The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 438
"A Bill of Goods"
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The army of the Republic of China, now in its seventh year of fighting the Japanese invaders, was on its last legs. But it was still tying down 80% of the Japanese Army.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 438. A Bill of Goods.

A few episodes back, I told you that in early 1944, Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the government and commander of the military of the Republic of China, warned US President Franklin Roosevelt that Chinese intelligence was picking up signs that the Japanese intended to begin a major offensive against China in 1944.

I also told you that US and British intelligence agencies dismissed Chiang's warning. In their view, Japan's position in the Pacific, where it was defending against the United States, and in Burma, where it was defending against British, Indian, and Commonwealth forces, were both getting weaker. Western intelligence thought it far more likely the Japanese would be drawing down their forces in China to reinforce Burma and the Western Pacific.

They also didn't trust Chiang. Chiang was known to be miffed that Roosevelt had broken his promise to send military aid to the Chinese army and his promise that the US and Britain would execute an amphibious landing in Burma and reopen the Burma Road, the route the Western Allies would need to ship large quantities of aid to Chiang's forces.

It wasn't only that China desperately needed this promised assistance that now would not be coming. Chiang perceived in these broken promises clear signs of a shift in priorities by the Americans and the British in the Pacific Theater, a shift that downplayed the importance of China and threatened Chiang's position as a member of the Big Four and a peer of Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. It seemed the only interest the Americans had in China these days was to use the country as a base for their shiny new B-29 bombers.

And the Western Allies were well aware of Chiang's views. If Chiang was unhappy about their change of priorities, talking up the threat of a major Japanese military action in China would be just the sort of thing he would say if he were trying to get them to change their minds. He was "crying wolf," so to speak.

The Republic of China was in a bad way, with Japan controlling much of China's area and population, and virtually all of its industry, but that had been true for years now, and yet the Chinese fought on, forcing Japan to deploy 80% of its Army against China, and therefore leaving it with only 20% with which to oppose the other Allies.

It is sometimes said that China did the Allies a great service simply by tying down that 80% of the Imperial Japanese Army and costing Japan soldiers, supplies, and equipment for so many years. Since 1937, in fact. While this viewpoint has some truth to it, especially during the early part of the war, it must also be said that as the war continued and as American submarines sank greater and greater numbers of Japanese cargo ships and troop transports, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Japanese military to move large numbers of soldiers off the Asian mainland and onto Pacific islands and then keep them fed and supplied after they arrived. By 1944, it was nearly impossible. Japanese shipping losses had simply been too high. Allied intelligence failed to grasp this point, that a large-scale redeployment of Japanese forces in China to, say, the Philippines, was by now out of the question.

With regard to those shipping losses, Japanese military planners had some thoughts about that. You'll recall from episode 398 how the Japanese built the Burma Railway in 1943 to link the Burmese rail network to the Thai rail network. They did this so that reinforcements and supplies sent from Japan to the Burma front only needed to be sent by ship as far as Bangkok, rather than all the way around the Malay Peninsula. The longer route increased the risk of attack by an American submarine; shortening the route also reduced the number of ships needed, which was crucial, since Japan was losing so many ships to those same American submarines.

Japan's most important shipping route ran up and down the coast of China. Fuel and other raw materials were shipped north to Japan; supplies and reinforcements for Japanese forces in the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia were shipped in the opposite direction. And here is where enemy submarines were the greatest concern.

So the Japanese considered the possibility of building a rail line south from Manchukuo through China and on to Indochina as an alternative route that would be safe from those submarines and free up Japanese shipping for other uses. If you look at a map of Occupied China in 1943, you'll see that the Japanese controlled large portions of the country, but you will also see they did not control a continuous strip of Chinese territory running from north to south that would be necessary for such a railroad.

That meant that if the Japanese wanted their rail line through China, they're going to need to take more Chinese territory, and so the Army began planning an offensive in China for 1944, and this was the offensive Chiang Kai-shek was trying to warn Roosevelt about.

I want to talk about that 1944 Japanese offensive in China today, but before I do, I first want to take a look at events along the Burma front. Recall that during Japan's remarkable run of rapid-fire victories during the first six months after the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese Army was able to occupy virtually all of British-controlled Burma and advance up to the border with India. They were stopped only when the monsoon season began.

