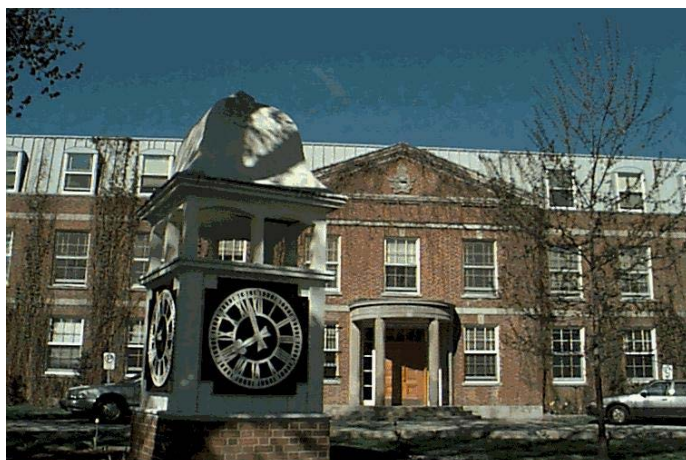


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CHINESE LIGHT FORCES' SUCCESS IN KOREA:

A USEFUL FORCE FOR CANADA'S FUTURE

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JCSP 40

Exercise Solo Flight

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CANADA'S FUTURE**

By Major S.M. French
Par le major S.M. French

12 May 2014

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CHINESE LIGHT FORCES' SUCCESS IN KOREA: A USEFUL FORCE FOR CANADA'S FUTURE

Know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat.

- Sun Tzu

INTRODUCTION

The above wisdom is one that Mao Zedong, the leader of Communist China during the Korean War, subscribed to understanding that war was no utopia and a general would not always be victorious. Through China's early successes in the Korean War, it is clear that Mao understood the importance of knowing yourself and your enemy.¹ His opponent, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, would have done well to heed the same dictum.

In October 1950, when General MacArthur met with the President of the United States, Harry Truman, his assessment of the Korean conflict was that "Chinese intervention was not a plausible or potent threat in the war."² Days later, on October 25th, the Chinese proved General MacArthur unequivocally wrong. The surprise of the initial blow to the United States (US) lead forces was complete. Chinese forces materialized in such numbers that complete formations were cut off and forced to fight their way clear along routes dominated by the Chinese light forces.³ This was to be the beginning of the longest retreat in US history which saw a technologically superior mechanized force out

¹Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, (Modern War Studies. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 20-21.

²S.L.A.Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet; Defeat of the Eighth Army by the Chinese Communist Forces, November, 1950, in the Battle of the Chongchon River, Korea*, (New York: Morrow, 1953), 8.

³United States, "The Korean War: The Chinese Intervention," last accessed 20 March 2014, <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/kw-chinter/chinter.htm>, 3.

fought by a light force composed of *uneducated peasants*.⁴ This offensive would ultimately cost General MacArthur his job and the United Nations (UN) forces the bulk of the Korean peninsula which they had just retaken from the North Koreans.

How was a peasant army able to defeat a modern army that had just five years earlier defeated both Germany and Japan? This paper will review the Chinese use of light forces in Korea during the counter-offensive in late 1950 and early 1951. It will also explore the reasons for their success and the advantages the Chinese had in fighting the UN forces. These lessons will then be assessed to evaluate what can be learned in the modern context for the employment of light forces. Finally, this paper will prove that there is value and a role for light forces in the Canadian Army.

BACKGROUND

On June 25th 1950, North Korean troops crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea in a bid to unify the country under communist rule.⁵ Faced with the threat of the spread of communism around the world, a US led UN sanctioned force intervened.⁶ Due to the speed of North Korea's advance, by August 4th, before most of the UN forces could arrive, the South Korean forces had been pushed into a small area around Pusan in the Southeast. With the arrival of additional international forces, the tide of the conflict turned, and on September 15th, US forces landed near Seoul to threaten the rear of the North Korean Army.⁷ Four days later, with UN forces breaking out at Pusan, the North Koreans started a general withdrawal from South Korea. With an unmistakable opportunity to reunify the

⁴Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 1.

