To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Joseph Pride Distretti entitled "The American Military and Naval Attachés and the Sino-Japanese War: 1937-38." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in College Teaching, with a major in History.

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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

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Graduate Studies and Research

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THE AMERICAN MILITARY AND NAVAL ATTACHÉS AND THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR: 1937-38

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts in College Teaching

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Joseph Pride Distretti

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3051816

DEDICATION

To the men of the 26th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), who between January and April 1968, held the fortress of KHE SANH. And especially to my brother Marines, who made the supreme sacrifice. Your death shall not be forgotten.

> But we . . . shall we remember:
> We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
> For he to-day that shed his blood with me
> Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
> This day shall gentle his condition.
>
> Henry V, Act IV, sc. iii

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To my wife Ann, who has spent countless hours editing and correcting the numerous drafts of this thesis. If not for her love and help, in the final analysis, I could not have completed this project.

And to Colin Muir, because his name appears nowhere else.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to provide a measure of insight into the perceptual change of the American Military and Naval Attachés toward the Sino-Japanese War in 1937-38. By examining the intelligence reports of the military and naval attachés in the field in China during this period a further understanding of the evolution of American policy toward the two combatant nations will be realized. Reliance is placed upon the Records of the Department of State, the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Military Intelligence Division, the Franklin Roosevelt Papers, and the papers of the Ambassador to China, Nelson T. Johnson, to show the attitudes of the attaché groups toward the East Asian War.

By August of 1938, both the Military and Naval Attaché groups came to agree that the Japanese could not win the war with China. The efforts of these men were, on the whole, competent and professional. In the opinion of the author, they provided a timely and realistic picture of the military and often political situations in wartime China. Each group evaluated the conflict in terms, military doctrines, and philosophies of its respective service. The military attachés chose to concentrate on the more traditional elements of warfare: General and Divisional Staff operations, whereas the Navy-Marine Corps personnel tended to focus on

irregular and guerrilla warfare efforts. The two attaché groups perceptions of the war, when taken together, offer an unusual and valuable insight into the nature of the war.

The impact of the intelligence data provided by these attaché units on military, naval, and foreign policy decisions has not yet been assessed. Further study of the interaction between the intelligence and war plans divisions of both the Army and Navy, the Department of State, the president and his close advisors is necessary to understand the importance of the work of the attaché groups in the formulation of American-East Asian policy in the years before Pearl Harbor.

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INTRODUCTION

American involvement in Asian affairs has, in recent years, caused a deep division in American society. In the last thirty years, Americans have fought two separate but closely related wars on the Asian mainland. When time is taken to reflect on the expenditure of blood and treasure, a natural question arises: why? The answer is not easily forthcoming. It lies intertwined in a complex series of events, circumstances, and personalities. Partial answers can be found in the idea of American omnipotence; or the result of sheer stupidity and ignorance. Nevertheless, for the serious student of American-East Asian relations, the task of bringing order out of chaos continues with the ultimate objective of answering the simple question "why." The task is not easy nor will a completely satisfactory answer ever be forthcoming.

The United States has had serious interests in East Asia since shortly after its independence when the first sustained commercial ventures were undertaken. The Treaty of Wangsia, in 1844, "opened" China to American interests and also unleashed a torrent of increasing American involvement in Chinese affairs that only ended in 1949. While the official American policy underwent modification from time to time, the direction and purpose remained constant, equal

access to commercial opportunity. The most serious threat to the policy resulted from the Sino-Japanese conflict of 1937-41. As a result, American policy managers were forced, really for the first time, to alter the nature and focus of the American policy toward East Asia. The result of this alteration was a new policy direction and increased involvement in the politics of the Asian states.

Most serious historical inquiry into the changing nature of American-East Asian policy in the late 1930's focused on the traditional institutional framework of policy managers in the executive branch of government. The most notable examples of this type of study are Dorothy Borg's *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis*,[1] and Hebert Feis's *The Road to Pearl Harbor*.[2] Both of these pioneering works concentrate on the decision-making process of the executive branch of government. These works offer valuable insight into the perceptions and beliefs of the policy planning group and how it sought to steer the United States through the worsening Asian storm.

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[1]Dorothy Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938: From the Manchurian Incident through the Initial Stage of the Undeclared Sino-Japanese War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

[2]Herbert Feis, *The Road to Pearl Harbor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950).

One problem with these works is that they give the impression that policy decisions were made in an information vacuum in Washington. Both authors do not venture outside the traditional policy-making institutions, the State Department (down to the ambassadorial level), the White House, and to some extent the Treasury Department. What is lacking in these studies is an attempt to explore the influence, if any, of nontraditional institutions on the development of policy.

To some degree this problem was alleviated in 1969, as a result of a binational conference held at Lake Kawaguchi, Japan. At this meeting, scholars from Japan and the United States sought to provide a holistic, comparative approach to the breakdown in American-Japanese relations. Edited by Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto, and published as *Pearl Harbor as History*, this study provided numerous new institutional approaches to the breakdown of relations between the two countries.[3]

Two of the most significant new approaches were taken by Russell Weigley and Waldo Heinrichs on the American aspect of the breakdown. Weigley's "The Role of the War Department and the Army" explored the perceptions and attitudes of the War Department's War Plans Division toward the rapidly

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[3]Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto, eds., *Pearl Harbor as History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).

changing situation in the Far East. Weigley contends that the Army itself refused to meddle in policy formation in the 1930's, thus permitting "the foreign policy of the United States to become inconsistent with its military capabilities. . . ."[4] Waldo Heinrichs, on the other hand, in his "The Role of the Navy Department," presented the idea of a Navy Department more involved and in tune with policy formation. "In the national policy deliberations and decisions in which it [Navy] played a part, it had a firming influence . . . making traditional Far Eastern policies somewhat more dogmatic and absolute." According to Heinrichs, the Navy did not influence policy direction as it did the variables of policy choice; it weakened "options involving settlement with concessions and [reinforced] those implying resistance."[5]

Another area of contribution to historical study that the Lake Kawaguchi Conference made was an exploration of the views and influence that the American Embassy in Tokyo had upon policy. Akira Iriye, in the "Role of the United States Embassy in Tokyo," explores how seriously the embassy's interpretations of events and proposals for policy were taken

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[4]Russell Weigly, "The Role of the War Department and the Army," in ibid., p. 167.

[5]Waldo Heinrichs, "The Role of the Navy Department," in ibid., p. 211.

by the policy managers in Washington.[6] Iriye concludes that the Embassy played a small part in the unfolding drama before Pearl Harbor. In essence, Iriye maintains that policy formation and influence upon the direction of policy was confined, much as Borg and Feis contend, to Washington and the traditional policy designers.

The Lake Kawaguchi Papers, as novel and insightful as they are, concentrate on American-Japanese relations to the almost total exclusion of the China problem. It is Japan in China that presents the nexus in the disintegration of American-Japanese relations before 1940. Unfortunately, historical scholarship has not produced the range of inquiries into the roles of subunits of government on Sino-American relations as the Lake Kawaguchi Conference did on Japanese-American relations.

Recent inquiries into the development of Sino-American relations have continued to be elitist and traditional in nature. Another deficient area in this field of study is that of the time reference. Little concentration exists on the development of relations in the 1930's as a unit; rather most work focuses upon the more immediate World War II period. Michael Schaller's recent study, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-45*, is an example of the latter type of

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[6]Akira Iriye, "The Role of the United States Embassy in Tokyo," in ibid., p. 125.

inquiry.[7] Robert Dallek's *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945*, is an example of the former type study.[8] Although Dallek's study is elitist, he does not confine himself solely to American-East Asian relations, but presents a comprehensive view of the Roosevelt years.

If one of the objectives of American-East Asian scholarship is to determine why an impasse developed in late 1941 which resulted in an attack on Pearl Harbor, then a comprehensive understanding of Chinese-Japanese-American relations needs to be written. Before such a task can be undertaken, a series of subunit studies, similar in scope to the Lake Kawaguchi papers, is needed for Sino-American relations prior to 1941.

This study focuses upon the attaché units that were attached to the American Embassy in China. This aspect has been selected for study because of the dual function of their role in the embassy. The period from July 1937 to late November 1938, represents a crucial time not only for the Chinese but also for the American government and its policy toward that conflict. Focusing upon the attachés will provide insight into how professional military men

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[7]Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

[8]Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

perceived the conflict. By so doing, an added link in the information network between China and Washington will be explored. The attachés provided intelligence not only to their respective service staffs in Washington but also to the Ambassador and eventually to the State Department.

Attaché perceptions of the military and political aspects of the Chinese war provide added insight into that conflict. How did the attachés perceive the war? What was the nature of the reports that emanated from China? What view did the attachés hold with respect to the Chinese Army? Could it defend China against Japanese penetration? Could the multifactional Chinese political groups be consolidated against a common foe? How were the Chinese communists viewed? Finally, what were the attachés' attitudes toward guerrilla war that raged behind the lines?

This study, however, has its limitations. First, it deals exclusively with events in China; Washington does not enter the picture. The reason for this is that the attachés were the actors in the drama. Washington and the effects of their reports are a totally different topic, worth additional study. To undertake a study where the attaché influence is traced among State, War, Navy Departments and the White House goes beyond the intent of this study. Secondly, to undertake such a study would possibly require a comparative approach between the American attaché units in China and Japan. This

approach, though necessary, was beyond the original purpose of the writer. While this study does not claim to be definitive, it is a beginning for a new approach to Sino-American relations in the immediate period before Pearl Harbor.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

Before one can evaluate the job done by the attachés, it is necessary to understand the military history of the Sino-Japanese War during 1937 and 1938 and be familiar with the background of the various attachés. Knowledge of the course of the war is important because the attachés' perception of who was winning or losing colored their analysis. Understanding something about their background is vital because their prejudices and sympathies so colored their reports that reference to the reports separated from the men who made them would be meaningless. With this background it is then possible to discern the fundamental philosophical divisions between the Army and the Navy-Marine Corps approach to the Sino-Japanese War.

The event which shattered the fragile peace between Nanking and Tokyo came on the night of July 7-8. The actual perpetrator of the incident at the Marco Polo Bridge (also known as the Lukouchiao Railroad Bridge) may never be known; yet it is still widely accepted that Japan was responsible for initiating the conflict.

Japanese troops had held field exercises at the Marco Polo Bridge, which was fifteen miles southwest of Peiping (Peking), for about two weeks prior to the incident. The

conflict resulted when the Japanese detachment discovered one of its members missing. After requesting to search inside the walled town of Wanping for the missing man, and being refused by the local Chinese garrison commander, the Japanese opened fire on the town.[1]

Reaction to the incident by members of the general American community in China was divided. Some members claimed that the incident was only a minor flare-up that would die out as quickly as it had begun; others "maintained for months that if one did not accept this latest incident as the beginning of a war, it would all blow over in time. . . ."[2] The American Ambassador to China, Nelson T. Johnson, sharply rebuked one official observer for using the term "Sino-Japanese War" in a report. Others took a more realistic view of the events. The fact that Japan had rushed troops into North China appeared to one observer that Japan intended to gain something from the action; how much and in what manner was left in question. Whether or not China would resist was still open to speculation in the

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[1]Nelson Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, July 8, 1937, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan: 1931-1941* (2 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), I, p. 313; Frank Dorn, *The Sino-Japanese War, 1937-41: From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor* (New York: Macmillan Company, Inc., 1974), p. 3; Barbara Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China: 1911-45* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), p. 164.

[2]Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 56.

weeks following the bridge incident. The general attitude expressed by the American professional military community was that some resistance would be offered but a negotiated settlement would be China's most likely course of action.[3]

With Japanese mobilization and massive troop movements underway, along with a significant lack of corresponding Chinese action, the manner in which the war would be fought was beginning to take shape. From the opening volley at the Marco Polo Bridge, Japanese troops enlarged the war. Chinese resistance, in and around the Peking-Tientsin area, devolved on local commanders. The absence of a centralized command placed elements of the defending 29th Army in a precarious position. Unable to sufficiently match Japanese strength and firepower, the commander of the 29th began a series of "tactical" withdrawals that would eventually remove his army from a position to block the Japanese thrust. Such tactical movements lent support to rumors that the 29th's commander had sold out to the Japanese. With the only available

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[3]Ibid., pp. 11, 57; Colonel Joseph W. Stilwell dispatch to Military Intelligence Division, July 16, 1937, Military Intelligence Document Number 2055-622/296, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as MID, R.G. 165); Commander Harvey Overesch dispatch to Office of Naval Intelligence, August 13, 1937, Register 21902-E, File C-9-D, Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence, Record Group 38, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as ONI, R.G. 38).

Chinese troops hopelessly out of position, effective coordinated resistance was abandoned; Peking fell to the Japanese on July 28. Two days later Tientsin was relinquished to the invaders.[4]

With the cradle of Chinese civilization north of the Yellow River in Japanese hands, the Chinese Central Government of Chiang Kai-shek moved to expand the horizon and scope of the war. What started as a localized conflict soon became a larger and more destructive war. Sometime prior to August 13, the Chinese government moved its crack German-trained divisions into the native districts of Shanghai.[5] From mid-August until mid-November, the two Asiatic combatants fought for the metropolitan area of that city.

With the commencement of hostilities in the Shanghai sector, the Chinese, with the dual elements of surprise and numerical superiority, took the offensive. The Chinese "operational plan" called for the attacking forces to drive a wedge between the international settlement and the bulk of the Japanese troops, cutting them off from their supporting units and fleet in the harbor. These first attempts to carry

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[4]Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 39; David Lu, *From the Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor: Japan's Entry into world War II* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1961), p. 17. See Appendix, Figures 1 and 2.

[5]Stilwell to MID, October 3, 1937, MID #2657-H-439/282, R.G. 165. Shanghai was divided into the native districts and the international settlement areas. See Appendix, Figure 3.

the field failed dismally. Japanese troop strength at Shanghai in the early phase of the battle consisted of between five and six thousand men of a Naval Landing Party. The Chinese outnumbered their counterparts by about five to one. Although numerically superior, the Chinese could not press home this advantage.[6]

On August 23, the battle reached a crisis point. Japanese Army units were put ashore to reinforce the battered but still determined Naval Landing Force. Though the landings were successful, the Chinese forces vigorously contested the amphibious assault, causing the Japanese numerous casualties in their success. The Japanese Army units operating on the right flank of the naval force were hard pressed for a number of days to establish a link-up with their sister service. Once the beachhead was solidified, the Japanese began their massive push inland, which in time would force the defending Chinese forces completely out of the area. The battle, with its see-saw actions, continued until the reinforced Japanese, using their superior fire power, began to simply overwhelm the battered defenders. By mid-November, the Japanese had succeeded in pushing the defenders nearly fifty miles west of the city, endangering the capital of Nanking.[7]

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[6]Stilwell to MID, ibid.; Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 7, 70.

[7]Ibid., pp. 72-73.

