VISIT TO MONGOLIA

By GROUP-CAPTAIN H. ST. CLAIR SMALLWOOD, O.B.E.

Report of a lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on Wednesday, October 22, 1958, Sir Hugh Dow, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., in the chair.

THE CHAIRMAN: Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,—It seems rather a work of supererogation on my part to be introducing to you Group-Captain Smallwood, whom most of you probably know a great deal better than you know me. However, he and I first knew each other a very long time ago, so long ago that it must seem to both of us to have been in some previous existence.

Group-Captain Smallwood has had a distinguished career in first the Indian Cavalry and then in the Royal Air Force. I understand that one of his activities forty years ago was to map out an air route from Peking to Urga. As you will realize, he has retained his adventurous spirit and his intrepidity to such an extent that he spends his holidays revisiting those areas. He has just returned from a visit to Urga, which now enjoys a much longer name which I cannot even venture to pronounce. Group-Captain Smallwood will now describe his visit and show a film.

YOUR Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I feel very embarrassed by the kind remarks the Chairman has made, and I implore you not to believe any of them. The trip I am about to describe was made in company with Dr. Charles Bawden, who is with us now, and partly with Dr. Robert Rupen, who came from the United States of America to see some of the country. It was an unusual and peculiar state of affairs in that the personnel of the so-called Cultural Mission consisted of Dr. Rupen, a well-known Mongolist who has written a great deal about the country, Dr. Charles Bawden, who is at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, and myself. Dr. Bawden came to our rescue on many occasions, when the language defeated us, by writing down in ancient script the word we were searching for. I owe him an immense additional debt because I am the world's worst photographer. Whenever I wanted to take a photograph, I called on Charles Bawden, and he immediately brought a wonderful light meter along, with the result that I managed to secure a great many beautiful photographs.

I should like, before saying more, to show a film lent me by the Government of Mongolia, because it will give the background to my talk by showing what the country looks like.

The invitation to visit Mongolia came from a Government department in Ulan Bator, a department which functions somewhat in the same way as the British Council in England. It is the Ministry of Cultural Relations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and so on, rolled into one and known as the Peace Committee. They are a most hospitable department and nearly killed us with kindness and hospitality. There was no attempt to pump us full of propaganda. We were shown everything we wanted to see, even some things we did not. We were only shown one collective farm, and that in course of development.

Before I left England there was a feeling expressed by some of my friends that I should never return from so wild and impossible a country.

Personally, I had no fear in that regard, as I had crossed the Gobi Desert forty years ago, when the people were not too friendly towards us; I then had no difficulty in returning to England, and I anticipated no difficulty on this occasion.

I will not bore you with the details and delays of our flight out, but an interesting fact was that in Moscow I had the pleasure of meeting the British Ambassador, Sir Patrick Reilly, a member of this Society, and Lady Reilly, a daughter of Sir Percy Sykes, who was at one time an Honorary Secretary of the Society. Hence I was on a very good wicket from the moment I landed there.

From London to Copenhagen we flew by the Swedish Air Line, and on to Moscow in a pure jet—one of the astonishing Russian T.U. 104s. The piloting and general arrangements were extremely good, though I cannot say we received the same attention as one receives on the B.O.A.C. from their charming air hostesses; apart from that everything went well. From Moscow we flew on to Omsk and Irkutsk. We landed at Omsk in the dark, and, as we were disembarking, a charming young Russian lady—an Intourist Guide—came up to the plane and asked: "Are there any English here?" "Yes," said Bawden and I, to which she graciously replied: "What, two in one day; I am in luck." That guide took us over and gave Bawden and me a room each in a hopelessly overcrowded hotel. There had been a weather hold-up, and literally hundreds of Russian travellers were sleeping in camp beds distributed over every inch of floor space.

