

Would the Atomic Bomb End the War in Korea?

RALPH E. LAPP

BEFORE his trip to Korea, General Eisenhower must have been briefed on the possible battlefield use of atomic weapons there. This was not his first briefing on the tactical uses of A-weapons. As NATO chief, the General received information on A-bombs that could be delivered by tactical aircraft. Since that time atomic artillery has emerged as an alternative method of placing atomic missiles on front-line targets (though there is no indication that atomic cannon have been shipped to Korea).

It has been reported that General Eisenhower was considerably impressed with the potentialities of tactical atomic weapons in connection with the European defense problem. General Gruenther, Chief of Staff for NATO, has, in fact, stated that such weapons would be used if the Red Army should attack. Korea, however, presents quite a different picture for the use of battlefield A-bombs.

Lethal Circles

No atomic bombs have ever been used against troops. The only two used militarily were those that demolished Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The peace-time military exercises that were carried out with troops near Las Vegas, Nevada, were not very realistic. Soldiers were kept six to seven miles from the bomb bursts, a distance at which the bomb has no lethal force. Thus there are no practical data for estimating troop behavior within, say, a mile of the bomb burst. Such data as were obtained from animal experimentation in the Nevada tests provide only criteria for physical damage—not for the all-important psychological effect.

The physical effects of a tactical A-bomb can be predicted fairly well. Given the power of the atomic explo-

sion, military planners can lay out on their maps the concentric circles of expectable damage. The innermost circle covers the area within which there will be lethal penetrating radiation. Another covers the limit at which the bomb blast will crush the human body. Still another prescribes the area within which the human skin will be charred. These are the grisly statistics upon which the effects of an A-bomb must be predicated.

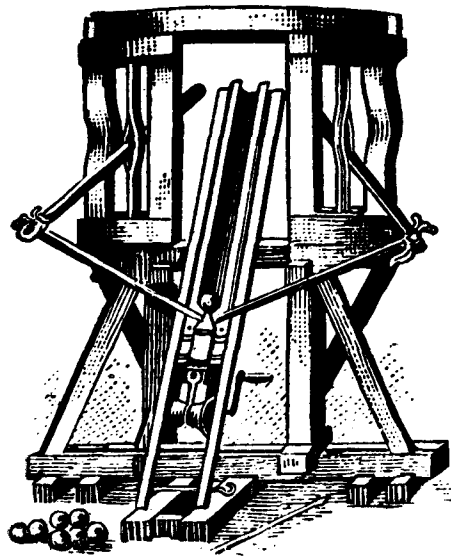
Just how big are these circles of destruction? Judging from AEC chairman Gordon Dean's remark about a "family of atomic weapons," bombs now come in quite a variety of sizes. "Size" is measured in terms of the amount of TNT to which the bomb blast is equivalent. The Nagasaki bomb, for instance, was revealed as equal to twenty thousand tons of TNT. Bombs much more powerful than this have since been developed, but we shall make no big error if we simply assume that the tactical A-bomb has the same power as the Nagasaki bomb. Making the

A-bomb into a tactical weapon has meant squeezing down its over-all size so that it can be carried by tactical aircraft; reduction in physical size also involves some sacrifice in bomb power, so that tactical A-bombs are considerably less explosive than strategic A-weapons. Even if the tactical A-bomb were twice as powerful as the Nagasaki bomb, our analysis would not be essentially changed. If much bigger bombs were to be used, the circles of damage would overlap our own front lines.

FOR estimating the effects of a tactical bomb, there are an abundance of data from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These data must, however, be revised to take account of the fact that a human being is harder to knock out than the average building. Quantitatively, it takes a blast pressure of only two pounds per square inch to collapse a building wall, whereas almost thirty pounds per square inch is needed to crush a man's chest. Furthermore, many people in Hiroshima died by being pinned under debris, by laceration from shards of flying glass, or by being trapped in burning houses. Thus in various ways there is less hazard from an A-bomb burst at the front lines than from one over a city. As a general rule of thumb the damage area for a battlefield A-bomb can be taken as being three square miles—if soldiers are caught above ground. The circle shrinks to less than one square mile if the soldiers take proper cover. Some of the bunkers used by the North Koreans and Chinese Communists would provide a haven even if the bomb exploded only half a mile away.

