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van Putten, James Dyke Oral History Interview:
Old China Hands Oral History Project

Greg Carlson
OLD CHINA HANDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Dr. James Dyke van Putten

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Hope College Archives Council
Holland, Michigan
1977
Map of the Amoy Mission

Fig. 1
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Preface

Interviewee: Dr. James Dyke van Putten

Interview I: July 15, 1976
Dr. van Putten's home in Holland, Michigan

Interviewer: Mr. Greg Carlson
Senior, Hope College
VAN PUTTEN, JAMES DYKE

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

James Dyke van Putten was born February 7, 1899 in Holland, Michigan. His father, Marinus van Putten, a real estate broker, and his mother, Mary (Dyke) van Putten were also born in Holland. The family's religious background was with the Christian Reformed Church and then later with the Reformed Church in America.

Mr. van Putten received his high school diploma from Holland High School in 1917. He continued his education at Hope College, where he majored in History and Education and obtained his A.B. degree. On a Y.M.C.A. fellowship, he attended Columbia University, from 1922-23, where he received his M.A. He also received a B.D. degree from the Presbyterian Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

On May 20, 1925 he married Frieda H. Gunneman, a native of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Accompanied by his new bride, Mr. van Putten arrived in China in 1925 to attend Chinese language school at the University of Nanking, in preparation for a missionary career in teaching. He was sponsored by the Southern Presbyterian Church. In 1926 they were transferred to Hangchow Christian College where they continued language study until domestic upheaval forced their premature departure.

After returning to the United States Mr. van Putten attended the University of Chicago for two quarters, in 1927, where he studied International Relations of China. He was later awarded the first Ph.D. in International Relations of China, in 1934 from the University of Chicago. His Ph.D. thesis concerned the "Historical Development and Contributions of Christian Education to the Culture of China".

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In the spring of 1946, Dr. van Putten returned to China as Director of the United States Information Service in Peking. He and his family lived in the Legation Quarter near the Imperial City. He worked with a staff of about fifty Chinese and one other American until he was given permission to leave China by the Communists in 1950. From 1950-51 and from 1951-52 he was Director of U.S.I.S. in Korea and Taiwan, respectively.

After a short term teaching courses on the Far East at a college in New Paltz, New Jersey, he came to Hope College in 1952 where he was chairman of the History-Political Science Department until his retirement in 1969.

In his interview, Dr. van Putten brings alive many of his China experiences, from the language classes and the athletic teams of his Nanking days, to two evacuations from Kuliang and Hangchow in order to escape the fighting between Chiang Kai-shek's troops and local warlords. Although Dr. van Putten's missionary experience in China never got beyond the language study stage, he raises some important questions about missionary activities in China, especially in regard to their use of English as the language of instruction at the university level.

In the second half of the interview Dr. van Putten talks about his experiences in Peking as Director of U.S.I.S. Under these auspices, Dr. van Putten found that he had more contact with the influential sectors of Chinese society than he would have had as a missionary.
INTERVIEW I

CARLSON: Why did you want to be a missionary? What motivated you?

VAN PUTTEN: I really wanted more to teach in the Orient. At that time there weren't any Fulbright Scholarships.

CARLSON: So you really didn't want to be a missionary.

VAN PUTTEN: I wanted to go out and teach because I felt it was more of a way to contact the Chinese that were going to be of importance, or Indians, other than the ordinary person. If you don't get the leaders you don't do anything.

CARLSON: Why did you pick China?

VAN PUTTEN: Well, I don't know. I was always interested in China, somehow or other. Of course I couldn't go out under the Reformed Church because they didn't have any openings in China, but the Southern Presbyterian did. The seminary I went to in Louisville was both Northern and Southern Presbyterian and they had an opening in China in one of their colleges. We had an opening in Japan and so they took me in China and the Reformed Church too the fellow from the Southern Presbyterian Church for Japan.

CARLSON: What were your first impressions when you arrived in China?

VAN PUTTEN: Gosh, the first time ... When you run into a city that's a Shanghai, and enormous city; the crowded conditions ... The downtown, inner Shanghai, was all foreign run: it was a foreign concession--American,
British, French; the buildings were all modern . . . streetcars, buses, and everything else.

CARLSON: So it was almost like an American city.

VAN PUTTEN: Yes. And the rickshaws by the thousands. Most everyone took rickshaws because they were cheaper and more direct.

CARLSON: Were you sent to Nanking University to learn the language?

VAN PUTTEN: Yes.

CARLSON: Were you supposed to teach there too?