Next morning we flew off to Irkutsk, where we left the care of the Russians and transferred into a twin-engine turbo-prop Ilyushin aircraft with Chinese pilots and crew. They took us to Ulan Bator. There I suffered a slight disappointment when we landed because, many years ago, when I laid out an aerial route to Urga (as Ulan Bator was then called) I had based the airfield to the south of the town; in other words, on the Chinese side. The Russians, when they went in and were influenced by the Mongolians, put the airfield on the north side of the town. However, it was an excellent airfield, on which we landed in considerable comfort. We were met by Mr. Zagd, head of the Peace Committee, and other members of it; we were presented with large bouquets of flowers and conducted to large Zim limousines, which took us to the luxurious Government guest house, at which we stayed in considerable comfort.

I show a view of the Government rest house, a few miles outside the capital. You will note that the view from the front of the house resembles a Scottish glen; the scenery is beautiful, the heavy forest being part of what used to be known as God's Garden. In the time of the Living Buddha, the whole of the area belonged to him, and part of his revenue was derived from selling the Asiatic wapiti's horns. They were ground up and fetched their weight in silver, being thought among Eastern races to be a very strong aphrodisiac. It seems odd for the Living Buddha to have dealt in that way, but that was a fact.

In the Cinema in Ulan Bator there was an interesting contrast in that the people still wore their native clothes. An even greater contrast was a man in his plum-coloured robe riding his pony, and nearby a modern

truck which probably came from Russia or Czechoslovakia, and, just beyond, the huge Government building—quite a change from the buildings I knew forty years ago.

One of the first visits we paid while in Ulan Bator was to the Gadang Monastery. There are few monasteries remaining in Mongolia now. Lamaism is disappearing. Gadang Monastery is kept as a show-place, and here there are precious relics to be seen. We were entertained by the Hambelun lama, the senior lama of Mongolia. He is also a member of the Peace Committee. Entertaining us to luncheon, he and his fellow lamas were jovial and cheerful hosts, presenting us with ceremonial scarves and snuff boxes.

I show the inside of the hospitality- or reception-yurt in which we were entertained, the yurt being a felt-covered tent with beams running from the side walls up to a point in the centre at which there is a hole so that smoke and bad air can escape.

The Religious Museum in Ulan Bator is a somewhat dreary building; little interest is taken in it and it is not kept up as it might be. The old summer palace of the last Living Buddha was of interest.

On the Sunday we spent in Ulan Bator we were taken to see the sports —archery, wrestling and so on. There is a charming custom in that, when a man pulls his bow and looses the arrow, the people sing good wishes to the arrow in its flight. A view of the wrestling, taken from the grandstand, shows their zest for colour-conscious feeling evident everywhere.

On the outskirts of Ulan Bator we saw a group of yurts. The main surround consists of a sort of trellis around which is put a thick felt mat of camels' hair and sheeps' wool; in addition to the camels' hair there is a canvas screen which keeps out rain, so that, on the whole, a yurt is a comfortable place in which to live. In fact, the Government are experiencing difficulty in persuading the nomads to give up their yurts and live in the new centres.

The country over which we travelled on the road to Western Mongolia consisted of rolling steppes which seemed to go on for ever; one went over a low pass and came out on to another valley exactly like the one before. It was typical steppe country. We met a camel caravan on the move, and Dr. Bawden had a chat with an ancient herdsman; there are not many people on the steppes and, when anyone appears, the nomads are only too glad to have a chat. We had a fascinating meeting with an old Mongolian shepherd who had owned a large flock of sheep. He had taken them into the capital and sold them for a very good price, and he pulled out an enormous bundle of tugrik* notes. It spoke well for the honesty of the people that he was able to travel, unescorted, carrying so large a sum of money. To the herdsman who had chatted with us we gave a glass of vodka, into which he dipped his fingers, cast a little on one side, dipped again and cast a little on the other side. And then he drank to appease whatever gods there were for the luck which had come his way.

On our way we passed also a number of lakes, around which the grass grew luxuriantly and herds of cattle grazed, obviously getting a good living off the land. We passed a small encampment with shelters for the cattle

* The tugrik or local currency. 2·30 tugrik = 1 rouble.

in very cold weather. There is a bridge over the Orkhon river, and as one crosses it one sees a notice in the Mongol language saying "No smoking," the theory being that if one dropped a match on the dry wooden structure of the bridge it would be disastrous.