With the Chinese troops retreating in disarray toward the ill-prepared capital, the Japanese juggernaut continued to roll over the depleted and battered Chinese Army. The tactical defense plan for Nanking called for two lines to be constructed outside the ancient walls. The first defensive line was to be eight to twelve miles from the city and the second, one to three miles from the capital. The Japanese attacked the circular defense in a pincer-like movement from the East and South; it was only a matter of time before the Chinese position would collapse. On December 6, the full weight of the attack fell on the defenders. By the 11th, the Japanese cracked the inner defensive line and the Chinese were forced into the single avenue of escape. From the outset of the ill-fated defense, the Chinese units were ordered to make a death stand. Now that their positions were overrun, there were no adequate plans for an orderly withdrawal. The Chinese Army, beaten by December 12, disintegrated. At the close of 1937, the Japanese controlled the centers of Chinese culture and industry.[8]

According to the prevailing military-political practices of the day, the capture of Nanking should have ended the war. In the conventional military view, the capture of the opponent's capital should lead to his capitulation, but this

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[8]Ibid., pp. 90-91.

was not the case in the Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese had simply taken to their heels and moved the seat of government deeper and deeper into the heartland of China to Hankow and later Chungking. In other words, the Japanese had no one with whom to negotiate when Nanking fell. Frustrated by this apparent breach of "etiquette," the Japanese unleashed their troops upon the surviving civilian population. For almost two weeks the "Rape of Nanking" raged while the Japanese High Command made no effort to control their troops.

Following the victory at Nanking, while the Japanese government was trying to negotiate a settlement to the Chinese morass, the Japanese Army shifted the direction of its operations. Turning from a westerly course of penetration, the Japanese, early in 1938, attempted to establish a link-up of their northern and central areas of operations. This shift in the operational axis helped bring about the first major Chinese victory of the war in April 1938. Chinese forces managed to halt temporarily a Japanese drive aimed at the vital rail junction of Hsuchow (see Appendix, Figure 4). The Chinese success in repelling this thrust, however, was short-lived. By May 1938, the Japanese succeeded in seizing Hsuchow and thereby combining the two operational fronts. Thus for all practical purposes, organized Chinese resistance appeared to have been eliminated in eastern China from the Great Wall to the Yangtze valley. Soon overextension

of Japanese lines of communications would prompt Chinese irregular forces to rise and strike at this vital umbilical cord.

By early summer 1938, the higher circles of the Imperial Japanese Government reached the decision to once again try for a military conclusion to the China Incident. In a series of operations of a limited nature, Japanese troops gained control of both banks of the Yangtze River just west of Nanking. When this operation was completed, an offensive with more grandiose objectives started. The first of these was the capture of Hankow, 400 miles beyond Nanking; a second objective was to bring the Chinese Army into a decisive battle, where, once and for all, the Japanese hoped that it could be eliminated. The first objective was accomplished; the second proved illusive (see Appendix, Figure 4).

Timed to coincide with the final push against Hankow, the Japanese in the early fall of 1938, enlarged their area of operations again. This time the target of their "liberation" was the last major port of entry remaining in Chinese hands – Canton. The *coup de grace* came to that port in the middle of October when the Japanese landed unopposed at Bais Bay (within sight of Hong Kong and Macao). On October 21, Canton was added to the list of Japanese controlled cities and four days later, on the 25th, Hankow fell. Now China was virtually isolated from the Western powers.

As 1939 unfolded on wartime China, the Japanese controlled some of the most important areas of the Middle Kingdom. The major metropolitan and industrial centers of modern China lay under the oppressive heel of Japanese domination. Shanghai, Nanking, Hankow, Canton, and Tsingtao were no longer sources of Chinese wealth and industry. What was left of these modern industrial and commercial nuclei was under almost total Japanese control. Shanghai alone, in the years preceding the war, accounted for nearly 70 percent of China's industry.[9] Under Japan's control was also some of the most productive agricultural land, the rice bowl of China. Perhaps the most devastating loss to the Chinese war effort was that this area had long been the major source of support for the Central Government. The population of this area now lay under the heel of Japanese oppression. Free China, relegated to the generally underdeveloped hinterland and isolated from the most economical avenues for the importation of munitions, was forced to conduct its war of resistance with little hope for change in the strategic situation for the next six years.[10]

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[9]Edgar Snow, *The Battle for Asia* (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 73.

[10]O. Edumd Clubb, *Twentieth Century China*, Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 226.

Reporting the struggle as it developed in China for the Roosevelt administration was, perhaps, the most competent staff of any power. Members of the American diplomatic mission possessed long periods of service and experience with China's distinctive and unusual cultural environment. Reporting the trauma of war, especially in an underdeveloped country like China, required the personnel involved to have a special sense of mission. This extra element was a prerequisite, not only because of the physical danger, but because an intimate knowledge and understanding of the Chinese ethnocentricities was required. "It was generally conceded that it took a minimum of ten years in China before anyone could rightly be termed, . . . an Old China Hand."[11]

An understanding of the Chinese ethnocentricities required the observer-reporter (attaché) not only to have a mastery of the cultural milieu, but also to have a comprehension of the internal and external forces that were attempting to transform the national identity of the Chinese state and people. Since the conclusion of the Opium War in the mid-nineteenth century, China had been forced to contend with the often violent forces of change. This stimulus of change shook the very roots of that civilization. China since 1842, had managed to stave off complete loss of its

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[11]E. J. Kahn, Jr., *The China Hands: America's Foreign Service Officers and What Befell Them* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 35.

national identity and had responded to the stimuli of change in a manner congruent with its cultural and societal roots. At least this appeared to be the case until the third decade of the twentieth century when Japan opted for a policy of total domination.

Interjection of this new element in the stream of Chinese development posed additional problems for the Americans on the scene. Not only did they have to report the more tangible aspects of China at war, such as military strength and fiscal stability, but also the less tangible aspects of morale, shifts in the national will, and the effects of the war on the Chinese national psyche. Reporting these often subtle shifts required the Americans to have the ability to ferret out, absorb, document, and interpret these changes in such a way as to present a coherent and total picture of Chinese resistance. It is within this sphere of reporting that the Americans proved such an asset.

The burden of reporting the military aspects of the war fell heavily on the shoulders of the military and naval attachés. While their function was intelligence gathering, and the majority of their reports do refer to the martial aspects of the Chinese resistance, they first had to understand the multifaceted composition of the Chinese character. If the attaché selection to the American mission in Japan was based on the individual's knowledge of the Japanese

character and culture, then one might reasonably assume that attaché selection for the China station was based upon similar familiarity with the Chinese scene.[12]

The senior officer of the military attaché's office was Colonel Joseph W. Stilwell. A career military man who graduated from West Point as an infantry officer in 1904, Stilwell spent the majority of his overseas duty in China. Appointed as the first officer to the new Chinese language school in 1919, he served in China at various duties for fourteen of the next twenty years. An assessment of him provides a seemingly contradictory set of impressions. The exterior man was "tough, impatient, and at times caustic." Yet to all that knew him well, Stilwell was understanding, humorous, and kind.[13] His most striking trait was a deep-seated sense of morality. Although not an overly religious person, Stilwell's morality was deeply rooted in his Puritan world view.[14] While not a moralizer, he abided by a personal code of conduct that set high standards and called for a high degree of personal integrity. "For those who failed to

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[12]Russell F. Weigley, "The Role of the War Department and the Army," in Borg and Okamoto, *Pearl Harbor as History*, p. 167.

[13]Frank Dorn, *Walkout: With Stilwell in Burma* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971), pp. vii-viii.

[14]Theodore White, *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978), p. 140.

'measure up' [to his standards] he had little patience. Toward those who compromised integrity . . . he looked with contempt."[15]

For a man with this set of values, one could argue that Stilwell, by composition, was ill-suited for duty in China where integrity was sold for so many taels of silver. While he clearly realized that the Chinese moral, ethical, and societal values originated from different precepts, this knowledge did not prevent him from "exploding in his diary about 'oily politicians, treacherous quitters, selfish, conscienceless, unprincipled crooks.'"[16] Yet somehow Stilwell managed to develop a deep sense of empathy with the common Chinese that would bolster his sagging spirits when all else failed.

Stilwell's second-in-command was a short, stocky individual from the mining district of Colorado, Major David D. Barrett. Graduating from the University of Colorado in 1915, Barrett embarked, at first, on a teaching career. With the United States entry into the First World War, Barrett joined the United States Army as a private in October 1917.[17] After gaining a reserve officer commission

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[15]Dorn, *Walkout*, pp. vii-viii.

[16]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 172.

[17]John King Fairbank's "Introduction to David Barrett," *Dixie Mission: The United States Army Observer Group in Yenan, 1944* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970),

in November 1917, he decided to make the Army his career when he augmented to the regulars at the conclusion of the Great War. Barrett found his way to China for the first time in 1921, when he was accepted for Chinese language study. After completion of the four-year course at Peking, he gained assignment to the Military Attaché's Office. His next duty in China came during the period 1931-34 when he was assigned to the 15th Infantry at Tienstin as the regimental intelligence officer. in 1936, Barrett was once again assigned to duty with the attaché's office, a post he would hold until 1943, when he would join Stilwell's wartime staff.[18]

David Barrett was by far the most fluent of the attaché group in his adopted language. In contrast to Stilwell, he was an outgoing, gregarious individual who, more often than not, became the life of the party at social gatherings. A favorite method that Barrett employed to liven up a drab affair was to tell jokes or sing popular American songs in Chinese.[19]

Unlike his superior, Barrett was not a Japophobe. Whereas Stilwell liked the Japanese countryside but not the people, whom he considered as "pale imitations of the Germans

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p. 8; The Adjutant General's Office, *Official Army Register* (Washington: Government Printing Office, January 1947), p. 59.

[18]Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, p. 8.

[19]Ibid., p. 9.

without the latter's brains and ability," Barrett confessed to not being completely at ease in their company. But he admitted, that he was "not the sort of China hand who [had] little to say in their favor." When it came to reporting the war, Barrett, because of his location in Peking, had ample opportunity to observe the character of the Japanese first hand as conquerors.[20]

Rounding out the military attaché's roster was a young language student pressed into service in the summer of 1937. Captain Frank Dorn became one of Stilwell's trusted lieutenants in his effort to coalesce the developments on the widely separated war fronts. Born in San Francisco in 1901, Dorn graduated from West Point in 1923 with a commission in Field Artillery. Before arriving for duty in China in 1934, Dorn had served in Asia once before, in the Phillipines. Prior to that he served as an instructor at the artillery school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and also as a Civilian Conservation Corps camp commander at Medford, Oregon.[21]

Known as "Pinky" to his friends because of his fresh complexion, Dorn, like Stilwell, developed an empathy for the Chinese. Understanding, as few Americans were capable,

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[20]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 87; Barrett, *Dixie Mission*, p. 35.

[21]Biographical information supplied by the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Historical Service Division, Washington, D.C.

the complex problems that beset China in the thirties, Dorn was extremely sympathetic to the plight of China and its people. This sympathy manifested itself outside the military person. Although understanding and sympathetic, Dorn did not allow his personal feelings to interfere with his professional coverage of the war. His reports were insightful, clear, and unusually free of the cultural bias that so often colored reports from China.[22]

Stilwell's opposite number in the naval component was Commander Harvey Overesch. Known to his friends as "Swede," Overesch attended Purdue University before transferring to the Naval Academy. Graduating from Annapolis in 1911, he served with the battleship squadron of the Atlantic Fleet during the American involvement in the first European conflict.[23]

The Naval Attaché's experience with China was, perhaps, the most varied of all the service personnel. Overesch's China service began in 1929, when he commanded the Yangtze Patrol's gunboat *Monocacy*. Although this command only lasted from February to June, he continued his service in East Asia as an aide to the Commander-in-Chief of the Asiatic Fleet

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[22]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 204; Agnes Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopp, 1943), p. 208.

[23]Biographical information supplied by the Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

until 1931. After a period of service at the Naval Academy, he returned to sea duty, serving as the commander of various ships attached to the Asiatic Fleet until January 1937. Before he was posted as the Naval Attaché, Overesch served a brief period of duty in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington, gaining experience with the management arm of the naval forces. He remained as the Naval Attaché and the Naval Attaché for Air until May 1940, when he was reassigned as commander of a destroyer division based at Pearl Harbor.[24]

A striking characteristic of Overesch's was his strong sense of duty. This aspect of his personality often made him appear stringent and inflexible in his relations with junior officers. While he did not command by the book, he was not the type of officer who would open up his orders to free wheeling interpretations. Orders were, for Overesch, a directive handed down by superiors. These directives were issued in "black and white" and could not be expanded beyond the original scope or mission. The precise meaning and the latitude that the officer was allowed to have were contained in the original order. It was Overesch's conception of duty and his position on what the orders contained that sometimes brought him into disagreement with his more daring and

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[24]Ibid.

flamboyant junior officers. This should not be interpreted to mean that Overesch was in constant conflict with his subordinate officers; quite the contrary is true. He was widely respected by his junior officers, but he had in his command two unorthodox and unusual Marine Corps captains.[25]

The marines assigned to the Naval Attaché's Office were Samuel Griffith and Evans Carlson. Both of these men would become marine legends later in World War II. Each would gain knowledge and experience during this period of duty that would enable them to effect drastic and major changes in marine tactics and organization for the drive across the Pacific. It was their knowledge of guerrilla warfare that would enable them to alter the basic complement of marine units during the early campaigns in the South Pacific. During that dark period, each of these individuals would lead a batallion of the elite Marine Raiders.

Samuel Griffith can be advanced as the intellectual of the naval unit. Born in 1906 at Lewistown, Pennsylvania, he attended the Naval Academy. Upon graduation in 1929, Griffith was commissioned an officer of marines. Before his assignment to language school in China, Griffith served in Nicaragua

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[25]Michael Blankfort, *The Big Yankee: The Life of Carlson of the Raiders* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), p. 180; Evans Carlson to Marguite Le Hand, November 1, 1937, Franklin Roosevelt Papers, President's Personal File 4951, Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter cited as Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951).

and Cuba with marine occupation and pacification forces. Rotated to China, he served first as a language student and joined the Naval Attaché's Office in 1936.[26]

The other junior officer, Evans Carlson, also became fascinated with the developments made by the communists in guerrilla warfare. Carlson became the first representative of a Western government to visit the communist base area at Yenan. His deep interest in the communist modification of guerrilla doctrine stemmed from their ability to mobilize and motivate the peasant masses in a way that the Chinese Central Government could not. Carlson's study of their methods of indoctrination, which he termed "ethical indoctrination" provides the Western world with the foreign term for its lexicon, "gung ho."[27]

Carlson has been described by various writers as a "military maverick; an American Candide; and as a principled moralist."[28] The son of a New England Congregationalist minister, Carlson in 1912, enlisted in the army at the age of sixteen. He obtained a commission during the European conflict and attained the rank of captain before resigning

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[26]Biographical information supplied by the Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

[27]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 175.

[28]Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, p. 39; Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 175; Smedely, *Battle Hymn of China*, p. 198.

in 1919. After working at various civilian jobs, Carlson enlisted in the Marine Corps as a private in 1922, and was commissioned in 1923.

Carlson began his association with China in 1927, when he served as the Regimental Intelligence Officer with the 4th Marines at Shanghai. In 1930, he was ordered to Nicaragua for a period of detached duty with the *Guardia Nacional*. It was during this period of duty that he won his first Navy Cross for leading twelve men against one hundred "bandits." In 1933, Carlson returned to China, this time as the Adjutant of the marine detachment guarding the American Legation at Peking. Returning to the United States in 1936, he was stationed at Warm Springs, Georgia, as the executive officer of President Roosevelt's guard detachment.[29]

While Carlson was serving at this duty station, he formed a deep attachment to the president and the executive household. When the marine was again ordered to China in the summer of 1937, Roosevelt asked Carlson to keep him abreast of the developments in China.[30] Roosevelt's penchant for personal informants gave Carlson the opportunity to

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[29]Kenneth Shewmaker, "The American Liberal Dream: Evans F. Carlson and the Chinese Communists, 1937-1947," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXXVIII (May 1969), p. 210.

