

Shanghai, China, February 10, 1940.

Subject: The Motion Picture Front at Chungking.

Submitted by: H. B. Howard, American Vice Consul.

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(Voluntary Report)

During the latter part of December, 1939, while in Chungking and Kunming on simple leave, I had the privilege of being conducted through the motion picture studio maintained at Chungking by the Chinese National Government and operated under the direct jurisdiction of the Political Training Board of the National Military Council.

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This studio, called the China Motion Picture Company, is but little known to the outside world, although today it is making pictures in China's wartime capital under conditions that would seem fantastic or incredible to the most imaginative Hollywood producer. Studio equipment, although in daily use, stands prepared for hasty removal to bomb-proof caverns hewn and dynamited out of the solid rock beneath the hill on which the studio is built. For instance, an American film printer of a well-known make stands partially cased and ready for the dangers of the next possible air raid. Should the final emergency alarm be sounded it is the signal for workmen hastily to slide a bamboo pole through waiting rope loops on the machine and quickly bear it down into the safety of the dugouts below. Valuable negatives remain stored in these caverns while in the cutting room prints of current films stand sacked in burlap bags ready for the final siren which warns the city that enemy bombers are approaching.

The entire procedure of removing valuable equipment to places of safety within thirty or forty minutes has been reduced to a systematic routine as the result of past experiences gained during the many air raids Chungking has withstood.

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In regard to the manner in which several of the technical departments function, it was interesting to observe that the development of all film is done by hand in a series of well built wooden tanks into which removable racks are placed. The film is dried on a hand-made revolving drum similar to those used in Hollywood years ago. An average of from 25 to 30 copies is made of each completed feature or newsreel. All film stock used by the studio is now imported from the United States.

Portable recorders of Chinese manufacture are used in conjunction with American cameras. The studio has a small sound-proofed screening room equipped with American portable projectors. The screening room is also used for scoring and dubbing. Necessary sound effects or musical backgrounds which cannot be recorded at the time the picture is photographed are generally dubbed in from a collection of American phonograph records especially made for such work and which contain anything from a baby's gurgle to a thunder storm. These added effects are picked up on a two-turntable record player and transmitted to one of the portable projector's loud speakers located in the screening room. Of course, at the same time this is being done the original sound track recorded on the set is also being played through a second speaker in the screening room and both the original and added effects re-recorded onto one track under the guidance of an operator or mixer stationed in the projection room. The picture is also projected while this re-recording is going on so that cues may be properly timed to the action on the screen.

During December, the studio was just completing the construction of its new and only sound stage. Heretofore makeshift space had been used

for the shooting of interior scenes or space had been made available by the Central Motion Picture Studio located across the river, - the only other motion picture company in Southwest China.

The new stage is about 60' X 120' in size and is equipped with cat-walks for the placing of overhead lights. It has a good sized monitor room with a glassed-in front overlooking the stage as well as an acoustically treated recording room and projection booth designed and wired for standard size stationary projectors. Large wooden beams hewn by hand support the building while its inner walls are sound-proofed with layers of burlap sheets back of which rice straw has been thickly packed. The outer plaster-covered walls are about $1\frac{1}{2}$ ' thick and rest on rock blocks which form a base of varying heights due to the slope of the hill.

From August, 1937, to the end of September, 1939 (excluding a 6 months' period when the studio was required to move from Hankow to Chungking) the following films have been produced:

1. 5 Feature Dramas totalling 29,600 feet. Subject matter stresses national patriotism and resistance.
2. 7 War Documentary Films totalling 40,280 feet - or 45 reels.
3. 9 Multi-Subject Newsreels representing 9,193 feet.
4. 8 Single-Subject Newsreels totalling 9,000 feet.
5. 10 Cartoons of war songs and slogans representing 10,575 feet - 15 reels.
6. 5 Newsreels (Flash Extras or Spot News Type) totalling 3,265 feet.

In addition to releasing these pictures in theaters, temples, schools, colleges and universities throughout Chinese areas not under Japanese control, ten Service Corps of three men to each unit exhibit these films to soldiers in the front lines. Each unit is equipped with two portable 35 mm. sound projectors of American make. They also exhibit the pictures free of charge in villages and small rural communities, many of which have never seen motion pictures before. The area now being covered by these ten Service Corps extends from Sian in Northwest China to the tropical wilds of Yunnan in the far South.

There are eight groups of cameramen covering the various war fronts. These particular units are jointly maintained by the China Motion Picture Company and the Central Moving Picture Studio - the latter studio being under the direction of the Central Kuomintang Headquarters. Only American 35 mm. cameras (silent) such as may be operated with or without tripods are used.

At the present time one unit has been detailed to Tibet to photograph the coronation ceremonies of the new Dalai Lama. Another unit has recently returned from photographing the removal of the supposed coffin of Genghiz Khan from Mongolia to Kansu Province.

At the moment the China Motion Picture Company is working on two feature productions which are scheduled to be finished in March. One of these films is a picturization of Amleto Vespa's novel "Secret Agent of Japan".

1/ There are submitted, as an enclosure, 11 photographs of scenes in and around the studio.

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