Fifth Encirclement Campaign Reading

After the failure of the 4th encirclement campaign in the spring of 1933, Jiang Jieshi immediately mobilized troops for the next campaign. Nationalist troops eventually totaled more than one million, mostly forces under various regional warlords, of which the largest part were men from the Guangdong warlord Chen Jitang’s army of 300,000+ (or 30% of the total nationalist force). Chen Jitang’s troops were mobilized to blockade the southern border of the Jiangxi Soviet. However, most of the warlords were somewhat half-hearted towards the campaign, due to a mixture of only wanting to keep their own power and having already seen four previous campaigns fail. In the end, the majority of warlord troops only participated as block-troops and occupiers of the captured communist regions. Jiang's own Guomindang (GMD) troops carried out the majority of the fighting.

As the commander-in-chief of the Nationalist forces, Jiang established his headquarters in Nanchang. In addition to mobilizing the warlords' troops, Jiang also adopted the strategy given to him by his German advisers' (Hans von Seeckt and Alexander von Falkenhausen), which involved the systematic encirclement of the Jiangxi Soviet region with fortified blockhouses. This method proved to be very effective. In an effort to break the blockade, the Red Army—under the orders of a three-man committee consisting of Bo Gu, Zhou Enlai and Li De (Otto Braun)—besieged the forts many times, but suffered heavy casualties with little success. The Jiangxi Soviet shrunk significantly due to the Chinese Red Army's (also known as the PLA, People’s Liberation Army) disastrous loss of manpower and material throughout the year, and by the end only a handful of towns and cities remained in Communist hands.

First Phase

The campaign officially began on 25 September 1933, when the first Guomindang (GMD) assault on Communist positions was launched. Three days later the Communists lost Lichuan. Although their force managed to stop the Nationalist advance on the southwest of Lichuan, further operations ended in failure: when the 24th division of the Chinese Red Army attempted to take Xiaoshi on 9 October 1933, not only did the city remain firmly in Nationalist hands, but the communists were forced to withdraw over the next few days while suffering heavy casualties. Witnessing this success, Jiang issued a new order on 17 October 1933, requiring troops to follow the principle of tactical
In order to perfect his German advisers' blockhouse strategy, defense, strategic offense in order to perfect his German advisers' blockhouse strategy. In contrast, the Communist leadership refused to adjust their tactics and stubbornly continued futile attacks on GMD blockhouses. Between September 25, 1933, and mid-November 1933, the Chinese Red Army failed to achieve any major victories and suffered serious losses, not only in battle but from defection and disease.

Second Phase

On 11 December 1933, a total of eight columns (long lines of troops) of GMD troops ventured out of their fortifications and started the second offensive. The Communist leadership decided to face the numerically and technically superior Nationalist army in open battle. As a result, Communist forces suffered badly. By the end of January 1934, warlord forces began to participate, and men from the Fujian warlord armies struck from the east in coordination with Nationalists from the north and south.

Third Phase

On April 10, 1934, eleven divisions of the National Revolutionary Army began their attack on Guangchang, and the communists decided to concentrate a total of nine divisions (a division is between 10,000-20,000 troops) in its defense. Due to overwhelming Nationalist superiority, Communist strongholds at Ganzhu, Great Luo Mountain and Yanfuzhang fell. On the dawn of 19 April 1934, the Communists launched a counterattack against the Nationalist force at the Great Luo Mountain, only to be driven off. On 27 April 1934, the Nationalists launched their final assault on Guangchang, succeeding in taking it by the evening and inflicting over 5,500 casualties on its Communist defenders. Remnants of the shattered Communist defense fled to the south and west under the cover of darkness.

Final phase

The three-man committee of the communist leadership divided their force into six different groups in early July 1934. On 5 August 1934, nine Nationalist divisions ventured out of their forts, taking areas north of Yiqian and adjacent regions. By the late September 1934, the Chinese Soviet Republic (area controlled by the Communists) was left with only Ruijin, Huichang, Xingguo, Ningdu, Shicheng, Ninghua and Changting. It was at this point that Zhou Enlai's spy network within Jiang's headquarter in Nanchang passed intelligence to the Communists revealing that Jiang was massing for a final push.
The decision was made to abandon the Jiangxi Salient, resulting in the beginning of the Long March. As a result of the Communist failure to defeat the Fifth Encirclement, the largest Communist base in China was lost.

Communist failures were mainly due to the policies of the Communist leadership:

- The Fifth Encirclement Campaign was a war of attrition, and the Communists were unable to replace lost troops and material. Unlike Mao, the new leadership believed the era of guerrilla warfare and mobile warfare was over, and tried to engage in regular warfare.

- **Hostility towards all Nationalist troops.** Under Mao's direction, warlord forces had been distinguished from Central Army units of Jiang's Nationalist government, sometimes allowing for a tenuous neutrality with the warlords. As a result, only 50,000 of Jiang's own troops were available in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and - to a great degree - 4th Encirclement Campaigns. When the new leadership took over, all Nationalist troops and those fighting with them were regarded as enemies of equal danger. Instead of having to fight an enemy force much smaller than it was on paper, the Communists had to fight a much larger enemy.

- **Static defense:** in addition to head-on clashes, the Red Army was also ordered to emulate the Nationalist static defense. Unlike the Nationalist's concrete fortifications, which were immune to virtually all Communist bombardments, Communist bunkers were built with wood and mud and were susceptible not only to Nationalist artillery but even to heavy rain and wind. These hastily, and badly constructed, bunkers only served to aid the Nationalists by becoming death traps for Communist defenders.
- **Poor use of intelligence.** The Communist leadership lacked serious interest in intelligence collection or use. While the Communists had already broken the Nationalist codes in the previous Counter Encirclement Campaigns, greatly helping in earlier successes, the new leadership did not trust the cryptography enough to make or alter plans according to new intelligence. This problem continued until the Long March, when Mao finally returned to power and began utilizing both cryptographic and human intelligence collection as a major part of their campaigns.

- **Increased nationalist strength.** In previous campaigns, Nationalist forces had insufficient troops to occupy newly conquered regions or act as rearguards, so soldiers were only stationed in urban areas or fixed fortifications. Large gaps were left between these garrisons, which Communists were able to use to harry defences and penetrate deep into the heart of Nationalist-controlled regions. During the Fifth Encirclement Campaign, Jiang had ten times the number of troops at his disposal than in previous campaigns, with a total of half a million. As a result, the encirclement was far more effective, with gaps between garrisons eliminated and conquered regions more easily consolidated.