

was between Chang and Li Ching-lin. Looking at this chart analytically, we would predict that the most plausible source of strain in this system would come from Li Ching-lin. History shows the truth of this prediction. Judged in terms of recruitment patterns and recruitment methods alone, we may say that Fengtien was the strongest faction *with* a geographical base.

CHAPTER 4

Military Capabilities: Recruitment

Since the military was the dominant political force of the 1916-28 period, an understanding of the composition and structure of the military establishment, the methods of recruitment, the manner of training, the types of weapons, and the prevailing tactical and strategic concepts should constitute a major part of our study. Unfortunately, very little reliable or systematic information on any of these subjects is available. Thus, in this and the following two chapters, it is necessary to treat these subjects in a highly tentative and generalized manner. I make no claim that this treatment is comprehensive; rather, I have tried to illuminate some of the central problems by piecing together whatever data are available.

All the Chinese militarists possessed standing armies and thus were faced with the necessity of recruiting soldiers. The total number of recruits needed at any given time, however, is difficult to estimate. Although there was a standard table of organization for all military units (which would stipulate the number of men in a division, for example),* it was seldom followed. Nor can we deduce a rough estimate of an army's total strength from the number of its weapons, because many armies were notoriously unarmed. While these problems should not discourage us from trying to reconstruct the total size of the military establishment, they do compel us to accept the possibility of a large margin of error, no matter how credible the sources of information might be.

* As the *China Year Book* once observed (1926-27, p. 1044), "In theory the division should number 12,512 officers and men. In practice, it is customary to credit a division with 10,000 all told, and this often proves to be an overestimation. On the other hand, there are divisions in which the number of men enrolled greatly exceeds the theoretical figures."

In the last years of the Ch'ing dynasty, the total size of the newly created army units, the provincial armies, and the Green Standards was less than half a million men. The revolution brought a great expansion in the ranks of existing units and of the new revolutionary units; although probably a million more men were recruited into the various forces.¹

Under the Republic, a process of demobilization was introduced in January 1913 and was accelerated after the suppression of the Second Revolution. By 1915, the total number of soldiers was reduced to about half of the 1913 figure.

The real momentum of growth began only after Yüan's death in 1916 and continued unabated until 1928. A study of the various numerical estimates available shows that it was next to impossible to determine with accuracy the size of the army in any given year and that there is little basis for choosing one set of figures over another. However, these figures do show a general trend over the years. Consequently, at the risk of gross simplification, we have estimated the growth of the armies in this period as follows: 1916, slightly over 500,000 men; 1918, over 1,000,000; 1924, over 1,500,000; and 1928, over 2,000,000.

Therefore, with each passing year, the military's need for manpower increased. The increase was especially sharp during major wars. Thus, while these wars contributed greatly to rural poverty, at the same time the resulting expansion of the army provided increased employment opportunities for the uprooted and impoverished people. The two phenomena were closely related.

The overwhelming majority of soldiers were recruited by two methods: coercion or profit incentives. A militarist might simply seize a number of able-bodied men and put them in uniform or he might give the local bureaucrats a quota to fulfill. However, coercion was probably used on a very small proportion of the total recruits, because the supply of soldiers was usually more than adequate to meet the militarists' demands.

The primary method of recruitment, then, was to offer opportunities for a stable profession and pecuniary rewards. The uprooted peasants and unemployed urbanites were often only too glad to join the army, since it required no special skills. The worsening population-land ratio, the lack of technological innovations in farming techniques, poor marketing and credit systems,

and primitive means of transportation all created serious poverty in the Chinese rural areas, where 70 to 80 percent of the population resided, and there was extensive unemployment and underemployment throughout the country. The poverty and social stagnation of rural China combined to make the military profession attractive to the peasants in comparison with the other opportunities provided in their environment. After they entered the army, poverty was also the most powerful force keeping them there.

