Chapter 4
SHANGHAI 1932

In Shanghai, events were taking place that would generate the first of the 31st Infantry’s many “peacekeeping” missions. Shanghai was a unique experiment in colonialism. China had given Britain trade rights in the city in 1843, but retained responsibility for protecting foreign residents. Over time, France and the United States joined Britain in the Trade Market. Dissatisfied with Chinese public services, the three created a protected International Settlement on July 11, 1854, linking their communities under a common governing body with its own court, defense budget, and full powers of self-government. Later, Russia and Japan joined the arrangement. The treaty powers allowed Chinese citizens to continue living in the settlement and take part in its government, but they had to pay taxes to the governing body like all other residents. By 1899, the International Settlement was roughly 7.5 miles long and 2.3 miles wide. Its security force, the Shanghai Volunteer Corps (SVC), included contingents from each nationality represented in the government, including a company each of Chinese and Japanese, an odd combination, given the animosity between them. The 4th Marine Regiment contributed the American contingent.

In 1931, Japan annexed Manchuria, renamed it Manchukuo, and began provoking incidents aimed at creating an excuse to grab more of China. The excuse came in January 1932 when nine Japanese citizens were slain by vengeful Chinese Nationalists in Shanghai. In response, Japanese warships sailed up the Whangpoo River, shelling Chinese forts and sending Marines ashore to seize the city’s Hongkew business district. The Chinese Communist Ninth Route Army entered Shanghai from the east to repel the invaders while Chinese Nationalist troops continued to hold the Woosung forts dominating the Whangpoo River. Fighting flared in both the city and its riverine approach. Although China’s Communists and Nationalists were bitter rivals, neither could tolerate Japanese control of Shanghai.

It soon became apparent that if fighting spilled into the International Settlement, the SVC might be overwhelmed, prompting a call for speedy reinforcement. British troops from Hong
Kong and Malaya and American troops from the Philippines were soon sent to reinforce the garrison. On Monday, February 1, 1932, Colonel Lorenzo D. Gasser, Commander of the 31st Infantry Regiment in Manila, received the following orders:

"Washington, D.C., Jan 31, 1932
1932
From the Chief of Staff,

To Commanding General
Philippine Department

On the request of the American Consul General, Shanghai, to furnish further protection for American lives and property in International Settlement, President directs that the 31st Infantry be dispatched to Shanghai at once. Navy will furnish transportation using Chaumont or other craft. Equip troops for indefinite stay and every emergency. Leave animals behind for present. On arrival have Commanding Officer report to senior American Officer ashore for instructions and duty.

MacArthur

Officers of the regiment were assembled at Manila's Cuartel de España at 8:30 AM to receive a verbal movement order. The move required transferring the post of Manila, its property, installations, and records to the 45th Infantry (Philippine Scouts). Detachments of Medical, Signal, Quartermaster, Finance, Ordnance, and Chemical Warfare troops were attached from other installations in Manila. Officers from other units were reassigned to the 31st to bring it up to its full authorization. In less than 12 hours, the regiment, which had been in the same barracks for nearly 12 years, made a complete transition from garrison duty in the tropics to preparation for battle under winter conditions in China. After dark on February 1, the 31st began boarding the USAT Chaumont, which got underway early the next morning.

Aboard ship, COL Gasser assembled his officers to stress the mission's international character, emphasizing the importance of orderliness and discipline. British, French, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese troops of the SVC would observe the 31st closely and draw conclusions about the American Army's quality. The 31st Infantry would not give them reason to doubt the ability and dedication of American soldiers. Heading north, the regiment changed from tropical khakis to winter wool olive drab. Cholera inoculations were administered to all. There was little information about the situation in Shanghai, but a contingency plan was formulated to make a forced landing under cover of machinegun and howitzer fire from the Chaumont. No detail was overlooked in preparing for the mission.

At daybreak on February 4, debarkation orders were published, directing the issue of two sandwiches per man, filling canteens, and establishing ammunition issue points aboard ship. The Chaumont dropped anchor on the morning of February 5 near the mouth of the Whangpoo River, pending instructions from the senior American officer ashore, the 4th Marine Regiment’s Commander. Japanese dive bombers could be seen attacking Shanghai and a steady exchange of artillery could be heard in the distance. Tension ran high as the men awaited instructions. Early that afternoon, the
Chaumont resumed its journey up the Whangpoo, sailing between Chinese forts and Japanese warships which been firing furiously at each other only minutes before. All held their fire as the Chaumont passed.

