

Muriel Anders' memories of China

MURIEL ANDERS, WIFE OF ARTHUR "TEX" ANDERS, RECALLS 1937 IN CHINA

*This is a transcript of a recorded conversation at the Anders' La Mesa CA home in the late 1980s.*

Well, what happened to me was that we went out in April of 1937. Tex got his orders, like they do, at the 180th meridian.

We left from San Francisco, stopped at Japan and ended up at Shanghai. Because there had been a strike in San Francisco and no ships had sailed, we had to board the President Line ship a night early and leave the next morning before they started the strike all over again. So the result was the ship was like an army or navy transport: it was full of military that had been held over because of the strike.

So we went out to Shanghai. We knew our way around because we had both been out there. There was trouble on the ship: our young doctor jumped overboard and disappeared, and the ship had to turn around - this was on the way. There was a big investigation. Fortunately, I had an aunt and an uncle who lived in Honolulu - that's where it happened - and we were with them, so we were not in the investigation. It was a big mess. This man had too much to drink, and jumped over. He had been having trouble, I think, with his wife.

Anyway, we got out of that, and we went directly to the Palace Hotel. But then Tex found out that there was a river boat heading up the river that very night.. They had to go to Hankow where the *Panay* was stationed. They had about six or eight gunboats that toured up and down the different ports, and the ship that he was assigned to, the *Panay*, happened to be at Hankow - halfway up the Yangtze River, 500 miles from the coast. The Yangtze is one of the longest rivers in the world. So we got a ship that very night - a little Butterfield Squire passenger boat that took eight or so passengers, with all the coolies down below, locked up so they couldn't commandeer the ship.

So we went up to Nanking, but we only traveled in the daytime because the river is so treacherous. We didn't go ashore in Nanking for some reason or other - they didn't let us, I guess, I've forgotten why - so I never got to see Nanking. We got off at Hankow and ended up living at the Lutheran Mission - they had a big building there, and they reserved the top two floors for the Navy people. So we had a couple of rooms in the Lutheran Mission and we had most of our meals next door at the Army/Navy Y. The ship stayed there for a month or so - I've forgotten how long.

Then the ship got ordered up to Chungking. So Tex said good-bye, and off the ship went. And the wives, Bill and I, got on another little Butterfield passenger ship and went up to Ichang, stopped there - Ichang is the beginning of the gorges - and we started at the gorges and that was wonderful, all day standing up on the deck - terrible whirlpools. We

saw a ship way up in the air that had lodged there the year before when the river was high and then we heard later that the river never got that high again, and the ship couldn't get off. We enjoyed that trip up the gorges.

When we arrived at Chungking, they had pontoons there, because the river went up and down so, and the river was very low. So we had all these steps to climb - big cement steps. We lived in the bottom part of the oldest house in Lung Men Hao, which was across the river from Chungking. The Captain of the ship always had the top quarters; we had the bottom quarters, which was rather odd. It was a big house, contained a huge hall, and we had our bedroom and sitting room on one side and our bathroom and kitchen on the other side. Every time you wanted to go to the bathroom, you had to look and see if anyone was calling on the Captain! And the kitchen was terrible. It was a brick floor.

We had no running water. And we had to take all our food up there; we shopped in Hankow - we had boxes of food which we had to keep locked up. As a matter of fact, you had to have a large staff - with no running water, they had to take care of everything. There was no ice. Nothing. And the refrigerator had to sit in cans of oil. The Captain's wife and son, one night went out to get a sandwich, in the kitchen. Our bottom part of the house had electricity - theirs didn't, for some reason, so they had to use lamps. We had been playing cards, the two of us, while the men were down on the ship waiting for a big freshet to come down the river - and we went out to the kitchen to fix a sandwich, and my gosh, the minute we turned on the lights, rats were running across the pipes. We had a hysterical time getting out of there.

We were there when the Japs started in on Shanghai. The Chinese mined the Yangtze River, so they couldn't go out that way - and that was the way the foreigners always went out -so our orders called for us to stay there. They put us on a little Butterfield Squire boat and we went down as far as Ichang. And then the ship anchored and wouldn't go any farther because they were scared - they were mining the river down there. So I thought I would get out and spend the war in Ichang. But a friend of Tex's who was on the Monocacy, and that was in Ichang, and they had a kind of clubhouse up above, so when he found out we were marooned, and when you're on a ship like that in a war zone where they were holding back the food - we didn't have enough to eat, then they came out and got us and put us in some little guest rooms.

There were three of us, the Captain's wife, and the engineer's wife and Bill and I - so they put us in those little rooms up there and we had to hire all the staff, because we didn't know how long we would be there. And we had to hire a cook, etc. - we did all this in a hurry, and the next day in comes the Panay, and we're on the deck, waving to our husbands, and we invited them to dinner - our new staff had already gotten some food and we had our husbands to dinner. And the next day, off they go, waving to us, not knowing how long we were going to be there.

But we were there not too long - three or four days - and then this little old Butterfield Squire decided to go farther down, so we went down to Hankow where the ship was. And as soon as we got there, Tex said, "Well, you got your walking papers - you've got to

leave". So the trouble is, the people were all coming out of Shanghai - we were halfway up the river - 500 miles from the coast - the whole of China was coming out to get out of the war. The only way to get out was the Chinese train that went to Canton. So what we did was to dump all the stuff out of our trunks and suitcases, and went searching around for food, because that place was being air raided, the food was disappearing, and I had to get canned milk for Bill, and it was a job. We locked the food up, you know, or it would disappear.

