

BOOK REVIEWS

R. John Pritchard, Historian/Attorney

As an historian of the Greater East Asia and Pacific War, and as a lawyer specializing on war crimes trials of that period, I am normally rather worried when I read an eyewitness account of that time where the writer makes free use of direct quotations in inverted commas. Pamela Masters, however, has managed to fuse together a tremendous amount of historical detail, atmosphere, and artistic license.

Pamela Masters' objective, plainly, was to convey the authentic atmosphere of a period which she experienced as an attractive young English teenager who had grown up in the port of Chinwangtao, a few miles south of the Great Wall of China and had gone to school in Tientsin. She has done so with an acute sense of timing—this is a quite splendid account. It isn't strictly "history", but it is about a time, long past, in which the colors, shapes, images and individual personalities come alive.

Although the names of some have no doubt been changed to protect a few sensitive, diffident souls, or the reputations of others who were venal, mad, or bad, the author has not found it necessary to invent a cast of characters to represent the KINDS of people she encountered in those days. And so I found myself yearning to know more about these individual people and their experiences, completely captivated by this extraordinarily honest and evocative story.

There is a good deal here about the nature of fear, privation and loss. But most memorable of all [is] the affection that the author and her family had for China and the Chinese, [and] the clarity with which she portrays the relationship between Chinese, Japanese, British and other expatriate foreigners in North China.

I am happy to recommend this book to anyone between the ages of 12 and 102. It is an authentic voice from a long-vanished era, and if there be any real justice in this life, it will one-day become the basis for a truly splendid full-length feature film. I, for one, will want to see that, too.

Summary: *Destined to be a Classic in its Genre*

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William Rowan

"In *The Mushroom Years* [Pamela Masters] "tells it like it was," in the best tradition of literary journalism. The exciting quality in her writing is her uncanny ability to make you a participant-of-the-moment as she takes you through her years in the Japanese prison camp at Weih sien in North China. Their Japanese Commandant set the ground rules at the outset



[stating] "...if your rations are short, ours will be too. If you are cold, we will be too. In short, we are all in the same boat; whether we're all rowing in the same direction remains to be seen." Unfortunately, hardship did develop for the prisoners, and developed in spades. They were cold and hungry, and many were treated harshly as early Japanese victories were replaced by defeat.

"Hats off to Pamela Masters! This is a book you'll refer to time and again, and a book you will never forget."

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Alan Caruba

"Countless memoirs have come out of WW2, but I found *The Mushroom Years* by Pamela Masters one of the

most interesting I've read. It tells the story of life in a Japanese prison camp by a woman whose grandfather helped open railroads in China in the late 1800's. Pamela was born in 1927 in Honan Province as her parents were fleeing from Chiang K'ai-shek's Army of Unification that was trying to subdue the warlords and unify China. Just sixteen when she was imprisoned, and eighteen when liberated, she was fortunate not be guarded by the Japanese Imperial Army but rather a Consular Guard in a camp headed by a repatriated Japanese diplomat. Her story is fascinating. You will feel better about [the West] that tried hard to help the Chinese emerge into the 20th century, only to have that short-circuited by the fanaticism of Mao's Communism that exploited the Chinese far worse than any imperial nation."

SMALL PRESS BOOK REVIEW

Henry Berry

"Pamela Masters is attending school in the Chinese city of Tientsin in Japanese Occupied China when Japan attacks Pearl Harbor. She is taken hostage along with her mother and two sisters in order to force her father to work for the Japanese. The family is sent to Weih sien Prison Camp [Mar '43] along with 2,000 other Allied nationals. The author is always concerned about her family and the possibility that their situation could take a drastic turn for the worse. On August 17, 1945, the prisoners' day of liberation comes.

"In covering an aspect of World War II that has received scant attention, Master's story has historic value. But it will be appreciated mostly by most readers as a clear-eyed account of a young girl who manages to keep her wits and her humane perspective in threatening circumstances."
