

FACING THE CHALLENGE

The Infantry Journal - October 1963

An army that does not get an opportunity to be tested in war is an unfortunate army. For any amount of training cannot teach in years what a war can teach in days. A limited war that gives an army a good shake-up is ideal training for any major war to come and more so when this shake up comes from a shrewd enemy. It is in this context that we should consider ourselves fortunate. The opportunity has, therefore, to be grabbed and necessary action taken before the next Chinese attack.

From this, however, it should not be understood that we have not proved worthy of our traditions. Nor is it intended to give support to the ignorant few who have indulged in loose talk and baseless criticism of the Army. Far from it. As a matter of fact we can now stick out our chests more than before, for having fought so gallantly against such heavy odds. Knowing what the circumstances were why talk of the prisoners of war? The mighty British Empire faced a similar situation in Malaya: thousands were taken prisoners and few of them could boast of having fired a single shot. We know, and more so do the Chinese, that the Indian soldier still reigns supreme. We cannot, however, ignore our weaknesses, which will weigh more heavily on us in a future war with such an enemy.

In this article I have ventured to put forward some suggestions which are the outcome of a feeling that it is not only the Indian Nation that the Chinese have challenged but also the supremacy of the Indian soldier. While putting forward these suggestions it is quite realised that their origin is at a very low level and that the implications of the implementation of some of them at a higher level may be enormous.

CHANGE IN OUTLOOK

The change in our outlook on war is necessary for the following reasons: -

- (a) Peculiar enemy.
- (b) Our resources.
- (c) Lessons learnt.

Peculiar Enemy

The acceptance of any number of casualties by the Chinese in the furtherance of their aim certainly makes them a peculiar enemy, but more so does their mobility which they have achieved not through better endurance but a more flexible organisation. Naturally our manner of assessment of enemy's capabilities must change. This also demands that on our own side we will have to tap our enormous resources of endurance, determination and will power, much more than we were required to do against any previously conceived enemy. Needless to say that this would require complete revision of our system of documentation and other office procedures during war.

Another peculiarity of our present enemy, which makes him different from those our Army has faced before, is their effective use of political propaganda as a major weapon to undermine the morale of our troops. Having been secluded from politics all the time, our troops are very vulnerable to the enemy's cunning use of psychological warfare.

Our Resources

Our concept of war is nothing but the British concept in World War II. We must now realise that the British concept was built up on the huge resources of wealth that they then had. Their stress was, therefore, on the various battle drills. War has been more a science for them than an art. Their enemies, who have always outwitted them tactically, were finally crushed under the sheer weight of the mighty British Empire, with the rest of the world helping her. How long will it take us to develop such resources as will crush the enemy through their sheer weight? Our system of government is such that even when the government decides to go all out in a war, our resources will still not match those of our enemy. The answer, therefore, is that we develop ingenuity of thought to make the best of our present resources, rather than stick to orthodox ideas and wait for the resources to develop. We must realise that our war with China is not only ideological, but that it is a struggle for existence. Fight we must, and that too to the bitter end, even if it means fighting as guerrillas if we are not able to match the resources of our enemy.

Lessons Learnt

Logistics: Most of the lessons learnt during the Chinese invasion pertain to the application of present teaching. There are also some that are in a way new to us. One of the latter pertains to our concept of logistics. We have gradually drifted towards a stage of reasoning where logistics reign supreme and dictate tactical aims. This drift is definitely harmful, and more so when in our appreciations we credit the enemy with a similar type of reasoning. It is not intended to attempt to dislodge logistics from its place of importance in planning, but we must explore our logistical resources to their extreme limits of possibility before discarding a tactical aim on their account. It may seem that that is what our present concept is. There are, however, numerous examples to show that we have drifted far from the real concept. How many times have our own troops made the impossible possible when forced by circumstances? Logistics can best be kept in their rightful place by the motto 'where there is a will there is a way'.