It is of course true that in the traditional society, there had always been powerful cultural and ideological forces at work to discourage people from joining the military profession. Such sayings as "Good iron should not be used to make nails," "Good men should not become soldiers" were undoubtedly deeply entrenched in the popular mind. On the other hand, it is also true that throughout history various dynasties maintained large armies. When economic conditions were favorable, these traditional inhibitions might be effective in dissuading people from a military career, but when times were hard, the military often provided the only outlet for survival and mobility. As one scholar has observed, "A major function of military roles in Chinese culture is the provision of alternative possibilities to individuals of ambition who desire to improve their social, political, and economic fortunes but who realize that humble tilling of the soil, thrift, and virtue do not often bring success."² Given the economic and social realities of the 1920's, Chinese farmers had little grounds for scorning the army; in fact, joining the army increased their social status. Unfortunately, there is very little information about the social, economic, and cultural characteristics of the Chinese soldiers. We can only get glimpses of these characteristics from widely scattered and often impressionistic records. The most important sociological study of Chinese soldiers that I have been able to uncover was conducted by Professor T'ao Meng-ho in 1929.³ He studied a sample of 946 men from a garrison brigade of 5,000 located "somewhere in north China." The first thing that attracts our attention is that it was a young force: almost all were under 30, and the largest group (43.3 percent) were aged 20-24. The second feature was the high turnover rate of its personnel: about two-thirds had joined within the previous two years, and almost no one had been in the unit longer than four years. Between 1926 and 1928, new recruits

were taken in every month, thus indicating that recruitment was a continuous concern of the unit.

The high turnover rate is intriguing and is open to several plausible explanations. First, battle casualties could have depleted its ranks, creating the need for new recruits. Second, many of the soldiers might simply have decided to quit for personal reasons after a brief period of service. Here the social background and economic conditions of the soldiers could give us some clues.

The interesting thing is that men with peasant background or no profession constituted 87.3 percent of the total membership of the brigade. About the same percentage were illiterate. Although the net income of a soldier was meager (about five dollars a month), 68 percent of the respondents reported that they sent money home to help their families. On a self-evaluative (subjective) basis, 73 percent of the soldiers regarded their families as poor.

Of course, we cannot ascribe universal validity to T'ao's data, but they provide us with some preliminary impressions. In the first place, they indicate that the overwhelming majority of soldiers were in their most productive age and came from peasant families. Their presence in the army can be taken as a partial reflection of the unfavorable conditions in their villages. They were barred from the educational channels of mobility, since most of them were illiterate. More fundamentally, they were very, very poor. The most telling connection between rural poverty and entry into the army was suggested by T'ao, who noted that traditional Chinese culture placed such an extremely high value on the single son in order to protect the lineage and to honor the ancestors that under a conscription system, a poor family with a single son would be willing to offer a large sum to buy a replacement for him. Yet, in his sample, 21.3 percent of the soldiers were the only sons in their families, which suggests that the families must have been in abject poverty to allow this to happen.

The linkage between army recruitment and general poverty produced several interesting consequences. On the one hand, in the 1920's desertion was very common. Chiang Fang-cheng, probably the best authority on military affairs of the early Republican period, estimated that the annual nationwide desertion rate for all units was somewhere between 15 and 25 percent.⁴ Desertion was most likely to occur in combat or when life in the army became unbearable (physical brutality by superiors, suspension or reduc-

tion of pay). But desertion became a realistic alternative only when there was some means of living outside the army. Thus a man usually would desert only after he had stayed in the army for a few years and had gathered a small personal fortune through saving or looting. (This might partially explain the high turnover rate in the brigade that Professor T'ao studied.)

On the other hand, there were also numerous reports that soldiers resisted dismissal or disbandment. Although individual units were undoubtedly plagued by large-scale desertions, it was the soldiers' refusal to be discharged from military service that presented the most serious national problem.

The crux of the matter was that the poverty-stricken soldiers simply did not want to leave the army when there were no prospects of a better livelihood elsewhere, and many deserters drifted back into the army when their fortune was gone, thus giving rise to the expressions *yin-hun-tzu* or *ping-yu-tzu*, meaning a man who drifted from one barrack to another in search of a living. Consequently, the reaction of the soldiers to disbanding was usually unfavorable and often violent. For instance, after the war between the Chihli and Anhwei factions in 1920, when one of Anhwei's Northwestern Frontier Defense Army brigades was ordered to disband, the soldiers mutinied, caused considerable damage to the Tung-chow area in Chihli, and were finally incorporated into the Fengtien army.⁵

It became increasingly difficult to distinguish between soldiers and bandits in many cases. So long as a soldier remained below the poverty line, he would try to stay with his unit or drift among units to sell his services. If he could not attach himself to a unit, then he might temporarily become a bandit. And there were many cases of defeated army units or individual soldiers setting themselves up as bandits or bandits becoming part of regular armies.* Hence, contrary to both traditional cultural heritage and the