⁵Kevin Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies: The North Korean and Chinese Soldier in the Korean War*, (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 2001), x-xi.

⁶Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow, November 1950-July 1951*, (United States Army in the Korean War. Vol. 20-4. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1990), 10.

⁷Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, x-xi.

Koreas and defeat the communists, General MacArthur received authorization from President Truman to cross into North Korea.⁸

To Korea's North, communist lead China was familiar with US policy as just the year before they had pushed the US supported Nationalist Chinese forces from mainland China in what effectively ended China's civil war.⁹ After a hard fought victory, Mao was unwilling to give the US a stronger foothold on the mainland as he saw the fall of North Korea as a precursor to greater US imperialist ambitions in the Far East.¹⁰ China sent a clear diplomatic signal of their unwillingness to let North Korea fall, stating that if any UN forces cross the 38th Parallel, China would enter the war.¹¹ General MacArthur, who commanded the UN force, did not believe this to be a risk and was supported by both his intelligence staff and US diplomats in this assessment.¹² On October 9th, UN forces crossed into North Korea and,¹³ unknown to the UN, on about October 13th, China's vanguard crossed the Yalu River into North Korea in response.¹⁴

The UN forces made quick progress as they rushed towards the Yalu River. By October 9th, the lead elements of X Corps had reached the Yalu on the East side of the peninsula, and in the West, the Eighth Army was in the process of crossing the Ch'ongch'on River, approximately 50 miles from the Chinese border.¹⁵ Largely unimpeded to this point, the situation was about to change.¹⁶

⁸United States, "The Korean War: The Chinese Intervention," 4-6.

⁹Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 26.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹¹Roy Edgar Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur*, (Texas A & M University Military History Series. Vol. 11. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1989), 7.

¹²United States, "The Korean War: The Chinese Intervention," 6.

¹³Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 45-47.

¹⁶Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 1.

CHINESE SUCCESSES

The primary reason the Chinese were successful in fighting the UN forces was, as Sun Tzu suggests, they understood their strengths, and the UN did not. The two strengths that the Chinese had as it relates to light forces were their employment of key fundamentals and the Chinese soldier. While the Chinese had other strengths, for the purposes of this paper, only those relating to their successes based on light forces will be examined.

Chinese Fundamentals

The Chinese knew that they needed to rely on their most important asset, their soldiers. They were also aware that the terrain in which they were going to meet the UN forces was ideally suited for the use of soldiers in tactics that would be able to help neutralize some of the UN's technological advantage. Mao believed man was more important than weapon in winning a war.¹⁷ The Chinese were no strangers in fighting with a technological disadvantage, as they had been forced to do against the Chinese Nationalist Army during the Chinese Civil War. This theory would again be tested, but this time against an even greater advantage held by the UN force. The Chinese were no match in terms of armour, artillery, and aircraft.¹⁸

Fundamental: Stealth and Surprise

Chinese tactics were heavily reliant on the use of stealth to achieve surprise. It was surprise that ultimately dislocated the UN force and sent them into withdrawal. Prior

¹⁷Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 56.

¹⁸Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 46-47.

to the Chinese attack, they had no understanding of China's commitment to defend North Korea and were unprepared for the Chinese.¹⁹ This stealth was achieved through practiced movement and the discipline of the Chinese light forces.

While the US had developed an advanced intelligence system in World War II, by the time they deployed to Korea it had been dismantled.²⁰ Even with indications that the Chinese had entered North Korea, they were only aware of a fraction of their numbers. On October 25th, the Chinese made their presence known with a limited attack on the Eighth Army as it sat astride the Ch'ongch'on River. This unexpected attack lasted 12 days²¹ during which time the Chinese routed South Korea's II Corps and severely reduced the strength of the US 1st Cavalry Division.²² The bulk of the Chinese Army then withdrew to the mountains in the interior of the peninsula between the two UN forces. The Chinese plan had been to destroy a South Korean division²³ which they had done.

