



Lessons in Chinese

"Out here the pot boils over and appears to grow daily more involved."

—Marshall to Pershing, October 30, 1925.

ASSIGNED as executive officer of the 15th Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel (he had been promoted to that rank in August 1923) Marshall on arrival in Tientsin actually took acting command and held it for two and a half months until the new commanding officer, Colonel W. K. Naylor, came from Washington. The regiment with headquarters and service companies and two of its battalions totaled about a thousand men.¹ One rifle company was in Tangshan; the rest of the men were in barracks in the American compound in Tientsin, where they had been for twelve years and where they would remain until 1938 on a mission unique in the American Army.²

The Americans occupied buildings which until the War of 1914 had belonged to Germany, on what had been the Kaiser Wilhelmstrasse and now was Woodrow Wilson Street. In the same compound was the headquarters of Brigadier General W. D. Connor, commanding United States Army Forces in China—a command that had existed only about a year and had been set up principally to keep the Army in close touch with the American Minister at Peking and with various foreign and Chinese officials.³

Down Woodrow Wilson Street, which as it went along became Victoria Road, Rue de France, and Via Italia, were the concessions of Britain, France, and Italy respectively, each quartering its contingent of troops. Adjacent was a detachment of the Japanese Army, which occupied a patch of Japanese ground. Until the Bolshevik Revolution there had been Russians in that vicinity too. Yet all these men in foreign uniform did not constitute an international force or, in the proper sense, even an occupation force. They were rather an extraterritorial police, each separately engaged in defending the lives, property, and commercial interests of its own nationals and in keeping open the lines of communications from Peking to the sea. All but the Americans had taken up residence in Tientsin in 1901 in accord with the Protocols that the powers imposed on China after the defeat of the Boxer Rebellion. The United States acquired similar rights under the settlement but, except for leaving a small legion guard in Peking, did not exercise them until the revolution of 1911 again raised threats of anarchy and a fresh effort to drive the foreigners out.⁴ It was then, early in 1912, that two of the three battalions of the 15th Infantry moved in from the Philippines, occupying quarters for which they paid rental instead of claiming a particular area as a concession. In the First World War the Germans were forced to give up their concessions; the Russians after the Bolshevik Revolution voluntarily relinquished theirs. Britain, France, Italy, and Japan held on to their respective areas, while the United States undertook generally to guard the quarter once assigned to the Germans.

For Tientsin itself the foreign garrisons, providing an effective defense of the city amid the chaos of civil war, were more obviously blessing than burden. The strategic and commercial importance of Tientsin was its position between Peking and the sea on the Hai River (Hai Ho) and on the Peking-Mukden Railroad. The railroad ran southeast from the capital through Tientsin to Taku, a port on the Gulf of Chihli; thence it turned northeast to Mukden in Manchuria. Lying thus athwart the main highroad to the Chinese capital, Tientsin was entirely without natural defenses. It was built on an alluvial plain sixty miles from the sea but only seven feet higher and was swept by floods, dust storms out of the Gobi Desert, and periodic bands of war-

ring provincial leaders. After the Boxer Rebellion its ancient wall had been torn down and the city largely rebuilt. Foreign troops thenceforth became its main security and in defending themselves and their nationals provided peace for the citizenry. Tientsin flourished. With nearly a million people in 1924, it was China's second greatest commercial city, second only to Shanghai.⁵

But foreign troops were also a symbol of China's tragedy and a badge of her humiliation. Incapable of defending the lives and property of foreigners, the Chinese government was forced to yield a portion of its sovereignty to alien commands. The chaos born of factional fights and civil war had made imminent the partition of the country among the great western powers and Japan. The United States, interested in the China trade since the 1790s and in the salvation of Chinese souls since the early 1800s, had persistently refused to take part in the scramble for special concessions. Instead, while demanding respect for our national interests, we tried to strengthen the Peking government. This, however, did not save us in the 1920s from being listed among their nation's oppressors and exploiters by Nationalist leaders. Nor did it avoid the clash of interest when nationalist boycotts and riots threatened American lives and property no less than the lives and property of the Europeans and Japanese.