Out-flanking: Our sensitivity to out-flanking moves of the enemy needs to be removed. We must realise that when the enemy gets to our rear we are in his rear, and this status cannot last for ever. Being an intruder he should be more worried about being cut off. Moreover withdrawal is an extremely difficult operation, which nine out of ten times throws the withdrawing forces off balance. It may, therefore, be more profitable to stand and fight than withdraw in a hurry.

The Spartan life: In mountainous and jungle country, where administrative problems are multiplied, we need to adopt the Spartan life to help reduce these problems. This is particularly applicable to those whose privilege it is to be able to live slightly more comfortably than others. Wrong interpretation of the maxim 'why not be comfortable when you can be comfortable' seems to be coming in the way of our adoption of the Spartan life. We must understand that comfort is a relative term. Our every condition can be classified as both comfortable and uncomfortable, depending on what standards of comfort we lay down for ourselves. So why not reduce our standards to the bare necessities and be always comfortable, with the added advantage of increased mobility.

POLITICAL AWAKENING

The protection of our troops against sabotage aimed at under-mining their morale needs our paramount attention. Our simple "Bhoop Singh" is extremely vulnerable to enemy propaganda especially when he is taken prisoner. He has, therefore, to be politically awakened. He must fully understand the communist methods of sabotage and indoctrination so that he can

put mental resistance when faced with cunning propaganda. Special teams of experts could be organised to visit units to educate the troops in this regard. These teams could explain the cause for which we are fighting and why it is a question of “do or die”. Radio too can be made good use of, but not by merely broadcasting “*Barhe Chalo Bahaduro*” records. Something more convincing and inspiring is required.

SENSE OF DUTY

Where it can never be said that we have anywhere shown lack of sense of duty, it has to be admitted that our approach to duty in many cases has been faulty. We have narrowed our aim of duty to successful inspections and good Annual Confidential Reports. The high ideal of duty for the sake of duty is often forgotten. Our sense of duty should drive us towards the aim of preparedness for war. If while sticking to this ideal one can still manage successful inspections and good Annual Confidential Reports there is nothing like it; but to deviate from the sacred path of duty towards the nation for selfish ends is a sin. Such acts could possibly be justified when war appeared only a remote possibility, but now if we still remain more worried about training programmes than actual training, we are guilty. We have to face facts and not deceive ourselves through paper achievements. When we know that certain standards cannot be achieved physically, what consolation does it give us to achieve them on paper? Hypocrisy must go if we are ever to avenge our defeat. We have definitely got into a vicious circle where each rank blames the next higher rank for continued hypocrisy. If military discipline, or ambition, prevents us from laying bare the hypocrisy of a senior, nothing prevents us from being sincere to our subordinates at least in as much as it does not interfere with the wishes of the senior. This little bit on every body’s part, and we shall break through the vicious circle. It would be wrong to doubt success through individual effort in this direction, as individuals comprise the Army.

Let us also not feel that by fighting we are doing a favour to any one. We have been brought up in the Army for this day. We have, however, every right to demand from the country the care of our families and home affairs. Letters from home narrating harassment of families by miscreants, and the police taking their own time, can have a devastating effect on the psychology of the fighting man. It is suggested that during the emergency, when leave is stopped, special committees of civilians be formed who should take up soldiers’ cases and see them through on the soldiers’ behalves. This will ensure that when the soldier does his duty he does it well.

MOBILITY

On the tactical side our main concern should be the increase in mobility of our Queen of the Battle – the Infantry. Apart from expecting a higher standard of physical performance, this beast of burden needs to be made lighter. At present, administration is weighing most heavily on an Infantry Battalion. Suggestions are made in succeeding paragraphs, which will, it is felt, multiply its efficiency in battle.

