

Robert Bruce Sheeks

(April 8th 1922~July 4th 2022)

Post World War II Biography in Brief

Written by Robert Bruce Sheeks

Submitted to Karen L. Thornber, Acting Chair, Committee on Regional Studies East Asia by wife Bao-Mei Liu Sheeks on 7/13/22

I was released from Marine Corps active duty right after the war, in September 1945; returned to Harvard College for my Junior Year, with academic credit for wartime intensive Japanese studies completed at the University of California and the University of Colorado under US Navy auspices during 1942/3.

Graduated from Harvard College, June 1946, Bachelor of Science, Magna cum Laude, in Far Eastern Languages and History. At the Commencement ceremony, I gave the English Dissertation as Student Speaker for Classes of '43, '44, and '45 whose graduations had been postponed by WWII.

Continued at Harvard University for a two-year MA Degree, completed in 1948, for the newly established discipline of China Regional Studies, under the direction of Prof. John King Fairbank.

1

My first employment was in Washington in 1948 at the Pentagon Building, serving as a China Affairs Analyst for the Department of Army. The plan was that I would subsequently serve as a Political Analyst in the US Military Attaché office at the American Embassy in Nanking. China, however, was in the throes of Communist revolution and the American Ambassador, Leighton Stuart, soon become a de facto prisoner in his Embassy.

As plan change was essential, I joined in Washington the United States Information Service (USIS), which was at that time part of the State Department. In 1949 I was posted to the American Consulate in Taipei, Taiwan to serve as Field Director of the USIS. I served in that post for three years, during which time the erstwhile Taipei American Consulate was elevated in status successively to Consulate General, then to Embassy. Concurrently as USIS Director, I served Ambassador Karl Rankin, as the Embassy's Public Affairs Officer in Taiwan, until I returned to the U.S. in 1951.

Upon return to the US and faced with the prospect of working in Washington, I found service in the State Department/USIS bureaucracy had lost its appeal, so I joined a San Francisco-based voluntary organization, initially named The Committee for a Free Asia, which subsequently became The Asia Foundation. I was posted to Malaya (later to become the nation of Malaysia), where a violent Communist insurgency was taking place against the colonial British and Malay government.

After three years in Southeast Asia, based at Kuala Lumpur, I returned to the US to serve in the Home Office of The Asia Foundation in San Francisco, which I did for ten years, between 1953 in 1963, making frequent trips for the Foundation to Asian countries, mainly in Northeast and Southeast Asia.

Work that I had been doing to promote science education and research in Asian countries brought me to the attention of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and its' Pacific Science Board (PSB), which invited me to join its staff in Washington, which I did in 1963. The Director of the Board was Harold Jefferson Coolidge, Harvard Class of 1927. I became the Associate Director of PSB, and served in that position for five years, through 1968. Coolidge remained Director until his retirement in 1970. He was a co-founder of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, serving as IUCN president from 1966 to 1972. From 1961 he was a founding director of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and received many awards during his career for his outstanding work in nature conservation. From complications after a fall, my revered friend and associate Hal Coolidge died in Beverly, Massachusetts February 15, 1985. He was buried at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, to whom Hal was closely related.

2

An additional undertaking of mine at the National Academy of Sciences was to help establish for the Academy's Office of Foreign Secretary a program for scientific and scholarly communication with Mainland China, under the directorship of Dr. Harrison Brown of Caltech. I had previously devoted considerable study to a keen interest of mine, the history of science in China and the emergence of China as a modern scientific power. Under auspices of the National Science Foundation's Office of Economic and Manpower Studies I co-authored a major study, "The Organization and Support of Scientific Research and Development in Mainland China", published in 1970 as a 600-page book. My principal colleague in writing the book was University of San Francisco Economics Professor, Dr. Yuan-li Wu, who was also a Fellow of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

