

# Seven Years in Tibet

by Heinrich Harrer (1952)

1939 Heinrich & German friends were climbing mountains in Pakistan when they were thrown in an internment camp in India. They treated him nice, but he wanted to be free. In May of '43 he escaped, but was captured in Tibet & sent back. Others gave him money & supplies & in Apr '44 seven got away. He & his friend Peter Aufschnaiter teamed up & headed north to Tibet. Tibet was a neutral country, but also forbidden to outsiders.

It was difficult to get food since people were hostile to foreigners. They had no travel papers & local authorities turned them back. Once they were sent with an escort & a letter to be able to buy food on their way to Nepal. 6nov45 they escaped to the mountains before reaching Nepal. They traveled by night & slept by day.

15jan46 they finally arrived to the forbidden city [Lhasa]. They had traveled 1000 miles & were amazed how well people not accepted them. They were given food, clothes & allowed to stay. The Dalai Lama's parents invited them to dinner.

In Feb '46 they were told they would have to leave Tibet, but his sciatica was inflamed & was able to buy some time. They were told those who helped them in their travels would be punished. By the time his back was better no one mentioned them leaving again. Then they were asked to build an irrigation canal, then a fountain & survey the city.

Sanitary conditions were deplorable, but they are very superstitious & slow to change. His friend was able to talk them into a new hydro-electric plant on the river. A good road to India might make it easier to get goods, but at a cost of the peace & leisure time. They were able to climb the local mtns.

The young Dalai Lama [born 6jul35] lived in the Potala towering above Lhasa. The Dalai Lama asked him to make a film & later a private theater. The Dalai Lama invited him to the theater & flooded him with questions about the outside world. The Dalai Lama looked forward to their lessons.

Tibet wished to be independent. Long ago a Moslem army marching on Lhasa was frozen to death in a sudden storm. The nation again prayed for a miracle, but on 7oct50 the Chinese invaded anyway. Heinrich had to leave. China said they would allow freedom of worship, but in return they would defend the country [send in soldiers]. Soon there was a famine, 1.2 million were killed, 99% of the sacred buildings destroyed. 1959 the Dalai Lama had to flee to India.

Quotes: "The haste of Europeans has no place in Tibet. We must learn patience if we wished to arrive at the goal." "Whether in Lhasa or Rome – all are united by one wish: to find God & serve Him."

Note: at 16,000 ft, only barley grows well. Drebung monastery housed 10,000 monks. The gov't hired beggars to work & paid them for the day, but the next day only half returned & in 3 days none [lazy]. There is a custom in Tibet that friends would line the road when one leaves & returns from a trip. Heinrich was born 6jul12 [same birthday as the Dalai Lama].