UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

# A Soldier at Heart:

# The Life of Smedley Butler, 1881 - 1940

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Eric Dennis Myers

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Soldier at Heart:

The Life of Smedley Butler, 1881 - 1940

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Eric Dennis Myers

Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Professor Joan Waugh, Chair

The dissertation is a historical biography of Smedley Darlington Butler (1881-1940), a decorated soldier and critic of war profiteering during the 1930s. A two-time Congressional Medal of Honor winner and son of a powerful congressman, Butler was one of the most prominent military figures of his era. He witnessed firsthand the American expansionism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, participating in all of the major conflicts and most of the minor ones. Following his retirement in 1931, Butler became an outspoken critic of American intervention, arguing in speeches and writings against war profiteering and the injustices of expansionism. His critiques represented a wide swath of public opinion at the time – the majority of Americans supported anti-interventionist policies through 1939. Yet unlike other members of the movement, Butler based his theories not on abstract principles, but on experiences culled from decades of soldiering: the terrors and wasted resources of the battlefield,

the use of the American military to bolster corrupt foreign governments, and the influence of powerful, domestic moneyed interests. Butler's story is reminiscent of a comment Mark Twain once made about America: "This nation is like all the others that have been spewed upon the earth – ready to shout for any cause that will tickle its vanity or fill its pocket." That was Smedley Butler in his early years – a soldier shouting for the "cause." Later, he would decide to expose those whose pockets he had helped to fill. This ideological shift – from imperialism to isolationism – rippled through homes across the country in the interwar period as it did in Butler's mind. In this dissertation, I will examine this ideological movement through the study of one of its most prominent leaders.

The dissertation of Eric Dennis Myers is approved.

Mary N. Hart

Janice L. Reiff

Joan Waugh, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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A special acknowledgement goes to the staff at the Archives and Special Collections in the Alfred M. Grey Research Center at Quantico, especially Greg Cina, Jim Ginther, and Michael Miller. During my research trips to Quantico, the team worked to fulfill all of my requests and patiently answered even the most trivial of questions.

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Brittany Adams, Stephanie Amerian, Matthew Crow, and Erik Greenberg, I could have hardly made it through the rigors of the program. Thank you, scholars.

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# VITA

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|---|---|
| 2001 | B. A., History/Sociology<br>University of California, Los Angeles<br>Los Angeles, California |
| 2006-2008 | Teaching Fellow<br>Department of History<br>University of California, Los Angeles<br>Los Angeles, California |
| 2007 | M.A., History<br>University of California, Los Angeles<br>Los Angeles, California |
| 2008-2009 | Graduate Student Researcher<br>UCLA Center for Community Learning<br>University of California, Los Angeles<br>Los Angeles, California |
| 2009-2012 | Teaching Fellow<br>Department of History<br>University of California, Los Angeles<br>Los Angeles, California |

# AWARDS

| | |
|---|---|
| 2008 | Graduate Summer Research Mentorship |

# INTRODUCTION

> *"…it is only those who have never heard a shot, never heard the shriek and groans of the wounded and lacerated (friend or foe), that cry aloud for more blood, more vengeance, more desolation."*
>
> -William Tecumseh Sherman[1]

The Marine Corps Base at Quantico sits on 100 square miles of wooded forest and swampy wetlands along the Potomac River in northeastern Virginia. It is home to some 12,000 marines[2] and civilian personnel, the FBI Academy, the Marine Corps University, and tucked behind the main road, an unassuming football field called Butler Stadium. A casual jogger circling the field would hardly be able to guess that the 10,000-seat arena was dug out of the hillside entirely by hand, the arduous labor of thousands of marines. Nor that the tons of concrete reinforced by rails were donated by the Potomac and Fredericksburg Railroad so that the total cost of the project could come in at under $5,000. Butler Stadium today assists in maintaining the fitness of marines at Quantico, but mostly forgotten are the efforts of Butler toward the stadium's conception and his dedication to complete the project at a fraction of its anticipated cost, one of his numerous striking achievements on behalf of the base. And yet, Butler Stadium is the only monument on base dedicated to Smedley Butler – a man with one of the most storied careers in the Marine Corps.[3]

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[1] William Tecumseh Sherman, May, 1865, quoted from B.H. Liddell Hart, *Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American* (Boston: Dodd Mead, 1929), 402.

[2] Throughout the dissertation "Marines" is capitalized when referring to the "Marine Corps." When used in reference to the soldiers themselves, "marines" appears in lowercase.

[3] On the construction of Butler Stadium see: "Quantico's $650,000 Memorial Stadium Nearing Completion at Cost of Only $5,000," *Washington Post*, January 21, 1923; "Marines' New Stadium is Nearly

A descendant of a long line of successful Pennsylvania Quakers and the son of a well-known Pennsylvania congressman, Smedley[4] was born into privilege. Combining his familial advantages with an intense work ethic and episodes of bravery, Butler excelled in the Marine Corps. But what set Butler apart from other well-connected political elites was his empathy toward the common soldier, the common veteran, and eventually, the common man.

In 1931, Major General Butler retired from the Marine Corps with the highest achievable rank and as one of the Corps' most famous members. He had appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in June of 1927. Humorist Will Rogers mentioned him in his columns. And writer and radio personality Lowell Thomas lobbied Butler for the privilege of writing his biography.[5] Following his retirement, Butler embarked on a career as a public speaker, often addressing crowds numbering in the thousands and holding court through a regular radio address for six months in 1935 that was broadcast across the East Coast.[6] In 1935, famed Louisiana politician Huey Long proclaimed in his book *My First Days in the White House*, that if he were elected President he would

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Completed," *New York Times*, August 13, 1922. The modern day description stems from the author's own observations at Quantico in the spring and summer of 2010.

[4] Throughout the dissertation Smedley Butler is referred to in a variety of ways, including "Butler," "Smedley," "General Butler," etc.

[5] "Cover," *Time*, June 20, 1927, (Volume IX, Number 25); For examples of Rogers' admiration for Butler, see "Will Rogers Remarks," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1927; "Will Rogers Remarks," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1929; "Will Rogers Remarks," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1931; Lowell Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye: The Adventures of Smedley D. Butler* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933).

[6] At the national encampment for the Veterans of Foreign War in 1933, Butler spoke in front of a crowd of some 10,000, according to reports. See *Chicago Daily Tribune,* August 28, 1933. Later that year, Butler shared the stage with James Van Zandt and Huey Long on a national speaking tour, prior to which, according to one historian, Butler was extremely popular and "commanded huge veteran audiences everywhere he spoke." See Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 94.

appoint Butler as his Secretary of War.[7] Butler testified in front of congress three times, the last appearance coming in 1938 as an expert witness on the dangers of expanding the military. Smedley's death on June 21, 1940, was national news, his obituary appearing in papers across the country, with the *New York Times* running a lengthy recounting of his life in glowing detail.[8]

As one of only nineteen "Double Recipients" of the Medal of Honor[9] and a participant in most of the military campaigns in the first third of the 20th century, Butler has a secure place in Marine Corps and military history. In nearly every major study from the Spanish-American War and Boxer Rebellion to conflicts in the Caribbean, Nicaragua, and Mexico, as well as in general studies of the Marine Corps, Butler's contribution is mentioned.[10] In one of the more popular Corps histories, Brigadier General Edwin Simmons's 1976 work on the Marines – *The United States Marines:*

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[7] Huey Pierce Long, *My First Days in the White House* (Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1935), 6. Butler was not aware that Long would have considered him for the position until after Long was assassinated in September of 1935. The book was published posthumously later the same month.

[8] "Smedley Butler of the Marines Dead," *New York Times*, June 22, 1940.

[9] For the official list of Medal of Honor winners, see: "Congressional Medal of Honor Society, Full Archive," Congressional Medal of Honor Society, Online at www.cmohs.org/recipient-archive.php. (Accessed November 1, 2012.)

[10] On American military and Marine Corps history see: Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); Edwin H Simmons, *The United States Marines, 1775-1975* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974); John Whiteclay Chamers II, ed., *American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Lt. Col. Philip N. Pierce USMC (Ret.) and Lt. Col. Frank O. Hough USMC, *The Compact History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1960); Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962* (Annapolis, Maryland: The United States Naval Institute, 1962); Peter Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy: The Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern American Navalism* (New York: Free Press, 1972); Kenneth J. Clifford, *Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the United States Marine Corps,* 1900-*1970* (Washington., History and Museums Division, United States Marine Corps, 1973); Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984); Paolo E. Coletta, *An Annotated Bibliography of U.S. Marine Corps History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc. 1986).

*1775-1975* – Butler is referred to no less than sixteen times. By contrast, the eight-year commandant and well-respected General Lejeune, elicits only ten references.[11]

Despite his military accomplishments, Butler is not a well-known figure in general American history. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that heroes of larger wars have generally overshadowed military figures involved in smaller conflicts. Not only has a selective memory swept interesting figures like Butler into obscure corners of the historical record, but also it has skewered our collective perception of American military history as a series of occasional but bold and large-scale wars. As one historian observed, it is this type of warfare that has dominated our national consciousness:

> The big wars, especially the Civil War and World War II, are celebrated in countless books, movies, and documentaries. As it happens, these were America's only experience with total war in which the nation staked all of tits blood and treasure to achieve the relatively quick and unconditional surrender of the enemy. Yet somehow many of us have come to think of Gettysburg and D-Day-conventional, set-piece engagements-as the norm, not the aberration.[12]

With the promise of dramatic battles and recognizable figures, the largest conflicts in American history are studied and revisited time and again, while figures like Butler, who fought in smaller conflicts, dwell in relative obscurity.

Another reason for Butler's lack of recognition in the broader history of America has to do with the reputation of the isolationist movement of the 1930s. The non-interventionist (or isolationist) movement has been viewed relatively unfavorably in most studies since the end of World War II. It has been characterized by historians as

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[11] Simmons, *The United States Marines,* 84-85.

[12] Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xiv.

everything from a mistake by misguided citizens that may have prolonged or actually contributed to the start of the Second World War, to a movement with darker, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi overtones.[13] Recent studies of the Depression have carried on in this vein, with historians such as David Kennedy writing that isolationist legislation introduced in the mid-1930s may have contributed to the rise of Nazi Germany: "Watching these events from Berlin, Adolf Hitler feared nothing from the United States as he began methodically to unspool his expansionist schemes." This dismissal from an otherwise even-handed scholar is an indication of the degree to which isolationism has been sidelined in historical study. As another academic observed, the movement seems to have been "relegated to the dustbin of history, exorcised of its anti-imperialist heresy and then ridiculed as rustic, narrow minded, and xenophobic."[14]

It is no wonder, then, that the studies which exist on Butler largely ignore his work within the isolationist movement and instead focus on his military career. Anne Cipriano Venzon's edited collection of Butler's letters – the only published collection of Butler's letters to date – ranges from 1898–1931, ending abruptly with Butler's military retirement. Journalist Jules Archer devotes much of his book *The Plot to Seize the White*

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[13] While there were certainly deep strains of anti-Semitism running through the isolationist movement, it appears to be indicative of the widespread anti-Semitism prevalent in the era more than a concentration within a certain group. The demonization of isolationists such as Charles Lindberg escalated in the "Great Debate" between isolationists and interventionists following Germany's invasion of Poland, and continued through World War II. See Wayne S. Cole, *Charles Lindbergh and the Battle Against American Intervention in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974); also Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention: 1940-1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953). Cole's books, along with works by Manfred Jonas and Matthew Ware Coulter provide less subjective analyses of isolationists.

[14] David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 392; Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), quotation from 241.

*House*, to a biography of Butler, but the biography is primarily concerned with Butler's military career, shedding little light on his activities in the 1930s beyond his involvement in the conspiracy referenced by the book's title.[15] Even Butler's autobiography, *Old Gimlet Eye*, concludes a few months prior to his retirement from the Marine Corps.[16] Hans Schmidt's *Maverick Marine*, the only complete historical biography of Butler's life, dedicates the final two chapters to Butler's post-military career – the most significant amount. However, the first thirteen chapters in his work concentrate on Butler's active-duty years in the Marines, despite the fact that most of what made Butler a "maverick" is his anti-imperialist ideology in his post-military career, an unusual and remarkable turnaround for such a high-ranking military officer. Schmidt's work is rich in detail, but glorifies rather than analyzes Butler's soldiering life, spending few pages on Butler's role in the anti-war movements of the 1930s.[17]

While theses biographies on Butler have their flaws, they remain generally reliable sources, and I utilize them throughout the study. The dissertation, however, differs from the previous three works in a number of ways. For one, I examine Butler's military service to a lesser degree than Schmidt and Venzon, focusing instead on specific events that later influenced Butler's theories on war profiteering. Likewise, the "Plot to Seize the White House," is included, but instead of delving into the minutiae of the

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[15] Jules Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1973).

[16] Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed., *General Smedley Darlington Butler: The Letters of a Leatherneck, 1898-1931* (New York: Praeger, 1992); Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*. To be fair to Thomas, Butler dictated most of the memoir in 1931. As Butler retired later the same year, there was little chance to cover a significant portion of his post-military career.

[17] Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987).

conspiracy as Archer has done, I primarily concentrate on how the event affected Butler's view of specific corporations, the wealthy classes, and Big Business in general. The dissertation also omits a thorough examination of Butler's personal life, such as his relationship with his wife and father, and the impact of his father's death on Smedley. While such intimate familial details would broaden an examination of Butler's life, the sources examined for the dissertation did not provide such psychological insight. Furthermore, this work's primary focus is on Butler's ideology during the 1930s and on situating him within this period of social and political turmoil, not on his personal relationships.

Butler's post-military career appears to have perplexed scholars and, as a result, the existing work on Butler has tellingly glossed over this period. This seemingly contradictory decade in Butler's life – composed of public speaking and anti-war writings – was surely an ideological evolution for the marine, and did not fit the expectations for a retired general. And yet, it was a fitting and logical conclusion to a life spent fighting on behalf of the average soldier. Butler's advocacy for the rank-and-file marine had made him popular during his military service, and it was natural for him to fight for the cause after retirement. As he transformed himself into a staunch isolationist and an ardent opponent to war profiteering in the 1930s, he always remained pro-soldier and pro-veteran. In fact, it was his pro-soldier stance that led to his involvement with veterans' organizations, which in turn gave shape and substance to his post-military ideology. Thus, by seeking insight into his final, most controversial decade of life, the dissertation helps fill the gap left by scholars who have so far mostly concentrated on Butler's military career, and uncovers the fascinating evolution of Butler's post-military thought,

in the process explaining the unconventional dénouement in the career of this former high-ranking and decorated military figure.

To accomplish this goal, I undertook the task of combing through more than 6,000 of Butler's letters, papers, military records, and other documents in the Archives and Special Collections at the Alfred M. Grey Research Center at the Marine Corps Base at Quantico, Virginia. Special attention was paid to nearly 1,000 pages of transcripts of a series of radio addresses given by Butler over a six-month period in 1935. The speeches are a culmination of Butler's anti-war thought, a valuable body of work that has previously been overlooked by scholars. By incorporating this original material and focusing on Butler's years after retirement from the Marine Corps, the dissertation aims to present the most complete picture of Butler's ideology during the 1930s of any academic study to date.

One of the aims of this study is to challenge Schmidt's notion that Butler's transformation from dedicated marine to isolationist stemmed primarily from his military experiences. Schmidt concludes *Maverick Marine* by claiming that Butler's post-retirement, anti-imperialism viewpoint originated from his days as a Marine Corps officer: "His (Butler's) radical 1930s recantation is best understood as evolving from experiences within the military and in civilian work, rather than from outside ideological influences."[18] Using evidence gathered from a study of Smedley's path – from his military career into his post-Marine Corps work with veterans – this dissertation argues that Butler did not fully develop his philosophy against war profiteering until he began to

[18] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 249.

have sustained contact with veterans' organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) in late 1932. While Butler's Marine Corps background helped him in the sense that it connected him with audiences of veterans, it was that very involvement with the VFW that led him to espouse views against war profiteering, views that the veterans' movement had been supporting for years. Butler's extensive military experience provided valuable first-hand accounts of war profiteering, but they did not provide the spark for his isolationist thought. Instead, as it will be shown, Smedley used stories of his Marine Corps days to bolster theories that originated within veterans' groups of the 1930s.

Butler's involvement in the veterans' movement of the 1930s also provides a new avenue to examine the isolationist movement. It was no accident that Butler adopted the strain of isolationism – the Devil Theory of War – that applied most directly to soldiers and veterans. Tracing Butler's ideological evolution from soldier to veterans' advocate to ardent isolationist provides a window into the isolationist tendencies saturating the intellectual landscape of the mid-1930s.[19] Through Butler's writings and speeches, we glimpse people's suspicions about war profiteering and the widespread fear of repeating the tragic mistakes of World War I that resulted in the deaths of millions.

While modern studies of U.S. isolationism are scarce, a growing body of literature on the Bonus Army, the Senate Munitions Inquiry, and veterans during the Depression

[19] In 1936, the American Institute of Public Opinion found that 95 percent of Americans agreed that the United States should stay out of a future European War. See George Gallup and Claude Robinson, "American Institute of Public Opinion – Surveys, 1935-1938," Public Opinion Quarterly, II (July 1938).

provides an avenue for examining the role of anti-interventionists in greater depth.[20] This reexamination of the era effectively argues that veterans were able to exert immense political pressure in their fight for the Bonus, first upon Hoover – through the Bonus March which led to his defeat in the election of 1932 – then upon his successor, Roosevelt. One historian pointed out that the "veterans' relationship with the New Deal soured from the start, and veteran politics exerted as powerful an influence on the Roosevelt presidency as it had in launching it."[21] Butler was a prominent figure at the height of veteran's movement in the 1930s, but because he was a freelance speaker rather than an official leader of an organization, his contribution is little mentioned in the history of veterans' activities.[22] This dissertation demonstrates his importance to the movement and properly inserts him into the discussion of veterans' activities in the era.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first three are chronological in structure, exploring significant moments of Butler's life and analyzing how each affected his personal development and contributed to the anti-war philosophy of his post-military

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[20] For example, see Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc. 2004); Gary Dean Best, *FDR and the Bonus Marchers, 1933-1935* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992); Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Matthew Ware Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s: Beyond the Merchants of Death* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997); Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History* (New York: M. Evans & Company, 1990); Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[21] Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 65. Ortiz demonstrates that the payment of the Bonus in the summer of 1936, months before the election, not only stimulated the economy but by appeasing veterans eliminated one of the largest and most vocal oppositions to the President, factors that significantly contributed to his reelection.

[22] Of the work on the movement, Ortiz acknowledges Butler's participation in the movement more than any other researcher, quoting Butler's speeches before the VFW's national encampment and monitoring Butler's involvement with VFW Commandant James Van Zandt and Huey Long in raising awareness for the Bonus issue on a speaking tour in 1933. See Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March*, 94-95 and 157.

career. In the first chapter, I explore Butler's family origins, his childhood, his motivations for joining the Marine Corps, and his experiences in the military from 1898 through 1915. I place special emphasis on the influence of Butler's family, as well as his early commanding officers, critical figures that led to Butler's understanding of what it meant to be a marine and instilled in him a sense of the value of ordinary soldiers on the front lines of U.S. armed conflicts. Also stressed are Butler's missions in Latin America and the Caribbean, where he was charged with protecting property interests – experiences he would recount in his post-military years as examples of war profiteering.

The second chapter follows Butler through the next decade and a half of his life. While his exploits on the battlefield had solidified his legacy as an admirable combatant, by 1916, Smedley had moved from soldier to administrator. These years saw Butler manage a Marine Corps base in France during World War I, take command of Quantico and build it into the top installation in the Corps, and battle local corruption in Philadelphia as Director of Public Safety. Butler's experiences as an administrator increasingly exposed him to the inner-most exclusive corridors of power, where he witnessed high-level corruption for monetary gain, providing ample material for a post-military career campaign against war profiteering.

In the third chapter, I demonstrate that the series of events in Butler's life between 1928 and 1931 were pivotal in transforming Smedley from an upwardly mobile figure with hints of an anti-imperialist streak into a fiery crusader against war profiteers in his retirement years. During that three-year span, Butler's father and brother both died, he was passed over for commandant position, and court-martialed just before retirement for insulting Benito Mussolini. Due to these events thrusting him back into the public

spotlight, Butler turned to public speaking in retirement, where he would develop his theories opposing war profiteering and become a leading speaker in the veterans' movement.

Though the first three chapters of the dissertation proceed chronologically, the last three are divided thematically, as they all encompass events between 1932 and 1936. Chapter Four addresses two events in Butler's life in the early 1930s – his run for Congress in 1932 and his involvement in exposing a plot to overthrow the White House a few years later. Both experiences had a great impact on Butler's career choices and on his developing anti-war ideology – the Congressional run alienated him from politics, and the plot increased his opposition to Wall Street interests.

In Chapter Five, I analyze the factors that led to Butler's successful career as a public speaker. I explore aspects of his style and substance that made Butler such a dynamic orator. I also examine Butler's involvement with veterans' organizations, illustrating how his anti-war views melded naturally with the veterans' cause, beginning with the Bonus March of 1932 and lasting until the payment of the Bonus in 1936. Lastly, I probe the genesis and composition of Butler's most well-known work – *War is a Racket* – which I argue is a convergence of observations from his military experience, facts divulged during the Senate Munitions Inquiry, and his deep involvement with veterans' organizations.

Chapter Six situates Butler within the non-interventionist movement of the mid-1930s and argues that Smedley Butler has a rightful place in studies of isolationism in the era. I follow my examination of Butler's relationship to the isolationist movement with a

section analyzing the series of seventy-eight, quarter-hour radio addresses Butler gave in the first half of 1935, in which Butler provided his clearest articulation of his principles on war profiteering and veterans issues.[23]

Butler's evolution from soldier to anti-war activist is a unique example of how a privileged member of the military and political elite chose to trade in his personal advantages to fiercely push for the rights of rank-and-file soldiers and average Americans. Examining Butler's biography through a historical lens also uncovers many little-explored aspects of American history in the early 20th century, and gives this intriguing character his due in the historiography of the era. Butler's opposition to U.S. military actions overseas was the culmination of a lifetime of varied experiences, but it was the veterans' movement in the 1930s that finally transformed the action-hungry Marine Corps officer into a vocal isolationist. Although it may have been surprising for a general of his stature to take on an establishment that had enabled his professional success, it was a logical transformation. For from his earliest days as an eager, young Marine Corps Junior officer to his post-retirement years as a veterans' advocate, one common thread seems to have run through Butler's being: he was a soldier at heart, and he always stood up for his brothers in arms.

[23] Smedley Butler to James F. Coyle of WCAU, December 17, 1934.

## Chapter 1 - The Fighting Quaker
## 1881 – 1915

*"If you wanted to give a swift summary of his career, you might say there has been no time in his life when he has been entirely out of trouble."*

-Lowell Thomas on Smedley Butler[1]

Understanding Smedley Butler in his retirement years first requires an understanding of the environment from which he came. Long before he evolved into an outspoken isolationist in the 1930s, Butler was an impressionable young man from a powerful Pennsylvanian family. The first chapter of this dissertation examines his Quaker roots and family background, his childhood and schooling, and early expeditions as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps – years that shaped Smedley's physical and intellectual growth and established his two core beliefs: a love of his country and a deep empathy with the common soldier.

Jolted into service in the Spanish-American War by the desire to help avenge the destruction of the *Maine*, Smedley began his military life as a foot soldier for American imperialism of the early 20th century. He led marines into Latin America and the Caribbean and took part in nearly every U.S. intervention in the region. Butler's extensive service, eventually reaching the highest ranks of the Marine Corps, gave him an insider's knowledge of the battles and occupations waged over several decades – a perspective he was able to later use in his retirement to inform the anti-imperialist

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[1] Lowell Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye: The Adventures of Smedley D. Butler* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), 2. Though published in 1933, Smedley dictated the contents that would comprise the biography to a representative over a three-week period in the summer of 1931. The memoir not only stops at 1931, then, but reflects the anti-Naval Academy and Naval Officer bitterness Butler felt during the events of that and the preceding year. Those events are explored in Chapter 3.

rhetoric for which he became known. His military exploits also propelled him into the public spotlight during his years as an active marine. Following his retirement, that lingering fame would provide him with an important platform, leading to his becoming a prominent speaker for veterans' organizations and securing his own series of radio broadcasts.

## FAMILY AND "FRIENDS"

Smedley Darlington Butler was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania on July 30, 1881, into a well-established Quaker family. Endowed with a wealth of familial connections and professional opportunities, Smedley grew up in the shadow of many prominent men: his father, congressman Thomas S. Butler, paternal grandfather Samuel Butler, head of a local bank and State Treasurer from 1880-1882, and maternal grandfather Smedley Darlington, who served two terms as a representative from Pennsylvania. Smedley's father, Thomas Stalker Butler, was an attorney and judge before he would follow in his own father's footsteps to become a fourteen-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1897-1928), occupying the position of chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee of the House for nearly the entire length of his son's military service.[2]

[2] Thomas Butler guided Smedley's personal and professional development until his death in 1929. In his letters, Smedley affectionately addressed his father as "Daddy" through their last exchanges the year of his death. Unfortunately Thomas Butler's papers were destroyed, according to reports. See Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 6-7.

The Butler family had deep roots in both the state of Pennsylvania and the community of Quakers in the region.[3] The first recorded ancestor of the family, Noble Butler, arrived in Pennsylvania in 1710, and soon after the family began its long line of Pennsylvania Quakers. During the American Revolution, while the majority of Quakers abided by the directive to remain peaceful, some – mostly younger members swept up in the "war for freedom" – disobeyed. Groups of Quakers joined up with the army and one of them - Nathanael Greene – was the first to earn the nickname, "Fighting Quaker."[4] Smedley's family would continue this tradition – his father served on the Naval Affairs Committee, and one of Smedley's grandfathers, according to Smedley, was "put out of Orthodox meeting" for enlisting to fight in the Civil War.[5]

Smedley would soon follow a similarly pugnacious path. Of the many nicknames Smedley garnered during his time in the service, "Fighting Quaker" was one of the more popular ones, since his religious origins and family legacy were commonly known by, as

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[3] In 1647, Englishman George Fox began preaching what would later be considered Quaker doctrine, and the Society of Friends was born. Persecuted for their practices (some members would shake or "quake" in ecstasy during religious service, thus the derogatory nickname, "Quakers") and doctrine, many members of the Society of Friends made their way to America, where they established a formidable presence in the colony that would later be named for one of their leaders, William Penn. Fox's early principles, such as "Seek things, not names," the desire to know God "experimentally," and an emphasis on Christian qualities rather than dogma, ran contrary to the main Christian practices of the time. And while the era produced a number of sects of Christianity, Quakers quickly distinguished themselves with by wearing grey or brown colored clothes, the absence of clergy or churches, and the refusal to pay state-required tithes. Such plain dress reflected a belief in the superiority of inward moral characteristics versus outward religious displays, as well as a commitment to not spend time or money on material excess while such resources could be used to help others. For more on Quaker doctrine, see Jessamyn West, ed., *The Quaker Reader* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962).

[4] Elswyth Thane, *The Fighting Quaker: Nathanael Greene* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1972). As a teen caught up with the fever of revolution following the Boston Tea Party, Greene knew he risked being expelled from Meeting, but did so anyway, joining the Kentish Guards, a small militia group in Rhode Island.

[5] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 3.

he put it, both his "enemies and friends."[6] In his memoirs, Butler claimed to be proud of both titles – fighter and Quaker – and paid dues to the Quaker Society throughout his life. In the end though, it seemed the Quaker influence on Smedley was more of a cultural than philosophical nature. Through his later years he used the formal language of "thee" and "thy" when writing to his relatives, yet made few references to his religion in his letters, never exploring it in the same depth that he did such ideas as war profiteering, veterans' rights, the role of the police, American imperialism, Prohibition, and most other topics.[7]

## YOUNG SMEDLEY

Butler began his formal schooling in Friends' Graded High School in West Chester, Pennsylvania, but soon was placed into the Haverford School, the most elite Quaker school in the area. In his youth, his smaller physique made him one of the scrawnier children in his class, and with two younger brothers at home – Horace and Sam – Smedley surely felt pressured to perform well. An antagonism toward traditional education and a liking for outdoor activity helped him overcome his physical stature. As he would put it years later in his memoirs: "Studying was not my specialty. I have always preferred action to books." Butler became an avid athlete, captain of the Haverford baseball team and quarterback of the football squad. His enthusiasm for sports

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[6] By 1927, the *New York Times* reported that Butler was known by at least the following nicknames: "Old Gimlet Eye," "the Fighting Quaker," "General Duckboard," "Battling Butler," and "the Hell Devil Marine." See "Butler of the Marines Goes to War," *New York Times*, March 13, 1927.

[7] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 5; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 6-7.

continued through his military career, resurfacing especially in the 1920s when Butler formed a competitive Marine football team at Quantico. [8]

It was as a boy at the Harverford School that Butler would also get his first taste of public speaking. He entered the school's yearly speech competition and surprised his class by performing an unexpected piece instead of the William Cullen Bryant oration he had practiced before his peers. Though the short passage from Twain's *Roughing It*, "Storm on the Erie Canal," might be considered innocent by today's standards, the bawdy tale of a Duke, his fiancée, and a shipwreck was – according to Butler's account – enough to rile the other boys, as they "clapped and pounded" the floor, and to elicit "dropped jaws" from his educators. He did not know it then, but Smedley would receive similar reactions to many speeches in his post-military career: applause from his peers, and shock and dismay from authority figures. [9]

## THE SPARK

Butler would have never become a military man had it not been for the Spanish-American War. While Butler's father and grandfather had both served, Smedley's brothers attended college instead.[10] Butler's father originally had aspirations of higher education for Smedley as well, and years later compensated the Marine officer for what

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[8] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 5; Also see Jules Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 1973), 38. In his examination of Butler's role in exposing a coup to overthrow FDR, journalist Jules Archer dedicates a significant portion of his account to a detailed biography of Butler.

[9] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 5-6. Mark Twain, "Storm on the Erie Canal," from *Roughing It* (Hartford, Conn: American Publishing Company, 1873), 360-376.

[10] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 7.

college would have cost.[11] Smedley may have attended college, too, were it not for the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in the Havana Harbor of February 15, 1898. The tide of national emotion that arose from the event carried the country into war, and swept Smedley along with it. As he tells it, "The excitement was intense. Headlines blazed across the papers. Crowds pushed and shoved around the bulletin boards. School seemed stupid and unnecessary." As a passionate sixteen-year old, Smedley was appalled by the destruction of the battleship and eager for revenge. "I clenched my fists when I thought of those poor Cuban devils being starved and murdered by the beastly Spanish tyrants," Butler later recounted, "I was determined to shoulder a rifle and help free little Cuba." This impulse early in his life reflected two significant facets of Butler's personality that would emerge throughout the year: sympathy for the underdog, and a willingness to back up his convictions by joining the fight.[12]

Where could a Pennsylvania boy of sixteen formulate such a view of Spain and its empire in the late nineteenth century? Following the explosion of the Maine, reports ran rampant of Spanish abuses against defenseless natives. Although salacious stories did stoke the flames, most Americans already had little patience for a hesitant President McKinley or an investigation into the cause of the explosion. According to one historian, "'Yellow journalists only rode the wave of feeling; they did not create it."[13] Young men across the country were drawn to the call and a stirring nation would soon launch itself

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[11] In 1917, Butler's father gave Smedley $4,000 "in lieu of an education." See Smedley Butler to Maud Darlington Butler and Thomas Stalker Butler, October 6, 1917, Butler Papers.

[12] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 6-7.

[13] David F. Trask, *The War with Spain* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1981), xiii.

into a period of American imperialism that would define American military action for the first third of the twentieth century.[14]

With the destruction of the *Maine* in 1898, Smedley instantly began to seek out ways to join the war. He attempted to enlist with his local Navy recruiter, but was turned away. At sixteen, Smedley was two years under the age requirement. Though his determination was strong, at first it seemed that he would have to find a non-military route to participate in the war. Instead, he found the Marine Corps. When the young Smedley overheard his father conveying admiration for the Marine Corps to his wife Maud, Smedley decided this was his chance. The following morning, while his father was away, he convinced his mother to accompany him to the Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington to enlist. When Thomas Butler found out about the scheme, he begrudgingly allowed it, likely impressed by his son's gumption.[15]

## THE MARINES

The Marine Corps of Butler's first days was a stark contrast to the broad, far-reaching organization it would become by the time he left. The Corps began almost as an afterthought; the first marines were commissioned on November 10, 1775 by the

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[14] Fiorello La Guardia – future mayor of New York City and the same age as Smedley – was so determined to join the war effort he became a sixteen-year-old correspondent for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. See Howard Zinn, *Fiorello LaGuardia in Congress* (Unpublished Dissertation, Columbia University, 1957), 6-8; For more on the build up to the Spanish-American War, see Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961) 133-159; also Trask, *The War with Spain*, 24-51.

[15] Smedley may also have read his father's support for intervention in his local paper in which the elder Butler wrote a brief plea for U.S. involvement that included: "The United States is impelled to intervene through a spirit of humanity—of Christianity—and she means business." See "Butler's Opinion," *Chester Times,* March 23, 1898, 8; On Butler's childhood also see "Smedley Butler of Marines Dead," *New York Times*, June 22, 1940. Butler's three-column obituary in the *New York Times* covers much of his early life.

Continental Congress to assist sailors in Boston in warding off the British during the American Revolution. In 1798, Congress passed "An Act for Establishing a Marine Corps," officially organizing those marines in the Navy into a "Corps of Marines," and crafting early guidelines for recruitment, staffing, and pay. Within two years, the Marine Corps began to earn its reputation as a fierce combat force, assisting in decisive victories over Barbary raiders and Tripolitan ships during battles in the Mediterranean. They solidified their reputation with contributions in the War of 1812, the Seminole War of 1836 , the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), and rushed Harpers Ferry in October of 1859, killing John Brown after his notorious raid. Marine battalions contributed minimally to the ground forces of the Union Army (and even less to the Confederacy) during the Civil War (1861-1865), but were effective as guards aboard Navy ships and on short ground missions. They protected naval yards and patrolled Navy ships as "seagoing constables," in the late nineteenth century, in such locales as Samoa, Korea, China, Panama, and Hawaii. In 1874 the ranks of the Corps declined from over 3,000 enlisted men, to around 2,000, and just under a hundred officers. It would remain approximately that size until 1898.[16]

Smedley joined a Marine Corps in decline. But while few could have predicted the extent of its expansion over the next two decades, there were signs of growth on the horizon. The Naval Appropriations Act of 1882 called for modernization, and the Navy soon saw an increase in funding, numbers, and technology. This key congressional act, combined with a decades-long publicity campaign by eager young Naval officers known

[16] On early Marine Corps history, see Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 3–144; also Edwin H. Simmons, *The United States Marines: 1775-1975* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974) 1-72.

as the "Young Turks" who – with the support of large, industrial contractors – propelled legislators to fund ship-building projects that would put the United States at the forefront of navies across the globe. (The celebrated "Great White Fleet" circumnavigating the globe in 1907 would announce such an achievement to the world.) And while the number of marines dwindled during that time, the growth of the Navy and the expanding American empire would soon call for a corresponding increase in the size and power of the Marine Corps. The Spanish-American War and engagements during the first decade of the twentieth century propelled the rise of the American military, but it was U.S. involvement in World War I that jumpstarted its rapid development. In 1890, the entirety of the armed forces comprised less than 39,000 men, with an annual budget of close to $66 million. By the 1920s, there were over 250,000 troops and the nation's military budget stood at around half a billion dollars. The rise of the Marine Corps was in line with this trend; from the Spanish-American War to World War I, the number of Marines would increase nine-fold, to 18,000, and during the First World War, to over 75,000 members.[17]

## EARLY CONFLICTS

Away from home for the longest period in Smedley's life, the slight, sixteen-year-old with the distinct nose yearned for guidance. He found it in his commanding officers. Sergeant Major Hayes led Butler's training: Six weeks in Washington, likely consisting

[17] Marine Corps history in this section from Millett, *Semper Fidelis*; Simmons, *The United States Marines;* Peter Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy: The Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern American Navalism* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), 277-316; Jack Shulimson, "Marine Corps, U.S.: 1865 – 1914," from John Whiteclay Chamers II, ed., *American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 414 – 415. For the military build-up in the 1890s see Ross Alexander Kennedy, *Uncertain Security: American Political Ideology and the Problem of Militarism, 1890-1941* (Unpublished Dissertation. University of California, Berkeley, 1994), 5-6.

of "parade drills plus lectures on military regulations." According to Butler, Hayes, the veteran British-turned-American soldier, "was getting on in years, but he was still a magnificent two hundred fifty pound specimen, built on heroic lines," who "was one of the most perfect public servants I have ever met."[18] Butler then shadowed Captain Mancil C. Goodrell, Butler's commanding officer at Guantanamo. In Goodrell, Smedley found a Civil War veteran representing the ideal soldier he would strive to embody: gruff and extraordinarily brave. On their first night on patrol together in Cuba, the pair came under fire. Upon hearing scattered shots, Lieutenant Butler dove to the ground. The Captain did not break stride, instead ribbing the cowering Smedley. Butler recounted it years later, stating how, "He [Goodrell] made me feel so ashamed for noticing a mere bullet that I scrambled at once to my feet…he wasn't disturbed at all. He sauntered along, relating hair-breadth escapes he had had during the Civil War." [19] Butler would strive to replicate the bravado of the Civil War veteran in his own way, molding his battlefield steadiness on the experienced veteran. Historian Hans Schmidt registered Butler's admiration: "Smedley earnestly mastered the unflinching style [of Goodrell]," and Butler himself credits Goodrell to an even greater degree in his memoir: "Whatever luck or skill I've had in the soldiering business I attribute to the teaching and example of that splendid officer."[20]

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[18] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 10.

[19] Ibid., 20.

[20] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine,* 8. More details of Smedley's first mission away from home can be found in Martha Strayer, "Smedley Butler was 'Scared to Death' and Homesick on His First Marine Assignment," *Washington Daily News*, Feb. 4, 1931.

The Spanish-American War ended in August of 1898, and a brief three months after Butler had enlisted, he was back home in West Chester, and out of the Marines. But not for long. In December of 1898, Spain signed the Treaty of Paris, handing over the Philippines to the U.S. for twenty million dollars and sparking an immediate uprising that led quickly into an armed conflict. What would become the Philippine-American War marked the beginning of a long period of American imperialism. For Butler, this was meaningful because Congress expanded the size of the Marine Corps threefold. He reentered as a first lieutenant, and was shipped off to the Philippines.[21]

The Philippine-American War lasted from 1899 to 1902 and resulted in the deaths of nearly 4,200 Americans and more than 20,000 Filipinos. President McKinley and his advisors, in initiating the conflict, appeared to have been motivated by a number of factors, including a desire to stave off European powers in the region and to use the Philippines as a "bargaining chip" with Cuba or Spain for potential trade interests in Asia. Yet, the violent resistance of the Filipino people, and the remote geographic location of the Philippines gave the U.S. occupation an imperialist timbre.[22] One historian sardonically expressed the hesitation felt by many: "The brief and glorious Spanish-American War to free Cuba was one thing. But this long, squalid battle to conquer the ungrateful Filipinos was another that called the high-flown rhetoric of empire

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[21] Stuart Creighton Miller, *"Benevolent Assimilation," The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), 13-30; "Admitted to the Marine Corps," *Washington Post*, April 9, 1899; Kenneth McCaleb, "Life Story of Butler-Fightin' Quaker, Chapter 3," from *Philadelphia Record*, Feb. 1931.

[22] Nell Irving Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 154; Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 3-7. Linn concludes that while a number of motivations were at play, the intervention was most likely "accidental and incremental," a result McKinley's slow initiative and belief that war could be avoided.

into question." The invasion of the Philippines and the beginning of this new American imperialism pushed the limits of "Manifest Destiny" – the 19th century belief by Americans that the United States had a "god-given" right to expand across the continent – and appeared to many not dissimilar to the European racial and economic imperialism dominant in the nineteenth century.[23]

An anti-imperialist movement arose to protest the actions of the United States, espousing many of the ideas Butler would later champion in the 1930s. In the furious debate over the ratification of the Treaty of Paris – which ended the Spanish-American War and purchased the Philippine Islands from Spain – Speaker of the House Thomas Reed objected on the House floor: "We have bought ten million Malays at $2.00 a head unpicked, and nobody knows what it will cost to pick them."[24] The treaty narrowly passed, spawning opposition across the country, but as it would be when anti-interventionists could not prevent the United States from entering World War II, the rise of the anti-imperialists was not able to slow the coming years of U.S. expansionist policy.[25]

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[23] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 146-169, quotation from 154. The Philippine-American War is widely recognized as the start of American imperialism. The U.S. would occupy the islands for some forty years, departing only in the wake of World War II.

[24] From Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and H. C. Lodge, 2 vols.* (New York: Scribner's, 1925) Volume I, 370.

[25] Comprised of prominent Americans such as Andrew Carnegie, Charles Francis Adams, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, Henry James, Josephine Shaw Lowell, Mark Twain, and others, the Anti-Imperialist League (1898-1921) was the most powerful anti-imperialist group, yet hindered by division amongst Progressives and their mixed support for the foreign policy of Teddy Roosevelt. See William E. Leuchtenburg, "Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898-1916," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Dec., 1952), 483-504; Jim Zwick, ed. *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War* (Syracuse University Press: July 1, 1992).

Butler gave numerous speeches denouncing imperialism after his retirement, but at the time of his participation in the Philippines, there was little evidence that he was aware of the anti-imperialist sentiment running through streams of American thought. The nationalism and patriotism of the day carried young Butler to the next adventure. Smedley's knowledge of the Philippines at the time of his service there was likely limited to accounts of war heroics. In his memoir, Butler gave a clue to his mentality at the time, as he described his first thoughts approaching the Philippines:

> The decaying hulks of the Spanish warships still showed above the water, where Admiral Dewey had left them after the Battle of Manila Bay, on May 1, 1898. I could picture him standing on the bridge of the Olympia, giving the famous order, 'You may fire when ready, Gridley.'… Here we were to defend the flag Dewey had raised in the Islands.[26]

Butler relished the opportunity to serve in the same locales as those storied adventures. That naïve idealism would soon change. In the Philippines, Butler would come under heavy fire for the first time, and begin to see the stark contrast between the glorified accounts of battle and the realities of war.

Departing from San Francisco in April of 1899 on the transport ship *Newport*, Butler's battalion arrived in the Philippines months after fighting erupted between American and native Philippine forces. Stationed in Cavite and assigned to assist the Army, the marines in Butler's battalion sat on the sidelines for months, much to Smedley's chagrin. "If there was a skirmish they hogged the show and we were kept in

[26] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 30.

the navy yard." In October, the marines were finally put out in the field, assigned to assist the army in capturing the town of Nocaleta.[27]

The specific task assigned to Butler's battalion was to push the rebels up the peninsula into a designated area for the Army to attack. Commanding his first company in action, Butler's eagerness to enter battle soon gave way to fear as he came under fire while marching his troops down a narrow road. Years later, Butler recalled how "my heard pounded and how my stomach seemed to shrink into a small hard ball. I longed to be anywhere on the face of the earth, anywhere except lying flat on that Philippine trail. My panic couldn't have lasted more than a few seconds, but it seemed hours." Butler mustered his courage and rose to the occasion, pushing the insurgents back from their position and emerging without a scratch. This would not be the last time Butler would freely admit his fear during battle. In a struggle to become a leader like the officers he admired, Smedley consciously coached himself into believing he was made for battle: "Now that I had come unscathed through my first pitched battle, I pretended to myself that I liked it and that the barrack life to which we were returning would seem very dull."[28]

Life in the barracks in the Philippines, however, was far from dull. Gambling, cockfights, and heavy drinking were commonplace, and Butler clearly enjoyed it all – one night causing such a ruckus that he was relieved of command the next day by a

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[27] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, Aug. 8, 1899, Butler Papers.

[28] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 33-36.

Colonel he had kept awake.[29] While his shipmates got tattoos of their loved ones, Butler inked a giant Marine Corps "Eagle, globe, anchor" emblem across his chest. The process took many days and Butler contracted a fever as a result, yet the tattoo signified a commitment by Butler – he would be a marine for life.[30]

## CHINA

From the Philippines, Butler was sent to China, where he would be drawn into intense firefights that were in stark contrast to "marking time" in the archipelago. In 1900, a group known as "Boxers United in Righteousness" went on a violent rampage in eastern China and Peking. Fighting against what they considered imperialist expansion into China, the Boxers killed foreigners, Catholic missionaries, and Chinese Christians. A "China Relief Expedition" of approximately 2,000 international troops was quickly engaged – with the overall command under the British – to quell the escalating violence that came to be known as the Boxer Rebellion. Among the British, German, Russian, and Chinese forces were three American Marine Corps regiments, one of which included First Lieutenant Butler, fresh from his service in the Philippines.[31]

Butler's service in China would be lauded for its heroics. He earned the honor and respect of fellow soldiers by putting his personal safety on the line: Butler was shot in the leg while he was carrying a wounded man to safety, and also took a bullet in the

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[29] The demotion was temporary, as Butler would earn back his rank a few months later.

[30] Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House*, 42; Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 34-40.

[31] Dennis L. Noble, *The Eagle and the Dragon: The United States Military in China, 1901-1937* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 5-35; Michael H. Hunt, "*The Forgotten Occupation: Peking, 1900-1901*," *Pacific Historical Review,* Vol. 48, no. 4 (1979), 501-29; "Smedley Butler of Marines Dead," *New York Times*, June 22, 1940.

chest on a separate occasion. And yet he continued to rejoin the troops. The fighting was fierce, and Butler – though he fought well enough to become brevetted to the rank of captain at the age of 19 – often feared for his life. [32] A month after his first serious wound, Butler wrote his mother a sentimental note on their upcoming battle, and the possibility of his own death: "Preparations all made, expect to run against 30,000 chinamen to-morrow morning. Don't be worried about me. If I am killed, I gave my life for women and children just as dear to some poor devil as thee and Horrid [Horace] are to me."[33] While self-sacrifice may have been common in the Corps, altruistic sentiments like these help explain why Butler was so well liked among his men – he viewed himself equal to every other soldier.

The intensity of the Chinese conflict stayed with Butler years later. He gained a respect for the Chinese people he was defending as well as other nations' soldiers – American marines were joined by forces from Russia, Britain, Japan, Germany, and Italy. Butler admired many of the soldiers from other countries, but especially the Russians. In his retirement, Butler remained impressed with their physical prowess: "The Russians were husky giants, and useful, too…Two of the Russians, with no effort, could pick up a rail with which four of our men had to struggle." [34] Butler's experience fighting alongside foreign troops resulted in a skepticism toward new wars and new enemies, years down the road. In his memoirs, Butler would write that the concept of "allies" had

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[32] Butler was shot through the right leg during the battle of Tientsin on July 13, 1900. See Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, July 23, 1900, Butler Papers; Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 64; "Home from the Wars: Capt. S.D. Butler, Wounded at Tientsin…" *Washington Post*, January 11, 1901.

[33] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, August 4, 1900, Butler Papers.

[34] Millett, *Semper Fidelis,* 155-156; Quotation from Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 44.

changed since China. These were "not, however, the same Allies who fought together in the World War. In 1900, Germans, Austrians, Russians, Italians, British, French, Japanese and Americans made common cause against the Boxers."[35] In his later years, this unity he witnessed between nations gave Butler pause, and led him to question future conflicts, especially the build up to World War II, in which former allies would be cast as foes.

After China, Smedley returned home to West Chester for a celebration for him and another officer, attended by nearly 2,000 people – including notable figures such as John D. Long, the Secretary of Navy.[36] Though it appeared his actions had garnered him fame, a significant factor in this recognition, however, was his father's political status. For even before Smedley had been recognized as a hero, he was followed by the American newspapers, one writing that Butler was one of a famous pair of soldiers in China: "Two of the Lieutenants accompanying this force are well known here, one of them being Lieutenant Smedley D. Butler, son of Congressman Thomas S. Butler of the Sixth Pennsylvania District."[37] In China, Smedley had earned his rise in military rank, but he would have to work even harder to gain recognition as more than a congressman's son.

Of the larger picture, Butler was unaware, nor did he claim to understand the foreign policy decisions that led to his battles in China. Speculating on the reasons he

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[35] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 44.

[36] "Sword for Gallant Capt. Butler," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 18, 1901.

[37] "Tales of Defeat of Americans," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 24, 1900.

was under fire, he described himself, "innocent of Boxers as a new-born babe," continuing:

> A young officer marching in a column with his company knows nothing of the diplomatic and political background inspiring an expedition, nor can he grasp the complete picture of a campaign. He trudges along in a little world of his own and deals only with the men around him.[38]

Butler appeared ignorant of the politics behind most of the early conflicts in which he was involved. He was away from home for the first time, surrounded by other soldiers, and busy emulating his commanders.

Butler's portrayal of his ignorance as a young soldier as mentioned so far, while factual, should be viewed with a hint of skepticism. Such a defense conveniently allowed Butler to retain the glory of his actions in his later years. If the young Butler had been aware of the political underpinnings of his early conflicts, he may have felt guilt in reflecting back on his involvement in some of the less honorable interventions, such as the Philippine-American War. Painting himself as a politically ignorant youth, Butler could avoid feeling shame in retirement, and claim he too had one of the manipulated marines used to in the service of war profiteers.

And yet, it is difficult to find evidence in Butler's first letters as a soldier that he possessed a real comprehension of his role in American foreign policy. The next few sections, however, will show signs of Butler's developing awareness, culminating in a full-blown critique of American foreign policy by the time he reached Nicaragua in 1909.

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[38] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 44.

## THE BANANA WARS[39]

Following the Spanish-American War, a series of economic and political interests and jingoistic impulses converged in an expansionist policy that would see American military intervention in the Philippines, China, Cuba, Venezuela, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.[40] American loans in those regions comprised nearly a billion dollars by 1915, with direct investments totaling well over two billion.[41] Theodore Roosevelt led the charge with a desire to the turn the United States into "an international police power," defining his ideology in his address to Congress in 1904 in what would come to be known as the "Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine." The update to the nineteenth century doctrine asserted the right of the United States to intervene in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to stabilize the economies of those countries. In effect, it declared the Western Hemisphere off-limits to European

[39] The series of American interventions into Central America and the Caribbean during the approximately thirty-year period following the Spanish-American War are commonly referred to as the "Banana Wars," a reference to heavily exported fruit, as well as the use of the U.S. military to protect agricultural and other private interests. See Ivan Musicant, *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish American War to the Invasion of Panama* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), 1-5.

[40] For a thorough discussion of the motives behind American intervention in the Caribbean in the early 20th century, see Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); Also, Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire, 1900-1934* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

[41] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1959) 40-41. Williams argues that the closing of the frontier and the Open Door Policy bolstered the search for foreign markets, though doesn't go so far as to credit American expansionist motives to economics alone,

military intervention, even for the purpose of debt collection, establishing an American sphere of influence over the region.[42]

Because of the small and often clandestine nature of American interventions into countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, marines were frequently the first on the ground. As such, Butler would serve as one of the main military figures in the so-called "Banana Wars" and become widely regarded as a specialist in expeditionary work. These experiences revealed to Butler the powerful economic powers behind the military and became the basis of much of his campaign against war profiteers in the 1930s.

After returning from China and spending over a year guarding the Philadelphia Naval Yard, in 1902, Butler was sent to a U.S. Naval station in Culebra, a small island near Puerto Rico. When naval officers assigned marines to perform laborious tasks abandoned by sailors, the tension between the two groups thickened. Smedley expressed the marine perspective in a letter to his mother: "It is a damned outrage to make the Marines do all the work the Jackies buck at," and boasted about what he considered to be their superiority: "We showed them what we could do with 120 men when they had been using over 200."[43] Some resentment may have derived from the health risked faced by marines undertaking these tasks. During the digging of a canal that ran across the island, from the interior harbor to the outer bay, many marines contracted Chagres fever[44] – a

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[42] See Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean,* 4-23; On Roosevelt's racial and masculine ideology see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170-215.

[43] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, Dec. 14, 1902, from Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed., *General Smedley Darlington Butler: The Letters of a Leatherneck, 1898-1931* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 34-35.

[44] Also known as Panama Fever.

serious, flu-like condition that was sometimes fatal. Butler himself contracted it twice, and it laid him out for a week each time, at one point sending him into a delirium during which he feared for his life.[45]

Besides the unsavory work assigned to marines, a lack of official recognition from the Navy fostered Butler's distaste for sailors and naval officers. With the opening of the canal on Culebra laboriously dug by marines, Butler bitterly observed how, "flowery speeches were gracefully tossed off, but no mention was made of the men who built the canal. There was not one word of praise for the marines."[46] In his memoirs, Butler claimed it was this event that spurned an antagonism that he would carry into retirement: "I have never forgotten that. My lack of affection for the Navy dates from my Culebra experience."[47] Through the next two decades, Butler would have repeated run-ins with Naval officers that would reinforce the distaste for the Navy he had acquired in Culebra.