In the course of research on modern scientific development in China, I became keenly interested in the challenge of computerizing Chinese language documents written in Chinese characters, so as to make possible computer processing of Chinese language texts, and also computer-assisted translation from Chinese into English. This interest was outside of the scientific scope and work of the PSB so I pursued it as a personal interest. Computerizing Chinese language data seemed to me to offer favorable prospects, academic and commercial. Having devoted over 20 years in public service work I was keen to enter into the world of business, and a new career. Together with a Chinese friend from Taiwan, Mr. C.C. Kao, an electrical engineer who had been on the inventors staff of IBM at its headquarters in upstate New York. Mr. Kao had in previous years invented and developed the Japanese teletype machine that was in use in Japan, which was being used as the input device for Japanese language computers. I incorporated a new company in California, called the East West Computer Corporation, to adapt the Japanese system and hardware for Chinese language data on a commercial basis. Working with the giant Japanese electronics firm, Oki Denki, our efforts produced prototype units, that we managed to sell, but we found the market and profit margin so limited that we decided in 1969 to phase out the East West Computer Corporation.

That same year, I was recruited by a Detroit-based banking and investing limited partnership, "The Parsons Group" (aka The Bank of the Commonwealth Group) that aimed to invest in the booming offshore oil industry in South East Asia. I was introduced by mutual friends as a person well-versed in economic matters in that region. My employment was with the Group's headquarters unit, COMAC, at a very substantial salary, and I was given a sizable budget to become established in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Ultimately, I focused on the field of supplies and services for offshore petroleum exploration and production as the primary field to recommend to COMAC for investment. The principal customers were US companies engaged in offshore oil development in Southeast Asia. The business proceeded and prospered, but unfortunately the Detroit group became targeted in anti-trust actions because of its multiple ownership of banks and was forced to divest itself of certain operations. As a consequence, I was instrumental in handling the sale of COMAC's assets and operations in the region to British interests which included the large Borneo Company, and the Commonwealth Development Finance Corporation (CDFC), connected with the Bank of England and British Crown interests.

With phase-out of COMAC by 1972, I decided to remain in Singapore to be a self-employed consultant on business development in Southeast Asia. I was most fortunate that I had excellent clients, one of which was the Boston Insulated Wire and Cable Company (BIW), the founder and president of which was Mr. Harry Burley, a distinguished Harvard graduate. I helped to establish for BIW a technology-transfer and joint manufacturing venture in Taiwan with Pacific Electric Wire and Cable Corporation for manufacture of specialty cables, including flexible electric cables for high-speed elevators; chemical resistant cables for down-hole oil-well pumps; and heat resistant cables for use in shipyards and steel mills.

During the 1970's I visited the Malaysian state of Sabah (the former British colony of North Borneo) in connection with a wide variety of development projects for which I provided management services. One of these was the conversion of land-use from tapioca cultivation to extensive Oil-palm groves. Another was introduction of commercial marine aquaculture to produce species of the red algae, eucheuma, for sale to the Maine-based American firm, Marine Colloids. For this undertaking, I established a company in Hong Kong, Aquatic Resources Ltd., which at one time had over 200 workers mostly from the Philippines, to set up demonstration sea-farms on the reef flats surrounding Sabah's offshore islands. My close associate and technical partner was Dr. Maxwell Doty of the University of Hawaii, a world-renowned algologist.

4

After the 1970's, I incorporated in Hong Kong for project development work, a company called Development Management Limited (DML). In the 1980's I moved my base of operations from Singapore and South East Asia to Taipei. My main Taiwan project involvement during the 1980's and 90's was providing managerial and personnel assistance for construction of a set of three large parallel highway tunnels through the mountains at the north end of the island. That project had come to a technical and legal impasse. My company was able to help solve the problems by recruiting and managing tunnel boring machine engineers and operators from Russia, entailing seven visits to Russia during several years.