In the four years that followed the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty and the establishment of a republic early in 1912, the government of Yüan Shih-k'ai maintained a semblance of national unity under despotic and increasingly corrupt rule. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the first provisional President of China, who had stepped aside in the hope that Yüan could provide the leadership so desperately needed, broke with Yüan in 1913 when the latter took steps to make himself emperor. Sun's party, the Kuomintang, was expelled from the parliament in Peking. Some of them moved south to Canton, where in time the revolution would be reborn.⁶

On the death of Yüan in 1916 China fell into a long period of anarchy and confused civil war. Peking, for more than a decade, remained nominally the capital city and the parliament

there claimed to be the source of political authority. In fact, however, the President at Peking often exercised no real power outside the circle of his own retainers. The provincial military governors, whose aid had been sought by the national government, fought for political and military control of North China and for domination of the Peking regime. In the provinces warlords (*tuchuns*) recruited mercenary armies and fought and betrayed each other in a kaleidoscopic pattern of conflict in which few of the *tuchuns* suffered decisive defeat and none was ever quite victorious. South of the Yangtze the Kuomintang set up in 1918 a rival national government, which in 1921 elected Sun Yat-sen the President of the Chinese Republic. But here, too, effective political power proved elusive. The Kuomintang moved in and out of control almost at the whim of local warlords, and such allegiance as the provinces yielded to Canton remained also nominal. It was only on Dr. Sun's return to power in 1923, after being ousted the previous year, that the nationalist movement in Canton began to take effective shape.

The shape was tragically misunderstood in the West. Despite the weakness of Peking, most foreigners in China continued to hope that a strong conservative leader, a new Yüan Shih-k'ai or a super-*tuchun*, would arise to unify the country. Dr. Sun with his visionary principles and demands for the immediate end of special treaty rights seemed an obstacle to unity as well as a menace more or less serious to life and property.⁷ That point of view was widely shared by foreign diplomats, who incidentally remained accredited to whatever regime took up the reins in Peking, and was conveyed strongly to foreign capitals, including Washington. When Dr. Sun sought foreign aid for his movement the United States was cool. So were Britain, Canada, Germany, and Japan, whom he also approached. Only Moscow listened. From the beginning Lenin had been sympathetic, approving in particular the Kuomintang's militant stand against foreign imperialists.

In the autumn of 1923 the Soviet Union sent Mikhail Borodin to Canton to advise Dr. Sun and to cement an *entente cordiale* between the Soviet Union and the Kuomintang. Borodin, an unusually able and persuasive agent of the Communist Inter-

national, began by reorganizing the Kuomintang, already a one-party government in southern China, along the lines of the Communist party. He also negotiated the admission of Chinese Communists on the proviso (which proved worthless) that they must accept Kuomintang principles and work loyally for the Chinese revolution, which it was agreed was not Communist.⁸ Under Borodin's tutelage the Canton government became vigorous and efficient. It caught the imagination of idealistic and ambitious young men. Through organization of peasants and workers it laid roots for popular support. It developed a revolutionary fervor that spread its reputation far beyond Canton.

Since the first task of the revolution was the conquest of power, Kuomintang leaders set about creating an army. In 1923 Chiang Kai-shek, one of Dr. Sun's early supporters, who had received the bulk of his military education in four years at the Preparatory Military Academy in Tokyo, was sent to Moscow to study Soviet political and military organization. A few months after his return (in mid-1924) he was put in charge of the newly created Whampoa Military Academy in which he was to train officers for the revolution—and would in the process create an outstanding reputation for himself.

Soviet in form, nationalist in aim, Dr. Sun's government began in 1923 to develop an increasingly promising amalgam of idealism and discipline. Yet the contradictions—the essential incompatibility of Kuomintang and Communist aims—that were in the end to destroy the Chinese Republic were already present in the instrument being forged in Canton to create it.

At Tientsin, when Marshall arrived in 1924, the ambitions of the Kuomintang (soon to be known as the Nationalists) seemed remote. (It is unlikely that Marshall in the beginning even knew who Chiang Kai-shek was or was aware of the existence of a Soviet Military Mission, headed by General Vasili Blücher, which had been sent to southern China in the same year.) The immediate concern of the 15th Infantry was with the confused struggle of the *tuchuns* in the north, particularly the triangular wars among Chang Tso-lin, whose base of power was in Manchuria, Wu P'ei-fu, who dominated the relatively helpless government at Peking, and Fêng Yü-hsiang, called the "Christian