## HONDURAS

Butler continued his involvement in the Banana Wars the following year. In 1903, amidst tension between the Honduran government and large masses of its citizens, the Honduran Congress installed its own president over the popularly elected one, Manuel Bonilla. Supporters of President Bonilla rose up in protest and the country spun into revolution. As British, Mexican, and Spanish diplomats in Nicaragua requested

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[45] Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House*, 48.

[46] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, Dec. 14, 1902.

[47] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 101.

support from their governments, the United States saw an opportunity and interceded.[48] This intervention was largely a show of force – a warning to other nations, "establishing exclusive American hegemony based on unobstructed military reach," as one historian put it, and creating an economic foothold that would later benefit companies such as United Fruit.[49]

Butler and the Marines were to assist with the surrender of the government troops, and ensure that the transition proceeded smoothly. While he executed his orders precisely, Butler's observations at the time indicate a rising skepticism about the purpose of his mission. He seemed unimpressed with the Honduran rebel army, or the civilians the marines were sent to guard: "We may find some American interests that need protecting. There certainly are none here for this is the most God Forsaken place I have ever stumbled over." After arriving in Puerto Cortez, ready for action, Butler's battalion encountered little resistance. Though the marines had been dispatched in response to the outcry of a few hundred American citizens, Butler saw very little evidence that the expats were in danger, nor that they were very wealthy or respectable citizens, describing them as, "a pretty poor lot, most of them having left their country for their country's good, I imagine." Butler was beginning to fashion an understanding of the Marine Corps as a force sent abroad to protect the economic interests of the United States; and some of

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[48] Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 37-47.

[49] Venzon, *General Smedley Darlington Butler,* 38-39. The Honduran situation – along with the Venezuela Crisis of 1902-1903 – are often considered a pre-amble to the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine – asserting power in the region to show American strength, as well as facilitate future economic investments. See also Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 32.

these interests were worth more protection than others.[50] Had Butler examined his role a bit more deeply, he may have discerned that the motives behind American intervention in Honduras reflected the complex foreign policy of the time: an expansion of American military power in the region mixed with the desire to protect economic investments. As a young marine, however, it seemed his main concern was the action in front of him.

## FAMILY AND THE PHILIPPINES

Following Honduras, Butler returned to Philadelphia in 1904, where he served as captain of the Marine guard for the *U.S.S. Lancaster*. Though little has been written on this period in Butler's life, the beak-nosed, slender officer spent this time with family and friends in the area. It was through one of these friends – Richard Peters – that he met his future wife, Richard's sister, Ethel Peters. The Peters were a prominent family in the Philadelphia area – Ethel's grandfather had been president of Philadelphia Railroad, and a great-uncle had once been head of Harvard University. By the end of the summer, Butler had successfully wooed Ethel – whom he playfully nicknamed "Bunny" due to her protruding ears – and they were married on June 30th, 1905. The wedding was celebrated in the local papers, as well as in the *New York Times*, which recorded that, "a large body of marines in uniform attended." After a one-month honeymoon, Butler was sent to back to the Philippines in preparation for an unlikely, but possible, attack from Japan.[51]

Butler's service in the Philippines from October of 1905 to August of 1907 was a combination of some of his lightest duty with his most strenuous. Stationed at

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[50] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, March 20 and March 26, 1903, Butler Papers.

[51] "A Day's Weddings," *New York Times*, July 1, 1905; Venzon, *General Smedley Darlington Butler*, 47-48.

Olangapo,[52] Butler and his wife mixed well with a group of newlywed officers and their spouses. The Butlers welcomed their first child, Ethel, named after her mother, on the island. In Smedley's tradition of branding close friends and relatives with a nickname, the tiny baby girl was soon christened "Snooks," an ironic nod Pvt. Walter Snooks, the largest member of Butler's 2nd Regiment.[53] Snooks would be the first of three Butler children (Smedley Jr. was born in Philadelphia in 1909 and Thomas in the Panama Canal Zone in 1913). A full-time mother, Ethel would bear the primarily responsibility for raising the children, as she and the family followed her husband on most of his deployments. Maintaining harmony within the Butler household fell to Ethel as well. As one historian observed, she was a particularly "resolute and self-possessed woman," as she "loyally stood by him through the erratic convulsions of what would be a stormy career."[54] Ethel's ability to create stability at home allowed Smedley to dedicate most of his time and energy to the military, and certainly contributed to his professional success.

The Philippine assignment did not entirely consist of domestic pleasures. One of Butler's tasks was to prepare against a potential attack from the Japanese by hauling long-range guns into the hills above the strategic Subig Bay. Butler lamented both the work and doubted the effectiveness of the guns in defending against a potential Japanese attack, even though the marines spent months "in that Godforsaken spot, dragging six-inch guns up the mountains to defend the bay," it was all for "a problematical future war

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[52] On the island of Luzon, northwest of Manila. A naval base was established at Subig (Subic) Bay during the Philippine-American War,

[53] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, July 3, 1906, Butler Papers; Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 116.

[54] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 32.

with Japan."[55] Alone at their outpost, at one point, Butler's crew became short on supplies. In a decision that would become typical of Butler in later years, he circumvented official protocol. Instead of waiting for the next supply shipment, Butler commandeered a local "dugout" with a sail composed of flour sacks and a body made of bundles of bamboo poles and, accompanied by two other soldiers, sailed the few miles across the bay to the naval base at Subig Bay to retrieve basic rations. The boat nearly capsized, and the action was considered so risky and irrational that Butler was hospitalized for three weeks in Cavite, a medical board declaring that Butler had displayed evidence of a nervous breakdown. Soon after, Butler was sent home on medical leave, a lighter punishment than another soldier might have received for disobeying orders. For example, when future commandant A. A. Vandegrift was a second lieutenant in 1909, he was court-martialed for returning late from a short leave, charged with "absence over leave," a mild form of desertion, and reduced in rank.[56] While there is little evidence to suggest that Butler's father or anyone else had a hand in decreasing the severity of the reprimand, and Smedley may truly have displayed signs of illness, in any case it was a fortunate turn of events for Butler, who was able to retain his rank and continue his service after his recovery.

Returning to Philadelphia in late 1907, Butler contracted symptoms of tuberculosis and was granted nine months of sick leave. When a family friend offered

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[55] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 118. Butler was right to doubt the security of the bay – it was taken by the Japanese army almost forty years later and occupied during World War II, from 1942-1945.

[56] General A. A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A. A. Vandegrift* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964), 29. Alexander Archer Vandegrift would serve Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1944 to 1946, and won the Medal of Honor for his service in World War II.

Butler the job of managing a coal mine in West Virginia, he jumped at the opportunity; he could not imagine himself sitting around doing nothing: "I didn't intend to be an invalid," he stated, explaining why he accepted a job in a field which he had no experience.[57] The job would not prove as restful as Butler imagined: Managing coal miners was far different from commanding marines. When he had to fire the superintendent of the mine for repeated sobriety violations, the drunken man shoved a gun in Butler's face. In another episode, Butler narrowly missed being killed on a runaway coal car.[58] There were positive experiences also, as the mine became more productive under Butler's watch and Butler eventually earned the respect of the miners. Yet, when offered the position full-time, Butler turned it down. After a clean medical examination, he returned to the Marines in the fall of 1908, promoted to the rank of major. Soon after, Butler and Ethel had their second child, Smedley Jr., while Butler was stationed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Meanwhile, political events were transpiring that would lead Butler back into action in Latin America.[59]

William Howard Taft's inauguration in March of 1909 was soon followed by an increase in U.S. intervention into Latin American countries, as Taft pushed for "dollar diplomacy." This approach was a modification of Roosevelt's Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine that called for American wealth and resources to help neighboring countries build their infrastructure, spreading U.S. influence without aggression. The military

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[57] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 121.

[58] Ibid., 123-127.

[59] Venzon, *General Smedley Darlington Butler*, 63.

would be used, but as "peace keepers." As such, Butler and the Marines would be involved in nearly every intervention. Their first was Nicaragua.[60]

## NICARAGUA

In 1909, Major Smedley Butler, stationed in Panama with his family, had already made a name for himself within the Corps. Future commandant and celebrated marine Alexander Vandegrift began his service with Smedley in Panama, and years later recalled Butler's popularity: "Everyone in the Marine Corps at this time had heard of Smedley Butler." Butler was no longer a boy-soldier looking to emulate his commanding officers. Though he stood at only 5 foot 9 inches and 140-pounds by this point, he was a leader in his own right. That leadership would be tested in Nicaragua.[61]

In October of that year, an uprising led by a group of prominent Nicaraguans - and supported by American business interests - began an effort to overthrow the Nicaraguan dictator, Jose Zelaya, the president of Nicaragua since 1893. In December, following the execution of two American mercenaries fighting for the rebels, Secretary of State Philander Knox ended relations with Zelaya and formed the Nicaraguan Expeditionary Squadron, sending U.S. troops to the region. Before the United States could intervene, Zelaya resigned and fled to Mexico. Yet the revolution continued, with fighting between the revolutionary leaders and Zelaya's successors. U.S. forces were

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[60] Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean,* 160-164.

[61] Robert Asprey and A. A. Vandegrift, *Once a Marine: The Memoirs of General A. A. Vandegrift* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1964), 36; For a description of Butler's physical stature, see Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 7.

strategically placed to aid to the rebels and protect property owned by American companies such as Bluefields Steamship and others.[62]

The rebel cause in Nicaragua was valid, in Butler's view. His distaste for Zelaya's dictatorship was strong, with Zelaya's greed being his most egregious offense. "During his Presidency of 16 years…he managed to save, out of a salary of $2500.00 a year, $22,000,000.00," Butler wrote in 1910, and sarcastically added, "this is of course only being accomplished by the strictest of economy."[63] Once the rebels had captured the government, another rebellion took hold, and U.S. forces switched from supporting the uprising to defending a newly established government.

Butler's primary involvement in Nicaragua involved defending the railroad. When Butler arrived at the town of Corinto, he found the naval officer in charge had been scared off by rebels and had abandoned a train twenty-five miles up the tracks. Butler led a group of approximately 500 soldiers – a mix of marines and sailors – back to the train to reclaim it. Though he encountered "at least a thousand excited little [Nicaraguan] soldiers," he pushed on until a rebel officer confronted him directly, shoving a gun into his midsection. According to his own account, Butler "made a grab for the General's gun and had the luck to tear it out of his hand," and the troops were allowed to pass.[64] Such exploits won over soldiers such as Vandegrift to such a degree that he would attribute

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[62] David F. Schmitz, "Nicaragua, U.S. Military Involvement In," from *American Military History,* 500-501; Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean*, 172-173; Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 138-140; Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercentaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky), 104-114.

[63] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler and Thomas Butler, Corinto, Nicaragua, Jan. 2, 1910, Butler Papers.

[64] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 146.

most of what he learned in Nicaragua to Butler: "He impressed not by words but by action. He was a fighter in the fullest sense of the word."[65]

While Butler rose in popularity within the Corps, his service in Nicaragua sparked an intellectual awareness: he noticed certain assignments seemed to be mercenary missions. To Butler, the most offensive practice he witnessed in Nicaragua was not the dictator's greed, but the use of marines solely to protect American corporate investments. He stated plainly years later, "In the capital we had been given to understand that the railroad had been taken as security for a loan made to the Nicaraguan government by American banking interests."[66] He made similar statements at the time as well. It was a theme that would remain with Butler well into retirement, and the first notes of his disdain for misusing the American military can be found in a letter from March of 1910:

> What makes me mad is that the whole revolution is inspired and financed by Americans who have wild cat investments down here and want to make them good by putting in a Government which will declare a monopoly in their favor. The whole business is rotten to the core and I am ashamed to think that a Republican Administration, is, if anything, assisting the revolution.[67]

Butler's awareness of the economic motives in Nicaragua fueled contempt for the American business interests who used marines to protect their questionable financial commitments. He continued in the same exchange:

> The whole game of these degenerate Americans down here is to force the United States to intervene and by doing so make their investments good. There is no

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[65] Asprey and Vandegrift, *Once a Marine*, 40.

[66] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 144.

[67] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler and Thomas Butler, March 1, 1910, from Venzon, *General Smedley Darlington Butler*, 75-76. Major investors in the region at the time included such companies as United Fruit Company, Bluefields Steamship Company, and Siempre Viva Mining Co., amongst others.

> patriotic movement in this revolution, it is simply a sordid desire on the part of one dog to take from another cur a good picking bone and I really don't see why we don't either thrash both of them or go away and let them eat each other up…[68]

And he was not through. In a letter to his father in July of the same year, Butler again lashed out at the politics that had placed him in Nicaragua. Commenting on an article in *The Philadelphia Press* that shed some light on the possible financial motives for U.S. intervention in Nicaragua,[69] Butler unleashed the following tirade:

> This is not, by any means, my first experience wielding the "Big Stick" in shady diplomacy, but it is the most sickening. Senator Stone, quoted in the Philadelphia Press…puts the case of these American citizens very well but much too mildly. These renegade swine from the slums of our race are all engaging in enterprises, which, if successful, will pay them 50 to 100% dividends, but are not willing to take a gamblers risk, in other words they have taken a 100 to 1 shot on a horse race and for fear of losing have called in the Police to hold all the other horses, thereby assuring the victory of their 3 legged animal.[70]

As Butler pointed out, he was familiar with the Roosevelt foreign policy of the past – he had enforced it in Honduras – but witnessing the corrupt practices of Americans in Nicaragua and its effect on citizens triggered in Butler a critical view of American foreign policy for the first time. The view would be reignited in his post-military career. Butler's later critiques included detailing the impact that intervention and war would have on the lives of the average Nicaraguan citizen, a theme that would be the focus of his 1935 book, *War is a Racket*, and other writings in the 1930s. In a 1910 letter, Butler expressed misgivings about the presence of marines in the impoverished country, and how it could lead to animosity towards the United States:

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[68] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler and Thomas Butler, March 1, 1910.

[69] William J. Stone, "Sees Millions in Nicaraguan Deal," *The Philadelphia Press*, June 26, 1910.

[70] Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler, July 14, 1910, Butler Papers.

> The poor common people are the only sufferers, as is always the case, and their blood will be on our heads, they are already blaming us, if we do not lend our support to one side of the other pretty quickly…There will be a famine in this country unless the men are sent back to their farms shortly.[71]

As it would be in the 1930s, Butler's stated views in Nicaragua were less of a completely formed expression of broad policy, and more a condemnation of violence he witnessed first-hand. Writing again from Nicaragua, Butler delivered an emotional outburst to his mother, one laced with statistics from his experiences – a method common in his writings in the 1930s:

> During the fighting last week 150 of these poor ignorant natives were killed and fully 300 wounded, town is just alive with the injured. Over 3000 men have been killed during this revolution and the Lord only knows how many wounded and to make matters worse not a single advantage has been gained by either side. You never see a whole native except the generals, and I think it is about time somebody stopped this useless slaughter and if God is willing I intend to do it…and at all costs stop this horrible slaughter of a poor race which does not want to fight. This is by far the bloodiest revolution Central America has ever seen and it is an everlasting shame on our great nation that she permits it…[72]

Amid the chaos, moneyed interests worked hand in hand with the U.S. State Department. A new Nicaraguan National Bank was secured with American help, and American banks loaned the Nicaraguan government substantial sums by putting a lien on the national railroad – a deal approved by the State Department. During the 1930s, Butler pointed out these ties to corporations, but while he served in Nicaragua, his focus was on the corporations themselves.

Following a brief battle near the end of the revolution that saw three sailors and approximately fifty rebels killed, Butler wrote an exasperated letter to his wife

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[71] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler and Thomas Butler, March 1, 1910.

[72] Ibid., June 4, 1910, Butler Papers. Butler's description of the native Nicaraguans as "poor" and "ignorant" reflected an all-too-common jingoistic American attitude of the time.

bemoaning what he observed: "It is terrible that we should be losing so many men fighting the battle of these d--- spigs…all because Brown Bros. have some money down here."[73] Towards the end of his stay in Nicaragua, Butler repeatedly mentioned the company's influence, even in reference to a celebration thrown by the company: "Brown Bros, the Bankers whose loan to Nicaragua caused our presence, gave a big dinner."[74] Butler's criticism of the oldest private bank in the United States – Brown Brothers – was aimed at the bank as well as other American corporations invested the area. In the 1930s, Butler would employ similar generalizations, speaking of J.P. Morgan as a shorthand to criticize both that company and other banking institutions, and skewering DuPont as company exemplifying war profiteers in general.[75]

As a deal began to be brokered to end the revolution, Butler found himself leading the province of Granada for a short period, facilitating the change in government. In his new administrative position, Butler quickly began to ruffle feathers. He issued a proclamation guaranteeing the return of any government property, "including arms, ammunition, tobacco, or liquor." Much of this "loot" had fallen into the hands of the wealthy and politically connected citizens, and once Butler issued his decree, he was removed from office. Writing his mother just after the event, Butler repeatedly refers to the politically connected group as a "gang" that cares little for the average Nicaraguan.

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[73] Smedley Butler to Ethel Butler, October 9, 1912, Butler Papers.

[74] Ibid., November 23, 1912, Butler Papers.

[75] Brown Brothers and Company was one of the primary lenders to the Nicaraguan government. By 1912 they owned the majority stock in the National Bank of Nicaragua and financed half of the building of the national railroad. For more on the involvement of Brown Brothers and other American banks in Nicaragua see, Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean,*160-216; and for a general understanding, see Isaac J. Cox, *Nicaragua and the United States 1909-1927* (Boston: World Peace Foundations, 1927).

However, Butler was later presented with a proclamation by a group of over sixty Nicaraguan politicians speaking – presumably – on behalf of their constituents in support of Butler.[76] Years later, Butler would summarize how he connected with the average citizen in spite of challenges posed by powerful interests:

> The influential politicians who expected to be specially favored were dissatisfied with the redistribution and enraged at me. They appealed to the Admiral, and I was relieved as governor. But the general population apparently appreciated my effort to deal justly with them. The citizens of Granada held a public demonstration in my honor and presented me with a gold medal for restoring peace to their city. [77]

This early experience in politics was brief, but it hinted at what was to come. In Butler's political ventures after retirement, he often put the interests of average military veterans and ordinary citizens above others, upsetting powerful political interests in the process.

## MEXICO

In the early twentieth century, American investments in Mexico were far greater than those in Nicaragua.[78] At the same time, the Mexican government had grown increasingly hostile towards foreign – and especially American – business interests and sought independent economic growth. Revolution came to Mexico in 1910, and a year later the country was under the control of rebel leader Francisco Madero and his backers – the Maderists. That leadership was short-lived when in 1913, General Huerta staged a coup d'état known in Mexican history as *La Decena Tragica* (Ten Tragic Days). The

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[76] Smedley Butler to Ethel Butler, October 9, 1912, Butler Papers.

[77] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 165.

[78] In 1914 it was estimated that U.S. companies had interests nearing one billion dollars in the country and it was the third highest oil-producing country in the world. See David Healy, *Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean, 1898-1917* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) especially 260-261.

plot closely involved American and British diplomats and resulted in the assassination of Madero, his brother, and vice president Jose Maria. As a result of the overthrow, Huerta took control of a country under considerable unrest. As Huerta increasingly sided with British interests over American, the United States made plans to intervene. Smedley Butler would play a crucial role in those plans.[79]

In 1914, the Wilson administration initiated an investigation into the prospect of an invasion of Mexico. Smedley Butler was assigned as a spy in Mexico City, and for at least ten days posed as either a guide book writer or a U.S. Secret Service agent searching for a criminal who supposedly joined the Mexican army, depending on who was asking. Butler gained access to military forts, and was able to obtain and draw a series of maps that detailed the location and status of the Mexican military. The intelligence gathered was never utilized in a U.S. invasion, but Butler's experience of posing as a writer would later provide him with material when he did become an actual writer and co-authored a fictionalized account of the incident in a 1927 book he, *Walter Garvin in Mexico*.[80] Butler's spy work demonstrated the trust placed in him by the Marine Corps, as they sent him on the independent excursion with little oversight. Missions such as his time as a spy in Mexico would also add to the varied experiences that would form an eventful and diverse military career.

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[79] Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3-39.

[80] On Butler's exploits in Mexico, see Edith C. O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomat's Wife in Mexico* (New York: Harper and Co., 1916) as well as his own fictionalized account: Smedley D. Butler and Arthur J. Burks, *Walter Garvin in Mexico*, (Pittsburg: Dorrance & Company, 1927).

Butler's spy work was not the end of his service in Mexico. In April of 1914, Huerta's forces captured a U.S. Navy landing party and intercepted a German cargo ship bringing ammunition to Tampico. In response, U.S. forces invaded the city of Veracruz and Butler arrived on the *U.S.S. Chester* in charge of the 3rd Marine Battalion. He joined 3,000 American troops that included Colonel John Lejeune.[81] Battling side-by-side, Butler's and Lejeune's units came under sniper fire as they worked through the streets, and they overtook the city with minimal casualties. After the dust settled, seventeen U.S. soldiers had been killed, and over 120 Mexicans. The U.S. would occupy the region until November of 1914. Butler departed in September, just as a much larger war in Europe erupted.[82]

The American intervention in the Mexican revolution did little to stabilize the country – revolution would rage in various forms through 1920 – and yielded mixed results. Some of the reasons for the intervention were certainly congruent with Butler's later critiques of American foreign policy, yet at the time of his service, so early in his career, there is little evidence that he considered the economic factors behind the invasion. In his memoir published in 1933, Butler stated that "The intricate ramifications of the situation were not our affair. Marines are given orders, and they go," a nod to the complexities of factors behind U.S. involvement in the region.[83] Certainly, the

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[81] Lejeune would become, as one historian observed, "the most important Corps leader since Archibald Henderson," serving as Commandant from 1920 to 1928 and transforming the Marine Corps into their own amphibious assault role."See Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 322-329, quotation from 322; For a through account of Lejeune's life and career, see Merrill L. Bartlett, *Lejeune: A Marine's Life, 1867-1942* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

[82] Smedley Butler to Ethel Butler, April 24, 1914, Butler Papers; Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 177-180; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 69-73.

[83] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 170.

intervention in Mexico represented an extension of American military dominance in the Caribbean, which, along with the start of World War I, led to a near-absolute expulsion of European forces in the region. As a result, U.S. economic interests were not only secured in Mexico, but would grow, despite the initial revolution's goal of riding the country of foreign influence. According to one historian, following U.S. involvement, "American corporations, especially the oil companies, achieved a preeminence in Mexico they had never enjoyed before,"[84] a conclusion fitting with themes in Butler's later writing such as *War is a Racket* and "Common Sense Neutrality."

Due to a law passed by Congress in 1915, the conflict in Mexico marked the first time officers in the Marine Corps were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. In January of 1916, Butler became one of fifty-nine recipients of the award – the largest number awarded in any conflict before or since. Butler felt his distinction was too broadly defined, his actions undeserving of the honor, and the sheer number of awards an obvious political act.[85] In a letter, he expressed his discontent to his mother:

> The Medal of Honor is the prize for which all of us soldiers strive and risk our lives and to have it thrown around broad cast is an unutterably foul perversion of Our Country's (sic) greatest gift…Several times in my life in the service I have performed acts that, even in my own conscience, seemed worthy of this reward, but not in Mexico.[86]

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[84] Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico*, 576.

[85] Butler received the award, "in recognition of the distinguished service rendered by you upon the occasion of the seizure of Vera Cruz, Mexico, April 21 and 22, 1914." See Josephus Daniels, Sec. of Navy, to Major S. D. Butler, Jan. 18, 1916, Butler Papers. For a catalogued account of Butler's military communications, see Eunice Lyon, ed., *The Unpublished Papers of Major Smedley Darlington Butler, United States Marine Corps: A Calendar* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University, 1962).

[86] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, Feb. 21, 1916, Butler Papers.

Butler refused the award, resulting in a six-month correspondence with Marine Corps Commandant George Barnett and Secretary of Navy Josephus Daniels that illustrated the extent of Butler's stubbornness even in the face of his superiors.[87] Daniels ended Butler's repeated insistence that he not be awarded the medal with the curt reply, "The department does not feel that a matter of this nature should be given reconsideration."[88] A year later, Butler would receive another Medal of Honor for heroics in Haiti, and while he would not be remembered specifically for his first Medal of Honor, its importance played a large role in his legacy, just as he feared. One reason why Butler's military career remains so celebrated within the Marine Corps is the accomplishment of being one of only seven "double recipients" of the Medal of Honor in the Marine Corps. Though he won it the second time legitimately in his own eyes, each introduction of himself as "Two-time Congressional Medal of Honor Winner, Smedley Butler" would be a reminder of how politics play a role in every aspects of a soldier's career, even in the awarding of its highest honors.[89]

## FIGHTING IN HAITI

In 1915, the United States launched an intervention into Haiti that resulted in a tenuous relationship with the country and an occupation of the island that would last for nearly two decades. This was not the first foreign involvement in Haiti, nor the first by

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[87] Smedley Butler to Josephus Daniels, Feb. 23, 1916, Butler Papers. For a catalog of the military correspondences between Butler and Daniels and Barnett, see Lyon, *The Unpublished Papers of Major Smedley Darlington Butler*, 65-67.

[88] Josephus Daniels to Smedley Butler, August 13, 1916, Butler Papers

[89] For the official list of Medal of Honor Winners, see: "Congressional Medal of Honor Society, Full Archive," online at http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-archive.php

the United States. Since the Haitian Revolution of 1804, Haitians had been weary of external influence on their island country. Plagued by economic and political instability through the nineteenth century, Haitians watched as European – especially French, German, and British – merchants gradually established a foothold, largely in the coffee industry.[90] Following the Civil War, American yearly exports to Haiti also rose steadily, reaching $5.3 million by 1890. In 1876 and again in 1904, Haitian political concessions allowed American investors to begin construction on the national railroad.[91] In 1910, the desire by American investors to reduce competition with European business coincided with a rejuvenated interest in the Monroe Doctrine from the Taft administration. When French investors looked to renew their lease on the Haitian National Bank, the U.S. government objected. A compromise was reached and with the help of the U.S. government, prominent U.S. banking interests acquired control of twenty percent of the National Bank. This involvement was "the first step in a chain of events that led to the North American military occupation of Haiti five years later."[92]

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[90] Ties with France were particularly strong, as Haiti and France were connected culturally, as French was the official language, Catholicism the official religion. Economically, the ties between the countries grew stronger as the 19th century progressed: French government took on loans and bonds from Haiti to help construct the National Railroad. By 1881, French investors controlled the Haitian National Bank. See: Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 1915-1934 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press,1971), 19-41; Arthur C. Millspaugh, *Haiti Under American Control, 1915-1930* (Boston, Mass: World Peace Foundation, 1931), 3-20; also Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean,* 245-246.

[91] A lop sided relationship existed between the two countries. While the numbers reflected a relatively low number for the United States –a fraction of one percent of U.S. exports – it accounted for over one-third of Haiti's imports. See: Ludwell Lee Montague, *Haiti and the United States, 1714-1938* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1940) 163; also Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti,* 35-36.

[92] Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean*, 245-255. Quotation from p. 245. One of the American financial interests connecting the U.S. with Haiti was Roger L. Farnham, vice president of National City Bank and soon to be vice president of the Haitian National bank. It is in these circumstances Smedley Butler would first cross paths with Farnham, establishing an revelatory relationship that would last well beyond the Haitian years; years when Butler would argue that U.S. military intervention was launched only to profit corporations, using his experience with men such as Farnham to support his case.

American economic interests in Haiti grew alongside increased military involvement. The United States first recognized the Haitian government in 1862, as the Union used of the port city of Cap Haitian to both harvest coal and launch attacks on Confederate blockade runners. Military intervention would continue following the Civil War, as the U.S. sent Navy ships to "visit" Haitian ports in 1868, 1869, 1876, 1888, 1889, 1892, and every year from 1902 to 1913 with the exception of 1910.[93] Between 1888 and 1915, no Haitian president served his entire seven-year term, as rebels ousted the heads of state with increasing regularity.[94] By 1914 the country was seen as so unstable and threatening to foreign residents that the *U.S.S. South Carolina* dispatched its entire marine guard to the island, joining forces from Germany, France, and Britain to stabilize the region. That same year, nine separate American warships visited Haitian shores. In 1915, Major Smedley Butler, serving in a Marine regiment under the command of Eli Cole, entered into this environment of mass instability and regular insurrections.[95]

In July of 1915, a rebel uprising overthrew the Haitian government once more, culminating in the dramatic public dismemberment of its president, Guillaume Sam. The United States responded quickly, landing troops within a day, sending orders to Admiral

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[93] Navy Department, "Memorandum on the Republic of Haiti prepared for the Senate committee appointed to inquire into the occupation and administration of the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic by the forces of the United States," August 15, 1921. From *Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo. Hearings before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate, Sixty-Seventh Congress, First and Second Sessions, pursuant to Senate Resolution 112* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 63. Hereafter: *Inquiry into Occupation*; Also, Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 30.

[94] During that time period, ten presidents were either killed over overthrown and the instability only became fiercer as the years progressed. From 1911 to 1915, and the country went through seven different leaders with most removed by a violent uprising. See Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 42; For a list of Haitian Presidents from 1879 to 1930, including a brief explanation of the action behind their departures from office, see Millspaugh, *Haiti Under American Control*,12.

[95] *Inquiry into Occupation,* 64.

Caperton, commander of the *U.S.S. Washington*, and dispatching marines stationed in nearby Guantanamo Bay to join them immediately.[96] Caperton acted quickly, stabilizing the capital by positioning troops to protect the Haitian Congress and other key government institutions. In addition, the United States saw this moment as an opportunity to intervene in the island nation's politics. President Wilson expressed the strategy to Secretary of State Robert Lansing:

> Let the Haitian congress know that it would be protected, but that the United States would not recognize any action that did not put in charge of affairs men who could be trusted to end revolutions…In other words, that the United States considered it its duty to insist on constitutional government, and would be prepared if forced to do so, to take charge of election and obtain a real government which the American Government could support.[97]

Two Haitian presidential candidates arose: Dr. Ronsalvo Bobo, championed by the rebels, and Sudre Dartiguenave, the president of the Haitian Senate. The United States supported a government based on the Haitian Constitution, and thus leaned towards Dartiguenave, who assured the American government that the Haitian government would be cooperative toward American interests. During the election, Admiral Caperton ordered all spectators disarmed and stationed marines inside the Haitian assembly. Though Caperton insisted that "No pressure of any kind was brought to bear upon any Haitian elector in Dartiguenave's interest," many disagreed with this interpretation of the

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[96] Ibid., 307.

[97] Wilson to Lansing, August 3, 1915, State Department Decimal File 838.00/1418, from Munro *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean*, 353.

events, including Smedley Butler.[98] Reflecting on the event years later, Butler remembered:

> Bobo was a redheaded Negro, and the American government didn't think he would do. The other candidate, Senator Philippe Sudre Dartiguenave, had our backing…When the National Assembly met, the Marines stood in the aisles with their bayonets until the man selected by the American Minister was made president.[99]

But these comments came in 1933. During his service in Haiti, there is little evidence that Butler questioned the role of the marines. Even in 1921, testifying in front of the Senate committee investigating the occupation of Haiti, Butler emphasized that the role of a soldier was to follow orders without question, "We are only paid soldiers; we have nothing to do with the policy of our Government. We are only sent to these places to perform acts. We have nothing to do with the reason for which we are sent."[100] This was the official mantra Butler returned to when questioned about the country's military actions during his service. Yet as Butler's earlier letters indicated, adhering to protocol did not prevent him from privately voicing criticism of American policy.

While the election was taking place in mid-August of 1915, Butler's battalion was on the battleship *Tennessee*, en route to Cap Haitian from Philadelphia. Almost immediately upon landing, Butler's battalion was ordered to lead a guerilla war against the *cacos* - the Haitian bandits who had begun the revolution of 1915 and were a frequent cause of instability on the island. Butler took to the task with vigor, launching a small-

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[98] Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean*, 354-355; Quotation from "Caperton's Testimony," Tues. Oct. 11, 1921, from *Inquiry into Occupation,* 317.

[99] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 182.

[100] Butler's testimony, Thurs. Oct. 27, 1921, from *Inquiry into Occupation,* 528.

scale invasion of northern Haiti, at one point leading 700 marines into battle. Butler's mission would climax in November of 1915 in a dramatic capture of the last rebel stronghold, Fort Riviére. Butler and two other men led the attack, penetrating the fort by squeezing single-file though a fifteen-foot drain amidst a hail of head-on gunfire. For that action, Butler and two others would receive the Medal of Honor. This time, Butler could not turn the award down, for he had nominated the two other men. He also felt he might have earned it.[101]

Though there is clear evidence that U.S. troops were sent to Haiti largely to secure American economic interests including the National Bank and railroad, Butler noticed little of this, especially in his first months on the island. Unlike his experiences in Nicaragua and Mexico, Butler seemed to have interpreted intervention in Haiti less as a move to protect American economic interests and more as an effort to bring stability to the region. Upon landing in Haiti for the first time, he reports to his mother how "these natives are apparently overjoyed to have peace."[102] A few months later, he wrote of the potential prosperity of Haiti: "The country has unlimited wealth and its 2,500,000 people should all be well fixed if these infernal revolutions would only stop."[103] Likely, Butler found the country in such disarray that he had little time to consider the profiteering motives. Stabilizing the country was Butler's primary concern, and he consistently expressed his belief that such stability was for the inherent good of the people of Haiti.

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[101] For a detailed account of Butler's actions in Haiti in late 1915, see: Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler, October 5, 1915 and Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler, October 31, 1915, Butler Papers. Also see Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 181-208; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 75-80.

[102] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, August 16, 1915, Butler Papers.

[103] Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler, December 23, 1915, Butler Papers.

Another reason Butler ignored signs of profiteering could have been culturally motivated: this period of American history was rife with racism and jingoistic views toward non-white civilizations, and Butler was a product of his time. While racial references were few and far between in his letters, and he did not dwell on them, his characterization of the Haitian people reflected the anglo-centric perspective predominant among Americans in the era. Writing about Butler's views on Haiti, Mary Renda examined how Butler's "paternalistic" attitude towards the Haitian people was found in "marines of varied ranks and experiences," and that none expressed it as clearly as Butler.[104] Though this could also be considered a testament to Butler's forthright communication style, it is difficult to argue with the characterization. In his personal letters, Butler referred to Haitian soldiers serving under him as, "my little chocolate soldiers," and wrote that his "little black army will do very well, in time, and as long as white men lead them."[105] Butler's statements before Congress in 1921 also referred to Haitians in language evocative of a parent-child relationship:

> We were embued (sic) with the fact that we were trustees of a huge estate that belonged to minors. That was my viewpoint; that was the viewpoint I personally took, that the Haitians were our wards and that we were endeavoring to develop and make for them a rich and productive property, to be turned over to them at such time as our Government saw fit.[106]

Such jingoistic views likely dissuaded Butler from second-guessing the motivation behind the occupation – American soldiers were there to take care of the people.

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[104] Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 13.

[105] Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler, December 23, 1915, Butler Papers.

[106] S*enate Inquiry into Occupation*, 516.

Partially due to this paternalistic attitude, Butler displayed relatively little inner conflict in his role in helping launch what would be a nearly twenty-year occupation of Haiti. It would not be until after his retirement that Butler would be detached enough from the conflict in the country to make a connection to economic or other potential motivations.

On November 29, 1915, an agreement was reached between the Haitian and United States governments that called for the formation of a national Haitian police force under the supervision of the American military.[107] The resulting "gendarmerie" would comprise of U.S. marines and Haitian civilians, and in December of 1915, Butler was assigned as the top commander. Though he did not know it, this moment marked a transition in Butler's career – Butler's time as a combat soldier was at an end. The next phase of his military career would be as an administrator.

## CONCLUSION

Though Smedley Butler had initially joined the Marine Corps to defend Cuba against a Spanish aggressor, he had quickly adapted to his new duties and a new role: leading American interventions into small, neighboring countries to the south. While on missions he began to notice a pattern – marines were told they were sent to quell rebellions and stabilize governments, but in reality were often put in harm's way for the purpose of protecting protect private property. The inconsistencies he discerned between the official purpose of each mission and the realities he witnessed on the ground did not affect his performance, and he quickly ascended the ranks from second lieutenant to lieutenant colonel. But the early experiences planted a seed of dissention that would

[107] Ibid., 399.

come to fruition much later, beginning with a series of incidents towards the end of his military career.

The next chapter will continue to trace Butler's rise in the military as he made the transition from soldier to administrator. Off the battlefield, opportunities for professional advancement opened up, allowing Butler to achieved a rank and status that placed him in an elite class of officers and exposed him to the highest levels of military politics, where he would witness war profiteering on a massive scale. In retirement, he would use his status and insider knowledge to launch a sustained assault on the practice of war profiteering, speaking before large audiences about the perils of wars that benefitted munitions makers at the expense of soldiers' lives.

## Chapter 2: The Desk Soldier
## 1916 – 1928

*"From the black-and-white challenge presented by the banana wars he (Butler) had come up against the gray challenge of a public-versus-private interests and did not know how to cope."*

-General A. A. Vandegrift[1]

By 1916, lieutenant colonel Smedley Butler held an elite status among marines as a two-time Medal of Honor recipient. While his daring exploits on the battlefield cemented his warrior image, after seventeen years in the military, Butler made the transition from combat soldier to administrator. With his father now chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, Butler seemed destined to move into the upper echelons of the military and civilian world. He landed high-level management positions – as head of the gendarmerie in Haiti, leader of the Marine division of the American Expeditionary Force's main disembarkation camp in France, and acting as Public Safety Director of Philadelphia – that placed him in contact with some of the most powerful men in the public and private sectors. To an outside observer, he appeared on route to be named Commandant of the Marine Corps – the position held by his friend John Lejeune through most of the 1920s.

Instead, Butler ultimately followed a different path. This chapter demonstrates that while Butler advanced his career by capitalizing on his prior fame and worked to increase his prominence in the public eye, his ambitions soon became secondary to his loyalty to the rank-and-file soldier and to his critical views toward the corruption and

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[1] General A. A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A. A. Vandegrift* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964), 67.

waste he witnessed at the highest levels, both of which led him to become an outspoken opponent of war profiteering, a controversial role that would prevent him from attaining any significant political leadership positions. Nevertheless, his years as a high-level administrator were formative in the sense that they offered Butler an insider's knowledge of the ties between government and corporate entities, information to which the public was not privy.

## AN ADMINISTRATOR IN HAITI

By late 1915, violent resistance in Haiti against the American occupation had ceased.[2] Concurrently, the threat of German and French control of the island vanished with the onset of World War I, removing a prominent impetus for U.S. militarism in the country. With these threats removed, the United States reoriented its focus to repairing Haiti's infrastructure – and especially its fiscal system – to support the repayment of debt and American economic investments.[3] As it became apparent that the rebels were no longer a force to be reckoned with, Major Butler switched gears from combat soldier to administrator. He became head the national police force in Haiti, in charge of repair and stability of the country. Just as the conflicts on the battlefield ended, however, new political struggles over power and resources would erupt.

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[2] For Butler's involvement in the military campaigns in Haiti, see Chapter 1.

[3] Background to the period of American intervention in Haiti can be found in the following sources: Arthur C. Millspaugh, *Haiti Under American Control, 1915-1930* (Boston, Mass: World Peace Foundation, 1931), 1-33; Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 1915-1934 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press,1971), 19-63; Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 326-387. For a Haitian perspective on their response to European and American imperialism, see Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

Even before Butler led marines to put down the Haitian rebellion, the United States had been in negotiations with the newly elected Haitian government to secure a treaty that would give the U.S. favorable provisions, including control of Haiti's finances. Opposition to the proposed treaty ran high, with fears by Haitians that the United States was obtaining too much control over the country. Under intense diplomatic pressure – including the threat of American military control of the country – the Treaty of 1915 was passed by the Haitian Congress in November, and put into effect provisionally during the U.S. congressional break that winter.[4]

One provision of the treaty called for the formation of a national police force, or "gendarmerie."[5] Butler arrived in Port-au-Prince in December of 1915, and received the order to take charge of the forces, an assignment that included "recruiting, instruction, organization and equipment of all the Constabulary of Haiti." In Butler's eyes, the country was in desperate need of stabilization, and he was eager to assume the challenge. In 1921, he recalled his immediate recognition of the need for the gendarmerie in Haiti: "There was no Haitian police force there was no Haitian order there was nothing but pillaging and riot until the marines arrived when they took over this police and martial law was declared by the United States."[6] In the final month of 1915, Butler enlisted some

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[4] Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean,* 356-361; Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 74-77. On February 28, 1916, the treaty was approved by the U.S. Senate in a unanimous vote.

[5] Both "gendarmerie" and "constabulary" will used interchangeably in this study in reference to the national police force in Haiti headed by Butler.

[6] For Butler's orders, see Colonel Waller to Smedley Butler, Dec. 3, 1915, Butler Papers; "Testimony of Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler, Thursday, October 27, 1921, and Monday, October 31, 1921," *Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo. Hearings before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate, Sixty-Seventh Congress, First and Second Sessions, pursuant to Senate Resolution 112* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 517. In

900 Haitian soldiers, and "ordered their rifles and other equipment from the United States."[7] Within two years, Butler was leading a gendarmerie of around 6,000 men, and their responsibilities had spread to improving the infrastructure - building the public roads, building school houses, constructing telegraph and telephone lines, digging irrigation ditches, operating a coast guard service, and being in charge of "all sanitation and public health in the interior."[8]

He approached his duties with gusto. And of all the interior improvement projects, Butler was most concerned with the roads: "The roads and trails through the Republic of Haiti are in such a deplorable condition that the building of new highways and the reconstruction and repairing of those already in use have become matters of utmost importance to the development of the country." Smedley planned roads for "all classes of travel, including motor and wagon traffic," connecting "the larger cities and towns and areas of great production," weaving the agricultural areas with the urban by following the mail routes, and "providing a means of easy communication through all of Haiti," at a cost, Butler estimated, of $10,000 a month. Butler reported that the gendarmerie built, "21 miles of roads in five weeks and five days, through the worst tropical wilderness I have ever seen," at an estimated cost of "not over $500 to the mile." According to Butler, nearly 15,000 men were at work in all of Haiti on roads, and 50,000

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1921, reacting to reports of abuses by marines in Haiti, a congressional inquiry was launched into the U.S. occupation of Haiti, taking testimony from Butler, Admiral Caperton, and many others involved in the occupation. Hereafter as *Inquiry into Occupation*.

[7] Smedley Butler to Thomas Butler, Dec. 23, 1915, Butler Papers.

[8] Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 86-87; Smedley Butler to Maud Butler and Thomas S. Butler, October 6, 1917, Butler Papers.

men under the control of the Marines ("through our various activities") costing the U.S. government nearly $800,000 a year.[9]

Butler became well-versed in the administrative world while acting as a quartermaster, and developed into a master of logistics. He ordered materials for each of his soldiers, putting in requests for shoes, uniforms, and other basic costs of the occupation. While he gained many other insights during his time in Haiti, this habit of detailed accounting later supplied him with hard facts and concrete numbers in his descriptions of how war profiteers were capitalizing on military ventures. At this stage, however, there is little evidence that Butler had the time or the inclination to reflect on the business of war – he was too invested in the day-to-day operations to yet recognize the broader problem of war profiteering. Historian Hans Schmidt detected this lack of introspection at the time of Butler's duties in Haiti:

> Years later, Butler changed his perspective on the American occupation of Haiti…that he had personally been 'canned' in Haiti because he had refused to cooperate with New York banking interests, but this was not what he was saying at the time he organized the Gendarmerie.[10]

In Honduras, Nicaragua, and Mexico, Butler had advocated a quick withdrawal after combat ceased, but Butler's view of national sovereignty was not the same with Haiti. As a result of his first-hand view of how the country had been torn by revolution, and its close geographic proximity to the United States combined with paternalistic racial

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[9] Smedley Butler to John Avery McIlhenny, December 17, 1917, Butler Papers. Also, Lowell Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye: The Adventures of Smedley D. Butler* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), 210; and Mark Strecker, *Smedley D. Butler, USMC, A Biography* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc.. 2011), 73; Quotations from Smedley Butler to Colonel Waller, May 16, 1916 and Smedley Butler to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, December 18, 1917, Butler Papers;

[10] Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 89.

attitudes towards the Haitian people,[11] he was more permissive of an occupation in the case of Haiti than he had been previously in his career, or would be in the future.

In his work as head of the gendarmerie, Butler encountered a class of ruling elite that exploited the majority of a populace. In a letter to his father, Thomas Butler, Smedley described the absurdity of the situation:

> If it were not for the tragedy of the poverty of the working classes the situation here would be absolutely ridiculous but the suffering of the poor people, surrounded by the wealth of their own land, which their own chiefs will not allow them to benefit by, is really pitiful.[12]

Butler's early opinions on Haiti were a harbinger of his eventual resentment of the ruling classes. Such keen observations of the economic disparity in Haiti - the division between the wealthy and the working class – would become frequent anecdotes for Butler during the 1930s when depression would hit the United States and millions of Americans would be "surrounded by the wealth of their own land" without the means to wrest it from the hands of the wealthiest. His exposure to the grave economic disparity in Haiti would serve as fodder for his later rhetoric.

Fighting against the economic class disparity in Haiti was a natural fit for Smedley, as it aligned with his military mission. By quelling discontent, he could discourage future rebellions. Butler explained this connection between improving the well-being of average citizens and decreasing the likelihood of rebellion in his letter to a U.S. congressman:

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[11] See Chapter 1.

[12] Smedley Butler to Thomas Stalker Butler, May 16, 1917, Butler Papers.

> Aside from military and police duties, our marines acting as Haitian officers are doing everything in their power to assist the native population in rebuilding their roads, their irrigation works, their bridges, to clean up their towns, and generally better the condition of the people at large, by doing which, we hope to absolutely do away with the desire on the part of any Haitian to revolt against his government.[13]

According to Butler, his men were successful in this early stage, and the "vast majority of the people" were with them "because of our honesty and squareness." The average citizen of Haiti had grown suspicious of the government due to widespread graft and bribery, and according to Butler, "The people have been much oppressed by their former dishonest officials through an illegal squeeze system, which we have put an absolute stop to."[14]

With his fight against corruption came Smedley's distaste for the politicians in power. Butler explained the class system in Haiti in testimony before a congressional committee in 1921:

> The Haitian people are divided into two classes; one class wears shoes and the other does not. The class that wears shoes is about 1 per cent…Ninety-nine percent of the people of Haiti are the most kindly, generous, hospitable, pleasure-loving people I have ever known.[15]

Among Haiti's elite class, a person's social status was conferred by his or her skin color and degree of mulatto heritage. Butler had encountered corruption and unethical leaders in other Latin American countries, but the astonishment he expressed at corruption in the Haitian government was far beyond any judgments he had formed in his previous tours.

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[13] Smedley Butler to James Robert Mann, April 4, 1916, Butler Papers.

[14] Ibid.

[15] *Inquiry into Occupation*, 517.

Part of this disdain was likely due to his more intimate exposure to the inner workings of the Haitian government. No longer a soldier in the field, in Haiti, Butler dealt largely with politicians and high-ranking officials. He expressed his shock and disapproval of these figures repeatedly in letters and reports. In one letter to his father, Smedley sarcastically championed the Haitian government over that of the United States:

> You people in Washington have not the slightest idea of running a country, nor of taking care of yourselves, these statesmen down here can give you cards and spades and then run you off the earth.[16]

In a correspondence to his friend and superior Colonel John Lejeune, Butler expressed his frustration and fear that little would be accomplished in Haiti without marines in charge of the planned infrastructure projects.

> This [Haitian] government has lied to me two or three times, and I do not intend again to trust it or anybody in it. It is my opinion, which probably isn't worth a damn, that the Gendarmerie will not be a success without the control of the public utilities I have mentioned earlier in this letter.[17]

Earlier in the year, after the Secretary of Agriculture of Haiti suddenly resigned, Butler lamented the state of the country in a letter to his wife:

> Affairs in this poor country certainly are in a mess…They don't seem to be able to keep men in their Cabinet—no graft I guess. There really is nothing for us to do but establish a Military Government here and take over the country for a certain number of years.[18]

By the summer of 1916, Butler's frustration was at a tipping point. Writing to his mother, Smedley went so far as to suggest that the government would now have to be replaced in order for it to be rid of corruption:

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[16] Smedley Butler to Thomas Butler, June 24, 1916, Butler Papers.

[17] Smedley Butler to Colonel John Archer Lejeune, July 13, 1916, Butler Papers.

[18] Smedley Butler to Ethel Butler, Jan. 25, 1916, Butler Papers.

> We are having a hot old time trying to induce this wretched Government to do the honest thing by their country but I have given it up and am working now to put them out of power, bag and baggage, for they will never consent to be honest in the administration of their financial affairs.[19]

Butler's proposed solution – military occupation – would have run completely counter to his ant-war views years later, when he professed that the United States had occupied Haiti and other countries to protect profiteers. In 1916, however, Butler was more concerned with local government corruption and instability than with profiteering. And his solution of military rule was natural for one who had spent his life as a soldier. Despite his frustration with the ruling class, Butler had enough confidence in the Haitian people to believe that the U.S. would be able to hand the country over in only a few years. At this stage, he could not have anticipated that this was the start of a nearly 20-year occupation of Haiti that would define the American-Haitian relations until 1934.[20]

The most dramatic moment in Butler's time in service came in late spring and early summer of 1917. In April, the National Assembly of Haiti convened to rewrite the Haitian Constitution. Shortly thereafter, the American Ambassador to Haiti, Arthur Bailly-Blanchard, delivered a list of eight revisions for the Haitian government, the most contentious of which allowed for foreigners to own property in Haiti, breaking from traditional Haitian policy. In June, the National Assembly rejected the proposed revisions, and moved to pass a clause that prohibited foreign ownership. To prevent the passage of this clause, U.S. naval commanders in charge of the mission ordered Butler to dissolve the Haitian Assembly. With the support of the Haitian President, Sudre

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[19] Smedley Butler to Maud Darlington Butler, August 10, 1916, Butler Papers.

[20] For a military account of the occupation of Haiti, see Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 184-211.

Dartiguenave, Smedley delivered a "Decree of Dissolution" to Stenio Vincent, President of the Assembly, marching into the assembly with a squad of armed gendarmes. According to reports, the banging of soldiers' rifles caused such an uproar it forced the reluctant Vincent to read the presidential decree and dissolve the assembly.[21]

In the 1930s, Butler would return to this incident in speeches and writings, citing it as a prime example of how the United States used its power and influence to impose its economic interests on other nations. After all, the main reason the Haitian Assembly protested the constitution was the inclusion of foreign ownership into the constitution. That Butler was the one imposing civil law upon the Haitian people gave him unique insight into one instance where the United States had directly intervened in the government of another country for the financial gain of private interests.

It was also in Haiti that Butler gained an intimate understanding of the private financial powers involved in the occupation of a country. The prime example was the relationship formed between Butler and a powerful capitalist by the name of Robert Farnham. Farnham was both vice president of the National City Bank, president of the National Haitian Railway Company (Compagnie Nationale des Chemins de Fer d'Haiti) and he was in close contact with the U.S. State Department. Farnham was such a prominent figure in Haiti that one historian described him as the "spokesman for the American financial interests in Haiti," calling him "astonishingly influential," and remarked that, "Farnham had been a frequent caller at the State Department since 1911,

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[21] Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean*, 368-374; Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 97-100; Also see Testimony of Brigadier General Eli K. Cole, Thursday, November 10, 1921 *Inquiry into Occupation*, 698-703. For Butler's account, see Butler testimony, *Inquiry into Occupation*, 536- 538, and Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 216.

and during the Wilson administration he exercised an influence on policy which was rather surprising in view of Secretary Bryan's general attitude toward Wall Street."[22] Butler hosted a visit by Farnham on the island in November of 1917 and the letters between Farnham and Butler during this period are especially telling. In one, Farnham praised Butler's accomplishments in Haiti, and then suggested that it was time for business interests to take hold of the country for its betterment:

> To bring the fruit of all this it remains now for American capital to come along and furnish the sinews of war for development on a considerable scale, and to this end I may tell you I am devoting a great deal of time and I hope to succeed.[23]

Butler claimed to not be aware of Farnham's plans for Haiti, "I don't know anything about his aims or ambitions down here, but he made a deep impression on us and I am really hungry to see him again, for no particular reason except to have him around."[24] Writing to Farnham in February of 1918, Smedley would discuss an instance of the gendarmerie working with the unloading and selling of freight, deferring to Farnham:

> I sincerely hope that I have not messed up your plans down here and assure you that anything I have done to date can be readily undone and that we are all standing by ready to lend a hand whenever possible. We can handle this freight and in fact can put over nearly any other 'roughstuff' you may suggest.[25]

Butler may not have been familiar with the details of Farnham's business scheme, but if Butler had any doubt about the profits associated with military interventions, they were surely clouded by his relationship with the prominent banker, who not only profited with Butler's help, but unabashedly discussed with Butler his view that business and

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[22] Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean*, 332.