VAN PUTTEN: No, I was supposed to teach at Hangchow Christian College. That's a Southern Presbyterian college. There were about one hundred language students at Nanking from all denominations, about fifty men and fifty women. One of the nicest groups of people I ever met.

CARLSON: What types of things did you do?

VAN PUTTEN: Well, the language training doesn't involve a word of English. You start at eight in the morning and you get through at four in the afternoon and you get a break for lunch. The head administrator was an American, but the head teacher was a Chinese. He knew very little English and he started out the first day giving us ten or fifteen words in Chinese; he'd act them out. We'd have to repeat after, and repeat after, and repeat after. Your first hour was just these new words, then half the group was divided up into five smaller groups, and the other half went to individual teachers. And you had an hour that way. Then you changed around again, so everyone got the same instruction. Your first half year all your time was spent on the
spoken language. No written language. Towards the end of the first half year you started to get printed copies of words we had learned in sentences and paragraphs. This was all written down. Then you'd go over that with the main instructor and then with individual instructors. You didn't start in the written language until the second half of the year. You were supposed to, when you had finished, have 1500 characters you could use—writing, reading, and so forth.

CARLSON: So at the end of that year were you able to talk very well with the Chinese?

VAN PUTTEN: Converse in ordinary language, but not anything deep.

CARLSON: What kind of living arrangements did you have in Nanking?

VAN PUTTEN: We lived with missionaries. Nanking was a big missionary center. They had universities, a theological seminary. We lived with an engineer who built the buildings for the various missions in that part of the country. He built all the buildings for University of Nanking and the language school we were in. You were just lucky with the ones they placed you with. You paid them room and board. Of course the mission board took care of that. When you got through at four o'clock they'd say, "Forget it. Now don't do any studying at night. Just go out and have a good time."

CARLSON: So what did you do at night?

VAN PUTTEN: At the language school we had a basketball team, a baseball team, a tennis team; we played a lot of volleyball, we also had hikes.

CARLSON: Did you have a lot of activities with Chinese students?

VAN PUTTEN: No, most of the students were American, English, some French,
Dutch. It was a wonderful experience and the Chinese teachers were some of the best teachers I've ever had.

CARLSON: Had they been trained in the United States?

VAN PUTTEN: No, no they were trained there. The head teacher was the best individual teacher I ever had anyplace.

CARLSON: What did he teach?

VAN PUTTEN: Language—the new words. He acted them out. You see, while you're at the language school you're not supposed to use the words in English. You just have to learn it!

CARLSON: So the Southern Presbyterian Mission had a college at Nanking?

VAN PUTTEN: No. That was the General Presbyterian College. But the college I went to the second year was a Southern Presbyterian College.

CARLSON: From my reading, the years 1925-1927, when you were first in China, have been called the height of anti-foreign sentiments in China. Especially in Nanking and Hangchow. Did you note any of that?

VAN PUTTEN: Oh yes. The first year you had heard of it around the country. In the summer we went to a summer resort. We had a teacher just for the two of us; he came from Nanking right along with us and lived in the summer resort. He came every morning and spent the morning reviewing the new words. By that time we had started to read some. That summer we lived with a doctor who had a practice at Nanking. He had two small daughters. Afternoons we had free to do anything. We had a good baseball team from the language school because we had, I suppose, fifty fellows who had all played
college or university baseball. We never got beat that season. We challenged anyone.

CARLSON: Did you challenge Chinese?

VAN PUTTEN: We challenged anyone, Chinese universities, all the American Navy ships if they came up that far for a few days; they all had a baseball team. Up there you had different teams for different denominations . . . baseball teams. But they always said the Southern Presbyterians picked their missionaries by whether or not they were good baseball players, because they never got beat. And that's true. I pitched for Hope for four years and I pitched independent ball at different places in the country. A Southern Presbyterian doctor from Davidson College, he was a pitcher down there, and he and I pitched all the games. But we were getting rumbles there of what was happening on the plain. Then towards the end of the summer . . . the husbands never stayed up as long as the wives at the resort. It was really a missionary resort. It had all sorts of Chinese buildings too. It was up about 7000 feet—just wonderful weather.

CARLSON: What types of things did you hear about? Were there Chinese students demonstrating?

