

## Reminiscences - Generals' Secret Meeting

An account by Grace Howell of a secret meeting of eleven Generals in a cottage in Stockgrove Park c. 1941

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I have been asked by my nephew to write a few details of one day in my life during the II World War which will be a never forgotten day until my "journeys End"

Most of my life - with my husband has been spent in China. We decided we would spend our "sunset days" in our own homeland, both of us being born in London.

It was in 1935 that we "retired" on a very small income, with the intention of finding a small cottage in the country in the heart of England until we reached a better country, that is a Heavenly [one] [Hebrews 11:16].

On our arrival in England we searched through "Daltons Weekly" and saw amongst the many advertisements one that arrested our attention.

It was a "South Lodge on a large estate 15/- per week suitable for an elderly retired couple". We motored down to inspect this lodge and it proved to be "our dream come true".

It was in the South Midlands 2 and a half miles from the nearest town and a real "beauty spot". One friend who visited us remarked that it was a veritable Garden of Eden and my husband responded, yes indeed and no serpent in it!

After four happy years there the war came, and we were indeed grateful for this quiet retreat, but very anxious about our son who was at that time in Hong Kong and joined the Army there as Lieutenant in the Hong Kong Defence Force.

After the surrender of Hong Kong after two weeks intense fighting our son was taken prisoner by the Japanese, and was for 5 and a half years a P.W. (prisoner of war) on an island South of Japan.

Now comes the Cause of what I shall always remember as my day of days. It was at the period that the Army speaks of as the Eastern Drive.

I am not quite certain of the date, but I think it was the end of 1940-1941. When we were daily expecting the invasion of Hitler by England and before our Armies landed in Europe.

I know it was winter, and my husband had gone to the nearest town to get our "rations".

A short time after he left I heard a sharp knock on my front door and on opening it I faced an Army Officer who to my great astonishment "Commandeered" our Lodge, saying that he required it for a secret meeting place, for a conference of eleven Generals at 5 o'clock that evening.

He asked me many questions, who beside myself lived there, and my nationality and other personal questions about ourselves.

He seemed quite satisfied that he had "discovered" the right place at last. He requested me to let him look all over our little home and the lie of the land which surrounded the Lodge.

He then informed me that he would be along at 4 o'clock, bringing with him 12 military police to surround the Lodge, but would be out by eight.

When my husband returned at midday I told him of all that had happened in his absence and what was going to happen and he just stared at me quite speechless, and then I think he thought I was having a joke or pulling

his leg. All he could say was "I will believe you when I see it the Adjutant and the 12 military Police at 4 o'clock!!!

Right on time the Adjutant arrived at the Lodge and the Police with him, who hid themselves in the surroundings of our home and my "doubting Thomas" husband saw and believed what he had thought was my fantastic illusions.

With this officer's help, we arranged our lounge so as to hold even chairs and two small tables, he required for putting our maps and he also asked if we could supply some ashtrays, for those who smoked.

When all this preparation was finished he most politely requested us to remain in our dining room, until the departure of all these great (real?) Generals.

He personally would be outside both these rooms, "on guard" in our small hall to prevent anyone coming into the place, or any kind of disturbance, this of course we willingly consented to obey.

From our dining room we could see these great persons arrive from different places and roads, (as our Lodge was at the meeting of four roads).

They also came at intervals, and only one car at a time, and these cars seemed to disappear by magic."

The last one to arrive so we were informed by our "friend" the Adjutant was called by him "the little man" (we assumed he meant in stature, as after he spoke of him as "the Chief" of them all).

We saw nothing more of them all after they entered our home, we heard the Adjutant walking backwards and forwards in our small hall, whilst we inside were having our tea!

Later on, about 5.30 our door opened and a general 6 feet 4 inches tall walked into the room.

He said that he had been ordered by his "Chief" to express his thanks to us for so willingly accommodating them at such short notice then this tall general remarked that he had been very interested in the any Chinese things in our house, as he was born in China, and I think he said his father had once been the Governor of Hong Kong but I may be mistaken as my memory is not too good, and it was a long time ago!

In fear and trembling I asked him if I could give him a cup of tea, which he gladly accepted. He then asked us if we had any near relatives in the war, and we told him yes a son who lived in Hong Kong, and was a P.W. in Japanese hands.

