



THE Heroes

COMMANDER SIAN-KWAN LIN

AS WELL as anything else, the story of Sian-Kwan Lin explains why the people of China continue to wage barehanded battle against the overwhelming might of Japan. It is a story that starts in 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek marched north against the war lords, fighting to make Sun Yat Sen's dream of a great Chinese republic come true.

Not the least of the many "hotbeds of revolution" was the Naval Academy at Chefoo, where Lin and his fellow cadets, on fire with patriotism, plotted the seizure of gunboats as their part in the democratic struggle. All were imprisoned before they could act, and only the Generalissimo's swift approach saved them from death. Enlisting as foot soldiers, the young Chinese middies shared in the first victorious campaigns that gave promise of a unified country.

Setting up his capital in Nanking, Chiang Kai-shek sent the pick of his youth out

over the world to bring back the "know-how" that would put the infant republic on firm foundations. Sian-Kwan Lin, selected for service in the British navy, sailed with the Mediterranean fleet for a year, and then was graduated with high honor from the Royal Naval College in Greenwich. Back home with the rank of commander, Lin helped the Generalissimo to build a navy. Others headed projects in connection with industry, agriculture, education, highways, railroads, flood control and reclamation.

And then in 1937, Japan, alarmed at China's progress, attacked. The disappearance of a single Jap soldier was the pretext for invasion and total war. It was a well-timed blow, for the Chinese army was still without arms or artillery, and six light cruisers and fifty gunboats constituted the Chinese navy. Seeing that his one hope was to "trade space for time," the Generalissimo began the series of masterly retreats that drew the Japanese deep into the interior, far from their bases.

Nanking fell, and then Hankow, but Chiang Kai-shek, taking refuge in Chungking, dug shelters in the mountainsides. All the while, under cover of delaying actions, the industries of China were carried on bent backs from the coastal areas to the woods and hills of the hinterland. To grasp the tremendous scope of the movement, think of it in terms of the United States. What if an enemy, invading the Atlantic seaboard, captured all our territory out to the Mississippi? And the people of the ravaged regions had to load machinery, tools and goods on their shoulders, trek on foot to the Rockies, and there quarry caves for their factories and homes?

Throughout these crucial months, China's gallant little navy held the rivers but, one by one, the cruisers and gunboats went down under Japanese fire. Now the Generalissimo made a deal with Germany for five submarines, and Commander Lin was sent to Kiel, both for a course of instruc-

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tion and to receive delivery. High hopes, but soon blasted, for in tragic succession came the German pact with Japan and the invasion of Poland.

In China again, Sian-Kwan Lin found himself a submarine expert without a sub, and a sailor without a ship. But Chiang Kai-shek gave him no time for gloom.

"Lay mines in the Yangtze," he ordered. "Deny Japan the use of the river."

Lin might well have asked how and what with, for by that time, China's cupboard was scraped bare. Black powder, however, could still be made, and in Chungsha, he melted up the temple bells and even used gas tanks for casings.

Difficult enough, but simple compared to the task of transportation, for the river port of Kiukiang was 350 miles away, and there were no horses or trucks. One thousand volunteers, however, offered to act as pack mules, and off went Commander Sian-Kwan Lin, leading his small army over the roughest country in all China. Not only were the 300-pound mines a burden, but mountain trails had to be widened and chasms bridged, and in the valleys were broad streams to be forded—unceasing drudgery, endured by staggering men whose daily ration was a handful of rice.

Once out of the mountains the caravan marched only at night, hiding by day. Every villager knew that death was the penalty for aiding guerrillas, but shelter was offered gladly and never once was there a traitor. Women and children kept watch

on the hills, and when darkness fell, men and boys scouted the highways.

Now came the real job. First, small boats had to slip out into the river at midnight, and haul up the Japanese nets, and after that, came the mine laying. A chancy business, for enemy destroyers made constant play with their searchlights, but Lin developed a technique that won success for eight out of every ten sorties. In one month, ten Jap ships were sunk, among them three transports. More than that, Lin and his men dived in the dark after each explosion, salvaging precious materials.

A high moment, but soon the Japanese poured in more ships and troops, butchering and burning until they controlled the Yangtze and its banks up to Kchang. "Fall back and mine Tung Ting Lake," came an order from the Generalissimo. This was not a job that could be done secretly, for enemy bombers flew over Tung Ting the clock around, dropping flares at night.

A suicide mission, in fact, yet Lin had to choose from hundreds who begged for the service. Day in and day out, he loaded small craft with mines and planted them as placidly as a farmer planting corn. Death rained from the sky, and the waters of the lake ran red, but the heroic band kept on until Japanese bombs left them without a single boat to load. Only then did the survivors fall back, carrying their wounded commander, blown up at the last and escaping death by a miracle. **GEORGE CREEL**