Even after this attack, the Chinese still retained the element of surprise, as US intelligence continued to estimate only 34,500 Chinese troops in Korea, when in reality the number was closer to 300,000.²⁴ The Chinese ability to move that volume of forces into close proximity of UN forces undetected was key to their success. The Chinese accomplished this through strict discipline, by moving at night and staying under cover during the day,²⁵ effectively avoiding observation by UN aircraft.²⁶

¹⁹Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 8-14.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 5-6.

²¹Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 53.

²²Hoyt, 97-105

²³Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 47.

²⁴United States, "The Korean War: The Chinese Intervention," 7.

²⁵Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 13-16.

²⁶Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 55.

General MacArthur continued to ignore warnings and, supported by President Truman, ordered the advance resumed on November 24th.²⁷ On the night of the 25th, the Chinese attacked the Eighth Army again²⁸ as they moved away from the Ch'ongch'on River and then X Corps on the 27th at Chosin Reservoir.²⁹ This time the Chinese revealed their amassed force with the aim of destroying a US division.³⁰ While the Chinese were unable to achieve this, their offensive left the UN forces reeling and set in motion a withdrawal that would only end well South of the 38th Parallel.³¹

Throughout the withdrawal, the Chinese continued to use stealth that was afforded to them by their light force. It is clear that the level of success was possible because of the surprise achieved through stealth, but Chinese tactics were also enabled by their mobility and use of terrain.

Fundamental: Mobility and Use of Terrain

While the light nature of the Chinese forces allowed them to achieve surprise for this stunning offensive blow, it was their mobility through the mountainous terrain that dominated North Korea³² which enabled it. They exploited an axis of advance that was unavailable to the UN's mechanized forces and helped to limit the UN's technological advantage. The Korean War was the disappearance of the *flankless* front.³³

²⁷Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *The Day the Chinese Attacked: Korea, 1950 : The Story of the Failure of America's China Policy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Pub. Co., 1990), 121-123.

²⁸Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 69-83.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 92.

³⁰Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 13-16.

³¹United States, "The Korean War: The Chinese Intervention", 29-31.

³²Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953*, (New York: Times Books, 1987), 328.

³³S.L.A. Marshall, *Infantry Operations & Weapons Usage in Korea: Commentary on infantry operations and weapons usage in Korea*, (London: Greenhill Books in association with Institute for Research on Small Arms in International Security, 1988), xiii.

The Chinese preferred tactic was one of double envelopment which they had used successfully in the past to encircle the enemy and cut them off from supporting units. This tactic was ideal for a light force that could move 20 km a night³⁴ through the mountains against a motorized force that was fixed to the limited road infrastructure. By using ridges,³⁵ the Chinese could exploit gaps in numbers and at speed that the UN forces had not anticipated.³⁶ It was the Chinese ability to exploit these gaps that led to the isolation of UN units. This tactic was employed from section to divisional level and ultimately was used against the Eighth Army as a whole at the Ch'ongch'on River, which is what forced them to retreat.³⁷

The mountainous terrain also aided in neutralizing the UN's technological advantage as they relied heavily on armour support for various tasks to include reinforcing, counter attack, and resupply.³⁸ While the Chinese were ineffective against heavy armoured units due to lack of anti-armour weapons, tanks were equally ineffective in supporting the infantry when dislodging the Chinese from their preferred high ground.³⁹ The mountainous terrain also made it difficult to effectively employ artillery. The height of the mountains meant that well sighted positions and routes could not be effected as the artillery could either not properly deploy or the terrain would limit what the low trajectory firing artillery could target.⁴⁰

The light forces domination of the mountainous terrain was vital in the Chinese ability to out manoeuvre the UN and limit their use of armour and artillery. It was this

³⁴Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 43.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 66.

³⁶Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 67-68.

³⁷Ansil L. Walker, "Eighth Army Ordeal in Korea," *Military History* 15, no. 5 (Dec 1998), 36-38.

³⁸Marshall, *Infantry Operations & Weapons Usage in Korea*, xv.

