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The Film

During China's Cultural Revolution, one of the most tragic and least understood political upheavals of the 20th century, Mao Zedong's call to "make revolution" was answered by tens of millions of Chinese...and one American.

THE REVOLUTIONARY is a feature-length documentary film about the Maoist era and Sidney Rittenberg, an American who assumed an unprecedented role for a foreigner in Chinese politics. In those calamitous times, Mao's last stand to hold on to power and to his political legacy, Rittenberg rose to prominence—the most important foreigner in China since Marco Polo.



As a college student in the American South of the 1930's, Rittenberg had taken up the cause of labor and of civil rights. He arrived in China as a GI at the end of World War II and stayed to join the communist side in the civil war that brought Mao to power in 1949, the only American citizen to become a member of the Chinese Communist Party. He worked side-by-side with the Party leadership in the politically important Broadcast Administration, in charge of the English-language section of Radio Beijing. He also was a trusted translator of Central Committee documents and of Mao's Collected Works.

At the height of the Cold War that isolated America from China in the 1950's and 60's, China was consumed by a political and ideological struggle that reached its climax in the Cultural Revolution, since labeled "China's Holocaust." It was an era of widespread destruction in which millions died, that all but destroyed the Chinese Communist Party, and whose reverberations are felt to this day.

During his thirty-four years in China, beginning in the communist guerilla headquarters of Yan'an to the end of the Maoist era, Rittenberg was singled out as both a hero and a victim, hailed by Mao as "an international communist fighter" and condemned by Mao as "an imperialist spy." He was imprisoned twice. In all, he spent 16 years in solitary confinement. He survived to tell his story, an insider's uncompromising account of China's revolutionary turmoil.

No American has been in a better position to understand first-hand that era. Rittenberg knew its leaders personally, including Mao, Mao's wife Jiang Qing, and Premier Zhou Enlai. He was a follower, a colleague and a participant in those turbulent times. He led his life with the courage of





his convictions. Even more important, he's had the courage to re-examine those convictions, to question his own beliefs and behavior, and to do so on-camera.

Now 90 years old, his extraordinary memory opens a door to understanding China, then and now, that outsiders very rarely are allowed to enter. His perspective and insight could only have been provided by someone who was there. And it is made all the more compelling by Rittenberg's irrepressible sense of humor, and irony, and of anecdote, evident during twenty-six hours of interviews that took place over a five-year period beginning in 2005. The filmmakers have transformed those interviews into an extraordinary portrayal of historical events unknown to many Chinese, let alone to most Americans.

In the making of *THE REVOLUTIONARY*, the producers had to meet the challenge of an era from which archival and in particular visual materials are extremely limited or unavailable. In search of another approach to help us understand the depth and gravity of the events covered in the film, to provide a different angle of vision that could recapture the context and feel of those times, the filmmakers turned to Chinese art propaganda posters. Revolutionary art has played an unusually important role in China. Widely conceived and disseminated, it was used as a political tool and as a weapon. In this way, the film offers China's own representations in depicting revolutionary ideas and events. In addition, the producers sought out new or rarely used still photographs to help document the Rittenberg story.



His personal account of China unfolds on the biggest revolutionary stage of the 20th century. In so doing, it also reflects and embraces American impulses abroad: a story of idealism, and disillusionment, and critical self-examination. In the most dramatic ways possible, *THE REVOLUTIONARY* also is about the limits of the foreigner's influence on events

in distant lands whose history and culture are very different from his own, themes and issues still very much with us, as important now as they were then.



The Filmmakers

Irv Drasnin - Producer, Writer, Interviewer, Narrator

Stourwater Pictures was pleased to have had the opportunity to work with Irv Drasnin on THE REVOLUTIONARY. Irv's career in documentary filmmaking and broadcast journalism includes thirty-five years at CBS News and Public Television with extensive experience in China. His thirty documentaries include MISUNDERSTANDING CHINA (1972), SHANGHAI (1974), LOOKING FOR MAO (1983), and CHINA AFTER TIANANMEN (1992). Among his many awards for outstanding documentary film are the DuPont-Columbia Award (twice), the Director's Guild, the Writer's Guild (twice), the American Film and Video Festival (twice) and Christopher awards (twice). Mr. Drasnin holds a Master's degree from Harvard in East Asian Studies with a specialization in China and taught the documentary film program at Stanford (1980-82). He also was a founding member of The China Council of the Asia Society and its co-chairman (1981-83).