As the monsoon season wound down in late 1942, Army command in Tokyo queried the commander of the Japanese Fifteenth Army, the one stationed in Burma, on the feasibility of resuming the offensive and invading India. The commander, General Iida Shōjirō, queried his own subordinates, and the consensus was that it was not feasible, owing to the challenges of logistics and the terrain, and so there was no Japanese offensive on the Burma Front in 1943.

The Japanese Army instead spent 1943 addressing the logistical issues by building the Burma Railway. As for the terrain, well, the terrain along the front line between Burma and India was some of the worst in the world for military purposes; it consisted of rugged mountains enrobed in the emerald green of jungle. Beautiful to look at; not so nice for soldiers who have to march through it. There was nothing the Army could do about the terrain. It's a fundamental military fact that you fight wars on the terrain you have, not on the terrain you wish you had.

The Japanese also rearranged the political situation in Burma during 1943, by creating the State of Burma, with Burmese lawyer and politician Ba Maw as Head of State and Prime Minister. Officially, Japan had ended British control over Burma and established an independent Burmese nation. In reality, Japan still had large military forces stationed in Burma and the new Burmese government could do little without the consent of Japan.

On the Allied side, in 1942 the British military put a low priority on the Burma Front. This was the year of the loss of Tobruk and Rommel's advance deep into Egypt, when it seemed Alexandria itself might fall. When the British raised new military units in India, they sent them not to the Burma front but to Egypt.

The British had their own logistical problems to ponder. The Indian city of Imphal was close to the Burmese border, but it had no railroad. Supply to the units guarding the eastern border of India could come by rail only as far as East Bengal. It then had to be transferred to trucks and driven over some not-very-good roads for the final couple of hundred kilometers to Imphal. The British oversaw improvement of the roads to smooth the way for supply to Imphal in 1943, but these improvements would not be completed until 1944.

But unlike the Japanese, the British were not content to wait and attempted offensive action on the Burma Front in 1943. Since supply lines farther north were strained, the Indian Eastern

Army, as it was known at the time, advanced into Burma along the coast. This operation began in late December 1942, and ended in mid-1943 when the monsoons came again, in failure and embarrassment for all concerned. The Japanese could move faster in the jungle, and were able to evade front-line enemy units and attack their support units to their rear. The Indian soldiers and their British officers had little experience in jungle warfare and were bested repeatedly by the Japanese, whose skill in jungle combat was becoming the stuff of legend.

Remember how in 1941, the British saw themselves as the experts in jungle combat and assured themselves that the Japanese had neither the knowhow nor the equipment to handle jungle conditions. What a difference a year can make.

When the Eastern Army withdrew, it was a battered and demoralized force. Its commander, General Noel Irwin, held a press conference in which he criticized his own army as poorly organized and trained, and unmotivated. There was some truth in his criticisms, but his remarks only served to further damage the beaten unit's morale, and he was relieved of his command.

I'll note this was also the time in which the Bengal Famine was ravaging eastern India, which couldn't have been very good for morale, either.

The second British attempt to strike at the Japanese in 1942 was more unorthodox. British General Orde Wingate created special forces units with soldiers drawn from the Indian Army. Around 3,000 of them would infiltrate the Japanese lines and work their way into the Burmese jungle, where they would fight a guerilla war, sabotaging railways and Japanese supply routes. These units were meant to move quickly through the jungle, receive supply via airdrops, and generally disrupt and confuse Japanese military operations.

Wingate called these units Long Range Penetration Groups, but they are better known as "Chindits." The name is derived from *chinthe*, the Burmese word for *lion*. The Chindits operated from February to April 1943. Of the 3,000 who set out, barely 2,000 returned. Whether Chindit operations were worth the costs involved in establishing the units is debatable, and is still debated in our time. Nevertheless, Chindit operations carried propaganda value, and their exploits were publicized as an antidote to the failure of the Eastern Army and news of British officers openly questioning whether Indian soldiers had what it took to match the Japanese. Hey, look at our Chindits and tell me our side can't compete.

The exploits of the Chindits inspired not only the Allied military but the Japanese as well. Hang on for a second and I'll explain what I mean by that. I told you a few minutes ago that General Iida, the commander of the Japanese Fifteenth Army stationed in Burma, had queried his commanders at the beginning of 1943 on the question of whether to begin an offensive, and the consensus answer was no. By the end of 1943, Iida was no longer the commander of the Fifteenth Army.