³⁹Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 67.

⁴⁰Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 42.

freedom of movement that allowed the Chinese to use one of Mao's advocated tactics of destroying the enemy while they are on the move.⁴¹

Underestimating the Chinese

The US clearly underestimated the resolve of the Chinese in response to crossing the 38th Parallel, but did they give the Chinese an advantage that does not relate to their use of light forces? The US did not take the Chinese threat seriously for various reasons.

First, at the national level, the US had dismissed both military and foreign service personnel that had worked with Communist Chinese during World War II for being procommunist. They had predicted that the Chinese Nationalists would lose the civil war because they had lost the support of the people.⁴² Second, at the operational level, even after the initial attack that stalled the UN advance, General MacArthur continued to underestimate the capability of the Chinese.⁴³ This could have been due to his success against the North Koreans, and assuming that he would continue to face an inferior force, not one with extensive experience.⁴⁴ Third, prior to fighting the Chinese, all but twelve soldiers in one US company no longer had helmets and only two continued to carry bayonets. They also carried a grenade load of less than one per man and little in the way of other supplies and equipment.⁴⁵

While these examples explain UN ignorance in understanding the Chinese, the fact remains that by late November, when it became clear that the Chinese had committed to the war, they continued to succeed against UN forces by out manoeuvring them by

⁴¹Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 255.

⁴²Hoyt, *The Day the Chinese Attacked*, 97-98.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁵Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 19.

virtue of being a light force. To imply otherwise would take away from the achievements of the UN soldiers that fought, and this was simply not the case. In many instances the success of a defensive position was held by the determination and skill of UN soldiers who were forced to withdraw not because of failure, but because their positions were being isolated by Chinese manoeuvre at the higher level.⁴⁶

While the UN leadership and soldiers undoubtedly underestimated the Chinese, it was Chinese light forces that allowed for the fundamentals to be employed successfully. Their use of stealth, mobility, and terrain were all possible due to the Chinese soldier.

The Chinese Soldier

While employment of the above fundamentals were important, the Chinese knew that without soldiers that could accomplish these tasks, they would be unsuccessful. When making the decision to enter North Korea, Mao knew that he was doing so on the merits of his soldiers, their experience, training, mental resolve and morale.⁴⁷ It was important to have both physically and mentally robust soldiers.

Soldier: Experience and Specialized Training

At this time China had been fighting for more than 20 years between World War II and the Chinese Civil War. The first divisions that arrived in Korea were some of the highest trained and most experienced.⁴⁸ They were poorly equipped veterans who were highly motivated and battle proven with experienced leadership.⁴⁹ While the Chinese

⁴⁶Marshall, *Infantry Operations & Weapons Usage in Korea*, xvi.

⁴⁷Mossman, *Ebb and Flow*, 56.

⁴⁸Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 28-32.

⁴⁹United States, "The Korean War: The Chinese Intervention," 6-7.

leadership understood that there was a need to modernize their force,⁵⁰ they also believed that man was more important than the weapon and intended to prepare them for the best possible outcome.⁵¹

One of the soldiers' strengths that the Chinese sought to exploit was the UN forces lack of experience in night fighting, close combat, and the use of bayonets.⁵² They determined these tactics were also a way to further neutralize the UN's use of supporting fires.⁵³ The success of this tactic is borne out by, unlike the two world wars, most of the Chinese casualties were caused by infantry weapons. The Chinese tactics limited the artillery, armour and air advantage, leaving the infantry to defend themselves.⁵⁴

The Chinese also provided specialized training. This included anti-aircraft and anti-tank tactics as these were both new to the Chinese.⁵⁵ They were given training specific for operations in North Korea focusing on small unit tactics and mountain warfare.⁵⁶ Units underwent combat training that included attack formations, use of covering fire, and individual movement. They also trained in field problems and intensive combat training.⁵⁷

The Chinese also used mission command by necessity as they had very limited communications. The Chinese therefore briefed down to a level that was not matched in the UN forces.⁵⁸ While this decreased the responsiveness of reaction to the chain of command, it allowed lower level commanders to react to the ground tactical situation,

⁵⁰Hoyt, *The Day the Chinese Attacked*, 92.

