

MORE ON THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS IN FRANCE, 1917-1921: A NEW DISCOVERY

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A recent discovery throws some light on the army of skilled and unskilled men from Shandong and surrounding provinces that comprised the Chinese Labour Corps during and after World War One.

The medals

Several medals were awarded to British troops for service in the First World War - 1914 Star, 1914/15 Star, Territorial War Medal, British War Medal (BWM) and the Allied Victory Medal. All troops in "war zones" would have received the latter two, the BWM in silver.

Supporting the fighting troops was a huge army of non-combatants from Africa, the Middle East, Malta, etc., and from China, nationals of who were formed into the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC). In addition to Indian labourers, recruited from the sub-continent, were Chinese labourers resident in Calcutta, which comprised the 62nd Chinese Indian Labour Company. All these non-combatants in war zones were awarded the BWM in bronze, but not the Victory Medal.

British officers and Other Ranks with the CLC received the BWM in silver as well as the Victory Medal.

Unlike all other BWMs, which were impressed around the edge with the recipient's number and name, the bronze medals awarded to members of the CLC were numbered but not named. The appropriate medal roll (WO 329/2374-2383) held by the Public Records Office at Kew in West London reveals the identity of the 134,353 Chinese members of the CLC who were awarded the bronze medal. However, as many of the recipients could not be located once they had returned to China, a large number of these medals were undelivered and were returned to the Royal Mint for destruction.

The discovery

Some years ago, there came to light the pocketbook of Labourer

No. 34699 Ma Hongrui. This identified him with a photograph and two thumbprints and tells us that he was aged 32 on enlistment by the Weihai Wei Labour Bureau. He had a wart on his neck, was certified fit and his previous trade was a coolie. His home village was 25 *li* east of the fortified town of Lu, in Ling Hsien County some 100 kilometres north of the Shandong Provincial Capital, Jinan. The recent discovery, tucked away at the back of the blue cloth covered booklet, was Ma's copy of his Service Contract dated 10th July 1917, and illustrated in this Note.

It seems a fair contract, ensuring that Ma's mother (his next-of-kin) and father could collect 10 dollars a month from their local post office, even if his one franc a day pay was gambled away. All his other wants were provided.

Sadly, Ma's was one of those medals that were undelivered and thus destroyed.

Photograph, Taken

24 July 1917



Knowledge of English on engagement:—

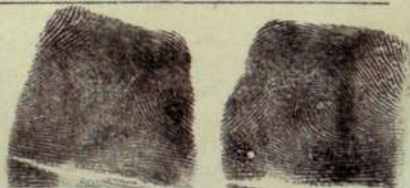
None

Previous Trade

coolie
1/2 p

Thumb

Print





Form F. 13. A.

By the terms of this Contract dated this ^{10th} day of ^{July} 19 ¹⁷ / ¹, the undersigned coolie recruited by the Wei-Hai-Wei Labour Bureau, declare myself to be a willing labourer under the following conditions, which conditions have been explained and made clear to me by the Wei-Hai-Wei Labour Bureau, viz:—

Nature of Employment.

Work on railways, roads, etc., and in factories, mines, dockyards, fields, forests, etc. Not to be employed in military operations.

Rates of Pay, etc.

Daily Abroad.	Monthly in China to family, etc.
Labourer ... 1 franc	10 dollars
Ganger (99 men) 1½ francs	15 dollars

Bonus (on embarkation).

20 dollars (additional to pay).

Compensation to Family in case of Accident.

Death or total disablement 150 dollars
 Partial Disablement up to 75 dollars

Additional.

Free passage to and from China under all circumstances.

Free food, clothing, housing, fuel, light and medical attendance.

Duration of Employment.

Three years, with liberty for employer to terminate contract at any time after one year on giving six months notice, or at any time for misconduct or inefficiency on the part of the labourer. Free passage to be given back to Wei-Hai-Wei or a Port North of Woosung.

Deductions.

No daily pay abroad during sickness, but food given. Monthly pay in China continues up to six weeks sickness.

After six weeks sickness no monthly pay in China.

No daily pay abroad for time lost owing to misconduct.

In cases of offences involving loss of pay for 28 days or more, deductions of monthly pay in China will be made.

Hours of Work.

Obligation to work ten hours daily; but a lesser or longer period may be fixed by the Labour Control on a daily average basis of ten hours.

Liability to seven days work a week, but due consideration will be given to Chinese Festivals, as to which the Labour Control will decide.

No. of Coolie 24679 Name Ma Jung Jui Age 32
 Home address _____ Province Shantung District Long Kien

Seal of the Wei-Hai-Wei Labour Employment Office:

Willing Labourer's thumb prints:—

