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THE JAPANESE PEOPLE'S ARMY

In their effort to solve the dual problem of attaining maximum war production and of preparing to resist ultimate invasion of the home islands the Japanese have established a single, semimilitary organization, the National Volunteer Corps. This organization, described both as "a production army" and as "a third line army," is said to be concerned primarily with assigning every Japanese "an appropriate defense duty." When Allied forces actually invade Japan, however, the National Volunteer Corps is to be mobilized immediately under the command of the Army and is to take up arms in defense of the homeland. The almost total failure thus far to deal seriously with the tremendous problems of arming and training the population suggests that the effectiveness of the National Volunteer Corps as a defense army may finally prove to be more propagandistic than military.

The National Volunteer Corps is largely civilian, both in leadership and in organization. The lines of authority are to run from the Prime Minister through the Home Minister to the prefectural governors. Within the prefectures the heads of the cities, towns, townships, and wards will control their units, while within these groups still smaller units of 10 to 30 members will be commanded by the superintendents of factories, offices, stores, schools, and other establishments. In an over-all advisory and administrative relationship to this organization will be the Civilian Volunteer Corps Council in the Cabinet. Made up of thirty-five officials, including the Cabinet Chief Secretary, the vice ministers of several ministries, and the heads of various civilian organizations, this Council first met on 12 May under the chairmanship of Home Affairs Minister Abe. On the anticipated day of invasion, however, the higher levels of authority will pass at once from the civil leaders to the military leaders and the various Corps units will be placed under the command of the military district commander, the commander in chief of the naval garrison, or the commander in chief of the naval station, depending upon the locality.

Though all the details of organization had been announced by 15 May, it was stated that final activation of the National Volunteer Corps would not be completed until the end of May. Partial explanation for this delay lies in the fact that the newly-announced Corps is in reality only an amalgamation of old patriotic organizations which have not yet been fully dissolved. Such groups as the IRA Young Men's Corps have promised to disband and give full support to the new, all-inclusive organization.

In line with the announced intention of assigning every Japanese a defense duty, the personnel of the National Volunteer Corps is to include

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virtually every member of the home population, excepting only pregnant women, mothers of infants, and "those who are considered the nucleus of homes." The groups specifically designated as members of the organization are: graduates of elementary schools who are over fourteen years old, all men who are below sixty, and all women under forty-five. Police forces attached to the various civil defense units and discharged servicemen have also been specifically named as personnel in the National Volunteer Corps. Although the Government has indicated its intention of carefully grouping the units to assure an even distribution of corps and personnel, at the present time many Japanese belong simultaneously to youth corps and student corps, to ex-servicemen's corps and occupational corps, and to other such overlapping units.

Concerning the functions of the Corps, the clearest statement was made before a meeting of prefectural officials on 30 April in the announcement that "although the Civilian Volunteer Corps could very well be converted into combat units depending upon conditions, their main duties are to man the fronts in production, transportation, fortress construction, air defense, relief, and supply of information." This means that in addition to participating in vital production and transportation the National Volunteer Corps will repair damage from air raids, assist in the program for the evacuation of cities and the dispersal of factories and buildings, undertake ARP duties, carry on routine patrolling, and finally, hold itself in readiness for combat when the anticipated invasion comes. Although this description will hold true for the Corps as a whole, certain units within it will have more specialized tasks. The Agriculture Volunteer Corps, for instance, will be primarily engaged in augmenting food production, and to further this end mobile units which can be dispatched to any part of the home islands are being organized. But as with the whole organization, "in the event of the worst" the agriculture corps would become a group of combat units.

Precisely what military significance the National Volunteer Corps will have in the event of invasion remains uncertain as yet. Evidence indicating that the Corps may be welded into an effective home defense army lies in the suggestion that ex-servicemen may be made the core of certain combat units, in the orders already sent out to district military commanders to begin the production of arms "easy to handle," and in the setting up of a program to train students in bayonet use, grenade throwing, kendo, and judo. Evidence to the contrary, however, may be found in the repeated emphasis upon the productive purposes of the Corps, the lack of any complete program for the military training of the units, and the declaration by Minister Abe on 15 May that even after it becomes a fighting unit the Corps will be used mainly in "the necessary fields of production, transportation, air defense, rescue work, and commissary distribution in the rear."

From these indications it would seem that the Japanese leaders do not seriously regard the National Volunteer Corps as a last-ditch fighting force, and intend to use its military potentialities chiefly for propaganda.

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In an Allied occupation of Japan, however, the organized units throughout the cities and countryside would certainly be an added element of resistance and a potential menace to civil order, no matter how poorly trained and inadequately equipped they might be. Meanwhile, their usefulness as a device to augment industrial and agricultural production will depend entirely upon what response the Japanese people make to this latest scheme to spur their energies.

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