⁵¹Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 46.

⁵²Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 76-77.

⁵³Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 63-74.

⁵⁴Marshall, *Infantry Operations & Weapons Usage in Korea*, 6-7.

⁵⁵Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 27.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 62.

giving them increased freedom of action.⁵⁹ The Chinese also empowered their soldiers by indoctrinating them with strong beliefs.

Soldier: Mindset

Besides experience from a protracted war, the Chinese Communists had the population's support from having defeated the Nationalist Army.⁶⁰ Mao was a believer in empowering both the population and the military by telling them not only the political reasons for fighting, but also how it affected them.⁶¹ With US history in supporting the Nationalists, it was easy for US engagement in Korea to be sold to the Chinese population as an imperialist threat to China.⁶² Mao believed that soldiers who understood what was at stake would "be brave, capable of enduring hardship, and primed to sacrifice their lives."⁶³

The communist approach was one that reinforced building team commitment to the cause. Discipline would take the form of public shaming that, in the Chinese culture, proved very effective. This team building approach was key in unit cohesion required for combat. The patriotism and Chinese tradition of family were vital in the recruiting and performance of Chinese soldiers.⁶⁴

The Chinese soldier had both the confidence and reason to fight the US imperialist, and were experienced in the basics that would neutralize some of the UN's technological advantage. However, there is a prevailing myth that the skill of the Chinese soldier was inconsequential as they won by sheer manpower.

⁵⁹Hoyt, *The Day the Chinese Attacked*, 96.

⁶⁰Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 26-27.

⁶¹Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 13.

⁶²Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 30.

⁶³Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 18.

⁶⁴Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 30-38.

The Chinese *Horde*

It has been claimed that the Chinese succeeded in pushing back the UN forces by overwhelming them with numbers as the Russians did in World War II.⁶⁵ In truth, the overwhelming human wave was very rarely used by the Chinese in Korea.⁶⁶ They had vast experience and routinely used tactics that would see them approach in multiple thin, well spaced lines that waited to close with the enemy position before firing. This was done to limit the effect of UN indirect fire support.⁶⁷

In terms of raw numbers, in late 1950, the UN had approximately 20 divisions in Korea with a total ground combat strength of 425,000 soldiers. Conversely, at the time of the offensive, the North Korean Forces were composed of 5 weak divisions,⁶⁸ and the Chinese force was approximately 300,000 strong with 30 divisions.⁶⁹ The numbers were not as lopsided as some believe even though the Chinese did have better concentration of force and a larger percentage of their forces were front line. While Chinese casualties were high, they reported casualties that were much lower than those estimated by the Americans.⁷⁰ The myth of the Chinese horde has been overstated. The skill of the Chinese soldier is what forced the UN to withdraw, not their numbers.

RELEVANCE IN A MODERN CONTEXT

As is evident from the Chinese success, even poorly equipped light infantry can be effective when employed with the right fundamentals and soldiers using

⁶⁵Hoyt, *The Day the Chinese Attacked*, 92.

⁶⁶Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 73.

⁶⁷Marshall, *Infantry Operations & Weapons Usage in Korea*, 5-6.

⁶⁸United States, "The Korean War: The Chinese Intervention," 6-9.

⁶⁹Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 349.

⁷⁰Mahoney, *Formidable Enemies*, 40.

complimentary tactics and terrain. While the success against the UN was due to knowledge of themselves and their enemy, much can be learned from China's employment of light forces for the modern context.