He was out and General Mutaguchi Renya was in. General Mutaguchi had been in command of the Japanese Army units involved in the Marco Polo Bridge incident, all the way back in 1937. The division he commanded played a role in the invasion of Malaya, the Battle of Singapore, and the final offensive against the Americans on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines.

Now his division was one of those deployed on the Burma front. When General Iida consulted with his division commanders about the prospects of a 1943 offensive, Mutaguchi was the loudest voice in opposition to the idea. Then, late in 1943, Tokyo relieved General Iida of his command. They didn't like how he kept asking for more support for the new Burmese government; apparently he'd not gotten the message that the Burmese government was merely a propaganda tool.

Tokyo appointed Mutaguchi to replace him, but when the 1944 campaign season came around, the most vocal opponent of an offensive into India became the most ardent supporter. Why the change? It's been said that Mutaguchi, who'd been part of Japan's greatest victories in the early part of the war, felt he was destined personally to win the war for Japan. A more prosaic explanation might consider that the new Burma Railway had resolved some of his logistical concerns. Another reason involved Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army. Bose was eager to prove what his force was capable of, and urged Mutaguchi to allow them to be part of the offensive, which was aimed at Imphal, which had become the key British supply point for the Burma front. Bose confidently predicted that once the Indian National Army defeated the British and seized Imphal, it would trigger an uprising across India.

So the 1944 Japanese offensive was aimed at Imphal, at the center of the front. As it happened, the Allies were contemplating two 1944 offensives, one at the southern part of the front, the other at the northern end.

At the southern part of the front, the former Eastern Army, now designated the Fourteenth Army, would advance along the coast as before. Things were different this time. With Lord Mountbatten now in command, the British had beefed up the Fourteenth by adding a British division and three divisions of soldiers from British colonial holdings in Africa. I suppose they figured these soldiers knew a thing or two about moving and fighting in the jungle.

The Fourteenth Army was able to advance into Burma and hold at least a strip of territory along the coast. The Japanese attempted the same infiltration tactics that had worked so well for them last year, but this time, the Fourteenth was ready for them. Indian units did not panic as they sometimes had last year, and when a British unit was surrounded, American cargo planes were available to airdrop supplies. The British force held its own, while the Japanese suffered, because in 1943, they'd relied on supplies captured from their enemies during their raids on rear areas. This year, they couldn't capture enemy supplies, so they starved. It was a modest victory, but it boosted the confidence of the Indians while frustrating the Japanese.

The northern offensive was the brainchild of the Americans, who cared little about the Burma front. What they cared about China; specifically, their B-29s based in China. The Americans hoped that coordinated moves by British and Chinese forces could capture northern Burma and clear the way for the Americans to build a road from eastern India into northern Burma, where it could link to the old Burma Road and complete a ground route from India to China to replace, or at least supplement, those air shipments over the Hump.

The American General Joseph Stilwell commanded five Chinese divisions facing the Japanese from India. The Chinese also had fifteen divisions along the border between Yunnan Province and Burma. These divisions were supplied with American equipment and were the best in the Chinese Army, but at American insistence, they were reserved for use in Burma.

So the Chinese would be attacking into northern Burma from the west and from the north. In addition, the Chindits would be deployed into Burma once again, like last year, only this time they had a clearer mission: to outflank the Japanese defenders, create chaos in the Japanese rear during the offensive, and turn Japanese jungle warfare tactics against them. Once again, American transport planes would drop supplies to the Chindits, but the Americans wanted to get in on the Chindit action themselves, so the US Army created its own Long Range Penetration Group, which came to be known as “Merrill’s Marauders,” named after the unit’s commander.

This northern offensive proved successful. Chinese units were able to lay siege to the town of Myitkyina, which was strategically important because it had an airfield. Japanese fighters based here would be in a position to attack the cargo planes carrying supplies to the B-29s based at Chengdu, while Allied fighters based here could provide escort. The Chinese were able to surround the town, which began a costly siege that lasted two and a half months, while those Chindits and Marauders harassed Japanese attempts to bring in supplies and reinforcements.

The Japanese commander was under orders to defend the town to the death. In August, he ordered his troops to withdraw and committed suicide, thus complying with his instructions.

