

Korea: the big push begins

Red China may find the price too high as its casualties increase

Mao Tse-tung, the boss of Communist China, is something of a poet. He also has written treatises on war. "We should strike," he once wrote, "only when we are sure that the enemy's situation, the terrain and the condition of the people are favorable to us and unfavorable to the enemy."

On the last day of 1950, the Chinese Year of the Tiger, Mao and his commander in the field, Gen. Lin Piao, decided the time was favorable for launching the big push in Korea. On New Year's eve the Red artillery laid down a barrage along a 20-mile sector of the 135-mile United Nations line stretched across the waist of Korea, just below the 38th Parallel and only 30 miles north of Seoul.

In the early hours of New Year's day, Lin struck head-on at a sector manned by South Korean troops and forced them back. Boring in, the Communists pressed into the Genghis Khan invasion corridor down which the North Koreans had marched to take Seoul in the heat of last summer.

Feeding the U.N. Guns. The Reds drove into a sector of minefields and barbed-wire entanglements already zeroed in by artillery. They were under constant attack by planes which swooped in at treetop level. But Lin's cannon-fodder pushed on over the bodies of their own dead despite 10-to-1 casualties. By Chinese standards, heavy losses are a small price to pay for advance. For manpower is what General Lin can most readily and continuously expend.

By General MacArthur's estimate, the Chinese have more than 1.3 million troops available for this battle. Lt. Gen. Matthew Bunker Ridgway, new commander of the Eighth Army (replacing Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker, killed in a jeep crash Dec. 23) has 320,000.

But Ridgway was confident he could stop the Chinese. If necessary, he is prepared to withdraw into beachheads based on Seoul and Pusan. There he can bring into play the most modern weapons in the American arsenal. These include 26-ton guns with muzzles 8 inches in diameter. And once the Chinese get within range, Ridgway can call on the Navy for artillery support.

The Chinese got a searing taste of how effective this can be in the heroic evacuation of Hungnam (PATHFINDER, Dec. 27, 1950). For 13 days, 9,000 men of the U.S. Third Division manned the tiny perimeter around the Hungnam beachhead and with the powerful support

"the BIG PUSH"

of naval cannon held off 11 Chinese divisions. The Navy used a battleship, two cruisers, eight destroyers and three rocket ships to pump more than 4 million pounds of high explosives into the enemy ranks. Attack bombers and planes from seven carriers flew 6,000 sorties to support the operation.

Behind this wall of fire, in an amphibious operation in reverse, 193 ships took off 105,000 men, 91,000 refugees, 350,000 tons of matériel and 17,500 vehicles. By noon on Christmas eve only 2,000 men remained in Hungnam; by 2:36 p.m. the operation was completed. "The only thing we left behind was the enemy," said one admiral.

In World War II in China, Mao's armies played it safe and stayed out of reach of the heavy punch of the Japanese. Before Seoul he will have to challenge a force that will have great superiority in fire-power and in the air and in the guts of its fighting men. Mao is going to get his fingers burned, and he may decide he can't afford to pay the high price of continuing the war in Korea.



Ridgway. Firepower and 320,000 heroes against Mao's hordes.



From shores of Hungnam.
Some of 105,000 the Navy took out.

(continued)