[30]Carlson to Le Hand, August 14, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951.

provide the president with his impressions about the worsening situation in East Asia.

Carlson, though a liberal of the Roosevelt strain, was an outcast in the military society of the 1930's. An officer without a college degree, Carlson held a deep-seated concept of morality that often colored his perceptions of the world around him. While a friend of China to the point of resigning his commission to be free to speak his mind on the perils of Japanese expansion, Carlson carried with him a strain of racial prejudice that offsets his biographer's assessment of him as a Christian socialist.[31] Apparently because of his religious upbringing, morality for Carlson lay at the center of almost every issue. He often reduced complex political or social issues into simplified ones. Using Christian dogma to its utmost, Carlson was able to fit personalities, political issues, even complex social questions into a simplified, reductionist, black and white moral absolute. Carlson was able to decide his position, for or against an issue, on the basis of Christian doctrine. There was little chance to persuade him to alter his position once his mind was set. More than once, Carlson angered superiors when he continued to express his opinions after being ordered to stop.[32]

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[31]Carlson to Le Hand, August 14, 1937, ibid; Shewmaker, "The American Liberal Dream," p. 208.

[32]Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, p. 250.

Given the diverse backgrounds and personalities associated with the attachés, and statements or interpretations as to how they perceived the war must be general in nature. There is little doubt that all the attachés felt that the continuing expansion of the conflict could possibly have severe ramifications for the United States in the long run. Whether or not one could justifiably say that as a whole they felt that China was fighting a war for democracy is open to question. Some of the attachés, especially Carlson, may have equated China's fight with that of liberal internationalism, but to say all of them saw the conflict as a war between democracy and fascism would be presuming too much.

As the war progressed, the two attaché groups came to see the conflict through different perspectives. How China should best prosecute the war became the center of American attention. While some of the debate that arose can be explained as the contention between two differing philosophies, Army vs. Navy Marine Corps, the fact remains that a confused picture emerged from the Asian battlefields on the progress of the conflict. A consensus did emerge early on that China lacked the implements for modern war. Their air power was nil; they lacked the necessary modern arms, tanks, heavy artillery, etc., to be on par with Japan. Yet underlying this agreement, serious differences separated the two groups on their fundamental perceptions of the war.

In the first phase of the war, that is July to December 1937, when all agreed that China was losing, there was no agreement as to why. When the Central Government survived the disaster of Nanking, and it became clear that the tide of battle had turned against Japan, there was no agreement as to why. The reason for this presents an interesting comparison in the differing military philosophies and personal interpretation of events. Personalities and social philosophies tended to distort perception of events and trends developing in China. A clear, precise, and coherent view of the Chinese policy and strategy toward the conflict as it was seen by the various Americans was not forthcoming for a long while.

CHAPTER 2

A PERIOD OF UTTER DESPAIR: JULY TO DECEMBER 1937

The five months following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident was a period punctuated by fear of an impending Chinese military and political collapse. The American attachés believed that the series of defeats inflicted on the Chinese Army were too great to be reversed. The attachés held little hope for any continued serious Chinese resistance. The Chinese Army was too badly battered and disorganized to remain an effective threat to Japanese desires. The attachés concluded that in a matter of weeks, China would be forced to capitulate to Japan and settle for a negotiated end to the conflict.

The outbreak of the war caught the attachés and most other Americans quite by surprise. Soon after the incident, the foremost topic for speculation in the minds of the attachés was "Will China fight?" Ten days after the bridge incident, Colonel Joseph Stilwell, the senior military attaché, remained perplexed as to Chinese intentions. He believed that if the Chinese Central Government intended to

resist, troop movements should have already commenced, but none had, as of July 16, been reported.[1]

Stilwell's opinion was that Chiang Kai-shek and his government did not intend to resist Japan over its incursion into North China. His reasoning stemmed from the lack of value of the region to Nanking. "After all North China brings Nanking little money, and the money question is a fair measure with which to predict the amount of resistance which any Chinese government will put up to prevent loss of territory."[2] Stilwell, it seems, felt sure that the Central Government would abandon the area north of the Yellow River to Japan without any serious resistance.

The military attaché cautiously warned that if the Central Government followed this course of action, popular political pressure might rise to the point where Chiang could be ousted from office. Stilwell believed, however, that this action was unlikely because the Generalissimo had "been in many tight places before . . . [and] he will weather the present storm, weakened perhaps, but still in the saddle." The War Department's representative forewarned his superiors that if domestic political pressure became too serious a threat, "Chiang might foment trouble in some other part of

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[1]Stilwell dispatch to MID, July 16, 1937, MID #2055-622/ 296, R.G. 165.

[2]Stilwell dispatch to MID, July 16, 1937, ibid.

China to divert attention from the alarming state of affairs in the North." Exactly what kind of trouble and where was not addressed specifically.[3]

The Naval Attaché, Commander Harvey Overesch, held the same opinion of the situation. Overesch believed that if China intended to resist Japanese aggression, the military should be reinforcing its troops in the North. Yet the American found the Central Government's effort very incomplete. This led him to consider that "large scale hostilities [were] unlikely making accession [to] Nipponese demands probable."[4]

One reason advanced by the naval attaché for the lack of Chinese action in the current crisis was the attitude of certain of Chiang's advisors. Overesch expressed his belief that these advisors were prepared to acceed to Japanese demands. Alluding to the Chinese propensity for placing local and personal interests above national interests, Overesch believed that these unnamed individuals had some "selfish undermining motives" for extolling the idea of concessions.[5]

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Overesch dispatch to ONI, July 18, 1937, State Department Copy, filed following 793.94 ONI/77, Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited R.G. 59).

[5]Overesch dispatch to ONI, August 13, 1937. Register 21902-E, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; see also the State Department copy 793.94 ONI/125, R.G. 59.

By early August, Overesch had become convinced that the Generalissimo would acceed to the Japanese demands concerning North China. While the Naval Attaché admitted that there might be political consequences to such a decision, he believed that Chiang was an astute enough politician to prevent a political crisis from toppling his government. Overesch reasoned that the Generalissimo would prevent an internal crisis by skirmishing with the Japanese in the north solely for the effect of offering some resistance. Using this as a means to save face, Chiang would then publicize the negotiated settlement to his own advantage "with a good chance to remain in power."[6]

Commander Overesch supported his assertion by the fact that the Japanese ambassador to China was enroute to Nanking to open talks. Citing a statement by a Chinese Foreign Office spokesman, the Naval Attaché emphasized that a settlement was possible as long as diplomatic ties remained. He believed also that Japan intended to negotiate a settlement since the militarists had allowed the ambassador to depart at all.[7]

As far as the actual course of the war was concerned, the Chinese were unprepared. Both attachés reported that

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[6]Overesch dispatch to ONI, August 13, 1937, ibid.

[7]Ibid.

there was little indication of Chinese troop movements while the Japanese were reinforcing their positions inside the Great Wall.[8] What developed in the area north of the Yellow River was a total route of the Chinese defenders. At every confrontation the Chinese forces were defeated. The strength of the opposing Japanese seldom approached, in numbers, those of the Chinese. The population in the northern area, according to the naval attaché, was "disposed [to] blame Nanking [for] lack of support."[9] Here the situation would rest, with Peking, Tientsin, and the area from the Great Wall to the Yellow River under Japan's control for the duration of the war.

In the first month of the war, both senior attachés were certain as to what policy China would follow in response to Japan's aggression. Stilwell, being the more outspoken, never doubted that the Central Government would abandon North China. Overesch appeared somewhat more unsure of the Chinese response. He reported first that the Chinese would not defend the area, then that they might possible do so, finally, agreeing with Stilwell, that the North would be abandoned.

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[8]Stilwell to MID, July 16, 1937, MID #2055-622/296, R.G. 165; Overesch to ONI, July 20, 1937, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/78, R.G. 59.

[9]Overesch dispatch to ONI, August 7, 1937, State Department Copy, filed following 793.94 ONI/112, R.G. 59.

If the attaché reports on the possible course of Chinese action lacked a firm foundation, it must be remembered that both men were operating far from the seat of the Chinese government. If the reports were speculative at first, it was due to the fact that the attachés were operating in an atmosphere heavy with uncertainty and unfounded rumor.

Several days prior to August 13, the Chinese by calculated design, as Stilwell had eluded to earlier, moved across the 1932 Truce Line and engaged the Japanese forces stationed at Shanghai. The Battle for Shanghai had begun, posing another area of operations for the American attaché groups to cover.[10]

An unforeseen factor now made itself known as the military attaché component tried to cover the enlarged and widely separated war zones. This new stumbling block was their inability to observe the war firsthand. As Colonel Stilwell maintained to the War Department, the accuracy of his analysis on the campaign at Shanghai was open to some criticism because of the distance from which the reports were written.[11] Both warring parties imposed severe restrictions on the movement of Stilwell and his group. The military

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[10]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 168; Stilwell dispatch to MID, October 3, 1937, MID #2657-H-439/282, R.G. 165.

[11]Stilwell to MID, October 3, 1937, ibid.

group's inability to witness the combat produced a large sense of frustration.

When finally allowed to travel to a war area, Stilwell found the trip of little value because he saw nothing of the Japanese Army in action and could gain little reliable military information. The tour of the provincial town of Kalgan (one time capital of Inner Mongolia, now in Hopei Province) was arranged by the Japanese Military Attachés' Office. Stilwell found his hosts extremely receptive to his questions concerning Chinese forces. Yet, when he tried to ask questions about the Japanese, he found "the Japanese officers became very restive, and rather unceremonious," and terminated the interview in about ten minutes when he persisted in his line of questioning. Stilwell concluded that the value of the trip was nill and that any third party was going to have trouble obtaining information from Japanese sources.[12]

On the Chinese side, matters were equally bad. From the start of the conflict, Stilwell had been unable to obtain either for himself or his officers the desired accredited status with Chinese forces at the front. The situation for Stilwell reached a crisis when Colonel E. R. W. McCabe, intelligence officer with the War Department's General Staff,

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[12]Stilwell dispatch to MID, September 21, 1937, MID #2341-141/22, R.G. 165.

ordered that Stilwell keep the Department better informed about the military situation.[13]

Stilwell, it appears, in desperation, appealed to Ambassador Nelson Johnson to arrange another attempt to get the Americans accredited to the Chinese armies at the front. The ambassador arranged a meeting with high ranking Chinese officials in hopes of getting the military attaché group accepted by the Chinese. When this attempt failed, Johnson, in a strongly worded dispatch to Cordell Hull for transmittal to the War Department, characterized Stilwell and his staff as being "indefatigable in their efforts to maintain friendly contact with the Chinese military command. . . ." Johnson tried to explain that the Chinese War Ministry, in reality, had little to do with the operation of the field armies. Each commander was a power unto himself that could not be broached by the central command.[14]

The restraints imposed upon the naval personnel stand in sharp contrast to those of their military counterparts. Evans Carlson, stationed in Shanghai, found little impediment.

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[13]Nelson T. Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, October 2, 1937, 793.94 118/76, R.G. 59; War Department G-2 dispatch to Stilwell, December 11, 1937, State Department Copy, 793.94 116/08 R.G. 59; Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 181.

[14]Willis Peck dispatch to the Secretary of State, December 16, 1937, 793.94 118/92, R.G. 59; Nelson Johnson dispatch to the Secretary of State, December 29, 1937, 793.94 118/88, R.G. 59; Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 181.

placed in his way when he sought to join the Chinese forces engaged at Shanghai. At first Carlson's efforts were rebuffed by the Chinese, when he tried to arrange a visit to the lines through the Generalissimo's local representative. Carlson explained this failure as Chinese reluctance to take responsibility for a foreigner's safety so close upon the heels of the wounding of the British ambassador.[15] Yet, he managed, despite the Chinese reluctance, to visit the front on several occasions. Finally in late September, Carlson obtained his own credentials and spent upwards of a week at a time with the Chinese troops engaged in the area.[16]

Carlson's observations of the Shanghai engagement led him to some assessments concerning the Chinese military effort. Finding the Chinese military machine weak in many areas, Carlson thought that what was needed immediately was a thorough reorganization. He also found discipline lacking in many units and no coordination of units in the field. To overcome these problems, the marine explained that better use of offiders who had studied abroad could help strengthen

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[15]Carlson to Le Hand, August 27, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; Evans Carlson, *Twin Stars of China* (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1940), p. 8. The British Ambassador was wounded on August 26, 1937, while traveling between Nanking and Shanghai. Although the Ambassador was not seriously wounded, the incident made the Chinese reluctant to allow foreigners into the combat zone.

[16]Carlson to Le Hand, November 1, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; Carlson, *Twin Stars*, p. 23.

the Chinese Army. However, he noted that the Chinese were gravely suspicious of these men and continued to give "responsible positions . . . to officers of the old Chinese school whose loyalty has been proven," without regard to their capabilities.[17]

In spite of the deficiencies he found in the Chinese military organization, Carlson was certain that the Chinese simply were not going to retire without making the Japanese victory as costly as possible. Not even a strategic retirement to save men and material was within the realm of the possibilities. One gains the impression from Carlson's letters that China was totally mobilized for war. All classes, accordingly, were prepared to resist Japanese domination with no intention of submitting at an early date. Yet the marine warned that the Japanese were secretly negotiating with some well-known elements of the Chinese leadership, offering them financial inducements to defect. If such conspiracies did materialize, Carlson warned, then the situation could be greatly altered to the detriment of China.[18]

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[17]Carlson to Le Hand, August 27, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; Carlson to Le Hand, September 11, 1937, ibid.

[18]Carlson to Le Hand, September 2, 1937, ibid.; Carlson to Le Hand, September 22, 1937, ibid.; Carlson to Le Hand, November 29, 1937, ibid.

Supporting some of Carlson's assertions on the deficiencies of the Chinese military effort was the Assistant Military Attaché in Peking, Major David Barrett. Commenting on the Chinese defense of Paoting, Barrett stated, "There were no leaders, no plan, no co-ordination, no co-operation, no brains. The Chinese 29th Army had no plan of action, at least none was put into effect." Barrett claimed that the Chinese did not concentrate its forces and ". . . the only moves made were those dictated by Japanese action."[19] While he expressed dismay at the leadership of the upper level of the Chinese Army, the assistant attaché concluded with praise for the men in the ranks. He felt that "the Chinese soldier . . . [was] excellent material . . ." and when properly led he "will go forward bravely and die cheerfully." In an apparent afterthought, the major added, "but his officers won't lead him, except to the rear, so he dies in large numbers, in a most futile manner."[20] Clearly Barrett, like Carlson, found that serious problems affected the performance of the Chinese field armies. Barrett saw the need for drastic improvement in the operation of the Chinese army if it was to carry out its assigned mission.

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[19]Major David Barrett dispatch to MID, November 27, 1937, MID #2657-H-439/357, R.G. 165.

[20]Ibid.