VAN PUTTEN: You heard rumbles. They had a little newspaper that came out every day and you'd hear that Chiang Kai-shek was coming up from the south. We'd get reports on just how far he had gone, what had happened, how they ransacked buildings, and whatnot. Well towards the end of the summer he was getting close to this summer resort—Kuliang. They finally gave us warning that we'd better get out. You usually rode in sedan chairs carried on Chinese' shoulders according to how much you weighed. If you weighed over a
certain weight you had to have four people carry you, otherwise two. These fellows would run up and down those mountains just so easily. But we had to rush down, my wife and this doctor's wife and his two daughters; they had three or four servants that I really had to take care of. We had to walk down. There weren't enough chair-bearers. So when we got down to the port at Nanchang we heard the soldiers were getting closer. So we were anxious to get out as soon as we could. Well we got down to the wharf about sunset and wherever you could find a place you slept. When you travel in China you always carried your own bedding no matter where you went because you never knew what kind of bed you were going to get—whether it would be full of bed bugs—and you had it packed with canvas outside. You had your pajamas rolled in there, your shaving kit. The women had the things they needed for fixing up. We finally found a place for the women to sleep, but it was reserved for just women, so I had to sleep out on the veranda that night. I didn't do much sleeping, because there were people running around outside all the time. You knew something was happening. Finally about midnight we got word a ship was coming down the river; it was a British ship. Of course we didn't have any tickets and another fellow and myself were chosen to go out and negotiate to see whether we could get on that ship. They anchored out in the river; they wouldn't come near shore. Well, we finally persuaded him. He said, "I don't have any cabins for you to use. You'll have to sleep on deck." So the whole gang of us went. When we got on the ship we didn't know this at the time, all the lower decks were loaded with escaping soldiers.

CARLSON: Nationalist soldiers?

VAN PUTTEN: No, the opposite, that Chiang Kai-shek was driving out. And
so we had a lot of baggage, too. We pulled our bedrolls up by ropes to the top deck—it was a big ocean-going liner—but all your trunks you had to leave on the first deck. We just asked the soldiers if they would mind sleeping on our trunks on the deck. We never should have done it because they used them as toilets. Oh, boy. We didn't know it because we were on that ship two or two and a half days going down the river.

CARLSON: These soldiers below deck weren't Nationalist soldiers?

VAN PUTTEN: No, they were escaping from the Nationalists.

CARLSON: So they must have been Communists?

VAN PUTTEN: No, they were the older group of Chinese.

CARLSON: Maybe warlords?

VAN PUTTEN: Yes, warlords. Every time we would stop anyplace, I went down right around the trunks to see they did not throw them off. When we finally got down to Nanking—we got there in the middle of the night—the soldiers were all let off first and they finally let us off, and we got our trunks. Boy, our trunks were a mess. Then we didn't have any transportation from the docks to the city of Nanking which was about five miles away, and another fellow and I were again selected to go and make arrangements to get the gate open—to open the city gates so we would get in. The gates themselves are thirty or forty feet high. We knocked on them and finally a fellow yelled to the people that we wanted to get in. We finally persuaded them. Then we had to find rickshaws to carry the people who wanted to come, and all our baggage... it was quite a parade. No one knew what was happening. So we got into the city, but I was filthy, boy! I don't think I ever was that filthy in my life.
CARLSON: This was while you were still taking language at Nanking?

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, yes.

CARLSON: Before you went down to teach at Hangchow?

VAN PUTTEN: When I went to Hangchow I didn't teach either. We had two years promised us of language instruction. We finally moved from Shanghai on down to Hangchow and we lived with a Presbyterian missionary who taught English at the college. We had a language instructor there, who came every morning. We spent every morning with him. It was not nearly as good as the language school so we didn't progress the way we should. We got through the fall, and the winter there is very, very light. Beautiful, beautiful! It's one of the most beautiful cities in China. They say "Be born in Soochow and die in Hangchow," because Soochow and Hangchow are perhaps the most beautiful cities in China.

Well, it finally came to the danger point—we were on a river, a good size river, and across the river were Chiang Kai-shek's troops. We never knew when they were going to start crossing, but every so often they would fire just rifle shots across the river. We never sat by a window on the river side. Well, one night, we were having a dinner party with a lot of our friends and we got a call from Shanghai from the Consul General who said you got to get out as soon as possible. There is a train leaving at 5:00 a.m. and you're each allowed to carry two suitcases. So, fortunately, we didn't have a lot of furniture. We had some furniture. I left all my books, I had about 5000 books. I didn't know what was going to happen to them. I had a nice Chinese dog—I had to leave him. We went to Shanghai—it was just a refugee train.

