

# The Wartime Rotary Club of Kunming (昆明扶輪社)

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Kunming (昆明) was the capital city of Yun Nan Fu (雲南府) in the Republic of China (中華民國). Kunming played a major role during the World War II. Before the Imperial Japan invaded the British Burma, the capital city of Yunnan was the terminus of the “Burma Road” that was used by the Great Britain to supply Chinese Nationalist forces. After the fall of Burma to the Japanese, the Allied continued to supply Kunming by air. Wujiaba (巫家壩), the former airport of Kunming, became a base of American and Chinese air forces, including the “Flying Tigers”, and the American volunteer group (飛虎隊—中國空軍美國志願大隊).

Kunming was transformed into a modern city as a result of the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War/World War II in 1937 when the invading Japanese forces caused a great number of east-coast Chinese refugees, some of whom were wealthy, to flood into the southwest of China. They brought with them dismantled industrial plants, which were then re-erected beyond the range of Japanese bombers. In addition, a number of universities and institutes of higher education were evacuated there. The increased trade and expertise quickly established Kunming as an industrial and manufacturing base for the wartime government in Chungking (Chongqing) (重慶).

As the result of the Battle of Shanghai (淞滬會戰), Taiyuan (太原) and Nanking (Nanjing) (南京) were eventually lost. And with the Battle of Wuhan (武漢會戰) in its death throes, China’s military forces and civilians retreated outside the reach of the Japanese military forces a year prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, with the relocation of the Chinese Air Force Academy from Jianqiao Airbase (筧橋空軍基地), Kunming’s Wujiaba Airbase was vastly expanded, becoming the new training hub for the battered but regrouped Chinese Air

Force in which Lieutenant General Claire Lee Chennault (陳納德中將) took command of cadet training duties in the summer of 1938. During the Second World War the city of Kunming was prepared as a National Redoubt in case the temporary capital in Chungking fell, an elaborate system of caves to serve as offices, barracks and factories was prepared but never utilized.

When the Japanese occupied French Indochina in 1940, the links between Kunming and the West grew increasingly vital as Allied forces provided essential support by importing materials from Burma. By this time, Kunming acted as an Allied military command center, which grouped the Chinese, American, British and French forces together for operations in Southeast Asia. The 'Office of Strategic Services' Service Unit Detachment 101 (predecessor to the 1st Special Forces Group) was also headquartered in Kunming and whose mission was to divert and disrupt Japanese combat operations in Burma.

Later in the War, Kunming was targeted by the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force during its bombing campaigns, and when the Burma Road was lost to the Japanese, the 1st American Volunteer Group, known as the "Flying Tigers", used Kunming as a base in 1941 and 1942 to fly in supplies over the Himalayas from British bases in India in defiance of Japanese assaults. They also were tasked with defending China's lifeline to the outside world, the Burma Road and the Ledo Road, which had Kunming as a northern terminus.



*The "Flying Tigers"*

Industry became important in Kunming during World War II. The large state-owned Central Machine Works was transferred there from Hunan (湖南), while the manufacture of electrical products, copper, cement, steel, paper, and textiles expanded.

Due to the political and military strategic situation of Kunming during the wartime, the city was always full of servicemen of the Allied Forces, and of course, no doubt, including many of the war correspondents. 《The Rotarian》 magazine, received a piece of correspondence from an American war correspondent, Fred B. Barton, about his observations in the city of Kunming, as well as his attendance in the regular meeting of the Kunming Rotary Club (昆明扶輪社). The report was then published on the magazine's December 1944 Issue. The 2 pages attached blow herewith is the reprint of the said Kunming Correspondence:



IN THE courtyard of "the old and tired, yet still proud" Hotel du Commerce, the Rotary Club of Kunming poses for the author's camera.