Captain Frank Dorn's view supported, in many ways, the assertions of Carlson and Barrett. A language officer assigned to Peiping before July 7, Dorn was drafted to supplement the thin ranks of the Military Attachés' Office in an urgent time. Since the Americans were restricted from visiting the front officially, Dorn found the best method was simply to "slip out" unofficially. Attempting to get information on Chinese troop movements soon after the incident, Dorn undertook a difficult and dangerous one-thousand mile trip from Peking to Tsinan. Reporting to Stilwell the information the military attaché desired, the captain also turned in an indictment of "chronic incompetence" against the Chinese army.[21]

In a September letter to his commanding officer, the captain's assessment of the situation stemmed from his belief that the Chinese had missed several excellent opportunities "to cause the Japanese considerable embarrassment. . . ." The American maintained that the Chinese had failed to "cash in" on those excellent opportunities because the military leadership was riddled with ". . . flabby inertia, almost stupid incompetence, and a complete lack of staff work of any kind. . . ." He acknowledged that he once

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[21]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 181; Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 56; Dorn letter to the author, May 4, 1979, in the author's possession.

believed in a Chinese victory but "I have lost my former glimmer of optimism."[22]

Dorn viewed the Chinese decision to adopt a strategy of a passive defense as a mistake. The Chinese, according to the officer, felt that they were facing such a superior adversary that all their forces could do was "delay it, harrass it, or wear it down over a period of time."[23] Psychologically at least, the Chinese forces operated under the aegis of a ready-made excuse to explain their defeats. The Chinese soldiers were led to believe that they were incapable of beating the Japanese on the field of battle by their own officer corps. Dorn accused the Chinese generals of fostering this inferiority on their troops because they were "feudal in their thinking and strongly influenced by politics of one kind or another. . . ."[24] The American felt that the overriding ambition of most of the Chinese generals was to displace the Generalissimo as leader and replace him with themselves. To keep their ambition alive, the Chinese generals seldom risked the destruction of their troops in battle. To take such a risk would mean to jeopardize their one means of advancement. A division reduced to a regiment

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[22]Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 130-31.

[23]Ibid., p. 105.

[24]Ibid., pp. 65-66.

would reduce the commander to a regimental commander. Such a loss of status could not be accepted if one's political ambition was to be kept alive. Dorn implied that the infection that sapped the vitality of the Chinese army was the virus of politics, casting Chiang Kai-shek in the role of "Typhoid Mary."

The Generalissimo's suspicion and distrust of the majority of his senior commanders, some of whom were ex-warlords, were not without some justification. The memory of the "Sian Incident," when the Generalissimo was kidnapped by a supposedly loyal general, was still too recent to forget. To neutralize any political or military opposition against him, Chiang often appointed men whose sole qualifying criterion was personal loyalty to him. From Dorn's perspective, a military career in China was a method to gain self-enrichment and power. To this end

> the great majority of senior commanders were determined to preserve their units as nearly intact as possible, for political bargaining value, rather than risk their destruction in battle by offensive action.[25]

With such predominating attitudes among the majority of the senior commanders and the Generalissimo also, the wonder is that the Chinese fought as well as they did.

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[25]Ibid., pp. 100, 8.

As a point of illustration of the Chinese general's political chicanery and unrestrained ambition, Dorn recounted the vascillation of Han Fu-ch'u, an old warlord and governor of Shantung province. According to Dorn, General Han and the Mayor of Tsingtao, representing their own personal, selfish interest, "took it upon themselves to bargain with the Japanese for the protection of Chinese territory [under their control] in exchange for protection of Japanese property." In the course of arranging this "protection," Han had refused to let Central Government troops enter his province from any direction. The governor, in a conversation with Captain Dorn, "considered that his sole duty was to the province and its welfare rather than to China as a whole. . . ." He also confided to Dorn that he would not allow his troops to fight beyond the provincial borders and "that he could 'visualize' Shantung as a buffer zone between the Japanese and Chinese political entities," with himself as the political leader. Although General Han eventually forfeited his life for his treason, Dorn implies that Han was only one of a few who were caught and thus punished.[26]

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[26]Barrett dispatch to MID, "Report Prepared and Written by Captain Dorn," December 31, 1937, MID #2657-H-439/438, R.G. 165; Nelson Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, October 19, 1937, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1937* (5 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), III, pp. 621-22 (hereafter cited as *FR 1937*, III); Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 84.

As a corollary to the treason of General Han, the naval attachés perceived that new troubles were besetting the Chinese war effort. While Overesch reported that attempts were underway by the Central Government to rid itself of traitorous elements in its armies, he sensed that all was not well within the Chinese government. For Overesch, the possibility of a military collapse was not one to be overlooked. He believed that the position of the Generalissimo had become dangerous, due to his handling of the Shanghai defense. Worried by the spectre of domestic political upheaval, the Naval Attaché viewed the future war effort with grave concern.[27]

Echoing these suspicions also was Evans Carlson. The marine captain believed that a "defeatest group" would gain power in the government "should reverses occur upon the Shanghai front. . . ." Carlson suspected that this group had succumbed either to Japanese bribes or their propaganda, opening the way for the successful Japanese amphibious assault at Chapu. Equally serious to Carlson was the internal dissension caused by the handling of the Shanghai campaign by the Generalissimo. Carlson feared that the Kuangtung and Kwangsi faction, headed by Li Tsung-jen and

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[27]Overesch dispatch to ONI, October 13, 1937, Register 21902E, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; Overesch to ONI, November 28, 1937, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/261, R.G. 59.

Pai Ch'ung-hsi, would dissolve the political ties that they had so recently made with the Nanking Government. If this happened, Chinese unity would be disrupted by the old political rivalries, causing immense harm to the war effort.[28]

Commenting on the battle of Shanghai, the senior military attaché disclosed what seemed to be at the heart of the Chinese army's problem. To stilwell the problem lay in the fact that the Chinese did not push hard enough with sufficient strength to dislodge the Japanese early in the campaign. "Hence the Chinese failure to win a decisive victory . . . seems inexcusable." The military attaché, in short, felt that the Chinese had no sound tactical plan for the battle, nor did they have a well-defined system for command responsibilities.[29]

Stilwell's assistant, David Barrett, took criticism of the Chinese Shanghai campaign one step further. Barrett explained that the Chinese tactics were ill founded. Relating information gained from a German advisor, Barrett reported that the Chinese only fortified the towns and

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[28]Carlson to Le Hand, November 1, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 169.

[29]Stilwell dispatch to MID, October 3, 1937, MID #2657-H-439/282, R.G. 165; Stilwell dispatch to MID, November 8, 1937, MID #2657-H-439/295, R.G. 165; Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 72.

villages around Shanghai and left undefended the fields between them. This allowed the attacking Japanese to pierce the defenders, front and outflank the defenses, forcing the Chinese to withdraw without offering any serious resistance. "The Chinese never secured the advantage of the numerical superiority due to their reluctance to defend open areas."[30]

Lacking a continuous defensive line in and around Shanghai, the Chinese abandoned the city on November 8, opening the way for the Japanese drive upon the capital of Nanking. The capital succumbed to the invaders on December 12, thus temporarily halting the Japanese thrust into Central China as the old year waned. As the new year approached, the American attaché community could only forsee more depressing events in store for the Chinese.

Assessing the military situation at the end of 1937, Stilwell forecast a bleak and almost hopeless 1938 for the Chinese prospects. The Chinese had suffered tremendous losses in war materials. Their losses in aircraft, air facilities, and artillery had reached critical proportions. These problems had yet to be dealt with in a serious or realistic nature by the Chinese High Command. Evaluating the problems that beset the Middle Kingdom, Stilwell appended a depressing note. "It is certain that any offensive by the

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[30]Barrett dispatch to MID, November 27, 1937, MID #2657-H-439/357, R.G. 165.

Chinese is out of the question, and it is very doubtful if a force capable of offering any further serious resistance can be created."[31] Stilwell's reasoning for such a dire prognosis stemmed from several factors; there was little cooperation between senior commanders, the Central Government was unable or unwilling to impose its will on its subordinate commanders, and the High Command was too dependent upon a strategy of passive defense.[32]

This depressing and somber assessment of December appears to have been a militarily realistic appraisal of the situation. The Chinese had lost valuable territory, thousands of their best trained troops and vast quantities of supplies and the implements of war, but had not succeeded in reversing or stemming the Japanese tide. The Chinese initiation of battle at Shanghai had not succeeded in its purpose. All Shanghai served to do, despite the Generalissimo's intentions, was to focus world attention on the Chinese plight, and sacrifice Chiang's loyal, German-trained divisions in a useless, ill-conceived battle. The campaigns of Shanghai and Nanking did little, as Stilwell caustically noted, to

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[31]Nelson Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, "Estimate of Military Situation Prepared by the Military Attaché," December 29, 1937, *FR 1937*, III, pp. 843-44; Barrett dispatch to MID, January 3, 1938, State Department Copy, 793.94 MID/260, R.G. 59.

[32]Johnson to Secretary of State, December 29, 1937, *FR 1937*, III, pp. 843-44.

help the Chinese cause. Rather they were more negative in their product and contributed immensely to crisis situation that now prevailed on the Asiatic mainland.

While no one in the naval group penned an account as explicit as Stilwell's, inferences can be drawn that they too felt the situation was becoming desperate. Evans Carlson expressed in guarded language his feeling to the White House that the end was near. Capturing Carlson's depressed feelings, Edgar Snow recounts a conversation that lays bare the arine's anxiety. Subdued in spirit, Carlson speculated that, with China's industrial bases gone, there was little hope left for a Chinese victory. Without industrial plants to make the modern weapons of war, Carlson reasoned, it had become impossible for China to fight a modern army like Japan's. Carlson too, apparently felt that time was running out for China.[33]

The consensus that emerged in late 1937, was that China was a doomed nation. From the attaché perspective, it seemed that everything that could go wrong with the Chinese war effort had gone wrong. In the Western sense a Chinese army did not exist. What passed for a national army was comparable to a "medieval mob." With the destruction of the best trained

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[33]Carlson to Le Hand, November 29, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; Edgar Snow, *Journey to the Beginning* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 196.

Chinese divisions at Shanghai, the defense of Nanking fell to run-of-the-mill divisions. These divisions were clearly no match for a modern field army like Japan's. While not one of the attachés questioned the quality of the individual Chinese soldier, the implication exists that, without some vast stroke of luck the Chinese soldier's spirit and courage would not be enough to stop the Japanese conquest. Too many serious problems existed in the Chinese military to allow effective and sustained resistance. The lack of staff planning, unsound tactics, the constant threat of domestic, political upheaval combined to hamper the resistance effort.

With the aid of the omnipotent muse of historical hindsight, the accuracy of the attaché reports and the view they reflect fall into disarray. But given the conditions that existed in late 1937, these reports reflected the best intelligence estimates then possible. Confusion and the chaos of retreat were the rules of the day. Given the hostile and restrictive measures imposed upon the fact-finding missions undertaken by the attaché groups, the wonder is that any meaningful intelligence information was transmitted at all.

Anyone who is familiar with Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang) history from 1937 to 1949 will find the same criticism expressed on Nationalist military capabilities. Though the reporting from July to December, 1937, may seem harsh and unrealistic, the attachés were not alone in their

opinion. Supporting and amplifying their positions were the American foreign service personnel in China who drew the same conclusions.[34]

While nearly all the attachés were forecasting "doom and gloom" by the end of December, they overlooked some important aspects of the Chinese resistance effort. One voice in the wilderness who had found some reason for optimism late in December was Evans Carlson. His reason for hope in the Chinese cause came from an isolated source, the 8th Route Army in the Northwest. It would be the peasant who would raise his club to smite the Japanese invader.

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[34]Nelson Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, December 8, 1937, *FR 1937*, III, p. 778; Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, December 3, 1937, ibid., pp. 751-52; George Atcheson telegram to the Secretary of State, December 6, 1937, ibid., pp. 766-67.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARD A NEW PERSPECTIVE: JANUARY TO OCTOBER 1938

In 1938, a new perspective evolved among the attaché groups, as a result of new developments in the course of the war. Although each of the groups arrived at the same final conclusion, they did so through different means. The naval attachés increasingly came to believe that if China were to remain in the war, the war could only be a protracted one. Chinese success, it seemed, was only possible in a long war of attrition in which the Japanese would ultimately exhaust themselves. They maintained that guerrilla warfare was the ideal strategy. Guerrilla tactics, they believed, would allow the Chinese the necessary time to rebuild their regular army for a final offensive that would drive the Japanese invader from China.

The military attachés, however, had come to believe that the survival of the regular Chinese Army was the key factor in the improved Chinese position by the end of 1938. They also emphasized that the Chinese masses' will to resist would ultimately prevent Japan from dominating China. It soon became apparent to this group of Americans that Japan would not gain an acceptable political settlement to the China Incident, no matter how many battles it won or how

much territory it occupied. Although the attaché groups reached these conclusions at different times during the year, the consensus emerged that China, in spite of all the carnage, would not collapse. Japan had become powerless to impose its will upon the Middle Kingdom.

Evans Carlson was the first attaché to begin this reevaluation of the Chinese effort. Carlson gained the impetus for his new approach to the war from the American reporter Edgar Snow. Snow had only recently returned from the communist enclave in the northwest, where he had gathered material for his book *Red Star Over China*.[1] The journalist convinced Carlson that all hope was not gone for China, even though it had suffered serious defeats. Between December 1937 and March 1938, Carlson traveled and lived with elements of the communist 8th Route Army, joining them on several forays behind Japanese lines. Convinced that he had found a novel twist to the Chinese war of resistance, Carlson persuaded the Central Government to allow him to return to the communist controlled area between April and August. It was during this second trip that Carlson was able to interview Mao Tse-tung and observe the communist war effort in Mongolia and Shantung.[2]

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[1]Edgar Snow, *Journey to the Beginning*, p. 196; Carlson, *Twin Stars*, pp. 34-35.

[2]Ibid., pp. 59-177, *passim*.

Carlson tried to report the Chinese resistance effort from as many angles as possible. He may have been used by the Chinese communists, since they alone allowed Carlson to view limited aspects of their war effort. There is every reason to believe that Carlson was used by the communists to promote their own purposes.[3] Nevertheless Carlson's impressions of their effort allowed him to begin to evaluate the Chinese war effort from another perspective.

Writing to Marguerite Le Hand, Carlson characterized Chu Teh, the commander of the 8th Route Army as being "kindly, humble and self-effacing. . . . He has the tenacity of a Grant and the kindness of a Lee." Carlson also credited Chu as being instrumental in establishing the united front with the Central Government. The American, it appears, effected a working relationship with the communist general that, at least from Carlson's point of view, was based on mutual trust and genuine friendship.[4]

A point that keeps reappearing in Carlson's letters is his insistence that the "so-called communists" (Carlson's terminology) were sincere in wanting to maintain the United Front with the Kuomintang. Continuing in this vein, Carlson acknowledged that the communists were "intensely loyal to

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[3]Shewmaker, "The American Liberal Dream," pp. 213-14.

[4]Carlson to Le Hand, December 24, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951.

