

WALL OF BRONZE

Liu Qing



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

TALES FROM THE FRONT, A Collection of Revolutionary Stories and Poetry

Communists are known for our reliance on and understanding of theoretical knowledge. Our conception of education and self-education comes directly from Lenin's famous formula: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." Yet, in our ongoing effort to acquire practical and theoretical knowledge, it may be necessary to engage with historical accounts of concrete struggles in which theory was both forged and applied in the sometimes murky complexity of real life. *Tales From the Front* aims to provide activists with concrete historical examples—both fictionalized and non-fiction—of those instances in which theory and practice mutually produced and intertwined with each other.

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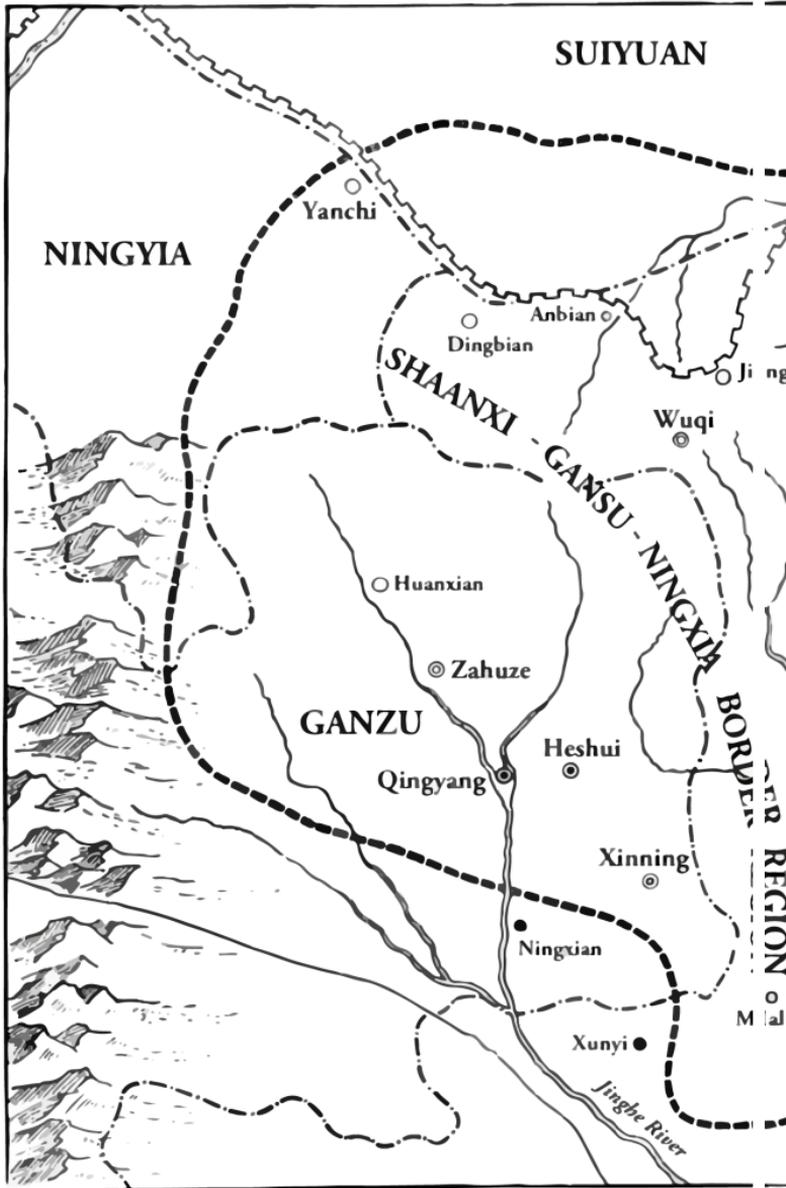
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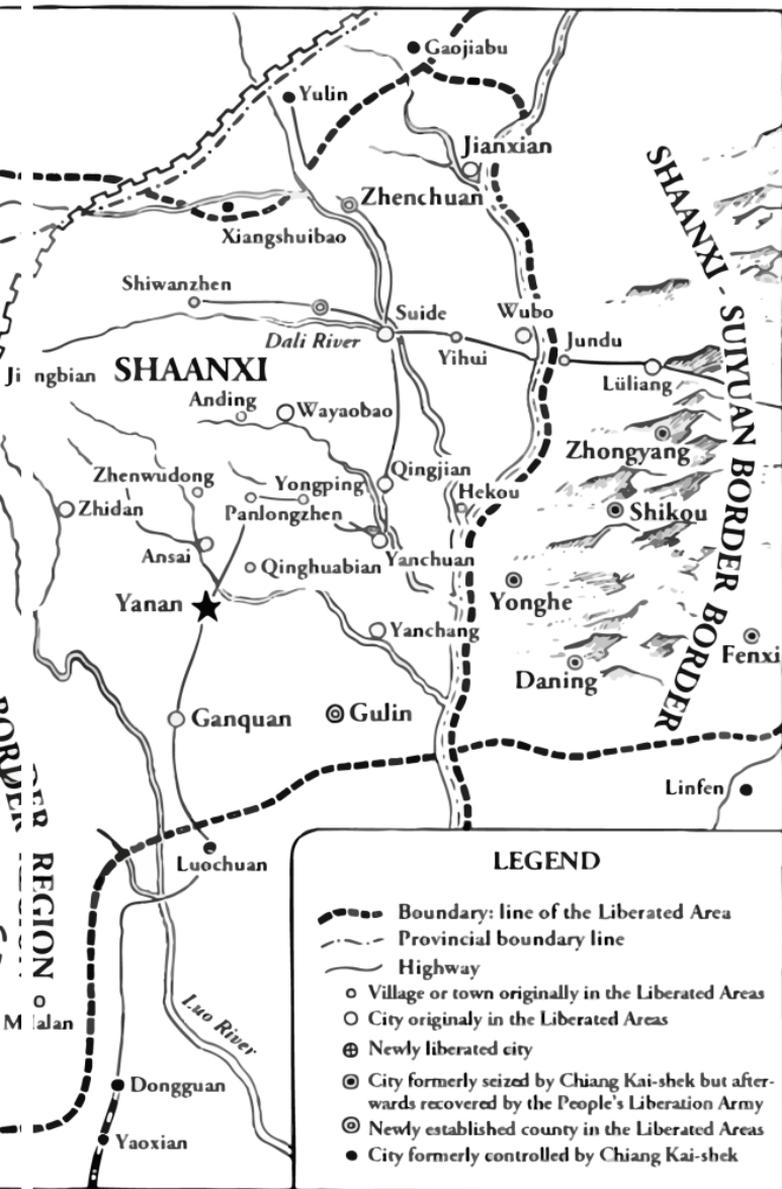
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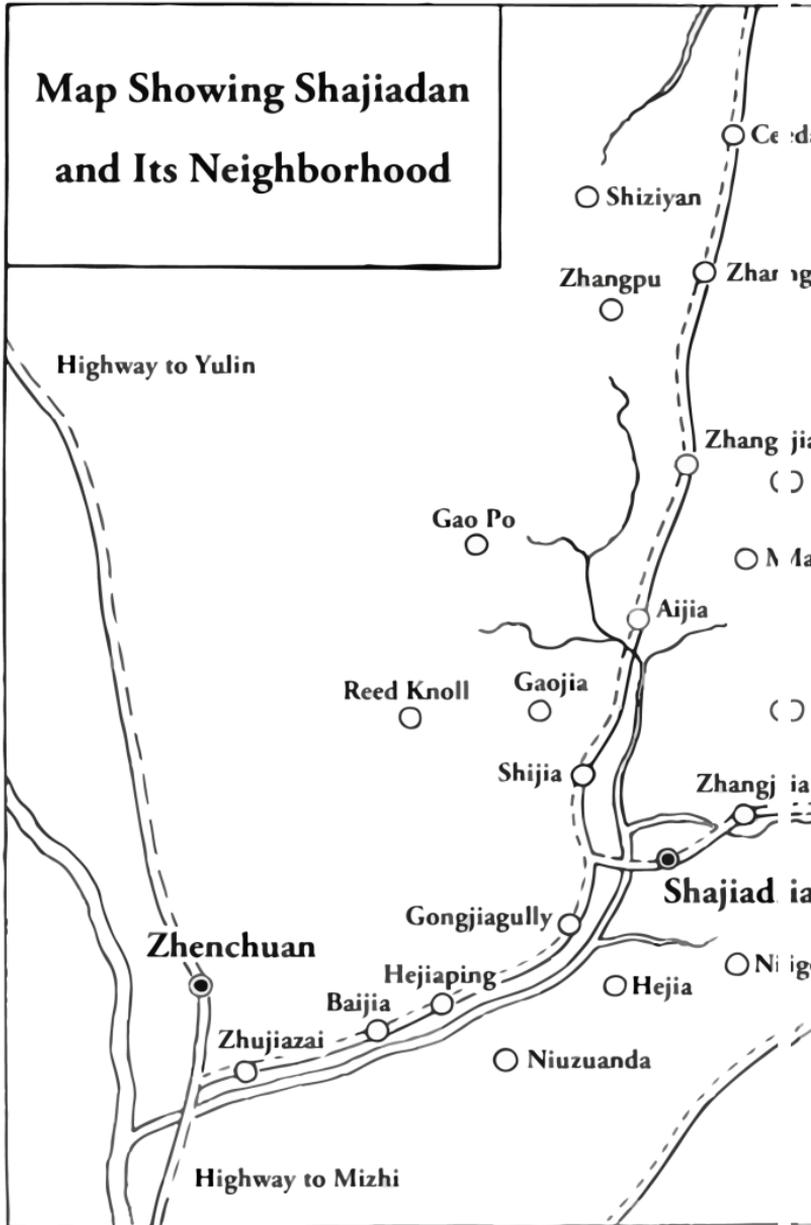
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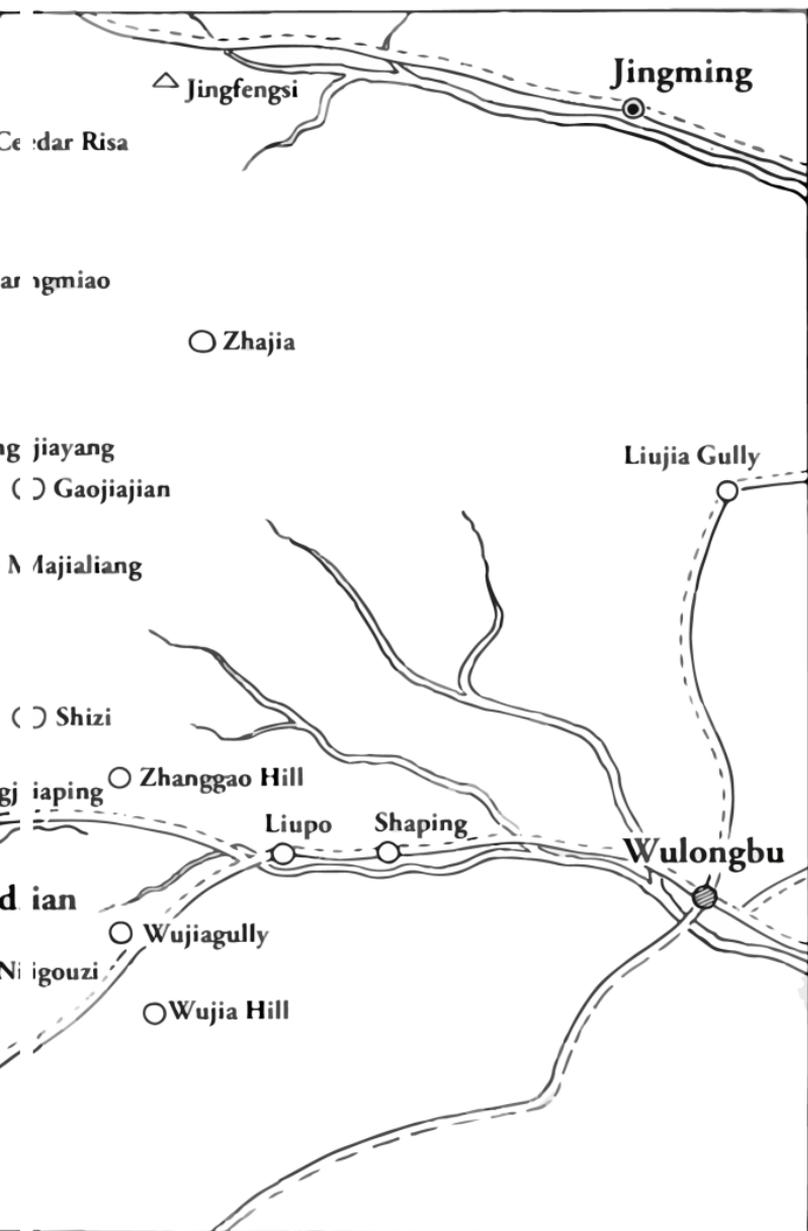
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Map Showing Shajiadan and Its Neighborhood





“...Comrades, what is the real wall of bronze? It is the people, the hundreds of millions who genuinely and sincerely cherish the revolution. They are the real wall of bronze. No force can break this wall, it is completely indestructible. The counter-revolution cannot break us; in fact, we will destroy the counterrevolution. When the people’s hundreds of millions are rallied around our revolutionary government and our revolutionary war expands, we will then be able to wipe out all counterrevolution, we will then be able to take all of China.”

MAO ZEDONG

The Northern Front

On the Xianyang-Yulin Highway, running along the east bank of the Wuding River, the distance from Suide to Zhenchuan is only about one hundred li. Ordinarily, mounted on the big mule, Comrade Ge could have made the trip in one day. But now, what with our Field Army moving north, the enemy considered this stretch of road to be our major military supply artery, and his planes raked it incessantly. One could only travel freely at night. Moreover, Ge wanted to talk personally with the leaders of Mizhi County about several important problems connected with military activities. As a precaution against air raids—Mizhi was close to the front—the county government had moved from the city of Mizhi to a large village fifteen li¹ to

1. One *li* is about one third of a mile.

the east. The regional Party committee had suggested that he see the Mizhi people, and so, with his escort following close behind, Ge turned off the highway to the mountain road leading to the temporary county seat.

That night he reported the military situation in the northwest to the county leaders from Mizhi. He told them that the plan of the Field Army to attack Yulin, in the north, undoubtedly would result in enemy counter-measures, and that local government people should be on the alert.

He set out again early the next morning after breakfast. As the county government people saw him off, they said he would have to cross several mountains before reaching the road to Zhenchuan. They recommended that he rest at noon in the village of Shajiadian. A temporary grain supply station had been established there by the district government to service the rear line organizations of the Field Army.

"The station is under the leadership of the Committee in Support of the Front in Zhenchuan," said the county head. "Since it's on your way, why not check things there and give them some instructions?"

"You ought to do that," urged the county Party secretary. "From what you've been telling us, we've had the wrong approach towards this coming campaign. The district men are probably still further off the track. The Party secretary of the

district has been there for less than a month. He's a hard worker, but he's not familiar with their situation. The district head puts too much stress on 'experience.' I haven't been there but I know exactly the line he's taking."

Comrade Ge laughed. "All right, I'll go," he agreed. "But not knowing their circumstances, I may not be able to solve any actual problems. You'd better go back now. And remember, do everything with a view to the coming battle. Don't get caught napping at the last minute." He shook hands with each of them and departed.

Events move so quickly in wartime, he mused. Within five months after the battles to keep the enemy from Yanan, the Army had struck the enemy three annihilating blows at Jinghuabian, the Yangma River and Panlongzhen, ripped through the forces of warlords Ma Bufang and Ma Hongkui in eastern Gansu and around the three western border cities of Shaanxi, after which it returned to the town of Shuanghuyou on the Dali River. A few days ago, the Border Region government had called a meeting of high ranking civil and military leaders to prepare for a new military task. The night of July 30, the whole army divided into sections and moved north along different routes. By August 5, all the sections had reached the Yulin front lines.

After Comrade Ge returned from the meeting, he had worked for three days and three nights

on civilian mobilization for the campaign. Just as he was beginning to make a little progress, a telegram arrived from Army Supply headquarters asking the Region to send a very competent man to Zhenchuan to direct the movement of grain supplies. The regional Party committee decided to appoint Comrade Ge. As Chairman of the Committee in Support of the Front (composed of representatives of the Party, the government and the people), he was the logical choice.

Now about three li out of the village, Ge stopped in a grove of willows by the side of the road while his escort camouflaged the mule's bridle and crupper with branches. The rising sun was turning the mountains scarlet. After the escort twisted a circle of slim willow around Comrade Ge's broad straw hat, he affixed a few branches to the knapsack on his own back.

"Do you know this road, Wu Zhong?" Ge asked. "We don't want to go wrong."

"We're going to Shajiadian, aren't we?" said Wu Zhong. Ge nodded. "Well, let's go then," said the escort. "I could find the way with my eyes closed!" Comrade Ge laughed affectionately. "You sure can blow your own horn!" He joggled the reins and the mule moved on. The escort walked behind.

On both sides of the road the fields were green and ripe with cotton, grain, melons, peaches, pears and dates. Very few of the hard-working

peasants were in sight, and Ge knew the reason: In the Suide Region alone, 8,000 peasants had been mobilized to deliver supplies for the army. In addition, there were those who had joined the army and the stretcher bearer teams. Nearly all the young men were taking part in the military campaign.

Here and there on the mountain slopes old men wielded their hoes; in the valleys, women tended melon vines; on the wide sunbaked flats of the river, whole families of women and children were picking cotton.

When they saw Comrade Ge, some of the women hurried over, happily calling him to stop. They had a few questions to ask him, they said.

“Comrade,” said one fifty-year-old mother, “my son’s name is Li Lizheng. He joined the army last winter. He wrote a letter that he’s now in the New Fourth Brigade. The past few days many troops have gone through here. Do you know if the New Fourth is with them?”

Another woman, holding a small mattock, demanded, “Hey, comrade, is the 359th Brigade in this attack on Yulin? My brother’s a machine-gunner in the 718th Regiment. My mother thinks and talks about him all the time...”

One woman was even more specific. “Comrade,” she asked, “do you know where our forces will go after Yulin? It’s not far from here. Do you think our baby’s father will have a chance to

come home for a visit?" Wu Zhong thought that the women's questions were ridiculous and that Comrade Ge should ignore them.

Why, these women didn't know anything about keeping military secrets! But Comrade Ge cut him short. He reined his mule, and with a pleasant smile listened to what they had to say. Then he told them that he worked in the local government, he wasn't familiar with the military situation. He advised the woman who wanted her husband to come home and see their baby to be patient. After the bandit forces of Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Zongnan were wiped out, that would be the time to talk of such matters...

"Do you believe that we can wipe them out, clean?" Ge asked her. He smiled and looked at her directly.

Her reply was emphatic. "Of course! When we have meetings in our village, the government men read us the newspaper, so we know all about our victories!"

Stopping here and there to chat with the women, Comrade Ge soon covered a considerable distance. Up and down grade, turns, forks in the road—he let Wu Zhong take care of the direction. Seated on the plodding mule, he was wrapped in a train of thought which the conversations with the women had evoked...

The Wuding River started from the marshy borders of the desert in the west, and in this

region turned and flowed south, dividing the county of Mizhi into two sections. Fifteen years ago, when the Kuomintang was still in control, the Communist Party had assigned him to work in the eastern section. Disguised as a donkey dealer, he helped the development of Red guerilla forces. But he had to leave before long. As soon as the guerillas became active, the warlords stationed troops in all the villages, the gentry and landlords organized "protection corps," the Kuomintang instituted the system of groups of families being responsible for the acts of individual members.... Finally, the widely scattered villages—ideal for guerilla activity—were forced by the Kuomintang to combine in a few centers, around which walls were built. Ge had no choice but to obey the order of his superiors to return to Jingbian County in the Red area to the south.

Now this same region had become part of the "old" border area. The warlords, the "protection corps," the Kuomintang, the family group system—all had been kicked out a long time ago. A rent reduction and increase production movement had been effectuated. This spring, land reform was put through. Talking to the women, Ge could see in his mind's eye the hundreds of millions who had started a new life. From their number came those who had joined the army, the stretcher bearers, and the great masses of peas-

ants now carrying supplies to support the Yulin front....

The people and the Party are bound together with ties of flesh and blood, he mused. Nothing can sever them!

