



Reminiscences of the life of
Chairman Mao Tsetung
during the northern Shensi campaign

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MORE than a month had passed since the organizations of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party had left Yen-an. During this period, by making frequent and sudden changes in our direction, we had led the enemy on a dizzy chase. Every place we came to, we stayed only a few days, then moved on. The plan of the Hu Tsung-nan brigand army to "demolish" the nerve centre of our Party was foiled time and again, and defeat pressed closer to Bandit Hu step by step!

Through Thick and Thin

In April 1947, the organizations of the Central Committee moved to Wangchiawan in Chingpien County. Nestling halfway up the side of a mountain, this little village had less than a score of families.

Chairman Mao Tsetung, Vice-Chairman Chou En-lai¹ and Comrade Jen Pi-shih were all living in two and a half cave rooms which a poor peasant known as Old Man Wang had loaned them. Dark and dilapidated, the place was full of pickled vegetable vats. You could smell the sour odour even standing out in the courtyard. Chairman Mao stayed in the innermost room. After we put in a rickety willow-wood table, there was no space left for any other furniture. Vice-Chairman Chou slept on a *kang* (earthen bed) near the door. To the right was the half room which was occupied entirely by a *kang*. When you stepped inside, you could not straighten up. Comrade Jen Pi-shih worked and slept in there. Old Man Wang, our host, was very apologetic. He told his family to lend us another cave, and asked our guards to help move out his belongings. On hearing of this, Comrade Chiang Ching said to me:

“Don’t move them! He’s got a big family — young and old, women and kids. How are you going to squeeze them all into one cave?”

“It’s too crowded in this place,” I said. “Even a company headquarters usually gets more space than this!”

“But conditions are hard at the moment,” she replied. “We’re a large organization. Moving into a little village like this, we’ve already caused the local people enough trouble. The Chairman has instructed

¹ Comrade Chou En-lai was then Vice-Chairman of the Chinese People’s Revolutionary Military Commission.

us that when we run into difficulties we should think of ways to solve them. He isn’t going to like it if we put too much stress on his comfort. Besides, we have to think what impression this might make on the people.”

The two and a half rooms were connected, and had only one entrance. In spite of the fact that our leaders lived in such cramped quarters, except when there was a meeting going on, you never heard a sound. The Chairman always went in and out softly, careful not to disturb the others. Late at night, tired from too much work, he might occasionally go out for a stroll. If another leader happened to be resting at the time, Chairman Mao would not even turn on his flashlight. It was the same with the others. Vice-Chairman Chou, who got up early in the morning, would go outside when he wanted to cough. Comrade Jen Pi-shih, who used to get up early too, would take his breakfast in the shed where the guards were billeted, rather than let the clink of crockery disturb other people’s rest. This spirit of mutual care and consideration among our leaders made a deep and unforgettable impression upon us. At all times they thought of others first. They never thought of their own personal convenience.

At mealtimes, the leaders were even more considerate, each insisting on eating only the coarsest grain. The Chairman firmly demanded gruel made of flour and elm leaves. Each time Vice-Chairman Chou picked up an elm-leaf muffin, he would say

with a chuckle: "Delicious!" Planning and thinking for the people of the whole nation day and night under such difficult conditions, our leaders were always calm, confident and unruffled; their spirit of revolutionary optimism constantly inspired and educated us, and taught us the great meaning of life!

The People Are Our Wall of Bronze

For ten years or more, the people of northern Shensi Province had been living a peaceful settled life. Not having known the alarms of war themselves, at first they took things rather casually. Whenever our march came to a new place, Chairman Mao would call the village cadres to a meeting. Sometimes he would also summon the secretary of the district Communist Party committee to check what preparations were being made for battle, and would mobilize the people to cache stores of grain and clear the fields so that nothing could be used by the enemy. He also gave the guards squad a task. No matter where we stopped, the first thing we had to do after removing the saddle-bags from the horses was to go out and do propaganda among the people, get to know the conditions of their production and livelihood, as well as the size of the population and the number of families, how much land was cultivated and what taxes were paid — and report it all back. Because Chairman Mao kept after us, this had already become a customary part of our work.

There had been a drought that year, with no rain to speak of since the beginning of spring. All the young men in the village had gone off to the front with their pack animals. Only the women and children were left. The sowing season would soon be over, but the only thing they could do was look at their ploughs and worry. Seeing this situation, the Central Committee organizations immediately called an emergency meeting. Chairman Mao mobilized every man in our organization to go out in the fields and lend a hand with the sowing and hitch our horses to the ploughs. He also told us to assign some people to go into the mountains with the country folk and help them cut brushwood, which they needed for boiling water and for cooking. The cadres and other people of the village cheered up at once. For they began to see that, instead of giving them any trouble, we had helped them solve their biggest problem.

It was then that we received more good news from the front. Our field army had wiped out an enemy brigade at Yangmaho and captured an enemy vice-brigadier. This victory encouraged us greatly. Everyone threw himself into his work more vigorously than ever.

When Chairman Mao was not working, he often went out for a stroll. He had been used to taking walks in Yen-an, but now his habits were a bit different. Sometimes he climbed mountains, sometimes he walked along the stone road, sometimes he rode on horseback. Each time he went out, he would cover

a score of *li*. All this was to accustom himself to our marches. As there was much work to do in the fields, Chairman Mao never let more than two of us accompany him. We were only seventy or so *li* from Wayaopao, and enemy spies were often active in the neighbourhood. We always worried whenever Chairman Mao wandered a bit far. So usually we sent a few men on ahead secretly. One day Chairman Mao happened to see them, and he asked: "Are those your men on that hill up there?"

I was taken aback. But I could not lie. After a long pause I could only say: "I was afraid —"

"Afraid of what?" Chairman Mao interrupted. Then he continued: "The enemy won't come this way at present. Their armed forces can't come, and it's not easy for their plain-clothes men to come either. We have the people on our side! Everyone's busy in the fields now, you ought to send a few more men to help with production. Why must they all go with me?" When he saw that we were stumped for an answer, the Chairman said pleasantly: "You must have faith in the people. Although the enemy may not have 'counter-revolutionary' written on his forehead, the country folk can spot a bad character immediately. We don't have to make a move. These neighbours will nab him! You men should do more mass work!"

At this point Chairman Mao gave me a meaningful glance and asked: "Have you heard of our organizations' 'Six Manys'?"

I said: "The country folk say we have many men carrying pistols, many who ride horses, many rolls of telephone wire, many women (radio operators), many flashlights and many pack animals."

Chairman Mao smiled. "Those are the characteristics of this detachment of ours! You can see what good analytical powers the country folk have. I'm afraid our own comrades may not be aware of these characteristics yet! But we must tell the people to observe secrecy. If the enemy gets hold of this kind of information, we won't be able to stay here long!"

The Chairman taught us time and again to believe in the people, to rely on the people. As long as we really did this, the people would stand with us for ever, be our wall of bronze. They would never leave us even if faced with a mountain of knives or a sea of flames! These words remained firmly in our minds, and we made them a standard for our behaviour. This was because they were absolutely right. Not once did they fail to hold good.

At the time, there was a primary school teacher in a village near where our Fourth Detachment was quartered who was a member of the Kuomintang. Although ordinarily he said nothing but "progressive" things, his thinking was actually quite reactionary. The country folk are very sharp, and they had been keeping an eye on him for some time. Afraid that since we were a big organization our presence might easily be detected, they imposed a news blockade of

their own accord and did not let him learn a thing. Later, after we had left Wangchiawan, sure enough he went over to the enemy. They grilled him: Where has Chairman Mao gone? He was tongue-tied. He had not the faintest idea. The enemy hung him up and beat him. Then they tied him with a rope and took him to Yen-an.

Now, after Chairman Mao's reminder, we immediately changed our methods. We sent several more comrades out to plant the fields and to cut brushwood in the mountains. This helped the local folk with production and enabled us to do our guard duty at the same time. It was killing two birds with one stone. After that, whenever one of our comrades in the guards squad returned from the mountains with a bundle of firewood on his back and walked with the Chairman back to the village, Chairman Mao would ask him with a smile: "Doing sentry duty again?" Everyone would laugh.

Making Hu Tsung-nan Take Our Orders

But those days did not continue for long. After the battle of Yangmaho, the main forces of the enemy concentrated in the Wayaopao area. They burned every neighbouring village to the ground. Not a single house was left standing whole. The doors and window-frames of every cave dwelling were also burned. The enemy made frequent forays in all direc-

tions, hoping to find our main force in order to fight a decisive battle.

To puncture the enemy's arrogance, our leaders worked more intensively than ever. Day and night they held meetings to analyse and discuss the situation. We guessed that another big campaign was probably being planned. At times like this, the leaders rarely came out of the cave. Only the secretaries ran in and out with radio messages. Once in a great while, Chairman Mao came out but then it was only to pace back and forth alone, deep in thought. He seemed to be pondering some important problem.

One afternoon, just as Chairman Mao and Vice-Chairman Chou were emerging from the cave, the confidential secretary rushed up with a radiogram which he handed to Vice-Chairman Chou. After reading it, Vice-Chairman Chou immediately gave it to Chairman Mao. The Chairman took it and read it. Then he said: "Lure the enemy away, then it will be all right." So saying he promptly went back into the cave and continued with the meeting.

For several days after that our leaders seldom rested. Sometimes the lamps in the caves burned right up until dawn. Clearly the Chairman was arranging a battle again, preparing to move the enemy about. We would soon be hearing of a big victory!

But the news from the front was not so good. The enemy had already occupied Suiteh and it looked as if they would reach the Yellow River bank in another couple of days. Up until then we had not

had any word of our army's movements. What was the real situation? Past experience told us that the enemy always took our orders, that they never could act outside the Chairman's accurate plans and shrewd calculations. But how, after all, was our army going to hit them this time? We waited anxiously.

On May 1, the Chairman again held a meeting in his cave that lasted all night. It was not until nearly daybreak that our leaders—still wearing their clothes—went to bed. Suddenly the thundering of artillery sounded to the southeast. We hastily got up. The Chairman came out of his cave with that patched and repatched grey padded jacket of his draped over his shoulders. "Is that artillery fire?" he asked the sentry, Yueh Cheng-pang.

"Yes, it's artillery! They've been firing for quite a while now," the sentry replied.

The Chairman did not say anything else. But as he returned to his cave, there was an animated expression on his face.

In a little while, everyone in the compound had risen. The Chairman and the Vice-Chairman did not bother to rest, but were soon working busily. A secretary with a radiogram in his hand flew into the Chairman's cave. We heard Vice-Chairman Chou say: "Good! Now that we've taken the commanding height, we've got the situation under control!" We were infected by the leaders' cheerful laughter, which immediately followed. Everyone tried to guess where we had struck.

For two days and two nights the artillery boomed. People could not repress their excitement. Whenever we had a free moment, we hurried to the top of the caves and looked. But we could not see a thing. We all believed that once we started a battle, victory was 90 per cent assured. Sure enough, not long after, news of victory came from the front. Our army had retaken Panlung, wiped out more than 7,000 enemy defenders, and captured the enemy brigadier Li Kun-kang. We had also brought down an enemy plane with rifle fire. Panlung was the enemy's strategic supply depot. Munitions, materials, uniforms and wheat flour were piled mountain high. As a quarter-master-general to us, Hu Tsung-nan was not at all bad. He delivered to us everything we needed. This gave our army more abundant strength to beat the enemy.

