THE CHINA EXPEDITION

Excerpts from the diary kept by then 2d Lt Shoup during the campaign he refers to as: "The China Exhibition of 1927."

By Gen David M Shoup (Ret.)

IT WAS April 1, 1927 at at Marine Barracks, Philadelphia. Already this day thirty-two brand new second lieutenants had among other things spent six hours in a hot classroom sleeping and listening to what the instructor was striving in vain to instill within our minds. This had put us in a frame of mind not exactly right for going to war, but no one especially desired to stay and have this happen to them every day for the next six weeks. The best alternative was to hope that another regiment be formed and sent to China which would include a part of this Basic Class. This hope was foremost in everyone's mind.

This particular evening four of us had driven downtown. There I heard the newsboy wailing, "More Marines go to China." The paper stated that another regiment of Marines was to be formed at San Diego and stand by in the event the situation in China became such that they would be needed.

This was great news, for we felt certain that some of us would surely get to go on this, the third detail. The commissioned personnel in the USMC was depleted by the Nicaraguan Expedition and the two units which were on their way to China.

We began to discuss the likelihood of our being among the chosen few and to cuss the possibility of being left behind. It would seem that Headquarters would be making a grave error by leaving us out of the picture. A few more words of assurance and we parted, my brother officers to the Navy Yard, and I to purchase one ticket good for any seat possible during no particular showing of that enthralling screen version of *What Price Glory*. I unexpectedly got a ticket for the evening performance. Since I had not requested permission to be absent after 2200, (we were school boys now), I called the Company Commander. This he granted only after some hesitation. This delay in answering and the rather dubious reply did not at that time have any special significance. I was to learn later, however, that there was a reason for both.

The film was even more stirring to me than the play produced in Indianapolis some 10 months before. This was because I now witnessed the picture as a Marine, the play as a college student.

The show ended and I lost no time in returning to the Barracks. I checked in. A brother officer greeted me in an envious manner with, "You sure are a lucky devil." I was informed that I was one of ten who had received orders to go to China. Not having time for such foolishness at this hour, I sang out in a rather knowing manner, "April Fool."

I rushed to the barracks and was met at the top of the ladder by another officer, whose glee already knew no bounds. Yes, we were fortunate. He took one moment to hastily warn me that those who had received no orders and were apparently doomed to remain in school, had already used one of the "lucky ten" rather roughly.

Later I had noticed a light in one of the rooms and heard loud talking inside. I knocked and the

door was swung open with a bang on the wall followed by the crash of a glass on the floor. A half dozen hands grabbed me, dragged me into this room, with its unbearable stench of cigarette smoke and alcohol, threw me to the floor and fell upon me—all the time saying such things as "You lucky so-and-so," "You Chinese devil." They were pouring gin on me from head to foot. My eyes smarted terribly and I will never know how many gulping swallows I took in order to keep from strangling. This initial onslaught lasted about five minutes, but seemed five hours. I was up, allowed to cleanse my face, but not excused from drinking what for me proved to be an undue amount of gin. I was soon sobbing and telling them how badly I hated to leave them and how they could see that I was in no way responsible for this bit of luck. This won them all over to my side and I left. All night long I was stringing beads of Chinese cash and brushing pigtails from my face.

Each Lieutenant went his own way, but there happened to be four of us that chose to leave Philadelphia at the same time. We arrived in Norfolk that evening and went in quest of the O.D. He turned out to be a 2dLt with whom I had become acquainted the preceding fall at the Marine football camp at Durham, N. H. It's a fact that with a few years' service, one is able to go into any Marine station and see old acquaintances, which helps to cast a spell over one and claim him for life.

