

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk HH: Part 1 of 2

Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk, Thomas J. Schoenbaum, and Thomas W. Ganschow circa 1985

The complete interview also includes Rusk KK: Part 2.

DEAN RUSK: I am delighted to share this tape with Tom [Thomas N.] Ganschow, a colleague and friend here that I admire very much. Perhaps I might begin with some passing remarks on the point that I have had a life-long interest in China at varying levels of knowledge and sophistication. When I was a very small boy in elementary school at Lee Street School in Atlanta, each year we would concentrate on one of the continents of the world. And I think it was in the sixth grade that our Carpenter's Geography Reader was about Asia. We spent a lot of time that year in looking at China. We learned something about its history, geography, manners and customs, economy, and so forth. This classroom work expanded into projects in arts and crafts and little dramas that we put on during the school year. So we were very much thinking about China. During that same period my church, the West End Presbyterian Church, maintained a missionary in China. Every two years or so that missionary would come home to report to the church on China and he would bring all sorts of interesting things with him to show us. We would talk about his work in China. In between his visits, the church would have occasional special programs on China and take up special collections to maintain our missionary out there. I remember as small boys we used to sit around on the ground in my back yard and we would talk about digging a hole.

RICHARD RUSK: Is this the kind of thing you were looking for, Tom?

DEAN RUSK: We knew that if we dug that hole deep enough, we would have a bunch of Chinese looking us from the other end. There was a Chinese hand laundry two blocks away, and we were fascinated by this Chinese gentleman, who ran that laundry. Almost every city had Chinese stores in which they sold the arts and crafts of China, and foods and textiles, and things of that sort. So there was a good deal of interest in China in those days. That attitude might have been a little patronizing. We were sending missionaries to convert the heathen, and we were teaching the illiterate to read, and things of that sort. Nevertheless, it was a very friendly attitude towards the Chinese people on our part.

In the year in which I graduated from college, 1931, the Japanese seized Manchuria. I was there at Oxford. I had a feeling that something very important was happening. I spent a great deal of time in following very closely the proceedings in the League of Nations, the reports of their commissions, the expressed attitudes of various governments to it. I remember seeing [Vi Kuyuin] Wellington Koo on a newsreel, standing before the League of Nations, pleading for help that never came. I learned that Secretary of State Henry [Lewis] Stimson of the United States, at the end of the [Herbert Clark] Hoover administration, felt that something ought to be done about this Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Apparently, President Herbert Hoover pulled on his coattails and wouldn't let him do very much. So he settled on what came to be known as the

Stimson Doctrine; the doctrine that we would not recognize any situation brought about by the illegal use of force. But China was very much on our minds.

After I left Oxford and went back to Mills College in Oakland, California--and there, of course, on the West Coast was a great interest in what was happening across the Pacific. I joined the West Coast branch of the Institute of Pacific Relations, and I followed Chinese affairs pretty closely. I was appalled when the Japanese extended their attack on China, along the coast, and extended it beyond Manchuria, and, in effect, opened up general war against China.

RICHARD RUSK: That would be after the Marco Polo Bridge incident in 1937?

DEAN RUSK: On at least one occasion I joined pickets who were picketing scrap iron being loaded on ships for Japan in the Oakland Harbor because this scrap iron was being used to make up the munitions of war, which were being used against China. I don't think my picketing did the slightest bit of good. Nevertheless, I was there. Then, when I was ordered to G-2 [General Staff-Intelligence] of the War Department General Staff in October 1941, two months before Pearl Harbor, I was more or less in charge of British spheres in Asia. This was India, Afghanistan, Nepal, Burma, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and so forth. That brought me into a very close association with China and Chinese matters. For example, shortly after Pearl Harbor, the British and General [Joseph] Stilwell and his small Chinese force were driven out of Burma by the Japanese, and they closed the Burma Road. One of the big questions that I had to work on was whether there were any alternative routes by which we could send supplies into China and help keep China in the war. I remember combing over all possibilities. Of course, the Himalayan Mountain range was a major obstacle. But we looked at everything, including possibilities of sending supplies through Afghanistan, places like that.

RICHARD RUSK: Hey, Pop, help me--

[break in recording]

DEAN RUSK: After the service with G-2 military intelligence, I went out to China-Burma-India to serve with General Stilwell. We've covered that pretty much in other tapes. Then, [I was] brought back to the Operations Division of the War Department General Staff in the early summer of '45. I was very much involved in the conclusion of the war against the Japanese in terms of Japanese surrender. Of course, many Chinese questions arose at that time.

SCHOENBAUM: If you could elaborate on what Chinese questions arose?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I just want to get a little outline here.

SCHOENBAUM: Okay.