In late afternoon, the Chaumont berthed at the China Merchants dock and unloading parties promptly went to work. F Company debarked to guard supplies that would be stored in the New World Building that night. The remainder of the regiment remained aboard ship, debarking the next morning. The regimental band played at the head of the column as the 31st marched 3 miles from the dock to the New World Building at the intersection of Nanking and Tibet Roads. Here and there clusters of Chinese civilians watched pensively, not knowing what to expect from the newcomers. Heavily armed Chinese and Sikhs (Indians) of the Settlement Police Force guarded every intersection.

Explosions echoed in the distance and shook the ground as Japanese and Chinese guns resumed their thundering exchange along the river. Headquarters and Machinegun Companies and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions took quarters in the New World Building. The 1st Battalion spent its first night ashore under the Shanghai Race Track's main grandstand, moving later to an abandoned library on nearby Bubbling Well Road. The 31st Infantry and 4th Marine Regiments formed a task force under the latter's commander. On February 7, a sergeant of the 31st Infantry raised the American garrison flag in front of the regimental headquarters.

The International Settlement's perimeter was lined with strong concrete blockhouses topped with steel observation turrets. They had heavy steel doors, telephone connections, windows for 2 machineguns, rifle ports for 8 men, and a searchlight mounted in a parapet above. Living conditions were hospitable since each blockhouse had its own urinal, electric heater, and folding cots for use between guard shifts. On the outside, blockhouses were fortified with triple layers of sandbags to absorb shrapnel and reduce the risk of penetration by antitank ammunition. Only a direct hit by artillery posed a threat. Medics were attached to each company, ensuring prompt treatment of injuries if they occurred. Hot meals were brought forward by truck and a Salvation Army car made regular rounds with cans of hot coffee to help keep men awake on guard duty.

The regiment's area of responsibility faced the suburb of Chapei where Chinese Communists had halted the Japanese assault. COL Gasser, his battalion commanders, and members of the regimental staff reconnoitered the perimeter that afternoon. Over the next two days, the 2nd Battalion relieved the Royal Scots Fusiliers along Soochow Creek while the 1st
Battalion reinforced the Settlement Police in the southern sector. The 3rd Battalion and Howitzer Platoon remained at the New World Building in reserve. A squad of riflemen manned each outpost along the settlement boundary. Troops marched to their posts with bayonets fixed. Uniform discipline was rigidly enforced to convey a thoroughly professional, intimidating image. Sentries were ordered to keep Chinese and Japanese troops, other than members of the SVC, out of the International Settlement. If Chinese troops were driven into the Settlement by pursuing Japanese, they were to be disarmed and turned over to the Settlement Police. If mobs tried to storm the perimeter, troops were to shoot only if authorized by an NCO and only to wound, if possible.

From positions along the settlement perimeter, Americans angrily watched barbarity and inhumanity taking place on a bewildering scale, but they were not allowed to intervene. Chinese Communists executed officials of the Nationalist government and other Chinese who were suspected of collaborating or fraternizing with Japanese troops. Nationalist police in turn executed people suspected of aiding the Communists or Japanese. In a field just a few blocks away, Japanese officers wielding Samurai swords could often be seen beheading captured Chinese officers, suspected spies, and public officials. Age and gender meant nothing. The Chinese people were victims of every side. Unless they lived inside the International Settlement, they had no one to turn to for protection.

On February 10, the 2nd Battalion's sector was extended across Soochow Creek to relieve units of the SVC, which moved farther to the northeast. The 3rd Battalion assumed responsibility for patrolling south of the creek. Chinese Communists occupying positions opposite the 2nd Battalion pointed their weapons at Americans who returned the gesture. American troops never knew what to expect from the Communists, some of whom were overtly friendly while others seemed sullen and menacing. On February 12, the combatants called a truce. The next day, passes were issued to 50 men, permitting them the liberty of the International Settlement.