All doubts were dispelled. What had happened was that while the enemy was seeking out our main army for a showdown, the Chairman had ordered our field army to use one brigade to lure nine of the enemy brigades from the Panlung-Wayaopao line to Suiteh. Then our main force was ordered to circle around and attack the enemy's rear. If the enemy had tried to get back from Suiteh, it would have taken them six or seven days at least. By then it would have been too late. This big victory deepened our understanding of Chairman Mao's brilliant military thinking: it won every battle. After Hu Tsung-nan attacked Yen-an, we had only a little more than 22,000 troops on all battlefields of the northwest, while the

enemy had more than 200,000. For the small to defeat the big it was necessary to destroy the enemy's effective strength and continually strengthen our own forces in the course of the fighting. With his thorough grasp of the enemy's ways, Chairman Mao not only commanded our troops, but he also directed the actions of the enemy. Thus, for two months, the enemy could only move according to our plan. It reminded me of how once, before Hu Tsung-nan barged into Yen-an, the Chairman decided to concentrate a superior force in the Chinghuapien sector northeast of Yen-an and destroy an invading enemy detachment. Sure enough, everything worked out as the Chairman had anticipated. Five or six enemy brigades of over 50,000 men, all fully equipped, charged towards Ansai. They saw only our Eighth Brigade openly withdrawing in Ansai's direction. They never dreamed that our main force would strike them a fatal blow in the Chinghuapien sector! The great victory at Yangmaho was won in the same way. Because our army correctly put Chairman Mao's concept of military strategy into practice, it was an army mobile and flexible, quick and powerful, could fight consecutive battles without shirking dangers or difficulties, spot and make use of the enemy's weak points, and hit hard mortal blows, not letting a single enemy escape the net. As a result, in two months the whole aspect of the northwest battlefield changed completely.



Directing the great War of Liberation, Chairman Mao studied a military map while in Cbiabsien, northern Shensi, in 1947

On May 14, a mass victory meeting of 10,000 people was held at Chenwutung to celebrate our army's victorious retaking of Panlung and the turn in the northwest military situation. Vice-Chairman Chou had hastened there before the meeting opened. On behalf of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao, he congratulated the heroic commanders and fighters of the Northwest Field Army. And he announced at the meeting: The Central Committee and Chairman Mao are still in northern Shensi!

"Chairman Mao is still in northern Shensi!" What enormous encouragement this news brought. Cheering and jumping for joy, people threw their caps into the air.

With Chairman Mao personally in command of us, all-out victory was sure to come quickly!

After Vice-Chairman Chou returned, several leaders sat in the courtyard and talked about the impressive meeting at Chenwutung. Their laughter filled the little yard. Finally, Vice-Chairman Chou said: "Chairman, our brigadiers are concerned about you. They say you don't have enough armed men around you. Every one of them asks permission to come and guard your safety!"

Chairman Mao laughed. Rising to his feet he said: "I'm certainly not going to divert any of their strength! Let them concentrate it to use against the enemy. We're quite safe here!"

The other leaders all smiled and nodded.

Old Man Wang The weather gradually turned sultry. Chairman Mao, in a cave where the air barely circulated, perspired as he worked. We felt rather bad about this. Outside the door, we built an arbour of branches so that Chairman Mao could enjoy the cool shade. Sometimes he ate his meals there. Every day at dusk, the Chairman would bring out a small stool and sit a while beneath the arbour; he would either study a foreign language, or correct the writing in the guards' diaries. Ever since we had left Yen-an, even though life was unsettled and he was very busy, Chairman Mao had persisted in teaching himself a foreign language; he never dropped it. What was more, he frequently reminded us to study whenever we had a spare moment. If we could not study systematically, we could read some novels. And so, when we set out we made a plan for each of us to read five novels on the march and keep a diary. Whenever the Chairman had time he always looked over our diaries or asked about our studies. In this informal manner, he gave us very helpful supervision.

It was a scorching afternoon. Chairman Mao and Vice-Chairman Chou both went to the little arbour to enjoy the cool shade. They turned on a battery radio which was resting on an overturned vat. The Hsinhua broadcasting station was reporting and commenting on the news of our big victory at Panlung and the mass victory celebration in Chenwutung. The girl announcer spoke with much emotion. When she told

of how Chiang Kai-shek broke his word and started the civil war, she denounced him with great indignation, in stirring tones. When she told of the joyous victory celebration at Chenwutung, the unrestrained enthusiasm in her voice was inspiring to hear.

"That girl comrade is terrific!" Chairman Mao said approvingly. "She indeed blasts the enemy with stern righteousness! And she's very stimulating when she talks about our victory. What a clear distinction between hate and love! We ought to train more announcers like her."

As he was speaking, the host of the compound, Old Man Wang, bare-armed and smiling, came hurrying over. Though past sixty, he was of hard robust build and was a skilled farmer. What with three sons and their wives and a whole troop of kids, there were nearly a score in his family. The three sons had all gone off to help at the front. At spring ploughing time families whose men were in the army or had been killed in battle lacked labour power. The old man volunteered his services and helped them plant first. Only after that did he tend his own land. His spirit of "looking after others before tending to self" was known and praised by all. He had been a member of the Red Guards when Liu Chih-tan was leading the revolutionary struggle of the people of northern Shensi, and he often told Chairman Mao stories of fighting under Liu Chih-tan. Chairman Mao was always the first to hail Old Man Wang whenever they met, and would pull up a stool and invite him to

be seated. The old man had never seen a radio before. Hearing such impressive sounds coming out of the square box, he was amazed. He leaned forward, his hands on his knees, examining the radio from all sides. After a long silence, he asked curiously:

“What is this? Is there someone inside?”

We all roared with laughter. “Don’t laugh,” said Chairman Mao. “If any of you understand the principle of the thing, explain it to old uncle.”

Radios were pretty rare in those days. The other guards and I had heard them a few times, but none of us could say what made them work. We looked at each other in embarrassment.

Chairman Mao brought over a small stool and invited Old Man Wang to have a seat. Then, in a casual chatty way, he began to explain what a radio was all about. He talked of the echoes in the mountain valleys, of the vibrations in the air, and finally of the various principles governing electro-magnetic waves. The more we heard, the more interested we became. It was like attending a fascinating lecture.

“Aiya! There’s certainly a lot of deep learning involved here!” Old Man Wang said in surprise. “Today I’ve opened my eyes and gained some knowledge! If you folks weren’t stopping here I’d never get to see such a thing! Even if I’d fallen over one on the road and brought such a gadget home, I’d probably have broken it up for firewood!”

We all burst into laughter. Chairman Mao laughed too.

“Fine,” he said. “Be sure you don’t make kindling of it if you happen to find one in the future.”

Old Man Wang nodded vigorously. “I won’t burn it, I won’t burn it. I’ll keep it to hear our Chairman Mao speak!” Again we wanted to laugh, but no one did. In wartime, the movements of our leaders were kept secret. The old man knew the leader who was talking to him only as “Li Teh-sheng” (the name Chairman Mao used during the time of the northern Shensi battles). He had no idea that this was our great leader, Chairman Mao!

After that, Old Man Wang always tried to get close to the Chairman. He felt this high-ranking leader was truly warmhearted and friendly, modest and easy to approach. Every day he went into Chairman Mao’s cave dwelling a couple of times. If it was not for pickled vegetables, then it was for grain, or to shift the pickling vats — and at the same time, to say a few words to the Chairman. He knew from the broadcast that Chairman Mao had not left northern Shensi. Every time he met us, he would announce:

“Have you heard? Chairman Mao is still in northern Shensi! Hu Tsung-nan’s bandit troops won’t last long!”

It was not until after we left Wangchiawan that the old man finally learned that the leader who had been living in his cave dwelling was Chairman Mao. The old fellow’s heart blossomed with joy.

“Chairman Mao is still in northern Shensi,” he would tell people. “He won’t go until Hu Tsung-nan is beaten.”

Later, the Kuomintang brigand troops occupied Wangchiawan, and the cave the Chairman had lived in caught the fancy of bandit leader Liu Kan. There, Liu had orgies of feasting and turned the place into a shambles. One day when Old Man Wang came down from the mountains to scout out the enemy’s activities, he was caught and brought back to the village. They hung him up and beat him, demanding that he tell them where Chairman Mao had gone. In a voice as hard as nails, the old man snapped:

“You want to know where Chairman Mao is, do you? He’s right here in northern Shensi!” Then he closed his eyes and would not say another word, no matter how the enemy whipped and kicked him. Crazy with rage, the bandits chopped off two of his fingers. Old Man Wang fainted several times. But each time he revived, it was always the same retort:

“Chairman Mao is still right here in northern Shensi!”

Marching at Night Through Wind and Rain

In the blink of an eye it was June. The corn we had planted was more than a foot high. All the country folk were busy weeding and spreading fertilizer. Tender green crops covered mountainsides — signs of a rich harvest. Goaded to fury by the disgrace of

successive defeats, Hu Tsung-nan again sent Liu Kan with more than four brigades to attack the Wangchiawan sector.

Command headquarters ordered us to make all necessary preparations for battle. The comrades who had been dispatched to do propaganda work among the people also came back. Knowing that our troops were getting ready to leave, the local people hastily concealed or removed everything that might be of use to the enemy. Chairman Mao, with particular concern, said that the enemy was coming from the east and that we should organize the withdrawal of the local people systematically, not let them run around blindly. He said we should tell the village cadres the direction we would be taking, so that they could lead the people the same way. Some of our men were afraid this might reveal our direction to the enemy. They suggested that the people move in a different direction. When Chairman Mao heard about this, he seriously criticized the idea. He ordered that the people must definitely be allowed to withdraw with their own army; this would reduce their losses. The people and the army had been fused into one and we should be responsible for the people to the end. Men were dispatched to call back those who had already gone off towards the east. When the people learned that our forces were moving west, they felt completely assured. Supporting the old people and holding the babes, driving their sheep and carrying their chickens, they hurried towards the west.

All the country folk in the neighbourhood were gone before dark. We received orders to depart that night. Quickly we put our things in order, got our animals ready, and waited for the order to march.

Thunder rumbled. The western sky filled with black clouds. It was going to rain very soon. The Chairman and several of the other leaders were still at a meeting in the cave. We were extremely anxious. Although there had not been much rain to speak of yet that summer, we hoped those dark clouds would quickly scatter. Otherwise, during the march our leaders might get soaked.

At long last Chairman Mao came out of the cave. We hastily led up his horse. The Chairman looked up at the sky, unbuttoned his jacket and said happily: "This is going to be a good rain!" He calmly sat down on a stool, not showing the least inclination to leave. Just then Comrade Wang Tung-hsing, assistant chief of staff of the detachment, came along.

"Chairman," he asked, "when are we setting out?"

"What's the rush?" said the Chairman. "We haven't seen the enemy yet!"