It was very hot. Climbing the third hill, the mule was covered with sweat. It panted rhythmically, like a dripping machine. Ge dismounted and led it into the shade of a group of poplars by the roadside to let it recover its breath while he waited for Wu Zhong to catch up. He unbuttoned his damp shirt to the breeze and gazed at the crops covering the rolling hills spreading unevenly into the distance. A faint cough broke the stillness and he turned around. A smiling old man with a hoe was coming towards him down the hill slope.

Tamping tobacco into his pipe as he approached, the old man said, "I brought a pipe but I forgot my flint. Can I borrow a light, comrade?"

"I'm sorry, I don't smoke," Ge apologized. "I didn't bring any."

The old man clucked his tongue regretfully and put the pipe back in his pouch.

"Old-timer, how are the crops this year?" Ge asked him.

"Not bad!" he pointed at the billowy mountains. "I figure we're sure to harvest at least seventy percent. The millet is ripe, the sorghum is in flower, and the black bean vines are thick. If it doesn't hail, no one will starve...."

Ge nodded. The old man began to reminisce.

“Ah!” with a sweeping gesture of his pipe he indicated a great circle. “All we people in the Border Region owe our lives to Chairman Mao! You know how fierce Hu Zongnan was after he took Yanan. Then this year we had a spring drought. It looked hopeless for us people in these old revolutionary bases. Ayee, who would have thought that Hu Zongnan couldn’t stand up after a couple of blows? He attacked Suide, then pulled back and hasn’t made a sound since. When we had the heavy rains this April, the government led the peasants to rush the planting. Now our fall crop is safely planted. You see, we haven’t a plot of barren ground.”

“Yes,” Comrade Ge patted the old man’s shoulder and laughed, “you’ve put it well.”

“It’s not that I’ve put it well,” rejoined the peasant seriously. “It’s because our Chairman Mao leads us well. Hu Zongnan couldn’t control us, and today our Field Army is going north to clean up his Yulin!”

The old man was full of enthusiasm. Ge asked him whether the mobilization of the peasants to support the front was affecting the farming. The old man said that it didn’t matter, that the movement came at just the right time: the crops had already been hoed three times, the wheat ground had been plowed a long time ago, men and ani-

mals were free in the idle period between summer and autumn.

Their talk turned to the mood of peasants towards the present campaign, and the old man compared it with the peasants' attitude last September, when Zhenchuan was being liberated. He said that although then it was in the midst of the autumn harvest, the peasants ignored the ripe crops on the mountain slopes. They all went to the front, for Zhenchuan was a cinder in their eye.

"This time our Field Army is going against Yulin," here the old man used a favorite expression among the government people, "and the peasants are at high tide!" Wu Zhong arrived. Taking the reins from Ge's hands, he began to lead the mule down the hill. Ge bade the peasant a warm farewell and asked about the main road to Shajiadian.

"You cross the small hill and there's the road," said the old man, pointing. "You should reach Shajiadian before noon if the road isn't crowded with civilian grain porters. Shajiadian has a grain station. Our village sends grain there too..."

Ge sat on the mule's back as they climbed the last hill, then dismounted when they reached the down slope. Before him was a wide dry river-bed which served as the road between Wulongbu and Zhenchuan. It was jammed with grain-laden donkeys and porters with strong poles on their shoulders. From each end of the poles hung baskets filled with grain. Moving steadily west, the

men and animals raised a long cloud of dust like a yellow dragon. Willow branches for camouflage decorated the bridles and grain sacks on the animals and ringed the peasants' broad straw hats. The cries of the donkey drivers mingled with the loud drone of hundreds of conversations; some men were singing to light off the drowsiness induced by the late morning heat. The shiny carrying poles gleamed in the sun, and the porters, plodding forward, kept wiping their dripping faces with the towels slung over their shoulders....

"Rotten luck," said Wu Zhong. "They're traveling slowly. They fill the whole road so that we can't get ahead of them."

"We'll go a little slower. What's the hurry?" With pleasure, Ge watched the imposing ranks of civilian grain carriers filing by.

"They make a big target if planes should come...." Annoyed, Ge cut him short. "If everyone is afraid that masses of people make a big target, then we ought to stop fighting. Is that the idea?"

Wu Zhong hushed but didn't reply. He had been criticized unjustly several times since he was assigned to escort Comrade Ge. Actually he wasn't afraid. He was only doing his best to carry out his duty, which was to protect the life and facilitate the work of his chief. But his ideas seldom met with Ge's approval.

They descended into the road and squeezed in behind a group of donkey drivers. Ahead of

this group were porters, and still further ahead was another group of donkeys. No beginning or end of the procession could be seen. The fine yellow dust rising from the road carried with it the pungent odor of manure. Comrade Ge covered his nose with his handkerchief and tapped the patched shoulder of a donkey driver beside him. "Where are you fellows from?"

"Jiaxian County, Beigan District, Third Xiang."²

"Are you all from Jiaxian County?"

"No, we come from all over the place. The porters ahead are from Jingbian, the mule drivers ahead of them are from Suide. Behind us are people from Wubu, Mizhi; some even come all the way from Shanxi Province...."

"Two provinces, three zhou, six counties, eighteen towns," a muleteer a few paces beyond them quipped over his shoulder. "You see how powerful we peasants are! Hu Zongnan is digging his own grave by attacking our region."

Obviously, the spirits of the porters were high. Comrade Ge asked them how they were mobilized; was it done by democratic methods? How could civilian support for the front be improved? These questions stimulated a discussion among about ten drivers. They didn't all speak to Ge directly, but talked among themselves. Although they had differences of opinion, as Ge listened to

2. An administrative unit composed of several villages.

them he found that on one point they all agreed: they felt that since Hu Zongnan had suffered three defeats in the south, even if his forces still had some strength left, he wouldn't necessarily risk another attack on the north. Therefore, if we succeeded in taking Yulin, the Suide Region would not have to mobilize civilians on so large a scale in the future.

Comrade Ge explained to them why this line of reasoning was wrong. He said, "We cannot hope that the enemy won't dare to attack, but instead should prepare for the time when he does dare, so that we can destroy him."

With this the drivers all agreed, "What the comrade says is right!"

"Planes!" stridently shouted Wu Zhong.

For a moment there was a hush, as everyone listened intently. Sure enough, a faint buzzing sound could be heard. While Ge was chatting with the drivers, Wu Zhong had been watching the sky. He couldn't let his chief come to any harm no matter how Ge might criticize him.

From one end of the gorge to the other, people were staring uneasily upwards, covering the sun with their hands. Surrounding mountain peaks blocked out most of the sky. Planes would be visible only if they flew directly overhead.

The droning sound grew increasingly loud, increasingly ominous. There was a stir among the

civilian supply teams; porters and donkey drivers all stopped.

Tightly grasping the mule's bridle, Wu Zhong spotted a dry gully off to the side of the road. He told his chief to take shelter there in the event of an emergency. But the latter seemed not to have heard him. With no change of expression Ge was calmly calling to the peasants not to become panicky, while his eyes roved over the nearby terrain for a suitable shelter for everyone in case the planes should attack.

The supply teams with which Ge was traveling were in a narrow pass; high mountains on the right, a steep cliff on the left—absolutely bare of any cover.

But a few dozen yards beyond, the passage widened into broad river flats. Trees were growing along the banks of the river, and further off to the side were crops. A militiaman with a rifle on his back stood at the edge of the fields.

"Keep on your camouflage," he was telling the advance civilian supply units. "Whatever you do, don't move if the planes come over. As soon as you run you become a target for strafing."

Comrade Ge asked one of the porters, "Is that fellow going with you to the front?"

"No," chorused several porters, gazing wildly at the sky. "He seems to be the one who passed us on the road not long ago...."

Ge looked approvingly at the militiaman. "You see," he said to the supply carriers, "he definitely has had experience. With a lot of people like this, it's even more necessary not to run around blindly..."

The peasants muttered their agreement, but they were hardly listening to his words. They kept their faces turned towards the sky to try to determine from which direction the planes were coming. Suddenly there was a shout.

"A small plane! A small plane!"

"Two! Ay, Three!"

"Where? Point them out!"

"There, to the west! See! See! They've gone..."

Over the western mountains, three American-made planes sped like arrows to the north. Comrade Ge figured they were going to raid the highway along the Wuding River.

The supply carriers heaved a sigh of relief after the planes had flown by. The porters began straightening the ropes hanging from their poles in preparation for again lifting their burdens to their shoulders. Ahead, the donkey drivers called to the men who had stopped at the river bank.

"Let's go! What are you waiting for?"

"You still better wait a little!" came a shout. It was the militiaman on the edge of the fields. "Peasant friends, listen to me..." As if addressing a rally, he was roaring an explanation: Planes always circle their target first, whether they are

going to bomb it or strafe it. Nothing ever happens the first time they come over. You think they've gone and become careless. But if they come back, you have no time to take cover.

"Suppose they didn't notice us. Who knows whether the column ahead of us gave us away? The planes passed directly over their heads. We ought to take shelter to be on the safe side!" He pointed at Ge and shouted what sounded like an order, "That comrade in the gray uniform! Hurry and tell those peasants still in the gorge to come out here to the river bank. They can hide here under the trees. Move quickly, don't just stand there!"

"All right! All right!" Comrade Ge replied cheerfully. He directed the people in the gorge, including his escort, to hurry to the river flats and find shelter.

Wu Zhong had taken a dislike to the high and mighty air of the militiaman. When the latter peremptorily issued an "order" to his chief, he was annoyed beyond endurance. Glaring at the militiaman, Wu Zhong muttered:

"You don't bother to find out who he is; you're too busy being commander-in-chief!"

"Stop the chatter!" said Ge sternly. "Go quickly! Peasant friends, hurry it up a little!"

In a few moments, the people in the gorge were all under the trees along the river.

Just as the militiaman had anticipated, the three small planes returned. They circled to the

west, then, viciously, let loose a thunderous burst of strafing, like the sound of a collapsing cliff.

Crowding under the trees, the supply carriers turned pale. The porters put down their poles and burrowed beneath the melon vines on the edge of the fields. To help the donkey drivers, the militiaman rushed among them, beating the animals with the butt of his rifle.

It was very tense, so quiet that you could almost hear the strong beating of hearts.

The planes separated in order to strafe cross-fire. One came over from north to south, then the next zoomed in from east to west. Making its turn, one of the planes passed directly over the heads of the hiding peasants. Hundreds of eyes, gleaming with hatred, burned up at the planes through the screen of crops and trees, while the machines, black smoke streaming from their tails, wheeled and strafed.

There was an uneasy movement among the peasants. A few feared that the plane, which had skimmed over so closely, had seen them. Wu Zhong kept a deathlike grip on the bridle of the mule. He urgently pointed out a nearby gully and pleaded with his chief to take shelter there. Comrade Ge paid no attention to him, but kept his eyes fixed on the shouting militiaman.

“Hold steady! Don’t run around! Keep yourself under control a little longer, peasant friends. This’ll be over soon.”

The ones who had wanted to move, stopped. Another plane began to shuttle back and forth, and everyone pulled in his neck and froze.

Then the planes flew away to the north, but no one dared to stir. All watched the militiaman, as if waiting for his instructions. After a while, he told them that they could come out. The peasants dusted the earth from their clothes. Relieved, they said they owed their escape to him.

The porters went in search of their carrying poles, while the donkey drivers straightened the grain sacks which had twisted awry on the backs of the animals in the confusion. Resuming their original ranks, the peasants continued on their journey.

Leaving the mule with Wu Zhong, Comrade Ge approached the militiaman. He wanted to know this dynamic fellow, to ask where he came from and where he was going, how he knew so much about air raid precautions. To his surprise, when the militiaman saw him drawing near, he came striding over and welcomed him with a glad cry.

“Commissioner Ge! Are you going to the front too?”

About twenty-five, the militiaman was of medium height and of average build. He was the picture of health, with a face made ruddy by long exposure to the sun. His clothes were those of a

peasant, a leather belt around his waist. He had a rifle slung across his back.

“How do you know me?” asked Comrade Ge, astonished.

“Last April, when I joined the stretcher teams, you spoke to us at our rallying point in Suide before we set out to go south!”

“Oho! No wonder you’re so experienced with planes. Good, we’ll travel together.” As they walked, the militiaman told Comrade Ge about himself. He said he was the leader of the militia in the third xiang of the Shajiadian District. Shajiadian was his hometown. He had joined the second group of stretcher teams attached to the Field Army, just in time for the Panlongzhen campaign. On his way through the mountains by the Yangma River, he had passed among the corpses of Hu Zongnan’s 135th Brigade. The stench was overwhelming. He had had to hold his nose for more than ten li.

After Hu Zongnan’s 167th Brigade had been wiped out in Panlongzhen, the militiaman had taken part in a victory celebration in Zhenwudong. Several tens of thousands had participated and Comrade Zhou Enlai had addressed them. When Comrade Zhou told them that Chairman Mao was still in northern Shaanxi, the whole audience had been deeply moved.

Later the Field Army drove through the Laos-hen Hill in Zhidan County and took Zhuzi and

Huanxian in eastern Gansu. Then, striking north, they recaptured the three western border cities of Shaanxi and returned to the town of Shuanghuyou on the Dali River. Their mission accomplished, the second group of stretcher teams was replaced by the third.

"Ah, then you're finally going home now?" queried Ge.

"No, I got home a few days ago. The Seventh Xiang captured an enemy scout and turned him over to our district government. The district wanted the militia to deliver him to the security section in the county seat. All our other militiamen were out, so I delivered him myself. Commissioner Ge, will you stay over at our place at noon?"

Ge recalled what the county Party secretary and the county head had said about the grain station in Shajiadian. "I'm planning to visit your district office," he replied.

Leading the mule, Wu Zhong caught up with them among the ranks of the civilian grain deliverers. He asked whether his chief wanted to ride, but Ge preferred walking and talking with this militiaman whom he liked so much.

Before they knew it, they had reached the forward gorge. A great mass of men and donkeys were milling around in disorder and the air rang with a loud babel of voices. This was the place which had just been strafed by the planes. The peasants had drawn off to the side of the road to

set their equipment in order. Some of them had run to a neighboring village and fetched several women with needle and thread to stitch the grain sacks that had been ripped open by the strafing. A great many of the sacks had been damaged, and the peasants were scooping up the spilled millet and wheat with their hands and loading it back into the repaired bags. The newcomers asked the extent of the damage. They were told that these forward groups were lucky—none of the men had been hurt.

Commissioner Ge observed the situation carefully but didn't stop. He continued on his way with the militiaman.

Two li further on, after a turn in the road, they came upon an unfortunate scene—the river bank was strewn with the bodies of strafed donkeys. The strange part was that there didn't seem to be many people in this advance group. A few of them, apparently the leaders of the grain supply teams, were discussing what to do with the grain that had been borne by the killed donkeys. Owners of donkeys were telling one another about the years they had spent in raising the animals and bemoaning the effect the loss would have on their livelihood....

Comrade Ge went ahead with the militiaman to inspect. "There are grain bags all over the place but where are the people?" he asked. "Was anybody hurt?" "Ai!" sighed the team leaders. "It was

terrible." Everyone began talking at once. The peasants were without experience. They ran in all directions when the planes came over. As a result, there were three killed and seventeen wounded. It didn't matter about the loss of the donkeys and the grain—the people were important. The dead and wounded had been carried to a nearby village by some of the porters. They had to ask the help of the local peasants to transport the wounded to the hospital in Wulongbu.

"Comrade," one of the porters asked Ge, "do you think we're doing this the right way?"

"Right," replied Ge, his heart filled with sorrow for this avoidable tragedy. He remembered what Chairman Mao had said after Hu Zongnan had attacked Yanan: "The strength of the Border Region people is great. Victory hinges on the organization and leadership of this strength." The way the militiaman had voluntarily led the men in the rear gorge during the air raid, his spirit of serving the people and his sense of responsibility to the people, had made a powerful impression on Comrade Ge.

The militiaman, after consoling the peasants whose donkeys had been killed, sought Ge to resume their march.

"What's your name?" Ge asked him.

"Shi Defu."

"Shi Defu," Ge repeated. He didn't want to forget that name.

Again they engaged in conversation as they traveled towards Shajiadian.

The Shajiadian Grain Station

There were about a hundred families in the village of Shajiadian. Originally a remote little place approximately in the middle of the triangle formed by the three county seat towns of Jiaxian, Mizhi and Yulin, it was thirty li to the east of Zhenchuan, the nearest town. After the split between the Kuomintang and the Communists, Zhenchuan became an anti-communist outpost and a gathering place for fugitive landlords. The Mizhi county authorities then created a district government in Shajiadian to strengthen the leadership of the work in the locality. In response to Chairman Mao's call to "Develop production and build a flourishing economy," following the rent reduction and increase production movement, a market center was set up in Shajiadian. The peas-

ants in the surrounding countryside were overjoyed. "Now we won't have to go to Zhenchuan any more to buy salt and charcoal, and tremble every time we go," they said. But because it was a poor district, the newly established market was a rather unexciting affair. Its major articles of trade were grain, rice, oil, salt, cotton, cloth, firewood and charcoal. The really substantial business was done by the Shajiadian co-operative in which the peasants of the district had bought stock shares. After the liberation of Zhenchuan, most of the commercial activity moved back to the town, and Shajiadian again became a sleepy little village. There had been considerable bustle in the past few days, however, because of the Field Army passing through on its way to Yulin.

Day and night, the road was filled with the peasants carrying grain from Wulongbu to Zhenchuan. Those who had set out early in the morning reached Shajiadian at noon and stopped to eat and rest. Under the trees in the valley, men and animals swarmed like ants. Loudly crying their wares, vendors of melons, eggs and wheatcakes wove their way through the noisy crowd.

The offices of the Party district committee and the district administration were in a twisting ravine further to the east. Formerly, this had been a residential section. Now, because of the grain station to which peasants of this district and three other districts made deliveries, and because the

Army rear-line organizations came here to draw grain supplies, the ravine was constantly jammed with pack animals, army men and peasants. There wasn't a moment's quiet all day long.

The army comrades knew about air raid precautions and put their animals in the peasants' corrals when they came to the grain station. But the civilians refused to be bothered. Just as they always did when going to market, they tied their donkeys in strings along the village slopes or on the large threshing ground. If you remonstrated with them, they would say it didn't matter; they were going as soon as they delivered their grain. The result was that every time planes came, they never had time to find a suitable shelter and would hastily lead their donkeys right into the peasants' cave homes! Sometimes, Shajiadian was as tense as a battlefield....

Jin Shiwang, the district Party secretary, was on his way back to the district office from the grain station when the planes had begun to strafe east of Shajiadian. He was thinking about the problem of the grain station, as he had been for several days. Now the problem was critical and absolutely had to be solved. Although the district head had a different view of the matter than he, and some very determined ideas, Jin was going to make one last attempt to convince him. If he didn't succeed this time, he would refer the ques-

tion to the county government. No further delay could be permitted.

As he walked along, the planes came over. The peasants delivering grain immediately rushed to take care of their animals. Jin ran to help them untie the reins, and grabbing a branch, joined in driving the donkeys to safety. Fortunately, the planes didn't notice the narrow ravine. In spite of the scare, nothing happened. Jin threw the branch away and entered the compound of the district administration office.

It was housed in the newly built residence of a landlord who had fled. The grain station was in a storage cave further up the mountain, beside the landlord's old cave dwelling. The compound enclosed a row of five cave residences. The doors of four of them were locked, because all the district government employees, including the cook, had gone to work receiving and issuing grain and fodder at the station. Only the door of the district administration office was open. Jin could hear the voice of the district head, talking in the cave. He entered to find the leader of the Second Xiang standing with his straw hat in his hand.

"Do it the way I've told you," the district head was giving his final instructions. "If you run into any problems, send word. If you're afraid you can't state it clearly, then come again yourself. It's not far. Only about a dozen li..."

The xiang leader was very distressed. "Problems! It's not that the people don't want to deliver grain. They all want to, but we don't know how to organize. Secretary Jin, district head Zao—you know that every hard worker and every strong animal has gone to the front. We only have an administration clerk left out of all our village government men. If the district men don't help us, we're really going to have a hard time!" "Sure! Sure! We understand," said Zao impatiently. "Saying it ten times isn't any better than telling it to us once. If you have no other questions, then hurry back and do it. Don't keep talking about how hard it is. We here in the district have a much harder time than your village! But when we get an order from the county, don't we have to fulfill it? Hurry back. It's noon and you can catch everybody at home eating lunch—the best time to call them for a meeting. Show a little revolutionary spirit! After we capture Yulin, the work on this northern line will ease up a lot." There was nothing for the xiang leader to do but go. As he turned to leave, he asked Jin, "Secretary, do you have any instructions?"