General," whose adroit shifts from one camp to the other effectively kept either Chang or Wu from holding the upper hand. By the middle of 1924 Wu had achieved military dominance of most of China except the tier of three southern provinces and the province of Chekiang on the coast south of Shanghai. Chekiang was in the hands of a *tuchun* who was at the time allied with Chang Tso-lin. In August, a month before Marshall debarked in China from the U.S.A.T. *Thomas* out of Manila, the *tuchun* of Chekiang tangled with his neighbor, the *tuchun* of the province of Kiangsu (in which Shanghai is located). The boss of Kiangsu was an ally of General Wu, and the dispute was soon widened to include war between Wu and Chang Tso-lin. Wu, attempting to block Chang's forces near Jehol northeast of Peking, was forced to flee when his momentary ally, General Fêng, defected and used the opportunity to seize Peking.

As Chang and Wu battled in the north during September and early October, the 15th Infantry stood guard, ready to keep warring factions out of Tientsin, hold the railroad, and defend themselves—all without fighting if they could possibly avoid it. Marshall, almost before he unpacked, put the regiment on special guard duty. His own daily ride for exercise was "converted to an inspection of a four-mile outpost line established three miles south of the compound and in patrolling a little for my own information."⁹ When Fêng seized Peking, Marshall telegraphed Captain Henry H. Dabney, who commanded the company stationed in Tangshan, well up the railroad toward Manchuria, to be ready for a crisis in the next few days. He sent a small reinforcement and put additional guard detachments along the railroad. To hold rolling stock that might be needed in transporting Marines to Peking to strengthen the legation guard, he sent a corporal and five men to the East Station in Tientsin with orders to shoot only in self-defense. For all detachments the deployments were military but the weapons with which finally the defense was to be made were psychological—bluff and persuasion.¹⁰

The testing of the 15th began when Wu's army, deserted by Fêng and under heavy attack by Chang, fell apart and the pieces drifted toward Tientsin. Some stragglers were drawn, as toward

an oasis, to one place in the war-torn country where there were still food and plunder. More came simply because Tientsin was on the line of retreat. The pursued and their pursuers, perhaps amounting to a hundred thousand men altogether in a single week, poured down by rail, steamer, horseback, or on foot.¹¹ The 15th Infantry's job was not to halt but to disarm them. Five outposts were set up where the fleeing soldiers were offered rice and cabbage and tea in exchange for their arms or were persuaded to take the long way around the city. Frequently the troops had to carry out their missions "with guns and knives pointed at their stomachs," but the job was accomplished. There was no shooting and no armed Chinese got loose in the city. Villagers around Tientsin were so grateful for the protection which the regiment thus provided them against potential loot and rape that the following spring they presented to the Americans a white marble memorial "gate," which remained with the regiment until it left China in 1938 and then was set up at Fort Benning. As for Marshall, he wrote an old friend: "I snaffled a nice letter of commendation out of the affair which is worth my three years in China."¹²

In the game of bluff, officers of the 15th Infantry had found more useful than bullets the working knowledge of Chinese picked up in the regimental language school. General Connor, an able diplomat as well as soldier, had established the school shortly after he came to China and had made attendance compulsory for all officers in his command.¹³ Marshall encouraged noncommissioned officers to attend and arranged for the preparation of simple exercises in conversational Chinese which would be useful to soldiers.

Marshall, whose experience with VMI and AEF French had done little to persuade him he was a linguist, had plunged into the intricacies of Chinese on his arrival, determined not only to learn the language but to learn it faster than anyone else. The others had been at it since February 1924—some six months before he got there—but by March of 1925 he was reporting to Pershing that he had caught up. "At my present rate," he wrote, "I should be well ahead of them in another month. Yesterday," he went on, "while conducting a summary court trial [martial],

I drew a Chinese witness who could not speak or understand English. Rather than hold over the case until an interpreter could be secured, I took his testimony in Chinese and did not have very much trouble in handling him." ¹⁴

He was delighted to discover this undeveloped talent, but there were moments of stress when it failed him. The regimental chaplain one day overheard him say something to his Chinese chauffeur. The chauffeur looked blank. Marshall said it again, louder, and then again, and louder still. No comprehension.

"Oh hell," said the student of Chinese, "send my car!" Then, looking up, he saw the chaplain. "You heard?"

"Yes," said the chaplain.

"Will it go all over the Army?"