Light Fundamentals

The Chinese employed the fundamentals of stealth, mobility, and use of terrain to great effect in the opening days of their engagement in the Korean War. Much like the Chinese, modern light forces are well suited to achieve surprise in terms of strength, positioning, and concentration of force. They can be used to find and exploit gaps through infiltration rather than needing to create gaps, as was the tendency of the UN forces as they were fixed to roads. Later in the conflict, the UN learned the importance of both patrolling and outposts in early warning and in denying the Chinese freedom of action.⁷¹

Where the Chinese were able to achieve surprise through stealth, current light forces can also achieve surprise through strategic mobility. By being at a time and place that they are not expected, through the use of airlift, a light force can provide strategic reach. A force that is well rehearsed in logistics and understanding of this type of operation can provide a rapid response option for a government. An adversary must therefore maintain a level of wariness that they would not otherwise require.⁷²

The dispersed nature of light infantry, as it looks for gaps, is also important to consider in the modern context as it has the advantage of avoiding concentration of force until the time of their choosing. This makes the destruction of the force difficult. Given

⁷¹Marshall, *Infantry Operations & Weapons Usage in Korea*, 6.

⁷²William S. Lind, "Light Infantry Tactics," *Marine Corps Gazette* 74, no. 6 (Jun 1990): 42.

the increasing capability of weapons to penetrate and destroy, dispersion also means that there is less likelihood of a catastrophic event if light forces are in smaller vehicles or on foot.

As demonstrated, the Chinese focused on conducting operations in terrain where the UN's mechanized forces could not effectively employ their superior firepower and protection. When the Chinese did decide to hold strong points that dominated the UN withdrawal routes, properly sited positions highlighted the light forces strengths and limited the ability of the UN to use their advantage. Modern light forces have the advantage of conducting operations in terrain where other forces cannot, but they require soldiers that are experienced and skilled.

Light Soldiers

Much like Mao believed, modern light forces focus on the value of an individual soldier's skills, experience, and mental robustness rather than the equipment he uses or the vehicle he crews.⁷³ A light soldier must have a different level of physical robustness and mental edge than that of traditional line infantry.

The Chinese soldier's physical edge allowed him to move for prolonged periods covering great distances with significantly less support than the UN forces. Their lack of technology made them reliant on tactics such as bayonets and night fighting to defeat their enemy. Modern light forces must therefore have the ability to conduct similar feats of physical exertion and need to foster a culture of fitness. Knowing that he would lose if he chose to have his light forces confront the UN directly, Mao focused on increasing

⁷³William F. Owen, "Patrol-Based Infantry Doctrine," *Infantry* 95, no. 1 (2006): 33.

field craft.⁷⁴ The Chinese conducted anti-armour, anti-aircraft, and mountain operation training prior to moving into Korea. This allowed them to not only have the skills to dominate the terrain, but also the confidence in their employment.⁷⁵ Modern light forces need to not only be experts in their skills, but must have confidence in them.

While physical robustness is important, the mental edge required is more so. The Chinese soldier's key advantage was their confidence in their cause; they were protecting their way of life and families from a foreign invasion.⁷⁶ In terms of modern lessons, while communist political indoctrination cannot be replicated in a modern democracy, the need for understanding the purpose of a mission remains valuable. There is a level of confidence in knowing what and why something is being done and believing in it. Also in terms of thought, a light soldier must not only look for gaps but, as the Chinese did, have the mentality that focuses on patrolling, ambushing, and raiding rather than seeking direct confrontation.⁷⁷ He must not only have confidence in his skills, but must know that he, and the soldier next to him, are superior to the enemy they are fighting.

The Chinese soldier also needed to be self reliant because of the lack of communication equipment. The modern light soldier, due to the dispersed nature of their operations, must also be self reliant and able to operate under a broad commander's intent.⁷⁸ Self reliance to achieve the commander's end state and find ways around problems need to be reinforced through training and experience, as it was with the Chinese.

⁷⁴Bevin Alexander, *The Future of Warfare*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 130.

⁷⁵Joe Labarbera and Rob Newson, "Bring Back the Light Infantry!" *Infantry* 98, no. 3 (Jul 2009): 10.

⁷⁶Robert Egnell, "US and British Performance in Expeditionary Operations: The civil-military dimension," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 6 (2006): 1045.

⁷⁷J.D. Winfrey, "Classic Light Infantry in Afghanistan," *Marine Corps Gazette* 93, no. 12 (Dec 2009): 11.