[the] Generalissimo . . . as the leader of the Chinese nation and people." Coupling this "loyalty" of the communists to their intense nationalism, Carlson became "convinced that this group [would] continue to resist [the] Japanese invasion even should the Central Government decide to come to terms with the Japanese." Carlson seemed to believe that he had found a group of Chinese who would continue to fight the invaders no matter what the recognized government did.[5]

The most significant aspect of Carlson's journey was that it presented a different and important picture of Chinese resistance. Rather than continue presenting a pessimistic picture of a pathetic Chinese war effort, Carlson became mesmerized with what he found. "He had been to Valhalla and wanted to tell the world about it." Written as a result of his observations and experiences, his report was but an amplification of his letters to Washington. He believed that guerrilla tactics could arrest continued Japanese penetration of China. "Ample time will [then] be afforded the Generalissimo to organize and train a striking force which will be able to deal the final coup de main [sic] to the Japanese main force." Carlson cautioned, however, that the 8th Route Army's pattern of resistance, if adopted as the primary strategy, would not by itself give China a

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[5]Ibid., Carlson to Le Hand, March 4, 1938, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; *New York Times*, March 1, 1938, p. 7.

decisive victory. He concluded that more than guerrilla tactics would be required before China could finally defeat Japan. Yet, a war of protraction using guerrilla tactics would seriously hamper Japanese ability to dominate and exploit those economically important areas of China.[6]

Even though Carlson's trip had given him some renewed reason for optimism, his official report was tempered with a somber assessment of the prospects for continued Chinese resistance. In his opinion there were four considerations crucial to the future course of the resistance effort. The continuation of foreign credits was an absolute necessity for Chinese procurement of munitions. Supplies had to continue to arrive from sympathetic powers. The third element was the necessity of silencing the "defeatist" group that was agitating for an early settlement of the conflict. Finally Carlson emphasized the need for maintaining a coalition of all domestic factions in a truly united anti-Japanese front. In spite of his renewed optimism, Carlson warned that these conditions were vital to a successful Chinese war effort. The situation in China was still critical,

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[6]Shewmaker, "The American Liberal Dream," p. 211; Evans Carlson, "A Report on the Military Activities in the Northwest of China with Especial Regard to the Organization and Tactics of the Chinese Eight Route Army (EX-Communist)," March 23, 1938, United States Army War College, Library, Carlisle, Pa., Prefix 1 (hereafter cited as "Report"); ibid., pp. 13-14.

and if China became isolated, or if internal unity was not maintained, then serious Chinese resistance could cease.[7]

By early 1938, Carlson had become persuaded that the attitude of the Chinese communists reflects that of the people. Carlson increasingly came to believe that if the communists were properly armed, they would be able to slow the Japanese advance into China. The communists would throttle the Japanese lines of communications, effectively blocking further advancement of Japanese columns.

Samuel Griffith reached much the same conclusions from an observation trip into the Chinese heartland. Little is known of Griffith's activities or duties prior to December 1937 (because of the method by which naval radio messages were transmitted).[8] In late December, Griffith and Major Truman Martin, an intelligence officer with the 15th Infantry, were ordered by the American legation in Peking to investigate the disappearance of three American missionaries from their residence in Shansi Province. Accompanied by a group of Japanese military officials, Griffith and Martin found that, although the Japanese had indeed conquered the area,

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[7] Ibid., Prefix 1.

[8] Each naval message was prefixed only by the station name and the designation of the originating officer, e.g., the Assistant Naval Attaché, Nanking. With the movement of the various officers in response to the shifting war, identification of the assistant attachés is tentative at best.

their control of the countryside was as yet tenuous. In route to the town of Shao Yang, the residence of the missing missionaries, Griffith and Martin witnessed the power of the Chinese irregulars in the Shansi-Chahar-Hopeh region. On the night before the Americans' arrival, the Chinese had engaged the Japanese and destroyed a railroad bridge. The Japanese claimed that a party of 400 men had succeeded in forcing a passage; in the ensuing engagement, several Chinese were captured and Griffith identified them, not as communists, but as belonging to the nationalist 29th Army.[9]

From their observations Griffith and Martin came to differing conclusions on the relative amount of control the Japanese exerted in the area. Major Martin claimed that missionaries in the region reported that ". . . Japanese troops are suppressing banditry and are obtaining the sympathetic support of the Chinese villagers." Griffith, on the other hand, reported that the peasants in the countryside were being armed and "that attacks are being made daily . . . cutting tracks and blowing up bridges." Griffith went on to explain that the area was unpacified and the population bitter, and those Chinese who returned to the occupied area were small in number. Other observers reported that out of

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[9]Martin to the Commanding General, Philippine Department, January 11, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/478, R.G. 165; Overesch to ONI, January 8, 1938, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/328, R.G. 59.

about seven million people in the border region, approximately one million had been enrolled in communist patriotic front organizations, and a half a million men were armed and serving in communist sponsored local militia units in North China.[10]

It appears from contemporary documents that Griffith was the more accurate observer of conditions prevailing in the North. Martin, for some reason, did not gather the full significance of what he had seen. By inference one can assume that Griffith and Carlson reached what amounted to the same conclusions in respect to the activities in North China, that the 8th Route Army and irregular units were actively engaged with the Japanese for control of the occupied areas. Deciding whether or not Griffith believed that the communists' organization was loyal to the Generalissimo and would continue to fight regardless of the Central Government's course of action, would be speculation. Both Griffith and Carlson seemed to agree that China would be a tough nut for the Japanese to crack.

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[10]Martin to the Commanding General, Philippine Department, January 11, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/478, R.G. 165; Overesch to ONI, January 8, 1938, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/328, R.G. 59; Overesch to ONI, January 12, 1938, Register 12358-A, File C-10-J, R.G. 38; Layman P. Van Slyke, ed., *The Chinese Communist Movement: A Report of the United States War Department, July 1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 50.

The changing attitude of the naval attachés toward Chinese capabilities had its profoundist effect on Commander Overesch. It was Overesch who determined what information would be retransmitted to Naval Intelligence in Washington, a position singular among the American military and naval observers in China.

Functioning as the nerve center for the naval group in Peking, Overesch oversaw a large portion of American intelligence work in China. He seldom left the confines of the former Imperial City to inspect or visit his subordinate officers' stations. From this restrictive "vantage point," Overesch acted as the central clearing house for intelligence matters. His weekly reports appear to be little more than synopses of his assistants' reports. His most important contribution to the overall picture was his preoccupation with relations between Soviet Russia and Japan.

The importance of the U.S.S.R.'s role in the Sino-Japanese conflict was of real concern to the American community. Prior to the time of massive American assistance, the Soviet Union was one of the few major powers extending aid to the Chinese. This assistance took the form of planes, pilots, aviation, support personnel, arms, and military supplies. As Soviet aid was having a positive effect, their motives came under increasing suspicion. Overesch expressed concern that the Soviets might be withholding "full support, supplying China

[with] only enough material to keep the latter going. . . ." The result of this Soviet action was "stimulating a prolonged, exhausting campaign for Japan." His explanation for this action was that Japan, mired down in China, would be less of a threat to Soviet Asia.[11]

Overesch thought conditions were ripe for conflict between the Soviets and Japan. By mid-January he had every reason "to believe that Japan [was] preparing herself for hostilities with Soviet Russia in the near future." The American stopped short of identifying who would be the aggressor, but he did believe the Soviets were skillfully leading the Japanese deeper into the Chinese quicksand "with the purpose of remaining on the sidelines for the next few months." It was his opinion that Soviet policy aimed at putting themselves in the "position to accept or decline hostilities depending upon circumstances." However, he felt sure that with the China Incident unresolved, that "Japan may be capable of desperate tactics," to end Russian aid to China.[12]

Prior to these reports, Overesch and the other naval attachés seemed to indicate that the war would be a short,

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[11]Overesch to ONI, January 12, 1938, Register 12358-A, File C-10-J, R.G. 38.

[12]Ibid.; Overesch to ONI, February 9, 1938, Register 12358-A, File C-10-J, R.G. 38.

not a protracted one. As early as October, the naval attaché disclosed that the Chinese forces were not "sufficiently supported with artillery, there was no air support, morale [was] apparently very poor on all fronts." Yet by early January, the naval personnel perceived new possibilities for the Chinese war effort. Overesch viewed the Japanese tactical situation as deteriorating almost daily. "As the Chinese retreat, the deeper into China the Japanese armies must go"; in pursuing the fleeing Chinese, Japan's problems continued to mount daily. Japan faced a complex series of problems due to thinly held lines of communications, a hostile native population in their rear, and depopulated and unproductive conquered areas. A resolution of the China Incident seemed beyond Japan's ability – "unless Japan is prepared to hold indefinitely all conquered areas by force." By early February, Overesch was decidedly optimistic in reporting the Chinese situation. He conceded that on the Lunghai front (Central China Theater, Hsuchow sector) the Chinese had given up some ground; but, more importantly, the Japanese offensive had not yet accomplished its objective.[13]

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[13]Overesch to ONI, October 13, 1937, Register 21902-E, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; Overesch to ONI, January 12, 1938, Register 12358-A, File C-10-J, R.G. 38; Overesch to ONI, February 9, 1938, Register 12358-A, File C-10-J, R.G. 38. (See Appendix Figure 4).

The change in the naval groups' perception of the war stemmed in part from several factors. The "discovery" of the 8th Route Army, irregular units, the infusion of Soviet aid, and the distance of the Japanese penetration all aided in changing the naval perception of the war. No longer would pessimism and skepticism prevail as the predominant mode of thinking. With the first substantial Chinese victory in the offing, the naval section changed its view about the Chinese ability to conduct a serious war of resistance.

Similarly the military attachés underwent a transformation in their perception of the war. This new perception was not as optimistic nor as far reaching as that of the naval component, but it reveals new facets of the Chinese resistance effort.

Following the lull in the fighting that developed after the collapse of Nanking and before the drive for Hsuchow was well underway, Stilwell, in early March, outlined what he considered to be the salient features in the new Chinese situation. He attributed the continuance of the Chinese resistance to the resiliency of the Chinese people. Among these the senior attaché included: the general determination of all classes to resist; cooperation from the Chinese Communists in the war effort; the lack of serious factional rifts in the Chinese Government; and no loss of morale in

either the military or the civilian population from the numerous defeats.[14]

On the negative side, Stilwell was concerned that serious problems continued to plague the Chinese military. The military attaché bemoaned the Nationalist lack of any offensive spirit and the use of a passive defense. He was also worried by the Chinese proclivity for guerrilla warfare. Adoption of guerrilla warfare, Stilwell believed, would seriously impair the Chinese ability to deal the death blow to the Japanese army.[15]

But Stilwell went on record for the first time as seeing the possibility of a successful termination of the war. "Since Japan cannot pull out and China refuses to quit," he reasoned, "the prospect of a long drawn out struggle increases. *It is possible for China to win.*" For Japan to get a decision, as Stilwell now saw the situation, would require an increased and sustained effort. He concluded that for Japan to win it "must occupy all of China east of the 110th meridian [a line from Hainan Island to Paotow, passing just east of Sian] and [even] that . . . may not be enough."[16]

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[14]Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, March 4, 1938, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1938* (5 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), III, pp. 115-16 (hereafter cited as *FR 1938*, III).

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., emphasis added.

The change in Stilwell's position between his December 29 estimate of the situation and his March 4 report is striking. What is even more remarkable is that there was little change in the relative military situation during that time.

When Stilwell penned his December report, he believed China to be on the verge of collapse. Subsequently China had refused several peace offers and had recoiled from either political or military capitulation. Another factor that may have influenced Stilwell's new appraisal was that since the fall of Nanking, Japan had been without a clear military objective in China. It was now Japan that was forced to fight an apparent holding action until the next move was determined. Even the areas that Japan had conquered were not pacified; the Chinese morass kept sapping more and more Japanese strength and resources.

Shortly after Stilwell's March 4 dispatch, the campaign for Hsuchow began in earnest. The Chinese forces under General Li Tsung-jen stopped the Japanese and momentarily halted their drive at Taierchuang on April 6-7. The immediate results were hailed as a Chinese victory. Not since the abortive Japanese invasion of Korea in the 14th Century had Japan been defeated on the field of battle.

While it is correct that the Chinese did indeed win the field, their "victory" was overshadowed by two facts. The Chinese failed to pursue and destroy the retreating Japanese

units which led to the Japanese renewing the drive. This Chinese failure resulted in the eventual loss of the vital rail junction of Hsuchow in May. Nevertheless, the victory gained at Taierchuang was enough for the naval attachés to begin to see real military hope in the Chinese cause.

To Evans Carlson, the naval observer on the scene, "the victory at Taierchuang was earned." Everything about the Chinese forces at Taierchuang was rated as good, superior or excellent. The marine enumerated several points that had finally brought success to Chinese arms. The first was the "invariable overconfidence of the Japanese and their contempt for the Chinese army"; second was the marked improvement in the organization and training of the Chinese divisions; and third was the shift in Chinese tactics to offset superior Japanese weapons — such as night attacks and close in fighting.[17]

Strangely the military attaché's office did not have an observer at the Taierchuang engagement. Colonel Stilwell, who had gained accreditation to the Chinese 13th Army, which bore a major-role in the action, had been ordered by the War Department to Lanchow to report on the amount of Soviet Aid entering China. Upon his return, Stilwell in conjunction

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[17]Assistant Naval Attaché at Nanking to ONI, April 15, 1938, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/453, R.G. 59; Carlson to Le Hand, April 15, 1938, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951.

with the German advisors and General Pai Ch'ung-hsi conducted a postmortem of the engagement on the battlefield. The military attaché concluded that the Chinese optimism over their hard won victory was "not fully warranted." He disclosed that the "Japs did practically all [the] attacking and withdrew, not because the Chinese actually forced them back, but because their own attacks broke down. . . ." He did credit the Chinese encirclement of the Japanese forces, which denied them needed supplies, as being a crucial factor in debilitating the Japanese attacks.[18]

While Stilwell expressed satisfaction in seeing the offensive spirit surface in the Chinese forces, he realized that they had not followed up and destroyed the retreating Japanese. By failing to pursue the disorganized and fleeing column, Stilwell believed, the initiative in the campaign still lay with the Japanese. "In which case . . . the Jap attack may well carry the invaders to Hsuchow."[19]

According to Stilwell's biographer, Barbara Tuchman, "Stilwell wanted deeply to find cause for optimism. . . ."[20] But his search for this optimism was frustrated by the harsh

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[18]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 185; Stilwell telegram via Robert Jarvis to MID, April 22, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/624, R.G. 165.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 186.

realities of the military situation. Stilwell, the China partisan, expressed a private sense of pollyannaism over the Chinese success, but officially he was markedly restrained and very professional over the Chinese victory. The winds of war had blown favorably upon the Chinese at Taierchuang, but Stilwell knew those winds would reverse unless the Chinese adopted a more aggressive spirit.

The other military attaché who covered the development at Taierchuang from a distance was Frank Dorn. Like his superior, Dorn was cautious in reporting the Chinese victory. Admitting that the Chinese had shown some heretofore unused attributes, such as coordinated attacks and an aggressive spirit, Dorn too attributed the victory not to the Chinese force of arms as much as to Japanese ineptitude. The assistant attaché believed the Japanese "defeat [was] due to under-estimation of [the] enemy, insufficient troops, exhaustion of ammunition and gas for tanks . . . [and the] inability of [the] Japanese infantry [to attack] without mechanized support."[21]

Dorn, in assessing the battle some thirty-five years later, uses such platitudes as "bold," "resourceful," and "great victory" in describing the Chinese success, yet Dorn

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[21]Dorn dispatch to MID, April 8, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/599, R.G. 165; Dorn, telegram via Robert Jarvis to MID, April 6, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/598, R.G. 165.

in his recollection of the battle paralleled a tragedy of the American Civil War. "Like General Meade after his victory at Gettysburg, the Chinese failed to exploit their success and thus reap the full rewards that come with a decisive defeat of an enemy." The change in Dorn's interpretation of the battle is probably the result of the passing of time. Where he had first viewed the Japanese defeat as due to an underestimation of the Chinese, he maintained his belief that the Chinese were all but incapable of decisively defeating their foe in 1938.[22]

Both the military and the naval attachés attributed the victory at Taierchuang to Japanese overconfidence. Carlson saw a shift in Chinese tactics and an improvement in their staff work, but Stilwell and Dorn found little improvement there. Admittedly these men did not comment directly on these questions, but one suspects that if the Chinese had really forced the Japanese from the battlefield, such improvement would have been duly noted. Whereas Carlson contended that the Chinese success was due to an improved Chinese army, Stilwell and Dorn countered that Japanese mistakes were the source of their defeat. As battles go, Taierchuang was soon to fade from memory as Japan's objectives became clearer.

