

SHORT HISTORIES OF THE PLA'S 12TH, 13TH, 14TH, 20TH, 26TH, 27TH, AND 39TH GROUP ARMIES

Xinhui

12th Group Army

The 12th Group Army's nickname is the "Hundred General Regiment", because a large number of PLA generals are from this formation, especially during the first communist revolution. The formation was created as a regiment during the anti-Japanese war. It attacked Japanese airfields in ShanXi region, in the so-called 'infantry attacks airplane' battles. This unit performed very well during the civil war, and won large number of battles.

In the latter part of Civil War, the regiment was enlarged into the 12th Army. It was part of the 2nd Field Army, tanking part in the liberation of Sichuan. During the Korean War, it became part of the 3rd Army Group, and took 31st Division from 11th Army. The 31st and 34th Divisions took part in defense of the Heartbreak Ridge.

Both 1st and 12th Armies belonged to the old 2nd Field Army. During the formation of Group Armies in the 1980s, the 1st Group Army was designated as Category A, and 12th Group Army was designated as Category B, both in Nanjing MR. Because of the Taiwan issue of the mid 1990s, the 12th Group Army received more training and budgetary support than before. An ATGM unit from this army's 36th Division took part in the October 1, 1999 Troop Review in Beijing, a great honor.

13th Group Army

13th Group Army was a member of the 73rd Division from the Hubei/Anhui Soviet, later it moved to Sichuan/Shaanxi Soviet and jointed the 31st Army as its 93rd division. During the Anti-Japanese War, It was incorporated into the 8th Route Army, as 129th Division's 386th Brigade, with the task of establishing the Taiyue operational base.

The Fourth Column served as a tactical mobile formation during the war of liberation, and commanded by 1st, 2nd, and 4th Field Army from one time to another. During the battle of Lin Fu, it destroyed the KMT¹ elite formation, the so-called "1st Brigade under the Heaven" and captured its commander Lt. General Huang Zhengcheng. The Fourth Column entered central China in March 1948 and took part of the battle of Luoyang. Its 13th brigade, 37th regiment, 7th company, 1st squad, and 10th brigade, 28th regiment and 5th company received honors as the "Luoyang Hero Squad" and "Luoyang Hero Company".

The Column also distinguished itself during the epic battle of Huai Hai, where 600,000 PLA troops encircled and destroyed the best of the KMT army, and marked the beginning of the end of the Chinese civil war. For its part, its 13th Brigade 38th Regiment's 1st Battalion received the honored title "Iron and Steel" Battalion. The Fourth Column moved down south and reached Hananin February 1949. It was then officially renamed as 2nd Field Army, 4th Army Group, 13th Army with Zhou Xihanas the command and Liu Youquang as the political commissar. Its 10th brigade was renamed as 37th division, and 13th brigade as 38th division. In addition, it also incorporated troops from the Yuxi MR as its 39th division. Liu Bocheng was the commander of the 2nd field army with Deng Xiaoping as its political commissar. 13th Army soon took part in the battle of Yangzi Crossing, and librated Nanchang, the birthplace of the PLA in May 22nd, 1948. In September of the same year, the 13th, reassigned as a member of the 4th Field Army entered the Guangdong and, Guangxi provinces. In the battle of Yunnan that followed, it captured KMT army's vice commander Clang Yao.

After the civil war, the 13th Army was assigned to the South Yunnan Garrison Region. According to the official PLA records, the 4th Column/13th Army destroyed over 53,000 KMT troops. In the spring of 1950, the 13th Army was ordered to "Aid the Vietnamese in their struggle against the French", in the process, it whipped over 3000 KMT troops who had escaped to Vietnam. In November of 1960, after a

¹ Editor's note. Abbreviation for Kuomintang, the party headed by Chiang Kai-shek, and official government of China before losing the civil war with the communist forces. These were also referred to as the Nationalists.

treaty with the Burma government was signed, the 13th Army supported with other troops from Yunnan Military District, launched an attack into Burma and attempted to push out KMT troops operating in that area. During this attack, the 13th army was ordered to study jungle warfare for future use.

The 13th Army moved its Head Quarter to Chongqing in December 1968. It took part in the Sino-Vietnam War of 1979 as main force of the Western line and completed its assignment in capturing the important city of Qantang in the Northwest.