* For instance, when Chao Ti was defeated by Feng Yü-hsiang during the first Chihli-Fengtien war of 1922, his disbanded troops turned to banditry. Despite the presence of the huge armies of Wu Pei-fu and Feng Yü-hsiang, these bandits became a very serious problem in Honan after 1922, numbering some 10,000 strong. *NCH*, Dec. 30, 1922; Feb. 3, 1923. Likewise, the famous Lin-ch'ieng robbery was perpetrated by former Anhwei soldiers disbanded after defeat. It is of considerable interest to note that apart from the ransoms they asked of their victims' families, they also demanded that the government give them full pardon and incorporate them into the regular army. Reluctantly, the government agreed. *NCH*, May 12-19, 1923.

prevailing contemporary belief that military life repulsed the Chinese, we find that the abject economic conditions caused the Chinese peasants in this period to view a military career not as a curse but as a welcome opportunity to escape from starvation and to lift themselves from an otherwise hopeless situation.

But although it is easy to establish a close connection between rural poverty and the peasants' embrace of a martial life when we look at China as a whole, it is more difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between the recruitment pattern of any region and the economic conditions of that region. In theory, if it is true that peasants flocked to the army because of their poverty, it must also be true that the poorer a region, the more likely its peasants were to seek military employment.

In reality, however, we cannot make such an inference. The size of an army was affected not only by the supply of peasants who wanted to be soldiers but also by the militarists' demand for their services. The militarists' needs, in turn, were influenced by the level of political stability in their region and the kinds of goals they wished to pursue. To analyze these needs, we need reliable information on population figures, crucial economic indicators, measurements of political stability, and the political objectives of most militarists in a given region. Unfortunately, we do not have such information on a region-by-region basis.

However, there are some grounds for suggesting that the north probably produced more soldiers than the south. Here we can only rely on indirect evidence, but a number of factors seem to have produced this interesting phenomenon.

The first factor that led the north to produce more soldiers than the south was that political events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries favored military expansion in the north. During these years, a northern army, Peiyang, was the most modern and best trained and generally the most powerful army. This pre-dominance of northern power over the rest of the country constituted one of the most crucial political facts of the early Republican years. For many writers, the 1916–28 period was simply referred to as the "period of Peiyang warlords." With the exception of Kwantung, Kwangsi, Yunman, and Kweichow, all the provinces had northerners as military governors at one time or another, mostly throughout the whole twelve years. Thus, northern troops were present in some eighteen provinces during this period.⁶

There were other factors that produced more soldiers in the north. Not only was the north poorer than the south, with lower agricultural productivity and lower living standards; it also was the area where the heaviest damage was inflicted by wars.⁷ Between 1916 and 1928, the northern provinces constituted the major battleground for nearly all the important wars. Natural calamities also exacted heavier tolls from the north than from other parts of China. The famine of 1920–21 left millions of people destitute in five northern provinces.⁸ Other cases of drought and flood caused many more deaths and forced millions more to desert their homes.⁹ These facts tend to bear out Chiang Fang-cheng's claim that of all the provinces in China, Shantung produced the largest number of soldiers, followed by Chihli and Honan.*

No matter what their provincial origins, however, most of the soldiers had no conscious collective cause. They rendered their services to a militarist not out of any personal or ideological attachment to him, but out of a desire to acquire material benefits or to avoid physical pain. These armies were most at home when they dealt with an impotent population, but were reluctant to face enemies in the field unless their own preservation was at stake. In ordinary situations, they would try to outmaneuver their enemies but avoid hard fighting. Very often, soldiers would defect or desert rather than do battle.

Much of this mercenary mentality can be attributed to the arbitrary methods of recruitment. Szechwan provides some of the most extreme examples of arbitrary recruitment.