⁷⁸Gregory A. Thiele, "True Light Infantry," *Marine Corps Gazette* 97, no. 7 (Jul 2013): 22.

By examining Chinese fundamentals and soldiers, there are lessons of value that can be learned for the employment of modern light forces. Given the advantages, the light soldier has a future, but does he have a place in the Canadian Army? History has shown that even though both line and light infantry have been successful in the past, line infantry is more often retained than light.⁷⁹

CANADA AND LIGHT FORCES

Through the examination of China's success in their initial offensive against the UN forces in 1950, a number of advantages have been identified that centre around either fundamentals or soldiers' attributes needed for success in modern light forces. Light forces are a valuable tool. To determine if they have a role in the Canadian Army, potential tasks will be examined as well as the current force structure of the Canadian Armed Forces.

There are a number of Canadian Army tasks that light forces can fulfill, such as Line of Operation 4 for international surge operations,⁸⁰ Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), or Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART).⁸¹ The Canadian Army currently fills these roles either in a large rotational basis or *ad hoc* manner giving them little emphasis. A smaller dedicated force would allow for greater expertise in this area and less of a requirement for relearning skills. Light forces are also suited for operations in much of Canada's terrain to include the arctic, a stated priority of the

⁷⁹Lind, "Light Infantry Tactics," 44.

⁸⁰Paul Mooney, "Army Prepares for Post-Afghanistan." *The Canadian Army Journal* 10, no. 4 (2010): 67.

⁸¹Paul Lockhart, "Light forces for Rapid Deployment and Theatre Entry," *The Canadian Army Journal* 14, no. 3, (2012).

Government of Canada.⁸² In the past, light forces in Canada have been used as a solution for these tasks.⁸³

Canada's current infantry forces are mechanized or line infantry. While Canada has three Light Infantry Battalions, despite attempts otherwise, they remain "mechanized battalions-in-waiting" rather than true light infantry.⁸⁴ Canada's focus is on a general purpose combat capability, and since their inception in 1995, on several occasions the light battalions have been retrained as mechanized battalions for operational tours.

From a historical perspective, mechanized forces are similar to line units in their focus on using manoeuvre to strike, while light units use manoeuvre to dislocate.⁸⁵ The nature of mechanized forces is one of tactical mobility and firepower with mass movement of large forces that can quickly move across an open battlefield. Mechanized soldiers must be well rehearsed in drills and skills that differ from light soldiers. The complex nature of the tasks that they are expected to fulfill require more centralized control. Inherently, by nature of task and training, a mechanized soldier thinks differently than a light soldier.⁸⁶ While there are situations where these skills are vital, they were not what was required for success in North Korea. The UN line infantry and mechanized forces did not have the confidence, skills or sustainment capability⁸⁷ to contest Chinese control of the mountains.

⁸²Department of National Defence, "Canada First Defence Strategy," 10.

⁸³Bernd Horne, *Bastard Sons: An Examination of Canada's Airborne Experience 1042-1995*, (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2003), 71-74.

⁸⁴D.V. Pittfield, "Is there a Future for the Canadian Light Infantry?" *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 10.

⁸⁵Lind, "Light Infantry Tactics," 42-43.

⁸⁶Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Marine Corps, "FMFM-2: Light Infantry," last accessed 10 May 2014, http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/files/4gwmanuals/light_infantry_for_4gw.pdf, 19.

⁸⁷Brian A. Hamm, "Ammunition management/resupply: For the Light Infantry Mortar," *Infantry* 91, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 17.