14th Group Army

14th Group Army (35201) Kuenming 14th Group Army started its history in the Anti-Japanese war. On August 1, 1937, a group of youth in Shenxi area formed the Shenxi 1st Youth Daredevil Group, it was also known as the “Shenxi New Army” and later incorporated into the 8th Route Army’s Tai Yue Military Region. It took part in the epic battle of 100 regiments under the command of Peng Dehuai and fought the Imperial Japanese Army’s Anti-Partisan Campaign that followed. Peng Dehuai later became the command of Chinese force in Korean War, and China’s first Defense Minister.

In 1942, 386th, and 212th Brigades and the 1st Youth Daredevil Group combined as the Tai Yue Column. Tai Yue Column eventually renamed as the 4th Column in Oct 1945. The 386th brigade, 1st Youth Daredevil group, and 212th brigade were renamed as 10th, 11th, and 12th Brigades. 4th Column was commanded by Chen Geng with Xie Fuzhi as the political commissar. During the Civil war, it operated with 22nd brigade of the 8th column and it took part in the epic battle of Huai Hai. After the battle, 11th brigade, 22nd brigade and 110th division were combined and form the new 14th Army of the 2nd Field Army.

In February 1949, 11th Brigade, 22nd Brigade and 110th Division were reassigned as 40th, 41st, and 42nd Divisions of 14th Army with Li Chengfang as its commander and Lei Rongtian as the political commissar. With sister army, the 13th it took part in the battle of Yangzi Crossing, and liberated Nanchang, the birthplace of the PLA in May 22nd, 1948. In September of the same year, the 14th, reassigned as a member of the 4th field army entered the Guangdong and, Guangxi provinces. It entered Yunnan in January, 1950 and took part in the battle of Xichang and conducted bandit suppression operations in that area. It also engaged with the surviving members of the KMT 93rd division operated within Burma’s border a number of times.

The 14th Army’s task in the 1950s were protect China’s border of the Western Yunnan province. During the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s, two of its engineering regiments went to Northern Vietnam to help the logistic needs of the North Vietnamese Army. It has been recorded these regiments engaged South Vietnamese Special Force on more than one occasion. The 14th earned a great deal of experience in jungle warfare during those years, and gained a nick name “Jungle Tiger” when its headquarter was moved to Kunming in 1968.

The 14th went into Vietnam again in 1979, this time as enemy and assigned to the Western line, it attacked Laojie, the provincial capital of Huang Lian Shan, cut off the 7th highway and establish a beach head around Hong River (Meikong). In protracted post-1979 Sino-Vietnamese border skirmishes that followed, 14th’s 42nd Division took Mt Koulin in 1981. And its 1st battalion of 126th regiment earned the honor of “Mt Kou Lin Hero Battalion” During the Second Sino-Vietnam war of 1984, its 40th division and 122nd regiment of the 41st division, took part in the Lao Shan campaign, In April 28, they took control of Lao Shan and 10 high ground and surrounding hills after a total of 5 hours and 20 minutes and destroyed two Vietnamese Garrison companies in the process. PLA’s KIA was around 100. The commander of 40th Division was promoted to the Commander of 14th Field Army afterward and became one of the 10 outstanding persons of 1984. Eventually he became the commander of the Chengdu Military Region. Elements 40th Division, including its tank battalion, also took part in the battle of 6.12, and 7.12. The 7.12 battle was the largest of the Second Sino Vietnam War engagements. On the Vietnamese side six regiments were involved, including two of 313th Division, one of 312th Division, one of 345th Division, and one special operation regiment. After one day of hard fighting, the LaoShan was captured, and 3000+ Vietnamese bodies were counted.

20th Group Army

20th Army started as the communist Red Army Eastern Fujian Independent division, a collection of guerrillas force operated in Eastern Fujian Province during the 1920s. After the Japanese invasion, it was incorporated into the New Fourth Army as Third support group, 6th regiment. It was first under the command of Jiangnan Headquarter, and then Subei Headquarter with a nickname, "Jiangnan Anti-Japanese Righteous and Brave Army" (Jiangnan Kangri Yiyong Jun).

In October 1940, it defeated the Nationalist's anti-communist elements in the battle of Yellow Bridge (Huang Qiao). After the Wannan incident of January 1941, the 6th regiment was reformed as 1st Division, New Fourth Army. In December 1944, under the command of Su Yu, the 1st Division and its three main regiments, moved down south and crossed the Yangtze river and became the 4th Column of the Zhejiang Military District (MD), while the wounded remain in Jiangnan and formed the "Jiang Anti-Japanese Eastern Route Headquarter" and later became part of the 6th Division, 18th Brigade, New Fourth Army eventual rejoined the 20th army as 59th Division's 175th Regiment.

