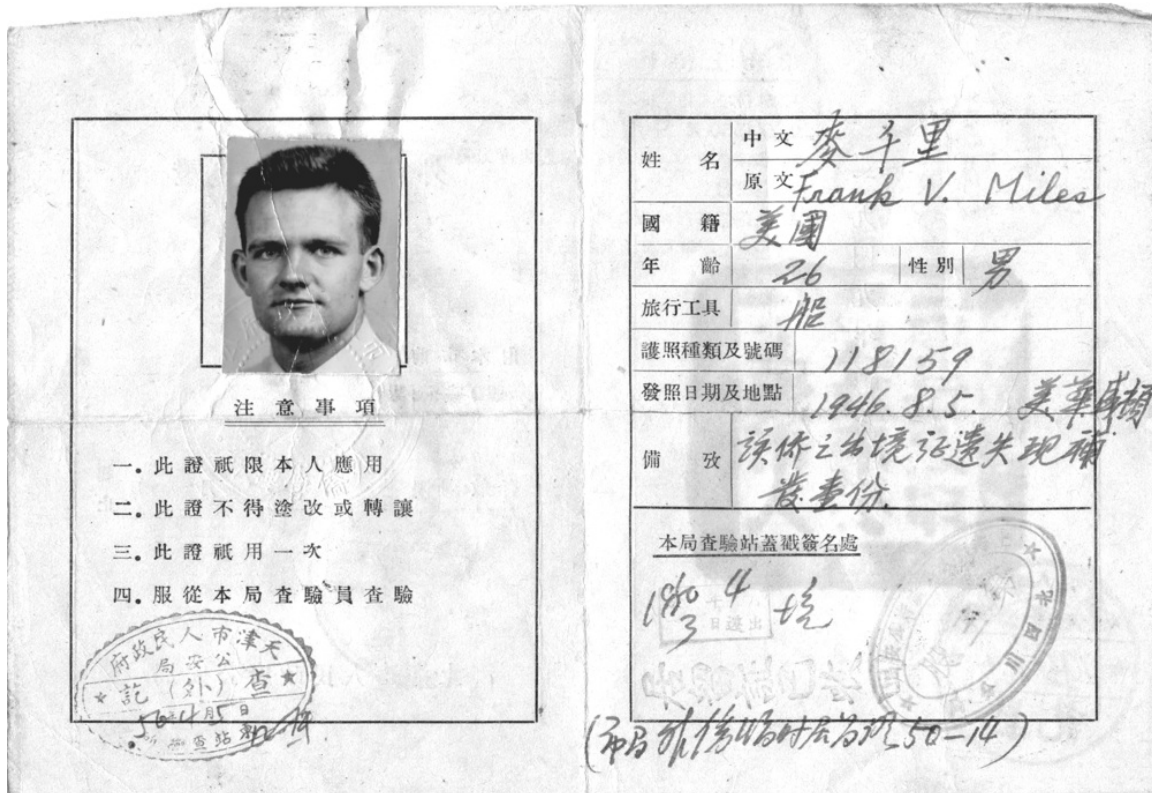


To Build Up a Record of Good Will: **Quaker processes in the Friends Ambulance Unit in China 1946-1950**

Catherine Miles Grant¹



Frank Miles ID, with arrival and departure stamps.

We purpose to train ourselves as an efficient Unit to undertake ambulance and relief work in areas under both civilian and military control, and so, by working as a pacifist and civilian body where the need is greatest, to demonstrate the efficacy of co-operating to build up a new world rather than fighting to destroy the old.

While respecting the views of those pacifists who feel they cannot join an organization such as our own, *we feel concerned among the bitterness and conflicting ideologies of the present situation to build up a record of goodwill and positive service, hoping that this will help to keep uppermost in men's minds those values which are so often forgotten in war and immediately afterwards.*²

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of a Founders Fund grant from CFHA that supported, in part, the research for this article.

² A. Tegla Davies, *Friends Ambulance Unit* (Great Britain: Headley Brothers, 1947), 5-6.

These were the words written in September 1939 by the first sixty volunteers trained in Britain to form the initial wave of Friends Ambulance Unit³ volunteers in China. As the world hurled itself once again into global war, the Unit was clear about its intention not only to provide tangible relief to those suffering as a result of war, but along with that to “demonstrate the efficacy of co-operating” and “build up a record of goodwill and positive service.”

As becomes eminently clear to anyone who lends more than a passing eye to the Unit’s experience in China (1941-1951), how in fact to spread “goodwill and positive service” in that increasingly fraught setting was often far from obvious. To get a flavor of that insistent tug at true purpose, one need only turn to the following words of young American Unit volunteer John Rue, written on 4 November 1949.⁴ This was a month after Mao’s proclamation of the new Communist People’s Republic of China, which the United States sought to disrupt and destabilize, instead recognizing Chiang Kai-shek’s Taiwan as China’s true government. Concerned about the increasingly shrill tenor of relations between governments and their people, John Rue challenged the Unit to tap into its deepest ideals as it tried to continue its humanitarian work:

If the Unit is to act as a reconciling force in political and economic conflict, we must develop

more than we ever have before an inner surety, a group unity, a more profound understanding of China’s problems and of what our relationships, as foreigners in China, are and ought to be. This calls for more self control, more self knowledge and a much deeper humility than we, as individuals, have shown in the past. Unless we live continually in that life and power, we are ourselves in danger of becoming active participants in the conflict: of losing completely our worth as agents of reconciliation.

Friends are as deeply concerned now as they were at the beginning of the war in 1939 that those eternal values are not forgotten. To build up a record of goodwill and positive service is still our duty. As relief workers, we are to relieve suffering. That is comparatively easy. Our problem is to do the job in such a way that we may become instruments of reconciliation, creators of goodwill.⁵

John Rue’s letter was included in a circular that went to all Unit members in response to an equally thoughtful 14 October 1949 communication to the Unit from longstanding Chinese Unit member An Min. In his letter, An Min gave a nuanced explanation for his decision to leave the Unit in light of shifts in his

³ Starting in 1941 the Friends Ambulance Unit in China, also referred to as the China Convoy, was primarily administered by the Friends Service Council in London. In 1946 its name was changed to the Friends Service Unit, and its primary administration shifted to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in Philadelphia. For the purposes of this paper both the Friends Ambulance Unit and the Friends Service Unit are simply referred to as *the Unit*.

⁴ FSU Chronicle #105– 10 December 1949, Archives American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia.

⁵ Letter by John Rue, FSU Chronicle #105 – 10 December 1949, Archives AFSC, Philadelphia.

thinking about where his personal duty towards his country lay now that “in order to improve the Chinese people’s living conditions, politically and economically, China has to have her own way.”⁶ Striking is the element of respect expressed in both of these letters, and their evident faith in the care in which it will be considered. But this was clearly a difficult juncture for all concerned.

Clearly, in the context of China’s convulsions throughout the 1940s, a quality of intention that went far beyond conviction, courage, and an adventurous spirit would be needed for the Unit to be a force of reconciliation. This paper examines instances in which Unit members’ processes reflect elements of Friends’ Testimonies (simplicity, equality, simplicity, integrity), and accompanying practices of deep listening and “standing in the light” to inform discernment.

Telling the story of the Unit in China with Integrity

Friends’ Testimony of Integrity – For Friends, having integrity means being authentic and having consistency between one’s values and one’s actions. Lack of integrity separates us

from our own soul, from the Light within, and from our community.

American Friends Service Committee – Quaker Testimonies⁷
Perfection is integrity, a mature oneness that draws even enemies to its heart, refusing to let antagonisms and dualisms have the last word.

Douglas Gwyn⁸

In speaking and writing about the Unit in China it is all too easy to remain focused on the experiences and activities of individuals and the organization. The experiences and activities were, in fact, astounding. Their accomplishments too were, in fact, remarkable given the size of the group and the context of the times. For example:

As the group most trusted not to be tempted by the black market during the Sino-Japanese War, the Unit transported more than eighty per cent⁹ of all medical supplies destined for civilians during that period (first delivered overland to China through Burma and later flying “over the Hump” -- the Himalayas -- from Calcutta).

In order to assist the millions of refugees who were returning to the area, beginning in 1946 the Unit undertook a major project of village rehabilitation based

⁶ Letter by Wang An-Min, FSU Chronicle #105 – 10 December 1949, Archives AFSC, Philadelphia.

⁷ American Friends Service Committee, *Quaker Testimonies*. (Philadelphia: 2011), 9.

⁸ Douglas Gwyn, 2014, *A Sustainable Life: Quaker Faith and Practice in the Renewal of Creation* (Philadelphia: Quaker Press, 2014), 40.

