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Pentagon

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Interview with Col. D.D. Barrett who knew Gen. Marshall in Tientsin, 1924-27, and during the period of the China Mission, Dec-17, 1959, the Pentagon.

His distinct recollection of Gen. Marshall was at the summer camp at Nan-Tu-Su. I was language officer in China from 1924-28 and therefore, not under the 15th Infantry in any way. I was attached to the U.S. Legation in Peking.

In the summer of 1926, the language officers were allowed the privilege of going down to the 15th Infantry camp and that was a great privilege as the summers in Peking were notoriously hot and we did not have any cottage to go to like the missionaries did and it was a big thing for us to be able to go to Nan-Tu-Su and get out of the heat. We could take our families down there. This was not a resort where business people went but an Army camp for the 15th Infantry to conduct target practice primarily. It was right on the sea very primitive - nothing but tents with one semi-permanent building the mess hall. We were quartered in tents and it was very informal and a wonderful place for the children. I took a Chinese teacher down there and I would study a half a day and the rest of the time was all my own .for any recreation that I saw fit. The only thing I did for the 15th Infantry in an official way was to act as an Officer in the target pits. I was a 1st Lt at that time.

Gen. Marshall was a Lt. Col. with the 15th Infantry and he was down at Nan-Tu-Su very frequently and I saw a good deal of him. He went out of his way to be nice to us language officers although'. we.-were not under the command of the 15th Infantry. He seemed to take a special interest in us and did his best to make us feel at home. He was so kindly and nice to everybody. He was not what you would call an easy man - he was not a back slapper. His conduct I would say was characterized by extreme dignity tempered with the greatest courtesy and consideration. He was never a martinet in any period Las Payne said He expected the best out of everybody. If you did not give the best, he was not hard on you but his estimate of you suffered accordingly. I heard Gen. Timberman as a 2d Lt say, "If you ever do a job for George Catlett Marshall you better deliver it all tied up with a red ribbon." He was not severe - he was dignified, friendly. Actually, he associated with us without any restraint whatsoever. To mention a very earthy fact, he used the same common latrine that we did without any compunction or dignity whatsoever. Would sit on this latrine and talk to us. There was no standoffishness in his character at all. It was very easy to see the respect, and to some extent, of course, a little of awe in which the officers of the 15th Infantry regarded him.

I do not remember that the Colonel commanding the 15th Infantry at the time was ever at the camp while I was there but Gen. Marshall visited it quite frequently and, therefore, we had a chance to know him better probably than if we had been serving under him directly in his capacity as second in command of the 15th Infantry. The first Mrs. Marshall was there at the time and we had an opportunity to meet this very charming and gracious lady. If she was in bad health, it was not evident. Although. She was not vigorous, she seemed in reasonably good her health. Personally, my wife and I did not get to know her as well as we did Gen. Marshall.

I have an example as evidence of how human Gen. Marshall could be on an occasion. I remember an extended hike into the mountains from Nan-Tu-Su I took with Gen. Betts, who was at that time a captain. We went on foot with our luggage, our camp paraphernalia carried on

jackasses and on the way home, we got caught in a very bad storm. We were just soaked all night and hiked all day long through swollen rivers and over rough country roads. We got back to Nan-Tu-Su about four o'clock in the afternoon and we were really pooped out. We were literally sweeping out our track - we could just barely drag one foot after another and that was about all. We met Gen. Marshall on the outskirts of camp and I will never forget - he laughed at the sorry spectacle that we presented. He was so human and kindly about it and he seemed willing on that occasion to make a little bit of fun of us which he did not normally do. When I met him in Nanking after the war when he came out to conduct negotiations between the National Government and the Communists, he spoke of this incident. He remembered it and brought it up and he said he would never forget how "you and Tom Betts" looked that day. He laughed about it which was, of course, very appealing to me to think that he would remember that trifle for such a long time.

One thing that impressed me and the other language officers was the interest Gen. Marshall took in the Chinese language. He took the trouble to learn it and study it and I have heard him speak Chinese, not at any great length, but enough to know that he had good accent and I think for the length of time he studied it, knowing his mental capacities, I imagine he acquired a very fair command of it. Studying the language, gave him an insight into Chinese culture as nothing else could and while I do not believe he ever had the time to devote a great deal of effort to the study of many aspects of Chinese culture, the fact he knew the language, enabled him to get a whole lot closer to the Chinese than he could ever have done had he not had the command of the language he did. We knew that he took an interest in the language and I believed he instituted the study of Chinese among the officers of the 15th Infantry on a required basis. Prior to that time, the officers serving in the 15th Infantry paid no attention to the language whatsoever. They picked up a few words and let it go at that. When I returned to China in 1931 with the 15th Infantry, there was a very definite language program going on and I assume that had been instituted by Gen. Marshall. Every officer had to study and if he could not pass his examination, they allowed him to drop his studies but it was considered a little bit of a blot on your escutcheon if you could not pass the fairly simple examination which was given. After you had completed a certain number of hours, they would come to the officer-in-charge of the language instruction and say that they were ready for the examination. Most of them passed it extremely well - some of them not so well and there were one or two that just finally gave it up. This was the Mandarin dialect - or what we call nowadays - the national language.

