



FROM INSIDE CHINA

中国报告系列

THE GREAT DISARMAMENT

百万大裁军

袁厚春 著 Danielle Vrublevskis 译



中国出版集团
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电 话 / (010) 68359376, 68359827, 68358224

传 真 / (010) 68357870

邮 编 / 100044

电子邮箱 / book@ctph. com. cn

网 址 / <http://www.ctph.com.cn>

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Chapter 1

The National Day Parade: The Story Begins

1

ON OCTOBER 1, 1984, Tian'anmen Square hosted a grand military parade. This was the first time in a quarter of century since 1959 that China had revealed its strength. The whole world watched with eager eyes, full of curiosity, excitement and suspicion.

Within China itself, everybody with access to a television was glued to the screen. Television, which had previously been a luxury, had suddenly appeared in the homes of millions almost as if conjured there overnight. This led to an unprecedented number of viewers, even if every family still complained about the inflation. At 10am, both the people sitting in Tian'anmen Square, as well as those waiting in front of the TV stirred: The military parade had started.

A black "Red Flag" convertible arrived at the head of Jinshui Bridge. Qin Jiwei, the commander of the Beijing Military Region, gave a smart salute to Chairman of the Military Commission of

the CPC Central Committee, Deng Xiaoping. Qin reported to him sonorously:

“Chairman of the Military Commission:

The troops are all in order for the parade marking 35th Anniversary of the People’s Republic of China. Please review them!

Commander of the Parade: Qin Jiwei”

Deng Xiaoping acknowledged his report with a solemn look. The worthy commander-in-chief of China’s armed forces didn’t wear military uniform; he was a leader without any military rank.

The open topped car used to review troops drove solemnly and smoothly along East Chang’an Avenue. Standing in it, Deng Xiaoping raised his right hand to hail the uniformed troops. He greeted the soldiers and the soldiers saluted their chairman.

When Deng spoke it was with a Sichuan accent; his voice was clear and resolute. Despite facing this moving spectacle he appeared appropriately calm. His manner combined the dignity of a commander-in-chief with the benevolence of a venerable elder. His movement was measured as befitting a leading senior officer, yet he was full of the poise native to a veteran politician. His performance was perfect; not even the most talented actor could imitate him.

The high-spirited officers and soldiers watched their marshal; their unwavering gaze following his solemn movements. When compared to other Chinese revolutionaries of the same generation he was the most robust. He was the youngest among the rest of the leaders with a similar status and he had experienced more of the vicissitudes of history than any of his peers. The new stage in Chinese history that began in 1976 had given him the chance to make his unique contribution to the nation. Now, wearing his

dark grey tunic suit he walked past the troops in their grass green uniforms. He was like a moving mountain; like a living monument.

People saw Deng as a part of their history but also as an active player in current events.

He reviewed the enormous army with a sobriety informed by history.

With the start of the magnificent "March of the People's Liberation Army" came the breathtaking sound of thousands of footsteps; the parade had begun! Members of the army, air force and navy as well as cadets from the military academy marched past the reviewing stand in Tian'anmen.

This was a brand new military. The officers and soldiers were all wearing modern military uniforms, which made them look even more vigorous and impressive. Although this was merely the appearance now required as a result of the standardization of the forces, it still won the admiration of thousands of spectators in the square.

No other design could replicate the beautiful pattern of these troops as they paraded in their straight lines and perfect rectangles. No melody could match the rhythm created by the sound of the marching soldiers, one hundred and sixteen steps in a single minute. There is nothing that arouses pride and patriotism in one's nation more than the sound of marching troops. Ever since the dawn of war, humankind has understood that a military parade is the greatest way to celebrate one's country, and has consequently regarded it as an incomparable occasion. We use it to boost morale before a campaign, to celebrate victory when our troops return home triumphant, and to welcome distinguished guests. Even when the fascist army loomed at the city gates, Marshal Stalin

composedly reviewed the troops in Moscow's Red Square in order to galvanize his countrymen's desire for revenge and belief in the inevitability of Soviet victory.