"Yes, sir," said the chaplain. "It will go all over the Army." ¹⁵

There was, after those first few months of bracing against the gusts of civil war, a period of comparative leisure for Marshall in which he reverted to the role of executive officer, attending to the myriad details necessary to carry into effect the regimental commander's policies. He continued his project of procuring shaggy little Mongolian ponies to mount a regimental detachment of "a sporty-looking cavalry troop," sponsoring horse shows and riding formations until the officers, listed as infantrymen, began to feel, in the words of their regimental poet, that they had joined the "Foot Hussars." ¹⁶

Perhaps Marshall proceeded too much as if he were still in acting command. In any case the 15th's new commanding officer, Colonel Naylor, author of a book on the *Principles of War* which was used by both the American and Japanese armies, proved to be jealous of his prerogatives. Not long after signing in, late in November, he issued a directive narrowly circumscribing the authority of his executive.¹⁷ Marshall had worked with difficult superiors before, and if he felt the strain unduly it is not recorded. Physically he was in good health, heavier by some twelve pounds before the end of his tour, and still an enthusiast for regular and vigorous exercises—his ride in the morning and a couple of hours of squash tennis before dinner in the evening was the usual day's routine. He played, of course, to win. "Squash tennis," he wrote, "is pretty lively, especially when I

undertake to beat these young fellows, which I usually do, but it is not like straight running, and you can pause for a needed breath.”¹⁸

Mrs. Marshall's health was, as always, much less robust, but the years in China were probably the happiest of her married life. They rented large and comfortable quarters on Woodrow Wilson Street near the compound and employed at least five servants. (The regimental commander in 1926 had fifteen. Nearly every officer had one or more.) As was the custom of the Army of that time, they took a paternal interest in the younger officers and their families, displaying the fondness they had always felt for children. Lily saw more of her husband than she had since before the World War, and the household chores were taken off her hands by their “perfect” number one boy, C. H. Hsieh, who twenty years later would get an appreciative letter from the General and enjoy on the strength of it a few moments of reminiscing for the press.¹⁹ There were visitors—some big names and some good friends. Roy Chapman Andrews stopped at the post on one of his trips to the Gobi Desert, gave a lecture there, and donated the proceeds to pay for the carpet of the post chapel which Marshall had encouraged Chaplain Miller to buy on credit.²⁰ Dr. Victor Heiser, health officer in the Philippines at the time Marshall was serving his first Army assignment there, spent a single evening with the Marshalls, talking into the early morning hours about the memories and interests they had in common, including their meeting not so long ago at Governor-General Forbes' home at Naushon. Governor Forbes himself also made a visit.²¹ When Senator Hiram Bingham came through and asked to see the deposed boy emperor, Henry Pu-yi, then living in Tientsin (and later to be the Japanese puppet ruler of Manchukuo), Marshall arranged the interview and produced a newly assigned American major, Joseph W. Stilwell, to act as interpreter.

Despite the convulsions shaking China which constantly threatened to engulf all foreigners there, life in the American compound was as relaxed and pleasant as any Marshall had known in years. Many of the informal parties on the post were sparked by the wit of Major E. Forrest Harding, a man with an

interest in military history and a knack for doggerel, who became one of Marshall's close friends and would serve with him later at Fort Benning. Stimulated by Harding's irreverent verse, Marshall on one occasion wrote one of his own called "Retaliation" and recited it one evening. Mercifully Marshall's only published sally in rhyme, it began:

Night after night we sit abject,
Our good wives sit adoring
While Forrest, Poet Laureate,
Another hit is scoring
A little fun at our expense,
With laughter as a recompense.

And for nine more verses recounted Harding's poetic triumphs and alleged success with the ladies of the post. Harding tactfully had it printed at the end of his own privately circulated collection of regimental verse, *Lays of the Mei-Kuo Ying-P'an* (the Chinese words meaning "American compound").²²

In the autumn of 1925 Tientsin again found itself a precariously neutral island in a turbulent flood of war. The fighting was essentially another round of the battles of the previous year, again involving Chang Tso-lin of Manchuria, Wu P'ei-fu, and General Fêng, the latter playing his old role alternately on both sides. Marshall wrote to Pershing at the end of October: "Out here the pot boils over and appears to grow daily more involved. An American gunboat with Marines is due here today to reinforce our garrison for the defense of the Tientsin concession and this possible port of entry. No one, official Peking or elsewhere, knows just what the present situation is leading to. There are three military leaders now in the field and their possible alignment with or against each other is continuing to be a matter of conjecture. Fighting has started south of this province, but reports are too conflicting to judge of results."²³ For the 15th Infantry the job once more was to try to hold the railroad open from Peking to Tientsin and from Tientsin to Shanhaikwan while keeping Chinese armed forces of all sides out of Tientsin.