Lucy Ostrander - Producer

Lucy Ostrander, an award-winning documentary filmmaker began to receive accolades for her work with her Masters thesis from Stanford University, WITNESS TO REVOLUTION: THE STORY OF ANNA LOUISE STRONG. In producing the film, she became the first American student to work with the China Film Co-Production Corporation. The film received a national PBS broadcast, and won a Student Academy Award, the Nissan Focus Award and a CINE Golden Eagle. In 2005 she was a recipient of an Artist Trust Fellowship. Over the course of 25 years, her documentaries have focused primarily on Northwest history and include EAST OF OCCIDENTAL, HOME FROM THE EASTERN SEA, FINDING THEA, THE RED PINES, ISLAND ROOTS, and FUMIKO HAYASHIDA: THE WOMAN BEHIND THE SYMBOL.

Don Sellers - Producer, Director of Photography, Editor

Don Sellers has been a cinematographer/videographer and editor on documentary films for over 25 years. After receiving a Masters Degree in Film and Broadcasting from Stanford University, Don worked as a cinematographer and editor on numerous programs produced for the PBS series Frontline and Discover. For Frontline, Don photographed around the world covering topics as diverse as the changes in China in the years after Mao's death, meetings in West Africa between the ANC and Afrikaners to address apartheid, the Catholic Church in America, Hollywood, Horse Racing and Earthquakes in California. In addition to his work for PBS, Don spent six weeks riding with the graveyard shift of Miami homicide shooting a series for ABC. He has taught film writing and production as a guest lecturer at Stanford University.

Joel Goodman - Music

Joel Goodman has scored over 100 films and television shows for an impressive array of distinguished directors and producers, including Wong Kar-wei, Barbara Kopple, Albert Maysles, Barak Goodman, Kevin Spacey, Irene Taylor Brodsky, Andrew Jarecki, Mark Zwonitzer, Marshall Curry, Oren Jacoby and Michael Epstein. Of these films 4 have received Oscar nominations and dozens of Emmy Awards. Joel's new Main Theme for the top rated PBS series American Experience premiered in 2011. His most recent score is to the theatrical documentary, Being Elmo. For more information, please visit www.joelgoodman.com.



Producer's Statement

From Producer Irv Drasnin

No revolution in history has loomed larger than China's or caused more controversy in America. This film is a journey of discovery not only for Sidney Rittenberg but for us all, a profound test of how we see the world and our place in it.

This is a story of personal and political ideals and disappointment, of fame and of infamy, of power and the abuse of power. Its events cover a period that ended more than thirty years ago but whose reverberations are still being felt today. It is important to connect the past to the present.

The mass movements of the Maoist era caused widespread devastation in China and deaths in the millions. Rittenberg not only was there but knew personally China's leaders, an active participant who rose to prominence and fell in disgrace. His role was like no other foreigner's in Chinese history.

During the past year alone, the Cultural Revolution has again become part of the political conversation in China and in the struggle among party factions holding different visions of China's future and perhaps of the U.S.-China relationship as well.

While different in form and substance, political art occupies an important place in today's China just as it did then. Then, revolutionary art became a weapon of the Maoist crusade, as this film dramatically shows. Today, it again is a source of forceful commentary but in the hands of individual artists with their own views of China's past, and present.

The Maoist years were marked by the isolation of America from China, years of animosity and distrust on both sides. Now, the U.S.-China relationship is critically interconnected, of singular importance as we move into a new century, all the more reason to pay attention to Sidney Rittenberg's story.

And please allow me one more reason why we think this film should be seen by as wide an audience as possible: the need to set the record straight, to contribute to an understanding of history for its own sake.

There has taken place in China a discussion of "historical amnesia." As one writer has expressed it: "We're still talking about the Opium War (of the 19th century) but we forgot about the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution."

In China today, the famine of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, once labeled "China's Holocaust," have been all but removed from official histories and museums. Sidney Rittenberg bears witness to those missing chapters.





