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XIV. The War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea

(October 1950-July 1953)

Dispatching Troops to Korea

At noon on October 4, 1950, three days after National Day, an airplane arrived in Xi'an city. I was told to leave for a meeting in Beijing without the slightest delay.

The Party Central Committee was holding a meeting to discuss the dispatch of troops to aid Korea when I arrived at Zhongnanhai* at 4 p.m.

Some comrades told me that Chairman Mao had asked those attending the meeting to list the disadvantages involved in dispatching troops to Korea. Chairman Mao then said: "You have reasons for your arguments. But at any rate, once another nation is in a crisis, we'd feel bad if we stood idly by."

I did not speak at the meeting because I had arrived late. But I thought to myself that troops should be sent to rescue Korea.

When the meeting broke up, I was taken to the

* Part of the former imperial palace now used as the premises of the Party Central Committee and the State Council. — Tr.

page 473

Beijing Hotel by comrades of the administrative section under the Party Central Committee.

I could not fall asleep that night. I thought it might be because I could not enjoy the soft, cozy spring bed. So I lay on the carpeted floor. But sleep still did not come and a train of thoughts flashed across my mind: The U.S. occupation of Korea, separated from China by only a river, would threaten Northeast China. Its control of Taiwan posed a threat to Shanghai and East China. The U.S. could find a pretext at any time to launch a war of aggression against China. The tiger wanted to eat human beings; when it would do so would depend on its appetite. No concession could stop it. If the U.S. wanted to invade China, we had to resist its aggression. Without going into a test of strength with U.S. imperialism to see who was stronger, it would be difficult for us to build socialism. If the U.S. was bent on warring against China, it would want a war of quick decision, while we would wage a protracted war; it would fight regular warfare, and we would employ the kind of warfare we had used against the Japanese invaders. As we had a national government and Soviet assistance, our situation was much better than it had been during the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression. We should dispatch troops to Korea to safeguard

our national construction.

Again and again I turned over in my mind the Chairman's remarks: "You have reasons for your arguments. But at any rate, once another nation is in a crisis, we'd feel bad if we stood idly by." I came to realize that his instruction combined in•

page 474

ternationalism with patriotism. "You have reasons for your arguments" — yes, but if the matter was considered outside the light of the emergency in Korea, you would get nationalism, not internationalism. I believed that sending troops to Korea would be a correct, necessary and wise policy decision which should be carried out without delay. Having straightened out my thinking, I gave my support to the Chairman's wise decision.

The Central Committee meeting resumed in the Yiniantang Hall in Zhongnanhai the next afternoon. After listening to other comrades, I said, "It is necessary to dispatch troops to aid Korea. If China is devastated in war, it only means that the Liberation War will last a few years longer. The U.S. will find a pretext at any time to invade China if its troops are poised on the bank of the Yalu River and in Taiwan."

Chairman Mao made the decision to send me to Korea. I did not decline the offer. When I was walking by the lake, someone said to me, "You don't seem to be resigned to your advanced age."

The First Campaign

At dusk on October 18, 1950 I crossed the Yalu River with vanguard units of the Chinese People's Volunteers. We reached the Ragocho Power Station on the morning of October 19 and arrived in a small gully to the northwest of the town of Bukjin on the morning of the 20th.

page 475

Travelling in trucks and tanks, some advance units of the enemy had driven to the banks of the Yalu River.

On the morning of October 21, a division of our 40th Army passing through Bukjin encountered Syngman Rhee puppet troops not far outside the town.

The First Campaign was an unexpected one. I immediately altered our original plan of march. Our troops displayed characteristic flexibility and mobility and wiped out some Syngman Rhee units in the Unsan Area near Bukjin, forcing the pursuing U.S. and puppet troops to retreat. We thus got a firm foothold there.

The First Campaign ended in victory for us on October 25.

Because of their high level of mechanization, the U.S., British and puppet troops were able to withdraw speedily to the Chongchon River and the Ke-chon Area, where they started to throw up defence works. Our troops did not pursue the enemy because the main enemy force had not been destroyed even though we had wiped out six or seven battalions of puppet troops and a small number of American troops.

The mechanized enemy troops moved and built fortifications speedily. Their tanks and fortifications formed a system of defence. It would have been unfavourable for our Volunteers to engage the enemy in positional warfare with the equipment they had at that time. They might even have suffered defeat.

page 476

We employed the tactic of purposely showing ourselves to be weak, increasing the arrogance of the enemy, letting him run amuck, and luring him deep into our areas.

While some small units of our army remained in contact with enemy troops, our main force assembled in areas east and west of Bukjin and made use of the favourable terrain to build camouflaged positions 30 kilometres from the point where the enemy set out to attack us.

One day in mid-November, Douglas MacArthur* came over on a reconnaissance flight. His command headquarters said in a broadcast to the troops: "get ready, push to the Yalu River, and be home before Christmas."