Local recruiters might trick gullible peasants into joining their "armies" and then sell their services to the commanders of real military units. When a deal was made, the recruits were formed into a new unit under the militarist. The recruiter became the commander of the unit, and pledged his allegiance to the militarist in return for money, weapons, and supplies. Since Szechwan had a number of contending militarists, each of them was anxious to prevent these units from falling into his rivals' hands. Such a process of army formation necessarily occurred at the expense of

* Chiang Fang-cheng, *T'sai-ping*, 1: 10–11, 13. Sonoda, a Japanese journalist with wide knowledge of Chinese political and military affairs, came to the same conclusion: "Shantung has become the most famous soldier-producing province. Whenever there was war, warlords from other provinces would come to Shantung to recruit soldiers. Consequently, innumerable young men from Shantung became soldiers or bandits and moved into other provinces." Sonoda, p. 141.

internal organization and discipline. Consequently, the Szechwan armies were famous for three things: there were more officers than soldiers, more soldiers than weapons, and more weapons than ammunition.¹⁰

Some militarists were acutely aware of the shortcomings of a recruitment process that indiscriminately accepted people regardless of their motives and qualifications. A few of them even tried to take corrective measures.

Shansi seems to have been the only province to preserve a regular conscription system after 1916. Shansi was too poor to maintain a large standing army strong enough to ward off neighboring militarists' intrusions. Through conscription, however, it was able to keep an inexpensive military establishment in peacetime for the purpose of training new recruits who would then return to civilian life. The program was stepped up after 1923, when the province faced increasing danger of aggression from neighboring provinces. Shansi was thus able to have a force of about 100,000 men trained in the skills of war without disrupting normal peacetime productive processes. When a state of emergency existed, the "reserves" could be mobilized swiftly.¹¹

Although conscription worked well in Shansi, it was not feasible in other areas, for several reasons. In the first place, a successful conscription program required a stable territorial base with a stable social system, so that some form of census could be conducted. Furthermore, without such stability, the ruling militarist had no incentive to plan a strategic allocation of human resources on a rational basis, which was the main attraction of a conscription system.

In the second place, a conscription system also required a relatively efficient bureaucracy to handle the statistics and the planning, and mechanisms of rural control to implement the program. Shansi was the only province that had had a stable regime since the founding of the Republic and that had an efficient bureaucracy by contemporary Chinese standards.

In the third place, most militarists considered rotational conscription to be too costly. After a militarist had made the initial investment in a soldier's training, he could draw dividends on the investment as long as the man stayed in the army. In this way, he would have a veteran army. A conscription program, on the other

hand, required continuous investments in training at certain intervals. Furthermore, the existing force would always be small, while most militarists wanted a large standing army because of the constant wars.

The counterproductive effects of indiscriminate or coercive recruitment, on the one hand, and the impracticality of a conscription program, on the other, led some militarists to devise other ways to improve the quality of their recruits. Feng Yü-hsiang, for example, was one of the few militarists who emphasized physical fitness and imposed a number of minimum standards for his recruits.¹² Moreover, Feng was careful to preserve the social and geographical homogeneity of his force. Because his soldiers came mostly from the provinces of Honan, Shantung, Chihli, and Anhwei, he preferred to recruit from these provinces, sending his officers and men to their home towns to encourage relatives and friends to join the army. The merit of this method was that all the recruits were screened to eliminate those who had served in other military units and acquired a "mercenary" mentality. Instead, a network of close social relationships was woven among these recruits and the existing members of Feng's army to promote good working relationships and enhance the army's solidarity.¹³

Many other militarists also used particularistic ties to guide their recruitment policy. In the previous chapter, we discussed the ways in which these ties affected the recruitment and integration of militarists into the factions. In the recruitment of rank-and-file soldiers, there were necessarily some differences. Since most recruits came directly from the rural areas, they had no existing institutional superior-subordinate ties. Since most of them were illiterate or poorly educated, the teacher-student and classmate ties were seldom relevant. The family, clan, friendship, and sworn brotherhood ties undoubtedly were more important, but the most important and pervasive ties were probably the locality ties, because of the sheer number of people involved. When so many men were needed, it was quite difficult to recruit only men who were closely and personally related to the existing members of an army. It was not so difficult to recruit men from the same geographical area.

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militarist could not expect it to play a highly integrative role. It could not be mobilized as effectively as the other ties to impose a socially and culturally defined set of rights and obligations upon the soldiers. Geographical ties would be at their strongest when members of an army found themselves surrounded by a hostile alien population. Thus, the armies of most militarists in the Chihli faction were composed of soldiers from the northern provinces even when their territories extended to both banks of the Yangtze River; in the south, for a long time Kwangtung was ruled by a Kwangsi militarist who commanded a predominantly Kwangsi force.¹⁴ But even then the feelings of solidarity existed only in the short run, when dangers were present. By itself the geographical tie was not as integrative as the other particularistic ties in the long run. In this sense, the generally low level of solidarity and lack of discipline displayed by most Chinese armies can at least partially be attributed to the recruitment process itself.