[23] Robert Leslie Farnham to Smedley Butler, January 21, 1918, Butler Papers.

[24] Smedley Butler to John Avery McIlhenny, January 29, 1918, Butler Papers.

[25] Smedley Butler to Robert Leslie Farnham, February 11, 1918, Butler Papers.

corporations could further the interests of America and act as a stabilizing force in countries such as Haiti.

## PREPARING FOR WAR

While Butler was in Haiti, events on the other side of the world set in motion a chain reaction that would lead to American intervention in World War I and shape the future of both America and Butler himself. When war broke out in 1914, the United States initially attempted to pursue a policy of non-intervention. President Woodrow Wilson's reelection campaign in 1916 rallied supporters by reminding them he had kept the country from going to war, yet by fall of that year, even Wilson knew war would not be preventable. The United States had come close to entering the conflict following the German destruction of ships carrying American passengers, with three attacks – on the *Falaba*, the *Cushing,* and the *Gulflight* – coming prior to the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915. Wilson, as one historian has concluded, "did everything he felt he could do to avoid war," but unrestricted submarine attacks and diplomatic developments in late 1916 and early 1917 convinced the Wilson administration that peace was unobtainable.[26]

Before President Woodrow Wilson signed the declaration of war against Germany in April of 1917, the U.S. military had bulked its numbers in preparation.[27] The Naval Appropriations Bill of that year gave the President the power to increase the Navy from

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[26] On the international events and domestic pressures that sent the U.S. into war, see William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 12-34; Kennedy, *Over Here*, 32-44; Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 5- 19. On President Wilson and the decision to go to war, see Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2009), 80-131.

[27] On June 30, 1916, the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs increased the size of the Marine Corps by 5,029 men. See "Report on the Naval Appropriations Bill, S." Report No. 575, 64th Congress, 1st session.

68,000 to 87,000 men, and the marines from around 10,000 to some 17,400. Congress soon authorized the Corps to exceed this limit, and by October it had grown to a wartime size of over 30,000 marines.[28] Though the Selective Service Act in May of 1917 had reinstated the draft, which provided the majority of the soldiers for the war, many others rushed to join in record numbers. The rapid growth in the various military branches was unprecedented, including the Marine Corps. One military historian deduced that "Marine recruiters enjoyed their finest hour in 1917."[29]

Smedley was one of those who jumped at the chance to join the fight. The World War was not only his ticket out of Haiti, but an opportunity to gain the glory of a generation-defining conflict. If the rapid escalation of enlistments reflected a mass desire across America to participate in the World War, that yearning was multiplied in professional soldiers of the era, including Butler. As one historian observed about American soldiers at the time, they longed for a conflict of the scope of the Civil War, which remained on the forefront of soldiers' minds in the early twentieth century:

> …the American mind in 1917 was filled with memories of a kind of warfare that would never again be waged. Somehow medieval notions of battle as arena for individual heroism, for the display of 'chivalry,' and 'honor,' survived virtually intact into the early twentieth century…a romantic view of war had a peculiar hold on the American mind which still throbbed with memories of the Civil War,

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[28] On the military buildup to the First World War and the logistical challenge that accompanied mass mobilization for the war, see Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End all Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 5-153. For a broad account, see David R. Woodward, "World War I (1914-1918): Military and Diplomatic Course," from John Whiteclay Chambers, II, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 812-814. Also Jennifer D. Keene, *World War I: The American Soldier Experience* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2006).

[29] Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 287-289, quotation from 288.

> memories glowing with the light of righteous glory and echoing with John Brown's hallelujahs.[30]

An examination of Butler's letter-writing campaign to his superiors reinforces this view. Butler's patriotic fervor is reflected in his numerous failed attempts to join the war. He was so eager to be sent to "the show" that he immediately began leaning on his connections. As he wrote to his father: "The day we received word war had been declared I wrote a note to General Lejeune expressing my desire to join any body of troops going to France in any capacity whatsoever."[31] Smedley expressed his desperate desire to join the battle to his father on many occasions. But while his father supported the war, he was unwilling to assist Butler's quest, fearing Smedley could be killed. As he explained to his son: "When spoken to by the High authorities I cannot ask it. I have not the strength, for thy loss would kill many of us helpless to assist thee," adding a very spiritual and emphatically underlined, "<u>If it comes it must be naturally</u>."[32] But this fatherly concern did not dissuade Smedley. The World War was his chance to fight in a conflict on a comparable scale to that which the Civil War veterans who had trained him had themselves experienced. Smedley had sought military glory since the Spanish-American War, and he would not be deterred.

On May 18th, 1917, Smedley officially requested to be relieved from his position in Haiti and desired to be assigned to, "any expeditionary force of the U.S. Marines likely

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[30] David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 177-178.

[31] Smedley Butler to Thomas Stalker Butler, May 16, 1917, Butler Papers.

[32] Thomas Stalker Butler to Smedley Butler, December 25, 1917, Butler Papers.

to see service in Europe."[33] However the day after the request, Lejeune wrote Butler to inform him that they were sending fewer marines to France than expected (2,700 instead of 3,000), which, according to Lejeune, "barred any possibility of my going at this time, as well as yours." Butler encouraged his brother Horace to enlist immediately, and expressed to his father that it was the duty of every citizen to become involved, and especially the duty of soldiers: "No red-blooded American can afford not to be one of those to volunteer, especially when he has been well cared for and trained by his Government as I have been." Butler was so enthusiastic that he measured the worth of men based on their willingness to participate in the World War: "I have no use for any American who doesn't want to fight and use every endeavor to get into it." Butler was single-minded in the issue – if you were an American man, you had an obligation to do everything in your power to serve your country in a time of crisis. This attitude helps explain Butler's affinity for veterans; he valued soldiers not only because he shared a common experience, but because he felt they were better Americans.[34]

As 1917 wore on, Butler's desperation to be sent to war escalated. He repeatedly called on Lejeune, his father, and congressmen with connections to his father, but to no avail.[35] One of Butler's greatest fears was personal – that he would leave the Marine

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[33] Lieutenant-Colonel Smedley D. Butler to The Major General Commandant, Pour au Prince, May 18, 1917, Butler Papers. The subject of the correspondence transmitted via the Brigade Commander was "Request for Expeditionary Duty in Europe" and the message was short: "1. I request that I be detached from duty as Chief of the Gendarmerie d'Haiti and ordered to duty with any expeditionary force of the U.S. Marines likely to see service in Europe."

[34] John Archer Lejeune to Smedley Butler, June 1, 1917, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to Thomas Stalker Butler, May 16, 1917, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to Maud Butler and Thomas S. Butler, October 6, 1917, Butler Papers.

[35] One Congressman writing to Smedley illustrated the extent of reach of Butler and his family. "Your father has gone into all these matters with the Secretary of War and with the Assistant Secretary of War

Corps without honor if he did not serve in France. Writing to his parents, he expressed his fear that he would be considered a disgrace: "This thing of being left out of the show is really more than I can stand and I tell you both very frankly that I shall never show my face in West Chester again if I am not allowed to go to France." Butler was especially conscious of his reputation, of how future generations would view him, and of the effect on his family's respectability. He expressed his worry in a letter to his parents:

> Some day my grandchildren will be subjected to the remark, 'Where was <u>your</u> grandfather during the Big War? And they will have to hide their heads in shame and either lie or say, 'He was a policeman in the service of a foreign black Republic.[36]

Smedley perhaps felt that Haiti was turning him into something less than a soldier, and part of his eagerness to enter the First World War could be attributed to his desire to return to the battlefield. He emphasized his distaste for administrative work in another letter to his family:

> There is no doubt about this being a real job but it is not one to my liking, I never see any soldiers except on parade, am nothing but an office man, but I suppose the experience in such a multitude of organizations will stand me in good stead sometime, just as my coal mining experience has.[37]

While he was reluctant to resign himself to the role of a full-fledged "office man," he conceded that his future career was likely headed in that direction. He was right, but did not anticipate how quickly he would adjust, winning accolades in France for managing

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concerning your ambitions. He advised me that there was no necessity for me to do anything; that he felt certain they would not change their plans. See Walter Lewis Hensley to Smedley Butler, October 2, 1917. Butler Papers.

[36] Smedley Butler to Maud Butler and Thomas S. Butler, October 6, 1917, Butler Papers.

[37] Ibid.

the main disembarkation camp for the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) within a year.

Butler finally left Haiti, but not before stabilizing the country from recurring rebellions, creating a disciplined gendarmerie, and helping to lay the foundations for a modern infrastructure, telephone systems, telegraph systems, government buildings, and hundreds of miles of roads, including an important series of paths connecting Port-au-Prince with Cap Haitien.[38] For his work, Smedley was officially and unofficially commended. In January of 1917, then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt toured Haiti, inspecting American forces and the Haitian government. Butler accompanied Roosevelt on a four-day cross-country journey, after which Roosevelt heaped praise on Butler and the gendarmerie. Following the visit, Marine Corps Commandant George Barnett wrote a glowing letter to Butler expressing great satisfaction with Butler's achievement:

> The whole party was greatly impressed with what the marines and Gendarmerie have done and are doing. I think the whole thing was a big feather in the cap of the Marine Corps, and I wish to congratulate you and all of the officers associated with you on the fine work done.[39]

As Butler was known to complete his assignments with a very high level of competence, his reputation may have actually worked against his desire to leave for the World War; his superiors claimed they could find no one to replace him.

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[38] Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 91-93.

[39] George Barnett to Smedley Butler, Washington, February 10, 1917, Butler Papers.

But finally, he did leave Haiti. Lejeune helped Butler obtain a position training new recruits, and in April of 1918 Butler landed in Quantico, the swampy Marine base in Virginia. In the 1920s, Quantico would represent a significant time in Butler's career, but his first assignment at the base would be brief. One of the recruits passing through was Josephus Daniels Jr., son of Secretary of Navy Josephus Daniels. The younger Daniels was so impressed with Butler that he pleaded with his father to send Butler to France with his regiment. The Secretary acquiesced to his son's request, and Butler suddenly had his long sought-after ticket to France as commander of the Thirteenth Marine Regiment. As Butler put it in his memoirs, "It was not my military record, but young Josephus Daniels that finally got me to France." Smedley arrived in France in September of 1918, with a determination so strong that he fought through a deadly illness that nearly killed him on the voyage.[40]

## FRANCE

On April 6, 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany and joined the Allies.[41] By the winter of 1917-1918, the Allied forces had largely fallen into despair. The Russian Revolution had ended fighting on the eastern front, and Germany had been successful against the Italian army. England's economy, dependant on sea commerce, was beginning to falter under German submarine warfare. American troops began arriving in

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[40] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 98-100; Quotation from Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 243; Butler contracted what was known at the time as the Spanish flu, ending the lives of over a hundred on the ship. The disease would kill 500,000 Americans in 1918. See Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 100; Venzon, *General Smedley Darlington Butler*, 206

[41] The Allies, or Triple Entente, was originally France, Russia, and United Kingdom, but as the war developed was joined by Italy, Japan, and the United States. They were at war with the Central Powers, composed of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman Empires, along with the Kingdom of Bulgaria.

the fall of 1917, but it would not be until the spring of 1918 when they would reinforce the Allies in France, providing 300,000 soldiers in March, and over two million by November – a crucial boost in numbers and morale that was one of the key factors in defeating the Central Powers.[42]

Butler's assignment upon arrival in France in early fall of 1918 was command of the Marine division of the Pontanezen Barracks near the town of Brest. The base at Brest operated as the main disembarkation port for the American Expeditionary Forces, and housed over fifty thousand troops at a time. Situated three hundred miles north of Bordeaux, the French military complex at Brest had been in use since the 17th century, and had once sheltered Napoleon's troops. When Butler arrived, he found the base riddled with disease, with over 5,500 deaths between the fall of 1918 and spring 1919. During the length of the war, more American soldiers died of disease than in combat. Though he may not have achieved the battle glory he longed for during the World War, Butler's service proved to be just as crucial to the Allied cause if he had been fighting on the front lines.[43]

Smedley quickly set about updating the fort to prevent further sickness and reduce the death toll. Yet, he was still disappointed that he would not be on the front lines, fighting Germans face to face, writing to his family: "…am ordered to command this concentration camp, the least desirable and lowest job in France." Though his initial

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[42] Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 36-38; Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis,* 296-318.

[43] During the war, approximately 50,000 Americans died in combat, while some 57,000 deaths came from illness. For figures on death and disease at the camp and during the war, see Strecker, *Smedley D. Butler, USMC,* 75; also Allan R. Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 357.

disappointment was severe, Butler found some value in his mission. In the same letter he put a positive spin on the situation: "However I am in France and will do all in my power to make these poor, miserable, wretched sick soldiers who pass by the thousands through here, as comfortable and happy as my poor strength will let me." And in his memoirs he reiterated this point: "I was deeply stirred by the plight of our boys who were dumped in that mud-hole on their arrival in France. I rolled up my sleeves and dug in, determined to make it as decent and comfortable a place as possible." Butler had found purpose in advocating for the common soldier, as he did through most of his career. In retirement, such devotion to the everyday man on the battlefield was repaid as Butler's popularity was bolstered mostly by enlisted men who flocked to attending his speaking engagements.[44]

One of Butler's greatest fears during those first few months at Pontanezen was that the American public would discover the harsh conditions in the camp, resulting in a scandal for the military. In December of 1918 – a little more than two months after Butler's arrival – Butler's fears came true: George Brown, a reporter from the Washington Post, passed through the camp. In the resulting article he chronicled the conditions of thigh-high mud and food served out of garbage bins. He described how soldiers lived in "such intolerable wretchedness and misery that one marvels at the patience and discipline that keep them from breaking into open rebellion." Yet the article praised Butler, referring to him as "a splendid type of efficient soldier who recently took command of the camp…working night and day to try to solve the problems that confront

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[44] Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler and Maud D. Butler, October 5, 1918, Butler Papers; Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 246-247.

him." Brown ended the article on Butler's assessment of the conditions at Pontanezen, reporting that he described the camp as, "the worst place on earth, and I have traveled all over the world."[45]

As his quote in the article indicated, Butler agreed with the reports on the conditions of the camp: "I admit all the nasty things they can say about us except that we do not try to make conditions better," he wrote to his mother, dwelling on one aspect of the article in particular – that his and his men's efforts to improve the camp had not been sufficient: "This statement hurts terribly as we all do work so hard, in fact I get so tired by the time I go to bed at night that I see bright stars jumping in front of my eyes." In a testament to the importance of the camp – or at least, the political importance of avoiding embarrassment in the press – Secretary of War Newton Baker ordered an investigation into camp conditions. Inspections would become routine in the next nine months of Butler's tenure, but he was prepared for them, and negative reports from the press quickly dissipated.[46]

Even within a few weeks of the first report, the squalid conditions of the camp had drastically improved. Mary Rinehart, a *Saturday Evening Post* writer made her way through Pontanezen later in January of 1919, seeking to find the worst the camp had to offer. Instead she ended up showering Butler and the site with praise:

> To have produced the *morale* I found under existing conditions was nothing short of a miracle of ability…Even the flu, taking its toll of men in the hospital nearby, was practically non-existent in the camp…I had been sent as a trouble-shooter,

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[45] George Rothwell Brown, "70,000 Yanks at Brest Toil in Mud While Waiting at Rest Camp," *Washington Post*, January 1, 1919.

[46] Smedley Butler to Ethel Butler, Brest, France, January 5, 1919, Butler Papers.

> and I continued to look for it…But the men were in fine condition, and cheerful. The food was better than in the hotel where I was stopping in the town….hot, abundant, well seasoned.[47]

Rinehart especially took to Butler, referring to him as, "that dynamo of energy, courage and sheer ability," and recognized that Butler did not follow regulations that would be detrimental to the men in his charge: "Butler was no red tape man. In defiance of regulations he was issuing double rations of food, and serving hot soup all day long to those who needed it."[48] Rinehart's observation was astute, as one of the major problems for Butler was navigating the bureaucracy to obtain a sufficient amount of supplies for men in the camp. And as Rinehart correctly understood, Butler had no qualms exceeding ration limits and disregarding the official line when it came to the well-being of his men. Butler boasted proudly of his actions at Pontanezen years later in his memoirs:

> I broke regulations all the time…When I ran one million dollars ahead of my ration allowance because I was feeding the troops in camp four and five times a day, the quartermaster department stirred up a mighty battle of words on paper.[49]

In one instance for which Butler become famous within the Corps, he marched thousands of soldiers down to an army warehouse to retrieve desperately needed wooden planks known as "duckboards." The camp was thick with mud and the boards provided pathways and platforms on the surface. After futile attempts to secure permission to acquire supplies from the nearby warehouse, Butler gathered his men and led them four miles down to the docks where they were stored. As he recalled, "Finally I got sick of

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[47] Mary Roberts Rinehart, *My Story* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Co., 1931), 278-279. Rinehart, the first female war correspondent in World War I, enjoyed a prolific and successful writing career, publishing over 40 novels and plays between 1906 and 1956, and was a regular contributor to the *Saturday Evening Post*.

[48] Ibid., 278.

[49] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 249.

waiting...One afternoon I marched down to the docks with seven thousand men and burst into the warehouses." Butler and his soldiers lugged supplies up the hill to the camp through the night.[50]

The story of the warehouse raid might not have gained traction had Butler not carried the duckboard of a lagging soldier. When Butler spotted one of his men resting, he picked up the boy's duckboard and carried it himself, shaming the young soldier once he realized who Butler was. From that point on, to his men he was "General Duckboard." The painted symbol of a duckboard appeared on camp vehicles and a contest to name the camp's newspaper led to its being christened *The Duckboard*. Butler had been constantly trying to boost morale at the camp, through bands, singing, and other means, but this spontaneous incident provided a greater uplift than Butler could have engineered. As he recalled in his memoirs, "From now on I could do anything with the men…That duckboard story built the camp."[51] The incident was a revelation to Butler of the power of publicity to boost morale, and provided a foundation for his later success in public relations, as commander of Quantico during the 1920s and in his public appearances in the 1930s.

The "duckboard incident" also showed Butler's now relatively prominent stature in the Marines and provides a clue to how he maintained it even while disobeying commands from on high. In the Philippines during his first years in the Corps, Butler had circumvented protocol by sailing across a bay to retrieve supplies. As punishment, he

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[50] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 103-104. Quotation from Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 250.

[51] "The Duckboard Story," *Pontanezen Duckboard* 1:2 (March 5, 1919); Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 249-254, quotation from 253-254.

had been placed on medical leave. After the incident in France, however, his superiors – Army generals Eli Helmick and James Harbord – supported Butler, and he was not disciplined. In his memoirs, Butler praised the officers, especially their tacit support of breaking protocol when it came to easing the "suffering of the soldiers."[52] Though Butler did not attribute the lack of repercussions directly to his own political clout, with his impeccable military record, close friendship with high-ranking officials like John Lejeune, and a father who chaired of the Naval Affairs Committee, Smedley would doubtless have been an officer to be reckoned with, possessing a large amount of prestige, whom superior officers might be hesitant to reprimand.[53]

When Butler presided over Pontanezen it housed 60,000 to 70,000 men, requiring some 100 cooks in each of the kitchens, feeding over 7,000 men an hour with a water system providing nearly 3,000,000 gallons a day.[54] Butler often dealt with shortages of supplies and it became a significant concern in his work and his life. Writing to his wife, he distressed: "I went to sleep finally nearly worried to death, this trying to keep 65,000 men fed, with never enough stuff on hand to do it more than one meal in advance."[55] He remarked that supplies such as axes, wood, picks, blankets, and kettles were in steady demand even as transportation was limited, stating in a letter: "We need 300 trucks and

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[52] Butler was especially fond of Harbord, writing in his memoirs: "General Harbord was one of the greatest officers and soldiers, if not the greatest, our country has had since the Civil War…After serving under him a few days I discovered he would back me in everything that would relieve the suffering of the soldiers," and on Helmick, Butler also was complimentary: "Helmick, like his life-long friend, Harbord, was a man of courage and initiative who saw things in a big way. The two of them stood by me in reconstructing the camp." Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 249.

[53] See Chapter 3.

[54] First Lieut. L.B. Bailey, "General Duckboards of Brest," *New York Times*, March 30, 1919.

[55] Smedley Butler to Ethel Butler, January 5, 1919, Butler Papers.

have only 46."[56] The constant shortage of supplies was certainly another reason Butler was so brazen about cutting through red tape and marching down to retrieve duckboards himself. As the financial cost of war would become a dominant subject in his speeches and writings during the 1930s, Butler's struggle to provide his soldiers the provisions they needed at Pontanezen provided him with another first-hand experience to support his points.

While he did not achieve his goal of fighting on the front lines, Butler's administrative work led to a significant career advancement. While at Pontanezen, he was promoted to Brigadier General, at the age of 37 becoming the youngest officer in the Marine Corps to achieve the rank. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal from both the Army and the Navy, and the French lauded him with the Order of the Black Star. Even with such accolades, however, Butler's self-evaluation of his service during the war would remain conflicted. When he wrote of his time in France – both at the time and years later – Butler would express pride at having helped so many soldiers recover from illness. Since the massive influx of healthy and spirited American soldiers "gave a great lift to Allied morale," as one historian phrased it, and contributed to many victories at a critical time in the war, Butler was likely undervaluing his accomplishment.[57] But Smedley was a soldier. Not fighting on the front lines in the great war of his generation remained a disappointment for the rest of his life. He wrote critically in his memoirs:

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine,* 102-103; Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House*, 80; On American forces giving a morale boost to the Allied cause, see Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 31.

"All the same, cleaning up a concentration camp[58] was not soldiering. The job could have been handled by any enterprising hotel-keeper or circus manager."[59] Though he may have thought little of it, the experience Butler gained in tending to such a vast number of soldiers, boosting morale through bands and activities, and managing the distribution of resources on the base would serve him well as preparation for his next assignment as commander of the Marine base at Quantico, Virginia.

## QUANTICO

In July of 1919, Smedley left the mud of France and was assigned as a deputy to his old friend, John Lejeune, now commander of Quantico. When Lejeune was promoted to commandant of the Marine Corps in the summer of 1920, Butler assumed command of the base. Though Butler was in charge of Quantico, off-and-on, during a period of relative few military engagements – the early 1920s – the peacetime exercises, base improvements, and especially public relation events he organized helped transform the base into one of the top Marine Corps bases in the country. His ability to draw attention to the Corps during peacetime, combined with the efforts of Lejeune in Washington, helped the Marine Corps sustain its size at around 20,000, while other branches of the military saw drastic reductions in numbers. In his new capacity, Butler also had the opportunity to hone the public relations skills he would use through the rest of life.[60]

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[58] Prior to its connotations following World War II, "concentration camp" was used to describe an area of densely confined people living in harsh conditions.

[59] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 246.

[60] Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 322-325.

When Butler took over Quantico in 1920, the base was equipped to service nearly 8,000 troops, but it was languishing with just 1,000 men. In comparison to the hectic pace of Brest, Butler was at first bored with the Quantico assignment. Writing General Helmick about the difference between his work in France and in Quantico: "I really feel ashamed of myself and must find useful occupation soon or rot."[61] Butler was eager to find useful occupation for himself and the marines under his command. This was especially evident in his correspondence with Roger Farnham – the banker he had met in Haiti and with whom he apparently maintained a close connection. In one letter, Butler inquired if there were not, "some fresh enterprise for a lot of us Marines to sail to, as life in the service now is more stupid than a Quaker meeting."[62] If Farnham might invest his vast resources into another foreign country, marines might then be called to protect them and Butler would have his ticket out of Quantico. While the letters to Farnham are indicative of Butler's awareness of the intertwined nature of business interests and military actions, in 1920 he seemed to welcome such a relationship if it benefited his personal short-term goals – especially leaving Quantico. By the 1930s, however, Butler would cite his dealings with those like Farnham to demonstrate to the American public the extent of what he come to view as a corrupt partnership between industry and the military.

There is no evidence to suggest Farnham replied with an offer satisfactory to Smedley. Disappointed, Butler soon redirected his focus to Quantico: he decided he would transform the base into the premier Marine Corps base of its day. Comprising

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[61] Smedley Butler to General Eli Helmick, November 14, 1919, Butler Papers.

[62] Smedley Butler to Roger Farnham, January 6, 1920, Butler Papers.

mostly woodlands along a swampy portion of the Potomac River, the Quantico would undergo major renovations and improvements under Butler. Construction and plumbing, roadwork, and other manual labor assignments became a marine's duty. As one soldier serving under Butler's command put it: "The twenty-five hundred Marines at Quantico were nothing but a labor force. There was damned little drill…Butler had made carpenters and plumbers out of the whole outfit."[63] Not only were quarters for soldiers and officers established, but also tennis courts and Butler's largest project, an outdoor football arena carved out of a hillside.[64] Hand in hand with physical improvements for the base came Butler's efforts to boost enthusiasm among the soldiers. One of his primary methods was to organize and promote sports activities. Sports – and especially football – were a priority for Butler, both for morale and public image of the Corps.

Football had developed as a collegiate sport in the mid-19th century at Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and other elite educational institutions largely an excuse for students to throttle one another, with names such as "Bloody Monday" ascribed to early competitions. By the early 20th century, the sport served as a way for college and military men to participate in symbolic warfare, while creating a sense of community and pride for their institutions. One scholar even postulated that football arose to create an opportunity for the acts of bravery and heroism that had existed in wartime: "For the college men who expected to become the nation's leaders, football served an essential

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[63] Colonel Frederic May Wise and Meigs O. Frost, *A Marine Tells It to You* (New York: J. H. Sears & Company, Inc., 1929), 336.

[64] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 324.

function as a surrogate war."[65] Football was also observed to have a beneficial effect not only on the players, but all of those who were linked to a winning institution, according to a historian of the sport: "For loyal alumni, the football team was a source of more intimate pride, but the general population on triumphant occasions could also feel powerfully connected to the team, and through the team to the community."[66] Butler was less motivated by the idea of creating a college-like atmosphere – since he had never attended college – and more by a pure enthusiasm for competition which he had maintained since his school days as an athlete. Yet when he proposed expanding football at Quantico, Secretary of Navy Daniels heartily approved, likening it to boosting "the true college spirit."[67]

One way Smedley made Quantico into the "varsity" of sports teams in the Marine Corps was by recruiting men from throughout the Corps to play on his football team. Though the games generated little to no revenue, they attracted a large audience whenever they were played, including nearly 60,000 in Baltimore in 1922. In 1924, the team traveled with great fanfare and expense to Detroit for a well-publicized game against the top college team at time, the University of Michigan. The Marine Corps team's defeat and the high cost of the trip put a damper on the football program at

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[65] Gerald R. Gems, *For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2000), 72. Beyond the violence of both football and war, the game had structural similarities to battle. Late 19th-century descriptions of the game went so far as to liken that the quarterback to a quartermaster who delivered the ball to his infantry, and running backs to calvary, all of them dependent on courage in the face of danger. On the relationship between early American football and warfare, see Gems, 11-34. For a general overview of the history of the sport, see John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[66] Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Moves and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 67.

[67] Josephus Daniels to Smedley Butler, December 6, 1920, Butler Papers.

Quantico, but it attracted wide publicity for the Corps, and Quantico would remain the leader in Marine athletics even after Butler's departure.[68]

Smedley understood that one of his missions in peacetime was to sustain the Marines' prominent status in the public eye, thus assisting Commandant Lejeune in making a case for continued funding. Butler approached his new mission with the same fervor he had exhibited for his live-fire campaigns, holding public relations events that dazzled the public and kept the Marines alive in the country's imagination. His largest public relations events were Civil War reenactments, held once a year during each of his first three years at Quantico. In 1921, it was a recreation of the Wilderness campaign, reenacted with modern equipment at the battlefield near Chancellorsville. With more than 3,000 soldiers, an assortment of anti-aircraft guns, armored cars, a tank, eighteen airplanes, and other Marine Corps weaponry, the show was more a display of Marine Corps might than a historically accurate tribute.[69] Butler himself marched the twenty-seven miles to Fredericksburg with the rest of the men as part of the three days of festivities. During the march, Butler got the chance to relive a similar situation to his "duckboard incident," when he retrieved a group of privates who had fallen out of line, and took over carrying one of their knapsacks, much to their embarrassment. In the summer of 1922, Butler took his troops to Gettysburg in a month-long march that included crossing a portion of the White House grounds. President Harding, Army General John J. Pershing and a number of congressmen joined a crowd of approximately

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[68] Smedley Butler to Thomas Holcomb, December 11, 1922, Butler Papers; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 138-141.

[69] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 260-262.

a hundred thousand to enjoy the reenactment in southern Pennsylvania. And in the fall of 1923, Butler took his troops to the Shenandoah Valley, reenacting the Battle of New Market. Not as much of a Civil War aficionado as his predecessor, President Coolidge failed to attend, but over 150,000 other guests reportedly showed, in spite of poor weather.[70]

The reenactments turned out to be much-needed public relations events for the Marine Corps. Following the "war to end all wars," the Navy saw a reduction from 133,000 men to 95,000, while the Army dropped from 231,000 to 137,000. The Marine Corps numbers, however, remained steady at around 20,000 men, due to efforts by Butler, Lejeune, and others who portrayed the Marines as the fierce "leathernecks" of the military forces, feeding the public an appealing image of an ideal warrior. One historian categorized Butler as one of two "incomparable public relations attractions" at Quantico that led to the continued popularity of the Marines Corps during the 1920s (the other being the East Coast Expeditionary Force). This growth, or at least stability in the Corps' strength, demonstrated that Butler was not only a valuable soldier on the battlefield, but had developed useful skills that could carry over to the private sector.[71]

Though Butler enjoyed great success in his public relation stunts as well as his promotion of sports on the Quantico base, he was not satisfied. He did not consider public relations to be real work. He was rather proud of the reenactments, but according

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[70] Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once A Marine*, 63-65; Venzon, *General Smedley Darlington Butler,* 242.

[71] Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 361-389. No branch of the armed forces concentrated on maintaining their troop levels as fervently as the Marine Corps. A larger standing army became politically unpopular after the war, and the Army and Navy drifted towards technological development in amphibious and aerial warfare. On the public relations attractions at Quantico, see Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 324.

to his recollections in 1931, still dismissed them as "diluted peace time battles, just play-acting after all." Butler turned down a lucrative public relations job offer from Packard Motor Car Company in Detroit, as he was not looking for just any type of work, but rather for an opportunity to be sent to a battlefield or conflict of any sort. As he wrote in his memoirs: "I was itching for a scrap – action – something with snap to it." The challenge he craved would come not overseas, but close to home in Philadelphia, as Butler would take a two-year break from the Marines to fight corruption and bootlegging in the City of Brotherly Love.[72]

## PHILADELPHIA

From 1924 to 1926, Smedley served as Philadelphia's Director of Public Safety, overseeing the police department for a newly elected mayor bent on reform. Butler was brought to Philadelphia by W. Freeland Kendrick, who ran for office on a platform of reducing crime and reforming the police department. Prior to accepting the position, Butler turned it down many times, insisting that the political network in Philadelphia would not allow for true reform. However, the enthusiasm and persistence of the mayor eventually wore Butler down and he accepted the post. Mayor Kendrick, with the help of Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot, lobbied President Coolidge to grant Butler a one-year leave of absence from the Marine Corps (eventually extended to two years) without a reduction in rank. Coolidge consented, and Butler was off to Philadelphia.[73]

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[72] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 136-141; Quotations from Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 262

[73] Fred D. Baldwin, "Smedley D. Butler and Prohibition Enforcement in Philadelphia, 1924-1925," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (July, 1960), 352-368. Baldwin's study uses the Philadelphia papers to compile a thorough account of Butler's struggles with bootleggers and politicians as Public Safety Director of Philadelphia.

In the United States, the development of our modern police coincided with two concepts: urbanization and professionalization. From 1890 to 1930, police in urban area increasingly adopted military models – including military-style uniforms and a system of rank. The military method of establishing constabularies in foreign countries to control a native population became a common strategy for state and city police in urban environments in the U.S. in what became known as the "war on crime." Military men were sometimes consulted and appointed to top police offices in these years, including General Francis V. Gerene in New York, Colonel James W. Everington in Los Angeles, and Major Metellus L.C. Funkhouser in Chicago. With his experience in Haiti heading the gendarmerie, Brigadier General Butler seemed well-qualified for the position in Philadelphia.[74]

Smedley's experience in Haiti did in fact prepare him for his work as Philadelphia's Director of Public Safety. As in Haiti, Butler faced widespread corruption in the city. With the adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution in 1920 that ushered in the Prohibition period came the creation of underground markets throughout the country, especially in urban areas. In Philadelphia, corruption was not limited to the elite class of politicians as it was in Haiti. A backlash against prohibition led to such growth in the black market that by 1924, corruption was seen as a problem throughout the rank-and-file police force, mid-level public officials, business owners, and others. Related problems spring up, including bootlegging, gambling, and prostitution,

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[74] Robert Fogelson, *Big-City Police* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 54-94. See also Gene E. Carte and and Elaine H. Carte, *Police Reform in the United States: The Era of August Vollmer, 1905-1932* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); For a comprehensive overview on the historiography of urban police studies see Eric H. Monkkonen, "History of Urban Police," Crime and Justice, Vol. 15, Modern Policing,1992, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 547-580.

and were intimately connected with the Republican political machine in Philadelphia and infiltrated the political and public landscape.[75]

The majority of Philadelphians were in favor of reversing this trend of rising crime and vice. The new mayor had been elected on a platform of crime reduction and reform, and by bringing in Butler – known to most at this time for his service in Haiti and as a two-time recipient of the Medal of Honor – he demonstrated to his constituents his commitment to his campaign promise. As Butler would come to realize within the next two years, his hiring was a political move far more than it was a genuine effort to reform the city. What the mayor failed to anticipate was the fervor that Butler would bring to this assignment. Butler descended upon Philadelphia like he had upon Haiti, approaching the job with a mentality similar to a soldier going into combat, at one point even declaring, "I am going to war," before launching a crackdown on corruption in the police department. On January 7th, his first day as Director of Public Safety, he gathered the entire police force into the opera house and delivered their new orders in a presentation that acted both as a warning and pep talk. Butler initiated forty-eight-hour raids on businesses involved in the vice racket, such as saloons, brothels, poolrooms, and speakeasies. Over 900 saloons were closed the first week (out of approximately 1200) and eight high-ranking police officers were suspended in a dramatic show of bravado

[75] Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years that Changed America* (Arcade Publishing: New York, 1996), 91-145.

heavily covered by the press. Butler arranged other "vice drives" and vowed to continue them until the city was clean.[76]

Though Butler paraded his early conquests, he quickly realized that such public demonstrations did not significantly affect the liquor and vice industries. In raids during his second week, Butler found that hundreds of spots that had supposedly been shut down were open once again, even in the middle of the day. Many members of the police force were in the pocket of bootleggers and businessmen, who according to Butler, thought the raids were "just a show." Although thousands were arrested, the courts produced few convictions, and those who were convicted paid a nominal fine and quickly returned to the streets. Most of the judges seemed to be either in league with the Republican political machine or simply did not support Butler's crusade. Cooperation for official channels quickly dried up after local political figures realized Butler was not content to act as a figurehead while the illegal industries thrived. Even maintaining policemen whom Butler could trust to be honest was a challenge.[77]

By the end of his stint in Philadelphia, political wrangling had taken its toll on Butler, wearing him out and giving him an experience that he would not soon forget. He had been accustomed to understanding the enemy in black-and-white terms, but the Pennsylvania city was filled with shades of grey. In April of 1925, he was quoted in the *New York Times* expressing frustration and a feeling of helplessness: "I have never seen a war that was as wearing and continually annoying as the fight against vice in this city has

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[76] *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 8, 1924; *Philadelphia Record*, January 9, 1924; "Butler Suspends 8 Heads of Police in Philadelphia," *New York Times*, January 11, 1924.

[77] Baldwin, "Smedley D. Butler and Prohibition Enforcement in Philadelphia," 364-368.

been…in fighting vice, your enemies are everywhere, and you never know where you are going to find them next."[78] One of the most troubling aspects for Butler in his work in Philadelphia was what he perceived as hypocrisy in the enforcement of laws. The laws that Butler pushed hard to enforce did not seem to apply to the wealthy class – they were off limits to him. How could he fight an enemy when its confidants and conspirators surrounded him with impunity? Butler knew the high-end hotels were home to speakeasies and free-flowing liquor, and finally, at the end of his tenure, proceeded to raid the top hotels in town: the Hotel Walton, Bellevue-Stratford, and the Ritz-Carlton. Police found numerous bottles of liquor and parties in full swing, but as only the mayor had the authority to shut down the hotels, nothing was done.[79] The immunity of the hotels seemed amplified, as Kendrick needed them for the city's upcoming sesquicentennial celebration. According to Butler, Mayor Kendrick was adamantly opposed to padlocking the establishments.[80] In other words, there was a world Butler was not allowed to penetrate, even if the most blatant violators of the laws Butler was supposed to enforce lurked within it.

When Smedley took the job in Philadelphia, he had done so without political motives. It did not appear that he considered the fact that his hiring may have been in part due to his father's political standing as a famed Pennsylvanian congressman. As such, when Butler's approach began to conflict with the mayor's goals, Smedley felt little

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[78] "Butler Tired of Vice War," *New York Times,* April 22, 1925.

[79] *Philadelphia Public Ledger,* May 1, 1924; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 9, 1924; For Butler's own account, see his series "Fighting Vice and Crime," especially, "Hotels Feel Wrath of Butler in New Drives," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1926.

[80] Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler, U.S.M.C., "Mayor Blocks Butler in Going after 'Big Places,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1926.

obligation to abide by plans other than his own.[81] He had no concrete plans to run for office, and could hardly predict that within six years he would enter the race for a Senate seat in Pennsylvania, campaigning in a place where he had alienated so many top political leaders.

Beyond a harsh introduction to big-city politics, Butler's exposure to the power of wealthy Philadelphians would leave a lasting impression of the stark contrast between police treatment of wealthy individuals and of those without means. Writing about the experience in the *Los Angeles Times*, he half-jokingly proposed a system of law enforcement to accommodate such a disparity:

> It might be well to make three classes and give the members of each class a distinguishing button. Those who have more than $1,000,000 should have a blue button. The possessor of such a button would be permitted to commit any crime on the calendar, including murder, and then, by showing his button, would be allowed to go free.[82]

Butler would carry this theme of social injustice into his speeches and writings in retirement, expounding on the power that companies and wealthy individuals wielded over the United States' war policy. He would draw a comparison between powerful companies pursuing their goals with no regard for the lives of the common soldier, and the political leaders in Philadelphia pursuing theirs, with little concern for the well-being of the common citizen.

Butler had some success during his two-year stint in Philadelphia – robberies and major crimes underwent drastic reductions. In the end, however, corruption and the

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[81] Baldwin, "Smedley D. Butler and Prohibition Enforcement in Philadelphia, 1924-1925," 353-361.

[82] Smedley D. Butler, "Quaker City Cools Off,'" *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1926.

liquor business remained steady. He was unable to institute lasting change in the battle against vice. Yet Butler's time in Philadelphia would mark the start of one aspect of his post-military career: writing. Early in his time in Philadelphia, Butler had met E. Z. Dimitman, a young reporter for the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* and the two had struck up a friendship.[83] Dimitman would soon become a collaborator in Butler's writings beginning with the 30-part series for Bell Newspaper Syndicate, Inc., "Smashing Crime and Vice."[84] The partnership between Dimitman and Butler would last through much of Butler's retirement. Without Dimitman, it is unlikely Butler would have capitalized on his fame in the late 1920s and early 1930s to become a prolific writer and public speaker. By 1926, Dimitman was so dedicated to working with Butler that he would journey with Butler and his family to Butler's next military assignment in San Diego.[85]

## SAN DIEGO

Butler's first assignment when he returned from his two-year leave of absence from the military was to assume the command of the Marine base in San Diego. Butler and his family with Dimitman in tow, arrived in February of 1926 and would leave almost exactly one year later. Though the command was not intended to be such a short

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[83] E. Z. Dimitman worked as a reporter and editor for nearly fifty years, becoming a famed newspaperman by the mid-20th century. He was employed mostly for Philadelphia papers, but also for the *Chicago Sun* and the *Newark Star-Ledger*. Dimitman first became a reporter in 1918 and joined the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1924, where he became city editor and worked until 1943. He was at the *Inquirer* throughout the entirety of his relationship with Butler. See "E. Z. 'Dimmy' Dimitman, 89, Newspaperman Extraordinaire," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 16, 1987.

[84] The series appeared in *The Los Angeles Times* from April 7 to May 6, 1926; individual articles are citied in this chapter. The authorship is unclear, though due to the professional quality of the writing and Butler's lack of publishing experience at the time, Butler likely dictated his account to Dimitman, who revised it into a journalistic narrative.

[85] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 148; Strecker, *Smedley D. Butler, USMC*, 92.

stint, a controversial Marine Corps incident made the Butlers an unwelcome family in the local community, and tarnished Butler's reputation with anti-Prohibition groups.

A few weeks after his arrival, Smedley and Ethel attended a party hosted by Colonel Alexander Williams, the acting base commander prior to Butler's arrival. According to Butler, Colonel Williams pressed drinks upon him through the evening. Writing at the time, Butler relayed the story to his mother, "Of course we did not take any but the drinking continued, cocktails passed around six times to my knowledge. However the only person who drank them all was Williams himself and he got very full."[86] According to Butler, after he repeatedly refused drinks, he and Ethel left the party and returned to their hotel. Not long after, Williams arrived at Butler's hotel and created a loud, drunken disturbance. "I heard a commotion," recalled Butler, a few days after the incident, "and looking around saw Williams staggering around making a great show of himself."[87] The next business day, Butler reported the incident to the district navy commander, Admiral Ashley H. Robertson. The admiral supported Butler's decision to press charges as the first step in cleaning up a base that had degenerated into "a thriving headquarters for bootleggers."[88]

Throughout the incident and in recollecting it years later, Butler insisted he was not a crusader for Prohibition – that Williams was in clear violation of naval regulations dating back to 1872 that prohibited officers from public drunkenness. According to Butler, he was upholding the dignity of the Corps: "Since I had become a commanding

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[86] Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, March 14, 1926, Butler Papers.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 277.

officer, I had never failed to try by court martial any officer who publicly disgraced himself and the Marine Corps."[89] Robertson requested Williams be tried by court martial, and Smedley was the main witness. Williams was found guilty, dropped to a lower spot on the promotion list, and transferred to the recruiting headquarters in San Francisco. Six months later - in a dark turn of events – Williams committed suicide by driving his car off a dock and drowning in the ocean.[90]

The court martial of Colonel Williams caught national attention in the press, partially due to Butler's recent publicity in Philadelphia and the country deviating from supporting the prohibition law. If the incident itself was not embarrassing enough for Butler, the press was vicious, attacking his position as well as his character. Butler was on the wrong side of public opinion on the issue of prohibition, especially in a well-known "wet" border town such as San Diego. Writing in his memoir in 1931, Butler recalled the treatment he received: "Most of the newspapers presented me as a double-dyed, teeth-gnashing villain and Williams as a martyr in shining armor sacrificed on the fanatical altar of prohibition."[91] He was berated in the papers, recalling: "I was called a skunk, a tin soldier, a swivel chair four-flusher, a bigoted fanatic, a half-baked fool, an ignorant blackguard, an egotistical and fanatical balloon-and just about all the names that aren't in the dictionary."[92] The names did not bother Butler, but his family was also jeered and harassed anytime they appeared in public. "I didn't care what San Diego

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[89] Ibid., 279.

[90] *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 1-2, 1926; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 168.

[91] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 276.

[92] Ibid., 285.

thought of me, but it was a different matter to have my wife and children live in a hostile atmosphere in which they were ridiculed and annoyed."[93] By early 1927, Smedley accepted a mission to China and his family returned to Pennsylvania. Even then though, the reputation as a staunch prohibition advocate followed him. None other than Will Rogers jested about Smedley's new assignment: "Smedley Butler arrived in China. The war will continue but the parties will stop."[94]

Through traumatic at the time, by 1931, Butler expressed few regrets about his time in San Diego. In his memoir, he used the Williams incident – and Prohibition – to hazard a non-unflattering generalization about his own character:

> My friends are always cautioning me to adopt a safe middle course that conciliates people. But I'd rather take a definite stand on a principle or issue which I am convinced is right, even if bricks are thrown at me. I prefer it to sitting on the fence and receiving empty ovations. Popularity is not worth the sacrifice it sometimes exacts. I try to be a fighter, not a politician.[95]

Butler either failed to grasp an alternative approach besides arguing an issue head-on, or he simply found the direct and uncompromising method preferable. While not dwelling on such stumbles in his career certainly helped propel his professional life forward, his desire to continue his confrontational ways off the battlefield would prove troublesome in retirement.

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[93] Ibid.

[94] "Will Rogers Remarks," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1927. Rogers, one of the most famed movie star and humorists of the era, first began his nationally syndicated columns in 1922, though had contributed to publications years prior. His daily "Will Rogers Remarks" column – in which Rogers would crack wise on a subject in the news or his personal life – would first run in the *Los Angeles Times* in November of 1926 and continued until his death in August of 1935. This appears to be his first comment on Smedley Butler, though he would make many more in the coming years when Butler would appear off and on in national news.

[95] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 286.

## BACK TO CHINA

Before he retired, Butler would be given one last military assignment overseas, in China. He sailed from San Diego on February 27, 1927, returning to China for the first time since his service during the Boxer Rebellion.[96] And once again he landed in the middle of a brewing international conflict. The year 1926 marked the start of an uprising in China known as the Northern Expedition. Led by military leader Chiang Kai-shek, forces sought to overturn the power of local warlords and unify China under the Kuomintang banner. Chiang's troops marched north, defeating warlord armies and often expunging communists and foreigners.[97]

Just before Butler arrived in China, the Kuomintang had raided British, Japanese, French, Italian, and American consulates in Nanking. American forces joined with Japanese and British troops to protect their nationals in China, especially those with substantial property interests, such as Standard Oil. Butler was placed in command of the mission with nearly 5,000 marines at his disposal, a number that made up around half of all foreign troops in Northern China.[98] It was a diplomatic mission, though Commandant Lejeune allowed Butler the freedom to use the marines as he saw fit. Butler recalled in his memoirs how important it was that the mission be nonviolent: "The Marines were sent to protect American citizens and their property. If we could not have maintained

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[96] "Butler of the Marines Goes to War," *New York Times*, March 13, 1927.

[97] For the American military intervention in the "The Nanking Incident," see Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 224-228; also Dennis Noble, *The Eagle and the Dragon: The United States Military in China, 1901-1937* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 23-28.

[98] Marc Gallicchio, "U.S. Military Involvement in China," from John Whiteclay Chambers, II, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 116.

friendly relations with the Chinese and have accomplished our purpose without fighting, the expedition would have been a failure."[99]

Prior to his arrival in Shanghai in late March of 1927, a number of riots broke out. Marines in the area patrolled the city and, with British and Italian troops, fought off Chiang sympathizers who sought to penetrate protected areas. Butler and his 4th Marine regiment arrived on March 25, and he assumed command of all the marines in China.[100] Though the goal of the trip was to control a tense situation through peaceful measures, significant resources were dedicated to protecting the interests of American corporations. Corporations held significant financial investments and property in China, and some of these – especially oil companies – played a pivotal role during the uprising. During the Nanking Incident, the American consul and other distinguished Americans sought shelter in the home of the head of Socony Oil in the city. Butler and other American soldiers arrived at the Standard Oil Compound dock near Shanghai, and when they moved to Tientsin, Butler utilized an area near the Standard Oil Compound at Hsin Ho to establish an aviation field, the company allowing the Marine Corps the use of the building to store equipment and house men.[101] Though their mission was to protect lives, with soldiers

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[99] Thomas, 288.

[100] Hallett Abend, *My Life in China*, *1926-1941* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), 66-72. Abend was the main correspondent in China for the *New York Times* during this period. His memoir of his experiences in the country is well-researched blend of facts and personal tales. He came into contact with Butler on a few occasions, and seemed both impressed and amused by Smedley, describing him as a "profane, quick-thinking, tough-talking teetotaler, and his officers and men felt that he knew his job thoroughly."

[101] Venzon, *Smedley Darlington Butler*, 268; Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler, June 14, 1927, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to John A. Lejeune, Tientsin, China, July 16, 1927, Butler Papers. Butler used the Standard Oil base to launch regular flights between Hsin Ho and Tientsin for communication and transportation.

stationed on Standard Oil's property, the lines between public and private interest began to blur.

The blurring of these lines would continue in the summer of 1927 after Butler moved the bulk of his forces from Shanghai to Tientsin. In December, an enormous fire erupted at the Standard Oil Installation in Tientsin, burning warehouses filled with gasoline, oil along with kerosene and candle grease that were, according to Butler, the main supply for the military. Assistance was requested and Butler arrived with over a thousand soldiers. Within a day, they had the blaze under control and in two days, the fire was completely extinguished after considerable destruction of Marine Corps tools and clothes.[102] Alexander Vandegrift, then a major serving under Butler, recalled how difficult the work had been: "After working through the freezing night we brought the fierce blaze under control late on Christmas Day, a signal victory which we celebrated by falling into our bunks, filthy clothes and all."[103] Vandegrift also pointed out that the oilmen and marines got along marvelously, to their financial gain: "The experience made us particularly close friends with the Standard Oil representatives, who donated $10,000 toward furnishing a new recreation hall for the troops besides supplying a new uniform to each officer and man who had fought the fire." According to Butler, the fire had cost Standard Oil a million dollars, yet the company assured Butler that the efforts of the

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[102] Smedley Butler to John A. Lejeune, December 27, 1927, Butler Papers.

[103] General A. A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A. A. Vandegrift* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964), 74. Vandegrift would have a prolific career in the Marine Corps. During World War II he commanded the 1st Marine Division in the Battle of Guadalcanal, and was awarded the Medal of Honor for leading a defense of the Solomon Islands. He would become the first marine to achieve the rank of four-star general while on active duty, and serve as Commandant from 1944 to 1946. See Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 365-373 and also Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*.

marines had "saved them four millions more." Other estimates had the fire destroying some $25 million in property and equipment. Though the cause of the fire was unclear, a detail of marines was assigned to the Standard Oil plant to prevent potential sabotage and future fires.[104]

Working closely with Standard Oil to protect its property would reinforce what Butler had learned in many years of service in Latin America and the Caribbean: the United States would send marines to intervene in the matters of other countries if there were private U.S. financial interests at stake. The closest he came to expressing such a concern at the time were in speeches to his troops. David Shoup, who served in China under Butler, wrote that during one of Butler, hinted at the economic inspiration behind the mission: "Very interesting was his explanation of the type of Americans in China who are doing all the growling and are paying no taxes in the U.S. and are receiving $3500 worth of protection per person."[105] During his time in China, Smedley maintained a steady correspondence with his father, Thomas Butler, conveying his own apprehension about the size of the forces, as a concentrated Chinese force would quickly defeat the marines in China. In one letter, Smedley fretted that the Marine Corps "better take us all

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[104] Vandegrift and Asprey, *Once a Marine*, 74; Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye,* 296; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 192.