We came to Chagan Bai Sing, translated as the White House, though about that I am not certain; evidently, however, Washington was not the first place to have a White House. Chagan Bai Shing was built in 1610 for one of the rulers and later ruined by internecine warfare. In the background there is a typical steppe scene showing an attempt at cultivation. At one time the Mongols thought that to dig in the ground was not only stupid, but dangerous, because of the release of all sorts of evil spirits who should be below ground. Now they have overcome that superstition and large areas of land are ploughed; there is a great deal of barley to be seen; also many herds of cattle; in fact, the animal husbandry of the Mongolians is of a high order. They have succeeded in breeding an animal known as a hainag, a cross between a yak sire and a cow. The first cross produces a strong creature of immense use in pulling carts over the rough countryside; the second cross is not so successful.

Another ancient ruin is the Black House—Hongtai Ju Yin—which is much older than the White House, dating back probably to the tenth century. Many people have been there hoping for finds, but there is little to be found on the surface. We did come across a few oddments there and round the White House, and also in the ruins of Karakorum, which was once the capital of the Mongol Empire.

From the Black House there was a view from a sort of battlement over a huge area of the country, with the river in the distance. Although the White House was knocked to pieces, there is a reproduction in Ulan Bator showing what the old house used to look like. The compound inside was used as a sort of midden, much like one sees in the case of French farmhouses.

There was a stupa outside the walls of the Black House, and our French-speaking Mongol interpreter climbed to the top. We had a highly-skilled English-speaking Mongol interpreter, but he had to part from him. Although the French-speaking Mongol was a good fellow, he was not of the same quality as the man who had to go. The latter was intensely interested in all the visits we paid; he was also rather like the apochryphal Englishman who said: "It's a fine day, let's go and kill something," for this man had a little ·22 rifle and he could not resist firing at every bird he saw. He put a pencil in the ground, walked back 25 yards and knocked it over with two shots out of three.

In the central courtyard of the Black House is a carved stone of immense antiquity, and there is an ancient custom of saying a prayer and dropping a stone on the head of what looks like a tortoise. There are all sorts of theories about the stone: it is said that it was a memorial stone. It is not at all easy to say what its real history is. It has a Thibetan inscription on one side and a Mongol inscription on the other.

Our French-speaking Mongol interpreter was also cultural attaché, who spoke not only Mongol but a little Chinese, and was a most valuable aide. Our chauffeur could not speak English, but in spite of that we all

got on extraordinarily well together. At the end of one day, when he had had an accident, we came into Tsetserlig, an aimak, or provincial capital. Bawden and myself, and the Mongolians who were with us as a sort of staff, were taken to sleep in one room in the Rest House. When we asked where the chauffeur was to sleep, our hosts looked very surprised and replied, " He'll sleep in the car," whereupon Charles Bawden said, " When we get back to England and tell people there that the chauffeur had to sleep in the car while we, who have done no work at all, slept in luxury, they will be very surprised." Actually, our chauffeur was given a bed, but not before that need had been made known. He had worked very hard and deserved a bed.

We had a Zim motor-car which took us over most of the country, although it really was not the ideal car for the purpose. Going over one of the rough roads, we hit a rock and the clutch-plate broke. We only limped into Tsetserlig with difficulty and had to leave the car there for repair. We were at the provincial capital of a province and able to call on the assistance of the local Governor, who produced a Russian jeep with five seats, and much more suited to the journey we were making. For some days we travelled in that vehicle whilst the luxurious Zim was being repaired; I believe a spare part had to be brought from the capital.

Tsetserlig, the provincial capital, was not a big place but interesting as showing the difference between it and the actual capital of the country. We visited the museum at Tsetserlig, in which there were many interesting objects, some rather strange. One department was entirely composed of specimens of biscuits, cakes and sweets made in the factory in Ulan Bator. Among the old things was a wonderful stele on an ancient tortoise base. When we had been round the exhibits, the curator asked us to sign the visitors' book, adding that we were the first Englishmen to have visited that museum. Whilst at Tsetserlig we noted that the local buses were as overloaded as in most Eastern countries.

