

How American Women Defy the Perils of Bandit Ridden China

What Happened When Dreaded River Pirates Captured a Passenger Steamer---and Other Hair-Raising Adventures.



Miss Jean Armstrong, of San Francisco, who has just returned from China following a harrowing

experience at the hands of Chinese pirates who released her and the other white passengers after murdering the crew of the steamship.

CHINA, the oldest country in the world, has revived one of the oldest of all industries and is making it pay extra dividends. The rejuvenated business is that of organized banditry, and while it has always flourished, in the last year or two it has reached unusually bloody proportions.

So serious has the situation become, in fact, that tourist agencies and governmental authorities are straining every effort to cope with the situation. There is scarcely an outlying district of China that is not terrorized at the present time by one or more bands of brigands, while the rivers and many parts of the sea coast swarm with pirate junks, ready to fall upon all small coasting vessels.

Yet, instead of entirely destroying all tourist travel, as had first been feared, the epidemic of banditry has had an entirely opposite effect, according to the tourist agencies. For the thrill hunting young man or woman tourist of the present day it is rated as merely an additional spicy touch to the picturesqueness of old China. And just as no African trip is complete without a sheik, so China's bandits have become an additional drawing card for a certain type of traveler bored by the usual form of tourist hold-ups.

Recently when Miss Jean Armstrong, a pretty San Francisco society girl, returned to America from an extended tour of the East, quite the most thrilling portion of her entire journey was her encounter with Chinese bandits.

She was on a small steamer on route from Shanghai to Hongkong. Late one night she was aroused by shrieks, two revolver shots and the padding of bare feet on the steamer's deck.

Below: Rev. Father Ernest Cunningham, a Catholic Missionary in China, who, with another priest, was captured in a fight with bandits.



Below, at Right: Miss Amelia Morrison, another San Francisco girl, who traveled through China unmolested only because she was escorted by twenty-five different guards.



Hastily slipping an overcoat over her night clothes, the pretty girl rushed up on deck. And there a terrible sight, more like those of the middle ages, met her eyes.

The steamer had been rushed by two junk loads of river pirates as it was cautiously making its way among the mud shoals. They were led by a tremendous Chinaman, in a tattered uniform, whose natural ferocious aspect was heightened by having small daggers fastened to the ends of each of his eight fingers. And even as the Ameri-



Above: A typical pair of Chinese bandits captured during a raid on a tourist train and held as state witnesses instead of being executed in the usual way.

can girl came on deck, the bloodthirsty leader had clawed away the chest of one of the steamer's officers for not moving at his commands.

Then followed a scene that Miss Jean Armstrong declares she will never forget. The native crew of the steamer was hastily herded to one end of the ship. Their hands were bound and in spite of their piteous pleas for mercy they were shoved overboard to drown in the muddy wake of the steamer. A large number of the native passengers were likewise drowned, the captain of the pirates himself disposing of more than a dozen. Only a handful of the richer Chinese passengers, the German engineer of the steamer and Miss Armstrong and the rest of the white passengers were spared. The whites were shoved into small boats and as they rowed frantically away, they saw the river pirates whipping the cargo of the steamer over the side into their junks.

Miss Armstrong's adventure was typical of many reported to the American authorities. In most

cases the Americans are forced to witness barbarous treatment of the Chinese natives by the bandits, while they, however, go untouched. For the bandits know that while a few butchered natives will raise no great furor among the Chinese authorities, a murdered white man or woman will bring Western intervention and possible embarrassment to their future plans.

Such was the case at any rate when bandits held up the Peking-Shanghai express and captured a large number of American and European men and women, chief among whom was Miss Lucy Aldrich, sister-in-law of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The bandits showed an oriental carelessness with the lives of the natives on the train, but on the other hand took the utmost care for the comfort of Miss Aldrich and her fellow captives while negotiations were being made for the ransoming of the prisoners.

It is not, however, from any particular humanitarian motive that care is taken by the bandits to refrain from spilling American and European blood. It is entirely from the fact that they have learned that their business careers will meet with an abrupt end if they invite intervention by the American marines or a European gunboat. When that danger is removed the life of a "foreign devil," and particularly one of the "lady devils," is worth even less than one of the traditional Chinese coins with a hole in it.

For instance, Mrs. William Chase, wife of a well-known American business man of Canton, China, was attacked recently by bandits in her husband's home outside the city. As it was later learned, the house was to be burned to the ground after being looted, and so hide all evidence of the assault.

As it turned out, however, Mrs. Chase had been warned of the band of freebooters who were operating in the neighborhood and during the present troubled times was taking no chances while her husband was absent. When, therefore, she heard a gentle knock on the compound gate, instead of opening it at once, she went to an upstairs window and peered out. There, lurking in the shadow, she saw a gang of more than a dozen ragged ruffians.

Without a second's pause she rushed to her husband's study, in which two rifles were always kept in readiness. After hastily barring the door of the house, she dragged these to her upstairs window and barricaded herself in the room. Two minutes after she had made her preparations the



One of Pavis de Chavanne's paintings in which he shows the horrible ordeal to which Chinese bandits subject their prisoners while holding them for ransom. One of the outlaws is exhibiting the severed hand of one of the male prisoners to the terrified woman.

bandits swarmed over the gate and into the compound. Mrs. Chase opened fire.