The Making of The Revolutionary

From Producer Lucy Ostrander

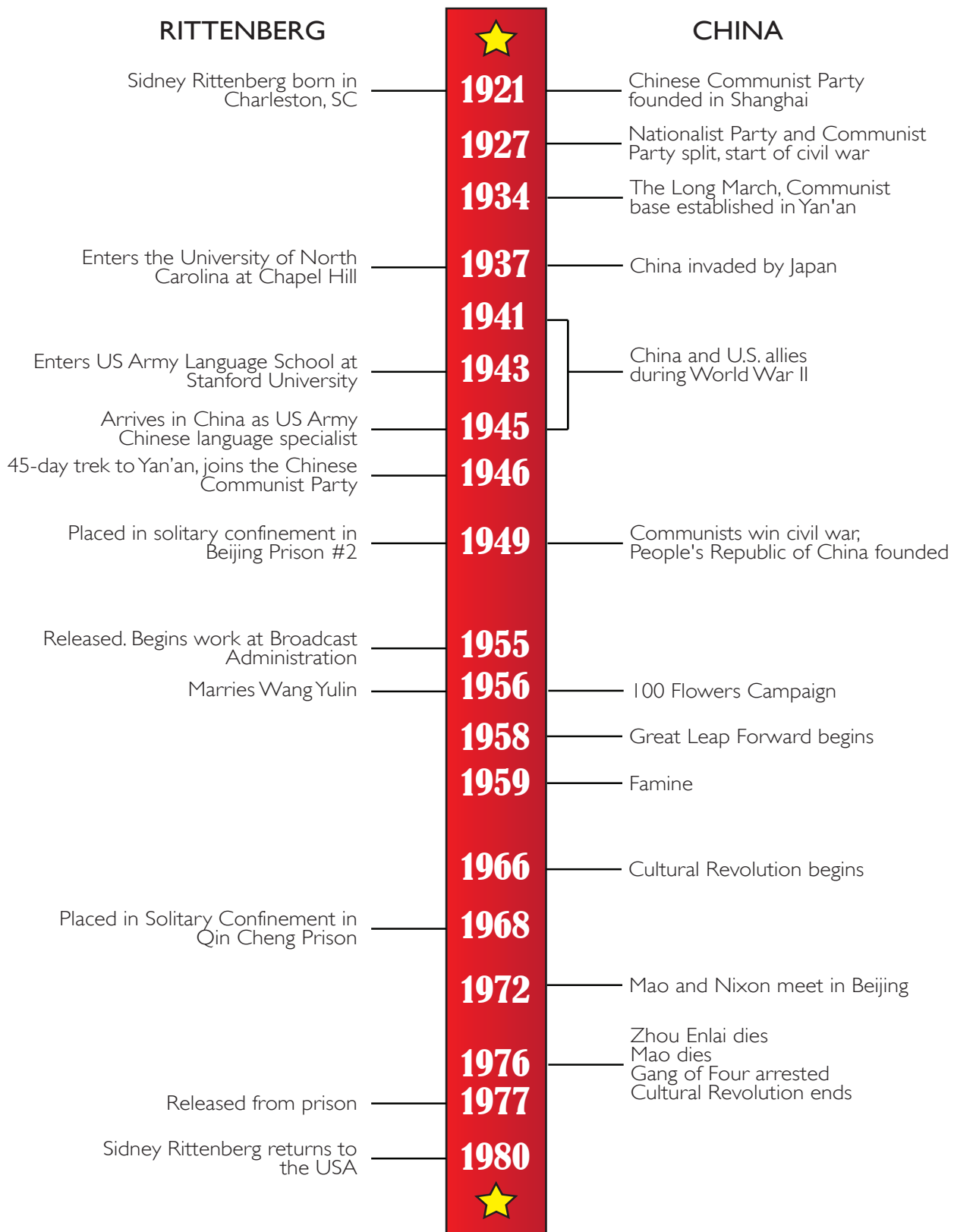
THE REVOLUTIONARY first began in 1983 when I was making my Masters film titled WITNESS TO REVOLUTION—THE STORY OF ANNA LOUISE STRONG. My subject had been a radical journalist in the United States in the early 20th century and had then gone on to report on the revolutions in the Soviet Union and China. She had interviewed Mao in the Yan'an caves. Since she did not speak Chinese, she needed an interpreter while in Yan'an—and that interpreter was Sidney Rittenberg. I interviewed him for the film.