"No..." Jin mumbled. He watched with sympathy as the disappointed xiang leader put on his hat and departed.

The secretary and district head were alone in the cave. Zao heaved a sigh and struck a match to a small roll of newspaper to light his pipe. The

pipe wasn't the usual local variety. It was made of two machine gun bullet casings which had been dropped by planes that had strafed Shajiadian a few days before. Zao had taken them, together with a rifle cartridge case for a mouthpiece, to a tinker and had them welded into a pipe.

As he puffed on this creation, Zao said with full satisfaction, "Here's another gift sent to us by our 'Minister of Supply,' Chiang Kai-shek!..."

Jin was wondering how this forty-year-old revolutionary comrade could be so subjective. Why didn't the unhappy manner of the xiang leader who had just left make Zao suspect that his own methods were wrong and make him try to think of a way to solve the conflict?

It was precisely this conflict which Jin wanted to discuss.

"Old Zao, it won't do," the secretary began as he sat down. "I've checked with the men from every district, who've come here with grain. The men in other district governments all go into the country to help organize the people delivering grain. As of noon today not one person from our district has made delivery. Just think, we're delaying deliveries in our own district. After the Field Army finishes this campaign and moves on, the peasants will have to travel much further to deliver the grain. If we don't deliver now when we're supposed to, the time will come when the Army wants it badly and we'll have to rush like mad. And every bit of this

stuff is public grain from the county storehouse spread among the peasants for them to hold in safekeeping last spring!”

“All right, tell me who would run the grain station while we were in the countryside?” Smoke streaming from his mouth and nostrils, Zao rapped his pipe on the table. “Other districts don’t have any grain station! We’re close to the front and we’ve got this urgent assignment. What is there to say? Our men aren’t gods with three heads and six arms. The old saying is right: ‘When you go to market in the city, you can’t work on the farm.’ If we try to do two things at once, we won’t do either of them well....”

Zao still held to his original ideas, still used the same line of reasoning. But Jin knew old saws too: “There’s only one truth!” Either he or the district head was wrong; they couldn’t both be right.

“Do you mean to say that out of this whole district we can’t find a couple of capable men to run the grain station?” He didn’t care that Zao would be annoyed at being asked this question again. Jin thought of the previous district in which he had worked. If he were there, under any circumstances he could always raise a few good men. But here, the man who knew the situation, the former district Party secretary, when the call came to “Make a big fist and slam the enemy,” had been the first to join the Army. Jin had only recently arrived. He still couldn’t make a definite appraisal.

Zao was upset. He laughed dryly and rose to his feet.

“You’re still not convinced. Even if I were fooling you, do you think all the men in the district office are fooling you? Because of this question we even called a meeting of the district Party committee. We agreed that it would be better not to keep all our men in the grain station, but could anyone think of how to replace them?”

He put his pipe on the table, and with his right hand folded down the fingers of his left, one by one, as he enumerated, “One bunch of Communists—our best men—took the lead and joined the Army. Party members also went to be the backbone of the stretcher teams, and they can’t be replaced by picking people at random. Of those who were left, didn’t practically everyone go off on the Yulin campaign? Didn’t you just hear that xiang leader say that each village has only one solitary administration clerk left?”

“Then your idea is that all district government people should stick with the grain station?”

“Do you know any other way to do it?” Zao countered. From a roll of documents he pulled out the county directive ordering the establishment of the temporary grain station. He scanned it for a moment, then read, “...select reliable people and assign a capable man to lead them... Secretary Jin, tell me where are we going to find ‘reliable people,’ a ‘capable man’? The best men,

all Party members, we sweated for years to educate have all gone to the front. 'A mud figure takes time to dry'..."

"The way I figure it is that for better or worse, I'm the district head, and I'm responsible. If I pick a group of people at random, we'll run short of supplies, our accounts will be a mess—to say nothing of possible graft. How will I be able to square things with the county? The grain station is temporary anyhow, only until the end of the Yulin campaign. I think the district men are the most reliable ones to run it. Their staying here may delay some of the other work in the district, but it'll save a lot of trouble later on. You've asked me about this several times, as if you'd found people to run the grain station. Secretary Jin, any time you can do that, just say so. I'd certainly like to see this knot of ours unraveled..."

Finishing in one breath, Zao sat down. He fixed his eyes on the secretary and waited for his answer. Jin looked at Zao's red face, the veins standing out in his temples. The district head was pretty worked up.

"Don't get excited," Jin told him calmly. "We're trying to think of a way to solve this problem, to do a good job. What's the harm if we discuss it a few times?"

Jin went into the question of responsibility. He quoted from the report on the revision of the Party Constitution which Comrade Liu Shaoqi

had made at the Seventh Party Congress: "As we serve the people we must hold ourselves responsible to them and enable them to obtain real benefit and emancipation through our service..."

This statement proved, said Jin, that to concentrate all the district men in the grain station when they were needed to lead the people, was not showing sufficient responsibility to the people....

"What you're saying," Zao interrupted, "is that if we act responsibly to the people by organizing them to deliver grain, we don't have to be responsible to the county so far as the grain station is concerned. Right or wrong?"

"Wrong," replied Jin evenly. "That's not my idea at all. Let me finish. Comrade Liu Shaoqi's report then went on to say, 'It is also necessary to understand the unity between responsibility to the people and responsibility to the leading bodies of our Party.' And then—'Any Party member who is responsible to the people is also responsible to the Party, and he who is irresponsible to the people is irresponsible to the Party.' He also said, 'When shortcomings or mistakes are uncovered in the directives of the leadership or of individual leaders in regard to tasks, policies or style of work, suggestions for correction should be made with a sense of responsibility to the people....'"

"The reason the county directed us to 'select reliable people and assign a capable man to lead them' is because they wanted us to be careful

when we set up the grain station, not slapdash. It wasn't that they wanted us to tie up all the district men to run it. Even if the county had ordered us to do it that way, if we found that it wasn't working out, according to the Party Constitution we could make recommendations. But as a matter of fact the county hasn't given any such order."

"I understand," Zao's face was still flushed, "and I understand your reasoning. But if you talk all day, we have no men. If you talk for three days, we still have no men. No matter where we have to be responsible, didn't you say yourself that we can't be slapdash about the grain station?"

Jin laughed. "What kind of wonderful men do you need to measure grain and weigh fodder? It seems to me that if you let the administration clerk keep the accounts, that would take care of the question of leadership. At the meeting of the district Party committee you said that because the Field Army was going against Yulin, supporting the front was our major task and grain delivery was the heart of the task; therefore we should concentrate all the district men in the grain station. That proves that you never intended to look very hard for other people. Now you've got the men measuring grain and weighing fodder, while there's no one to help the xiang organize the people to make deliveries. The problem isn't very urgent yet, but we're close to the front. What'll we do if there's a rush order? When Shi Defu came

back from the stretcher bearers, he said that Hu Zongnan's main force was right on our Army's tail all the time it was liberating the three border cities in western Shaanxi and fighting in eastern Gansu. He said while we're taking Yulin we have to watch out that Hu Zongnan doesn't try to send reinforcements. The enemy is still strong enough to come this way. If there's a change in the situation, our entire leadership in the district will be tied up."

Zao pondered a moment, then said he admitted his words at the meeting had been a little exaggerated, and he now no longer insisted on keeping all the district men in the grain station. But so far as there being any possible change in the situation, he couldn't help laughing.

"I don't think Defu is particularly accurate," Zao said lightly. "During the Agrarian Revolution,³ we were surrounded by the armies of over a dozen warlords, but the old Red areas remained the old Red areas. These latest attacks against us haven't gained the enemy any advantage either. What happened when they attacked Suide last spring? Such a mass of tens of thousands of men that they could only travel twenty to thirty li in a

3. The Second Revolutionary Civil War (1927-1936), led by the Communist Party of China, was also known as the Agrarian Revolution because the fundamental aim of the revolution at that time was to lead the peasants to a solution of the land problem.

day. We hit them, and in two or three days they fell apart. What's going to make Hu Zongnan so brave? Even if he does dare to move in this direction, he's several hundred li away. Can he get to relieve Yulin in time? And if he started to 'parade' towards here, why couldn't our Army do the same in Yulin as it did in eastern Gansu and western Shaanxi—clean up the place and move out? Then, once our Field Army left, we would have to close this grain station."

The secretary sensed a peacetime outlook in Zao's words. But Jin had already stated his strongest arguments without avail, and he could add nothing further.

"Well then," he asked with a smile, "do you or don't you agree that we should look for people to run the grain station? I've asked the opinions of our other men and they've said they don't see any necessity for district men to handle this job personally; that if we carefully check the men still in our various xiang, we'll be able to find people. All we need is one district man to lead the work in the station."

Zao picked up his pipe. He was rather displeased. "So that's the way it is. You ought to have told me that in the first place. Why beat about the bush? As long as the men have a plan, we can talk about it..."

Jin had been in Shajiadian for less than a month, but he already knew what a direct per-

son Zao was. He explained it was not because he wanted to conceal anything from him that he hadn't mentioned this before—it was only because he wanted to clear up the matter from an ideological standpoint.

He thought he'd probe the district head's attitude a bit further.

"They all say," he ventured, "that because Defu's only just gotten back, he's missed the chance to go to Yulin, and that he's very capable. What do you think of him?"

"No wonder they think they have a plan!" Zao chuckled. "He's all right. Defu can work in the station—but only measuring grain and weighing fodder. We don't want to raise him too high. It would only spoil him. He isn't someone who's suddenly dropped out of the sky, is he? Don't I know him pretty well, after nearly three years in this district? He's good at nabbing criminals, escorting them under guard, night patrol, messenger work.... But he's still young for a leadership job. As the old saying goes: 'Hairless lips make thoughtless slips.' Maybe in five or six years he'll be ready for it. He comes back from the front with a letter saying that he was a model stretcher bearer, and with a pennant of award. People think he's suddenly become very capable. I think the comrade's not bad myself, but doesn't a government man make progress by stages? The fact that

he could lead a stretcher team at the front doesn't mean that he can lead a grain station in the rear."

Jin thought of the phrase that appeared in an essay during the rectification campaign at Yanan—about those who "can't see the forest for the trees." He felt that Zao didn't attach enough weight to Defu's development because he knew him so intimately. It was not surprising that the county Party secretary had told Jin that the district head was inclined to overstress experience.

"The trials of the battlefield *are* different," he replied gravely. Defu had made a fine impression on him. "When I was at the Border Region Party School, I read Lenin's statement that a comrade learns more from one year in battle than from years of peacetime experience. Anyhow that was the general idea, and I believe it's right. A comrade in time of peace seems quite ordinary. It isn't until things become critical that he really shows his qualities. Comrade Defu is still young. If we pay attention to his education and don't let him become conceited, he'll be all right. Besides, who said the men wanted to make him leader of the station?"

The loud tones of Defu just then could be heard at the compound gate. "They're here! Their door's open!"

"Speak of him and he comes back!" Jin rose quickly. "How is it that I heard a mule come in

too?" He and the district head stepped out of the cave door.

"Why, it's Commissioner Ge!" cried Jin, and he ran down the slope into the compound yard to shake his hand.

Zao also hurried over to greet him. "Are you going to the front?" he asked.

"To Zhenchuan," said Ge. In spite of his hard journey he was in high spirits. Turning from one to the other, he queried cheerfully, "Pretty busy now, are you?"

"Aya!" they replied. "We haven't had any rest since the Field Army began moving up."

Smiling and chatting, they asked where he had been when the planes were strafing. Ge told them, briefly, then called to Defu who was helping Wu Zhong untie the luggage, "Let him do it himself!"

"I can do it, I can do it!" Wu Zhong was saying, but the militiaman insisted on opening the saddle girths.

"Is this mule well behaved?" he asked Wu Zhong. "You take the luggage. I'll tie it up..."

At the threshold of the cave, Ge had one final approving look at the bustling Defu, then he entered. The district head and Party secretary proudly told him that Defu had been commended as a model stretcher bearer at the front, and Ge's satisfaction with the militiaman increased. Defu hadn't said a word to him about it during their long conversation on the road.

Ge placed his straw hat, with its gray cloth band, on the table and took off his jacket. He looked at Zao with interest.

“Your face is very familiar...”

“My name is Zao Anben,” Zao introduced himself a little awkwardly.

“Our district head,” Jin added.

Ge’s direct scrutiny was starting to embarrass Zao.

“Did you take part in the Agrarian Revolution?”

“I was doing communications work in the eastern section of Mizhi in 1935—”

“That’s right, that’s right,” Ge remembered now. “If you hadn’t led me through the blockade,” he said excitedly, “I’d never have gotten out. The Kuomintang had their 84th Division to the south, their 86th Division to the north. They were in every village. A stranger to these parts like me could never have found his way through the gorges and ravines.”

“Ah!” recollection flooded back to Zao. “And you were Comrade Liang, the head of the Organization Department of the Mizhi County Party Committee!”

Ge nodded. “You weren’t called Zao then either. You were known as Old An, right?”

“Right. Commissioner Ge has a fine memory. If you hadn’t spoken, I wouldn’t have been sure. You’re much heavier than in those days.” Zao sighed regretfully, “Ay, more than ten years, and

gone by so fast. I was too narrow and provincial then. I only thought of going home to look after my old mother. It's a pity I didn't take your advice and go south with you to the old Red areas."

"Oh?" Ge fanned his shirt with the big straw hat. "Did the Kuomintang nab you?"

"Nearly, I finally got away from them all right, but I couldn't get into the Red areas. And I couldn't make contact with any of our own people. When Chiang Kai-shek and the Shanxi warlord Yan Xishan threw in together and the Shanxi troops came across the Yellow River, our forces had to pull out of Wubu and Jiaxian. I hung around Shanxi doing odd jobs. During the Kuomintang-Communist co-operation period against the Japanese, I went home to have a look. The landlord and gentry had called in the Whites. Not only my wife and baby—they even murdered my old mother.... When we began fighting the Japanese, our army came and our local organizations were restored. I made contact again, been working ever since...."

Ge had been listening closely to this recital, nodding sympathetically from time to time. Recalling the words of the county Party secretary about Zao's tendency to evaluate men and handle problems chiefly on the basis of past experience, Ge smiled with pursed lips. He again looked carefully at this man dressed in a uniform of coarse blue cloth. Zao looked like a big peasant.

Ge then asked the district Party secretary about his background. Jin said his story was quite simple. Only fifteen at the time of the Agrarian Revolution, he was working as a shepherd for a landlord. He joined the Party when the war started, and after a year as a member of the Party committee in his village, he was assigned to take charge of the youth work in his district. During the campaign for streamlining the army and the administration in 1942, because he had had a little schooling as a child and because the nature of his revolutionary work had forced him to study, he had made some progress and was sent to the Border Region Party School in Yanan. There he studied for three years. After the Japanese surrender he returned to work in the countryside. At first he was an organization section chief. He had been a district Party secretary for less than a year....

"We're young. Without much experience..." Jin laughed modestly. The escort brought in a basin of water, and Jin said, "You can wash, Commissioner Ge. We'll ask them to prepare lunch."

"Don't go to any trouble," said Ge. "We'll all eat your usual food together!"

Zao and Jin explained that this wasn't possible. Because the district men were working at the grain station, they only ate two meals per day, one in the morning and one in the evening. A bowl of green mung bean soup was all they had at noon.

"I'll go up to the station to call Shang Shengguang and Old Wang," Jin said to Zao.

"I'll go," Defu volunteered.

"That might be better," Zao agreed. "If you're not too tired, you can give them a hand."

"Tired after a trip of a few dozen li?" Defu scoffed cheerily. "Our stretcher teams chased Ma Hongkui with our army one hundred and twenty li in one night. At dawn we were able to open fire...."

"A good comrade," Ge turned with a smile to the district head and the Party secretary, as he washed his face. Defu left, and Ge asked, "How is it that your district men run the grain station themselves?"

"Hey ai," sighed Zao. "Secretary Jin and I were just talking about that. That question has got us stopped."

Jin felt confident now that Ge had arrived. "Let the Commissioner wash up and we can discuss it in detail," he said soothingly. "We'll see about lunch first...."

Direction

Comrade Shang, the district clerk, and Old Wang, the cook, came down from the station, and Jin and Zao went with them into another cave to talk about feeding their visitor.

The compound gate opened, and a peasant of about fifty, carrying a red tassel led spear, entered in a great hurry, his face dripping perspiration. He was well past the age to be in the self-defense corps; the spear was only a symbol of the fact that he was on official business. No one would be allowed to stop him on the road for any reason.

He made straight for the district administration cave. Zao and Jin ran after him, but he had already entered and was handing a letter to Ge.

“What’s wrong?” Zao strode over to take the letter. “Don’t you see this comrade is not from our district?” he scolded.

The remonstrance bothered the old man not a whit. Wiping his face with the edge of his jacket, he launched into a rambling account.

“Three dead, seventeen wounded. Two were hurt very badly. We took them on litters to Wulongbu. Aiyaya, I don’t see how those two can live....”

Jin and Zao quickly scanned the letter. Ge at once realized that he was talking about the grain porters who had been strafed by the planes. He had never thought that the xiang would be unable to mobilize enough men to transport all the wounded to a place where their wounds could be attended.

“Why couldn’t the other grain porters in the team carry them first, and then come back and move the grain?” he asked the old man.

“Ha! More than half of that team was shot up. Another team wanted to help them, but they said not to delay our army’s grain, that the xiang would be able to raise men to carry the wounded. They didn’t think about this being a border region—most of our men have gone to the front!”

Zao frowned. “One or two xiang can’t take care of moving many wounded. Grandpa, you go and rest in the next cave. We’ll write a mobilization notice to several xiang when our district clerk comes back.” “Will just sending a notice do?” said Jin. “The letter says that the leader of

the team requests our district to assign a man to help them.”

“I’ve got to tell you,” the old man put in, “if you don’t send a man, and just leave it up to the xiang, they won’t even be able to start by tomorrow.” His face was drawn with worry. “You mustn’t delay. Those wounds are liable to get infected. The way I see it, we ought to mobilize some men this afternoon, and ship the victims right through the night, if we have to, to where they can be looked after.”

“Grandpa is right,” said Ge seriously. “This shouldn’t be delayed. You ought to send a man. We have to exercise responsibility to the people.”

Zao pondered. The district men were all up to their ears in work, on top of which came Ge’s visit. What to do? At last he decided: “I’ll go!”

“Wouldn’t it be better if you sent some other comrade?” asked Jin. “With Commissioner Ge here, this is a good chance for us to discuss the problems of the grain station.”

“I’ll send the old man back with a notice first. I won’t go till after we’ve had our talk. It won’t take long...”

Jin was forced to assent. The old man was sent into the next cave to await the return of the district clerk.

Soon thereafter, lunch was brought in and Ge inquired about the situation in the grain station.

Jin let Zao speak first. He could fill in any of the details which the district head might leave out. He wasn't trying to be tricky; it was because he was quite sure that Zao's methods would be criticized, and he didn't want to be placed in the position of seeming to accuse him.

Starting with the county's directive, Zao related in detail what a heavy responsibility the grain station bore, the amount of grain that passed through the station in the course of a day, the work done by each man.... Finally he spoke of the difficulty of simultaneously running the station and carrying out the other district government duties.

"Originally, we figured the grain station was temporary," he said with a worried frown, "that it would last for ten days or so while we attacked Yulin. Then we found that we couldn't rely on the xiang and village units alone to organize the people for grain transport. We know that's not the way to do it, but we can't release district men from here to help them. Commissioner Ge, this work in the grain station is special. We can't just pick anyone to do it, can we?"

Ge turned to district Party secretary Jin.

"Men are a problem," Jin acknowledged. "This morning we all agreed to ask the xiang to try to find people who can work in the station and let the district administration clerk run it. But as a practical matter, we don't see yet how we can

carry this plan out..." Ge nodded. He recalled the words of the county Party secretary. "So that's the way it is..." he said half to himself.

During the meal, Ge made various inquiries about Shajiadian. They told him it was only a large village. It had a co-operative which was usually busy on market days, but now that nearly everyone was out working to support the front, business was bad. Ge asked how many men did the co-operative have?

"There were three," replied Zao, "but the manager was ordered by the county to work temporarily in the central grain station of the Regional Committee in Support of the Front in Zhenchuan. That leaves an old man who keeps accounts, and a clerk."

Ge appeared quite satisfied. Jin guessed he had asked that question with a purpose.