When the new troubles moved close to Tientsin, Marshall was taking increased responsibility for the regiment and in the last

week in December actually took command. Colonel Naylor, who had found the opportunities for conviviality in Tientsin irresistible, had been charged by General Connor with neglect of duty during summer and fall. Although the charges were eventually dropped and Naylor's subsequent career not damaged, he was relieved nevertheless. Marshall had inevitably assumed some command duties even before he replaced Naylor, and again commanded the regiment for two months until a new full colonel arrived.²⁴

During most of November and December a *tuchun*²⁵ who professed to be neutral in the struggle between Wu and Chang deployed his forces south of Tientsin, where they fired on Chinese troop trains trying to pass reinforcements to the north to fight against the Manchurian warlord. General Connor and the other commanders now ordered the International Train, with guards furnished by the foreign powers in Tientsin, to make special runs to the Chinese capital and to the sea. Several such trains, carrying the flags of Britain, France, the United States, Japan, and Italy, made the run from Tientsin to Shanhaikwan during November and December but none was able to get through to Peking between the fifth and twenty-fifth of December. As Christmas approached, another Chinese force arrived in the Tientsin area. On December 23, the day Marshall took acting command of his regiment, General Fêng—now fighting against Chang and his allies north of Tientsin—moved south to throw his army against the “neutral” warlord who had been harassing the trains. The maneuver put the 15th Infantry uncomfortably in the middle.²⁶

In the early afternoon of Christmas Eve, General Connor had word from a Chinese official that Fêng's troops had already moved into a part of the former German concession in which the 15th Infantry was quartered and had taken over the police barracks and municipal headquarters. Connor sent Marshall with a platoon of men to demand that the Chinese leave. Marshall proceeded to the police barracks, which he entered with Captain Frank R. Hayne and an orderly, and informed the Chinese officer in command that in conformity with treaty regulations Chinese were forbidden to come armed into the area. He asked

that they surrender their arms and leave. The Chinese, after only a few moments' hesitation, complied. Marshall was back with his mission accomplished less than an hour and a half after the news of the Chinese "invasion" had been received.²⁷

Eager as most of the Chinese were to avoid trouble with the foreigners, each confrontation was fused for explosion. The avoidance of trouble depended sometimes on the coolness and nerve of noncommissioned officers like Sergeant William Hambrick, who, in charge of one of the outposts, turned aside considerable bodies of armed Chinese troops; sometimes on junior officers like Captain William B. Tuttle, regimental adjutant. On Christmas Day, Tuttle with nine enlisted men moved out in a truck to confront some five thousand Chinese who had crossed the Hai Ho and entered the American defense sector. As Tuttle's truck approached, the Chinese, who were marching in column, deployed with fixed bayonets and kept coming. Tuttle dismounted, leaving his nine men boldly on guard against the advancing five thousand, and walked forward alone. Good-looking, athletic, with a cavalryman's ease and toughness, he took charge at once, giving in Chinese the order to halt. The Chinese halted. One of their officers came forward. For a considerable time, while the men waited on either side, the two officers tested each other. That prolonged discussion was a strain on Captain Tuttle's command of the language but his nerve held. The Chinese at last agreed to withdraw. Tuttle was formally commended by Colonel Marshall and informally immortalized by Major Harding in a doggerel epic, "Tuttulius at the Dike."²⁸

These displays of courage and cool judgment were creditable to the individuals and gratifying to the command, but they underlined the dangerous anomalies of the 15th Infantry's position. In the game of bluff General Connor was impressed in particular with two weaknesses in the American hand: although the 15th Infantry, like the other contingents of foreign troops in Tientsin, had an assigned defense sector, it did not have a concession into which to withdraw in case of trouble; second, it was all too obvious that the responsibility for practical decisions for or against armed clashes with the Chinese rested on a comparatively large number of junior officers and noncoms, any one of

whom might lose his head or act tough for fear of being thought cowardly by his fellows. These weaknesses so impressed Connor that he proposed that American ground troops be pulled out and the defense of the area left to the Navy unless the Army was given a specific concession and its position strengthened. Although his recommendation was not accepted, all the foreign powers, as the civil war continued, came to confine themselves narrowly to the defense of their own nationals.²⁹