Then the Adjutant appeared, and said that "the Chief was leaving, and wished this General to accompany him in his car. As he turned to leave us, he thanked me for the cup of tea and expressed to us so sincerely, his hope that our son would return safely to us (which at the end of the war he did) "Safe and Sound" but alas too late to see his loved Father who died in 1943.)

As an after thought this General said that all the Generals had been greatly taken with a motto that was hanging on a wall in the hall, and that the Chief had remarked on it as Great Common Sense, and one of the best he had seen or some such words as these.

I have it today hanging over my desk, the very same one, and which often brings back to me the memory of that day!

I quote the motto which I gave to my dear husband many years ago it is this:- "The best place to live in is just inside your income.

After all these Grand persons had left only the Adjutant remained and he insisted on helping us to put all the furniture back to its usual place etc then he dismissed all the Police on their motor cycles and they also "faded away"!

Afterwards he fetched his own from its hiding place, and came back to say farewell to us, and to express his own thanks. As he stood at our door ready to leave I took up the courage to dare to ask if I might know who we had sheltered under our roof on this great day."

He answered, "I am so very sorry that I cannot tell you but this I can say, that you have had here in your house Generals of the highest rank in the British Army".

Then he smiled at us and said, "oh my, this has been the most hectic day of my life", then he put his heels sharply together and his hand to his forehead and gave me a long "salute", and was gone!

My husband turned to me and said, Well my darling you will never again receive such a salute!

P.S. I hope by now that the Adjutant is himself a General!"

Grace Howell.

# 1 A Day of Days.

I have been asked by my  
nephew to write a few details  
of the day in my life  
during the "11 World War"  
which will be a true forgotten  
day of my "warrior" life.  
Most of my life - with my  
husband - Mrs. M. M. Jones  
in China.

We decided  
we would spend our  
vacation days in our own  
homelands, both of us.  
Being born in London.

It was in 1905 that  
we returned to a very  
small village, with the  
intention of founding  
a small college in the  
country, in the heart of  
England, until we  
reached a better country,

that is a "Mystery".

On our arrival in  
England, we searched  
through "Bottle's Gazette"  
& "Said" amongst the many  
advertisements one that  
arrested our attention.

It was a "South Lodge"  
in a large estate 5/6 per  
acre. Curiously for  
an elderly retired Capt.

We motored down  
to inspect this "Lodge"  
& it proved to be just what  
I had been

It was in the  
South Midland 2 1/2 miles  
from the March 1897 &  
the real "Fairy Spot".

The fields were  
rigidly to resemble  
that of the "Fairy"  
Garden of Edin. & my

husband, response  
 of, indeed. I do depend  
 on it!

After four happy  
 years there the War  
 came, & we were indeed  
 grateful for this great  
 relief, but very anxious  
 about our son who was  
 at that time in Hong  
 & joined the army first  
 as lieutenant in the  
 Hongkong Defense Force.

After the Surrender  
 of Hong Kong after two  
 weeks of intense fighting  
 our son was taken prisoner  
 by the Japanese, & was  
 for 5 1/2 years at P. W.  
 on an island South  
 of Japan  
 Now comes  
 the time of what I shall

about. Accounts as  
 my day or days. It  
 was all the period that  
 the Army speaks of as  
 the "Eastern Period."

I am not quite  
 certain of the date, but  
 I think it was the end  
 of 1780-1781. When we  
 were still depending  
 the invasion by Peter  
 of England & before  
 our forces landed  
 in Europe.

I know it  
 was winter, & my husband  
 had gone to the nearest  
 town to get our rations.

I think some after  
 he left I heard the  
 sharp knock on my front  
 door & on opening it  
 I faced the Army

Office, who to my great  
astonishment told me  
his Lodge, saying that  
he required it for a  
good meeting place  
for a Conference of  
Elders & Church at  
5 o'clock that evening.

He asked me many  
questions, who were  
present, how long, &  
my nationality, & other  
personal questions about  
Durston.

As I was  
quite satisfied that  
he had discovered the  
very right place at last.

He requested me  
to let him look at the  
our little home, & the  
top of the land which  
surrounded the Lodge.

Mr. Chen informed me that he would be staying at a hotel, bringing with him a military police to surround the lodge, but would be out of sight.

