

RED CHINA'S MILITARY REVOLUTION

By Capt Conway J. Smith

☛ BOUNDLESS MANPOWER, NEW MACHINES, AND COMBAT experience have given the People's Liberation Army a new profile. Its battle potential has increased and is vastly superior to that of the Korean war. Awareness of the nature and magnitude of this surging growth is a modern necessity.

In Korea, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was committed to a kind of warfare which neither it nor the Communist regime had ever before experienced. The war was a great economic burden on the Peking government because the army was not able to operate in its old outmoded ways. It was an army in transition, evolving from a guerrilla-like force toward modern organizational concepts. Furthermore, the loss of men and the great toll on equipment was a severe blow. The war left Red China with a heavy debt, since the Soviet Union had carried much of the financial burden and the military machine had become greatly dependent on the Russians.

At the same time the war aided the development of the People's Liberation Army. A great stimulus was given to political and economic reorganization. This impetus included military policies. Soviet arms deliveries were quickened and technical assistance programs were started on a crash basis. Furthermore, the war provided invaluable experience in large-scale, modern warfare, since both the army high command and the fighting forces were exposed to complex combat conditions.

The Chinese Communist military leaders had already demonstrated their resourcefulness in the previous 23 years, during which they were continually engaged in



Since Korea, Mao Tse-tung has modernized and reorganized his Peoples Liberation Army. It's a force we've got to reckon with



Wide World

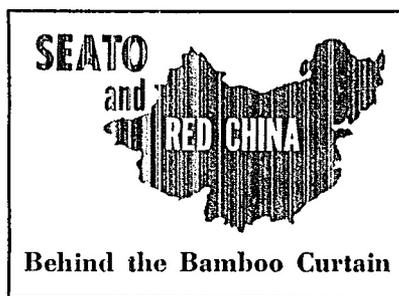
fighting. But the Korean war saw them make fatal blunders in positional and offensive campaigns against first class troops of an up-to-date army. Their problems stemmed from inadequate control of huge forces, insufficient transportation equipment, and lack of communications. The war also exposed need for better staff functioning and procedures for employment of large units.

As the war came to a close, the Red regime began a thorough reorganization of its entire military establishment. Emphasis was placed on modern organization, training, and the acquisition of modern equipment. This military renaissance was one of the fastest arming processes in modern times. From an infantry-heavy army of illiterate peasants the Communist leaders made substantial gains against basic and complex obstacles, to produce the largest modern army in the world.

The interrelation of military and political functions in high Communist leadership is well-known. Few of Red China's military commanders have reached high positions without also being important Party members. Top civilian Party leaders, too, have been closely associated with military functions and many hold key positions in the country's supreme military organ. Political and military work have always been indivisible and the army has traditionally been considered the fighting branch of the Communist Party. From the top leadership down to the lowest military echelons, the military commanders have been held responsible for the troops' military conduct. Meanwhile, their civilian counterparts, the political commissars, have been responsible

for the army's political integrity. These basic concepts have been retained.