In the morning we were given our assignments. Three of us were to be in the 15th Machine Gun Company. We also met the captain who was to command that Company. When he entered the door he looked like a very decent man except a little serious, but he no doubt had a lot to think of to get a new company organized and that with the help of three inexperienced Lts. I could tell at first glance, however, that he was one which it would be best never to say "I don't know" in reply to a question. This decision guided my reply when after shaking hands he inquired if I knew the organization of a machine gun platoon, to which I replied incorrectly that I did. He then said, "You will command the first platoon. You are getting 16 men from the Barracks Detachment here and you will complete your unit from the men from Annapolis who are arriving this afternoon. Diagram your organization and let me know by noon how many men you need to complete it."

A few days later we boarded a westbound train for California and the Far East. We were not fortunate enough to get a machine gun to take in the coaches or we would have spent many more hours dealing with things mechanical, for we were a machine gun company in name only. There were but few of the men who knew anything about the weapon and they only knew what they could remember of some few, faint and far away instructions which they had been given.

The trip was long, cold and eventful. Two near-wrecks (including a flooded washout in Kansas) and several way station throngs interspaced the 3,000 miles.

We arrived in San Diego and, as was the case when we left Norfolk, we were cheered by a cold, drizzling rain, the object being to keep us aboard as long as possible. Within an hour or so we reached our destination and were disembarking in the rear of the great new Barracks at the Marine Base in San Diego. Before the train had come to a halt I saw two officers whom I had known at Parris Island (my first foreign duty station).

The short period in San Diego was devoted to the madness of organizing and preparing for overseas. This madness gave way to frenzy when we were officially advised to be ready to start loading on Saturday and that we would sail immediately upon completion of the loading.

What with hundreds of motor vehicles and the caissons for the artillery, supplies for the entire Asiatic force for 90 days, and a couple of squadrons of aviation, it looked as if the mass of things collected upon the dock looked too enormous to be loaded upon any water craft that I had ever seen. This certainly was a revelation as to the capacity of ships.

Working parties toiled all Saturday night, and Sunday morn they were ready to announce that we would leave at 1700 on Easter Sunday, April 17. Our ship was the Dollar Lines' *President Grant*.

All lines were away and the ship was nosing away from the pier, but we still had thousands of strings of confetti connecting us to the U.S.A. The air was cloudy with the small bits of many-colored paper. The strings of paper soon became taut, broke and we were off amid loud and wild cheering. Off to what we hoped was to be a fight, although we didn't know at the time just what our destination was to be. The Associated Press in the late papers had predicted that it would be the Philippines, but we were sailing under sealed orders and no one, if they knew, would give out any statement to that effect.

After crossing the 180° meridian the ship was ordered to Olongapo, P.I. This was the topic of conversation for the rest of the while. As hard as we tried not to believe it, the inevitable will happen. Quite a drop in morale. Those who had served there before didn't help the situation by telling terrible tales of fever, dysentery, heat exhaustion, etc.

We unloaded at Olongapo. A couple of days and the ship sailed away for Manila, leaving us to our plight. But whatever it might be, it did not seem that it should be an immediate removal.

Most of the time was spent getting shaken down, situated in our new surroundings and most

of all becoming accustomed to this great change in climate. Painting and cleaning of equipment and schools not requiring strenuous exercise were the things which occupied the greater part of the time of the 15th Co.

A few days later *Chaumont* came and took the artillery to Shanghai and then to Tientsin. This relieved the pressure a bit, for in this remnant of a station so many men were almost unwieldy.

Our men were fast becoming efficient in the handling of the guns. They were able to tell what to do under certain likely situations which would arise while handling and firing the machine gun, but there were but few who had actually fired the weapon and it is only through actual firing that proficiency in manipulation is attained. The Captain was certain that we must have men fire the piece if it was only a few rounds each. We acquired a navy range at Macariga. We learned that the guns would function, which we didn't know for sure—although naturally we were reasonably sure for they were mechanically correct. But that isn't the same as actually hearing the put-put-put. Also a number of men knew the sensation of sitting behind a machine gun in action. It was all worthwhile, though we were cut short by the rain.

