

Guerilla Warfare

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In the latter part of October 1941, just after the Germans occupied Moshaisk about sixty miles west of Moscow, a Russian peasant, Mikhail Balin, his wife, Irene, and their sons, Peter and Anatoly, held friendly family council and decided to become guerrillas. According to press reports in a few weeks the four had killed five German officers and seventy-four soldiers, destroyed an enemy tank, twenty-one trucks and eleven ammunition carts and captured 1,200 grenades. This is merely one of numerous activities indicative of the importance of guerrilla warfare at the present time. Because of the relative significance of guerrilla activities, their consideration in connection with other studies of military functions seems important.

The Spanish word “guerrilla” translated literally means “little war.” Guerrilla warfare is sometimes called “partisan warfare” or “irregular warfare.” In general, the words “guerrilla warfare” are used to designate any military activity carried on by a comparatively small independent force or unit and irregularly conducted, with or without military organization, in connection with a regular war.

Guerrilla warfare was a part of major and minor wars conducted in ancient times and is reported in connection with most historical accounts of the wars of the past and the present.

In ancient Palestine, for example, a Midianite army was successfully operating and making progress, until a Jewish leader, Gideon, selected 300 men with whom he made a surprise attack at midnight on the enemy camp. To prepare for this attack, Gideon gave each man a trumpet and pitcher containing a burning torch. After he had stealthily placed his men around the camp, he gave a pre-arranged signal when all blew their trumpets to arouse the sleeping enemy and then simultaneously broke their pitchers to produce a great din and flare (ancient pyrotechnics). The effect of these tricks was to startle and frighten the Midianites who fled in confusion until they crossed the border into their homeland.

An illustration of the effect of the guerrilla warfare of modern history can be cited from European chronicles. On account of the activities of the Spanish Irregulars, the French officers had no rest in 1813; indeed they were only relieved from

the crushing pressure of Wellington’s operations to struggle in the meshes of the guerrilla and insurrectional warfare. In Biscay, the communication in the field was so intercepted that confusion often resulted; contributions could not be collected; magazines could not be filled; fortresses were endangered; the armies had no base of operations; the troops, sorely pressed for provisions, were disseminated and everywhere occupied. The harassing effect of the guerrillas contributed greatly to the ultimate defeat of the French.

American history reveals various examples of guerrilla warfare. One insurmountable obstacle in the path of Cornwallis was attested by the historian John Hyde Preston who describes the well known activities of the Swamp Fox. In part, he writes as follows: “But more terrifying than the approach of Greene was the presence of a young man whom Cornwallis had never laid eyes upon but who was always lurking near him in the woods and swamps with a band of terrible horsemen. The Earl would send out a scouting party and the scouting party would not come back, and another would go in search of them and find their bodies, stripped of clothes and weapons, lying in the thicket. It was the work of the Swamp Fox! But there was never a sign of that swift enemy—never a sign except a little troupe of mounted men, suddenly appearing on a distant hill, standing and watching and then riding off again.

“Marion’s band seldom numbered over a hundred men, some black, some white, all crouched over sleek horses. They would come without warning, like a suddenly waking wind, attack with awful ferocity, and then be gone as silently as they had come. They melted the loyalists’ pewter plate to make their bullets, forged their swords from old saws and scythes, and stole the steeds they rode upon. When Marion ambushed the Prince of Wales’ crack regiment, his men had but ten bullets apiece; yet they broke the enemy, captured their arms, and drove them back into the swamps.”

Later in American history in the Civil War, numerous examples of guerrilla warfare are recorded. As an illustration of one important partisan war, we quote from a lecture on “Strategy” given by Colonel Arthur L. Wagner:

“Yet, though the Army of the Cumberland had all the prestige of victory, though it was well organized, well trained, well equipped, and in excellent morale, we find it remaining stationary for six months. What was the cause of this? Rosecrans was not lacking in energy or enterprise; the President was impatient, popular sentiment demanded an advance. It was simply because the ceaseless activity of Morgan and Forrest, who destroyed railroads, burned bridges, blew up tunnels, and captured convoys, rendered Rosecrans’ communications so insecure that it was not until sufficient reinforcements, principally cavalry and mounted infantry, could be provided to guard the routes of supply that the Union Army was relieved from its paralysis and enabled to resume the offensive.”