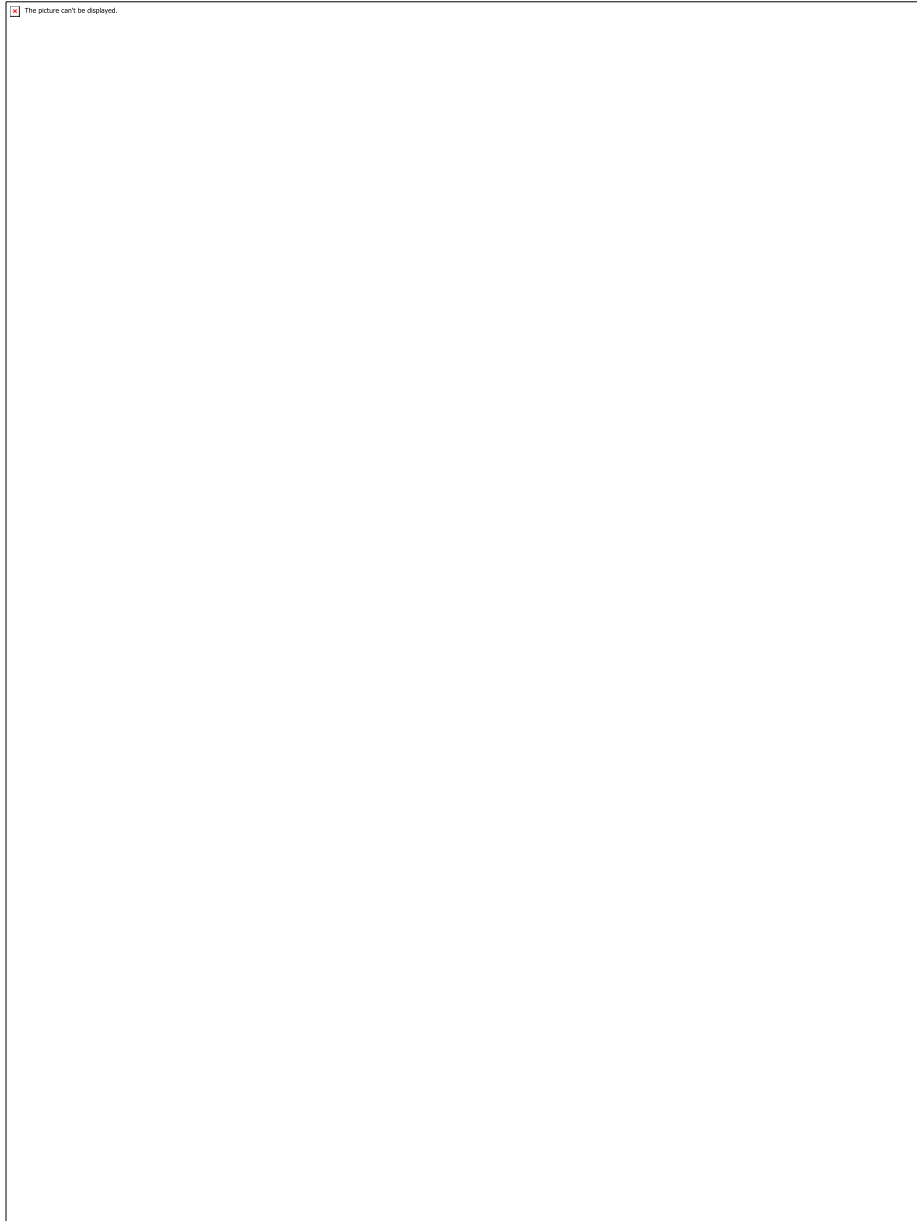
In 1998 I moved back to the US and have been residing in retirement in Santa Rosa, California since then. Perhaps of anecdotal interest, is that my first wife, Jane Packard Pratt, who passed away some twenty years ago (October 27, 1996), had grown up in Peking (Beijing); was a Radcliffe graduate. We first met when we were the only two students in an advanced Chinese reading course at Harvard in 1945/6. We were married in Cambridge at the Harvard

Chapel by Dean Sperry of the Harvard Divinity School. Jane Packard Pratt was the granddaughter of Dr. James Henry Ingram, an American medical missionary in China who for many years taught and was a surgeon at the Rockefeller-funded Peking Union Medical College.