Twenty-one years later my husband and filmmaking partner, Don Sellers, saw an article in the New York Times about Sidney: "A Long March From Maoism to Microsoft." It turned out that Sid lived near us and we met again.

After reading his autobiography, "The Man Who Stayed Behind," I was convinced a film needed to be made about his extraordinary life. Sid agreed to do it. So did Don and Irv Drasnin. Over a 5-year period beginning in 2005, four separate interviews produced some 26 hours of material for the film and an invaluable oral history of Sid's life and times. We were helped enormously along the way by Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, where Sid taught courses on China, and where his oral history now resides. We received the financial jump-start we needed from the philanthropist George F. Russell, the start of a long journey of fund-raising, shooting and editing this feature-length documentary. THE REVOLUTIONARY, we believe, was worth it.



Timeline





Reviews

THE REVOLUTIONARY was completed in late 2011, and had its world premiere at the Seattle International Film Festival in May, 2012 followed by its East Coast premiere at the Philadelphia Independent Film Festival in June, 2012. Here is what the press is saying:

"Rittenberg's gifts as a raconteur carry the film as he offers his insider's take on the machinations that led Mao's military victory and subsequent abuse of powerThe Revolutionary," tells a tale so tall, it's a tad surreal."

– Seattle Times

"... one of the highlights of this year's Seattle International Film Festival."

– MyNorthwest.com

"It's an amazing life story, well told through interviews, stills graphics, inter-titles, and wonderful old Communist posters to evoke the era."

– Seattle Weekly

"An exceptional documentary on China's history told from the perspective of the West does an excellent job in delivering powerful anecdotes of Chinese history."

– Seattle Chinese Times

"This impressive documentary tracks the path of Sidney Rittenberg, an American who wound up in China as an interpreter. . . . He got caught up in the idealistic foment of the moment and became one of the only Americans — perhaps the only? — to watch the earthquake of the Chinese Revolution and the bloody tsunami of the Cultural Revolution from inside the lofty position of party leadership."

– The Stranger

"... the definitive story of Rittenberg's rise, fall, and rebirth is told in a new film, The Revolutionary. . . . The film's structure is simple and powerful: The camera focuses tightly on Rittenberg as he dissects his decisions, a technique similar to that used in The Fog of War, the Oscar-winning documentary about Vietnam War-era Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara."

– The Philadelphia Inquirer



Prior to its film festival release, THE REVOLUTIONARY had only been shown to private audiences, particularly China experts. Here are a few responses:

"This is a splendid documentary. It brings out Sidney Rittenberg's incorrigible search for social justice and idealism as well as his remorseless ambition to make a difference and his relentless honesty about himself. He comes across as a complex, fallible, but admirable man. His relationship with his wife, Wang Yulin is touchingly portrayed. In a larger sense, Rittenberg's part in history (which was improbable but not at all small) and that history itself are brilliantly evoked. The ending, in which Rittenberg's very American pragmatism and his Chinese wife's commercial instincts triumph, is worthy of Voltaire's Candide. This is a painless but poignant way for Americans and other foreigners to begin to understand modern Chinese history. My wife and I loved the film."

– Chas Freeman Jr., former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia
and Nixon's principal interpreter in China.

"A remarkable film that captures Sidney Rittenberg's idealism and the price that he paid for his commitment to the Maoist cause. Vaclav Havel, the Czech dissident-cum-president, once remarked that in a totalitarian system, everyone faces the predicament of complicity in the regime's deeds. With extraordinary and moving candor, Rittenberg acknowledges his own complicity, as in his participation in "struggle meetings" that damaged the lives of others."

– Thomas P. Bernstein, Professor Emeritus, Columbia University

"Riveting! What delivery. What a tale. A man of true integrity telling a tale heavy with history and personal resolve and commitment. One gets a sense of the China of those days that is hard to obtain elsewhere."

– Dorothy J. Solinger, Professor, Dept. of Political Science University of California, Irvine

"This is the extraordinary story of Sidney Rittenberg, an idealistic American who believed wholeheartedly in China's communist revolution. As he looks back on the forces that lifted him to fame and then landed him in Chinese prisons, Rittenberg emerges as an engaging, complex, perplexing personality. The film is presented with wonderful clarity, honesty, and insight. Anyone wanting to understand the trials and tribulations of modern China should see this documentary."

