

CHICOM

The author of "Russian Small Arms and Tactics", which appeared in the two previous issues of the "Gazette", returns this month with a sequel on Red China.

By Jac Weller

☛ CHINA IS IMMENSE IN AREA, POPULATION, AND POTENTIAL military power. Her population of 700 million could lead to the largest army in the history of the world. In the immediate future, however, the Chinese economy appears unable to support such an army. About two and a half million men are on active duty, but are used periodically during the year for agricultural and construction purposes. Efficiency is limited by materiel deficiencies which extend right down into infantry squads. The average Chinese soldier is still poorly armed by Western standards.

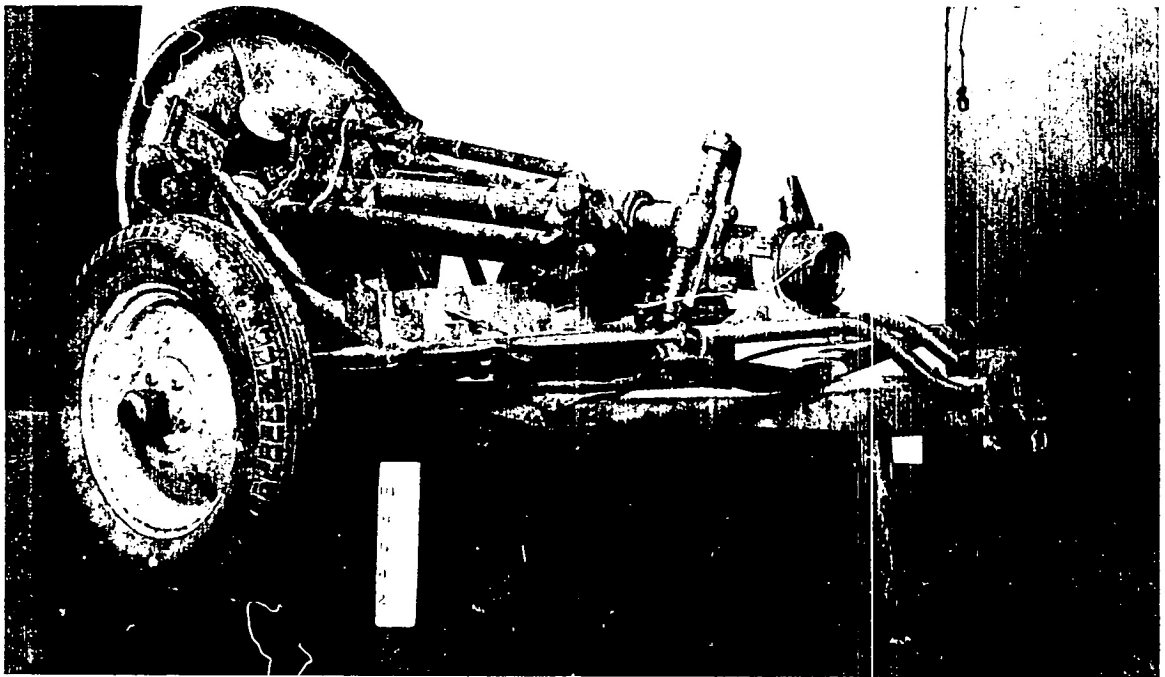
We should not forget, however, that war is made by men, not weapons. The Chinese showed in Korea that they could be tough, daring, and effective opponents. They adopted a type of offense and defense which minimized their disadvantages and emphasized their strengths. We must guard against overconfidence based on apparent US weapons superiorities. In a shooting and marching war, Chinese infantrymen will be better

than their equipment. About seven million men have been in the army for varying periods; many more millions are in their Public Security Forces (militia).

The Chinese Army today is essentially like the Red Army of 1926—improved by a dozen years of guerrilla fighting against the Nationalists, six years as the allies of the Nationalists against the Japanese invaders, and a final four years of war with the Nationalists again. In 1949, the Nationalists were finally driven from the mainland. The Korean War followed. By 1953 the Chinese had more combat experience than the Russians and Germans combined. The last ten years of comparative peace have been used to improve organization, training, and equipment.