On February 16, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions exchanged places and the former moved into the Studio d'Arts Building to relieve overcrowding in the New World Building. Unexpectedly, fighting resumed around Chapei that morning. Small arms fire rattled in sudden, intense exchanges throughout the day while Japanese planes bombed Shanghai's outskirts and artillery thundered in periodic outbursts that killed scores of civilians. As night fell, the sky glowed red from fires caused by the fighting. On February 18, the 3rd Battalion relieved SVC units in the northwest sector where fighting was heaviest. The 1st Battalion assumed responsibility for all territory south of Soochow Creek.
Toward evening on February 20, an armored car armed with a 37mm cannon and two machineguns, accompanied by a platoon of Japanese Marines, halted ten feet from Blockhouse B. Members of the 31st Infantry’s Howitzer Platoon and a squad from I Company manned the outpost. Across the intersection, a Chinese Communist machinegun poked from a second story window. The weapon's operator, a friendly sort who exchanged daily greetings with the Americans, was nicknamed "Charlie Chan" by the troops. "Charlie" operated his gun well and periodically threw small "potato masher" grenades at the armored car, seeking to roll them underneath where there was no armor. After a brisk fight that resulted in no casualties on either side, the Japanese withdrew, leaving "Charlie" in firm control of his intersection. During the exchange, Blockhouse B took numerous hits meant for the Japanese. Fragments from "Charlie Chan's" grenades sprung hundreds of small leaks in the outpost's sandbag face. From then on, the site became known as "windy corner."

On February 22, a Chinese civilian, acting as an emissary for the Communist commander in Chapei, approached the 3rd Battalion Commander, Major Leonard T. Gerow. He asked if any Japanese troops were in his sector. Major Gerow noticed the man looking nervously at a group of Americans wearing blue denim fatigue uniforms, the color worn by Japanese Marines. Gerow instantly recognized the problem and banned denims from the perimeter. On February 25, Britain's Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders relieved the 31st Infantry throughout its sector. Fighting ceased in the city during the night of March 1, when the Chinese Communists withdrew into the hills to escape a double envelopment by Japanese troops.

On March 3, the 1st Battalion relieved the Highlanders opposite Chapei. On March 8, the 1st Battalion dispersed a mob of Chinese beating Japanese civilians who lived in the settlement. The next day, the Japanese naval landing force Chief of Staff called on the 1st Battalion Commander, Major Robert O. Baldwin, to convey his admiral's appreciation. On March 7, the USAT *Grant* docked at Shanghai with 159 replacements from Manila. All were given a period of orientation training before being integrated into line companies. On March 18, the Woosung forts fell to the Japanese and Shanghai's commercial life began returning to normal, although under Japanese rule. With little left to do, contingents of the international force paid respects to each other with a series of parades, reviews, and sporting events at the Shanghai Racetrack.

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1 Leonard T. Gerow later became a lieutenant general, commanding V Corps in Europe during World War II.
Throughout its time on the line, the 31st was well organized and supplied. The Howitzer Platoon had two 75mm howitzers positioned behind the most dangerous sector. Machinegun companies (D, H, and M) each had 16 .30 caliber water-cooled machineguns and each rifle company had 4 air-cooled .30 calibers that were lighter and easier to handle. All 52 machineguns were kept at blockhouses. If trouble had come, the 31st would have taken a heavy toll. An ammunition supply point was established near each blockhouse and an ammunition reserve was kept at each battalion headquarters. Extra rifle ammunition, grenades, tear gas candles, and magazines for automatic rifles were kept in forward positions for each relief. That way, positions could be doubled in strength in minutes if an emergency arose. Reinforcement routes were reconnoitered and guides were posted at key points to ensure reinforcements could reach their stations by day or night. Large signboards in Chinese were placed at each post to show Chinese troops permissible points of entry if they were forced to retreat into the International Settlement.

The winter of 1932 was cold and wet and disease ran rampant in the International Settlement’s refugee-crowded streets. Sanitation and food were constant problems and rats greatly outnumbered humans. Two members of the 31st whose names are now lost to history, died of influenza during their tour of duty and were buried on the US Legation’s grounds. Although under fire on numerous occasions when Chinese and Japanese troops fired wildly at each other around the settlement’s perimeter, no member of the regiment was ever hit.

On April 1, the British East Lancashire Regiment relieved the 31st north of Soochow Creek, leaving the 31st with only internal patrol duties south of the creek. With the crisis past, the 31st Infantry settled down to a dull routine of garrison life. Sports competitions against the 4th Marines and British regiments punctuated the boredom. When the duty day ended, soldiers could receive a pass to leave the barracks and wander at their leisure around the International Settlement. “Tea Houses” with cheap Chinese beer and attractive “hostesses” beckoned as they did in various forms around every military garrison in the world. With peace restored, several of the 31st Infantry’s officers requested and received permission to have their families join them from Manila. Among them was Captain Robert Wright, B Company’s Commanding Officer.