His attack came around November 20, We sent small units to engage the enemy and to lure him to come after these units. It was nearly dusk when the enemy troops penetrated to the Unsan-Kusong line — the place we had planned for our counter-attack.

The enemy troops had been worn out after a day's fighting and were not ready to dig themselves in when small detachments of our troops began to strike at their rear. Then our main force swept into the enemy ranks with the strength of an ava-lanche and engaged the enemy at close quarters

* Douglas MacArthur became Commander-in-Chief of the "United Nations Forces" in July 1950 in the war of aggression against Korea. He advocated an attack on China. His setbacks in Korea brought about his dismissal.

page 477

with grenades and bayonets. The superior fire-power of the enemy became useless. Over-turned and damaged enemy vehicles were strewn over the road, blocking the retreating enemy troops.

This method of fighting, which the enemy troops had never experienced before, took them by surprise. Thus our troops won a major victory in the Second Campaign. The enemy lost no fewer than 6,000 motor vehicles and well over 1,000 tanks and gun-carriers. We captured only a small part of the equipment because most of it was later burned by the enemy with napalm bombs.

The enemy troops fled south in panic, abandoning Pyongyang and falling back on the 38th Parallel.

This campaign laid the foundation of victory in the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea recovered all its lost territory by the end of the campaign.

The Third Campaign

In the wake of the Second Campaign, our forces pursued the enemy and by mid-December made a sneak approach to the 38th Parallel. After making a thorough reconnaissance of enemy positions, our forces got everything ready for an offensive.

In the evening of December 31, 1950, our troops stormed across the 38th Parallel, captured Seoul and crossed the Hangang River to recover the port of Inchon and drive the enemy to the 37th Parallel.

page 478

The enemy brought in four divisions in reinforcements from Japan and the United States and massed them along a defence line along the Rakdong River; and they were supported by veteran soldiers shipped over from Europe. Enemy troops withdrawn from the Hamgyong area on the eastern front were also sent to man the defences along the Rakdong River.

The enemy's mechanized units retreated only 30 kilometres every day — a distance that our troops could cover in a night. The enemy plan was to do everything to lure our troops to attack his fortified positions, and then — having worn out our troops — to mount a frontal attack against us and land his marines on our flank to cut off our retreat route.

By now the Chinese People's Volunteers had fought three major campaigns in a row in severe winter after their entry into Korea three months before. They had neither an air force nor sufficient anti-aircraft guns to protect them from enemy bombers. Bombed by aircraft and shelled by long-range guns day and night, our troops could not move about in the daytime. And they had not had a single day's good rest in three months. It is easy to imagine how tired they were.

As our supply lines had now been extended, it was very difficult to get provisions. The strength of our forces had been reduced by nearly 50 per cent due to combat and non-combat losses. Our troops badly needed reinforcements and rest and reorganization before they could go into battle again.

By now we had three armies on the southern

page 479

bank of the Hangang River, quite close to the 37th Parallel. Our main forces were then stationed north of the Hangang River on the 38th Parallel and in the area south of it, where they were resting and

undergoing reorganization. They built fortifications in anticipation of enemy counter-attacks and a prolonged war.

The Fourth Campaign

Our troops stopped their attacks after reaching the 37th Parallel (the Suwon Area).

The enemy forces mounted their counter-attack in late January 1951, following their failure to lure our troops into their fortified zones along the Rakdong River. We fielded five armies against them.

In this campaign, we wiped out nearly two enemy divisions which suffered about 2,000 casualties. Most of the enemy troops we annihilated were Syngman Rhee puppet troops, and the rest were mixed French, Belgian and Luxembourg units. The U.S. army lost only a little more than a battalion. But the enemy's counter-attack was repulsed.

In February or March 1951, I left Korea for Beijing (the round trip took seven days) to report to Chairman Mao on the situation on the Korean front and to ask him for strategic instruction. I explained to Chairman Mao that as the Korean War could not be won quickly, the 50th Army on the southern bank of the Hangang River should be withdrawn to the northern bank before February 15, 1951.

page 480

The Chairman gave a clear instruction for conducting the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea: "Win a quick victory if you can; if you can't, win a slow one." That is a clear and flexible principle.

The Fifth Campaign

The enemy forces thrust northward on a massive scale in mid-February after they failed to lure our troops to the Rakdong River area.

Our forces fought the enemy bitterly while retreating from one position to another. The enemy forces pushed to the 38th Parallel in around 40 days.

Then in a counter-attack on the western front. our troops almost pushed the enemy back to Seoul. This was the first phase of the Fifth Campaign.

But the enemy did not give up Seoul this time. Many echelons of enemy troops were deployed outside the city, and the enemy did not beat a retreat after reaching the 38th Parallel on the eastern front.