Throughout their long period of conflict, the Chinese Communists were fighting mostly guerrilla-type actions. Only towards the end of their civil war and for a part of the Korean conflict were they operating as a regular force with fronts, lines of communication, and definite





The Chinese Communist 120mm mortar, the author says, is a simple, effective, and reliable weapon.

objectives. Even today, strategy and tactics are influenced by the old guerrilla techniques in which the present senior Chinese commanders had so much experience.

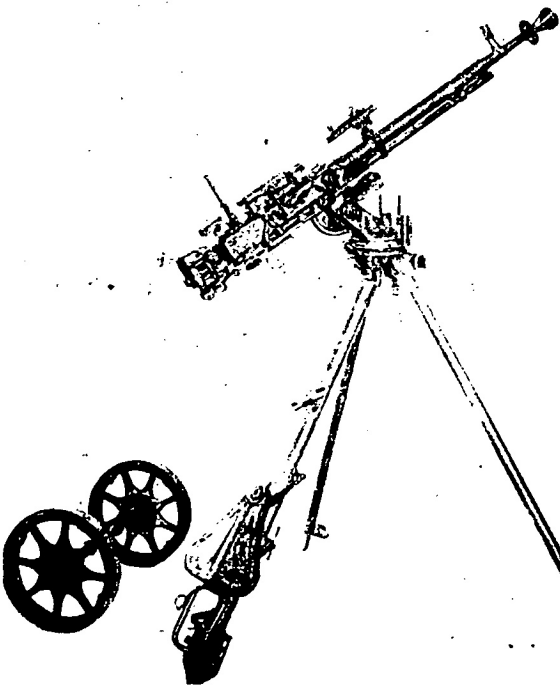
Organization of the Army

The Chinese Army is nearly beyond the comprehension of Western minds. The army blends indistinguishably into the Communist Party. The top commanders of the army are also the rulers of China. The army is all-powerful and seems at some levels to include both navy and air force. Ranks were only made definite in 1955. Even today, generals spend part of each year as enlisted men.

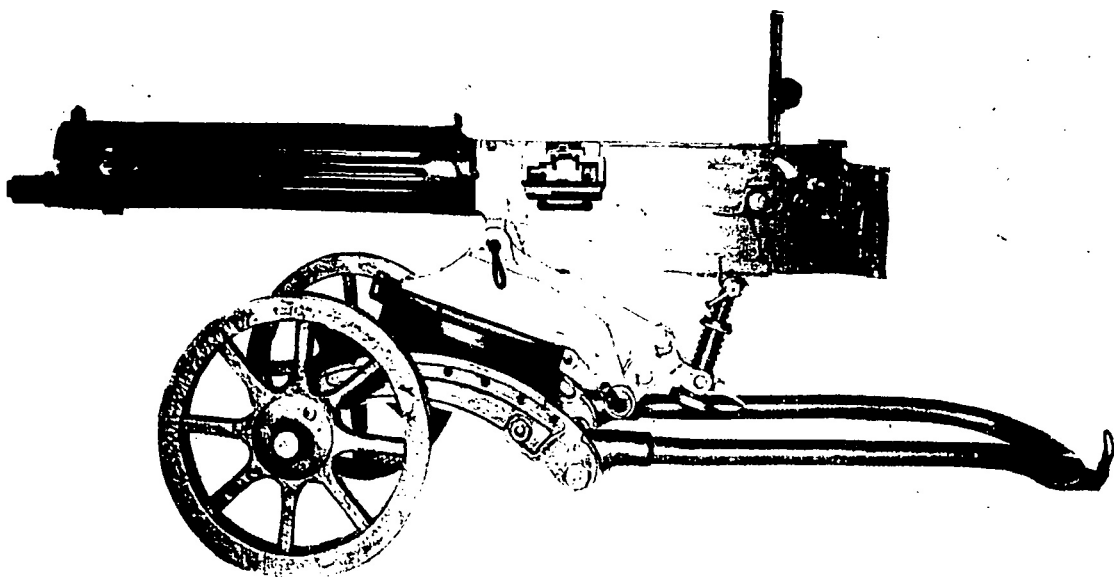
On the other hand, there is no mystery as to actual units, weapons, and general organization of the Chinese forces. Horse cavalry divisions are still in existence; there are also some armored divisions. Artillery and engineer units, some of divisional size, are known to exist. The Russian organizational influence is strong but not all-important.