After the victory of the Anti-Japanese war in late 1945, and according the treaty of Zhongqing, Zhejiang MD's military force were ordered to moved north into Shandong province and joined newly formed Shandong Field Army's as its 1st Column with Ye Fei and its commander and Lai Chuanzhu as the political commissar. The 1st Column's three main elements were the 1st Brigade (ex-Zhejiang 4th Column), 2nd Brigade (ex-Suzhong's MD's training brigade), and the 3rd Brigade (ex-Zhejiang's 2nd Column).

In 1947, the Shandong Field Army was renamed as Huadong Field Army, and three brigades of the 1st Column were enlarged to division size as the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divisions. The 1st Column became the main fighting formation of the Huadong Field Army and took parts in epic battles such as Mengling, Yu Wan Su, and Huaihai.

In February 1949, the 1st Column was renamed and reassigned as PLA 20th Army of 3rd Field Army, 9th Army Group, with Lu Fei as its commander and Chen Shifu as the political commissar. Its three divisions were renamed as 58th, 59th and 60th Infantry Divisions. Right after the reform, the 20th Army took part in battle of Yangtze Crossing, and battle of Shanghai.

After the Civil War, the 20th was station in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang area and prepared for the invasion of Taiwan as a reserve formation.

After the Korea war broke out, the 20th Army entered Korea in November 1950, and returned to China in October 1952, as one of the first PLA army to return. Elements of 20th also took part in the 1979 Sino-Vietnam war.

26th Group Army

The 26th Group Army started as a member of the 8th cColumn, East China Field Army in Shandong area. In, December 1938, the 4th Branch (Zhi Dui) of the Shandong column was created around the Julai Mountain area from communist guerrilla force operated there. The 4th Branch was renamed as 4th Brigade in 1941, and operated in Shandong's Lu Zhong area.

The unit was enlarged in August 1945 to become the 4th Division, Lu Zhong Military Region (MR) and incorporated Luzhong 2nd Reserve Brigade and 3rd brigade as its members. The unit was rename once again in November 1945 as the 9th Division.

During the Chinese Civil War that followed, 9th Division, a new 4th Division, and the reserve brigade of Lu Zhong combined into the 8th Column with Wang Jianan as its commander and Xiang Ming as the political commissar. The 9th, 4th, and the reserve brigade were reformed as 22nd, 23rd, and the 24th Divisions. The 8th Column operated mainly in central China area and took part in large battles such as Lunan, Laiwu, Meng Liangliang, Sha Tuji, Luo Yang, and the epic battle of Huaihai. During those battles, the 8th Column established itself was one of the elite formations of the East China Field Army.

In January 1949, the East China Field Army was renamed as 3rd Field Army, and the 8th Column was renamed as PLA's 26th Army, 8th Army Group, 3rd Field Army. Its three divisions were renamed as 76th, 77th and 78th Divisions. It took part in the battle of Yangtze crossing in the following April, and ended up in the Suzhou region by the war's end.

The 26th Army entered Korea in November 1950 as a member of the 9th Army Group and took part in the 2nd, 4th, and 5th Battles. During the 4th Battle of March 1951, it was attacked by US 187th Airborne Regiment and its helicopter borne infantry. This marked the first time a Chinese force engaged with a helicopter borne enemy force, considered a milestone for the PLA. The 26th returned to China in June 1952 and was stationed in the Shandong area for garrison duty.

In 1960, its 76th division moved to Fujian and joined the 29th Army as its 86th division, while it took over the 33rd Division from PLA central command as its replacement. The 33rd was later renamed as 76th division

27th Group Army

Perhaps, the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) 27th Group Army was most famous for its part in the brutal crack down of the student protesters in Tiananmen during those tearful days of June 1989. 27th Group Army started as a formation of the Jiaodong MR of the 8th Route Army during the Anti-Japanese War. After that war, Jiaodong MR moved into North Eastern China and incorporated as 9th Column of the Eastern China (Huadong) Field army with 5th Division, 6th Division, and the 3rd Reserve Brigade under its command.