Battle Organisation

Over and above the War Establishment already in existence, there should be a battle organisation which an infantry battalion should adopt as soon as there is a likelihood of its going into action. This organisation should cater for the establishment of a “Rear” for the battalion. This Rear should be as far behind the front line as the wireless communications permit, and the normal moves of the battalion in one particular theatre should not necessitate move of the Rear. It should be commanded by the second-in-command of the battalion, who should be made responsible for all paper work including documentation, reports, returns, indenting and

accounting. He should have as his assistants, the Quartermaster and one more officer. He should remain in touch with the commanding officer through wireless, and make frequent visits to the forward area to get his decisions on important policy matters. All offices except 'G' office should be located at the Rear. The Mess, Dhobi, sweeper and barber facilities should also be located there and brought forward only when the battalion is resting between operations. The infantry battalion will thus be freed of its heavy administrative tail, which at present makes its movement sluggish.

There may appear a number of flaws in the above organisation in view of how administration of an infantry battalion is run today, but once we decide to do it this way remedies for such flaws will not be difficult to find.

Hard scale rations

It is a pity that there is so satisfactory hard scale ration in existence in the Army today. The ones given in the précis are not available in sufficient quantities and hence can be treated as non-existent. A suitable item for hard scale rations can go a long way towards increasing the mobility of Infantry fighting in the mountains and the jungles. If what we have thought of is costly, why not think of something which we can afford? *Chana* and *gur*, for instance, are both nourishing and cheap. They were used with success in World War II, why not adopt them again? We also need to change our eating habits slightly. Getting used to tea with salt and without milk for instance, will greatly reduce the weight of rations on a soldier's back.

COMMANDO BATTALION

However light we make our battalions they will never be light enough. For better exploitation of the superior qualities of endurance and determination of our soldier it is suggested that we have a regular commando regiment consisting of a number of commando battalions. They should be composed of selected volunteers from all over the Army. They should have no monetary benefits – to dissuade money makers from entering the commandos. Only people with love for adventure should be able to get in. At their training centre they should be given intensive training for mastery of weapons, physical efficiency and guerrilla tactics. They should also be capable of performing the following tasks: -

- (a) Throw the appreciation out of gear by achieving what he would not expect a normal battalion to achieve.
- (b) Counteract the enemy's outflanking moves.
- (c) Make the enemy more cautious.

RESERVES

It is very rightly said that mountains eat up troops. In the mountains, which provide plenty of cover from view and fire, approaches open to the enemy are numerous. The Chinese, with their light administrative tail, have a particular knack of converting impossible approaches (impossible according to our standards) into possible ones. With our limited number of troops it is not possible to block all approaches by physically positioning troops on them. We will have to therefore, keep reserves at all levels down to company to dominate approaches not physically held. These reserves will have to be found even if it be at the cost of adding another un-held approach to the number of already un-held ones. These reserves will enable us to dominate all approaches and in order to be effective they will have to be as strong if not stronger than the troops committed on the ground. In general the reserves will perform the following tasks: -

- (a) To force the enemy to fight on the ground of our own choosing.
- (b) Make by-passing unsafe for the enemy by attacks on his supply lines.

- (c) Interfere effectively with the enemy build up for attack.
- (d) Reinforcement and local counter attacks.

CONCLUSION

The recent shake-up has indeed been a blessing in disguise. It has shown us our strong points as well as our weak ones, and we know exactly where we stand. The time we have got to recover is great boon and we must make the best of it. Having been brought up all these years in an atmosphere of peace and non-violence a trend was setting in where the aim of preparedness for war was being lost sight of. Now, with the danger of war lurking around the corner, a change in out-look both in our tactical concept and our sense of duty is very necessary. The increase in mobility of the infantry should be our primary concern. The necessity for holding uncommitted reserves at lower levels poses a problem for which an answer has to be found. Of course a lot more thinking is required to decide how best, with our resources, we can face the Chinese challenge to our supremacy as soldiers. We must realise that for us there is no alternative but to **ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OR PERISH.**