DEAN RUSK: Then I, after I was demobilized from the army in '46, I spent some time in the Pentagon as a civilian. In early '47, Secretary of State George [Catlett] Marshall asked me to come over and take charge of United Nations affairs in the State Department. Again, China questions were quite important there. I helped to develop the parliamentary devices by which we

kept the Republic of China on Taiwan in that seat in the United Nations. When we did it, I thought maybe those devices might last for four or five years. I was almost astonished to see that they lasted until after I left the office of Secretary of State.

GANSCHOW: That's pretty good planning.

DEAN RUSK: Anyhow, I was very much involved with China matters there. I had been in charge of the U.N. affairs, and then for a time, Deputy Under Secretary under the Truman administration. Then I suggested to Dean [Gooderham] Acheson that if he wanted me to take over the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern affairs, that I would be willing to do it. That particular post was surrounded in bitter controversy: McCarthyism, the debate about who lost China, and that sort of thing. But for some reason, I had been relatively untouched by that controversy and thought the possibility that if I was to move into that post, that we could take a fresh start, a fresh look at some of those questions.

So in the spring of 1950 three personnel matters came together. One, that I would take the post as Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Second, we would bring John Foster Dulles back into the government to try and work with us on the possibilities of more bipartisanship in Asian policy. And third, Philip [C.] Jessup was brought back in as Ambassador-at-Large to work with us on a variety of questions involving Asia. So those were pretty important. Very shortly thereafter, I was greatly involved with the Chinese issue as related to the entry of the Chinese into the Korean War. We can get into that at some stage, if you wish to.

The Rockefeller Foundation: During the fifties we had no relations with people on the mainland, the People's Republic of China. When the communist seized power on the mainland, they seemed to select the United States as enemy number one. They set about a campaign to try to erase all vestiges of a century of friendship between the Chinese and American people. I remember they charged that the famous Peking Union Medical School, which was the foremost medical school and hospital in Asia built by the Rockefeller Foundation, they charged that that was simply a device to permit Americans to practice vivisection on Chinese. They seized some of our consular agents and beat them up. They just did everything they could to make it clear that we were indeed enemy number one.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me interrupt--

[break in recording]

DEAN RUSK: At the Rockefeller Foundation we had very little to do with mainland China. Then after that, I became Secretary of State and all that's public knowledge for you people to prowl around in. But, Tom, why don't you begin on some of your questions?

GANSCHOW: Understand that some of these questions may sound very simple to you. But I think that from all of these, we will get a general picture and a more detailed picture with follow-up. In those very early years, Professor Rusk, did you, as you grew older, have a sense of this kind of special relationship that we had with China: that sense that we were sort of China's protector? Was that very strong in your youth? Do you have any memory of that? You've

mentioned the fact that we had missionaries out there and that was kind of condescending in some ways. Was there this sense in the United States that we had a kind of special relationship with China?

DEAN RUSK: I think maybe we were a little smug about it, but we thought we were trying to protect China from being carved up among the western powers. We did not have any special zones, allocated to us out there. We followed what generally was called the "open door" policy that all countries should have access throughout China for purposes of trade, and relationships, and things of that sort. In a sense, we felt that we were opposed to some of the policies of the colonial powers.

GANSCHOW: Was the "open door" term a very familiar term to students at that time? To my students, it's just a word they read and they have to memorize it, then spit it back on exams. But was that a kind of common word to refer to China at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. There was a good deal of talk about the "open door" policy, as opposed to the idea of carving China up into sectors of influence by the colonial powers. Yes.

GANSCHOW: Another point would be, when you talked about the Manchurian years in which China was being invaded, you mentioned that not much was done to help China. Do you think that there was an impression that probably developed out of those Teddy Roosevelt times that Japan was strong? Japan knew how to operate in this world? China was a weak sister, therefore, should be taught a lesson? Do you think there was a sense in our country that let things take their course? If Japan takes over China, that just teaches China that she's got to--you know, this kind of unsympathetic feeling that people seem to have.

DEAN RUSK: I don't think that the attitude was pro-Japanese over against China in any way, or anti-Chinese. I think the attitude was one of basic isolationism: that the United States had been tricked in to getting into World War I by some slick, city slickers in Europe. That we ought not to cross the oceans to involve ourselves in other peoples' quarrels. That sense of isolationism was very strong indeed! You see, we had not joined the League of Nations, and that gave them major impetus to the isolationist feeling. When Henry Stimson tried to find ways and means in cooperating with the League of Nations on any of these matters, he found--

GANSCHOW: I want to ask you whether before the 1940s, did you have any impression at all of Mao Tse-tung, the Chinese Communist? Do you remember any impression?

DEAN RUSK: No. Not really. Not until I got out there during the war. Of course, there were articles in publications, like the Journals of the Institute of Pacific Relations, things of that sort, about Mao Tse-tung and the communist party. I don't recall having any--

GANSCHOW: How about Chiang Kai-shek and Madame [Mei-ling Soong] Chiang before the 1940s?