⁹ David Brough, “The Friends Ambulance Unit China Convoy 1941-1951 Exhibition. The Xi’an 8th Route Army Museum. Themes and Panels Titles and Text.” Eighth Route Army Museum, Xi’an, China. (2014); Susan Armstrong-Reid, *Armies of Peace: Canada and the UNRRA Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 305: “By V-J Day, FAU trucks were hauling 95 per cent of the medical supplies being provided to civilian hospitals in [the parts of west and south China not occupied by the Japanese] – despite hazardous road conditions, destruction to the railways, internal political strife, and runaway inflation.”

in Zhongmou, Henan Province.¹⁰ Zhongmou had been more than 90% destroyed by the Sino-Japanese War and the flooding of the Yellow River; later, in 1948, it changed hands five times during the fighting between Communists and Nationalists.¹¹ The village rehabilitation project included a clinic which developed into a 40-bed hospital, an agricultural development and breeding station, a machine shop and garage, a primary school, well digging and drilling, brick kilns and oil presses, and weaving and spinning groups.

With the outbreak of the full-scale Chinese civil war, the Unit's leaders made extraordinary efforts to open avenues to work in areas on *both* sides of the conflict. Unit members, travelling with one pass signed by Communist Dong Biwu and the other signed by the Nationalist military council (taking care to produce the right one when confronted!) rehabilitated hospitals, operated medical clinics, and sent small medical teams to remote areas to treat battle wounded and to help control diseases (kala-azar¹², leprosy, glaucoma, and children's infections resulting from malnutrition) among civilians.

"A drop in the ocean of need" these may have been (as former Unit members

have asserted through the years) but it is striking indeed.

That said, what has pulled me into the story of the Unit are the ways its Quaker roots come through in so many of the written records left behind by Unit members. While the Unit was in China neither to evangelize, nor to steer converts to the Religious Society of Friends (in fact many of the Unit volunteers were not Quaker, and so a major task of this diverse group was to seek common ground in service that operated on principles of pacifism and maintained a commitment to nonpartisanship) it was grounded in Quakerism.¹³ Thus, individually and collectively, its members – particularly those who were Friends – were able to bring to their witness the processes of a faith tradition that cultivates a trust in God to help individuals align their life choices with their deepest beliefs, and an inclination to listen deep within for invitations to greater alignment.¹⁴ At the heart of these processes is the profound invitation to *stand still in the light*, as George Fox proclaimed so eloquently in the mid-seventeenth century:

The first step of peace is to stand still
in the light (which discovers things

¹⁰ "Honan [Henan] suffered more in the period from 1938 to 1945 than any other province of China. The area was devastated by the three scourges of flood, famine and war, each causing untold hardships, suffering, and loss of life." Summary Report of the F.S.U. (China), 15 September 1950, AFSC Archives, Philadelphia.

¹¹ Press Release from American Friends Service Committee, 2 May 1949, AFSC Archives, Philadelphia.

¹² Kala-azar is a childhood parasitic disease that is 95 per cent fatal if untreated. In 1949 Spencer Coxe, writing from the China Desk of the AFSC, reported that 10,000 lives had been saved by the kala-azar program launched by the Unit (Spencer Coxe, "Quakers and Communists in China," *Far Eastern Survey* 18, no.13 [1949]: 152). This work was carried on by Communist medical services after the Unit's withdrawal from China, and Chinese health authorities reported to MT-19 members of the Unit who visited the area in 1978 that the disease had been eradicated. Lewis M. Hoskins, "Friends in China," *Friends Journal*, (October 1, 1978): 3.

¹³ That said, given the theological diversity of the Society of Friends, the Unit faced criticism from some Quakers, including some from within the Unit, who charged it with being insufficiently explicit about the Christian roots of its social witness. Thomas P. Socknat, "The Canadian contribution to the China Convoy," *Quaker History*, 69, no. 2 (1980): 84-85.

¹⁴ Gwyn, *A Sustainable Life*, 42.

contrary to it) for power and strength to stand against that nature which the light discovers: for here grace grows, here is God alone glorified and exalted, and the unknown truth, unknown to the world, made manifest, which draws up that which lies in prison and refresheth it in time, up to God, out of time, through time.¹⁵

The China context is particularly rich in opportunities to observe Friends' approaches and processes. While we can by no means attribute all actions of Unit volunteers to their "claim on the Inner Light"¹⁶ there is much to explore. The copious records of Unit members and their home offices are remarkable in their insight, their comprehensiveness, and their articulateness. The fact that so much is available to us is a reflection both of Friends' longstanding commitment to careful record-keeping, and the fact that distances and the realities of war frequently made more ephemeral forms of communication impossible.

The Peace Testimony and the Unit in the context of China

Before joining the Friends Ambulance Unit, volunteers signed a document of *Agreement for Service Overseas* with the American Friends Service Committee that established its intent in the following way:

The American Friends Service Committee is an agency through

which members of the "share the burden of suffering of another, to help him recover his sense of self-respect and integrity, and to restore a faith in love and good-will through a practical demonstration of human sympathy and brotherhood.

Convinced of the error of the way of violence, Friends seek to make creative love the basis of their relations with their fellows. As a matter of historical fact, the Committee has provided opportunities for such service for those who have felt unable to perform military service and for others who have come to share the Committee's basic concern. We seek in our workers those who share this fundamental attitude and motivation; we do not ask that they become members of the Society of Friends.¹⁷

The Friends Ambulance Unit, which was formed during both World War I and World War II in order to provide opportunities for alternative service for conscientious objectors while also alleviating the suffering of those affected by war, operated in many parts of the world. Its work in China (1941-1951) spanned a critical decade of history, beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945. Not long after the Japanese surrender in September of 1945, China was torn asunder by a full-scale resumption of the civil war between Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists under and Mao Zedong's Communists. The Chinese Communist

¹⁵ George Fox, "To All That Would Know the Way to the Kingdom," (1653).

¹⁶ J. William Frost, "Revealed Truth and Quaker History," *Quaker History*, 106, no. 1, (Spring 2017): 26.

¹⁷ Agreement for Service Overseas, American Friends Service Committee, Signed by Frank Miles 13 August 1946, Frank Miles private collection currently in author's possession (eventually to be donated to the AFSC Archives in Philadelphia).

Party ultimately became victorious and the People's Republic of China was formally established on 1 October 1949 despite the United States' strenuous backing of the Nationalists. The Korean War broke out in June 1950, with China and the United States on opposite sides of the military and ideological divide in the great windup to the Cold War. The Unit stayed on until 1951, having ultimately determined that it was no longer a viable option to continue the work and, in fact, that their continued presence in China had become a liability for their Chinese associates.¹⁸

A total of approximately 350 foreign¹⁹ and Chinese Unit volunteers, along with many more Chinese staff, overcame formidable practical difficulties to carry out their work, dealing with mind-boggling obstacles to transportation and communication: language, distance, and protracted interruptions. They braved discomforts, and at times risked their lives. They often worked in contested areas. They faced increasing anti-foreigner suspicion as relations between China and the United States deteriorated.²⁰ Again and again they needed to adjust their activities in the combustible mix of shifting political, military, and economic circumstances over which they had no control. And (in some ways the most challenging) they were frequently called to wait in the face of the unknown.

Responding to a calling to offer one's gifts

To be drawn into Quaker faith and practice today is to respond at some deep level to a calling into *peoplehood*. Of course, participation in a Friends meeting should satisfy personal needs and desires. But that is not the real goal or meaning of faith and practice. It is the far greater venture of placing one's own gifts, insights, and worth at the disposal of a group, which in turn places itself at the disposal of divine, imponderable purposes in the world. It is the mystery – indeed, the *sacrament* – of finding the best one has to offer individually raised to another level of worth and meaning when submitted to the processes of the community...”

Douglas Gwyn²¹

We center our story on young Frank Miles,²² an American Quaker who joined the Unit in July 1946 at the age of twenty-two just after being released from his service as a conscientious objector with the Civilian Public Service (CPS). His letters and journals offer glimpses into his personal attempts to live into the tenets of his faith during a period that was formative both for him and for China. Particularly interesting is the fact that, over the course of four years there (1946-1950), Frank

¹⁸ Andrew Hicks, *Jack Jones, A True Friend to China: 'The lost writings of a heroic nobody', The Friends Ambulance Unit 'China Convoy', 1945-1951* (Hong Kong: Earnshaw Books), 362.

¹⁹ The first Canadian contingent arrived in 1944. Socknat, “The Canadian contribution to the China Convoy,” 69.

²⁰ Spencer Coxe, letter from China Desk of the American Friends Service Committee 29 June 1949, Archives AFSC, Philadelphia.

²¹ Douglas Gwyn, *A Sustainable Life*, 24.