CPT Wright and several other officers rented suites of rooms for their families at the Cathay Mansions Hotel. Mrs. Wright and the children traveled to Shanghai by commercial liner with a stop enroute at Hong Kong. In Shanghai, the Wright children were enrolled at the American Mission School where they were taken by ricksha daily. While the children were at school and the men were at the perimeter, the ladies shopped together on Shanghai’s famed market streets. Jade, silver, and copper jewelry or house wares could be bought from skilled artisans at a fraction of their value. One silversmith in particular seemed a craftsman of rare talent. His artful designs inspired the wives of the regiment’s surgeons, Mrs. William F. Sappington and Mrs. Charles M. Rylander, to suggest presenting silver cups to company commanders as rewards for keeping their units’ venereal disease rates low, a real challenge in the 1930s.² Several companies had bought exclusive rights to brothels that agreed to serve no other

² VD was a serious matter in the 1930s. Soldiers were often hospitalized for up to a month, during which they received no pay and for which they owed the Army additional time on their enlistments to make up for lost service. If an officer caught VD, he was required to resign from the Army. Regimental surgeons conducted monthly “short arm” inspections to make sure no one was concealing an infection.
customers. The regiment’s surgeons made weekly inspections of the establishments to make sure they maintained proper health and sanitation standards. What would have been illegal in the Philippines, a US territory, seemed a virtue in Shanghai.

The silver cup idea soon grew to grander proportions. Inspired by the impressive ceremonial silver of British regiments in the Shanghai garrison, the officers’ wives decided it would be nice to commemorate the regiment’s service in Shanghai with a silver punch bowl and cups to be used at “Despididas and Bienvenidas” (hail and farewell celebrations) at Manila’s Army-Navy Club when they returned. It was soon decided that each officer would buy one cup engraved with his name and each would pay a share of the punch bowl's cost. The officers collected 1600 dollars for the set and the ladies heavily influenced its design and the choice of silversmith.

A ceremony called the "passing of the cups" was devised before the silver set was even completed. When the regiment set sail for Manila aboard the USAT Republic in June 1932, machineguns were wrapped in oriental rugs, heavily embroidered table cloths and sets of fine china dishes were set aside for troop dining halls, and every family carried back a treasure trove of fine goods. Fortunately, the Philippine government gave the regiment "freedom of the port" so no customs checks were made. The famous Shanghai Bowl that today graces regimental headquarters at Ft Drum, NY followed the regiment to Manila in July 1932. It soon became a deeply treasured part of the regiment's tradition and a reflection of the bond between the regiment and its families.

Returning to the Philippines on 27 July, PFC Earnest Calvin Cloud was among the last 36 men to return toEstado Mayor. The post had been "guarded" during the 31st Infantry's absence by Philippine Scouts. Before departing for Shanghai, the 31st stored locked foot lockers in locked company supply rooms, but on returning, the locks were off and many of their belongings had been "liberated". Earnest didn't care about the khaki uniforms he lost, but he was mad as hell about losing a two-strand chain bracelet given him by a Stone County girl who later became his wife.

Earnest returned to the United States in 1934 and was discharged at Fort McDowell (Angel Island, California) on 27 July. He was shocked to learn that no one back home ever heard of the Shanghai Expedition and most people didn't care. When Earnest participated in full uniform in

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3 Earnest C. Cloud died in 1998 at Deming, NM.
a Labor Day celebration at Crane, Missouri, he expected people would honor veterans. What he got instead was jeers from a group of Civilian Conservation Corps jerks, driving their girls around in a new, olive drab 1935 Chevy pickup with USA in blocked white letters on the hood. How's that for gratitude?

Not much has changed in that respect. It was no different for most men returning home in 1945, 1953, or 1971. We're heroes and the apple of every girl's eye when a war starts, but instant outcasts when war ends or goes badly. It has been the same for soldiers of every country, win or lose, since the dawn of time. We do what we must and get on with our lives, quietly feeling sorry for the unfortunates who never felt the comradeship of a soldier's life and who will never experience the excitement of being whisked from boyhood to manhood to the tune of bullets passing by or through.