DEAN RUSK: In Georgia we had had sort of a sentimental interest in Chiang Kai-shek and his wife because the three Soong sisters had attended Mercer University.

GANSCHOW: Did you know that as a youth? Did anybody say--

DEAN RUSK: No. Not really.

GANSCHOW: This was something that you learned later on.

DEAN RUSK: When Chiang Kai-shek became President of China, the fact that his wife was from Mercer--not Mercer, Wesleyan. That was of considerable interest to people here in Georgia. Not until the war did I have any strong impressions of Chiang Kai-shek and his government, its nature, things of that sort.

GANSCHOW: Let me ask you a question about--I know you've gone over the Stilwell business a lot, but I ask you this: first, did you agree with how Stilwell, well, first of all, what he did say and how he went about saying what he did say? There are those who believe that though Stilwell knew Chinese some and knew the Chinese people some, he was not always very tactful with the Chinese people. He didn't know how to really deal with the Chinese people. You might know the language and you might know the culture, but you still have to know how to work within that culture. How would you reply to that?

DEAN RUSK: General Stilwell, in my judgment, had a deep affection for the Chinese people at the grassroots. He really did think that they were a great people. And he thought that if Chinese soldiers were well-armed, well-equipped, well-trained, well led, that they would be very good soldiers. But his affection for the Chinese people caused him to react rather sharply to what was being done to them by the Chiang Kai-shek regime: the inadequacies, the disappointments, the failures that had their impact upon the Chinese. And he was very impatient with the corruption that was evident on all sides of China. So that made him testy with respect to the inadequacies that he was constantly confronting. Now, I have already talked about the impossibility of General Stilwell's major mission out there. I needn't repeat that.

GANSCHOW: In other words--

DEAN RUSK: You know, when you have to have an American in the chow line for Chinese troops to throw the anti-malaria pills down their throats to keep Chinese officers from gathering these Atebrin pills up, from selling them on the black market in China, you know, you get testy. When you had to establish your own American paymasters to pay the troops, because that's the only way the troops could get any money, you get impatient.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall any other things of that nature that we had to involve ourselves with?

DEAN RUSK: General Stilwell knew a lot about the Chinese. Maybe there were some things that he did not understand. But if by these traditional Chinese ways of doing things the result was going to be zero, then he was not very tolerant about the Chinese ways of doing things. I remember on one occasion he was visiting with Chinese forces in Burma and a grenade went off. General Stilwell knew that this was some Chinese soldier out there fishing in the river with the

grenades. These grenades had been brought ten thousand miles through submarine infested waters at great trouble and expense to get them up there where they could be thrown at the Japanese. So, General Stilwell raised hell about that grenade being fired under those circumstances. And the senior Chinese officer spoke to one of his juniors, and he went away and soon dragged in a Chinese soldier. Then the senior Chinese soldier just shot this soldier, right there in front of General Stilwell. He said, "He's been punished." Well General Stilwell knew, and the rest of us knew, that that particular soldier probably had nothing to do with the firing of that grenade. He was just putting on a demonstration. So some of these things, day by day, are sort of hard to live with. We had to train--

RICHARD RUSK: You weren't there for that one?

DEAN RUSK: No. We had to train our troops never to try to take anything away from a Chinese soldier. Their fanatical attachment to anything that they possessed, however small it might appear to be, was such that they would kill you if you tried to take it away. You had to tolerate a great deal of just plain, old Chinese curiosity. I, myself, had shaved in Burma with my little tin mirror on a tree. And a Chinese soldier came up within a foot of my face and just stared at me while I was shaving. He was fascinated by this. If you tried to shove him away, he might kill you. There were a lot of things we bumped into while working with the Chinese.

GANSCHOW: Did you personally think of or recommend things that could be done to get Chiang Kai-shek to change that government, to make changes, to improve the situation then? Would you really--were you personally aware of what was going on in Chiang's government or did this come out to you later in reports?

DEAN RUSK: First, let me say that at the time of Pearl Harbor, we ourselves needed China. Nazis were halfway across Russia; [Erwin] Rommel was rushing through North Africa; Japanese had defeated our fleet at Pearl Harbor and were rushing through Asia. Things looked pretty bleak for us. And it was important to us to tell ourselves that there was a China: a great country of great people, who had been valiantly fighting the Japanese for ten years and they were now our allies. Within that process we underestimated, in our own thinking, the impact of ten years of war against Japan standing alone, that Chiang Kai-shek had gone through. The extent to which this had eroded the very institutional structure of China: the governmental structure, the economy, the educational system, and all the rest of it.