[105] David M. Shoup, *The Marines in China, 1927-1928,* (Hamdon, CT: Archon Books, 1987), 110. Shoup was awarded the Medal of Honor for leading troops in the Battle of Tarawa during World War II and would serve as commandant of the Marine Corps from 1960-1963. Interestingly, after retiring from the Corps in 1963, his post-military career would follow a similar trajectory as Butler's. In a 1965 speech, Shoup railed against the Vietnam War: "I don't think the whole of Southeast Asia, as related to the present and future safety and freedom of the people of this country, is worth the life or limb of a single American [and] I believe that if we had and would keep our dirty bloody dollar crooked fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed exploited people, they will arrive at a solution of their own." In 1966, Shoup joined the Vietnam War protest movement, writing and speaking out against the war until American troops withdrew in 1973. See Howard Jablon, *David M. Shoup, A Warrior against War*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); quotation from 101.

out or leave us strength enough to prevent unnecessary bloodshed." He made similar intimations when he advised the commandant that missions such as the one in China could damage the reputation of the Marine Corps, as they were usually accomplished very little yet endangered American lives.[106]

A few years later, Butler would make reference to the experience – and especially Standard Oil's role in it – and continue to do so throughout his retirement and public speaking years. As late at 1938, Butler brought up the incident, speaking candidly about the purpose of the mission to a congressional committee: "We were up there guarding the Standard Oil property with 4,000 marines to do it, and lived in the Standard Oil property."[107] In the same testimony, Butler offered an alternative way to protect business interests that were threatened abroad, one the did not risk marines' lives and waste taxpayer money: "If the Standard Oil had been required to insure its barges we would not need to have a gunboat there….Let them insure their property and be required to pay a premium on it, and the taxpayers would be relieved of $60,000,000 to support the fleet out there."[108]

Without his second tour of duty in China, it is unclear whether Butler would have adopted such a clear and strident anti-war-for-profit stance as he did once he retired. While his experiences as a young marine in Latin America and the Caribbean had

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[106] Smedley Butler to Thomas S. Butler, February 7, 1928; Smedley Butler to John A. Lejeune, January 31, 1928, Butler Papers.

[107] "Statement of Major General Smedley D. Butler, United States Marine Corps (Retired)," *Hearings, Naval Expansion Program*, U.S. Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, 75 Congress, 3rd Session, April 8, 1938, 145-146. Anticipating a war in Europe, the committee sought recommendations of current and former military men as to the level of preparedness necessary for the defense of the United States,

[108] Ibid.

exposed him to instances of corruption and war profiteering, it was during his final tour in China that Butler seemed to connect some of the dots, recognizing an overarching theme he would return to time and again in his post-military career.

## CONCLUSION

Butler's years transitioning from combat soldier to administrator gave him valuable experiences that would prepare him for retirement and inform his anti-war profiteering philosophy. From his time as head of the gendarmerie in Haiti, running the camp at Brest, and overseeing the development of Quantico, Butler garnered the professional and organizational skills that would allow him to maintain a prolific schedule of writing and speaking until the time of his death. His direct exposure to the day-to-day costs of military projects in Haiti, Brest, and Quantico would give concreteness to his arguments against war profiteering. Although Philadelphia and San Diego could be seen as bumps in an otherwise highly successful career, those misadventures heightened his awareness of his public persona, and he took early steps to build and strengthen his reputation. And Butler's final experience in China – once again, assigned to protect the financial interests of a large corporation – cemented what appeared to him to be a pattern, learned over so many years of military service: no matter what battle cry used by politicians to rally the masses, wars were fought to ensure the profits of a privileged few.

Chapter Three will explore the final years of Butler's service in the Marine Corps. But instead of concentrating on his military duties as I have in the past two chapters, I will examine a series of personal and professional setbacks that altered his career

trajectory. It was these conflicts that propelled Butler into the public speaking world instead of retiring in peace and solitude. After the Marines, Butler decided to leverage many of the experiences as a combat soldier as well as a military administrator to rally a new generation against war profiteering.

## Chapter 3: Transitions
## 1928 – 1931

*"Poor old Smedley – he just seems to have a mania for getting in bad in peace times. But you let a war start and there don't ever seem to be any kick about what he does."*

-Will Rogers on Smedley Butler[1]

The three-year span from 1928 to 1931 was a turbulent time for Smedley Butler, beginning with his father's unexpected death in 1928, which devastated Butler and his family. Returning to the command at the Quantico Marine Corps Base, Butler took on public speaking engagements and began writing more regularly. He contemplated a memoir and made plans for retirement. But another death would briefly alter his trajectory. In July of 1930, then-Marine Corps Commandant Wendell Neville died after suffering a stroke, and Butler altered course; retirement could wait if there was an opportunity for him to attain the highest rank in the Corps. He made a strong push for the job, but a lower-ranked officer who had attended the Naval Academy was chosen over him. Butler openly expressed his bitterness toward naval commanders, heightening the tension between himself and the Navy brass, especially Secretary of Navy Charles Francis Adams. In early 1931, the rift grew when Butler was court-martialed by Adams and placed under house arrest for a speech deemed to be insulting to Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini. Butler was quickly cleared of the charges, but not before "The Mussolini Incident" became front-page news, propelling the 49-year-old soldier back into the national spotlight.[2] Armed with popular support, Butler retired from the Marines with new

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[1] "Will Rogers Remarks," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1931.

[2] The Mussolini Incident drew international attention for a two-week period, but was an embarrassment for the State Department which made concerted efforts to minimize press coverage after the event. Today it is largely omitted in major studies of the era, but those historians who have examined it have indicated that the case against Butler was wrapped up quickly in response to pressure put on the Hoover administration by a wide swath of the American public as indicated by a majority of newspapers which rushed to Butler's defense. See John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 34-37; also David F.

political aspirations and an eye toward a profitable life as writer and orator on the national speaking circuit.

No academic study of Butler to date has traced the impact of the combination of these events on Butler's post-military career. Anne Venzon analyzed the Mussolini Incident through Butler's letters, but mentioned the death of Butler's father only briefly, and omitted the importance of both of these events on Butler's post-military career.[3] In *Maverick Marine*, Schmidt touched on Butler's lingering bitterness towards his superiors, but not on the impact of those feelings on Butler's thinking. He merely stated that during retirement Smedley would occasionally make jabs at the Corps, but that Butler "mainly avoided Marine Corps politics, and as a public figure dwelt upon larger issues of crime, gangsterism, imperialism, war, and peace."[4] This chapter will demonstrate that the series of events in Butler's life between 1928 and 1931 were the key components that transformed Smedley from a successful military figure with hints of an anti-imperialist streak into a fiery crusader against war profiteers in his retirement years.

## TRAGEDY STRIKES

On April 22, 1928, Thomas Butler, at age 72, suffered a heart attack in his Washington office. The congressman remained ill in a Washington hotel for weeks before passing away on

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Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 113-116.

[3] Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed., *General Smedley Darlington Butler: The Letters of a Leatherneck, 1898-1931* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 295-312. Venzon's collection and analysis of Butler's letters is primarily concerned with his military years, especially his time in combat.

[4] Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 213. Schmidt does not include veterans' issues in this list, even though Butler spoke as often on the subject for the payment of the bonus and other veterans' issues as he did about the above issues during retirement.

May 26. The funeral in Westchester, Pennsylvania, was impressive. The city officially suspended business for the day, and in Washington, the House of Representatives went on recess in observance of Thomas Butler's death. His thirty-one-year tenure made Thomas Butler the longest-serving member of the House of Representatives, and as one paper reported, "one of its most picturesque members." The *Washington Post* wrote that Thomas Butler's death was a heavy blow to the power of the Naval Affairs Committee, which he chaired, and was "as great a loss to the Nation as to his family, his friends and the House of Representatives." Attending the funeral services were a wide range of leaders, including General Lejeune, American Legion members, Pennsylvania National Guardsmen, and seventy-eight Congressmen including all of the members of the Naval Affairs Committee, an outpouring that demonstrated the extensive political reach of a man reverently nicknamed "Father of the House."[5]

Brigadier General Smedley Butler was stationed in China in command of the Marine Corps expeditionary force during his father's illness and his death, able only to send a wreath of oak leaves and lilies sporting the ribbons of his Third Marine Corps Brigade for the funeral. His father's death was a heavy blow to the Butler family, and especially to Smedley. Part of his sorrow was due to the fact that he had been away during his father's final weeks. Smedley's brothers Sam and Horace had returned to Pennsylvania from the oil fields in Texas in time to be with their father, but Smedley could not have made the trip. Historian Hans Schmidt emphasized the agony that consumed Smedley while in China: "Personally, this was a big shock for Smedley, and he was greatly upset at not being home during the critical time." An officer

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[5] "Chairman Butler Seriously Ill," *New York Times*, May 3, 1928; "T. S. Butler Dies in Capital Hotel," *New York Times*, May 27, 1928; "Taken By Death: Butler, 32 Years in House, Dies of Heart Attack," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* May 27, 1928; "Coolidge Condolence Goes to Mrs. Butler," *New York Times*, May 29, 1928; Quotations from "Veteran House Member Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1928, "Thomas S. Butler," *The Washington Post*, May 29, 1928, and "Notables at Funeral of Thomas S. Butler," *New York Times*, May 30, 1928, respectively.

serving with Butler overseas at the time described his condition to Commandant Lejeune: "Smedley will feel it greatly because there seemed to be a very close bond between him and his father." Butler was so distraught that he even contemplated staying in China indefinitely.[6]

Within six months, however, Butler reconsidered residence in China and returned to the United States. On January 8th, 1929, he was detached from his Third Brigade and accepted orders to take the "first available transportation to the West Coast of the US," proceeding from there to Washington D.C. to report to the General Commandant. He arrived in San Francisco in February, and promptly went on vacation with his family. They traveled to Los Angeles, then Texas, eventually landing in his hometown of West Chester, Pennsylvania at the end of February.[7]

Back home, Butler soon discovered that his popularity remained strong in Pennsylvania, and rumors circulated that Butler might run for his father's seat in the House.[8] Organizations began requesting Butler's presence at events even before he had arrived at his mother's house in West Chester. Butler turned down most requests in February and March from local

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[6] "Notables at Funeral of Thomas S. Butler," *New York Times*, May 30, 1928; Quotations from Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 201, and Colonel Henry C. Davis to Major General John A. Lejeune, June 5, 1928, Butler Papers; In November of 1928, Butler wrote to his mother that he saw little value in returning to the United States. One motivation for Butler to remain in China was lingering ill-feelings towards the press during the Williams affair in San Diego. As he wrote to his mother: "For some reason they [the Chinese people] trust me and it is some great satisfaction to find some people who do, for thee knows full well that Americans do not regard me in any light except that of a fool—so it might be that we will settle here in China where the people will at least tolerate us. And after all these poor folk are far more deserving of our efforts than Americans who, as a race, are plain hypocrites." See Smedley Butler to Maud D. Butler, November 25, 1928, Butler Papers.

[7] The Commanding General to Brigadier General S.D. Butler, "Orders; change of station," January 8, 1929, Butler Papers. He would then be assigned to command the Marine Corps Base at Quantico; Smedley Butler to Thomas Richard Butler, February 18, 1929, Butler Papers.

[8] *Army and Navy Journal*, 65:40, July 2, 1928. The rumors would resurface in early 1931 after Butler announced he would retire in the fall that year. He would prove the rumors partially true by running for office in 1932, but instead of seeking his father's seat in the House, he attempted to win the nomination for Senate, and was soundly defeated. The election and the impact on Butler's post-military career will be addressed in Chapter 4.

organizations including the Ardmore Rotary Club, Foreign Policy Association, Kiwanis Club, and others, claiming that he was still on vacation. He wrote to one friend that he was "simply spending the time at home with my mother and resting after two years in China," and to another that he was "not making any more speeches nor attending any official functions." The vacation, however, did not prevent him from giving an address at Swarthmore College, which his son Tom Dick attended. That speech, among others given around the same time, would provide a testing ground, as he searched for potential career options while contemplating retirement.[9]

On March 5th, 1929, Commandant John A. Lejeune allowed his eight-year stint as head of the Corps to expire. Major General Wendell Neville, the highest-ranking marine at the time, was named his successor. Butler was reassigned as commander of the Marine Base at Quantico in April, returning to familiar territory on the Virginia coast. Back at Quantico, Butler resumed infrastructure projects and continued to champion athletics, but unlike his service in the early 1920s, Butler did not stage Civil War reenactments nor engage in any other large-scale public relations stunts on behalf of the Corps. He seemed to be content with residing at Quantico for the next few years, moving up to the rank of major general, and retire at the higher pay grade. What he would do for an occupation after retirement, considering he would only be in his early fifties, remained in question.[10]

## TESTING THE WATERS

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[9] Quotations from Smedley Butler to Millard P. Burlingame, March 6, 1929, Smedley Butler to Gene Baldwin, March 11, 1929, and Frank Aydelotte to Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler, March 13, 1929, Butler Papers; For more on Butler's public speaking career, see Chapter 5.

[10] "Lejeune to Retire as Head of Marines," *New York Times*, February 7, 1929; "Neville Named Marines' Chief," *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1929; "Gen. Butler Named as Quantico Chief," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1929.

Through much of 1929 and 1930, Butler entertained a number of career options, from private sector jobs to public office. At first he attempted a writing career, but quickly found it filled with challenges. His misgivings about becoming a writer led him to public speaking. This decision-making period in Butler's life is briefly covered by Hans Schmidt, who remarked that Butler sought extra income from writing and public speaking. Largely absent from Schmidt's study is the way Butler developed the confidence and skill to explore these career paths. He only devoted a paragraph to Butler's relationship with Arthur J. Burks,[11] who, as it will be shown, was an important figure in both Butler's brief foray into professional writing, as well as his decision to abandon writing as a career and take up public speaking instead.[12]

In the years leading up to his retirement, Butler needed money. He and his wife were looking for – and would eventually purchase – a pricey home in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania and his two sons were in college – Thomas S. Butler at Swarthmore and Smedley Butler, Jr., at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.[13] Butler felt his military salary at Quantico (his annual pay was around $5,100) was insufficient to support his family, and so began to devote time to what Schmidt has referred to as "cashing in on sidelines open to him as a public figure of

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[11] Burks was a prolific writer of pulp fiction, writing thirteen books from 1925 to just before his death in 1974 and hundreds, if not thousands, of short stories for pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*, *Mystery Tales*, and many others. According to one biographer, Burkes wrote "tens of millions of words for the pulps," and another (Jones) referred to him as "a million-word-a-year pulp producer in the thirties," having at one point, having eleven different stories featured on the cover of different magazines in one month. Burks wrote in many genres, including science fiction, horror, mystery, western, and adventure. He began writing in 1920 while a lieutenant in the Marine Corps, and had published short stories and a book before Smedley recruited him to co-author the pulp-adventure *Walter Garvin in Mexico* in 1928. He left the service in 1928 to write full-time. See Stefan Dziemianowicz, "Arthur J. Burks*," St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers* (Detroit: St. James Press, 1998), 109-110; Robert Kenneth Jones, *The Shudder Pulps: A History of the Weird Menace Magazines of the 1930s* (West Linn, OR: FAX Collector's Editions, Inc., 1975) 83-95.

[12] For Schmidt's coverage of this period see Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 202-204.

[13] His sons' attendance at such exceptional institutions was in stark contrast to the leatherneck route their father had taken, yet it fit within the family tradition as Smedley's father and his brothers had all attended college.

some repute in military and police affairs." Having worked with E.Z. Dimitman to publish the 30-part series on his stint in Philadelphia ("Smashing Crime and Vice") and with Burks on the pulp-adventure story *Walter Garvin in Mexico*, Butler was confident that he could exact some profit from retelling the stories of his life. Upon his return from China in January of 1929, Butler had resumed a correspondence with his co-author Burks to explore this project and other possibilities, including a memoir of his military adventures.[14]

Burks, a recently retired Marine Corps lieutenant who split his time between Los Angeles and New York, had earned more than $1,000 a month on various writing projects in 1928. He wrote to Butler that he was planning to "do much better in 1929." Burks's success must have been enticing to Smedley, as he was seeking ways to supplement his income. In a letter to Burks, Smedley stressed his financial motivation, indicating that "with the family growing up, and heavier school bills coming along, I have need for every cent of money possible."[15]

It took Butler and Ethel a few weeks to resettle at Quantico, but by the beginning of May, he finally had the time to seriously consider Burks' offer of writing collaboration. In one letter, Butler boasted of his productivity: "Got up this morning and dictated about 4,000 words in story form and will send them to you as soon as they are dressed up." By the end of the month, Butler had compiled at least 35,000 words, focusing on his early career in China and the Philippines. But Smedley struggled to produce the amount of copy that Burks requested. The act of writing, Butler discovered, proved difficult. One of the problems was finding the time to write amid a

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[14] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 202; Figures on Marine Corps pay grades from Bernard C. Nalty, Truman R. Strobridge, Edwin T. Turnbladh, and Rowland P. Gill, *United States Marine Corps Ranks and Grades*, 1775-1969 (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1970), 70.

[15] Arthur J. Burks to Smedley Butler, January 6, 1929, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks, March 16, Butler Papers.

busy schedule, as Smedley was still in charge of Quantico. He explained to Burks: "I get up every morning at five thirty and dictate this in order not to interfere with my regular work, so you see it is pretty hard."[16]

Another challenge was Smedley's lack of contacts in the publishing world. He found it difficult to trust individuals in the publishing industry due to multiple experiences of broken promises and failed deals. In a letter to Burks, Butler directly addressed his concern: "You know what our experiences with publishers have been…I don't trust these birds as far as I can see them."[17] In a subsequent letter, Butler went into greater detail about how his low opinion of publishers had developed:

> I have had several experiences along these lines. I spent four months at one time transcribing and rewriting my Nicaraguan letters at the earnest, personal solicitation of the editor of the Century Publishing Company, who assured me, positively, that they would be saleable. This bird kept the manuscript for four months and I sat around in a Fool's Paradise expecting some word from him…before finally receiving the usual flub-dub.[18]

Due to his distrust of publishers, Butler limited himself to a literary circle composed chiefly of Burks, Dimitman, and a few others. Dimitman, who had traveled with the family to San Diego in 1926 to help Butler on his syndicated newspaper series, was now a reporter at the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, and freely dispensed advice to Butler. But for writing opportunities and potential book sales, Butler seemed to favor Burks, the marine who had made a post-military career out of freelance writing.

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[16] Smedley Butler to Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks, May 3 and May 22, 1929, Butler Papers.

[17] Ibid., May 16, 1929.

[18] Ibid., June 13, 1929.

After Butler was promoted in rank and received a 33% boost in pay in July of that year, his need for extra money would decrease.[19] But he expressed his wish to be reimbursed for the time he had spent writing at Burks' urging, explaining to Burks in August of 1929: "I am not as desperate as I was for 'education money', nevertheless, I would like to get something for the six weeks work on this manuscript." Nevertheless, the desire to continue writing in hopes for a large payday from his memoirs had vanished. Butler was not accustomed to repeated rejection, and with no special connections to further his writing career – as he had enjoyed in the military arena – Butler seemed to place the idea on the back burner. Butler would never completely abandon the idea of profiting through writing – crafting a memoir and short pieces through the 1930s – but by late 1929, he had turned his attention to public speaking.[20]

## PROMOTIONS AND MISSTEPS

With the death of Marine Corps Major General Eli Cole, Butler was promoted to the rank of Major General on July 5th, 1929. At the age of 47, he became the youngest Major General ever commissioned in the Marines, and the youngest in the armed forces in his era. *Time* magazine summarized his career highlights in a brief paragraph:

> Since 1900, General Butler has fought in nine countries, won many medals. Grizzled Marine campaigners recite many a yarn of his personal bravery. Philadelphia politicians recall with horror the year (1924-25) when, as Director of Public Safety, he endeavored to "mop up" his home town.[21]

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[19] The average pay grade increase between Brigadier General and Major General was from $5,100 a year to approximately $6,800. See Nalty, Strobridge, Turnbladh, and Gill, *United States Marine Corps Ranks and Grades*, 70.

[20] Smedley Butler to Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks, August 22, 1929, Butler Papers; For more on Butler's public speaking career, see Chapter 5.

[21] "Youngest Major-General," *Time*, Volume 14, Issue 4 (July 22, 1929).

This brief summary demonstrates Butler's renown, but the mention of his unpopular stint in Philadelphia illustrated how the Prohibition issue was very much on the minds of journalists and the American public. Though Butler did not consider that issue to be his main crusade, it would resurface at important moments, especially when Butler ran for Congress in Pennsylvania a few years later.

As indicated, Butler had begun speaking and writing for pay while at Quantico. At that time, the substances of his speeches was often culled from his old military stories. In December of 1929, one of these speeches would set off a chain of events that would throw his future in the military into question. And yet, Butler had not intended it that way: "The meeting in Pittsburgh is not a political one," Butler wrote the month before the engagement. Despite his intentions, on December 5th speaking in front of the Pittsburgh Builder's Exchange, Butler dropped what Schmidt called "his anti-imperialist bombshell." In the speech, Butler gave an account of how, in Honduras, he had been involved in rigging the elections of 1912, and a few years later in Haiti, how he had led marines to force the passage of a constitution favorable to American interest.[22] Though those two revelations were shocking enough, Butler's most controversial statements in his Pittsburgh speech concerned marines bullying the populace in Nicaragua to secure an election result favorable to U.S. interests:

> We Marines took charge of two elections in Nicaragua. The fellow we had in there nobody liked, 'but he was a useful fellow— to us…so we declared the opposition candidates bandits. Then 400 natives were found who would vote for the proper candidate. Notice was given of opening the polls five minutes beforehand. The 400 voters were assembled in a line and when they had voted…polls were closed.[23]

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[22] Smedley Butler to F. S. Woods, November 19, 1929. Butler Papers; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 204.

[23] "Again, Butler," *Time Magazine,* December 23, 1929, Vol. 14, Issue 26.

The speech garnered a few local headlines including the attention-grabbing: "General Butler Bares Marine 'Gang' Vote Tactics."[24] However, no serious repercussions may have occurred had famed author and journalist Sinclair Lewis not been in Pittsburgh to read the morning papers. According to reports, Lewis, upset after reading about Butler's speech in the *Pittsburgh Press*, telegraphed Senator William Borah and "demanded a senatorial investigation."[25] Within days of the speech, Butler received a letter from Marine Corps Commandant Wendell Neville, inquiring into the reports. Butler denied a few of his quotes in the *Pittsburgh Press* article, and argued that the whole incident was the result of the press' desire to sell papers and Sinclair Lewis' appetite for free publicity:

> The attention of the Major General Commandant is respectfully invited to the apparent desire of this newspaper to bring about a row by practicing the age-old newspaper trick of publishing excerpts from speaker's remarks, without context. Attention of the Major General Commandant is also respectfully invited to the undoubted desire of one Lewis to get some inexpensive advertising.[26]

In Butler's mind, his speech had been fair: he had simply recounted the facts of his experience. His retelling of his experiences in the Banana Republics had been just as descriptive and frank during his two-day testimony in front of a congressional committee in 1922.[27] And many supporters felt that Butler had not been out of line, including the famous humorist Will

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[24] "General Butler Bares Marine 'Gang' Vote Tactics," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 6, 1929.

[25] "Nicaragua Rule is Described in Dinner Address," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 6, 1929; Robert K. Cochrane, Jr. to Smedley Butler, December 17, 1929, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to Commandant Wendell Neville, December 14, 1929, Butler Papers.

[26] Smedley Butler to Commandant Wendell Neville, December 14, 1929, Butler Papers.

[27] Testimony of Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler, *Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo. Hearings before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate, Sixty-Seventh Congress, First and Second Sessions, pursuant to Senate Resolution 112* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 511–542. The committee, formed in response to criticisms of Haitiain policy in the early 1920s, called Butler in to testify about the general conditions in Haiti, and the role he had played as head of the gendarmerie. In his testimony, Butler described aiding in the disbanding of the National Assembly of Haiti amongst many other actions that could be construed as anti-democratic and imperialistic.

Rogers who, when learning of Butler's reprimand, commented that these were "tough times in the country to express an opinion," and lamented that "Gen. Smedley Butler started doing a little reminiscing out loud about some of the old-time antics of the Marines in Nicaragua, and now he is to face a Senatorial firing squad."[28]

The Hoover administration may have had good reason to consider disciplinary action against Butler. Days before the controversial speech, martial law had been declared in Haiti after a small uprising against the American forces that remained in the country. The United States was in the process of sending around 500 marines to reinforce the already 700 or so occupying Haiti, and the State Department was already receiving criticisms in both the press and Congress.[29] Butler was aware of the tense situation in Haiti, yet he still regaled audiences with stories of questionable American acts in Latin America and the Caribbean. Disciplining Butler, then, likely appeared to be a logical course of action for the administration.

In mid-December, Butler was summoned to the office of Secretary of Navy Charles Francis Adams and given a verbal reprimand. Butler was embarrassed by the encounter, writing at the time: "I have been before the Secretary of the Navy and have received my 'spanking.'" A few years later, Butler recounted the exchange with Adams in his memoirs: "If I'm not behaving well it is because I'm not accustomed to reprimands, and you can't expect me to turn my cheek meekly for official slaps."[30] Because of his high rank and outstanding military service record, his close friendship with Marine Corps Commandant John Lejeune, and his own father's

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[28] "Will Rogers Remarks," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1929.

[29] "Rushing Marines to Haiti, Hoover to Tell Congress of Troubles There," *New York Times*, December 7, 1929.

[30] Smedley Butler to Robert K. Cochrane, Jr., December 23, 1929, Butler Papers; Lowell Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye: The Adventures of Smedley D. Butler* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), 300.

powerful position on the House Naval Affairs Committee, it is little wonder that Smedley was not "accustomed to reprimands" from the department heads in Washington. But now, with Lejeune retired and his father dead, the controversy over Smedley's Pittsburgh speech was the first indication that the powers in Washington were no longer on his side.

Butler also suspected that some of the animosity towards him may have been stirred up by potential future political rivals: "Their fear lest I get into the political game in Pennsylvania is so great that they seemed determined to drive the (Naval) Department into doing something to me."[31] It was a rational suspicion, but difficult to prove. It was unclear if Adams or anyone else was particularly targeting Butler, or if they were simply offended that he would make such potentially damaging comments on American foreign policy at such an inopportune time. Nonetheless, the verbal reprimand clued Butler's into the fact that he was not in the good graces of the military establishment and perhaps had far more enemies in Washington than he imagined.

## TRAGEDY AND DISAPPOINTMENT

On February 13, 1930, Smedley received another shock on the family front – his brothers, Sam and Horace, were in a car accident in Texas; Horace had been killed, and Sam badly injured.[32] Biographers - including Schmidt – make no mention of this incident, but the accident was certainly a tragic blow to Smedley and his family. Butler spent the next two weeks at home, and when he returned to Quantico, he moved his mother in with himself and Ethel (their

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[31] Smedley Butler to Robert K. Cochrane, Jr., December 23, 1929. Butler Papers.

[32] "Gen. Butler Kin Killed," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1930; Over a year later, Butler described the accident to an acquaintance: "Horace and Sam were driving along a road in Texas and, in an effort to save a child's life, they turned across the road and were struck by another automobile. Horace was killed and Sam badly hurt. That is the substance of the tragedy." Smedley Butler to Howard Matlack, June 2, 1931, Butler Papers.

sons were away in college), explaining to brother Sam: "I insisted with her staying with us for an indefinite period as I think it is best for her, and I certainly know it helps me." Smedley also described his own deep grief in the letter: "I am in good shape personally, but have a sort of blankness about my mental condition that is hard to get over. However, time will help it, I know."[33] Following so soon after his father's passing, the sudden death of a brother certainly must have added distress to the Butler household. And on the heels of the professional reprimand what may have seemed to be a stable life, in terms of both family and career likely seemed to be crumbling before Butler's eyes.

Soon after Horace's death, Smedley increased his correspondence with his brother Sam, who worked for Arab Gasoline Company in Eastland, Texas. Butler invested at least $1,000 into a new drilling project, and also used Sam's company to supply the fuel for an upcoming Marine air show. He also found time to become preoccupied with other diversions, especially cars – a passion for which appeared off and on through the 1920s.[34] He might have been content discussing automobiles and other hobbies had events in the summer not returned his attention to the Marine Corps politics.

If an informal reprimand, and the death of both his father and brother within a two-year time span were not enough to rattle Butler, on July 8th, 1930, Marine Corps Commandant

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[33] Smedley Butler to Samuel Butler, March 4, 1930, Butler Papers.

[34] Smedley Butler to Samuel Butler, March 5 and April 8, 1930, Butler Papers; Butler kept a correspondence with more than one executive in the automobile industry. His enthusiasm for new cars emerges in letters to Stutz Motor Company, such as on in May of 1930: "There is a rumor out that you are getting a new car out with a dual valve, eight cylinder engine, and, if you are, I want to look forward to getting one, trading in the one that I have…My car looks exactly like a new one and runs better, so will not think of trading it in unless I can get a bigger engine and something entirely new." See Smedley Butler to Herbert L. Clay, May 16, 1930, Butler Papers.

Wendell C. Neville died.[35] Butler had been especially close to Neville early in his career and fondly described their relationship in his memoir: "Nobody could be down-hearted when Neville was one of the company. In life's darkest moments, Neville found something amusing to say. In my later years with the Marines, Neville, John A. Lejeune and I formed an inseparable trio."[36] Within weeks of Neville's death, Butler delayed his plans to become a full-time public speaker, and put himself in contention for commandant.

From the start of the nomination process, it appeared that Brigadier General Ben Fuller would receive the commission. Butler speculated that much of this had to do with Fuller being a Naval Academy graduate, explaining his view of the situation to friend and future Commandant Thomas (Tommy) Holcomb:

> They have spent months attempting to poison the President's mind against me, giving as their reasons the following: first, I am not a not a Naval Academy graduate; second, I dislike the Navy; 3rd, not being a graduate of the Naval War College I could not, if I wanted to, cooperate with the Navy as I have not the education and do not understand their viewpoints with regard to the Marine Corps; 4th, they are trying to convince the President that I am, and have always been, a disloyal person.[37]

Though by this time he had spent over thirty years in the Marine Corps, Butler believed that charges of "disloyalty" could be raised against him due to his December speech in Pittsburgh. Writing to Robert Cochrane of the Pittsburgh Builders Exchange – where he had made the infamous speech – Butler first confessed the reasons behind his correspondence: "I am writing because I thought it might be interesting to you to know that this incident is more than likely to

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[35] Neville had been ill for over a month after suffering a stroke. He eventually died of "heart disease" at the age of 60. "Gen. Neville Succumbs," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1930; "Gen. Neville Dead," *New York Times*, July 9, 1930.

[36] Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 24.

[37] Smedley Butler to Thomas (Tommy) Holcomb, July 16, 1930, Butler Papers.

prevent my appointment to the head of the Marine Corps." He then elaborated that he was not disappointed with the Pittsburgh Builders Exchange, but rather with the military:

> It does seem too bad that 32 years of service should be thrown away on account of a rotten newspaper article, but that seems to be the way the land lies at the present time. I am assured on very best authority that it is the only argument which can be used against my appointment and that the State Department is determined that I shall not be made, and on that account only. My record is perfect with that one exception and I feel that it is manifestly unjust to charge me with disloyalty to the administration – and that is the charge being urged.[38]

In anticipation of the challenge, Butler rounded up support for his cause. According to a letter to Captain R.A. (Torchy) Robinson, Butler indicated that many influential leaders had come to his side: "Our best information indicates that 31 Senators have been to see the President in my behalf and over 100 members of the House have taken a hand – so you see they will know they have been in a fight before they get through."[39] One of the most glowing recommendations for Butler came from former Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels, who telegrammed President Herbert Hoover to urge Butler's appointment:

> Eight years of intimate personal and official relations with General Smedley Butler enabled me to test the stuff of which he is made – He has courage, integrity, loyalty and a great record as a soldier and man. He would bring distinction to the position of Major General Commandant of the Marine Corps. I am writing without his knowledge or suggestion from anyone.[40]

Despite all the support offered on Butler's behalf, it did not appear to be enough. Butler could sense that defeat was inevitable. Writing to Captain Robinson, Smedley sounded pessimistic:

> …the guess is that he [Hoover] is hoping the storm of support raised in my behalf will die down by that time and he can appoint General Fuller without any unusual comment. It is

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[38] Smedley Butler to Robert Cochrane, Jr., July 17, 1930, Butler Papers.

[39] Smedley Butler to Captain R. A. (Torchy) Robinson, July 29, 1930, Butler Papers.

[40] Josephus Daniels to Herbert Hoover, Telegram, July 11, 1930, Copy in Butler Papers.

> then the expectation that I will get mad and retire and General Russell can have his two stars as a reward for his State Department service.[41]

Indeed, on August 6th, 1930, President Hoover appointed Major General Fuller as Commandant of the Marine Corps on a recommendation from Secretary of Navy Adams. While Hoover's motivations were unclear, he was likely simply taking the recommendation of his Navy Secretary. Adams' choice seems to have been based on a personal preference for Fuller. It was improbable that it was been based on Fuller's military record, for his was much less impressive than those of several officers who outranked him.[42] Fuller was also not well-loved within the Corps itself, one military historian describing the him as, "a methodical but uninspiring officer." Furthermore, Adams and Butler had butted heads months earlier over the Pittsburgh speech and according to one scholar, Fuller had "strong Navy…support, which counted for more than all Butler's congressional and public backing."[43]

At the appointment of Fuller, Butler first reacted bitterly. Prior to his push to become commandant, Butler and his wife had begun making plans for retirement. Immediately following the fiasco, however, Butler seemed to change his mind: "I had always thought I would retire under these conditions, and Bunny and I had fully determined to do so until we learned that my stars were to be given to Russell as a reward for his service with the State Department."[44] He

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[41] Ibid.

[42] "New Army and Marine Corps Head," *New York Times*, August 6, 1930; Along with Butler, Fuller's was promoted over the higher ranked and more senior major general Logan Feland, and brigadier generals Harry Lee and John H. Russell. See "Brig-Gen. Fuller Promoted Marine Commandant President Jumps Seniors to Make Appointments," *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1930.

[43] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 329; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 207.

[44] Smedley Butler to Thomas (Tommy) Holcomb, August 12, 1930, Butler Papers. Butler felt that a deal had been reached between Adams, Fuller, and brigadier general John Russell, wherein Russell would be assigned command of Quantico upon Butler's retirement and would be next in line for commandant. Butler guessed correctly, as Russell would assume command at Quantico in December of 1931, two months after Butler retired, and would

stated in a letter to his brother that he would not relinquish his post nor do anything that might cause him to lose it:

> The Marine Corps will now be reduced to suit the Navy's ideas, but I have a permanent commission, confirmed by the Senate, and they simply cannot drive me out of it until I am ready to go. I can only lose it through the sentence of a General Court-Martial, and I will not give them an excuse to Court-Martial me.[45]

Butler was conscious of this danger, mentioning in more than one letter that a court-martial was the only way to oust someone at his level from the Corps.[46] His fear would prove prescient – he was officially court-martialed in February of the following year for another of his speeches – as if his political foes had simply been waiting for Butler to make a wrong move.

By September of 1930, Butler's mood had improved. Writing to Lejeune, he denied any lingering animosity over the incident and declared himself ready to move on. "I am not in the slightest degree bitter," he wrote, but he emphasized that he must leave the Marines as they were giving him nothing to do, "I simply cannot sit around and do nothing any longer, my health won't stand it."[47] Duty at Quantico seemed to drag,[48] and Butler felt his assignments were intentionally pointless. He described one such task to a friend:

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become Commandant of the Corps in 1934. See Alan Millett and Jack Shulimson, *Commandants of the Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 248-252.

[45] Smedley Butler to Samuel Butler, August 11, 1930, Butler Papers.

[46] Butler wrote at the time: "I am not going to allow these fellows to hand me any more rough stuff. Of course, I shall not say anything that will get me tried by court-martial, but have a definite little plan by which I can get square with these double-crossing Admirals." Smedley Butler to Brigadier General Cyrus S. Radford, October 16, 1930, Butler Papers. While it is unclear as to what Butler's plan comprised of, he certainly had terse parting words – in both speeches and writing – for the Naval high command.

[47] Smedley Butler to Major General John A. Lejeune, September 22, 1930, Butler Papers.

[48] There were regular duties for Butler, but innovation seemed to be at a standstill. During the first years of the Depression, the role of the Marine Corps was in debate. The Hoover administration viewed the Marine Corps primary function as "hemispheric defense" and missions of nonintervention, and reduced the number of enlisted men from 17,586 to 15,355. See Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 319-343.

> We are just about to commence the erection of four more barracks. We haven't the men to fill the barracks we already have, but, of course, it will add great dignity to this command to have more empty brick buildings…there are practically no men here – they all seem to be serving in the Navy Yards.[49]

Retirement seemed the best option. Butler and Ethel began to look to purchase a house in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where they hoped to retire comfortably. In September of 1930, one of Ethel's cousins died, another tragedy to befall the family. The number of personal losses was staggering to Butler and weighed heavily upon his emotional state and that of his family. Butler expressed despair in a letter to a friend: "This makes seven close relatives of ours who have died in the last ten months – in fact this is the worst year I have ever put in for sorrow and disappointments."[50] However, Butler was not one to wallow in depression; he was a man of action. He wrote a few days later to an associate in the State Department:

> …I have almost recovered from the disappointment and now don't give a damn, and since we have been unfortunate in the loss of several members of our family on both sides, Bunny and I are well fixed financially and intend to go into civil life and spend the rest of my useful days in blackguarding Admirals and members of the State department with two exceptions, you and Buzzy Hewes.[51]

The lingering bitterness expressed in the letter indicates that the disastrous year would not only be a cause for mourning, but also gave him fresh perspective, and the license to speak his mind.

The loss of so many relatives also had the unintended consequence of providing Smedley and Ethel a comfortable nest egg. They could now afford to retire. Butler confessed as much to Lejeune: "Due to the number of unfortunate tragedies we have had in our family in the last year,

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[49] Smedley Butler to E. J. Lafferty, September 12, 1930, Butler Papers.

[50] Smedley Butler to Captain R. A. "Torchy" Robinson, September 10, 1930, Butler Papers.

[51] Smedley Butler to Honorable F. L. "Freddie" Mayer, September 19, 1930, Butler Papers.

we are both well off financially and will not really have to work for a living."[52] The personal tragedies of 1930 then, had a dual effect on Butler, both emotionally draining him and unexpectedly providing for his family. Combined with the recent reprimand from the Navy Secretary and the disappointment of not being chosen as commandant, everything seemed to usher him closer to retirement. One last incident involving a story about Italian dictator Benito Mussolini would be the final nudge that would propel him definitively out of the Corps.

## THE MUSSOLINI INCIDENT

On January 19th, 1931, Butler gave a speech at the Philadelphia Contemporary Club entitled "How to Prevent War." In arguing that some dictators could be ruthless beyond reason, Butler related an anecdote told to him by an unnamed acquaintance. According to the story, Butler's friend was riding in a car in Italy with the Prime Minister of Italy, Benito Mussolini, when the car ran over a child and did not stop. When Butler's friend protested, Mussolini turned to him and asked, "What is one life in the affairs of a State?" Unbeknownst to Butler,[53] a reporter was in the audience at the private gathering and published Butler's words the next day in the *Philadelphia Record*, sparking a minor international incident.[54]

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[52] Smedley Butler to Major General John A. Lejeune, September 22, 1930, Butler Papers.

[53] Though Butler had made many speeches, some of them invited the press to attend, while others did not. In a statement to Secretary of Navy Charles Francis Adams, Butler insisted he was under the impression that he was speaking in front of a private meeting that night: "I was told by the President of the Contemporary Club before which I spoke on January 19, 1931, that I could speak my "mind freely" and from his remarks, taken in their entirety I understood…that my statements were to be confined to the limits of the four walls." See Major General Smedley D. Butler to The Secretary of Navy, February 8, 1931, Butler Papers.

[54] "Butler Accused Mussolini as Hit-Run Killer of Child," *Philadelphia Record*, January 20, 1931; Also see David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 113-116; John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 34-37; Ellery C. Stowell, "The General Smedley D. Butler Incident," *The American Journal of International Law*, Col. 25, No. 2 (April 1931), 321-324; and Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 209-212. According to Butler, he understood the For Butler's take on the incident, see Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 305-310.

From the time of Mussolini's election in 1922 until the Ethiopian War of 1935, the United States maintained amicable relations with fascist Italy. An economically prosperous Italy was viewed by the U.S. government as a key ally in the effort to stabilize Europe following the First World War. Historian David F. Schmitz has argued that the State Department was eager to support Mussolini and his government largely due to his stance against Communist Russia: "First and foremost, Fascism was seen as a check against the spread of Bolshevism."[55] And in the 1920s, Mussolini himself was perceived by many Americans as a moderate within the Fascist party, to the point where he was even championed by progressives such as Ida Tarbell, Charles Evans Hughes, Lincoln Steffens, and Herbert Hoover.[56] Ties between the U.S. and Italy grew through the decade, after a war-debt settlement in December of 1925 erased approximately 75% of Italy's obligation to American debtors, and J. P. Morgan Company lent the fascist government over one hundred million dollars.[57] As one scholar observed, "Italian-American relations were never more cordial than during the years of Herbert Hoover's presidency, 1929-1933."[58]

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[55] David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 60-84, quotation from 71.

[56] Ibid., 60.

[57] Douglas Forsyth, *The Crisis of Liberal Italy: Monetary and Financial Policy, 1914-1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 263-285; David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 144-181. Forsyth's thesis connected the political transformation in Italy with economic trends. Though it appears to be more correlation than causation, his work is a valuable historical study on the impact of American investment in the financial growth of Italy following World War I. And while Schmitz delved deeply into the economic relationship between the U.S. and fascist Italy, his account concentrated on the perception of this relationship in the American public and especially the press. Schmitz astutely observed, however, that the support of the American business community quelled criticisms that Mussolini's fascist regime was not economically sustainable, and extended the relationship between the U.S. and Italy in the 1920s and early 1930s.

[58] David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 112.

And so, when the Italian press criticized Butler's speech in Philadelphia, American officials took immediate notice. Mussolini issued a statement repudiating Butler's story and the Italian Naval attaché alerted Secretary of Navy Adams of the Italian government's concern. In response, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Stimson issued a formal apology to the Italian dictator and initiated steps to investigate Butler for misconduct.[59]

Stimson moved swiftly to quell the negative press against Italy and prevent damages to U.S. – Italian relations. According to one historian: "Stimson's quick apology [to Italy] and movement for severe discipline of Butler were the result of his desire to end the unfavorable publicity about Mussolini and to control public opinion about Fascist Italy."[60] The Italian government had been viewed favorably by a majority of American news publications through the 1920s. However, there were some members of the press who reported on the mass censorship of journalists in Italy – including some who went so far as to report on scandals involving Mussolini himself, infuriating the State Department.[61] Following Butler's speech, Stimson began to see stories about the repressive nature of Mussolini reemerge in the press, which – in light of Butler's speech – seemed to gain new credibility. To stop the flow of criticism, Stimson initiated a brief investigation of Butler and persuaded President Hoover to order Adams to begin court-martial proceedings against Butler on the grounds that he had slandered a foreign head of state while on active duty. According to Stimson, this course of action was supported by

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[59] "United States Apologizes to Mussolini; General Butler to be Court-Martialed for Slur on Italian Premier in Speech," *New York Times,* January 30, 1931.

[60] Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy*, 114.

[61] In one famous example, George Seldes of the *Chicago Tribune* was expulsed from Italy for reporting on the Mussolini government's involvement in the murder of an outspoken critic of the regime, Giocomo Mattioli. See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 44-46; Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy*, 79-80.

President Hoover, but opposed by Adams, who tried to prevent the court martial during a cabinet meeting on January 29, insisting that Butler had too much political influence. Though Adams was no friend of Butler's, his experience with the controversial appointment of Commandant Fuller the previous summer likely gave him pause, as he understood Butler's ability to raise public and political support. Stimson initiated court-martial proceedings over Adams' objections. Within a few weeks, this decision would ignite a fiasco that could have been avoided had Stimson heeded the Navy Secretary's advice.[62]

From Butler's perspective, the affair seemed to be another adversarial political move by Adams, with whom he had been in conflict since his speech at the Pittsburgh Builder's Exchange in December of 1929. On January 24th, 1931, Adams, investigating the incident under orders from Stimson, sent Butler a sharply worded letter, demanding to know if the article in the *Philadelphia Record* contained "a true account of your speech in fact or in substance," and if not, "you will please inform me exactly what you did say in your speech."[63] Butler confirmed that the reports of the anti-Mussolini speech were true except that he "did not use the term 'Hit (and) Run Killer of Child." He attributed the headline to the paper's desire "to attract attention." In the same letter, Butler pointed out that the entire brouhaha had arisen from the report of one paper, while others did not consider the remarks to be offensive or even newsworthy: "The *Philadelphia Record* has gone out of its way to hit me below the belt. No other Philadelphia newspaper, to my knowledge, considered my remarks of sufficient interest to even quote

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[62] Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy*, 114-115. Schmitz uses the journals and letters of Stimson to compile an account of the Hoover administration's handing of the Mussolini Incident, and especially Stimson's role in the affair.

[63] Charles Francis Adams to Smedley Butler, January 24, 1931, Butler Papers.

them."[64] His self-defense had little effect. On the morning of January 29th, Marine Corps Commandant Ben Fuller levied the charges against Butler: "Conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline," and "Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman." Butler secured Major Henry Leonard as his legal counsel, and was confined to the limits of Quantico pending trial by general court-martial.[65]

The day before Butler was formally charged, the story caught fire in the press. The incident was reminiscent of the 1925 court-martial of Army Colonel William E. Mitchell that had resulted in months of coverage and a sensational, public trial.[66] With its confluence of factors – an international drama that pitted a Marine Corps hero against a fascist dictator and a rare look inside a famed military institution through the court-martial of the highest-ranking officer since the Civil War[67] – the "Mussolini Incident" and Butler's impending court-martial promised enticing copy. Butler was front-page news in major newspapers across the U.S., and

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[64] Smedley Butler to The Secretary of Navy, January 27, 1931, Butler Papers.

[65] The Major General Commandant to Smedley Butler, January 29, 1931, Butler Papers; Major Henry Leonard, U.S.M.C. (retired) was a successful attorney in Washington and had served with Butler in the Boxer Rebellion. See Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 210; At the same time that Butler was retaining counsel, Italy attempted to resolve the situation by sending a note from the Italian Ambassador to Secretary State Mussolini reading, "Will you please communicate to the Federal Government that I consider closed the incident which for my part I have already forgotten." See "Butler 'Forgotten,' Mussolini Cables," January 31, 1931.

[66] Unlike Butler, Mitchell had repeatedly – and publicly – criticized the inefficiency of the Navy and War aviation departments while acting as Assistant Chief of the Army Air Service in early 1925. After receiving threat of a reprimand for his comments, Mitchell lashed back in the press, challenging the Coolidge administration for months until he was court-martialed in October of that year. Mitchell was convicted for "publishing assertions prejudicial to good order and military discipline," and received a five-year suspension from the Army that prompted his resignation. See Fred L. Borche III, "Lore of the Corps: The Trial by Court-Martial of Colonel William "Billy" Mitchell," *The Army Lawyer*, January 2012; "Mitchell Found Guilty by Army Court-Martial," *Washington Post*, December 18, 1925; "Butler 'Incident' Recalls Coughlin's," *New York Times*, January 30, 1931.

[67] Major General Fitz John Porter was court-martialed in November of 1862 for his role in the Second Battle of Bull Run. Though convicted, the verdict was reversed in 1886. Akin to Butler, the charges were likely politically motivated. See Otto Eisenshiml, *The Celebrated Case of Fitz-John Porter* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950) and James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 528-530, n. 29.

was propelled into the national spotlight during the two-week fiasco.[68] The majority of articles came to Butler's defense, and criticized the Hoover administration's handling of the situation. Articles sporting mocking titles such as "Railroading the General," "Our Comic Opera Court-Martial," and "Why Did He Do It?" ridiculed Adams and the State Department, and were especially critical of the government's apology to fascist Italy. Prominent military and civilian figures spoke out in Butler's defense, many – including Governor Pinchot and Governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt - offering to testify on his behalf. If that were not enough, Butler's supporters bombarded newspapers with letters to the editor, as readers from Hollywood to Mississippi voiced their support for someone who appeared to be a persecuted American hero.[69]

Butler personally received thousand of typed and hand-written letters, telegrams, and other correspondences from a wide range of people, from politicians to average citizens, each offering some form of emotional, financial, or professional support.[70] From the time the incident hit the press until a few days after its resolution, Butler received more letters per day from this

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[68] The front-page press coverage includes, but is not limited to: "Italy's Ambassador Protests Slap at Duce by Maj. Gen. Butler," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 27, 1931; "Gen. Butler Quizzed on Rap at Duce," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 1931; "Mussolini Denies Butler's Charges," *New York Times,* January 28, 1931; "Butler to Explain Talk on Mussolini," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1931; "Butler Arrested; Will Fight," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 30, 1931; "Text of the Formal Apology to Mussolini Given by Stimson to the Italian Ambassador," *New York Times*, January 30, 1931; "Six Admirals and Retired Major General to Hear Case," *Washington Post*, January 31, 1931; and many others.

[69] "Railroading the General," *Houston Press,* February 1, 1931; "Our Comic Opera Court-Martial," *Literary Digest,* February 28, 1931; Typical of the criticism was the sardonic – and anti-Italian comment: "it would be real sweet if Mussolini should send us an apology for Al Capone," from "Why Did He Do It?" *Detroit Free Press*, February 9, 1931; Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye*, 307.

[70] In late February, Butler told numerous correspondents he had some 2,000 letters to respond to, more than at any other time in his life. For example, see Smedley Butler to George Seltzer, February 14, 1931, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to John H. Farrell, February 24, 1931, Butler Papers. The defense of Butler is often combined with a virulent pro-American stance, and there are many strains of anti-Italian sentiment in a number of them.

broad, geographic and social spectrum of Americans than he had in his entire career.[71] Most of the letters referred to Butler's military service, such as the letter from an anonymous fan to a radio station in New York where Smedley had spoken: "Every mother and all loyal Americans and Italians both here and abroad should join in and sign the petition for the release of Gen. Smedley Butler which is the least that can be done to replace the hurt to one who has fought heroically for our benefit." More and more letters came, seemingly from every state in the union. An admirer from San Diego claimed that Butler still had many supporters in the town, despite the fallout after the Williams affair, and had faith that Butler could emerge from this new controversy as well: "We all hope you will meet these charges as you have met similar ones in the past – head on, and that you will come out with more prestige added to your good name." In Tampa, Florida, one backer of Butler gave his support and assured Butler that there were "at least ONE HUNDRED MILLION Americans in your favor." This estimate of support was an overstatement, as there were approximately 120 million residents of the United States at the time, but such glowing, supportive letters demonstrated to Butler that he was both popular, and perceived to be popular with the American people.[72]

With the thrust of public opinion against them, an eager Hoover administration sought to diffuse the national firestorm. Additional motivation behind the quick dismissal may have

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[71] See The Personal Papers of Major Smedley D. Butler (Butler Papers), Special Collections, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, VA, Alfred M. Grey Marine Corps Research Center. The span between January 28th and February 14th, 1931 is by far the most dense period in the collection. In most of his late military career and through his retirement years, Butler received between ten and fifty letters per week. During the Mussolini Incident, he received upwards of 100 letters or telegrams per day.

[72] Quotations from Anonymous to Dr. Charles Fama, January 31, 1931, Deane Plaister to Smedley Butler, January 31, 1931, and E. G. Hensley to Major General Smedley D. Butler, January 31, 1931, Butler Papers, repectively; For population estimates, see "Population: Continental United States and Outlying Territories and Possessions, 1910, 1920, and 1930," *Fifteenth Census of the United States – 1930*, online at www2.census.gov (Accessed October 1, 2012.)

originated from the memory of the aforementioned high-profile court-martial of Colonel Mitchell six years earlier. While resulting in a conviction, the trial was an embarrassment to the administration, as one military historian deduced: "Despite the result, the Mitchell court-martial stands alone, or nearly so, in court-martial history for the extent to which the defense was able to use the trial as forum to debate policy questions and attack current military practice."[73] And beyond reducing negative press aimed at the Hoover administration and its relation to fascist Italy, Butler's written exchange with Adams may have expedited an end to the proceedings. According to reports, after receiving copies of Butler's letters and the apologetic tone, Stimson changed his mind and advised against a court-martial.[74] And in just a few days, after brief negotiations with Butler's attorney, the Secretary of Navy agreed to dismiss the court martial proceedings on the condition Butler accept a formal reprimand.[75]

Butler reluctantly agreed to the reprimand. Writing to a close friend just after the settlement, Butler explained that the entire process had brought immense stress on his family, and he had wished for a speedy ending rather than a lengthy process even if he might have found justice eventually: "In conclusion, Fred, this thing was killing my mother and my wife. I just had to compromise and wait for a better opportunity to have it out."[76] Under the terms of the settlement, Butler composed a letter of explanation to Adams. He admitted little guilt, and reiterated his position that at the time of the speech he was under the impression his comments

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[73] Fred L. Borche III, "Lore of the Corps: The Trial by Court-Martial of Colonel William "Billy" Mitchell," *The Army Lawyer*, January 2012, 4.

[74] Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy*, 115.

[75] "Gen. Butler Freed with a Reprimand as he Voices Regret," *New York Times*, February 9, 1931.

