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NOTES ON THE CCF PRISONER OF WAR

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NOTES ON THE CCF PRISONER OF WAR

Introduction and Background

During the time I was with the 523rd MIS Platoon (later redesignated the 523rd MIS Company), assigned to IX US Corps, Korea, one unmilitary trait of the CCF POW was very obvious and at the same time rather perplexing. This trait was the apparent lack of conscience and the volubility with which he disclosed information to his interrogators, information which in some cases would do much damage to fellow members as well as the mission of his immediate unit. There were some POW's, it is true, who did not volunteer information; however in most cases they cooperated fully in answering specific questions put to them. The readiness with which they answered questions indicated that there would possibly be a pattern of behavior useful to IPW procedure as applied to the CCF POW.

A limited inquiry was made into the reasons for this willingness to disclose military information to the point of endangering their comrades-in-arms. While the nature of the unit's mission prohibited a detailed study, discussion with those more experienced in handling CCF POW's indicated that regarding this matter there was information hitherto not available in the field.

It is the purpose of this paper to collate the information obtained without specific references as to source or documentation. Suggested exploitation of this information is added for use in IPW procedure and psychological warfare which in many ways is directly dependant upon knowledge of the enemy's capabilities and vulnerabilities materially, physically, and mentally.

It is felt that some background is important to the understanding of the information obtained. A brief personal history and the limitations of the study follow.

Towards the end of June 1952, I was placed on TDY with an IPW Team attached to the 2nd ROK Division from my parent unit. Prior to assignment in MIS, my training and experience had been in the QMC. Due to conditions requiring the immediate presence of an officer with the IPW Team, with no more than a three-hour orientation on IPW procedure and on the current frontline situation, I was sent to the 2nd ROK Division which was then on the line. Since these three hours constituted my training in G-2 activities except for what was learned through personal experience, it must be admitted that another with customary training may have noted different items of interest and placed a different emphasis on what was experienced.

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Of some aid in the processing of POW's was my training in university level psychology which included several courses requiring some mastery of interview technique. This training, and a number of courses in sociology which included a small amount of field work, was most useful to me both in questioning and handling POW's, and in working closely with ROK personnel in G-2 activities within the Division.

The information which follows must be considered as having possible prejudices in point of emphasis due to the shortcomings in military training and my academic background. In addition it must be pointed out that complete reliability of the information requires further qualification. Foremost of these limitations is the very nature of interrogation at divisional levels; EEI based on information of more or less immediate tactical value must be obtained within a 24 hour period. (In this particular situation, the IFW Team was used primarily as a source of information for Corps G-2. Its work paralleled to a great extent activities of US divisional MIS units in obtaining information and publishing interrogation and document reports.)

Another limitation is found in the small sample. During the five months or so that this team was in operation, some 70 POW's were received from elements of three CCF divisions which in turn represented elements of two CCF armies (corps). POW's, as determined by the parent MIS unit during Corps interrogation, were all enlisted personnel but included non-commissioned officers up to the level of assistant platoon leader.

Since interrogation was conducted in most cases through interpreters, translations, frequently from Chinese to Japanese to English were common practice. In most cases, due to the high level of training of interrogation personnel, this was no handicap except as the time required for processing was lengthened. However, where the attitude of the POW was concerned, the cause of these attitudes was quite often difficult to ascertain. For example, whether reluctance to talk was due to training, fear of execution once the POW had told all that he knew, lack of respect for the interrogator, antagonism towards the captor, previous mistreatment, or some other cause was at times not capable of being determined.

It is only with these limitations in mind that the following data should be interpreted. The need for further verification by personnel qualified by background and training will be more fully discussed at the conclusion of this paper.

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The POW's Characteristics and How They are Affected by  
Communist Indoctrination Procedure

The average CCF POW was considered to be almost illiterate, but he was not so unintelligent as he may have appeared superficially due to lack of education, conditions of shock, or a weakness in observation caused by military movements at night. The CCF Army has made efforts to raise the educational level of its soldiers and most of them were able to write their names and quite frequently wrote other Chinese characters even though they claimed to have had no formal education. He usually came from a farming community and stated that farming was his occupation. His physical condition was usually good and while some complained of previous food shortages, at the line there appeared to be no severe lack of food. He lacked training in military security; in some cases sufficient weapons were not available to his unit. At times he fought with maniacal intensity though seemingly indifferent to the cause of Communism.