So there were a lot of things that theoretically needed to be done, but the big question was whether there was any capability of executing on the part of the Chinese government. Chiang Kai-shek, toward the end there, had the most tenuous control over his own generals, his own province governors, his own warlords, things of that sort. So a good many of the "reforms" that the Americans, chiefly through civilian channels, tried to get him to adopt were simply beyond, in my judgment, his administrative capability. I don't know to what extent the full story's been told as to the impact upon Chinese institutions of ten years of war during the thirties preceding Pearl Harbor, because it was dreadful. Now the Chinese did some amazing things in moving a good deal of their industry out to the west, and hanging on with their fingernails to their existence as a nation, and staying somehow in the war. They simply didn't have the capability of organizing their society. And I suppose that that contributed largely to the notion that the

mandate of heaven had changed when the communists appeared on the scene.

GANSCHOW: Did you know about the so called "Dixie Mission" at that time, in which we were supposed to explore possible relationships of the communist with U.S. government?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I was aware of it although that was handled by, as far as the military was concerned, by General Stilwell's staff and Chungking. I was back in New Delhi. At that time, we were looking for anybody who would be willing to shoot at the Japanese. So we were interested in trying to encourage and stimulate the Chinese communists to do just that, up in their part of the country. Just as I personally authorized the dropping of arms and American cigarettes to Ho Chi Minh out in Indochina. After all, the major effort of the war at that time was being made by those communists, the Russians. So we weren't interested in ideology at that point. We were interested in the notion of getting somebody to shoot at the Japanese.

RICHARD RUSK: Probably communism then didn't have quite the same stigma attached to it as it later came to have during the fifties.

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was a good deal of that stigma. After all, the communist regime came into the Soviet Union in 1917 and we didn't recognize it until 1933. So there was a good deal of feeling about it.

RICHARD RUSK: Which probably mitigated somewhat during the war.

DEAN RUSK: From an ideological point of view. Then it was mitigated during the war because, we and the Soviets, were fighting the same enemy.

GANSCHOW: At the time, Professor Rusk, or even now, do you think it was unfortunate that we didn't perhaps have, some sort of successful conclusion to that "Dixie Mission" that we, perhaps, would have established? For example, the story goes that the possibility that Mao or Chou En-lai could have been invited to the United States to see the President. That didn't come off apparently because Ambassador [Patrick J.] Hurley was rather opposed to this whole business. Do you think that was unfortunate at the time? I mean, did you have any thoughts about that in terms of--

DEAN RUSK: By and large, as far as the government is concerned, I think we tried not to intervene directly in the Chinese civil war. After all, our relations were with the Kuomintang government. They were the ones who were providing the forces we were fighting in Burma. And they were the ones on whom we thought we would have to rely if the Japanese armies in China refused to surrender as a result of the impact of [Douglas] MacArthur/[Chester William] Nimitz coming across the Pacific. We might have to fight a major war in China and we felt we needed the Kuomintang government. As a matter of fact, if you'll recall Tom, we and the Russians during the war made an agreement under which the Russians promised to continue to recognize the Nationalist government after the war. That was an expression of our view that the Nationalist government was the legitimate government and was the one that we would be dealing with. We did not want to undermine that government any further by giving undue status to the Chinese communists.

GANSCHOW: The feeling really was then that we might have to fight a major war in China against the Japanese?

DEAN RUSK: A real possibility, yes. This was long before the Japanese surrender, and we had seen so much evidence of the tenacity and ferocity of the Japanese armed forces that we couldn't be at all sure that if somebody in Tokyo said "surrender" that they would surrender. Because they certainly weren't surrendering up to that point anywhere.

GANSCHOW: What time frame were you personally thinking of in terms of that involvement back when you were at the CBI [China-Burma-India theatre]?

DEAN RUSK: The whole CBI effort was, as I had mentioned in another tape, somewhat like the Al-Can Highway. You just might need it. We thought that MacArthur and Nimitz might find themselves needing major supporting ground forces on the mainland of China at some stage in their attempt to close in on Japan. So were trying to keep China in the war and trying to build up some Chinese capability to fight the Japanese, when and where necessary. Now, as it turned out, all that effort was perhaps not needed. But you couldn't know that in the middle of a war. You had to be ready for whatever comes.

GANSCHOW: So, you don't think there was any, at least at the time of the "Dixie Mission," there's not a sense there of a major shift towards a new government? It's really a strategy or a tactic to try to get a part of the Chinese people involved in the war against the Japanese.

DEAN RUSK: That's right. Now, General Stilwell was sort of interested in the possibility of a democratic regime in China, and there was some flirtation with that idea although there was very little to build on in that direction in terms of people, in terms of strength, anybody who could pull it off, but not in terms of opting for a Chinese communist regime as an alternative to Chiang Kai-shek.

GANSCHOW: This might be, you know, a kind of sensitive question, but what did you think of the American ambassadors: perhaps the earliest one that you remembered to China? Perhaps [Clarence Edward] Gauss or [Patrick J.] Hurley?

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RICHARD RUSK: Let me repeat this: What did you think of the American ambassadors in China during those years? Were they ably equipped to deal with the Chinese. The tape ran out so I--

DEAN RUSK: Gauss at least knew the Chinese; but, to pun, Hurley, he was a bull in a China

shop. He just wasn't capable of anything. I could use other languages.