So we were there several weeks waiting for our turn - they had a list of people waiting to get on the train. And when we got on the train, it was heading for Canton which was being bombed daily - that was our destination. We had to take all of our food, all of our water. And we had to take a Chinese interpreter. And it was a typical Chinese dirty train, and it was a several day trip to get to Canton, but our train was forever being pushed to one side to make way for the troops that were coming up to fight the Japs. This was around September or October. I think it was October.

Our trip was rather hazardous because our destination was Canton. As soon as we got to Canton, the Embassy people met us and ran us out of the station and took us over to Shameen, an international island that was supposed to be safe, but the only connection with Canton was a footbridge - it didn't feel very safe. We had to stay there because the Pearl River that goes from Canton down to Hong Kong had just been mined. So everybody was stuck on this little tiny island.

The hotel was just filled, you know, the rooms were all taken, but because I had a four year old, they had a little room up on the fourth floor of the hotel. So that night Bill was asleep and I was standing at the basin washing his socks - we didn't have many clothes - we had to travel light - and Bill was asleep and the lights all went out. Nobody had told us anything - what the alarm was or where to go - we had just gotten there, you know, and so I saw a houseboy go by with a candle out in the hall, and I summoned him in, and he told me there was an air raid coming. The elevators, all the electricity was off, so I commandeered the boy in no uncertain terms and picked up my sleeping child - I wasn't going to get caught on the fourth floor of this hotel - and I had to go down a fire escape, carrying my child, with the boy leading the way, down to the lobby.

The rest of the people who had just arrived hadn't been told where to go either. We found out later we should have gone to the basement of a bank building, you know, for the safety. So we sat in the dark lobby of the hotel. I put a couple of chairs together for Bill. We could hear the planes go over, but fortunately they didn't dump bombs on the hotel. They dumped them on Canton, just a short distance away - we could see all the flares and stuff. So the next day, the women were invited down to the Mindinao where my husband had had duty, but I was too nervous to go. I stayed there with Bill and took care of another couple of kids, and we were out in the garden of the hotel, in the daytime. We thought we were safe enough, but all of a sudden, we hear a plane, and here was the old rising sun right over our heads! Right over our heads!

Anyway, we were there for several days and then they found out where they had placed those mines in the river, and it was safe to send the ship down to Hong Kong. So we all piled aboard this passenger ship, and it was nerve-wracking. We were wondering if they were going to miss those mines - and we got down to Hong Kong which had just had a terrible typhoon - there were little ships up on the beach and everything - so they had to keep us in Shameen until they had a place to put us in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was all jammed up with refugees. A ship came in - one of the Dollar boats - so they took us right straight to the Dollar boat, and they piled us in those rooms. Bill and I shared a berth with my friend. In the meantime, the other wives all had to go back to the States because the Philippines was all crowded - there was no place. But because my father was in the Philippines and had a home there, they allowed me to go. Not only did I go, but also my good friend, the engineer's wife. She and Bill and I got on a ship, waved good-bye to the girls who were heading back to California - the Captain's wife. Nobody could go to the Philippines, but we were allowed to go down there, and my father met us, and we stayed there comfortably with my father for several months.

And then - Tex was blasted. He told you about being on the *Augusta*. Afterwrds they put him in the Marine Hospital at Shanghai, and he got a little better. He was very badly wounded. And then this husband of the girl who came down with me and was living with my father was executive officer, I guess of a destroyer, and the destroyer was coming to Manila. So her husband got permission to bring Tex - gave him his room - and brought Tex down to Manila, and then they put him in the Canacao Hospital, which my father lived not too far from. When he got better he could come out to my father's house. And they kept him there for several months recuperating. And then we had a nice stay up at Baguio.

And then, when he got well enough, they shipped him back home on one of the Dollar boats. When we left - I'll never forget - here were all these Japanese coming out and apologizing. I don't think we even talked to any of them, did we? Remember when we were leaving Manila? Oh, and then what - to finish the story - we got to Tokyo, Yokahama, and oh, my Lord, the Japs - the princes, they've got cards, they were all saying "so sorry". We had the most beautiful flowers - miniature cherry trees in porcelain containers, wisteria all in bloom, and all these important people. We had so many flowers in our room we distributed them through the ship. They were so gorgeous. Then the sad part was, when we got to Honolulu. (Tex: *They also had geisha girls come on board*). Oh Lord, yes, and besides that the Ambassador had us out to dinner in Tokyo. We had a nice dinner. (Tex: *Funny part of it was though - we were asked to go out to the Embassy and have dinner, and they invited certain Jap officials who wanted to be there, but since we were only going to be there one night, it was decided that they would invite the Japanese people who had invited me, to come to the Embassy. And of course, Bill couldn't go, and the Japanese said they could furnish a baby-sitter, an amah. So they did. And when we came back after the dinner, there was Bill, in bed, and they thought they would give him a present, and the present was a big toy bomber!*)

Anyway, that was our story. We've got pictures of Bill and me taken after that evacuation. Poor little old kid - he didn't have enough to eat; I didn't have enough to eat.

We had an after-effect, though, with Tex. He was so badly hurt that he had to be put in the hospital.

Text © 2007 Nick T. Spark

No portion of this text may be reproduced or posted on the Internet without express permission.