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8th Route Army Harries Foe by Hit-Run Tactics

Operating Behind Japanese
Lines, Chinese Reds Pick
Off Forts One by One

By Harrison Forman

By Wireless to the Herald Tribune
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WITH THE 8TH ROUTE ARMY BEHIND THE JAPANESE LINES, IN CHINA.—Mafang is typical of thousands of Japanese strongpoints in north China with which the Japanese hope to hold millions of Chinese in bondage. But the Paluchun (Communist 8th Route Army) gives them no peace in these forts. The Paluchun swoops suddenly upon this or that fort, killing or capturing the garrison and firing the blockhouse.

The Paluchun have captured or destroyed 13,000 of these forts in the last year.

Mafang got it last night. Mafang was a powerfully built strongpoint perched atop a promontory commanding two important valleys and the Lishih-Lanfeng highway. The highway, incidentally, is lined with telephone poles. But they are not wired, since guerrillas and the Paluchun have stolen the wire so many times that the Japanese just gave up trying to maintain telephone service. Even motor traffic on the highway is rare, since every truck must run a gauntlet of mines laid by the Paluchun.

The Japanese occupied Mafang from the time it was built in 1941 until last March, but, finding it necessary to withdraw troops from North China for more urgent use elsewhere, they have

turned such strongpoints over to their puppets for garrisoning.

They do not trust the puppets, however, for the fifty-odd puppets garrisoning Mafang were equipped with old discarded weapons and practically no ammunition. This the soldiers of the Paluchun learned from inside information. When they surrounded Mafang last night they shouted to the puppets just what their strength and equipment were, and named the puppets one by one. They were warned that they had better surrender or be killed to the last man.

The puppets surrendered, and the Paluchun fired the strongpoint. It is still burning today.

Mafang's nucleus was a circular blockhouse about twenty feet in diameter and twenty feet high. It was built of stone and mud bricks and was bristling with machine-gun loopholes. Adjacent was the garrison's quarters, built half underground. Trenches surrounded the nucleus about twenty feet from the blockhouse. Just beyond was a double-line barbed wire defense.

One 8th Route Army soldier scrambled down and up the ditches encircling the hill and cut the ropes of drawbridges over them; whereupon other soldiers dashed across under cover of machine-gun fire.

The captured puppets were a sorry-looking lot. They were bewildered and frightened, for this particular batch has had a reputation for mistreating the people in the vicinity. They obsequiously answered all questions the way they thought the 8th Routers would like to have them answered.

It was dusk as we left the smoking ruins of the fort. People were gathering from the countryside with picks and shovels to complete the strongpoint's destruction during the night.

The Japanese will return, of course, and round up these same people and force them to rebuild the strongpoint. The people know

this, but they know also that it takes time—and time is something the Japanese do not have too much of with events moving so rapidly these days.

We have just received word that 100 Japanese arrived at Mafang some hours after we left.

Block house; pulled down