This was the CCF POW as he appeared to most people who came in contact with him. However the point to be developed here is the sociological structure which is peculiar to his origin, the impact of Communist procedure on this sociologically conditioned personality, and the possible exploitation of the psychological result by UN military forces.

While no attempt was made to discover family and community patterns of behavior through direct interrogation, it may be assumed that since most of these POW's came from rural communities the traditional patterns of conduct, attitudes towards parents, and strict adherence to community customs were followed by them previous to conscription by the CCF Army. Of these modes of conduct, the one to be considered here is the intimate nature of family and primary group relationships, the family tradition of conference before action, of parental (including in many cases relatives and figures of importance to the community) approval, and particularly the process of group decision.

Though circumlocution is customary in the use of the Chinese language, this does not mean it is obscured to the point where there is no community of feeling among the members of the group during a family discussion. No matter what the patriarchal system may have imposed, there was within the primary group some interchange of opinion and feelings; there was an intimacy that comes from common knowledge of and attitudes towards matters of group importance. There was within the primary group a closeness of thought and a unique system of pride and sanction which made it function as a Chinese family.

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Whether opinion was handed down from above within the patriarchal system, or group decision was reached regarding some course of action; there was ultimate unity of action, acknowledged and made one's own through understanding and compliance. Thus through a community of feeling, thought, and action, the members of the primary group were made to feel that they were a part of the group, and that this was where they belonged.

Under the regime of Communism, it must not be thought that these patterns of relationships were entirely overthrown. And if they were abandoned, it was in many cases a matter close to survival. It may be further posited that even if abandoned, there is yet remaining at least a vestige of fondness for the intimacy of old, that at times the soldier now so far from home must feel poignantly the emptiness of a life now deprived of the previous closeness of thought, action and mutual understanding.

It may be assumed that there is within the structure of Communism a need for elimination of thoughts and deeds inimical to its survival, and that thought control with its damaging effect on primary group feelings is imposed to fill this need.

In the CCF soldier's life, even on the frontline, this assumes the prevalent form of "triangular control." Most simply described, this system involves the antithetical qualities of trust and suspicion, or of mistrust and loyalty. Superiors at all levels of command instruct those of lesser rank to be on the lookout for subversive activity on the part of their fellow soldiers in word and action. At the lowest level, each man is to watch two others, thus forming the triangle of distrust. With loyalty to "the cause", infractions are reported to superiors; enforced by fear of "plants" who may make obvious overtures of disloyalty and report those who fail to inform superiors, there is no choice but to report all infractions. Each superior trusts (or knows that out of fear) his men will report all indications of disaffection, and yet expects that each man will distrust every other member's loyalty to the Communist cause.

The impact of this invidious form of thought control on the average CCF soldier is manifold. Of its many ramifications, sufficient for discussion here is the fact that within the smallest military grouping, where interaction between members should be the least formal and the most intimate, there can be no deep feeling of trust or dependability among the men. Instead there is a mounting fear of being informed upon by those seeking personal favors, of having everyday acts misunderstood by the overzealous. There is a partial paralysis of initiative and overt activity for which they

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are personally responsible. This is overwhelmingly true of non-operational matters which are so vital to the morale of any group. In short, for these soldiers who had previously experienced a great deal of intimacy and unity, of group decision and mutual trust, there remains no trace of interaction beyond that of operational maneuvers and conversation pertaining thereto. For those who so completely belonged to a primary group, there are now no friends who can be entirely trusted. Even humor must necessarily become standardized. \*

The explanation of why the CCF POW is so cooperative during interrogation is found, then, in the release that comes from being rid of the restrictions imposed by fear and lack of trust. He responds to the questions asked of him because he does not feel that his answers are betraying friends when he has none. He feels little loyalty towards a system which denies his previous and current need for belonging. He is more willing to talk to strangers who seem to warrant trust than to acquaintances whom he knows he cannot trust.

It is the feeling of return from this loneliness, felt all the more painfully by being among humans with whom he cannot communicate, to a place of trust and release from the tension of being continuously on his guard against words and actions which may be misconstrued as disaffection subject to punishment, which offers opportunity of exploitation by IPW personnel. The promoting of a desire for release from such a situation of fear and mistrust to one of personal freedom and security is a function of psychological warfare operations.