So what kind of parade was being held in 1984?

. . . Rapturous applause broke out suddenly in the reviewing stand. Ah, the female soldiers were coming! Every female soldier looked so smart, lively and spirited. Peaked hats adorned their heads and they wore a dark blue mid-length skirt paired with elegant boots. The heavy march was transformed into a dance under their gentle tread; the fierce slogans and yells were mellowed by their sweet voices into a song. They were a variation in the composition of the magnificent parade; unifying power and beauty, they were a feast for the eyes.

Deng Xiaoping and other leaders in the reviewing stand smiled pleasantly. They liked this troop, which was so full of youthful energy.

Following quickly behind were the twenty-four mechanized squadrons with their motors thundering. Anti-tank missiles, mine-laying rocket systems, armored personnel carriers, modern style tanks, automatic guns, shore-to-ship missiles, submarine-to-ground missiles, ground-to-air missiles, medium-range missiles, long-range missiles and strategic missiles; all showed the unprecedented strength of the Chinese military. It was the first time that these modern weapons and equipment, designed and built domestically, had been presented in public. Faced with political turmoil and economic woes for year upon year, the Party and the people had devoted themselves whole-heartedly to the modernization of the army.

The rumbling had not yet faded away when a sharp howling

began roaring across the sky. A group of ninety-four bombers, attack aircraft and fighters flew over Tian'anmen in formation. Everyone raised their eyes to the heavens to admire this last show of the parade, a poetic conclusion to a majestic performance.

The airplanes flew above Tian'anmen exactly as Qin Jinwei had scheduled, although it was a shame that the thin wisps of clouds had not also obeyed his wishes and disappeared. It seemed as if the clouds veiled both the airplanes and their colorful smoke-trails. The conclusion of this most splendid final act was not perfect yet it also gave the people room for imagination.

Deng Xiaoping's head was craned to look at the sky. Holding his hand above his eyes to shield them from the sun as he looked up he also directed the gaze of those beside him by pointing . . . He was able to see farther and more clearly than others and it seemed as if his eyes were fixed on a destination as yet unseen by anyone else. He continued to look up for a long while, watching until tens of thousands of peace doves and colorful balloons rose up into the sky to where the fighters had just flown past . . .

The senior aids at Deng Xiaoping's side in Tian'anmen Square were also watching attentively. The generals still wore their old-fashioned Dacron uniforms, much like most of the soldiers in China at that time. Placed within the context of a worldwide history of military parades, this phenomenon was both interesting and rare. It was a clear sign that China and its army were in the process of replacing the old with the new.

Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Central Military Commission, Yang Shangkun was also gazing up at the sky. His smile was calm and reserved. As the man responsible for actually organizing all the important operations within the military, he

remained full of contemplation even at this most exciting moment.

The night before, while the final decorating and cleaning tasks were being attended to, the Military Affairs Section of the People's Liberation Army General Staff Department received a call from the General Office of the Central Military Commission: "Vice-Chairman Yang wants to read the 'plan'. Please send it here immediately."

Was it the plan for the next day's parade? No, it was a plan for the reduction and reorganization of the armed forces. He re-read it several times although he had already met with the Standing Committee of Central Military Commission several times in order to examine the policy.

It was as if this parade was a farewell to history . . .

2

ON NOVEMBER 1, one month after the National Day parade, the commanders and commissars of the Navy, Air Force, Second Artillery Corps and the eleven military regions all gathered in the Conference Room of Beijing's Jingxi Hotel for a meeting of the Military Commission. Deng Xiaoping greeted them all calmly, sat down and delivered a speech that lasted nearly ninety minutes. He spoke in a jocular tone yet he was talking about shocking strategic decisions. Without a doubt, this speech is crucial literature for the study of the history of the People's Liberation Army. That aside, the skilful delivery and style of Deng's address meant that this speech was a wonderful, emotionally rich piece of prose.

"Where to start?" Deng Xiaoping looked amiably and warmly