Guerrilla warfare has grown increasingly more important until at the present time it is indispensable in the conduct of the war in China and is probably indispensable in Russia also.

Guerrilla warfare, operating in conjunction with regular warfare, has enabled the poorly equipped, partly trained Chinese to hold the well equipped, highly trained Japanese in check for about five years so that the invaders have not reached their goal in China. The invaders announced that they expected the Chinese population in the invaded sections of China to support their new masters. Actually, however, they have allowed the Japanese to occupy only territory within rifle range of military garrisons and guarded supply routes or lines of communications.

The Japanese military regime divided occupied China into 1033 districts, each governed by a Japanese officer or some one presumably sympathetic with the Nipponese designs. Actually, however, it has been reported that the Japanese completely control only 97 of these districts; they partly control 193; and the Chinese completely control 743.

In the occupied regions of China, the Chinese men and women who are members of guerrilla bands usually engage in their vocations by day and operate against the Japanese at night, destroying supplies, killing isolated small units of Japanese and disrupting supply lines and lines of communications.

Guerrilla warfare in all of China is highly developed and fairly well organized under the leadership of Mao Tzu Tung and Chu Teh. Among the basic principles of organization for guerrilla warfare in China are the following:

In the first place, there is the national spirit of China. The Chinese are willing to sacrifice

themselves in their opposition to Japanese domination. The people can no longer endure any more from the Japanese imperialists, and they are engaging in revolutionary efforts to rid themselves of the Japanese menace. The Chinese leaders consider guerrilla warfare a part of national policy.

As a consequence of a reasonably well united China, the people have supported guerrilla activities in a cooperative manner as one aspect of total war, obtaining thereby what the Chinese term the “quality of mass” (large number of warriors). Thus, a large number of small groups of warriors operate with some cooperation among themselves and as units of a national army contributing to the general program of wearing out the enemy. According to the principles of their own instruction, the enthusiasm of the Chinese people for their cause must not be allowed to wane.

Guerrilla units in China have political and military leadership. This is true regardless of the source or size of such units which (1) may organize locally or (2) be formed from an admixture of regular troops with groups of the people or (3) may consist of regular army units intact. A unit may consist of a squad of a few men, a battalion of a few hundred men, or a regiment of several thousand men. The guerrilla leaders sought are those who are unyielding in their policies, resolute, loyal, sincere and robust. Among qualifications demanded of leaders are that they be well educated in revolutionary technique, self confident, able to establish severe discipline, and able to cope with counterpropaganda. Indeed, these leaders are depended upon to be models for the people. As war progresses, it is felt that good leaders will gradually overcome faulty discipline, strengthening and increasing combat efficiency.

The Chinese distinguish the organized guerrilla warfare from the unorganized, which they say cannot contribute to victory. They class the unorganized as banditry and anarchism, a haven for disappointed militarists, vagabonds and bandits. They admit the existence of corrupt guerrillas among the Chinese people, often including persons who, under the guise of guerrillas, indulge in unlawful practices. To eliminate such illicit activities, the Chinese leaders try to give their people suitable education and training.

The success already attained by the Chinese is attributed in part to their ability in guerrilla tactics, which are based on alertness, mobility, and the attack. The tactics are adjusted to the enemy situation, the terrain, the existing lines of

communication, the relative strength, the weather and the situation of the people. The general directions issued by the Chinese leaders for guerrilla activities are to deceive the enemy, attack weak points, deliver lightning blows, attack, withdraw, and seek a lightning decision; to harass the enemy when he stops, strike him when he is weary, pursue him when he withdraws, harass his outposts, his flanks, his rear. At his vulnerable spots, he must be attacked, dispersed, exhausted and annihilated.

In particular, the Chinese objectives for guerrilla warfare against Japan are (1) to organize the military strength of the Chinese people, (2) to maintain the partisan warfare as an important part of the entire war, (3) to diminish the extent of the territory under enemy control, (4) to assist the regular army and (5) to attack the enemy in every quarter, every effort being made without expectation of producing the decision, but supporting all major military efforts of the regular war.