[76] Smedley Butler to Fred Lewis, February 13, 1931, Butler Papers.

were "confined to the limits of the four walls." Butler ended the letter with what might be considered the closest thing to an apology: "I very greatly regret this incident and the fact that my indiscreet remarks have caused embarrassment to the government."[77] A quick reprimand followed, with Adams issuing the strongest words of condemnation in the first paragraph:

> …the Navy Department cannot express too clearly its disapproval of the conduct of any officer of the naval establishment in making remarks which tend to embarrass the international relations of the Government. Such action on the part of an officer of your rank and length of service merits and receives the unqualified condemnation of the Navy Department and for their utterance, which you admit, you are hereby reprimanded.[78]

However, in the second and final paragraph of the reprimand, Adams called attention to Butler's exemplary service, claiming it had been a significant factor in the dismissal of the court martial:

> In view of your letter expressing regret, taken in connection with your long record of brilliant service, the Navy Department feels that it is no longer necessary to resort to proceedings by General Court Martial, and expects that this incident will have a salutary effect upon your future conduct in matters of this character.[79]

Adams could not deny Butler's outstanding military record, and the wording of the reprimand is a testament to Butler's service as well as a nod to how well-known Butler's record was in the public eye. Following the reprimand, Butler was immediately reinstated to the command of Quantico with all the privileges associated with his rank and position.[80]

Though many factors led to the dismissal of the court martial and the light reprimand, Butler felt that the two most crucial factors were the backing of such large numbers of people across the country and favorable coverage from the press. As he explained to a friend: "Due to

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[77] Smedley Butler to The Secretary of the Navy, February 8, 1931, Butler Papers.

[78] Secretary of the Navy to Smedley Butler, February 8, 1931, Butler Papers.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Richard V. Oulahan, "Gen. Butler Freed with a Reprimand as he Voices Regret," *Special to The New York Times*, New York: Feb. 9, 1931.

what appears to have been a gigantic wave of public protest, the thing was stopped…It goes to show that you cannot get away with persecution in this country." Butler was convinced his redemption came from the outpouring of public support, and he conveyed his gratitude to the public in another letter: "I shall spend the rest of my life being grateful to the citizens of this country, whose opinion won this battle for me." Butler would make good on that pledge within months, donating half his earnings from a very profitable speaking tour to unemployment relief in Philadelphia.[81]

## RETIREMENT

Butler went on the retired list on October 1st, 1931, and would begin a national speaking tour ten days later. Though he was transitioning to a more lucrative career, Butler felt little joy in leaving the Marine Corps. He wrote a somber note to his lecture-tour agent, Louis Alber, after the contracts had been signed: "This is a big step and to-day I am slightly depressed on finally having made this leap into space. However, both Mrs. Butler and I are firmly convinced this is the only thing to do, and anyhow it is done and there is no use talking about it." As much as Butler desired to retire from the Marine Corps, he naturally found it difficult, having been a marine since the age of sixteen. Writing about his final review of his men at Quantico, Butler admitted to succumbing to emotion at the thought of leaving: "It was my farewell to arms. What if there were tears in my eyes?"[82]

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[81] Smedley Butler to Josephus Daniels, February 10, 1931, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to Fred Zimmerman, February 14, 1931, Butler Papers; For a full account of Butler's speaking tours in 1931 and 1932, see Chapter 5.

[82] Smedley Butler to Louis J. Alber, December 18, 1930, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler, "To Hell with the Admirals! Why I Retired at Fifty," *Liberty*, December 5, 1931.

Though his heart may have been heavy, it was also filled with resentment. He sought payback for the attempted court-martial and for being passed over for the commandant. Earlier in 1931, in a discussion about his retirement with E. Z. Dimitman, the author proposed to Butler that he might write a magazine piece explaining why he was leaving the Corps. Dimitman suggested that he emphasize his boredom at Quantico and portray himself as a soldier seeking out the next adventure:

> I think this should be along the lines that all your life you have been active, have had excitement, tasks to do, etc. Now, as the senior Major-General in the Marines, there is no chance for foreign duty, nothing to do in Quantico, so, you are RETIRING in order TO DO THINGS, to GET ACTION and so on.[83]

Dimitman's assessment of Butler was accurate – Butler's lack of active occupation certainly contributed to his leaving the Corps. Butler did want "action" and there was still much fight left in him. So much so, that when it came time to write the piece, instead of examining his desire "to do things," Butler used the article as an opportunity to take action – in this case, to attack everyone in the military who he felt had betrayed him in the past two years. The article, "To Hell with the Admirals! Why I Retired at Fifty," was published in *Liberty* magazine in December of 1931. In the piece, he fused braggadocio with personal jabs, mixing career highlights with a heavy dose of anti-Navy and anti-Naval Academy rhetoric. From the first of its seven pages to the end, Butler employed sarcasm to skewer the Navy establishment with passages such as the following:

> My grave mistake was in seeking a commission in the Marine Corps in 1898 and immediate action in the Spanish-American War instead of bidding for a Congressional appointment to the United States Naval Academy, where I could have spent three or four quiet years, to emerge an ensign in the navy – with the war over and little likelihood of

[83] E. Z. Dimitman to Smedley Butler, May 30, 1931, Butler Papers.

> action…it is because of this error in judgment that I retire from the Marine Corps. I retire because I am not a graduate of Annapolis.[84]

Butler, then, left the Marines with a large chip on his shoulder, especially against the military elite.

## CONCLUSION

Heading into a national speaking tour at the conclusion of his final, tumultuous years in the military, Butler had a ready-made platform for disseminating his views. And after he was passed over for commandant and nearly court-martialed, he found himself alienated from the military power structure, and as a result, far more receptive to arguments against war profiteering. The three years covered in this chapter were therefore pivotal in catapulting Butler out of the military world, where he had been educated since 16 and spend the most vibrant years of his life, and into a very different civilian world. With no more reason to hold back in his criticism of the powerful interests that determined the country's actions, and rather with an ax to grind, Butler found his voice and his cause, especially in defense of the common soldier. He also remembered his debt to average citizens well into retirement, keeping them close in mind when forming his theories on war, warning the public that they were being manipulated into supporting and fighting wars that only benefitted a handful of profiteers. The following chapters will trace Butler's development as a public speaker in the 1930s and the emergence of a more mature anti-war philosophy that can be described, ironically for this old war hero, as his own brand of pacifism.

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[84] Smedley Butler, "To Hell with the Admirals! Why I Retired at Fifty," *Liberty*, December 5, 1931.

## Chapter 4: Politics and Plots
## An Election and a Conspiracy

*"To Butler's enemies he was a highly controversial, unorthodox fighting man whose irrepressible temper and tongue kept him in the headlines. To his friends he was a patriotic war hero with strong convictions about democracy and a deserved reputation for bluntly speaking out the truth, regardless of consequences."*

-Jules Archer[1]

This chapter examines two events of the early 1930s – Butler's run for a Pennsylvania Senate seat in 1932 and his involvement in exposing a plot to overthrow the White House a few years later – and evaluates their impact on Butler's post-military career and ideology. Butler's unsuccessful Senate campaign represents the final break from the high-level political world he had sought to enter since he transitioned into an administrator in 1916. Instead of becoming a viable pathway for Butler to pursue his fight for the common man as he had hoped, the experience alienated him from politics, and led to a falling out between Butler and one of his most powerful political allies at the time, Gifford Pinchot.[2] In the second incident – Butler's discovery of the "Plot to Overthrow the White House"[3] – Smedley came to believe that groups of wealthy individuals had revealed themselves to pose a real threat to the United States. The alleged plot solidified Butler's distaste for Wall Street interests and led him to intensify his crusade against war profiteers.

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[1] Jules Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House* (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 34.

[2] Pinchot, an influential politician in the early 20th century, is largely remembered today as one of the leaders of the conservation movement. He helped establish the profession of forestry by founding the Society of American Foresters and National Conservation Association, and served as the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service from 1905 to 1910. He served two terms as governor of Pennsylvania, the first from 1923 to 1927, and the second from 1931 until 1935. See Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington: Island Press, 2001).

[3] Also known as the "Business Plot."

Prior to exploring these two significant events in Butler's life, the chapter will briefly examine the early years of the Great Depression. Butler operated within a unique period in American history, and his actions and way of thinking can best be understood when situated within the context of his era.

## THE ONSET OF THE DEPRESSION

To understand Butler's mindset as a would-be political figure and whistle blower in the 1930s, it is important to know the economic conditions of the time. The U.S. economy had always experienced up-and-down swings since the 18th century, but with the rise of industrialization, consumer culture, and technological revolutions in the late 19th and early 20th century, cyclical economic patterns became more drastic, affecting a greater number of people around the world on a scale like never before.[4] Still, during the first two years following the stock market crash of 1929, many businessmen and social commentators felt the recession was part of a "natural" economic landscape. As historian David Kennedy observed, "Down to the last weeks of 1930, Americans could still plausibly assume that they were caught up in yet another of the routine business-cycle downswings that periodically afflicted their traditionally boom-and-bust economy."[5]

With the eventual realization that this downturn was far more severe than previous "panics," however, the entire capitalist system began to be questioned. Critics of the system –

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[4] Though Butler and many in America were concerned about domestic policy that led to the economic meltdown, the forces at work across the globe likely had more to do with the systematic failing. For studies on the causes behind the Great Depression, see: Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 85-108; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 155-174; and David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43-94.

[5] Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War*, 65.

socialists, Marxists, and others – pointed out the inevitability of cyclical downturns since the 19th century, and with the onset of the Great Depression, alternative forms of government began to be taken seriously both by political leaders and ordinary citizens alike.[6] Germany, Italy, and Japan adopted new forms of government, and the question of whether the American model would last through the Depression was anything but certain. Joblessness created doubt in the effectiveness of capitalism, and critics of the system called for drastic changes. Communists, socialists, and labor unions all saw growths in their ranks as radicalism swept through the United States. An assassination attempt on newly elected President Roosevelt in 1933 by an unemployed bricklayer resulted in the death of Anton Cermak, the popular mayor of Chicago.[7] As one historian emphasized, the economic conditions had ignited a rising upheaval of the social order:

> Disillusionment with Roosevelt ran deepest and most dangerously…among jobless workers and busted farmers, among reformers and visionaries…and among radicals who saw in the Depression the clinching proof that American capitalism was defunct, beyond all hope of salvation or melioration.[8]

Another issue at the forefront of the minds of citizens during the 1920s and early 1930s was Prohibition. The sale of alcohol was banned in 1920 by the passage and implementation of the Eighteenth Amendment, and the following decade saw an explosion of organized crime and

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[6] Two of the most popular critics of FDR, Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin, while they did not advocate replacing capitalism with socialism or communism, called on the government to do far more to "share the wealth" in the country, arguing for a greater expansion of help to the working poor than had been considered since the Populist era. See Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982).

[7] Sine 500,000 people attended Cermak's funeral in March of 1933.For the assassination attempt on Roosevelt by Giuseppe Zangara – the unemployed bricklayer – that resulted in the death of Cermak, see Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*; 464-466; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 116-117; For a comprehensive view of the life of the rising politician in Cook County politics and his brief term as the first foreign-born mayor of Chicago, see Alex Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago: A Study of Political Leadership* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962).

[8] Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 219.

varying degrees of enforcement of the law.[9] As Smedley Butler had realized during his stint as Director of Public Safety in Philadelphia, there was a large portion of the population that did not want to stop the influx of alcohol nor prohibit its consumption. That proportion would increase, as across the country the "grand experiment" seemed more and more like a grand failure. In October of 1930, a series of articles in the *Washington Post* by famed bootlegger George Cassidy detailed his role as one of the main suppliers of liquor for Congress and the White House since the start of Prohibition, revealing the hypocrisy of so many lawmakers who claimed to be "drys."[10] As a result of the articles and the changing of public opinion, the election the following month saw a drastic change in the makeup of Congress, from a "dry" majority to a "wet" majority.[11] By the time Butler would run for office as a "dry" candidate two years later, it was

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[9] See Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years that Changed America* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996). Behn argues that the Volstead Act and Eighteenth Amendment were the result of a nearly fifty-year struggle that first began with the formation of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1873. Also, John J. Rumbarger, *Profits, Power, and Prohibition: Alcohol Reform and the Industrializing of America, 1800-1930* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989). Rumbarger traced how temperance movements were often based on combination of values of the rising middle class, including "obsessions concerning the effects of drinking and middle-class fantasies about capitalism's capacity to establish a rational social order." (xxii) and documented its lack of effectiveness: "No succession of legislative triumphs at the local and state levels ever succeeded in lowering substantially per capita increases in drinking." And that prohibition succeeded because, "enough urban capitalists believed such a ban was, in existing circumstances, a necessary precondition of the social reform required to ensure successful and permanent transformation of American society in o and industrial order characterized by political stability and labor's social quiescence." (xxiv) Rumbarger argues that "property interests have played decisive roles in our nations reform history." (xxv)

[10] "Cassidy, Capitol Bootlegger," *Washington Post*, October 24, 1930. The *Post* appeared to have been aware of the significance of their scoop, for began the series of articles with a preface that included: "The story told here for the first time sheds a new and astonishing light upon actual enforcement conditions under the eighteenth amendment…"

[11] For the impact of Cassidy's articles and the impact of the congressional election of 1930 on the Prohibition issue, see Garrett Peck, *Prohibition in Washington, D.C.: How Dry We Weren't,* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 125-146. Peck concluded, however, that while Prohibition was an important issue, economic issues outshined even the liquor laws, which again, would work against Butler running as a Republican: "Cassiday's articles in the *Washington Post* were certainly a contributor to the Republican defeat, but the wider issue was the Great Depression. The economy was imploding, people were being laid off and their savings had evaporated. The public desperately wanted change. The Republicans in Congress were given the boot." Ibid.,133.

estimated that nearly two-thirds of the population of Pennsylvania was in favor of repealing Prohibition.[12] Butler would have his work cut out for him.

## POLITICS

Smedley's brief run for a seat in the Republican primary for Pennsylvania Senate provides in spring of 1932 provides an illuminating insight into the power of the Prohibition issue, and exposes the inner workings of a senatorial campaign during the early 1930s. The race affected Butler on a personal level as well. The political run – and especially the results – would prove so disastrous that he would swear off politics for the rest of his life. His desire to acquire an official political post extinguished, Butler would instead become involved in national veterans' organizations that were requesting his services, opting for a career as a freelance public speaker and choosing to lead people from outside the formal political process.

Little has been written about Butler's defeat in the Republican primary for U.S. Senate in the spring of 1932. In *Maverick Marine*, biographer Hans Schmidt concluded that, like his rocky experience in Philadelphia as Director of Public Safety and his tumultuous final years in the Marine Corps, Smedley's defeat in the Republican primary was a launching point for his public speaking career. According to Schmidt, the election "freed him [Butler] from another tangle of demands and constraints."[13] While it was certainly true that following the election Butler felt better able to operate outside the structure of an organized institution such as political office, Schmidt devoted just a page to the specifics of the campaign. In this chapter, I will expand on

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[12] According to the *Literary Digest* poll, "Seventh Report of the Literary Digest Prohibition Poll-Classified Geographically," *The Literary Digest,* April 2, 1932, 6.

[13] Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 215-217.

that analysis, and address the events during the political race that led Butler to swear off politics. Because it was immediately following this political run that Butler was transformed from a popular retired general with a political future into a controversial, independent speaker-for-hire, it is vital to explore the details of his campaign that led to his disenchantment with the political arena.

Rumors of Butler's entrance into the political arena began to emerge upon his formal announcement of retirement in August of 1931. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* eagerly speculating, posted on its front page:

> There is opinion that Major General Butler, a native Pennsylvanian and son of one of the State's great congressional leaders, will be found taking an active part in Pennsylvania politics…It is known that he has considered becoming a candidate for the Senate. He has made no definite decision in that direction, but politicians would not be surprised if a Pinchot-Butler alliance emerged in the near future, with the Governor seeking control of the Pennsylvania delegation to the Republican National Convention and Butler as a candidate for the Senate…Conferences with such an end in view have been proceeding in Pennsylvania.[14]

The Philadelphia paper seemed to have an accurate insight into the actions of Butler. The following month, writing to the chairman of the Republican City Committee of Pennsylvania in response to speculations of a political run such as the one published in the *Ledger*, Butler gave concrete hints about how he wished his political future to play out:

> Of course I would like to be of some use to this country, but I very gravely doubt the possibility of ever being elected to a Public Office. In the first place, at the present time, I take very little interest in Public Office holding and would only go after one which would be too big to attain. I, of course, would like to be United States Senator from

[14] "Butler Pact with Pinchot Looms as General Pushes for Retirement," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, August 21, 1931.

> Pennsylvania, but realize, full well, there is not the slightest chance of me ever being one.[15]

Though he had worked in an appointed political position in Philadelphia as Director of Public Safety, the desire to run for office is absent from Butler's writings prior to this letter. In the same letter, Butler elaborated: "I have no desire to be Governor or to hold any position beneath that of Senator, so have decided to just drift along and see what turns up. Perhaps there may be an opportunity to help out as time goes on."[16] If Butler was not planning a political run, others may have been scheming on his behalf. By leaving the door open to a position in politics, Butler may have put into action the behind-the-scenes planning by career politicians that would lead both to his brief run for Senator as well as his hasty retreat from the political stage.

While Butler's ambiguously stated political ambitions could have been an attempt to not ruffle political feathers, his remarks landed him on the radar of politicians in the state, including that of the governor of Pennsylvania, Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot was not only popular within the state, but had been an associate of Butler's since his crime-fighting days in Philadelphia.[17] In late 1931, correspondence between the two men picked up. In November, Butler was on a cross-country speaking tour, but he wrote to the governor with expressing interest in assisting him in a run for President in 1932: "When I finish this speaking tour and have gotten our house paid for, I will be ready to sail into a lively advocacy of your campaign for the Presidency. One thing at a time, is my simply and homely motto, and Bunny's home is the first."[18] Butler confessed that he

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[15] Smedley Butler to Kenneth F. Kressler, September 2, 1931, Butler Papers.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Pinchot and Butler had become friends during Butler's first year as Director of Public Safety in 1925. The two would exchange occasional correspondence from fall of 1925 until 1933.

[18] Smedley Butler to Gifford Pinchot, November 9, 1931, Butler Papers.

was not seriously considering a political future, but that his views were evolving; he was leaning to oppose Hoover in the upcoming election, though he had been a life-long Republican. A few months later, the governor publically showered Butler with praise, going so far as to write a glowing introduction to be read when Butler was presented an award at the American Legion:

> I covet the opportunity to say how deeply I admire the man you honor today. Smedley Butler has more good qualities than I have time to list. His courage, his honor, and his driving energy are old stories to all of us. They are great qualities, but I think even beyond them is his humanity. Smedley Butler is folks…He is true and real and just full enough of the Old Nick to make us love him. And he never went back on a friend. [19]

This praise may have been genuine, though as Pinchot was a consummate politician, it may also have been fueled by a desire for Butler's support in the upcoming election. Another possibility was that the governor was planning Butler's run for senate, without his knowledge. In the end, however, it would appear that Pinchot was not looking out for Smedley's best interests. In fact, he may have led him into politics simply to be defeated. According to researcher Jules Archer, journalists such as Paul Comly French of the *Philadelphia Record* concluded that Pinchot deliberately set Butler up for inevitable defeat in his campaign to "eliminate him as a potential political threat."[20]

By February of 1932, Butler still gave little indication that he would run for Senate, though the primary election was to be held in April. Writing to Harry Thompson, a friend in Pennsylvania who wished for him to run for office, Butler expressed interest in the position, claiming "nothing would give me greater pleasure than to represent this State in the United

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[19] Gifford Pinchot to the Honorable David J. Davis, January 9, 1932, Butler Papers.

[20] See Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House*, 123.

States Senate."[21] But he also explained his doubts; especially the fear that he would need a substantial amount of money to compete, which he felt was impossible for him at this time:

> But you know as well as I do that I would have to have $1,000,000.00 to make any kind of showing. I have not the $1,000,000.00 and decline to wear anybody's collar. Therefore, as grateful as I am to you for your kindly thoughts, I am obliged to let the matter stand as it is.[22]

Despite his assertion to Thompson that he would not "wear anybody's collar," Butler stepped into the shifting sands of Pennsylvania politics the following month. He announced his candidacy for Senate on March 3rd, 1932, running as a "dry" candidate with the support of Governor Pinchot and his political team against incumbent and Boss Vare-backed James J. Davis.[23] Immediately following his announcement, Butler was bombarded with hundreds of letters, both of support and opposition, one of them from Thompson, who offered his support with a knowing aside, referring to Butler's association with Pinchot: "I'm glad you found the $1,000,000.00 or its equivalent…Well, I will do all I can for your candidacy."[24]

Butler's decision to run as a "dry" seemed to be his largest obstacle. Pennsylvania was a state where, according to a poll by *The Literary Digest*, 75% of the voters favored repeal of Prohibition.[25] His critics attacked him immediately on the issue. The head of the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform warned Butler that his stance could damage his

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[21] Smedley Butler to Harry A. Thompson, February 13, 1932, Butler Papers.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Gen. Butler, As Dry, Will Oppose Davis," *Washington Post*, March 3, 1932; "Gen. Butler as Dry Seeks Senate Seat," *New York Times*, March 3, 1932; "Smedley Butler Out for Senate; Will Run as Dry," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 3, 1932. As indicated by the sources, papers outside of the state followed Butler's campaign closely.

[24] Harry A. Thomason to Smedley Butler, March 26, 1932, Butler Papers.

[25] "Seventh Report of the Literary Digest Prohibition Poll-Classified Geographically," *The Literary Digest,* April 2, 1932, 6. Across the country, the figure was 74%. In other words, of the 3.7 million people polled, 2.75 million favored repeal of Prohibition.

reputation: "Your declaration that you will run as a dry candidate for the United States Senate from Pennsylvania undermines the confidence in your integrity and sincerity, which a great many of your fellow Pennsylvanians heretofore hold for you."[26] The magnitude of the problem was recognized by some supporters, including Butler's friend, Harry Saylor, managing editor at the *Philadelphia Record*, who wrote: "Wets, who are in the majority in Pennsylvania, must choose between you and Senator Davis, a very recent convert against prohibition….This, frankly, is an impossible situation."[27] Saylor proposed that Butler should consider being flexible on his stance: "Isn't it possible to believe in prohibition right up to the hilt, and still think the people ought to be allowed to vote on it?"[28] Prohibition appeared to be the hot-button issue of the day, and Butler's unwavering support of the unpopular policy posed a nearly insurmountable obstacle from the start.

Though Butler's political campaign was short-lived, it offers insight into regional politics of the 1930s. One scholar of the era, J.T. Salter, concluded that Pennsylvania politics were nearly identical to other parts of the country: "In short, the organizations of the major parties in the United States are practically the same wherever they are found." Salter pointed out that Pennsylvania had a long, well-established history of political bosses: "They began functioning before the law was technically aware of their existence; and they have drawn their life and power from the realities in the political process."[29] While it was common for urban politics to be

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[26] Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, Pennsylvania Division to Smedley D. Butler, March 3, 1932, Butler Papers.

[27] Harry T. Saylor to Smedley Butler, March 4, 1932, Butler Papers.

[28] J. T. Salter, *Boss Rule: Portraits in City Politics*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1935), 5. Salter makes a strong case for the legacy of party bosses and their impact on Pennsylvanian politics over many generations.

[29] Ibid..

influenced by boss rule, Philadelphia had an especially rich tradition: "…nine bosses or feudal barons have ruled Philadelphia for the last eighty-four years – William B. Mann, Robert Mackey, James McManes, David Martin, Isreal Durham, Boies Penrose, Edwin H. Vare, and William S. Vare. They were the government that ran the government."[30] Butler's opponent, James J. Davis, was supported by the last name on Salter's list of bosses, William Vare, and Davis seemed the shoo-in for winning the election. But two things stood in Butler's favor: politics in Pennsylvania were not entirely concentrated in Philadelphia, and the traditional power of Republican bosses was fading due to the impact of the Great Depression. However, while people may have been more open to a non-establishment candidate like Butler, a greater political metamorphosis was taking place that would make most Republican primaries in Pennsylvania and other states obsolete: the Democratic Party was on the rise.[31] As one scholar pointed out, it was the Depression, now three years in that caused most people to rethink their loyalty to the Republican Party:

> Economic adversity was the biggest single reason why in 1932 the Democratic candidate for the Presidency carried 42 states, why Democratic candidates for the United States Senate won 27 places and lost 5, why 313 out of 435 congressional districts elected Democratic Congressmen, and why 30 states out of 35 chose Democratic governors.[32]

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[30] Ibid., 211.

[31] For more on the Pennsylvania elections of 1932, see E. Jeffrey Ludwig, "Pennsylvania: The National Election of 1932," *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July, 1964), 334-351. Ludwig argues that two of the most significant factors in the general election of 1932 were the divergence from a strong Republican majority and the decline in voter turnout and registration, mostly due to unemployment. He dismisses the notion that issue of Prohibition was a major factor due to the lack of mention in newspaper articles. In fact, as other scholars have pointed out as well, this was likely due to the fact that "dry" candidates such as Butler in both parties had been debate in the primaries, and so there was little decision on the issue in the general election.

[32] Slater, *Boss Rule*, 217.

Since states like Pennsylvania that had been staunchly Republican since the Civil War were changing party allegiances in the midst of the economic debacle, even if Butler had won the primary election, there is no guarantee he would have prevailed in the general election.

To make matters worse, Smedley would lose votes due to his association with Pinchot. As one Pennsylvanian wrote: "I cannot support you with the Pinchot shackles on and I think, Smedley, regardless of your wonderful personality and your inimitable way of convincing people, that millstone will be too much for you."[33] The criticisms that Butler was on Pinchot's ticket – and thus not campaigning on his own terms but those dictated by his sponsor – seemed to be largely valid. Butler did not seem to be in much control of his campaign and would later regret aligning himself with the governor. Writing to a supporter in March of 1932, Butler explained that he was, "…not attempting to handle these (campaign) things myself."[34] During the campaign, Butler gave a flurry of speeches on topics he seemed to know little about. He crisscrossed the state, driving over 5,000 miles in 26 days and giving – by his own account – at least 167 campaign speeches on topics ranging from the role of the federal government in providing electric power, unemployment relief, and solutions for the troubled Pennsylvania industries of coal and anthracite.[35] Butler's main plan for economic revival, outlined in a speech in Pottsville, were based on raising tariffs to increase the value of domestic goods. The plan did not differ greatly from his party, and he did not claim his ideas were new: "It is in line with the principles upon which the Republican Party has for generations produced and maintained

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[33] W. Walter Wilson to Smedley Butler, March 5, 1932, Butler Papers.

[34] Smedley Butler to Charles R. Michael, March 21, 1932, Butler Papers.

[35] Smedley Butler to Ray A. Robinson, May 10, 1932; Smedley Butler to Lee D. Butler, May 28, 1932, Butler Papers.

prosperity in this country."[36] Though he had seldom – if ever – spoke on ideas such as the tariff prior to the election he now repeatedly drove that point home, insisting that a stiff tariff was required for economic recovery in the state.[37]

To many outside observers, Butler seemed politically naïve. A member of the Division of Women's Organization for National Prohibition leveled such criticism in sympathetic tones: "This poor, futile, misguided soldier, floundering in the midst of political maneuvers he could not understand, was never anything but a straw figure raised by Pinchot and labeled 'dry.'"[38] As was the case during his time as Director of Public Safety in Philadelphia a decade earlier, Butler appeared to many observers to be a soldier out of his depth in a political world he did not quite fully grasp. For instance, Butler had no knowledge of how money was raised for his election, nor of the people in charge of spending it. As he wrote just after the election in a letter to former campaign manager, Arthur Dale: "I do not know the Treasurer of the campaign; in fact, I do not recall ever having been told his name. I will be grateful if you, as Chairman, will see to it that he files the necessary returns and makes the proper accounting."[39] This hands-off approach seems plausible, as Butler was on the road most of the time, and placed his faith in his handlers. After the election, Butler's lack of involvement helped him defend himself against accusations from a congressional committee that his campaign had taken up to $250,000 from Pennsylvania political

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[36] Smedley Butler, "Speech for Release to all State Papers, Pottsville," April 13, 1932, Butler Papers.

[37] Ibid. "Before we can have a restoration of prosperity in Pennsylvania we must stop the flood of foreign commodities," Butler stated in Pottsville, dedicating the final portion of that speech – and others - to the issue.

[38] See *Philadelphia Record*, April 28, 1932.

[39] Smedley Butler to Arthur C. Dale, April 30, 1932, Butler Papers.

organizations in violation of election law.[40] Biographer Hans Schmidt also found Butler's claimed innocence to be credible: "He (Butler) was not a professional, had no organization of his own, and had previously been on the lecture circuit for many months."[41]

Butler might have been able to discern from the start that his campaign was doomed. As he remarked to one supporter, his late start in the race hurt him, and it was something he regretted: "I should have known better than to go into such a thing in so great a hurry and without proper preparation."[42] Butler did not launch his campaign until March of 1932, just one month before the election, and he did so while still on a lecture tour (he continued speaking for a fee during the first few weeks of his campaign).[43] Running against a well-organized incumbent, Smedley's late start alone might have been enough to put him out of contention, but campaigning as a dry candidate in a state favoring the repeal of Prohibition turned out to be political suicide. With the onset of the Depression, by 1932, most of the country – including Pennsylvania – had either begun to or completely reversed their view on the issue, from supporting the Eighteenth Amendment to supporting its repeal. Later in the year, Roosevelt would be elected with the tacit understanding that he would repeal Prohibition. It was so well understood that it was barely

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[40] Butler received a detailed letter requesting he produce "an itemized account for each expenditure" from the Special Committee on Investigation of Presidential and Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, which he forwarded to Dale, explaining, "As you are aware, I have no personal or actual knowledge of any campaign contributions or disbursements and you, as Chairman, were good enough to file the necessary returns and made the proper accounting…Could I trouble you once more to send me the information requested by the United States Senate Committee so that I may forward it to Senator Howell?" See Robert B. Howell to SDB, August 8, 1932, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to Arthur C. Dale, August 18, 1932, Butler Papers.

[41] Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 216.

[42] Smedley Butler to Ross Pier Wright, May 13, 1932, Butler Papers.

[43] On March 18th Butler gave a speech on "Our Crime Problem" at the City Hall in Claremont, New Hampshire, for which he was paid $350. Alber and Wickes to Smedley Butler, March 10, 1932, Butler Papers; In late March he was home in Newtown Square, when he wrote to Lowell Thomas that he was dedicating his time to speaking on behalf of his campaign. See Smedley Butler to Lowell Thomas, March 21, 1932, Butler Papers.

discussed during the presidential election. As scholar Edward Behr wrote in his comprehensive work covering the period, by 1932, most of America saw the liquor industry as a source of tax and employment:

> Even in that dry sanctuary of America, its rural heartland, famers were beginning to respond favorably to pro-repeal arguments…They were among the hardest-hit Depression victims of all, aware of the grain and hops they could expect to sell to breweries and distillers.[44]

Sticking with his principles – staying a "dry" – backfired against Smedley. The "drys" had dwindling support, and Butler realized this fact, confessing as much to a president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Eerie, Pennsylvania: "I feel very keenly the approaching doom of Prohibition due largely to the lack of interest on the part of those who profess to be drys."[45] Butler was on the wrong side of the issue and his stubborn personality and decision to stick to Pinchot's campaign strategy led him to forego changing his position to accommodate the views of the majority of citizens in his state. On April 26, Butler was roundly defeated in the Republican primary, receiving approximately half as many votes as his opponent Davis.[46]

Yet, Butler – who grew up around politics because of his father – was not as naive as he seemed. More likely, as he explained to friend, he understood the political dealings around him, but could not figure a way to counter them all: "I am not quite as dumb politically as I look and in addition have several loyal advisors who do not even look dumb."[47] He explained to another

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[44] Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years that Changed America* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996), 235.

[45] Smedley Butler to Sylvia Bernie, May 13, 1932, Butler Papers.

[46] For more on the Pennsylvania elections in1932, see E. Jeffrey Ludwig, "Pennsylvania: The National Election of 1932," *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July, 1964), 334-351.

[47] Smedley Butler to Honorable John S. Fine, May 13, 1932, Butler Papers.

associate that the election's result may have been inevitable from the start – "Pennsylvania politics is Pennsylvania politics" – but that he had wanted to give it a try to satisfy his enthusiasm for new adventures: "It is simply another one of those experiences which seem to take place in my life at regular intervals, when I reach a stage when I can't resist the temptation to try something new. I always get licked, but seem to be ready to enter another war."[48]

One factor in Butler's defeat impacted his view of politics more than the results themselves: the motives of his political backers. Though Pinchot supported Butler by speaking in favor of him during the campaign, many of his actions were questioned later by historians and by Butler himself shortly after the election. According to one scholar, Smedley lost a number of counties that other Pinchot-backed candidates had won, and Butler discovered that Pinchot may have made a deal with Davis to direct vote his way in return for delegates at the National Convention if Pinchot were to run for President.[49] Researcher Jules Archer presented the evidence more bluntly, concluding that some journalists at the time understood "that Governor Pinchot had set Butler up for defeat to eliminate him as a political threat, making a secret deal to support Davis."[50] The evidence shows that Butler likely got wind of the back-room dealings, and of the notion that Pinchot may have backed Butler as a tentative way to reach the "dry" vote for his own political gain. As Butler wrote to a friend, the election was, "a sordid tale of desertion on the part of my backers."[51] In many letters following the election, Butler spoke of

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[48] Smedley Butler to Ross Pier Wright, May 13, 1932, Butler Papers.

[49] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 217.

[50] Jules Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 1973), 123.

[51] Smedley Butler to Ray A. Robinson, May 10, 1932, Butler Papers.

having been "stabbed in the back." It was not the loss then, but the realization that back-room deals had ensured his defeat that dismayed him the most.

Butler's first and last political run soured him on politics. He admitted as much in a letter to an acquaintance: "My venture into politics was most disastrous and I have no desire to reenter the game, as it is most distasteful to me in every way."[52] The absence of a desire for public office remained through the rest of his post-military career, but was fueled less from his defeat at the polls than a disappointment in those he considered close allies, such as Pinchot. Whether he discovered concrete proof of the treachery or not, Butler's relationship with the governor deteriorated after the election. Nearly a year later, Smedley responded to a letter inquiring about possible favors with the governor:

> I am sorry to tell you that I have no influence with Governor Pinchot and have had none since the campaign last spring when I was so badly defeated in the race for the Senate. At that time I dropped out of the race and have since been powerless to help you or anyone else.[53]

Smedley's reply in this letter – and others – indicated that bitterness lingered long after the election results had been tallied. Though he would abandon the political office, Butler would remain active in promoting political issues. The election loss might have been a stumbling block to his political career, but abandoning the goal of public office gave Butler a freedom as a speaker and writer he would not have otherwise had. He was not beholden to his constituents, a political party, or anyone else; he could speak his mind and do what he believed was right. As a speaker for hire, he would use this freedom to push for the rights of veterans, immediate payment of the soldiers' Bonus, and other issues he cared deeply about, issues not necessarily prescribed

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[52] Smedley Butler to Frank N. Moore, June 17, 1932, Butler Papers.

[53] For example, see Smedley Butler to William C. Schultz, January 17, 1933, Butler Papers.

by the Republican Party. Without this early political defeat, and alienation by his more powerful political friends, Butler may not have found his niche on the lecture circuit, and may never have become the leader of veterans that would garner the admiration of such a wide range of the American public.

## THE PLOT TO OVERTHROW THE WHITE HOUSE

If Butler's unsuccessful run for Congress has not been a subject of serious study it may be because it has been overshadowed by his role in a conspiracy to overthrow President Franklin Roosevelt. Depictions of the plot in popular culture first appeared with a fictionalized account in a 1935 novel by Sinclair Lewis, and have arisen periodically ever since, including in a 1976 made-for-television film, a History Channel program in 1997, and in a 2004 documentary on the dangers of wealthy organizations.[54] Schmidt examined the controversial plot in *Maverick Marine*,[55] but prior to this, accounts of the event had been largely absent from academic studies, a rare exception being Arthur Schlesinger's mention of it in *The Politics of Upheaval*.[56] The most comprehensive examination of the plot outside of academic works is in Jules Archer's journalistic book *The Plot to Seize the White House.*[57] Archer's work is based on interviews and prior research by investigative reporter George Seldes, who wrote about the controversy in his two books, *One Thousand Americans*, which delved into the immense power held at one time by

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[54] See Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (New York: The Sun Dial Press, 1935); *The November Plan*, dir. Don Medford, Universal Pictures, 1976; "The Plot to Overthrow FDR," The History Channel, 1997; *The Corporation*, dir. Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott, 2004.

[55] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 223-231.

[56] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 82-83.

[57] Jules Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1973). Though Archer's work is primarily an account of the plot, over one hundred pages of his work are dedicated to a biography of Butler.

a small number of Americans, and *Facts and Fascism*, which detailed the activities of right-wing groups in America.[58] Archer also took advantage of the work of John Spivak,[59] whose book, *A Man in his Time*, resurrected the plot in the 1960s from the dustbin of Depression-era lore to ask significant questions about the event.[60] As Butler's involvement in the plot has been well documented, the events within the thwarted coup that had the greatest impact on Butler's views on war. Prior to discovering the plot against FDR, Smedley was certainly no admirer of big business, but specific encounters escalated Butler's anti-Wall Street feelings motivated the retired general not only to report his findings to a congressional committee, but to dedicate the next year of his life to speaking out against banking interests.

An unintended consequence of Butler's fame was the unwelcomed attention that it would often attract. Visitors would often arrive unannounced at his home in West Chester, requesting his services. One group of men that approached Butler contained members of a right-wing organization that attempted to overthrow the White House. Discovering the plot alarmed Butler, giving him a sense of urgency to his message against wealthy capitalists and war profiteers. After exposing the plot to the American public, he launched a six-month radio series broadcast

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[58] See George Seldes, *One Thousand Americans* (New York: Boni & Gaer, 1947) 79-80, 208-212, 287-292; George Seldes, *Facts and Fascism* (New York: In Fact, 1943), 112-114. Seldes was an award-winning investigative journalist for the *Chicago Tribune* who created controversy in the 1920s through his coverage of the Soviet Union and Fascist Italy. See George Seldes, *Witness to a Century*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987).

[59] Spivak, an active writer and socialist, was a reporter for *New Masses* in the 1930s. He was the first to write a full exposé of Butler's involvement in the plot, including testimony that was omitted from the congressional committee report. Though much of his work is tinged with wild speculation and an anti-Semitic fear of Jewish bankers common in the era, his material on Butler appears mostly factual and useful. See John L. Spivak, "Wall Street's Fascist Conspiracy: Testimony that the Dickstein Committee Suppressed," *New Masses*, January 29, 1935, 9-15.

[60] John L. Spivak, *A Man in his Time* (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), 301-331. Spivak questioned the lack of a thorough investigation into the plot by the McCormack-Dickstein Committee, and pointed out that, "None of the prominent persons named in Butler's testimony were questioned." After carefully analyzing the final report, Spivak concluded that the Committee was either obsessed with persecuting communists, or hiding something related to the fascist plot Butler had uncovered, writing that the final report gave "eleven pages to the threat by communists," but only "one page to the plot to seize the Government and destroy our democratic system." Ibid., 330-331.

coupled with regular speaking engagements, ushering in the most productive year of his post-military career. The "Plot to Seize the White House" fueled Butler's anti-elite views, and made him more determined than ever to protect the American people from what he judged to be harmful elements of the upper class. This chapter gives a brief overview of the conspiracy, discusses how the event shed light on American radicalism in the 1930s, and explores what the literature so far has omitted, which is namely, the impact of this event on Butler.

There is scholarly disagreement about the influence of revolutionary forces in America during the early Depression. Writer John Spivak, who investigated underground groups during that era, believed them to be a growing threat: "At no time in world history have there been so many secret organizations in so many different countries working to destroy their governments as in the mid-1930s."[61] Historian Amity Shlaes has documented the American fascination with the Bolsheviks, the Russian Revolution, and the Soviet Union through the 1920s, especially in the "intellectual world." Over eighty books about the country were published in the United States over the decade and thousands of Americans visited the Soviet Union to witness "Lenin's experiment" for themselves.[62] In the United States, many of these groups formed more radical organizations and openly discussed revolution. One scholar commented that many of these dangers were certainly very real and present:

> It is tempting, from a distance of three decades, to be patronizing about the political nightmares of the thirties, but in fact there were fascists in America and there were

[61] Spivak, *A Man in his Time*, 333.

[62] Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 116-118.

> Communists, both groups at their peaks of strength and both possessed by dreams that could not thrive in our frustrating democracy.[63]

Other scholars concluded that despite a few notable instances of radicalism, fascist and communist groups were largely marginalized in the period. At its height in the 1930s, the Communist party claimed a membership of around 30,000 in the United States, and historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. argued, its influence on the Roosevelt administration was negligible: "If the Communists hated the New Deal in this period, the New Dealers could hardly have cared less."[64] After studying fascist leaders and writings of the era, Schlesinger concluded: "In 1934 and 1935 the American fascists were in the main a collection of crackpots working the back alleys."[65] One of the reasons such groups may have been relegated to the "back alleys" was the immense crackdown on anti-American activity in the mid-1930s. Radical groups had a visible presence in the early 20th century, but their size and effectiveness was far overshadowed by their persecution. Anti-communist witch hunts were common in the American political scene since the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Red Scare of 1919-1920.[66]

While the 1920s saw their moments of paranoia, the crisis of the Great Depression exacerbated the government's fear of revolutionaries to such a degree that it spawned the formation of what was named the Un-American Activities Committee. According to Walter Goodman: "It was not until after the stock-market crash that the House of Representatives

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[63] Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The extraordinary career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964), 12.

[64] Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 191.

[65] Ibid., 82.

[66] For a comprehensive analysis of the hysteria surround the Red Scare see Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955). Murray's detailed account shows that the persecution of alleged communists as a method to attack organized labor was bolstered by the press and political leaders that exacerbated the situation instead of resolving it in a non-hysterical manner.

decided that the domestic menace of Bolshevism was worthy of formal study by a proper committee."[67] New York congressman Hamilton Fish launched the Fish Committee in May of 1930 to address the threat of communism. An assassination attempt on president-elect Roosevelt in February of 1933 led the committee to launch an investigation of anarchists, and in 1934, with the rise of Adolf Hitler, Fish's fellow New York congressman, Samuel Dickstein, launched the McCormack-Dickstein Committee[68] to investigate Nazi and fascist activity in the United States.[69] In the 1930s, Smedley Butler would testify before the Committee, exposing an alleged plot to overthrow the President.

According to Butler's testimony given in November of 1934 to the House Un-American Activity Committee – and supported by the accounts of journalist Paul French and Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, James Van Zandt – Butler was approached by a military veteran named Gerald MacGuire, who claimed to be a member of the American Legion in Connecticut. According to Butler, MacGuire told him he represented a group that advocated on behalf of the common soldier, and they wanted Butler's help to overrun the current leadership of the American Legion. Butler reported on this first interaction:

> The substance of the conversation, which lasted about 2 hours, was this: They were very desirous of unseating the royal family in control of the American Legion…and very anxious to have me take part in it. They said that they were not in sympathy with the then administration-that is, the present administration's treatment of soldiers.[70]

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[67] Goodman, *The Committee*, 6.

[68] Also known as the Dickstein Committee.

[69] The Special Committee on Un-American Activities was an early incarnation of the House Un-American Activities Committee made infamous during the 1950s. See Goodman, *The Committee*, 6-12.

[70] "Testimony of Maj. Gen. S. D. Butler (Retired)," United States Congress. House of Representatives, *Special Committee on Un-American Activities. Investigation of Nazi Propaganda Activities and Investigation of Certain Other Propaganda Activities*: *Public hearings before the United States House Special Committee on Un-American*

Butler could not quite grasp the intention of MacGuire at first – MacGuire's interests did not seem to benefit the enlisted man. So Butler pressed him for more details. As Smedley told the Committee, it was not uncommon for him to receive unusual visitors at the Butler home: "So many queer people come to my house all the time and I like to feel them all out."[71] MacGuire, however, caught Butler's attention due to his financial backing. MacGuire visited Butler many times over the next few weeks, and expressed interest in paying Butler on behalf of his "clients" to make speeches for the American Legion in support of the gold standard. Though Smedley refused the thousands of dollars he was offered, reportedly supplied by an organization with ties to the prominent families of Morgan, DuPont, and political figures such as Al Smith,[72] Butler continued feigning interest in an attempt to gather key names and information so as to later report the plot to the authorities.[73] In his testimony, Butler described that in his encounter with the plotters, he used some of the skills he acquired as Public Safely Director in Philadelphia to lure the men into revealing the names of the parties involved:

> Now, I have had some experience as a policeman in Philadelphia. I wanted to get to the bottom of this thing and not scare them off, because I felt that they had something real. They had so much money and a limousine. Wounded soldiers do not have limousines or that kind of money.[74]

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*Activities, Seventy-Third Congress, Hearings No. 73-D. C.-6, Part I* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1935), 9. Hereafter *House Special Committee on Un-American Activities*.

[71] "Butler Testimony," *House Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, 10.

[72] Alfred E. Smith, the three-time governor of New York was the first Catholic to run for President, losing to Herbert Hoover in 1928. He remained a prominent political figure through the 1930s, nearly winning the Democratic presidential nomination in 1932. See Paula Eldot, *Governor Alfred E. Smith: The Politician as Reformer* (New York: Garland, 1983).

[73] "Butler Testimony," *House Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, 8-20.

[74] Ibid., 11.

The plotters suggested Butler might lead a volunteer army of 500,000 veterans, imitating the actions of the Croix de Feu,[75] a right-wing French veterans' organization that had gained political sway in France.[76] The idea was to put pressure on Roosevelt to reinstate the gold standard he had abandoned in 1933, so that the money of wealthy backers such as J.P. Morgan, would be secure, or at least guaranteed by gold.[77] As Butler learned more of the plot, he brought in a friend, journalist Paul French, to meet with MacGuire. French testified to the committee that MacGuire had expressed much more direct threats to the government in their conversations:

> During the course of the conversation he continually discussed the need of a man on a white horse, as he called it, a dictator who would come galloping in on his white horse. He said that was the only way; either through the threat of armed force or the delegation of power, and the use of a group of organized veterans, to save the capitalistic system…he said, "We might go along with Roosevelt and then do with him what Mussolini did with the King of Italy."[78]

The group's expressed intention to overthrow the government, combined with its ability to acquire large sums of money, provided adequate justification for Butler to report the plot.

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[75] Originating as an organization of French World War I veterans, the right-wing Croix de Feu (Cross of Fire) gained strength during the Great Depression, growing from 500 members in 1928 to a membership of 400,000 in 1934 and by 700,000 by 1937 according to estimates. The nationalistic group warned of a growing German militarism, opposed Socialism and Communism, and also advocated accords between labor and corporations, a minimum wage, and suffrage for women. There is continued debate amongst historians as to whether the organization can be characterized as fascist, or simply a right-wing group that gave rise to the French Social Party (Parti Social Français). See William D. Irvine, "Fascism in France and the Strange Case of the Croix de Feu," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 63, No. 2, (June, 1991), 271-295; also Kevin Passmore, "Boy Scouting for Grown-ups? Paramilitarism in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2., (Fall 1995), 527-557.

[76] In his testimony in front of the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, MacGuire confirmed he was impressed by the Croix de Feu. In one of his letters to R.S. Clark, a wealthy veteran, that was submitted to the Committee as evidence, MacGuire stated that while in France he attended a meeting of the Croix de Feu and "was quite impressed with the type of men belonging. These fellows are interested only in the salvation of France, and I feel sure that the country could not be in better hands because they are not politicians…There may be more uprisings, there may be more difficulties, but as is evidenced right now when the emergency arises party lines and party difficulties are forgotten…and all become united in the one desire and purpose to keep this country as it is." See "MacGuire Testimony," *House Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, 112-113.

[77] Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House*, 23.

[78] "Testimony of Paul Comly French," *House Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, 21.

The congressional investigation, however, was inconclusive. The major parties named in the conspiracy were not convicted of any wrongdoing nor forced to testify in front of Congress. Even Butler himself testified his doubt about the depth of the conspiracy, especially at first:

> I told Paul (French) to let his newspaper see what they could find out about the background of these fellows. I felt that it was just a racket, that these fellows were working one another and getting money out of the rich, selling them gold bricks. I have been in 752 different towns in the United States in 3 years and 1 month, and I made 1,022 speeches. I have seen absolutely no sign of anything showing a trend for a change of our form of Government.[79]

Towards the end of his testimony, Butler explained that he had had a change of heart and decided to expose the plot based largely on a specific conversation with MacGuire: "Now there is one point that I have forgotten which I think is the most important of all," he stated before relaying to the Committee the contents of that discussion, which was about an emerging anti-Roosevelt organization:

> I said, "Is there anything stirring about it (the organization) yet?"
> "Yes," he says; "you watch; in two or three weeks you will see it come out in the papers. There will be big fellows in it"…and in about two weeks the American Liberty League appeared, which was just about what he described it to be.[80]

If MacGuire had been acting alone, Butler would have likely doubted the potential for the plot to go through. That MacGuire was in contact with an organization with the power and resources to execute the plot he had outlined worried Butler more than anything else MacGuire told him, and led Butler to expose the plot as potentially dangerous.

Though composed of powerful members, the Liberty League failed to become an influential force in American politics during the 1930s. In the years following Butler's

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[79] "Testimony of Butler," *House Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, 19.

[80] John L. Spivak, "Wall Street's Fascist Conspiracy," *New Masses* (January 29, 1935), 11.

testimony, the League did become the largest and most well known conservative group publically opposed to President Roosevelt and his New Deal policies. Its founding members that included former Democratic presidential candidates Al Smith and John W. Davis, businessmen Alfred P. Sloan and Sewell Avery among other wealthy and prominent figures, and historian Hans Schmidt characterized the group as "the major organized right-wing assault on Roosevelt in the mid-1930s." However, the only "assault" they would launch against Roosevelt would be political in nature and would produce few results. Members of the Liberty League realized their impact was minimal, according to the leading scholar on the group's history, and that they only may have slightly altered FDR's view on a few of the issues: "They [Liberty League members] took what comfort they could in the thought that they had forced some restraint and temperance on the Administration; that without the Liberty League the New Deal would have been far more radical than it was." And historian David Kennedy indicated that right wing organizations such as the American Liberty League were not the main source of radical movements in the U.S. during the 1930s, as the groups were confident that the New Deal was doomed to fail, and simply "bided their time and awaited the catastrophe that they believed inevitably lay ahead." Thus, most historians agree that the impact of the League on FDR's policies was minimal at best.[81]

George Wolfskill, whose 1962 book *The Revolt of the Conservatives* is the only study entirely dedicated to the Liberty League,[82] conceded that the group was organized and vocal,

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[81] Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 214-219, quotation from 219; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 228; George Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934-1940* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 262.

[82] Though Wolfskill's thoroughly researched account of the American Liberty League indicated that the League had little impact on Roosevelt or his policies, the study is a valuable document of the operation of a wealthy, right-wing political organization in the 1930s. Because many members of the group – especially Al Smith – felt their cause

labeling them "the most articulate spokesman of what…may be called political conservatism."[83] But after a careful analysis of their activity, Wolfskill concluded that the League achieved little over the decade, mostly because they represented the antithesis of what most Americans desired:

> The League failed because the people, rightly or wrongly, regarded it as the executor of a bankrupted estate, the medicine man selling worthless stump water. The League failed because it represented economic and political conservatism at a time when both were out of style.[84]

Though the formation of the American Liberty League in August of 1934 had compelled Smedley to report the details of the plot to the Dickstein Committee, in the years following Butler's testimony, the group did not appear to be the threat he had predicted. Its lack of effectiveness could have been partially due to Butler's exposure of the plot, confirming the suspicions of critics of the wealthy who feared that Wall Street posed an imminent danger to the future of democracy. In addition, the aims of the Liberty League seemed to diverge too sharply from the values of the American people. Even if Butler had gone along with the plot, there is no guarantee that his championing of the gold standard, overthrowing FDR, or any other ideas proposed to him by MacGuire would have garnered enough support to raise an army of veterans to seize the White House. In the past, when Smedley had championed the ideas of others – especially during his election run in 1932 – he had struggled to gain support. Instead, Butler would prove most popular was attuned to the sentiments of his audience. Changing their minds was out of his reach.

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justified, they promoted their goals and argued publically on behalf of their candidates and issues, providing a glimpse into the rationale of what was referred to as the "Tory" class.

[83] Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives,* viii.

[84] Ibid., 262.