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[22]Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 157-58.

In mid-April, Carlson in his characteristic manner offered his appraisal of the future course of the war:

> If the Chinese keep their heads and maintain their unity they can beat them [the Japanese], but they must continue to be as self-analytical and resourceful in the future as they have been in the past several months. . . . By retiring in front of strength drawing the Japanese into salients which expose the latter's flanks, continuing to employ night attacks and close-in fighting, continuing to develop guerrilla warfare against the lines of communication, never ceasing their hammering, they can steadily whittle the Japanese down to their size, while protracting the war to the economic disadvantage of the Nips.[23]

The key to success rested upon two factors in Carlson's estimation: unity of the Chinese political factions and protraction of the war. Missionaries had noticed a change in the people, who a few months previously were "indifferent or antagonistic towards the Central Government, now they [were] solidly behind it in the policy of continued resistance."[24]

The naval attachés became increasingly attracted by the idea of a protracted war, a war that would bring into the conflict China's only two advantages: vast land area and manpower. In their reports dispatched after the first of the year, they devoted a tremendous amount of space to

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[23]Carlson to Le Hand, April 15, 1938, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951.

[24]Ibid.

guerrilla activities.[25] The range of guerrilla activities encompassed both active battle fronts and those areas supposedly conquered and pacified by the Japanese in North and Central China. The reported unit strength ranged from small bands to one numbering as high as 3,000 men in eastern Shantung Province.[26]

By July, Commander Overesch appears to have adopted a conflicting view of the effectiveness of guerrilla operations. In his report of July 2, the naval officer commented "that guerrilla activities have not thus far seriously threatened the security of the larger cities or permanently disrupted any Japanese lines of communications." But he cautioned, "the fact remains that they are taking a daily toll in Japanese casualties and [are] forcing large numbers of Japanese troops to patrol and repair lines of communications." By the end of the month he was wondering why, in spite of the large number of men committed to Chinese guerrilla

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[25]Overesch dispatch to ONI, March 18, 1938, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/419; Overesch dispatch to ONI, March 24, 1938, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/428, R.G. 59; Griffith dispatch to ONI, March 25, 1938, Register 21902-G, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; Overesch dispatch to ONI, July 2, 1938, Register 21902-H, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; Overesch dispatch to ONI, July 31, 1938, Register 21902-H, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; Overesch dispatch to ONI, September 16, 1938, State Department Copy, 793.94 ONI/647, R.G. 59.

[26]Overesch dispatch to ONI, July 31, 1938, Register 21902-H, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; Overesch dispatch to ONI, July 2, 1938, Register 21902-H, File C-9-D, R.G. 38.

operations, more damage was not done. He concluded that "in many cases they seem to be too well satisfied with political activity only." Overesch felt that a serious leadership problem was developing between the rival Chinese factions, leaving the Japanese unmolested. But if leadership was lacking and Overesch was becoming critical of the concept of guerrilla warfare why did he submit an estimate that guerrillas accounted for 5,000 wounded per month from North China alone?[27]

A partial answer to this seeming paradox may lie in the fact that Evans Carlson, whose second tour of the communist area was about to be concluded, reported the information to his superior. Carlson's report of his observations has not been located by this author. Yet, it is conceivable that Carlson, who was in the Shantung area about the end of July, may have been the one responsible for the figures and thus for the change in Overesch's position. If this is the case, the July 2 dispatch may reflect the Naval Attaché's personal views on the subject, while the following report infuses Carlson's observations and data on the matter.[28]

Gleening what information is available on the situation from Carlson's letters to the White House, one finds that,

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[27]Overesch to ONI, July 2, 1938, Register 21902-H, File C-9-D, R.G. 38; Overesch to ONI, July 31, 1938, Register 21902-H, File C-9-D, R.G. 38.

[28]Carlson, *Twin Stars*, p. 253.

according to Carlson at any rate, two different kinds of guerrilla activity existed behind Japanese lines. The communists were in control of the Hopei-Charhar-Shensi region and were actively engaged with the Japanese for dominance of the area. Carlson, however, found the situation in Shantung as being completely different. Guerrillas operating there were under the command of the Nationalist Admiral Shen Hung-lieh, the former mayor of Tsingtao. Carlson noted that the operations in that area seemed to lack the units to make their strikes as effective as those of the communists.

Carlson felt that the difference was the quality of leadership that existed between the two groups. He related the opinion that,

> Shen is an earnest patriot, but a Chinese of the old conservative school. He does not believe that people should be organized except as they organize themselves. Well, people do not organize themserves effectively if the initiative is left to them, and it is vital that they be organized in the areas in [the] rear of the Japanese lines if resistance is to be of a high order, and if activities are to be coordinated.[29]

Another factor, that may help account for Overesch's paradoxical position in July, is the increased international press attention that Chinese guerrilla activities were

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[29]Carlson to Le Hand, August 15, 1938, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; Johnson telegram to the Secretary of State, September 1, 1938, *FR 1938*, III, pp. 274-75.

receiving. Carlson, upon his return, talked at great length with the American and British press corps covering the China war. The marine was eager to talk to anyone who would listen and the journalists were eager to listen; their interest was fueled in part by the propaganda of the Chinese Ministry of Information. The Chinese intended to arouse world (and especially American) sympathy for China's plight. It is quite possible that the paradox developed because the reports were meant to complement the press reports from China. The disparity between the July reports could conceivably have been an attempt to presage Carlson's reports of his travels. Simply put, if Carlson was in contact with his superior and the July 31 report is based on Carlson's information, then Overesch's idea may have been to prepare Washington before Carlson spoke to the press.[30]

The military attachés lacked the optimism of their naval counterparts on the developments in the field. Between May and July, they again became critical of the Chinese army and the political motives that seemed to dominate Chinese military policy. While the military attachés had not, as a group, reverted to the gloom and doom picture of imminent Chinese collapse, there was criticism of the Chinese strategy

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[30]Carlson, *Twin Stars*, pp. 270-71; Tillman Durdin, "Marine Finds China Runs 'Occupied' Areas," *New York Times*, August 9, 1938, p. 9; White, *In Search of History*, pp. 76-77.

which, in their collective view, handicapped the Chinese army. One such element of criticism concerned the loss of the rail junction of Hsuchow.

There was disagreement among the American military observers as to the value of the junction. David Barrett doubted that the loss of the city would "have much effect upon the ultimate outcome of present hostilities." The Chinese, according to Barrett's analysis, seemed "little daunted by its loss," they apparently feel "that the Japanese have been made to pay dearly for a prize. . . ." Frank Dorn disagreed. With Hsuchow in Japanese hands, they had come to control the valuable north-south railroad net and also the eastern leg of the Lunghai Railroad, rendering it useless to the Chinese. Dorn seemed to be hinting that the Chinese had not made a determined stand for a vital link in their communication network.[31]

This is the first criticism by an American of Chiang Kai-shek's handling of the battle. Dorn charged that the confusion which hindered the defense of Hsuchow was the direct result of Chiang's meddling. "All orders of a decisive nature, for instance, must emanate from Hankow. If the Generalissimo personally is to command the armies in the

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[31]Barrett dispatch to MID, May 21, 1938, MID #2657-I-276/527, R.G. 165; Dorn dispatch to MID, June 6, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/247, R.G. 165.

field he should be in the field and remain there."[32] Here, once again, was the view that the problems of the Chinese army rested at the top.

As the first year of the war drew to a close, Stilwell also believed that the Chinese high command was chiefly responsible for China's situation. The American concluded that Central Government, "as usual let events drag them along. They go where the Japanese attack pulls them and still think only in terms of defense." Stilwell added that the typical Chinese military mind was more interested in where the next defensive line would be rather than in stopping the Japanese advance once and for all. They were "thinking of where they will fight in Hunan [Province] after Hankow falls." He was sure that China would drag the war out to the limit. Stilwell was fast coming to the conclusion that it was the people rather than the government that would be the "well" of resistance against Japan.[33]

In a later situation report, Stilwell expounded the point that the Chinese government was not as spiritually motivated as the people.

> On the Chinese side, the spirit to fight to the last is of the utmost importance, but to an

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Stilwell dispatch to MID, June 25, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/778, R.G. 165. (See Appendix Figure 4.)

> observer it appears that, coupled with this spirit, should go the determination to make a stand before the Chinese armies are driven back to the point where the Japanese can afford to ignore them. After all, a government maintained with difficulty in the mountain fastness of Szechuan and Kweichow or far-distant Yunnan can very easily lose the aspect of a real China, and assume the appearance of a rebel faction fighting against a country, even though Japan-dominated, which, because of its size and population, must be considered as the real China by most of the world.[34]

To Stilwell, and presumably the other military attachés, the possibility of a protracted war was dangerous. When the above report is compared with Dorn's June 6, it becomes evident that the Central Government was lacking the political determination to engage Japan. What had first been viewed as a reluctance on the part of the Chinese to engage a materially superior foe, was now seen as something more sinister. Planning to fight in Hunan in July, before the fall of Hankow in October, shows how ingrained the concept of a protracted, defensive war had become to the ruling elite. What Stilwell had seen as vitally important all along was the necessity of China bogging down Japan in a "meat grinder" series of offensive operations, much like Grant's strategy against Lee. If such an offensive strategy were followed, the Chinese superiority in manpower would soon drive the

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[34]Stilwell dispatch to MID, July 15, 1938, MID #2657-I-276/529, R.G. 165.

Japanese losses to unacceptable levels with the probable result being domestic pressure for a Japanese withdrawal.

From early 1938, the naval component increasingly came to believe that China could continue to offer effective resistance to Japan's onslaught. In official and unofficial reports was a constant thread of optimism which, despite Chinese setbacks on most fronts, grew into a consensus. This consensus centered around three important points; protraction of the war to a state where commitments and responsibilities overextended Japanese manpower and resources, guerrilla warfare to keep pressure on Japanese lines of communications without risking the complete destruction and annihilation of the regular Chinese army, and the infusion of outside support from countries sympathetic to China's cause or countries like the Soviet Union. The naval attachés believed that in this way China could blunt and eventually reverse Japan's aggressive designs on the Asiatic mainland. But such a course of action presupposed a united China wedded to a single purpose. Without the wholehearted support of the various factions only token resistance would be possible.

There appears also in the naval position a serious lack of military realism. While the protracted war doctrine, seen in historical perspective, seemed to be the only viable course of action then open to China, the lack of adequate military resources appears to have been overlooked. The

Japanese campaigns in the spring of 1938, seriously limited China's access to needed war material. The loss of Amoy in May and the naval blockade of Canton seriously weakened China's ability to defend itself. Contrary to Carlson's view, even if the necessary credits and supplies had been readily forthcoming from those countries friendly to China, there were not enough ports of entry to bring the material into China. The Indo-China transport network (Haiphong to Kunming, Yunnan railroad) had track gage changes and was dependent on continued French cooperation. The overland road from Burma was not yet suitable for large scale transport of war materials.[35]

The immense logistical strain placed upon China, with a coast dominated by the Japanese, compounded by the psychological isolation of the Chinese was enough to cast doubt on the whole naval perception as to China's ability to continue serious resistance. The naval group, and Carlson in particular, did overlook, or at best deemphasize, the effect of these factors when viewing the military situation. Their position on protracted war, guerrilla tactics, and the infusion of outside aid did not reach the heart of the situation.

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[35]Carlson to Le Hand, October 16, 1938, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951.

Unlike the naval unit, Stilwell's group in principle opposed the idea of protracted war. The military attachés felt that this strategy left the initiative for battle entirely to the Japanese. By placing the utmost reliance upon winning through outlasting, the Chinese could never pick the time and place to fight a conventional battle. Rather, they were forced to respond to Japanese advances, losing the element of maneuver and surprise. According to Stilwell, "the idea of the Chinese is simply to make it [the Japanese advance] costly; they do not care about holding any given position, feeling that there [are] plenty more good ones in the rear, and the idea of a counterattack does not appeal to them." The military attachés believed that this concept was so ingrained that there was little hope that it would ever be discarded.[36]

Another area of disagreement with the naval view was on guerrilla operations. Barrett noted that such activities were widespread and were causing the Japanese trouble. The Assistant Attaché, however, appeared troubled by the success such operations were having. Barrett warned that such activities might be more harmful to the Chinese cause than the results they produced. The peasant, he reasoned, "may

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[36]Barrett dispatch to MID, November 17, 1938, MID #2657-H-439/1074, R.G. 165.

decide that it is better to side with the Japanese and enjoy some measure of peace and quiet than endure both the exaction of the guerrillas and the oppression of the Japanese army."[37]

The only point of semiagreement with the naval group came in the form of aid to the Chinese effort. Stilwell, by late August, believed that it would be in the United States' interests to aid the Chinese. In a brief meeting with the Treasury Department's agent in China, J. Lossing Buck, Stilwell advanced the idea that more should be done to aid China. According to Buck, Stilwell argued that American policy should be more positive with respect to China. Relying on Stilwell's opinion, Buck stated that the money spent would be "'better defense for us than only building our own defense equipment.'"[38] Although it is not certain, it is highly likely that the others in the military group agreed with Stilwell on aid to China.

As the war continued, Stilwell and the other military attachés concluded that whether or not a protracted war was conducted, Japan could not win. Japan's "no-win situation" was the result of the determination of the ordinary Chinese peasant not to capitulate to the invaders. The implication is evident from the various reports that the decision to

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[37]Barrett dispatch to MID, August 17, 1938, MID #2055-622-315, R.G. 165.

[38]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, pp. 189-90.

continue the war was not made by the Chinese political leadership, but by the lowly peasants. The masses, with or without political leadership or organization, would continue the war. If the leaders capitulated, the peasants would likely continue to resist. There was little hope, after 1937, that Japan could win a military decision to the war. The Chinese armies were beaten and ineffective after the Nanking debacle, but the common soldier of peasant stock was not finished with the war. He was a resilient character and would continue to oppose the Japanese no matter how wasteful and ignorant his officers were.

