

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

March 12th, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the United States' decision to reject the use of Chinese Nationalist troops in Korea. In the interview segment, ER and Dorothy Stratton, director of the Girl Scouts, discuss girl and women power in national defense.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Dorothy Stratton

[ER:] Good Day, this is Eleanor Roosevelt. Every Monday thru Friday, my son Elliott and I have the opportunity to visit with you here in my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. Each day it is our desire to bring interesting guests that we're hopeful you will enjoy meeting. Elliott will you tell our listeners today's plans?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Mother. Today there are over a million and a quarter girls who belong to the Girls Scouts. Their training as well as the fun they've received through scouting is very well known already. The part they're preparing to play, should a national emergency arise and the potential woman power contained in the Girls Scout Organization is something we'll hear about a little later in the program, when Mrs. Roosevelt interviews Dorothy Stratton, national executive director of the Girls Scouts of the United States. Recently a listener wrote that she couldn't understand how troops in Korea could represent United Nations' action when troops from one UN member, Nationalist China, were not allowed to assist. Mother will attempt to answer this as soon as we've heard from the sponsors who make this recorded program possible.

[Break: 1:37-1:57]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Our mail today, Mother, contains a letter from Mrs. James Friskin of New York City who writes as follows: "I should be very glad if you could tell your listeners on NBC, how it happens that although there is a representative of General Chiang Kai Shek on the UN council, his offer of troops to help in Korea was refused. Although I am not at all in favor of it, quite the contrary, I am puzzled as to how their exclusion could be possible, when the United Nations are supposed to be working together." (2:32)

[ER:] Well, there is a very difficult situation in regard to Chinese representation. Um the actual delegates um seated in the United Nations and uh properly accredited-ed are the representatives of the nationalist government. The nationalist government of China, however, was driven out of Chinese mainland and-and took refuge in um [Elliott Roosevelt: Formosa--] Formosa. And ah um there is no way actually, however, of removing uh the representatives of China-- China was one the original powers um in the formation of the great powers, in the formation of the United Nations. She has the veto and she's a permanent member in the Security Council, uh-um therefore if any question were brought up, China's representatives, properly accredited at present, could veto any actions. [Elliott Roosevelt: hm.] And for that reason uh nothing has been actually done. And in the Security Council, uh-um there has been of course no acceptance of the new and revolutionary government of communist uh China. Now why uh a refusal of the aid of Chiang Kai Shek's troops um that I think is quite easily understood because um the United Nations commander would have an entire right to accept or refuse uh I imagine any troops he felt he did not need, aid-- or it was unwise to use and I think it would be felt by the United Nations that when um Chiang Kai Shek was ah in a rather peculiar position it would be unwise to give to um the communist um Chinese uh something that they could uh fasten on as being um ah an action actually um -- seeming to be

an action of war against them. And for that reason I think uh it would be considered by everybody involved that it would be better not to accept uh Chiang Kai Shek's offer. (5:30)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Let me ask you this, ah the Chinese Communist and the Soviet Union use a subterfuge in the Korean War and that subterfuge is that the Chinese government of communist China is not at war with the United Nations [ER: No.] they are taking no steps whatsoever in the matter of Korea. They further ah go on, and state that the troops, the hordes of Chinese that are now fighting the UN troops in Korea are volunteers. [ER: That's right.] Ah what would be wrong with the United Nations in calling for volunteers with no action on the part of any government, but for volunteers to join the UN army ah to fight in Korea, and if it so happened that thirty or forty thousand nationalist Chinese came in, the United Nations could very easily shrug its shoulders and say but we just called for volunteers to support our police action. Now we don't take any regard as to nationality or political position on anything. They are under the United Nations commander who in turn is under our jurisdiction. (6:51)

[ER:] I supposed that could have been done, but uh we have been a little critical of the Chinese um subterfuge and I suppose uh that it was not considered uh wise to undertake the same subterfuge. I think you're quite right that it might have been done that way! [ER laughs] [ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap](7:11)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Isn't it just possible ah that a very good answer to a great many of the difficulties that we face today is that we think with a western mind, and most of the leadership in the UN is thinking with a western mind, and that uh in all likelihood, if we started copying the thinking and the ways of approaching some of these problems that are followed by the eastern mind in thinking of uh the Soviet Union and the Chinese communist, maybe it would be good to fight fire with fire?