The Chinese Army is essentially an infantry force. Its real power comes from triangular infantry divisions (TO strength, 17,600) with fairly thin supporting elements at each level. The organization of infantry regiments (4,150 men) seems now to be standardized after a good deal of experimentation following the Korean War and is theoretically similar to that of the Russian Army. The scarcity of armor, self-propelled and conventional artillery, and motor transport, however, makes a considerable difference in the actual composition of field units.

There are three rifle battalions (840 men each) and one weapons battalion (590 men) in each regiment. The weapons battalion consists of an artillery company, a mortar company, a recoilless rifle company, and an anti-aircraft company. Many artillery companies still have



Some of Red China's weapons are far outdated by Western standards. This ancient AA machine gun is still in use, along with the newer 14.5mm ZPU.



This water-cooled HMG, used in the Korean war, has now been largely replaced by an air-cooled type.

four 70mm howitzers which fire a nine-pound shell at a muzzle velocity of 675 fps, but they are slowly receiving modern Russian-type 76mm guns. Both have been found effective in rugged terrain. The mortar company has four 120mm and some smaller mortars. There are usually six 57mm or 75mm US type recoilless rifles in the RR company, but these are being replaced with similar Soviet-type weapons which are smoothbore and fin stabilized. Many anti-aircraft companies still have single 12.7mm Russian HMGs, but some have the newer quad-mounted Soviet 14.5mm ZPUs.

A Chinese regimental headquarters is larger than most and contains in addition to support units a reconnaissance section and a security company. This last organization is unusual, and appears to stem from the guerrilla origin of the Chinese Army. It is essentially an elite unit of about 300 well-armed men. Their principal function is to protect the regimental commander and his immediate military family and also to carry out critical missions of short duration. The security company has been downgraded to some extent theoretically, but appears to be still fully operational.

The Infantry Battalion

Each infantry battalion has a headquarters group, three rifle companies (200 men each), a mortar company, an a MMG (medium) company. There are in theory nine 82mm mortars and nine MMGs; many units still have only four mortars and six MMGs. The mortars are the simple, reliable type used in all Bloc armies and will fire US and NATO 81mm ammo. The MMGs are of Russian origin and are heavy. They appear old-fashioned with their low two-wheeled carriages, long trails, and armor shield. These were, however, the most effective weapons the Chinese had in Korea and are still good. Their low cyclic rate of fire and overall weight

allow continuous and stable operation. The Chinese appear to choose their best soldiers for handling these weapons.

Each rifle company contains three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon provided with three 60mm mortars and two US-type 3.5-inch RLs. The number of the latter may have been slightly increased recently. The rifle platoons consist of an AR squad and three other squads. The designation "rifle" is used here in a loose sense. Weapons that we would call rifles are not issued at all in many platoons.

Infantry Small Arms

There are three categories of small arms in China today. The most numerous are Jap, US, British, old Russian, and "War Lord" Chinese weapons of WWII and before. Some of the bolt Mauser rifles are 60 years old. Many Chinese copies of foreign ARs, SMGs, and the like are of poor quality. But these weapons are now mostly in the hands of Public Security Forces, not the Chinese regular army.

The second most numerous class of small arms came from Russia to the Chinese as the Korean War progressed. These were mainly weapons produced in the USSR after the beginning of WWII. (See *Russian Small Arms and Tactics*, GAZETTE: Oct-Nov '62). The short bolt action carbine, M1941, was the last and best of the Mosin-Nagants. The two WWII SMGs, the M1941 (PPSH), and M1943 (PPS), are good modern arms. The Russian MGs of several models are also first-class. These weapons all fire the old Russian conventional ammunition, the 7.62 rimmed rifle round or the 7.62 pistol cartridge.

