

Escape From Beijing Report ¹

By

G Martel Hall ²

March 4, 1943

¹ Prepared by Maoism Library <https://digital.sfasu.edu/digital/collection/EastTexRC/id/25367/>

² Memo by G. Martel Hall summarizing his observations of the Communist-controlled areas of China, March 4, 1943. Sent to the U. S. State Department by ambassador John Carter Vincent. This memo was classified SECRET by the U. S. government upon its receipt.

MEMORAINDAUM

On May 21, 1942, I left Peiping for Chungking, arriving January 26, 1943. Before starting, I asked the 8th Route Army leaders in Peiping how much money would be required for the trip and was told "you are an ally and America has done so much for China that it is as little as we can do to assist you through our territory and provide you with money if necessary". This I found later was literally true for they did offer to advance cash on some occasions. The route followed was roughly parallel with the Peiping-Hankow railway as far south at Shihkiachwang³, thence northwest over Wu Tei Shan, crossing the Tungpu railway south of Tatung, thence west to Kolan and across the Yellow River at Hing (Hainshing), then parallel with it to Mitze, Suiteh, Yenan and Sien. From here on the usual motor route was followed to Chung-king via Chengtu⁴. In view of the fact that the area comprising Hopeh⁵, Shansi and Shensi had not been visited by any American for some years, I deemed it wise to spend some considerable time in the more important places and was able to see and travel through a large area in addition to the actual route indicated above. The observations under the following headings are based on much more study than that ordinarily made by a casual traveler. My efforts in this connection were facilitated in every way possible by the leaders of the 8th Route Army but in no sense was my trip a "conducted tour", since I was able to wander about at will, dropping in here and calling there with no guide unless requested.

MILITARY

When in 1937 the Central Government and provincial troops were driven out of central and southern Hopeh and practically all of Shansi, the 8th Route Army moved in and have since that time been solely responsible for contesting the suzerainty of this area with the Japanese. Their influence and actual hold on the country varies from place to place so that the hill area is largely free of Japanese whereas they have been able to establish forts and strong points through the plains at vary close distances. These forts are built by forced labor and are of very flimsy construction and could be easily demolished by mountain guns or small field artillery. They vary from strong points housing perhaps 20 men to rather powerful focal centers where as many as 250 soldiers may be stationed. This development may be termed the "fort policy" and is due to a

³ Aka Shijiazhuang

⁴ Aka Chengdu

⁵ Aka Hebei

large extent to the inability of the Japanese to eradicate the 8th Route Army in spite of repeated efforts and large and expensive campaigns comprising the use of as much as 100,000 troops in one district. In order to partially control the country, the enemy have therefore found it necessary to establish themselves behind barbed wire entanglements and brick and stone breastworks at irregular but close intervals and at strategic points. In spite of all this the country is, however, relatively free from Japanese domination, especially at night and in the more mountainous areas. The people of both provinces cooperate in every way with the troops which of course are largely composed of sons, brothers and husbands of the local people who voluntarily join up to fight for their homes. As a consequence, both food and information are supplied by the people which is of estimable value to the military and enables them to avoid traps or unnecessary hardship. The morale of the army is excellent and during my stay I found that they were carrying on incessant warfare against the invaders. Not a day passes but what reports of action are brought in and wounded may be seen in the numerous "small hospitals" hidden in the out-of-the-way hill areas. According to their statistics, the following is of interest:

Number of engagements fought:

1937-1938:	638
1938-1939:	2,051
1939-1940:	6,936
1940-1941:	6,152
1941-1942:	12,221

"Engagements", of course, include everything from a small skirmish to a fairly large action.

Japanese killed and wounded:

1937-1938:	34,007
1938-1939:	31,083
1939-1940:	64,355
1940-1941:	50,257
1941-1942:	50,306

Puppet troops killed and wounded:

1937-1938: --

1938-1939: 15,430

1939-1940: 23,475

1940-1941: 21,581

1941-1942: 33,526

Japanese captured:

1937-1938: --

1938-1939: 385

1939-1940: 689

1940-1941: 326

1941-1942: 284

Puppets captured:

1937-1938: --

1938-1939: 7,521

1939-1940: 15,338

1940-1941: 15,355

1941-1942: 17,914

Puppets surrendered:

1937-1938: --

1938-1939: 17,935

1939-1940: 9,180

1940-1941: 5,178

1941-1942: 4,306

Rifles captured:

1937-1938: 6,487

1938-1939: 14,183

1939-1940: 37,284

1940-1941: 22,113

1941-1942: 15,715

Cartridges captured:

1937-1938: --

1938-1939: 405,000

1939-1940: 4,760,500

1940-1941 2,626,585

1941-1942: 1,131,262

Further listings would comprise almost every conceivable object used in warfare but are omitted because it is believed that the above will give a fair indication of the activity of these troops in the areas where they contest domination with the Japanese. It is of course impossible to check on the accuracy of the data supplied by them but from inquiries I made both with doctors and civilians I believe that their statements may be accepted as being fairly accurate. Their losses during this time are listed as follows:

Officers and soldiers killed: 80,874

Wounded: 150,500

The 8th Route Army groups are stationed throughout the hill and plain area. The major concentrations are of course in the wilder parts of the mountain area of western Hopeh, Shansi and Shantung. Communications are maintained by telephone and radios. For efficiency's sake, however, each area is subdivided and commanded by a general who to all intents and purposes acts independently when necessary. Officers and men enjoy substantially the same rations of food, play games together and exhibit a uniform enthusiasm which is most encouraging. For one and all their motto is "Free China from the Invader".

