

Coronet

January, 1943

p. 91

What the Japs Told Me

by JOY HOMER



The fabulous adventures of an American girl who worked with Japan's Fifth Column to revive Democracy in the Far East

THE LETTER hiring me as an underground lecturer in Japan was phrased like this: "We hope, dear Miss Homer, that you will contrive to visit us in November when the chrysanthemums are yet in bloom. Our places of beauty—Tokyo, Kyoto, Nikko—they eagerly await your desirable presence."

The gentlemen who wrote this letter were anti-war, anti-fascist Japanese who had been working secretly against their Government. They had tried to stir up anger against the China "incident" and sympathy for the democracies. Some were business men, some college professors, some actually Government leaders. Because I had just returned from a year in Free and Occupied China and could be relied upon as an eye witness, these men arranged for me to visit Tokyo and lecture secretly on Japanese atrocities.

That's how it happened. I sailed

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from Shanghai, one November night, on the strangest lecture tour imaginable. I brought with me no tell-tale literature to give away my mission, only some smuggled photographs taken in Nanking by Japanese soldiers—photographs of rape and murder.

After four months spent at their bayonet points in a dozen conquered cities, my impression of the Japs was not a pleasant one. I had been shoved about, questioned like a criminal, shot at more than once, and forced to watch Chinese coolies clubbed and kicked to death. But in the home country I was to meet a different breed.

My first morning, while I was still hard at my cup of coffee, a very young man burst into the dining room, loaded down with notebooks. It would seem he had recently started an underground press devoted to fighting Japan's military regime and stirring up sympathy for China. In the next hour I supplied him with enough material to last a dozen issues. Round-faced, smiling but stubborn in his convictions, he was perhaps the only Japanese of my acquaintance who refused to sit about and bewail the state of his nation. Instead, he went ahead and did something about it. I hope he is still alive.

The next afternoon I swallowed my stagefright and delivered my first lecture. The audience consisted of the men who had arranged my visit, plus their friends, families and acquaintances. The last group worried me a bit; for they were not quite heart and soul against their Government. And if I failed to convince even one of these non-believers, he might go straight-way to the police and lead to our col-

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lective arrest. For an hour I told them stories of China, stories of agony and murder, of needless brutality, and finally of China's queer tolerance toward her conquerors. At the end of that hour, each man and woman present shook me warmly by the hand and the meeting closed with a prayer for China's victory.

This may sound outlandish; but many groups in Japan are pretty plaintive about their war. Japanese Communists, few in number and helpless to act, wait patiently for the day when their Government will fall and they will inherit the rule. Members of the Diet, Japan's version of Parliament, watch their powers taken one by one away and think dark thoughts about their military cabinet. Within the Japanese army itself exist cliques and intrigues, while between the army and navy there is a half-century of mutual suspicion.

BUT ONE group in Tokyo really surprised me.

Somehow I had always thought of Japan's editors and publishers as a crowd of eager patriots. For years they had issued their government's farcical military communiques with a straight face and a lot of long words. But for one long comic afternoon I conferred with reporters from Tokyo's leading papers, and the single purpose of this meeting was to infuse some anti-military, pro-Chinese stories into the Japanese press. Seldom have I met men with fewer illusions. After a decade of printing their Government's pronouncements, they would move the world on its foundations for the sake of a little truth. For some time now, these men had been printing subversive copy

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about atrocities in China and their army's bungling by issuing it in the form of denials. And Tokyo readers had long since learned to believe implicitly any statement which was hotly denied in their press.

As for my tales—sure enough, when I was safely out of the country, Tokyo papers carried “emphatic” denials. In this way, I probably reached my largest audience.

On the whole, though, the country is bombarded with idiotic propaganda. Every day of the year, the average Japanese is reminded that his army is fighting in China to “free the poor oppressed Chinese from their Communist dictators.” He hears that his army and navy must now fight America because America, for some unmentioned reason, is eager to exterminate Japan. He has a proper schoolboy crush on his Military through sheer force of repetition.