In a concerted drive, the Chinese People's Volunteers and part of the Korean People's Army pushed back the enemy troops on the eastern front. But one of our armies advanced too far (almost to the 37th

Parallel) during the drive. It became confronted with supply problems and had great difficulties in getting food. The men were exhausted when they came back to our positions. Because of oversight in its arrangement for a shift of position, a division of the 60th Army was attacked by aircraft and en-

page 481

circled by mechanized units while on the march. It lost a total of 3,000 men. That was the second phase of the Fifth Campaign. The losses in this campaign were the highest suffered by our forces in the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea.

The Fifth Campaign was fought on a mammoth scale with one million troops taking part on either side. Our forces were still unable to annihilate a whole regiment of American troops in the campaign. They succeeded in wiping out a whole U.S. battalion on six or seven occasions, and a division of puppet troops.

If we encircled a U.S. regiment, our troops would need two days to wipe it out because they were poorly equipped and the enemy air force and mechanized units would do everything to rescue the encircled unit. Only once did our troops wipe out an entire U.S. regiment and none of its men was able to escape; this took place in the Second Campaign. Otherwise our troops were able to wipe out only whole U.S. battalions. If a U.S. battalion encircled in the night were not wiped out while it was still dark, the Americans had the means to rescue it the following day.

Chairman Mao sent a telegram instructing us not to try to annihilate large bodies of American troops at a time, but to decimate them piece-meal. This was an excellent method, but a transitional period was needed for our men to build strong fortifications without which it would be impossible to carry out this approach.

The enemy forces had become quite exhausted in over two months of intense fighting from the begin-

page 482

ping of the Fourth Campaign to the end of the Fifth Campaign.

During this period, our forces had constructed a network of good fortifications. The surface defensive positions of our forces were giving way to fortifications built underground. A defence-in-depth tunnel system* was taking shape gradually along the 38th Parallel. The tunnel fortifications were so strong that no enemy troops could penetrate them (an example was provided by the tunnel fortifications of the Sangkumryung Ridge).** As a result, the enemy's attacks were repulsed one after another.

With concentrated forces, we could now crack the enemy defence line at any given point. Our troops had learned to wage defensive warfare well as offensive warfare of a positional nature by using tunnel fortifications.

With the emergence of strongly built defences in the summer and autumn of 1951, our forces began to employ Chairman Mao's "piece-meal" attack method against the enemy.

* A total of 1,250 km. of tunnels and 6,240 km. of trenches involving the shifting of 60 million cubic metres of rock and earth were dug along the front by the Chinese People Volunteers and the Korean People's Army during the war -- *Tr.*

** In 43 days of fighting ending November 25, 1952, the U.S. forces dumped 10,000 bombs and 1,900,000 shells that blasted away two metres of rock from the summits of a small cluster of heights known as the Sangkumryung Ridge. Fighting back from tunnel fortifications built deep underground, the Chinese People's Volunteers repulsed no fewer than 900 attacks on the hills, inflicting a total of 25,000 casualties on the enemy. — *Tr.*

page 483

In launching an attack, our troops concentrated in camouflaged offensive positions to bring maximum fire power to bear on the enemy. In such an attack, a part of the enemy — usually a battalion — was wiped out. We fought many such battles — around four or five per month. The numbers of enemy troops thus put out of action were not small when they were added up.

Moreover, our forces had mastered the tactic of storming strongly fortified defences in positional warfare. The last battle in which our forces stormed enemy defences took place one evening in late July 1953, when four of our armies cut through a 25 x 25 kilometre gap in the enemy's bunker defence system in a single night just before the signing of the Armistice Agreement. Our forces wiped out a heavy artillery regiment of the U.S. Army and a great part of four puppet divisions.

Employing this new tactic of active defence in positional warfare, our poorly equipped forces could breach enemy defences when attacking and hold their ground when defending their own positions. Thus our troops won the initiative on the battlefield. This tactic, which was the manifestation of the fine political equalities and military traits of a revolutionary army, created a most favourable condition for conducting positional warfare of a protracted nature.

This victory won by our troops forced General Mark W. Clark, Commander-in-Chief of the enemy's Allied Forces, to request that the Armistice Agreement be signed without delay. Clark said: "In carrying out the instructions of my government, I

page 484

gained the unenviable distinction of being the first United States army commander in history to sign an armistice without. victory."

Signing the armistice, I thought that the war had set a precedent for many years to come — something the people would rejoice at. It was a pity, however, that having established our battlefield deployment, we were unable to deal greater blows against the enemy.

We gained a lot of experience in the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea. Our success in moving supplies to the front without any air cover was likewise a valuable experience. We also gained

much experience in countering germ warfare.

On the Korean battlefield, the Chinese People's Volunteers and the Korean People's Army fought shoulder to shoulder to help each other like brothers. Fighting together for three years, the Chinese People's Volunteers and the Korean people and the Korean People's Army built up a militant friend-ship sealed in blood. The feeling of internationalism between our two peoples became even more profound.