Hearing the Chairman talk like that, we became even more worried. We remembered the time we were leaving Yen-an. Guns and artillery were roaring in unison, planes were bombing, but the Chairman was as steady as Mount Tai. Today our main force was far away. We had only four companies of men, and not even a small field piece. A few hundred rifles would have to hold off four and a half enemy bri-

gades equipped with American arms — the responsibility was too heavy. The assistant chief of staff understood how troubled we were, and he kept urging: "It's better to start a little early, Chairman. The road is hard to travel in the dark."

The Chairman smiled. "I've crossed the snowy mountains and I've crossed the marshy grasslands. But I've never been across the desert. Don't worry. We'll never do what the enemy expects. They want to drive us across the Yellow River, but we're going to do just the opposite — travel west. There are plenty of roads! What's so special about crossing the desert! Let's wait and have a look. There'll still be time enough to leave after Hu Tsung-nan's troops get here!"

"You go first, Chairman. I'll stay here for you and fight an engagement with the enemy to see what they're made of. Then we'll give you a report." Comrade Wang Tung-hsing was very good at sensing the Chairman's feelings. Since he would not leave, the Chairman must be considering how to strike the invading enemy, both to provide better cover for the people's withdrawal and to prevent the enemy from estimating our real strength.

Chairman Mao heard Comrade Wang Tung-hsing out, and, sure enough, he smiled with pleasure. Promptly rising to his feet, he queried: "Do you dare to stay behind?"

Comrade Wang laughed. "Why not? If only the Chairman will give the order!"

"Good! How many men do you want?" the Chairman asked.

"Give me one platoon!"

"Good! We'll leave you one platoon. Be sure to fight an engagement here!"

After receiving the order, Comrade Wang speedily began making preparations.

Chairman Mao twice paced the length of the courtyard, back and forth. It seemed as if the cave dwelling he had lived in for nearly two months were receiving the Chairman's review with deep affection. Lowering his head, the Chairman pondered for a while, then he turned back to us and said:

"Sweep the cave clean and check everything in it carefully again."

The sky was darkly overcast. We lit a lantern. When the leaders were ready and mounted, scattered drops began to fall. Sure enough we were running into rain.

Just before leaving the compound, Chairman Mao stood outside the door of Old Man Wang's cave dwelling and asked: "Is our host still here?" I replied: "The village cadres have already led the people away." Only then did the Chairman get on his horse.

We went along the rear of the village, then climbed through the drizzle towards the ridge of a mountain to the west. Although it was June, the weather was rather cold late at night in that fine murky drizzle. The nearer we got to the top, the stronger the wind and rain became. Our leaders wore

raincoats and were mounted on horses, but their trouser-legs were soaked from the knee down. Wang Chen-hai, who was leading the Chairman's mount, proceeded with great caution. He kicked every little stone in the path out of the way, for fear that the animal might stumble. Whenever he came to a slippery stretch, he chirruped to the horse repeatedly, as if telling the old black horse: "Be careful!" On the downgrades, he would say in an undertone: "We're going down. Watch your step!" And the old black horse automatically slowed its pace. The road was so slippery that we skidded with every step, and the night was so dark you could not see the fingers of your hand before your face. Stumbling and colliding with each other, we travelled on. Where the animals could not be ridden, the Chairman dismounted and walked with us slowly up the mountain.

After crossing the ridge, the path became muddier than ever. Every time you put your foot down the mud sucked at your shoe and would not let it go. The night was so dark that whenever the line of march stretched out a bit too long, the ones in the rear lost contact. Those up front had to keep clapping their hands to show where they were. Below was a deep ravine into which you might easily tumble if you were not careful. Chairman Mao strode along calmly, his cloth shoes squelching in the mud. I walked close beside him so that I might catch him if he slipped, but he proceeded quite steadily. Concentrating on moving forward, I accidentally stumbled and

was about to fall when the Chairman quickly put out a big hand and pulled me upright. A feeling of warmth flooded my heart.

At daybreak we reached Hsiaoho. Enveloped in thin mist after the rain, the village looked exceptionally lovely. We were now forty *li* from Wangchia-wan. Our detachment halted and rested. Some time before noon we heard heavy rifle and artillery fire to our rear. Planes began circling overhead. Scouts reported that Comrade Wang Tung-hsing had engaged the enemy! Our one platoon, on a controlling height at Yangyilaowan, was blocking the advance of three brigades. It beat back three enemy charges. In spite of the help of artillery and planes, the enemy could not move forward a single step. After three and a half hours, having successfully accomplished his delaying mission, Comrade Wang Tung-hsing at last voluntarily withdrew.

According to our scouts' reports, enemy outflanking units were moving in the same direction as we. At dark, we continued our march. The sky, which had just cleared, again changed, and it started to pour. Travelling upwards along the ridge, suddenly we heard scattered rifle fire down below. At the same time we noticed in the valley to the left a long row of flames. There seemed to be no beginning or end to them. This succession of bonfires stretched on and on, turning the whole valley red with their glow. It was the enemy, and they were right below us. Comrade Jen Pi-shih issued an order: No one was

to turn on his flashlight or smoke. We travelled a bit further, then the men ahead suddenly halted and word was passed back: Rest where you are. We were sweating with anxiety, worried about our leaders' safety. The situation was so critical — how could we stop here? We sent a man to inquire. What had happened was that the peasant guiding us had lost the path. Our troops had no way of going on. All we could do was to send to a nearby village for another guide. To prepare for anything that might happen, our guards detachment dispatched a platoon with three machine-guns to set up a position commanding the valley, which was down the slope to the left.

The Chairman stood in the rain. On that bare mountain there was not even a rock to sit down on. Guard Shih Kuo-ju removed his pack and placed it on the ground. "Sit here, Chairman!" he said. "That will make it dirty!" said the Chairman. "It doesn't matter," Shih replied quickly. "If it gets dirty, I can wash it." The Chairman said: "Thank you," and seated himself on the soaking wet pack.

It was raining harder and harder. The water streamed down our faces into our collars. We thought: Wouldn't it be fine if we could build a shelter so the Chairman could get out of the rain! Unfortunately there was not a tree in sight. Then the men got an idea. Several men crowded together around the Chairman. In that way the wind could

not do much, and when we held an old greatcoat over our heads, even the rain was kept off.

The Chairman laughed. "A real wall of bronze! Neither wind nor rain can get through! But you men will be cold!"

"We're young and healthy, the cold doesn't bother us!" we replied in practically one voice. Crowding together, we really did not feel too cold.

As he sat down, the Chairman automatically pulled out a cigarette. Tapping it on his hand, he held it up to his nose and sniffed it. He looked as if he wanted to have a smoke. Guard Chang Chen-kuo asked: "Would you like to smoke, Chairman? Here are some matches. They're still dry." The Chairman said: "The order is no smoking!" And he put the cigarette back in his pocket.

Battered by wind and rain, we were in a very difficult situation. At any time the enemy might charge up the mountain. The firing was sometimes heavy, sometimes light, sometimes far, sometimes near. Our hearts were in our throats. The Chairman said quietly: "This is a good rain. In another half month the wheat will be ready for harvesting!" Hearing those calm words, we at once grew steady. As long as Chairman Mao was with us, the worst situation could be changed to a good one.

After about an hour, Comrade Pi-shih came over. He reported the situation to the Chairman and said: "A guide's been found. Let's go on. We're only twenty *li* from Tientzuwan!"

"Let's go!" said the Chairman.

The detachment resumed its march. We asked the Chairman to ride on a stretcher, but he refused. "I told you long ago I won't sit on that thing!" he said. "If you want to carry it, that's up to you! Thanks to Hu Tsung-nan's attack, I've had exercise which has made me quite strong. I really ought to thank him!" We all laughed.

The rain seemed to lessen a bit. At dawn we reached a little village about five *li* from Tientzuwan. The Chairman had not drunk a mouthful of hot water during the night march. We made a temporary halt and found a narrow little cave that was pitch dark, where we prepared to dry our clothes over a fire and boil some drinking water. The comrades quickly piled up some brushwood and stripped off their upper garments to dry them by the fire. Smoke filled the whole cave, choking us and making our eyes water. We asked the Chairman to remove his shoes so that we could dry them.

"They'll only get wet again after you toast them dry," he said with a smile. "I'd better just wear them this way."

After daybreak, we crossed the ridge and entered Tientzuwan. The detachment and its pack animals found shelter from the rain under the trees at the edge of the village, and waited there for orders. The country folk of the twenty-odd original households here had all gone away. All that remained were empty cave dwellings.

Comrade Pi-shih said: "The enemy has also set out. They're only 20 or 30 *li* from us."

"Let's rest here," said the Chairman, "and make preparations for fighting on the march! Organize the security detachment well. If the enemy comes, we'll leave immediately. If they move on through the valley, we'll remain here." Then he looked down the mountain and added: "The enemy is probably heading for Pao-an."

Sure enough, scouts kept coming in with reports: "The enemy is passing through the valley!" "The enemy is all gone!"

"Good," said Chairman Mao. "We'll stay here."

The pack animals were unloaded, living quarters were found, and our troops began to rest.

No sooner had we moved in than Comrade Wang Tung-hsing returned with his platoon. The Chairman came out of his cave to greet them. He shook Wang's hand and said affectionately: "Well fought! If one of our platoons can hold off the attack of three enemy brigades, it proves they're in no way formidable! It shows we can lick Hu Tsung-nan very quickly! I've already sent radiograms to all our positions, commending you men. Such courage and military skill deserves formal citation!"

Comrade Wang Tung-hsing said: "The Chairman commands us well."

"You're an excellent fighter!" said Chairman Mao. "I am going to give you another mission. Do you dare to go?"

Comrade Wang laughed. "If only the Chairman will issue the order, I'll dare to go anywhere!"

"Good! I want you to go to Yen-an. Do you dare or not?" the Chairman asked with a smile.

"If the Chairman says so, I'll leave immediately," Comrade Wang replied, also smiling.

"Take a company and tail the enemy. Make a trip to Yen-an. Don't let the enemy get any sleep for two days and two nights! You have two tasks: Go to the section around Date Garden and find out what the enemy is doing. Where are they living? How are they treating the people? The other is to visit the people in that neighbourhood. See whether any of them have come back. You must find a way to help them solve whatever difficulties they're having. Be alert and resourceful on the road. If you run into a large enemy detachment, move on. If you meet a small enemy detachment, resolutely wipe it out!"

"I certainly will firmly complete my mission!" said Comrade Wang. He started to leave.

"Not so fast," the Chairman said. "Have a meal first and then go. There's still time. Take a radio along and keep direct contact with us!"

The mission assigned, Comrade Wang seemed to think of something. He hesitated a moment before saying: "If I take a company, won't that be too much? How will you get along here?"

With a gentle smile, the Chairman placed a hand on Comrade Wang's shoulder. "Don't worry, just

go," he said firmly. "Don't bother about me. I've got my own methods." He paused, then added: "We may not be here when you come back. I can't tell you definitely where we will be. But one thing is sure — we won't leave northern Shensi!"

We won't leave northern Shensi! What a powerful voice! It had already become the symbol of our victory!

Having accepted his assignment, Comrade Wang Tung-hsing made all necessary preparations, selected a radio operator and left with a company of crack troops. They tailed the enemy in the direction of Yen-an.