²² A lifelong Friend, Frank Miles moved to Canada in 1974, became a Canadian citizen, and served as General Secretary of Canadian Yearly Meeting from 1983 to 1989.

served in projects on both sides of the Chinese civil war, growing into ever-greater responsibilities and ultimately serving as Chairman of the Unit at the time of China's transition to becoming a communist country in the early days of the Cold War.

Within three weeks of being released from his three years of service to the United States as a conscientious objector working with the Civilian Public Service (CPS),²³ Frank was on his way to China, having made a two-year commitment to serve with the AFSC's Friends Ambulance Unit. He ended up staying on for four years, serving from 1946 to 1950.

In a 1977 interview Frank Miles explained part of what went into his decision to go to China after being released from Civilian Public Service:

The type of alternative service which a conscientious objector had, seemed a pretty pale experience compared to that of his friends who were risking life and limb in the various armed services around the world. One of the aspects of my decision at that time was the wish to get out and serve in a relatively dangerous place, but also to be of real and direct

service to people who had been in the midst of war's suffering.²⁴

This desire to make a contribution that involved relative risk is consonant with what was expressed by many who served out their commitments as conscientious objectors with the Unit during World War II.²⁵ Frank Miles was one of the smaller group who came to China after completing their commitments as conscientious objectors.

Friends' Testimonies of Equality and Simplicity: With MT-19 in Yan'an and beyond

Friends' Testimony of Equality: Belief in everybody's capacity to be a vessel of God. Friends seek not only to experience equality among our own, but also to bring a more equal footing to the wider society through work for peace and social justice.²⁶

Friends' Testimony of Simplicity: Belief in Spirit-led restraint, and in living "lives in which activities and possessions do not get in the way of open and unencumbered communication with others and with

²³ When the United States entered World War II Frank Miles looked for an opportunity to be of service in a way that was more aligned with his faith than the military and enrolled in a program at Guilford College, North Carolina, to train young men to undertake work in international relief and reconstruction. Within months this training was discontinued, as congressional legislation cancelled the right of conscientious objectors to go overseas. Frank was then drafted as a conscientious objector into the Civilian Public Service (CPS) and, for just over two years, he cut trails in the Smoky Mountains National Park, served as a medical "guinea pig" for jaundice experiments at the University of Pennsylvania, and worked as an attendant in both the State Mental Hospital in Trenton, New Jersey and in the psychiatric clinic of the Duke University Medical School. Frank Miles personal papers currently in author's possession.

²⁴ Frank Miles, "Midwest China Oral History Interviews", (1977). China Oral Histories. Book 52. digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/china_histories/52

²⁵ Timothy Stewart-Winter, Timothy, "Not a Soldier, Not a Slacker: Conscientious Objectors and Male Citizenship during the Second World War," *Gender & History* 19, no. 3 (2007): 519-541.

²⁶ AFSC, *Quaker Testimonies*, 7.

– Quaker Testimonies



one's own spirituality.²⁷
American Friends Service Committee



²⁷ AFSC, *Quaker Testimonies*, 13.

²⁸ The author extends profound appreciation to the photographers whose images contribute so much to our understanding of the story of the Unit in China. With vast appreciation, credit for photos included in this article go to Douglas Clifford, Frank Miles, and Betty Clifford.

As a central part of maintaining the Unit's commitment to working on both sides of conflicts, in December 1946 its Medical Team 19 (MT-19), along with *Welcome to Ya'nan – Zhou Enlai (above), Zhu De (below), Ma Haide and reporters (right)*.²⁸ several tons of medical supplies, were flown in to Yan'an, in order to offer assistance to the communist-run International Peace Hospital (referred to by the Chinese as "Yan'an Central Hospital," and later "First Rear Hospital"). The hospital was situated in Yan'an, the seat of the Chinese Communist government, deep in the loess hills of Shaanxi province in northwest central China (where Mao and his armies had regrouped at the conclusion of the Long March). It took strenuous negotiations to gain permission from Chiang Kai-shek for this Quaker-run unit to cross the Nationalist blockade and enter the so-called "Border Region," with supplies and experienced personnel who could help with training of hospital staff. Top Communist officials Zhou Enlai, General Zhu De, Ma Haide, and several news correspondents greeted the arrival of MT-19.

While working on a hospital-wiring project in Changte, in central China (Henan



Province) young Frank Miles wrote to his family to tell them about this momentous development for the Unit:

The big news is that the American Army is pulling out of China. This affects our work because the only communication we have with our group working in the Communist territory in Yen'an [Yan'an] is by US Army courier plane. This means that we'll shoot our reinforcements in there immediately and they'll be on their own until some means of contact can be arranged. Life should prove very interesting for those people during the next few months.²⁹

At that point Frank had no anticipation of going to Yan'an himself. However, one week later (10 February 1947) Frank wrote to his family to tell them that he would be one of the two Unit volunteers to join MT-19 in Yan'an, on one of the last U.S. Air Force planes before they pulled out having given up hope of a peaceful settlement between the Communists and the Nationalists:

Dear Folks,

I have some news that will most likely startle you. I'm am [sic] going in with the Team into Yen'an. Last week when I wrote it didn't seem that there would be any possibility of my going. But since then the picture has changed and we just received word a few minutes ago that I am to leave from here on the 12th to go to Nanking and from there by plane in to Yen'an.

This is the opportunity of a lifetime for me, and a phase of the



FSU [Friends Service Unit] work in



²⁹ Frank Miles, Journal, 2 February 1947, private collection held by the author.



MT-19: Back row: Peter Early (U.K. physician), Jack Dodds (Canada, medical and laboratory technician), Elizabeth Hughes (U.K., nurse), Eric Hughes (U.K. anesthetist), and Chinese interpreter; Front row: Margaret Stanley (U.S.A., nurse), Frank Miles (U.S.A. medical mechanic), Li Xingpei (Chinese, interpreter)

China which is very important. Friends' work has always been non-partisan as an outgrowth of our pacifist views. It seems to me to be of tremendous import that we bring our message of reconciliation to all the peoples of China. It is a nation in chaos, the civil war is taking huge amounts of resources, both natural and human, when these are needed so greatly to restore the wreckage of the Japanese war. The two groups in this struggle must find a way to mediate their differences and work together to rebuild their country. Our influence may be small indeed, but we shall throw in all our efforts in the

direction of peace for China...

I'll be able to tell you much more at some later date. When this later date will be, I don't know at all. It may be a month before we can make contact with the outside world, or it may be a year. So if you hear nothing further from me, you'll understand that we just haven't been able to get messages through. Don't worry, I have found the place where I can best make my contribution and I am happy about the opportunity no matter what. And of course as soon as I possibly can, I'll get word out to you.³⁰

On 2 March 1947 American volunteers

³⁰ Frank Miles, letter, 10 February 1947, private collection currently in author's possession.



Frank Miles and Margaret Stanley landed in Yan'an. They brought to seven the numbers on MT-19 members in Yan'an (pictured here, along with their interpreter Li Xingpei -- front row).

Douglas Clifford, physician from New Zealand (now Canadian and residing in British Columbia) who was also a talented photographer and the source of many of the photos included in this paper.

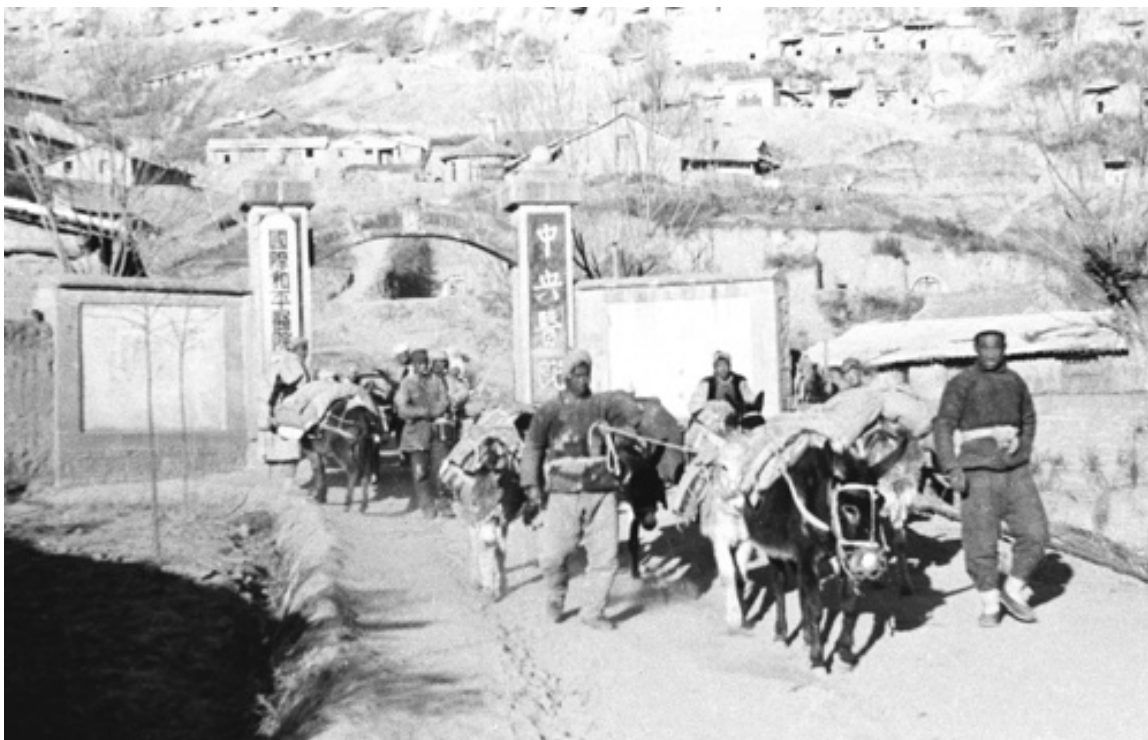
Soon after arriving in Yan'an, MT-19 faced a consequential decision about whether or not to remain with the International Peace Hospital in Yan'an, given the news of the threat of an imminent attack by Nationalist forces. They chose to stay; this would allow them to serve people suffering as a consequence of