From these fragmentary facts it should be clear that a few A-bombs are not going to end the war in Korea, although a public conditioned by the





cliché “two A-bombs ended the war in the Pacific” will probably have trouble believing this.

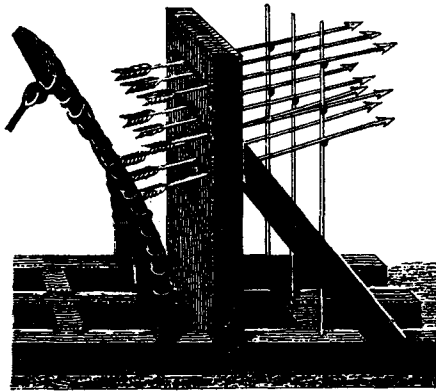
The public may well ask, “Just how many bombs *will* it take to end the war in Korea?” After all, great publicity has been given to the “enormous destructive capacity of our atomic stockpile,” and so the layman is justified in asking this question. Then too, Gordon Dean has stated: “I think that when a situation arises where, in our carefully considered judgment, the use of any kind of weapon is justified, we are now at the place where we should give serious consideration to the use of an atomic weapon provided that it can be used effectively from the military standpoint . . .” With this in mind let us look at the battle line in Korea. Just how many targets are there where an A-bomb would be militarily effective?

The General and the Banker

Our present battle line in Korea covers about a hundred and fifty linear miles of fighting front. That front is plenty rugged—not only in the language of the G.I.s but also in terms of terrain. The sharp defiles and superabundance of mountains are a soldier’s nightmare. Except for rare moments when the enemy swarms up the slopes of sectors like Triangle Hill, A-bomb targets are few and far between. Indeed, low-altitude aerial reconnaissance of the front rarely ever shows an “inviting” concentration of manpower and matériel. Yet concentration—and vulnerable concentration—of enemy troops is a prerequisite for effective use of the A-bomb.

There are such hordes of Communist troops in Korea and so many more in reserve that it would be folly to expend one A-bomb to produce a couple of hundred casualties. A military man faced with the problem of ordering the use of an A-bomb is in much the same situation as a banker placing large investments. If the banker’s judgment is faulty and his financial returns are poor, sooner or later he will go broke. In the military case, the bomb stockpile would at the very least have a dent made in it sizable enough to alarm the planners who were trying to conserve it for an all-out war.

Thus the dilemma is posed. In Korea atomic weapons cannot be regarded as “general-purpose” weapons to be used indiscriminately. They must be viewed as “special weapons” or as “weapons of opportunity.” As a spe-



cial weapon, the A-bomb must be used with skill and finesse if it is to be effective. Maximum reliance must be placed on accurate and up-to-the-minute intelligence of the enemy target. Quick communication and co-ordination with the bomb-carrying aircraft may be of the utmost importance if the enemy is to be caught in a vulnerable posture.

OTHER limitations of the A-bomb in Korea may be illustrated by drawing a comparison between conventional and atomic bombing or between artillery fire and atomic detonation. For example, early in November Allied guns fired forty-two thousand rounds in an eight-hour barrage directed at Papasan Mountain, while U.N. aircraft flew 120 sorties plastering the hill with bombs, rockets, and jellied gasoline. From my knowledge of the comparative firepower of an A-bomb and ordinary high explosives, I estimate