– Terry Lautz, Syracuse University

"The Revolutionary provides a fascinating perspective on the greatest revolution of the twentieth century as seen through the eyes of an American progressive swept up in it. Sidney Rittenberg is a master raconteur who tells his tale of dramatic political ups and downs with all the charm familiar to those who know him."

– Michael H. Hunt, Emerson Professor Emeritus, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill



"The Revolutionary is the remarkable story of Sidney Rittenberg, as only he could tell it. It is equally the story of China during decades of political and social upheaval and of his deep personal involvement in the Chinese revolution. Through Rittenberg's eyes and in his words, China's past comes alive. He delves into this history with clarity and candor, and does not obscure his role in events that a lesser person would prefer to forget or to rationalize. This is a compelling and deeply moving film that deserves the widest possible audience."

– Jonathan D. Pollack, Senior Fellow, John L. Thornton China Center, Brookings Institution

"Through the invaluable insights and rather new perspectives provided by Sidney Rittenberg as a result of his unique engagement with the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party over the course of six decades, viewers of The Revolutionary are provided with a deeper and more profound "insider's" understanding of the course of the Chinese revolution and the rise of modern China as we know it today. Sidney's very up-close and personal self-assessment of his own role in the frequently messy nature of Chinese political affairs, including the good, the bad and ugly sides of his own involvement—not only gives strong credibility to the film, but it also allows us to better appreciate both the potential virtues and hazards of becoming a zealous "true believer" in any type of radical political movement or campaign."

– Denis Fred Simon, PhD, Vice-Provost for International Strategic Initiatives, Arizona State University

"In this absorbing documentary film, Sidney Rittenberg reflects on his remarkable life as an American member of the Chinese Communist Party. From the mid-1940s through the end of the Mao era, Rittenberg had remarkable access to the highest reaches of political power in Beijing. Ranging from his conversations with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai to his two long imprisonments under suspicion of espionage, Rittenberg provides a fascinating window onto China's continuing revolution under Mao."

– Andrew Walder, Denise O'Leary and Kent Thiry Professor,
School of Humanities and Sciences, Stanford University

"A mesmerizing portrait of a remarkable man. Fascinating from beginning to end."

– June Teufel Dreyer, Professor of Political Science, University of Miami

"This revealing film goes a long way toward solving the puzzle of how an idealistic young American civil rights activist became the first American member of the Chinese Communist Party, only to become enmeshed in the brutally cruel and chaotic factional struggles of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. Highly recommended for those seeking more clearly to comprehend both the allure and the inhumanity of revolutionary Maoism."

– Richard Baum, Author, "Burying Mao" and "China Watcher: Confessions of a Peking Tom"



Credits

THE REVOLUTIONARY

A film by Irv Drasnin, Lucy Ostrander and Don Sellers

Produced by Irv Drasnin, Lucy Ostrander and Don Sellers

Written & Narrated by Irv Drasnin

Music by Joel Goodman

Cinematography & Editing by Don Sellers

Location Sound and Gaffer: Keehn Thomsen

Associate Producer: Nancy Bourne Haley

Consultant: Xiaoyan Zhao

Sound Mixer: Dave Howe

Graphic Designer: Deborah Ristic

Video Post Production

Modern Digital, Seattle

David Fassio

Kurt Horn

Tim Maffia

Jesse Howards

Sound Post Production

The Annex, Menlo Park

Forrest Lawrence

Bad Animals, Seattle

Wendi Wills

David Howe



Photographs & Posters

Sidney and Yulin Rittenberg

Collection International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

The Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina

Bettmann/Corbis

Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis

George Silk/Getty Images

Mark Kauffman/Getty Images

JACQUET-FRANCILLON/Getty Images

The Newspaper Guild-CWA

Library of Congress

Collection J.A. Fox /Magnum Photos

Rene Burri/Magnum Photos

Yackety Yack, Published by the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1940

The Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, Harvard University

"Dunce Cap" denunciation image, Chinese Cultural Revolution @ Li Zhensheng/Contact Press Images from the book "Red Color News Soldier" (Phaidon, 2003)

Posters from the Ann Tompkins (Tang Fandi) and Lincoln Cushing Chinese Poster Collection, C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley. Also published in /Chinese Posters : Art from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution/, Chronicle Books, 2007. Digital image courtesy Lincoln Cushing / Docs Populi.

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