And indeed, Ge followed up by inquiring how many village government men were left in Shajiadian, how many Party members and relatively capable people were there among the villagers. Zao said that all the village government men were leading the civilian grain delivery work for the Yulin front; only an administration clerk remained, and he wasn't a Party member. Two men had just returned from working as stretcher bearers. One was Defu, the militiaman; the other was a man called Ba Hu, a former soldier who had lost the use of his left arm. Although Ba Hu had

spent nearly two years in the armed forces of the regional government, he had not joined the Party. He was a careless sort, taciturn, and inclined to be stubborn. Then there was Shi Yonggong, a Party member who could read a little and keep simple accounts. Last spring he had been the village administration clerk, but he had a bad stomach ailment. When the fighting started and the work became heavy, he couldn't keep up, and had to be replaced....

"All our village has is this assortment of odds and ends," Zao concluded, and he looked directly at the Commissioner.

"Not bad," laughed Ge. "You've got quite a lot of people!"

"If we try the other villages, we might be able to find some more," Jin suggested cheerfully.

"It seems to me that you're still using methods of peacetime leadership." Ge wiped his hands with a handkerchief. Lunch was over. He had already drawn his conclusions.

At this turn in the conversation, Jin took out a little book and prepared to take notes. Zao's literacy was limited to reading ordinary letters. He stared at Ge. Could it be that he was going to be criticized again for relying too heavily on past experience?

"We've reached the tensest part of the campaign," Ge continued. "No matter what work we do, it must be done with an eye on the battles. Of

course the work at the grain station is important, but there's other work equally important. For instance, the job of organizing the people to deliver grain. Or, the request for stretchers which just came in from the grain carriers who were strafed. And other important jobs that you can't ignore will arise in the future. Just because your district has a grain station, you don't expect that people won't come looking for you about anything else, do you?"

Ge smiled at the two men as he spoke. "If there should be a sudden change in the situation, your district people wouldn't be able to spend all their time at the grain station, even for one day. If you don't prepare in advance, who'll take over from them in an emergency?"

Jin hadn't expected Ge to go right to the point about a change in the situation. Zao was even more surprised.

"How is it going to change?" they asked.

"Do you think Hu Zongnan will stand idly by while we take Yulin?" Ge retorted with a laugh. "He was trailing us all the time we were campaigning in eastern Gansu and western Shaanxi against Ma Bufang and Ma Hongkui. He's got a whole brigade in Yulin. Is he going to abandon it? Naturally, if he moves slowly, we'll chew it up and take Yulin. But if he moves quickly? According to Chairman Mao's strategic principles, we'll have to find a way to head him off and destroy his

reinforcements. We're not afraid of his coming; we only want to prepare for it. Unfortunately, most of our local government men and the peasants don't see it that way. Has the county passed on to you the Northwest Party Bureau's directive on this campaign?"

"We've got it. The people took it as the usual thing," said Jin, "—a call to increase their vigilance."

"We were always calling them to prepare for war and nothing ever happened," said Zao. "It got so even the peasants stopped paying any attention. When the enemy occupied Suide last spring, Mizhi County got all ready. We were going to leave nothing for the enemy; land mines were laid all around the city. Then three days later the enemy retreated. The peasants thought it was terribly funny."

"That was wrong," said Ge solemnly. "You should have explained to them. The enemy didn't come last time because we cut off his retreat. But that doesn't mean he's never coming."

Jin and Zao asked where the main forces of Hu Zongnan were at present. Ge walked over to a map of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region hanging on the wall, and they came and stood beside him.

"When the Field Army attacked eastern Gansu, the enemy was in this region," Ge made a circle west of Fuxian County. Then he indicated another circle west of Zhidan. "They were there when we

fought in western Shaanxi. Now they've got ten and a half mobile brigades under the command of Dong Zhao and Liu Gan concentrated there, including the 36th Division of their 29th Army. The 36th is already coming our way."

The place Ge was pointing at was Jingbian County, just south of the Great Wall, and north of Zhidan. They resumed their seats.

"After Hu Zongnan attacked Yanan, he wanted to destroy our Northwest Field Army there and then. When he found that he couldn't succeed, he planned to swing his troops around and cross the Yellow River to go after our forces in southern Shanxi. But now that our Northwest Field Army is concentrated north of the Wuding River, don't you think he won't come after it instead?"

Zao remarked that previously the enemy had moved slowly for fear of surprise attacks. Ge laughed.

"In a couple of days he'll know for sure that all our forces are surrounding Yulin, miles away from him. Why should he be afraid of quick marches then?"

Jin was curious. Ge seemed to imply that the Field Army wanted the enemy to move north.

"Why does the Field Army want the enemy to come up here before engaging it?" Jin queried. "Can't we lick them in the south?"

Ge grinned. "That's something you two don't have to worry about. Chairman Mao has got his

own plan. Under his direct leadership, we can be completely optimistic." However he went on to castigate the kind of blind optimism of local government men which led them to neglect serious preparations for war. "Whether or not the attack on Yulin succeeds, it will lead to a big battle," he concluded positively.

In a great burst of light, Jin could see it now. Slowly, he nodded his head. He could feel the tension growing in him.

Zao was red in the face. He said to Jin, "Had we known this before, we wouldn't have put our district men in the grain station."

"I think you ought to reconsider transferring men from the various xiang," Ge mused, then asked, "Didn't you say there were very few men left in the xiang governments? In the event of a big battle, the xiang will need all the men they've got. Besides, when your district office people go into the countryside, how will they lead the peasants without the xiang government men there to help?"

Jin and Zao looked at each other—he was right. Ge explained further: all revolutionary work—including the maintenance of a grain station—is done by Party members and government employees leading the people. But you shouldn't rely on Party members and government workers alone. He cited enrollments for the army, stretcher bearing, transportation, militia and other examples, to demonstrate the mass nature

of the war. Armies by themselves cannot win victories. The enemy's military forces outnumbered ours several times over and they were equipped with American arms; but due to the strength of the people, we were in a position of superiority.

"Do you understand this principle?" Ge asked, smiling.

"Yes," they replied. "We understand."

"Then the problem is quite clear, isn't it? No matter how great the strength of the people is, they can accomplish nothing without first-grade organization and leadership." He related the incident of the morning's strafing. He told them how Defu had led the grain carriers to safety in the rear gorge, but that in the forward gorge, because of lack of good leadership, the loss had been relatively large.

"That's what we mean by the function of leadership," he concluded. "It's the duty of your district men to lead the people, not to measure grain and weigh fodder. According to the necessities of preparation for battle, the Party members and men in the xiang governments have similar duties—they must also lead a section of the people. The people are giving everything to the destruction of Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Zongnan's bandits. You must fulfill your responsibility to them...."

Zao and Jin listened, abstracted. They were about to ask him more about the grain station,

when the door opened and two young women came in, or to be more exact, two unmarried peasant girls. One of them wore her hair in braids in the style of the women comrades in the dramatic troupes. The hair of the other was bobbed. Each carried a bundle of cloth shoes.

"We've brought the shoes for the army," said the girl with the braids, then both girls dumped their burdens on the table.

Ge observed that the shoes had been tacked together in pairs. In each pair, one shoe sole bore the inscriptions: "Down with Chiang Kai-shek!" or "Destroy bandit Hu Zongnan!" or "Courageously kill the enemy!" while on its mate was written the name of the girl who had made them.

Ge was delighted. "Do you know how to write?" he asked the two.

"We can scrawl a few words," Braids retorted casually.

The girl with the bob added, "Some we wrote ourselves. Old Zhen in the co-op wrote most of them."

"Very good, excellent!" Ge approved. "Our soldiers will certainly be very happy to wear these shoes, and they certainly will wipe out the enemy for us." He turned to Jin and Zao. "Who's in charge of this work in your district?"

Ge's speech had plunged them both into deep thought. Jin looked at Zao, and the latter spoke to the girls.

“Why didn’t you give these shoes to the xiang government?”

“The xiang head said the district office is in our village, to turn them over directly,” replied Braids. “Didn’t he tell you about it?” asked Bobbed Hair. “Oh,” said Zao, “he probably spoke to Shang. Did you notice whether Shang was in the next cave? If not, you’ll find him in the grain station. We’ve got some things to discuss here.”

The girls took a last look at Ge, then departed with the shoes.

After they had gone out of the door, Ge said, “You must show responsibility to the women too. They’re all working hard for the battle.”

“Yes, we haven’t been doing our work right,” Zao acknowledged. “How do you think we ought to handle the grain station?”

“Isn’t your idea that we should try to find men for the station in this village?” Jin ventured.

“Yes. Then no matter how the situation may change, your district, people are still free for action. You won’t be held up in your work in other villages. Since mobilization in this region is very widespread, why can’t you mobilize those men you mentioned while we were eating? The ones back from the front, the fellow with the bad stomach, the men working in the village or the co-operative—they’ll all do. Now with everyone else so busy, none of them will refuse.”

“Good, that’s the best way to do it,” Jin said happily to Zao. “Yonggong has a bad stomach and can’t go to the front, but does that mean he can’t work in the village? He’s a Party member and he’s done it before. There’s no question about Defu and the others. Even though the co-op still has a little merchandise, there’s not much work now; and if it should get busy, military necessity comes first anyhow.”

“Right,” agreed Ge. “Secondary matters should give way to the needs of battle. The Regional Committee in Support of the Front has taken over many men from the counties and sent them to front-line grain stations. Didn’t you say the manager of your co-op went too?” Zao looked as if he had plowed his way through a dense fog into the brightness again. He sighed. The burden was lifted from his heart. His face was red no longer.

“Eh! We had been treating the station like an ordinary granary. The county granary has a manager, an accountant, a measurer—all Party members. I forgot completely that our station is only for the war period, that it shouldn’t be compared with a regular granary...”

Deliberately, Jin took some of the blame on himself. “I was influenced by that too,” he said. “I only knew that our district men weren’t right for the station, but I didn’t think the problem out thoroughly. I even suggested a transfer of people from the xiang.”

Commissioner Ge was very pleased to see that the two district leaders now understood the situation. One day things might change radically, he reminded them, and the work in the district would become even more heavy. Therefore the question of whether to appoint a district man to run the grain station was worth considering further. He said since the station was so close to the district office, why not let someone in the village government handle it? When the district men went into the countryside, they would have to leave one man behind in the office anyhow. He could look in on the station occasionally. That would save the trouble of having to make other changes later on....

“What do you think about giving the job of leadership to Defu?” Ge inquired.

From the way Ge had talked, Jin had long since guessed that that was his idea. But he also remembered Zao’s comment about Defu’s youth: “Hairless lips make thoughtless slips!” Jin therefore showed no reaction and waited for Zao’s reply.

“Your instructions for the grain station are absolutely right,” said Zao excitedly. “Defu is a good comrade, but still a little ‘green’ to be running things. Yonggong would probably be better....”

Ge was very interested in Defu, and he asked, “What’s wrong with him?”

Zao compared Defu with Yonggong. The latter was over forty, steady, careful, had been an administration clerk for several years, and could write and keep accounts fairly well. If they brought Old Zhen from the co-operative to be the station accountant, Yonggong could do a good job. Defu was young; he probably couldn't handle it. He had been a hired farm hand for so long, then spent all his time in the militia. Every time there was a mass movement, Defu had served as messenger, arrested "bad eggs" and joined the struggle against the landlords. He hadn't enough experience in positions of leadership, his writing and arithmetic were poor. Although he had done well recently with the stretcher bearers, it was not the kind of meticulous work needed in a grain station. Last spring he and his brother Degui had volunteered to join the army. Both were bachelors and good boys. At home they only had their old mother and Zao had approved that Defu go, but the then district Party secretary would not give his consent. He had said that Defu was needed in Shajiadian, and let the brother go instead. Defu remained in the village.

"And there's another thing," Zao continued regretfully. "The people's impression of him is not so good. He doesn't admit it himself and no one has any proof, but everyone has seen how sweet they are on each other. I heard that since he came

back, the girl is sticking closer to him than ever. I don't know how the affair is going to end...."

"Is it the girl with the bobbed hair who was just here?" Jin had heard some of the rumors.

"That's the one. She's a tough customer. Her parents are always quarreling with her about Defu, but can't do a thing with her. They've asked me to talk to him."

"But actually have they done anything wrong?" Jin wanted to know.

"They just won't admit it!"

"What's it all about? Tell me in detail from the beginning," Ge laughed. He could see in his mind the bold Defu and the bobbed haired girl with the big eyes.

The girl's name was Li Yinfeng, said Zao. She was nineteen. Her family moved to Shajiadian from another village about ten years ago so that her father could rent land here from the local landlord. Because she was an only child her parents didn't want to have her betrothed too early. From childhood she worked like a boy with her father, planting and weeding. She could carry water and manure with the best of them. People called her "The Wildcat." While many of the youths weren't interested in marrying her, they liked trying to fool with her, and some of them had "ideas." Of course now in the new society everyone was better behaved. She and the girl with the braids studied reading and writ-

ing together, and did women's association work in the village. It was said that Defu called at her home many times in the past, and when she began to do social work it was still easier for them to get together. Since they met in the course of their duties, no one had any reason to interfere. But the rumors gradually grew. If they had been able to marry, everything would have been all right. Unfortunately Yinfeng's mother and father were old-fashioned. They felt that to let their daughter marry a man who was suspected of improper relations with her would be too much of a loss of face. They flatly refused their consent. Defu's mother was also against the match. She thought the girl was too wild, that she wouldn't make a good daughter-in-law....

"Defu's fault is that he didn't listen to the advice of the Party branch," Zao went on sorrowfully. "He ought to stop running around with her and stirring up rumors. The idea of all the Party members is that the two of them should use the regular methods the peasants are accustomed to—first convince the parents, then arrange things through a proper matchmaker—not make a bad impression on the people. But neither of them seems to mind. It's for this reason that Yinfeng hasn't been admitted to the Party. The Party branch wouldn't approve her application. They said to let the matter rest for the time being."

Commissioner Ge laughed heartily. He then asked Jin, "Do you know anything about this?"

"I haven't been here long and Defu only returned four or five days ago. I just heard this story the other day; I'm not clear about the details. But according to the district men, Defu and Yin-feng aren't necessarily doing anything wrong."

"Well then," said Ge, "just tell them to behave themselves. And you ought to explain this to the people, not compromise with their backward customs. We don't want to dampen the youngsters' enthusiasm for their work."

"Oh! We haven't done that," said Zao hastily. "We've only told him to be careful, not to get into trouble."

"All right," said Ge. "I don't know the situation. If you have someone more suitable than him to run the grain station, so much the better."

Jin actually was not clear either about Defu or Yonggong. He wanted to call in other district men to get more information from them.

"Why not send someone else to help organize stretchers for the wounded grain carriers?" he suggested to Zao. "Then we can continue our conference through the afternoon."

Zao looked inquiringly at Ge.

"We don't have to hurry it too much," the Commissioner said. "Comrade Jin can first talk about it with the men in the grain station. Then the two of you can decide. I have to go on. Last night I had

a phone call from regional Party headquarters telling me not to stay long in Mizhi County. Army Supply sent them another telegram to hurry me..."

A moment later, there were wild shouts outside that a plane was coming. The ravine filled with donkey drivers rushing their animals to safety. There was an enormous uproar. The three men in the cave went to the door and looked up at the sky. A low four-engine plane flew slowly over the mountains from the north. The loud throbbing of its motors shook the air.

"A transport going back to its base from Yulin," said Ge. "They rely on Chennault's air force,⁴ we rely on the strength of the people. You must do a good job organizing this competition!"

Wu Zhong arrived with the mule and Ge put on his big straw hat. Jin and Zao saw him out. Taking advantage of the break afforded by the grain deliverers having run for shelter, the district men came down from the station for a bowl of soup. Ge shook hands with each of them. He

4. Claire Chennault is a notorious US air force general who once served as adviser to Chiang Kai-shek. In 1946, taking advantage of his special connection with Chiang, he organized the "Civil Air Transport, Inc." in which he was the major stockholder. This corporation made tremendous profits through large-scale smuggling, and, during the Chinese People's War of Liberation, helped Chiang in air-lifting his troops and attacking the Chinese people.

complimented them on their hard, patient work. Zao asked them about Defu and Yonggong.

"Yonggong is watching the station. He ate already," said Shang, the district clerk. "Defu went home to eat."

"Defu hasn't eaten since early this morning, when he was at the county seat, and he's come many li since then. Green mung bean soup would hardly be enough," said another man. "Isn't that him going down the slope?"

They all looked at the silhouette of a figure with a rifle across his back. Ge nodded his final farewell to everyone, then he too began to descend the slope.

"We're closer to Zhenchuan than to the county seat," Jin called after him. "When you get to Zhenchuan, if there should be any change in things, please send us your instructions...."

Shi Defu

The district men finished their soup and returned to the station. In view of their divergent statements about Shi Defu, Jin decided to have a chat with him.

Defu's home was in the big gorge. As Jin wound his way through the endless stream of civilian grain carriers, he had to move slowly because of the porters and donkeys, and the food and fruit sellers who flanked the hundred-pace wide passageway. At the northern end of the marketplace, he asked for directions. He was told that Defu lived halfway up the mountain in a compound with four caves; that he was at home, and that there was no dog in the compound.

Jin climbed the slope and entered the compound gate. Through the open door of the cave on the far left, he could see a woman and a five or

six-year-old child having their noon nap on the kang. The chatter of an old woman came from the cave on the right. Only the two caves were occupied. The old woman must be Defu's mother, thought Jin. He heard the voice of Defu, pleading rather helplessly.

"Ma, don't be always nagging me about this thing, will you? Can't you see that there's going to be fighting and all hell's going to break loose soon? Who's got time to bother about such things?"

"You don't want to marry her now?" The old lady was firm. "Then get engaged now and marry her in the winter. How about that?"

"If you keep talking about it, I'll quit eating and leave!" said Defu angrily.

From the center of the compound, Jin hailed the militiaman. Defu put down his bowl and bounded to the door. Barefoot, he broke into a broad smile as he welcomed his visitor.

"Secretary Jin! Has Comrade Ge gone?"

"He's gone," replied Jin. He came into the cave.

Defu's mother hastily whisked some ragged quilts off the kang, swept it vigorously and covered it with a matting.

"Don't bother, don't bother!" protested Jin, seating himself on the edge of the kang.

"Never mind about the matting," Defu said to his mother. "This is the first time he's come here, but he's no outsider. Ma, this is the new Party secretary."

The old lady looked at Jin respectfully. The latter urged Defu to continue eating. Only after Jin firmly refused the pleas of mother and son that he share in the meal did Defu finally resume his place on the kang and take up his bowl.

She hadn't expected Defu back so early, the mother explained to Jin, and she hadn't had time to prepare a good meal for him, only this egg and noodle soup, "he just got back from the front a few days ago," she said, giving her son an affectionate look.

Jin glanced at the thin, wrinkled face of the old woman and recalled that she still had another son at the front. He felt that hers was an especially strong mother's love.

Finishing his food, Defu wondered why the Party secretary should personally come to see him so soon after the departure of Commissioner Ge. But Jin said nothing, and sat examining the interior of the cave.

The walls were freshly plastered; on the floor were a few large earthenware grain vats. Off to one side was a gleamingly polished high chest of drawers, completely out of harmony with the rest of the furnishings in the cave. With one look Jin could tell that it was a share of confiscated landlord property. Beyond the chest, next to the stove was a water jug. The rifle which Defu usually had slung across his back was leaning against the windowsill. Hanging on the wall above the

chest of drawers was Defu's scarlet award banner with golden tassels. Jin had seen the banner when Defu returned from the front. In the center it was inscribed with large letters: "For Hard Work and Valor."

Down one side ran the inscription, in smaller letters: "Presented to Model Stretcher Bearer, Comrade Shi Defu," and continued along the opposite border: "by the Political Department of the First Detachment Headquarters, Northwest Field Army." The banner and the chest of drawers added color to the cave, and clearly indicated what kind of family inhabited it.

Jin smiled as he let his eyes rove. Defu's mother told Jin that these caves had formerly been used by the landlord for storing hay. During land reform last spring, the four caves were divided between Defu and another peasant. They replastered them and moved in from their dilapidated former dwellings shortly before Defu left with the stretcher bearers. The donkey shed leaked when it rained and there was something wrong with the millstone, and the neighbor waited for Defu to return so that they could fix them together. But no sooner did Defu get back than the neighbor went off with the donkey to deliver grain at the Yulin front.

"Ai!" sighed the old woman. "A family of poor hired hands moves from our little earthen cave into a big spacious place like this—it seems so

empty. What we need is a young bride here to make it feel like a real home. Now there's a girl who's just eighteen this year...."