As one might expect, the KMT, as a political party with a distinct ideological outlook, stressed ideological enthusiasm as well as physical fitness in its recruitment policies. In building its military power, the KMT originally tried to recruit in Kwangtung, but its recruiters were driven away, jailed, or murdered by the local militarists.¹⁵ Barred from this nearby source, the KMT government set up clandestine recruiting stations in the big cities in central China, inside the territories of hostile militarists. The Whampoa Military Academy set up recruiting centers for junior officers in both north and south China.¹⁶

Since the KMT army was still in its infancy, it offered little prospect for individual profit-making. Nor did the KMT use coercion in its recruitment. Consequently, we may assume that the many young men who approached the recruiting stations were attracted primarily by the ideological appeal of the party's programs. Therefore, the KMT had a very strict system of selection and its recruits may have been superior to those of other militarists.

The KMT, however, was an exception. There is little doubt that the recruitment patterns adopted by most militarists offered significant incentives to the large mass of the poverty-stricken rural population to take advantage of the opportunities offered by a military career. By doing away with most physical and intellectual

criteria, the armies made it possible for people from the lowest economic classes, who otherwise would have had an extremely difficult time competing for the limited opportunities offered by farming, to make a living. Many soldiers were even able to improve their social position, through increases in their education or wealth or by rising in the military hierarchy.

While the educational opportunities offered by the military way of life were not very great, nevertheless the army provided in many cases a peasant's only chance to escape from his village confines. For a farm boy from the mountainous regions of eastern Shantung to accompany an army into Kiangsü, Hupeh, or Szechwan inevitably broadened his range of experience. He might even have a chance to improve himself through some formal education. If he was lucky enough to have joined the army of one of the more enlightened militarists, he might learn a few hundred characters, some songs, a more efficient way of managing his activities, and possibly even a trade.

The financial opportunities offered by the military were more important. If a man stayed in his village as a farmer, his chance of economic improvement was nil. But if he joined the army, even when the pay was very modest he might still save a fraction of it to assist his family. If he joined a well-managed and well-financed army or an army in control of a rich area, he would do even better. In either case, a soldier's financial status was much better than that of the average peasant.

Even in poorly managed armies, the opportunity to gain sudden wealth was always possible. In fact, for many soldiers this was the major reason for staying in the military. Many armies had no qualms about plundering the populace, or they might engage in some illicit trade like gambling, prostitution, or opium. The leaders and the rank and file would all profit from such activities. A good example was the extensive opium trade carried out by the Yunnan troops in Kwangtung in the 1920's, which made the Yunnanese the wealthiest of all troops in Kwangtung.¹⁷ Bravery in action could bring a large share in the booty, and even in defeat the soldiers could go on individual forays to loot the civilians. Although we do not know precisely how much wealth could be accumulated in this manner, we can at least state that the average

soldier was conscious of the possibility that an illegal "killing" could give him a greater fortune than he could acquire by saving through a lifetime of hard work on the farm.

Last, there was the most formal and most visible kind of upward mobility: rising in the army hierarchy. We must remember that in twentieth-century China the military organizational ladder did not represent merely professional status; it had much wider ramifications. Generally speaking, the higher military status one reached, the more respect and deference one commanded, the greater wealth one acquired, the more political power one wielded, and the greater number of people's lives one could affect. These facts made upward mobility in the military more valuable than in other professions.

In China in the 1920's, there were no insurmountable barriers between officers and soldiers. A considerable number of soldiers could expect to become officers, and some moved all the way up. Thus to a certain extent the officers and soldiers could be considered as different parts of the same and continuous mobility ladder. To be precise about this subject, we need to have reliable information about the total number of soldiers, where they were distributed on different hierarchical levels at a given time, and how fast they could move from one level to the next and with what probability of success. Unfortunately, we do not have such information.

However, it is easy to find numerous cases of men rising from rags to riches. The very existence and high visibility of these cases must have had considerable impact upon the common soldiers' conception of their opportunities within the military profession. For they could see that a humble social origin was certainly no major hindrance to their own careers.

