



Evans F. Carlson on China at War, 1937-1941

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING



K265.06
Q151

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Hugh Deane, Editor



ADD83/01

Foreign Languages Press



20027922

First published by China and Us Publications,
New York, USA 1993.

Home Page:

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ISBN 7-119-03535-5

Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2004

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

PREFACE

Huang Hua

It is a great honor for me to write a preface for the new, PFS (China Society for People's Friendship Studies) 50-book series under the general title of *Light on China*. All these books were written in English by journalistic and other eyewitnesses of the events described. I have read many of them over the seven decades since my student days at Yenching University. With some of the outstanding authors in this series I have ties of personal friendship, mutual regard, and warm memories dating from before the Chinese people's Liberation in 1949.

Looking back and forward, I am convinced that China is pursuing the right course in building a strong and prosperous country in a rapidly changing world with its complex and sometimes volatile developments.

The books in this series cover a span of some 150 years, from the mid 19th to the early 21st century. The numerous events in China, the sufferings and struggles of the Chinese people, their history and culture, and their dreams and aspirations were written by foreign observers animated by the spirit of friendship, equality and cooperation. Owing to

copyright matters and other difficulties, not all eligible books have as yet been included.

The founder of the first Chinese republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen wrote in his Testament in 1925, “For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of the people’s revolution with but one end in view: the elevation of China to a position of freedom and equality among the nations. My experiences during those forty years have convinced me that to attain this goal we must bring about an awakening of our own people and ally ourselves in common struggle with those people of the world who regard us as equals.”

Chairman Mao Zedong declared, at the triumphal founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, “The Chinese people have stood up.” Today, having passed its 53rd anniversary, we see the vast forward strides that have been taken, and note that many more remain to be made.

Many foreign observers have traced and reported the real historical movement of modern China, that is: from humiliation — through struggle — to victory. Seeking understanding and friendship with the Chinese people, their insight and perspective were in basic harmony with the real developments in China. But there have been others who viewed China and the Chinese people through glasses tinted by hostile prejudice or ignorance and have invariably made irrelevant observations that could not stand the test of time. This needs to be better understood by young people and students, at home and abroad. The PFS series *Light on China* can help them gain an overview of what went before, is happening now, and will emerge in the future.

Young students in China can additionally benefit from these works by seeing how foreign journalists and authors use

fluent English to record and present historical, philosophical, and socio-political issues and choices in China. For millions of students in China, English has become a compulsory second language. These texts will also have many-sided usefulness in conveying knowledge of our country to other peoples.

Students abroad, on their part, may be helped by the example of warm, direct accounts and impressions of China presented by their elders in the language that most readily reaches them.

Above all, this timely and needed series should help build bridges of friendship and mutual understanding. Good books long out of print will be brought back to strengthen the edifice.

My hearty thanks and congratulations go first to ex-Premier Zhu Rongji, who has been an effective supporter of this new, PFS series. They go to all engaged in this worthy project, the Foreign Languages Press, our China Society for People's Friendship Studies, and others who have given their efforts and cooperation.

Chairman Mao Zedong has written: "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently. The world rolls on, time presses. Ten thousand years are too long. Seize the day, seize the hour."

The hour has come for making these books available to young people in China and abroad whose destiny is to build a better world together. Let this series add a small brick to that structure.

Beijing, Autumn 2003

*So well thy words become thee
as thy wounds;
They smack of honor both...*

Edgar Snow thus dedicated *People on Our Side* to Carlson

Notes of the Editor

The severest critics of the China of today go so far as to argue that the Chinese revolution was wrong from the beginning and never should have happened. That is a mistaken extrapolation. The Chinese revolution was a historical necessity, a popularly supported overthrow of a moribund, corrupt, reactionary regime. Carlson's letters to President Roosevelt remind us of this.

Not everything was as close to perfection in north China as Carlson thought. He was carried away. But he was a professional, knowing soldier and he asked the proper questions and saw for himself as much as he could. His reports are an important contribution to our understanding of the early phase of the Japanese invasion.

Carlson's autobiographical conversation with Helen Foster Snow in 1940 (the portions related to China are excerpted from the whole) is published here for the first time. It, the three letters to Edgar Snow, Agnes Smedley's memorial address and the other inclusions complement

the letters to FDR.