RICHARD RUSK: He's out of the way, so we can use that. Is he gone?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, sure. He's gone.

RICHARD RUSK: He was gone in the forties, wasn't he?

DEAN RUSK: But he was a sort of a strutting buffoon in so many ways. He made very little contribution.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, it was Hurley I believe who did not transmit the message from Mao and Chou En-lai who wanted an invitation from the Americans to visit the United States. It was Hurley who kept that message bottled up in China.

DEAN RUSK: I don't believe that message would have gotten a favorable reply in Washington. But at least Hurley should have forwarded it and let Washington think about it.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you know anything about that back at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Not at the time, no.

RICHARD RUSK: When did you first become aware of that?

DEAN RUSK: Around the time that the communists were seizing China, in '49.

RICHARD RUSK: That Mao wanted to come to the United States?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. I had heard that. But it was not on--

SCHOENBAUM: Can you elaborate what the basis of your judgment on Hurley is? Why? Were there some incidences or stories?

DEAN RUSK: Let me think about that and maybe come back to it later. I was never directly, personally associated with him on any of his missions out there. But [J.] Leighton Stuart was a dedicated friend of China.

SCHOENBAUM: He became Ambassador towards the very end. And, oh, he took some bitter abuse from the Chinese communists.

DEAN RUSK: He was very kind, intelligent. But he simply was not in tune with the prevailing political winds in Washington and therefore, not permitted to be a very effective ambassador. When General Marshall went out there, he did so simply because the President asked him to. It was his sense of public service. I think we all thought at the time that his mission was doomed to failure, that the Nationalist regime had been woefully weakened, that the communist regime were not going to compromise on anything that Marshall might put forward if the communists

made a judgment that they could take the whole thing. So Marshall tried manfully, while he was out there, to work something out. But he came home disenchanted with both sides; with a sort of plague-on-both-your-houses attitude. I don't think that was a personal fault of Marshall that he did not succeed. I think it was simply the situation which would not permit him to succeed.

GANSCHOW: Would you mind if I tell you a little story about Hurley? Professor Rusk may have heard this. The story goes that when Hurley got off the airplane, he gave a huge war whoop because he was from Oklahoma, I believe. Just a--I mean he bellowed out a war whoop that sent everybody running for--you know--They calmed all the Chinese down and said, "Well, no, he's just showing how the American Indians," or something. He had a war whoop, you know. That's just the kind of person he was.

RICHARD RUSK: Like LBJ in India.

GANSCHOW: Did you know some of the foreign service personnel personally in China: [Oliver Edmund] Clubb, [John S.] Service, or [John Paton] Davies [Jr.], or any of those people? And would you be willing to evaluate, you know, in light of the later criticism? Was there too much leaning to one side by these people? Did they get caught up in a kind of romantic vision of revolution there? Or were they sincere--I mean, did they become, in fact, really anti-Chiang, anti-Nationalists?

DEAN RUSK: I knew Edmund Clubb later when I--He was head of the China desk when I was Assistant Secretary for the Far East there. I knew John Service and, particularly, John Paton Davies very well when I was out there with General Stilwell. They were his political advisors. They were both dedicated, intelligent, sensitive people. Entirely loyal to the United States. I testified in John Davies' hearings at the State Department. I think that they were subject to wholly irresponsible attacks and were badly dealt with. I think it was Dean Acheson who relieved John Service and it was John Foster Dulles who later relieved John Paton Davies. My guess is, if General Stilwell had been living at the time these hearings came up, he would have been there to testify and would have clarified a lot of the things that, from my point of view, were only hearsay. For example, I have no doubt in my mind that--There was considerable contest going on between General Stilwell on the one side and Chiang Kai-shek and General Chennault on the other about strategy in China during the war. General Stilwell wanted to build up ground forces that could effectively fight the Japanese. General [Claire Lee] Chennault and Chiang Kai-shek wanted to concentrate all the tonnage over the hump into airpower. General Stilwell pointed out to Chennault that if you have any success on that, the Japanese will just come up and take your bases away from you, which, in fact, was what they did at one point. That was a very intense controversy. Chiang Kai-shek was not interested in really committing his ground forces against the Japanese because he was looking over his shoulders at the communists at the end of the war. And he also had relatively few troops of his own that he could trust. Many of his so-called Nationalist troops were troops that were loyal to the governors of the provinces, or to some warlord, and not really directly under effective control by Chiang Kai-shek. Now, your question was--

GANSCHOW: Were there any of these people, though, that perhaps were--that you personally knew, that you felt were too caught up in this kind of revolutionary business?

DEAN RUSK: No. I don't think so. I think that all of us thought that China would be better off if some significant changes could occur in the way they were doing things, particularly as it related to the well-being of the Chinese people.