Under Chinese planning, regular operations and guerrilla hostilities are interdependent. Guerrilla operations during the anti-Japanese war may temporarily become its paramount feature, especially insofar as the enemy's rear is concerned. However, if we view the war in its entirety, there is no doubt that the regular forces are of primary importance because they are responsible for producing the decision. By its contribution to the entire war effort, guerrilla warfare assists the regular forces in producing the favorable decision. Orthodox forces may, under certain conditions, operate as guerrillas, and the latter may, under certain circumstances, develop to the status of the former. However, both guerrilla forces and regular forces have their own respective development and their proper combinations.

Although the two kinds of warfare are conducted most effectively in a cooperative manner, the tactics normally used in each are different, and according to the Chinese fundamental principles the following chief differences exist: The basic tactics of orthodox operation are constant activity and movement; in guerrilla warfare it is to strike suddenly and then retire. The general features of reconnaissance, partial deployment, general deployment, and development of attack that are usual in mobile regular warfare are not common to guerrilla warfare. Unlike the regular warfare, guerrilla warfare never involves the transformation of a moving situation into a positional defensive situation. There is in guerrilla warfare no such thing as a decisive battle; there

is nothing comparable to the fixed passive defense that sometimes features orthodox war.

Not only Chinese partisan warfare, but also Russian partisan warfare is very important, especially in the region of Russia now occupied by the Nazi. In August 1941, Marshal Semyon Budyenny appealed to his people in gist, about as follows:

With fresh forces our powerful Army each day deals heavier blows to the Nazi bands. To help the Red Army, a mighty people's force has arisen throughout the entire territory occupied by the Germans. To you men and women of the districts occupied by the Nazi, we speak. Those who are able to handle arms—join guerrilla detachments. Create new ones. Annihilate German troops, exterminate them like mad dogs. Derail trains. Disrupt communications. Blow up ammunition dumps. Not a single bushel of grain is to be left for the enemy. Mow as much as you need for the near future and destroy the rest. Destroy the plantations of industrial crops—beet-root, rubber plant, flax. Exert all efforts to fight the enemy and destroy him.

Budyenny's appeal has been heeded and we may get a picture of the consequences from the following narrations of happenings in German occupied territory.

Two German tanks fell behind the main Nazi force. They were captured by a guerrilla detachment under the command of Red Armyman Kivskik. In connection with this seven motorcyclists were killed.

A guerrilla force under a commander named Znamensky raided a German headquarters, destroyed a tank, captured two staff cars and killed four soldiers and four officers.

Near the town "O," a small Soviet force armed only with one automatic rifle and seven ordinary rifles stopped 15 German ammunition trucks one night by placing spiked planks across the road. When the guerrillas opened fire the surprised Nazis fled to the woods.

Russian women participate in guerrilla activities. In one case, a Nazi officer was billeted in the house of a 70 year old woman collective farmer, Bogdanova. The old woman was forced to sleep in the hall. One day the sounds of battle came from the village street. Bogdanova realized that the Russians were approaching. She took an axe, noiselessly approached the seated officer, and hit him in the back of the neck. Just then two Nazi soldiers came into the house. They snatched the axe from the old woman's hands, dragged her to the yard, hurled her on the snow and poured benzene over

her. They were prevented from setting fire to her by Russian men. One Nazi was killed and the other captured.

A young girl, Katya, acted as a scout for an important detachment and frequently took part in fighting. Another, Julia, recently gave information which enabled her comrades to repulse a Nazi attack on the village of "N" and capture a rich haul of German equipment. Women and children keep the guerrilla lighters informed of every action of the Nazi forces.

In Kharkov, the Germans captured three wounded Russian soldiers. They were tortured and hanged from telegraph poles in the village of Kolomaky. Posters affixed to the poles threatened shooting for anyone who attempted to take the bodies away for burial. To cause greater fear, the Nazis stationed guards armed with automatic rifles at the poles. Thus it remained for two day and two nights. On the morning of the third day the bodies of the Russians had been removed and the German guards were hanging on the poles in their places.