CARLSON: Just for foreigners?
VAN PUTTEN: Just for foreigners. We finally got to Shanghai. Then we had to find places to live in Shanghai because all the hotels and everything were filled. We found a boarding house--one big room--a place to sleep--a room we lived in, but there was a missionary home where we could get our meals. Then we started to study language again. We had a language teacher there. It's hard to study a language when you are hearing shots every so often.

CARLSON: Even in Shanghai?

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, around Shanghai. Shanghai itself we weren't afraid of because it was just loaded with foreign soldiers from all over the world, and all sorts of gunboats in the rivers. After a few weeks, I don't know how long, but a friend of mine wanted to go back to Hangchow and get some things from there. We asked our Consul General if we could take the chance and he said that things looked pretty quiet now. So we took an early train and went back to Hangchow--it's about 150 miles. We got there and found that my dog was still alive, but he hadn't been taken care of at all, so I had him shot. I picked up some more things we missed and went back. Soon after that it was spring?--we had to get out of Shanghai.

CARLSON: 1927?

VAN PUTTEN: Yes. The city was packed with people. Finally, one of the big steamer lines, the Dollar Line, agreed to rent the steerage to us. It cost everyone $100 for the trip across the Pacific. Again this fellow and I had to get all the names of the people who wanted to go and fit them to the plan of the boat--three deckers, in the steerage. We arranged it that the single people would be at one end of the room, then the nurses, then the married people, sort of separate. When we got onto the ship, the plan didn't
So you never really got a chance to teach like you were supposed to, except for studying and coaching basketball.

VAN PUTTEN: I didn't do anything except for studying language. Yes. I coached at the University of Nanking in one championship. At least we won the championship. A lot of guys could play tennis which I played at home, but I never went out for the tennis team because I never had time, I was playing baseball in the spring.

CARLSON: You mentioned that while you were in Shanghai that there were gunboats and foreign troops. What do you think about that "gunboat policy" used by foreigners? It seems like that was the cause of all the anti-foreign feeling.

VAN PUTTEN: Well, I suppose it brought it on. I don't think we would like it if another group of foreign nations occupied New York City. Compare Shanghai to New York City--they're both pretty big cities. Well, all the entrances to the international city were fortified--troops all the time, and there would be some exchange of shots during the daytime between the foreign soldiers and the Chinese. But we finally got out on the steerage boat. It was quite a trip from there back to America. Most of us, the only clothing we had was the clothing we had on our backs, and a great many of us had to buy new clothes in Shanghai. When we came into San Francisco harbor at one of our customs, they charged us duty on the clothes we had on our backs. (laughter)

CARLSON: That's terrible.
VAN PUTTEN: Oh, we were mad. My folks were living in Grand Rapids at that time, so we went to Grand Rapids. The first night home--I woke up the next morning and I said, "Now we have a chance really to sleep without any disturbances, and I would wake up early in the morning, and it was 3:00 in the afternoon!" (laughter) The first day in maybe two months we weren't excited about something. It was quite an experience.

CARLSON: You had already completed college here, and you were in a college there. What kind of differences are there between Chinese universities and . . .

VAN PUTTEN: Well, at that time, they were too much like American schools. That was my great, great complaint with them.

CARLSON: How do you mean?

VAN PUTTEN: We didn't take the Chinese, I think, enough into our confidence as to really what we should teach. All these colleges had a Chinese section, too, but the majority of the work was taught in English. They had a lot of good teachers, and a lot of beautiful buildings, but I think they should have had more emphasis on getting more people trained in the Chinese language--to teach them through the Chinese language. But of course, Chinese is a hard language; I've studied a number of languages, and Chinese is the hardest, no doubt about it. It's something like Hebrew which you never learn to speak, you just read it, or Greek, but they had a lot of good men on their faculty. In our language school there were people who were just coming out with us who were very qualified men--doctors, some dentists, all sorts of teachers and nurses, but I think my main criticism of missionary work as I saw it was that we tried to make everything so much like it was in America.

CARLSON: Is this what you get into . . . I wanted to find your PhD. thesis,
and it's not in the library.

VAN PUTTEN: The college library?

CARLSON: I checked in the...

VAN PUTTEN: ...it isn't a book. It's still in manuscript form.

CARLSON: O.K., maybe they've got it in a special collection. I don't know, but it wasn't on the regular book shelves, I don't think.

VAN PUTTEN: I gave them a copy.

CARLSON: Maybe it's in archives or something like that. But what exactly, what type of contributions do you think Christian education had on the Chinese?

VAN PUTTEN: You should read this. I mean my experience. I really took it up in there.