[ER:] It might be. It might be. I agree with you that we do think in western ways and we do um ah not perhaps uh-uh meet deviousness with deviousness [ER laughs] in the way that we might ah-we might do occasionally. Eh I personally um am rather glad that we have not accepted um Chiang Kai Shek's offer for a purely personal reason. Um I think it would have added to uh the difficulties within the United Nations and I think it would have uh made it appear that we were taking sides in what is a purely Chinese question to settle: who and what um shall actually be the government of China?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well uh I think that the UN probably is uh following a very correct course with regard to Chiang Kai Shek, but uh my suggestion does not involve changing that [ER: No I realize--] refusal of an offer on the part of Chiang Kai Shek, the fact that uh he uh may release soldiers from his army uh to go and volunteer to fight on the side of uh [ER: South Korea] United Nations and the South Koreans, uh I would think would have no change in attitude on the part of the UN whatsoever, with regard to Chiang Kai Shek himself. In fact, I am surprised that Chiang Kai Shek has made the offer because he has got the problem of defending his uh last stronghold and I would think if he offered these troops that it would weaken his strategic position of defense. (9:43)

[ER:] Well I should think so too, and I would wonder whether they would volunteer, that's one of the questions I would uh wonder about, and I would also-- (9:56)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well maybe they would volunteer the same way that the Chinese communist soldiers have volunteered with whole uh regiments and whole divisions--

[ER:] whole divisions. [Elliott Roosevelt: at a time] [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] Well that might be, that might be, a um and um-- it may also be, I don't know how much sympathy there might exist between

the South Koreans and the uh Chiang Kai Shek troops or well possibly when there might be uh, when it came to the point, more sympathy between uh the Chinese troops of aiding the North and [Elliott Roosevelt: Uh-huh.] Chiang's troops.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap:] [Elliott Roosevelt:] well of course those are questions which we--

[ER laughing:] Perhaps all things being considered, we have to--we-er better be glad they were left where they are.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well those are questions uh-uh which I think uh I would think would be very interesting to the American public to have um more enlightenment to know whether uh the fact that uh eastern world people, people uh with the- with the same color of skin the fact that they were fighting on the side of the South Koreans whether that would antagonize the South Koreans and they would feel that uh Chiang Kai Shek might not be building up so that he could take them over too, and uh final peace came and they won , if they do win, uh those are all problems which would have to be studied very carefully of course, but uh it would seem to me that if more volunteers could be gotten from uh Asiatic countries, from uh India, from Pakistan, from Indonesia, from all over the Asiatic world and enlisted armed if necessary by the [ER: UN] Unite-UN, uh through the aid of the United States, I would- I would think that it would be a great force to overcome the argument that is being put forward by the Chinese communists that we uh of the American Hemisphere are entering into the affairs of the Asiatic people. (12:11)

[ER:] Oh, I think that is quite true, and I would like to see us more and more leave the decisions on these questions to the Asiatic powers, I think as much as possible. Um we should gradually withdraw, and leave it to them to make the decisions.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I hope that this answers Mrs. James Friskin's letter, and I'm afraid that now we must move on to another part of the program.

[Break 12:38-12:50]

[ER:]The subject of man power is very much in the news these days, but equally important, and not so widely discussed, is the matter of woman power. So today I've invited Miss Dorothy C. Stratton, national executive director of the Girl Scouts of the United States of America to discuss this matter. I'm happy to present to you Miss Stratton. I am very happy that you're with me today. [Dorothy Stratton: unclear.] Before we go on uh to our discussion Miss Stratton, I would like our listeners to know more about you personally. During World War II, you were the director of the SPARs as I remember well [ER laughs].

[Dorothy Stratton:] That's right.

[ER:] Tell me a little about it, how did you come to that?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Oh, how did I happen to be the Director of the SPARs?

[ER:] Yes.

[Dorothy Stratton:] I was in the Navy first. And um I was serving at uh the-the School for Radio operators at the University of Wisconsin. I got word to come to Washington by the fastest transportation possible. [ER laughs] And when I got there I met a room full of admirals, who said, "Will you take over and organize the women's reserve of the Coast Guard." [ER: Well now that--] So I did.

