China to Honor Americans Heroes in a New Memorial at the Site of the World’s Worst Flood of the 20th Century

China Recalls the Flood Relief Service of Charles and Anne Lindbergh, Thomas “Lyt” Harnsberger, an American Missionary, General Wang and Hermit Lin, Ceremony to be held Aug. 26th, 2006.

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Gaoyou, North Jiangsu, China July 30, 2005. The Gaoyou City Government announces their plans to honor of the long time friendship of Americans and Chinese who partnered to rebuild
the ruptured Grand Canal levees in 1932, following the worst flood and levee disaster of the 20th century. Gaoyou officials plan an Aug. 26th ceremony to honor the flood victims and five forgotten international heroes including Charles and Anne Lindbergh and an American Presbyterian Missionary, Thomas Lyt Harnsberger, whose voluntary flood relief work helped restore the livelihoods of 5 million. These five individuals are being recognized for the first time since they helped to achieve one of the finest flood relief and reconstruction projects in all China. The summer 1931 China floods included 7 typhoons and 1000 levee breaks. The catastrophe now ranks as the deadliest flood disaster of the 20th century, killing 3.7 million, affecting 50,000,000 and flooding 70,000 sq. miles. The flood story had been totally forgotten even in Gaoyou, a city destroyed, until the third generation of an American missionary family partnered with local officials to open a museum last December to restore the historical legacy.

The five individuals to be honored include 3 Americans and 2 Chinese who volunteered together in friendship and partnership, accepting no money for their work:

* **American flying legends, Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh**, whose aerial surveys, photos and writing about the devastation helped to bring world attention to the unprecedented disaster.

* **American Presbyterian Missionary, Thomas Lyt Harnsberger**, who instigated and supervised the dike rebuilding project.

* **General Wang Shuxiang**, a famed water conservancy expert who managed 20,000 workers and led the engineering and rebuilding work of the ruptured levees

* **Buddhist Hermit Lin**, who sold all his life’s possessions and donated 200,000 yuan to fund the project.

The lost legend of the world’s worst flood returned to Jiangsu last December 2005 from San Francisco as the Harnsberger family story took the shape of a new historical museum, put together by the partnership of the Gaoyou people and based upon the oral history and modern research of the Harnsberger family.

“The great flood story had always been a “larger than life” legend in our home, about a mythical, nearly Biblical flood – a tale my father always told to everyone he knew. A great disaster story it was, brought on by a typhoon which carved huge levee breaks at the Grand Canal, a “suspended lake” poured down upon the lowlands in a flood that submerged a 10,000 sq. mile area, covering the rice fields 15 feet deep for 6 months. It was like 1000 Katrinas – the Yangtze flooded 900 miles long 40 miles wide, everywhere millions starved. For 70 years the story remained a legendary key in our family tradition for it told of the greatest achievement in our grandfather Lyt’s life in helping others, which went unrecognized until now”, states Steve Harnsberger.

Gaoyou Vice Mayor Ni Wen Cai adds, “the story of this terrible disaster and these remarkable heroes had been completely forgotten in China. Not until Hutch and Jim Harnsberger and his family came back to Gaoyou, did we really know anything about it, there were no records of any Americans ever having been part of this tremendous reconstruction project, in fact the story of the flood disaster itself had been almost completely lost. When Steve showed up with these incredible 1931 aerial photographs of Gaoyou Lake pouring through ruptured levees taken by Charles Lindbergh, I knew we had rediscovered a treasure, an incredible piece of our history,
buried for so long. It was something we simply had to share with the people of Jiangsu, so we created the 1931 Flood Museum and this Monument. The story will never be forgotten now”.

In December of 2005, Gaoyou City Government and the Harnsberger family partnered to open a new museum featuring rediscovered aerial photos of world’s greatest flood taken by Charles and Anne Lindbergh at the end of their “North to the Orient” flights. Steve adds, “The story here is not about how bad the disaster was. It is about how these people rose up together in response to an overwhelming tragedy, the worst disaster of them all. Through great personal sacrifice, compassion and struggle to persevere, the rebuilding of the Grand Canal dikes was achieved and ultimately recognized by the Chinese Government as one of the finest and most important reconstruction projects in all China. Their work was a product of the friendship of Americans and Chinese. Now, it will be remembered in this new stone monument and within these same dikes as a concrete symbol of the long term friendship between the Chinese and American people.”

Gaoyou’s City Government plans a ceremony on the morning of August 26, 2006, 75 years to the day after the Grand Canal levee breaks destroyed the city and most of Jiangsu. Two of the sons of the heroes, Wang Zhenzhi and Dr. James P. Harnsberger, both in their eighties, will be present and will meet for the very first time. The legacy of these long forgotten heroes will forever be remembered in a stone monument along the banks of China’s Grand Canal in Gaoyou City, Jiangsu Provence.

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Background
The great China Flood and levee disaster of 1931 is now regarded as the most deadly and widespread flood of the 20th century, killing 3.7 million, covering 70,000 square miles while breaking over 1000 dikes. Gaoyou was the site of the single mostly deadly event when the levees broke in the early morning sweeping thousands to their death as they slept. Nearly 2,000,000 workers helped rebuild the dikes nationwide. American aid and wheat was provided on loan to feed the Chinese people, over 450,000 tons. The new 1931 Flood Museum opened in December and a China CCTV documentary aired in April. The Gaoyou Government has announced plans to replace the lost Chinese tablet, recreating the original to permanently carve the historical record in stone on the 75th anniversary of the typhoon and levee breaks this August 26, 2006.

Links:
China Greatest Natural Disaster, Shanghai Daily News 1-1-06
http://english.eastday.com/eastday/englishedition/features/userobject1ai1782587.html

1931 Flood Article online: http://www.aboutgaoyou.com/history_pages/9_1931floods.htm

http://www.lindberghfoundation.org/documents/Mar06newsletter.pdf
http://english.cctv.com/program/rediscoveringchina/01/03/index.shtml