war, it fit squarely in the Unit's intentions to have groups working on both sides of conflict, and perhaps there was some allure to it as well. Li Xingpei, translator assigned to MT-19 by Communist leader Dong Biwu,³¹ describes the Unit's decision as follows:

Hu Zongnan [a general in the Nationalist army] constantly sent airplanes to bomb Yan'an, threatening to launch an imminent invasion. Both Director Su and President Li were very frank with the FSU group and told its members the truth. They explained to them that according to Chairman Mao's strategic considerations, our army would not make a last-ditch defense of any particular city or place. Rather, we would move to the countryside. When that happened, life would become more difficult. So please carefully think about your future and make a decision on whether to stay or to leave. If you want to return to Zhengzhou, you may fly back on the airplane regularly scheduled for the U.S. observers.

Peter Early replied: "We were working in the KMT [Nationalist]-occupied areas all the time without having a chance to see the whole picture of the democratic China. We particularly needed to know more about people in liberated areas who badly needed aid from the outside world. That was why we were longing to come here—our dream has now come true! The Chinese civil wars are bound to be protracted, and we are to

³¹ Li Xingpei, "Recollections of the International Friends of the Friends Service Unit (FSU)", in *White Coat Soldiers' Honorable Writings – Yan'an Central Hospital-Northwest Military Region First Rear Hospital, April 1939-August 1950*. Translated by Jianghai Mei, 2016.



Leaving the hospital gate, March 1947

provide services here for at least a year or over a year. How can we leave right now?

MT-19 had thus thrown in their lot with the staff and patients of the International Peace Hospital, as equals, to face together whatever was to come.

Exactly one week later (9 March 1947) in the face of an imminent Nationalist attack, MT-19 joined the Communist-run International Peace Hospital in evacuating from Yan'an³². For the next fourteen months they moved together from cave village to cave village through the rugged hills of northern China, sharing the simplest of conditions with the medical staff and patients of the hospital. They travelled mostly on foot, often under the



Hospital staff march south from San Jiao

³² The First Rear Hospital was one of four mobile hospitals that retreated with – and was completely dependent on – Mao's Eighth Route Army. Susan Armstrong-Reid, "Two China Gadabouts': Guerilla Nursing with the Friends Ambulance Unit, 1946-48," in *Colonial Caring: A history of colonial and post-colonial nursing*, ed. Helen Sweet and Sue Hawkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 218.



Moving patient out of a cave

cover of night to avoid air attacks, paralleling the path of the battles between the Communist and Nationalist forces. The length of their stays varied as the military

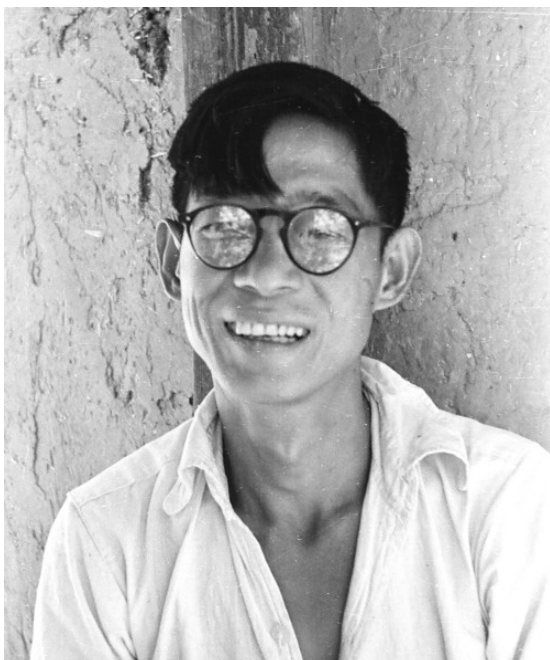


situation dictated, moving more than twenty times.

Over this period MT-19 and International Peace Hospital treated thousands of civilians and military



Putting on plaster hip spica at Li Chia Ke l'ai



Li Xingpei, MT-19 interpreter and author of 1985 account.

Li Xingpei's vivid account of their shared travails, along with the writing and later recollections of each of the members of MT-19, make vivid reading (e.g., "A cattle lair was turned into a medical lab"). But that is the material for a future publication. What comes through resoundingly in Li Xingpei's account is the mutual respect developed through their shared experiences whether in the context of blister-producing long marches, night moves and near-misses, or operations performed in the crudest of circumstances.

Six months into their journey (5 September 1947) Frank Miles wrote the following:

Frank Miles fitting wooden leg to boy soldier

casualties, in the most rudimentary of settings and with excruciatingly limited access to medical supplies and equipment.

To be on the move has continued to be our lot. Our total moves now add up to 13 and at this moment we are on the other side of



Image 17: Mt-19 receives first mail in ten months: 18 January 1948.

the Yellow River. In adding up distances travelled, the other night, we decided that as a group we have walked about 400 miles. My personal travels, besides, have been at least 150 miles beyond this group mark. However one and all have made the journeys with good spirit and health, on the whole, wearing a few blisters to be sure, but nothing serious. And if at times we have found life in the villages to lack a little in variety, our travels have more than made up for this deficiency.

As yet we see no direct possibility of getting in either personnel or mail. We live in the hope that it won't be many months now till contact can be reestablished but we don't know. I am reconciled to remaining another year without letters though at times they would be mighty welcome.³³

(In fact, it would be ten months before they would receive their first mail.)

There was ample time for reflection. A letter written by Frank during that period (9 September 1947) seems almost to have arisen as spoken ministry in Meeting for Worship:

After living in such villages for several months, one becomes very accustomed to differences in surroundings from those at home or in other parts of China. However, occasionally, as last night when I sat out under the stars listening to the sounds of evening, I am particularly struck by the contrast with the life of an American city. Against a subdued background of an occasional donkey braying, sheep baaing, dogs barking,

and voices babbling, just below I heard a small group of people singing a somber folk song. Farther along someone played a little tune on a Chinese violin while several others beat time with their hands and hummed the melody. And coming from a distance I heard a few notes of a plaintive tune being played on a flute. It's another world from the one where streetcars clang their way along, where automobiles swish by (we haven't seen any since we left Yen-an), and where the radio is the chief source of entertainment. Yes, it's also a much less hurried world and, even in the midst of war, life seems to be carried on with little of the strain and tension which is so evident at home. Perhaps we Americans have a lesson in simplicity to learn from these people.

The war goes on with no abatement, much fuel being added to the flames in the name of the American public. The Border Region people laughingly say that "Uncle Sam" is the quartermaster for the Kuomintang while they in turn, though unwillingly, are the Communists' quartermaster by furnishing captured supplies of U.S. origin. We have seen more than enough to realize the truth of this statement. Both sides mowing each other down with ammunition made in USA. It is tragic that our government should add to the suffering of the Chinese, especially when they have had to endure so much already. Here is emphasized to me the importance of a group, like ours, working in this troubled zone. Small as our influence may be, it does let the people with

³³ Frank Miles letter, 5 September 1947, private collection.

whom we come in contact know that there are people in America and in other nations who are concerned with the welfare of all persons living in this country who would be their friends as they would be the friends of all mankind, that in spite of political and cultural differences we can work together in close cooperation and build lasting friendships.