With more than four brigades, Liu Kan, rushing about like a headless fly, was never able to locate the trail of our Central Committee organizations. Finally, he had to give up and return in dejection. Comrade Wang and his men just at that time began to nip the enemy's tail. Liu Kan was puzzled. He had never expected to meet a People's Liberation Army unit here. He had no choice but to defend himself hurriedly. Abandoning arms and equipment all along the way, he and his brigades fled back to the city of Yen-an.

Not long after, we heard that Comrade Wang had penetrated to the outskirts of the city. There he gathered five or six guerrilla detachments and started a struggle against the enemy. At the same time, they helped the local peasants quickly harvest 800 piculs

of wheat. When this news reached us, Chairman Mao said approvingly:

"Excellent. Eight hundred piculs of wheat harvested now are more useful than the destruction of 800 enemy soldiers!" Half a month later, Comrade Wang Tung-hsing, having completed his mission, returned victoriously. Everyone smiled and talked happily as we went to congratulate him.

"So you're back," I said. "The *Empty City Ruse*¹ is concluded too."

Comrade Wang did not understand. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"We had so few troops to protect the Central Committee and Chairman Mao to begin with, and you went off with a whole company," I said. "If you hadn't come back soon we would have had trouble finding enough men to do sentry duty, to say nothing of fighting a battle!"

Comrade Wang laughed. "What are you getting excited about? When you're with Chairman Mao, everything's as steady as Mount Tai! I remember a line that's inscribed on the Yen-an city wall: 'In

¹ A story from the famous historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in which Chukeh Liang, prime minister of Shu, saves the city of Hsicheng by a ruse. When Ssuma Yi, acting prime minister of Wei, led his troops to Hsicheng, he found the city gates wide open and Chukeh Liang inviting him to enter. Knowing Chukeh Liang as a strategist who never took risks, Ssuma Yi suspected an ambush and ordered his army to withdraw. In fact, the city had no forces for defence.

his mind a million bold warriors.' How well those words fit our great leader! We may not have many men, but with Chairman Mao's thinking to guide us, we're bound to defeat the enemy!"

THE GREAT TURNING POINT

THE organizations of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party remained in the village of Hsiao-ho for over 40 days. The prelude to the new battle had begun! In early August the main forces of the Northwest Field Army drove straight up to Yulin. Hu's bandit army took panic and hastily switched its forces from the southern front to the northern, to relieve the besieged city. From the Chih-tan-Ansai sector, following east along the Great Wall, came the enemy 36th Division, headed by Chung Sung. The combined seven brigades of Liu Kan and Tung Chao hurried north along the Hsienyang-Yulin Highway. Bandit chief Chiang Kai-shek flew to Yen-an to supervise personally. All the enemy positions were thrown into confusion.

Our March Is Our Classroom

The village of Hsiao-ho was in the path of the spearhead of the enemy's attack. According to our scouts' reports, the enemy's "swift brigade" was rushing with full force towards the village. The Central Committee organizations decided to move. On the evening of July 31 the Chairman told us to check and return the implements we had borrowed from the local people, and pay the original price of anything we had broken. We also were to call on every family and say goodbye. Soon after, Comrade Jen Pi-shih summoned all cadres of platoon leader rank and above to a mobilization meeting. He said we had a difficult march ahead of us. The enemy planned to blockade Suiteh and Michih, and surround us west of the Wuting River. In order to smash their plot we had to get to Suiteh first and find a chance to wipe them out. It was therefore necessary for everyone to display a tough and stubborn fighting spirit. After the meeting, Comrade Pi-shih inspected the defence positions of the guards detachment. Obviously, the situation was pretty tense.

Chairman Mao and the other leaders all rose early on the morning of August 1. Knowing that we were leaving, the local people came in groups of four or five to see us off. The courtyard was quickly jammed full. Lan-lan, a young girl who had made some shoes for the Chairman, pushed her way up to him through the crowd and said: "I want to go with you!" then burst into tears.

"Lan-lan," the Chairman said with a smile, "you haven't left your mother yet and you're already crying. If you go with us and cry, your mother won't be around to comfort you!" His jesting made Lan-lan laugh. The Chairman waved his hand in greeting to the local people. "Old neighbours," he called, "we've lived here more than 40 days. We've given you a lot of trouble!"

"You comrades helped us till the land," said the local people. "It's you who've worked hard for us!"

The people swarmed around, shaking hands and holding on to our clothes, and could not stop saying how sorry they were to see us go. There were so many people and so many voices, it was hard to hear clearly what was being said. Vice-Chairman Chou stepped up on a rock and said in a loud voice:

"Old neighbours, you also know that the enemy may come this way. When we leave, you must bury and conceal everything and get ready to move! Don't let the enemy get hold of a single grain. Starve them to death! Pin them down! The day of the total destruction of the enemy isn't far off!"

At once the local people set up an excited cheer: "Wipe out Hu's bandit army!"

Our troops were already far ahead, but the people still clustered around our leaders and would not let them go.

"Please go home everybody," the Chairman said. "We'll be coming back again before long!"

Crowding ahead and behind, the local people saw the leaders to the edge of the village. The Chairman kept turning to wave his hand even after he had gone a good distance.

Our troops marched along the Tali River valley towards the east. At times wide, at times narrow, the river twisted through the mountains. All along the march, we had to keep crossing back and forth. Some places had a small bridge, others only a few big stepping stones. Travelling on horseback was plainly a nuisance, so the Chairman simply dismounted and walked. He chatted and joked with us all the way. At the shallow parts of the river, he was over the stepping stones in two or three bounds. Where the water was deep, and there were no stepping stones or bridge, the Chairman waded across with us, not even bothering to remove his shoes and socks.

Northern Shensi mornings in August are clear and cool, but when the sun gets overhead it burns like fire. Your clothes run with sweat and the stones bake so hot they seem ready to smoke. All we could do was pant with the heat. No one was better than the Chairman at noticing the comrades' change of mood. Seeing that we had all fallen silent, he took off his straw hat and fanned himself with it.

"This is very hard on you comrades," he said.

That remark immediately revived everybody's spirits. "We've only gone a few paces," many voices cried together. "You can't call this hard!" "It can't be compared with the Long March!" "What's hard

about it? We march when we feel like it, and rest when we feel like it. It's the enemy who've really got it hard. We're always pulling them along by the nose!"

The Chairman laughed heartily. "Well put! The enemy has a hard fate. The inhabitants and the surroundings are strange to them, and they came from south to north, without any support from the people. We're dragging them to pieces! We may have to suffer a bit of hardship, but we're winning victory in exchange."

The Chairman was always like that. Whenever there was an opportunity, he would talk to us about the current situation, or lead us into a discussion of useful questions. From the stars above to the earth below, political economy, ideological education, art and literature, labour and production — no topic was excluded. As a result, so far as we were concerned the march was a classroom where we could gain a lot of new knowledge.

Chatting with the guards as he walked, Chairman Mao asked them about their families, whether they had received any letters, how the harvests had been. Usually when we were in camp the Chairman was busy with his work and could not possibly get close to every man. But on the march he had a good chance to understand us all. Later on, he asked us whether we understood the significance of this march. We repeated what Comrade Pi-shih had told us at the

mobilization meeting. The Chairman was obviously very satisfied.

"That's right," he said. "If we fight this battle well, the entire military situation will change."

Somehow the conversation turned to a discussion of which unit fought the best. Someone commended the New Fourth Brigade. Suddenly the Chairman pointed at me and said:

"Yen Chang-lin, you're from the New Fourth Brigade. Tell us, what is it that makes the New Fourth Brigade so formidable in battle?"

It is embarrassing to have to admit it. Although I had been in the New Fourth Brigade for several years I had never properly summed up and analysed the courageous and skilful battle experiences of my own unit. I thought of only one reason. "Because the Party leads us well!" I said.

"That's the most fundamental reason!" said the Chairman. "With strong Party leadership, the fighting quality of an army is bound to be high. Our revolutionary armies all have that characteristic."

Without thinking, I blurted: "Our New Fourth Brigade is different in other ways. One is that most of our men are from Hopei!"

The Chairman shook his head. "Not all Hopei men are necessarily good fighters. In the Three Kingdoms period, weren't the famous Hopei generals Yen Liang and Wen Chou both killed by Kuan Yun-chang of Shansi?"

Everyone roared with laughter. I could feel my face getting a bit warm. For the moment, I did not know what to say. The Chairman saw my embarrassment, and he said:

"Whether you can fight or not doesn't depend on what province you're from. The Kuomintang soldiers are the worst fighters, but as soon as we liberate them, and they have some class education and take part in meetings to recall their sufferings in the old society, and they understand why they are fighting and who they are fighting for, they immediately become good fighting soldiers."

At once a light dawned in my mind. My thinking still had some remnants of provincialism!

"It doesn't matter if you say the wrong thing," the Chairman encouraged me. "Think again, carefully. If it's right, everyone will accept it. If it's wrong, we'll all analyse it, and then you'll understand."

I thought a moment, then, gathering my courage, said: "The New Fourth Brigade has many veterans. Nearly all joined back in 1938."

"There's a reason that can stand!" said the Chairman.

"Nearly all our cadres are old Red Army men who were on the Long March," I went on.

"Veteran cadres are experienced in directing warfare," said the Chairman. "That's also a reason. Any more?"

"Our arms aren't bad either," I said.

The Chairman nodded. "Right. With veteran cadres, veteran fighters, a high level of class consciousness, always winning victories—arms and equipment are sure to be plentiful."

I said a few more things. Some were right, some were wrong. The Chairman patiently helped me analyse, one by one—which were the main reasons, which were secondary, which did not count as reasons at all. With the Chairman pointing these things out, I seemed to become more familiar with our own troops. All during the march I berated myself for not using my head, not trying hard enough to learn. Not only was the Chairman constantly concerned about our political progress, but there was never a moment when he was not giving attention to strengthening our ability to analyse problems.

Outstripping the Enemy

At dusk we reached Chingyangcha, a small town near the desert. When we had passed this way in April, the Chairman had lived a few days in the town office here. It was here that he had issued the directive "With firm fighting spirit defend and expand the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region and the Liberated Areas in the Northwest" (The Central Committee circular of April 9, 1947). The enemy had not long invaded and occupied Yen-an, and they were swollen with conceit. But in the five months which had elapsed we had won several big victories, while the enemy were wearing themselves out with a lot of

blind floundering. Now the military situation was developing exactly in line with what the Chairman had planned. On this long trek the organizations of the Central Committee were hauling behind them 50,000 or 60,000 enemy troops. It was a heavy enough load! But we were confident that once we dragged the enemy over, victory would definitely be ours.

We stayed in Chingyangcha for one night and set out again at daylight. The first two days of the march, in spite of the hot summer sun, were fairly easy. When the enemy speeded up, we also moved faster. When they slowed down, so did we. We kept a distance of a day or two's march from the enemy, never letting them get off the hook. But when we reached Huoshihshan, the situation suddenly changed. Not stopping to eat or drink, the enemy put on all their speed to catch up with us. Enemy planes began circling overhead, bombing and strafing. Vice-Chairman Chou quickly ordered us to camouflage ourselves. Every man wove a crown of willow tendrils to wear on his hat.