"Haven't you anything better to talk about?" Defu cut in irately. He was embarrassed in the presence of the secretary.

Jin knew it was this conversation that he had interrupted. The old woman felt so intensely about Defu's marriage—as if only his taking a bride would dispel the emptiness of the cave. Defu's displeased manner made Jin think of Yin-feng, the girl with the bobbed hair.

"Don't be impatient," he soothed the old lady. "Wait until we've finished Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Zongnan, then we can go back to ordinary, peaceful life. It will take a little time. Defu is right. This is a period of warfare..."

The old woman wanted to speak further, but Defu who had finished his meal, forestalled her. "All right, all right, don't chatter. You go wash the dishes and pans. We have things to discuss."

During the hot weather, most of the peasants set up cooking stoves under mat awnings in their courtyards. Defu's family had done the same, and his mother left the cave for the outdoor kitchen. The militiaman filled his short pipe, then turned to the secretary.

"You've come to send me on a mission?"

"No. There's a question I want to talk to you about." Jin told him that the district had decided

to turn the grain station over to the men of Sha-jiadian Village. He wished that if Defu had no urgent business to attend he would go around and notify people that there would be a meeting this evening to discuss division of the work.

"You will take part in the work too," said Jin. "Who do you think would be the best man to put in charge of the station?"

"Whom is the district planning to appoint?"

"I want your opinion on who would be most suitable." Jin was deliberately testing him.

Defu thought awhile, then said, "Ah, the responsibilities are heavy."

"Yes, they're heavy."

"Finding weighers and measurers is easy. Old Zhen is best on the books; only picking a man to run the station is hard. The leader of the peasants' association would be fine, but he's leading a grain supply team to the Yulin front!"

Defu suddenly remembered, "Didn't you say we were going to draw men from the different xiang to work in the station, and that one of the district men would run it?"

"Comrade Ge says it isn't necessary to use a district man."

"Oh," Defu understood now. This was an order from Commissioner Ge. Again he pondered, then said, "How about Yonggong? He has a bad stomach, but for this job he wouldn't have to run around. He hates to leave his family, but the work

would be in the village and he wouldn't have to. His wife gave birth to a baby, but that's over a month ago so he doesn't have to look after her every minute. I think he wouldn't refuse the job."

"Some people say he's not so good in a tight situation...."

"What?" Defu was getting the feeling that there was more to this than met the eye. Ge must have told the district government something important to bring about such a sudden change in the grain station. "Has the enemy in the south started to move?" he asked.

"Not yet." Jin didn't want to get everyone all upset before the fact of enemy activity was definitely established. He said merely, "Commissioner Ge wants us to be prepared. Isn't that what you yourself advised when you came back?"

Defu finally lit the pipe he had been holding in his hand. He laughed. "When I was coming back from the Dali River I saw the Field Army men starting off for Yulin. I figured we better make some defense preparations because that son-of-a-bitch Hu Zongnan is always looking for an opening. When I told Zao he said I was young and talked too much, that I shouldn't get the people worked up over nothing...."

"We don't want to exaggerate the danger, but we shouldn't have too peaceful an outlook either. As long as we're prepared it'll be alright."

“That’s true. With the Field Army in this region, what have we got to worry about? Let Yonggong run the station and I’ll help him a little. Wonder which way will the enemy be coming?”

The firmness of Defu’s confidence impressed Jin. He asked Defu about his experiences in the stretcher teams. How exactly had he been chosen as a model?

“That’s really nothing to talk about.” Defu patted his thigh. “It’s only because my legs were stronger than the others’. The peasants weren’t used to walking long distances. By the time our teams reached a place to camp for the night, they were all worn out. Arranging housing, getting food, carrying water... I’m young, I could run around more. And on the road, taking turns at carrying the stretchers, I could last a bit longer than the rest, that’s all.”

“As simple as that?” Jin asked with a smile. “Weren’t you picked to be a platoon leader after the fighting in east Gansu?”

Defu smiled. “We had some trouble there too. The mountains in east Gansu are high and the valleys are deep. Around the three border cities it’s one big desert; the villages are small and far apart; on the march, the Army stretched out a few dozen li. We didn’t have to worry about places to sleep; it was warm and comfortable sleeping outdoors. The big problem was food and water. Everyone carried his own rations, but how could

we cook without water and wood? The men were tired and hungry, and I'm a Communist. Of course I had to work hard to solve their problems." Jin nodded. He was delighted with Defu's spirits.

"Never mind. Let Yonggong take charge. I'll help him," Doufu repeated. "No matter how tough things get I don't think it can be any worse than when we were in east Gansu and the three border cities."

"That's not necessarily so," Jin reminded him. "It depends on which direction the enemy comes from. If we don't have that problem, perhaps we'll have others. We don't want to treat things too simply and have panic if some major difficulty arises."

"You're right," Defu admitted. "When I was with the stretcher teams, Staff Officer Huang of the First Detachment Headquarters used to tell us that too. The squad and platoon leaders of our stretcher teams would tell us to grit our teeth when we ran into trouble, that things would be better when we got to another place. But the staff officer said that was wrong; they ought to say that only when the reactionaries were wiped out completely would everything be all right. He said there were plenty of troubles ahead until we destroyed the enemy for good..."

"That's my idea exactly," said Jin, very pleased. This young fellow has really learned something at the front, he thought.

Jin still wanted to know Defu's attitude towards his affair with Yinfeng, but then he heard the voice of Shang, the district clerk, talking in the courtyard with Defu's mother.

"Secretary Jin," Shang called from the doorway, "a comrade has come from the hospital administration in the third xiang. He wants to talk to the man in charge of the district. I told him the district head is out, to tell his business to me, but he insists on seeing you."

"What's wrong? Did he tell you?"

"If he told me and I could have handled it, I wouldn't be bothering you."

"All right." Jin turned to Defu. "Notify those people. We'll continue our discussion at the meeting tonight. At the co-op."

The three men left the cave together and descended the slope to the market grounds. Shang was going to the co-operative, and Defu asked him to notify the men there. Jin and Defu proceeded into the winding ravine, where the latter was going to tell other villagers about the meeting that night. As they passed the home of the girl with the braids, she and Yinfeng were sitting outside the door, sewing. Yinfeng ran away into the compound the moment she recognized the approaching men. Braids didn't move.

"Defu," she hailed as they drew near, "come tonight if you're free. I've got something to talk to you about."

This invitation in the presence of the secretary made the militiaman feel very awkward. It was perfectly obvious that she was making the date on behalf of Yinfeng.

"I'm busy tonight. I've no time for visiting."

"You're really busy?" Braids didn't seem to believe him. She smiled. "Since you became a model at the front and have a red banner hung on the wall, you don't know anybody anymore. I don't think that in all these days you've been back you couldn't have found even a few minutes..."

Sympathizing with Defu's embarrassment, Jin explained that a meeting actually would be held that evening. The militiaman's face was still scarlet as they continued on their way. Jin guessed that the "anybody" Braids had mentioned was, of course, Yinfeng. He also recalled the other girl, the eighteen-year-old, of whom Defu's mother had spoken.

What was the real relation between him and Yinfeng? Jin asked Defu. "Tell me. Perhaps I can advise you..."

"I'll tell you the absolute truth."

Defu looked at the secretary's smiling countenance and began to speak freely.

He said he and the girl had been friends for a long time, but that the Party branch and Zao had criticized him for not behaving properly with her. They said he was injuring the prestige of the Party with the people. No one seemed to believe

that he and the girl had done nothing wrong. On account of the rumors, Yinfeng's mother and father had stopped talking to him. After he went to the front with the stretcher bearers, the father had sent someone with a message to his mother, saying, "You now have land and a good home. Find a bride for Defu quickly. Don't let him keep running around wild, or the friendship between our two families may be lost." By the time Defu had returned home, his mother had already engaged a matchmaker to arrange a marriage for him with a girl in another village....

"Didn't you hear me and my mother talking about it?" They had come to a fork in the road and both men stopped. "Everyone is down on me for different reasons," Defu continued. "I was cited as a model and when I came back Zao told me to be careful because now my actions would have even more influence on the people. So I've been staying away from her. She must think I... Ai! What a mess!"

"That because you're a model you think you're too good for her?" Jin suggested, smiling.

"Who knows? Now with this business about the other girl, she must doubt me even more."

"Truly now, were you very thick with her?"

"Ha!" Defu laughed wryly. "The Party doesn't allow old-fashioned oaths—how can I make my answer strong enough? The people are guessing

according to the usual way of these things. How can I convince them?"

"Then your idea is that you still want Yin-feng?" Defu laughed unnaturally and indicated that he did. With his eyes fixed on the secretary, he waited for Jin's reply.

Jin spoke seriously, "Tell her not to worry. This is not the time to fuss over such a problem. We should be devoting ourselves entirely to the destruction of Hu Zongnan. Later we can think of a way to convince her mother and father. They're also a part of our reliable people, only they're finding it difficult to change their old ideas. Will you take my advice?"

Surprised that the secretary was not opposed to his relationship with Yin-feng, Defu joyously agreed, "I certainly will! I'll be waiting for you with the others at the co-op tonight."

They parted and walked off on their separate paths.

A Discussion with the Masses

The Shajiadian co-operative was housed in a row of five large stone caves in a compound on the main street. Its original purpose was to support the newly established market fair by keeping it filled with goods for trade. Business boomed for several years. In the sale of consumers' daily necessities, in encouraging the home spinning industry of the village women, the co-operative had served a real function. With the liberation of the large town of Zhenchuan, trade in the Shajiadian co-operative was affected. Hu Zongnan attacked Suide in May, and some of the co-op workers left to join the defense campaign. Of the three men remaining, the manager was temporarily assigned to the general grain station

in Zhenchuan. The affairs of the co-operative were now handled by Old Zhen, the accountant.

Old Zhen had been a poor scholar who earned a meager living in his youth teaching Confucian classics in private schools. Later, when the "new style" schools became the fashion, Zhen was unable to continue as a respected hired hand in the field of scholarship and took a job as book-keeper for the local landlord. He next worked for a time in a shop in Zhenchuan as an accountant, then became a scribe in the Yulin law court under the Kuomintang. Because of his straightforwardness (frowned upon as "strange" in those days), his abhorrence of injustice, his insistence on fair treatment, he never stayed very long in one place. Past fifty when his home section went "Red," when he heard how fine the regions under the leadership of the Communist Party were, he resolutely returned from Yulin, and said he would be happy in such a world even if he had to go bare-foot and plow the soil for a living. The years he spent as accountant in the co-operative were the most satisfying of his life. He moved his family to Shajiadian, determined to devote the rest of his days to the work of the revolution.

His only child, a son, attended a free middle school in the county seat. When Hu Zongnan invaded the Border Region, the boy applied for duty in a rear line hospital. Zhen's wife hated to part with him, but the old man insisted that

it was only right. So strong was Zhen's revolutionary ardor that he even thought of joining the Party. However the organization considered his thinking rather complicated and delayed making a decision.

At the moment, business in the co-operative was quiet, and when the old man learned he was going to be asked to help with the grain station, he couldn't have been happier. He and Zhang Mingzheng, the clerk, had finished eating their dinner in the store, and he told Zhang to hurry with the cleaning of the dishes—that the men would soon be coming for the meeting.

Two villagers were the first to arrive. The big fellow who had to stoop to enter the door was the village administration clerk. Because woodworking was his regular occupation, he was known to everyone simply as "Carpenter." The other man wore a multi-patched military uniform faded to a pale gray. He was Ba Hu, a soldier who had been sent home because of an injury to his left arm.

Carpenter had a deep booming voice in keeping with his bulk. If he hailed anyone in the gorge, the whole village could hear him.

"Haven't any of the others come?" he roared as he came into the room. He turned courteously to his companion. "There won't be many people at the meeting tonight. Why don't you take a seat on the kang?"

"I haven't the patience to sit," retorted Ba Hu with a smile. Standing in a military posture of "at ease," he drew out his pipe, filled it and lit it from the oil lamp burning on the low table on the kang. People who didn't know were unable to see that his left arm was deformed. He sat down on a bench beside Zhang.

"Your wife has been here asking about the price of some goods she wants to buy," Old Zhen said to him kindly. "Today we heard that we have to prepare against the enemy possibly coming this way. I think she better wait awhile, and then see."

"Defu told us. We won't buy now."

"That's right, don't buy!" said Old Zhen warmly. "If the enemy comes in this direction to reinforce Yulin, there'll be some confusion here. A lone woman like that, with a baby too, she won't be able to manage. You've just come back from the front, and now you're going to work in the grain station."

"Until the reactionaries are cleaned up no business line will be profitable," added Zhang.

Ba Hu was somewhat on the sullen side. He didn't say much, but he was a man with a purpose. People said he was the kind who could "snap an iron nail in half with one bite." To avenge his father who had been hounded to death by the local landlord, he shouldered a gun in the district militia as soon as Shajiadian was liberated, for he knew the Communist Party

and the poor were of one heart. Later he was transferred to the county and then the region defense corps. He lost the use of his arm from a wound suffered during a battle against the Kuomintang west of the Wuding River. In February 1940, when the Communists reached an agreement with the Kuomintang, some of the fighters were released from service, Ba Hu among them. When he returned home the men in the village government helped him farm a few tracts of land. Using his discharge bonus he bought some merchandise, and with his wife ran a small stand on the street during market-days. He wanted to rejoin the army when Chiang Kai-shek started the civil war, but since his younger brother insisted on going in his place, he went with Defu to serve as a stretcher bearer. Now the Field Army was marching on Yulin, and Ba Hu rejoiced.

“Last year when we liberated Zhenchuan, the landlord who murdered my father, and his whole crew, ran away to Yulin. Where can they run to this time now that we’re attacking Yulin itself?” Ba Hu felt badly that he and Defu had come back from their stretcher team service too late to join the men who went to the Yulin front.

Ba Hu sat on the bench, smoking his pipe. “Starting from yesterday morning, the sound of our artillery moving up on Yulin couldn’t be heard on the mountain top any more. I don’t think Hu

Zongnan can get his reinforcements to Yulin in time," he said with grim satisfaction.

Carpenter was sitting on the edge of the kang. "You've lived in Yulin," he said to Old Zhen. "People claim it's hard to defend. What exactly is the layout?"

Taking up his long-stemmed pipe, Zhen explained that the city was surrounded by desert. If grain could be stopped from the outside for three days, most of the inhabitants would have nothing to put in their pots. Zhen counted on his fingers: outside the south gate was a temple and a tower; there was a military outpost beyond the north gate, and a monastery outside the east gate—all fortified.

"If we take these three places, Yulin is checkmated, dead."

"Today Shang Huaizong from Gongjia Gully was gabbing in the street that the Kuomintang was shipping grain in by planes," said Chang.

"Distant waters can't slake thirst," bellowed Carpenter. "You don't want to listen to that kind of talk. When Hu Zongnan's forces were in Suide last April didn't they claim the same thing? They lasted three days, then put their tails between their legs and ran!"

"But if they're really flying in supplies," said Old Zhen seriously, "then they can hold out a few days until the reinforcements come."

Carpenter had faith in the strength of our forces. When the Central Committee of the Communist Party was in Yanan, he worked there every year from January to December. More than once he sat among the thousands of people listening to Chairman Mao. He left there late one night only after the heavy bombing of March 13, this year, when the enemy was attacking the city. He moved in with his brother, who lived nearby, and refused to come home. But when the enemy captured several neighboring towns and villages, and he heard that Chairman Mao's strategy was to destroy the enemy in a war of movement, he realized that we would not retake Yanan in the near future and returned to Shajiadian. Sure enough, shortly thereafter we won two victories at the Yangma River and at Panlongzhen.

"We can be sure," he boomed, "that Chairman Mao has a great plan. He doesn't risk anything unless he's positive of his ground. Whether we take Yulin or not, we won't let the enemy get the upper hand."

With this everyone agreed. The only question was whether the enemy would come from the south along the Xianyang-Yulin Highway, or come from the west along the Great Wall.

"It won't matter if they come from the west," was Old Zhen's analysis. "Then they would only be trying to reinforce Yulin. But if it's like the last time when they attacked Suide and they come

swarming up from the south—that would be a big affair. That would mean they were going all-out directly against our Field Army....”

Carpenter laughed. “You certainly know your ‘Three Kingdoms.’⁵ If we didn’t have you to figure it out so exactly, we’d never understand!”

Just then Yonggong hurried into the room. “I thought I was late,” he said, relieved. “The others still haven’t come....” He removed his shoes and climbed on to the kang.

“What are Defu and the district men up to?” said Carpenter suspiciously. “Letting us come early. Why aren’t they here yet?”

“Defu?” sniggered Zhang, but he said no more. He was a little jealous of Defu.

The men guessed Zhang was hinting that the militiaman had gone to a rendezvous with Yinfeng. Every time people referred to Defu’s “improper” conduct in his presence, Yonggong felt the Party was losing face, but he never knew what to say. On this occasion, however, he could testify that Zhang was wrong.

“Defu went home for his rifle. He’s going to give it to the xiang leader. Defu won’t need it, working in the grain station...” said Yonggong.

5. A famous historical novel written by Luo Guanzhong (1330-1400 A.D.), describing the wars among the three kingdoms of Shu, Wei and Wu in the third century. The novel is replete with military strategy.

“Defu’s a changed lad since he came back from the front a model,” added Carpenter.

“Each experience brings new knowledge,” quoted Old Zhen eruditely. “It’s too bad his family used to be so poor and he had to work all the time, without even a chance to attend winter school. The last few years his work as a militiaman has kept him out on patrols day and night. We’re so near the border.... He hasn’t even had time to attend any of the literacy classes. Without literacy, progress is slow. Ba Hu, when you and he were in the stretcher teams, how much responsibility did a platoon leader actually have?”

“There are six stretchers to a platoon, six men to a stretcher,” said Ba Hu. “Six times six is thirty-six...”

“I mean what does that kind of a platoon leader do?”

“Aiya,” Ba Hu laughed. “His job is harder than an army platoon leader! Billeting, food, assignment of duties.... From the time we set out, that man the district chose from the sixth xiang couldn’t handle it. When we were crossing the Shenshan Mountain from Zhidan to Zhuze, the Army comrade told Defu to take over...”

Old Zhen nodded. “He’s a capable boy. We didn’t appreciate him before.”

“Young fellows are hard workers.” Yonggong was delighted to hear Defu praised. The militiaman’s prestige had increased considerably.

"He's quite sharp," said Yonggong, "and very brave. He would have been even better in the army than his brother."

Everyone said it was a pity Defu was needed in the militia, otherwise, he would make a good hand in the grain station.

"How has your stomach been behaving? Has it been acting up lately?" Old Zhen asked him. "We hope you can be a main pillar of our grain station."

"Ha," Yonggong said without much confidence. "It's been all right, but I don't think I'll be of any real use. Still, what can I say? Everyone has gone to the front, the district, men will be working in the countryside.... I don't have enough ability. Everything depends on the united efforts of you men...."

Several people were heard coming through the compound gate. The district Party secretary was talking to the local xiang leader. Defu was with them as they entered the cave. Some of the early arrivals rose and invited Jin and the xiang leader to be seated.

"Then if there's nothing else, I'll be leaving," the latter said to the secretary. "We're going to hold a xiang meeting. If the village men are going to run the grain station, I suppose they needn't come to our meeting."

"No," Jin replied, and he cautioned, "In talking to the people, don't put the situation in too dan-

gerous a light. All we're doing is opposing laxness. The people are in high spirits over this Yulin campaign. We don't want any wild rumors if the enemy should suddenly head in this direction. For the time being, our major task is to organize the delivery of grain."

"I understand," said the xiang leader. "If things get really tight, Defu can take charge of the militia again!"

"We can't decide that now. We have to see how the situation develops and how long we want to maintain the grain station..."

"Don't worry," said Defu. "Just keep an eye on that rumor-spreading son of a bitch, Shang Huaizong."

The xiang leader slung Defu's rifle across his back and departed. Jin asked everyone to be seated and he sat down on the kang. Zhang poured the secretary a bowl of water. For a moment, all in the cave became silent. Jin didn't drink, but looked at the assembled men with a smile. After dinner, he had discussed the problem with the district men and learned their ideas about each of the villagers who would work in the grain station.

With their eyes fixed on the secretary, the men waited for him to speak.

"It's getting late," said Defu. "Let's get started."

"All right," Jin took two sips of the water, set the bowl down and said, smiling, "I think you all know why we are here. Is everybody willing?"

"We wouldn't have come if we weren't," said the men.