We, who are fortunate enough to be sharing in this venture of cooperation and friendship, have been impressed, again, with the complete interknittedness of this world of 1947. Though we are in a distant region where most of the modern technological improvements have not penetrated, yet the future of these people is intimately tied up with that of USA and the rest of the world. It becomes increasingly clear that, in a physical sense, we are a "Universal Brotherhood". My hope, for the New Year and the years to come, would be that we may be agents building toward a "Universal Spiritual Brotherhood" of men.³⁴

Li Xingpei concludes his chapter about MT-19 (published in 1985) with the following comments, highlighting the mutual respect of foreign and Chinese associates:

By the end of the year, our foreign friends had treated or saved the lives of over 2,000 wounded soldiers. They made long and difficult journeys of thousands of miles in spite of the harassment of enemy planes and

various types of hardships. They went through thick and thin together with our comrades and did their very best to save the lives of the wounded, fully displaying the spirit of humanitarianism...

Our foreign friends worked at our hospital for over a year. Their conscientious spirit and service made a deep impression on us. At the same time, our diligent attitude towards work and our idea of sacrificing our lives for the revolutionary cause also made a deep impression on our foreign friends.³⁵

MT-19 had made contributions that went far beyond the medical care they provided alongside their associates from the International Peace Hospital. Their concentrated efforts to help the Chinese people in Communist-controlled areas in the midst of the civil war would be remembered. So, too, would the grace with which they shared in the circumstances of the Chinese during those precarious months in the remote hills of western Shaanxi. Theirs was the lived expression of the Friends' Testimonies of Peace, Equality, and Simplicity.

These would make possible, in the near future, the Unit's expanded work in the province of Henan north of the Yellow River despite the full-scale guerrilla warfare that had erupted there, and the Communists' disgust with the United States' support of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists.

Should I stay or go? Personal discernment aided by others

³⁴ Frank Miles letter, 9 September 1947, private collection.

³⁵ Li Xingpei, *White-Coated Warriors*.

In Friends' practice, personal discernment is often aided by others. Quaker faith and practice is a bold venture in Spirit-led living.

Douglas Gwyn³⁶

Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?

#27 From Advices and Queries from Britain Yearly Meetings' *Quaker Faith & Practice*

For young Frank Miles, though, his own contributions to China to date seemed far less obvious. True, he had been one of the seven members of MT-19, historically significant with its intersection of bipartisan Quaker service with the storied beginnings of Mao's Communist China in the rugged hills of Yan'an. In truth, though, Frank was acutely aware that he had not been in a position to make a significant contribution there after the evacuation from Yan'an, since all things mechanical had soon had to be abandoned given the ruggedness of the terrain over which they traveled. Even the x-ray machine and generator had had to be

hidden in a safe spot. In his role as medical mechanic, Frank had been only nominally part of the critical medical work of MT-19, where surgeries had to be performed by natural light. Even raw materials (wood, oil drums) with which one might make such necessities as prostheses and bedpans were virtually nonexistent.

Having concluded his two-year commitment with the Unit, Frank Miles now faced the decision about whether or not to extend his stay in China. His journals and letters repeatedly expressed his readiness to continue with the Unit if he could be of real service. On the other hand, there were strong pulls towards resuming the undergraduate education that had been interrupted for years now. He also yearned to fall in love and start a family.

At a pivotal time in Frank's decision-making came Lewis Hoskins, then Unit Chair, stopping in Zhongmou on his return trip from negotiations with Communist authorities in Shihchiachuang. In the manner of Friends' discipline of deep attention,³⁷ Lewis Hoskins listened carefully to Frank's concerns, reflected back to him his gifts, and helped him see how these might be placed in service of upcoming Unit activities at this critical juncture. Here we see Friends' practice of experienced leaders recognizing and nurturing the gifts of others, offering deep presence to their discernment process.

³⁶ Gwyn, *A Sustainable Life*, 48.

³⁷ Patricia Loring, *Listening Spirituality, Volume 1: Personal Spiritual Practices Among Friends* (Washington, DC: Openings Press, 1997), 162 offers a beautiful description of Friends' practice of deep listening: "Part of our practice of listening to another can be holding together in the Light both the utterances of the one we are listening to and our own inward responses... As with many practices, what begins by feeling like keeping a sweaty grip on ourselves can become relaxation into God's own freedom, into liberation from the all-too-human need to manage the situation, to control outcomes, to be the savior or to have the definitive, intelligent, wise, or good word on the subject at hand. We can begin to be simply present, simply together, open together to the Spirit of God that is not only within but between and among us, uniting us, stilling us into awareness of our union in Love. In this way, our encounter with one another may also become an encounter with the divine. The distinction between love of neighbor, of oneself and of God becomes less and less easily perceived.

Not long after this conversation Lewis Hoskins wrote to Frank's parents with a striking explanation of what went into their son's decision to extend his stay in China with the Unit:

Shanghai

July 7, 1948

Mr. and Mrs. Ross C. Miles,
45 Lansing Ave,
Salem, Oregon.

Dear Friends:

I would like to write to you directly to give my interpretation of Frank's recent decision to extend his services in China for a time, and to indicate how welcome this decision is to us. I know that he naturally feels a strong call to renew family ties and to return to formal schooling. But he also feels some personal frustration in his China experience thus far and wants to do an especially worth-while job before he returns to the States. Just now he is very much challenged by the opportunities confronting the Unit and he sees a place for him in it. We are all greatly distressed by the growing violence and the increased hatreds engendered by this strife and the tragic suffering of the common people. We are gravely concerned by the international overtones to the war here and regret the current American policy which does not seem to be in touch with the realities of the situation.

In a recent Friends' Retreat held in Shanghai and in discussions within the Unit for some months there has been a sense of unity and concern that the FSU continue and expand its

impartial services on both sides of the fighting lines and that we do what we can to offer opportunities of reconciliation and to demonstrate a spirit of good will. At the same time, those of us who have been working in Honan have been acutely aware of the increasing medical needs of the region, made doubly serious by the increased military activity and the consequent withdrawal of missionary personnel and medical institutions. It is quite literally true that there is only one group now operating here who has the spirit, experience and requisite good will on both sides to meet this need - the F.S.U. It is a tremendous challenge to us who are keenly aware of our limitations, but we who see the world again gathering forces for another devastating and catastrophic war can feel no other way but compelled to throw our pitifully small, but somehow, perhaps, significant efforts to reverse the trend in one of the crucial zones of the world politics. In this way, the whole history of the FAU-FSU in China has been in preparation to contribute something at this vital time and place. Only because of the heritage of confidence and respect among Chinese on both sides can we undertake this challenge now.

It is because of this concern that some of us have just made a trip into Communist territory to make a working agreement with their high authorities. We are very satisfied now about our relationships with and documents from officials on both sides. It is now up to us to put our scheme into operation. The respect earned for the Unit by MT-19 in Liberated Areas during the past year

opens the way for this service.

Despite the advantages of our heritage, the Unit unfortunately is poorly equipped and staffed to undertake such a gigantic program. We need finances and personnel. I have confidence that the Friends in our home countries will catch the vision of the opportunities for a unique and vital service in China and will provide the necessary funds. I anticipate that the problem of personnel will prove more difficult. Not only is the war over and many young men already in their civilian niche, but the dislocations of a long struggle have naturally increased the yearning of all young people to settle into a normal existence. The type of work envisaged calls for maturity and experience. People with these are not easy to recruit quickly and send to China. That is why both the Friends Service Council and the American Friends Service Committee, although heartily endorsing our plan, warned of the personnel difficulties and expressed the strong hope that present members in key positions would remain as long as possible until they could be adequately replaced by new recruits. We have urged this point of view on our members and a number have responded by agreeing to remain several extra months to help get this new important program well under way. We need doctors, nurses, driver-mechanics, administrators, and handy-men. But of especial importance is experienced people who are "comfortable in China", who speak some of the language, who get along with the Chinese and this environment.

Frank is a very important person in

the work of the Unit just now in Honan. Not only does he fill a responsible position at Chungmou [Zhongmou], but, with his background and experience, he is vital to the development of our expanded medical work. If he is able to remain with the Unit until next spring, as he now intends, I am convinced that he will be asked to assume very important administrative responsibilities for the Unit. He realizes that he is receiving a significant education from his China residence. He is gaining valuable experiences and is achieving a degree of maturity more rapidly than that obtained from formal but cloistered halls of learning (I am a college professor myself and corroborate this). During the past two years in China I have seen him grow in many ways: physically, mentally, in capacity to accept and discharge responsibilities of an administrative type, in all-around abilities especially of mechanical nature, and, not least, spiritually. I am confident that he is still growing, still increasing in stature. I believe that additional time in China will not delay his education really, but will make it more meaningful to him when he does return to school.