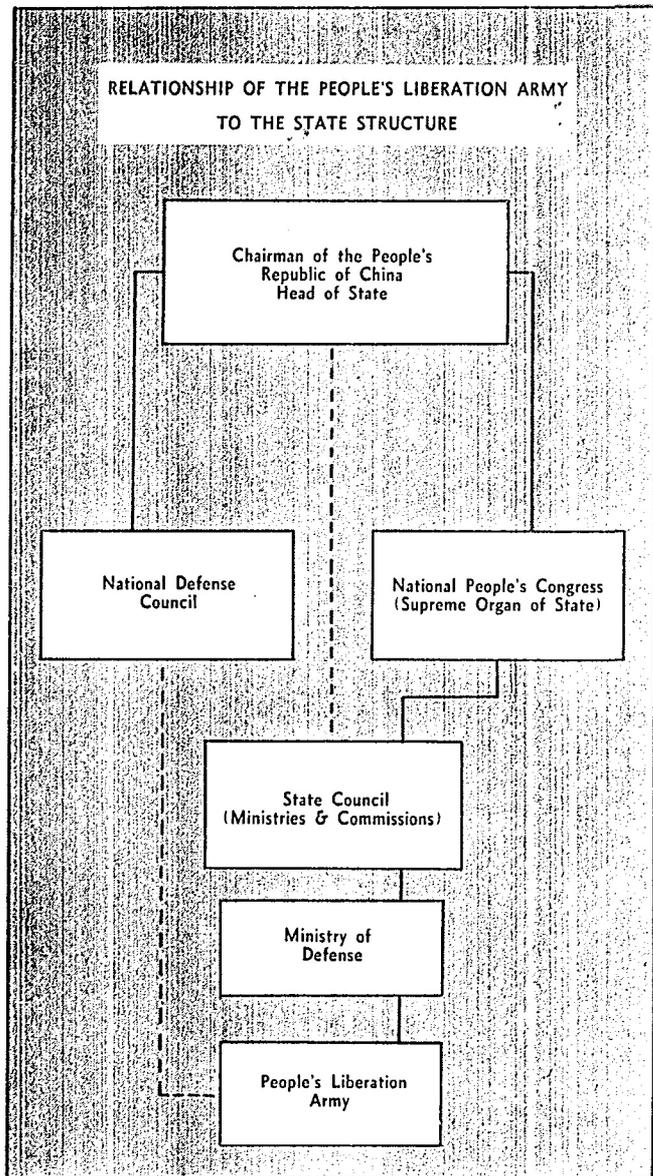
But an even closer relationship was necessary. On 8 February 1955, the National Defense Council (NDC), formerly the People's Revolutionary Military Council, became the central military organ of Communist China. Mao Tse-tung (head of the Party and the state) was ap-



pointed chairman at the same time, a fact which indicates the importance of this body. The NDC was established with cabinet status. Its leadership came from the ranks of the Communist Party. Chairman Mao's loyal supporters, Gens Chu Teh and P'eng Teh-huai, were appointed Vice-chairman and Minister of Defense, respectively.

Today the NDC includes 15 vice-chairmen and 81 ordinary members in addition to Chairman Mao Tse-tung's position. All members are selected by the National Party Congress. Their designated purpose is to direct military policy and planning. The country's top military leaders are on the council to serve as strategic planners. This provides for a centralized command and prevents individual leaders from taking their own course and exercising undue influence within their respective commands.

The Ministry of Defense is subordinate to the NDC.



The People's Liberation Army in turn is subordinate to the Defense Ministry. This arrangement has a unique feature. The NDC has army officer members and these officers therefore serve on a command level senior to the Minister of Defense. It appears that this peculiar organization was designed to prevent the Defense Minister from gaining too much power over the army.

The PLA has played an important part in the government's ambitious economic development program and therefore has an importance which extends beyond its purely military functions. In several instances the army has served as a well-disciplined labor force. Labor commitments have been both large and small. Gigantic construction projects like the mile-long bridge across the Yangtze River were accomplished with military labor forces. In addition, increased agricultural production has been accomplished to a great extent with troop labor. Thus many soldiers are engaged in food production and are, in effect, paying for their own weapons, since Red China's main export is food, which pays for its huge industrial expansion and arms program. Most of the great land reclamation projects of the ambitious five-year plans, railroad building, and industrial growth also have used military labor.