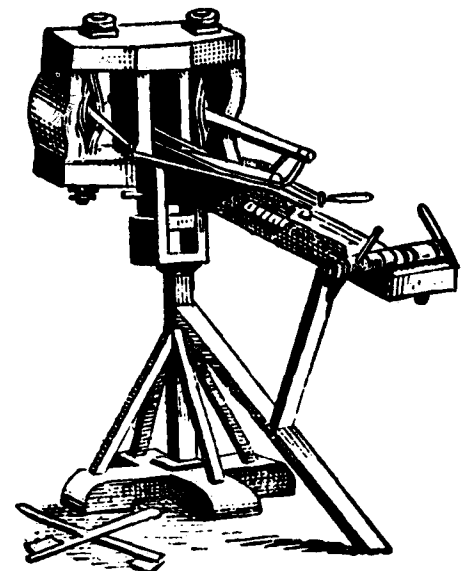
that this eight-hour battle involved the equivalent of *more than two or three A-bombs*. The exact number would be futile to calculate because of the topography, enemy troop dispositions, proximity of our own troops, troop vulnerability, etc. But the situation would probably not have allowed the use of the tactical A-bomb.

Blast-out vs. Pin-down

The time factor must also be emphasized. Ordinary artillery fire can be zeroed in on an area for hours on end to pin down enemy troops. Atomic fire is essentially a one-shot affair, over in ten seconds, with no persistent after-effects except under special circumstances.

Thus even if an enemy could be blasted off a mountain slope, reserves could pour in to fill the vacuum. The A-bomb has a blast-out effect but no pin-down effect. Here the reader may argue that troops might have the wits, if not the life, scared out of them by a nearby atomic explosion. This, of course, might also apply to our troops. But the Communist troops in Korea have frequently displayed their scorn for death by plunging headlong into massed gunfire. They may be intimidated by the A-bomb, but they may also live up to the old Russian proverb: “One can get used to everything, even hell.”

In the more than two years of the Korean struggle, vast quantities of shells, rockets, and bombs have been consumed. Many of these have been used against pinpoint targets that would not be “worth” an A-bomb, but





it can be estimated that so far the Korean War has involved the equivalent of more than two hundred A-bombs.

Non-Front-Line Targets

If the tactical A-bomb will not be effective on the front lines, what are the chances that it might be useful behind the lines—that is, in the sector that stretches from the fighting front to the Yalu? Here the weapon could be used more freely, since there would be no worry about the proximity of our own troops. Also, more powerful bombs could be used, and enemy reserves might be concentrated and not dug in.

However, the total potential target area is very large compared with the front line. Furthermore, while the first A-bombs to fall behind the lines might find profitable targets, it is unlikely that the enemy would continue to provide good targets for later bombings. So while there might be initial successes on a limited scale, it seems doubtful that they would be long sustained. Our commanders might presently find themselves committed to dropping A-bombs *behind* the Yalu in a desperate attempt to smash the roots of enemy strength. This, of course, might be the gambit that would lead to another world war.

Even if the use of the A-bomb in

Korea did not precipitate a world war, it might undermine the NATO defense of Europe. There our line is a thin one. It is hoped that the tactical A-bomb may be the critical weapon for strengthening it. If the preview of our tactical A-bomb in Korea shows it to be an indifferent weapon there, the Soviet planners may conclude that it will be equally ineffective in Europe, even though the plains of Germany are in violent contrast to the hills of Korea, and the battlefield A-bomb may well be a vital factor in the NATO defenses. But we might commit the cardinal sin of tipping our hand by showing the A-bomb to be of limited military utility in Korea.

A-Bombs for Asians?

Quite apart from the military aspects, we must never overlook the fact that the A-bomb occupies a special place in the world of weapons. Last summer General Omar Bradley commented before a Congressional committee, "The A-bomb is nothing more than a great concentration of explosives. We do not hesitate to use TNT to destroy a target, and we do not hesitate to send over one thousand planes with TNT to drop. What is the difference between that and sending over one plane with the A-bomb?"

The difference is that the A-bomb is much more than "a great concentration of explosives." It is a package containing the greatest propaganda value that it is possible to hand an enemy. If we use the bomb in Korea, Soviet propagandists will scream that Americans are setting out to annihilate the yellow race. The line will be that we used A-bombs against the Japanese and now they are being unleashed against Koreans and Chinese.