I have written in some detail to explain our needs and our opportunities and to corroborate Frank's feeling that he should remain in China a while longer. I am glad that I decided to stay an extra year and I do not think Frank will regret his decision. I hope you will not be too disappointed.

With warm personal regards,
Lewis Hoskins

Chairman³⁸

Frank came away from his conversations with Lewis Hoskins with a clarity about the rightness of staying on in China, a “can-do” spirit about new responsibilities offered to him as director of the Machine Shop and Garage for the Zhongmou Village Rehabilitation project, and a marked sense of perspective and refreshment. I quote from his journal below:

Journal 20 June 1948

Lewis, Mark, Henry, and Charles’ arrival has risen morale about 300%. Lewis especially has a way of clarifying issues and easing difficult situations which I admire tremendously, as well as being one of the finest people I know. Personally, he has helped me to see my relationships and problems more clearly and has given me a vote of confidence, which gives me added assurance in planning to stay over with the Unit...

The year ahead is full of opportunity, based on past preparation and experience. If I dig in, there is a real chance for growth – more than equivalent to a year’s college work. So, let’s up and at them.³⁹

Journal 4 July 1948

We are simply snowed under with work [at the Machine Shop and Garage] but I am as happy about it as it is possible to be – in other words, I feel as though I am making a useful contribution and that is a fine feeling.

Incidentally, my hands are even getting calloused again.⁴⁰

Frank’s regained sense of perspective comes through, too, in a letter he wrote to his parents on 14 July 1948, telling them of an evening’s walk where, despite the strife, the deeper rhythms of village life endured:

As I was walking down to the Shop this evening, I realized again how much a part of my life the Chinese village scene has become and what a pleasant part of my life it is. This particular spot is relatively new to me but the patterns of life are so similar in all the parts of the country where I have been that I feel as though this community is a familiar and old group of friends. My relation to them is not as a member of their inner circle and I don’t think it ever could be, I’ll never know enough of the language nor be able to look at the world from a similar enough viewpoint to achieve that. But I believe they do have sort of an open place in their hearts for me, and others like me, whom they consider to be friendly and rather eccentric people from the outside world – ‘perhaps these foreigners are a little queer, certainly they make lots of mistakes, but they have been useful too, I want to get to know them and find out more about them. They have lots of interesting stories to tell of their home countries.’ This seems to be the sort of thing which runs through their minds when they see us. And for me it is fun to stroll through

³⁸ Lewis Hoskins letter, 7 July 1948, Frank Miles private collection held by author.

³⁹ Frank Miles, Journal, 20 June 1948, private collection held by author.

⁴⁰ Frank Miles Journal, 4 July 1948, private collection held by author.

the streets and occasionally swap a story for a song or some interesting tidbit of local news.

There is an atmosphere which goes along with the evening stroll through the village which could never be duplicated in our part of the world. The appreciation of it grows on one the longer he lives here and beyond a doubt it is the one thing which a returned worker will miss most when he gets back to his home. How can I describe it? The ingredients which make it up are something like this: light conversation of the elders out in the middle of the courtyards, laughing voices of children playing games, cries of babies who are hungry or just wanting someone to play with them (the numbers of babies and children just cannot be imagined in our relatively childless USA.) - snatches of song played on a violin or a flute, sounds of all the voices of the animals of the lower kingdom, and along with the wind, myriads of other little voices and sounds which I CAN'T identify. Mix all of these thoroughly and if you get them in the right proportions you have the comforting and satisfying sounds of a village evening.

Darkness has been creeping up on me, making it impossible to go on, so we'll leave the rest of this to another day.⁴¹

This young Friend was "standing still in the Light."

He would need that Light in the months to come, as things in China became increasingly fraught, the situation of

foreigners within it more and more tenuous.

Group discernment: Moving forward in the context of full-scale civil war

Consider that the Unit had come to China in 1941 expecting that its role would be focused on relief and reconstruction during, and as a follow-up to, the Sino-Japanese War. Yet now, in 1948, it found itself in the midst of an intense and protracted civil war; the long-simmering conflict between the Communists and the Nationalists had burst into full-scale conflagration after the breakdown in April 1946 of a brief attempt at peace talks. This was playing out in particularly fierce ways in the area north of the Yellow River region in central China, where in 1946 the Unit had undertaken a major project of village rehabilitation and medical work in the village of Zhongmou and the surrounding area. Most foreign missionaries (who had gradually returned to the area after the end of the Sino-Japanese War) were now once again abandoning the area as Mao's Communist forces secured village after village. News in early 1948 of killings of missionaries, too, frightened many away.⁴²

During two consecutive weekends in late January and early February 1948, Friends from the Unit, along with Friends from Shanghai and Nanjing, met in Shanghai in a retreat "to consider the role of Friends in the present situation in China." Their records report that they spent "a great deal of time... in quiet meditation,

⁴¹ Frank Miles Letter, 14 July 1948, private collection currently in author's possession.

⁴² Erleen J. Christensen, *In War and Famine: Missionaries in China's Honan Province in the 1940s* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2005), 231-2.

out of which the speaking arose,” from which they emerged with a renewed commitment to bear positive witness by doubling down on their efforts.

The following letter “To Friends Everywhere” was one of several that grew out of their time together:

Dear Friends,

For some time members of the Friends Service Unit and Friends in Shanghai have felt a growing concern over the gravity of the situation in China with its increasing strife and bloodshed. In the course of a retreat arising from this to consider our task in the face of the problems involved, we have at times felt baffled and despondent; we have realized that there is no easy solution to the problems that face us and that ours must be a continuing search. As we have continued to seek for guidance, light has not been withheld and we have been granted a measure of common purpose and of encouragement. We are strengthened to realize that Friends everywhere join with us as seekers.

The retreat has shown us that in these times of strife and travail in China, the work is so great and the workers so few that we feel more concerned than ever, as individuals and as a corporate body, to bear an effective witness, appealing to and answering that of God in all men. We have realized that only the much deepened renewal of our discipleship to Jesus

can enable us to bear positive witness to our Lord and to His redemptive love. In our striving to bring back to Him those who now ignore or resist His love we are humbly convinced that we should make sacrifices of our strength, time and money, more than we have ever done before; that we may all be one, He in us, and we in Him. The form of our service matters little; it is His spirit working through us that brings life.

We are encouraged that the Friends’ Service Unit has been able to maintain Friends’ practice of working on both sides of the battle lines. We hope that they may have the increasing support and sympathy of all Friends so that their witness, by life and word, may be made on behalf of us all.

We hope that other groups of Friends who may receive this message, particularly those in China, will join with us in our search and will let us know how our concern may be developed among them and among us all, to the increase of active faith and prayer among all men and women of goodwill and the lessening of bloodshed and suffering among the sorely harassed people.

On behalf of Friends in retreat,
Mary G. Campbell, Lewis Hoskins,
J.L. Poan, Harry T. Silcock⁴³

Here we see retreat attenders carving out extended time together so as to seek divine guidance from a place of deep

⁴³ Also listed as participants were Dr. Kolbl, A. Borgeost, Lindsay Crozier, Margaret Garvie, K.S. Huang, Ted Herman, J. Usang Ly, William Leete, Don Warrington, Dorothy Warrington, Mrs. Yamanouchi, Saburo Yamanouchi, and H. L. Yen. Letter, Shanghai Retreat, January 1948. AFSC Archives, Philadelphia.

waiting and listening, for best use of their “gifts in the service of God and the community in those times.”⁴⁴ They understand that Friends’ longstanding commitment to pacifism, as an outgrowth of a fundamental belief in the capacity of all people to be vessels of God, requires thoughtful discernment in each particular context. The records of the two retreats held by Friends in China in early 1948 capture that intention and spirit.

Frank grew in purpose, skill, and gravitas as he stepped into new responsibilities as director of Zhongmou’s Machine Shop and Garage. He took part in the risky night rescue mission of sixty drums of petrol in Kaifeng. He also joined a negotiation team that met with Dong Biwu in Shijiazhuang, one of several significant efforts to make it possible for the Unit to continue its work as Communist

troops became increasingly active in the Zhongmou area where so much of the Unit’s work was then centered. (The Communists took over Zhongmou for good in October 1948.)

This was one of several ambitious trips Unit delegates took to try to smooth the way for long-term relations between the Unit and the communist Liberated Areas government (in particular to secure written passes to operate in the Border regions of Henan, Hebei, and Shandong), with which experienced varying success.⁴⁵

Then came the Staff meeting of October 1948, attended by foreign and Chinese staff representatives from Unit projects around China. Attendees reaffirmed the Unit’s intention to continue to carry out work in both Communist and Nationalist areas despite the difficulties imposed by a critical shortage of personnel,



⁴⁴ MT-19 receives first mail in ten months: 18 January 1948. Advices and Queries from Britain Yearly Meetings, *Quaker Faith & Practice* #27 Britain Yearly Meeting of Friends. *Quaker Faith & Practice: The Christian Book of Discipline*. (London: Quaker Books, 1995).