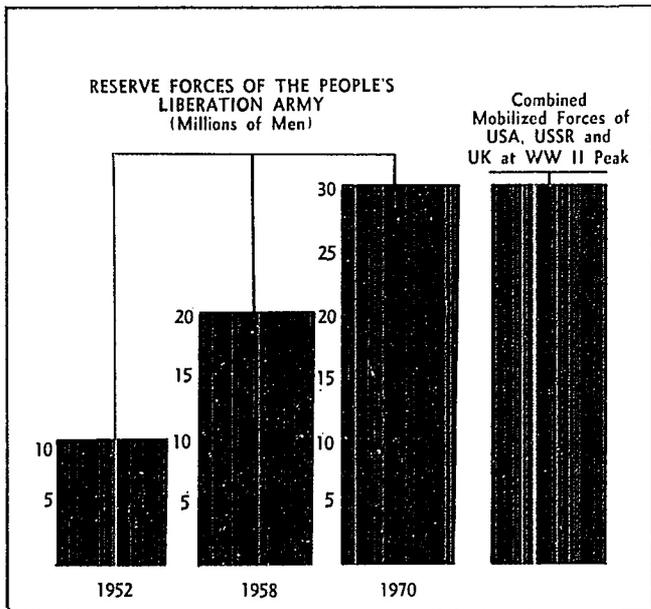
It can be assumed, of course, that the extended non-military functions of the army have not been completely advantageous to the army itself. Loss in training time has undoubtedly resulted in a reduction of combat efficiency in some units. Whether these diversions produced gains which offset the loss has not yet been determined, nor is it clear whether the regime had a choice in the matter.

Regularization and Modernization

Traditionally the equality of men and leaders had always been stressed in the Red Army. But by 1955 this unrealistic, though somewhat democratic, concept was disregarded in favor of modern views of rank distinction. Newly promulgated orders brought the army closer to the Soviet model. Marshal rank was conferred by the head of state on several top generals. The state council was authorized to select generals, while the Ministry of Defense was empowered to select field grade officers. Field commanders were permitted to choose their own company grade officers. And as in most governments, the head of state was installed as supreme commander.

The general structure of the army was divided into seven departments, each with a chief of staff or director: (1) General Staff; (2) General Training Department; (3) General Political Department; (4) General Cadres Department; (5) Armed Forces Supervision Department; (6) General Rear Services Department; and (7) Finance Department.

Military units subordinate to the large departments were divided into five field armies which were later redesignated as military districts and expanded to eight instead of five. The operational forces were reorganized so that the army consisted of more than 150 infantry divisions numbering over 18,000 men each. In support of this large force were three parachute divisions, three armored divisions, and not less than 20 artillery divisions. In addition, there were anti-aircraft, anti-



tank, railway, and engineer divisions. The authorized minimum strength of the peacetime army was placed at 2,500,000 active troops.

The Military Service Law

Military conscription laws conceived in 1954 were the basis for the Military Service Law of 1955. This law provides Red China with a large standing army and a massive, well-trained reserve force. Basically, the law calls for an annual yield of a half-million draftees. (In contrast, the US drafted only two million men between 1948 and 1955).

In 1958 the first three-year draftees were released to the active reserve forces. Those drafted into the air force had to serve four years, while those taken into the navy were obligated for five years. These long terms and continued training in the active reserves are significant. Selectivity has improved the quality of the soldier and a planned yield of recruits has enabled the army to modernize rapidly and efficiently. But most sobering is the staggering size of the reserve force. Presently it is thought to be 20,000,000 men. The Communist goal is five percent of the population. Thus a force of more than 30,000,000 men may be available. This figure is roughly equal to the combined, peak mobilization strength of the US, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain during WWII. Since Red China holds one-fourth of the earth's population, it enjoys a gigantic margin in manpower.

The Reserve Forces

The importance of the reserve forces stems from their many functions. They have been an important auxiliary to the regular forces in consolidating power in China and as a principle reserve of manpower.

Generally, the reserves are organized into special units where the population is dense, into non-specialized units in sparsely populated rural areas. In each case the reserve units are designed to be self-sustaining since the members are engaged in their regular vocations. In this manner the regime has tried to create the idea that the reserve soldiers are protecting their own possessions and therefore must support themselves.

Politically reliable leaders are appointed to direct the reserve forces. Each level of command has an appointed chairman and a council, and each level of command is under the constant surveillance of superior commands at least two echelons higher.