While Butler's testimony was never disproved, the physical evidence in the case was virtually nonexistent. MacGuire and other parties involved in the plot were cagey in their testimony, and gave ambiguous or contradictory answers at times. Others were never called to the stand and the official report was mixed. On the one hand, it acknowledged that Butler's statements were true, "There is no question that these attempts were discussed, were planned, and might have been place in execution when and if the financial backers deemed it expedient."[85] But it also concluded that there was little the committee could do: "No evidence was presented and this committee had none to show a connection between this effort and any fascist activity of any European country."[86] When the name of the American Liberty League – along with other names Butler gave in his account – was suppressed from the Dickstein Committee's published report on the hearings, it raised suspicion among Butler and other critics, inspiring writers such as John Spivak to ask, "Why these inexplicable acts? Had the Committee found that the plot was too hot to handle?"[87] The Committee released a statement explaining why witnesses named by Butler had not been called to testify, and why names had been omitted from the report:

> The committee has had no evidence before it that would in the slightest degree warrant calling before it such men as John W. Davis, Gen. Hugh Johnson, General Harbord, Thomas W. Lamont, Admiral Sims, or Hanford MacNider. The committee will not take cognizance of names brought into the testimony which constitute mere hearsay.[88]

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[85] "Committee's Findings," *Special Committee on Un-American Activities. Investigation of Nazi Propaganda Activities and Investigation of Certain Other Propaganda Activities*: *Public hearings before the United States House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Seventy-Third Congress, Hearings No. 73* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1935).

[86] Ibid.

[87] Spivak, *A Man in his Time*, 313.

[88] "Public Statement of Special Committee on Un-American Activities," *Special Committee on Un-American Activities. Investigation of Nazi Propaganda Activities and Investigation of Certain Other Propaganda Activities*: *Public hearings before the United States House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Seventy-Third Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934), 1.

The testimony from Butler and French may have been hearsay, but similar hearsay would not prevent the Committee from calling hundreds of suspected communists and fascists to the stands in the following years.[89] Perhaps aware of these criticisms, in a radio address in late February of 1935, Dickstein responded to these charges from Butler and others:

> It [the Committee] did not feel like dragging into the mud of publicity names of persons who were mentioned by General Butler unless his statements could be verified, since untold damage might be caused to a person's reputation by public discussion of testimony which could not be substantiated. This accounts for the fact that when the results of the hearing were finally made public, references to Alfred E. Smith and others were omitted.[90]

Statements such as the one from Dickstein's speech reflected a fear of offending powerful individuals. The omission of names did not indicate a greater conspiracy, or a connection between those named and the Committee itself. Instead, as one writer of the era observed, "The rich and influential seemed to have a unique ability to avoid being called before a committee investigating un-American activities."[91] As the plot seemed to dissipate upon its exposure by Butler, congressmen on the committee had far more to lose than to gain by upsetting powerful figures in the political and finance world.

Though he may have been partially responsible for deterring this plot to overthrow the White House, Butler did not emerge in the press as a hero. The coverage surrounding the event was generally unfavorable, portraying Butler as a blowhard, a retired General in search of a

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[89] From the launch of HUAC in 1930 by Hamilton Fish, through the McCormack-Dickstein Committee in the mid-1930s, the Committee collected more the four thousand pages of testimony from people suspected of being involved in "subversive activity." The focus was on communist groups far more than any others. See Goodman, *The Committee*, 3-61.

[90] "Speech of Samuel Dickstein," February, 1935, as quoted in Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives*, 95-96.

[91] Spivak, *A Man in his Time*, 321.

fleeting moment of fame.[92] In large part, the event was either ridiculed by critics or simply left the public confused. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. pointed out that "No one quite knew what to make of the Butler story…Most people agreed with Mayor La Guardia of New York in dismissing it as a 'cocktail putsch.'"[93] However, there were strong parties in Butler's corner: James E. Van Zandt, national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and subsequently a Republican congressman, corroborated Butler's story and said that he too had been approached by "agents of Wall Street."

Though he had retained the support of most veterans, Butler was upset at the negative press coverage, and became infuriated when he learned that some of his testimony before the committee was not made public. In a radio broadcast a few months later, he implored his listeners to get involved: "You might encourage also, the Committee on Un-American Activities to publish all the testimony they took – to run out all the leads—call all the witnesses available – big and little. Get at the bottom of it or rather, at the top."[94] The next month he chastised the McCormack-Dickstein Committee itself: "This committee…is a committee that didn't investigate very thoroughly. It is a committee that suppressed the vital points of the testimony. It is the committee that slaughtered the little and let the big shots escape."[95] Over a year later, he

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[92] See "Plot Without Plotters," *Time* (Vol. 23, Iss. 23, December 3, 1934), Though the piece in *Time* outlined the plot, the magazine generally attacked Butler's character: "No military officer of the U. S. since the late, tempestuous George Custer has succeeded in publicly floundering in so much hot water as Smedley Darlington Butler."

[93] Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 83.

[94] Smedley Butler, "Munitions Makers," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 18, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[95] Ibid., February 26, 1935.

would still hold a grudge, berating the committee, as one writer put it, "for suppressing testimony and for refusing to call the higher-ups in the plot."[96]

Although Butler's whistleblowing may not have changed the direction of the country, the events gave concreteness to his anti-corporate, anti-big business frame of mind. The plot, the suppression of testimony, and the lack of action by the committee reinforced Butler's belief in the inordinate power of the wealthy. Aside from the plot itself, the emergence of the American Liberty League – as predicted by MacGuire – had convinced Butler that though he may have doubted MacGuire's efficacy, there were powerful groups in America who were seeking ways to upend democracy.[97] Speaking about the possibility that bankers and other private individuals could upend democracy in America in 1936, Butler emphasized his position: "…they'll try the same tricks used by European dictators to keep capitalism on the top of the economic heap. That, I think, is the real danger facing us today."[98] The plot planted in Butler's mind the fear that the United States government could be overthrown and converted to a dictatorship at any time.

That perceived danger spurred Butler into action. He took to writing and speaking more than ever before. In the year following his testimony he would publish his anti-war manifesto *War is a Racket* as well as a blistering series of articles for the popular publication *Common Sense*. He would give nearly eighty regular radio addresses articulating his philosophy on the outrage of war profiteering, and he would travel across the country to speak out against war profiteering and Big Business and its influence on U.S. military actions, maintaining one of the

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[96] In his 1935 interview with Walter Wilson, Butler lashed out at the committee and the press coverage of the event. See Walter Wilson, "Where Smedley Butler Stands," *New Masses*, Nov. 12, 1935, 17.

[97] Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 218.

[98] Walter Wilson, "Where Smedley Butler Stands," *New Masses*, Nov. 12, 1935, 17.

more lucrative public speaking careers in the 1930s. In this way, the "plot to overthrow the White House" was important not only for shaping Butler's anti-Wall Street views, but as an impetus for the most productive year of his career, which is the focus of the following two chapters.

## CONCLUSION

Butler's brief political run and his testimony before the Dickstein Committee were both efforts to serve the public, and his conduct in both instances, that virtually ensured he would remain outside of the powerful circles of Washington. In the first instance, Butler attempted to secure a political office which would have given him a platform to work on behalf of the average Pennsylvanian. Despite his good intentions, advocated for positions he knew and cared little about, alienating potential voters in a race that was an uphill battle from the start. In the second instance, Butler's revelation of the "Business Plot" appears to have been another attempt by the retired soldier to continue protecting the American people. While his testimony to the Nye Committee certainly fired Butler up to continue his offensive against war profiteers, it may or may not have prevented a *coup d'état*, and, unfortunately for Butler, it certainly damaged his public reputation.

As long as Butler had his core group of supporters – veterans – such damage to his reputation in political circles would be not be significantly felt by him. But less than two years after his testimony, when soldiers would be paid their Bonus and become largely disinterested in politics, leaving Butler would be left without his main audience. The veterans' issue, however, is a bit more complex than that. Therefore, the Bonus, the veterans' movement, and Smedley's impact upon it will be the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Just Talk
## Public Speaking and the Veterans' Movement

*"For a great many years, as a soldier, I had the suspicion that war was a racket; not until I retired to civil life did I fully realize it."*

-Smedley Butler, *War is a Racket*[1]

In the spring and summer of 1932, approximately 40,000 veterans and their families made their way from across the country to Washington, D.C, creating a makeshift camp across from the Capitol at Anacostia Flats. Calling themselves the Bonus Army, the veterans hoped their presence in Washington would pressure the Senate to pass the Patman Bonus Bill which would distribute a promised "Bonus" pay for their service in the First World War.[2] Smedley Butler arrived at the camp on July 19th to give what the *New York Times* referred to as a "fiery address." By all accounts it was an emotional speech, with Butler controlling the crowd like the experienced public speaker he was by that time. As the *Times* reported, "With a "damn" or a "hell" in every few words, General Butler evoked tremendous applause when he mounted an improvised stand."[3] His speaking style captured the attention of the audience, including the press, who reported:

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[1] Smedley Butler, *War is a Racket* (New York: Round Table Press, 1935), 2.

[2] On the Bonus Army see Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc. 2004). In their thorough study, Dickson and Allen argue that the devastating impact of the Depression hit veterans especially hard, compelling political action that culminated in the Bonus March. Also see Roger Daniels, *The Bonus March: An Episode of the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 256-265; and Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 179-204.

[3] "Gen. Butler Urges Bonus Army to Stick," *New York Times*, July 20, 1932.

> With his coat removed, his blue shirt and white collar dripping with perspiration, General Butler exhorted and berated. At times he left the subject and told humorous tales, but by the time the "point" of the speech was reached he had returned to the subject of the bonus army.[4]

A few days after Butler left the camp, President Hoover, fearing continued negative publicity as well as a growing Communist presence among the veterans, called in local police and military troops to remove the veterans. In what became known as the Bonus Riot, veterans and their families were bombarded by tear gas, tanks, and gunfire. Soldiers armed with fixed bayonets burned the shacks to the ground, as thousands were violently removed from the camp. In the end, three men were killed and the Hoover administration had lost most of the support of the four million veterans and their families.[5]

The Bonus March was an important moment in Depression-era history, and it also marked a significant moment in Butler's post-military career. Butler had left the Marine Corps nine months earlier and embarked on a demanding speaking tour. He had wanted to meet up with the Bonus Army for some time, expressing his admiration for the veterans to the crowd when he finally arrived: "I went on the retired list last October and this is the first time I have felt at home since."[6] The speech at the Anacostia camp reflected Butler's enthusiasm for the veterans' movement, and with wild gesticulations,

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[4] Ibid.

[5] For details of the removal of the Bonus Army and Hoover's motivations, see Donald J. Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, Conspiracy, and the Bonus Army* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 139-225; also Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 153-183. For the political impact of the Bonus March, especially on the Presidential election of 1932, see Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 32-65.

[6] "Gen. Butler Urges Bonus Army to Stick," *New York Times*, July 20, 1932.

he regularly slipped into extreme statements: "This is the greatest movement of any kind in the history of the United States. This is the greatest demonstration of Americanism ever seen."[7] These exaggerations seemed to be a reflection of the intense empathy that Butler had for veterans and their movement. He had come of age in the Corps and had spent over thirty years as a soldier, surrounded by soldiers. Now a veteran, it seemed a natural that he would take up veterans' causes. While Butler was an ardent supporter of the veterans' issues prior to the Bonus March, the fallout from the Bonus Riot would spur him to action, narrowing the focus of his speeches until he became a leading speaker in the veterans' movement.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the development of Butler's most well known book to date: *War is a Racket.* Focusing more closely on veterans' issues allowed Butler to reexamine the issue of war profiteering in greater depth. By advocating for the Bonus, he joined a line of intellectual inquiry led by veterans' organizations during the 1920s that had questioned reasons behind the lack of payment to veterans. This section shows how Butler's distinct philosophy that war was a "racket" was developed from a combination of arguments on behalf of the Bonus, his experiences in the Marines, and his concern for rank-and-file soldiers.

It is worth mentioning that Butler was not a popular and influential leader of the veterans' movement in the 1930s simply because of his stellar military record. Instead, his talent for public speaking was what allowed him a second career as an activist during the 1930s, and provided the platform to explore his newly formed anti-war ideology.

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[7] Ibid.

Before tracing his involvement with veterans' organizations, the chapter will first explore the motivations behind Butler's choice of public speaking as an occupation, and detail the ways in which his unique speaking style provided him with immediate and sustained success after his retirement from the Marine Corps.

## ORATOR

Few studies of Butler include more than snippets of his speeches given during his extensive public speaking career in the 1930s. Many scholars who have examined Butler – including Anne Venzon and Eunice Lyon – omit this aspect of his life entirely, relying on his extensive collection of letters during his years in the military.[8] Also absent from the research is the correspondence leading up to Butler's decision to become a public speaker; and no scholar has yet performed a thorough examination of Butler's speaking style. This section strives to fill that research gap with a detailed account of Butler's career as an orator.

In 1935, after Smedley had established himself as a leading public speaker on veterans' affairs, he paused to reflect on his post-military success: "During the past four years I have made over 1,200 speeches in over 700 towns and cities. I don't know how to do anything and I haven't anything to sell. All I know is how to understand and to handle

[8] Hans Schmidt drew from a wide array of sources including written material and personal interviews and Jules Archer mostly examined Butler's published writings. See Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987); Jules Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1973); Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed., *General Smedley Darlington Butler: The Letters of a Leatherneck, 1898-1931* (New York: Praeger, 1992); Eunice M. Lyon, ed. *The Unpublished Papers of Major Smedley Darlington Butler, United States Marine Corps: A Calendar* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University, 1962).

men."[9] Butler was being modest, of course, for by this point in his career he had mastered a great number of skills both on and off the battlefield. But before delving into the facets of Butler's speaking career, it is useful to examine the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of his speaking style, which greatly contributed to his popularity. One of the skills that put him in demand throughout the 1930s was his ability to captivate an audience.

In 1938, Butler closely examined the methodology behind the effectiveness of lectures. In a letter he wrote that year to a fan, Butler described his public speaking method in detail, explaining that he did not rely on his reputation to ensure the crowd was listening, but instead began each speaking engagement by attempting to win the audience over:

> In speaking to an audience, I try first to get there (sic) blood flowing and get them into a friendly frame of mind by telling them what I think they want to hear and trying to amuse them. If I am successful in gaining their rapt attention and good will, I then proceed to hand them things which perhaps they don't like, but I always try to feed it to them in small doses until by the expressions on their faces I judge they are with me.[10]

Smedley continued in the same letter, elaborating on the careful attention he paid to pace and tempo to ensure the audience remained with him until he got to the point he wanted to make:

> I try to start speaking in a normal, conversational, intimate tone and don't raise my voice or do any shouting or any particular gesticular motion, nor do I try to

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[9] Walter Wilson, "Where Smedley Butler Stands," *New Masses*, (Nov. 12, 1935), 18. Wilson's interview with Butler at his house in Newtown Square lasted at least four hours, and included a lunch with fruits and vegetables grown on the Butler's seven-acre property.

[10] Smedley Butler to Dr. Norman C. Webster, July 16, 1938, Butler Papers.

> make any very positive statement or elicit any applause until I am certain they are with me.[11]

Though he stated in the same letter the had "never had any instruction in public speaking and really have never reduced it down to a formula," it was clear by his detailed recounting of his approach to the stages of a speech that he had developed a systematic method of speechmaking that he would employ throughout his career.[12]

In his early years of public speaking, most of Butler's speeches were not planned ahead of time. L.C. Whitaker – Butler's personal aide during his final years in the Marines – described Butler's practice of speaking off the cuff, explaining in one letter to a journalist: "General Butler never prepares his speeches in advance."[13] Unrehearsed and gruff of manner as he was, Smedley would occasionally even curse, which led to his being cut off while speaking on the radio at least twice during the 1930s. Butler's friend and later assistant E.Z. Dimitman defended Butler in a letter to a college official who worried that Butler might be too profane if invited to speak there: "As one who has known General Butler intimately for many years, I want to assure that General Butler is never profane in his public utterances. While in the heat of oration, the General lets slip an occasional 'hell' or 'damn', as a matter of emphasis."[14] Dimitman, an experienced journalist, commented that such phrases were not the most offensive of the day: "These words can hardly be called profanity," and explained that because Smedley was accustomed to speaking with marines, he might slip up now and then: "The General is a

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] L.C. Whitaker to Mr. C. J. Hill, June 25, 1931, Butler Papers.

[14] E.Z. Dimitman to W. J. Swigart, April 4, 1932, Butler Papers.

God fearing man but a lifetime in the armed service of his Country has given him many vigorous terms of emphasis and many habits which are not easily thrown off when one returns to more polite company."[15]

Butler's rough style would particularly suit audiences composed mostly of veterans, another reason why he became one of the most prominent speakers in the veterans' movement in the 1930s. Researcher Anne Venzon – in a rare mention of Butler's speaking style – concluded that Smedley's particular verbal panache suited the subject of his speeches particularly well:

> He generally delivered his speeches extemporaneously, discussing the Marines' overseas exploits or his experiences as a crime fighter. These were subjects well suited to Butler's pithy, hyperbolic style, and his ebullient, staccato delivery of an address—frequently one containing highly controversial opinions—made him a popular lecturer.[16]

Butler's mix of improvisation and conversation gave the audience a feeling of intimacy – they were not being lectured to, they were being included in an experience. One fan, describing Butler's speaking style to a radio station, wrote that: "His manner of talking is a delight to his hearers, for it embodies a picturesque quality that holds attention from the first word to the last."[17] After a speech at the Worcester Economic Club in Massachusetts in 1932, a journalist remarked that Butler's style was so striking that dispelled preconceived notions of Smedley as a reckless military hero:

> Reading about Smedley Butler is one thing – it conjures up a vision of the garrulous bravo, a fighting fool who would taunt an admiral as shoot a spiggoty.

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[15] E. Z. Dimitman to W. J. Swigart, April 4, 1932, Butler Papers.

[16] Venzon, *General Smedley Darlington Butler*, 296.

[17] Samuel Wesley Long to *Collier's Weekly*, nd. (est. early 1929), Butler Papers.

> Seeing and hearing the man is something else – he turns out to be a scrapper who may be dramatic but who does not dramatize himself to himself. His belligerence is tinged with philosophy.[18]

Butler's keen ability to capture an audience through speech transcended even his own military reputation and, along with his adoption of views popular with veterans, it enabled him to thrive as a public speaker in the 1930s.

## TALKING THE STRIPES OFF A ZEBRA

While in the Marines, Butler had delivered numerous morale-boosting speeches to his soldiers, becoming somewhat notorious in the Corps for a personality that shined through in his verbal performances. General A.A. Vandegrift, a Medal of Honor winner who witnessed Butler's speaking prowess on a number of occasions, including their service together in Haiti, wrote about Smedley's oratory skills in his memoir: "That man (Butler) could talk the stripes off a zebra."[19] Future commandant David Shoup remembered listening to one of Butler's speeches during his service in China in 1927 and being struck by his style and substance.[20] Outside of the military, Butler cut his teeth speaking in front of a civilian audience in the mid-1920s while serving as Director of Public Safety in Philadelphia. At one point, Butler spoke regularly in front of "church bodies and other organizations," supporting – ironically, as he would discover – Mayor Kendrick's promises to "clean up" the city, and updating prominent groups on the

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[18] "Transcript," *Current Comment*, Boston, Mass., February 1, 1932, Butler Papers.

[19] General A. A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A. A. Vandegrift* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964), 49.

[20] David M. Shoup, *The Marines in China, 1927-1928, The China Expedition which turned out to be The China Exhibition* (Hamdon, CT: Archon Books, 1987), 110.

progress made.[21] Upon Butler's return from China in 1929, he was bombarded with requests to give speeches, marking the start of a long and successful speaking career that would carry beyond his military years and well into retirement.

Butler was also fortunate to retire when he did in the 1930s, a decade which saw the flourishing of a popular lecture circuits with numerous opportunities for a skilled orator. Through the early years of the American colonies, public speaking had belonged to the Christian tradition, with tent revivals and "Awakenings" supplementing the regular sermons of local communities.[22] With the arrival of the Enlightenment and secular ideals in the 18th century such as Thomas Jefferson's championing of the educated yeoman farmer, public speaking acquired a new purpose – to educate the American citizenry, ignite intellectual curiosity, and provide practical solutions to day-to-day issues.[23] In the early 19th century, the "lyceum" movement created the first structured circuit of adult lectures focused on educating the American public on issues ranging from textile work to the literary works of the day. Writers, politicians, explorers, and intellectuals flocked to participate in these lecture tours, which were themselves bolstered by a rising middle class and the revolutionary transportation developments first of the Erie Canal and then the railroad industry. As one historian remarked, "By the time of the Civil War, lyceum

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[21] Brigadier General Smedley D. Butler, U.S.M.C., "Butler and Mayor have First Real Clash,'" *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1926.

[22]On the history of organized public speaking in America see John E. Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua: From Rural Education to Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth Century America* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997); also Andrew C. Reiser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism* (New York: Columbian University Press, 2003).

[23] Reiser, *The Chautauqua Moment*, 100-101.

had become equated with popular adult entertainment."[24] In 1874, Reverend John Heyl Vincent began an annual two-week religious and intellectual retreat on the shores of Lake Chautauqua, in southwest New York. By attracting the greatest political, scientific, philosophical, and Christian minds of the era, Chautauqua's popularity skyrocketed. By 1900, the Chautauqua Book Club had over two and a half million members. Over 10,000 local Chautauqua groups had formed and would foster a traveling "circuit Chautauqua" through the 1920s.[25] The advent of national radio and the evolution of silent films into "talkies" would gradually diminish the influence of both the lyceum and circuit chautauquas by the 1930s. And yet, a continued demand for adult education, entertaining lectures, and the appearances by celebrity figures would allow a prominent lecture circuit to thrive through the Great Depression. This was the public speaking scene that Smedley encountered as he returned from China in 1929 and began to weigh his options for a future career.

One of the reasons Butler was in high demand as a speaker upon his return from China may have been that – fortunately for him – the topic of China was popular in the U.S. at that time. The rise of Chiang Kai-Shek, the success of the Northern Expedition, and a recent famine in China had garnered intense media attention in the United States.[26]

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[24] Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua*, 12.

[25] Ibid., 20-26.

[26] For the general coverage of China during this period, see *New York Times* correspondent Hallett Abend's *My Life in China*, *1926-1941* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943). Butler's return to the United States corresponded with the ongoing famine in China that would affect over 40 million Chinese, from 1928 – 1929. For reports of the disparity and political wrangling that perpetuated the suffering in the famine, see "12,000,000 Starving; China Asks for Aid," *New York Times*, November 17, 1928; "Thousands Die Daily in Chinese Famine," February 23, 1929; and "Politics has Part in Chinese Famine," *New York Times*, April 8, 1929.

The increased attention on the "Middle Kingdom" in the late 1920s and into the 1930s also fit into a long-held American curiosity about Asia. As scholar Karen Leong pointed out, China had "populated the American imagination" from the time of the early republic, and this fascination grew with accounts from missionaries, the emergence of the film industry, and the publication of Pearl S. Buck's novels in the 1920s and 1930s.[27] According to historian Henry Yu, interest in China also stemmed as far back as the founding father with "exoticized tales" and Chinese production of highly sought-after goods by the American upper-class prevalent in the Colonial Period:

> Early elites such as George Washington carefully cultivated an ideal of themselves as cultured by proudly decorating their homes with porcelain tea sets and tasteful chinoiseries, and the exotic cachet of Oriental objects has been a crucial element of class distinction in the US ever since.[28]

Butler was by no means immune to this preoccupation with Chinese artifacts as a symbol of status carried into Butler's life: he so cherished the two ceremonially umbrellas awarded to him in China that he brought them back with him and displayed them prominently – as a conversation piece – in the home he purchased just before retirement.[29]

But by June of 1929, Butler was branching out, speaking on more than his experiences and the current situation in China. His occasional speeches were beginning

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[27] Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1-11, 26-28, 163-164. Buck's novel on rural China, *The Good Earth*, was the best-selling book of 1931 and 1932, and won the Pulitzer Prize.

[28] Henry Yu, "Asian Americans," from *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History,* Mary Kupiec Cayton and Peter W. Williams, editors (New York: Scribner's Sons, forthcoming).

[29] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 202. Butler reportedly displayed his "Thousand Blessings Umbrellas" prominently in the household.

to garner enough attention that he was receiving invitations to speak at graduation ceremonies for large universities. These invitations were the first indications to Butler that he could make a living speaking, as it was the first time he received large fees for his speeches. He acknowledged in a letter to Burks that the income helped pay larger bills on his plate, such as his sons' college educations:

> I have made some speeches in Philadelphia, and while I have not made <u>much</u> money out of it, it has helped. On one occasion I made the graduation address of the Drexel Institute and apparently pleased the audience, as since then I have received several invitations from institutions in the eastern part of the United States…and hope to get the children's schooling paid from this source.[30]

Butler sensed a growing potential in the field of public speaking, and seemed to favor it over a career in writing – where there was no guarantee of payment for hours of work. Burks seems to understand this development, and encouraged Smedley to pursue the professional speaking circuit, writing to him:

> You said something else in your letter that interested me immensely: your speeches. Would you make a tour if an offer sufficiently attractive were made to you? Louis J. Alber…is one of the best booking offices in the country. Pays all expenses and makes a guarantee to people of your standing.[31]

Louis Alber was head of the Cleveland-based Alber Bureau, one of the largest lecture bureaus in the country at the time, representing such prominent clients as Walter Lippmann, Idea M. Tarbell, and Lowell Thomas.[32] This first introduction to the world of speaking tours is noteworthy, as Butler would eventually become a client of Alber's, taking on national speaking tours, and refining much of his ideology as he made his way

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[30] Smedley Butler to Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks, June 13, 1929, Butler Papers.

[31] Arthur J. Burks to Smedley Butler, June 14, 1929, Butler Papers.

[32] Ibid., July 6, 1929, Butler Papers.

through those appearances. Without Burks's contact with Louis Alber, it is unlikely Butler would have made a name for himself on the lecture circuit, or considered the occupation a viable option.

By late 1929, Smedley had begun regularly giving speeches and gave up his efforts to support himself and his family through a writing career. He signed a deal both with the International Speakers Bureau as well as the Alber Bureau, and was hired to speak at least five times a month through late 1929 and early 1930, mostly in Pennsylvania.[33] He received daily requests, and sensed that if he had the time and energy, he could make a living at it, stating in one letter: "So many invitations to make speeches come my way that I could go nearly every night of the week, and thus destroy myself completely and all to no purpose except to possibly entertain other people."[34] Yet, he may not have been completely convinced. Speaking was tiresome, difficult work. Smedley confessed to a friend at the time that he was not eager to give more talks, as he was exhausted from "running around the country trying to make speeches."[35]

Another issue Butler had with public speaking was its seeming lack of substance. Speaking in front of crowds felt purposeless to Butler in his early stabs at the profession. At one point in 1929 he felt he had "given enough to the American people in the way of acting as an entertainer…I am not a propagandist, and have no message for anybody – so

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[33] "List of Engagement and Contacts Made by General Butler During Period October 21, 1929, Butler Papers.

[34] Smedley Butler to Theodore E. Brown, March 27, 1930, Butler Papers.

[35] Smedley Butler to Mrs. Mabel Dean Bacon, October 28, 1929, Butler Papers.

there is no object in my appearing anywhere except for money."[36] He was not satisfied at being just a hired sideshow, and seemed close to abandoning the career if he were only to be an entertainer. But despite his complaints, Butler continued to give speeches and accepting the money that came along with it. He spoke in front of groups if the price was right, and on occasion would lower his fee for the Y.M.C.A. "or marines or policemen."[37]

Butler might have abandoned the profession when he earned enough money had he not found a larger purpose in it. He wrote in the spring of 1930: "I have no axes to grind and am not a candidate for public office – or anything else in the hands of the people who invite me."[38] In the two years between this statement and his retirement, Butler was passed over for commandant and court-martialed, and he resigned bitterly from the Marine Corps, immediately racing off on a cross-country speaking tour. In other words, he would soon find enough "axes to grind" to sustain a speaking career for many years.

Louis Alber reconnected with Butler in July of 1930, just prior to Neville's death and Butler's reemergence on the national stage in his run for Commandant. In July of 1930, Alber offered to manage Butler after his military career in any speeches or "some public addresses after you retire from the Army."[39] That Alber did not know Butler was in the Marine Corps and not the Army, showed that at this point he was not familiar with Butler. Yet by October of 1930, Alber would be booking Butler at $250 per speech -

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Smedley Butler to Theodore E. Brown, March 27, 1930, Butler Papers.

[39] Louis J. Alber to Smedley Butler, July 12, 1930, Butler Papers.

$150 more than Butler had previously made – demonstrating the rapid development of their relationship.[40]

During the time that Butler struggled to make writing a financially viable occupation, the demand for him as a public speaker may have offered some relief. In November of 1930, Butler's speaking schedule picked up, as Alber began booking dates while they worked out details of a longer contract. In December, Butler would sign that contract with Louis Alber for the 1931-1932 season - October 1st, 1931 thru June 1st, 1932 – guaranteeing Butler an income of at least $15,000 for the period.[41] One notable speaking engagement within that period would be November 14th, when Butler spoke at the Vanderbilt Hotel. His talk was titled "My San Diego Experience," and likely dealt with the incidents surrounding the unfortunate Williams Affair and Prohibition. The following afternoon – on the same program – Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., was slated to speak on "Some Experiences."[42] Two months later, Butler's recounting of a story about Mussolini as told by the younger Vanderbilt – possibly during this joint appearance – would result in the most high-profile incident in Butler's military career.[43]

## CAPITALIZING ON FAME

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[40] Smedley Butler to Arthur J. Burks, October 2, 1930, Butler Papers.

[41] "Contract between Smedley D. Butler and Affiliated Lecture and Concern Association," December 4, 1930, Butler Papers. The amount of money was not small. For example, $15,000 in 1930 would be approximately $200,000 when converted into 2010 dollars. See http://oregonstate.edu/cla/polisci/individual-year-conversion-factor-tables (Accessed November 26, 2012)

[42] Louis J. Alber, "Programs: To be given in Vanderbilt Hotel, New York City," November 14, 1930, Butler Papers.

[43] For more on the Mussolini Incident, see Chapter 3.

When the Mussolini incident of late January and early February of 1931 propelled Butler into the national spotlight, he was inundated with requests to speak in public. Having emerged from the incident virtually unscathed and very famous, the controversy could not have delivered a better result had he orchestrated it himself. Capitalizing on the high demand for his speeches, Butler decided to use the weeks of vacation he had accrued to quickly turn some profits. According to Butler's own account, between March 9th and April 16th he "traveled 14,600 miles, spent 31 nights in sleeping cars, covered 14 states, and made 52 speeches in 41 different places."[44] Writing to a friend in March, he stated his plan: "I have one hundred and fifty invitations to make speeches between now and the first of July, but, of course, I cannot do them all and will simply take on those that will give the biggest returns, and hope to make enough to start buying a house, as I may retire any minute."[45] Butler knew he might not be in the spotlight for long, and he used his fame to land engagement he felt would best provide a financial cushion for his family.

Social factors, however, would steer Butler away from his personal financial goals and towards helping to ease Depression-related suffering and with the broader economic recovery. Americans had weathered the stock market crash of 1929 and a banking panic in December of 1930, it was not entirely clear in early 1931 how long the economic downturn would last.[46] Observing the deteriorating conditions in Philadelphia, Butler decided to give half of his earnings to unemployment relief in the city during the

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[44] Smedley Butler to Samuel Butler, April 22, 1931, Butler Papers.

[45] Smedley Butler to Roy "Torchy" M. Robinson, March 5, 1931, Butler Papers.

[46] For example, unemployment numbered 4.1 million at the end of 1930, but at a low point in 1921 had been at 4.9 million. For more on state of America during 1930 see David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929 – 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 58-69.

period in which he was in the greatest demand as a speaker. In a letter to Captain Robinson, Butler explained that his desire to repay the citizens of Philadelphia for supporting him during the Mussolini Incident coincided with a philanthropic urge:

> Have had two thousand letters to answer and over one hundred invitations to make speeches in every direction. Am starting out on Monday and will attempt to make twenty speeches in twenty-one days, and am glad to give half of what I make to the unemployed in Philadelphia. Theses Philadelphians stood by for me like tigers in this recent controversy, and I feel that I owe them so much that it is only fair to get out and try to make them something.[47]

Butler's motivation for helping out the unemployed was not entirely altruistic, however. For one, he may have already been planning his run for office; aiding Philadelphians would raise both good feelings and his profile in the city. Also, Butler learned of a faction of rivals that did not want him speaking, and desired to punish him beyond the court-martial. Not wanting to enter into any more debacles with the military brass, Butler confessed to a friend: "…a rumor had reached me that certain influences were attempting to stop my speaking, hence the charity aspect came in very suitably, as you can see."[48] Furthermore, when he began to reap the financial benefits of his fame through the plethora of speaking gigs, Butler began to somewhat regret his decision to share his profits. In a letter to Lowell Thomas, Butler expressed some regret at his hasty decision: "This so-called lecture tour has been eminently successful, but as I have been dividing up with the Unemployment Relief Committee of Philadelphia, it has not yielded as much as it otherwise would."[49] In April of 1931, Butler elaborated in a letter to his brother Sam: "Had it not been for the fact that in a burst of enthusiasm, I agreed to give half of what I

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[47] Smedley Butler to Roy "Torchy" M. Robinson, March 5, 1931, Butler Papers.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Smedley Butler to Lowell Thomas, April 12, 1931. Butler Papers.

made to the Philadelphia Unemployment Charity, I would now be financially well fixed. But I have given them $3500."[50]

Though he may have wished he could have retained some of those funds, Butler did believe in helping the unemployed, and understood that the country was entering a deep depression and that, relative to so many others, he himself was financially well situated. In mid-April, he continued his charitable giving, donating $500 to the Salvation Army, and stating in a letter that he had always admired the work of the organization.[51] The money he was being paid to speak was significant, and Butler contrasted it with how much he had made previously:

> Mrs. Butler and I have lived on an average salary of about $3,000 a year for the last thirty-three years. We have nothing, and while the going is good I am going to get it if I can. I fully expect to retire next Fall and before snow falls I want a roof to put over the heads of my family."[52]

By that time, Butler was likely making closer to $6,000 a year,[53] but he did have expenses to consider. In July of 1931, Butler bought a five-bedroom, 4,000-square-foot house in West Chester, and had it remodeled for months before moving in, explaining to Torchy Robinson that his only fear was that it was too large to be of practical use. Corresponding with Sam in June of 1931, Butler confirmed that the past few months had

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[50] Smedley Butler to Samuel Butler, April 22, 1931, Butler Papers.

[51] Smedley Butler to Horatio G. Lloyd, April 17, 1931, Butler Papers; During most of the 1930s the median income hovered around fifteen hundred dollars a year, with millions of households making under two hundred dollars yearly. With his yearly salary in the Marines of over $6,000, and speaking engagements four to five times a week paying him upwards of $200 per speech, Butler was on pace to put his family in the top five percent, if not higher. See Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 276.

[52] Smedley Butler to Senator Charles L., McNary, May 6, 1931, Butler Papers.

[53] Estimate based on the historical pay grade of Marine Corps officers. See Bernard C. Nalty, Truman R. Strobridge, Edwin T. Turnbladh, and Rowland P. Gill, *United States Marine Corps Ranks and Grades*, 1775-1969 (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1970), 70.

been profitable for him, but did not know how long it would last, as lecturing was physically draining: "I have been successful in making some money, but with the hardest kind of work." Nevertheless, he continued speaking until his retirement to support his new real estate purchase to secure his finances for the future.[54]

## FROM RETIREMENT TO THE LECTURE CIRCUIT

Butler would officially retire from the Marine Corps on October 1st, 1931. Commandant Ben Fuller – despite having had his differences and having tangled politically with Butler[55] – took the occasion to praise him for his military work: "The Marine Corps will miss you, and the Major General Commandant takes this occasion to express his appreciation of your service, and the hope that whatever you may undertake in the future will be attended with success and happiness."[56] Days before Smedley went on the retirement list, he addressed some 1,200 veterans at the state convention of the American Legion in Connecticut, hinting that his plans for retirement did not mean he would steer away from controversy: "I am through, but you will hear more from me. I am going to get busy in the Legion business when I get out where I won't get in wrong

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[54] Smedley Butler to Captain Ray "Torchy" Robinson, July 7, 1931, Butler Papers; Smedley Butler to Samuel Butler, June 1, 1931, Butler Papers.

[55] Butler waged a fierce political campaign to win the position of commandant of the Marine Corps, eventually losing to Fuller. For more, see Chapter 3.

[56] Fuller's praise continued: "You have served through two wars, and have taken part in many hazardous and important expeditions in foreign countries. You have distinguished yourself by personal heroism and splendid leadership in battle, and have otherwise rendered outstanding and valuable service in positions of great responsibility." The Major General Commandant to Major General Smedley D. Butler, September 4, 1931, Butler Papers.

when I say things."[57] At this point, his public statements revealed little opposition to war:

> We don't want any more wars, but a man is a damn fool to think there won't be any more of them. I am a peace-loving Quaker, but when war breaks out every damn man in my family goes. If we're ready, nobody will tackle us. Give us a club and we will face them all.[58]

Butler went further, claiming that the United States was not naturally a peaceful nation, nor would it stand idly by if there was a war to be fought: "No pacifists or Communists are going to govern this country. If they try it there will be seven million men like you to rise up and strangle them," adding that a person could be anti-war, but always ready to fight: "Pacifists? Hell, I'm a pacifist, but I always have a club behind my back." Butler clearly backed the upkeep of the military, if not the stockpiling of ammunitions, for as he put it, the country would fight, and needed the means to do so: "Well, we won't go out to fight anybody else unless we've got the goods and produce them. There is no use talking about abolishing war; that's damn foolishness. Take the guns away from men and they will fight just the same."[59] In previous months he had blasted American foreign policy in his accounts of the U.S. military's overthrow of governments in Latin America, yet it is clear that Butler's thoughts on war remained far from the ideology he would develop in the succeeding years. At this point in late 1931, he continued to see the need for a strong, and perhaps aggressive military force. But that view would soon undergo a transformation during his involvement with the veterans' movements of the 1930s.

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[57] "Maj. Gen. Butler Will Retire Oct. 1…He Makes a Fiery Speech," *New York Times*, August 21, 1931.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

## VETERANS

Butler's post-military philosophy on war profiteering would begin to take form as Butler aligned himself with veterans' organizations, groups that played a major role in shaping America during the Great Depression. In 1930, more than four and half million military veterans – in a country of approximately 100 million at the time – mobilized in numerous veterans groups across the country, demanding to have their voices heard. Some sixty-three congressmen – including fifteen senators – were themselves veterans of the First World War. Journalists of the 1930s such as Oliver McKee, Jr., predicted that the veterans' movement would prove to be one of the most powerful forces shaping American policy during the era, writing that "the American veteran of the world War has arrived on the political scene, and in arriving there, has brought a new force into our political life. Hereafter, we must recon with him."[60] Recent evaluations of the New Deal era have begun to recognize the impact of military veterans on the political discussion, and their influence on the outcomes of the presidential elections in 1932 and 1936.[61] Though Butler was popular with veterans' organizations even prior to the Bonus March, following his speech and support of the issue through the 1932 election, he became one

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[60] Oliver McKee, Jr., "The Political March of the Veterans," *The Commonweal*, Volume XIII, Wed., November 12, 1930 (New York: Calvert Publishing Corporation), 40-42. According to McKee writing in 1930, "the present Congress has more veterans than any Congress since the war (World War I)."

[61] For recent studies of the ability of veterans to wield political power during the 1930s, see Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Barber also situates the Bonus March amidst a long tradition of protest in Washington, achieving variable levels of success, but shows a general apathy towards protests as they became more common in the 1960s.

of the most sought-after speakers for veterans' groups, and a recognized leader in their movement.

When Butler entered retirement in October of 1931, there were two major veterans organizations: the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). The American Legion was the primary veterans group of the day, launched in 1919 just after World War I and reaching a height of nearly a million members during the 1920s.[62] According to one scholar of veterans' organizations, the Legion grew faster than the hundreds of other similar associations created after the war for two reasons: it had help from the War Department, which offered bureaucratic support, and its leaders were "men drawn from the nation's political and economic elite."[63] Prominent founding members included republicans and democrats alike, a non-partisan body composed of figures such as Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., New York State Senator and U.S. Treasurer Ogden Mills, and Senator Bennett Champ Clark. Financial backing by the Morgan Guarantee Trust and others powerful institutions ensured the organization's stable financial footing.[64]

But with a leadership made up of – or at least tied to – some of the most elite circles in America, the American Legion was denounced by many, including Butler, as being controlled by a "Royal Family" of wealthy, Wall Street-friendly politicians. Though he may have been one of the more popular retired officers, Butler recognized that

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[62] The history of the American Legion in this section comes from the following sources: Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans, 1990); William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989); and also Raymond Moley, Jr., *The American Legion Story* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1966).

[63] Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 16-17.

[64] Rumer, *The American Legion,* 31-37.

many legionnaires were convinced there was a need to "clean out the selfish politicians who are using their position in the Legion to secure for themselves personal recognition by the big political parties." Coming off his loss in the Pennsylvania election, and not eager to enter into politics again, Butler denied he was the man to help solve the Legion's problems, writing in a letter: "I am heartily in sympathy with this movement to clean up and if I thought that by running for this office (National Commander) I could contribute to the downfall of the selfish leadership which is deterring the soldiers, I would be glad to do so." Yet Butler would continue to associate himself with the Legion, despite his criticisms of the organization's leadership, speaking before local chapters throughout his career. Even so, he more closely aligned himself with a rival veterans' organization: the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).[65]

Formed into a national organization in 1914 out of a consolidation of smaller groups of veterans of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, the Veterans of Foreign Wars could not claim famous soldiers or politically connected leaders as members, and maintained a relative small membership – just 20,000 in 1920 – during its first decade and a half of existence. Beyond the absence of high-profile leadership, its slow growth at the outset could also be attributed to a lack of ideological differentiation: the organization echoed the stance of the American Legion on most issues. According to one historian, this "overlapping of agendas and attributes" allowed the American Legion to keep the upper hand in veterans' politics for many years.[66] From 1929 to 1932,

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[65] For Butler's view on the American Legion, see Smedley Butler to T. J. Leary, August 24, 1932, Butler Papers.

[66] Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 21.

however, the VFW suddenly experienced a bout of rapid growth, becoming the second largest veterans' organization with a peak membership of around 200,000 members. The VFW's brisk rise was due to a significant break from the American Legion on a crucial issue of the time for veterans: the demand for immediate payment of the Bonus. Following the violent dispersal of the Bonus encampment – at which the VFW had been the most prominent organization represented – the group was propelled into the national spotlight.[67]

## THE BONUS AND THE BONUS ARMY

Benefits for veterans had been a concern of the earliest governing bodies in American history, beginning in the colonial period with the Plymouth Colony of Massachusetts, which called on the colony to provide for the maintenance of any maimed soldier. Following the Revolutionary War, pensions were provided for veterans wounded in the war and dependants of soldiers killed in action. In 1783, when payment of Revolutionary War fighters threatened to be withheld, a band of soldiers marched on the capital in Philadelphia, muskets drawn. The Civil War pension system created for veterans at one point consumed a fifth of the national budget. In this tradition, when the

[67] Ibid., 32-65. Ortiz attributed the growth of the VFW to the number of veterans of the First World War joining up on behalf of their stance on the issue, and demonstrated that the organization was the key group in organizing the Bonus March; Relative to the American Legion, there are few major studies on the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Two recent works by Stephen Ortiz constitute the most comprehensive work: the aforementioned *Beyond the Bonus March* and "'Soldier-Citizens': The Veterans of Foreign Wars and Veteran Political Activism From the Bonus March to the GI Bill," Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 2004). Also see Herbert Molloy Mason, Jr., *VFW: Our First Century, 1899-1999* (Lenexa, KS: Addax, 1999), and Mary Katherine Goldsmith, "The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States: The History of a Veterans' Organization, Its Function in Assisting Veterans, Influencing National Legislation, and Interpreting and Promoting Americanism, 1899-1948," M.A. thesis, University of Kansas City, 1963.

soldiers returned home from the horrors of the Great War in 1918 they demanded a "Bonus" beyond the dollar-a-day pay they had received during their service.[68]

And yet, veterans of the First World War faced unique struggles in their battle for their bonus pay. By the early 20th century, older veterans organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) had lost much of their influence, and political support for benefits for veterans – especially uninjured veterans – seemed at an all-time low. Historians Paul Dickson and Thomas Allen summarized the dire situation of veterans in the early 1920s: "…as the power of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) waned, so did congressional sympathy toward able-bodied veterans."[69] The struggle for the bonus and other veterans' benefits during the 1920s would resurrect veterans' organizations, spawning the American Legion, and boosting the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Through these groups' persistent efforts, there was early success in 1924 when Congress granted World War veterans "adjusted universal compensation." However, soldiers who had served long enough to be owed more than $50 did not receive payment, and were instead issued certificates that would become redeemable in 1945.[70] During the relatively prosperous 1920s, the settlement seemed to appease most veterans, reducing complaints on the issue. A renewed interest in expediting the bonus payment would spark Congressman Wright Patman in May of 1929 to introduce a bill for immediate payment, but the bill would not even make it to committee.

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[68] On soldiers' pensions, and especially their contribution to the creation of the welfare state, see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992). For a more general account, see Amy W. Knight and Robert L. Worden, *The Veterans Benefits Administration: An Organizational History, 1776-1994* (Washington, D.C.: The Administration, 1995); and Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*.

[69] Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 4.

[70] Ibid., 5. The promised Bonus would pay the soldiers $50 for each month served in the World War.

Following the stock market crash in October and the onset of the Depression, the demand for the bonus would rise, reaching a fever pitch in early 1932. Veterans felt they were unemployed in disproportionate numbers than the rest of the population, and in fact, they were correct. They often blamed their age and more advanced station in life, and indeed they were older than the average worker and many were married, lacking the flexibility of single men to move where jobs were located. An American Legion report in 1931 claimed that 800,000 World War veterans (out of an estimated 4.7 million) lacked employment and a Veterans' Administration study the same year revealed an unemployment rate 50 percent greater among veterans than among non-veterans of the same age.[71] As one historian pointed out, "These statistical studies supported veterans' claims that the war years had set them back in the race with their civilian counterparts for a share of the nation's wealth."[72] The restlessness grew, and soon the soldiers would take their case directly to Washington.

In March of 1932, Walter Waters, an unemployed veteran in Portland, proposed a march on Washington to demand payment. Nothing came of that initial proposal, but in May, following the defeat of a Patman-sponsored bill for immediate payment of the Bonus, some 250 veterans hopped onto trains in Portland bound for Washington.[73] The veterans did not embark on this mission without a sense of irony, christening themselves the Bonus Expeditionary Force (BEF), a play on the name given to the troops sent to fight in First World War, the "American Expeditionary Force." Tens of thousands of

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[71] Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, 181.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army,* 5.

disgruntled veterans marched on the White House and Washington D.C. in the upcoming months. The Bonus Army – as it would become known – was less the work of a few motivated veterans, and more a channeling of a growing discontent among veterans nationwide. Weeks before the start of the Bonus March, the VFW had staged a demonstration in Washington with nearly twelve hundred veterans. But when approximately 40,000 veterans, families, and other supporters installed themselves through June and most of July in a makeshift "Hooverville" at Anacostia Flats, across the river from the capitol, the movement took on a new significance. The former soldiers aimed to pressure the Senate to pass the Patman Bonus Bill that would pay the veterans the remainder of bonuses promised to them for their service in World War I. When another version of the Bonus bill was defeated in the Senate, most veterans stayed in Washington, fueling rising tensions between the veterans and the government. The results would turn deadly.[74]

Following his unsuccessful run for political office, Butler had returned to public speaking, and kept abreast of veterans' issues. From the early days of the Bonus Army, he expressed a desire to help, eventually staying at the camp for a full night. He arrived at the camp, on Tuesday, July 19th and gave a rousing speech that afternoon. It was a hot day, but Smedley had experienced far worse, having spent many summers down the road at Quantico. His energy was high as he jumped from topic to topic, per his style: "At times he left the subject and told humorous tales" and reportedly threw a "damn" or a

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[74] The background and events of the Bonus Army, Bonus March, and Bonus Riot, are compiled from Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, 179-204; Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 56-183; Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order,* 256-265; and Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 49-65.

"hell" in every few words," according to the *New York Times*.[75] Butler emphasized his devotion to veterans, and his fondness for their company: "I'm here because I've been a soldier for thirty-five years and I can't resist the temptation to be among soldiers…I went on the retired list last October and this is the first time I have felt at home since." Smedley was also concerned about how veterans were being treated when they protested: "You hear folks call you fellows tramps, but they didn't call you that in '17 and '18. I never saw such fine soldiers. I never saw such discipline."[76]

Butler and other veterans demanded immediate payment of the bonus. Critics, including most leaders of the American Legion, argued either that the bonus payment would bankrupt the country, or that soldiers were not a "special class" and had not signed up to fight the war in hopes of being paid an extra bonus, but had fought to defend the country and receive the honors of a soldier returning from war.[77] The latter argument carried weight until the fallout from the Depression landed hundreds of thousands of veterans in unemployment, facing financial devastation. As the veterans' difficulties intensified, criticism grew against banks and financiers who had profited from the past military actions of the government. It was not simply that the soldiers had been brave and thus deserved payment, it was that others had profited from solders' sacrifices and continued to enjoy great influence over the government. At the Bonus Army camp, Butler made reference to those corporate powers: "You have as much right to lobby here

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[75] "Gen. Butler Urges Bonus Army to Stick," *New York Times*, July 20, 1932.

[76] Ibid. The importance of Butler's visit to the camp in raising the morale of the troops is emphasized in Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 151-152.

[77] Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army,* 5.

as the United States Steel Corporation,"[78] and finished his speech with a plea for the veterans' group to stay in place as long as it took to achieve its goal. Butler then threw in a colorful chastisement war profiteers: "Hang together, and stick it out till the gate bars of hell freeze over; if you don't you are no damn good…Remember, by God, you…didn't win the war for a select class of a few financiers and high binders." He advocated that veterans use their political power to exert pressure on the politicians instead of resorting to violence: "You got the vote – if you use it together, you can get your bonus." Though his speech was packed with emotion, he encouraged lawful protest and a peaceful resolution: "Don't break any laws and allow people to say bad things about you." With this statement, Butler seemed to slip into back into the role he had played at Quantico from 1920-1924, managing public relations for the Corps and ensuring it received good press. While he was always a staunch advocate for following the law, in this case Butler additionally felt that it was important for veterans to understand that unruliness could give veterans a bad name, and that with too much bad press, their cause might be lost.[79]

His overnight stay at the camp at Anacostia Flats left an impression on Butler; he was reinvigorated to fight for the veteran cause. Writing about the Bonus Army after leaving the camp:

> All they want is work and the opportunity to get food. They have assembled not so much to impress Congress, but from the feeling that all together they will at least have congenial company and can bear their troubles better in a body than singly…I am going to do everything in my power to help them and I am going to

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[78] "Gen. Butler Urges Bonus Army to Stick," *New York Times*, July 20, 1932.

[79] "Butler Tells Bonus Vets to Stick it Out," *Times-Herald,* July 20, 1932**;** "Gen. Butler Urges Bonus Army to Stick," *New York Times*, July 20, 1932.

> fight everybody who is against them. For after all, the tie that binds the soldiers together is stronger than any other bond.[80]

One week after he left, on July 28th, Hoover called in the cavalry, infantry, and a machine gun squadron, which joined local police to remove the trespassers; an estimated 16,000 veterans were violently removed from their temporary dwellings. Three men who would become seminal figures in American military history - General Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, and George Patton – led the forcible removal. Troops burned encampments, physically harassed veterans, and showered tear gas on veterans and their families. At certain times, the operation became especially violent. Though no police or active military were seriously injured, two veterans in the Bonus Army – Eric Carlson and William J. Hushka – were killed by police gunfire.[81] Over 2,000 people, mostly veterans, attended Hushka's funeral at Arlington National Cemetery, where he was buried with military honors.[82]

The conflict had massive political repercussions. Even if the average American did not agree with veterans on the issue of the Bonus, they objected to Hoover's tactics. As a historian on the era deduced, it was the President's apparent indifference towards the veterans that was especially damning: "There seemed no excuse for his refusal to see their leaders; no excuse for resorting to arms…no excuse for forcing pell-mell evacuation in the dead of night." The veterans had heeded Smedley's warning, had not fought back to a significant degree, had followed the law, and were thus the clear victims in the

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[80] Smedley Butler to Brigadier General Charles G. Long, July 26, 1932, Butler Papers.

[81] Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007) 129-130; Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 153-183, 192.