I remember one time down in Benning when I was a student at the Infantry School, they had a performance of Rio Rita at the theater. They had some very handsome chorus girls. As we were going out, my wife and I happened to meet Gen. Marshall and he said in Chinese, "Extremely pretty". He remembered that very well.

He would have had difficulty when he went back to China in using this Chinese, He undoubtedly remembered a lot, and Gen. Marshall is not a man to forget something he ever had learned. But having been totally disassociated not only with speaking Chinese but thinking along Chinese lines, he would naturally make no attempt whatsoever to make use of what knowledge he had. I suspect, however, that there were many occasions when the people with whom he was dealing were speaking Chinese and he understood a whole lot more than they realized of what was being said, particularly when he was familiar with the topic which was under discussion. And the

fact that he had studied Chinese at all was of the-utmost significance because in dealing with the Chinese it places you in a favorable position. They appreciate very much that you ever took the trouble to learn Chinese because so few people do and they respect you, even if you speak it very very badly and even if you have forgotten it all. Gen. Marshall acquired a sufficient command of Chinese to deliver a speech in it. I suggest you check that. To deliver a short speech in Chinese is a mental feat of no small proportion and it shows how well he could apply himself to something like that when he wanted to.

In response to question of Gen. Marshall's lack of knowledge of Chinese thought and background, Col. Barrett said he did know a lot about it. No man could live in the atmosphere of a treaty port for three years without getting something out of it. Gen. Marshall was a man that wherever he was, he had a feeling for what was going on around him. He was intensely observant and, as I say, having studied Chinese and having met many, many Chinese officials, I have no doubt that on a number of occasions, he conversed with them quite extensively. In Chinese. Many of these officials did not know a word of English so rather than use his interpreter altogether, Gen. Marshall would speak to them directly. It must have made a great impression on him. "Gen. Marshall is not man who could live in any country without studying something about its history. He was right there just like a goldfish in a bowl as far as being subject to Chinese impacts and culture were concerned. Gen Marshall was a man that the Latin saying applies very closely, "I am a man, therefore anything human I do not consider alien to myself." He was very much that way. I do not think he had time either in China or in subsequent years to become somewhat of a dilettante in Chinese culture.

Dr. Pogue says he is glad to hear that because Payne who was supposed to have some knowledge of China and whose chapters on China describes had been considered by many to be accurate describes Gen. Marshall as having considerable knowledge of Chinese painting on silk and Chinese philosophy and this sort of thing, that he is going beyond.

I think it is going a little bit far. Certainly, Payne knows China. No man who lived in China as long as he did and taught in Chinese universities. He married a Chinese wife. He lived close to the people for a long time and I would certainly regard him as an authority on China but I think he may have overestimated Gen. Marshall's interest in certain aspects of Chinese culture. Actually, Gen. Marshall would look at a painting and say "this is a painting on silk," or "this is Chino (?) vase", or "this is a piece of Sung pottery." Actually, he would know that but to take the time to try to get very deeply into any aspect of Chinese culture, particularly philosophy, I rather doubt.

Dr. Pogue states he was interested in the politics of the period and he has seen references to this in letters to Gen. Pershing but he has seen nothing about his wrestling with points of philosophy.

The mission of the 15th Infantry, if it had any mission, was supposedly for the protection of Americans and the guarding of the railroad line from Peking to the ocean so that in the event of the repetition of the Boxer outbreak, Americans could be taken to points of safety. Of course, at the time, the mission was utterly outmoded and actually, from many aspects, there was no reason at all for an American Regiment to be stationed in Tientsin. I was awfully it was because I had an opportunity to serve three of the happiest years of my whole military service with it. The British

and French still have their missions there. The Germans have gone but the British had a concession and a considerable number of troops. The French had a concession and the Japanese had a concession. Naturally, Gen. Marshall's relations with the officers of these various garrisons were both official and social.

Dr. Pogue stated that his correspondence does not show any letters from foreign officers but some with British business men.

That is very strange as he must have known a number of the officers extremely well.

Dr. Pogue stated he had hoped he might find one that had reached a high command.