GANSCHOW: But they weren't undermining or deceiving?

DEAN RUSK: No, no. No, no.

RICHARD RUSK: They remained objective observers of China?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think so. I think if anybody would look back now--I don't know whether these materials have become available, but if you look at the reports of John Davies and John Service in the light of history, they stand up very well. One thing that I mentioned in an earlier tape, maybe, that one must understand: We had had this century of pretty warm relations between the American and the Chinese people. Then when the communists took over, many Americans felt like jilted lovers. Here the Chinese, our dear friends the Chinese, have turned against us. And that was a bitter pill to take. There were some of those who were prepared to make maximum political benefit out of it.

RICHARD RUSK: How about for you personally? Did you personally feel like the jilted lover? I think it might have been John Davies who, in a conversation or an interview with Warren Cohen, said that he recalls a very visceral, emotional reaction that you personally had to the news that China had indeed gone communist. Do you recall that?

DEAN RUSK: Well I was very disappointed. For example, when General Marshall went out there the nationalist forces, at least on paper, outnumbered the communist forces by about ten to one. We saw so many instances of the mishandling of the Chinese nationalist forces. For example, General Sun L-i-jen, a graduate of VMI [Virginia Military Institute] had been the Chinese commander of the Chinese forces in Burma. That force had performed very well in Burma: a good fighting force. Well Chiang Kai-shek at the end of the war moved that force up into northeast China because of the communists, but he wouldn't let this force operate as a unified force. He broke it into pieces: a little here, a little there, a little over there. Some of us felt at the time that it was because Chiang Kai-shek did not want to have that much power in the hands of General Sun Li-jen, that Sun Li-jen might take everything away from him. That that was just--

RICHARD RUSK: Tom, could you spell Sun Li-jen.

SCHOENBAUM: Sun Li-jen. He becomes head of the government for a while in Taiwan, right at the very early part.

DEAN RUSK: Very early, very early. Then we thought that the nationalist forces might at least hold the Yangtze River line as the communists started moving south. A good friend of mine, a colonel in the regular army, came back from China at that moment and told us in the Pentagon that Chiang Kai-shek would be able to hold the Yangtze River line, but again Chiang Kai-shek

mishandled his forces and this colonel shot himself--this American colonel--because he was so bitterly disappointed in what happened there. All these things are pretty well spelled out in the White Paper put out by the State Department during the [Harry S] Truman administration. On that White Paper that was worked on by the Historical Office, Philip Jessup kept in touch with it from the point of view of Dean Acheson. But we didn't tell the Historical Office people what to say and what not to say in that White Paper. It was put together as an honest job, but it was a very unpalatable production from the point of view of those who were backing Chiang Kai-shek one hundred percent in this country. So that was an element of considerable controversy.

GANSCHOW: That was one of my questions: if you were involved at all with the preparation of the White Papers.

DEAN RUSK: I was involved in the decision to publish the White Paper, but I was not involved in the actual preparation of the White Paper. That was done basically by the professional historians.

GANSCHOW: I see.

DEAN RUSK: You may remember that in the Eisenhower administration they decided to put out their own White Paper on China. They went through a lot of trouble to put one together and it came out so close to the one that was already out that the Republican administration never published it. They thought somehow that they could tell "the truth" in a White Paper of their own. But the record was simply against them.

SCHOENBAUM: Your views were substantially in accord with the Truman White Paper, I take it, at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Basically yes. You see, when the Chinese communists began to make their major move the question of what the United States ought to do about it, if anything, did come up for discussion. We were disarmed. By the summer of 1946 we did not have a single division in our Army nor a single group in our Air Force that was ready for combat. Our defense budget for three fiscal years had come down to just a little over eleven billion dollars, reaching for a target of ten billion dollars. So the question of intervening with any military forces in this Chinese Civil War simply was wholly unrealistic. And those of us who had had any experience with China and its vast population knew that we could mobilize several million men and still do no more than occupy a few of the coastal cities. We weren't going to conquer seven hundred million people who didn't want to be conquered. So, there was no real military option open, even though there were those who were pressing for it. It just didn't make any sense.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, I need to follow that up with just one statement you made during our taping on CBI. That is, you felt had a fleet of transport aircraft--I believe it was C-46s--been made available to Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalists toward the tail-end of our effort there, that perhaps that might have swung--

DEAN RUSK: No. I had an earlier time in mind. You see, when we were flying cargo across the hump, we were typically doing so in the old Dakota, DC-3, C-47 aircraft, two-engine jobs: a

wonderful workhorse during World War II. But these DC-3s could not reach the altitude of the mountains that they had to go through. They had to weave their way through these peaks. Well, in bad weather, it was terrible. The chance of a hump flyer who reported for duty out there to perform his stated missions and come home was only forty percent. We lost a lot of those flyers: a few of them to Japanese Zeros, but most of them to mountains, to weather. Then the older brother, the big brother of the DC-3 came in: the DC-4 engine aircraft. At the time when I saw the first one I thought that was the aircraft to end all aircraft. I had never seen such a majestic plane. If we had had a fleet of a hundred of those, say two years earlier out there, then we really could have pumped stuff into China to help the situation.