There is at Tai Ghuru a rock covered with all sorts of interesting inscriptions. It is said that there was a hole at that spot out of which came a serpent which caused a good deal of trouble, so the gods came along and put the stone over the hole so that the serpent could not get out again. The modern version describes the man who put the huge stone over the hole as " a people's hero." The inscriptions on the rock are in Thibetan, Mongol, old scripts and new scripts, but one of the most interesting things about the rock was a fish drawn on one of the facets, as representing Christianity.

While near the rock we ran into the Czech Archæological Expedition, with whom we had a good deal of converse. There were some grazing camels nearby, and the archæologists were amusing themselves by getting on and off them. We went to the ruins at Karakorum, and one of the most interesting old remains was a stone turtle, which might be fifth or sixth century, with a stele sticking up out of its back.

We had various views of Erdeni Tso, a famous monastery, founded by the convert Khan Abdai in 1586. In a close-up view we see the wife of the keeper of the place and her staid little daughter, with whom Charles Bawden fell in love at once, and she was very pleased to be made a fuss

of. Mongol children are, as a rule, absolutely charming, which reflects the exceedingly kind treatment their parents mete out to them. I have never heard a cross word spoken or seen anger shown to a Mongol child. The children are forthcoming and friendly; they think nothing of speaking to a foreigner as if they had known him all their lives; their natural charm is a good augury for the new generation.

Inside Erdeni Tso there was, in the old days, a stadium and a swimming pool. The place is still kept in fairly good order and the old buildings have been repaired. The square building inside the compound was at one time the residence of one of the princely lamas. Though rather dilapidated, there is still a good deal to be seen inside that stupa-walled compound. The courtyard beyond became better and better as we went on in. We were able to take a comprehensive photograph of the various temples. There are three temples to Buddha all alongside one another, the centre being dedicated to Youth, the left to Old Age, and the right to Middle-age. That dedicated to Old Age was full of beautiful old relics, and on the first floor we wandered about and saw bowls of votive offerings with their treasures. There were highly-decorated doorways.

I am reminded of an incident at Tsetserlig when we were shown a place which had been a lama's residence. We asked to be allowed to go inside, but were told, "It is top secret; you cannot go there." Bawden and I, being rather troublesome, said, "The door is open, let's look." With great difficulty we managed to get inside the compound, but were told we must not go into any of the buildings. We said we did not wish to, but there were some highly-decorated doors which Bawden said he would like to photograph, and he was told, "You cannot photograph that one, but you can photograph this." Both doors were next to one another; the highly top-secret door which Bawden was not to photograph had in front of it an ordinary weighing machine, which was looked upon as a secret piece of machinery of which no foreigner should be allowed to take a photograph!

I mentioned that we met some Czechs engaged in archæology. They have formed a joint party with some Mongolians and are undertaking a great deal of excavation. There are in the country some 200 sites of ancient remains already located. The Mongolians themselves are keen and anxious to reveal the secrets of their past, and they undertake a great deal of digging.

When we visited the site at Tungyukuk it was interesting to see the method adopted. Already there have been some valuable finds, and there is no shadow of doubt that they will find a great deal more. We also saw some diggings about 20 miles from the capital, where a number of articles had been unearthed, including golden bowls which have been placed in the National Museum in Ulan Bator.

Stele were found at Tungyukuk, and also a large stone, on which were recorded many historical events, and the design on which might be termed modern, although it dates back to the seventh and eighth century A.D.

After we had inspected the diggings, we were taken into the hospitality yurt, and the Mongol in charge of the diggings (Namnandorzh) and the Czechs entertained us in the most generous manner. After we had eaten

and drunk quite a lot, a bottle of Russian champagne was produced and little bowls handed round to everybody. Before we drank, one of the Czechs, who had a little English, rose and said, "I should like to propose the health of the Queen of England; we in Czechoslovakia admire Great Britain very much." We were mostly pleasantly surprised. It was, however, typical of the many touches of goodwill with which we met wherever we went.