Command of the entire area is in the hands of able Commander Chu Teh, veteran of the old Red Army who is assisted by Pan Te-wei, Ho Lung and Nei Jung-chen, all of whom are native soldiers who can and do take the field with their troops. The soldiers in some instances receive a dollar a month, but even this small remuneration has been largely discontinued. The food, while not as abundant as the leaders would like, seems

nourishing and one finds surprisingly good state of health among combat as well as headquarters divisions.

POLITICAL

The success which the 8th Route Army has enjoyed through-out this area in combatting the Japanese is largely if not entirely due to the cooperation between the civilians and military. In fact, areas where they have had the least success are those which are not politically organized. The support in areas which have been overrun by the Japanese varies with the length of time that they have been occupied or subject to Japanese mistreatment. As practically all of north China has suffered heavily, the support of the country people is almost unanimous and is not confined to any one group. One landlord whose house I occupied may be taken as typical, he himself stating that under the 8th Route Army he was better off than he had been before they came in and that his taxes had actually been slightly reduced. His two sons were both fighting at the front and were enthusiastic supporters of the cause. In order to educate the people politically, there are a large number of civilian workers, political commissars and women workers and school teachers. It is remarkable that in even the most remote villages one can find a man whose sole business is keeping the public informed and I have been greeted by village elders who knew that America, England and Russia were China's allies in the war of resistance against the invaders. These same men would not have known, a few years ago, whether China was a republic or an empire. An energetic policy of education is carried on both with the people and the troops, old and young alike. Blackboards are erected in the villages on which characters are written and classes are held at night especially in the winter when other duties do not require full time attention. The policy of land confiscation and division has been given up and an effort has been made to organize the people into the most nearly democratic form of government that I have found in China. The system at which they aim is to have local and district government which administer all civil affairs and composed of duly elected representatives wherever such elections are possible. In a large number of cases appointments have been necessary due to Japanese occupation. These assemblies are composed of one-third Communists, one-third Kuomintang and one-third non-party members and it would appear that this proportion had actually been fairly maintained. The right of recall enables the electors to control the activities of their delegates. I have visited several of these "congresses" and have found that the people take considerable interest in trying to work out improvements in their existing forms of government. There is absolutely no censorship and one may criticize or applaud according to his heart's desire. Delegates

are not paid and serve as volunteers. Any man may be nominated provided he has the backing of some guild or group of importance. Communist delegates are withdrawn where they exceed the desired proportion. So far as I was able to ascertain, there is no squeeze or corruption among any officials in this area and as this state of affairs seemed most surprising, I spent some little time trying to find corrupt officials either military or political but was unable to unearth any scandal of importance and no cases of flagrant dishonesty. Political education is further helped by propaganda plays which are conducted throughout the area even in the most heavily occupied parts. These players give performances frequently at the risk of their own lives as, if caught by the Japanese, they are executed without mercy.

ECONOMIC

Plain Area: In the more fertile regions the Japanese endeavoring to secure much needed cotton and grain for shipment to Japan and for use among their troops. The objective of the 8th Route Army is to frustrate this in so far as possible. Owing to the "fort policy" indicated above, Japan's endeavors along this line have been increasingly successful though every foot of territory has been bitterly contested. Statistics are not obtainable but it would appear that considerable amounts of cotton are being obtained and shipped to Japan.

Mountain Areas: This region is difficult for the Japanese to control but is a poor producing area growing principally grains of one kind or another which are used as the principal food of man and beast. Every effort is made to prevent any of this foodstuff from falling into Japanese hands and at harvest period the military assists in gathering the crops and in their transport to safe places of concealment. West of the Yellow River where the Japanese have not invaded, life of the country goes on much as usual and there appears to be some excess of foodstuffs, although it is necessary for the inhabitants to import cotton. As all the northwest provinces, with the exception of the plain areas, are very poor country it has been difficult for the military and people to provide themselves with adequate food but due to crop rotation, improvement of irrigation and agricultural methods, there is no actual want except in small districts where the Japanese have been successful in destroying current crops. Such districts receive aid from neighboring districts and I have not seen any beggars or bandits in any of this area. Also, the general appearance of the people would indicate that they have sufficient and better food than could possibly be expected. The government and military also cooperate in encouraging manufacture which is of course largely hand

industry and are now producing a great proportion of the things required such as cloth, household implements, guns, ammunition, etc., etc.

GENERAL

Without traveling through this area, it is impossible to appreciate the hellish hardships which have been caused by the Japanese invaders. There is scarcely a village and certainly no town of importance that they have not visited. Their visits are worse than either plague, pestilence or famine, since they destroy homes, murder the men and rape the women and appear to want to reduce the country to a desert since they have not been able to subdue it. Young men are captured and inducted into the puppet army or forced labor in Manchuria. After Japanese raids in the mountain areas, I have seen smoking ruins of villages and crops, with the people left destitute, and depending on outside assistance to keep them from starving to death. The genuine patriotic effort that is being made by the people of north China contrasts most strongly with the apathy which is encountered south of Yen-an. I might add that before leaving Peiping I had suffered from a strong prejudice against those so-called communists but after traveling through their territory as their guest and being shown every possible consideration, I feel that they are going to be one of the major factors in the China of the future. Mao Tse-tung's statement that their aims are: "Win the war; a strong united China with good government" may be taken as absolutely sincere.

G. Martel Hall