RICHARD RUSK: Tom [Ganschow], was it your feeling that had we had that capability then, that we might have had a--played a decisive factor in the civil situation?

GANSCHOW: Yes. and then there is the question, that nagging question in my mind, if we would have, you know, was there anything we could have done to stop the communists from moving out of Manchuria. They may have taken--I mean obviously Chiang made a mistake by spreading his forces thin in Manchuria, getting his forces trapped up there. But was there a way to stop them up there before they got down into China itself. Could we have done anything about that? Well, I think Professor Rusk has answered that, in a sense. I mean, we didn't have the combat forces and, I think even more importantly, I don't think we had the feeling to do that. We just finished a war; why should we get back involved in another--I mean, two wars you might say. We finished a war in Europe and we finished a war in--

DEAN RUSK: It would have taken a large remobilization of our armed forces to have done anything whatever, militarily, about it.

GANSCHOW: Could I ask you a question about the atomic bomb? You know, there are events that happen in your life [and] you always remember where you are. I still remember when President Kennedy was shot: I remember I was preparing for a Chinese lesson, in fact. I'll never forget that. Could I ask you where you were at the time of the dropping of the bomb and what impact--I often think the impact on China was much greater, or at least as great, as the impact on Japan. I tell my students that. I say, "The impact of the dropping of that bomb was as great on China as it was on Japan."

DEAN RUSK: Well, in August 1945 I was in the Operations Division of the General Staff of the Army at the Pentagon, but I was not in that section which had prior knowledge about the atomic bomb. That was held very closely. But I remember being at my desk when the flash came in from Hiroshima and a regular Army colonel at the next desk, when he saw this said, "War has turned upon itself and is devouring its own tail. From this time forward it will make no sense for nations to settle their disputes by means of war." That instant insight of that Army officer has always lived with me. But, I was not particularly aware of what the reactions were in China as distinct from the rest of the world. You may well be right.

GANSCHOW: I describe it, for example, this way. Chiang Kai-shek actually, in part, wrote about the fact that he was waiting for the Americans to come. He didn't feel his forces could deal with the superior equipped, trained Japanese forces. So therefore he hung back waiting for the

Americans with all their power, all their tanks, all their machines, all their guns because they were going to have to come to China first, clean out the Japanese there and then on to the islands of Japan. Well I could just see Chiang getting word that the war is over. The bomb had been dropped and it must have been a bomb dropped on him. I mean, no American troops, no equipment, and here he has to face the communists.

DEAN RUSK: I'm sure this was a major event for him. I might put in here, I don't know where you would fit it in. But in 1968 I made my final call on Chiang Kai-shek. Once again he gave me a long talk about his government being the government of all China: that it had to go back to the mainland, and in going back to the mainland it would expect and would need American support. Well this time I said to him, "Mr. President, there are only 200 million of us Americans back there and there are 700 or 800 million Chinese over there on the mainland and I can assure you that we will not bleed ourselves to death in fighting a conventional war against the Chinese." And he turned to me almost in fury. He was very agitated. And he said, "You must never, never, never even think about the possibility of dropping an atomic bomb on the Chinese." All of a sudden his being Chiang Kai-shek was less important to him than being Chinese. And I said, "Well then you have your answer, Mr. President." That sense of being Chinese: "Under no circumstances must you even think about dropping an atomic bomb on the Chinese." That impressed me greatly.

GANSCHOW: During those war years did you have an impression of people such as Hu Shih, who was the Chinese ambassador to America, Wellington Koo, Hollington Tong, any of those people?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, they were very able people.

RICHARD RUSK: Just a minute, Pop. Go ahead

[break in recording]

GANSCHOW: Capital H-U. Capital S-H-I-H. Wellington Koo--Capital W-E-L-L-I-G-N-T-O-N.

DEAN RUSK: I-N-G.

GANSCHOW: I-N-G-T-O-N, I'm sorry. Capital K-O-O. Hollington Tong. H-O-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N. Capital T-O-N-G.

DEAN RUSK: Right. Well, they were very able people; they were civilized people. They could have played a very important role in a constitutional democracy, for example, in China. I had great interest in them and great respect for them. Unfortunately the tide of events almost swept them aside. Wellington Koo was one of the ablest diplomats that ever came down the track, but he was not able to mobilize general international support for China during the assault of Japan on China during the thirties. He appeared for them at the League of Nations, for example. They had some very able people there in China. I don't know whether the next generation that you now find in Taiwan has comparable abilities, but these were educated, civilized, cultured people.

Anyone could not help but have great respect.