Part of the reason the Japanese could not do more to defend against these two Allied offensives had to do with the disastrous outcome of their own offensive, aimed at Imphal. Mutaguchi had been inspired by the example of the Chindits and concluded that whatever they could do, Japanese soldiers could do better.

Initially, that offensive went well. Two Indian Army divisions on the border were forced to retreat to Imphal although, crucially, they were not destroyed. The Japanese and their Indian allies surrounded Imphal and lay siege to it, but the Japanese besiegers were poorly supplied and began to succumb to hunger and disease. Attacks on the besieged city were beaten back, and Indian units from other parts of the front were brought in to counterattack. When the monsoon season began, Mutaguchi refused to consider withdrawal, hoping that the monsoons would force the Indians to call off their counterattacks.

The British commander on the scene, General William Slim, kept up the counterattacks. He judged that the monsoons would do more damage to the Japanese, and especially to their already-strained supply lines, than it would to his forces. He was right about that. The poorly supplied Japanese began to starve. Some Japanese units attacked stronger Indian formations out of desperation, hoping to seize food from their enemies. Hungry and rain-drenched Japanese soldiers in their despair gave up on niceties such as shaving or haircuts, until they looked like "wild men of the mountains," as one Japanese officer put it.

After three miserable months, and with an army that had all but lost the ability to fight, Mutaguchi finally agreed to a Japanese withdrawal. The failed siege of Imphal became the worst Japanese defeat of the war so far, with nearly 55,000 soldiers killed, wounded, felled by starvation and disease, or captured, out of a force of 85,000.

The Allied side suffered 12,000 casualties. General Slim was knighted, as were a number of his subordinates.

[music: Holst, "Dance to the Spirits of Fire" from *The Perfect Fool*.]

Despite American attempts at misdirection, the Japanese were well aware that the US was deploying its new B-29 bombers to China and intended to use them for raids on Japan. The Japanese government and military were already taking steps to prepare. Fighter aircraft were redeployed from China to the Home Islands. Prefecture governments were instructed to build bomb shelters for the civilian population, although by 1944, Japan was critically short on steel and cement, two indispensable commodities needed in the construction of shelters.

The Japanese also amended their plans for their 1944 offensive in China, which was called Ichi-Go, or Operation Number One. Besides securing a rail route all the way through China to Indochina, the offensive would also seize control of the airfields in southern China which the Americans intended to use as bases for escort planes to protect the B-29s.

In early April, it was clear that the Japanese offensive Chiang had warned the Americans about back in January was about to start. The Chinese Army was in a sorry state. The economy of the Republic of China was also in a sorry state. By this time, the national government was collecting taxes in kind from the peasant farmers, which was every bit as unpopular as you would expect.

Army officers were encouraged to make their units as self-sufficient as possible. This meant setting up shops to manufacture the unit's own equipment. It also meant raiding those same peasant farmers for food to feed the soldiers and a good deal of smuggling. Although Chiang's government and the Japanese puppet government of Wang Jinwei were officially mortal enemies, there was in reality quite a bit of black market trade going on between them. Some Army officers traded with the enemy for supplies for their units and got rich in the process.

By 1944, Chinese peasants were beginning to starve and all this corruption created widespread hostility toward the Army at home and contempt for the Chinese Army and Chiang's government abroad.

The best units of the Chinese Army were those 15 divisions along the border with Burma. When Chiang received word that the Japanese offensive was about to begin, he wanted to redeploy the fifteen divisions he controlled along the border with Burma, but the British and Americans were about to begin their offensive in northern Burma and those 15 divisions were a crucial part of their plan. American officials told Chiang that if he redeployed those divisions to face the Japanese Army in China, the United States would cut off Lend-Lease aid. Chiang had no choice but to back down.

These 15 divisions were equipped by the Americans, which made them some of the most effective forces in Chiang's Army. His desire to use them against the coming Japanese offensive was understandable, but the Americans were more interested in opening supply routes into China, routes which would be used to supply B-29 bombers for raids on Japan. The Americans believed Chiang was more interested in strengthening his position for the inevitable postwar resumption of the civil war against the Communists than in defeating the Japanese. And they were not altogether wrong.