On our way back to the capital we visited the coalmines at Nalaikha, and, after having braved the depths of those mines, we were taken for a long drive on a picnic outing. From the hill on which we picnicked, we looked down upon the Tola river valley and the summer camp created for the Pioneers, a group of young people, who are taken for a special treat to this summer camp, amidst most beautiful scenery.

A photograph taken at Nalaikha, near the coal-mines, shows a cart with an ancient form of wheel, with one cross-piece, as usual in Mongolia, but round the wheel there is a modern rubber tyre. If that is not a contrast between ancient and new, I do not know what is. The cart is, moreover, drawn by a hainag, the cross between a yak sire and a cow. Another contrast is that between the modern buildings and the Mongolians in the clothes they have worn for a hundred years and more.

I thank you all for listening so patiently, and now I shall be pleased to answer any questions.

Miss M. W. KELLY: Did you hear or see anything of Molotov? Is he not in Ulan Bator?

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: I knew that Molotov had been appointed as Ambassador to Ulan Bator. I was asked by some friends if I would like to see him, and I said I would very much like to do so. Forty-eight hours later I asked where Molotov was and they replied that they did not know where he was at that moment. I asked again forty-eight hours later and my friends replied that he had gone to Moscow. Probably he had no particular wish to meet a travelling Englishman. He, however, appeared shortly afterwards on the occasion of the Anniversary Parade which you saw in the opening film and which celebrated the country's independence. It has now been independent for thirty-seven years, and the thirty-seventh Anniversary Parade took place whilst Dr. Bawden and I were away in the steppes. Molotov was seen and photographed there with other people.

Asked the height of Ulan Bator,

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD replied: Just under 4,000 feet, and round it there are hills rising to great heights.

Mr. KENT: We were told that the lamas and lamaism were disappearing. Is there no longer a representative of the Thibetan lama?

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: One could say there is a representative because the lama of the town would pay tribute to the Living Buddha if there were one. After the Living Buddha died and the Court of Lamas suggested they should appoint another, there was no great enthusiasm, and since then lamaism has gone down and down.

Mr. KENT: Do the people take to that readily?

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: I would think that in no Eastern country could one eliminate religion, though at times it peters out. It could, in fact, be said that there is now little religion remaining in Mongolia, but there are still a certain number of people who get consolation from their religion. When I made my farewell speech at the dinner given us, I said I was glad to note that the Government had not completely eliminated the lamas because obviously a certain number of those in the country derive consolation from their presence. At the same time, there is no doubt that the country was terribly poor under lamaism, because when every third son went into the priesthood it meant fewer people of use from the point of view of production. All the lamas did was to pray and turn prayer-wheels. That did not advance the economy of the country. The decline in the number of lamas means more men are able to take part in the cultivation of the land and so on, which is to the material advantage of all concerned.

Asked how long the visit to Western Mongolia lasted and in what year it took place,

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD replied: On this last visit, this summer, we were in Mongolia for three weeks; when I went there forty years ago I was in the country between two and three weeks, but there was then not so much to see.

Asked if he had seen many wild animals,

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD said: Not many animals but a number of different birds: Demoiselle cranes flew around the lakes, duck, eagles and a few small birds. When I saw our interpreter, who shot at all birds, aiming at a hoopoe, I stopped him.

Mr. LANGE: Was the language on the stone found near Ulan Bator rendered in Cyrillic alphabet or in the Russian language? I believe most Mongolians would not understand the Russian language.

