do. Otherwise, you're just taking up breathing space. I've never regretted the war or the experiences because it taught me something, gave me the self-confidence that I could resolve any problem and take care of any situation that comes up.

After the war Eddie Fung served six months in the air force, worked as a butcher in Bakersfield, California, while attending junior college, and went on to study at Stanford University, majoring in chemistry. He worked as a metallurgical technologist at the Livermore National Laboratory until he retired in 1977. Every year around Au-

gust 15, Fung faithfully attends the reunion of the Lost Battalion Association in Texas as the sole Chinese American member of the most decorated Texan unit of any war.

SOURCE: Eddie Fung, interview with Judy Yung, August 17, 2002, San Francisco, California.

OTHER REFERENCES

- Gavan Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific* (New York: William Morrow, 1994).
- "History of the Lost Battalion," Lost Battalion Association, 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, USS *Houston* Survivors, 2002 Roster, pp. iv–vii.
- Marjorie Lee, ed., *Duty and Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1998).
- K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

One Hundred and Seven Chinese (1943)

Gilbert Woo

At the time that Gilbert Woo¹ wrote the following satire on repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, Congress was in the midst of debating the issue. The Citizens' Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion, which consisted of China scholars, writers, and church leaders, lobbied heavily for the Magnuson bill. If passed, the bill would repeal the fifteen Chinese exclusion acts passed between 1882 and 1913, establish an annual quota for Chinese immigration, and grant naturalization rights to Chinese in the United States. On the surface, the legislation appeared to be dealing racial discrimination a blow, but Gilbert Woo, a liberal journalist at the Chinese Times newspaper,² saw it for what it was—a token gesture and an insult to Chinese Americans.

In the following article, which appeared in his newspaper column "Qizhi" or "I Wish to Inform You,"³ Woo pokes fun at the debate over the small quota as well as at the arguments that labor unions and veterans' organizations were raising over potential job competition and the threat of interracial marriages should Congress pass the bill. But given the international situation—with China as a wartime ally to the United States—Congress decided to vote for repeal, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the bill into law on December 17, 1943, technically ending 62 years of Chinese exclusion.

1. Gilbert Woo (1911–1979) was one of the most widely read columnists in the Chinese American press. He was born in Taishan District, Guangdong Province, and immigrated to the United States in 1932. In his forty-year career as a journalist, he consistently advocated for equal rights in American society, social reforms in the Chinese American community, and prosperity in China.

2. Founded by the Chinese-American Citizens' Alliance in 1924, the *Chinese Times* is a daily Chinese-language newspaper that claims to speak for American citizens of Chinese descent.

3. Gilbert Woo began writing the column on March 9, 1943. The title, "Qizhi," comes from the formal phrase commonly used at the beginning of a Chinese letter, "I wish to inform you." The column ran in the *Chinese Times* for over a year, covering a wide range of topics such as housing issues, the internment of Japanese Americans, and developments in China.



Gilbert Woo reading
the *Chinese Pacific
Weekly*. (Courtesy
of Lucy Huang)

Should the Chinese Exclusion Act be repealed, then 107 Chinese⁴ will enter the United States every year. As a result, the attention of all those who oppose the repeal seems to be focused on these 107 individuals.

These 107 individuals—ah, you can truly be proud of yourselves. In number there are not enough of you to make up a full set of mahjong tiles; yet in power you can scoop up the moon's reflection in the water.⁵

Do you know that an American boxer claims he can take on 100 men? So actually, they can summon a boxer and he alone can beat you black and blue in the face. And yet, believe it or not, just hearing about you strikes terror into the hearts of millions of Americans.

There used to be a Sergeant York in the United States, who, single-handedly, captured over 100 German soldiers.⁶ So actually, an army sergeant alone is enough to tie all of you up. And yet, believe it or not, just mentioning you causes millions of Americans to lose sleep and appetite.

4. The annual allotment for Chinese immigration was later fixed at 105.

5. Meaning, "to achieve the impossible."

6. Sergeant Alvin Cullum York served in Europe during World War I.

An American robber with one single machine gun can hold off 5,000 policemen. So actually, the head of a gang of robbers alone can mow you down like so much wheat. And yet, believe it or not, just speaking about you sets millions of Americans trembling.

Actually, one single streetcar is enough to take you to Seal Rocks.⁷ One single apartment building is enough to hold all of you and you will not even have to fight over the bathroom. Five pounds of coffee is enough to give you insomnia all night. Five *jin*⁸ of *wujiapi*⁹ is enough to make you so drunk you cannot tell left from right. One porky pig is enough to give you the runs. You are not supermen, nor are you celestial beings. And yet they fear you more than the government troops feared the 108 bandit-heroes of Liangshanpo.¹⁰ Come to think of it, we might as well petition Congress and request special permission to increase the number by one to make it 108 individuals. But, on second thought, since Wu Song killed his sister-in-law, he would not fit in here.¹¹ We had best leave him in China.