You'll recall that during the early days of the Japanese war on China, the Japanese Army seized the port city of Shanghai, then advanced up the Yangtze River to the city of Nanjing, the capital of the Republic of China. The city fell, and the infamous Rape of Nanjing followed. The Japanese then continued to advance upriver along the Yangtze and captured Hankou and Wuchang, two cities which in our time have been combined into one large city, Wuhan. The name Wuhan combines parts of the names Wuchang and Hankou. See?

Anyway, after that string of defeats, the Nationalist Army was able to halt any further Japanese advances. Ever since, the Japanese controlled this long, narrow salient that followed the Yangtze River valley west from Shanghai into central China. In the coming offensive, the Japanese planned to use Hankou and Wuchang as the starting point for an advance north along the rail line that ran to Beijing, and then south toward Changsha.

On April 17, the Japanese First Army began advancing south from their front line on the Yellow River along the railway, while the Japanese Eleventh Army advanced north from Hankou. Chinese defenses were weak and uncoordinated. It took just three weeks to secure the rail line. Japanese losses were just 850 killed and 2,500 wounded. Chinese casualties ran close to 100,000.

The capture of that rail line cut off an additional 300,000 Chinese soldiers to the east, who were now trapped in an enormous pocket. Within that pocket, panic gripped Chinese soldiers. Army formations collapsed into chaos as soldiers and officers alike fled the region, every man for himself. Some officers commandeered Army trucks to carry the loot they had seized from

Chinese civilians in the region. Infuriated civilians fought back. They attacked and killed soldiers and captured their loot and their weapons and equipment.

A Chinese army of 300,000 simply evaporated, like a puddle on a sunny day.

Chiang Kai-shek was becoming frantic. His remaining army, apart from the units the Americans insisted be reserved for the campaign in Burma, was undersupplied and underequipped. Soldiers couldn't remember the last time they got paid. He sent a message to President Roosevelt, requesting a billion-dollar loan. Otherwise, Chiang warned, he might not have an army left.

In Washington, Chiang's request sounded like blackmail. "Pay me a billion dollars or we quit the war." Most in the US government believed the money would go to overseas bank accounts in the names of Chiang and his cronies. The US refused to provide the loan.

On May 27, the Japanese began the second stage of their offensive. Now the goal was to advance south from Wuchang along the rail line toward the ultimate goal of Nanning, near the border with Indochina. A second advance east would secure a branch rail line that led to Japanese-occupied Hong Kong.

The first major battle on the drive south was at the city of Changsha. You may recognize the name. This is not the first time the Japanese tried to take Changsha; it is in fact the fourth time. The same garrison force and the same commander who had held them off the previous three times tried again, but as *Time* magazine correspondent Theodore White wrote, "[H]is units were three years older, their weapons three years more worn, the soldiers three years hungrier than when they had last seen glory."

There were American air bases south of Changsha, and capturing them was one of the Japanese Army's goals. This was the Fourteenth Air Force, which had adopted the moniker "Flying Tigers" from the old American Volunteer Group of 1941. From these bases, American fighters and medium-range bombers had been attacking Japanese positions in China, as well as providing cover for the B-29s flying supplies over the Hump. Chinese soldiers defending Changsha were bitter that they had received no American aid, yet were called upon to defend American air bases.

The American flyers did attack the Japanese forces advancing on Changsha. Meanwhile, at Chengdu, commanders of the Twentieth Air Force, the B-29 unit, had been asked how many bombers they could have ready for a raid on Japan on June 15. They replied, maybe 50. General Hap Arnold himself, in Washington, told them to have 70 bombers ready to fly on the night of June 14. This required some frantic work and a heavy schedule of cargo flights back and forth from India.

Why June 14? No one at Chengdu knew the answer, but Arnold wanted the first bomber attack on Japan since the Doolittle Raid to coincide with the invasion of Saipan, a one-two punch meant

to drive home to the Japanese that they were losing the war and could only expect things to get even worse.

The target was the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at the city of Yawata on Kyushu Island, the extreme edge of the American bombers' range. The Imperial Iron and Steel Works was a major producer of Japanese steel and a tempting target. In fact, because of the long distance and the nighttime bombing, exactly one American bomb landed on the grounds of the Steel Works, doing hardly any damage at all.

Despite the raid's modest accomplishments, the attack was celebrated in the American news media. American losses during the raid were comparatively light, and the attack exposed the shortcomings of Japanese air defense. Japanese radar was primitive, while Japanese fighter planes were ill-suited to attacks on these bombers and Japan lacked adequate air bases to support them.