It reformed again in March 1947, and its formations renamed as 25th, 26th, and 27th Divisions with Xu Shiyong as its commander and Lin Hao as the political commissar. After the reform, it was thrown into the battle of Shangdong, and later the whole Eastern China front lines. During the battles, it gained a formidable reputation and became the main fighting formation of the Eastern China Field Army. During the battle of Wei Country, its 29th Regiment, 25th Division, held out its position for 20 hours against overwhelming KMT attacks, and enabled the rest of 9th Column to thrust deep inside enemy's rear. For its action, the 29th Regiment was rewarded with the honor of "Wei Country Regiment". This battle only reinforced 9th Column's tough image.

In September 1948, the 9th Column was put to the test once again during the battle of Jinan. 73rd Regiment of 25th Division, broke the enemy defense line and flood open the city wall. After the battle, the 73rd was honored as the "Jinan First Regiment". The PLA gained a great deal of experience with urban warfare during this battle. With Jinan secured, the PLA launched a general offensive against the KMT in the epic battle of Huaihai, and marked the beginning of the end of the Chinese civil war. During Huaihai, the 9th Column was used for the destruction of the KMT's American trained and equipped Huang BoTao Army Group, in addition, elements of the 9th Column took part in the victory against the Yu Shuangdui and Du Yuming army groups.

The 9th Column was renamed as PLA's 27th Army in February 1949 with Nie Fengzhi as its commander and Liu Haotian as its political commissar. Its three divisions were renamed as the 79th, 80th, and 81st Divisions. It was under the command of the 9th Army Group, 3rd Field Army. With the 3rd Field Army, the 27th Army took part in the Yangtze crossing and battle of Shanghai. During the battle of Shanghai in May of 1949, due to the lack of transportation, the 27th was without heavy weapons after crossing the Suzhou river, and suffered heavy casualties, but managed to force the KMT garrison to surrender. The 27th Army also displayed a great deal of discipline, all troops including its commander slept in the field and no one broke into civilian homes, a great contrast with the former KMT garrisons.

The 9th Group Army commanded by Peng Deqing entered Korea in October 1950 with its three armies, the 20th, 26th and 27th. It took part in the 2nd Battle and 27th army's 80th and 81st Divisions engaged the US 1st Marine and 7th Infantry Divisions. In 30 degrees below zero, after suffering heavy casualties from the bitter cold and US airpower, it managed to destroy the US 31st Regiment, 7th Division, including capture of its Regimental color. The 31st Regiment was the only US regiment totally destroyed during the Korea

war. In addition to the destruction of the 31st regiment, the 27th Army also destroyed the 1st Battalion, 32nd Regiment, 7th Division, and the 57th Field Artillery Battalion. Due to heavy casualties, the 27th was rebuilt, and went back to action during the 5th Battle, or what the UN called the PLA Spring Offensive. The 5th Battle was the largest engagement of that war. The 27th returned to China in October 1952, and was assigned to the Nanjing Military Region (MR).

After the Sino-Soviet border clash of 1969, the CMC ordered the 27th to the Beijing MR to boost the defense of the nation's capital. Some of its units also took part in the Laoshan defense in the Sino-Vietnam Border War in 1987.

39th Group Army

It is one of the oldest formations in PLA. It was created during the Second Revolutionary War as one of the three formations of the Red Army back in 1920s. It acted as the vanguard troops of the Long March. In 1934, it's 26th and 27th Armies formed the 15th Army Group, and took ten months to link together two soviet (communist controlled areas) in Shaanxi. 15th Army Group was one of the three main Red Army formation of CCP at that time. The 15th Army Group was assigned to the 1st Red Area Army in 1935 and took part in all the military campaign in Northern China. During the anti-Japanese war, it is was also one of the first formations to engage the Japanese regular forces.

On October 31, 1950, elements of the 39th Group Army were the first PLA formation to fight against the American 1st Cavalry Division, and to score the first PLA victory against the division. On November 11, 1950, it defeated the American 25th Infantry Division, capturing 115 soldiers of the 3rd Company, 24th Infantry Regiment belonging to 25 Division. The prisoners included the first African-American POWs captured by PLA. Elements of the 39 Group Army took parts in almost every campaign of the Korea War.

On October 28, 1990 Jiang Zemin personally reviewed the troops of 39th Group Army after it won as one the Ace formation of the PLA under heavy snow. In the winter of 1996, thousands of motor transport carried the 39th Group Army across the grassland to Tibet. The exercise included seven reconnaissance companies acting as pathfinders. Remote control recon drones, infrared, GPS, and much other modern equipment were used to aid their mission.