# CHINA

By Fred B. Barton  
*American War Correspondent*

## CORRESPONDENCE

*Cuff notes on two Rotary luncheons... where jest and song make any outlander feel at home at once.*

### KUNMING, CHINA

IN ORDINARY times you would not be visiting Kunming, China. The sight-seeing trips usually show you the coastal cities and towns. But now that the Japanese control the seaports of China, any goods of war and any militarily important visitors entering China must make the journey by air. So you fly over "the Hump," which is a sizable ridge of the Himalayas separating the tea plantations of Assam in India from the rice paddies of China, and come to Kunming.

In your hotel room you see a sign over a wash basin having two faucets, one containing precious boiled water that is safe to drink, the other water for hand washing only. Says the sign: "This pipe's water can't drink." (All right, laugh; but how's your Chinese?)

You walk gingerly down the roughly cobbled streets. Jinrikishas overtake you. An occasional Army truck or jeep, some driven by Americans, some by Chinese, moves along on the left side of the street, as in Britain and in India. Dozens of patient men and some women

carry incredible loads suspended in baskets from a pole balanced on one shoulder. Bricks, fuel, even live chickens in wicker hampers and all manner of farm produce and other merchandise, move along by human power. Watch the men walk. They use a springy step, fairly tossing the weight in the air with each tread so that, to a degree, they do not have to carry the load, but only move it forward.

Step into a store. Prices are high, for China is experiencing inflation. A can of evaporated milk such as you would buy in the United States for 10 or 15 cents costs you about 400 Chinese dollars, or 400 CN's. You have already purchased a pocketful of CN's, either at a bank or through your houseboy or some other informal channel. The rate of exchange varies: this reporter has within a fortnight bought CN's at the rate of 180, 185, and 200 to the American dollar.

When you go shopping, you anticipate difficulty in translating Chinese figures into anything you can understand. You may or may not have learned how to count one, two, three, four: EE, ARH!, SAHN, SZ!—so the book tells you. For

"eleven" you take the word for "ten," which is "SHER," and add "EE," which means "one." It is all very simple.

But don't bother. Any storekeeper knows a quicker system. You wish, say, to order some calling cards bearing your name in both English and Chinese. The printer may write out a figure for you. Better yet, he may uncurl a huge roll of bills from his own capacious pocket and count out whatever number of bills your purchase will cost you. One hundred calling cards cost this reporter 200 Chinese dollars, or about a cent apiece. Not bad in any country, and surprisingly cheap in a land where paper and cardboard of any kind is incredibly dear.

Some customs of China startle you, but you quickly accept them as the natural thing in a country having one of the oldest civilizations in the world. A funeral caravan passes you, the casket being borne by ropes suspended from two poles resting on four men's shoulders. A live rooster accompanies the deceased to the grave, but the rooster comes back. That is to foil the evil spirits which thenceforth will cease to annoy the departed loved one, but will

leave the graveyard with the rooster.

You do well to keep the matter of evil spirits in mind, especially if you drive a jeep. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, a Chinese man or woman (please do not call anyone a "Chinaman," and never, never speak of any person as a "Chink") will dash across your path, missing your fenders by inches. He or she looks back with a cheerful smile as if to say, "Whoopee, I made it!" They love to take a chance, these carefree Chinese. And because they believe that their personal evil spirit follows about three feet behind them, every time they narrowly escape death under the wheels of a truck or jeep they destroy, or at least baffle, their evil spirit and thus enjoy new freedom for two or three weeks. (Evil spirits never stay killed—that would be expecting too much. But what a thrilling way to get rid of your hard luck for a fortnight!)

Yet you cease very quickly to feel a stranger in China. The natives do not regard you as a stranger, but rather as a friend. They are a free people: poor, hard working, to be sure, yet free. They respect themselves and they respect you. They are prepared to like the flying men of America and those from Britain's R.A.F. who have come this long distance both to fight the Japanese from within China and to help train new Chinese troops in the essential science of warfare.