To keep from being spotted, our detachment rested during the day and travelled at night. It was drizzling as we left Huoshihshan. The fine rain soaked our clothing. We arrived at Hsiaoyaitse before dawn. The Chairman did not bother to change his drenched clothes and shoes, but immediately got busy reading radiograms. In the afternoon, we resumed the march. As we rounded a mountain top, the Chairman suddenly leaped down from his horse, then stood still.

As far as the eye could see, the whole flat valley looked as if it had been swept bare by a flood. In May, this area had been overrun by bandit troops. Scores of columns of men and horses had converged on this place. Where the animals' hoofs had trampled, bushes were ruined and crops were mashed to a pulp. The doors and window-frames of many cave dwellings had been wrenched off for firewood, jugs and crockery had been smashed. The Chairman stood gazing at this devastation for a long time. Only after our detachment was far ahead did he mount his horse. He spoke very little the rest of the journey. Our hearts were also blazing. We felt a terrible rage at the crimes of the enemy.

The weather seemed deliberately to be making things hard for us. Whenever we halted, the rain stopped. But the moment we set out, down it came again. From Hsiaoyaitse to Hsunchienszu, the rain never let up. The Chairman's clothes were soaked through. There was not a dry spot on him. Marching with lights out in the dark, we could not see the road. The men who had gone ahead to look for billets for us, at first could not find any. Everyone stood out in the rain, each helping the other. At last we managed to locate a little house across the street from a monastery. We invited the Chairman to go in and get out of the rain.

"Have Vice-Chairman Chou and the others come yet?" he asked.

We hurriedly sent someone to look for them. The Chairman remained pacing back and forth in the rain. Only after the other leaders arrived and places for them to live were all arranged did he enter the house.

Because we had been marching in the rain for several days without any oilcloths to cover our saddle-bags, our bedding was all wet. Old Hou, the stableman, had covered the Chairman's saddle-bags with his old overcoat that day, but the rain still got through. We had just unpacked the wet bedding when the Chairman signalled us to leave it alone with a wave of his hand. He turned up the oil lamp and began to work. That night we made a fire from some damp brushwood and toasted our clothes dry. The light in the Chairman's room shone until daybreak.

For us, marching was not much of an effort. But for the Chairman and the other leaders, it was not so simple. Not only did the Chairman have to plan and map out the people's revolutionary struggle on all the battle fronts throughout the country, he had the People's War of Liberation on the northwest battlefield under his direct command. During the march, even when we stopped for a brief rest, the communications men immediately set up the radio so that the Chairman could contact our various positions. Whenever we made camp, he began to work before the saddle-bags were removed from the horses, reading and signing radiograms, drafting instructions. Even when he took his rice bowl in his hand, he

never left his papers. It was the same with the other leaders. The edge of a *kang*, the cover of a vat, a millstone, a rock — they just sat down beside it, and that was their desk. When others marched, they also marched. But when others rested, they did not rest. And so they were even more busy and overworked on the march than when we stayed at one place.

The closer we got to Suiteh, the faster became the pace of our march. The last few days, we kept receiving news of victories from the Yulin front. Our Northwest Field Army had already swept away the city's outer defences and destroyed over 5,000 enemy troops. The enemy was rushing up reinforcements in great haste and panic. We therefore had to reach Suiteh ahead of them, then lead them to the place we had chosen. Although he was tired, the Chairman continued striding onward, up front. The night of the 11th, as we were crossing a mountain ridge, he suddenly asked:

“What time is it?”

“Two-fifty,” I replied.

“Good!” said the Chairman. “Our forces have already withdrawn from the Yulin battle!”

Truly, the military situation was changing every second! While the conference in Hsiaoho was still going on, many of us knew that the attack on Yulin and luring the enemy up north was of great strategic significance. Not only did it co-ordinate with the drive south across the Yellow River of the army commanded by Comrades Chen Keng and Hsieh Fu-chih



On the Eve of a Decisive Battle (oil painting)

by tying up the enemy so that they could not interfere down there, but the toppling of this reactionary stronghold would also remove a threat to our rear. The military supplies we would capture could be used in our War of Liberation. Why then did we suddenly want to "withdraw"? I thought I had heard wrong, and I asked:

"Chairman, is our main force leaving the Yulin battle?"

In the dark I could not see his face clearly, but his voice was absolutely firm: "We want to pick an advantageous time to hit their reinforcements! When this happens, the enemy positions will be thrown into confusion!" — Chung Sung and his bandit troops had already moved up from along the Great Wall and arrived at Yulin.

No matter how malicious or crafty the enemy might be, we firmly believed they never could do anything that did not fit in with the Chairman's comprehensive planning and farsighted arrangements. The attack on Yulin was off. That meant that graves had already been dug for the enemy at some other place. By leaving Yulin in the hands of the enemy we were adding to their burdens. Their grain supply alone would be a headache, to say nothing of other problems. If it were sent from Hotao, it would have to be shipped across the desert. But trucks could not travel on sand, and the enemy had no fodder for camels. And they could not get help from the south because we had the whole road blocked. Sooner or

later the day would come when the enemy would either have to surrender, or starve to death!

Sure enough, our army's sudden withdrawal fanned the flames of the enemy's arrogance. When Chung Sung arrived in Yulin, he hardly paused to rein in his horse, but at once divided his forces into three columns and set off in hot "pursuit", howling that he was going to "finish the northern Shensi warfare in one battle". Little did he know that the noose was already around his neck!

It was afternoon when we reached Lichiayai. We at once prepared to camp, but Chairman Mao stopped us with a wave of the hand. "Don't bother to open the luggage. I'll rest a while leaning against the saddle-bags." We placed the saddle-bags in a cool shady spot, and the Chairman and the other leaders gathered for a meeting. I looked at our fighters. Weary from marching several days without rest, some of them were leaning against trees, some against doors of cave dwellings. Soon more than half of them were fast asleep. After lunch, the Chairman finally sat down and reclined against his saddle-bags. We urged him to go into the house and rest.

"We'll be leaving in a minute," he said. "The enemy's close to Suiteh. We've got to beat them to it." He stood up and walked a few paces, as if trying to drive off his fatigue.

A forced march of 60 *li* brought us to Huangchiakou, only 30 *li* from Suiteh. It was the middle of the night, and both men and horses were tired.

Just as we were boiling drinking water and cooking our food, an unexpected report came in: Seven enemy brigades led by Liu Kan were driving on Suiteh at full speed. Comrade Pi-shih hastily asked for instructions. The Chairman said decisively:

"The enemy have fast troops. So have we. We're going to outrace them!"

"Shall we start right away?" asked Comrade Pi-shih.

The Chairman nodded. "Right! Start at once!"

We hurriedly got ready to march. Only one man was missing at roll call — Old Kao the cook. He had made a fire and was cooking something for the leaders to eat. But who had time for that now? Several men ran over, picked up the pots, and we set forth.

The night was pitch dark. Walking was very difficult on the yellow mud road. The city of Suiteh was just ahead. We hastened our steps. The big Suiteh bridge lay before our eyes. Militiamen guarded the approaches. All was quiet and still. We crossed the bridge. We had left the enemy behind after all. Their brazen plan to pin us down west of the Wuting River had come to naught!

Suiteh was already a desolate scene in the darkness. Everywhere were broken tiles and collapsed walls. The inhabitants were all gone. Walking down two streets, we did not see a single person. Not a lamp burned anywhere. No cocks crowed, no dogs barked. The doors and window-frames of the cave

dwellings had all been burned, leaving only black gaping holes. The Chairman dismounted and stood deep in thought amid the rubble as marching men tramped past him. Suddenly, I felt my ire rising. I remembered passing through here several years before. It was a prosperous place then. A forest of shops with eye-catching signs had lined the streets. People, mules, horses, had flowed by in endless procession. But today it was a heap of ruins. Sooner or later we'd make the enemy pay for this!

Suddenly, we heard a clatter behind us. Old Kao the cook, carrying a lunch box, hurried up to us, panting. "Chairman," he cried, "come and eat!" He had taken advantage of the time we were assembling to cook some soup with dumplings.

"Since it's ready," said the Chairman, "invite everybody to have a bit!"

He was always like that. The Chairman never wanted to be given any special treatment. When there was food, he shared it with the others. When there was none, he went hungry with the rest of us. Sometimes on the march, we might be able to buy him a water-melon. He insisted on portioning that among us too. Sometimes our dry ration ran out. Then the Chairman saved his steamed bread to distribute among us. Once, when a man's shoes wore out, he brought out a pair of his own and told him to put them on. During the war, when we could not buy cigarettes, some were sometimes sent to him from east of the Yellow River. These too he divided among us. Now,

even though there was only a little soup, the Chairman did not forget the other leaders.

Once beyond Suitch, our troops turned due north. Liu Kan grabbed only empty air, but he immediately set out on our trail. When this was reported to the Chairman, he said:

"Good! If the enemy can go without food and sleep, so can we! March!"

Our detachment moved on rapidly.

We Definitely Won't Cross the Yellow River!

On the surface, the organizations of the Central Committee seemed to be in a very difficult spot.

Ahead, the enemy moving south from Yulin was pressing closer step by step. Liu Kan and his seven brigades were giving chase behind. The two enemy columns, totalling nearly 100,000 men, were closing in on us in a pincer movement. This time the enemy planned again to compress our Central Committee organizations and our main armed forces in the narrow space between the Wuting and Yellow Rivers. Paying no attention to any of this, we continued along the route we had previously decided upon. When our troops reached Chingerhping, mounted scouts reported that Liu Kan was 60 *li* behind us, and had made camp.

"Good," said the Chairman. "They're resting. We'll rest too!"

However, another report immediately followed that the enemy's north column had reached Chen-chuanpao, north of the city of Michih. So our detachment did not want to rest for long, and we continued the march.

Since we marched rapidly day after day, and the Chairman had neither enough food nor sleep, he was quite tired. He swayed in the saddle as soon as he mounted his horse. So he quickly dismounted and strode forward. We could see that the Chairman was fighting to overcome his fatigue, and we hurriedly brought up a stretcher.

"What's this?" laughed the Chairman. "You want me to get on the stretcher again?"

I said: "You're too tired, Chairman. The comrades are all willing to carry you."

Continuing to walk, the Chairman said: "Everyone is tired! You may be willing to carry me, but I'm not willing to be carried! We also had stretchers on the Long March, but we used them only for the sick and wounded. To travel on a stretcher isn't a good thing. It means you're either sick or seriously injured!"

We had heard long before that when the Long March reached northern Shensi and our people were fighting at Chihlochen, the Chairman had fallen ill and had been carried on a stretcher to the front to direct the battle. So, hearing him speak like this now, we could not help laughing.

During the day the sun struck down upon us like a hot radiator as we marched. Our chests and backs were soaking wet. But what troubled us more was our constant worry over our leaders' safety. From the direction of the march, we seemed to be heading for Chiahsien. Some of the men tried to guess whether we would cross the Yellow River. Several proposed that we urge the Chairman and the other leaders to cross over first and get away from the enemy. Could not they command the fighting just as well from the eastern side? While we were discussing this, word suddenly came from the rear: Vice-Chairman Chou was ill. On hearing this, the Chairman was startled. After learning the details, he said:

"Take the stretcher quickly and carry Vice-Chairman Chou!"

We ran back with the stretcher in great haste. Vice-Chairman Chou was exhausted, and his nose was bleeding. He was sitting on the grass, resting. When we dashed up and opened the stretcher, he said:

"You'd better hurry back and look after the Chairman. I'll be all right in a few minutes."