We had listened to a letter only a week before in which the General had said that he was making every effort to get us out of Olongapo. He was hoping that we could have the opportunity to smell the Whangpoo in the good old summer time. Now we sure enough were going to China. Everyone would have been pleased to go—anywhere. But now that we were going to China, all were quite happy. We started for China, and that's where we wanted to go.

This meant breaking camp: quickly accomplished. We returned to find all sea bags, equipment and company property in a deplorable condition. Having been beneath the best part of the roof over our company barracks, everything was soaked to the limit. Elbow grease and sunshine helped put a silver lining in these clouds, and all looked forward with eagerness to the coming of *Chaumont*.

Chaumont arrived on the afternoon of the ninth of June. We were ordered to be ready to go aboard at 0300 on the tenth. None were sorry, for five weeks under the past conditions had been quite enough. All was put in readiness before liberty. Then those that desired and had the money or had already formed the habit of "chit" signing, proceeded to Tia Juana and Gordon's Farm to bid their bottled friends a fond farewell.

The ship plowed her way through the Yellow Sea up the Whangpoo and past the mouth of the Yangtze River and the Woo-Sung forts. These old forts are still manned by the Southern forces and one thing they do is to fire upon any ship attempting to proceed further up the river after sundown. Ships must lie out over night and enter by daylight for the river traffic is so heavy.

We arrived 10 June and tied up at the docks of the Socony installation. From the dock we could see Camp Butler, which had been but recently occupied by the 4th Marines. It did not look so appetizing, especially when we expected to camp there and had no idea for how long.

Of all ways to learn a town, the best is to be detailed in charge of the Shore Patrol. This duty I was fortunate enough to get two different times during our short stay at Shanghai. I soon learned the streets of the city, knew my way about, found that there were some 60 cabarets in the foreign concessions, each doing a flourishing business. I learned the limits of the whole foreign concession and of each of its parts, and of the places most frequented by those on liberty, as well as those restricted to US Marines.

After a short stay we headed for Tientsin via a layover at Toku Bar.

It was here that we spent the 4th of July. The US ships were in full dress, the first time I had seen a ship bedecked with all her flags. The salute was fired at noon and the actions of the Chinese working on the barges was an amusing sight.

We continued up river and disembarked at Tientsin.

The platoon was assigned tents, the equipment was laid aside and I took them in quest of some chow. We were greeted with one of the worst sandstorms which they had had in Tientsin. This sand is blown all the way from the Gobi Desert. At times one could only feel, it was so blinding. It seemed almost impossible to get one's breath. After about 45 minutes of this, it began to pour down torrents of rain. That was the end of the sandstorm but it had already ruined everything.

In Tientsin everyone was alert that not one detail go unattended which might make for a snappier appearance of himself and his outfit when General Butler and the American Minister reviewed the troops.

A couple of weeks of this and in the meantime our battalion had moved ashore. The reasons for doing this were few, the biggest one being to give us something to do and to leave *Chaumont* not so crowded. However, *Henderson* was docked alongside and we were sure to go north on her should the situation arise.

The next morning a lieutenant was announcing an auction sale of shawls, luncheon sets, lace and silks. The girl he was engaged to and with whom he had spent many days and many dollars had just informed him by letter that she had decided that it was not proper to stand by and wait for him. He was a professional soldier and might never come home to her. She had learned a

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great deal about men from him and she wished to use her knowledge on others, and above all that, she was having an enormous time and getting in around 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning.

All the time rumors had been flying red hot about all sorts of movements that could be possible, even to going to Brest by rail. But after they were all sifted down, it was quite proper to think that at least part of the 3d Bn was going to Hsin Ho on the Hai Ho and that the battalion there now would come to Tientsin and occupy billets.

One of the numerous battalions or regiments had let out a rumor that we were all going home in the near future and whatever originally was the dope given out, it was now said to be very authentic, for the Dollar Line wanted to know where to come get us.

