

Past Commander Frank Delacy Mortimer

*Risked his life to preserve China Post 1 Records as a POW during WWII
Generals Ward, Chennault and Lt. Helseth, China Post 1 Shanghai, China*

*Ron Burkett, Commander
By Scott Riebel CPI Historian*

China Post 1 is an American Legion post, unique in that, it is a post – the only post within the American Legion – operating in exile. China Post 1 was formed on November 28, 1919, chartered on April 20, 1920, and made its home at the American Club in Shanghai, China. The unique quality of China Post #1 is reflected in the character of its membership. In addition to meeting the qualifications established by the National Constitution of the American Legion, China Post #1 members are usually further distinguished by the character of their service while in the service or in the international community.

This is the story of one such member **Past Post Commander Frank Delacy Mortimer**. During WWII Commander Frank Mortimer risked his life to secure the Post's historical records and endured years of disease, malnutrition, unsanitary conditions, routine daily abuse and unbelievably cruel torture at the hands of his captives. This is his story.

Frank Delacy Mortimer was born on November 29, 1894 in Everett, PA; attended Temple University Department of Commercial Education in 1911 and entered the active service on July 19, 1917 in the United States Army. Frank attended ordnance school at Rock Island, Ill from September 1917 through January 1918. After the successful completion of ordnance school, Frank was transferred to the Camp Meade, MD, Reserve Officer Training Corps, R.O.T.C. program, where he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant on February 28, 1918.



Risked life to preserve Post records.

Frank was sent to France on October 5, 1918 through March 3, 1919 serving with the A.E.F. assigned to the Ordnance Supply. He returned to the United States on March 3, 1919 from Brest, France aboard the SS Agamemnon (formerly the German Liner Kaiser Wilhelm II), married Helen L Rogers in Philadelphia, PA and was honorably discharged June 30, 1919.

On August 14, 1919, Frank with his new wife Helen in tow arrived in Vladivostok, Russia as a First Lieutenant working for the Russian Railway Service Corps** which among other things exposed him to the way of life, and economic opportunities in Shanghai, China.

Frank moved to Shanghai, China and opened a books and stationary import business and named it the Chinese American Publishing Company which was located at 25 Nanking Road. Frank joined the newly forming “American Legion Club” in 1920 and was elected Commander of the Frederick Ward Post 1, Shanghai, China in July 1936. He was elected for a second term in 1937

THE AMERICAN LEGION.

GENERAL FREDERICK TOWNSEND WARD POST,
SHANGHAI, CHINA.

"There is no finer form in the world than the American Legion. It stands for the unshakable principles of
this American democracy. There is no man or woman who is eligible should become a member of it. It invites the spirit of good
Americanism. It stands for America first, last, and all the time. If we can expect to speak of loyalty and service here all of our
people nothing will ever shake the solidity of this Republic."
— Leonard Wood.

MEMBER'S CERTIFICATE OF THE AMERICAN LEGION.

ARTICLE IV. MEMBERSHIP. SECTION 1. — Two persons shall be eligible for membership in the American
Legion who were regularly enlisted, drafted, inducted or commissioned, and who served on active duty in the Army, Navy or
Marine Corps of the United States or some time during the period between April 6, 1917 and November 11, 1918, both dates
inclusive, or who, being a citizen of the United States, or the issue of his wife, served on active duty in the Army,
Navy or Marine Corps of any of the governments associated with the United States during the Great War provided that no person
shall be entitled to membership (a) who being in the Army, Navy or Marine Corps of the United States during and pending
the war was in possession, public or other grounds, he called himself in military discipline or regulated action, or the
while being in such service was assigned to duties which were commensurate with his military status and he was not
subsequently being returned to an honorable status.

SECTION 2. — There shall be no form or class of membership except as above mentioned in which there is provided.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

NAME: Frank D. Mortimer ✓

BUSINESS: Book & Stationery Importer, Wholesale & Retail

BUSINESS ADDRESS: Chinook American Book Co. 25 Nanking Road

RESIDENCE: 221 Pookling Hill Road 4th #11

BRANCH OF SERVICE: Ordnance Corps

DATE OF ENTRY IN SERVICE: July 1917

PLACE OF ENTRY IN SERVICE: State College, Penna.

DATE AND PLACE OF DISCHARGE: June 30, 1919 - Philadelphia, Pa.

BRANCH OF, AND DETAILS OF SERVICE: _____

Dues are payable in advance and the receipt should be forwarded to Shanghai on Mon. 10th day of month, and copy
to post quarterly. Dues for subject members are \$10.00 per year payable in advance. Dues include subscription to
the "American Legion Monthly".
This application should be filed in post marked with check the dues to:

during a tumultuous time that some writers have referred to as the “Stalingrad of China”, the battle of Shanghai.

On July 7, 1937 Japan invaded China following the Marco Polo Bridge incident also, known as the Battle of Marco Polo Bridge, setting off what is known as the Second Sino-Japanese War. While the Marco Polo Bridge Incident provided the pretense for the commitment of additional Japanese combat troops into southern China, the fact is that Japan was resource poor in terms of the raw materials needed for continued economic and political expansion.