Just then Comrade Chiang Ching also came up. Only after repeated urgings did Vice-Chairman Chou finally consent to travel on the stretcher.

Vice-Chairman Chou, like the other leaders, was very busy on the march. He ate and slept little. Matters large and small had his personal attention. At times, to take some of the load of heavy responsibilities off the Chairman's shoulders, he went to bed

still later than the Chairman, and rose still earlier. Except for specially urgent radiograms, he was never willing to disturb him. Often, in the course of only an hour or two of sleep he would be awakened by his secretary several times. His shoes were worn right through, but he never let anyone know, afraid that the comrades would busy themselves for his sake. He had not expected that the moment he mounted the stretcher the holes in his shoes would be revealed.

Comrade Chiang Ching said: "Vice-Chairman Chou, your socks are showing through the soles of your shoes."

Vice-Chairman Chou laughed. "Showing, are they? No wonder my feet felt the bumps on the road when I walked!"

The stretcher had reached the Chairman by then, and Vice-Chairman Chou again wanted to get off and walk. The Chairman hastily held him down. After walking beside the stretcher a distance, the Chairman said to us with a smile:

"Train a soldier a thousand days in order to use him once. That stretcher of yours is having some use at last. That's what's called — You can't go wrong if you're always prepared." Everyone laughed.

Twenty *li* from Michih, our troops left the highway and entered a valley to the east. After half a day's march, we came to a market town called Wulungpu.

We had seen very few country folk on the road, but after turning into the valley there were more and

more of them. People were seen working in the fields, or carrying loads on shoulder poles along the road. As we went deeper into the valley, we came to a fair in the market place. People were coming and going, buying and selling. The place was crowded and jolly, and very lively. The enemy had not been here, and the people were peacefully going about their business as usual. When the Chairman saw this, he immediately told the comrades of the Mass Work Section to get together and explain to the people the need for concealing their things from the enemy.

The appearance of our marching detachment in the bustling market town startled the people. Some of them recognized the tall man at the head of the troops as Chairman Mao. A stir rippled through the crowd. People dropped their abacuses and their scales, put their bags on their backs, and all rushed forward.

The whole of northern Shensi was in the flames of war. In these hard times when people thought of their own leader, their difficulties became easy to bear, they could have hopes of victory and look forward to happiness. And now, Chairman Mao was still in northern Shensi, sharing with everyone the rough and the smooth. His serene smile, his calm appearance, brought faith and strength to all. Unable to control the surging emotions that filled their breasts, the people shouted, with all the love in their hearts:

"Long live Chairman Mao!"

The Chairman waved to them fondly from his horse, and the people crowded around him. The

detachment was engulfed in an ardent human tide. It was almost impossible to move. The comrades of the Mass Work Section promptly took this opportunity to do their propaganda job.

We spent the night in Wulungpu, then continued east. At dusk there was a sudden big rainstorm. Thunder rumbled and lightning flashed. Sheets of rain came slanting down from the sky. We were running with water from head to foot. Each man's body seemed to gush with limitless springs. The heavy rain and savage wind drove against us so that we could not open our eyes. It was impossible for our detachment to go on. We could only take shelter in a village.

The village was called Tsaochuang. We found a dilapidated cave, and the Chairman quickly called a meeting to study our line of action. The water streamed from his clothes to the floor.

The wind howled savagely, and our battle horses whinnied. Ahead, it was pitch dark. The country folk in the village were all asleep. A few old locust trees served as our temporary shelter. Everyone crowded together under them. Looking at the flickering lamplight in the cave dwelling, someone said: "The Yellow River's just ahead. This time we're sure to cross." Immediately seven or eight voices dissented: "The Chairman told us — until we've beaten the enemy, we definitely won't cross the Yellow River!" Sure enough, Comrade Jen Pi-shih came running out to us in the rain. "The direction of our

march is not going to change," he said. "We shall continue to advance along our original route."

From our leaders' manner, we could sense that a big battle would soon begin. Who would have imagined that at that moment the bold and able fighters of our Northwest Field Army were closing in on the Shachiatien sector from all sides and squeezing the enemy 36th Division in a tight encirclement.

In less than an hour we got the news that Liu Kan's bandit troops had set out from Wulungpu. Comrade Jen Pi-shih reported this to the Chairman.

"Fine!" said the Chairman. "Since the enemy's so diligent, we must start too!"

The storm was raging. We could distinguish the path only by the flashes of lightning. After each flash the darkness at once bound us tightly again, preventing us from swinging into full stride. We kept hearing a heavy rumbling — torrents were sweeping boulders down from the mountain tops. The word was passed along: "Careful!" But you could barely hear your own voice, even when you shouted.

At dawn the rain finally stopped. Our detachment arrived at the banks of the Chialu River. The mountains, above and below, were white with water. It had simply become a watery world. The Chialu River had suddenly become much wider, blocking our way.

This was unexpected. We sweated with anxiety. On both sides of the river were mountains so high you could not see their summits. Between was the

racing water. Calculating by the time we'd been travelling, the enemy was probably only 30 *li* behind us, at most. The terrain was so unfavourable, and all we had was a small guards detachment. Could we hold out long enough for our leaders to get safely across? I looked at the Chairman. He was sitting on a boulder with the other leaders holding a meeting. They were chatting and laughing. Suddenly we heard heavy rifle fire to our rear. Soon, artillery also began to thunder. It happened that a unit of our field army was attacking the enemy from the flank. We saw the Chairman calmly rise to his feet.

"All right," he said. "That's the way we'll do it!"

Comrade Jen Pi-shih at once issued the order to march.

Our detachment temporarily changed its direction, abruptly switching from east to west. There, the mountains were high and the cliffs steep. The mountain trails were rugged. But while on the lower slopes you had at least a twisting path, on the heights you could see only clouds and mist. Not even a narrow trail could be found. The Chairman got down from his horse and called:

"Up the mountain!" He strode forward in the lead.

Comrade Wang Tung-hsing gave special instructions to the men in the rear of the guards detachment to wipe out all traces of our change of route.

"It doesn't matter," said the Chairman. "Even if we put up a sign reading, 'Mao Tsetung has gone into

the northwest mountains,' those stupid clods wouldn't be able to do anything about it."

Hearing the Chairman say this, we all laughed. Vice-Chairman Chou said to Comrade Wang with a smile: "You can't go wrong if you're always prepared. You'd better do it. Making the enemy search around for a while won't be bad!"

Halfway up the mountain we again heard some firing down below. Vice-Chairman Chou halted and asked: "What's up?" The Chairman also halted. Holding his straw hat in his hand, he asked leisurely:

"Is that the enemy coming?" He found a rock and sat down, then added: "Very well, we'll wait for them and see what the devils look like."

A man came up from the rear with a report. The firing was from the militia on the opposite shore. After the misunderstanding was cleared up, the Chairman rose and said: "Everything's all right. Let's go on!"

On a knoll near the summit, we gazed back towards the east. Like a fiery ball, the sun was rolling out of the purple mist. The Chialu River seemed only a thin stream. In the distance, the Yellow River, amid the lofty mountains, appeared particularly placid, with none of its usual roaring ferocity. Draped in sunlight, it was extremely beautiful, gladdening our hearts and spirits. Our tension and fatigue of many days instantly vanished. Fascinated by this lovely sight, we stood and feasted our eyes

on the scenery down below. Li Wen-kuei, leader of a guards squad, nudged Shih Kuo-jui and said:

"You're a great one for poetry, aren't you? Look at that! Full of poetic beauty! Why not compose a poem?"

Shih stood wrapped in thought for a moment, then began: "The Yellow River is waving to us. . . ."

The Chairman, who happened to overhear, asked with a smile: "Shih Kuo-jui! Are you thinking of crossing the Yellow River again?"

Shih, also smiling, quickly replied: "We're making up poetry!"

"Ah," said the Chairman, "you're in such good spirits. Excellent! We'll rest a while and listen to your poem!"

"I'm afraid I can't do it very well," said Shih. Gazing at the Yellow River, he pondered for a time, then out came the poem:

The Yellow River roars!
Smiling, it waves to us,
Ho! Dear Chairman Mao,
Cross the Yellow River,
The eastern side is safer than the west!

At this point he got stuck, and everybody laughed. Li Wen-kuei hastily waved his hands for silence, and Shih went on:

We also wave to the Yellow River,
Yellow River, you needn't worry,
We have our field army here,
And tens of millions of people,
All's going smoothly, and we're quite safe!
See you again!

We all roared with laughter and gathered around Shih to tease him. "That's a fine poem you've made," said the Chairman. "Unfortunately, it has no ending. You ought to add another verse:

After we've beaten Hu Tsung-nan,
We'll call again and trouble you,
To take us to the eastern side."

The poem completed, someone started a full-throated rendition of *The Yellow River Cantata*, and we all joined in heartily: "I stand on a lofty mountain peak, and watch the Yellow River rolling, rolling, racing towards the southeast. . . ."

Reverberating among the mountains, the splendid song grew in power and magnificence. In high spirits, we climbed towards the top and, before very long, crossed the ridge.

It was at that time that Liu Kan's forces charged to the banks of the Chialu River. Unable to find any trace of our Central Committee organizations, he assumed we were crossing the Yellow River from Chiahsien County. And so he set up his big guns on the river shore and began bombarding Chiahsien City. The city was directly opposite the mountain we were on, and from the top we could clearly see the shells burst and the columns of smoke. Now we could better understand why the Chairman's judgement was always correct. It was due to his thorough understanding of the enemy's situation and because he had a full grasp of the laws of their movements. Dragging 50,000 or 60,000 enemy troops behind us, after count-

less sleepless nights and tense days, in the heat of summer, under a scorching sun, disregarding hardships and difficulties, crossing mountains and rivers, driving through wind and rain on a long march, he had finally led the enemy to the place he had planned. Now the mission had been accomplished. Smiling, the Chairman stood on the top of the summit, enjoying with all his heart the beauty of the rivers and mountains, and the mighty panorama of our wonderful motherland.

At this very moment, the Kuomintang radio station was broadcasting a mad gibberish, boasting of their "great military achievement" in occupying all the county towns in the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region. How could they know that the noose around their neck was being drawn tighter and tighter?

As Steady as Mount Tai On the top of the mountain was a small village called Pailung-miao. On such a commanding height, it held strategical importance. Vice-Chairman Chou thought the Chairman was too tired, and he wanted to camp in this place.

"This is an advantageous spot for us," he said. "Headquarters can set up here."

"Right," said the Chairman. "We'll stop here. Deploy the security guards well. If the enemy comes up the mountain, we can fight them off for more than three hours. There'll still be time for us to go, then."

After dark, the enemy lit a big fire in the sector west of Chiahsien County. Its flames leaped high, turning the mountains and fields crimson. We could see very clearly from the mountain, as if the fire was right before us. Comrade Wang Tung-hsing hurried to report it to Vice-Chairman Chou, who came out for a look.

"Have the security guards take good positions," he said. "Don't tell the Chairman. Let him have a good sleep. He's too tired!"

Who would have guessed that the Chairman, in his room, would overhear him? "Wang Tung-hsing!" the Chairman called in a loud voice. "Don't worry. Today, the world isn't theirs, it's ours!"