Since 1956, the Chinese have been re-arming with the new Soviet intermediate power carbines (SKS), SMGs (AK), and ARs (RPD). All are now being produced in

Chinese factories. But the replacement rate from both home manufacture and shipments from Russia is so low that years will pass before half the Chinese infantry have these new weapons.

Some senior officers in the Chinese Army don't want to abandon full rifle power weapons even within platoons. The more powerful rifle round must be kept for company MGs anyway. The Chinese appear to have no intention of eliminating SMGs firing pistol cartridges, usually the 7.62 Russian pistol cartridge. The Chinese copy of the PPS M1943 is still being produced and fits nicely into the Chinese system of using grenadiers.

Throughout the Korean conflict, the Chinese were sending into action platoons armed only with a bag full of grenades. Other platoons had SMGs firing pistol cartridges. These have now been combined. Many platoons in each infantry battalion are armed with several improved stick grenades and pistol power SMGs. The assault potential of men so armed would be considerable at short range.

Russia is known to have standardized on the AK for

would have no personal arms. Some Chinese soldiers would again go into action intending either to pick up the arms of their own casualties, or take weapons from the enemy.

The Chinese leaders are capable military men with a lot of actual combat experience. Why do they allow conditions to continue that appear to us to be so undesirable? There are several answers, the most important of which is the guerrilla origin of the Chinese Army itself. The conditions referred to are not unusual in guerrilla armies and do not greatly hurt their efficiency.

China has limited industrial capacity for military materiel and restricted purchasing power even in Bloc countries. She has chosen to concentrate on heavier weapons rather than press forward a complete infantry re-arming program. The Chinese just don't feel that their present infantry weapons are a real disadvantage. Their soldiers are not carefully trained in marksmanship; each infantryman who has a weapon is still expected to take care of it himself and conserve his ammunition. This same thinking applies to some extent



ChiCom manufactured version of Russian PPSH at right. Note substitution of magazine for drum.

use within infantry platoons and to have relegated the SKS carbine to a secondary role. The Chinese at present have more SKS carbines than AKs. But there are still more bolt action rifles and carbines firing full power rounds than all the new intermediate power arms combined.

Pistols are common in the Chinese army and sometimes serve as a kind of rank insignia. The two new Russian reduced power weapons (PM and APS) are backed by Japanese automatics firing the 8mm Nambu round, Russian and Japanese revolvers, and the Russian Tokarev (M1930) pistols. Our Cal. .45 Model 1911A1 automatic, the old holster stock Mauser, and some other pistols are also fairly common.

Chinese regiments of 3,000 men in Korea had only 1,000 to 1,400 weapons of all types. This ratio has been increased but still is not up to Western standards. In an emergency in which China called up all her reserves and didn't have massive logistic support from Russia, there would again be men who had only a bag of grenades. Many members of crew-served weapons teams

to AR gunners. In a nation with poor logistics and a weak economy, this approach has advantages.

The Chinese in Korea did supply fairly abundant ammunition for their MMGs. They fought predominantly with these, save at close range. They appear still to treat MMGs as a privileged weapon and have plenty of ammunition for them. The presence of unarmed men in regiments has advantages. Where motor transport and air cover for it are in short supply, extra strong backs are helpful to carry MG ammo. The presence of the "have nots" keep the men who have weapons on their toes. The Chinese infantry has the ability to outmarch any other in the world. Unarmed men help here.

Infantry Tactics

In their guerrilla days, the Chinese specialized in ambush and surprise attacks at unexpected points, particularly at night. Where possible, they surrounded their enemies and exterminated them. Their best defense was a fighting withdrawal followed by disappear-

ance. These tactics were still used in Korea and probably will continue to be used by the Chinese, although they now have a regular army with modern service schools and intensive conventional training.

As the Communists gained strength against the Nationalists and in Korea, they began to operate on definite fronts with their own lines of communication. They adapted their particular style of fighting to more orthodox conditions, but continued to try to encircle and annihilate, or at least envelop one flank and attack from unexpected angles. Much was written of their "human sea" assaults delivered in part at least by Chinese grenadiers of poor quality, but they accomplished more by infiltrating United Nations lines and attacking what were supposed to be rear echelons. Frontal attacks were formidable, mainly because of the excellent support given by the Chinese MGs. Surprises pulled off by Chinese who had succeeded in passing through front lines undetected were always dangerous.