[82] Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 192.

conflict. Butler too, saw this in the result: "I tried my best to steer the course of my soldier friends so that they would not lose the advantage they had gained, and it came out somewhere near the goal I had hoped for." Of course, Butler did not hope for the violence, but instead that the veterans would garner sympathy from the press and the American public.[83]

And they did. The excessively violent treatment of the veterans proved to be the tipping point in an election Hoover seemed destined to lose. Upon reading the news of the troops and police removing the veterans, Roosevelt reportedly declared in private that he had the election locked up.[84] The commander of the Bonus Expeditionary Forces came to the same conclusion, years after the event:

> The B.E.F. played a decisive part in the November elections and in the defeat of the Republican Party. It can be argued that, had Mr. Hoover not chosen to use force to drive out the B.E.F. the veteran vote in a score of States might have gone to him and erased the narrow margin that gave the Democrats their victory.[85]

Historian William Leuchtenburg also surmised that the removal of the veterans was the final straw in Hoover's doomed reelection campaign: "After the rout of the Bonus Army, Hoover encountered the bitter animosity of men and women who held him personally responsible for their plight. In Detroit, he was greeted with the cry: 'Down with Hoover, slayer of veterans.'"[86] The political tide of the country was changing. The Bonus Army

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[83] Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order,* 265; Smedley Butler, to Gifford Pinchot, August 6, 1932, Butler Papers.

[84] Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill,* 2.

[85] W. W. Waters as told to William C. White, *B. E. F. The Whole Story of the Bonus Army* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 130-131.

[86] William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 16.

and resulting riot demonstrated to the political powers and the country that veterans were to play an instrumental role in the impending transformation.

The government's handling of the Bonus Army cemented Butler's anti-Hoover views. Yet even prior to the event Smedley Butler had begun to distance himself from the Republican Party. Months earlier, he had privately professed his support for Franklin Roosevelt, with whom he had been friendly since his time in Haiti. When Roosevelt secured the nomination in July, Butler emphasized in a letter to FDR that, "I am still dry, but for you lock, stock and barrel and will do anything in my power to further your election."[87] Hoover's handling of the Bonus Army sent Smedley – and many other veterans – on the campaign trail on behalf of Roosevelt. Writing to a representative of FDR, Butler stated: "I am extremely anxious to do something to help the Governor into the White House…However, not being versed in political warfare, I am in doubt as to how I may be of assistance."[88] And he vowed to take action: "I do not want to remain peacefully and safely at home if, by going actively into this fight I can further the cause."[89] In a few weeks, Butler was on the road making speeches in support of the Democratic presidential nominee on a regular basis – so much so that his assistant, Lois Winter, had to turn down paid speaking engagements on his behalf.[90] Butler was doing everything he could to help elect FDR as a token of friendship: "Franklin Roosevelt is an

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[87] Smedley Butler to Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 5, 1932, Butler Papers.

[88] Smedley Butler to Louis Howe, September 1, 1932, Butler papers.

[89] Ibid.

[90] For example: "He (Butler) has been requested by the Democratic National Committee to do considerable stump speaking on behalf of Governor Roosevelt." Louis Winter to Jesse W. Vandegrift, September 16, 1932. Butler Papers.

old and close friend of mine and as soon as he was nominated, I offered my services, without compensation of course, and at his request I placed myself for speech-making purposes in the hands of the National Democratic Committee."[91]

Butler was not the only non-Democrat who had jumped into the fray: the election became personal to many high-profile veterans. Following the Bonus March fiasco, VFW national commander James Van Zandt[92] backed Roosevelt, and Louisiana political giant Huey Long[93] was on the campaign trail for FDR as well. Including Butler, all three powerful speakers supported the governor and bashed Hoover for his treatment of the Bonus Army.[94] Like Long and Van Zandt, Butler would speak wherever the campaign sent him, including "Roosevelt Rallies" such as the one thrown by the Allied Roosevelt

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[91] Smedley Butler to Russell Y. Page, November 2, 1932. Butler Papers.

[92] James Edward Van Zandt served in the U.S. Navy during World War I, and in the Naval Reserve until 1942. He was a charismatic leader in the veterans' movement and served as national commander of the VFW from 1934-1936, giving thousands of speeches and radio addresses in favor of the bonus and veterans' rights. In 1938 he was elected to the House of Representatives and served four years in Congress before resigning in 1943 to fight wit the Pacific Fleet. After the war he would serve seven more terms. There is no official biography of Van Zandt, and little information available on his life. Biographical details compiled in this sketch from: Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 90-95; "Van Zandt, James Edward (1898-1986) *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress*, (Online at http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=V000069, Retrieved October 5, 2012);

[93] Huey Pierce Long, Jr. was the charismatic governor of Louisiana from 1928-1932 and outspoken Senator from 1932-1935. He was one of the most vocal, and popular opponents of the New Deal, and was seen by many as a viable presidential contender before his assassination in September of 1935. Many of Butler's views corresponded with Long's, and their relationship is detailed in Chapter 6. For more on Long, see Richard D. White, Jr., *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (New York: Random House, 2006); T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York: Alfred A. Knoft, 1970); and also Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 42-68.

[94] Donald J. Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, Conspiracy, and the Bonus Riot* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 282. Though Lisio recognized Butler and Van Zandt's impact on influencing the veteran vote, he was more concerned with Long's performance: "To everyone's surprise, Long did so well on the campaign circuit that…he might have carried Pennsylvania also for Roosevelt if he had been allowed to campaign there."

Clubs of Pennsylvania and The Womens' Political Council of Philadelphia, which Butler headlined.[95]

Butler had considered himself finished with politics after his own disastrous run for office in Pennsylvania, so his decision to campaign for Roosevelt and jump back into the fray shows just how much of an impact the Bonus Army had had on him. Following Roosevelt's win, Butler once again became soured on the political world. Writing to a friend a few days after the 1932 election: "Now that the campaign is over and we have succeeded in driving Hoover out of the White House, I am entirely through with politics."[96] Butler would continue charging fees for speeches, but would become increasingly interested in supporting veterans' organizations, joining a national speaking tour for the Veterans of Foreign Wars the following year, and working closely with the association to promote veterans causes.

The Bonus March had had an impact on Butler in other ways as well. Though he had supported the immediate payment of the Bonus prior to the march, following the forcible removal of the veterans, and with greater involvement with the VFW and other veterans' organizations, Butler's intellectual framework recalibrated. In his speech to the Bonus Army there had been hints of his opposition to big business. However, Butler would increasingly target war profiteering in the months and years to come, eventually questioning why large companies should have profited during and after World War I while soldiers suffered.

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[95] Flier, "30th Ward Roosevelt Rally featuring Gen. Smedley Butler," Nov. 5, 1932. Butler Papers.

[96] Smedley Butler to H. D. Senat, November 18, 1932, Butler Papers.

A year into his retirement, Butler finally became formally involved with the VFW. His ties with the organization would become so close that from 1933 to 1936 he would serve as the VFW's main recruiting speaker. It made sense: Butler enjoyed the company of veterans. As he explained to a Kiwanis Club president inquiring into his speaking schedule at the time, he charged fees when in demand, unless it was to benefit veterans: "(I) have made a definite rule that during the rush periods I will not make speeches, except for Veteran organizations, unless I am paid for doing it."[97]

Butler spoke occasionally at VFW gatherings during the first half of 1933, but became intimately connected with the organization in August, following the group's national encampment in Milwaukee. At the event, Butler gave a blistering speech, urging veterans that they must consider their fight to gain the Bonus similar to an actual fight on the battlefield:

> You've got to get mad. You've got to hate. You've got to turn on these fellows who call you names such as "treasury raiders." The only trouble with you veterans is that you still believe in Santa Claus. It's time you woke up—it's time you realized there's another war on. It's your war this time. Now get in there and fight.[98]

Such motivational talks to veterans reflected the language Butler had grown accustomed to using in the Marines. He often framed political conflicts in terms of warfare and battles, terms that he felt veterans could identify with. And while he did not aim to insult, he often called veterans stupid or gullible in his efforts to motivate the ex-soldiers to become more politically active on behalf of their rights.

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[97] Smedley Butler to Joseph Cairns, Jr., February 1, 1933, Butler Papers

[98] Butler address at the national encampment was reprinted in December in the VFW's monthly publication *Foreign Service*. See Smedley Butler, "You've Got to Get Mad" *Foreign Service* (December 1933), 30.

Butler would soon become a major part of the VFW's public image. At that encampment in Milwaukee, Butler had shared the stage with VFW National Commander James Van Zandt. A few months later, Van Zandt arranged for Butler to join him on a national speaking tour in the first half of December. Butler's popularity, Van Zandt felt, could bring larger crowds and more press, thus focusing greater attention on veterans' issues such as the immediate payment of the Bonus, and veterans' opposition to Roosevelt's Economy Act.[99] The Economy Act, part of the legislation from FDR's first hundred days, requested that Congress cut $500 million from the federal budget which included a nearly 50 percent cut in payments to veterans. Veterans were appalled, alienated many – like Butler – who has supported FDR in 1932, and made the Economy Act a rallying cry for the next three years.[100]

In the end, the tour was a success and marked the beginning of what would be a close relationship between the VFW and Butler – an association beneficial to both parties. As one historian observed, "Butler…commanded huge veteran audiences everywhere he spoke….The VFW also realized that Butler was a real asset in its effort to obtain national media attention."[101] With the VFW providing his speaking gigs, Butler would be able to make a living surrounded by the company of his favorite group of people. With Butler's help, the VFW in turn would gain recruits and grow in influence, as Van Zandt wrote at the end of 1933: "I am certain that your presence at any of the

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[99] James Van Zandt to Smedley Butler, October 24, 1933, Butler Papers; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 138-139.

[100] See Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 138-139.

[101] Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 94.

meetings sponsored by our Organization would mean not only a vast increase of membership but a great deal of strengthening the Veterans of Foreign Wars in the minds of the veterans in general."[102] Van Zandt's instincts would prove correct, as in the following year Butler would speak regularly for VFW more than any other organization and the VFW's membership would continue to increase until 1936.

In early 1934, Butler devoted much of his time to veterans' groups and issues when he was not contracted to speak elsewhere. Barney Yanofsky, the editor of the VFW's publication, *Foreign Service*, would serve as Butler's manager, booking tours for Butler in March and June, at which Butler was paid $50 a speech (lower than his normal fee of $150 - $250 at this point.). The size of the audience varied from city to city: some events would draw around 2,500 attendees, while others had less than 1,000. Butler became so involved to the organization that he wrote to a wounded vet in March of 1934 describing himself to be "entirely in the hands of the Veterans of Foreign Wars."[103]

Butler maintained a regular correspondence with both Yanofsky and Van Zandt through 1934 and grew especially close to Van Zandt.[104] One reason they got along so well was their common experience in the military (Van Zandt served in the Navy) and

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[102] James Van Zandt to Smedley Butler, December 22, 1933, Butler Papers.

[103] Barney Yanofsky to Smedley Butler, February 17, 1934; Barney Yanofsky to Smedley Butler, May 7, 1934, Butler Papers; Charles A. Moran to Chairman, The General Butler Mass Meeting, March 17, 1934, Butler Papers.

[104] Van Zandt became so comfortable with Butler that he sent him a three-page, hand-written note from a fishing trip in which he remarked: "Have been wishing you were here with me to enjoy the fishing but the 'wishing' does nothing since you are away back in Penna," and signed the letter, "Your Sidekick, Jimmy." See James "Jimmy" Van Zandt to Smedley Butler, August 19, 1934, Butler Papers.

Butler's affinity for veterans. He spoke of this affection on many radio broadcasts the following year, at one point acknowledging that it might be even considered too strong:

> I know I will be charged with being overly sentimental towards these soldiers, and I am and I shall continue to be, and will fight their battles as long as a breath of life remains in my body. I know them! I have been through fights with them and I love them because they are unselfish, simple, plain but courageous Americans.[105]

Butler so enjoyed speaking in front of veterans' groups that he often reduced his fee (substantially in some cases, collecting as little as $25 a speech). He also held the VFW in high regard, considering its members to be "real" soldiers, tougher than most: "The V. F. W. isn't a knitting society; it is a real outfit and it always pleases me very much to be invited to meet with you because I just love to go every place soldiers ask me to go," and later in the same speech, "The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is a gorgeous scrapping outfit. There are no fakers in it. For that reason, it is a joy to be with you and it is our business as soldiers to stick together."[106]

## VETERANS AND BUTLER'S VIEWS

As hinted at throughout the chapter, Butler's own views about war profiteering did not fully develop until he began speaking before veterans' organizations in the early 1930s, especially in favor of immediate payment of the soldiers' Bonus. When he shared the stage with Commander Van Zandt and other prominent veteran leaders, Butler absorbed many of the ideological stances that had long been held by the largest veterans' groups through the 1920s. The veterans' organizations provided Butler with significant

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[105] Smedley Butler, "Profiteers of the World War," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 15, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[106] Smedley Butler, "You've Got to Get Mad" *Foreign Service* (December 1933), 30.

direction as he transformed himself from an old soldier regaling audiences with pot-boiler tales of his military exploits to the vocal critic of American foreign policy and his own military career.

In arguing on behalf of veterans' causes, Butler initially echoed many of the Veterans of Foreign War's major policy stances. The top VFW goals were commonly known within the group, and reiterated in speeches and writings, as emphasized in a letter to Van Zandt that urged members to write to their congressional representatives and urge support for three issues: "(1) Immediate repeal of the Economy Act; (2) Immediate Cash Payment of Adjusted Service Certificates; and, (3) Immediate, just and uniform assistance for Veterans' widows of World War, and all Wars of this Nation, and their dependents."[107] Veterans' groups had been addressing the issue of war profiteering for over a decade before Butler took the stage in 1933. In fact, one issue the Legion and VFW agreed upon through the 1920s was their joint critique of war profiteers from the First World War. As one historian pointed out, this was one of the "radical" issues on which they came together:

> Despite the Legion's elite provenance, rank-and-file veterans in the Legion and the VFW expressed a critical view of the patriotism undergirding a political and economic system that would send soldiers off to die in the trenches and pay them a mere pittance while industrialists and capitalists profited handsomely safely at home. To address this discrepancy, each organization repeatedly called for measures that would "take the profits out of war."[108]

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[107] Henry Martin to James Van Zandt, February 1, 1934, copy in Butler Papers.

[108] Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 21.

Butler began to push for these same ideas. He searched for the root cause of why Bonus payments were not being made and investigated other avenues that received funds that might have gone to soldiers instead.

And Butler was also a product of his time, for the onset of the Depression drew widespread attacks on the banks, Wall Street, the wealthy, along with a thoughtful debate on a fairer distribution of wealth. Figures such as Dr. Francis Townsend,[109] Father Charles Coughlin,[110] and Huey Long, all amassed large followings, largely based on their relentless critiques of the rich and powerful and their exhortations to expand the social safety net for seniors and the poor. In his work *Voices of Protest*, historian Alan Brinkley traces the rise of Long and Coughlin to the New Deal's failure to immediately address the needs of millions of Americans who were unemployed or living in poverty:

> Throughout the past two years, during some of the Depression's darkest hours, most Americans had looked to Franklin Roosevelt as a source of energy and hope. Now, however, the New Deal seemed to be losing both its spirit and its strength…the grip of the New Deal upon the loyalties of the public seemed far from secure; and new political forces began to compete with the President for popular acclaim.[111]

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[109] In 1933, Long Beach resident Dr. Francis Everett Townsend created a plan that would pay citizens over the age of sixty a monthly wage, if they promised to retire from work and spend most of the money over the month, thus attempting to aid the elderly while stimulating the economy. The "Townsend Plan" grew rapidly, and by 1935 some twenty-five million Americans had signed petitions to adopt the Townsend plan, and nearly five thousand Townsend Clubs sprouted across the country. The influence of the movement is seen as a precursor to the Social Security Act signed by Roosevelt in August of 1935. See Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[110] Charles Edward Coughlin, a priest from a small parish in a Detroit suburb, became one of the most popular figures in America during the 1930s through his radio addresses, with an estimated audience of ten million for his weekly program. His broadcasts were often political, and his favorite topics ranged from attacking Communists and international bankers, to championing social-justice, to arguing for the nationalization of the American banking. See Charles J. Tull, *Father Coughlin and the New Deal*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1960); also Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*.

[111] Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 3-4.

Approximately ten million listeners every week tuned in to hear Father Coughlin's radio sermons critiquing big business and calling for a restructuring of the American economic system to help ease human suffering.[112] And in the early 1930s, Huey Long captivated Americans across the country with verbal assaults on the wealthy and proposals with mass appeal, such as the "Share Our Wealth Plan."[113]

Butler's speeches on behalf of veterans would integrate many of the same critiques of capitalism popularized by those leaders and adopted by so many citizens. One of the first times Butler openly questioned the morality of the unequal distribution of wealth in American society was during his speech before the national VFW encampment in August of 1933:

> We are divided, in America, into two classes: The Tories on one side, a class of citizens who were raised to believe that the whole of this country was created for their sole benefit, and on the other side, the other 99 per cent of us, the soldier class, the class from which all of you soldiers came. That class hasn't any privileges except to die when the Tories tell them. Every war that we have ever

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[112] Obtaining an accurate measure of radio audiences in the 1930s was – and continues to be – a logistical challenge. Many writers at the time seemed to take to hyperbole in gauging Coughlin's influence in the era. However, Alan Brinkley that even if his popularity were exaggerated at time, that everyone knew Coughlin's radio audience was immense: "There is no way to accurately to measure how many people were listening to his [Coughlin's] radio sermons…Even his most inveterate foes, however, had to admit that his audience was vast and widespread – at least ten million on an average Sunday, most radio experts estimated, perhaps many more than that. It was, some said, the largest regular radio audience in the world." See Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 119.

[113] Introduced in a speech in February of 1934, Long's Share Our Wealth Plan proposed helping needy families by guaranteeing a yearly income from $2,000-$5,000 by taxing the very wealthy. Alan Brinkley observed that Long's goal was to "prevent anyone from accumulating a truly obscene fortune and would make an enormous fund of wealth available to the rest of the people in the country." The plan garnered little support in Washington and many economists found it unfeasible. However, it was immensely popular amongst ordinary citizens, with some eight million people joining 27,000 Share our Wealth Clubs in 1935. See Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 68-81. For a critical analysis of Long and the plan, see Richard D. White, Jr., *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (New York: Random House, 2006), 193-206. Long himself anticipated the plan would be eagerly adopted by banking interests and millionaires, writing of the smooth transition in his posthumously published *My First Days in the White House*. See Huey Pierce Long, *My First Days in the White House* (Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1935), 93-115.

> had was gotten up by that class. They do all the beating of the drums. Away the rest of us go.[114]

To Butler, it was not simply the existence of the social elites that posed a problem, it was the notion that they sent soldiers to fight and die while they themselves remained in safety and reaped profits. His speech at the encampment – which was not only popular at the time it was given, but was lauded with its own article in the VFW's December issues of *Foreign Service* – also illustrated how Butler's views on veterans' benefits were melding with an increasingly sharp critique of Wall Street:

> We march down the street with all the Sears-Roebuck soldiers standing on the sidewalk, all the dollar-a-year men with spurs, all the patriots who call themselves patriots, square-legged women in uniforms making Liberty Loan speeches. They promise you. You go down the street and they ring all the church bells. Promise you the sun, the moon, the stars and the earth—anything to save them. Off you go. Then the looting commences while you are doing the fighting. This last war made over 6,000 millionaires. Today those fellows won't help pay the bill.[115]

Through his years of service, Butler had understood that marines were often used to protect property interests, but now he realized that war profiteers were not only using soldiers in the field, but also bent on denying them promised pay after the wars. And Butler was determined to expose this cruel irony.

With Butler, Van Zandt, Huey Long, and many others arguing on behalf of the Bonus, by 1935, the issue seemed to be gaining ground. The Patman Bonus Bill, introduced in January was passed in both the House and Senate. In May it was vetoed by President Roosevelt after a dramatic speech in front of a joint session of Congress. The House overrode the veto by a staggering vote of 322 to 98, but the Senate could only

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[114] Smedley Butler, "You've Got to Get Mad" *Foreign Service* (December 1933), 30.

[115] Ibid.

muster a 54-40 majority, falling eight votes shy of the necessary two-thirds majority.[116] The bonus was closer than it had ever been to passing since it was first proposed in 1920. Within the next few months, a series of events would mark a dramatic turning point for the veterans' movement and finally see the passage of the Bonus Bill.

On Labor Day, 1935, a hurricane in the Florida Keys killed over 400 people including more than 250 veterans vacationing or working in the area. A scandal erupted when it was revealed that due to mismanagement, the bodies of many victims (including veterans) had been burned or mishandled. Details emerged that some deceased veterans had been in the Bonus Army but recruited by the government to work in Florida – far away from Washington. Press reports lambasted the government and portrayed struggling veterans as its victims. Butler, speaking in front of the VFW convention weeks later, called it a "damn clever scheme" on the government's part, to ship veterans to live (and now, die) in Florida so they would not be near Washington to advocate for the Bonus. He demanded a thorough investigation: "Find out why they were sent down there; why they were not treated like civilians; why their bodies were burned."[117] The outrage soon dissipated as another event claimed the public's attention. In September of 1935, weeks after the hurricane, Huey Long was assassinated, diminishing the hopes of his "Share Our Wealth" revolution for many Americans.

A few months later, Butler predicted end of the Bonus controversy. "…the next session of Congress is going to pass a bonus bill, Franklin D. Roosevelt is going to steal

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[116] Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 223-232.

[117] Ibid., 226-247, quotation from 247; Butler's appearance was also reported in the press. See *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 1935.

the credit for it and make political capital out of it…The dumb soldiers will believe he is for him again because of it.[118] Butler's prediction about the Bonus bill was correct – in January of 1936 a new Bonus bill became law, but over Roosevelt's veto. Butler would not be quite as accurate in his prediction for FDR. The President could not take credit for the bill's passage, though it – and the payment of the Bonus that summer – deflated the veterans' movement who had been one of Roosevelt's most powerful critics.[119] At the same time, the payment of the Bonus stimulated the economy just months before the election.[120] As summarized by one scholar, it did seem to be the end of an era of veterans' politics: "With the resolution of the Bonus, no other single issue existed that could so effectively mobilize and galvanize the remaining New Deal dissidents into a focused and meaningful political coalition."[121]

While the payment of the Bonus silenced many critics of the administration and removed the urgency of the veterans' movements, it also demonstrated that years of lobbying by veterans and their supporters had achieved their highest goals. Such an achievement, instead of quelling activists like Butler, only encouraged them. For Smedley, the awarding of the Bonus simply meant he would shift gears, adopting a cause parallel to his fight for the Bonus and criticisms of war profiteers. With the escalation of war in Europe during the 1930s, his new aim would be to keep America out of war, but

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[118] Walter Wilson, "Where Smedley Butler Stands," *New Masses*, Nov. 12, 1935, 17.

[119] On the passage of the Bonus bill, see Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 170-185.

[120] In June of 1936, approximately $1.9 billion in Bonus bonds were issued. Each veteran received $50 for each month served in World War I. The average payment was $581 per veteran, which was nearly a third of the annual income. For an economic evaluation of the Bonus payment, see Lester G. Telser, "The Veterans' Bonus of 1936," *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 26:2 (Winter, 2003-2004) 227-243.

[121] Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill*, 185.

without his core audience of veterans and soldiers rallying behind a common cause, he would find the task far more cumbersome.

## WAR IS A RACKET

So far, the dissertation has traced Butler's development as a public speaker and tied the development of his vocal stance against war profiteering to the Bonus March and the issue of the Bonus payment. This chapter concludes with the genesis and analysis of Butler's 1935 booklet *War is a Racket*, that also provides a bridge to some of the themes – such as isolationism – to be explored in Chapter 6.

*War is a Racket* contains a concise view of Butler's anti-war philosophy as developed from his experience with the veterans' movement, and is the most well-known of Butler's writings to this day. Its importance in Butler's legacy is recognized by both Hans Schmidt and Jules Archer, who cite *War is a Racket* as the main document reflecting Butler's anti-war ideals in the mid-1930s.[122] This study expands on their research, showing that the origins of the book were culled from his speeches pushing for veterans' rights, and that his catchphrase "war is a racket" was recognized in its time as a unique approach within a larger opposition to war profiteering that was prevalent during the Depression.[123]

While Butler had lambasted war profiteering before, he did not seem to develop the phrase "war is a racket" until sometime in early 1934. The phrase seems to have

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[122] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 236-240. Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House*, 218-220.

[123] In the early to mid-1930s, war profiteers were a common target for critics of the Roosevelt administration, supporters of the Bonus payment, and the general public. See Chapter 6.

originated from a speech delivered on May 30 at a Memorial Day observance in Denver, Colorado. In a newspaper article titled "'War a Racket I Won't Join' Says Butler," Butler was quoted using the phrase in a denunciation of war profiteering, using his military experience to support his claims:

> War is a racket. I know because I've been in it for 35 years. I'm out now to arouse the American people to put an end to the racket. There is blood of American Marines on every hill in Nicaragua which was spilled to collect Wall Street debts – was spilled so Wall Street could make money out of bananas and sugar.[124]

By June, the phrase "war is a racket" had been attributed to Butler enough times that he received a letter from Henry Leach, editor of the popular *Forum and Century Magazine* on the topic. Leach praised the new anti-interventionist slogan with enthusiasm: "I am delighted with your dynamic definition 'War is a Racket'!" He urged Butler to submit 1500 words on the subject, stating that his piece could change people's minds: "I can think of no better antidote for the dangerous war psychosis in which we seem to be engulfed."[125] As anti-war critics were commonly published in that era, the editor's enthusiasm appears to be a genuine recognition of a new catch phrase that concisely encapsulated a common critique.

Butler's resulting 1500-word article, "War is a Racket," co-written by his old writing partner, journalist E.Z. Dimitman, would be published in *Forum and Century* in September of 1934 in an issue with an essay from Ida M. Tarbell – the famed journalist who had published a best-seller on the history of Standard Oil – and a piece from Upton

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[124] "'War a Racket I Won't Join' Says Butler," *Washington Herald*, May 31, 1934. Found in Ed Parker to Smedley Butler, December 1, 1934, Butler Papers.

[125] Henry Goddard Leach, (Editor of *The Forum and Century*) to Smedley Butler, June 5, 1934, Butler Papers.

Sinclair.[126] This first publication of *War is a Racket* would serve as the blueprint for what would become a small book by the same title the following year. The article began with a general attack on war: "War is a racket; possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope." Butler explained the reasoning behind the phrase: "A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. Only a small 'inside' group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses." In this case, he reasoned, it was the war profiteers who were that small group: "Out of war a few people make huge fortunes."[127]

Since Butler's piece was published prior to the Senate Munitions Inquiry, which produced a plethora of detailed figures related to the profits made during World War I,[128] this first incarnation of *War is a Racket* lacked many specifics about war profiteering. Instead, *The Forum* article was as much a plea on behalf of soldiers as it was condemnation of those who made the profits. "The soldiers, of course, pay the biggest part of the bill. If you don't believe it, visit the American cemeteries on the battlefield

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[126] Smedley D. Butler, "War is a Racket," *The Forum and Century* (September, 1934), 140-143.

[127] Ibid., 140.

[128] Prompted by a public outcry from Butler and many others at the time (See Chapter 6), Senator Gerald P. Nye launched the Senate Munitions Committee (also known as the Nye Committee) on September 4, 1934 to investigate war profiteering during World War. The landmark investigation into the munitions industry and war profiteering resulted in thousands of detailed pages on company profits during the First World War Held until 1936, it remains the largest and most thorough congressional investigation to date on the profit motive for war. For more, see Chapter 6, and also Matthew Ware Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s: Beyond the Merchants of Death* (Westport. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997); Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962); John E. Wiltz, *In Search of Peace: The Senate Munitions Inquiry, 1934-1936*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963).

abroad or visit any of the veterans' hospitals in the United States." [129] He gave examples of the suffering of disabled veterans, reiterating that when there is discussion of the costs of war, "That is part of the bill."[130]

The article expanded upon many points Butler had been making in front of VFW groups for the past year and echoed isolationist sentiments of the era. Butler argued that soldiers were tricked into joining the military, "In the World War, we used propaganda to make the boys accept conscription," and pointed out that the wages of soldiers were but a fraction of what workers in munitions factories and shipyards were earning at home. And he ended the article with a plea to take profit out of war by regulating the wages made by anyone in a war-related industry during wartime:

> The only way to stop it (the war racket) is by conscription of capital before conscription of the nation's manhood…Let the officers and director of our armament factories, our gun builders and munitions makers and shipbuilders all be conscripted – to get $30 a month, the same wage paid to the lads in the trenches…Why shouldn't they? They aren't running the risk of being killed or having their bodies mangled or their minds shattered. The soldiers run that risk.[131]

Butler was generally not opposed to capitalism, but in times of war, he felt it necessary to limit the profits of large companies and others, which were a result of the sacrifices of the soldiers. By removing the possibility of profiting from war, Smedley reasoned, munitions makers, business interests, and their allies in government would never have a

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[129] Butler, "War is a Racket," 140-142.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid., 143.

reason to cajole the American people into supporting a conflict fought mainly to benefit war profiteers: "That will stop the racket – that and nothing else."[132]

The booklet *War is a Racket* went on sale for $1 in March of 1935, and was popular enough to garner a five-page excerpt in the June edition of *Reader's Digest* (couched – in the typical *Reader's Digest* randomized fashion – between an article extolling the virtues of the Chinese people and a psychological analysis of depression).[133] The book form of *War is a Racket* expanded upon Butler's previous effort, with chapters that included "Who Pays the Bills" and "How to Smash this Racket!" He also leaned a great deal on the results of the Senate Munitions Inquiry. In fact, of the booklet's five chapters, one of them, "Who Makes the Profits," is entirely based on the figures revealed to the committee. Armed with that evidence, Butler methodically explored the profits of large companies during wartime:

> Take our friends the du Ponts, the powder people – didn't one of them testify before a Senate committee recently that their powder won the war?...How did they do in the war? They were a patriotic corporation. Well, the average earnings of the du Ponts for the period 1910 to 1914 was $6,000,000 a year. It wasn't much, but the du Ponts managed to get along on it. Now let's look at their average yearly profit during the war year, 1914 to 1918. Fifty-eight million

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[132] Ibid.

[133] The excerpt from *War is a Racket* is preceded by a one-page biographical introduction of Butler. Hans Schmidt claimed that Lowell Thomas commended Butler in this introduction with the quote, "Even his opponents concede that in his stand on public questions, General Butler has been motivated by the same fiery integrity and loyal patriotism which has distinguished his service in countless Marine campaigns." In fact Thomas is only quoted at the very top of the page-long introduction: "If you wanted to give a swift summary of his career, you might say there has been no time in his life when he has been entirely out of trouble." The original quote seems to have come from the editors of The Reader's Digest. In the introduction, the editors also quoted Butler commenting on the difficulty of his service as Director of Public Safety in Philadelphia: "…my foolish notion that laws applied to rich and poor alike caused a growing antipathy toward me," a statement hinting that in all of Butler's service, seeing the disparity in class treatment was the major contributing factor to War is a Racket.[133] See Smedley D. Butler, "War is a Racket: A Condensation from the Book," *The Reader's Digest* (June, 1935), 111-117; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine,* 236.

> dollars a year profit we find! Nearly ten times that of normal times, and the profits of normal times were pretty good. An increase in profits of more than 950 per cent.[134]

Page after page, Butler traces the profits, but not in a dry manner – he followed the figures with sardonic comments thus making the data more accessible to the common reader. Throughout the work, Butler highlights some of the staggering and at times absurd findings of the commission, especially the wasteful expenditures: "Also somebody had a lot of mosquito netting. They sold your Uncle Sam 20,000,000 mosquito nets for the use of the soldiers overseas…Well, not one of those nets ever got to France!"[135] Butler also drew from his own experiences to advance his argument. One of his theories was that depending on when war profiteers needed someone to fight, the enemy would change:

> Back in 1904, when Japan and Russia fought, we kicked our old friend, the Russians out and backed Japan, whom we were then financing. Then our very generous international bankers were financing Japan. Now the trend is to poison us against the Japanese…To save that China trade of about $90,000,000 or to protect the private investments of less than $200,000,000 in the Philippines, we may be roused to hate Japan and to go to war – to a war that may cost us tens of billions of dollars, hundreds of thousands of the lives of Americans, and many more hundreds of thousands of physically maimed and mentally unbalanced young men." [136]

*War is a Racket* stands out among the anti-war literature of the 1930s in several ways. Because it is essentially a dictated speech put down in writing, it is an accessible read that offers a concise spin on a common critique of war profiteers during that period. It also fused Butler's military experience with details of the Nye Committee to create a

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[134] Butler, *War is a Racket*, 27-28.

[135] Ibid., 30.

[136] Smedley D. Butler, "War is a Racket," *The Forum and Century* (September, 1934), 140.

unique, effective argument on behalf of both the American people and the rank-and-file soldier who would be sent to war.[137]

## CONCLUSION

Butler's success as an orator in the early 1930s can be traced to both his effectiveness as a public speaker and the opportunities afforded him by the veterans' movement. His reputation as well-decorated war hero drew large crowds, but veterans also admired him for his commitment to the common soldier, a rare quality in an individual of his rank. The Bonus March brought him back into politics as he campaigned for Franklin Roosevelt and the issue led Smedley into the veterans' movement, where he established himself as a leading advocate for immediate payment to the soldiers, and developed into a staunch critic of war profiteering.

Butler's involvement with the veterans' movement was a crucial step in his intellectual growth, exposing him to arguments on behalf of the Bonus that coincided naturally with the critical views he had developed about war profiteers over thirty years in the Marine Corps. He gathered his ideas into *War is a Racket*, and seemed poised to take his fight to the economy and other Depression-era issues when the death of Huey Long and the subsequent payment of the Bonus essentially took the wind out of the veterans' movement. With these developments, Butler lost his primary audience and began his slide into obscurity.

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[137] Butler acknowledged the Nye Committee's impact within *Racket*, though expressed a suspicion that there was much more to uncover, stating that even though its disclosures were "sensational" they had "hardly scratched the surface." See Butler, *War is a Racket*, 32. The Nye Committee is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

In the next chapter, I explore Butler's role in the isolationist movement. His theories on isolationism were drawn from events unfolding around him, and expanded upon the anti-war ideas developed within the veterans' movement. I will also delve into a series of radio broadcasts delivered by Butler in 1935. In those speeches, Butler reiterated ideas discussed in *War is a Racket*, but also diverged from the rhetoric against war profiteers to lay out a broader, more complex argument against what he saw as the increased militarization of the U.S. and the buildup to another world war.

## Chapter 6: Radio Butler

Butler, Isolationism, and the Pep Boys Speeches

*"For a moment in 1935, intelligent observers could almost believe that the traditional structure of American politics was on the verge of dissolution."*

-Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.[1]

By 1934, the nation languished under the Depression. The New Deal had been in effect for two years, and the country had seen only minor improvements. Unemployment remained at over twenty percent, and there was little relief in sight.[2] Large segments of the population felt that President Franklin Roosevelt was not doing enough to ease the suffering of ordinary citizens. Historian Eric Foner argued that this desire for change pushed America to the political left, resulting in the most liberal period the country had ever seen: "…for the first time in American history, the left enjoyed a shaping influence on the nation's politics and culture."[3] And people across the country began to look beyond the President for solutions.

National leaders like Father Coughlin and Huey Long attracted a broad following, but there was also a great deal of smaller-scale political engagement during the period.[4]

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[1] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 69.

[2] Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007) 189-213; Shlaes argues that while President Roosevelt spent the first two years attempting to fix the Depression through legislation and action, beginning in 1934 he took a more political course, tapping into the anti-banking sentiment in the country to put the blame on certain parties. He found parties to persecute for causing the Great Depression. A convenient target was Andrew Mellon who was a visible representative of the older, wealthy class, and as Secretary of Treasury had presided over the stock market crash.

[3] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 211.

[4] By some estimates, approximately ten million listeners each week listened to Father Charles E. Coughlin's radio sermons. Senator Huey Long gained mass appeal with his "Share Our Wealth Plan," and

Civic organizations of all kinds debated the future of the country; veterans, unions, and other disgruntled Americans marched on Washington. And while historians have characterized the 1930s as an "Age of Roosevelt," from the perspective of the average citizen the period might be more accurately characterized as a golden age of politically passionate speakers, writers, and critics.[5]

Smedley Butler was one of the public figures challenging the political establishment on behalf of the American populace. He adopted a specific brand of isolationism unique to the Depression era which argued on behalf of rank-and-file soldiers, laid the blame for the First World War at the feet of war profiteers, drawing on his military experiences for evidence. By 1935, Butler was at the height of his influence as a public speaker and writer; millions of struggling veterans knew his story and tens of thousands had personally heard the decorated military hero and son of a Congressman speak out for the Bonus payment and justice for the common man. Butler's pamphlet, *War is a Racket*, was published in the spring, and for the first six months of 1935, the

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other ways to redistribute wealth in America. See Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982).

[5] Labor history presents many examples of widespread organization and smaller union activity. See Staughton Lynd, ed., "*We Are All Leaders": The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s* (Urbana, IL: University of Illionis Press, 1996); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Consumer groups also grew rapidly during the era - mostly amongst middle class women – and gathered enough political power to help push through the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act of 1938, the first significant national consumer protection legislation since the Progressive Era. On the rise of consumer power see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

former general gave a series of radio broadcasts that reflected and helped shape the rapidly changing political environment.[6]

The first section of this chapter situates Butler within the arena of protest in the mid-1930s and argues that Butler should be included in studies of isolationism in the era. His anti-interventionist stance was aligned with those of other leading isolationists of the time, yet Butler is absent from nearly all studies on isolationism.[7] Following an examination of Butler's relationship to the isolationist movement is a section on his radio broadcast series from first half of 1935. From January to July, Smedley gave seventy-eight, quarter-hour addresses, sponsored by the auto parts company Pep Boys[8] and broadcast from WCAU in Philadelphia.[9] The radio format allowed Butler to sound off on the theme of his choosing, without the constraints of interacting or responding to a live

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[6] Smedley Butler to James F. Coyle representing WCAU, December 17, 1934; Also see Hans Schmidt, *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 236.

[7] The most prominent studies on isolationism of the 1930s include: Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1940* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932 – 1945* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Wayne S. Cole, *Charles Lindbergh and the Battle Against American Intervention in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974); Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention: 1940-1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953); Alexander DeConde, ed., *Isolation and Security: Ideas and Interests in Twentieth-Century American Foreign Policy* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1957); Justus D. Doenecke and John E. Wiltz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (Arlington Heights, Ill: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1991); Ronald E. Powaski, *Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism, Internationalism, and Europe, 1901-1950* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991).

[8] Navy Buddies Manny Rosenfeld, Moe Strauss, W. Graham Jackson, and Moe Radavitz, who had met in the Navy, founded The Pep Boys as an auto parts store in Philadelphia in 1921. By the 1930s they had expanded to at least forty locations around city. See http://www.pepboys.com/about_pep_boys/ (Accessed November 26, 2012).

[9] For details of the radio contract, see Smedley Butler to James F. Coyle, December 17, 1934, Butler Papers. WCAU began as a 250-watt station in the back of an electrician's shop in 1922, but in 1928 was bought by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and became the flagship station for the network. In 1933 WCAU converted to a 50,000-watt station, and at night could reportedly be heard along most of the Easter seaboard. See Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 3rd Edition (Boston: Wadsworth Cenage Learning, 2011).

audience that he faced in his public speeches. This overlooked trove of historical material acts as a rare insight into Butler's frank thoughts on subjects such as the Depression, crime, organized labor, veterans' issues, and causes concerning the average American. These speeches are contextualized within Butler's own developing philosophy on war profiteering and isolationism and signified the culmination of Butler's ideological journey.

## THE ANTI-INTERVENTIONISTS[10]

In 1935, the American Institute of Public Opinion, a group that defined itself as a "commercial research organization of which Dr. Gallup is director" conducted its first national survey, asking Americans, "If another war like the World War develops in Europe, should America take part again?" The results were staggering: 95 percent of those polled responded "No."[11] This would hardly have come as a surprise to someone living in the United States during the time, for the vast majority of Americans during the 1930s characterized themselves anti-interventionist or "isolationist." Idaho Senator William Borah's definition of isolation given before the Council on Foreign Relations in January of 1934 seems to best encapsulate the basic view:

> In matters of trade and commerce we have never been isolationists and never will be…But in all matters political, in all commitments of any nature or kind, which encroach in the slightest upon the free and unembarrassed action of our people, or

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[10] The term "isolationist" and "anti-interventionist" will be used interchangeably throughout the chapter.

[11] George Gallup and Claude Robinson, "American Institute of Public Opinion – Surveys, 1935-38," *Public Opinion Quarterly, II* (July, 1938), 373-388. An precursor to the Gallup Poll, according to their own account their work was "the first inclusive compilation of these surveys ever published and as such constitutes a unique record of the state and trends of public opinion from October 1935 to May 15, 1938." They depended on over 600 field reporters who conducted personal interviews across the country. On national questions, the interviews ranged from 3,000 to 50,000.

> which circumscribe their description and judgment, we have been free, we have been independent, we have been isolationist.[12]

A common misconception today of isolationists is that they were like ostriches – heads in the sand, ignoring world events.[13] In fact, the isolationist movement in America during the 1930s was as much a response to world events as it was a retreat into domestic affairs. In the 1920s, post-World War depressions had hit Germany, Japan, and Italy, resulting in the rise of militarism and extreme right-wing governments. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, beginning a new era of violent imperialism in Asia. But it was the aggression of Germany and Italy in Africa and Europe that signaled to most Americans that Europe seemed on the path towards another horrendous war. It was isolationists' awareness – not their ignorance – of these international events that made them argue so passionately about what proper role of the United States should be.[14] And that role, they contended, was to avoid military involvement in European affairs at all costs.

Few isolationists favored severing all ties with Europe, or even curtailing immigration. As one historian emphasized: "No American isolationist made a principle out of cutting off all foreign trade nor seriously advocated trying to attain economic self-

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[12] William E. Borah, "Council on Foreign Relations" Speech, January 8, 1934, from William E. Borah, *Bedrock: Views on Basic National Problems* (Washington: National Home Library Foundation, 1936), 58.

[13] One of the men who popularized this characterization was the not-yet world famous children's book cartoonist Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel who would dedicate his talents to the interventionist cause, drawing regular covers and cartoons for the short-running newspaper *PM* that mocked the isolationist position with bitter vitriol from early 1940 until Pearl Harbor. See Richard Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: the World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* (New York: New Press, 1999).

[14] As historian Eric Hobsbawm has documented, this unchecked military belligerence was a main determining factor leading to World War II: "…it is quite undeniable that what caused the Second World War concretely was aggression by the three malcontent powers." Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 37. Whether or not early intervention by the U.S. or other European powers could have prevented the Second World War is a counterfactual beyond the scope of this dissertation.

sufficiency. None sought to close this country's doors to immigrants or foreign travelers."[15] Scholars such as Walter McDougall have pointed out that to do so would have been a significant departure from an American tradition of "Unilateralism," wherein the United States relied on Europe for economic prosperity, through such benefits as tariffs on imported goods, immigrant labor, and trade with foreign nations. This continual exchange with Europe demonstrates that the U.S. was never purely "isolationist" during any time in its history, including the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, and only held to a view of military isolationism that prevented involvement in European conflicts.[16]

The strategy of military isolation seemed to apply exclusively to Europe, and not to U.S. intervention in its own hemisphere. One expert on isolationism explained:

> When historians use the term 'isolationism,' they are really referring to the United States's abdication of collective peacekeeping and its determination to avoid the political difficulties of the Old World…Because isolationists could tolerate, even endorse intervention in Asia and South America, one must stress that anti-European unilateralism was an essential core of so-called isolationism.[17]

In fact, there were very few isolationists in the 1930s that were concerned with American influence in Latin America or the Caribbean, or its relationship to U. S. intervention in Europe. Even Smedley spoke far more often in opposition to intervention in Europe and

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[15] Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 5.

[16] Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 49-51. McDougall argues that the conection between the United States and Europe duing the 19th century was such that "Americans were intimate members of the Atlantic community in every way *except* as regards their neutrality and peculiar democracy."

[17] Doenecke and Wiltz, *From Isolation to War*, 4.

to participating in another World War than against the United States intervening in the affairs of Latin American countries.[18]

The opposition to the isolationist view – the interventionist position – though smaller in size, had a powerful supporter in President Roosevelt. Having spent much of his childhood in Europe, Roosevelt had developed an international worldview that earned him, according to historian Robert Dallek, the label of "the most cosmopolitan American to enter the White House since John Quincy Adams." Dallek pointed out that Roosevelt believed in "the interdependence of nations," and the President felt that the way to achieve economic recovery and rescue America from the Depression was through a broader, global approach. To Roosevelt, the prosperity of American economy depended upon working closely with European countries, and, Dallek discovered, Roosevelt "saw an unbreakable link between prosperity and peace."[19] Yet, the President yielded to the immense power and popularity of the isolationist movement through the mid-1930s, endorsing many steps toward non-intervention, including the Senate Munitions Inquiry and the Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937.[20]

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[18] Instead, Butler would use his experiences in Asia and the Caribbean protecting property interests to support his larger theory that war profiteers drove the United States into larger wars, and could potentially do so again. See especially: Smedley D. Butler, *War is Racket* (New York: Round Table Press, Inc., 1935).

[19] Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), quotations from 3, 20. Dallek also recognized that Franklin's cousin Theodore might also have been as cosmopolitan as Adams and FDR.

[20] In the build-up to the Second World War, the Neutrality Acts limited American assistance to European countries, and were generally a way for Roosevelt to prevent Congress from instilling more radical isolationist policies. For more on how FDR balanced his internationalism with a non-interventionist Congress and public, see Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt & the Isolationists, 1932-1945* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

One of the main rationales behind most non-interventionist thinking was the patriotic insistence that isolationism was simply a continuation of a long American tradition originating with Founding Fathers George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Isolationists often cited Washington's warning that Europe's interests were only remotely related to those in America,[21] and Thomas Jefferson allegedly espoused the view of many other Founding Fathers when he said, "Our first and fundamental maxim should be, never to entangle ourselves in the broils of Europe."[22] In fact, this traditionalist defense of isolationism had persisted through the nineteenth century, articulated with especial urgency in the anti-imperialist movement of the final decade. Researchers Justus Doenecke and John Wiltz traced the predominance of this theory through the first hundred years of the country's history following the Declaration of Independence and concluded that: "No responsible politician dared challenge Washington's position," and as a result, "isolation became identified with Americanism."[23] A challenge to the military isolationism of America came during World War I, when the United States decided to intervene in European affairs. But as a result of the disillusionment caused by the Great War, the traditionalist view reemerged and, according to this line of thinking, by returning to isolationism in the 1920s and 1930s, the country had returned to its traditional roots.

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[21] Washington's Farewell address is the most often cited example of the stance of the Founding Fathers on isolationism. In it, Washington urged future American leaders, in their dealings with Europe, to, "steer clear of permanent alliances…by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics and the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships and enmities." See Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 8-9.

[22] Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, October 24, 1823, from Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 708.

[23] Doenecke and Wiltz, *From Isolation to War,* 4-7.

Manfred Jonas, in his study of the ideology of isolationism in the 1930s *Isolationism in America*, explored the extent to which isolationism was common and widespread. Its adherents did not seem to be linked by geography or political affiliation. Supporters of isolationism were widely diverse, from German immigrants who remained sympathetic to the causes of the homeland, to Democrats from the Midwest who distrusted banking interests, to those people who regretted the involvement of the United States in the First World War. Jonas explained:

> It was a general American sentiment; not, as sometimes pictured, simply a Midwestern phenomenon born of the insularity of the American interior…Isolationist leaders had diverse backgrounds, advocated varied courses of action, and shared few domestic interests. But men from New York and California, from Idaho and Texas, men whose political creeds ranged from the socialism of Norman Thomas to the conservative Republicanism of Herbert Hoover, made common cause in the field of foreign policy because they believed in unilateralism and feared the effects of war on the United States.[24]

The diversity of support for isolationism allowed a speaker like Smedley Butler to find receptive audiences across the country. After traveling across the country on his first whirlwind speaking tour through "27 states and 62 cities" and having one-on-one conversations with approximately 1,500 people during his travels, Butler wrote a brief article on the commonalities among the people he met. One thing he noticed was a general reluctance to support interventionism:

> The average American seems to think our Government and a good many of our people are more concerned over European affairs than those of our own land…Americans, as I encountered them on this tour, are not inclined to approve the giving or loaning of anything to European nations (privately or publically) until they stop this war mongering.[25]

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[24] Jonas, *Isolationism in America,* 17.

[25] Smedley D. Butler, "Discovering America," Unpublished, (nd. est. December, 1932), 9-10, Butler Papers.

Historians of isolationism have supported Butler's observation: the Great Depression itself was certainly a major cause of isolationism in the 1930s. So while citizens were aware of world events, most were far more concerned with domestic issues; the most vital issue of the day – in every survey in the 1930s until May of 1939 – was the economy.[26] It is no accident that renewed support for isolationism in the country came at a time of economic despair, as citizens showed a lack of interest in troubles other than their own.

One argument that Butler employed with much gusto was that the geographic location of the United States – with physical boundaries that naturally isolated it from Europe – needed only to maintain a military capable of defending its borders. And that could easily be done with the present Navy. He wrote in 1935:

> The ships of our navy, it can be seen, should be specifically limited, by law, to within 200 miles of our coastline… one hundred miles is ample, in the opinion of experts, for defense purposes. Our nation cannot start an offensive war if its ships can't go further than 200 miles from the coastline. Planes might be permitted to go as far as 500 miles from the coast for purposes of reconnaissance. And the army should never leave the territorial limits of our nation.[27]

With conflicts increasing around the world beginning in 1935, others, such as President Roosevelt, felt that another world war not only would damage the economy, but also disputed the argument that America's geographic isolation would prevent an attack.[28] In 1938, the President publicly insisted that to be safe, the country would have to occupy all

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[26] Gallup and Robinson, 595-596.

[27] Butler, *War is Racket*, 44.

[28] The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, followed the next year by German and Italian support of Francisco Franco and his group of far-right Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. For more on the origins of the Second World War, See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 24-177.

of the Americas: "…the United States must be prepared to resist attack on the western hemisphere from the North Pole to the South Pole, including all of North America and South America…any possible attack has been brought infinitely closer than it was five years or 20 years or 50 years ago."[29] The geographic isolation argument persisted – in spite of FDR's protests – possibly because it had been proven to be true by history. The original argument was used in the late nineteenth century, when anti-imperialists, alarmed with the sudden increase in the size of the Navy, questioned the necessity of a maintaining a large standing military. As one historian pointed out, senators were "convinced that America's geographic position in the world made it extremely difficult to attack…even an army of 100,000 men, the ceiling authorized by Congress in 1901, struck many as dangerously high."[30] Though the numbers of troops needed to defend the country from attack differed in the 1930s – especially with the expansion of airplanes and amphibious warfare – the argument from Butler and others was just as convincing.

In his speeches and writings, Butler also drew from personal experience to express the horrors of war. In 1939, he made a plea for "Common Sense Neutrality" by appealing to mothers of young boys. Asking them to imagine what their sons would experience in the next war, he wrote:

> Somewhere in a muddy trench, thousands of miles away from you and your home, your boy, the same one that is sleeping so sweetly and safely in his bed with you on his side, is waiting to "go over the top." Just before dawn. Drizzling rain. Dark and dismal. Face caked with mud and tears. So homesick and longing

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[29] Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume XII* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 229-231.

[30] Ross Alexander Kennedy, *Uncertain Security: American Political Ideology and the Problem of Militarism, 1890-1941* (Unpublished Dissertation. University of California at Berkeley, 1994), 147-148.

> for you and home. Thinks of you on your knees praying for him. He is frightened to death, but still more scared the boy next to him will discover his terror. That's your boy. Stomach as big as an egg. I know, I've had that sensation many times.[31]

Butler was not content merely to appeal to the emotions of his audience in order to convince them of a problem. As a former soldier, he was interested in finding solutions. One of his plans was for World War I veterans and relatives of dead or maimed soldiers to decide whether or not the country should go to war because "Congressmen, with very few exceptions, don't put on a uniform when War is declared. They don't shoulder a rifle and a pack and they don't march away to kill and be killed. No sir."[32] A similar proposal was put forth in 1935 by Louis Ludlow, a congressman from Indiana. The Ludlow Amendment would have required a nationwide vote on whether or not the United States could go to war (except in the case of invasion) and would have additionally limited war profiteering.[33] Butler agreed with the resolution for the most part – especially removing the profit aspect of war – and encouraged support for it on a number of occasions. Yet he disagreed that the entire population should vote on the issue. To Butler, potential soldiers should decide if the county should go to war, as they would be the ones fighting it: "Only those who are of age to bear arms and are physically fit to bear arms – only those should be permitted to vote on whether the Nation is to remain at peace or go to War – only

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[31] Smedley Butler, "Common Sense Neutrality," in Paul Comly.French, *Common Sense Neutrality: Mobilizing for Peace* (New York: Hastings House, 1939), from Smedley D. Butler, *War is a Racket* (Los Angeles, 2003, Feral House) 56.