Smiling, Comrade Wang Tung-hsing left.

During the latter half of the night there was a big rain. Water pelted the enemy at the foot of the mountain, making them howl and cry. They fired their rifles and their artillery to give themselves courage. We slept well all night.

In the morning it was raining harder than ever. The whole mountain was white and misty, like a waterfall. As we went down the mountain, the water simply pushed us along. It was impossible to stand still. The horses could not be ridden. The Chairman walked with us, hand in hand.

In the valley we went north, towards the upper reaches of the Chialu River. The torrents had overflowed the river bed. There was no telling how wide it was. Our advance guard found the narrowest part

of the river, and started to build a bridge. There were two big boulders on either side of the river which seemed usable as foundations for the bridge. But the torrent was too strong. You got dizzy just looking at it. When the Chairman arrived, Comrade Wang Tung-hsing hurried up to him and reported: "The flow's too rapid. It is going to be difficult to build a bridge. A few comrades have already swum across to find some of the local people on the other side."

The Chairman walked to the river's edge and examined the situation carefully. Then he put the end of a branch in to test the speed of the flow. Vice-Chairman Chou and Comrade Jen Pi-shih had long since been busy supervising the construction of the bridge.

Suddenly rifle and artillery fire sounded from the direction of Pailungmiao. The thunder of the exploding shells sounded directly overhead. Our guards detachment was exchanging fire with the enemy. The place seemed about to become a battlefield! The Chairman turned and looked at the mountain top, then, quite unruffled, paced back and forth along the river bank. The fighters building the bridge had stripped, and were straining with all their might to fling ropes and spars to the opposite bank so as to set up a framework on which boards could be laid. But the river was wide and the water fast. Some of the spars fell in the middle of the river and were washed away. Though the situation was very tense, the bridge could not be built immediately. Comrade

Wang Tung-hsing grew quite upset, and he hurriedly asked the Chairman's permission to find some way of getting him over to the other side first. The Chairman shook his head:

"No. I'll stay here. Find a way to get the secretaries, the radio men and the documents across the river first!"

More than once the Chairman had taught us that we must pay attention to preserving our documents under all circumstances, because they affected the lives and future of the people of the whole country. Many times he had instructed us: "In a crisis you needn't worry about me. Save the secretaries and the documents first." At all times, he placed the country and the fate of the people first, never giving a thought to his personal safety. That was the noble way of our leader!

Soon, in accordance with the Chairman's instructions, the men in charge of documents and communications, holding onto unsaddled horses, swam with the current to the opposite shore.

The fighting grew hotter, but the bridge building still progressed very slowly. On both banks, men pulled the ropes tight and lashed them around boulders, then laid some doors upon the ropes. But the rough water and the high waves caused the ropes to sway and dance. What was more, there were not enough doors. So our men had to swim the river again and borrow some lumber. Just at the moment our organizations' entire personnel and their horses

were all gathered on the river bank, the enemy planes chose to come out in the rain. But the Chairman was completely unperturbed. Turning to a staff officer, he said:

"Give me the radio messages!" And he sat down on a wet bare rock and concentrated on reading through the messages. In a little while our radio transmitter was set up, and the sound of "di-di-da-da" rang on the river bank.

The calm and steadiness of our leader gave us additional strength. When only the last section of the floating bridge remained to be built, local people finally arrived with many doors and pieces of lumber, and helped us lay them one by one upon the ropes. The floating bridge was finished. Comrade Wang Tung-hsing ran to the middle of it and jumped up and down a few times. The little bridge swayed wildly, but it was quite sturdy. He hurried back to the Chairman and reported: "We can cross!"

Only then did the Chairman rise and take the lead, crossing the bridge with large strides. The other leaders also crossed, one by one. Finally, our detachment, in single file, crossed over, group by group. The pack animals were too heavy with their loads. All we could do was unload them and have men carry the things across piece by piece on their backs.

Gradually the rain slackened. The firing, however, did not stop. Confronting the enemy's concentration of troops and artillery fire, our guards detachment held its position and repulsed the enemy. Chairman

Mao and the Central Committee organizations at last crossed the Chialu River safely.

There were no enemy on the north side of the river, and we followed along its bank towards the west. Soon the sound of firing could no longer be heard. That day we never left the river side. Sometimes we walked on a mountain slope, sometimes we turned into the river valley. It was not until nightfall that our leaders decided to billet in Yangchiayuantse.

Yangchiayuantse happens to be on the south side of the river, which meant that we had to cross the Chialu a second time. We were clearly at the upper reaches. But it had just rained, and the water was very turbid. When we tried wading, however, it only came up to our waists. Crossing on horseback, you could avoid getting wet. Chairman Mao rode his old black horse, and we rolled up our trouser-legs and started wading. Just as we reached the middle of the river, we heard a roaring sound. People on the opposite shore shouted:

"Hurry! A mountain torrent is coming!"

Looking back, we saw a huge wall of water tumbling down towards us. Guard Wang Chen-hai pulled the Chairman's horse for all he was worth from the front, while we shoved mightily from behind. But the animal refused to hurry.

"You all go ahead quickly," said the Chairman. "The mountain torrent can't sweep me away!"

Of course we would not let go. Dragging and pushing, we finally managed to avoid the torrent.

still on the road. Chairman Mao had told us then: The coming of Liu's army into the Tapiéh Mountain area was like a sharp knife stuck into the enemy's heart. And now our Eastern China Field Army was carrying the attack into enemy-held territory, advancing into southwestern Shantung, thoroughly smashing the enemy's major offensives on the eastern China battlefields, and effectively co-ordinating with the fighting of Liu's army. A big counter-offensive was beginning to take shape!

We were then in the midst of a great change, but we did not immediately realize we were at a turning point in history. It meant that **“in this land of China, the People's Liberation Army has turned back the wheel of counter-revolution — of U.S. imperialism and its lackey, the Chiang Kai-shek bandit gang — and sent it down the road to destruction, and has pushed its own wheel of revolution forward along the road to victory”**. It was not until later when we heard Chairman Mao's talk on “The Present Situation and Our Tasks” that we truly understood the great significance of this change.

But the turning point in the war came under unusually difficult and complicated circumstances when the enemy was strong and we were weak. The enemy thought they had an overwhelming superiority. They were so arrogant that they stopped at nothing in their vicious activities. When the enemy 36th Division arrived at Chenchuanpao, it divided at once into two columns, sending the 123rd Brigade east in an

attempt to join up with Liu Kan and force our army either to fight with its back to the water, or flee across the Yellow River. How could the smugly complacent enemy know we had already spread a big net over them?

In the morning, the wind rose and drove the dark clouds out of the sky. Veils of white mist drifted up from the mountain valleys. The organizations of the Central Committee set out that day from Yangchiauantse and marched towards a district near the front. We reached Liangchiacha at dusk. This hamlet was 20 *li* from Shachiatien, and had only six or seven families. With several hundred of us crowding in, there was practically no place to stand. We finally managed to find a two-room cave dwelling for the Chairman and the other leaders, and a small one-room cave for the working staff. Everyone else had to camp out in the open. The river bank, the foot of the cliffs, the mountain slopes, were all covered with our people. When everything was in order, the Chairman ordered us to change into light gear. We were startled. Although we had run into tense situations several times on the road, we had never switched to light gear before. Why should we change into light gear now, when we had Chung Sung bottled up like "a turtle in a jar"? The Chairman said:

"You know that we're in for a big battle with the enemy in the Shachiatien sector. The main forces of both sides are concentrated here. The territory is both narrow and small. If we fight successfully, our

situation will change from dangerous to safe, and for the time being we won't leave. If we don't fight successfully, we'll have to cross the Wuting River and go west again."

Light suddenly dawned on us. The Chairman had told us often: We should strive for the best in things, but be prepared for the worst. Especially when commanding battles, you should always prepare several alternative plans—what to do if you fought successfully, what to do if you didn't fight successfully, and what to do if the situation changed. Even changes in the weather should be taken into account. Only if you had carefully considered all possible circumstances would you be able to seize the initiative and be in an unbeatable position. And so, even in this battle, which we were certain to win, the Chairman instructed us to get ready to cope with any change. This was not being overcautious, because when the enemy crowded into this narrow little area with nearly 100,000 men they would put up a violent death struggle, like "the plunging of a snared beast". All the more so because Chung Sung, having just been cited by Chiang Kai-shek for "meritoriously relieving Yulin", was bursting with conceit! And so we immediately set to work, burning what had to be burned, and burying what had to be buried. Some men picked up their diaries, not having the heart to burn them because Chairman Mao had corrected them personally!

Not long after, Command Headquarters made contact with the headquarters of the Northwest Field Army. It turned out to be in a village only a dozen or so *li* from us. The Chairman ordered that telephone lines be strung immediately. He wanted to talk directly with the front.

The telephone bell rang.

The telephone was on a table in the outer room of the cave. The Chairman strode over to it and picked up the receiver.

"Yes," he said, "this is Mao Tsetung!"

Those of us standing outside the cave were startled and delighted! It was like a clap of thunder breaking open the dark clouds and letting the sunlight stream down bringing spring to trees and flowers. "This is Mao Tsetung!" That deep firm voice had confidence and strength. From the time the enemy had occupied Yen-an, the Chairman had always used a pseudonym. Today was the first time he had used that great name of his. This showed that the situation had changed enormously. We had already reached the summit; the enemy would have to start going downhill. After the command post at the front reported that the enemy 36th Division was surrounded, the Chairman said in a loud voice:

"Good! Make it clear to every commander and fighter: This battle will decide the entire military situation. They must resolutely, thoroughly, cleanly and completely annihilate the enemy; don't let a single one get away!"

In the cave the leaders held a tense meeting, not even pausing to eat. Maps covered the wall, and were spread on the *kang* and the table as well. Never moving a step from the telephone, the Chairman sat by it, listening to reports of changes in the enemy's situation, issuing orders on the placement of our forces, and marking symbols on the military maps. Since we had run out of candles, the room was lit only by a lamp burning cotton-seed oil. The light was dim. It did not shine more than a few feet, and so it was far from easy to examine the maps. But the Chairman did not seem to mind a bit. He worked busily far into the night.

The weather behaved badly. There had been nothing but drought in this sector before, and now in the past few days there had been one rainstorm after another. Late at night, it rained again, hard and fierce. There was no shelter in the open. All we could do was cover our heads with our quilts, several of us crowding together beneath each. Anyhow, no one felt like sleeping. The joy of victory made us forget all our hardships. We chatted and joked until, before we knew it, it was daybreak. It was still raining, and there was a sound of distant thunder. Someone said it was artillery. We were all sceptical. Could it have started so early? Throwing off the quilts over our heads, we ran out to look, discovering at the same time that we were all plastered with mud. We listened carefully to the thunder. Again it faded into silence.

The lamplight still burned in the cave, and the telephone kept ringing. Neither the Chairman nor the other leaders had slept all night. Carrying materials, the battle staff officer kept going in and out. Nearly everyone gathered around him to ask the news. When he only smiled and waved his hand, we refused to let him go. Hearing the noise, the Chairman quickly put down his telephone and came out of the cave. In high spirits, he said:

“Go up on the mountain and listen for the artillery! When the firing becomes intense, come down and let me know!”