When my husband returned on Friday I told him of all that had happened in his absence, that I was very nervous and that I was afraid something would happen, the first started at my quiet speech, I thought he thought I was having a fit or something like that.

All he could say was "I will bring you when I see the Federal and Chinese Military Police at a hotel!!!"

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Right on time, the <sup>agent</sup> arrived  
at the lodge, & the Police  
with him, who hid  
themselves in the  
surroundings of the house  
& my "doublet" <sup>trays</sup>  
husband, Sam & I knew  
what he had thought.  
Even my perfectly ill  
with this officer's  
help, we arranged our  
couage to be to hold  
about. I had a few  
small tables, he required  
for putting out trays,  
I also asked, if we  
could supply some sub-  
trays, for those who  
tray.

When all this  
preparation was finished  
he took politely request  
us to remain in the  
dining room, until

the departure of all  
these great leaders.

It is personally, would  
be outside both these  
rooms, "Or guests" in  
one small hall by  
passing through the  
into the place, or any  
kind of disturbance,  
this of course, for village  
conspicuous they!

From the dining  
room of the hotel, the  
these great persons  
arrive from different  
places & roads (by  
the lodge bar at the  
meeting of four roads)

They also came  
at intervals, & take  
the car at intervals, &  
these cars seemed  
to disappear by magic!

The last one to arrive  
to we were informed  
by Mr. Smith the  
Adjutant Gen called  
by him the little man  
(we assumed he meant  
in status, as after the  
shots & him at the day  
of that all)

We saw nothing  
more of them all after  
they entered our lines  
we heard the Adjutant  
walking backwards  
& forward in our front  
hall, whilst we were  
like having our tea!  
about 5.30. A General  
threw a General  
6 ft. 6 inches. Walked into  
the room.

It is said that  
he had been ordered

by his Chief to follow  
his hands to as for  
be willing accompany  
them at Rangoon. He  
then told General  
remarked that he had  
been very interested in  
the "Magg" Reception  
in London. As he had  
been in China, he had  
heard that his father  
had been from the  
Governor of Hong Kong.  
but I had not known  
of my father's going to  
London, it was a long time  
ago!

In fear of troubling  
I asked him if I could  
give him a copy of the  
which he gave me.  
He then asked me if I  
had any near relatives

4  
in the war, I was told by  
you a son who lived in  
Hunting, & was a P.W.  
in Japanese hands.

When the Adjutant  
appeared, I said that  
the Chief was leaving  
& would like to request  
to accompany him in  
his car. As he turned  
to leave us, he thanked  
me for the Cup of Tea  
& expressed his  
gratitude, his wife took  
as I would, returned  
safely to us - (which at  
the end of the war  
he did) Safe & Sound  
but alas too late to  
see his loved father  
who died in 1943.)

Again after though  
this General said that

all the Generals had  
 their heads taken  
 with a motto that  
 was hanging on a wall  
 in the hall, & that  
 the King had remarked  
 on it, the great Emperor  
 Quang, & one of the best  
 he had seen. ~~There~~  
 Such words as these.

I have it today  
 hanging on my wall  
 the very same one,  
 which I saw hung  
 to be the memento of the  
 day.

I quote the motto  
 which I gave to my dear  
 husband many years ago  
 of a true

The best place to live in  
 is just beside your letter.

After all these Grand  
 Ancestral had left  
 Only the dependent remained  
 I he, insisted on helping  
 us to put all the family  
 back to its usual place  
 etc. Thus he dismissed  
 all the others on their  
 motor cycles & the  
 who faded away.

Afterwards he  
 fetched his provisions  
 to hiding place &  
 came back to say  
 farewell to us. He  
 then saw us.

As he stood at  
 the door ready to leave  
 I took up a large  
 stone to put it down  
 length of our legs  
 sheltered under our  
 on this fresh day?

148  
44  
The Account: I am  
Very sorry that I cannot  
tell you how this I can  
say that you have had  
here in your house  
General of the highest  
rank in the British  
Army.

I have been  
at as I said to my  
this has been the  
most terrible day of  
my life; they have put  
my heels sharply up  
this hand with force  
I gave me a blow  
which I was not!

My husband told  
to me I said with my  
darling you will be  
again please such a  
salute!

(B) I hope by now that they had  
to himself a General.

Grace Howard