[32] Smedley Butler, "For the Boys," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, April 5, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[33] Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists,* 253-262. The Ludlow Amendment was one of the strongest pieces of proposed isolationist legislation in the 1930s. Introduced first in 1935, Roosevelt maneuvered to bury the amendment in the House Judiciary Committee until 1937. In December of 1937 the Japanese bombing of the USS Panay fueled a resurgence of isolationism, and the Ludlow Amendment finally came to vote, but fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass.

those who would be called upon to fight the war should be permitted to vote on this question."[34] Another idea to prevent unnecessarily sending soldiers into harms way was that the mothers of soldiers from the last war should vote on whether the country should go to war:

> Let's appoint a commission of gold star mothers and the mothers of terribly wounded veterans to draw up a plan to keep us out of wars entirely…Mothers who gave their sons and the mothers of mangled soldiers will do a better job than any crowd which did its suffering at home…The mothers' judgment would be sincere and honest. [35]

While Butler surely recognized the improbability of this proposal becoming a reality, his point was clear: the motives behind going to war ought to be just and transparent. If politicians who decide to go to war were not the ones fighting the war, there needed to be a way to ensure their motives were not profit-driven. This was Butler's colorful contribution to a rapidly spreading belief in the isolationist camp: give the soldiers a voice so the United States would never again go to war for the profit of a few.

## WAR PROFITEERING AND THE DEVIL THEORY OF WAR

The most distinct aspect of 1930s isolationism was the theory that came to be known as "The Devil Theory of War," a phrase coined by Progressive historian Charles Beard in his 1936 polemic of the same name.[36] The theory was that powerful business

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[34] Smedley Butler, "For the Boys," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, April 5, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[35] Smedley Butler, "Munitions Makers," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 18, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[36] Charles A. Beard, *The Devil Theory of War: An Inquiry into the Nature of History and the Possibility of Keeping Out of War* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1936). Manfred Jonas considered the "Devil Theory of War" to be the definitive isolationist theory of the era, stating the theory, "in the form which it now assumed, was the only original contribution of the isolationists of the 1930s to the definition of America's relationship to conflicts in other parts of the world." Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 140.

interests in search of profit drove the country into participating in the First World War. The government was complicit in this action, helping to manipulate the American people and obscuring from them the true motivations behind entering into the war. While the critique targeted common recipients of Depression-era resentment - Wall Street and the wealthy – it also took specific aim at the munitions makers, and others who had directly profited from the war effort. The argument was that profiting from death and destruction was deplorable, and those who lacked the moral fiber to resist those profits might also be capable of propelling the country into a conflict for financial gain.[37]

Historians in the decades following the Second World War who have reexamined the "Devil Theory of War" generally disagree with its premise. While certainly there were companies that profited from the war, there is little evidence to sustain the theory that those same companies led the United States to intervene. Instead, the main cause of entry into the First World War was Wilson's concern that American merchant ships would not be able to travel freely, and that the diminished amount of commerce would have a drastic impact on the U.S. economy. As William Leuchtenburg put it:

> Once the U-boats started sending to the bottom every ship that came within their periscope sights, they threatened to drive all American cargo vessels from the Atlantic, thereby precipitating a serious depression. Not only "merchants of death" but also millions of American workers and farmers had a stake in not letting that happen.[38]

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[37] Jonas, *Isolationism in America* 140-141; Doenecke and Wiltz, *From Isolation to War*, 8.

[38] For the international events and domestic pressures that sent the U.S. into war, see William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 12-34, quotation from 27; Also, David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 32-44; Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End all Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 5- 19; and Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2009), 80-131.

This viewpoint became obscured in the anti-interventionism so predominant in the 1930s. The debate over war profiteering had arisen in the 1920s, but began to gain even more traction amidst the economic turmoil of the Great Depression. In October of 1933, the publication of William Stone's article "International Traffic in Arms and Ammunition" in *Foreign Policy Reports*, warned that the growing international arms trade was a threat to peace. In March of the next year, an article entitled "Arms and Men" in the popular *Fortune* magazine caused a stir when it suggested that munitions makers prolonged wars and lacked national loyalties.[39] Walter Millis's 1935 book *Road to War* – read by millions – contended that U.S. had been tricked by European powers, and argued with a mix of poetry and passion that involvement in the World War had been a grave mistake:

> The war had mangled its usual number of human bodies, inflicted its usual hurts and tortures, closed another day in its long, routine tale of agony. But all that, for the moment, was far away. America, men simply thought, was in a war; and among them all, none quite knew how it happened, nor why, nor what precisely it might mean.[40]

The two books with the greatest impact on the debate – *Iron, Blood and Profits* and *Merchants of Death* – suggested that arms manufacturers had stoked the flames of war leading up to the First World War, and focused their critiques on American companies

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[39] David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929 – 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 387; William T. Stone, "International Traffic in Arms and Ammunition," *Foreign Policy Reports*, IX (October, 1933), 130-140; "Arms and the Men," *Fortune*, IX (March, 1934), 53-55, 116-120; On the impact of the articles in American society, see: Matthew Ware Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s: Beyond the Merchants of Death* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), 21.

[40] Walter Millis, *Road to War: America 1914-1917* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935), 460. According to Charles Beard, "Among the many books that contributed to American disillusionment about how war came in 1917…few, if any, were more widely read or more powerful than Road to War…" See Charles Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941: A Study in Appearances and Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 5, n. 5.

such as the DuPont corporation.[41] A number of similar works followed[42] and the theory caught fire, igniting demands for a congressional investigation.

While veterans' organizations and others had been critical of the munitions industry in the 1920s, it was the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – through the lobbying efforts of its National Executive Secretary, Dorothy Detzer – which took steps to convince Senator Gerald P. Nye to introduce Senate Resolution 206 in early 1934, to establish what would be known first as the Military Affairs Committee and then the Nye Committee. Nye was not Detzer's first choice – she had lobbied over 20 senators before him, she wrote in her memoir years later. Most senators had responded coldly or with replies that Detzer interpreted to be the question: "Do you want me to commit political suicide?" The munitions lobby was strong, yet Senator Nye was bolstered by public opinion favoring the inquiry, and was able to garner enough support for the Nye Committee to begin holding public hearings on September 4, 1934.[43]

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[41] George Seldes, *Iron, Blood and Profits: An Exposure of the World-Wide Munitions Racket* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1934); H. C. Engelbrecht and F. C. Hanighen, *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1934).

[42] Other important works include: David Starr Jordan, *War and Waste: A Series of Discussion of War and War Accessories*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1914), Charles Beard, *The Devil Theory of War*, (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1936), Allen W. Dulles and Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *Can America Stay Neutral?* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), and Quincy Howe, *Blood is Cheaper than Water*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939).

[43] Dorothy Detzer – referred to by the *New York Times* as "the most famous woman lobbyist" – was an active leader in the peace movement following the death of her twin brother, who was gassed while fighting in World War I. She became well known in her work lobbying government officials on behalf of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in the 1920s and early 1930s, and helped to name a woman to the 1932 Geneva Disarmament Conference – the first woman to serve in such a role. See Dorothy Detzer, *Appointment on the Hill* (New York: Henry Holt, 1948), 7-25, quotation from 140; also, Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s*, 11.

The Senate Munitions Inquiry[44] would continue on and off from 1934 through 1936, gathering testimony from some of the largest companies in America on their productions of ships, gas, bombs, guns, clothes, submarines, munitions, and nearly every war-related manufactured good that enabled a corporation to earn a profit. The committee seemed to both reflect the times as well as push the country deeper into anti-interventionism, or as an expert has observed, the investigation was "both an expression of and a force for isolationism." Though the inquiry did not absolutely prove the "Devil Theory of War," it certainly lent credibility and evidence to it and other critiques of war profiteering. Even a scholar who was skeptical of the committee's motives and results acknowledged that, "the committee, its hearings and reports, and the speeches and legislative activities of its members undoubtedly strengthened isolationist or noninterventionist sentiment in the United Sates before World War II." It was a momentous investigation into the munitions industry that gave a detailed account of the American companies who profited from World War I. Executives at corporations were willing to testify as they felt they had done little wrong, and their insights were so revealing it led one modern academic to characterize the inquiry as "probably the best look historians will ever get of the modern armaments industry." And such an investigation was a direct result of the environment created by the spread of "Devil Theory of War."[45]

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[44] Also referred to as the Nye Committee. Studies the committee on which I relied include: Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962); John E. Wiltz, *In Search of Peace: The Senate Munitions Inquiry, 1934-1936*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), and Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s*.

[45] Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations*, 3; Wiltz, *In Search of Peace*, 96; Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s*, 3.

As a vocal critic of war profiteering, Butler followed the Nye Committee proceedings closely. In late 1934, as the Committee began holding hearings, Butler borrowed the figures provided in the Senate Munitions Inquiry to support his theory about the relationship between wars and corporate interests. The new information would result in the expansion of his "War is a Racket" article in 1934 into a book which summarized Butler's views. Those views would be further articulated in his series of radio address from January through July of 1935. Through an analysis of those speeches we can trace how the committee's findings fit well into the Devil Theory of War, supporting the widespread belief that "Merchants of Death" had driven the United States into the First World War. The speeches also illuminate the uniqueness of Butler's argument, as he fused military experience and advocacy for veterans' issues into a strident yet coherent criticism of interventionism.

## THE CRACKED LIBERTY BELL

In his radio addresses for WCAU Philadelphia, Butler had the freedom to discuss topics of his choosing and was not under the pressure to entertain a crowd that came with public speaking. In a way, the broadcasts can be understood as Butler's manifesto. Butler laid out his theories on everything from politics to policing, drawing from life experiences and the political and social movements around him. Many speeches covered similar ground – such as war profiteering and the Bonus – but others proposed theories on isolationism, patriotism, and the Nye Committee, which are not found anywhere else in Butler's writings or speeches on the lecture circuit. The broadcasts represent the most complete summary of his world view on record and due to their breadth and detail, the radio addresses will be the sole concentration of this section.

By the time Butler's first regular broadcast aired in January of 1935, radio was no longer a novelty, but a major fixture in American culture. The first commercial radio broadcasts in 1920 had signaled the dawn of a new technology, but it would be at least a decade before the new medium would be fully utilized in the political realm. Through the 1920s, stations popped up around the country, experimenting with formats that varied from talk shows, to sermons, to vaudeville acts and other types of entertainment. The first ten-thousand-watt station appeared in 1928, the same year nationally syndicated shows like *Amos 'n' Andy* hit the air waves.[46] By the 1930s, though, a popular show could reach millions of listeners, and the culture of America was changing. For the first time, Americans from across the country could experience the same program simultaneously. Politicians soon saw they could appeal directly to great numbers of people through this medium. Huey Long used radio to build a following in Louisiana in the 1920s, and took to the airwaves as often as Roosevelt when he entered Congress in 1932.[47] President Roosevelt capitalized on the medium, utilizing his oratory skills to quell potential discontent, connecting intimately with the public in his "Fireside Chats" beginning in March of 1933.[48] Father Coughlin, who began airing his sermons on a Detroit radio station in 1926 by attaching a microphone to his pulpit, would reach over

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[46] On the expansion of radio in the early 20th century, see Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 129.

[47] Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 62.

[48] William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 330-331. Roosevelt was the first President to capitalize on the new technology of the radio. His thirty "Fireside Chats" established the precedent of a regular, direct address to the American public that all presidents after him would follow. One reason he was so effective, according to Leuchtenburg, was his style. "He talked like a father discussing public affairs with his family in the living room."

ten million listeners in the mid-1930s with his populist message and a voice described as "brushed with brogue, melodic and soothing."[49] Radio was a force in America.

Butler had spoken on the radio on prior occasions,[50] but the "Pep Boys" speeches would be his first chance at a regular address enjoyed by the major voices of dissent of the day. Though he did not sign a contract, in a letter to Philadelphia's WCAU representative James Coyle, Butler outlined to the details of the broadcast. He was to give six, fifteen-minute talks in each two-week span, and was to be paid $150 for each address. They would be recorded from a microphone at his desk in his home in Newtown Square at 11pm and Butler was allowed to discuss whichever topic he chose. Butler wanted to make this last point clear, writing to a Coyle: "It is my understanding that I am not to be limited to any one subject, but that my talks are to swing around the general topic – real American Patriotism."[51] There was no indication of how many weeks Butler was to continue the series of speeches, but as the radio station commissioned Butler for two-week periods, it is likely they wished to gauge the response of the listeners before committing to a contract of any sort of length. As Butler was unsure if the broadcasts were going to last a significant period of time, he most eloquently addressed the issues most dear to him – the Bonus, veterans' rights, war profiteering, patriotism, the Depression – within the first month, repeating such arguments through the series or

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[49] Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 229.

[50] Not all the experiences were positive, however. For instance, on October 2, 1934, Butler was cut off for "objectionable language" while giving a five-minute talk at a veterans' meeting broadcast over national radio. Thousands of veterans objected to the censorship, writing NBC on Butler's behalf. See "Maj. Gen. Butler Cut Off Air as He Addresses Veterans," *Chicago Tribune*, October 4, 1934; Edward R. Leigh to the National Broadcasting Company, October 28, 1934, Butler Papers.

[51] Smedley Butler to James F. Coyle representing WCAU, December 17, 1934, Butler Papers.

broadcasts. As such, many of the speeches analyzed in this section are from January of 1935. The response was good, and Butler would give seventy-eight addresses that went out the Philadelphia area over the next six months.

Smedley's voice was gravelly, nasally, and gruff, and rose to a slightly higher pitch when excited. It had the staccato cadence and commanding delivery you might expect from a Marine Corps officer. On the public speaking circuit, Butler had often referred to himself as an entertainer, adjusting his topic and delivery to the whim of the crowd. He viewed the radio addresses differently. This was his chance to inform the public on the issues about which he cared most passionately. He stated as much in his first broadcast:

> They told me that my experiences in far parts of the world would be sufficiently interesting to keep your attention…and perhaps that's true. But I'm not coming here tonight or any other night to entertain you. I'm asking for your cooperation to help throw light on an evil condition which exists all over the world.[52]

Although Butler did weave his own experiences into many of his discussions, he would do so to prove a larger point. Staying true to his word, most of his speeches address a perceived evil in society, and often times propose a way to get rid of it. Throughout the series, Smedley covered favorite topics such as war profiteering, veterans' rights, the "Tory" class, and the need for the soldiers' Bonus. He commented on events of the day, such as the findings of the Nye Committee, the Depression, and even the Lindbergh kidnapping trial, but always found a way to tie in war profiteering or another of what he considered to be the larger "evils" in America.

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[52] Smedley Butler, "The Cracked Liberty Bell," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 4, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers. Originally unnamed, I have categorized the speeches based on a predominant line or theme in the transcript.

One topic on everyone's mind in the era was, of course, the economy. At the end of 1934, unemployment exceeded 23 percent, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average had fallen to a meager 93 from a height of 343 in October of 1929. Like millions of Americans, Butler was impatient with the sluggish progress of the New Deal. And akin to other critics in his time, Butler offered a response to the Depression and steps to economic recovery. While he did not have as detailed a plan as Roosevelt, Butler proposed that people be assured of "Three Securities" as a way to counter the difficulties created by the Depression. These included: "The Security of livelihood; The Security against the major hazards and vicissitudes of life; The Security of decent homes."[53] Butler believed the federal government should insure that its citizens had those basic rights, and in fact that Americans "…should have had them long ago."[54] He would return time and again to the "three securities" in his broadcasts, defining them in one speech through a series of declarations: "The people of this country must be assured of security. They must be properly fed, they must be properly and comfortably housed and they must be given a chance to work so that they will be able to secure these necessities."[55] Smedley also agreed with the Townsend Plan, arguing out that ensuring the livelihood of older citizens was essential to maintaining the American way of life: "We want the people of America to feel secure both economically and physically. If you

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[53] Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man*, 214-215; Smedley Butler, "The Three Securities," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 6, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[54] Smedley Butler, "The Three Securities," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 6, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[55] Smedley Butler, "Property over People," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 13, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

have a feeling that after 60 you'll go to the poor house, there's no security."[56] Coincidentally, four days after Butler's speech, Roosevelt would introduce the Social Security Bill to Congress, appeasing the voices of critics like Butler and especially the Townsendites.[57]

Butler's "three securities" proposal came almost six years before Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech of January 1941.[58] Of course, it is highly unlikely that Butler's radio addresses were an inspiration for Roosevelt's legendary plan. While Butler had campaigned on behalf of FDR in 1932, the two rarely corresponded, especially after Butler's ardent opposition to the Economy Act. Instead, the similarities between Butler's "Three Securities" and FDR's "Four Freedoms" illustrated the commonality of thought among leaders in the 1930s who saw in the desperation of the country as a need to redefine its priorities. Many programs and platforms from critics were put forth as solutions to the Depression. Butler's ideas were also similar to Huey Long's Share Our

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[56] Smedley Butler, "Property over People," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 13, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers; Dr. Francis Everett Townsend's plan to pay citizens sixty and older a monthly wage gained traction in 1933 and 1934, and by 1935 had attracted some twenty-five million Americans to the cause with over five thousand Townsend Clubs emerging across the country. The movement is seen as a precursor to the Social Security Act signed by Roosevelt in August of 1935. See Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[57] President Roosevelt had been considering an old-age pension since early 1934. Social Security became a reality largely through the work of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins combined with pressure from the Townsend movement. See Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 265-273.

[58] The Four Freedoms (Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear), delivered in his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1931, were meant to define fundamental human rights, and support a foreign policy that could call for intervention if those freedoms were in danger anywhere in the world. Roosevelt would return to this argument time and again during the Second World War. The freedoms were transformed into paintings by Norman Rockwell that would be distributed as posters in support of the Allied cause as well. "Freedom from Want," the point most similar to Butler's plan, is depicted as family enjoying a large turkey dinner. On the impact of the "Four Freedoms" speech, including an argument that it revealed the motivations behind Roosevelt's social theory, see Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Wealth Plan proposed a year earlier. Long's plan was more of a general attack on the wealthy, but some eight million people joined 27,000 Share our Wealth Clubs in 1935, less as a response to the specific reforms proposed – of which there were few – but to join in the protest against the moneyed class.[59] With its promise of economic security, Butler's message likewise resonated with Americans in the Philadelphia area who listened to his broadcast.

Of the themes Butler weaved through his speeches, a vocal patriotism was one of the key issues that set him apart from other critics of the government. As Butler was a decorated soldier, his audience likely expected a program with a patriotic slant. In fact, this had been one of the few specific requests that the station made of Butler.[60] He obliged, and when he realized he would be integrating the concept of "patriotism" in his talks in the upcoming weeks – and eventually throughout the series of Pep Boys talks – Butler decided to dedicate an entire show to the issue. In the broadcast, Smedley addressed the subject of patriotism head-on, speaking about it in a way he had not expressed in past writings or speeches. First, he defined the concept: "Patriotism in its true sense is love of a fine clean ideal. And for want of something better we make this idea concrete and call it a country. And to go further, a country is nothing but a

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[59] At one point, Long proposed to guarantee $2,000-$5,000 for every family by levying heavy taxes on the top 2% of incomes, but for the most part his plan contained few specifics. See Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 68-81. For a critical analysis of Long and the Share Your Wealth Plan, including the opposition from most economists of the era, see Richard D. White, Jr., *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (New York: Random House, 2006), 193-206. Long himself anticipated the plan would be eagerly adopted by banking interests and millionaires, writing of the smooth transition in his posthumously published fictional account of his first year as President. See Huey Pierce Long, *My First Days in the White House* (Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1935), 93-115.

[60] As Smedley wrote to the radio representative: "It is my understanding that I am not to be limited to any one subject, but that my talks are to swing around the general topic – real American Patriotism." See Smedley Butler to James F. Coyle, December 17, 1934, Butler Papers.

collection of homes."[61] To Butler, patriotism was something as natural as the love of one's home.

Butler recognized that President Roosevelt was trying to appeal to these honest instincts in his "Fireside Chats," but was concerned that some Americans were beyond reason. According to Butler, "present day manufactured mass patriotism has gone a long way astray!" It was increasingly difficult for Americans to grasp the concept of "patriotism," observed Butler, not because there was a shortage of love for one's country, but because the concept itself had been co-opted: "Unscrupulous exploiters…have changed this pure and sweet 'love of home' type of patriotism into a noxious selfish nationalism."[62] To Butler, nationalism – as stirred up by war profiteers and anyone else driving America into war – was a sinister concept leading the country down a path towards future military conflicts:

> Nationalism is the conviction on the part of a mass of our people that we are superior to all other peoples. That our country is better than any other. It is stronger than any other. Has a bigger fleet than any other and has more right in the world than any other country and knows better how every other country should conduct their affairs than they do themselves.[63]

Butler insisted that nationalism was a dangerous force that would lead America into one conflict after another. To illustrate his point, Butler explained that this concept of "nationalism" was not present in American history until 1898: "Up until we branched forth into imperialism with the Spanish American War, we didn't have this feeling fully

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[61] Smedley Butler, "Patriotism and Nationalism," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 7, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

developed. But now we are like the rest of the nations. We are hypocritical."[64] To bolster his contention of the link between nationalism and American imperialism, Butler cited his military experience intervening in Nicaragua and participating in the large infrastructure projects to modernize Haiti as examples of the insistence of the U.S. government to impose the American way of life on other countries:

> We give as a reason for hanging on to the Philippines that we know better than they do themselves. That our sanitary plumbing constitutes the greatest reason for their happiness. We go down to Haiti, Santo Domingo and Nicaragua and with the excuse of teaching them how to run post offices and build roads we exploit them, and justify our actions to ourselves by saying that this is for their good.[65]

In Butler's mind, the true motive behind the interventions – profit – was hidden, and the American people were misled into believing the United States knew what was best for their neighboring countries, and needed to intervene. While he also continued to bemoan war profiteering on many occasions, in this assault on "nationalism," Butler was targeting what he felt was an unhealthy impulse advanced by the press and propagandists. By distinguishing between "nationalism" and "patriotism," he was looking to give Americans a way to love their country without feeling justified in occupying or invading another.

Due to his military background and immense dedication and service for the United States – and especially Marines and veterans – Butler's "nationalism vs. patriotism" lesson, unique to his broadcasts, could be sternly critical of American foreign policy while lauding the system in place. This anti-imperialist, pro-American viewpoint

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

– that one could love his country (patriotism) without feeling superior to other nations (nationalism) – not only provided Butler a way to critique U.S. imperialism and intervention while championing the idea of America, but served as a model for veterans to do the same.

One of the reasons Butler was so interested in the concepts of nationalism and patriotism was because he was a veteran. Veterans, Butler felt, were more faithful to their country than any other group of people. And during the 1930s, veterans were formidable critics of America, since they were usually immune from attacks of disloyalty by their opponent. At a time when communists, fascists, and socialists were often lambasted for their loyalty to other countries, rumors abounded of conspiracies to overthrow the government,[66] veterans like Butler were usually seen as American patriots serving the best interests of the United States.

And yet, even veterans were sometimes attacked in the public eye and labeled "communists" by opponents who disagreed with their politics. Because of this, Butler took to defending veterans throughout his broadcasts, pouncing on anyone who would write or say negative things about this unique group of Americans: "The man who speaks ill of the American soldier should be ashamed of himself. Discuss the bonus all you

[66] Of course, Butler exposed one of these so-called plots in the "Plot to Seize the White House." Another plot included a fascist group called the "Khaki Shirts" that tried to recruit veterans in 1932. Communists were especially feared, according to one historian: "Liberals were soft; they were betrayed by foolish scruples. But Communists were hard; they preferred the deed to the word." Most fears of rebellion were unfounded, based more on the radical rhetoric of the organization or the demonization of the group itself. See Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, 69-207, quotation from 185.

please. But do not call these defenders of the nation vile names."[67] Butler explained that the well-being of veterans and soldiers was always his priority:

> I know I will be charged with being overly sentimental towards these soldiers, and I am and I shall continue to be, and will fight their battles as long as a breath of life remains in my body. I know them! I have been through fights with them and I love them because they are unselfish, simple, plain but courageous Americans.[68]

Smedley could not tolerate slander against soldiers, especially the kind that sought to demonize them as radicals, though he recognized it as a common strategy of the time: "One favorite form of attack on an honest official is to call him a Communist, an anarchist or some other kind of radical."[69] When a Chairman of the Pennsylvania Republican State Committee, M. Harvey Taylor, questioned the patriotism of Democratic Pennsylvania Governor George Howard Earle, a veteran of the First World War, Butler dedicated one of his broadcasts to defending the Governor. In it, Butler used Earle's case as a launching pad to defend the loyalty of all veterans:

> All of us know that a man who bore arms in defense of this Nation in war time is not likely to attempt to overthrow the government in peace time. The oath of allegiance he took when he donned Uncle Sam's uniform in 1917 is not very different from the oath of office he swore when he took office as Governor of Pennsylvania last January…If he cared enough to offer his very life for his country in war time he certainly cares enough to protect the interests of the people of this Nation in peace time.[70]

Butler's arguments on the soldier's behalf would sometimes become emotional pleas. As 116,00 American soldiers perished in the Great War, and another 204,000 had

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[67] Smedley Butler, "Profiteers of the World War," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 15, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Smedley Butler, "In Defense of Governor Earle," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, June 13, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[70] Ibid.

returned with physical or psychological disabilities, he had an ample supply of death and destruction from which to draw.[71] In one of his addresses, Smedley made a case against war profiteering with a series of morally probing questions:

> We have got to make up our minds here in America. Is life more valuable than a share of stock? Is the clean body, the perfect soul, the modest ambition and the dearest hope of an American boy of more value in our national set-up then the value of the dollar or a share of stock in a munitions plant?[72]

Butler did not oppose profits, he was simply against making money at the expense of Americans who had to die for that profit – especially soldiers, whether they were conscripted or volunteered, especially when they were tricked into believing in a higher cause. Butler also saw war profiteering as indicative of a larger trend in American society – valuing property rights over human rights:

> In the last fifty years, we have found life being subordinated to property…We have been so successful in doing that for property that the majority have accepted it as the normal thing – it has become a part of our National theory for property rights to be above those of the human being.[73]

Butler used examples from his military experiences to support his argument, such as his tour in China in the late 1920s. In one broadcast, Butler described how when he was in command of the troops in China, he was informed in a sly, indirect manner of property interests that were to be protected:

> Some five thousand US Marines had been sent to China in March, 1927 to protect the lives of Americans, and incidentally, if not too much trouble, some odds and ends of investments lying around. But "Life" first, always remember that. Of

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[71] Figures from Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 31-32.

[72] Smedley Butler, "Profiteers of the World War," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 15, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[73] Smedley Butler, "Property over People," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 13, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

> course if we had any spare time we were to look around once in a while, sort of casually, as it were, to see that the Standard Oil properties were safe…Well, you catch the idea – just an example of two way instructions.[74]

Though troops were not directly ordered to defend property over life, as a Brigadier General at the time, Butler was exposed to orders that indicated the military leadership had the values of corporate interests in mind. And if his experiences in the Marine Corps were not evidence enough of profits being prized above the lives of Americans, Butler had to look no further than his memory of the Bonus Army forcibly removed from its camp in Washington as a clear example of the priorities of the American government.

The Nye Committee also provided detailed evidence of war profiteering. The hearings began in late 1934 and continued though Butler's broadcast, exposing the financial cost of World War I and the profits made by the largest companies during the war.[75] Butler saw the importance of the committee immediately: "If there was an investigation badly needed it's this one into the munitions racket. And it must go on. No matter who tries to stop it…This investigation is the little fellows only safeguard. We are learning something every day they meet, and it is great reading too."[76] Each report gave Butler fresh ammunition to use in his addresses, and he took it upon himself to carefully

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[74] Ibid.

[75] In December of 1934, after the Nye Committee revealed startling profits by corporations such as the DuPont Company during World War I, Roosevelt attempted to curb the investigation of the by appointing Bernard Baruch – a former banker and advisor to President Wilson – to lead a White House committee to investigate instead. However, through public pressure and support from the press, the Nye Committee continued its investigation through 1935 and into 1936. For more on the Senate Munitions Inquiry (also known as the Nye Committee), see Coulter, *The Senate Munitions Inquiry of the 1930s*; Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962); John E. Wiltz, *In Search of Peace: The Senate Munitions Inquiry, 1934-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963).

[76] Smedley Butler, "Munitions Makers," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 18, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

put the costs in perspective for his audience.[77] Using a blend of facts and sarcasm, Butler delivered a blistering picture of the "true patriots" – the profiteers who stayed safely in America and made money on the backs of those fighting in the trenches:

> Now, during all this time – the great and true patriots who were safely at home doing their bit, manufacturing the materials of war for these boys to use, these fellows who were singing the star spangled banner on every occasion, proclaiming their patriotism to high heaven – made 16,000 millions of dollars out of this stricken nation. They spent 1,000 millions of dollars building an air-plane which would not fly – 675 millions of dollars for wooden ships which would not float. They made over 30 million pairs of shoes for an army of four million soldiers. Twenty million mosquito nets for the use of two million soldiers in France, where there were no mosquitoes. Thousands and thousands of leather saddles for an army which had no cavalry. The Central Leather Company paid dividends of 1500 per cent.[78]

The itemized figures resonated with Butler, as he had had first-hand experience with the cost of military supplies, managing the Marine barracks at Camp Pontanezen in France. Supplies had been severely limited at the camp – Butler earned the name General Duckboard for leading a unit to procure desperately needed wood planks – and discovering that millions of dollars had been wasted on useless items like mosquito nets amplified Butler's feeling that profiteers had bamboozled the American soldier, and by extension, the American people.

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[77] Butler – and most of the country – followed the proceedings through the numerous articles in the press, beginning in late 1934 when substantial revelations on war profiteering were made by the DuPont Company and others. For example, see: "Private Selling of Arms Scored," *New York Times*, December 10, 1934; "Vast Profits of War Told Inquisitors: Rich Munitions Deals Related," *Los Angeles Time*, December 14, 1932; "War Profits up toe 800% Shown at Senate Inquiry," *New York Times*, December 14, 1934; "Quarter Billion Du Pont Powder Profit Detailed," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 21, 1934; "De Ponts' New in War Totaled $228,731,000," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1934; "Congress Hits at War Costs on 3 Fronts," *Washington Post*, January 18, 1935; "Builders of Ships got Huge Tax Cuts," *New York Times*, January 22, 1935; "Senate Committee Delves Deeper into War Profits," *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 1935; and more.

[78] Smedley Butler, "Profiteers of the World War," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, January 15, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

Butler's critique of war profiteering also coincided with his support of immediate dispensation of the Bonus to veterans. In pushing for the payment, he brought the discussion back to the plight of the soldier:

> Everybody else got cash. The government gave the soldier an I. O. U. Payable twenty-seven years after the war was over…At the end of the twenty-seven years the interest will have nearly eaten up the principal…Nobody else was given I. O. U.'s.[79]

Butler's ability to use evidence provided by the Senate Munitions Inquiry greatly enhanced his argument because he could contrast the meager wages of soldiers with the money paid to individuals in the private sector:

> He (the soldier) did his job but the human tools of the selfish financial interests have managed to undo his bloody work. This soldier was given $1.00 a day. Those who worked at home got anywhere from $5.00 to $25.00 a day. The Duponts through their dividends, 1,000 per cent; the Bethlehem Steel Company 800 per cent; the International Nickel Company over 1800 per cent.[80]

Butler insisted that such exorbitant profits by private companies during wartime were immoral. He knew his figures well from serving in the Marine Corps and working with veterans groups after retirement As such, Butler was able to make a powerful, personal argument to which veterans and supporters of the veterans could relate.

Smedley did not just want to connect with this group; he wanted to motivate them to action. But what type of action would it be? He knew that there were many radicals within its ranks who were, so displeased at conditions during the Depression that they wished to change the country's system of government. After speaking at a local high

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

school to a group of anti-war students, he addressed the desire for radical change in a broadcast:

> From what some of the boys said, and from some of the questions popped at me, I get the impression that some of the boys are more interested in some political or economic change in our Nation than they are in keeping our Nation out of war. Now, that's going to hurt the fight against war.[81]

Butler advocated for change, but did not desire to upend the system of government: "Don't attach communism or fascism to your anti-war views – don't make it a crusade against capitalism – don't divide your strength. Just make it a crusade against war and limit it to that."[82] Butler was not so much concerned that the alternative forms of government were inherently wrong, but he worried that such views could alienate the public and detract from the goal of keeping America out of war. "We must avoid all fanaticism and bigotry,"[83] he stated at one point, emphasizing the importance of supporting the current political system: "A people without pride in their form of government is politically dyspeptic."[84]

Similarly, Butler counseled veterans that marching on Washington had become ineffective following the Bonus March. The new direction for veterans, Butler felt, was to organize into a political voting block:

> Stay at home, you veterans. You won't get your back pay by a march on Washington. It won't do any good. You can't frighten Mr. Roosevelt the way

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[81] Smedley Butler, "For the Boys," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, April 5, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Smedley Butler, "The Last Broadcast," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, July 2, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[84] Ibid.

> you frightened Herbert Hoover back in 1932…My advice to you is – just stay at home and organize yourselves politically. That is your constitutional right – it is your privilege. You have the power – there are almost five million of you. Yes, and all of you have relatives and friends too.[85]

In his final broadcast, on July 2nd, 1935 Butler decided to speak "in a general way about the problems confronting our Nation."[86] He went after his favorite target – the very wealthy. As he had done in his very first broadcast, Butler explained that there were now two groups in America. One was a "new Tory class – a group that believes that this Nation, its resources and its man power were provided by the Almighty for its own special use and profit," while on the other side "is the great mass of the American people who still believe in the Declaration of Independence – who still believe that this Government was formed to secure to its people, forever, their inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It was the Tory group that through "its wealth, power and its influence – long ago obtained a firm grip on our government to the detriment of our people and the well-being of our Nation." Butler maintained that "we must strive – and the Roosevelt administration seems to be doing that in Washington today – we must strive to remove our government from the clutches of the greedy, the piratical and the dishonest, and return it to the people." He ended the speech by reiterating his stance on war profiteering, emphasizing the desperate need to reform the system that enabled it to flourish:

> And let us see to it that those who suffer in these wars and then pay for them besides have something to say about getting up a new one…Let us see to it that

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[85] Smedley Butler, "Veterans and Politics," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, May 31, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers.

[86] Smedley Butler, "The Last Broadcast," Speech, *Pep Boys Talks*, WCAU Philadelphia, July 2, 1935, Transcript, Butler Papers..

> those who pay for the wars – those only – and not those who remain safely at home and profit by the slaughter – shall have the power to decide whether there shall be another or not…Yes, and let us see to it that the profit is permanently taken out of the war racket, too. [87]

For Butler, isolationism meant allowing the soldiers to decide when to go to war. It was a theory more concerned with the removal of profit than on foreign events. Soon though, events both foreign and domestic would move the debate away from war profiteering and into a fight over the role of America in the world.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the strains of isolationism dominant in the United States during the mid-1930s, as demonstrated by the activities and writings of one of the leaders of the veterans' movement, Smedley Butler. Unlike the anti-interventionist movement in the late 1930s, the movement from 1931-1935 is difficult to track, as it simmered through so many parts of society, driven less by major world events and instead by intangibles like the memory of the First World War and domestic struggles due to the Great Depression. Butler's writings and speeches serve as an important historical record of this ideological movement, in particular how it related to issues that mattered most to the old retired soldier – the payment of the Bonus and the morality of war profiteering.

Through the freeing medium of radio, Butler disseminated his thoughts on what he felt were the most pressing issues of the day, such as when he chose to lambast war profiteers using the scandalizing data from the Nye Committee. The broadcasts demonstrated the extent to which the "Devil Theory of War" had taken hold in the

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[87] Ibid.

veterans' movement and won over isolationist thinkers such as Butler. The broadcasts also help to complete the portrait of Butler as an isolationist thinker. Without a live audience to rally, Smedley was able to develop more complex and mature ideas than he had in the rest of his career. His proposals to address the Depression in ways that would benefit the average citizen reflected the widespread impact of the social movements of the day – such as those led by Huey Long and Francis Townsend. Arguments such as Butler's carefully parsing definition of patriotism, as an ideal to be contrasted with nationalism, demonstrate an understanding of the motivations that drove America into war, provided a way for ordinary people to support isolationism while remaining loyal Americans, and represented a weary comprehension of the difficulty of preventing future conflicts.

While the WCAU broadcasts were not the end of Butler's crusade, they were the pinnacle of his intellectual thought on isolationism and of his importance in the veterans' movement. Butler remained committed to the isolationist cause until his death in 1940, but never reached the popularity and influence he enjoyed in 1935. In the section that follows, I conclude the dissertation by addressing the last years of Butler's life, including the reasons behind his descent into relative obscurity and the formation, without his involvement, of the largest and most powerful group of non-interventionists in the 1930s: the America First Committee.

## EPILOGUE

> *My friends are always cautioning me to adopt a safe middle course that conciliates people. But I'd rather take a definite stand on a principle or issue which I am convinced is right, even if bricks are thrown at me. I prefer it to sitting on the fence and receiving empty ovations. Popularity is not worth the sacrifice it sometimes exacts. I try to be a fighter, not a politician.*
>
> -Smedley Butler[1]

On September 8th, 1935, just over two months after Butler finished his final broadcast on WCAU, Huey Long was assassinated in the Louisiana state capitol building by Dr. Carl Weiss, the disgruntled son-in-law of one of Long's political enemies.[2] Long and Butler had shared the stage on a VFW speaking tour in 1933, and admired one another. Long had championed immediate payment of the Bonus, and in his proposed White House cabinet, Butler would have been his Secretary of War.[3] Butler was a fan Long's Share our Wealth program and many of his other ideas, which he incorporated into his own theories on the banking industry, Wall Street, and the Depression.[4] At the national VFW encampment in New Orleans less than a week after Long's assassination, Butler expressed the admiration that he and many veterans held for Long: "Roosevelt is going to be reelected, and you can't help it for the simple reason that the best friend the soldier ever had, and the one magnificent human being in America, Huey Long, is

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[1] Lowell Thomas, *Old Gimlet Eye* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), 286. Butler probably dictated the above passage – as he did the bulk of the memoir – to Thomas's assistant in the summer of 1931.

[2] For a detailed account of the assassination and death of Huey Long, see T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York: Alfred A. Knoft, 1970), 848-876.

[3] Huey Pierce Long, *My First Days in the White House* (Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1935), 6. Long's fictional work detailed the first year of presidency. It would be published posthumously, a few weeks following his assassination.

[4] See Chapter 6.

dead."[5] It soon became clear that Butler's prediction was far more prescient than he knew when he spoke in what was probably a moment of exasperated grief. Not only did veterans lose a leader with the death of Huey Long, but when the Bonus Bill was finally passed in January of 1936, and the payment of the Bonus came a few months later, veterans also lost the main rallying issue of their movement.[6] With no cause to unite them any longer the veterans' political enthusiasm waned, and indeed Roosevelt was elected in 1936.

For Smedley, 1935 represented a high point in his career, and paradoxically also the beginning of a slide into relative obscurity. After the passage of the Bonus, Smedley would continue speaking in front of veterans' groups and other organizations, but he would never again reach the audiences he had during the time when he aired his own broadcasts. This was partially due to political inactivity of veterans groups following the passage of the Bonus, but Butler's own choices also played a part. In the summer of 1935, Butler ignored his background in public relations from his years at Quantico, and risked damaging his reputation by associating openly with communist groups. One

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[5] "Butler address," *36th National Encampment of the VFW, 1935* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936), 33-37.

[6] Historian Stephen Ortiz emphasized the importance of the passage of the Bonus by ending his study on the political power of veterans during the 1930s upon its passage. He argued that the Bonus not only helped quell veteran dissent, but because it provided an economic stimulus, it contributed heavily to Roosevelt's win the Presidential election in 1936: "With the resolution of the Bonus, no other single issues existed that could so effectively mobilize and galvanize the remaining New Deal dissidents into a focused and meaningful political coalition." Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 184-186.

evening he shared the stage with leaders of far-left groups even after being warned by reporters not to appear.[7] In his talk, Butler divulged these warnings:

> A lot of New York newspapers have tried to keep me from coming here tonight. They told me I'd find a nest of Communists up here. I told them "What the hell of it!" In 1917 the government went around drafting boys in to the army; they didn't ask then what a man's politics were; they merely asked if he had a sound body and a strong back. I am here to talk on the veterans and I take it that everybody here is either veteran or is interested in the veteran's problems. That is all that I ask.[8]

But it was no longer 1917, and anti-communist sentiment was high during the mid-1930s. Months after the speech, Butler defended his appearance before radical clubs. Not one to shy from controversy, he chose the popular communist publication, *New Masses*, to present his views. The four-hour interview was published in November of 1935 in a sprawling exposé.[9]

Whether it was his association with communists or his constant attacks on the wealthy on behalf of the average citizen, Butler seemed to have alienated most of his peers, and to have few friends left in his social circle by 1935. In the interview in *New Masses*, Wilson documented Butler's isolated state: "I gathered from the General's conversation that he is a man pretty much alone," and elaborated on the ways in which Butler had ostracized his old friends in the elite:

> Most of his old associates from among army officers and business circles don't like the things he has been doing and saying lately…By taking the stand he has

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[7] "Butler for Bonus Fight," *New York Times*, June 16, 1935. Butler recounted his warning months later in an interview with for *New Masses* magazine. See Walter Wilson, "Where Smedley Butler Stands," *New Masses* (November 12, 1935), 17.

[8] "Smedley Butler Address," June 15, 1935; from Wilson, "Where Smedley Butler Stands," 17.

[9] Walter Wilson, "Where Smedley Butler Stands," *New Masses*, 15-18.

> risked and got ostracism from the ruling class – the admirals, the Royal Family of the Legion, the reserve officers, the West Point clique, the Wall Street crowd; the fascists hate and distrust him…He told me that even certain relatives have lined up against him. It would seem that he has broken irrevocably with the upper classes.[10]

As Hans Schmidt estimated, based on an interview with Butler's son, Smedley become distant and isolated toward the end of the 1930s: "Of his lifelong friends in the Marine Corps, only [Roy] Torchy Robinson came regularly to visit…and Smedley came to feel that many of his old cronies had had ulterior motives."[11] Though he was far from dead, by the end of 1935 it seemed Smedley had become largely irrelevant.

Consorting with communists less than a year after being blasted in the press in November of 1934 for exposing what seemed to many like a flimsy plot to overthrow the White House also took its toll on Butler's reputation with veterans. Though Butler continued to speak before small organizations through early 1940, his attitude and circumstances had diminished his role as a leader of the veterans' movement as well as his mass popularity. He was slowly excluded from national VFW events, and did not appear to speak or attend the annual national encampment for the VFW after 1937.

In April of 1938, Butler would be called before Congress one last time. The hearing was regarding a bill to consider the possible expansion of the Navy through the Naval Expansion (Vinson) Act. Butler testified as one of many military experts, and was quick to declare his anti-interventionism stance:

> I am what you might describe as a military isolationist. I believe in having all sorts of friendly contacts and commercial contacts with all other nations on earth,

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[10] Ibid., 18.

[11] Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 243 and 280.

> but to keep the soldiers, sailors, and marines away from them and have them stay within our own boundaries.[12]

Butler's testimony reveals that though he may have alienated members of his class with his strong views and rhetoric, he never abandoned his isolationist philosophy. He felt that those like him, people who believe "we should guard the continental limits of the United States," represented the vast majority of people in the country: "…from my observations among the people of America, [isolationism] constitutes about 85 percent of the opinion."[13]

Following Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 the debate over U.S. involvement grew fiercer. Isolationists formed a national organization for the first time. The America First Committee had been started by Yale students in 1939, and the group spread nationally the following year, gaining the support of politicians, celebrities, and businessmen, including Walt Disney and actress Lillian Gish, Sears chairman General Robert Wood, Governor Philip La Folette, aviator Charles Lindbergh, and others and reaching a membership of over 800,000 by 1941.[14] Isolationists faced a vocal and determined opposition, including the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, numerous business leaders, and a large segments of the press, including publications such as the *New York Post, PM,* and the *New York World-Telegram*. Interventionists

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[12] "Statement of Major General Smedley D. Butler, United States Marine Corps (Retired)," *Hearings Before the Committee on Naval Affairs, United States Senate, Seventy-fifth Congress, Third Session on H. R. 9218: An Act to Establish the Composition of the United States Navy, to Authorize the Construction of Certain Naval Vessels, and for other purposes*, (Washington, GPO, 1938), 142.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention: 1940-1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953) 3-34.

commonly characterized isolationists as anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi, ignoring the varied motivations behind the isolationist movement.[15]

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, swiftly ended the debate over isolationism in America. Many isolationists – especially veterans – immediately volunteered for service. Once a pragmatic strategy of national defense, isolationism soon became viewed as a harmful theory that had left the United States vulnerable to attack from a foreign invader. And so, the narrative continued, isolationists had led the country astray. In his 1944 popular historical account *The Battle Against Isolationism*, Walter Johnson examined this predominant view:

> Those leaders who upheld the isolationist position from 1939 to the time of Pearl Harbor did a great disservice to the United States by morally disarming that segment of our people which accepted their leadership.[16]

If the "battle against isolationism" was the first conflict that had to be fought for America to be able to enter the Second World War, it effectively pitted isolationists and other anti-war activists as intellectual combatants against the Allied forces. Such a view of the isolationist movement largely remains in existence to this day.

This study challenges that broad-sweeping theory by examining a patriotic sub-group of isolationists: military veterans, such as Smedley Butler, who focused the isolationist discussion on an attack on war profiteers. Veterans were a powerful political

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[15] While isolationists certainly included radical elements, it is difficult to show that they were any more or less anti-Semitic than society at large. Charges of anti-Semitism proved effective, however, as prominent members of their group such as Charles Lindbergh were found to have ties to Nazi Germany. See Wayne S. Cole, *Charles Lindbergh and the Battle Against American Intervention in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), especially 171-185, and 215.

[16] Walter Johnson, *The Battle Against Isolationism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1944), 228.

force during the Depression and contributed to the election of Roosevelt in 1932 and the payment of the Bonus four years later.[17] When the government continually refused to compensate veterans for their service during the First World War beyond their dollar-a-day wages, Butler and others began to scrutinize the priorities of the nation's leaders, especially their wartime monetary policy. Public calls for an investigation led to the Senate Munitions Inquiry, which uncovered mountains of evidence of war profiteering as few official inquiries have done before or since. The extensive details uncovered by the committee bolstered the anecdotal evidence that Butler and his veteran comrades had been reporting for years, and supplied valuable ammunition to the growing campaign against the "Merchants of Death." The veterans' call for isolationism, then, was rooted in the desire to prevent future wars on behalf of Big Business, and to protect soldiers and the country against what they perceived to be the exploitative goals of munitions makers. To veterans like Butler, the real traitors in the isolationist debate were those who were willing to profit from the death of Americans.

Discussions of isolationism, veterans, and American foreign policy were popular in the 1930s, and part of what drew large audiences to Butler's speaking engagements was doubtless the issues about which he spoke. The other attraction was his expressive style and dynamic personality. In analyzing his speeches and radio addresses, the dissertation hopes to create a fuller picture of the power of Butler as an orator. Smedley had a way of telling a story that drew admirers from all corners of the country. And as radio listeners in the vicinity of Philadelphia during the first half of 1935 knew, Smedley

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[17] In June, 1936, veterans received on average $581 per person, pumping nearly $2 billion into the economy. For an economic evaluation of the Bonus payment see Lester G. Telser, "The Veterans' Bonus of 1936," *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 26:2 (Winter, 2003-2004) 227-243, figures from 233.

could argue on behalf of his country so passionately that, even as he railed against inherent injustices in the way in conducted itself, his patriotism was never in question.

As a lone-wolf type of figure who traversed many different strata of American society, Butler's life provides a window to examine distinct currents in U.S. history, including the military imperialism launched by the Spanish-American War, the Dollar Diplomacy that shipped American troops to the Caribbean and Latin America, the logistical challenges of World War I, the Prohibition debates, and finally, the role of veterans in the isolationist movement of the 1930s.

When the isolationist movement organized and expanded in 1939 through 1940, Butler's speaking schedule once again picked up. With discipline honed through a thirty-year military career, Butler was reluctant to relax when there was a cause to fight for. On the road making speeches to small crowds through early 1940, his health began to deteriorate. But Smedley refused to stop, embarking on a demanding six-week speaking tour even after signs of illness had surfaced. It was too much even for the accomplished soldier. In June of 1940, as the isolationist debate raged in response to the fall of France to Nazi powers, Butler returned from a speaking tour and fell ill. Bedridden for four weeks at the Naval Hospital in Philadelphia, he died on June 21, 1940 from an unknown condition of the liver and gallbladder, possibly cancer. He left an estate worth only $2000 to his son, Thomas.[18]

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[18] "Smedley Butler, Outspoken Marine Officer, Dies at 59," *Washington Post*, June 22, 1940; "Smedley Butler Dies after Long Fighting Career," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 22, 1940; "Death Calls Gen. Butler: Spectacular Retired Officer of Marine Corps Ill Four Weeks," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1940; "Gen. Smedley Butler Leaves $2000 Estate," *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1940; "General Butler's Estate $2000," *New York Times*, July 19, 1940; Schmidt, *Maverick Marine*, 244-245.

Butler's death did not go unnoticed. The *New York Times* ran a lengthy obituary that covered most of his military career, and like many other posthumous descriptions of Butler's life, paid little attention to his post-military activity.[19] His funeral was held at the Butler residence in West Chester, and was attended by congressmen, and prominent Marine Corps officers such as Colonels A.A. Vandegrift and A.E. Randall, Brigadier General Cyrus Radford, and Major Lucian Whittaker, Butler's aide for so many years. More than 30 police officers from Philadelphia also attended, a tribute to his service as Public Safety Director of the city. Butler's legacy in Philadelphia was also recognized a month later, when a plaque honoring Butler was dedicated in the Philadelphia City Hall, inscribed with the words: "He enforce the law impartially. He defended it courageously. He proved Incorruptible." Other prominent Americans sent messages to the Butler family, including President Roosevelt, whose telegram to Ethel Butler read: "I grieve to hear of Smedley's passing. I shall always remember the old days in Haiti. My heart goes out to you and the family in this great sorrow."[20] In June of 1941, a Naval destroyer was named for Butler, in recognition of his military service, a somewhat ironic twist considering the years he spend speaking out against war profiteering and expansionism.[21]

Smedley would have been 60 years old the year that Pearl Harbor was bombed, and if the deferential treatment he received during his 1938 congressional testimony is any indication, there were many in Washington who considered Butler a military legend,

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[19] "Smedley Butler of the Marines Dead," *New York Times*, June 22, 1940.

[20] "Military Leaders Honor Gen. Butler," *New York Times*, June 25, 1940; "Honor Paid to Smedley Butler," *New York Times*, July 25, 1940. Quotation from FDR in "President in Tribute to Smedley D. Butler," *New York Times*, June 23, 1940.

[21] "Destroyer Named for Gen. Butler," *New York Times*, June 8, 1941.

and one highly capable of continuing to lead in a time of war. Quite a few generals were of Butler's age at the time, including major general Douglas MacArthur, who was called back into active duty at the start of the war and Vice Admiral William Halsey, just a year younger than Butler, who had named to command the South Pacific Area and South Pacific forces.[22] Had Butler been alive at the time of the Japanese attack, he would have certainly responded to the call of duty as he had as a 16-year-old boy when the Spanish-American War broke out. Because in the essence of his being, Butler always remained a soldier at heart.

From his first skirmishes as a young Marine Corps officer in 1898 to his radio broadcasts as a wizened and retired military hero in 1935, Butler held two beliefs close to him: an unwavering love for the United States and a deep conviction of the goodness of the average soldier. As the son of a congressman from one of the most prominent Pennsylvania families, he had endless opportunities to become a powerful and wealthy member of an elite class. What makes him an exceptional figure in American history was the way he traded in those advantages to wage a campaign against segments of that elite class and in the process became a fearless and tireless spokesman for the common soldier and the average American.

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[22] Michael Schaller, "Douglas MacArthur,"from John Whiteclay Chambers, II, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 405-406; Donald D. Chipman, "William F. Halsey," Ibid., 310.

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