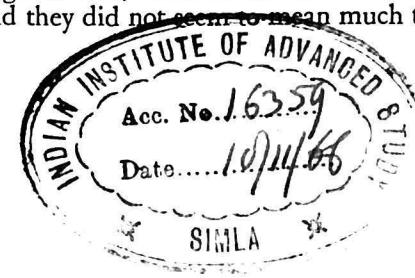
Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: That is true; most do not understand the Russian language; but a number are learning Russian and some go to Moscow to do so. Actually the Cyrillic alphabet is used in Mongolia and it is not, in characters, unlike Russian. Most notices on the shops appear to be in Russian, but they are really in Mongolian. The old script about which Dr. Bawden knows is still comprehensible to many Mongols. In Inner Mongolia, where the Cyrillic script was adopted, they have given it up and gone back to the old script partly because the Chinese wish that.

Asked the relationship between Inner and Outer Mongolia,

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD replied: No relationship. Inner Mongolia is completely controlled by China. Outer Mongolia, though this is difficult for many to realize, is an independent country. It is so often thought to be one of the Soviet Republics. I remind you that it has been an independent country for thirty-seven years.

H.R.H. PRINCE PETER OF GREECE: In one of the photographs I noticed a Russian shrine. Could Group-Captain Smallwood say who was buried there?

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: There are shrines and statues all over the place, some to Mongol heroes, some to Russian heroes. Lenin is represented. To my mind they did not seem to mean much to the Mongolians.



We walked by an important statue going into the Academy of Science at Ulan Bator, but no one seemed impressed.

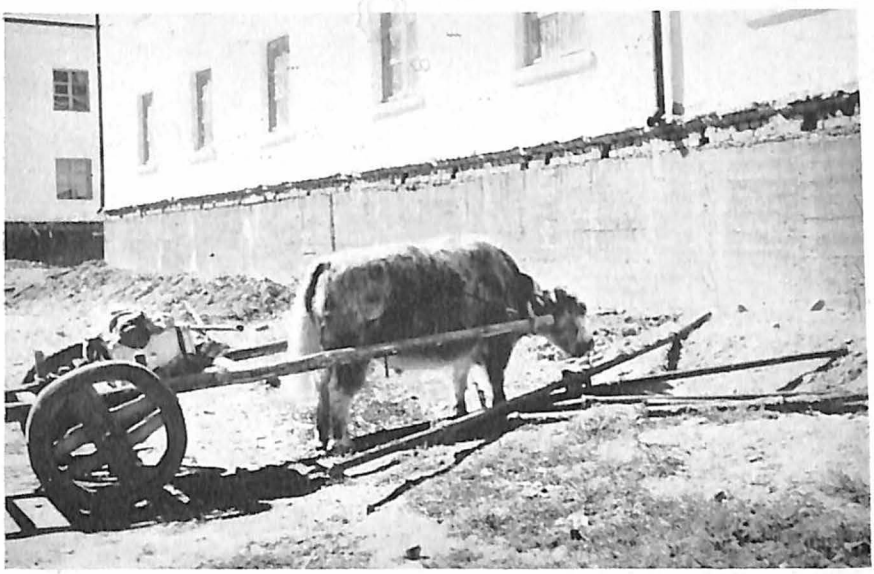
Mr. LAMBAIT: In view of the number of lakes we saw in the photographs, is the country well irrigated from the point of view of agriculture?

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: It is an enormous country; there is a large area to the south, the Gobi Desert, in which there is practically no water. I believe about five per cent. of Outer Mongolia is almost desert, or semi-desert. There are a few lakes in the steppes and some important rivers, the Tola and Orkhon among them, but they are not navigable. They help grass to grow and are therefore important in the maintenance of the herds which are still most important from the point of view of the country's economy.