CARLSON: What types of things did you say in the paper?

VAN PUTTEN: Well, take the agriculture teachers. They introduced a lot of new products and improved the seed that they were planting. Of course, the Chinese are good farmers. If anyone can make something grow, the Chinese can. And it's such intensive agriculture. No one has a large piece of land. Of course, in northern China it was wheat, and that type, and in southern China it was rice. But they had all sorts of fruits -- a lot of fruits I wish we had. In fact we got to like them so that every once in a while you see them on a fruit market in this country, but they want about a dollar for a bite. I was going to say, I think...my general experience, impression of the missionaries, they were a wonderful bunch of people who were trying to
do something very well. But a lot of us did it through the English lan-
guage, which I thought was a mistake. And also a lot of foreigners became
little gods, because a lot of people went out who never had any experience
before at anything, and they were put in positions of authority. Another
complaint I make is that they built too nice homes for foreigners.

CARLSON: Do you think perhaps that missionaries should have lived right
among them?

VAN PUTTEN: Not right among them, but they didn't have to have these very
expensive homes. Of course, building is a lot cheaper than in America, and
we used the Chinese labor, in which you'd have an American supervising.
But that was my experience. Later on when I went back to China as a non-
missionary, I found I had more influence with more different types of Chinese
from the lowest to the highest than I ever did, otherwise.

CARLSON: Did you feel that was because you had that knowledge of Chinese?

VAN PUTTEN: Well, I don't know. Missionaries didn't come too much in con-
tact with the upper classes of the Chinese. They did most of their work
with the lower classes, and most of them were uneducated, so they had to
spend a lot of money on schools to get them educated the way you thought
they should be educated. That's where I thought a lot of bias came in.
When I was in Peking for four years as director of the United States Infor-
mation Service, I came in contact with about 50 Chinese working for me, un-
der me, and all of them were trained. The secretary, the Chinese assistant
I had, finished college in China and also had taken some graduate work in
China and right now he is the top Chinese in our American Consulate in Hong
Kong. I got him that job when he finally got kicked out. He and his wife,
dressed as bums, got down to Hong Kong that way. He had to leave his two
boys behind. That was 1950. And he hadn't seen his boys for 25 years. One of them escaped China and got to Hong Kong last summer. He wrote us right away and said, "I can't tell you how he got here because I might give away some schemes that they're using." He was hoping the other boy could get out, but he didn't, and it's 26 years and he hasn't seen him.

CARLSON: Do you hear from those type of people often?

VAN PUTTEN: Well, in Hong Kong, yes we write, but to our friends in China we never write. It would just be endangering their lives, because I'm sure all of their mail is censored. They give it close scrutiny. In Peking when the Communists took over, we stayed right there. I was informed immediately that I could not go outside the city of Peking. My wife could, and my children could, but a Chinese soldier sat outside of our front gate. Every house is surrounded by a courtyard with a gate and the soldier was sitting out in front of our gate. Every time I would come out, he followed me to wherever I went all over Peking. If I went to my office, he sat right there. Of course, I couldn't do anything. Of course, the Chinese assistant of mine stayed on. Well, we had to finally close our library, too, we were getting so many customers. The Communist soldiers wanted to use our library because we had a wonderful supply of magazines and newspapers from around the world.

CARLSON: What was the purpose of USIS there in Peking?

VAN PUTTEN: To try to bring in as much correct information about America as possible, with the doctors, for instance, the latest medical bulletins and journals. Other professions would help them out and our library was a reading room for both English and Chinese. We'd have a thousand readers a day. It's better than Holland City Library, that's for sure.
CARLSON: Peking was quite a big city.

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, a wonderful city. Here's a picture.

CARLSON: Were you the first director of USIS in Peking?

VAN PUTTEN: No, there was one American who preceded me. He was transferred to Nanking, and they sent me to Peking.

CARLSON: What was your job?

VAN PUTTEN: I was chief administrator. Of course, one of my jobs was to make contacts, too. We entertained a lot of Chinese of all ranks and they entertained us -- you get a real good friendship between peoples. It was a wonderful experience.

CARLSON: I've read a couple of books our of Hope's library on American foreign policy in China. I was wondering if you knew anything about an executive headquarters set up in Rockefeller Hospital in Peking?

VAN PUTTEN: Do you mean recently?

CARLSON: No, it was like in '46 or '47.

VAN PUTTEN: Well, of course we went our shortly after the war finished. They still had a lot of Japanese troops in prison areas. There may have been. I never came across it.