It was no longer a haphazard rumor, but a candid truth, that part of the 3rd Bn, Prov Regt was going to Hsin Ho on the Hai Ho and the 15th MG Co. and 82nd Co had been filled to full strength by transfers from the 83d and 84th Companies. The 82nd Co. and the 1st MG Platoon and Howitzer Platoon embarked on a lighter at 0500, 27 July 1927 and proceeded to Hsin Ho as a guard battalion. Everyone looked forward to that trip down the Hai Ho on a steel barge. The mercury was leaping higher each day with a desire to reach the 120° in the shade mark.

By noon on the 28th we swung around in midstream, went up tide and tied up to the Standard Oil dock, not of Shanghai this time but of Hsin Ho on the Hai Ho. Then the now-old procedure, march to the area, assignment of tents, getting rid of the heavy marching order, return for bunks and miscellany, unload the company property, the gun carts, get shaken down in the tents and then until dark "ten men here," "8 men report to Gunner B————," "Four to Sergeant ————," etc., etc. Policing up the camp, changing whatever happens to be already done, never satisfied with existing conditions. None of this "What was good enough for those before us is good enough for us."

At evening time we'd sit along the bank of the Hai Ho ten thousand miles from home and wonder what really was our mission here and of what benefit we were to the promotion of civilization. When we thought over the places we'd camped and the way our orders have read—something like this: you will embark Olongapo P.I. aboard *USS Chaumont* and proceed to Standard Oil Dock, *Shanghai;* you will embark in *USS Henderson* and proceed to Taku Bar, board lighters and proceed to Standard Oil Compounds at Hsai Ho and Tientsin—we wondered still more.

One night about 0100 we were awakened by the sound of rifle firing, and that it was very near at hand could not be mistaken. It did not take long to discover that we were not the objects at which the shots were being directed, for about a half mile across the flat lowlands and toward the sea near Hsin Ho there could be seen the flashing of shots fired from opposite directions which meant that the battle was taking place at that spot. Many of the shots could be heard whizzing overhead and two hit the large oil tanks near which several of us were standing. They glanced from the sloping roofs and went whirring into space with that familiar sound which a bullet has when directed by some foreign object from its natural course. After about an hour of intermittent firing and volley firing, everything became quiet and the camp returned to its sleep only wondering what the import of all this could be and hoping that we would soon get to try our ability to hit human targets.

The explanation came the next day when a couple of the wounded from Hsin Ho came to the camp seeking to get their wounds dressed by the good American (*Die Phop*) doctor. Through an interpreter it was learned that the occasion for the firing was the city police of Hsin Ho defending the town from a band of brigands or bandits which had come to seek out the rich men and hold them for a huge ransom. This is the practice and the means of livelihood of many such bands made up of starving deserters from the armies of the warring factions.

We had a squad of riflemen and one of machine gunners on watch every night and if the like of this had happened again there would have been some US Government property (in the form of lead) which would have been expended upon those who were putting us in danger. This never did occur again in such a way, but nearly every night a few shots could be heard in various parts of the countryside. But they caused us no concern. I believe I am safe in saying that those who were at Hsin Ho at that time are the only ones which can say they heard Chinese bullets singing over their heads during our stay in China, though these were not directed at us nor were we allowed to return them.

We went to a nearby field daily and spent some time in drills, but the greater part of our time was spent on the range. Always we returned in time for tiffin and spent the afternoon on the guns and equipment. A great group of men were in this Company and the morale at all times appeared to be far in excess of our expectations. Therefore at parades, etc., the 15th Company always made a creditable showing and at times did even receive some direct comment from General Butler. Naturally this didn't make any one of us feel badly. For as long as it seemed that our mission there was to outshine the troops of other nations, that was ever our objective and our goal.

We had been priding ourselves upon the speed with which we could cover these 2½ miles and

were about ready to challenge any other platoon. But this time I was setting a very slow pace. So slow that the guide even asked me if I was feeling O.K. I would not admit my feelings, but I could scarcely stay at the head of the column at the slow rate we were walking. I managed to get to the area, give the platoon instructions for the remainder of the day and have the Sergeant dismiss them. This was the last time I saw this wonderful group of men.