[ER:] You did. That's the-that's the answer to that question. Well now in our present national emergency, I notice uh that you are advocating uh using our greatest unused resource, namely woman power. Will you tell me a little about your feeling on this subject?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I feel that uh we still tend to think in terms of an all-male defense force, in spite of our experience during World War II. I think that um we should think in terms of all our human resources uh of whom half are women. And uh we know that our opponents uh have uh more man power than we have, so it's particularly important that we should make good use of all that we have.

[ER:] Particularly, as they are using woman power to the limit!

[Dorothy Stratton:] Yes, uh they [ER: unclear] appear to be from all we can hear.

[ER:] Well uh I happen to know that every woman uh must hold a job just like every man. And in the last war, I also happen to know that it was women doctors who served in the trenches because they were more expendable than the men who were kept in the hospitals.

[Dorothy Stratton:] Yes. (15:22)

[ER:] So uh that being the case, I suppose we mustn't lag behind. And I-I'd like to have your evaluation from your experience of whether the women today are really capable of assuming the great responsibilities that would be thrust upon them.

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, I think they are. We found during World War II that the women who came into the services could perform almost any job that we could uh open the doors for them to perform. The problem was to get them a chance for them to do the jobs. And I believe that they proved that they can do the jobs, and do them well.

[ER:] Well you see, you have the same faith in women that I have. And I had mine enormously reinforced by seeing women in other countries during the last war. Uh to see what women did in England, for instance, jobs that here they would have told us a woman couldn't possibly do, just because they had to do them, they did them. [Dorothy Stratton: Yes.] And um so I'm very much interested to find that with your experience you have exactly the same feeling that I have. Now, how do you think that women can best serve their country?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I think there'd be at least three ways uh one of which would be to serve in the armed forces. That's a-a very direct kind of service, but we know that the chances are that not a large percentage of women will serve there. And of course in the labor force, we already have approximately eighteen million, which is one third of our total uh labor force. It's interesting to me that over a half of those women are married. That's a rather new development don't you think?

[ER:] Yes that is, that is. (17:13)

[Dorothy Stratton:] And then I- I think a-a third way is um through the volunteer service in the community. That seems to me to be a very important way. I heard Lady Redding say, when she was here, you remember she was Head of the Women's Volunteer Services-- [ER overlapping: Oh I remember well.] yes, she said-- [ER: She did such wonderful work in England.] yes, she said that um, every women would have to hold both a professional job and a volunteer job and I wonder if that isn't going to be true in this emergency.

[ER:] Well I think it's very apt to be true and they did manage to do it in England in the last war, a great many of them. And I do think one other thing probably, and I'd like to ask you about this: when married women uh are largely drafted into um industry or-or volunteer service of different kinds, uh it will be necessary to organize uh for the care of children on a community basis, and there is a place where older women, particularly, can be very valuable I think, don't you?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Yes I do, and I think that's a very important part of planning for the use of women in the event of a greater emergency than we now face.

[ER:] Well now how can women be encouraged to play their full part in the national emergency?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I think that um on programs such as yours, if you can give encouragement as you do to um the effect that women are capable and can perform jobs well, that one of the things we need is public support. And you will recall, Mrs. Roosevelt, how uh-uh apathetic the public was toward the women in the services during the last war. That's number one I think to get public support for women in jobs.

[ER:] Well of course it's traditional here for men to feel that women should be protected and um the need for their getting out has always been, I think a little resented, uh as though the men weren't doing their complete uh job. And I think that's one of the things we have to uh try to prevent the men from feeling, because this is uh--in-in order that the men to do their full job, uh with um a feeling that the work at home is carried on.

(19:38)

[Dorothy Stratton:] Yes, but we never have really faced uh a-an emergency uh of the type we face now, and it seems to me that-that we have to think in terms of what all of us can do uh and that that doesn't mean that the men aren't doing their part certainly.

[ER:] No, it-it must--they must agree that women's citizenship um makes them equally responsible with them.

[Dorothy Stratton:] Yes. I think that's a very good summary of it.

[ER:] Well how does your conviction about women's citizenship responsibility fit in with your present job as national executive director of the Girl Scouts?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well, that's-that's an interesting question. As you know uh since you're an honorary vice president of the Girl Scouts, you'd probably know more about the organization than I do. But [ER: Oh no I don't.] you-you know that it's been a character building and citizen building organization for all of its thirty-nine years. And if we're really in a long term crisis, as we appear to be, uh we think the job of helping today's girls grow into really capable and uh responsible women, is uh a very important one. And, now that's a- that's one reason why I'm interested in girl scouting. You know, we now have about a-a million and a quarter girls, and that's a good many.

