

BOOKS

Sun Tzu Alive and Well

by Col Bruce M. Mac Laren, USMC(Ret)

THE SEVEN MILITARY CLASSICS OF ANCIENT CHINA: Translated by Ralph D. Sawyer. Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1993, 568 pp., \$29.95. (Member \$26.95)

SUN TZU: Art of War. By Ralph D. Sawyer. Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1994, 375 pp., \$9.95. (Member \$8.95)

SUN TZU: The Art of War: The New Translation. By J. H. Huang. Quill William Morrow, New York, 1993, 299 pp., currently out of print.

How much Sun Tzu is enough? Some, like myself, can never be satisfied. Since Commandant A. M. Gray's nomination of *Sun Tzu's Art of War* as a top required reading choice in ALMAR 016/90, I'm pleased to announce that Sun Tzu is alive and well, not only in the personal and professional libraries of U.S. Marines but also in the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) and at the Academy of Military Sciences in Beijing, China. I wryly suggest that Marine Corps interest has forced the PLA to become even more familiar with one of their own military founding fathers in order to stay abreast of us in the art-of-war theories.

The Seven Military Classics of China translated by Ralph D. Sawyer presents to the general reader an opportunity to examine previously overlooked Chinese military history. The author, who has spent the last 20 years in international consulting work throughout Asia and is currently working on a general history of warfare in ancient China, has compiled six of the major ancient military writings and combined them with the questions and observations of Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung (circa 627 A.D.) to form the collection of seven military classics. Sawyer points out that it was not customary for these writings to be in private hands inasmuch as the contents gave broad general guidance for the formation of military and political

power. Moreover, these classics also suggested policies, ruses, and other forms of overt and covert deception which might help to topple an enemy—or a nonbenevolent emperor. The contents are indeed revolutionary. Thus, as primers for revolution, these classics were passed carefully, if not secretly, from generation to generation. The new information being translated from the bamboo slips currently being excavated at Linyi and Qu Fu supports the author's opinion.

Sawyer organizes his translations chronologically in the following order: T'ai Kung's Six Secret Teachings, the Methods of Su-ma, Sun Tzu's Art of War, Wu-tzu, Wei Liao-tzu, The Three Strategies of Hunang Shih-kung, and finally, Questions and Replies Between T'ang T'ai-tsung and Li Wei-kung. His treatment of *Sun Tzu's Art of War* in this book is admittedly light because of the availability of other analytical translations. Mr. Sawyer refers the reader to BGen Samuel B. Griffith's translation for what he refers to as "a systematic English presentation." Nonetheless, his supportive notes for Sun Tzu, and the other military classics, give the reader ample options to obtain and measure the various differences. If a reader is really interested in Chinese ways of warfare, and not just *Sun Tzu's Art of War*, I rate this edition as an excellent, scholarly, supportive reference. The author's organization, clear-writing style, comprehensive notes, and selected bibliography open up new investigative avenues as well as adding much more depth and insight to the seven selected classics.

In 1994, Mr. Sawyer wrote his own translation of *Sun Tzu, Art of War*, except in this version he goes into much more elaborate detail and definition as compared to his treatment of Sun Tzu in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*. Yet, compared to the works of other translators, Sawyer is demonstrably briefer in the actual translation. His Chapter 13, dealing with the employment of spies, is a good illustration of his conciseness. The author takes the reader through a general introduction and historical background that sets the stage nicely for his actual classical translation. These preliminaries are a valuable addition, and Sawyer transitions smoothly

and logically from them into his actual translations, which are well supported by precise notes to assist the reader. Repeated references to the Linyi bamboo slips indicate that there is more to come in this ancient study of Chinese military strategy.

Finally, Mr. J.H. Huang has also written his version of *Sun Tzu: The Art of War: The New Translation*. I place this edition into a category which I simply call "nifty." The organization of the book lends itself to being used as a field manual or an after-action checkoff list for any conscientious young noncommissioned officers or officers. If the soft-covered edition could be reduced from its 7-by-9 inch size to a 4-by-6 inch manual similar to the old FMFM 1-2: *Marine Troop Leaders Guide*, Marines would be able to carry a back-up reference to reinforce their normal Marine Corps troop-leading steps in an offensive or defensive situation. Huang organizes his version of Sun Tzu into a very brief introduction and then goes immediately into a 13-chapter translation. He uniquely splits each translation page in half: the left side being a strategic or tactical question and the right side stating, "Sun Tzu Said." For example, reading Chapter 13, Spies, Huang sets his pages as follows:

Book 13

ESPIONAGE

On Agents
a. The types

Sun Tzu Said
So, in espionage, there are five: agents - in place, moles, turned agents, hidden provocation agents and mobile informants.

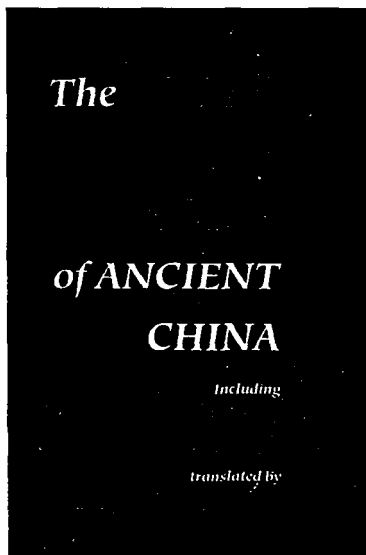
Mr. Huang relied heavily on expertise and advice from active and retired military personnel from all Services. This is evident as illustrated above in the use of terms such as "mole" and "informants" as opposed to "inside" and "living" which were used in other translations.