"Good," Jin chuckled with satisfaction and began, "Mr. Zhen is over sixty; Carpenter is village administration clerk; Ba Hu has just returned from the front; Zhang works in the co-operative—but to support our Field Army's campaign against the enemy, we need to mobilize all our strength. I hope you four men, together with these two Communists, will do a good job of running the grain station..."

"Others are already on the firing line. What have we in the rear got to say but do our duty!" Carpenter exclaimed loudly.

Old Zhen felt very uncomfortable about the polite way the district Party secretary addressed him as "Mister."

"Fighting Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Zongnan, we don't distinguish between Party and non-Party members," he said. "Tell us what the district wants, Secretary Jin, and whatever strength we have, we'll give."

Pleased, Jin put the matter before them: the station was divided into a grain section and a fodder section; the grain section was the most important. It handled large quantities, its procedures were complicated.

"The district men ran the fodder and grain sections together," he said. "Now that you're taking over, the district would like you to set the fodder

section up here in the co-operative. That would make both your work and air raid precautions more convenient. What do you think of the idea?"

That would be the best way to do it, the men agreed.

They began to discuss the division of labor. Old Zhen had been delighted when he heard Secretary Jin and the xiang leader mention Defu. Now the old man recommended that Defu take charge of the grain section. In accordance with the directive of the district government to divide the station into grain and fodder sections, he asked that the latter be given to the cooperative. With the help of himself, young Zhang, and Carpenter—who would still attend to his village government duties—they could do a good job of it.

"Secretary Jin is right. The grain station is the most important," concluded Old Zhen. "Put Defu in charge, let Yonggong keep the accounts and Ba Hu handle the measuring. They're three experts. What do you all think of the idea?"

Smiling their agreement, the men exchanged glances. Only Yonggong looked rather put out. Unhappy, he hung his head. Defu, a militiaman who had been under his leadership for years, had come back a hero after one stint at the front as a stretcher bearer. Was this young fellow now going to become his leader in people's minds? When district head Zao was leaving Shajiadian that afternoon, Yonggong had run into him. Zao

had told him to prepare to take charge of the grain section. But now, Secretary Jin was asking the men for their opinions....

"I have my reasons," the stubborn Old Zhen could see that Yonggong was displeased. "In the first place," he explained, "Defu was able to lead a platoon of stretcher bearers at the front very well. He's had battle experience. If he takes charge of the station, no matter what happens, there'll be no question about him. Secondly, you all know our co-op manager isn't here. Zhang and I still have our work in the co-op to do. Yonggong, you've got a bad stomach. If you can just sit in the cave keeping the accounts, that won't be too tiring, will it?"

Yonggong was embarrassed. "It'll be easy enough. But what if I can't handle such complicated accounts?"

"I'd like to hear everyone's opinion," Secretary Jin said, gazing at Carpenter, Ba Hu and young Zhang.

The last two had no suggestions. They said they were better at working hard than at thinking up plans. Carpenter seemed to have something on his mind, but he didn't speak. He just stared at Yonggong with a scornful smile. When Secretary Jin asked Carpenter for his views he laughed aloud.

“How did you manage to keep straight accounts of all that property we confiscated from the landlord last spring?” he asked Yonggong.

“It’s easy enough for you to talk. You don’t have to do the job!” Yonggong glared at Carpenter.

“Didn’t you hear Secretary Jin say that the grain accounts are complicated? Those landlord accounts were simple!”

The men launched into a long discussion of whether Yonggong would be able to handle the accounts. Defu, who realized what was troubling Yonggong, didn’t know what to say. There was a conflict in his mind. While Old Zhen’s proposal seemed right to him, he didn’t want anyone to think that he was anxious to be put in charge of the grain station.

Finally, Carpenter brought forward a new proposal with which everyone agreed: For the time being, Defu would run the fodder section, Yonggong would handle the grain section and Old Zhen would keep the grain station accounts. Depending on how things developed, they would make further changes in these arrangements....

“This way you’ll probably be able to learn from Old Zhen how to keep the grain station accounts, eh, Yonggong?” Carpenter was very pleased that his idea had put an end to the arguments.

Defu came forward with a suggestion. “Old Zhen is getting on in years, Yonggong’s stomach is bad and our friend Ba Hu has the use of only

one arm," he explained. "The work in the grain section is heavy. Why not let Uncle Carpenter help them. Zhang and I can run the fodder section alone. Zhang can keep the accounts. The weighing of the fodder I can handle by myself with help of the porters who deliver it or draw it. If we get too busy, Uncle Carpenter can help us; when the grain section is busy, he can help them."

"Fine!" boomed Carpenter cheerfully. "I've got long legs. A few extra paces won't wear them down!"

The men laughed uproariously. When Carpenter came back from Yanan last spring and took over the duties of village administration clerk, his wife had fretted, "You're taking that job? You may be a big fellow, but all the running around will wear your legs down!"

"It can't do it completely," Carpenter had replied, "and even if I wear off half a yard, I'll still be taller than you!"

Old Zhen chuckled as he told the story to Jin, but Carpenter was a bit embarrassed at this recital in the presence of the district Party secretary, and he smiled self-consciously.

Jin was very satisfied with Defu's proposal. He told the men to settle their home affairs and put the co-op in order tomorrow morning, then start the grain station work in the afternoon. After holding a meeting, the district men could go into the countryside.

As the men were leaving the co-operative, Old Zhen said to Defu, "Your mother has sent someone to talk about that girl. Are you interested in her or not? Now that you're back, I hear that the matchmaker is going to call on your mother in a couple of days. If you're not interested, you ought to tell her not to waste her time."

The men all stopped and looked at Defu.

On his way home for dinner, after notifying Carpenter and Ba Hu of the evening's meeting, Defu had told Braids of his conversation with the Party secretary. Of course, she must have immediately reported the news to Yinfeng. Now Defu replied to Old Zhen in no uncertain terms.

"I hope you can get a message to the matchmaker—tell her not to come. There's a war going on. Who's got time to think of such things?" Then he walked out of the room with the other men.

Old Zhen also came out to escort the Party secretary to the compound gate. The murky light from the eating house, diagonally opposite, illuminated a soldier with a rifle across his back, leading a horse. Liu, the innkeeper, with much gesticulation, was directing him how to find the district administration office. Just then he saw Jin emerging from the co-op compound.

"Good, good. Here's the Party secretary," he said to the soldier. "You can go with him." He shouted to the men across the street, "This com-

rade has come from Zhenchuan with a letter for the district.”

Jin hurried over, took the letter from the soldier and entered Liu's eating house to read it. The men crowded into the little stone building after him. “Has the enemy become active?” they wondered. Jin tore open the envelope, and in the light of the oil lamp read the letter aloud in a low voice:

“We have here a group of soldiers wounded in the Yulin campaign. Tomorrow (August 10) morning they will be passing through Shajiadian on their way to a rear line hospital. The district government should prepare water for them. If it should be possible to mobilize the people to present gifts of eggs and fruit, so much the better. Please do not delay...” Jin held the letter closer to the light to read the oval seal: “Suide Regional Committee in Support of the Front.”

“What's happening up north?” Jin turned to ask the messenger.

“Yesterday we destroyed all of their outposts except one,” said the soldier. “But our Fourth and Sixth Regiments took it this afternoon.”

“When can we attack the city?” the men asked, delighted.

“How would I know that?” the messenger replied with a laugh. To Jin he said, “Comrade, give me a receipt. I have to go on.”

“Sure. We’ll go to the district office together and get one,” said Jin, then he spoke to the men. “Can we manage about the water?”

“That’s easy,” said Carpenter. “People are all asleep now, but I’ll tell Lanying and the other women to discuss it in the morning. I can help them.” Lanying was “Braids,” leader of the village women’s association.

“The women have group leaders,” added Defu. “They can take care of collecting gifts.”

All of the men agreed to this arrangement, and Jin and the messenger set off through the winding ravine for the district office.

Yinfeng

At dawn, when the women of Shajiadian Village rose to bring in the firewood to start their stoves, the stentorian voice of Carpenter calling Lanying resounded across the slopes. Ever since he became village administration clerk, when he bellowed, people in every cave in the village listened, for Carpenter's hails usually meant official business. Lanying, preparing to light the fire, hurried to her compound gate.

"Last night a notice came from Zhenchuan," Carpenter stood on the slope. "They want us to prepare water for stretcher bearers and some wounded soldiers from Yulin who'll be coming through here this morning—maybe some eggs and fruit too. The village government men are all busy getting ready to go to work in the grain and fodder stations this afternoon. We'd like you

women to take care of it. If you get too busy, I'll help you...."

"What time will the wounded arrive?"

"It's about thirty li from Zhenchuan to here. Probably after mid-morning...."

"That's time enough. Come on up. I'll call Yinfeng."

"You don't have to. Isn't that her?"

Lanying turned to see Yinfeng, a welcoming smile on her face, hastening towards them. She was straightening her hair and brushing hay from her clothes. Yinfeng lived only two compounds away. She had already lit the fire, and was pulling the bellows when she heard Carpenter shouting for Lanying. At this hour, it must be something important, she thought, and came running out. In the compound she met her mother, who demanded impatiently, "Wouldn't he call you if it concerned you? Wild filly!" Without turning her head, Yinfeng flew out of the compound gate. Last night, Lanying had waited until Yinfeng's mother was out of earshot, then whispered to her what Defu had said. The girl was so happy, she couldn't sleep half the night. She vowed to herself that she would take his advice. No matter what happened she would concentrate on her women's work with Lanying....

Carpenter climbed the slope. He wondered whether Yinfeng's radiant appearance had anything to do with the curt answer Defu had given

Old Zhen the previous night. Could it be that her parents thought more of the boy since he returned from the stretcher bearers a model, and gave their consent? Lanying, of course, knew. Smiling, she looked at Yinfeng with teasing eyes. Carpenter, completely in the dark, stared from one girl to the other.

They discussed the question of the water, and the girls mentioned several women, not burdened with small children, who could help. Carpenter said to notify them. He could call on each family in the village and ask them to prepare gifts. After breakfast, all could start on their various tasks—boiling water, borrowing bowls for drinking, collecting the gifts.... The wounded would probably rest under the trees beside the river and the women should look after them. He would carry the pails of boiled water.

“You decide among yourselves how to divide your work,” he told the girls.

“We can do it,” Lanying agreed. “I’m only afraid we don’t have enough fruit trees in this village; everybody will be giving eggs. If the wounded are many and we don’t have enough fruit to go round, it’ll be very embarrassing....”

“Hejia Village up the mountain has plenty of orchards,” said Yinfeng.

“That’s right,” said Lanying. “Let the district notify all the villages in the xiang to prepare gifts. Then they’ll be ready in time.”

Carpenter laughed. "You girls think of everything! We rushed around last night but we couldn't think of anybody. All right, you take care of your own jobs. I'm going to the district office."

As he started down the slope, Shang, the district clerk, came along the ravine road. He was holding a letter in his hand. He waved it at Carpenter when he saw him.

"Oh, here you are. Fine. Send someone at once with this to the xiang government in Gongjia Gully. We want to collect some gifts. The letter mustn't be delayed!"

"Right," Carpenter took the letter. "Now this is doing it in proper form," he said to the girls. "You see the district still thinks things out better than you."

The girls were entirely satisfied, but Shang reminded them that the gifts from the various villages might not all arrive in time, nor would the wounded soldiers necessarily all reach Shajiadian in one group. "Secretary Jin says that when you're ready to give out the gifts, you'd better speak to the comrade in charge of the convoy first. Then you can plan better," said Shang.

They understood, said the girls. Shang took a special look at Yinfeng, and departed for the district office.

Lanying and Yinfeng were the most active and enthusiastic women in Shajiadian. Lanying, though older than Yinfeng by two years, had not

married because her fiancé—Ma Jinbao, the third son of a poor peasant—had joined the army when he was seventeen. Stationed at first in the county, his regiment after being transferred to the western Shaanxi border, became the Third Brigade, and then was incorporated into the regular forces of the Field Army. Although only twenty-five, Jinbao had been steadily promoted from soldier to squad leader, to platoon leader, to company commander. He had not been home for eight years.

Jinbao's parents had arranged the engagement to Lanying a year before he went into the army. By the time the girl became eighteen, her father and mother had already urged on several occasions that the marriage take place, but Jinbao was in far-off Ningxia Province and wrote that he was unable to come home. In 1946 a letter to his family from Jinbao said that he had become a company commander, and Lanying's parents began to suspect that the marriage would never be consummated. They felt that since Jinbao was continuously advancing, it was quite possible he might not want the country girl his parents had selected.

In the fall of 1946, the army moved fairly near to Shajiadian, and after Zhenchuan was liberated, Lanying went to see Jinbao, although some people laughed and said it was actually to let him have a look at her. The result was that the old style engagement became a new style romance.

Jinbao was very taken with her. In order to keep up with her sweetheart's progress, Lanying, old enough to be a teacher herself, had entered the second year of Shajiadian's elementary school. She was the leader of the village women's association; she was a Party member for more than a year. Jinbao said he would leave the fate of their engagement up to her. He would release her from it if she didn't want to wait for him; if she was willing to wait, she would have to wait until the reactionaries were wiped out, but that shouldn't be very long. Lanying said she would wait and happily returned home.

She was already wearing her hair in braids by then, like the girls in the army theatrical units, and the villagers said that now even her walk was different. Thereafter Jinbao wrote to her directly.

Lanying's courageous determination had startled and inspired the respect of all the village girls, especially Yinfeng. No matter that her parents said Defu was no Company Commander Jinbao, and that she couldn't be compared with Lanying, Yinfeng took the older girl as her mentor and constant companion. Lanying sponsored her for membership in the Party, and although her application was not approved due to the opposition of Yonggong and a few others, who were disturbed by rumors that she was having an affair with Defu, Yinfeng did not lose heart. She

believed Lanying's words: the truth about her and Defu would inevitably be known.

A short time after breakfast, the two girls and four other women were holding a meeting in Lanying's home. They agreed that one should boil drinking water, two should borrow bowls, and three should collect the gifts. Lanying's mother laughed at them for not having thought of first boiling the eggs to be distributed; in that way they'd be easier to eat or carry.

"I'll boil the water for you," said the old lady. "You take care of other things."

That made four women available to collect gifts. Lanying told the bowl borrowers to go first and assigned sections of the village to the ones who would collect the gifts. Yinfeng raised the point that Hejia Village was fairly distant, that the fruit might not arrive in time. She said her family had been given two apple trees last spring when the landlord's confiscated property was divided, and that although her mother had sold a great deal to the vendors who plied their wares among the grain porters, there were still plenty of apples left on the trees. She had just told her mother to pick some more, but she was afraid the old lady would be unwilling to part with too many.

"You go ahead and collect the gifts," Yinfeng said to the women. "I'll take a basket and pick apples from our trees on the slope."

“Wait and see how many we can collect from the other families,” the women suggested. “Besides, maybe the apples from Hejia Village can get here in time...”

“That’s right,” Lanying agreed. “Let’s get the important things done first, then we’ll see about additional apples from your trees.”

Baskets in hand, the women set out on their appointed rounds. By the time they began to return, one by one, their baskets full, Lanying’s mother had a great cauldron of water hissing steam. The people had responded with their usual enthusiastic generosity to any call in support of their army. About five hundred eggs had been collected, but only two or three families were able to give apples, and they numbered less than one hundred. Yinfeng was the last to return, her face flushed with excited pleasure because she had convinced the women she called on to donate more than was originally requested of them. The result was she collected nearly twice as many eggs as anyone else. When she saw how few the apples were and learned that her own mother had contributed only about twenty, she frowned. All talking at once, the women tried to console her.

“Don’t be like that. Your family still gave the most...”

“We don’t have many apples in this village, and these are just ripe and fresh...”

"It all depends on what people give. If there isn't enough to go round, we can't demand that one or two families make up the difference..."

Yinfeng tossed her head. "What are you saying? Our soldiers risk their lives at the front. They give their blood! We put on a little show to welcome some of them, and give each man one apple! That's how you'd treat a beggar! Lanying, let them boil the eggs. You and I'll go up the slope to pick apples!"

"If you feel you must, then we'll give your family eggs in exchange," the women proposed.

"That's a good idea," interposed Lanying's mother. "Yinfeng, you ought to understand—your mother's not like you. It's not that she's unwilling to support the army, but she was poor for so many years, if she gets her hands on even a needle, she hates to give it up..."

"Aunty, your family and ours are neighbors," Yinfeng turned to her and said. "We see each other every day. Tell me, did we own anything when we came to Shajiadian? The crops we tended were the landlord's, the sky above us was his, and so was the ground beneath our feet. Before we even dared say anything, we first had to read the landlord's face. Now we have land and a home of our own, but did we earn them by our labor? I say if my family presented all their fruit to support our army, it wouldn't be enough! Lanying, it's getting late. Let's go."

The women looked at her respectfully. Lanying at first had thought there was something in what her mother said, but when she heard Yinfeng speak and listened to her comparisons, she picked up a basket.

"Let's go," she echoed. "You girls hurry and boil the eggs. We'll be back soon."

The old lady called out that Lanying should talk to Yinfeng's mother first, but Yinfeng, already outside the door, said there was no time for that, and the two girls ran out of the compound.

They went up the mountain like the wind, and their bosoms were heaving when they reached the apple trees. All the fruit which might have been reached from the ground had already been plucked. And they had forgotten to bring a long hook.

"I'll climb up," said Yinfeng. "You stand here and catch them in your jacket."

"Be careful. I don't want you to come down on your head!"

Agile and bold as a boy, Yinfeng scrambled up the tree, grasped a branch and began picking. Lanying caught the apples she tossed and put them in a basket. Hoing on the opposite slope across the valley, Yinfeng's father saw a figure in the tree. Even in the distance he could see that it was not the stooped figure of his wife. He assumed that someone was daring to steal his apples in broad daylight. The old saw has it

that "The shoemaker goes barefoot," and for the sake of the small income he could make from their sale, he had never even tasted one of his apples. He stopped hoeing, peered again, then began to shout.

"Hey—who's picking those apples? Hey—who is that over there!"

"Yinfeng," said Lanying, "answer him."

"He ought to know by now that there hasn't been any stealing in the Border Region for ages." Yinfeng went on with her picking. Both legs were planted firmly on a big branch; little drops of perspiration stood out on her face.

"Hey—who's picking those apples? Do you want to hear me swear?"

Lanying giggled. "Yinfeng, hurry up and answer him."

Yinfeng paused. "Papa," she shouted with all her might, "it's me—"

Her father stood still, looked again, then resumed his hoeing.

When the girls had picked about fifty apples, Lanying said it was enough, but Yinfeng insisted on continuing. She wouldn't come down from the tree until they had filled two baskets with nearly one hundred apples, and then only because Lanying announced she thought she could see stretcher bearers coming through the far end of the gorge. Since it had to wait for the grain carriers to make

way for it, the vanguard of the stretcher bearers traveled very slowly.

The girls had eased their heavy burdens half-way down the steep slope, when they met Yinfeng's mother coming up with a rake. Lanying's mother had told her.

"Aunty," Lanying greeted her with a smile, "we were afraid to delay so we didn't speak to you first. We'll give you eggs in exchange..."

"If they're picked, they're picked. What's all this about exchange?" Yinfeng's mother was afraid people would laugh at her and she pretended not to mind, but her eyelids fluttered at the sight of the two baskets filled to the brim with bright red apples. Noticing that Yinfeng's firm white flesh could be seen through a tear in a trouser leg she had ripped -while climbing the tree, the old lady seized on this as a vent to her anger.

"You're a madwoman," she shrilled at her daughter. "Those trousers were just made this year! You go home and sew them before you go running around the gorge! A nineteen-year-old girl, absolutely shameless!"

"Yes, Ma," said Yinfeng faintly. She and Lanying scurried back to the village.

Boiled eggs soaking in cool water were being put into baskets by the women. Gifts from other villages were mostly eggs; there were only a few dozen apples. An army comrade in charge of the convoy had come up to the village to ask where

the wounded men should stop. Carpenter, who was directing him to the office, brought a set of big wooden buckets for the water, and Lanying's mother filled them with a gourd ladle. When the army comrade saw the gifts crowding the room he was very pleased. He returned to the gorge to tell the stretcher bearers to rest right there. A few minutes later Lanying and Yinfeng came in and thumped the baskets of apples onto the kang. The women stared at them with wide, smiling eyes.

"Where did you get so many apples?" Carpenter asked, astonished.

"These are all from Yinfeng's family," said the women. "Don't you know that the land they were given from the landlord has fruit trees on it?"

"Oh—" said Carpenter. He looked at Yinfeng. "What a girl! We'll probably have another 'model' in our village now."