Not all the letters are in the Roosevelt library at Hyde Park and efforts to locate those missing have been in vain so far. Fortunately the letters reporting Carlson's travels in north China are in place.

Carlson used the Wade-Giles system for rendering Chinese names (more or less). The modern pinyin version of the most important of them is listed at the end of the text.

Dr. Charles M. Grossman, chairman of the Evans F. Carlson Friends of the People's Republic of China, supplied the splendid photos taken by Sa Fi in north China and was helpful in many ways.

The letters to President Roosevelt and Carlson on the New Fourth Army first appeared in the *U.S.-China Review*, the quarterly publication of the U.S.-China People's Friendship Association.

Hugh Deane
August, 1993

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Carlson on Himself

In the summer of 1940 Edgar and Helen Snow, Rewi Alley and Carlson got together for much needed rest and conversation at a cottage in Baguio, the Philippines—the first and last reunion of the Gung Ho Kids, Helen Snow called it.

Helen Snow thought she might write Carlson's biography and to that end she got him to sketch his life for her. Michael Blankfort asked for the text when he was writing The Big Yankee, 1947, but she couldn't find it. "I had arrived from the Far East with 44 trunks. Mostly full of papers and files. I was never able to find anything when I looked for it," she wrote in a preface to the autobiography written when she located it much later.

Carlson's account of his early China experience follows.

... It was decided to send the regiment (the Fourth Marines) to China so I went to Shanghai, arriving in February, 1927. I was Battalion Operations Officer and

helped make plans for the defense of Shanghai.

Six months later, as we had no regularly organized intelligence service, I decided to organize one. I was detailed as Regimental Intelligence Officer of the Fourth Marines—I was the only one. I didn't know anything about intelligence but I went ahead just the same. I now became interested in China for the first time. The Kuomintang had its committee system and was organizing a government in Nanking in 1928. My job was to interpret the situation in China for headquarters in Washington. From 1927 to 1929 I studied the political developments and tried to learn what the Kuomintang was trying to do in the way of government. This started me on the road to political thinking.

I attended the burial of Sun Yat-sen as a member of Admiral (Mark L.) Bristol's staff in June, 1929. Then I went home in September, 1929.

(Carlson served in Nicaragua until 1933, fighting Sandino's guerrillas—bandits to him. There he began to think of and apply principles of justice and fairness in dealing with Nicaraguans and the enlisted men.)

Before leaving Nicaragua I had had a letter from Colonel Kilgore, head of the Fourth Marines, asking me to come as Intelligence Officer again. One month after the Nicaragua affair was over, I was on my way to Shanghai ... When Colonel Kilgore died in May, I felt my obligation was over so I requested transfer to the

American Legation Guard in Peking as adjutant. I wanted to study Chinese.

During my three years at Shanghai I had followed current political and military developments in China. Now I wanted to study the history and cultural phases. My wife (Etelles Sawyer Carlson) and I were in Peking from the middle of 1933 to 1935.

In Peking I was editor of the *Legation Guard News*. Before this it had been just gossip copied from a magazine in the States. I used it to change the whole attitude of the five hundred Legation Guards. They were indifferent or antagonistic to the Chinese. China was only a post. They got drunk and pushed the Chinese off the streets. Every day we had to have men picked up for altercations. I felt this could be changed through "ethical indoctrination" and education.

I worked this phrase—"ethical indoctrination" out myself and used it first in Peking ...

The *News* was educational. It described such things as street signs and the Altar of Heaven and related stories from Chinese history. The editorial was 250 words and I always tried to point a moral to change the attitude of the men toward the Chinese—to make them see the Chinese as human beings, different but real.

Colonel Rixey agreed with this program. He gave me permission to start the Legation Guard Language School for the men. Ninety registered and fifty stuck it out. The

course taught 400 characters and how to romanize any character. It took about a year. I was director ... I studied Chinese an hour a day between seven and eight in the morning with a tutor two years. I learned five or six hundred characters and could speak the language on trips.