⁴⁵ Spencer Cox, “Quakers and Communists in China,” 152-155.

severe lack of funds and materials, and the continuing “military situation.” The list of questions for consideration, distributed to Unit members in advance of the meeting, gives a hint off the complexity before them:

The purposes and objectives of Unit work in China and particularly in the areas under dispute during the civil war should receive some re-examination by the staff at this time. The major area of our work is extremely unstable and may become dangerous. That there is a tremendous need there, there is no doubt. Can the overtones of goodwill and reconciliation be conveyed by our continued work out there? What balance should we seek? What should our formal relationships be to officials on each side? How much publicity should be given to this phase of our work? Are we approaching the status of smugglers if we take the drugs across the lines without specific approval of the Nationalist Government each time (which might well preclude it)? What should be our attitude if we are ordered out of the area? Can we keep up with shifting lines of control? What should be our policy on dealing with military patients? These and other similar questions have been discussed many times before but should be reviewed at this time. Should we have additional work based in another area or should we “put all our eggs in one basket”? In this type of emergency work, is there room for married couples, for families? What are we to do to guarantee continuity and experienced leadership in the

administration of the Unit both at H.Q. [Headquarters] and in the field? Should we consider offering more attractive arrangements for older or experienced people of proved merit who would be willing to remain for a longer period of service? The Agenda will be crowded with such problems.⁴⁶

This was a decidedly complex and delicate time for the Unit. These questions,



Frank Miles, Chairman Friends Service Unit, Shanghai (and his official “chop”).

too, called for a standing in the light, deep listening, and careful discernment.

New responsibilities, and a situation in China ever more fraught

At the October 1948 Unit Staff Meeting in Shanghai Frank was stunned to be asked to serve as Chairman of the Unit (to follow Lewis Hoskins upon his repatriation) until a long-term replacement could be found. He agreed with some trepidation and relocated to Shanghai, which at that point was still controlled by the Nationalists. Within a growing anti-religion and anti-foreigner climate within

⁴⁶ Staff Meeting Documents, Shanghai October 1948, Friends Service Unit. AFSC Archives, Philadelphia.

China,⁴⁷ as well as personnel shortages and diminishing funds to support the work from their Quaker sources outside of China,⁴⁸ Frank would need to bring every ounce of his capacity for attending deeply and speaking with intention, as Chinese and foreign colleagues alike navigated uncharted political waters

Initially the Unit was hopeful that its track record of collaboration and nonpartisanship would allow it to continue, particularly as the medical work in Zhongmou continued to be valued:

China's Civil War has resulted in the almost complete isolation and blockade of over 100 million people and has brought renewed suffering and damage to the nation. The FSU (China) finds itself in the almost unique position of being able to carry on its work across the lines and in disputed areas and is gradually expanding its activities in these regions as the most significant testimony it can make to the power of good-will.⁴⁹

Tensions soon grew, though, as the Communists consolidated their position on the mainland while the American government's support of the Nationalists continued unabated. Locally simmering resentments festered with months of isolation as entire regions were cut off. Over time the situation deteriorated. Period records report difficulties the Unit encountered in making practical working arrangements with the Communists,

particularly with regard to gaining travel permits. For many months the Unit's largest project in Zhongmou, by then taken over by the Communists, was cut off from headquarters in Shanghai which was still in Nationalist hands.

On 27 August 1949 Chairman Frank Miles sent out a letter to all Unit members in which he paved the way for the Staff meeting with a series of questions for consideration; now he was the one to lead others in thoughtful processes of discernment:

With the rapidly shifting political and military situation, shortages of personnel, uncertainty about the future, myriads of [sic] problems arising from isolation, and a new and highly socially conscious government to deal with, the best that can be said is that we kept our program going.

Undoubtedly the first question we must face is the collective and individual strength of our motivation and spiritual resources. If past months have been difficult, the coming period will be more so, it seems to me....

Do we have the stamina to see it through and maintain a positive attitude in all of our relationships? This is of vital importance, and it behoves [sic] each of us to examine himself frankly and honestly on this score. If we have what it takes, we can move ahead, confidently facing the future, but if not, we should leave while we can do it with some

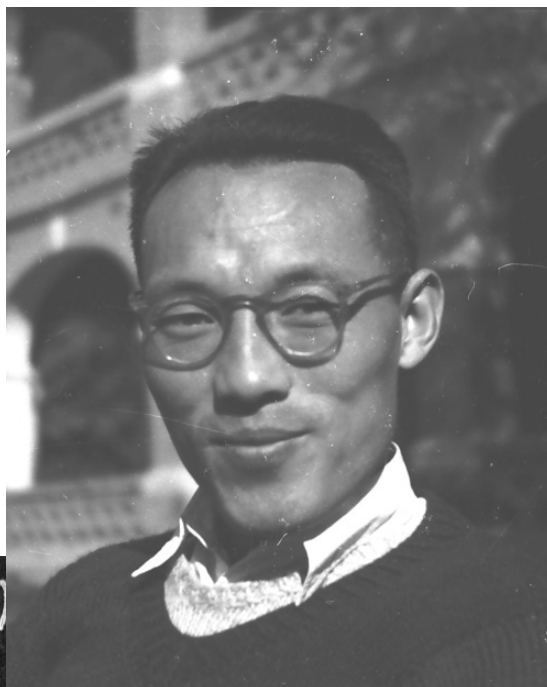
⁴⁷ At that time the Unit consisted of "13 Chinese, 15 British, 3 New Zealanders, and 14 Americans... engaged mainly in medical work, village rehabilitation, training of medical mechanics, and transportation of medical supplies in West China." "Periodic Summary No. 5" of the American Friends Service Committee Program in China, October 1948, AFSC Archives, Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ Armstrong-Reid, *China Gadabouts*, 209.

⁴⁹ Armstrong-Reid, *China Gadabouts*, 209.

semblance of grace.

With this question settled we must look next to those dealing with our relationships to the Government. To what extent is the Unit willing and able to co-operate with the Government programme? To what degree can the Unit see its administrative control and responsibility taken over by them? How far is the Unit willing to identify its purposes with those of the Government? How much freedom of movement and leeway in planning



Page from photo album of Betty Ringeisen (Clifford), Unit Secretary in Shanghai -- Zhongmou Council Members travel to Shanghai, October 1949 -- Shou Hsueh Yu (Chinese), Jack Gerson (Canadian), C.T.Liu (Chinese), and Doug Clifford (then-New Zealand, now Canadian).

must the Unit have if it is going to carry on effectively? How much

Government sponsorship should we accept? What should the Unit do in

the event that the United States or Great Britain sever diplomatic relationships with this part of China?⁵⁰

In October 1949 (very shortly thereafter) the Communist People's Party captured Beijing, and Mao declared the formation of the People's Republic of China. That month a delegation from Zhongmou visited Shanghai, for in-person meetings. The sense of warmth and shared purpose is palpable in this photo, but external pressures continued to mount. Now twenty-five years of age with some months of experience as Chairman of the Unit in China, Frank had no illusions about the complex times the Unit faced. On 6 June 1949 he wrote a letter to his parents from which we can almost see him reaching for strength surpassing his own:

I can see that this next period is going to take patience and fortitude of great magnitude, to say nothing of the broadest vision we are capable of bringing to these problems --- we must qualify because more than ever the channels of friendship and understanding are shrinking. Personal shortcomings and differences will have to be brought into proportion and a renewed insight into the divine source of life with the resultant love for all fellowmen be put into play.⁵¹

Deeper listening yet in discerning way forward

If it was difficult for the Unit and its

foreign members to navigate the shifting terrain of China, it strains the mind to imagine the lived experience of the Chinese members and staff whose own country was undergoing such cataclysmic changes. It was becoming increasingly problematic for these essential partners in the work of the Unit (who worked as doctors and nurses, accountants, hospital managers, translators who traveled long distances with Unit leaders for complex negotiations) to continue to work with this foreign group.

Chairman Frank Miles was not oblivious to this strain, as is evident in the following letter that he wrote to Chinese Unit member C.T. Liu, superintendent for

C.T. Liu at Hostel in Shanghai.

the Unit's hospital in Zhongmou.

(By that time the Communists had just captured Shanghai, making possible resumed communication between Unit headquarters in Shanghai and Unit members in Zhongmou, which had shifted permanently to Communist control eight months earlier. This was a time in which the local government of Zhongmou was eager to assert its control and to elbow out the Unit.)