I think I might possibly help you dig them out. If you knew the name or designation of a British Regiment which was serving in Tientsin at the time. A point in connection with Gen. Marshall's interest in Chinese culture, of course you realize that Tientsin was a treaty port and no center of culture by any means. But Gen. Marshall must have visited Peking on a number of occasions and even being in Tientsin, a man of his temperament would never divorce himself from the community like a British treaty port business man that lived there all his life and never learned to speak a word of Chinese and never had any relations with the Chinese except in the course of his business and then very much on a strictly formal side with business transacted through his "contredor" (?) and his interpreters.

Dr. Pogue states he found Gen. Marshall remembered the names of the various, leaders and factions in China at the time and what they did and how they lined which was pretty complicated.

It was very complicated but in as much as at least the nominal mission of the 15th Infantry to be a protecting force for Americans, it was up to him to know the complicated politics of the time. He wanted to know if there was any chance of civil war breaking out here. The only way the regiment might be needed to protect Americans would be in connection with civil war. Certainly there would not be any more Boxer uprisings.

Dr. Pogue asked about the retreating forces after Chang Tso Lin and whether they were the ones of Feng Hu Hsiung. It was just outside of Tientsin when he was commanding the regiment briefly while Naylor was away.. He had a few scary days there.

Therefore, it was up to him to recognize the complexities of the war lord situation which prevailed in China at that time, what leader was on top, what leader was likely to go out, and what clashes were likely to occur. That would all bring the 15th Infantry into the picture. The situation might sound extremely complicated with a lot of names Chang Tso Lin, Feng Fu Hsiung and leaders like that. The fact was there was no government of China. There was a nominal republic of China but to it did absolutely nothing. The war lords occupied their own area and fought continually among themselves solely for the purpose of increasing their power and money. That is what brought about the intolerable misery of the war lord years and caused Sun Yat Sen and his principal lieutenant at the time, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek to determine to

move north and throw out the war lords and have a real government that exercised some authority over the people.

Q. You must have worked for at time with Stilwell?

A. I sure did. I was assistant military attaché. Stilwell with the 15th Infantry the same time Gen. Marshall was. He had been a language officer.

Q. Some suggest he started the language school and then Marshall made it apply to all the officers.

A. There may very possibly have been but if Gen. Marshall had not taken an interest in the language school, it would have come under Stilwell who had such things as language and culture under him. But I doubt if he could have instituted any such program of language study along the lines I saw in effect - he might have submitted a proposal to Gen. Marshall. Whether he came after Gen. Marshall, I don't know but their terms with the 15th Infantry overlapped very closely.

Q. My impression was that he had Harding had the battalion at the time Gen. Marshall was there.

A. That could be because Gen. Marshall and Stilwell were very close. Each one held the other in extremely high regard and Gen. Marshall was always cognizant of Stilwell's particular outstanding qualifications

Q. Did you ever have an impression at the time you knew Stilwell that he had a left-wing orientation.

A. No sir, I do not think he had a left-wing orientation at all. The only thing was Gen. Stilwell became very bitter in his feeling for Chiang Kai-Shek and also he had the same feeling which many Americans had at the time that the Nationalist government forces were not pulling their whole weight in the boat but that the relations of CKS with the Chinese Communists were affecting the overall effort. Gen. Stilwell could no more have had a left-wing slant - it was entirely out of consonance with his character. The man had been a soldier all his life with the utmost loyalty to the President of the U.S. and a man with traditions behind him. If he had had any politics, he would have been an extremely conservative Republican. And for him to have had any slant in that direction - you have studied the relations between Stilwell and CKS , and the friction that developed caused Stilwell to have hard feelings towards him and that may have unconsciously caused him to feel a little more kindly towards the opposition but to have any slant - it was impossible. I served under Gen. Stilwell in the China-Burma-India theater and he sent me to Yen-an in charge of a mission - a liaison group - whose sole purpose was liaison with the Communists.

Q. Was Col. Yeaton with that group?

A. Col. Yeaton came after me. Immediately after me came DePass - I am not sure. I was the original commander of the group, under Gen. Stilwell. That was before Gen. Wedemeyer came

in. Gen. Stilwell came me a briefing before I went there and there was no pro-leftist side whatsoever. What he wanted a cold blooded evaluation of what they could do. To try to find out what they had done in the past and what they were capable of doing in the future and to give him my ideas of what way to make use of what capabilities they had. But you could not say he had any pro-leftist learning. What he wanted to do was win the war - he thought more use might be made of the Communists than was being made at the time.