Exploitation

The successful exploitation of the enemy's vulnerability due to this feeling of aloneness and fear requires some additional information on the previous experiences of the POW. There are two broad categories of CCF POW's. The first category consists of those who were conscripted into service in the CCF without previous military training, the second consists of those who have had prior service in the Chinese Nationalist Army (CNA).

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\*Even in just a soldier would be unable to suggest, for example, desertion to a place where the food might be better, a thing which was heard several times within ROK units, when it was learned that the CCF had a higher meat ration than their own. Contrary to superficial conclusions (as might have been the case and reported as such in CCF units) of low morale, this was evidence of a morale high enough to laugh at personal (and group) shortcomings in material as opposed to idealistic goals.

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Of those with no prior military training, there are two types which may be of interest to the interrogator. First there are those who have been sufficiently indoctrinated in Communism to become relatively immune to UN psychological warfare appeals; usually of squad leader or higher rank, if these individuals are security conscious, they will be very incommunicative without a warming up period which will in many cases exceed that available to divisions. Results in some cases will be unsatisfactory. These are also the ones who often fear capture (and interrogators) the most. However these individuals were not very numerous and most of them were successfully interrogated at Corps level.

The second type in this category consists of those who have neither feelings of strong attachment nor abhorrence for Communism. Usually with no rank, their duties are either combat or labor; for them military life is their current means of existence: they do not feel that their efforts are directed towards a cause. Frequently very cooperative, even to the point of volunteering information, most of them are no great problem in interrogation.

Of those with previous service in the CNA, it may be noted that in addition to the nostalgia for primary group intimacy of the family, they have experienced army life of a less restrictive nature, where there was at least some spirit of camaraderie. Usually somewhat antagonistic towards Communism, quite often they have been deliberately placed in positions of little responsibility where they are unable to exercise military talents developed in the CNA. In some there is an undercurrent of bitterness because their abilities were flouted by the CCF Army.

Needless to say, this is the group which can be expected to be the most cooperative. When indications of good treatment are given, they may be depended upon to give whatever information is requested of them. They have been known on occasion to volunteer information on how to most successfully attack enemy fortified positions. When several prisoners are from the same unit, they can be interrogated together to good advantage if skillful interrogators are available.\*

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\*One such situation occurred when the intake of POW's was too great to permit individual interrogation and yet Corps directed that there would be no screening and that each POW would be interrogated. One interrogation by a highly skilled Korean civilian of four prisoners at the same time was conducted. Observation of the proceedings suggested a classroom situation where the interrogator asked questions and two, three, or even all of them answered eagerly. The enthusiasm displayed by the prisoners who were for the first time permitted to speak without reservations was amusing except when the cause of their eagerness was understood. Truly, their expressions of everyday feelings must have been stifled to the point of madness to cause them to speak so freely to their former enemies once it was learned that no punishment would result.

It must be cautioned, of course, that where there is one dominant personality, group interrogation should be discontinued or modified immediately.

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While there are three rough groupings of CCF POW's, there are some techniques of interrogation which are applicable to all groups. In a sense, techniques which are particularly useful are refinements or variations of basic interview techniques.

To begin with, an interrogation is essentially an interview used for military purposes in order to obtain information about the enemy's capabilities and vulnerabilities from a person acquainted with the enemy. As in all good interviews, the reliability of the information obtained is dependent to a great extent upon the level of rapport between interviewer and interviewee. This does not mean that the POW is to be handled with kid gloves; rather it means the rapid establishing of points of mutual understanding to promote optimum conditions for securing desired information. With the highly cooperative and informed POW it also means some orientation of his processing to the highest echelon of interrogation to relieve the anxiety which any one in strange surroundings feels. This orientation should also be directed towards allaying fear (due to language barriers) of escort personnel in whose custody he is evacuated. In a more general sense, it means the recognition of the fact that the POW must be able to trust us before he will give aid which in many cases is tantamount to treason.