And though the average Japanese is highly dissatisfied with war conditions (lack of fuel and a thousand other necessities), he is also ready to live, fight and die for his country. Those of us who hopefully talk of bombing Japan into a state of internal revolt are barking up the wrong tree. You do not find rebellion among martyrs, and while bombs may destroy Japan's factories, they cannot destroy her nerves.

AMONG the intelligentsia, however, little groups of heretics hold out like small guerrilla bands. And you can't scoff at their inertia despite the fact that they talk much and do little. After all, it took no small amount of nerve to bring me to Japan to speak. A single quiet whisper in the ear of the

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Tokyo police force and they might all have disappeared mysteriously from their homes, never to return.

They are enormously sincere and capable of becoming competent administrators. Many are loved by their people and fellow statesmen, and they may claim a large following when the war is done. For it is only the sanity of men like these that will be able to guide Japan to a right place among the nations.

There is no certain way of knowing exactly how many such Japanese exist. Once at a dinner party I spoke bluntly on the subject of Japan's military sins. I met the usual resistance from shocked guests, among them my elderly host. But later that evening as I was leaving, he trotted along, his beard as agitated as a wheatfield while he hissed intently: “Please, you must not believe me. I hate this war. I *hate* it. But I dare not speak out. I am ashamed, truly.”

It spoke well for Japan's democratic fifth column that I was able to leave for America aboard a Japanese liner. No hint of my job there had been breathed to the authorities. And today the number of rebels has grown. Japan's attack on her American “enemies” has naturally drawn some of her dissatisfied fence-sitters back to the side of her Military. But this same attack has confirmed the faint hearted belief of many more that they are in the hands of madmen. I am convinced that very few men in the Japanese Government knew of the plans for Pearl Harbor. Even their Mikado was kept in happy ignorance. And the hundreds of loyal Government men, the members of the Diet and other

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institutions who have been shorn of their powers and dragged wholesale into a great war—they will not soon forget or forgive.

But we must not expect too much from them. Japan's culture is barely skin deep, regardless of her military successes. And even her most intelligent and sophisticated citizens are incredibly naive. In dealing with them, we will find use for an applied Alice-in-Wonderland psychology.

Take, for example, the last group that I met on Japanese soil—a crowd of several hundred students, all of whom adored their army and thought their country could do no wrong. It was up to me to convince them, or their teacher and I would find ourselves in jail.

I talked. I argued. I pled. I showed proof. At the end of an hour some of the students, far from being convinced, were obviously infuriated.

At this moment their teacher arose and introduced my fiance, also a correspondent homeward bound from China. She asked him to speak. As he rose awkwardly to his feet my heart sank, for I feared more talk was dangerous.

But he came forward and faced the semi-hostile group. He said not a word. Instead, he reached quietly into his coat pocket and came forth with a pack of cards. Then and there he gave the boys a magic show that left them bug-eyed. An amateur magician, he caused half the objects in the room to disappear before the evening was out. And the boys knew a master when they saw one. All the wonderful hot arguments faded from their eyes and their brains. War and

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rape and murder wandered out the window as 200 slanted eyes began to glisten. Then laughter began and the room was soon in an uproar. When they said good-by to us that night, there was worship in their attitude.

Which may point a way to raising good post-war Japs. We might treat them as criminally inclined children in need of playgrounds and lollypops.

After three years as a reporter in China, Joy Homer is fully equipped to give the low-down on affairs Asiatic. She has journeyed through all but three of China's provinces and interviewed Chinese leaders the country over. No safety-first correspondent, she has been target for machine gun and rifle fire, has watched battles from front line trenches, and traveled with guerrilla units behind the Japanese lines. Through all the fortunes of war, Miss Homer has worked side by side with the people whose struggle she recounts, making her tales exciting and authentic.

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