Higher levels in the reserve are under control of the regular army, which has special departments for dealing with reserve affairs. The organizational structure of the reserve and its close supervision by the regular army was designed to prevent non-conformity and individualism. It is virtually impossible for an individual to deviate from his orders.

In summary, then, the reserves are a source of well-trained manpower, and have become an effective security force throughout Red China.

Training the Operational Forces

In accordance with modernization plans, progress has been made in formal education and training for regular warfare. Previously, due to a high illiteracy rate,



Wide World

Red Chinese soldier—Half a million draftees a year, a staggering reserve force of 20 million

military training was limited to field demonstrations, lectures, and various visual teaching methods. Because of lack of equipment and limited knowledge of modern warfare, military and political indoctrinations were the main subjects.

Again, the Korean war accelerated modern training concepts and Soviet influence helped establish formal training in the People's Liberation Army. But problems with the Chinese peasantry plagued the ambitious educational program. Illiteracy, differences in dialects, and general lack of education precluded a rapid growth in formal military education. By 1958, however, significant progress had been made toward establishment of military schools.

Within five years after the Korean armistice, the People's Liberation Army developed combat and service schools, staff colleges, and administrative schools. This was taken as a step toward modernization, and a move away from strictly primary educational instruction. In addition to these training functions, outstanding officers were sent to the Soviet Union for advanced courses.

Formal schooling became the responsibility of the branch schools—that is, each branch of the army maintained its own special school. After undergoing basic indoctrination within the unit, the first students were promptly enrolled in the branch school for formal instruction. This system was designed to standardize military training and hold it under close supervision.

The PLA Academy in Nanking was formed to provide advanced military-political studies. Only high ranking officers, who would naturally be career soldiers of reliable political integrity, were assigned to this elite school. The academy staff consisted not only of ranking officers and civilians but many Soviet advisers as well. It was established as the highest educational institution in military training, and the final step before post-graduate work in Russia.

The Impact of Soviet Aid

The Soviet Union has made modernization of the People's Liberation Army possible. Aid given to the Chinese Communist forces has greatly improved their capabilities and fighting potential. Standard divisions five years after the Korean truce have become tremendously more powerful than those used in the war. Increased technical assistance, military advisory assistance, and modern equipment have brought the army up to western military standards.

One authority on Red China observes that Soviet advisory assistance reaches every level of command. No regiment of infantry has less than one Russian adviser, while most of the technical services have advisers down to the squad level. Another source claims that as many as 250,000 Soviet advisers were in China after the Korean war. Their salaries were said to be ten times those of Chinese generals.

Soviet equipment has made it possible for the Chinese Communists to build an air force, a navy, and a Marine-type amphibious force. These forces have been

supplied from the beginning with Soviet weapons and give the Chinese the nucleus for a well-balanced military force.

One American Army officer, a competent authority on the People's Liberation Army, has cited interesting aspects of Soviet aid to Red China. He says the Soviet Union provided only controlled aid during Korea—that is, they gave only those items which the Chinese could put to maximum use. Tanks, for example, were given to the Chinese in restricted numbers since they couldn't maintain them in larger quantities, and weren't familiar with armor doctrine. If this observation is correct, the large numbers of tanks, planes, and ships given to China in recent years indicates a growing capability for use and maintenance of these items.

Some Weak Spots

A former military attache at the Chinese Nationalist Embassy in Washington, who has observed the growth of Red China's army with care, describes both its strength and weakness. He cites, for example, the lack of modern engineer equipment and know-how and says Soviet guidance has been necessary to make possible most of the engineering triumphs such as bridging the Yangtze. This observer also points to the primitive communication system in China and alleges that the lack of adequate signal capabilities is the weakest single aspect of the army. He also calls attention to the fact that the low literacy of the average soldier constitutes a tremendous problem in terms of teaching them technical skills.

Atomic weapons have probably been withheld from the People's Liberation Army by the Soviets. However, the Chinese Communists no doubt are eager to develop their atomic potential in all its applications. Chen I, the present Foreign Minister, has warned that Communist China may obtain nuclear weapons if the US puts them in other countries of the Far East.