When it is remembered that the enemy has a well developed political indoctrination program which is designed to instill fear of our treatment of POW's and that the POW therefore has a certain degree of apprehension in merely being captured, it is understandable that immediate steps must be taken to insure the prisoner's recognition of the falseness of his political officer's statements, and at the same time establish feelings of security in that our surrender instructions and promises of good treatment were not empty words. Any proof of living up to our statements will be that much more reason to disbelieve his previous source of information and to cooperate more fully with the interrogator. Proof must include in addition to verbal reiteration, overt actions of concern for the POW's physical well being and protection from retaliation.

Broadly speaking, it does not include more than adherence to the Articles of the Geneva Convention; it does imply that whenever possible individual attention must be given to assure the prisoner that we abide by the Articles and thereby eliminate the fears that make for poor rapport. Once he is confident that we will not mistreat him, nor force him to divulge information, nor execute him once information is obtained, the POW will not be reluctant to answer

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questions. It is pointed out that even with recalcitrant prisoners such treatment, while apparently useless at division level, may pay high dividends at higher levels of interrogation.

It must be remembered that the feeling of trust and the free expression of thoughts most probably has been cherished by the prisoner even though he has had very limited opportunity to exercise them. To the extent that there is even one person he can trust, and in a degree treat him as a friend, cooperation will be improved. Understanding the POW's starvation for friendship and trust is one of the keys to successful interrogation.

The prisoner may be made to feel that he is in friendly hands by elimination of spectators, rapid evacuation to a place of greater safety and comfort, and, of course, food and medical attention whenever needed and feasible. Included must be the informing of capturing personnel of the importance of keeping the word and honor of safe conduct passes, friendly propaganda leaflets and broadcasts. Permission, written if necessary, to retain certain keepsakes of no importance to intelligence is frequently concrete assurance of fair treatment which will be appreciated by the POW. Interrogators should be trained to establish this feeling of friendship and trust without obvious overweening mannerisms and without the coldness of a collector examining his latest acquisition.\*

All announcements regarding meals, periods of rest, resuming of interrogation, etc., should be made well ahead of the hour and then adhered to closely to increase the feeling of reliability. Just as the periodic announcing of the correct time during psychological warfare broadcasts enhances the truth of the whole broadcast, so does each minor incident of reliability increase the feeling of trust that the POW has for so long lacked. Again it is pointed out that while actions of this nature may seem like babying the prisoner, they are also means useful to the goal of successful interrogation.

In cases where extreme arrogance is displayed by the POW, and time is very limited, a more demanding approach is sometimes necessary. However, removing the necessity for arrogance is more

\*A genuine expression of friendship is not the same thing as being unable to feel awkward through ignorance of customs familiar to the POW or through unfeeling practice of a previously distasteful act. That is to say, the ease with which something is done is no index of the feelings which are actually involved (and quite often obvious to the interviewee).

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profitable in the long run than obtaining information in spite of it. Arrogance is often a product of fear and a desire to conceal it; it is sometimes the result of falseness detected in the captors (not necessarily the interrogator); and can be removed successfully by the interrogator discovering it or another interrogator in many cases.

Fear of his comrades in the field, and the lack of those who can be completely trusted while an active member of the CCF is a matter that can be exploited by psychological warfare.\* First of all, operations intended to induce homesickness among enemy troops should include not merely matter to instill the desire to return home to families and loved ones, but also to re-create a fondness for the previous feelings of family life before the advent of Communism. Direct thought questions such as, "Do you have a single friend that you can trust?" could be asked. It is possible that such questions may be effective on those who are in higher positions of authority. Indeed, it is a question that can profitably be asked of any individual who is dominated by fear such as that inspired by Communism.

Questions regarding freedom of speech, religion, and other personal freedoms and rights can be centered on this theme. Tied in with the ability to think and act freely is the tacit agreement to tolerate differences of opinion, a measure of trust that individual thoughts and feelings are worthy of expression. It is when this feeling of trust is lacking that personal freedoms cannot be exercised.

Coupled with this lack of friends is the incorrectness of the idea that the CCF soldier who is planning desertion should "talk it over with others." It is an impossible thing to ask of those who can trust no one. (Prisoner reports indicate that even the reading of friendly leaflets was prohibited and had to be done covertly. No prisoner was able to assess the effect of leaflets on their comrades.) Rather the theme should be, "Trust no one until you are where you can speak freely," or more positively, "Fear everyone until you are free." Except when it is known that groups are in operation to effect escape, all appeals should be addressed to individuals. Escape plans should, likewise, be designed for individual execution. Voice broadcasts might be more effective when worded as if addressed to individuals rather than to tactical units as a whole.