For your welcome the G. I.'s, or American enlisted men, in conjunction with the Chinese, have developed a new international language: a shorthand Esperanto. You learn it in a single lesson. "Ding-how." It originally means "Very good." Today it means variously: "Hello—I like you—you and I speak the same language." It voices a community of ideas. The Chinese bootblacks call every American "Joe." "Want a nice shoeshine, Joe? Ding-how, okeh, Joe."

They smile at you. It is easy to smile back.

Inside the old and tired yet still proud Hotel du Commerce the Kunming Rotary Club sits down to a filling luncheon. You expect perhaps to eat with chopsticks? Then this meal will disappoint you. You have foreign cooking and you eat with knives and forks. The menu is simple: soup, baked beans, a large hunk of delicious salt pork, a roll, coffee, and a doughnut. When I ask for tea, the waiter is surprised; Americans are supposed to love their coffee, but he can get you tea.

The lunch starts informally with the singing of a grace. You sit down, shake hands across the table or nod an acknowledgment of an introduction further down the table, and the meal progresses. It could be a Rotary Club meeting anywhere.

Someone announces a new blood bank, just being launched under American medical auspices, and asks that would-be blood donors see him after the luncheon. Someone announces that the Rotary Club of DeKalb, Illinois, U.S.A., has sent an autographed songbook and suggests that the gift be not only acknowledged with a warm-hearted letter, but reciprocated with something native and unique.

Guests are introduced. A British Army officer from a Rotary Club in Kent now nearly extinct because of the war. A visiting American colonel from Toledo, Ohio. A former member of this Club, now residing in another city of China, back today to say hello to his old friends. And the guest of honor: J. Lossing Buck, most easily introduced as the former husband of Pearl S. Buck, but in his own right an important agricultural economist in China. As a professor at the University of Nanking College of Agriculture, Professor Buck can speak with authority on matters dealing with the

utilization of the soil. Today he discusses the problem of deflating the currency when once the war ends. It is a matter, he says, about which he has also recently addressed the Rotary Clubs of several other cities of China.

The speaker is introduced by the Vice-President of the Club, Everitt Groff-Smith, of the Chinese Consulate Ministry of Finance, and an American now completing 28 years in China. The Club's President is absent today. He is L. C. King, a native of China, but a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is head of the Kunming municipal electric power company and also of a cotton mill. His wife is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College, back in Massachusetts, and a member of the board of directors of the International YWCA.

Though Kunming's Rotary Club is essentially a *Chinese* Club, most of its members went to school in the United States. They are American-minded; or rather, say, international-minded. They certainly are not provincial, not strange, not slow. They get your point. They laugh easily. They are good businessmen, and good citizens.

You are a Rotarian? Then, regardless of where your home Club is, you'd feel at home in Kunming!

#### CHUNGKING, CHINA

**T**HE first thing you notice is the pedestal of small silk flags on the head table. You have just climbed the long stone steps from Chungking's main street and have entered Victory House. It is Thursday noon. The Rotary Club of Chungking is to hold its luncheon on the open-air terrace at 12:30.

The slight drizzle does not penetrate the tightly woven roof of bamboo. You shake a few hands, hang your raincoat and steel helmet on the hat rack, and

BENEATH a roof of bamboo, the Rotary Club of Chungking sits down to Thursday luncheons. The food is "Western style"—but the fellowship is international.

CHUNGKING welcomes its visitors, and labels them with this badge.



## The Rotary Club of Kunming

Sponsored by the Rotary Club of Nanking (南京扶輪社) from the capital, the Rotary Club of Kunming (昆明扶輪社) was a member club of Rotary International, No. 4298, and in point of seniority came next to the Chinkiang Rotary Club (鎮江扶輪社), Kiangsu (*Jiangsu*) Province (江蘇省). Informally founded in December 1936 under the supervision of Governor Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (鄺富灼博士), the 81st District of Rotary International, the Club was officially elected a member of Rotary International on 28 May 1937 with 34 charter members, as the 20th Rotary Club in the Republic of China (中華民國). The Club met every Thursday at 7 p.m. at Hsin Yah Restaurant.