CARLSON: Did you ever meet George C. Marshall? He had come to China after the war to try and settle things, mediate between...

VAN PUTTEN: Do you mean after the '27 war?

CARLSON: No, after World War Two.
VAN PUTTEN: You see, we had to get out. No, not World War Two. I don't think I met Marshall. I don't know, I met so many people though. So many foreigners would come to our building to use it, and I'd give them the news I had of China, too. They were very understanding and they would never use my name. Our libraries were packed every day, and we stayed open until 9:00 at night, and opened at 8:00 in the morning. It was a good library. I always wonder what happened to the books. I know they were packed, but whatever happened after that, I don't know.

CARLSON: Were you the only foreigner involved in...

VAN PUTTEN: ...Peking? I was the only foreigner until the last year I got an assistant.

CARLSON: So you had an all Chinese staff.

VAN PUTTEN: Yes.

CARLSON: Were you really close to them?

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, yes. All of our entertainment, I mean we went out to dinner at foreigners' places and they came to ours. But my main preference was to entertain Chinese and be entertained by them, so we got to know them well, like professional people -- you get to know them. They also see what the Americans' side of things are, too. You get them into your home, and they invite us to their home. It was a wonderful experience.

CARLSON: Did you ever talk about...the Communists must have been very close at this time, as far as taking over the country, did you ever talk about those kinds of things?

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, yes. A lot of the top Chinese were scared stiff. They
didn't know what was going to happen. When the Communists finally took over, they took over things gradually. We had a very nice Chinese building for our library, a big building, and part of it was two floors. I had my office and my assistant's office up there. One day, three Chinese officers and three privates came up to my office unannounced. Most visitors who wanted to see me had to go through my assistant, who had his office right down below, with my secretary. They just walked in just as brazen as could be, and just told me things I had to do.

CARLSON: What types of things did they tell you you had to do?

VAN PUTTEN: I had to close the library. I could understand most of their Chinese but when you want to take time, you use your assistant, who had command of both English and Chinese, and let him translate it for you so you have a chance to think of what to say. Then you give your answer in English back to your assistant, and he often can improve upon your English -- a better word to use that wouldn't offend so much. It was a wonderful experience to go through. Finally, they consented, in the spring of '50, I guess, to let us leave. We had to get permission from the Communists. Of course, most of the foreigners had already left.

CARLSON: What kind of channels did you have to go through to get permission?

VAN PUTTEN: Through our American consulate, and they would go through the Chinese government. Fortunately, we had a very top notch Consulate General. He got in bad with the American government under this Wisconsin Congressman McCarthy. He was actually fired from the State Department.

CARLSON: When was this? While he was still in China?
VAN PUTTEN: No, after. They found fault with a lot of people who were in China. Colonel Barrett was the best Chinese scholar in China. He knew more Chinese than the average Chinese did. He had to get out of the military service. This Mr. Club who was the Consul General, I worked with him entirely because it's the proper thing to do. Well, soon charges were brought against me, because the staff wanted better salaries and better hours. Well, we just didn't have the budget to do it, and so they took us to trial. We had to go to trial, but Mr. Club went right with me.

CARLSON: This is your Chinese assistant?

VAN PUTTEN: No, this was the Consul General. We had some other Americans with us, too. All were Chinese, more or less, and they brought all sorts of charges. Well, I just let Mr. Club do all the talking, and in good Chinese -- he was expert in it -- and we did raise their wages a little and we gave them longer vacations. It was the usual thing that was going on at that time. But it was an interesting experience to go through it, a Chinese trial. You never knew what was going to happen. They could do anything. They'd cut off your head if they wanted to.

CARLSON: This was a trial under a Communist court?

VAN PUTTEN: Yes. Fortunately, Mr. Club was an expert in Chinese. He was expert in Chinese and in Russian, too. And then, of course, when the Communists came in, a lot of Russian advisors came in, too. You could tell, because they didn't know Peking, and the Americans knew what was going on. They would just soak them high prices for goods. But it was a wonderful experience, and I felt, as I said before, I had more contact with Chinese and I thought I could influence them better, not just to become Christians, I wasn't interested in that, but to know what was going on in the world and
what they should do, and help them. We were able to get a lot of scholarships for Chinese to this country and to other areas around the world. And the same thing I... Going through all of this, though, it wasn't always fun, it really was revealing as to what you can do in trying some... Of course, we had our kids with us there when we were in China. There was an American school operating in Peking for Americans and other foreigners who wanted to send their kids there. But, of course, when the Communists came in this closed and my wife had to take over teaching. It was fortunate she was a teacher by profession. She gave my son a B or a C in Latin and he's never forgiven her for that. He's never had anything else but an A. He was valedictorian of his class at Hope.