One has only to recall how the Soviets harped on their baseless trumped-up germ-warfare charge to appreciate how viciously they would try to scare the world with atomic-warfare propaganda. The decision to use the bomb is far more than a military one. Clemenceau's observation that "War is too serious a thing to leave solely to the generals" applies with full force when that war involves the use of A-bombs. The decision on the A-bomb must not be made in secret in the Pentagon.

The ultimate decision to use the bomb in Korea rests with the Presi-

dent. This provision of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 is, in itself, testimony to the fact that the American people do not regard the A-bomb as "just another weapon."

Undoubtedly President Eisenhower will be under great pressure to make a dramatic decision. Using the A-bomb in Korea would be graphic evidence of a more vigorous policy in Korea. Legislators like Senator Edwin C. Johnson, who once said, "I would use the atom bomb over there if I had my way," are not likely to change their minds. Pressure from Capitol Hill as well as from Main Street may reach the breaking point if our military forces suffer reverses in Korea or if the war drags out indefinitely.

If President Eisenhower is faced with the question "Should we use the A-bomb in Korea?," he will certainly realize that atomic weapons are the instruments of total war. A-bombs too easily ignite a chain reaction outside the bomb case. Any attempt to confine their use to a limited war would involve the risk of total war.



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CHANNELS:

Comments on TV

MARYA MANNES

NOTES made in semi-darkness can be illegible, but the following emerged clearly after a recent session before the screen:

"'You can't keep on killing!' says attractive blonde to murderer boy friend."

This was made in the kind of voice used by wives to admonish husbands for small faults like untidiness—a mixture of irritation and resignation. The man in question had already shot one man dead and slugged another fatally. I do not remember that he paid with either his own life or his liberty, but I may have switched stations.

'Too Much Smiling'

The compulsion to smile, particularly in men, is one of many video distresses. Smiling is natural for pretty women, but the mark of the true male is a certain facial composure. The over-mobility of announcers, M.C.s, and salesmen is bad enough, but it is even more disturbing when newscasters feel

they have to soften their messages with smiles. There is nothing remotely funny about most news, and facts are not meant to ingratiate. One feels a deep gratitude, therefore, for Ed Murrow's concerned and serious face, which relaxes into a half-smile—usually wry—at very rare and very appropriate instances. A like tribute can be paid to Alistair Cooke on "Omnibus." Cooke is able to convey a humorous thought without convulsing his features.

One of the few men on television whose visible mirth is not only tolerable but infectious is Arthur Godfrey. But then, his is the laughter of the tolerant, adult, and animal male, not a commercial commodity.

'Bride and Groom'

No further notes were necessary to recall the intrinsic horror of this daily noon show on Channel 2. For here we have a real live bride and bridegroom telling the story of their courtship to the prompting of a respectfully playful

M.C. before being married in close-up by a live minister. The three pairs of couples I have forced myself to watch have been tender and grave and somehow inviolate. This is the miracle (aside from the extraordinary motives impelling them to make public this private moment): that in spite of the camera's pitiless eye they manage to seem moved and be moving—a triumph indeed of human innocence over commercial exploitation.

After one pair were pronounced man and wife, they proceeded on a honeymoon provided by the sponsors to a "lovely old-world inn" in New England. The video audience was treated to a photograph of the bridal suite in which the newlyweds would spend—according to the M.C., who was hastening to a close—"many hours of happy relaxation."

'Kaltenborn—Fantastic'

A recent "The Author Meets the Critics" inspired this note. In it Justice William O. Douglas's book *Beyond the Himalayas* was the object of considerable heat generated by H. V. Kaltenborn, its critic. The well-known commentator deplored what he called the Justice's "sentimentality" and "dogooding," quoting with heavy Teutonic sarcasm those passages in the book most tainted with these qualities. (The only anti-liberal cliché he omitted during the program was "starry-eyed idealist.") If TV had a fourth dimension, it would have shown Mr. Kaltenborn encased in, and insulated by, a cellophane bag clearly labeled "19th Century." Senator Hubert Humphrey made energetic but fruitless efforts to