The officers were:

- (1) President – Yun T. Miao, Chairman, Yunnan Economic Council
- (2) Vice President – Dr. Alexander James Watson (華德生醫生), M.D., Superintendent, Church Missionary Society Hospital (大英傳教會惠滇醫院院長)
- (3) Secretary – Roger D. Arnold (安汝智), General Secretary, Young Men's Christian Association, Kunming
- (4) Treasurer – T. H. Hoang, Manager, Wing Fung Bank
- (5) Sergeant-at-Arms – V. B. Molgaard, Yunnan Representative, British & Foreign Bible Society

And the Board of Directors were:

- (1) President Yun T. Miao
- (2) Vice President Dr. Alexander James Watson
- (3) Secretary Roger D. Arnold
- (4) Treasurer T. H. Hoang
- (5) Chou Chia-Lee, Manager, Yunnan Provincial Telephone Company
- (6) Y. Ho (何瑤), President, University of Yunnan (雲南大學校長)
- (7) Y. H. Shiao, Manager, Yunnan Telegraph & Wireless Administration

English was the lingua franca of the East and West, and this being a very international Club, its proceedings were conducted in that tongue. While no definite principle was laid down, account was generally taken, in the election of directors and successive presidents, of the various national representations in the Club membership.

An example of a small club doing a big job --- Show need for railway in summer 1939 --- Realizing the need for a railroad connecting Burma with southwestern Yunnan after a British Consul had spoken at a meeting, the Rotary Club of Kunming immediately started action on the matter, and, working through the Ministry of Communications, within six months saw actual construction of the railroad under way.

Here is a piece of news clipping in December 1943 – [The Rotary Club of Kunming, China, meets every Thursday, holds occasional “ladies nights,” converses and conducts its programs in English, has 21 Chinese members, one American, one Englishman, one Netherlander. Members

sit on stools around a round table, serve themselves to stewed beef, stewed chicken, stewed cabbage, stewed sausage, bamboo sprouts, all tastefully cooked, from large bowls in the center of the table, eat with chopsticks from small bowls. And that's only a shred of what Captain John W. Watson, of the U.S. Army Air Corps, saw and enjoyed on a delightful visit to this tenacious little Rotary Club in a war-boomed city of 500,000 far in China's interior. Captain Watson is a former active and now honorary member of the Rotary Club of DeKalb, Illinois, and prior to that was an active member of the Rotary Club of Champaign, Illinois.]

February 1945 was the 40th Anniversary of Rotary International. In Kunming, to celebrate the International Understanding, the Rotary Club held a special luncheon to entertain 50 American servicemen who were stationing in Kunming. International Service at work, as always, was in China!



Many a poignant story of human kindness had come out of World War II, but few surpass this one related by Ralph E. Loper, a former Rotarian of Fall River, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He was attending a meeting of the Rotary Club of Kunming one day in 1945 at which an American Army sergeant was present as a special guest. The sergeant told how, about a year before, he saw a package thrown or dropped from a train passing his Army base. He investigated and found that the package contained a live Chinese baby girl – with her throat cut. The soldier rushed the child to his base, where a doctor closed the wound. The sergeant took charge of the baby, and during the months that followed she became an attractive, healthy youngster. Knowing that they were soon to be moved forward, the sergeant and his buddies raised a purse to provide for the child while in an orphanage. He asked that the Kunming Rotary Club take charge of the fund and look out for the child. Yes, the responsibility was accepted.

In the year of 1948, some of the members moved to Taipei (臺北) of Taiwan (臺灣), and became the seeds of a new club – The Rotary Club of Taipei (臺北扶輪社) which was admitted to Rotary International on 6 October 1948. One of them was Charter Secretary Roger D. Arnold who was transferred to serve the Young Men's Christian Association in Taipei.

Regrettably, the Rotary Club of Kunming was ultimately terminated on 21 December 1950 due to unfavourable political and social environment.