

"CHINESE DONALD"

Salute to an Honest Man

THERE is something strangely final about the death of W. H. Donald, the veteran Australian-born newspaperman who was for many years the friend and advisor of leading figures in modern China. It marks the end of a period: to those who knew him it seems almost a portent, like the death of Falstaff.

Not that Donald was ever rejected at the end by those he had served. He died in the Country Hospital, Shanghai, at the age of 71, brought back with every care and attention to die in China as he had wished. But his death was certainly hastened by his long internment in a Japanese prison camp in the Philippines. And just as certainly his personal influence—so valuable at a number of critical points in recent Chinese history—was sadly missed in China after 1941.

No "Mystery Man"

A lot of nonsense has been written at one time or another about China's "foreign advisors" and "men of mystery"—legendary heroes of the type of "One-Arm Sutton," General Morris, "Two-Gun" Cohen, and the rest. Undeniably China has always attracted picturesque and colourful adventurers from all over the world, and they are fair copy for the gossip-column. But to one of the most experienced American journalists in the Far East—Randall Gould, editor of the *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*—we owe the most effective debunking of the whole "foreign advisor" legend.

"Any writer," says Gould in his recent book, *China in the Sun*, "finds it a distressing task to dispel romantic illusions. But the hard fact is that most of 'what they say' concerning men of genius and figures of mystery guiding Chinese destinies is so much unmitigated bosh. The truth is that in keeping with the nature of this hard, primitive land and its imperturbable inhabitants, events have worked out mostly on the basis of earnest effort. Trial and error, not inspiration, have been responsible for practically all the progress China has made."

Down to Earth

Donald was no mystery man of genius spinning webs of policy, no lonely idealist "following the gleam." He was a hard-headed, practical working newspaperman who got his first job on the China Coast because he was a teetotaler and a member of the Y.M.C.A. He had integrity, sobriety, and a Christian conscience; he had also remarkable energy and an amazing flow of conversation. He worked on various newspapers and Information Bureaus from Hong Kong to Peiping, and first became well-known through his close association with the "Young Marshal" Chang Hsueh-liang, whom he succeeded in curing of the drug habit that had threatened that amiable young spendthrift with disaster.

When the Young Marshal "went abroad" after the loss of Manchuria, to

return a very different man, Donald stayed on in China as a family friend and unofficial advisor to Mme. Chiang Kai-shek. The part he played as a private negotiator in smoothing out the celebrated "kidnapping" of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek by the Young Marshal at Sian in 1936 is familiar to any reader of the newspapers; it had much to do with the growth of his personal legend. To the newspapers he now became "China's Number One White Man."

For four more years Donald remained with the Chiangs—years of war strain and considerable physical hardship. He was with Mme. Chiang in the motor-car accident at the Shanghai front in 1937 that was the beginning of her protracted illness; he was through the long months of bombing in Hankow and Chungking. In those war years Donald flew thousands of miles in all types of planes over all sorts of country—and he was a very tired man by 1941. His complete fearlessness and outspoken criticism of graft and inefficiency made him many enemies in Chungking; and he began to think longingly of retirement.

Donald Leaves China

Throughout 1940 Donald made several trips to Hong Kong, where he was fitting out the yacht in which he hoped to make a cruise of the Pacific. In 1941 he got away, with a young Chinese secretary, Miss Ansie Lee of Hong Kong, who was to help him with the writing of his memoirs. By-passing his native Australia—which he refused to re-visit in view of the appeasement policy of the Menzies Government towards Japan in the years before Pearl Harbour—Donald touched in on New Zealand, and then made his way to Tahiti.

But he could not break away so easily. From Chungking repeated cables assailed his island retreat demanding his return; and his abiding loyalty to the Chiangs proved stronger than his wish for peace and quiet. Late in 1941 he began the return journey, via Honolulu and the Philippines. He was in Manila, on the last stage back to China when the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbour.

