

Reporter's Notebook; Deng to Retire in the U.S., And Other Chinese Rumors

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Of all the rumors that have swept Beijing in the last week, perhaps the most astonishing was that in a nefarious attempt to kill demonstrators the Chinese Government had electrified the metal grates over the city's subways.

Students carefully walked around the grates for a day or two, until they saw that others were walking over them with impunity. Then the rumored danger was that the army planned to drop paratroopers into Tiananmen Square to deal with the students, and demonstrators carefully searched the skies for this new threat from above. Deng Is the Topic

Perhaps it is inevitable that with the newspapers and television stations carefully avoiding the real events, people should rely on rumors. In any case, some of the rumors are so unfavorable to the Government -but repeated with such absolute conviction - that the authorities may be worse off with the rumor mill than with an independent press.

"Did you hear?" a businessman asked the other day. "Deng Xiaoping is going to retire in the United States. He's got a lot of money there." One of today's rumors was a generational variation: it said American bank accounts of Mr. Deng's eldest son, Deng Pufang, had been frozen by American banking officials. A Germ of Truth

Some of the rumors begin accurately, but get better each time they are handed on. One rumor started out that Mr. Deng, China's senior leader, had declared that it was worthwhile to bring out 150,000 troops in the capital if that would bring China 20 years of stability. That may or may not have been true, but at least it was plausible. Unfortunately for Mr. Deng, a somewhat embellished version was the one that stuck.

It quoted Mr. Deng as saying that to achieve 20 years of stability, it was worth killing 200,000 students. *The Birth of a Rumor*

It is easy to see how rumors start in Beijing. This conversation took place Sunday night on the street:

A middle-aged Beijing woman speaks to a young man in civilian clothes who had a military haircut.

WOMAN: Are you a soldier?

MAN: Yes, I am.

WOMAN, astonished: Where did you come from?

MAN: Xian.

WOMAN, shouting to the crowd: The troops have come! The soldiers are already here! They are from Xian!

A large crowd gathered around, and the woman asked the man triumphantly: So how many of you are there?

MAN, looking puzzled: Just two of us. We wanted to come and see the capital. *A Measure of Success*

Another conversation, overheard in the Western district on Sunday morning:

A young man, to a small crowd: "The American President, Bush, has said that if the Government can't implement martial law within 24 hours, then it isn't effective." (The attribution was inaccurate.) Another young man: "Yes, I've heard that too. And I believe that 24 hours is the accepted international standard. People always say that if martial law isn't implemented within 24 hours, then it can't take effect."

Young man No. 1: "Well, we should wait until 10 A.M. Then it will be 24 hours, and we will prove by international standards that martial law has failed." *Awaiting the Troops*

Throughout the capital, neighborhood residents have taken charge of local intersections. The people stay up all night, passing the time by exchanging increasingly implausible rumors about the imminent arrival and undoubted

brutality of enormous numbers of troops.

Most of the corner-watchers are people who live nearby, but a few are sent by the central student organizing committee to make sure that all intersections are covered. The main strategy, if the troops come, is to block their path with people and obstructions like bicycles, bricks and anything else available. They also speak to the soldiers and try to convince them that they should not attack their fellow countrymen.

The students' latest concern is that the Government will use soldiers from remote areas because they speak different languages and may be unable to understand the students' pleas for retreat. So the student organizing committee now sends members of minority nationalities to all the major roads where it expects troops may arrive, so that they can function as translators and persuade soldiers to leave in any tongue.

"We can convince any group of soldiers not to attack us," Pa Hardin, a member of the Uighur minority, said the other day as he waited in front of the Beijing Train Station. He had been assigned to stand there in case Uighur soldiers emerged from the station to attack the students.

Another tactic has been adopted by the "Kamikaze" group of workers who roam around the capital all night looking for invading army convoys to halt. Many of the Kamikazes now carry knives, so they can puncture truck tires, and they often travel with their wives or girlfriends. The idea is that the woman will distract the soldiers while the man slashes the tires. What's Good for Leaders

In some ways the students imitate the nation's leaders.

Before the Communist victory in China in 1949, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai were famous for their accessibility and common touch.

When they conquered Beijing, they moved into the walled Zhongnanhai compound in the center of the capital, but for the first few years, ordinary Chinese could still stroll around the leaders' compound. As time passed, not only were ordinary Chinese barred, but a complex system of passes was devised so that permission was required to go from one part of the compound to another.

The students on Tiananmen Square have adopted a similar system. The outside of the square is cordoned off by students, supposedly to protect those who are resting inside. Then there are several inner circles, each cordoned off by student guards who demand a pass to go through. To see the student organization's top leaders, a visitor must be escorted through four different checkpoints and

present identification at each.

"We need to have a good system of discipline and organization," a student leader explained this evening. "Otherwise the Government will say we encourage chaos."

A version of this article appears in print on May 23, 1989, on Page A00001 of the National edition with the headline: Reporter's Notebook; Deng to Retire in the U.S., And Other Chinese Rumors.