This translation is much "lighter" reading than Griffith's. Mr. Huang uses the second half of his book to provide the reader with supportive historical and language comments. He, in particular, and like most other Sun Tzu translators, is very interested in the continuing examination of the Linyi bamboo slips and as a researcher and interpreter he has spent 7 years researching the Linyi text. In sum, Mr. Huang presents Sun Tzu's principles concisely and in a unique military format for the novice student of *The Art of War*.

Upon my undertaking the review of these three books, the editor suggested I

might compare these translations of Sun Tzu with those of BGen Samuel B. Griffith, MajGen Tao Hanzhang and Mr. Thomas Cleary, which were previously reviewed in the *Gazette*. (See Oct63, p. 14; Feb88, pp. 78-79; Dec90, pp. 72-73.) Let me reflect back to the spring of 1954, when MajGen Ernest N. Harmon USA(Ret) told our graduating class at Norwich University that as regular professional officers we had best start learning about other military strategists besides Grant, Lee, Mahan, and Clausewitz. Upon my arrival at The Basic School, Capt Ralph Estey, my company commander, a well-decorated veteran from World War II and a recent combatant from the Korean campaign, told us at one of his informal outdoor training circles, "Gentlemen (the captain always called us gentlemen), I strongly suggest that you add *Sun Tzu's Art of War* to your professional library." At this time, Western translations of Chinese warfare were scarce, less a two-volume British translation of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Brewitt-Taylor. This was a really hard-to-read verse text-book on feudal life in China. In 1962, Headquarters Fleet Marine Force Atlantic published BGen Griffith's translation of Mao's *Yu Chi Chan*, a primer on guerrilla warfare. In 1963, I purchased my first copy of BGen Samuel B. Griffith's *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*, and for awhile, I felt well armed.

At this point, let me say that I opined Mao plagiarized much from the Grand Master, Sun Tzu. Griffith clearly states that Mao paraphrased Sun Tzu. Many biographers of Mao claim he was more influenced by Luo Guanzhong's *The Three Kingdoms*. I personally argued this point on two occasions with MajGen Tao Hanzhang, PLA(Ret), at the 2d and 3d International Symposiums on *Sun Tzu's Art of War*. Gen Tao will argue that while Mao's thoughts on protracted war were



for the most part original, there was some influence adopted from Sun Tzu. Mao biographer, Phillippe Devillers, might also disagree.

When I last left China in April 1992, I believed that in advance of Mao's approaching 100th birthday that the Chinese historical and archeological society in Qu Fu was about to suggest that Mao be elevated to the same level of prestige as Sun Tzu and Confucius. Upon departing Beijing, I passed my old copy of Griffith's translation, complete with personal notes and earmarking to Gen Tao via our interpreter. I hoped that the general would perhaps find time to read and comment upon a Western translation of Sun Tzu. It would be enlightening for us to read what Tao, a distinguished Chinese officer, perceives as translation differences. Gen Tao is a professional, wry, articulate, and historically knowledgeable officer even as he enters the latter side of his eighties. Even though Tao is still a professed Marxist, I am as comfortable with his translations of

Sun Tzu, as I am with Gen Griffith's. Both officers have marched their own tough strategic and tactical military trails, and I believe that their military perceptions help to make a difference.

If Griffith does lose something in his literal Western translation, and if Tao appears to give more credit to Mao for originality than deserved, then I would concur with Capt George C. Aucoin, who wrote two of the excellent reviews cited above, that Thomas Cleary is a welcome catalyst between Griffith and Tao. I believe Mr. Cleary does a better job than Griffith or Tao of tying in Taoist and Confucian thought to these old military principles. Thomas Cleary is not only easy to read and to understand, but his writing style makes reading ancient history pleasant. Likewise, his academic credentials are impeccable. He translates Sun Tzu as being more compatible with the *Analects* than with the thought of Mao Tse Tung. This will become important as more bamboo slip excavations continue and we can more accurately tie Sun Tzu to Confucius. If you climb Mt. Tashian in Shantung and view that geographically "compartmented" world from the emperor's perspective in those ancient days, such a connection is hard to imagine.

For any old O3s who are having trouble trying to grasp my point here, let me just say that this author comparison is analogous to the changing of the old bolt-action Springfield '03 (Griffith) to the 30 well-aimed rounds per minute of the M-1 (Tao) to the current M-16 (Cleary) . . . to include all changes in between.



>Col Mac Laren who served 30 years active duty, (54-84) 15 years in Far East, 5 years with Korean Marine Corps as Sr. Advisor, maintains close ties with Chinese PLA relative to strategic studies and *Sun Tzu's Art of War*.

Quote to Ponder

Blitzkrieg

Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness.

And so as water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy.

And as water has no constant form, there are in war no constant conditions.

—Sun Tzu
The Art of War