A Prisoner of Japan

During the first weeks of the fighting, General MacArthur offered him air transport to Australia; but Donald refused any special treatment. With other Europeans he was arrested at his Manila hotel, and transferred to the Santo Tomas concentration camp. Contrary to stories later current, Donald was registered as a prisoner under his own name, "W. H. Donald, born Lithgow, N.S.W., Australia, age 66. Occupation, journalist." Though there was a price on his head of 100,000 pesos (about £15,000) the Japanese *kempeitai* never caught up with him.

Jack Percival, the Australian war correspondent who was interned in the same Santo Tomas camp, has described how once a Japanese gendarme came looking for Donald and was shown his

registration card. "Too old," the Japanese officer said regretfully, when he read Donald's age. But after that narrow escape the Australian volunteered for a draft to another camp, Los Banos, which was in the malaria belt. Here he lay low until the finish.

Movie Rescue

"In the camp I did not worry," Donald later wrote to Randall Gould. "I was protected by the fact that no China Japanese came to Manila, and also by the loyalty of fellow internees who maintained my secret. Time went swiftly for me."

"I was rescued from Los Banos camp. A swell rescue. Like a movie, with paratroopers landing and co-operating with guerrillas, who swarmed into the camp from the jungles, firing upon the Japanese guard boxed around the camp. Over 100 Japs were killed, and 2,146 white people were rescued and on the lake in amptanks in two hours, with the camp in flames behind them."

"I lost everything I had, and am now reduced to one handbag. Enough for any man. My trials and tribulations with baggage have disappeared. Why aggravate life with lots of encumbrances?"

American Censorship

Immediately after his release, Donald sat down on an empty ammunition case and wrote a statement for press release. It was the old theme—to him so familiar, from those pre-Pearl Harbour days when China fought alone—of what the Allies owed to China. And if a tinge of bitterness appeared in the language that he chose, who could blame him?

"The question of the moment," Donald wrote, "is the equipment of China as the foremost nation in the Far East, of rehabilitating her and setting her upon her feet to undertake her new responsibilities. Here is where the Allies will be called upon for heavy financial loans or credits, and for expert technical assistance. It should be forthcoming liberally and spontaneously. Without it China will flounder for innumerable years and in increasing confusion."

"The Allies have much to repay China, have much forgiveness to ask, and they have paid bitterly for their betrayal of her between 1937 and 1941. The only way out now is for them boldly to shoulder their obligations."

The statement was censored by General MacArthur's Headquarters, which returned the comment: "We cannot pass such controversial statements by Mr. W. H. Donald."



Spencer Digby photograph

W. H. DONALD

A portrait taken for "The Listener" during his visit to New Zealand in 1941.

Donald made one quick visit to the United States; and with Ansie Lee was present at the San Francisco Conference in 1945. But he found little comfort in the uneasy birth of the United Nations; and his tough frame, weakened by long years of Japanese internment, was beginning to crack. The rest of the story is best told in his own words—in a letter written to Rewi Alley six months ago, which I am allowed to publish here. To me there is something curiously appropriate in this final exchange of greetings between an Australian and a New Zealander who had both devoted their lives to China—one to become known as "China's Number One White Man," the other as "China's Number One White Coolie."

Country Hospital,
Shanghai, June 18, 1946.

Dear Rewi.—I have just received your letter of June 2, and I am glad to see your signature once again. I have wondered for a long time where you are, and it seems to me that you've got about as far westward as you can go. However, that you are still above ground is something.

I have been flirting with the minions from the other side for some time. After escaping from the internment camp at Manila, I arrived in San Francisco in May, 1945; and I escaped from America in October, going to Tahiti. I was chasing the warm weather. I arrived on the 8th of November and by December 20th, I could scarcely breathe. I had a fluoroscope taken and the doctor told me I was "in a very serious condition." I asked him what he meant and he said there was something serious the matter with my lung. He told me to go to the hospital at once. I went. They aspirated me, kept me in the hospital a week, threw up their hands and confessed that they could do nothing. "You must go to America at once," and that meant that I must get an airplane some way or other.

So I telegraphed Madame Chiang and, fortunately for me, the Commodore at the Naval Hospital in Honolulu was a doctor I used to know at Peking, Dr. Wilcutts. The plane came to me at Tahiti, flew me to Honolulu, and three days afterwards the doctors were

(continued on next page)