According to newly published works on Red China, the development of atomic energy for military use seems to be a remote possibility. Recently, however, there has been speculation that Moscow has put a number of atomic bombs in Peking's custody, and that atomic testing is being carried out in Sinkiang Province. It is known that Red China has at least one atomic reactor. There have been official announcements from Peking which admit the existence of 15 atomic research laboratories in Peking alone and 21 elsewhere in China. There is growing belief that Peking has embarked on the steps preliminary to production of atomic weapons.

Poor morale has never been a problem in the Chinese Communist Army. There has always been a good reason for their high and buoyant esprit: aggressiveness and success.

Many observers claim that political indoctrination accounts for the "gung ho" spirit of the Red soldier. His ability to withstand physical hardship and privation and his philosophical realism toward death have been helpful in making him a good soldier. He has thus

been able to neutralize many of the effects of modern war which have been so disrupting to the average "western mind." When given the opportunity, the Chinese soldier displays unusual intelligence, readily absorbs instruction, and shows resourcefulness and initiative.

Much of the Chinese Communist success in building an aggressive spirit stems from instilled hate. Many have told of the great uplift in morale accomplished by Red propagandists who fire the troops to a frenzy of hatred. The effectiveness of this stimulant is sobering when the experience of Pierre Mendes-France, former French Premier, is noted. Not until he visited China, he claims, did he ever feel the hostility of a whole people. He had previously felt the enmity of foreign leaders, but never the masses of a country. Communist propaganda, in this application, has been effective.

Political and military functions, indivisible in the Communist army, are complementary in developing the Red soldier. The very structure of the army is instrumental in convincing and motivating the men. The military commander has responsibility for operations, intelligence, logistics and administration. But the political commissar provides the guidance for political training, education, welfare, morale, and discipline.

Red Soldier Has Status

Morale is generally high because the soldier in Red China has favorable social status. Traditionally, the military men in China has been at the bottom rung on the social ladder. An old Chinese proverb goes, "As you would not use good iron to make a nail, so you would not use a good man to make a soldier." This attitude no longer prevails. The soldier is looked upon as a crusader or the representation of revolutionary spirit. The Red soldier has material and spiritual fulfillment to a great extent. He has personal recognition. The soldier in Red China eats well, too, and is constantly reminded of this as he gazes on the hungry, nearly-starved population which supports him.

But certain deficiencies which tend to depress morale have been reported. Examples of inequalities, discrimination, and partiality have been cited as sources of local discontent. Promotions, military justice, and assignments allegedly have been dependent on rank and party affiliation.

Morale, whether it is artificial or not, is high. It remains so because the Red Army is in a constant state of war. Should it find itself in a protracted period of peace, its battle-hardened veterans would be displaced by recruits. The new blood would have no basis for accepting the hardships of military life. There would be no crusade or revolutionary spirit, and high morale would depend on the successes of indoctrination and agitation. Only time will tell whether combat spirit can be replaced with political fanaticism.

Since the Korean war, the Chinese Communist navy has made great progress in development from a tiny nucleus. In a relatively short time it has become the

largest navy of any Asian nation and has increased its capabilities tremendously.

The most significant addition to Red China's naval development is the large number of submarines acquired from the Soviet Union. Red China now has the world's fourth largest submarine fleet, capable of blockading the offshore islands and extending its activities far beyond the coastal areas. Furthermore, a top American commander in the Pacific reported in April 1958 that Communist China had been building its own submarines for two years in Shanghai shipyards. Today, Red China operates no fewer than 20 fleet submarines in the Pacific. This force represents one submarine for every five the Soviet Union has in the Pacific.