CARLSON: Did you have any contacts with missionaries when you went back and were Director of USIS?

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, yes. They often came to me for information on things and also they were interested in certain books. We had a lot of books on religious literature, too. They entertained us quite a bit. We entertained them.

CARLSON: Did your attitudes towards missionaries change from when you had initially gone over?

VAN PUTTEN: There were certain sects you had nothing to do with. It's the same way in this country -- there are sects you have very little to do with. They think they have the truth and no one else has it. We enjoyed our contacts with the missionaries. We got to know some very interesting people. Not only Americans, but British and people from other countries, too.

CARLSON: Was there a difference between British and American attitudes
towards Chinese?

VAN PUTTEN: Very little, very little. The British had a library there, in Peking, too. The head of the library then has just recently been appointed the ambassador to China. He was a very good friend of mine.

Well, we finally got all our furniture packed and the Communist officer stood there while everything was being packed, and marked every book I had. The titles had to be translated into Chinese. So my Chinese assistants stayed at the house while they packed our goods and translated all the titles into Chinese. Then the interesting thing is, I didn't know if I'd get the books. But finally they arrived. I got a notice from a New York firm that they had my books in storage and if I wanted them the government would pay the freight here to Holland, our furniture, too. We didn't know where we were going to end up. Fortunately, when I first came back, I had an offer for a temporary job right away at one of the New Jersey colleges, New Paltz. I taught International Relations there one semester and a summer. Then, Dr. Lubbers, the president of Hope, came through one day and stopped and wanted to know if I'd come to Hope. Of course, we wanted to because our son started Hope as soon as he got back. No, he had already started Hope. Oh, yes, because we had left China and I was sent back to Korea to be Director of USIS and our family stayed in this country. I went through most of the Korean War and got kicked out of Korea twice. Then I spent a year down in Formosa.

CARLSON: Do you think there was any chance the United States could have settled things between Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists?

VAN PUTTEN: No, no chance.

CARLSON: Or had the Communists gotten so far in their "liberation" that
there was no chance?

VAN PUTTEN: No chance. Actually, the things the Communists have done since I don't approve of.

CARLSON: Such as?

VAN PUTTEN: Some of their rulings and treatments of people. They were pretty hard on people who had any sort of authority under Chiang Kai-shek. A lot of the rich Chinese have left China, have gotten out. But a lot of them....

CARLSON: How about your staff? Were they harassed at all by the Communists?

VAN PUTTEN: Well, a number of them went on strike for more wages. About half of them went on strike. Of course, they were forced to: they couldn't do anything.

CARLSON: The Communists forced them to strike?

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, sure. A number of them were just as loyal as could be. In fact, a number of times I'd find a notice on my desk translated into English. Somebody would want to see me at the YMCA. I would go there and find a person who had worked for me. They didn't dare come to the office anymore. They'd want to see me and tell what was happening in their family. I'd ask if there was anything I could do for them, of course. We had a number of things we did not want to take back to America. One Chinese couple, he was a consul in a number of areas around the world, in pre-Chiang days. They had a daughter, and they used our library and came to our home often. We left them a number of things. One of these pressure lamps, for instance.
CARLSON: A Coleman lantern?

VAN PUTTEN: Yes, a Coleman lantern because you never knew when the lights were going out. In Peking, you see, they didn't increase the size of the power plant as the city grew, so you'd get too much current and lose it all. So you had these all ready to light all the time. But they, in return, always give you better gifts than you give them. We have a lot of our stuff packed away. My wife has a beautiful array of Chinese garments, some go way back to monarchy times. We have a number of prints like these and scrolls. A number of them were painted by people we knew. Later on I'll show you a picture of our living room in Peking a girl painted for us.

CARLSON: You remarked in your vita that that house which had been built in the 1500's was the best house you ever had.

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, sure! You could entertain 100 people in the living room.

CARLSON: Was it built Chinese style?

VAN PUTTEN: It was Chinese style. I read a book recently that said during the was there were prisoners in that house. It was top-notched with red pillars this big around in the living room. My son had a shortwave radio. He built his own sets. When he was 12 years old he was talking all around the world. People would hear him in different places and we'd get grown men who'd come to Peking and want to talk to this fellow. They'd find it was just this little kid. (laughter) But the Communists walked into the house and made him take the whole set apart.

