

## The 1st Chinese Liberation Army

With Russian forces pushing relentlessly into China, the commander of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, General Jian Dao Tseng of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in Lanzhou Military Region was in a dilemma. His Division had been ordered to hold in place but had been quickly overrun by the Soviet 17<sup>th</sup> Army. Knowing his senior commander he knew that trying to escape and evade would result in his execution even if he reached Chinese lines which looked unlikely. His alternative was to act as a guerilla but this held little appeal for the general as he suspected that there was a good chance of them executing him to (on the grounds that he had been very corrupt whilst his unit was assisting in local projects). He therefore decided to employ a risky strategy. Ordering the remnants of his headquarters to escape and evade south or join the partisans, he set out to find a Soviet unit. He waited out of sight by the roadside for a rear echelon supply unit. When one came into sight he stepped clear of the cover with his arms raised in surrender, ensuring that he was



*Illustration 1: General Jian Dao Tseng*

*“So Valudin, you not only report by yourself but bring me a general, you will go far my boy, you remind me of your father in the Great Patriotic Way, Yuri Ivanovich we only caught a Hitlerite colonel on our first day though! Obviously China has better pickings than Leningrad!”*

*General Victor Tugarin's personal diary with thanks to his daughter Anya*

seen in plenty of time. His luck held and he was not shot on sight. Fortunately for him, the excited conscripts had with them a commissar, Oleg Valudin who was travelling to Army headquarters as a replacement (the Soviets had learned quickly that behind the front line there were plenty of guerrillas and so had adopted a system where vehicles would wait at designated points for others to be going the same way. Valudin sat the captive (minus his watch and rank slides that had been taken as souvenirs) in the UAZ with him while he dreamed of the fame for capturing a general. As they drove on Jian made plain to the commissar that he was dissatisfied with the Chinese regime and was not surrendering but wanted to defect. Valudin was stunned, this could be his lucky break. Once the convoy reached its destination, he ordered the driver to continue on to the 17<sup>th</sup> Army's headquarters. When he arrived he went straight to his senior officer's headquarters and explained who Jian was. His superiors agreed with his (really Jian's plan) and promptly gave their captive

accommodation (although guarded him against any trickery). Stunned that his plan was working beyond his expectations Jian co-operated happily giving as much information as he could that would be of use to the Soviets. Meanwhile the Soviets put the main part of the plan into effect.

By the winter, agents went about the atrocious prison camps (these were basically tents open to the elements, although a few had wooden barracks that the inmates had to build themselves). As they went they offered their inmates freedom in return for joining what was to become known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Chinese Liberation Army. In their efforts to escape the camps (where deaths were running at about 4% a month), many volunteered. These were assessed to see if they would be suitable. Most were and they were put into training. Here a harsh



*Illustration 2: Physical activity training played a major part in training. The Soviet martial art of Sambo was one of the main ways of doing this.*

regime reigned, the troops were retrained in Soviet methods and taught the basics of Russian. Live ammunition was used by the training staff and training “accidents” were common with a casualty rate of about 2% (a considerable number of these accidents were actually suicide but no reliable figures exist). Officers were predominantly Russian although some junior officers were Chinese. Equipment issued was captured Chinese items repainted with Soviet style markings. Occasionally Chinese characters were painted on with slogans similar to those found on Soviet tanks. Uniforms were Chinese issue with a shield showing the Chinese flag sown on the upper left arm. Ranks were shown in Soviet fashion. Only at the end of their training as they approached the front would the recruits be issued live ammunition for their weapons (small arms were a mix of Chinese and Soviet, while heavier weapons were Chinese).

Committed in Operation Silver Wind in the summer of 1996 under

### **Major General Oleg Valudin**

*Born in 1964, an only child of Colonel Yuri and Mary Valudin. His father was a regular army officer who had been part of the relief force fighting the way into Leningrad where he meet Oleg's mother.*

*Growing up Oleg loved reading and loved listening to his maternal grandmother's fairy tales. Even so he grew up a dedicated communist. Undertaking his military service he was selected to be a commissar. Popular with his men who he took great pains to look after he surprised himself enjoying the life of a soldier. Assigned to the Group of Soviet Forces Germany he decided to become a regular soldier to the delight of his father.*

*In 1995 he was ordered to China and after some string pulling by his father was assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> Army's headquarters working for a friend of his father.*

*He is a veteran NPC who speaks Russian (10) and Cantonese (6) plus a little German (2).*

*By July 2000 he is war weary but still loyal to the system. He looks after his men well (no mean feat as they are looked down on by the Russians and loathed as traitors by the locals). He is willing to take harsh measures to protect his men but prefers not to and regrets any needless deaths.*

the command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army, the 1<sup>st</sup> Chinese Liberation Army performed adequately. With the unit really of an under strength divisional size and formed as a motor rifle division, it managed to dent the Chinese defensive front although its losses from ATGM spider web defences were heavy. Follow on formations managed to break through the Chinese line and push onwards. Rebuilding to almost divisional size over the autumn it was thrown into the vicious defensive battles of the

winter. Cut off and isolated by a Chinese attack it fought ferociously (with the men dreading capture). The remnants of the Liberation Army eventually reached Russian lines after a month fighting on foot. No vehicles escaped and the troops were relying purely on captured munitions and existing on the meagre amounts of food they could loot. General Jian was not among the survivors, he was captured and his trial and execution were shown on Chinese television as a warning. Valudin did however escape and unusually for a commissar was given command of the survivors. The Liberation Army was again rebuilt although it is noticeable that Valudin was gentler on the newer recruits than Jian had been. The unit remained on the reserve during the spring offensive of 1997 and was busy conducting anti-marauder operations against partisans to blood the troops. During this time it is recorded that harsh measures were taken against a group of deserters, with each member of their own company being responsible for bayoneting them in front of the remainder of the division. In a last ditch Chinese counter-attack of mid 1997 the 1<sup>st</sup> was thrown into the line when the 29<sup>th</sup> Motor Rifle Division was over-run. Eventually the counter-attack was fought to a standstill but at the cost of yet again shattering the 1<sup>st</sup>. Withdrawn to Manchuria with the 5<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army it has rebuilt itself into two



*Illustration 3: Major General Oleg Valudin photographed in an unknown town in China 1998. TASS*

regiments of infantry (which are now no longer mechanised or even motorised), an artillery



*Illustration 4: The only known photo of the 1st Chinese Liberation Army taken during the mid 1997 counter attack.*

*Private collection of Anya Valudin*

of drafted Russians and ethnic minorities.

regiment using towed guns for one battalion and heavy mortars for the other two, a cavalry squadron on steppe ponies, a transport unit using a mix of commandeered vehicles (enough to move about a quarter of the unit at any one time but subject to numerous breakdowns) and a small armoured squadron for emergency use. In addition pride of place is an old steam train (called the Rail Bound Dragon) that has been armoured and carries a number of heavy weapons (a ZU23-2 in an armoured mount on the front, a Type 59 with no engine on a flatcar and a ZU30-2 turret mounted on an armoured coach). This is painted in gaudy colours in imitation of a Chinese dragon. The unit is still under the command of (now) Major General Valudin although it is no longer exclusively Chinese, the last rebuild including a number

Current location: Manchuria

Current Subordination: 5<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army

Current strength: 800

Vehicles: 6 Type 59 tanks



*Illustration 5: 1st Chinese Liberation Army Type 59 restored to original condition as part of the memorial in Mongola where many of the survivors settled after the war.*