Yinfeng blushed deeply. Carpenter hadn't meant anything when he said it, but he realized at once that everyone assumed he was referring to her romance with Defu. The women glared at him reproachfully from their egg packing. He was terribly embarrassed. Lanying's mother shooed him out when her daughter brought thread to mend Yinfeng's trousers.

"You live in Yanan a few years and you learn all that smart city patter!" she snorted. "Everything's ready. Take your water now and be off!"

"Of course, of course," Carpenter was glad to get away from the strained atmosphere. As he hooked the buckets on the ends of his carrying pole, he looked at them in surprise.

"Yi! How did the water get this color?"

"Go along!" she said. "I put a little green mung bean in it to make it more cooling. What are you making such a fuss about?"

"Ah," Carpenter's mouth was still open with amazement. "Defu was the first, but who knows how many more models our village will have?"

"Go on, go on!" Lanying urged him. She was mending Yinfeng's trousers. "Take the water down and let the stretcher bearers drink. We'll be there in a minute."

Carpenter picked up a basket of bowls and shouldered his carrying pole. He stole a glance at Yinfeng on his way out. Her face was still scarlet.

The women hadn't seen Lanying's mother put the green mung bean in the water. They teased her, saying her considerateness proved that she would make a worthy mother-in-law to Company Commander Jinbao.

"A son-in-law is half a son. He'll certainly be happy to hear about this..."

The old lady laughed with satisfaction. "Stop your nonsense! I'm not like Yinfeng's mother. As long as I'm doing a good thing, I don't care what people say. Yinfeng, is your aunty right or wrong?"

"Aunty!" was all the mortified Yinfeng could reply.

"If everything's packed, then let's go," Lanying had finished mending the trousers. She snapped off the thread.

Laughing and chattering, the six women carried the eggs and apples down into the gorge.

Groups of people surrounded the wounded soldiers under the trees on the river bank. In the shade of the spreading boughs, the stretchers were lying on the grass. The wounded, their heads, arms or legs swathed in bandages, were chatting with the peasants, except for a few, who, seriously hurt, bore their pain in silence. Some of the stretcher bearers were ladling out the green mung bean water, some were helping the soldiers drink, others had squatted and were drinking themselves. At the south end of the grove stood the convoy leader, directing a newly arrived group of stretchers. The peasants, soldiers and stretcher leaders kept up a loud buzz of conversation, of which the women caught snatches as they walked among the wounded.

"...How many enemy have been wiped out this time?"

"Huh! As soon as they saw our Field Army, they ran for their lives into Yulin city. We got those who couldn't run fast enough. I don't know the exact number..."

"...Have we reached the city yet?"

“It’s been surrounded for two days and we’ve been getting ready to storm it. When we wounded came this way, all peasants we met on the road were carrying either grain or scaling ladders...”

“...The enemy used to laugh at the poor equipment of our Fourth and Sixth Regiments. Once they had some of the enemy surrounded in a fortress and called to them to surrender. The enemy said let’s see you fire a couple of rounds of artillery and then we’ll give up! What will they have to say now that we actually have big guns?...”

“If son-of-a-bitch Hu Zongnan is slow with his reinforcements, running to the city won’t help those Yulin Kuomintanglers. We’ll get them even if they hide in the rat holes...”

Lanying and Yinfeng inquired for the leader of the convoy. Soon, winding his way through the masses of people, a comrade with a red cross on his leather bag came up to them. He smiled broadly at the sight of the baskets full of white eggs and shiny red apples. The stretcher bearers were saying that this was their first stop in an old liberated area and that the peasants here certainly were better organized than in the newly liberated section north of Zhenchuan.

The comrade asked about the number of gifts. He said that there were one hundred and three wounded in this convoy. They were from the Yulin front. Another batch, who had been in the fighting west of the Wuding River, would arrive

tomorrow. The girls said that was fine. They could save the gifts from two of the villages until the following day.

After Carpenter calculated how to divide the eggs and apples among the wounded, the six women formed teams of two, one holding the basket, the other distributing the gifts.

The soldiers grinned with pleasure. When the women came beside them, some of them, in spite of the pain it caused, raised themselves from the stretchers to receive the presents. The women urged them not to move, and gently put the eggs and apples next to their pillows. The wounded nodded their appreciation: one man, lying on his back, saluted. Those who were too badly hurt to be able to indicate their gratitude for the people's love otherwise showed it in their eyes. A few shed tears....

Secretary Jin arrived and was immediately surrounded by the peasants, who told him the good news they had just learned—Yulin was already besieged for two days, preparations were being made to storm it. The convoy leader approached him and complimented him on such thorough arrangements having been made for the wounded so quickly.

“Really excellent,” said the comrade. “We never expected that each of the wounded would receive three apples. We have no canteens. The fruit will quench their thirst on the road....”

Jin smiled modestly. "It was all done by the people." He asked Carpenter who had just brought another set of buckets of green mung bean water, "Did the apples from the village with the big orchards get here in time?"

"No," Carpenter wiped the sweat from his face. "Most of them were contributed by Yinfeng's family. They were afraid that those apples would be too late, so after all the other gifts were collected, they rushed and picked these. Heh, heh! Yinfeng tore her clothes climbing the tree!"

"Then you'll replace her apples when the others get here?"

"They don't want them. Lanying's mother told me that Yinfeng wouldn't even take eggs in exchange. They said when the other apples come to give them as presents tomorrow."

"Ah!" Jin looked at Yinfeng, distributing gifts at the western end of the grove. "The girl is very progressive."

The convoy leader asked which one was she. Carpenter considered this an honor to the village. "There she is," he said, pointing. "The one putting the apples beside that soldier's pillow..."

"I see her. Such a model example of supporting the army ought to be put in the newspaper," the comrade suggested to Jin.

Jin smiled. "Put it in the paper?" he thought to himself. "Some comrades who still have feudal ideas say that girl isn't respectable!"

“What has Hu Zongnan been doing since we surrounded Yulin?” he asked the convoy leader.

“His 36th Division, near Jingbian, probably will reach the battle zone first.” The comrade noticed that the peasants were listening to him, and he whispered into Jin’s ear, “Our main force has moved west of Hongshan to intercept it.” Then he resumed his conversational tone and said loudly, “If they come, we’ll fight them. Of course our superiors have a definite plan...”

Jin assumed we were going to keep the city surrounded and fight off enemy reinforcements. “What about from the south?” he inquired.

“I haven’t heard yet...”

At some time during the discussion between the Party secretary and the convoy leader, Yonggong and Defu had joined the crowd of quietly listening peasants. In preparation for full-time duties in the grain station, they had been cleaning up as much heavy work as they could on their farms, because the women of their families wouldn’t have been able to handle it alone. Noticing the crowd, they had come over to learn the news from the front.

“It looks like district head Zao was right,” Yonggong said to Defu. “Hu Zongnan won’t dare to come up from the south.”

“Maybe,” said Defu. “The campaign will be easier if he doesn’t come this way.”

Jin overheard them. He turned and asked, "Have you straightened out your affairs at home? Zao and the district government have approved the ideas you men agreed upon last night. You can take over after lunch."

"We'll be on time," they replied.

After a while the convoy leader blew his whistle. He announced the next resting place and directed the stretcher bearers to leave in the same order they had arrived. The women, having finished distributing the gifts, returned to the village with their empty baskets. The peasants also gradually dispersed.

That afternoon, Yonggong, Old Zhen and Ba Hu took over the grain section. Defu and Zhang began their work in the fodder section. In the village office, Yinfeng and Lanying assorted the gifts which arrived late from two other villages in preparation for the wounded who would reach Shajiadian the following day. Carpenter circulated among all three centers of activity. After a short meeting except for district clerk Shang and Old Wang, the cook, all of the district men went into the countryside.

Everyone plowed into intensive work. While waiting for news of victory from the Yulin front, the people maintained their vigilance against enemy movement from the south....

The Situation Changes

The Northwest Field Army had formed a wide semi-circle, running from Gaojiabu in the east to Xiangshuibao in the west. Yulin stood midway across the diameter formed by a stretch of the Great Wall, on the northern side of which was wasteland and desert. At dawn, on the sixth of August, the Army began driving inward. By the eighth it had wiped out two Kuomintang regiments, two Hu Zongnan battalions (flown in the previous year, after the liberation of Zhenchuan), and nearly all the local armed counter-revolutionary bands in the four counties fringing Yulin. The Field Army reached the suburbs of the city on the morning of the eighth—one day before Commissioner Ge had arrived in Shajiadian Village—and began to prepare for a direct assault on the stronghold. At the same time, Field Army troops

and the Fourth and Sixth Regional Regiments of Suide were deployed to take up positions west of Hengshan to meet Hu Zongnan's 36th Division, coming from Jingbian.

To escape being intercepted, the enemy Division went outside the Great Wall and marched through the desert. Receiving its food by air, sleeping out in the open at night, it traveled at top speed during the daylight hours. By dusk of the twelfth, the Division was about seventy li from Yulin. Hu Zongnan ordered it to continue marching through the night. The pack animals were exhausted, having had no fodder for several days, and the soldiers were forced to unload them and carry the equipment on their own backs. Because it would have been difficult to supply food, the Field Army sent no force into the desert to give battle. Moreover, Hu Zongnan's quick move had caught it before preparations were completed for storming Yulin. And so, on the morning of the thirteenth the Field Army lifted its siege to let the Division enter the city. Other plans were made to deal with Hu Zongnan's 36th later.

When, on the morning of the thirteenth, no grain carriers from Wulongbu passed through Shajiadian, many people in the village believed it was because Yulin had been liberated and that the Field Army would be coming south or moving west. Defu was doubtful.

From the eleventh on, no more wounded had come from the front. Although Yulin was supposed to be difficult for the enemy to defend, it was hardly likely that our forces would not have any casualties while storming into the city. Old Zhen shared his opinion. Ba Hu recalled an occasion in eastern Gansu, where a division of warlord Ma Hongkui, leaving all its heavy equipment behind, sneaked out of an encirclement on a moonless night into the wilderness beyond the Great Wall.

Carpenter figured this was like the siege of Suide; in spite of being supplied by air, Yulin similarly would be starved open rather than opened by assault. But whether the enemy chose flight or surrender, he said, they would have to wait until someone came from Zhenchuan in the afternoon with the real news.

This optimism induced Yonggong to recall how one regiment and a whole brigade came over from the enemy during the liberation of Zhenchuan last year. He had heard that the Kuo-mintang enemy troops in Yulin were not loyal vassals of Chiang Kai-shek, like Hu Zongnan's men. He thought it was by no means impossible that they might revolt against Chiang and join the revolution.

Everyone had an opinion, with reasons to support it. The people were very confident; so much so that even Old Zhen began to thaw his cautious

reserve. But at noon, they received a rude shock. A rush directive from the county administration, stating that enemy forces were advancing on Suide in the south, ordered immediate preparations for battle.

Two Hu Zongnan units under generals Dong Zhao and Liu Gan, consisting of a total of seven brigades, were sweeping towards the city. One was coming from the west along the Dali River; the other was swarming up from the south along the same route by which Suide had been invaded previously. Supplied by Chennault's air force, the enemy was quite cocky. They looted every village in their path. This, they were convinced, was their best chance since the occupation of Yanan to wipe out our Army or to force it east across the Yellow River.

Now regardless of the situation in Yulin, the people of Shajiadian had to turn their attention to the south. Contrary to expectations, Hu Zongnan's men had abandoned their careful pussy-footing and were rolling forward like a yellow whirlwind in spring. Nevertheless, having been warned of this possibility by Commissioner Ge, the people were not particularly flustered. They believed the stopping of grain shipments north to Yulin via Zhenchuan meant that the Field Army would rush to their region and demolish the marauding enemy, and that Shajiadian would again become a base of operations for the southern front.

Lanying and Yinfeng and several other active members in the women's association hurried to the district office during lunch hour to learn the news. After district clerk Shang told them, Defu added some words of advice.

"The wilder the enemy acts, the better our chance to destroy him. You women mustn't be upset. With Chairman Mao here in north Shaanxi, there's nothing to fear!"

Shang wrote six letters—one to each xiang in the district—calling all the district men back at once for a meeting. The letters were turned over to Carpenter, but after scouring the village all morning he could only find four men who were free. Yinfeng and Lanying volunteered to deliver the remaining two messages. After lunch, the village government men returned as usual to their work in the grain and fodder stations. Everyone waited for news from the northern front as to what the Field Army was going to do.

Late in the afternoon, district head Zao and Party secretary Jin returned. They immediately read the directives contained in the communication from the county. There was a mimeographed directive of the Suide Regional Party Committee on action to be taken in the light of the instructions of the Northwest Party Bureau; a definite assignment of practical duties in preparation for battle from the Mizhi County Party Committee; a decision by the County Finance and Grain Section

regarding the issuance of supplies to district guerrilla units; an instruction from the Security Section of the County concerning security measures and the weeding-out of traitors; instructions to co-operatives from the Construction Section of the County on how to remove and conceal their merchandise, and many other orders. All had to be executed without delay.

Shajiadian was enveloped in the heavy tension of a battle zone.

Zao remembered how he had argued with Jin about the grain station and was ashamed. Standing before Jin, the big man blurted emotionally. "Secretary, I want you to know what is in my heart. When Secretary Wang left here to join the Army, all of the district men thought the County Party Committee would appoint me to replace him as district Party secretary. To tell the truth, I thought so myself. And so, when you were sent here, I was a little against you. But today I'm for you. You see further ahead, you see the whole picture...."

Zao had never gazed so affectionately at this Party leader—younger than him by more than ten years. Startled, at first Jin didn't know how to answer. This was typical of the straightforward Zao. Whether arguing for his convictions or admitting his faults—he was open and honest. He could be stubborn as a mule if he couldn't see a point, but the moment he was convinced he'd

admit it without any face-saving or reservations. Now the Party directives had straightened him out completely.

"I was practically the same as you," Jin laughed. "Don't you remember? I wasn't clear until that day Commissioner Ge came here and explained the situation."

"Let's get started!" Zao slammed the table with his huge hand. "That dog Hu Zongnan has got his nerve! We'll organize guerillas and work with the Field Army and fix the bastard!"

Jin was calm as always. "Don't get too excited. That way it's easy to go wrong. There's plenty of work this time. Wait till the men all come back, then we can talk it over in detail."

The duties fell into three categories, said Jin. First, to forestall any rumors from reactionary landlords, it was necessary to explain to the people how the recent developments would help us wipe out the enemy. Second, the people had to be mobilized to remove everything which might be of use to the enemy and to prepare temporary hiding places in caves and pits for the women, old folks and children. Third, with Party members and militiamen as a nucleus, a district-wide guerilla force must be organized. The directives had pointed out that the latter was the key to the success of all the other work. The duties of the guerillas would be to coordinate with the xiang and village Party members and government men as

they lead the people, to suppress counterrevolutionaries, and, after the enemy had been smashed or scattered, to capture Hu Zongnan's "fleeing rabbits." The county committee of the Party had ordered that the district heads should be leaders of the guerillas and that the district Party secretaries should be the political commissars. Unless overrun by the enemy, district men were not to leave their own districts, xiang officials were to remain in their own xiang.

"The difference between us and other districts is that we have a grain station." Jin again looked at the directives. "We don't know what's happening on the northern front. The county only mentions distributing the grain from the Gaojiabu bins among the peasants for safe-keeping. That's in another district. Nothing is said about us. Still, we'd better prepare to do the same if the situation should take a turn for the worse. We've got over 100 piculs here!"⁶

"What a nuisance!" Zao fretted. "This grain station has got us tied hand and foot! County men will be sent to each district to strengthen the leadership, and the letter says that the head of the organization department of the county Party committee is coming to Shajiadian; but who knows when he'll get here? How can we operate if we don't know whether the grain station will

6. A picul is 100 catties, or about 140 lbs./60kg.

continue? We really ought to put Defu in the guerrillas. How about sending a letter to Zhenchuan and asking Commissioner Ge?"

"All right," Jin agreed. He sent Shang to call Carpenter, then began his letter.

Carpenter arrived just as he finished writing. He couldn't find any more messengers, said Carpenter, but he himself would like very much to go to Zhenchuan where he could learn the full story on what was happening at Yulin. His legs were long. If he could find Commissioner Ge quickly, he'd guarantee to be back before ten in the evening.

"Don't worry about a thing. There'll be no delay," Carpenter assured them. He put the letter in his pocket and set off at a fast clip.

By the time the sun had sunk behind the mountains, all of the district men had returned from the various xiang. The grain station men met at the district office for dinner, with the exception of Zhang, who remained on duty in the co-operative. Many of the villagers gathered around the district office to learn the news, and soon the cave and compound were buzzing with excited people. The peasants had already heard the disappointing report that Yulin had not been liberated and that the Field Army was withdrawing south, and they were feeling rather discouraged. Discussing Yulin, Yonggong and Ba Hu both considered it strange that nothing seemed to have been accom-

plished in spite of the fact that the Field Army had surrounded the city for several days. Could it be that the whole thing was a deliberate trick to draw Hu Zongnan up from the south?

Half of the contributors to the clamor of voices in the compound were women. They obviously were alarmed by the savage advance of the enemy forces. Most of their men had gone to the Yulin front as grain carriers. What could they do, the women worried, if the enemy should suddenly drive into this region? Lanying thought of how enthusiastic they had been in gathering and contributing gifts a few days before. Yet Yulin had not been liberated, and she didn't know what to say to them.

Then Yinfeng saw Defu, carrying his bowl from the kitchen on the way to the office cave, and she signaled to Lanying with her eyes.

"Defu!" called Lanying. She ran and stopped him at the door. "The women are upset because their men aren't here. They're afraid that if the enemy comes—"

"Tell them to keep calm. Just say—"

"You talk to them."

"All right." Holding his bowl and chopsticks in one hand, Defu waved the air with the other. "Quiet down, all of you," he shouted.

The women and the old men in the compound turned in his direction. When they saw it was Defu who wanted to speak, they stopped their

conversation and listened. Yinfeng's father was there with a group of old men. Though he didn't look at Defu, he too listened attentively.

"There's no need to get excited," said Defu. "We have word from the county that the enemy is still two or three days away from Suide. Figure it out: Suide is over a hundred li from here; that would mean at least another two days. In those four or five days our Field Army is sure to have everything prepared. Don't worry. Since the Communist Party has a mouth that can eat knives, it's got a stomach to digest them too..."

Defu uttered the last folk saying emphatically, and the people found his analysis reasonable. Yinfeng stared at him with such open affectionate admiration that the women in whose midst she was standing shot disapproving glances in her direction.

"Tell me, Defu," inquired the wife of the neighbor who shared his compound, "if we don't attack Yulin, will the grain porters come home? Or will they still stay with the Field Army?"

"Yes, what about that?" cried the women. It was this question which concerned them most.

Defu laughed. "If our civilian carriers come back what will our Field Army have to eat? Carpenter just took a letter to Zhenchuan to find out about the grain station. When he comes back we'll know better what's happening on the northern front. Keep your chins up. Having our

Field Army near is the best guarantee of safety. It's getting dark. All of you better go home and make dinner."

At the further urging of Lanying and Yin Feng, in twos and threes, the women left the compound. The old men, still talking regretfully about our failure to take Yulin, also departed. Only then was Defu able to carry his bowl into the cave which housed the district administration office.

All of the district men were in the cave. None of them had bothered about eating. They were deeply engrossed in discussing their new duties with Secretary Jin and district head Zao. Yonggong, also holding a bowl, stood off to a side and listened.

With the county directive that "the effectiveness of the guerillas will be the key to the success of all the other work," as the basis of his argument, the chief of the district security section was saying that they should amend their original decision regarding the method of operating the grain station. He said that Defu should take part in the guerillas because the Field Army's rear line organizations would probably be moved and the grain station closed. Under the direction of Yonggong, Carpenter and Ba Hu could wind it up....

Yonggong, who had been listening closely, said hastily, "It's easy, to hear you say it! Old Zhen will have to take care of the co-op and the fodder section; he won't have a minute to help me. I'll

be busy enough with the grain section accounts. Carpenter has his village duties. If we wind up, will we be able to dispose of one hundred piculs of grain all at once? District Head Zao, unless Defu works at the station, I—”

“What kind of attitude is that?” interrupted Zao sternly. “If you don’t agree, we can talk it over. At a time like this, what’s this business of backing out?”

“I’m only saying I can’t handle the whole job,” mumbled Yonggong. “I didn’t mean that I won’t take care of the accounts.”