Recognition of the role of sea power in the conduct of war has been obvious in Red China's military growth. A great percentage of Soviet aid has gone into building a strong naval force, and the Chinese Communist navy has been greatly influenced by its Soviet counterpart. By 1958, the navy had grown strong enough to deal with any but the major sea powers and was even then capable of carrying out more than nuisance raids. Though it lacks capital ships, the Red China navy is strong in torpedo boats and is gaining in heavier types of combat ships. The new navy also has more than 400 aircraft, most of which are modern jets.

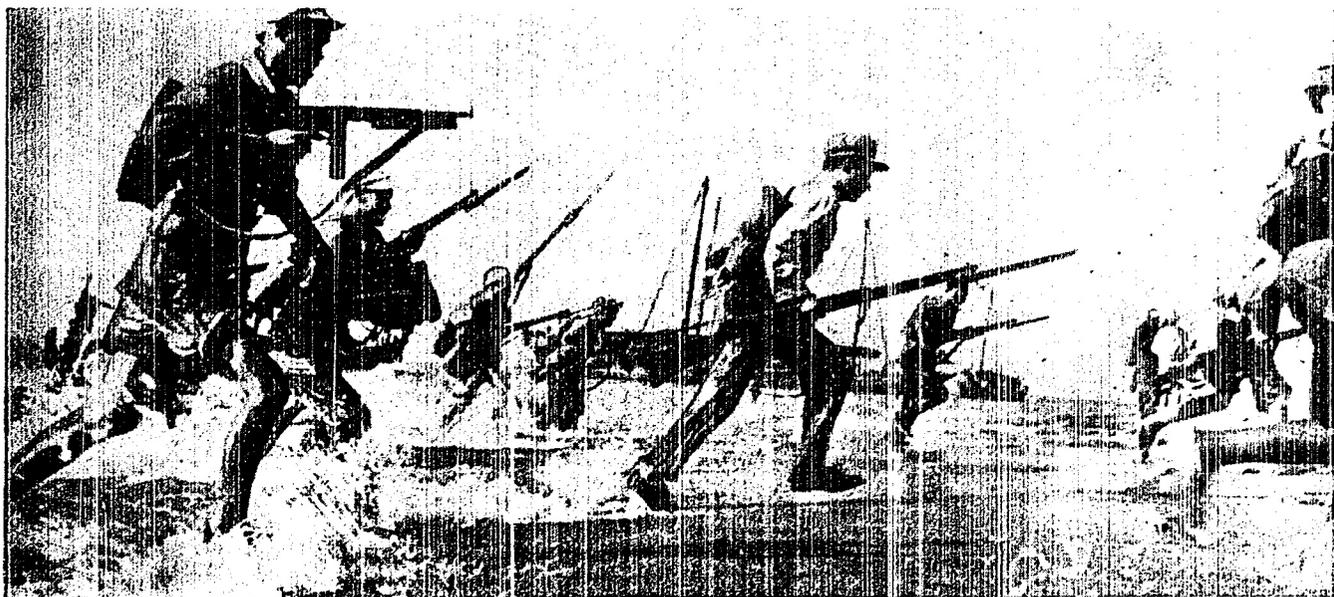
Red China's navy had by 1958 developed an amphibious attack force of well-trained, highly disciplined marines. Though it has never been made clear that a marine corps exists in name, it is a fact that a large naval landing force is available.

At one time there was reportedly a marine establishment commanded by the chief of the navy. The first commander, it is said, selected the best soldiers of the People's Liberation Army for the core of four marine divisions. In addition to these divisions, ten separate brigades were formed at Port Arthur, Amoy, Kulotao Island, Yinkauo, Hungchow, WhangPou, Haikow, and Yulin.

The Red "marines" were equipped with Russian armaments by 1950 and by 1952 were reorganized along Soviet quadrangular lines. There has been no indica-



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Wide World

PLA Marines—Next to USMC, Red China's amphibious forces are the world's largest

tion that Chinese Communist amphibious troops have organic artillery, tanks, or aircraft. In 1953, three more divisions were added to the original four and two amphibious landing vehicle regiments were activated. The total strength of the amphibious corps exceeded 140,000 men. Should this amphibious force be designated as a separate service, it would be the second largest marine corps in the world, topped only by the US Marine Corps.