Before the new year was far along, the Tientsin area had become quiet again and remained so during most of 1926. In March, Colonel Isaac Newell arrived to take command of the 15th. But Newell, an easygoing Georgian winding up his Army career, was content to leave the details of running the regiment to the executive who had already amply demonstrated his competence. There was a quip in the regiment that "let George do it" was born in Tientsin at that time.

What George did for the most part was the work common to regimental commands everywhere. To help keep his men out of the clutches of "cheap liquor and cheaper women"—the 15th for years led the Army in venereal-disease rate³⁰—he worked to develop the athletic and recreation facilities. He encouraged the presentation of amateur shows, pressing into service any officer who showed aptitude for organizing such programs. He backed the chaplain's program for setting up a recreation room for the soldiers and conveniently looked the other way when the chaplain arranged a comfortable place for some of the old-timers to do their gambling. So much pressure was put on company commanders to keep down the venereal-disease rates in their units that some provided free rickshas to bring back the men from bars at closing time.

At Nan Ta Su, some hundred and seventy-five miles northeast of Tientsin near Shanhaikwan, the point at which the Great Wall enters the sea, the regiment in 1924 had built a range firing camp. Marshall undertook to improve the living conditions there so that it might be used more widely as a combined training and recreation area. The tents were fixed up to accommodate families, and units were sent in turn to the camp during the summer on training assignment, with time off for swimming, sight-

seeing, and drinking beer at "Denny's Dump." Marshall took his turn with other regimental officers in commanding the summer camp and carrying out the training. These were all small matters in contrast to the great swirling chaos of China in revolution, yet in fact they were the matters in which the colonel was deeply and nearly continuously involved, and on which the affairs of China only impinged now and then. But it was service with troops and he was satisfied.

A young lieutenant, assigned as language officer in Peking, visited Nan Ta Su in the summer of 1925 and was dismayed to find a colonel who he knew had been an important figure in the Army in the war here condescending to instruct sergeants and corporals in the simplest routine of training. "It seemed," the lieutenant recalled much later, "to be a great comedown, and I began to wonder what the Army held for me [when] almost ten years after a great war . . . one of its large figures was busily engaged in teaching little groups of eight men how to handle themselves on the field. Secondly, I think I was a little surprised that he didn't feel that sort of thing beneath him. . . . It was a considerable time afterwards that I realized that that was really part of the essence of George Marshall, that basically when he thinks there is something that should be done . . . he follows it right down. . . . It was only, as I say, after I had been there some time that it really began to dawn on me that . . . this is a strength and not a weakness that he's showing." ³¹

At about the same time that Colonel Newell arrived, General Connor was replaced as head of the United States Army Forces in China by Brigadier General J. C. Castner, a change disruptive of headquarters and regimental routine. Castner was of that irritating breed of military men who pride themselves on being simple, rough, and blunt old soldiers. A Rutgers graduate with an excellent record in World War I, he affected a private's unpressed trousers and rumpled, sweaty shirt and was convinced that the way to turn out a well-disciplined, rugged command was by hard drill and long hikes, the latter led by himself at a pace that forced the men at the end of the column to run most of the time. (He proudly reported to the Chief of Staff at Washington after one hike that he had sweated thousands of pounds of fat off

his command) Castner's bluntness caused something of an international stir when, on being greeted at a reception by the wife of a British official with a polite "delighted-to-meet-you," he replied, "Lady, tie that bull outside."³² In regimental affairs Castner insisted on intervening in the smallest details. Marshall decided to try a mixture of diplomacy and strict adherence to military protocol. On Castner's arrival Marshall called in Lieutenant McCammon of the regimental staff, informed him that the new CO was as interested in hunting as in hiking, and gave McCammon the permanent assignment of keeping the general happy. Marshall himself would see Castner punctiliously every morning, salute, and ask for instructions. But he declined all invitations "to sit down and chat." If there was nothing more, sir, he would say, he must return to his duties. So he made it difficult for the general to impose and impossible for him to criticize.³³ The tactic worked: Castner gave him highest ratings at the end of his service in China.