With a trend toward globalization and the rise of non-nation state actors, an asymmetric enemy is becoming more likely.⁸⁸ Much like the Chinese did to the UN, the enemy will not fight on our terms. War in the future is expected to be low intensity conflicts against unconventional forces rather than a nation state.⁸⁹ With recent experience in Afghanistan, the hard learned lessons must not be forgotten. Canada needs to maintain regular war fighting skills as the risk of a high intensity conflict is low, but the consequence of failure is extreme. Conversely, the threat to a nation by irregular warfare, which the US determined was their top priority in 2008,⁹⁰ is low, but the likelihood of occurrence is high. Ultimately we are best served by being prepared for both eventualities.⁹¹ Conventional heavy units are not well suited for the irregular environment with their protection first approach and limited mobility in complex terrain.⁹² Not being platform based, light forces have a mindset that is more conducive to these operations.⁹³

Light forces would not only compliment mechanized forces with their different skill set,⁹⁴ but would also compliment Canada's Special Operations and Special Forces. While there is undoubtedly an overlap in skills, light forces could be used to support their tasks when required and relieve some of the pressure on this small and highly sought-

⁸⁸Peter Gizewski, *Army 2040, The Global Security Environment: Emerging Trends and Potential Challenges*, Prepared for Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Carlton University, (27 May 2009): 11-13.

⁸⁹Robert Wilkie, "Hybrid Warfare: Something Old, Not Something New," *Air & Space Power Journal*, (Winter 2009).

⁹⁰Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2008), 13.

⁹¹Michael R. Melillo, "Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities," The US Army Professional Writing Collection, (Autumn 2006).

⁹²J.D. Winfrey, "Classic Light Infantry in Afghanistan," *Marine Corps Gazette* 93, no. 12 (Dec 2009): 8.

⁹³Julian D. Alford and Scott A. Cuomo, "Operational Design for ISAF in Afghanistan: A Primer," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2009): 93-94.

⁹⁴Scott Kelley, "Light-Heavy: A Lethal Combination," *Soldiers* 54, no. 2 (1999): 47-48.

after force.⁹⁵ While light forces have limitations, such as protection and firepower, equipment is becoming lighter, and the individual soldier's killing power has increased in terms of range and destructive capability.⁹⁶ If the Chinese had had effective anti-armour weapons, the results would have been even more devastating for the UN.

The discussion of force generation with respect to Canada's infantry battalions is beyond the scope of this paper, however having nine homogenous battalions undoubtedly simplifies this process. That being said, the Chinese success in the Korean War demonstrates that there is a role for light forces. If built properly, they can provide skills and a way of thinking that is different from Canada's current mechanized force. While there is a potential to retrain units when required, the difference in skills between mechanized and light are significant and their large number make it impossible to know and practice them all.⁹⁷ In a profession where you must be a master of your trade, having both mechanized and light forces provides additional options and expertise. If we are willing to move toward a true light force, the Canadian Army should re-examine and formalize the skill set, procure equipment and vehicles specifically to highlight their strengths and leverage their potential.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proven that the Chinese light forces were successful because of their use of stealth, surprise, mobility through complex terrain, superior use of training, experience, and the mindset of the Chinese soldier. Even though the UN underestimated the Chinese resolve and expertise, making their initial success possible, after the effects

⁹⁵Lockhart, "Light forces for Rapid Deployment and Theatre Entry."

⁹⁶Ezio Bonsignore, "Infantry Anti-Tank Weapons: At the Turning Point?" *Military Technology* 26, no. 6 (Jun 2002), 156-158.

⁹⁷Pittfield, "Is there a Future for the Canadian Light Infantry?" 11.

wore off, they proved to be a worthy enemy that relied on the strength of their soldiers rather than the human wave doctrine that some would believe.

There are many advantages to be learned from the Chinese that are applicable in the modern context. Light forces can be moved around the world or through complex terrain. They focus on soldiers and not equipment. They have fundamentals, skills, tactics, and a mindset that are different than those of a mechanized force. Canada also has tasks that are well suited for light forces and the addition of a true light force would do much to help diversify Canada's Army and provide a useful option between mechanized and special forces.

General MacArthur's mistake in 1950 was in underestimating his enemy and not understanding the value and expertise of a light soldier when employed with the right tactics and in the right terrain. To know light infantry is to understand what it is capable of and suited to achieve, and what it is not. Mao was successful because he knew the value of light forces and understood how to employ them to their maximum advantage. Sun Tzu would have been proud.

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