This school showed the importance of education to men. Within three months the men on "office hours" offense dropped to three or four a week. I gave lectures on various subjects. The whole attitude of the Guard changed. I had the men box with Chinese and they took pride in talking with the coolies in their own language. They fraternized with the Chinese for the first time. In six months there were no offenses. This had never happened before. I thought of the concept, though Rixey helped. Shanghai did the same afterward.

I went home in 1935 as aide to Major General Charles H. Lyman at Quantico. I also wanted a chance to pull together my observations on China and to gain knowledge of the legal background of American relations with China. I went to George Washington University for a seminar in International Law and International Relations. This was night school between eight and ten, with Professor Hill as the authority. I wrote three theses and got a B at the end.

My first thesis was on the legal basis for the presence of foreign military and naval forces in China. I discovered that the only legal basis for foreign warships was

the clause in the 1860 treaty with Britain providing for pursuit of pirates.

One thesis was on Japanese expansion in Eastern Asia, which I traced back to Hideyoshi. Another was on the use of Marines to support American diplomacy in China.

By this time I had proved that the concessions and extraterritoriality and the general foreign attitude were imperialistic. This I recognized gradually from Nicaragua to now.

I sold the thesis on legality to the *Naval Institute Proceedings* and the one on the Marines to the *Marine Corps Gazette*.

Later in Shanghai I wrote book reviews and editorials for the *China Weekly Review* and J.B. Powell—these were anonymous.

(In January 1935 Carlson was promoted to captain. That autumn he went to Warm Springs to organize a Marine Detachment to guard President Roosevelt, beginning what became a personal friendship with FDR. In 1936 Carlson attended Marine Corps School and the next year returned to Warm Springs to guard the President. Roosevelt never had any other guard but him.)

I wanted to specialize on China so I planned to go back and be a language officer. This was approved and I sailed from Seattle on July 31, 1937. The Shanghai Incident (July 24) occurred while I was at sea. I had expected

the war in China for some time and the time seemed ripe now.

I had been selected as a major by the Board in December, 1936, but was not appointed, as I had to wait to move up on the seniority list. My title was Attache for Language Study but actually I was Assistant Naval Attache.

I landed in Shanghai on August 18th, four days after the battle started and left Shanghai on November 19, 1937, one week after the battle ended. I went to Nanking, Hankow and Sian in Shensi and on to Shansi. This first trip was completed when I returned to Hankow on March 1, 1938. I walked and rode a thousand miles.

When I had dinner with Ambassador (Nelson T.) Johnson and Jimmy McHugh and others, the toasts were all to Chiang Kai-shek and his side. I proposed a toast to Old Hundred Names, the common people, who are bearing the support of the war. There was silence but they drank. On my last trip to Hankow I had dinner with Johnson and he toasted Old Hundred Names.

(Carlson was due for retirement on August 27, 1940 but resigned from the Marine Corps on April 30, 1939 at Hankow, forfeiting a \$300 pension. He was reacting to the Navy Department's criticisms of press accounts of his North China experience and views and he had strong feelings about U.S. policy and China realities and wished to be free to speak and act.)

I went to the Taierchuang battlefield at the end of March and was there for the victory on April 6th or 7th. At the end of April I began my trip to Suiyuan and Shantung, covering 1,500 miles.

I had a close escape with the Eighth Route Army. Two Japanese garrisons were fifteen miles apart and we were to go midway between them in the morning. But a guide double-crossed us and we came out behind a line of trees and saw the Japanese garrison a mile and a half away. But the Japanese were not alert. We followed the low places and got through.

Moving fast is a good idea. The Eighth Route Army is the fastest marching army in the world. It goes at most sixty or seventy miles, the average being thirty to thirty-five miles. The average in the American army is eighteen to twenty miles.

All the time I was with the Eighth Route Army I thought of the parallel with the American Revolution and I remembered my ancestor who fought in it. I could never think myself behind him in courage or enterprise.

In 1927 in Shanghai I did not see the massacre but I heard it. I didn't understand this then. I thought about it but had the authoritarian idea—they were rebels against constituted authority. Chinese politics just looked like a mess. When I became intelligence officer in the fall, I thought the Communists in Kiangsi were only bandits. I believed the Kuomintang stories then.