In southern China, American air support was able to slow the Japanese advance southward, but not stop it.

By early 1945, the Japanese Army completed its drive to the Indochina border. Japan now controlled that corridor of land it wanted, the one that ran from Manchukuo to Indochina. Japan had also succeeded in driving the American Fourteenth Air Force out of southern China. The Japanese lost around 100,000 soldiers killed, most of them by disease. China's National Revolutionary Army lost 750,000 soldiers. That figure includes killed, wounded, taken prisoner, and deserters.

But even after these losses, the NRA still had five million soldiers under arms. And the Japanese victory was a hollow one. The United States was by then moving its bombers out of China anyway, and on to Saipan and the other Mariana Islands, which were better suited as bases for bombing Japan. And the Japanese did not have enough time to build and organize their hoped-for supply line across China.

Chiang Kai-shek was seen by the American government and the American public as corrupt and incompetent, unable to hold off the Japanese even with American assistance and hoarding American aid for use against the Communists after the United States defeated Japan for him. The NRA's poor showing against the Japanese further damaged the reputations of Chiang and his government.

Roosevelt sent a personal envoy to China, Patrick Hurley, a corporate lawyer who had served as Secretary of War in the Hoover Administration, in the hope he could smooth over relations between China and the United States and perhaps even broker some kind of deal between the Republic of China and the Communists that would allow them to unite against Japan. Hurley traveled to China via Moscow, where Soviet foreign secretary Vyacheslav Molotov told him the

Soviet Union wanted good relations with the Republic of China and had no interest in Mao Zedong and his movement, who in Moscow's view weren't really Communists at all.

Hurley took Molotov at his word, and in Chongqing relayed Molotov's remarks to Chiang and assured him the Chinese Communists were no threat. Chiang was not convinced, nor could Hurley persuade Chiang to appoint American General Joseph Stilwell, the man who called him "Peanut," commander-in-chief of the Chinese Army. Instead, Chiang blamed Stilwell for China's collapsing position, because Stilwell opposed redeploying those fifteen American-equipped divisions to oppose the Japanese offensive in China.

Chiang instead told Hurley he wanted Stilwell replaced and pledged to work cooperatively with any other commander the Americans might send. Hurley recommended the President recall Stilwell and Roosevelt agreed. Hurley next traveled to Yenan, where he met with Mao Zedong and Chou Enlai. There they negotiated an agreement that would unify the Nationalist and Communist forces against Japan. The agreement called for a coalition government based on the principles of Sun Yat-sen, and military and economic reforms.

Hurley returned to Chongqing convinced he had brokered the deal that would unite the Chinese, but the Republican leadership scoffed at the proposal. T.V. Soong, the wealthy and influential financier who was also Chiang's brother-in-law told Hurley, "The Communists have sold you a bill of goods."

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd like to thank Three Blind Men and an Elephant for their generous donation, and thank you to Andy for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Three Blind Men and an Elephant and Andy help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as America prepares for a wartime Presidential election and the Soviet Union prepares a summer offensive against a German Army already struggling to contain the Western Allies in Normandy. Dr. Win-the-War, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

Oh, and one more thing. While the reputation of Chiang and the Nationalists worsened during the war, the Communists managed to improve their reputation with the West. The Chinese Red

Army was small and ill-equipped, but Mao Zedong oversaw a strong guerilla campaign against the Japanese occupation. Japan controlled huge swaths of China; at least, that's what it said on the map. In reality, the Japanese controlled the cities and the rail lines, but the Red Army moved freely through the rural areas in between.

Mao likened his fighters to "fish who swim in the sea," the "sea" being China's large rural population. Red Army soldiers could ambush small Japanese units or sabotage rail and telephone lines, then melt away when the Japanese Army came hunting for them in numbers. The Red Army had able leaders, and in stark contrast to Chiang's Army, treated the rural peasant farmers with respect. The Communists took control over large estates and made the land freely available to the local farmers. They armed the peasant farmers and taught them how to fight the Japanese. Red Army soldiers helped work the fields between military missions. They trained children to spy on Japanese soldiers. They did much to improve the lot of women, ending the practice of foot binding and providing safe haven for women fleeing abusive husbands.

They also taught them Mao's ideology.

[music: Closing War Theme]