(20:20)

[ER:] Yes uh and I think the training that you can give them in the Girls Scouts um is important from a great many um aspects. I think that one of the things that uh women need-- and they should get it when they are girls-- is the feeling that they have a responsibility for the whole community, that it isn't centered just in their own home.

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well we try hard um to instill that into the girls who are girl scouts, and as you know there is also a world association of Girl Scouts and girl guides, so we try to get the girls to think in terms not only of themselves, and their own town, and their own country, but also to think of the world as a whole.

[ER:] Well I've happened to have uh seen quite a little of those international encampments that uh you have for the girl scouts. I've visited them several times. And I've always been impressed by the fact that even though they couldn't speak each other's languages, the girls seemed to get on. They found some kind of language that they could make themselves understood in, and then they learned each other's songs and that was wonderful way to enjoy themselves.

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I hope sometime we'll learn to speak other languages also. I-I don't know why we should go on being monolingual.

[ER:] Well I agree with you, because of course I think it's great help if we speak two or three languages and I always wish that we did a better job in our schools. We do a very poor job in comparison with-- well let's say Denmark, where I was last summer where I found that almost every child spoke three languages before they were eleven years old; and then four and five before they were fifteen or sixteen. [Dorothy Stratton: I--] Now I have to stop for a minute, and then we'll come right back, Miss Stratton, to this interview, we just let our announcer have a few words.

[Break: 23:08-23:17]

[ER:] Now I want to get right back to this question, Miss Stratton, of what the Girls Scouts are doing now in the civil defense program?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well, I'm glad you asked me that question because we've been working hard to see where the Girl Scouts could fit in to the total program. We've just completed a check list, which is for the use of every Girl Scout which shows her what she herself can do to be prepared to be of service. And we're uh printing um two hundred thousand of those and we're going to send one free to every Girl Scout. We think that she should learn first of all to take care of herself, so that um she won't be uh-a burden to other people, and that means from the brownies up. And then we think that there are certain specific things which she can do to help other people. Now with the-the uh brownies, of course first of all um a girl of seven or eight should learn to be uh as self-sufficient as possible, and then she can learn uh to take care of younger children and to help them with the songs and the games that they like to play. She can also get a first aid kit ready to have at home. Now, with the older girls we emphasize the child care so that the parents and the grownups can um do their own defense jobs. We try to teach them to cook for large numbers of people and uh we teach them about first aid, and also we give them some information and training in disaster squads. We have a number of those organized uh throughout the country. (25:07)

[ER:] That's interesting.

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well w-would you like to hear something about them?

[ER:] Yes I would, I'd like very much to know what-what you teach them in the disaster work. (25:15)

[Dorothy Stratton:] We have um emergency squads in Texas City. Uh those squads were set up following the disaster several years ago, you remember [ER: I remember] about that. Um they uh are learning what to do in the event of emergency; they are taking care of the child care center there, um especially taking care of small children, uh and so that the parents uh can have time for other things. Then uh in uh

Medford, Oregon for example the Girl Scouts and uh other youth agencies have set up a neighborhood organization for emergencies. In Sacramento, California they helped in the flood relief last November. They manned the day nurseries, distributed drinking water, adopted families uh who needed uh furniture and clothing, and in the Mississippi floods the Girl Scouts supplied many small articles which the flood victims couldn't uh expect to get immediately from the relief agencies, well such little things as soap, and washcloths, and needle and thread.

[ER:] They're not little things at all. As far as soap is concerned it's one of the most important things [Dorothy Stratton laughs] in disaster cases. [ER laughs]

[Dorothy Stratton:] Uh, you might be interested to know that in uh greater New York they've already issued their own checklist on preparedness so that each girl can check up on herself and uh in Chicago they've made a survey of the number of Girl Scouts who are first aiders. You know the Red Cross [ER: Yes.] recommends there be at least one first aider in every home.

[ER:] Well that's um--all those things are very useful, but I want to ask you one other thing. I discovered in England that very often uh people were obliged to do things out of doors case of disaster that they never before had done, now Girls Scouts ought to be particularly able to take over some of that work. For instance, uh cooking out of doors for-- in-in great quantities, um and running a sort of outdoor kitchen uh is not uh just the preparation that everybody has but Girl Scouts I should think could do that very well. How--what do you find about that?

