

BOOK REVIEW

China Mailbag Uncensored

C Letters from an American GI in World War II China and India

by Lou Glist ISBN 1-885373-21-X Houston, Texas 2000

As reviewed by Walter Ko

It was February 1945, a newly-wed of four months young American named Lou Glist, made a long trip to Asia battle field known as China, Burma India Theater. This book, *China Mail Bag Uncensored* was a collection of love letters to his wife Lottie in the States in words, sketches, cartoons and spirit.

Lou's long journey landed him in Calcutta, India. From affluent America to a deprived Asia under war offered him a fresh perspective. Being sensitive, he gave a vivid report on his observation with his artistic pencil sketch of the people he met. He showed not judgment but compassion, not arrogance but understanding. Many times, the golden rule came up notably in Shanghai, China relating to extra-territoriality (The legal system, under which foreigners and their activities in China remained amenable to foreign and not Chinese law). His sharp observation showed that he was sensitive and respectful to local culture and customs. He landed in Kunming, China after a flight over the hump in March. The trip gave him an overview of the Burma Road which was a difficult and demanding project for 15,000 US Army Engineers. Among them were 9,000 American black troops.

Lou was an observant young man. His letters filled with a lot of Chinese history so that his wife would understand what he was trying to convey. His style was simple, humorous and memorable. With his words, sketches and cartoons, the scene and people come alive. His letters not only updated his daily activities, but also provided an insight on Chinese, American and world politics, such as Stilwell, General Chennault, the Flying Tigers and America aid to

China. He shared happiness of Gaan Bay (Bottom Up) drinking party, hardship of ordinary Chinese people, life and death. He sketched and described what Chinese army recruiters looked like: the recruits were linked together by a rope around their neck, the recruiter following along with a stick in his hand (P.120).

His October 10, 1945 letter told of his arrival at Shanghai, "Pearl of the East". His next letter described this Chinese Republic birthday by giving a history lesson 101 with two interesting questions: "How do you go from a Confucian monarchy to a republic? Do you use the imperfect example of the West?"(P. 180). His story of the foreign settlements in Shanghai involves Britain Opium Wars, extra-territoriality and the most-favored nation (all foreign powers shared what any one of them could squeeze out of China). He sympathized the European Jews who escaped Nazi persecution settled in Shanghai, the only place to let them in without a visa. The November 20,1945 letter condemned colonialism. The colonial empires were all built on the principle of the inferiority of races, color, and religion, regardless of the advancement of the cultures.

Lou's book is a masterpiece. His sharp focus, artistic sketch and knowledgeable mind enable him to translate reality into words. Readers will enjoy his experience. His love of humanity and justice free him from prejudice, discrimination and judgment. My only complaint is that this book should be treated as literature. Lou belongs to the Greatest Generation. His service and book are both appreciated.

Walter Ko was born in China and grew up in Hong Kong with a traditional Chinese culture education. He came to the United States of

America in 1973 and was a graduate of University of Missouri at Rolla and Central Missouri State University. He has been a St. Louis resident over 25 years, and had been the Associate Editor and now the coordinator of

Chinese American Forum, a cultural quarterly published in St Louis, Missouri. Mr. Ko has been a public speaker many times at local community colleges and universities on Chinese culture, Taoism and Confucianism.