GANSCHOW: Did you know any of these people personally, Professor Rusk?

DEAN RUSK: I've seen Hu Shih a number of times, and I've seen Wellington Koo. I've seen Hollington Tong, of course, quite a few times. I respect them.

GANSCHOW: This is reiterating a question, but I would like to be sure that we don't--I think Richard asked it--that sense of surprise, or that shock just wasn't expected when Chiang lost the mainland. I mean, was there a sense of personal sense--did you in a sense expect that to happen, or was it still a shock to you?

DEAN RUSK: I was braced for that in my own mind because I knew how the situation was developing in China, but nevertheless to me the seizure of the mainland by the communists dismayed me. I thought that this was a major event. After all, if you combined this great Chinese people, both in mass and in capabilities, with the communist ideology, and if they were to go on the rampage, there would be major problems ahead. There was also the possibility of close working relationships between them and the Soviet Union. We were having all sorts of problems with the Soviet Union at that time, so I was disappointed and dismayed. I won't say I was shocked because one could see it coming.

SCHOENBAUM: Again I'd like to reiterate this question if I could. At the time, Professor Rusk, did you feel that our government could have done anything to change the balance there, to save Chiang, to save the nationalists--I'm talking at the time? And then, has your view changed over the years? I mean, I know pretty much what your view is now, but at the time did you think, "Well if we only would have done this."

DEAN RUSK: I have thought about that question a great deal and I myself do not see what the United States could have done that would have prevented the communists from taking over in China. You would have to go back to the ten years of attrition of Chinese capabilities by the long war with the Japanese, the ineffectiveness of the Chinese governmental structure: the Kuomintang structure. If anything, it was Chiang Kai-shek who lost China rather than the United States.

RICHARD RUSK: General Stilwell, apparently, when he left CBI and was recalled, his advice to the Americans back here was that we should get the hell out of China.

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you remember talking to Stilwell about that?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes. We talked about it from time to time, but I didn't see him after the war. There are just limits to power and we did not have the power to start with. And if we had tried to use it, we would have found that its limits were very severe in dealing with a situation like China.

GANSCHOW: It seems to me that's one of the hardest things for a government official, especially in your--like the power you had and the power a president has--is to make that realization, that there are limits to power. And some people learn it and others don't.

DEAN RUSK: I think the considerations that lead to the communist takeover of the mainland are pretty well set out in the White Paper by the Truman administration.

GANSCHOW: So that would answer perhaps my next question. The State Department's view towards the mainland and Taiwan during that, just during that period. Was there a strong feeling to just let the civil war take its course or do you think, can you remember even before the Korean war? Was there any sense of, "Let's see if we can't at least protect Chiang on Taiwan, or the nationalists on Taiwan?" Or was there just a sense, "Well, let the thing go to its conclusion?"

DEAN RUSK: We did feel that we had some obligation to the nationalists who fled to Taiwan. After all they had been our allies during the war. We knew a lot of them. We respected a lot of them. Now when they went to Taiwan, their record there on how they treated the people of Taiwan was pretty bad in the initial stages.

GANSCHOW: We talked about this the other night.

DEAN RUSK: Very rough indeed. That we didn't like very much. Then there came up the discussion of what our attitude would be toward Taiwan. Now the Joint Chiefs of Staff, somewhere along there, 1949-50, put out a paper and sent it over to us at the State Department in which they said Taiwan was important to the strategic interests of the United States; but we don't have any armed forces that could be used for the defense of Taiwan so it will be up to the State Department to defend Taiwan with diplomatic means. Well we went back to the Pentagon and said, "Now look, whom are you kidding? Because there are limits to what can be done by diplomacy standing alone and there is no way to guarantee the safety of Taiwan if you fellows aren't prepared to put up some troops for it." Well that argument was still going on at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War. When that happened, particularly in that first week or so, we did not know what the true meaning of the North Korean invasion of South Korea might be. We did not know whether this meant that Asian communists were going to make a surge in other places, for example, against Taiwan and into Southeast Asia. So, it was at that point that President Truman intruded the 7th Fleet between Taiwan and the mainland and said he wouldn't permit any military operations in either direction, trying to circumscribe the possible impact of what had happened in Korea. Then we stepped up our aid to the French in Indochina to try to discourage any move in that direction. But that was a bluff, putting the 7th Fleet in there. We could count thousands of wooden junks all along the mainland coast there in the vicinity of Taiwan--thousands of them. So we took some of these wooden junks out to sea and fired naval shells at them to see what it would take to sink them. It was a very difficult thing to do. These wooden junks just don't sink that easily because wood floats. We did not have in our 7th Fleet at that time one shell per junk. So if the Chinese on the mainland had simply set--

RICHARD RUSK: (laughter) Is this worthwhile for you, friend?

GANSCHOW: Oh, my.

DEAN RUSK: If they had just started with thousands of their wooden junks headed for Taiwan-

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