In both North and South China the civil war continued in 1926. In the north shifting alliances of the warlords continued to frustrate any conclusion. By the spring of the year the Peking government, never strong, had collapsed. Weary and endless, these struggles among Chang and Wu and Fêng and their fickle provincial allies revealed the absence of a nation but did nothing to create one. It was in the south that a force less feudal and more hopefully national was being shaped. Early in the previous year Dr. Sun Yat-sen had come north to confer with the northern warlords in a vain effort to put together a coalition that might conceivably unite the country. Already ill, Sun died in Peking in March 1925. His death curiously gave new life to his cause, for in legend he began to be remade into the ideal leader and symbol of Chinese nationalism that he had never been able to make of himself in life. His party meanwhile fell into the hands of living leaders more effective in grasping power than he. At first there were two: Borodin and Chiang Kai-shek. They had openly split by the beginning of 1926, but the differences and antagonism between Communists and anti-Communist Nationalists within the Kuomintang were patched over temporarily pending the conquest of power. Chiang set about that early in 1926. He

won the southern provinces in succession and then began to carry out Dr. Sun's long dream of the "Northern Expedition." Military success was swift, and by the end of the year Chiang's armies were threatening Shanghai. Marshall at that time reported to Pershing the uneasiness of the foreign diplomats: "Officials in Peking have their wind up pretty badly, fearing the southern part will leap into control of North China any month, through successes in the field and treachery on the part of leaders in this section. They fear that the Kuomintang (Southerners) will sweep into power and calmly disregard all treaty stipulations as to concessions and extraterritoriality, in the enthusiasm of conquest and in the belief that the Powers are really unwilling to risk actual fighting over the question."⁸⁴

The Kuomintang had, of course, made no secret of its wish to kick the foreigners out of China as quickly and with as little ceremony as possible. Although this was necessarily a promise made by every Chinese leader who sought popular support, the Nationalists had been most militant about it. Furthermore, despite Chiang's obvious disagreement with the Communists, the whole southern movement remained frighteningly Red in the eyes of most foreign observers.

Marshall himself was not inclined to oversimplify the issues or the problems for the future, which some twenty years later would fall in part into his lap. "How the Powers should deal with China," he continued in his letter to Pershing, "is a question almost impossible to answer. There has been so much wrongdoing on both sides, so much of shady transaction between a single power and a single party; there is so much of bitter hatred in the hearts of these people and so much of important business interests involved, that a normal solution can never be found. It will be some form of an evolution, we can only hope that sufficient tact will be displayed by foreigners to avoid violent phases during the trying period that is approaching."

This was the time—at the end of 1926—that the split between Chiang and the Communists headed for a showdown. Borodin shifted the Kuomintang capital from Canton to Hankow, ignoring Chiang's demands that it be set up at Chiang's own base in Nanchang. From that time on, relations between the two leaders

became increasingly strained until, in March 1927, while Chiang was occupying Shanghai, the Hankow government declared that he was deposed from his party position. Chiang responded by establishing his own government at Nanking.

For three and a half years Borodin had been playing a careful game, supporting native Chinese aspirations (which up to the point of the victory of the revolution coincided with Communist purposes) and avoiding any show of the ultimate Soviet aim to subvert and dominate. Now his careful work was suddenly undone. In April a raid by agents of the Manchurian warlord, Chang Tso-lin, on the Soviet Embassy in Peking uncovered evidence that the Communists were planning to take over the Kuomintang. That dropped Borodin's mask a little and made his position more difficult. In June, Stalin sent new and explicit instructions to Borodin to begin at once the communization of China, and these instructions were revealed by the Indian Communist M. N. Roy to a native leftist leader. It was a challenge the Chinese could not ignore. In July, under pressure of disillusioned members of the Chinese left wing of the Kuomintang, Borodin, General Blücher (the Soviet military adviser), and other Moscow agents were forced to leave the country. With their departure the position of the Chinese Communists became untenable and they retired to organize a fresh base of power among the peasantry. Chiang was left in control of the Nationalist movement. Within a year he had captured Peking and in October 1928 formally established the National Government in Nanking.