They were strongly anti-Japanese at the time and undoubtedly many Americans were taken in to some extent by certain aspects of the situation. They fell for the agrarian reformer stuff. I was taken in to a certain extent. In other words, I was favorably by certain aspects of what the Chinese Communists were doing at the time. You could not help but be impressed by the fact - it was like doing into a different world to go into Yen-an. The entire atmosphere was different. There were no sentries on the high hdq. The top, Chou En Lai and Mao Tse Tung, moved around with utmost freedom and mingled with the people all the time. It was very possible that what I saw in Yen-an was a Potemkin business put on especially for me but you can carry a show to a certain extent but you cannot carry it on for too long a period.

At the time, the Chinese Communists were communists - that is the thing that we should have known. A communist is a communist no matter what he is. But I firmly believe that their relations with the Soviet Union were very greatly different from what they were later at the time at the time when the Soviet Union saw that the Chinese Communists were going to be a success and naturally, they exploited it to the limit.

At the time the Chinese 6ommunists were extremely anxious to make a deal with the U.S. They always emphasized to me that they were willing to work under the Generalissimo. They were a part of the Genealissimo's command - the Communists' troops were an integral part of the Chinese Nationalist Government Army. They had unit designations. Of course, they were maintaining illegally a huge number of troops which were not a part of the armed forces of Nationalist Chine.

Q. A question that historians will. have to deal with some time is at which point these people became conscious of purpose to fool us for a time and how far it was they were actually willing to work for a time with the Nationalists until by fairly lawful means they could take over. Of course, whenever you believe anything, you intend sooner or later to put that into effect. But it may be evolutionary rather than evolutionary. Now it is possible in the period of which you speak, they were still thinking along those lines that they would work with this man (CKS) and someday they might get what they want but they are not going to push it too far. Now it that it may happen, that it was not a change on their part but the fact the Russians came into the picture in 1945,46 and 47 that changed the situation. That is an interesting one to note whether at the time Gen. Marshall first went there, Chou En Lai and Mao Tse Tung were still intending to go along these lines or whether they had already become a part of the bigger regime.

A. Well, sir, that is a most interesting question. There are certain concrete facts in connection with this which the extent to which they influenced the outcome of history is very difficult to assess but there are certain things that you can nail down. For example, when it became clear to the Communists that they were not going to get any arms and had to pass through the

Generalissimo, my final recommendation before I left was that I thought they were good guerrilla fighters and through they could be used to harass the Japanese to a very considerable extent. That they could carry on regular operations on a large scale in the field, I doubted. But I suggested that be given a whole lot of arms - not a whole lot - but a whole lot more than they then had, and then we watch to see how they used them. If they used them to fight the Japanese in guerrilla warfare and made good use of the arms, give them some more. If they used the arms to fight the Nationalist government, never give them another thing. Try, if possible, to get the arms back but it would have been very difficult. If they hoarded the arms, never give them another thing. That seemed to me a sensible recommendation. I made that recommendation just at the time I was to leave the command of the Liaison Group. I had been up there a long time and I was assigned what seemed to me at the time a more important mission. In other words, it seemed to be to my advantage that I no longer be connected with Liaison Group in Yen-an. This was at the end of 1944 when I left. I then went to west China to be Chief of Staff to the Chinese Combat Command commanded by Gen. McClure. That was under Gen. Wedemeyer.

Q. Was Hurley there?

A. Yes, sir, I was in Yen-an when Hurley came there. He had nothing to do with my going. Nut I was there when Gen. Hurley made the first contact and negotiations with Mao Tse Tung and it was an extremely interesting thing to see. I don't think Gen. Hurley was ever taken in by the Communists. I think Gen. Hurley was never taken in by anybody. I think he only knew that he was a loyal Army officer and also was intensely conscious of his own personal part in these things. He was not very likely to be taken in by anybody - a hard headed lawyer.

Q. His reports for about a year were contradictory.

A. That seems to be obviously foolish because he not only had served in China at the time when he was young and impressions registered on him. He -as greatly enjoying his service in a sort of romantic period. In other words, we were having it very good indeed. Tie gained an insight into Chinese that would never leave him. He followed the world situation closely from the time he left China until the day he went back there.

That was his business. He did not have probably to devote to any intensive study of the Chinese situation in particular but he met CKS at Cairo, didn't he - or was it at Casa Blanca? Wherever it was.... And China was an integral part of the whole thing and he had to keep in touch with the Chinese war effort to judge how the American arms should be distributed and all that. He was closely in touch with the situation in China and always with the background of having himself known something about it...a great deal about it.

Q. Those that have attacked him, said he knew it only through Stilwell's eyes.

A. Oh, no. Gen. Marshall was not a man to see anything through someone else's eyes.