



# The Chinese Communist Party during the war with Japan

The war record of the Communists contrasted sharply with the Nationalist's performance. Unlike Chiang, **Mao** seemed determined to take positive action to drive the Japanese out. From 1936 to 1939 the Communists built up their forces under the brilliant leadership of **Lin Biao**. They had virtually no resources – at first they were mainly armed with spears! However, they knew the countryside and the peasants and they made excellent use of guerrilla tactics. They cut telegraph wires, blew up railways and surprised Japanese troops in ambushes, capturing their weapons.



## Guerrilla Warfare

Mao describe the Red Army as the '*fish who swam in the sea*', the sea being China's peasants. The peasants supported the Communists from the start. The Red Army lived in the villages with the peasants. They taught children to spy on the children that Japanese soldiers were coming, they would bury food and tools. They would hide away cattle. The people hid in caves or tunnels under the village. They laid mines. The Japanese soldiers never knew what they could touch in one of these empty villages. An old plough, a parcel, even a dead cow might explode.

- From 1937 onwards they carried out a successful guerrilla operation against the Japanese, gradually moving eastwards from **Yanan** and taking control of Northern China.
- In 1940 the CCP began a campaign known as the **Hundred Regiments Battle** in which they attacked the Japanese controlled railways system and paralysed Japanese transport.

Small Red Army units struck deep into Japanese-held territory, hit important targets, and then retreated back into safety. By working with the peasants, the communists were soon in control of the countryside. They never met the Japanese head-on, melting away if attacked. When the Japanese were weak, or caught unawares, they were suddenly attacked.

## The Japanese Retaliate

The Japanese responded in 1941 with the '**Three All Campaign – kill all, burn all, destroy all**'. Their aim was to turn people against the communists by burning down their villages and crops and killing the peasants. The campaign had the opposite effect. It drove peasants to support the CCP.

- In 1937, the CCP held **30,000 sq miles** of China with **2 million** people.
- By 1945, when the Japanese surrendered, the CCP held **300,000 sq miles** and **95 million** people!

## How did the CCP gain support during the War?

Life in the Communist liberated areas was generally far better than in those areas under the control of the KMT. This was mainly due to Mao's Red Army which had all the qualities which Chiang and his officers seemed to lack. The CCP had a core of dedicated and able leaders. They were not corrupt. They treated the peasants with courtesy and respect. As they taught peasants to fight, they also taught them about Communist beliefs and ideas.

- Big estates were confiscated from rich lands and shared among the peasants.
- Rents and taxes were reduced and peasants were given interest-free loans.
- Out-dated and undesirable practices were abolished especially in the lives of women. For example '**foot binding**' which involved the practice of binding girl's feet tight in bandages so they grew up with small feet.
- Women's Associations were set up to help women to free themselves from violent husbands.
- The Red Army was very disciplined and never treated the peasants badly. In return, the peasants kept the Red Army informed about Japanese activities. The Red Army also helped in the fields and around villages.

## Questions

1. Read **Source A**. Why do you think the author switched sides?
2. According to **Source B**, how effective were Chiang's tactics?
3. Han Su-yin was a Communist who took part in the Long March. Does this change your view of **Source B**?
4. What does **Source C** tell us about the nature of the Japanese occupation?
5. Why did the KMT lose support during the Japanese invasion?
6. What could the KMT have done differently to avoid this loss in support?
7. Why did the Communists have to use guerrilla tactics?
8. List the factors which helped the Communists gain support from the peasants.