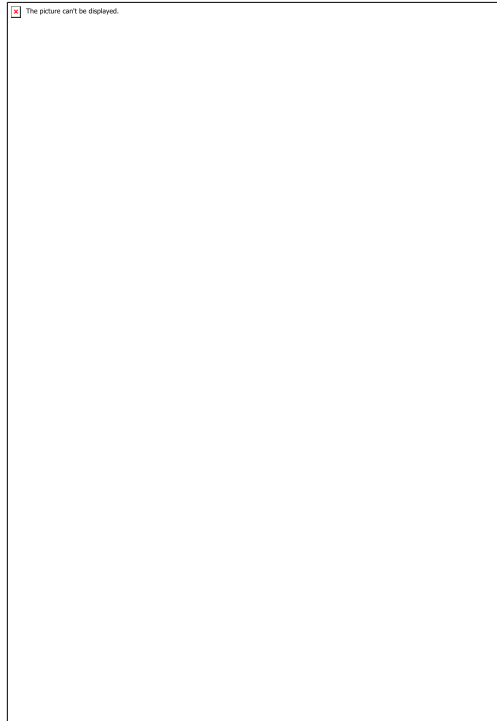
My beloved present wife, the former Ms. Liu BaoMei of Taichung, Taiwan, and I married in California in 2001. A graduate of Sonoma State University and the University of San Francisco, she is a member of the Quality Control Administrative, Data Consultant Staff of the Kaiser Permanente Hospital here in Santa Rosa, not far from where we reside.

Photo:

Robert B. Sheeks at age 90, visits the Tienhou Temple in Lukang, Taiwan -
December 2012



One Marine's War



On the right is shown the cover of *One Marine's War*, a biography mainly about Robert B. Sheeks, written by [Gerald A. Meehl](#), published by the [Naval Institute Press](#). The author, "Jerry" Meehl, first met Bob Sheeks in 1979, in Sabah, Borneo. Jerry's idea and research for this book began in 1995. Sixteen years later the book's release date was on May 15, 2012. The first two book signing events were held on July 24 at the [Boulder Book Store](#) and July 26, 2012 at the [Tattered Cover Book Store](#) in Denver, Colorado. The latest signing event took place at the **USS Arizona Memorial, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on Sunday November 11, (Veteran's Day) and Monday November 12, 2012. A special guest who attended the event was Mr. Daniel Martinez of the National Park Service, historian and television personality. Copies can be ordered through [Amazon.com](#) or any major book retailer. Future book signing locations will be announced here.**

At a point in history, when our nation was suddenly thrown into an unwanted world war, the focus of the military and the American public was revenge and total victory over Japan. But as much as victory in World War II inevitably entailed death and destruction, winning the war also needed clear-minded winning methods against enemy resistance. Lt. Sheeks developed various methods, but then had to convince most of his fellow Marines, that valuable intelligence could be gained from Japanese POWs and is worth the risks involved. His mission would employ a variety of means to induce surrenders, including use of surrender leaflets and loudspeaker systems, some of which were powerful and jeep-mounted that he personally developed. These means alone would not have been effective unless he also had the cooperation of Marines engaged in combat and their realization of benefits to be gained by inducing Japanese troops to give themselves up and

not fight to the last man.

Despite strong anti-Japanese emotions and attitudes facing him, young Lt. Sheeks knew, however, that were he given the chance to persuade enemy combatants (as well as civilians) to surrender, he would be able to help provide his Division's D-2 intelligence section with valuable information about resisting enemy troops, emplacement locations, and weapons. He was convinced that such information could lead to saving lives, on both sides. Under battlefield conditions, Lt. Sheeks' leadership displayed a sense of trust and patience with whom he served with and the Japanese who could eventually give themselves up. He was strongly motivated and determined, able to stay calm and focused on what he firmly believed he could accomplish. This is the true story of how Lt. Robert B. Sheeks carried out that mission.