With wild cries they sought shelter from her bullets. At the same time they in turn opened up fire on the upstairs window. Five times during a long afternoon they attempted to rush the door of the house and each time Mrs. Chase's steady fire drove them back; in fact, after the last rush she had taken toll of more than half the band.

The end of the siege came in dramatic fashion. Neighbors who had heard the firing had notified the troops. These, came tearing to the house, surrounded the compound and crashed through the gate. The bandits were trapped and every single one of them concerned in the attack on the brave American woman was cut down.

It is such attempts as these that both Chinese authorities and tourist agencies fear. It is to be hoped that the taking of American or Eu-

ropean lives that they take particular guard. And a notable instance of their precautions were the elaborate plans recently made for the trip of sixteen-year-old Amelia Morrison from San Francisco through bandit-infested China to Harbin.

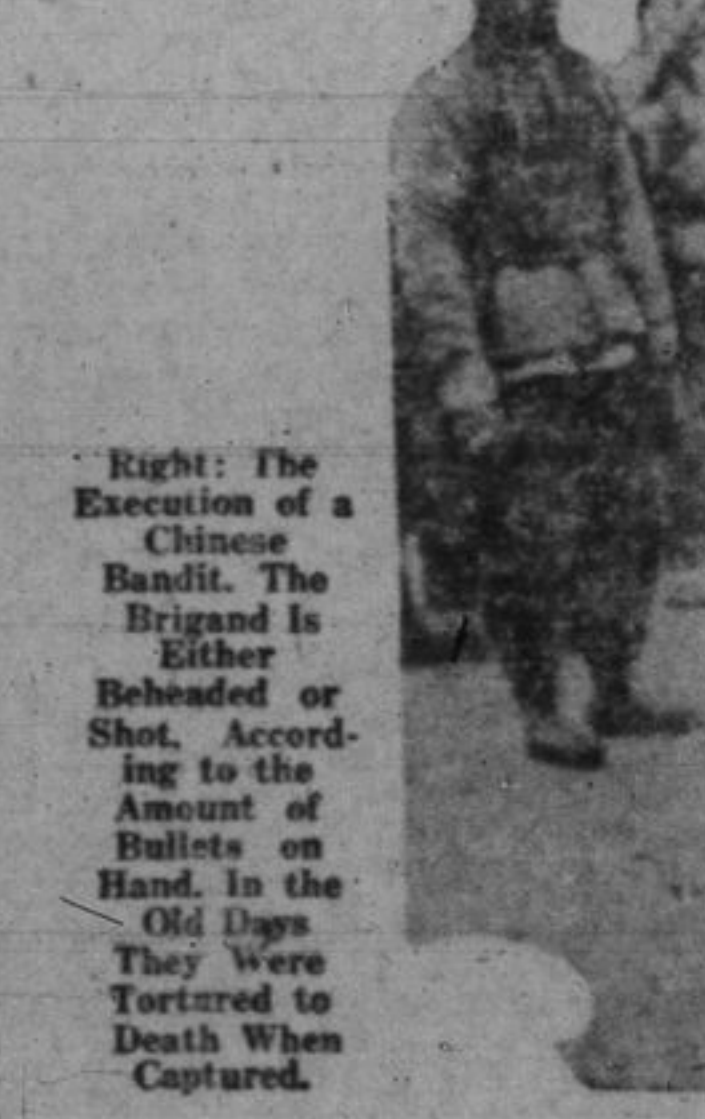
During the long and winding journey Miss Amelia Morrison was chaperoned by twenty-five different government or tourist agency representatives. She left San Francisco under the care of Captain Yardly, master of the steamship President Cleveland. She was met at Hawaii and again at Hongkong, where the ship landed her. At every stop of her way, at Hongkong, at Canton, at Shanghai, at Tientsin, at Peking and at a dozen smaller cities before she arrived at last at Harbin, she was met and chaperoned by agents. And though she passed through a country where sporadic fighting is still going on and which is heavily infested with bandits, not once did she have the slightest trouble.

Authorities in close touch with the bandit dangers of China put the recent wave of lawlessness down to two factors. The first is the fact that for years there has been fighting, and in between the campaigns the soldiers frequently turn bandit for a livelihood.

The second factor said to account for the present wave of brigandage is the abolition of torture. Years ago a bandit, when put to death, was not simply executed. He died by any one of a dozen horrible means, that served thoroughly to impress the fear of the punishment.

But in recent years the death sentence in China can only be carried out by one of two means, either by lopping off the head of the condemned man or by shooting him. As most Chinamen are good Buddhists and believe implicitly in the re-incarnation of their soul in another form, a painless sentence of death is something to be laughed at. They are quite willing to take their chances, and while the government executes every man proved to have been implicated in banditry, either by shooting or, when bullets are scarce, by the old-fashioned executioner's sword, the painless death sentence has gone a long way toward encouraging the present crime wave in China.

Above: Mrs. William Chase, the plucky wife of an American business man in Canton, who, when bandits attacked her home, shot half of them before soldiers arrived.



Right: The execution of a Chinese bandit. The brigand is either beheaded or shot, according to the amount of bullets on hand in the old days. They were tortured to death when captured.