The Russian guerrillas keep in touch with Red Army headquarters by radio and on one occasion reported the position of a new German air field for bombers. Red airforce planes promptly bombed the field, destroying 24 Nazi planes and about 3,000 barrels of gasoline.

The Russians in the Ukraine give important assistance to the Red Army not only by their military activities, but also by the aid they render to the intelligence service of the Soviet forces. Regular communication exists between most guerrilla units and the Red Army regular troops. Ukrainian guerrillas have their own newspaper, *Za Rudiansku Ukrain*, which is widely distributed in enemy occupied territory. This newspaper tells of the exploits of the guerrillas and serves as a means of communication between them.

As of 12 February 1942, a guerrilla detachment reportedly commanded by Medvedev, had carried out about 50 raids behind enemy lines during the last four months. Among their declared accomplishments against the Nazis are:

(1) Having learned that the German 576th Engineer Battalion was to move to a new place, the guerrillas lay in ambush. When the enemy column approached, the partisans opened fire, destroying two staff cars and several troop trucks. They captured the battalion standard, staff, documents and a large quantity of arms. The Germans suffered considerable losses. (2) South of station "Z," these guerrillas blew up a railway bridge; then,

taking advantage of traffic congestion, they opened fire with rifles and machine guns and showered a troop train with grenades. (3) Soon after that, Medvedev's detachment raided a town, killed, several policemen including the chief of police, burned down a woodworking factory turning out material for enemy fortifications, and captured a large quantity of arms, 600,000 rubles in Soviet money and 3,800 German marks. (4) The Soviet guerrillas gathered and turned over to the Red Army command information on movements of enemy units and the location of centers of resistance. The native inhabitants assisted them. A woman collective farmer guided guerrilla detachments for miles among German units, risking her life and those of her family. Residents of one village hid wounded guerrilla, Kashcheyev, and nursed him to recovery. (5) The detachment grew tenfold in four months. During this time, Medvedev's men captured two small towns, blew up three troop trains, killed 2 generals, 17 other officers and 407 soldiers and noncommissioned officers. Ten ammunition trucks, nine light bombers and four locomotives were destroyed. Three railway bridges and seven large wooden bridges were blown up and telegraph communications destroyed in many places.

Russian guerrillas are organized by their voluntary acceptance of regulations which they have prepared in cooperation with the Red Army leaders. The guerrilla oath which follows, signifies in brief, the major responsibilities of Soviet partisans:

"I, a Red guerrilla, swear to my comrades in arms that I shall be brave, disciplined and merciless to the enemy. To the end of my days I shall remain faithful to my country, my party, and my leader Stalin. If I break this sacred oath, may severe punishment be meted out to me at the hands of guerrillas."

To prepare individuals to fulfill the requirements set forth in this oath, the Soviets have planned a training program including the following subjects: Map reading, first aid, sanitation, patrolling, sniping, use of weapons; how to negotiate terrain; street fighting; woodcraftsmanship; and how to develop the important personal qualities of quietness, confidence, alertness, control, and attention to detail. Some Russian guerrillas have received such training; others are receiving it; still others are operating without special training.

However, experience has taught that efficiency in the use of guerrilla tactics can be immeasurably enhanced if the individual and the group are trained and organized in advance of enemy

penetration and around adequate bases, which are created to maintain protracted struggle behind enemy lines. By bases here is meant (1) human centers of resistance, (2) the mobilization of the genius and resourcefulness of the people, and their proper use in loyal support of the armed irregulars.

Russian guerrilla tactics to an extent more vast and successful than military experts outside of Russia have understood or conceded, have critically interfered with the enemy's time calculations, have repeatedly cheated his multiple penetration tactics of decisive success and have prevented his effective organization and exploitation of conquered resources.

In general, although guerrilla warfare has not been the primary means of settling great military conflicts, it has had an important contributing effect on the final results of many a major war. The present war is probably no exception. Partisan warfare has unlimited possibilities and may be conducted on land, in the air, or on the water. In fact, some commentators have interpreted the activities of the United Nations on the water and in the air in the southwest Pacific as guerrilla warfare, because the tactics so far have often been "hit and run." Such tactics have important delaying and harassing effects.