It is at this juncture that the American military and naval attachés differed. The naval group looked to novel concepts such as guerrilla warfare where space and time factors were limitless. The military group looked at the raw courage of the Chinese people and their capabilities of endurance and inner strength. While both groups decided that China would continue to resist Japan's designs, the means that they employed to arrive at the consensus are different and important. Military efforts, especially novel ones, can either succeed or fail. Too many independent variables can influence the course of military efforts. Yet with a firm and determined populace, less is given to chance and more to conviction. The Chinese people were firm in their position; the military attachés agreed on this.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The disparity between the two attaché groups' perception of the war possibly hampered, for some time, the formulation of a clear picture of the conflict by the policy managers in Washington. The fundamental areas of the disagreement and the timing of their respective shifts in opinion tended to cloud an already obscure view of the war. On the surface of the issue it appears, at first reading, that the two groups were not reporting the same war. Before this aspect of the problem can be addressed, a recap of the two attaché positions would help the reader delineate their positions. Next an analysis of the group shift and what this perceptual shift signifies will help in determining the philosophical orientation of each group. Finally, an attempt will be made to explain how the attachés viewed the danger of Japanese domination of China to the United States.

The most disparaging aspect of disagreement between the two attaché groups was the perception concerning the Chinese strategy of protracting the war. The naval attachés' apparent concern in supporting the Chinese position of a protracted war stems from their basic belief that the Chinese lacked the modern arms and trained professional forces to engage the Japanese in a continuous exhaustive campaign. Rather

than have the Chinese risk their meager resources in such a manner and chance their total destruction, the naval group accepted the doctrine of protraction. They perhaps simply saw a war of attrition as being the most favorable alternative available to the Chinese. This doctrine developed because of the drain it placed on Japan's manpower, natural resources, and financial resources. Japan's strategy had to center on gaining a speedy decision in a lightning war; otherwise, a lengthy involvement in China would, in the naval assessment, bankrupt Japan.[1]

As a necessary corollary to the doctrine of a protracted war, the naval group wholeheartedly supported the adoption of the principle of guerrilla warfare. Carlson and Griffith, possibly because of their previous encounters with guerrilla operations and also because of their observations in China, countenanced the necessity of offering some type of resistance to Japan in the meantime. As Carlson commented, guerrilla tactics would effectively block further Japanese penetration and protract the war; giving the Chinese time to adequately train a force capable of dealing a death blow to the invaders.

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[1]Carlson to Le Hand, April 15, 1938, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951; Samuel B. Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung: On Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1961), pp. 66-67; Carlson to Nelson Johnson, October 14, 1938, Nelson Johnson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Evans Carlson, "The Unorthodox War Continues," *Amerasia* (March, 1939), p. 15.

Griffith's observations led to the conclusion that guerrilla activities were presenting Japan with a tremendous problem. The people were being armed, thereby limiting Japan's areas of control and stifling its lines of communications, thereby forcing more and more troops to be used for garrison duty rather than for offensive operations.

The Naval Attaché echoed these sentiments on the value of guerrilla operations. Commenting on the widespread range of such operations, Overesch noted that it is only when a full realization is obtained of what is going on behind Japanese lines that one is able to fully comprehend the tremendous losses in men and material the Japanese army must be suffering. Later he estimated that there were close to 10,000 men per month from North China alone.

The key to the naval attachés' position essentially was that the Chinese did not have the trained forces and material necessary to oppose successfully the Japanese in conventional orthodox war in 1938. In their opinion for the Chinese to continue to contest the Japanese, two conditions had to be met. The first was to protract the war and deny Japan the speedy victory which it sought. Second, the Chinese had to inflict as much damage upon the Japanese as possible and to deny the Japanese and their Chinese collaborators the political and economic cohesion necessary to exploit the conquered areas. But as Carlson cautioned, this strategy

must not be allowed to replace the need for training a formidable army to conventionally engage the Japanese and destroy its main force. Simply put, protracted war and guerrilla operations were seen by the naval group as measures of expediency to obtain time.

Standing opposed to the naval view, the military attachés regarded the protraction of the war and the ensuing emphasis on guerrilla warfare with deep-seated distaste if not horror. Stilwell, personally, considered the idea of a protracted conflict as a sign of military weakness. The idea of trading space for time was an inherent manifestation of Chinese tradition; that is, "that most Chinese are Taoists at heart. Taoism teaches nonresistance to outside forces; [and] it is foolish to struggle against a general trend."[2] Although Stilwell's comment was written several years later, he had captured what he considered to be the essence of the Chinese mentality. Simply put, to offer resistance in the Western sense was beyond the ability of the average Chinese commander. The aggressive spirit manifested itself least of all in the higher levels of command.' The Chinese, in Stilwell's view, were still creatures of tradition and, as was their nature, viewed the future by looking to their past.

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[2]Theodore White, ed., *The Stilwell Papers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 318; Tuchman, *Stilwell*, p. 172.

Rather than protract the war, the military attachés, as a group, foresaw the need for the Chinese to forgo a passive defense and shift to the offensive. As Stilwell often stated, the Chinese seldom took the initiative which allowed the Japanese to maintain the element of tactical surprise in the attack. The Chinese went where the Japanese attack pulled them and still think in terms of defense. The military attachés decried the Chinese inability to counter-attack. As David Barrett noted, Japanese tactics, pushing out salients repeatedly, offered countless opportunities for a Chinese counterattack. But seldom was the attack started. Dorn claimed that it was Confucian values that often prevented a Chinese counterattack. The Chinese penchant for conflict resolution by discussion and compromise "were unable to match the Japanese attitude that violence, self-sacrifice, and courage on the battlefield could overcome all obstacles."[3] The analysis of the military group was that the Chinese could better use their resources in an offensive war rather than a protracted defensive one. To the military attachés, Chinese forces had to begin to gain the offensive spirit, make better use of their superior numbers, tactics, and terrain, and disregard the idea of passive defense. Traditional philosophical precepts had to be overcome if China was to rid itself of Japan in the near future.

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[3]Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 128.

Hence the naval attachés generally favored a war based upon the protraction of the conflict; emphasis on guerrilla tactics, use of regular troops in a static defensive posture, all as a means to buy China the necessary time to train an army capable of confronting Japan as an equal is important. What then did they see of the political consequences of such a strategy for the Central Government? While not directly commenting upon the subject, one can draw inferences that they saw only minor consequences from such actions.

Evans Carlson foresaw only the need to maintain the "United Front" intact. The marine believed that each of the two major anti-Japanese political forces contributed to the resistance effort. The communists possessed the ability to mobilize the people and instill in them "a deep spiritual conviction and a militant nationalism . . . for resisting invasion."[4] The more progressive elements of the Kuomintang, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, contributed devotion and integrity to the national cause. Carlson believed that the Generalissimo was in a position that raised him above party interests "enabling him to perceive and select for the public benefit the meritorious ideas and practices of all parties."[5]

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[4]Carlson to Le Hand, September 23, 1938, Roosevelt Papers, PPF 4951.

[5]Carlson, *Twin Stars*, pp. 318, 276, 130.

The junior marine officer assumed that a rapproachment between the opposing parties had occurred. This idea, borne out of a military and spiritual necessity, was equivalent to a parliamentary war cabinet, where both parties put away their political ambitions for the common good. Carlson believed that the end result would be a government where extremist elements in each party would be ousted and a beneficial centrist government, able to weld the diverse national interests together would emerge to govern wartime China. Rather than believe that dark clouds on the political horizon could result from a protracted war, Carlson only saw beneficial results deriving from it.

The military attaché group, especially Stilwell, saw in protracting the war, the distinct possibility and even a probability that the Central Government would suffer the vexations of isolations from the vast population if this strategy was followed. Stilwell's July 15 report emphasized the political consequences such actions would invite. Stilwell warned that such a government could well lose its national identity.

According to Frank Dorn's analysis, the majority of the peasants were abandoned by the Central Government, and were not directly under the heel of the Japanese occupation. Hence the apparatus of the government remained intact, but without direction or guidance from outside. "Thus stranded,

[the peasant] soon began to grasp at any straw of paternal authority and deliverance from their isolation."[6] The severest implication of Dorn's analysis is that the Kuomintang callously and wantonly deserted the masses who existed inside and outside areas of Japanese occupation. Into the leadership vacuum flowed the communist cadres planting the seeds of the postwar revolution. The communists filled the peasants' need for leadership and direction.

The military attachés appraisal of the political situation by the end of 1938 exhibited a consensus conclusion. The very nature of the war-protracted, left the Central Government in an awkward and isolated position. The farther into the interior Chiang retreated, the more precarious and isolated the government became. Fearing the loss of the government's national identity and the abandonment of millions of anti-Japanese Chinese, the military attaché group became even more opposed to the concept of a protracted war and a passive defense.

While the two attaché groups differed over the means they used to arrive at the same conclusion, it should be remembered that they were in agreement as to the end product. That is, Japan could not conquer China. The multiple problems of a hostile population, a vast land area, and limited

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[6]Dorn, *Sino-Japanese War*, p. 230.

resources combined to deny Japan the victory it sought over China. Japan simply did not have the necessary resources and manpower to conquer the vast area of China.

The foregoing discussion has focused upon the fundamental areas of disagreement between the two attaché groups. Given the diversity of their respective views, what assumptions and conclusions can be drawn from each position? Why the discrepancy of five months between the naval turning point in April 1938, and the similar August conclusion of the military personnel?

Evans Carlson and Samuel Griffith, returning from the hinterland of irregular or guerrilla activities, gleaned the idea that the war was not going to be one where conventional doctrines would dominate. The ability of irregular forces to hamper the movement of Japanese troops and supplies and to create problems in the occupied areas became a stimulating new force in the way these men perceived the war. Also a dominating factor in influencing their new view of the war was the ability of the communists to mobilize the people to oppose Japan. Carlson's letters to the White House carried his unshakable belief that no matter what the Central Government did in regard to Japan, the communist element was committed to the struggle. It only took the Chinese victory at Taierchung to swing Carlson and most importantly his superior, Commander Overesch, to the position that by

merging the two doctrines of waging war together they would provide the eventual tactical and strategic wherewithall to reverse the course of the ear.

When the events of April 6 and 7, the Taierchang engagement, are viewed in their proper context, the naval personnel's assumption that the popular will of the Chinese people to resist could not be broken, their position begins to harden. This is especially true of Evans Carlson. The reverses the Chinese suffered in the remainder of 1938, as serious as they were, did not dampen their optimism. By October, the naval group believed that Japan was in dire straights to launch the invasion of South China.[7] In other words, Japan was desperate and grasping at straws to bring the China Incident to a conclusion. Even the disaster of Munich failed to dissuade them from their belief.

The shift in opinion from the military group's perspective started in March of 1938. Stilwell maintained that factors were such that Chinese morale and unity could not be broken. He also felt that Japan lacked the capability to occupy the great expanse of China necessary for a total conquest. This view did not mean that he felt the situation was not serious, rather he intoned a belief that the Chinese people were determined to resist the Japanese invation. To

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[7]Carlson to Johnson, October 14, 1938, Johnson Papers.

Stilwell, and apparently the other military attachés, the spirit of the people to resist was one of the most important factors in the total resistance effort. Stilwell held this view with minor modifications until the end of the summer.

By August, Stilwell's position became such that he was seemingly advocating increased American involvement in the war. This shift in Stilwell's position probably derived from several observations made during the course of the war. The people and the army, despite severe setbacks, were still determined to carry on the struggle, all classes, including the often reclarient communists, were firmly committed to the conflict. Another factor that comes into Stilwell's preview was the inability of the Japanese, despite several excellent opportunities, to fix and destroy the weakened Chinese Army. Had Japan succeeded in this goal in the Hsuchow campaign, Stilwell might not have advocated an increase in American aid to China. Another factor that possible entered into the new position was that political and military leaders who were pro-Japanese in sympathy had been purged from the Central Government's ranks. A final factor that probably influenced Stilwell's August decision was that Japan had committed too many mistakes, both tactical and strategic, to bring the war to a successful conclusion. Simply put, the prognosis that had existed at the end of December was no longer applicable in August. Japan was not capable of

conquering China; China's resilience was too strong to allow a Japanese victory by August and certainly by October 1938.

Part of the problem in explaining the time lag in the attachés reactions to the Chinese situation may lie in previous exposure or the lack of it to the potential of guerrilla warfare. The two marine "advocates" of a guerrilla approach to the war — Carlson and Griffith — had firsthand experience with small wars. Both junior officers had served with pacification forces in the Caribbean and Central American areas. Carlson served in Nicaragua, and Griffith, in Haiti. Of the army group, only Stilwell had encountered guerrillas in the Philippines (1904-06), and then only on one or two occasions.[8] Barrett and Dorn had not encountered such activities in their careers. This explanation may go far in understanding the differing approaches to that aspect of the war.

The differing reaction by both groups to guerrilla warfare raises an intriguing question: How did the two services deal with the theoretical or philosophical implications of guerrilla operations toward regular forces? The United States Army experienced a somewhat limited encounter with bush wars. The Indian campaigns, the Philippine Insurrection, and Pershing's Mexican expeditionary force are the

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[8]Tuchman, *Stilwell*, pp. 18-21, *passim*.

only pre-World War II examples that come most readily to mind. On the other hand, the Marine Corps had been almost constantly engaged in small wars, in one place or another, since the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. The military attachés' seeming lack of interest with Chinese guerrilla activities may result from more than lack of exposure — it may lie in a complete intellectual void on the subject. This may, in fact, help explain why the military component never detailed an observer to report on the 8th Route Army's activities in the period under review. Only additional research into professional publications of the Army's combat arms will reveal how these units viewed guerrilla warfare.

An additional factor worth considering is why the military attachés were so critical of conventional Chinese military strategy. Part of the explanation may lie in Stilwell's background. Stilwell's experience as a Corps Intelligence Officer during the first war instilled in him the need for offensive operations. The static nature of that war left a profound effect on most professional military men to bring offensive action or a war of movement back to the battlefield. Prior to Stilwell's embarkation for China as military attaché, he taught at the Infantry School at Fort Benning. According to his biographer, "Stilwell studied the

theory of combined mobility, penetration and surprise. . . ."[9] What he found in China was a medieval mob for an army that adopted a strategy contrary to that then being developed in the West. The Chinese adopted a passive strategy that had at its core the objective of holding or avoiding advancing Japanese units. To a man with Stilwell's level of professionalism such an idea was all but totally unacceptable.

What developed in China during 1937-38, was that each group viewed the war through its independent and often conflicting set of criteria. Each group focused upon those aspects of the war with which it was most familiar. What emerged was not only a somewhat narrow view of the war but also a view that was tinged with the military thinking or philosophy that was in "vogue" then. Each group shows a tendency to exclude those elements of the war effort with which it was not familiar. Generally the military attachés scrutinized the upper levels of the command structure, while the naval group reported on those levels of command that were on the battalion or company level. Simply, both groups reported differing aspects of the war. Even though a different intellectual basis was used in evaluating the situation, the fact remains that a unity of opinion emerged by the summer of 1938. From the different focal points

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[9]Ibid., p. 125.

emerged a picture of the war. In the end, both groups came to believe that China could not be defeated.

There is good reason to believe that the attachés, especially Carlson and Stilwell, viewed the expansion of Japan into China as a matter of vital concern to the United States. As early as the summer of 1937, Stilwell saw China as a necessary first step in Japan's expansion into the Western Pacific and southern Asia. Carlson, barred from openly speaking against Japan's expansion by Marine Corps authorities, resigned his commission in 1939. By early 1940, he was stressing in public speaking engagements the idea that unless America and the other democracies acted to blunt Japan's expansion it would soon be too late. As the events of December 7, 1941, proved, Japan could only be stopped by the enormous expenditure of American blood and treasure.