Naval construction during 1955 was carried out under the planning and supervision of Soviet advisers. Swatow harbor was converted into a deep-water harbor. Twamkong, the southernmost harbor in China, was improved to acceptable naval standards. In addition, naval supply stations were built at Hainan, Swatow, and Foochow to support off-shore island defenses. Significantly, Soviet technicians and specialists have speeded up construction of submarine facilities at Taichen and at several other points along the coast of Red China.

In addition to growing naval strength, the People's Liberation Army has acquired considerable air support. Red China's air force, by 1955, was the world's fourth largest. Although only a fraction of the size of its Western counterparts, it has become a modern, capable, and potent military arm.

Like the Red Chinese navy, the air force virtually appeared over night, thanks to its Soviet sponsor. And like the navy, also, it is extremely dependent upon the Soviet Union for its existence, although Chinese-made planes have taken their place alongside Russian-made craft. Presently, Red China produces 20 MIG fighters each month.

The Chinese air force has grown to nearly 3,000 first-line jet fighters, including MIG-17 and MIG-19 types. In addition to this, more than 700 conventional type aircraft have been included. Twin jet bombers have been delivered to China from Russia, and are already operational. The Reds claim they are now building many of their own jet bombers as well as fighters.

Of additional interest and military significance is the rapid development of helicopter-borne assault tech-

niques. The People's Liberation Army has been using limited numbers of modern Soviet HOUND helicopters in practicing vertical assault.

Airfield construction, too, has been extensive since the Korean war. During 1955 alone, seven jet airfields and seven other major fields were completed through joint efforts of Red China and the Soviet Union. These were all built in strategically located areas—some close to Indo-China, others near the Formosa Straits, and still others near industrial complexes. It is also interesting to note that most of the Chinese Communist airfields are designed and equipped to be self-sufficient from two to four weeks in the event of war, and that nearly all of them are served by more than one mode of transportation.

The Red air force is not large enough to handle both long range air missions and close ground support missions in case of an all-out war. It has not placed top priority on close ground support, but more emphasis is expected as additional planes and pilots become available.

Military Relations, With Other Countries

Significant military relations with foreign countries have taken place since the Korean war. The foreign programs of the People's Liberation Army have been in keeping with the accelerated activities of Communist China as a government.

After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Port Arthur, where a strong naval base had been established, the Red Chinese acquired a new bastion. This transfer, in May 1955, had been agreed upon 14 February 1950 in a treaty of mutual friendship and aid. Port Arthur had been held by the Soviet Union since the end of WWII, when it was acquired through the Yalta Treaty. Darien also was turned over to the Chinese Communists but the actual transfer of both bases was postponed until after the Korean conflict. During the Korean war, Soviet troops occupied both bases, releasing Chinese soldiers for Korean service.

While Darien and Port Arthur were given to China,

several Chinese ports were turned over to the Soviet Union to be used as submarine bases. Hulutao, near Port Arthur, Hsiangshan, on the East China Sea, and Yulin, on Hainan Island, were placed (temporarily at least) under Soviet operational control and developed into major submarine bases.

From Korea, six divisions of Chinese "volunteers" began to withdraw in the spring of 1955. By fall, 12 divisions were recalled from the 900,000-man force left in Korea after the war. In 1958, there were 350,000 troops left in Korea as the final stages of the withdrawal began. During March and April of 1958, more than 100,000 men left Korea for China. The remaining forces were to be depleted by late summer. This was done only after the North Korean forces were fully established.