C.T. Liu

June 17, 1949

Chungmou [Zhongmou]

Dear C.T.,

One of the most impressive reports which came down from Chungmou this last time was yours of the hospital work. All of us read it

⁵⁰ Frank Miles, Chairman's Report to Staff Meeting, Friends Service Unit Chronicle #98, 27 August 1949, AFSC Archives, Philadelphia.

⁵¹ Frank Miles letter, 6 June 1949, private collection currently in author's possession.

with interest and were amazed to see the wide territory from which your patients come, as shown on the distribution chart. I am very happy to know that you are there helping to keep the hospital running smoothly during this period when there are so many difficulties.

Wei Min has told us a little of the difficulties which Chinese members have met, particularly in dealing with the local government. They must make life pretty trying for you at times when they misunderstand the purposes of the Unit and consider you to be "reactionaries". I'd be interested to hear a little of your recent experiences, with all the past difficulties of the hospital you must have been in some tight places.

Another aspect of things which I would like to hear your opinion on is the work and future of the Unit. Do you look on the plans for concentration on medical work and the opening of another hospital as sound? Would you be interested in undertaking a job in a bigger hospital? What about the general outlook for Chinese members, from what you have seen are there going to be a continuing number of young people who are interested in working with us? These and many other questions are running around in my mind and I hope we will have plenty of opportunity to talk about them at

Chungmou (when and if I get there). At any time I would like to receive word of what you are thinking about your and the Unit's future.

These past few months in Shanghai have been very different from any I have known in China before. I had always lived in small towns and villages until then and the contrast has been very great. I'm beginning to get accustomed to big city ways now, but I still look forward to being some place where there are not so many people and where there is less hustle and bustle. What little Chinese I know is rapidly slipping away because everything is done in English but I still believe that I could find my way through the country and take care of getting myself three meals a day, if I had to.

Have you heard anything from your family since liberation? If the Ping Han railway is being repaired as rapidly as the others are, it shouldn't be long until you can go directly up to seem [sic] them.

Please give my best regards to Chang Chen Lao and all my other friends at the hospital.

Sincerely yours,
Frank Miles⁵²

In fact, some Chinese Unit members and associates later paid dearly for their association with the West, particularly during the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It is no wonder

⁵² Frank Miles letter, 17 June 1949, private collection currently in author's possession.

that far less of the story of the Unit has been left by those Chinese members who were also absolutely central in carrying out its mission.⁵³

In April 1950, after an anxious six-month delay caused by permit restrictions and the naval blockade of Shanghai, Frank made a precipitous departure for America in April 1950, leaving through the port city of Tianjin. The Korean War broke out soon after that, in June 1950.

Frank was replaced as Unit Chair by Bob Reuman. The following is his announcement of the Unit's decision to close its doors after a decade of service to China, followed by his analysis of the disheartening changes in the attitudes of the Chinese Communists to the Unit:

It is with deep regret that we report that the Friends Service Unit must close down its projects in China. The increasing tensions and conflicts in the international situation have made it impossible for new personnel to go to China to continue the work of the Unit there."

It is helpful to realize that in its first contacts with the Communists, the Unit had to make a great effort to get across the lines to carry on projects in Communist territory. The Communist officials appreciated this, and in some cases misinterpreted it as a gesture of support for them rather than a desire to serve impartially.

Later on as the situation changed, this

mistake was realized, but was replaced with a further misunderstanding and misinterpretation which was universal to one degree or another in the Unit's relationships. The Communists, motivated by high ideals developed what might be described as a religious fervor. They were absolutely convinced that what they were doing was the right, and the only right thing for China. They felt strongly that "He who is not with us is against us", and the Unit's attempt at neutrality was understood to mean indifference or was thought to be almost passive resistance to their program.⁵⁴

The Unit closed its doors for good in 1951.

**Refusing to let antagonisms and dualisms have the last word:
Some legacies of the Friends
Ambulance Unit in China**

"Perfection is integrity, a mature oneness that draws even enemies to its heart, refusing to let antagonisms and dualisms have the last word."

Douglas Gwyn⁵⁵

Now six and a half decades after the Unit regretfully ended its programs in China, striking is the accruing collection of Chinese individuals' accounts of their time working with the Unit. What is emerging speaks to a remarkable legacy left by that small group despite the all-too serious

⁵³ During the 1980s several Canadian former Unit volunteers formed the Chinese Student Foundation of Ontario (CSFO), which supported three offspring of Chinese Unit members for university studies in Toronto. Since then one of these, Wang Yunying, has a number of doors for me to better understand the context of the Unit in Henan and the experiences of some of the Chinese Unit members with whom Frank Miles associated closely.

⁵⁴ Bob Reuman, Summary Report of the F.S.U. (CHINA), 15 September 1950, AFSC Archives, Philadelphia.

⁵⁵ Gwyn, *A Sustainable Life*, 40.

strains.

§

Testifying to the powerful legacy of the FAU's contributions to China, in 1978 (soon after China and the United States began to resume unofficial relations) Frank Miles and other members of the Unit's original MT-19 group made a trip back to China as guests of the Chinese Ministry of Health. Out of that visit relationships with several former Chinese colleagues were re-established, from which further opportunities for exchange and the mutual expansion of understanding grew. Now China has again honored the Unit's work with new exhibitions in Xi'an (permanent), Beijing and Nanjing (temporary) and Yan'an (awaiting confirmation of opening date). I am buoyed by the keen interest, in China as well as in the West, in knowing more about this story and considering its meaning for our current times. All of this comes at a time of heightened tensions between the governments of China and the United States, and of increased intolerance, fear-mongering, and sable-rattling emanating from leaders in this country and several others as well. This story of Friends' service has particular relevance as we consider the nature of our witness in an increasingly fractured world.

In April 2016, during a research trip to China, my fellow travelers and I were privileged to be central players in a ceremony honoring the gift from former Unit volunteer Douglas Clifford of some 700 digitized photos to the Eighth Route Army Liaison Museum in Xi'an. This museum now displays a permanent exhibition about the Friends Ambulance Unit, *The Commemoration of our Shared Memory and Eternal Friendship*, developed in 2014 by David Brough (son of British Unit

member Bill Brough) in partnership with the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

Words spoken at the ceremony by Mr. Feng Jian, Deputy Director of the ICOMOS International Conservation Center in Xi'an (IICC-X) and Director of the Xi'an Institute of Archaeology, highlight the lasting friendships that endure to this day despite decades of severed relations and a current backdrop of inter-governmental friction:

I'm thrilled to be here. In this room, friends from Canada, the United States and China have gotten together to do meaningful things. We are the descendants of the Friends Ambulance Unit people. Yesterday was the Qing Ming festival, an important traditional festival in which we commemorate our ancestors. Today is another important day in which we commemorate international humanitarian workers and their spirit. The people of FAU came to China voluntarily, to help the people in need and in pain. ... In 2014, the Eighth Route Army Museum, together with IICC-X and Mr. David Brough, the contact person of the FAU descendants, organized an exhibition called "Our Common Memories" of the FAU China Convoy. It showed the humanitarian works of these people. During the exhibition, we met Mr. Li Gang, son of Li Xing Pei who worked in Yan'an with MT-19, and he brought us photos and videos of the return visit of MT19 friends in 1978. Thanks to the support by our government and people, our exhibition is still updating. This donation will greatly enrich the current presentation, and help us to

understand the spirit behind the relics
and documents.

At this ceremony I was thrilled to meet Li Gang, the son of Li Xingpei, the interpreter for MT-19 during their many months in the remote hills of Shaanxi. Li Gang gave me his father's published account of those experiences, which is quoted in part in this paper. Professional translator Jianghai Mei has rendered the text of his chapter in English, as her own expression of appreciation for the sacrifices made by those nimble and persistent souls who made up Unit in China. Former Unit member Douglas Clifford, now a sprightly ninety-seven years old and living in Port Alberni, British Columbia, has now read and reflected on that account, continuing the dialogue of deep listening and considered response.

We will continue to uncover the legacy of goodwill left by the Friends Ambulance Unit, whose presence in China at times touched "the creative edge of Friends' peacemaking":

"As prophets, Friends maintain the absolute renunciation of violence and are willing to suffer for their nonviolent witness for a peaceful and just world.

As reconcilers, Friends also meet hostile parties and warring powers where they are and work to find pragmatic alternatives to resolving conflict among them.

The interplay of these different gifts and callings defines the creative edge of Quaker peacemaking to this day."

Douglas Gwyn⁵⁶

May we carry their lessons into our lives today.

⁵⁶ Douglas Gwyn, *A Sustainable Life*, p. 24.