Days passed, officers with small ailments came and went, and still I remained in the same little bed staring at the same monotonous walls, and counting the figures in the designs on the painted walls. I grew steadily weaker and lighter in weight but with the exception of a very high fever and an occasional chill, I was very well off for the shape I was in.

A month went by and one day the doctor wore a different expression. He said he may have some good news for me. He returned a few moments later and said, "You are going home tonight, Shoup." This was very unexpected and just then, and as I was, I didn't really care to start home but just to get away from the hospital. I would have made an attempt to go to the North Pole. I refused to become excited for I knew I couldn't stand that.

I wanted once more to see the men of my platoon. I hated to leave such an outfit and why shouldn't I when it then appeared that all I had in the world was my trunk and the friends I had here? Then when I actually went to tell the men goodby and the tears rolled down the cheeks of the first two whom I met and who bade me goodby, I left the barracks room for I could no longer say what I wished. It is partings like that which one hates to see come to pass, yet passed they form a line of sweet and unforgettable memories.

I found that I had been suffering the past seven weeks from an acute attack of "diagnosis undetermined." I learned later that they wrote on my record—influenza!

The same afternoon that we received orders to return home, several of the classmates we left in Philly arrived as our reliefs. At the railway station that night there was quite a reunion. And what is more, I think every officer in the battalion and a large percentage of all those in the regiment were present at the station when we left. It was certainly the biggest send-off we ever received. There were also many enlisted men of our various outfits at the train to bid us farewell. This certainly was quite a bit of flattery for 2dLts, for the C.O. himself could not have been more highly honored nor given a more exuberant bon voyage than we received.

The following morning we arrived at Chingwangtao with no members of the group lost—physically at least. A 20-minute ride on a flat car at this early morning hour brought us to the large coaling piers where *USS Pecos* was tied up. This was to be our means of transportation on the next leg of our 10,000-mile journey. It was to take us to Shanghai. We boarded her and in less than 10 minutes she was underway.

There were also about 200 Marines aboard that were returning to the States for discharge or medical survey. We were all to report aboard *Chaumont* for further transportation to San Francisco; therefore *Pecos* tied up alongside *Chaumont* so as to facilitate our transfer. The next morning found us aboard *Chaumont,* which we learned, according to the present schedule, was to be our home for a period of about 70 days. She wasn't leaving Shanghai until the 6th or 7th of January. This would be ample time to see anything which we left unseen last summer upon our hasty departure. Also we would get to spend Christmas and New Year at Shanghai.

The passenger list began to swell as the time drew nigh for our sailing and among and above all in importance was the quite poised and cultured personage—the wife of Adm Bristol. You know it does make a difference to have the Admiral's lady aboard—especially to the skipper of the ship. Rumor had it that Mrs. Bristol wished to visit Hong Kong and Canton en route to Manila. And along with this another that we were stopping at Hong Kong for some six days.

The keeper of the Golden Gate was kind and we entered safely about 2000 on the 24th of February. We laid out the rest of the night and tied up to the Army docks at eight o'clock the next morning.

The Marines aboard were glad to get away from the gobs. This applied especially to those that were not assigned any particular duty and were always having their style cramped or awakening from a dream with something like the following flowing into their ears: "All right, Marine. Ya can't stay there, soldier—getcha feet offa that paintwork. Aw right, Marine—out you come—get up or get wet. Say—whatin'ell do you think you are—a passenger? Turn out and turn to, soldier, you ain't on no *Leviathan.* Up-up-up ya come—five o'clock and nothing done yet."

We arrived in Philadelphia, reported in at the Yard, and were allowed no time to get shaken down; but instead began attending classes immediately. I was writing a quiz over material they had covered before we arrived—less than 15 hours after my arrival.

Many of the same instructors, four of the same class, and the surroundings were identical to those last year. This includes the room which cost me $440 during my absence and had not improved in appearance one bit. Really at times it all seems like a dream, but it was all quite real. USMC