They say that once the 107 of you manly fellows arrive, you will compete with the tens of millions of Americans for bread and thus drive down the living standards of the United States and cheapen the labor force. Do you really have such power? Or can this be some trick concocted by your Mr. Zhiduoxing?¹²

They say that once the 107 of you manly fellows arrive, you will introduce the problem of yellow and white marriages to this country. Now I am really confused. Are not your ranks filled with people like Lu Zhishen?¹³

Ah, you 107 manly fellows! I cannot help but prostrate myself in admiration. And when you finally arrive, we will be at the dockside to welcome you, loudly exclaiming, "Long live Liangshanpo!"

As historians and political analysts have correctly pointed out, the Chinese exclusion laws were repealed in 1943 as a goodwill gesture to China and to counter Japanese propaganda in Asia. The repeal did little to rectify the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, as the token annual quota of 105 was applied to Chinese people from any part of the world. As for Gilbert Woo, outspoken articles like this one would eventually cost him

7. A cluster of rocks off the coast of San Francisco where sea lions like to gather.

8. A Chinese measurement, one *jin* is equivalent to half a kilogram.

9. Potent Chinese liquor.

10. The headquarters of a group of 108 outlaws who battled corrupt officials, as immortalized in the eighteenth-century Chinese adventure novel *Shuihu Zhuan* (*The Water Margin*), first translated as *All Men Are Brothers* by Pearl S. Buck.

11. Wu Song, one of the bandit-heroes, killed his adulterous sister-in-law to avenge the murder of his brother.

12. Zhiduoxing is the nickname for the resourceful Wu Yong, the mastermind strategist among the bandit-heroes.

13. Another member of the bandit-heroes of Liangshanpo, Lu Zhishen was a monk and therefore a man who must remain celibate.

his job at the Chinese Times. He went on to write for the Kuo Min Yat Po (Chinese Nationalist Daily) before establishing his own newspaper, the Chinese Pacific Weekly, in 1946. He remained Chinatown's liberal voice and conscience until he died in 1979 at the age of sixty-eight.

SOURCE: *Chinese Times*, September 7, 1943; reprinted in *Hu Jinguang wenji* [Selected works of Gilbert Woo] (Hong Kong: Xiangjiang Chuban Youxian Gongsi, 1991), pp. 37-38. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

OTHER REFERENCES

- Him Mark Lai, "A Voice of Reason: Life and Times of Gilbert Woo, Chinese American Journalist," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 1992, pp. 83-123.
- Fred Riggs, *Pressure on Congress: A Study of the Repeal of Chinese Exclusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950).
- L. Ling-chi Wang, "Politics of the Repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Laws," in *The Repeal and Its Legacy: Proceedings of the Conference on the 50th Anniversary of the Repeal of the Exclusion Acts* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America and Asian American Studies, San Francisco State University, 1994), pp. 66-80.

PART THREE

Becoming an Integral Part of America, 1943-2003

Sweeping changes in immigration, domestic, and foreign policies irrevocably changed the composition and lives of the Chinese American population during the second half of the twentieth century. In the aftermath of World War II, Congress passed the War Brides Act of 1945 and Alien Wives Act of 1946, which allowed over seven thousand Chinese women to enter as nonquota immigrants and join their husbands in America. This, in turn, generated a baby boom and noticeable infusion of family life in urban Chinatowns such as those in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Boston. But after China turned Communist in 1949 and the Chinese fought against Americans in the Korean conflict a year later, U.S.-China relations deteriorated. The anti-Communist hysteria that followed in the 1950s forced overseas Chinese to sever ties with their homeland. At the same time, changes in domestic policies encouraged them to set down roots and become an integral part of America. Anti-Chinese laws, which for decades had denied the Chinese fundamental civil rights and legal protection, were revoked one by one, enabling them to intermarry with whites, own land, and find better jobs and housing outside Chinatown boundaries. These new developments opened up opportunities for the Chinese to move out from the shadows of exclusion and become fuller participants in American life.

As the country entered the Cold War era, a series of refugee acts were passed which admitted approximately thirty thousand professionals, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and ex-government officials escaping unstable political conditions in China. The Chinese population in the United States swelled from 117,629 in 1950 to 237,292 in 1960. Unlike earlier Cantonese immigrants, many of these newcomers were well educated, cosmopolitan, spoke the Mandarin dialect, and came from central and northern China. Arriving at a time when conditions were turning favorable for Chinese Amer-