If we look at all the topmost militarists of the period (inspectors general of several provinces or commanders in chief of a force occupying several provinces), we find that obscurity of social origin was a shared feature. Chang Tso-lin (Manchuria) and Lu Jung-tung (Kwangtung-Kwangsi) came from the outlaw's world. Wang Chan-yüan (Hunan-Hupeh) and Chang Hsün (Yangtze valley) joined the army as foot soldiers. Ts'ao K'un (Chihli-Shantung-Henan) had been a cotton cloth peddler, and Chang Tsung-ch'ang (Chihli-Shantung) had earned his early living as a cymbalist and

a helper in a gambling den. Wu P'ei-fu (Hunan-Hupeh, Chihli-Shantung-Henan) and Feng Yü-hsiang (northwest) both came from impoverished families. All these men joined the army (either directly or via banditry) to escape hardship in civilian life. Five of these eight militarists joined the army as soldiers, three as reformed outlaws.

If a soldier cared to look around, he would have no trouble finding one or more of his immediate superiors who came from as lowly a social background as his own. For instance, Feng Yü-hsiang's most important subordinates came from very humble backgrounds. Surveying Feng's top 25 commanders in 1925, Sheridan found that only two had graduated from military academies, while 23 had risen from the ranks. The lack of formal education was shared by commanders on all levels of Feng's army.¹⁸

There is reason to believe that the rate of upward mobility at all levels accelerated during the latter part of the period. As the armies expanded, new units came into existence and more wars were fought. These conditions were favorable for a large number of lower-level officers and men to move upward at a faster rate.* As the discussion of military training in Chapter 5 will show, the number of cadets graduated from China's military schools could not possibly meet the increasing needs for officers. As supply lagged behind demand, the soldiers' opportunity to be promoted increased correspondingly.

Certainly, this discussion of upward mobility is not intended to imply that soldiers and officers enjoyed equal opportunity for advancement. But the lack of rigid organizational stratification, the inadequate supply of officers, and the low level of the military art all tended to blur the distinction between officers and soldiers as two separate groups of personnel. This blurring allowed a significant

* In 1916, there were only 32 division commanders in the country; in 1924, there were 84. After the wars of 1924, a period of reorganization and realignment led to the creation of so many new divisions that it became quite impossible to determine their exact number; possibly 200 divisions were in existence between 1925 and 1928. *CYB*, 1926-27, pp. 1069-86; 1928, pp. 1291-97. Furthermore, the majority of top officers stayed in their positions for only a few years and then moved out because of death, defeat, dismissal, or promotion, leaving vacancies for lower-level aspirants. As a result, the high-ranking officers were fairly young. My preliminary study of those division commanders whose ages were known for 1916 (15 out of 32) and 1924 (37 out of 84) shows that the median and mean ages of both groups were 43 years.

icant number of soldiers to move up the mobility ladder, and some even managed to reach the very top.

In sum, this chapter purports to show that, contrary to popular impression, the peasants who constituted the bulk of the armies were not impressed but joined voluntarily. While the growth of the armies was not caused by the peasants' demands for employment but by the militarists' needs for more power, the growth was facilitated by the existence of peasant masses in dire economic conditions. Compared with farming, the military offered not only some measure of occupational security but also some realistic hope of social and economic advancement. However, the fact that the majority of soldiers were drawn to military life by remunerative motives also created many problems in morale, discipline, and training. We shall turn to these problems in Chapter 5.

Military Capabilities: Training

From a modern point of view, we would expect that a period of training would follow the induction of recruits into an army. A comprehensive training program would include discipline, that is, a body of basic rules and regulations, and technical training, to teach the recruits how to use their weapons. In this chapter we shall examine the amount and quality of training provided to officers and soldiers in the armies of the militarists.

Disciplinary Training

In most of the armies, disciplinary training was very poor. By and large, there was a high correlation between the militarists' indifference to recruitment standards and their neglect of training. Those who recruited by any available means also tended to regard training as a long, tedious, and expensive job. In many cases, the recruits were assigned to regular combat units immediately upon arrival and were expected to acquire the necessary skills and discipline during active service.