By August 1937 the Japanese army occupied all of “Chinese Shanghai” leaving the international community, occupied primarily by British and American citizens,

untouched, permitting the citizens there and their spouses and children to live and conduct their businesses as normally as possible. Thousands of westerners, protected by the diplomatic security of the International Settlement, continued to live as they had lived since the British came here in the 19th century.

In 1940, the British declared the international community in Shanghai, indefensible and moved two regular infantry battalions to Hong Kong. The Americans US Marine Fourth Regiment, Second battalion, followed suit in November 1941 leaving approximately 12,000 Brits, Americans and other foreign nationals defenseless.

On December 8, 1941, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the British issued orders to its naval river patrol boats to surrender. The Japanese Imperial Army moved into the international community in Shanghai to secure that area and the foreign nationals who might organize an underground resistance.

In the early morning hours of November 5, 1942 the Japanese rounded up over 300 Allied nationals in Shanghai including Past Post Commander Frank Delacy Mortimer. Many were prominent citizens, individuals who, because of their connections in the financial, political, and information spheres, had the potential to cause trouble for the Japanese. Arrested were business leaders, retired US Navy personnel, and people who had been working in intelligence. Considered POWs with the rank of sergeant by the Japanese, 382 internees found themselves in the former barracks of the US Marine Fourth Regiment, Second battalion, at 372 Haiphong Road.

In 1940, with uncommon foresight and anticipation of the inevitable Japanese occupation of Shanghai, and in an effort to protect the China Post's records, then Adjutant Frank Mortimer had the records bound into volumes and hid them in a camouflaged area in the attic of his company warehouse. Unfortunately, during this period, the Japanese quartered troops in his warehouse. Had they discovered the Post records, Frank would have been executed.

Pootung Camp received the first intake of internees in late January, 1943. Originally men only camp, the camp held single men or those men who had sent their families home before the war. The buildings consisted of the condemned godowns (warehouses) of the British American Tobacco Company located not far from Pootung Point.

Upon their arrival the internees found the compound littered with junk and debris which included the bombed out ruins of a Chinese village destroyed during 1937. Without the use of mechanized equipment, internees cleared this area to construct playing fields and garden plots.

Some 1,519 internees called Pootung home at one time or another. The camp's inmates, all men, were moved north to Fengtai, near Peking, in June of 1945, under exceedingly difficult conditions. There, they lived in crowded, hellishly hot godowns until the end of the war.

Frank survived years of internment, unsanitary overcrowded conditions, disease, starvation, daily abuse and frequent torture. After his release from the camp, Frank returned to the warehouse, recovered the records and turned them over, intact, to Gen. Claire Chennault and the leadership of China Post 1.

Without his courage and foresight these records might have been lost to time. The Post owes Frank Mortimer an enormous debt of gratitude for the sacrifice he made to preserve the records and history of our Post. The post records that Frank carefully bound and hid in his warehouse still exist today and are in the possession of China Post 1.

After the war Frank returned to the United States where the years of internment had taken its toll. Frank died at the age of 74 at 17068 New Bloomfield Road, Perry, PA on 15 Apr 1969.

From the Harrisburg Telegraph September 9, 1930:

I don't believe I told you about the interesting guest Mr. and Mrs. John L. Rupp have at their home, 220 South Twentieth Street. Mrs. Frank D. Mortimer, Shanghai, China, who was the former Helen Rogers of this city, is spending several weeks here. Mr. Mortimer has a large stationery store and publishing house in Shanghai, where they have lived for the past ten years. During Mrs. Mortimer's absence her home is being occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Ellenberger, of this city. Sailing from China in February of this year, Mrs. Mortimer has had a glorious spring and summer touring France, Germany, Austria and Hungary, en-route to this country. She expects to sail for home from San Francisco about November first, visiting in Philadelphia and New York before going to the Pacific Coast. I am just green with envy. But I don't dare ruin my disposition pitying myself because of a stay - at - home complex...

***The American Expeditionary Force Siberia (AEF Siberia) was a United States Army force that was involved in the Russian Civil War in Vladivostok, Russian Empire, during the end of World War I after the October Revolution, from 1918 to 1920. AEF Siberia was part of the larger Allied North Russia Intervention.*

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's claimed objectives for sending troops to Siberia were as much diplomatic as they were military. A major reason was to protect the large quantities of military supplies and railroad rolling stock that the United States had sent to the Russian Far East in support of the prior Russian government's war efforts on the Eastern Front. Equally stressed by Wilson was the need to "steady any efforts at self-government or self defense in which the Russians themselves may be willing to accept assistance." At the time, Bolshevik forces controlled only small pockets in Siberia and President Wilson wanted to make sure that neither Cossack marauders nor the Japanese military would take advantage of the unstable political environment along the strategic railroad line and in the resource-rich Siberian regions that straddled it.

Concurrently and for similar reasons, about 5,000 American soldiers were sent to Arkhangelsk (Archangel), Russia by Wilson as part of the separate Polar Bear Expedition.

SOURCE IS WIKIPEDIA