



# Take China: The Last of the China Marines

*Harold Stephens*

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The occupation of China by US Marines both before World War II and after the war are part of our forgotten history. What little that has been written about the China Marines we find only as casual references in memoirs of retired generals and diplomats.

Never have we heard the story as seen through the eyes of a young, unlettered Marine private who served in China after the war. "We were not loading ships to go home;" he wrote. His division was stationed on Guam after the battle of Okinawa, waiting to be sent home.. "We were loading ships to go to China to repatriate the Japanese forces. That was the reason they gave, but there were other factors at hand which they didn't tell us. These we would find out for ourselves much later. All we knew now was that we were going to a foreign land we had knew existed, nor did we know exactly why we were going. We made no decisions, and controlled no destinies, not even our own. We were told to pack our gear, and to load the ships. That was all we knew.."

When asked why he wrote a war book some 55 years after he experienced it, the author said, "I felt it was a story that had to be told. History is being re-written and facts are becoming lost. People today cannot understand why we dropped the atomic bomb, and how do you tell them the bomb actually saved lives. The world turmoil we are facing today is nothing new. As young Marines we faced terrorists, dealt with human rights and learned child abuse in its worst form. As young 17 and 18-year old Marines in China we faced a whole communist nation, and we did it alone. Not so long ago, when a US spy plane was forced to land in Red China, no one quite knew what to do. When the same thing happened in Tsingtao, China, 1945, no one asked what we had to do. We knew. Our company, some 250 Marines, boarded a Navy landing craft, sailed into the communist controlled Shantung Peninsula waters and stormed ashore to rescue our pilot and plane." TAKE CHINA is an autobiographical story about a complicated and confused world which was known to only a few, and almost forgotten today. Take China is a story of intrigue and betrayal, and a unique love story in which the author must choose between a Chinese bar girl and a White Russian woman looking for roots.

Take China is not a book for squirmy stomachs. Stephens tells of the many atrocities committed by the Japanese and about the sex slave trade they fostered during the war. It's about suicide bombers and child abuse, long before it became an issue in the West. Stephens paints a picture of China that is hard for us to fathom today. "Something had to be done," he said, "and in this case, the communist take over was the only solution. That I could never have admitted before."

Take China is also a love story, about Marines who fall in love with Chinese women, but there's a law that prohibits them to marry. There's also plenty of action when Stephens is captured and imprisoned by the Red Army, and when he manages to escape by swimming out to a Passing junk in dead winter.

Take China is about a China that no longer exists; it's a capsuled piece of history that the world has forgotten, of maybe, never knew.

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