This laxity in discipline was attributable to the commanding officers, whose indifference implicitly encouraged the soldiers to act as they pleased. More significantly, the militarists' personal life-styles were usually unprofessional and set bad examples for their men. Many of them were notorious with women, and gambling was the most popular way of socializing among the militarists.¹ Greed and corruption were pervasive; and most important militarists were able to amass a huge personal fortune after a few years in office, invariably through irregularities.² When corrupt and incompetent militarists led the armies, they could neither in-

spire confidence nor expect respect and discipline from their ranks. No greater harm was done to the armies than that caused by the widespread addiction to opium among officers, which also affected their soldiers. Frequently, a whole army became a collection of addicts. This greatly impaired both its fighting strength and its morale. The opium habit in some cases may have been deliberately encouraged by the commanding militarist, for once the soldiers had acquired this habit they had to stay in the army and fight harder for the militarist in order to pay for their opium. In some cases, opium addiction helped a militarist to tie down a large number of followers who had to rely on their commander for supply. The most notorious case of addiction was reported among Yunnan troops. Huang Shao-hung, the noted Kwangsi general who had experience working with Yunnan troops, reported that when Yunnan troops went on expeditions into other provinces, they were usually issued opium in lieu of food and wages.^{*} The addiction to opium became so demoralizing that even when the commanders realized the harm done they could not rectify it.*

Another factor that induced sagging morale and discipline was the officers' embezzlement of funds, especially the soldiers' pay. Since the primary motivation of most soldiers in joining the army was money, they naturally resented any reduction in their already meager pay. After Yüan Shih-k'ai's death, the last threads of centralized control were broken, and the soldiers' income came to depend more on the honesty of their commander than on the soundness of the system. In some units the pay scale was reduced, or the pay might not even be issued for months.[†]

One of the most immediate consequences of the prevalence of corruption among officers was that it became increasingly difficult for the higher command to keep track of its soldiers. Almost all commanders inflated the size of their forces, sometimes to intimi-

* When Fan Shih-sheng of the Yunnan army decided to ban opium smoking, he aroused such fierce resentment that one of his top lieutenants was assassinated. After several battles, his army simply withered away. Huang Shao-hung, 1: 98-99.

[†] An officer's irregularities might take many forms: he might render false accounts of expenditures and pocket the funds appropriated for his unit; he might reduce the percentage of salary paid in cash; he might pocket all surpluses; or he might simply expropriate all the money and leave his soldiers payless for months. *NCH*, Oct. 18, 1919; *T'sai Ting-k'ai*, 1: 133-39.

date enemies, but quite often simply to cheat their own superiors by drawing pay for nonexistent subordinates. Thus it was not unusual for a division or brigade to be credited by shrewd political observers of the time with only 70 percent or even 50 percent of its professed strength. When the top commander did not know exactly how many soldiers he actually possessed, he could exercise little supervision over their payment, and his command of their loyalty was impaired correspondingly. In fact, disputes over pay were one of the primary causes of the recurrent tension within the armies, which sometimes erupted into open riots or mutinies.*

Although such open acts of defiance as riot or mutiny provide us with a glimpse of the seriousness of the decline of discipline in some armies, they do not give us the whole picture. For each mutineer or rioter there were even more soldiers who became so disaffected that they simply deserted, as the high desertion rate cited earlier demonstrates. But the most telling indicators of the deterioration of discipline were the soldiers' conduct in war and their treatment of the civilians.

The lack of disciplinary training tended to reinforce the mercenary mentality that had prompted so many soldiers to join the army in the first place. Soldiers went into battle in the hope of being rewarded by their commanders or allowed to loot. To that extent, the soldiers had a stake in their military unit, whose continuity was instrumental to their personal well-being. But the army lost its instrumental value when it was placed in an unfavorable military situation. For in the final analysis, few mercenaries would accept high risks, since the first condition for making a profit was to stay alive. The implicit contractual relationship between the commander (employer) and the soldiers (employees) dictated maximizing material gains and minimizing battle losses. Such a strategy was scrupulously observed by a large number of Chinese soldiers. Consequently, some "marginal units" frequently

* According to a survey published in *Ku chün*, a journal devoted exclusively to military problems, between 1912 and 1922 there were recorded 179 mutinies, of which 38 cases involved a direct dispute over pay increases or pay in arrears. A large number of the other mutinies attributed to disbandment, insubordination, or unspecified reasons also involved an indirect dispute over pay. (Looting, for example, would often be caused by failure of prompt payment.) Ai Shih, "Min kuo i lai ping pien piao," *Ku chün*, 1, 4-5 (Jan. 1923); Shou Kang, "K'o p'a t'i ping pien pien," *ibid.*