The direction of these events was clear enough, though they had not been consummated, when the Marshalls sailed home in May 1927. There is no evidence that Marshall formed, before he left, any firm ideas about Chiang himself, though he appears to have shared the typical western concern over the threats of radicalism inherent in the Kuomintang bid to conquer the country. By the time Chiang reached Peking the foreign powers had increased their troop strength in China from the 4800 stationed there in midsummer 1926 to 18,000. Included in that figure were 936 United States Army and 4965 United States Marines.³⁵ Very shortly after Marshall left China, Major Stilwell reported back to General Castner the results of a three-week observation trip to the eastern and southern armies of General

Chiang. Stilwell's views, with which Marshall certainly became familiar when Stilwell joined him at Benning, were considerably more sympathetic to Chiang. He had found the Nationalist armies badly fed and poorly equipped but imbued with faith in their cause, strongly anti-foreign, led by young student officers convinced they could beat any European army in the field.³⁶

Marshall in his three years at Tientsin had at best a glimpse of the beginning of China's long agony. In the manner of Army careers he now moved away from it. He was to go back to Washington to lecture at the Army War College. It was not an assignment he especially relished (he had turned down five previous requests to teach there); he would have preferred to instruct at the Infantry School at Benning, which had asked for him in 1924 and 1925 when he was not available. When the request was not repeated in 1926 he accepted General Hanson Ely's invitation to come to the War College.³⁷ Mrs. Marshall was pleased with the assignment. Whether or not she encouraged him to accept it, she was "radiant over the idea of a beautiful house at Washington Barracks." She had enough Chinese rugs, lacquers, screens, and brocades to furnish a large place, and she came back looking forward eagerly to setting up housekeeping in style and showing off the acquisitions of her "three-years' shopping trip."³⁸ They got back to Washington in May or June of 1927, ahead of their household furnishings, and while waiting for them stayed in the apartment of their old friends the Palmers.

In August, Mrs. Marshall became ill. Her old heart condition became seriously aggravated by a diseased thyroid gland and she went to Walter Reed Hospital for a medical examination. An operation was required, but she was so weak that Marshall took her home in an effort to build up her strength for this ordeal. "The joy of her new house, the peace and quiet, did a great deal for her," and she soon wrote General Pershing that she was going back to the hospital where she expected to remain for a long time. "The heart is a slow thing to improve," she added, "but I pray I may be back in my own house at the War College before long."³⁹

The operation on August 22 was long and extremely serious. As soon as she was able in early September, she wrote her "Aunt Lottie" Coles that she felt she had been given back her life, but

that it was a matter of life and death for her to have complete rest and quiet. In this period of slow and painful recovery she leaned heavily on her husband, who spent on her all the time he could spare from his classes at the War College, which had begun early in September. She told her Aunt: "George is so *wonderful* and helps me so. He puts heart and strength in me." ⁴⁰

Despite her slow recovery she thought she could leave the hospital soon for home, where she expected to be confined to bed until Christmas. The doctor apparently told her on September 15 that she could go home the next day. She sat at her desk to write the good news to her mother. But suddenly the pen fell from her hand and she slumped over the unfinished note.⁴¹

It was a little after nine in the morning. Colonel Marshall had just begun his lecture when a guard entered to call him to the telephone. They left together. The guard stood by while Colonel Marshall took the call. "When Colonel Marshall answered the call," he said afterward, "he spoke for a moment over the phone, then put his head on his arms on the desk in deep grief. I asked if I could do anything for him, and he replied, 'No, Mr. Throckmorton, I just had word my wife, who was to join me here today, has just died.' " ⁴²

Marshall's grief at Lily's death measured the strength and exclusiveness of his attachment to her. Pershing, who in one tragic evening in 1915 had lost his wife and three of his four children in a fire, wrote: "No one knows better than I what such a bereavement means and my heart goes out to you very fully at this crisis in your life. It is at such moments that we realize that our reliance must be placed in the Father who rules us all." Marshall replied: "The truth is, the thought of all you had endured gave me heart and hope. But twenty-six years of most intimate companionship, something I have known since I was a mere boy, leaves me lost in my best effort to adjust myself to future prospects in life. If I had been given to club life or other intimacies with men outside of athletic diversions, or if there was a campaign or other pressing duty demanding a concentrated effort, then I think I should do better. However, I will find a way." ⁴³

His way would be through hard work, which was to yield five of his most constructive years in the Army.