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well, you see I said you were a good Girl Scout, Mrs. Roosevelt. Um that's uh that's very true. Uh the-the girls get experience uh first of all in-in cooking outdoors for small groups without the utensils that most of us have and uh under very primitive conditions, and then they learn to cook for larger groups. That's one of the things that-that we think we can especially help in is-is teaching them how to get along uh in the event that they don't have all the utilities that we expect to have uh ordinarily. (28:07)

[ER:] I saw some girl guides cooking in the pouring rain outside of L-- quite a ways outside of London. Um and it was one of the most remarkable exhibitions because I did not see how they kept their food from getting completely saturated with rain, but they did. [Dorothy Stratton: Well--] It was perfectly good food when they handed it out.

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I'm glad to hear that. [ER laughs]

[ER:] So did I, I'm very much interested--I'd like to ask you another thing, because I think this is also important, we know that there are young girls who are not Girl Scouts, now how can they contribute uh to uh their country at the present time? (28:52)

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I-I think that that's another very interesting question, because we know that um all of the youth serving organizations together serve only a small percentage of the girls, so your question is-is a very important one. Obviously they will learn a great deal in the schools, particularly uh with regard to the first aid program and they will learn how to take care of themselves in the event of atomic attack in the schools. Uh they will also uh learn at home and through uh other community agencies, but uh I think thing that-that all of us would be interested in is that they have some group through which they can work. I think generally speaking, most of us learn better if we- if we work with others than if we try to work just by ourselves, especially if we're getting ready to function in the event of emergency. (29:45)

[ER:] Well now, one thing I that saw in England uh during the bombings, uh I wonder if we are preparing our children to do, and that is the ability to um do certain things in very restricted space. They had children for instance go into the bomb shelters which were all were small and they had taught them uh how for instance-- uh there would be an older girl who would lead and um they would go through certain rhythmic motions of dancing or of uh calisthenics or something, because children get restless and if they just sit and listen for bombs, it's uh pretty tough on their-their nerves and the idea behind this was that a child that was concentrating in a small space on doing certain motions uh could have her mind filled or his mind filled with something different. I wonder if they're doing anything like that now. (30:53)

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I-I don't know about uh what's being done to teach children to um-uh act um somewhat normally in restricted area, and I'm sure that England has had uh much more experience and knows much better how to do that than we do, but uh I do think that um that we are teaching through the patrol system, which is used in the Girl Scouts, for one leader to be able to direct the activities of other children, I-I do want to make this point Mrs. Roosevelt, that-that we're not directing our whole program to the emergency. I uh--

[ER:] Oh, naturally not, because uh it would be um it would be rather foolish I think at the present time to do that, but nevertheless uh there are things that might be learned, it seems to me, um that might be learned really in the form of play, eh that might then be useful. (31:52)

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well I think that's ah-a very interesting point and uh when I go back to the Girl Scouts I'll talk with them further about that.

[ER:] Well, I'd-I'd be glad to have you talk to them because I can remember um watching a number of-of um of youngsters, I can remember seeing a group of youngsters um in an aerial attack, I mean a bomb had uh—they-they hadn't actually dropped a bomb, but they had alerted the people in that area, and the children were going down uh into the shelters. And I can remember so well the beginnings of uh the type of thing children uh did. Uh they all stood up together and took hands and began to sing and to sway, eh and then they would do little steps and they would sing little verses and um it- uh it was a time of waiting. The bomb never dropped and after a while the alert was called off-off, but nevertheless the children had shown their discipline and their ability to put through uh that time and uh I-I just think that could be taught children right now--how in um in through the scouts and through the various children's organizations, do you think it would be possible? (33:22)

[Dorothy Stratton:] Well, I-I think it would. Um don't you think that-that the first thing we want to teach the youngsters is-is resourcefulness, each person to know what to do and um as you suggest also uh through groups. And uh I think that the things you suggest could very well be taught.

[ER:] Well, resourcefulness and uh a spirit of independence, of taking care of yourself and being responsible for yourself, and that I think is one of the basic things, um that girl scouting does teach just as boy scouting does. And now before we must close our discussion, through you, Miss Stratton, I would like to extend to the Girl Scouts birthday greetings, as it is the thirty-ninth birthday of the organization. Happy Birthday to you all [ER laughs] and thank you so much for being with me today. (34:22)

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