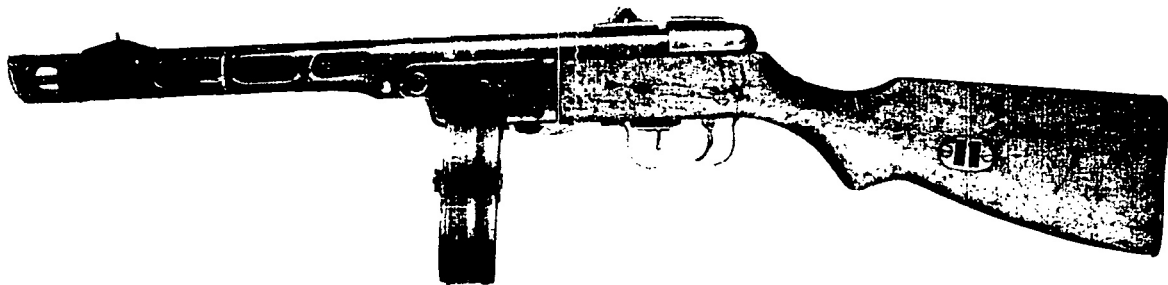
Defensively, the Chinese in Korea showed a tendency to disengage whenever possible and retire so as to present a wide belt of "no man's land." They would

interlocking fields of fire, as well as having their mortars zeroed in for close support. They were still deficient, however, in providing real concentrated fire by several weapons on a single objective.

The Chinese army reorganized after the Korean war along Russian lines. Russian advisers were common in Chinese staff schools. The indications are that the Russian influence has waned in favor of the military philosophy of Mao Tse-tung, which better fits Chinese materiel austerity. In future conflicts, regular strategy and tactics will have a strong guerrilla flavor. The Chinese will strive for surprise and are more likely to attack at night. Their plans will be simple but well coordinated. At almost every level, there will be two thrusts rather than one. Even though they now have a great deal more heavy equipment than during the Korean war, their infantry with limited organic support weapons will still be their most dangerous force.

Conclusions

The Chinese army has a sobering ultimate potential. At present, however, and for a generation, China will



Chinese are equipped with Soviet SMG, the PPSH Model 1941. A later model has folding metal stock.

prepare a kind of ambush zone in which their positions were sometimes so well concealed that US patrols could go right over them without realizing it. Our enemies would not disclose one of these positions just to cause a few casualties. Both the disengagement and the preparation of defensive ambushes were normally accomplished at night. US tactical air support was such that the Chinese seldom attempted daylight operations.

Towards the end of the Korean War, the Chinese copied US tactics. Their materiel did not allow conventional artillery barrages up to US standards, but they were able to approximate these with the aid of mortars. Russian medium guns of fine accuracy were fired a couple of times at long range targets, then were pulled back into caves, only to reappear an hour later for two more shots from a different position.

Infantry-wise, the Chinese abandoned to some extent their human sea idea and tried coordinated frontal attack by fire teams of rifles, SMGs, and ARs supported by mortars and MMGs. Defensively, they learned to use their excellent MMGs in well-chosen positions with

not be able to support as many soldiers as a Western nation of one-tenth her size. Her troops will not be well-armed according to Western standards. Lack of an effective navy and adequate motor transport means the Army can operate only within walking distance of China. Even the narrow Formosa strait has been beyond its capacity.

On the other hand, within areas where they can receive simple logistics support from their homeland, the Chinese will be extremely formidable. Infantry, to be effective, must move, communicate, and fight. Chinese units can really move, although mainly on foot and at night. Communications are much improved. Chinese fighting qualities are unquestioned—stamina and fatalistic bravery will go far to make up for their weapons disadvantages. They have discipline that conquers the natural fear of death; their leaders know combat from long practical experience. Keep an eye peeled for the unexpected and have all rear area units ready to defend themselves on a 360-degree basis—especially at night.

USMC