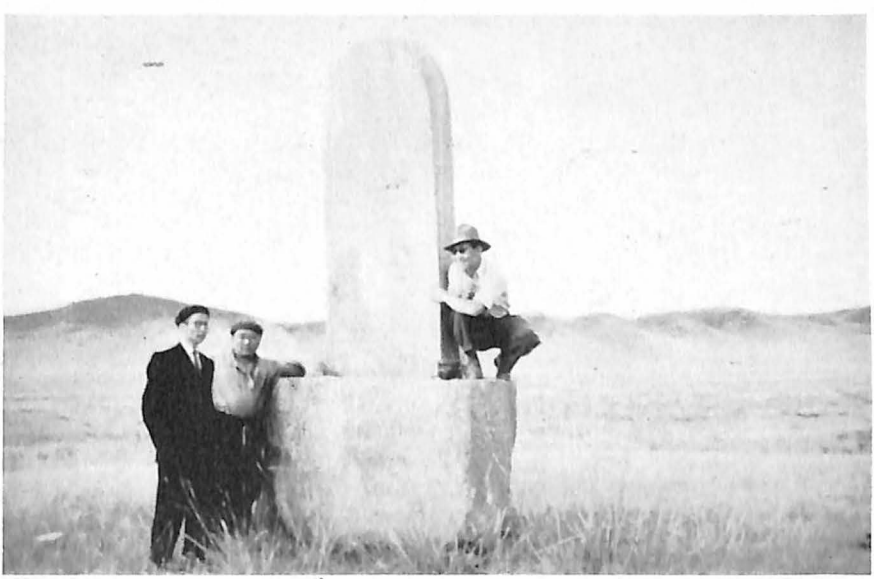
Mr. RUDOLF MAYER: The wheels shown on the cart near the coal-mines were exactly the same as those seen on ancient chariots.

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: I believe there is a direct connection; it is not improbable that Alexander left some of his chariots in the country.

The CHAIRMAN: It now only remains for me to thank Group-Captain Smallwood on your behalf for what I am sure you will all agree has been a most interesting lecture. I do not accept his statement that he is "the world's worst photographer." Far from it. We thank you very much indeed, Group-Captain Smallwood. (*Applause.*)



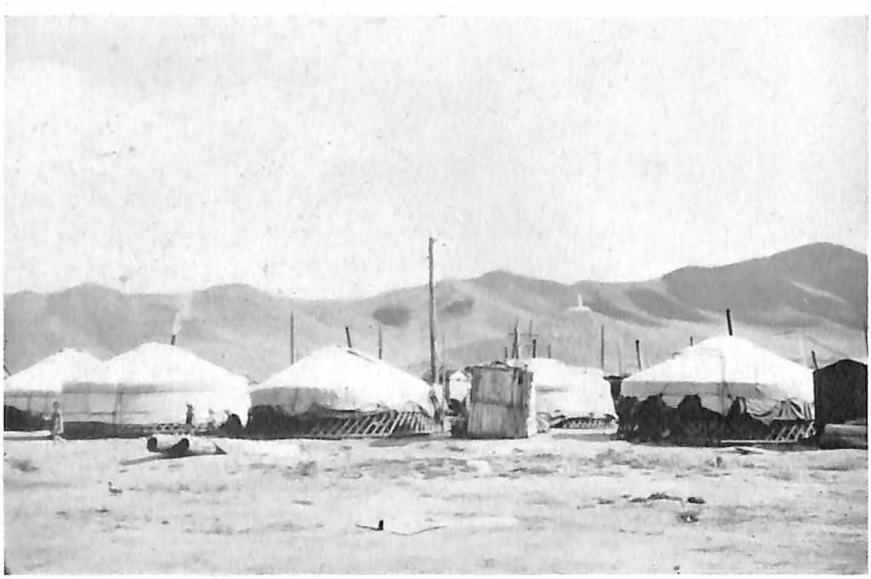
A HAINAG CROSS BETWEEN YAK AND COW. NOTE PRIMITIVE WHEEL SHOD WITH RUBBER TYRE



MEMORIAL TABLE NEAR THE WHITE HOUSE, INSCRIPTION IN TIBETAN AND MONGOLIAN. LEFT TO RIGHT, MONGUL CULTURAL ATTACHÉ, CHAUFFEUR AND MONGUL-FRENCH INTERPRETER

To face p. 26

THREE TEMPLES TO BUDDHA AT ERDENI TSO



YURTS OUTSIDE ULAN BATOR

PART OF THE GADANG MONASTERY AT ULAN BATOR

THE GOVERNMENT GUEST HOUSE AT ULAN BATOR, THE CAPITAL