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APPENDIX

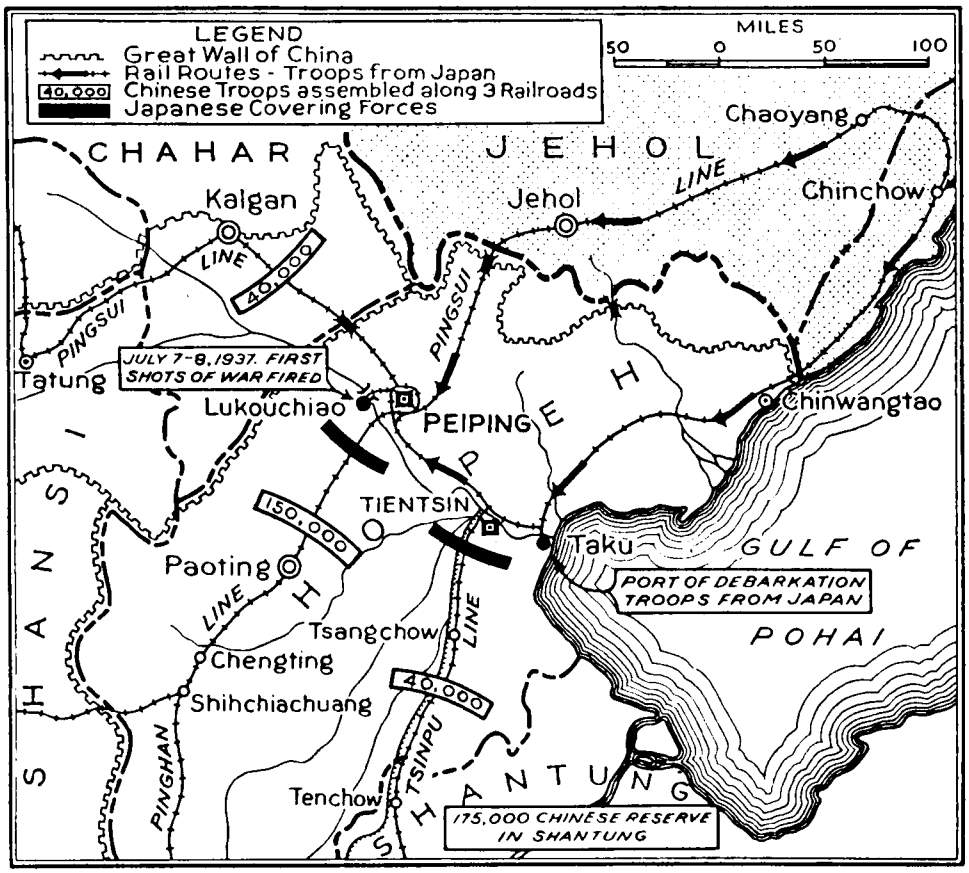


Figure 1. Initial operations in North China, 1937.

Source: C. Rodney Smith, "Military Lessons from the Chinese-Japanese War," *The Marine Corps Gazette*, XXIV (March, 1940), p. 27.

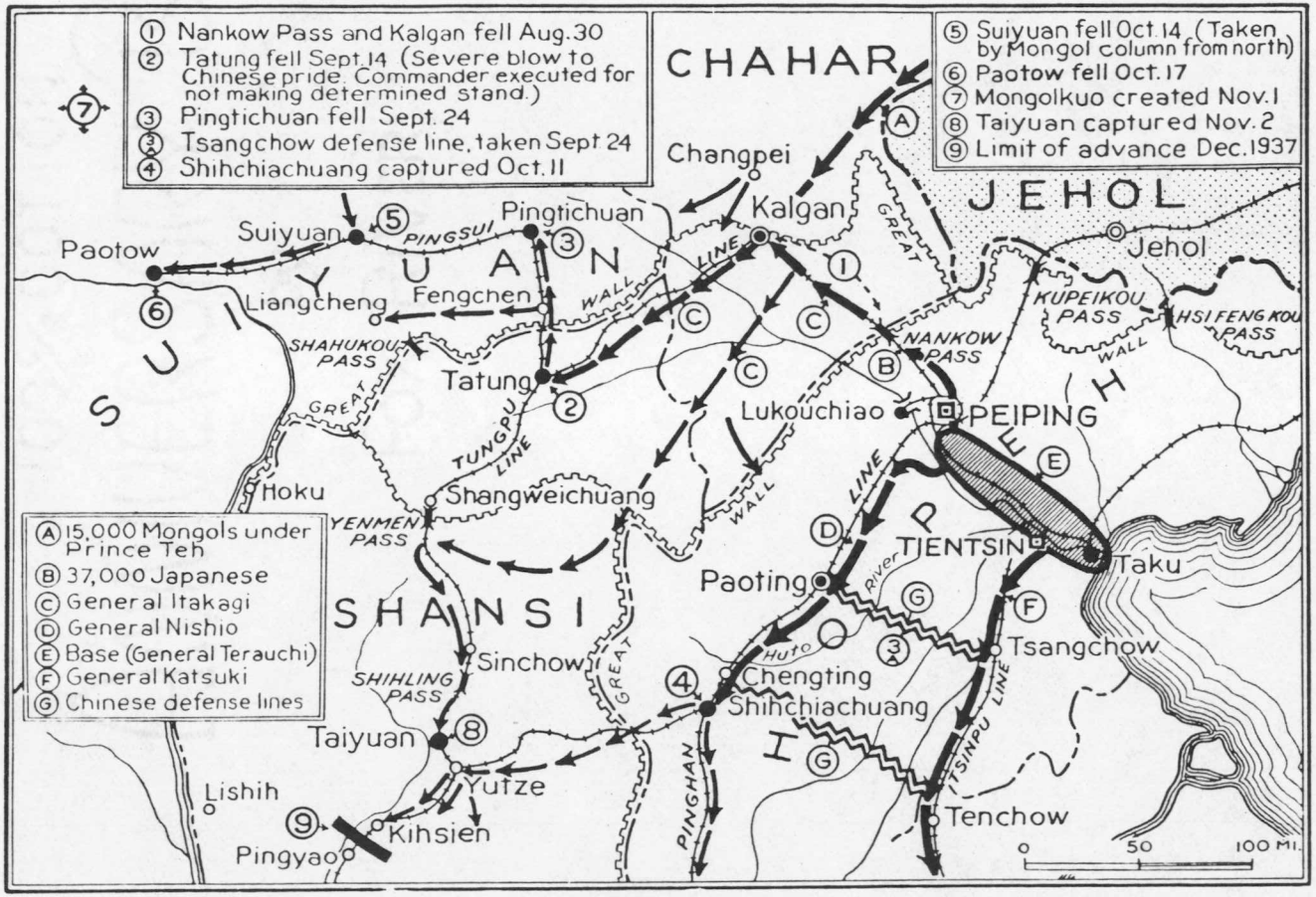


Figure 2. Japanese operations, 1937.

Source: C. Rodney Smith, "Military Lessons from the Chinese-Japanese War," *The Marine Corps Gazette*, XXIV (March, 1940), p. 30.

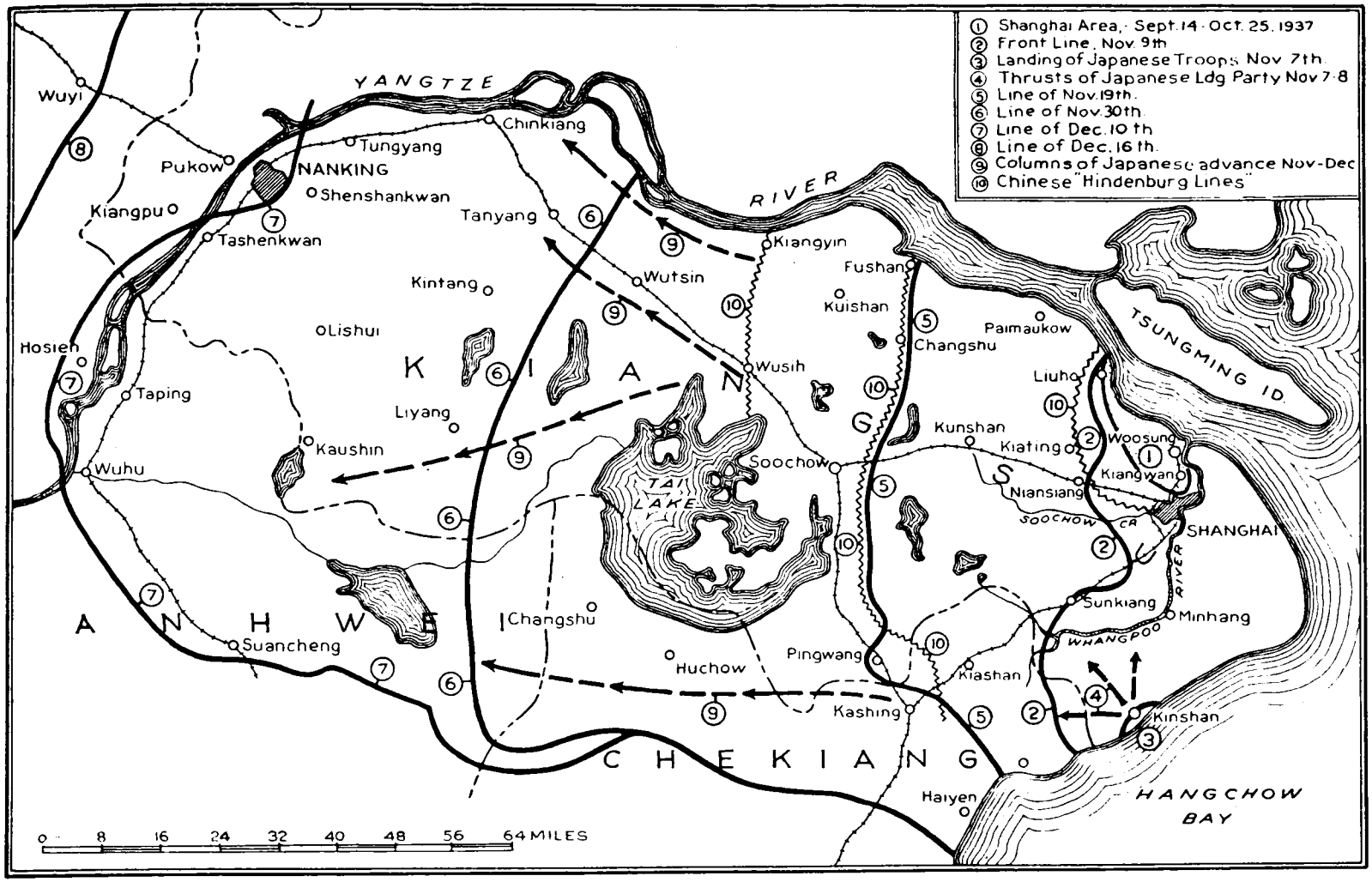


Figure 3. Shanghai-Nanking Campaign, November-December 1937.

Source: C. Rodney Smith, "Military Lessons from the Chinese-Japanese War," *The Marine Corps Gazette*, XXIV (March, 1940), p. 33.

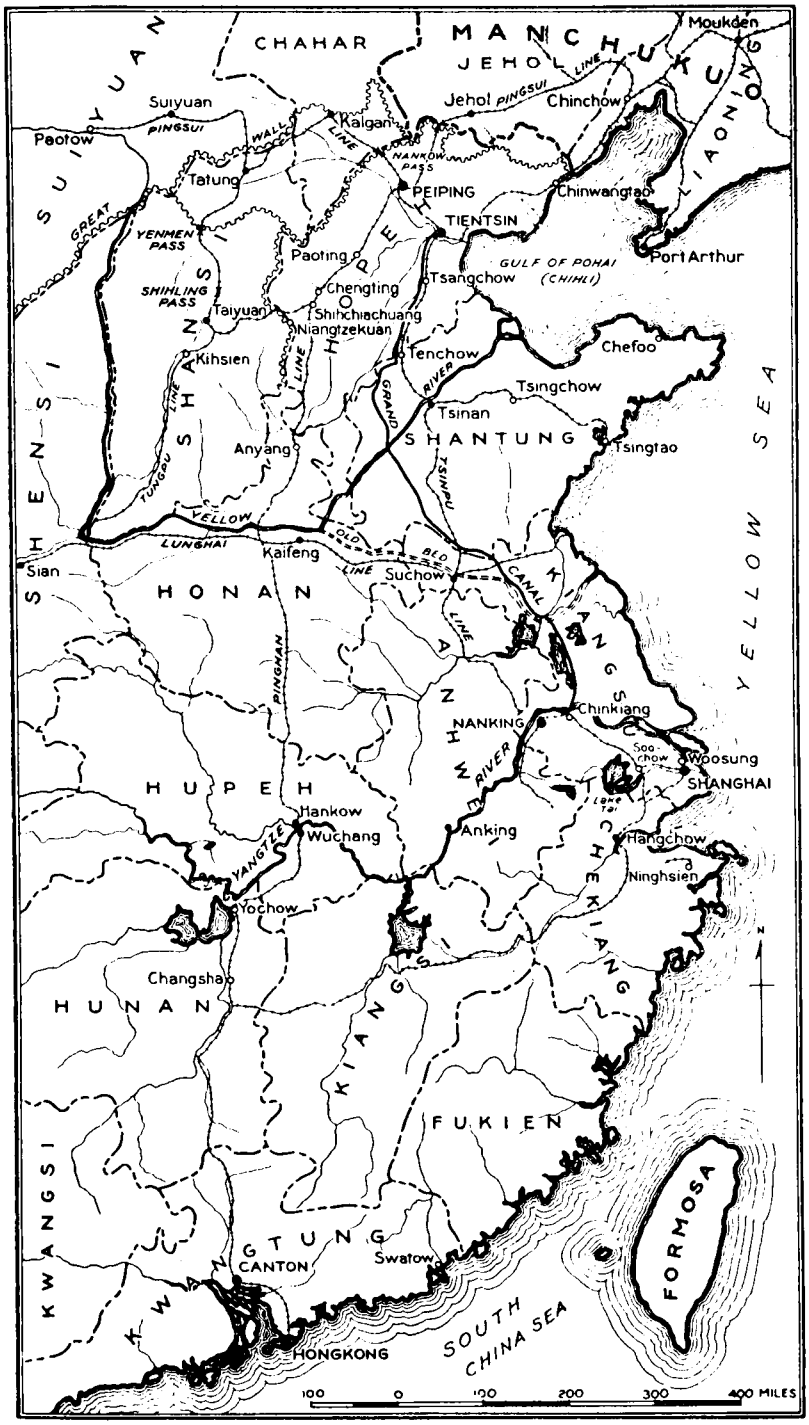


Figure 4. General map of war areas in China.

Source: C. Rodney Smith, "Military Lessons from the Chinese-Japanese War," *The Marine Corps Gazette*, XXIV (March, 1940), p. 29.

VITA

Joseph Pride Distretti was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on August 28, 1949. He attended elementary and high school in that city until 1963 when he moved with his parents to Adamsville, Tennessee. He graduated from Adamsville High School in May 1967. He then attended Jackson State Community College, Jackson, Tennessee, until he volunteered for duty with the United States Marine Corps. He served two tours of duty in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia before being honorably discharged in December 1971.

He resumed his studies at Jackson State Community College before transferring to The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in history in March 1976. He entered the Graduate School in the fall of that year, and received a Master of Arts in College Teaching degree in history in June 1981.

He is married to the former Ann Smith of Selmer, Tennessee.