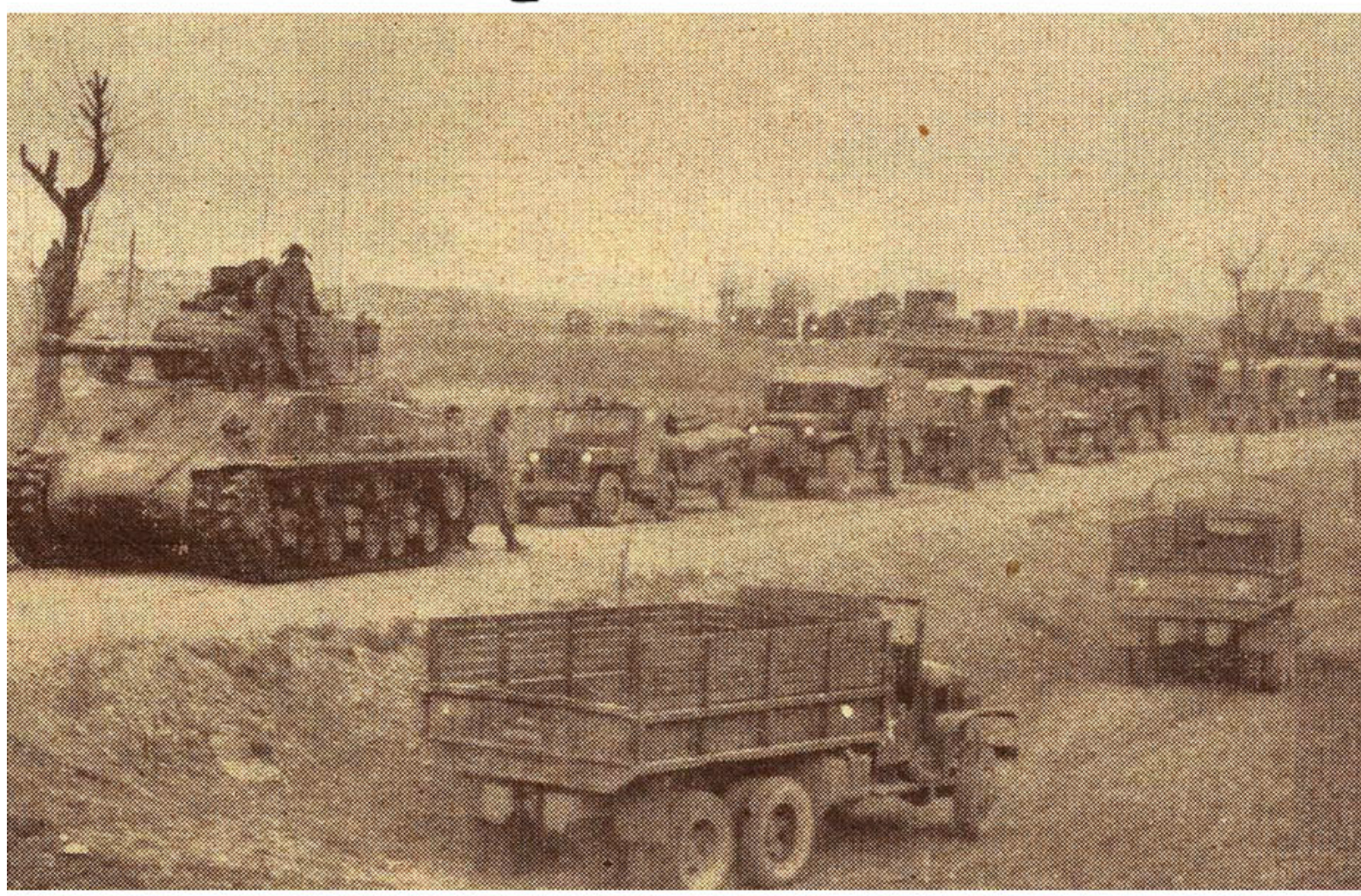


Pathfinder

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Are China's Reds invincible?

