China Under Attack

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Japan attacked China in 1937, launching the second Chinese-Japanese War. At first, Japanese forces overpowered the Chinese. But when Japan bombed the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in 1941, China gained a powerful ally—the United States. The United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, forcing the country to surrender and ending World War II and the Chinese-Japanese War. Jonathan Miedel talked to his grandmother, Mary Yu Chang, about growing up in China during the war.

When the war began, my grandmother was only 6 years old. Her family lived in Shanghai, but her father had to leave because his job had been moved to the temporary capital, Chongqing.

When he realized that the situation in Shanghai was getting worse, he sent for his family to join him.

The most direct route from Shanghai to Chongqing was by boat on the Yangtze River. However, the Japanese had occupied many coastal cities by that time. My grandmother’s family had to take a huge detour. They traveled by sea to Hong Kong, then to North Vietnam. Then the rest of the trip was in crowded diesel trucks traveling through the mountains. "On some of the sharpest turns, some of the trucks slid off the edge of the cliffs," my grandmother recalled.

Every time someone heard an airplane, the passengers would jump out of the trucks and crawl on their hands and knees through cornfields. My grandmother said that the leaves would cut her face. Everybody was covered in blood and mud.

When my grandmother and her family finally arrived, Chongqing was extremely crowded with refugees. Fortunately, her dad’s company had houses for its employees. My grandmother’s new house only had two rooms, so it was extraordinarily cramped.

1 detour: a roundabout way temporarily replacing a regular route
When my grandmother was 8, her mother contracted tuberculosis and died. Her dad hired a caretaker to take care of my grandmother and her brother. On nice days, the caretaker would send my grandmother out to the rice paddies to collect slugs. Then the caretaker would fry the slugs with peppers. Peach trees provided another source of food. My grandmother would climb the sticky trees to get the fruit. She stated this was the one time during the war when she actually enjoyed herself.

During her time in Chongqing, there were many air raids. The city had a detailed plan in the event of an air raid. If the siren went off and only one ball was placed on top of the pole on the mountain, it meant school was over. If a siren went off and two balls were on top of the mountain, everyone ran to the man-made tunnels in the mountain for shelter.

During one of these attacks, bombs destroyed the tunnel next to the one my grandmother was in. She said that everybody inside was killed.

The war ended in 1945, when my grandmother was 12. On the return trip to Shanghai, her family took the direct route, along the Yangtze River.

Conclusion: This story taught me how terrible war can be. I learned that Chongqing was bombed more than 5,000 times during a five-year period. I never realized how much war could change everyday life. I believe my grandmother learned many valuable lessons in a difficult way. I hope these events have taught the world the terrible outcomes of war.

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2 tuberculosis: a disease that affects the lungs
3 rice paddies: irrigated or flooded fields where rice is grown
4 slug: a long wormlike land mollusk that is related to the snail but has an underdeveloped shell or no shell
5 air raid: an attack by airplanes (as bombers) on a surface target
1. Where did Mary Yu Chang live before the Chinese-Japanese War?
   A Chongqing  
   B North Vietnam  
   C Hong Kong  
   D Shanghai  

2. When the war started, Mary Yu Chang was only six years old. According to the text, all of the following were effects of the war on her family EXCEPT
   A the family had to flee to Chongqing  
   B the family had to live in a cramped house  
   C the family had to hide in tunnels during bomb attacks  
   D the family had to join the army and fight  

3. What can you conclude about the second Chinese-Japanese War after reading the passage?
   A The war was over quickly and didn’t do much damage.  
   B The war changed the lives of many people.  
   C The war only affected the people in Chongqing.  
   D Everyone in China survived the war.  

4. Read this sentence from the passage: “But when Japan bombed the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in 1941, China gained a powerful ally—the United States.”
   In this sentence, the word **ally** means
   A enemy  
   B friend  
   C weapon  
   D device  

5. Which statement best describes the main idea of the passage?
   A The Yangtze River is a direct route that people travel in China by boat.  
   B Chongqing was bombed thousands of times during the second Chinese-Japanese War.  
   C Life was difficult for Mary Yu Chang and her family during the war.  
   D Air raids were a common occurrence in China during the war.
6. When did Mary Yu Chang enjoy herself during the war?

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7. When passengers were traveling to Chongqing, they would jump out of trucks and crawl through cornfields every time someone heard an airplane. Why might they have reacted that way? How do you know? Give specific examples from the text that support your answer.

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_______ the war ended in 1945, Mary Yu Chang and her family returned to their hometown.

A  Instead
B  However
C  Yet
D  After
9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Mary Yu Chang spent part of her childhood living in a part of China crowded with refugees to survive the second Chinese-Japanese War.

Who? ________________________________________________________________

(did) What? ____________________________________________________________

Where? _________________________________________________________________

How? _________________________________________________________________

Why? to survive

When? __________________________________________________________________


Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: ______________________________________

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