Red Chinese military leaders have shown their readiness to send troops to many parts of the world for military action. Since Korea, they have offered to send soldiers and equipment into Indonesia, Egypt, and Iraq. Evidence of military aid from Red China has been found in Indo-China where both Chinese and Soviet equipment were used. Furthermore, it has been reported that more than 2,000 Chinese Communist officers served on the staffs of Ho Chi-minh as he conquered Indo-China. In Malaya, the so-called Malayan Liberation Army is known to have received supplies from the Red Chinese. And in Yunnan province in south China, a so-called Free Thai Army, equipped and trained by the People's Liberation Army, has been waiting to exploit any internal disturbance in Thailand. Also, recent military activity in Laos reflects Red Chinese influence in many respects. We have also seen Red China's foreign policy projected with military force along the Indian frontier.

Military Activities in the Taiwan Straits

During the years following the Korean war, Chinese Communist activities in the Taiwan Straits passed from a period of psychological warfare to a period of active military aggression. While they massed their forces and staged a huge military build-up, a continuous barrage of propaganda diverted world attention. Finally, by 1955, they actively engaged in the seizure of off-shore islands. Yikianyshan, Yushan, and Pishan were seized while Tachen and Nanchishan were occupied following evacuation by Nationalist forces.

The intensity of military activities quickened in 1958, when the People's Liberation Army began a prolonged bombardment of Quemoy in advance of the announced invasion of the island. The move came, suspiciously, at a time when American forces were active in Lebanon. On the mainland opposite Quemoy, considerable air and ground forces were massed—more than 500,000 men and perhaps one-third of the air force.

The situation during the summer of 1958 had tactical as well as international military significance. On 23 August 1958, when the artillery assault began, the Reds fired more than 40,000 rounds at the tiny island within two hours. In the 15 days following, their shore batteries lobbed 200,000 rounds on Nationalist-held outposts. Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters claimed Quemoy ultimately endured more high explosives than the Japanese fired in China between 1937 and the close of

WWII. This showed not only a tremendous artillery capability, but a pronounced increase in firepower since the Korean war.

Should the offshore island dispute become more serious, the Chinese Communists are capable of using ballistic missiles. Since the summer of 1958, a number of these weapons have been installed opposite Quemoy. The next outbreak may see Red China enter a full-scale modern war which would reveal their complete arsenal.

Conclusion

Compared to the armed rabble of the Korean war, the evolution of the People's Liberation Army provides an index to the growing military threat which Red China presents today.

This potent force may be felt in open war. If it is met in battle, it will probably act as it has in the past—resolute, aggressive, and indifferent to losses. But the People's Liberation Army will better exploit its boundless manpower, because new machines and knowledge of modern warfare have given it a new profile. The PLA's battle potential is immeasurably superior to that of the Korean war and can be expected to improve further under the guidance of its determined leaders and its Soviet sponsors.

If Red China's military might is not committed to open war, its weight may be applied as a diplomatic lever to aid Red China and the Soviet Union in their negotiating capacity at the conference table. By exerting pressure on little countries in the Far East, the People's Liberation Army can divert attention from European problems, disrupting the balance of bargaining power in favor of the Communist bloc. We have seen this happen in recent times. For example, the critical situation in Lebanon during the summer of 1958 was further complicated by a threatened invasion of Quemoy and a massive artillery bombardment. Again in 1959, Red China sent troops into Tibet (some spilling over into Nepal) just before discussions on Berlin were to begin. This form of intimidation, diversion, and diplomatic blackmail may become the primary tool in the spectrum of Communist intrigue as they continue their struggle for world domination.

Too many of us are prone to evaluate Red China in terms of her failures and shortcomings. We are prone to search for intellectual aspirins—"Red China is a paper tiger" . . . "the Sino-Soviet bond is weakening" . . . "Red China carries the seed of her own destruction and will soon collapse under her own weight." These are all second guesses or wishful thinking, generally without factual support. The military events of the past few years have shown such thinking to be dangerous and careless. The one fact about Red China of which we can be certain is that the People's Liberation Army will continue to develop rapidly at any cost and will become a more serious threat as time passes. With that in mind, it may be well for us to consider a statement attributed to Gen Lin Piao in 1937 concerning the Japanese:

"The enemy's greatest weakness was the arrogance which led him to underestimate the quality of Chinese Communist will to resist."

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