Lin Piao commands huge, indoctrinated forces but leadership is a weakness



The road back. *Bumper to bumper the Yanks retreat in Korea as empty trucks move up for refills.*

How good are the soldiers of Red China? Pfc. George W. Marsh, 19, with the United States Second Division in Korea, can answer that. For four days last week his company was pinned in a Communist trap on the Chongchon River front. Marsh was one of the lucky 15 who managed to escape and get back to Pyongyang.

There he wolfed his first hot meal in three days and talked about the most frightful experience of his life. "Man," he said, "those Chinese are good soldiers . . . You can't see 'em; you can't hear 'em. You don't know they're there until they're on top of you. . . . They're experts at camouflage and the best damn night fighters I've ever seen. We could walk a company over the hill and see nothing. Then we'd look around and they'd be swarming on us like flies. It was just like they'd sprouted from the ground."

Marsh is a youngster whose combat experience is limited to the Korean campaign. But his opinion of the Chinese soldiers is shared by veterans like Sgt. Howard Bozarth of Austin, Tex., who campaigned with the Second Division for 11 years. He experienced more horror in a few hours in the battle of Chongchon than he did in eight flaming September days when the Reds almost smashed the Naktong River line above Pusan.

And an American unit commander who saw tough going in World War II told Homer Bigart, New York *Herald Tribune* correspondent at the front: "Without any artillery or air force, they're making us look a little silly in this godawful country. These people are good. You just can't find them in the daytime. They're beautifully disciplined and never fire a shot until they're within 30 feet of you."

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Soldier for Stalin. As this week began at least 1 million Chinese were fighting in Korea. They were from the Manchuria-based Fourth Field Force, biggest and best of Mao Tse-tung's four armies. The Fourth is commanded by Red China's ablest general, Lin Piao (pronounced Linn Bee-Yow), a good soldier and a fanatic Stalinist.

A military protégé of Chiang Kai-shek, he has been a troop commander for 23 of his 42 years. His colleagues boast that he never lost a battle. But that's an exaggerated rating, because Lin was smart enough not to tangle with the hard-hitting Japanese armies. All of his victories were scored against Chiang's low-grade, ragtag troops. Trained in Moscow, Lin is a member of the powerful Stalinist group of the 44-man Communist Central Committee which, with Mao's Politburo, rules Red China.

After the defeat of the Japanese, Lin marched into Manchuria with an army of 45,000 and started building Red China's best fighting force. The Russians gave him the pick of Japanese arms and the best troops—sturdy Manchurians and Koreans—from the famed Japanese-trained Kwantung army. With his new army, Lin led the victorious drive against Chiang's Nationalists from Manchuria to Canton.

School for Soldiers. With Chiang driven off the mainland, some of Lin's troops went back to the soil, but many were recalled after the outbreak of the war in Korea. They were equipped with better weapons than they had used against Chiang and lectured two hours every morning and two hours in the evening on the glories of Stalinism.

A captured Chinese told American officers: "In the evening we had to be able to repeat the morning's lesson by rote. If we couldn't remember it, we would be locked in solitary confinement."



Gen. Lin Piao. *On soft pickings, never a battle lost.*

Invincible Reds?

The Red Chinese army's principal strength is its size. It has an estimated 2.5 million under arms with another 2.5 million in reserves. It has good equipment, the best the bulging Soviet arsenal can supply.

But it's not an invincible army and it has its weak points:

- ● Inexperience against troops with modern equipment.

- ● Poor communications.

- ● Weak staff officer setup. (In the war against Chiang, for instance, the Communists were held up for 50 hours by weak Nationalist defenses on Soochow Creek in the heart of Shanghai. American GIs of World War II caliber would have taken the position with an end run in five hours.)

- ● Finally, it fights for a nation that is economically and politically unstable. Its factories have been stripped by the Russians, and millions of Chinese hate Mao and what he stands for.