The artillery we had heard that morning had come from Changchiakaoshan. When the enemy's forward defence unit—the 123rd Brigade of the 36th Division—drove on Wulungpu, Chung Sung discovered that he was already encircled. He hastily ordered the 123rd Brigade to hurry back and relieve him. But when the brigade turned around and entered the Changchiakaoshan sector, our two brigades, which were waiting in ambush there, surrounded it. Our forces then attacked and, within two hours, destroyed the enemy's 123rd Brigade completely and captured its brigadier, Liu Tse-chi. Liu Kan's bandit troops, which were also intending to relieve Chung Sung, were blocked by another of our detachments in the Chiahsien sector. In a panic, Chung Sung tried frantically to break out of the encirclement. Hu Tsung-nan reviled him in a radio voice message, openly cursing him by name, and ordered him to “hold out

and await reinforcements”. Liu Kan, who had been reprimanded for “Jack of enthusiasm in reinforcing Yulin”, was now ordered by Hu Tsung-nan to rush to the rescue of Chung Sung that same night. But Liu Kan was being delayed by our assaults, and he was afraid our army would annihilate him. So, with all sorts of misgivings, he just moved about in slow dilatory actions on the banks of the Yellow River. Hu Tsung-nan was furious. He wanted to have Liu Kan relieved of his post and submitted to disciplinary measures. The real battle had still to begin and the enemy was already in a mess!

The complete destruction of the 123rd Brigade was only the prelude to the battle of Shachiatien. The most exciting part came later. After receiving the Chairman's instructions, we flew up the mountain. By now the rain was over and the sky had cleared. A flaming red sun came out. Except for the wind rustling through the grass, the countryside was perfectly still. Impatiently, we all waited until dusk. But we still heard no sound signalling the commencement of battle. What in the world was happening?

After a while men came up to replace us so that we could go back and eat. We saw the Chairman still at the telephone, talking with someone in the command post at the front. We heard that he had not left the phone all day. Every change at the front was immediately reported here. The Chairman even asked about the fortifications the fighters had dug.

When we entered and reported, the Chairman pushed the telephone aside and laughed:

“Don’t be impatient. It’s not time yet! Very soon, though!”

Sure enough, just as he finished speaking, a thunderous booming started in the southwest. Countless big guns roared in unison. In an instant, the sky seemed to fall and the earth to split. The vibrations were so strong that dust showered down from the ceiling of the cave. The Chairman and the other leaders all stood up and went outside. The watchers on the mountain came flying down, shouting excitedly: “It’s started! It’s started!” On all sides, people shouted and cheered. The Chairman smiled.

“Good!” he said. “Let’s see how Hu Tsung-nan explains this one!”

Reports of victory kept coming in: Now, the enemy were all in the net; now, we were searching for Chung Sung. . . . Between dusk and dark, in just two hours, we wiped out the enemy’s whole reorganized 36th Division. Thus victory came in a flash with the impact of a tremendous thunderbolt! Only a few days before, the flames of the enemy’s fierceness were thousands of feet high, and they had the fantastic dream that they could end the northern Shensi fighting in one battle. But with the battle of Shachiatien they collapsed like an avalanche of snow, and were swept into oblivion by the mighty torrent of the people’s revolution.

Again the Chairman and the other leaders worked through the night. When it was turning light, and just as we were washing our faces, stretcher-bearers carrying the wounded arrived from the Shachiatien battlefield. The Chairman immediately ordered the mobilization of every man in our organizations, and directed that a temporary station be set up to boil water and cook gruel, and that all the medicos set to work changing the dressing and bandages of the wounded. He also ordered that the pack animals of the organizations be used to transport the wounded. Vice-Chairman Chou came out to check and supervise this work personally.

The valley filled with stretchers. Local women hurried over to carry the wounded. Vice-Chairman Chou stood on the slope. Whenever a stretcher came by, he lent a hand. When some lightly wounded walked by, he helped them over to the rest station, brought them food and water, and looked after them carefully. At the same time, he comforted them, saying:

“The victory of Shachiatien is of great significance. Your wounds are marks of glory. Go to the rear and recuperate well. After your wounds are cured, you can return to the front. Don’t worry, we have troops here to protect you. The enemy won’t dare to attack us again!” He urged everyone to display a revolutionary fraternal spirit, and help and look after one another. The wounded were deeply moved to see how concerned the leaders were about

them. Several of the badly wounded, struggling to bear their pain, did not permit themselves to utter a single groan.

Just as we all were feeling overjoyed and encouraged by this great victory, our leader, again keeping ahead of the times, was considering the next step in continuing to annihilate the enemy. We did not see him rest a minute. He was busy examining the maps, issuing orders, making detailed deployments of forces, comprehensively planning and thinking. When the Chairman immersed himself in his work, he forgot all about sleeping and eating. Only after our repeated reminders did he finally take a little food. Then he hurried off to a meeting in Houtungyuan Village, where the headquarters of the field army was located. The generals came from far to greet him.

"Well fought!" said the Chairman.

Smiling, the generals crowded round to shake his hand. "You're thinner, Chairman!" they all said.

The Chairman laughed. "Walking's easier when you're thin!"

"Chairman," said a brigadier, "you were in danger several times. We certainly were worried about you!"

"And I was worried about you!" said the Chairman. "So many enemy troops. If you had been defeated, the victory of the northern Shensi campaign would have had to be postponed!"

"There was nothing to worry about!" said the brigadier. "If we can win, we fight. If we can't win,

we march. The enemy can't beat us at marching! We just drag them to death!"

Another brigadier said: "We've got a bigger appetite, too. The enemy thought we could only take a small bite out of them, and they all gathered in one place. That made it perfect for us to swallow them whole! Only Liu Kan got off lightly!"

The Chairman smiled. "We won't let him get off lightly! We have to pin him down and fight an all-out battle. Our original plan was to finish off a dozen or so of his brigades first, then counter-attack. Now, although we still haven't destroyed that many, it looks as if the enemy is already having a pretty hard time! Hu Tsung-nan is a man of no ability, treacherous and vicious. He has big ideas and no talent. He has so many troops, but he can't do a thing to us! Although we've fought him many times, we haven't suffered a single defeat. All he's good at is carrying out our plans." Then the Chairman added: "But what is to be done? Whatever way we think, that's the way he has to act. . . ."

The generals roared with laughter. Chatting, they entered the cave. Everyone asked the Chairman to sit and rest a while. The cave was very small, and the *kang* was fully occupied with people sitting on it. Some were crowded outside the cave, and sat beside the door. After a brief rest, the Chairman spoke again:

"The northern Shensi campaign is already over the hump. The most wearing, the hardest period is

already past. The initiative of the campaign is in our hands. Of course, we still have difficulties, not with regard to our military strength as compared with the enemy's, but mainly with regard to grain. Without grain, you can't fight a war. There isn't much grain in the border region, so we won't fight here. We're going to fight our way out! We're going to hit Hu Tsung-nan right at his front door. We're also going to eat his food — it's a good bargain!"

Again the generals burst into laughter.

"The battle of Shachiatien," the Chairman continued, "knocked the cockiness out of the enemy completely! The situation is extremely favourable to us. We must find the chance to win a few more handsome victories like this one. Then the enemy in northern Shensi won't have an inch of ground to stand on."

After the meeting, the Chairman again went to the commanding height south of the village, and looked at the place where the enemy 36th Division was destroyed. A general handed him a pair of field glasses and, standing by his side, related how the 36th Division had been wiped out. The Chairman nodded repeatedly, commenting approvingly several times that this terrain had been well selected, that it was favourable to our army. He asked detailed questions about the progress of the battle and the co-ordination of our artillery.

When we returned to Liangchiacha, it was already dark. Because the village was too small, all

the organizations had moved to Chukuanchai. Vice-Chairman Chou and Comrade Jen Pi-shih had been waiting to go with the Chairman. And so he did not stop, but went right on.

The valley road was very stony and the horse hoofs kept striking sparks in the dark night. We stumbled and bumped into each other all along the road. Although the journey was only 20 *li*, it seemed as if we would never reach the end of it. And to make matters worse, the Chairman's old black horse lost a shoe. The Chairman treated animals well. He refused to ride.

"If I ride I'll only fall asleep!" he said.

He had not closed his eyes for three days and three nights. We were anxious to reach our destination quickly so that he could get some rest. So we broke our rule and turned on the flashlights we carried to light the road ahead. Who would have expected that when we arrived in Chukuanchai the comrade in charge of the billeting would say that the Chairman's house was in the rear valley another two *li* away, where the surroundings were quieter? The Chairman could not help laughing.

"I don't need quiet, now," he said. "All I need is sleep!"

The comrades vacated a cave dwelling for him temporarily, but no sooner did he set foot in the door than the leaders again got together for a meeting. Beloved leader! He gave his heart's blood to wrest victory for the revolution! Even after an extremely

tense and exhausting period how difficult it was to get even a brief peaceful sleep. He gave all his energy and wisdom to the cause of the people's liberation! The wheel of the revolution was rolling forward at flying speed along the road our great leader had pointed out! In this generation of ours, the heroic people shall write an entirely new history!

On August 23, the Chen-Hsieh Army powerfully surged across the Yellow River between Shenh sien and Loyang. The victory at Shachiatien produced a chain reaction on every battlefield in the country. When Hu Tsung-nan's mobile troops were being detained by us on the northern front, his rear was left empty. This enabled the Chen-Hsieh Army to cross the river without any difficulty, then divide and spread out both towards the east and the west. The eastern column threatened Loyang, thus tying down the enemy in Honan and helping Liu Po-cheng's army in its southward advance. The western column pressed straight for Tungkuan. It was obvious the enemy would have a hard time holding Sian, Hu Tsung-nan's old lair. Hu Tsung-nan grew panicky! He sent an extra-urgent order to Liu Kan to dash south. But Liu Kan was holed up in a mountain valley northeast of Michih. Short of food and water, he did not dare move. In addition, the autumn rain was falling steadily, and the weather was turning cold. All his men were complaining bitterly. On receiving the order, he had no choice but to risk annihilation in a dash south. Our powerful Northwest Field Army,

commanded by Chairman Mao personally, in a spirit of hard struggle that shunned neither difficulties nor dangers and ignored the fatigue of continuous fighting, hotly pursued the southward-fleeing bandit forces of Liu Kan. Moving south along the Hsienyang-Yulin Highway, our army prepared to race ahead of the enemy, then block their way and attack them. We would make the enemy pay a heavy price for every step!

The high tide of the big counter-offensive had come! Chairman Mao thought and planned day and night. From this remote little village, one brilliant directive after another, one important deployment order after another, flew to the front. From the Yellow River in the north to the Yangtse in the south, from the sea coast in the east to the Han River in the west, the forces of our mighty People's Liberation Army galloped over the length and breadth of the vast countryside like wind sweeping away remnant clouds. The day of the final extinction of the counter-revolutionary rule of the Chiang Kai-shek dynasty which had lasted over 20 years was not far off!

The brilliance of Chairman Mao's thought illuminates the road forward for the people of the whole country, leading us from victory to still greater victory!

胸中自有雄兵百万
——记毛主席在陕北战争中
陆长林 著

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