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\*This was brought to the attention of the operations section of Psychological Warfare, EUSAK G-3 during December 1952. At that time only the fact that the CCF soldier had no one to trust and therefore subject to a loneliness peculiar to the CCF was presented informally.  
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There is, however, the difficult problem of encouraging individual action when formerly decision was arrived at by group discussion. Into each appeal for individual action should be the suggestion that it is an act sanctioned and desired by those who are dear to him, his previous community, and those who have safely reached our lines.

Admittedly the low educational level of the average CCF soldier may make abstractions of this nature almost impossible to put on paper. Cartoons may offset this low literacy rate when skillfully employed. In addition, the maximum use of ground and aerial broadcasts may overcome this shortcoming where it is the most effective.

For all three types of enemy personnel, thought questions pointedly referring to trust and friendship and the system of belief that enforces a regime of loneliness may be effective at all levels of education. Even the dialectically inclined will not be completely immune to this approach. Propaganda contrasting present conditions with former ones may be particularly useful when directed at those who were previously in the GNA.

In all three enemy types, loneliness, especially that which is made more poignant by being in the midst of others, is a vulnerability with high possibility for exploitation. Optimum exploitation requires highly selected individuals who have full command of language, are well-grounded in Chinese customs, have a sensitivity for reaching the enemy's weaknesses most tellingly, and can participate directly in the gathering of information useful to the psychological warfare effort.

#### Discussion and Conclusion

This section is not intended to be a formal point by point critique of the preceding material but rather a brief listing of those things that must be done before the foregoing can be completely accepted. It is not felt that such proof is necessary for the implementation of the suggested methods of exploitation, but any well-conceived program should not be without a research plan to verify, amplify, modify, or delete new and old concepts and theories as required by current, on-the-spot observation. There should exist a workable body of theory, up-to-date and understandable.

It is felt that the explanation of why CCF POW's talk so readily, and why they cannot be their brother's keeper, is essentially correct. The degree to which this may be generalized requires further research. Most necessary is information on whether

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this explanation can be used to advantage on other enemy units, viz., the NKPA; and whether this explanation is a product of a specific cultural conditioning and the impact of thought control, or a product of thought control and universal characteristics of human behavior and thought.

If preliminary study indicates that provincial differences will be sufficiently reflected in family and community patterns of relationships, interrogation data from processed POW's should be used to establish the distribution by provinces of the membership of units presently on the line or likely to come on the line.

There is also need for more knowledge on the content, extent and procedure of Communist indoctrination in the CCF Army. Of importance here is the extent to which the new doctrine was believed during various periods of the indoctrination program. How the soldier felt during this time towards his previous standards of conduct, his fellow soldiers, his family, and his instructor must be evaluated. By more fully understanding the impact of this indoctrination program, a tailored counter-measure may be planned to take advantage of points of stress in the day to day life of the CCF soldier.

The methods of control used by the CCF to keep line soldiers in the proper attitude towards Communism is a project worthy of study. The nature of punishment used, the corrective and remedial techniques employed, tests of loyalty: all may be information of value. The nature of control methods will probably be of greater significance in non-military matters. This will be particularly true, if as presently indicated, this, more than any previous one, is a war of ideas. It is certain that occupation policy and military government procedures can take advantage of the knowledge gained.

Research should also be aimed to discover at what point the soldier began to disbelieve his political indoctrination officer as well as in the cause of Communism itself. When turning points in attitude are determined effort can be directed specifically towards bringing about situations or conditions favorable to a shift in attitude. This information would be of interest to the planning and timing of psychological warfare activities.

While this may seem like a very brief program on paper, the data required can be limited or expanded as the situation and time warrant. A detailed study should primarily reflect data of current value; research on POW's captured before the advent of the peace talks can be eliminated or very lightly sampled.

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The briefness of this suggested program does not mean that the data should be gathered by anyone less than those who have been trained and have qualifications for gathering data and processing it into meaningful information. Nor does it mean that new channels of study will not become necessary as the body of knowledge develops.

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