

You Don't Need a Big Vocabulary in China - Just an Index Finger

SOMEWHERE IN CHINA – The higher brass in China has decided that as far as language is concerned, East is East and West is West and there's damned little you can do about it. The GIs can't learn Chinese and the salt of the earth here can't learn English.

The higher brass has at long last done about the only thing it can do, by giving the GIs a little booklet called "Pointie Talkie." with the essentials of practical conversation written out in Chinese. In case of emergency, you find what you want to say in the book, point it out to someone who can read and wait for him to point out one of several possible answers on the opposite page.

The book comes in handy, since American soldiers have been able to teach most of their Chinese acquaintances only two English expressions. The first is "hello"; the second can't be printed here, but you hear it a lot in the Army and the average Chinese has no conception of what it means when he says it.

The chief barrier that keeps the Chinese from learning English is the English pronunciation, as impossible to them as their subtle use of tones is to us. The name of Roosevelt comes off the Chinese tongue as Lo'-so-fu; Willkie is We-er'-jee; Churchill, Cho'-tchi; Stalin, Su-tai'-leen; Stilwell, Suh-tee'-wel; Chennault, Chuh'-nuh-duh; Hitler, Shee'-duh-lah; Hirohito, Jah-ho'. The only well-known foreign name that presents no difficulties is Mussolini, who comes out the same in Chinese.

There is little or no attempt by the masses to pronounce the names of foreign countries, so the countries get and keep Chinese names. China itself is *Chung Kuo*, or "central country." The United States is *Mei Kuo*, or "beautiful country." Britain is *Ying Kuo*, or "heroic country." Just from habit, they call Germany *Duh Kuo*, or "virtuous country." Italy, not worth the trouble, remains the same – Ee'-tah-lee.

The new handbook is expected to be the greatest boon to American soldiers since the invention of the blitz cloth. It begins with a Chinese prologue which means: "Dear Chinese friends: I am an American officer [to the Chinese peasant, all American soldiers are officers], I came to China to help the war of resistance, but I cannot speak Chinese. If I ask you something, I shall point to the sentence printed on the left side of the page, and I hope you will give me the answer printed on the right side of the page and I hope you will answer me correctly."

Among the essential messages for transmission to the Chinese are:

"I shall go to speak with him if someone will escort me."

"Please ask them to put someone on the phone who can speak English."

"I am an American [soldier] and am lost."

"Where is the latrine?"

"Please put it in a kettle and boil it until I ask for it."

"Please get me a flat board as long as my arm."

"How much time before the enemy arrives?"

"You are very polite, but I want to pay for this. It is our custom to do so."

"I must go now. But before leaving I wish to thank you for all of your courtesy."

"Please ask these people staring at me to go away, I want privacy."

The last is usually the handiest, except that it doesn't do any good.

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