CARLSON: So the Communists really limited your activities.

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, yes. Mine especially. I couldn't go out of the city.
My wife and kids could. One trip we often made was to the Great Wall, just to get outside of the city and go wander up and down the Great Wall for half a day. You'd take a servant along to carry the lunch for you. That was one of the nice things, one of the advantages of having servants. One of your better servants would put up a nice meal for you and he'd ride along. If it was too heavy, we'd hire a coolie to carry it. The Great Wall was a great place to go to get out of things for a while. You'd take a long hike on the wall. But my impression of China, I think, was very favorable. The more you got to know the people, and to talk with them in their own language, the better you liked it. I lived in India four years and I didn't get nearly as good an impression of India. The British still ruled over there then. The Indians live at a much lower level than the Chinese. It was hard to get acquainted with the better class of Indian. Their castes were so important. This was one nice thing about China: there was no caste system. The humblest boy could rise as high as he wanted to.

They had some wonderful mission hospitals in Peking, supported by American money. One was supported by Rockefeller's money. The missions had hospitals and doctors. If you were sick, they'd come up to your home or you could go down to the hospital. I had very bad bursitis in this left shoulder when I was in Peking. A Chinese woman, a good friend of ours, the wife of the man who had served China overseas, said, "Let me take you to a Chinese hospital to use acupuncture." Of course, I knew nothing about acupuncture, but you'll do anything to get rid of bursitis in your shoulder. So she took me to a Chinese doctor, she had made an appointment. I don't know how many needles he stuck into my shoulder, but you couldn't feel any of them. I've never had bursitis since.

CARLSON: Amazing.
VAN PUTTEN: It is. A lot of people laugh at these things but the Chinese have hundreds of years of experience at this. Some of their medicine is very primitive, but their doctors were excellent.

CARLSON: Would that have been a unique thing, to have a Westerner visit a Chinese hospital?

VAN PUTTEN: You wouldn't even know whom to go to, you see. This woman, who was one of the leading women in Peking, stayed right with me. Of course, I was scared stiff. When you look at it and see all those needles in your shoulder and you don't feel a thing, you wonder what's happening. I wish I'd had that for my knee that hurt in football. That every once in a while bothers me.

CARLSON: I would imagine most foreigners would not go to a Chinese hospital.

VAN PUTTEN: Oh, no. This was one of the advantages of this position. There were a lot of foreign businessmen in Peking. It was a big city. But they had very little contact with the Chinese except for people working for them.

CARLSON: What kind of attitudes did businessmen have towards Chinese?

VAN PUTTEN: Not too good or too bad: just indifferent. My wife and I have often said we wouldn't mind going back to China if things were normal. In fact, on the pensions you get from Hope College you'd live well in China, but you can't in the United States. If Social Security hadn't come into effect just at about the time I started to teach at Hope, we would be hard up.

CARLSON: So you would like to go back to China?
VAN PUTTEN: Oh, I'd love to. If I had a chance to go back just to visit. I bet there are a lot of people who'd like to see me, too. We did try to do a lot of things to help the Chinese in various ways. There was sort of a famine going on out in the countryside one time, and I went out and helped pass out a can of rice to each one as they came by. You never can imagine how grateful people are, if you can help them some way. This may be wrong to say, but I think there are other things to do than try to get them to be Christians.

CARLSON: That is one of the criticisms of the missions, that people were worried so much about their physical needs, like being fed and clothed, that they really didn't care about their spiritual...

VAN PUTTEN: That's right. You can't... If you're hungry, you aren't interested in anything else. When you live in China, you have servants according to your position. So we always had six servants around.

CARLSON: Did your servants become part of the family?

VAN PUTTEN: We had one woman called an amah. If you have any other women servants, she's the boss of them. And she's in charge of keeping your house nice. Then, we also had a woman who did sewing for my wife. She could do any sort of work. Some servants won't do anything in a bathroom, even if it's a modern bathroom. You have to get one of the lower class...caste. As I said, in India we had a modern bathroom in our home. But even the lowest servant we had wouldn't wash around the toilet. My wife had to do that. (laughter) Interesting things.

As I said, the doctors were doing wonderful work all over the Orient. There was so much they could do, because medicine was way behind in India and China -- any place I've been. You saw a lot of cases of leprosy: there
was no confinement of lepers. They would often be on the street begging. You had medical problems in China, but at a mission hospital, you could get as good a treatment as you wanted.

CARLSON: Well, I've run out of questions. Thank you.
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