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DOSA AF DEVELOPMENTS 1957

Since the end of 1956, there have been relatively few developments in DOSAAF, the Voluntary Society for Aid to the Army, Navy and Air Force, which have attracted much attention in the Soviet press. There are now some indications that this period of preparation without blatant propaganda may be drawing to an end, since there is to be an all-Union Congress of the organization in February 1958 (Voyenniye Znaniya, No. 10, 1957).

A recent Western estimate of the strength of DOSAAF (Background Information, 25 May 1956) was approximately 20,000,000, an increase of 33 1/3 percent on the figure, suggested by R.L. Garthoff (Soviet Military Doctrine, Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, p. 415), of 15,000,000 in 1953. But since then Pravda (23 January 1957) has calmly informed the world that in the past three years membership of DOSAAF has doubled, indicating about 30,000,000 at present on the basis of Garthoff's figure. It seems that there is as yet no intention in the Kremlin to slow down recruitment, for in Georgia the immediate goal has been reported as 50 percent of the adult population (Zarya Vostoka, 9 October 1956). Already 65 percent of all Georgian Komsomols are DOSAAF members, which would suggest, if the ratio were applicable to the other republics, a Komsomol component of nearly 11,900,000 on the strength of DOSAAF throughout the USSR.

However training facilities for this vast nominal strength are evidently not yet adequate, although progress is being made rapidly. At the beginning of July, Lt. Gen. S.D. Shatilov, the Vice-President of the Society, informed its Central Committee of his intention to double the number of instructors in the next three years. This is urgently necessary, because a newly-published resolution of DOSAAF's Central Committee suggests that at least two-thirds of the nominal membership at present receives only a periodical refresher course, at intervals which are certainly too great to maintain efficiency. The relevant extract from Voyenniye Znaniya (No. 10, 1957) reads:

"It is a primary task of all committees to ensure that in the next two to three years military instruction throughout the country should be on a scale sufficient for the annual training of not less than one-third of the members of the Society on courses, in study groups, sports teams, sections and life-saving groups."

If the present membership is taken as remaining stable until 1960, this indicates an intention to train some 10,000,000

members annually by that time; hence DOSAAF remains incomparably the largest paramilitary force anywhere in the world. (The total strength of the U.S. regular armed forces, including all three services, is now about 2,800,000.) To assist in overcoming the dearth of DOSAAF instructors, for the last two years (see Background Information, 8 October 1956) emphasis has been placed on the participation of ex-officers of the reserve and demobilized servicemen in both administration and training.

Col-General P. Belov, Chairman of the Central Committee of DOSAAF, remarks in Voyenniye Znaniya that:

"...in connection with the reduction of armed forces, a proportion of the draft groups in future will not enter the services. We should take steps to see that young people released from the draft can receive, even outside the Army, the military training necessary to do their duty in defending the motherland."

The significant detail in this routine sentence is its continued use of the future tense. When Marshal Zhukov first announced this policy at the XXth Party Congress, he too used the future form, as was then only natural. But the second of the two major demobilizations announced by the USSR, involving 1,840,000 men in all, was due to have been completed in May this year. Belov's formulation therefore suggests that the new policy has not yet gone into effect, and it is possible that the Presidium has delayed its implementation as a result of the Polish, Hungarian and Middle Eastern crisis of 1956, and the continuing tension due to the alignment of Syria with the USSR in 1957.

Evidence of the modern equipment used by DOSAAF continues to accumulate. A Kiev Radio report (15 March 1957) shows that a growing number of units formed at collective farms in the Ukraine are being equipped with gliders for elementary flying training. As a result of an article in Pravda Ukrainy (31 October 1957) it is now possible for the first time to make some appraisal of the intensity of the parachute training provided by DOSAAF. Col.-Gen. F. Zhmachenko, the chairman of the Ukrainian organization, reports that:

"in the first six months of 1957 young Ukrainians completed more than 10,000 jumps from aircraft and balloons, as well as several tens of thousands of descents from parachute towers."

Descents from towers are of relatively little value in a parachutist's training as they are too synthetic to provide adequate realism. Zhmachenko indicates that some 20,000 jumps a year are being made in the Ukraine from aircraft and balloons, a substantial but not an unusual figure. A minimum of two jumps a year is required to provide adequate continuation training for a trained parachutist, so that if no initial training at all were being provided a DOSAAF parachute strength of perhaps 10,000 men could be assumed in the Ukraine. But in fact the initial training of replacements and recruits for expansion requires an annual minimum of approximately

five descents per man (the British airborne infantry course allows for eight). There are therefore probably rather fewer than 10,000 fully-trained DOSAAF parachutists available at short notice in the Republic at any one time. The population is slightly more than 40,000,000, and Zhmachenko reports a total DOSAAF membership of "several millions", of whom about 500,000 are activists. If, for the purposes of rough estimation, the Ukraine is accepted as typical for the whole USSR, the all-Union parachute force supplied by DOSAAF would then approach 50,000 men immediately ready for operations, without the need to undergo a refresher course. It is true that the Ukraine has a higher technical level than most other Republics, which would suggest that it might be further advanced in the development of airborne training than the average. But to counterbalance this, the climate is not so suitable for parachuting as in the Asiatic and Caucasian Republics; the Ukraine may therefore reasonably be used as a yardstick.

Interestingly enough, the Republic in which DOSAAF is most highly developed is Georgia. A Tiflis Radio broadcast (January 22, 1957) stated that membership had increased by 68,000 in 1956 and that every enterprise, department, kolkhoz and state farm in Georgia now has its own primary unit. By contrast, as recently as 1955 (see Background Information, November 19, 1955) DOSAAF had no organization at all on a third of the Soviet collective farms. The rapid completion of the build-up of Georgia may well be a straw in the wind pointing in the same direction as the recent appointment of Marshal Rokossovsky to the command of the Transcaucasian Military District. It suggests that the Kremlin at least is taking the Middle East situation in deadly earnest.

r.r.g.

See also Background Information, 15 December 1956.