The organization section chief agreed. “He can’t run the whole thing himself. It’ll be even more impossible in a couple of days when things get still tighter. But Yonggong, you better stick to those accounts! So many people have left their families to work with the Army at the front. You’re a Communist. When the going gets rough if you only worry about your family, the people will have plenty to say!”

“As long as someone else takes the major responsibility, I’ll finish those accounts if it kills me,” Yonggong promised.

“Fine words!” said Defu sharply. “I don’t want to scare you, Yonggong, but the enemy is moving up. When both sides start maneuvering, nobody knows where the fighting’ll be. The guerillas are mobile, but the grain station can’t move, no mat-

ter what the danger. You won't be able to do your job unless you make up your mind to stick to it."

"You talk as if you know the grain station won't be wound up quickly," Zao said to Defu. "What proof have you got?"

"Look here—" Defu was not in the least abashed. "The county orders the granary at Gaojiabu to wind up, and Gaojiabu is on the highway running east from Mizhi to Wulongbu to Jiaxian. That must be because they believe the enemy may be heading for that road. Zhenchuan doesn't take any more grain from Wulongbu, and Zhenchuan is on the highway which goes north to Yulin. Sha Jiadian is in the 'V' between the two highways. So our superiors probably are waiting to see which way the enemy troops move after they get to Suide before deciding how we'll fight them and what to do about our grain station here."

The men said that having served with the army, Defu's figuring was likely to be correct. Jin didn't express any opinion.

"Let's wait and see what instructions Commissioner Ge sends," he merely commented. "When you've finished eating we'll discuss the steps we must take to prepare for battle."

During the meal, Jin told Old Zhen to turn over the grain section accounts to Yonggong immediately; then Zhen and Zhang should run the fodder section and at the same time prepare to move and conceal the merchandise of the co-operative.

Zao let the old man read the directive about the co-op from the county Construction Section.

It was dark after dinner, and the lamps were lit. The men of the fodder and grain sections and the district men went into separate caves to hold their meetings.

After a while, the voice of Carpenter came thundering from the dark compound. "In which cave is Secretary Jin and district head Zao?"

"They're over here!" chorused the district men. The noise brought the grain station workers running towards the former's cave.

Carpenter had not returned alone. With him was Feng Zhaoxi, the manager of the Shajiadian co-op who had been transferred to Zhenchuan. They joined the men meeting in the light of two sesame oil lamps, and the village grain station workers crowded in behind them. Everyone was sure that if Feng had returned, the main grain station at Zhenchuan was being discontinued because the Field Army was coming south.

Old Zhen was happy, thinking that he could relinquish responsibility for the co-operative to the manager, he enthusiastically squeezed his way forward until he stood beside Feng.

With his cloth sash belt, Carpenter wiped the perspiration from his head. "I met him on the flat of the Wuding River," he said. "There were many travelers and I nearly didn't recognize him in the dark."

"What's happening on the northern front?" the men asked Feng.

As Feng removed his knapsack. Carpenter related what the co-op manager had told him on the road—how Hu Zongnan's 36th Division had reached Yulin by making a detour outside the Great Wall.

The men agreed that Hu Zongnan was full of wily tricks. Because their guesses had been so far from actuality, Yonggong and Ba Hu stood bug-eyed with confusion.

"Huh! That son of a bitch Hu Zongnan has a heart of pure poison," snorted Carpenter. "He wants the 36th to occupy Zhenchuan and link up with the enemy forces coming from the south."

"Really?" the men asked Feng incredulously. "Really." Feng was a man of deliberate words and action. People who didn't know him sometimes thought he was playing high and mighty. As a matter of fact, deliberateness was a quality of those who planned well and handled affairs competently.

"The 36th Division entered Yulin at two o'clock this afternoon," Feng said casually. "Just before I set out, a telegram came from the front reporting a portion of the enemy had advanced south as far as Sanzha." "Why, that's twenty li from the city!" Old Zhen was beginning to get upset. "I've been there. It's a very important place."

If that were the case, things were much more serious than the men had thought. Hu Zongnan was not only trying to relieve Yulin—he was going to attempt a pincer attack from north and south on a vast territory.

Secretary Jin asked, “What is the Field Army going to do?”

“Fight.” Feng smiled, completely unperturbed. “We’ve been holding open the sack, waiting for the 36th Division to come in. Now that we’ve got it, aren’t we going to strike? Wait till it bores in a little deeper, then we’ll close the sack and it won’t be able to run anywhere.”

Feng’s words and manner gave the impression that the doom of the 36th Division was already sealed, that the seven enemy brigades in the south were a mere trifle. But several of the men were skeptical. We didn’t take Yulin when the enemy in the south was far away. Now they’re rolling up like the wind and the 36th is moving down to meet them. Would the Field Army be able to come in time to destroy them?

The close-mouthed Feng only laughed. “That isn’t our concern,” he said. “What has Chairman Mao remained in northern Shaanxi for?” He plainly didn’t consider the situation particularly serious.

Asked where the Field Army planned to finish off the 36th, Feng mysteriously shook his head. He said he didn’t know. Secretary Jin told the men

not to ask any more questions about military secrets. Then he changed the subject.

"Why have you come back?" he inquired of Feng.

"Has Commissioner Ge sent you to take charge of the grain station?" ventured Zao.

"No," said Feng. "I can't tell you. Guo, the vice-head of the county, has sent a letter to you two. You'll know after you read it." He took the missive from his knapsack and handed it to them.

Jin ripped open the envelope, and he and Zao pressed close to the lamp and began to read. The district men crowded around to read over their shoulders, while the others surrounded Feng and plied him with questions.

"Wait till they've finished," he advised. "Then we'll talk some more."

Zao and Jin put down the letter. Everything was now clear.

"There's nothing much to talk about. We've got to act!" said Zao. He turned to Jin. "Tell them the directive. The village men still have to take over the grain station. Then the district men can discuss this thing further..."

Everyone fell silent and looked at the secretary. They waited for him to speak.

Jin took the letter in his hand. "The situation is as Manager Feng says. The Field Army is preparing to wipe out the 36th Division. We all must remain calm. The grain delivery route from Wulongbu has been changed, but that doesn't

mean deliveries will stop. The main grain station will move from Zhenchuan to the district seat of Wuzhuang. Some of the grain will be transferred to Cedar Rise in our district, and vice-head of the county, Guo, is going there with some of his men tonight. Feng has delivered this letter on his way there too....”

“Ah, all....” The men all looked at Feng. Old Zhen’s whiskered mouth was open as round as a cup. He had figured it completely wrong.

“I’m going with him,” Jin continued. “I also must take along two district men. We’ll discuss who should go soon.”

“Aren’t we going to organize guerillas?”

“Wait a bit,” said Jin. “Let’s settle one question at a time. The letter says our grain station is small and easy to wind up. We’re to keep going with it until we’re notified to the contrary. Just how to handle it will be up to the Committee in Support of the Front. Old Zao, are we formally deciding then that Defu will be in charge of the grain section, Yonggong will be responsible for the accounts and Ba Hu will help them with the grain measuring?”

“What else can we do?” replied Zao. “I thought at first that Feng was coming—”

“There’s no use talking about that,” Jin cut in. He asked Defu, “Do you have any ideas?”

"I'll do what I'm told, the best I can. Yonggong, you just keep those accounts straight. Ba Hu and I will do all the physical work."

"Right!" affirmed Ba Hu.

"Then you grain station men can go and get started," Jin directed. "There's nothing more that concerns you here."

Feng accompanied the village men into the next cave. He wanted to talk with Old Zhen about cooperative matters. Carpenter finally remembered that he was hungry and went looking for Old Wang, the cook, to get something to eat. Only the district men remained in the cave. They were waiting to learn the decision on the formation of a guerilla unit.

Jin read to them from vice-head of county Guo's letter: "Commissioner Ge has already arranged by telephone with the Party county committee that Comrade Zao shall be the leader of your district's guerilla organization. Comrade Liu Zhonghe will be its political commissar, and it will operate in your district in all the xiang south of the main highway. Organization department head Bei of the Party county committee will not be coming to your district. He's going to High Temple District, which is near enough for him to guide Comrades Zao and Liu conveniently. In addition to his regular duties. Comrade Jin shall be responsible for the battle preparations in the xiang north of the main highway. The means of

victory are in our hands, but the struggle will be a severe one. Please put these instructions into effect immediately.”

Placing the letter on the table, Jin said, “Now we must decide which two men will go with me to Cedar Rise.”

The Comrade Liu Zhonghe referred to in the letter was the district security assistant. He asked Zao, “Then we’re really forming two units in this district, aren’t we? In an emergency will our unit join forces with High Temple District to the south?”

“Of course,” said Zao. “The main job of the others will be to take charge of grain deliveries. We’ll carry out the Party county committee’s directive on guerilla operations south of the highway.”

Liu Zhonghe requested that after the Shajia-dian grain station was terminated, Defu should be permitted to join the guerillas. After a brief consideration, Jin consented. The district men discussed the allocation of their duties a while longer, and then final disposition was agreed upon. The organization section chief and the administrative assistant would go north with Secretary Jin. The propaganda section chief and the head of the self-defense battalion would operate in the southern xiang of the district. The district clerk would remain in the administration office to maintain the regular functions and to serve as liaison between the various levels.... Jin and Zao

stayed behind in the cave for a talk after the men left, to make ready for their departure.

Now that the exigencies were going to compel these two comrades to separate and take up their duties in different places, Zao rather hated to part with Jin. When Jin had been appointed as district Party secretary, Zao had considered it unfair to himself. Moreover he had been annoyed with the former's frequent quotations from political texts and reports and his indirect style of talking. He had felt that the years Jin had spent in Yanan had given him only an intellectual flashiness and shrewdness in place of the simplicity and directness he had possessed as a government worker of peasant origin. Zao was not as happy with the new secretary as he had been with his predecessor, and there had been a gulf between him and Jin. Yet this recent experience had shown him that Jin was even more capable than the former secretary. He was more solemn; he didn't like to joke. But that was the man's temperament, not necessarily a pose. Today, they were going to part on the eve of a serious battle, and Zao asked Jin whether he had any instructions.

"No. We've discussed all the steps for battle preparation. Any future questions, organization department head Bei will be able to answer. I only think that you—you—How shall I put it?"

"It doesn't matter. Go ahead and say it."

“Well, you ought to pay more attention to your attitude towards the men. They can’t be handled simply by ordering them around. You have to train them and teach them; make them understand the reasons for things. You should give them methods, then take your hands off and let them do the work themselves. The revolutionary struggle will need many new men to lead the people. Just think—when you joined the revolution, how many government workers were there in the entire county? If we only had the same handful of men today, how could we lead the people to victory over such a powerful enemy?”

“Right! And the result was that in ‘36 we cracked under the enemy encirclement. But it’s very different now....”

“I’m glad you see it,” said Jin with a smile. He explained why Zao’s original concept about grain station cadres was unsuitable to the requirements of the military emergency and pointed out that his view of Defu was due to his failure to appreciate how a man developed in the heat of battle.

“If you don’t understand this point,” Jin went on, “when you’re leading the guerillas, you’re likely to feel that there aren’t enough government men in the three xiang south of the main highway, and you won’t be able to do your job well. Doesn’t our Party directive say that this campaign will be a severe test of our men? I think the Party estimation is absolutely correct. Many govern-

ment people blossom out in peacetime. You get to think they're pretty good. Then a serious struggle proves they're not good at all; while on the other hand it produces many models and heroes—people you never noticed before. You ought to watch this point. Don't evaluate people by your everyday subjective impression of them...."

Zao sat like a statue, staring at the map of the Border Region hanging on the opposite wall. He was deep in thought.

"Oh," Jin recalled something else. "If you find that a man has a fault, or that there's something about him, you shouldn't judge him on the basis of what you think the situation probably is. It's up to you to investigate every detail, then talk to him about it in a very friendly manner. For instance, I talked to Yinfeng today on my way back from the Fourth Xiang. I think she's a very politically aware young woman and completely respectable. It's highly unlikely that Defu 'got friendly' with her. Even if you suspect them, you shouldn't say so. In fact you should indicate that you *don't* suspect them, then investigate their case from every angle. How would you like it if people, without any proof, accused you of having bad relations with some woman? Take a greater interest in the welfare of your men. Talk to them often, give them more ideological enlightenment. If they say or do something wrong, don't rant and rave at them. You know our saying: Everyone wants

to serve *the people*, not some particular leader.... Sometimes you chat and joke with Yonggong and Defu, but why do you suppose they're still a little afraid of you?"

"I definitely will pay attention to these things from now on," said Zao quietly. "But about Defu and Yinfeng—"

"Don't explain. There's no time now. I have to get my affairs in order, and I still want to say a few words to Defu about the grain station. After the battle is over, we can continue this chat."

"All right...."

At about midnight Jin and Feng, and the two men selected, set out through the still night for Cedar Rise. Feng had given Old Zhen complete instructions about the co-operative, but Jin had time to talk to Defu only briefly. He had emphasized the necessity of unity with the people and said that if there were any important questions concerning the Shajiadian grain station, district clerk Shang should get in touch with Zhenchuan and Cedar Rise. After seeing the travelers off, the men returned to bed.

Zao, Liu and the two men started early the next morning. They took with them six rifles and about one hundred grenades—all the district center had. After deciding on the village of Niuzhuanda in the Second Xiang as their rallying point, they separated and went into the xiang south of the main highway to mobilize the people for battle.

Stinker Shang Huaizong

Not since the retreat from Yanan five months before had there been such excitement in the territory lying between the Wuding River and the Yellow River. A great ferment of battle preparations under the direction of Party members and government personnel was seething in thousands of villages and hamlets. Moreover, all non-military government organizations, schools, banks, trading companies, factories—including the personnel and their families—began a great exodus towards several ferrying points along the Yellow River. Starting from the third of the month, the main highway from Mizhi and Wulongbu to the city of Jiaxian, on the water's edge, was choked with a continuous flow of people and pack animals.

This news was brought to Shajiadian on the morning of the fourteenth by the peasants delivering grain from neighboring districts. Near noon, civilian organization personnel and their families from the counties of Hengshan and Zhenchuan passed through Shajiadian on their way to Jiaxian. The situation was very tense. Although the number of people delivering grain from the three districts to the east was sharply reduced that day, men from the rear line units of the Field Army stationed in the Shajiadian district came as usual to draw their supplies. Characteristically, they were quite casual about the changed circumstances. In reply to the questions of the grain carriers and the villagers, they explained that the movement of government personnel did not mean that northern Shaanxi was being abandoned. It was a temporary departure to avoid unnecessary losses. One soldier, standing on the high level in front of the grain station, guaranteed that the Field Army would finish off Hu Zongnan's forces in a shorter period than the time it would take the enemy to reach the battlefield. He pleaded with them to have courage, to do their part in preparing for battle, in supporting the front....

The maintenance of the Shajiadian station, with its over one hundred piculs of grain, was going to be difficult. Many people were surprised that a young fellow like Shi Defu should dare to undertake such a task. Some worried for his sake.

True, he had been a model stretcher bearer; but to run the grain station at a time like this was an incalculably heavier responsibility than the ones he had borne at the front. Yinfeng's father even said Defu was a "clod," not to be compared with a clever person like Yonggong, for instance. (As a matter of fact, the old man's low opinion of Shi Defu's intelligence was one of the reasons he opposed the militiaman's marriage to his daughter.) Defu's mother thought he was overestimating his own ability, but what was the use of talking—for several years now she hadn't been able to control him.

Defu knew his work wouldn't be easy, if anything it would become harder. Yet when his superiors assigned him this duty, how could he refuse? Seven years ago, when he was eighteen, he had joined the Party. He was a hired hand then of Shang Huaizong, the landlord in Gongjia Gully. Ever since that day, whenever the Party asked him to do a job, the word "no" was never heard to pass his lips, come thunder, lightning, hell or high water. Now, the whole Border Region—from Chairman Mao down to every single peasant—was engaged in a struggle to annihilate the enemy. The thought that serving with district head Zao in the guerillas would be much easier than his work in the grain station never even occurred to Defu...

The movement of personnel towards the Yellow River worried Yonggong. Every time porters arrived with grain, Yonggong plied them with questions on what was happening in the east, what were the developments in the south....

"You know the general picture," Defu censured him, "so why keep asking? Asking isn't going to change things. We'll get ourselves into trouble if you're careless with the accounts. Giving out wrong receipts will be bad too."

Busy weighing grain, Ba Hu snorted with scorn. "Asking questions is a pile of crap!" He always agreed with Defu. After he heard the Army comrades' explanation, he concerned himself only with his work.

Yonggong mournfully clucked his tongue. He hadn't dreamed the situation would be so tight. The anxiety which he had felt when Yanan was evacuated settled on him again like a pall. The men were alone in the storage cave, and he asked doubtfully, "Do you think Chairman Mao will cross the Yellow River this time?"

"You're just like you were last spring!" exclaimed Defu. "So that's what was behind all your questions! Well, you don't have to waste your time worrying. When Comrade Zhou Enlai addressed the mass meeting at Zhenwudong, he said Chairman Mao would be together with our army and our people wiping out the enemy. Now

that the enemy has been lured up in this direction, do you really think he'd cross the river?"

Yonggong sighed faintly, but said no more. He judged the conditions in northern Shaanxi entirely on the basis of whether or not Chairman Mao remained. He still couldn't forget 1936, when the Red Army withdrew from the counties of Jiaxian and Wubu, and the Kuomintang combined with the local landlords and gentry in a massacre of the people. Defu was only twelve or thirteen at the time; he didn't know much. But every hair on Yonggong's head had stood on end. Now Yonggong's fervent wish was that Chairman Mao would not leave, and that this would also provide a measure of safety for the people *and* the local cadres....

At noon, the three men went down to the district office for lunch. They found district clerk Shang concluding a meeting with the xiang leader, the xiang Party secretary, and the cadres of the villages; Carpenter, the administration clerk, and Lanying, the leader of the women's association, represented Shajiadian. Although most of the men were away at the front, caches had been prepared when Hu Zongnan had attacked Yanan; when the enemy occupied Suide things potentially useful to the invaders were concealed. Now it was up to the village cadres to lead the populace in hiding the supplies again. The knotty problem was to arrange caves and pits in which the

old folks, the women and the children could take shelter. The rainy season was approaching, and it was feared that the mountain freshets would flood the pits. Finally it was decided that in an emergency villagers from level regions should crowd into the caves of the villages in mountainous sections. Shajiadian and another village were directed to clean the caves and repair the paths leading to them....

The meeting over, Lanying hurried off to call together Yinfeng and the other more active women. Carpenter explained to Defu and Yong-gong what had just transpired.

"This afternoon, Lanying and I will go with a number of people to straighten up our village's cliff caves," he said. "How did you get along at the grain station this morning? I'm afraid for the time being I won't be able to help you..."

"There haven't been many deliveries today," replied Defu. "We don't need you yet. You keep working on your battle preparations!"

Some of the cadres from the neighboring villages were not too enthusiastic about repairing the caves. These hideouts were prepared during the Mohammedan Revolt in the Manchu Dynasty. The paths leading to them, twisting like a sheep's intestine, had long since been washed out and were overgrown with wild date trees and brambles. The caves themselves were weakened by the burrowing of rabbits and squirrels; pheasants

and ravens had littered the interiors with their droppings. No doubt the caves were in a terrible mess. It would hardly be worth the trouble, they said. When the enemy came, why not simply hide in some ravines until they had gone?

But others were opposed to this careless method. Better to expend a little effort and be safe, they insisted. The people who needed concealment were old folks, women and children. If the situation should suddenly change, where could they find suitable hiding places in a hurry?

Defu reminded them that consideration had to be given to the families of army men and civilian grain porters. "Those men who are at the front have gone there for the sake of all of us," he said. "The way I see it, we government workers ought to treat their old people and children like our own. Our superiors have told us to prepare the caves. We shouldn't refuse the job, no matter how much trouble it involves. Suppose something should happen to some of those families as a result of our neglect? When their men come back from the front, how can we govern people—safe at home—how can we explain?"

The men nodded at this. "That's right!" they said. "We ought to carry out our orders. That's the least we can do, with the government moving our rear line organizations and families to the Yellow River...."

"A stitch in time saves nine...."

The men were about to return to their respective villages when a mass of people came pouring into the compound, with three men from Gongjia Gully at their head. The first of them, a peasant, was dragging the second, Shang Huaizong, the landlord, by the front of his white shirt. Behind Huaizong was the third man—also a peasant—carrying a pipe in one hand. His other hand was clenched in a fist as big as a sledgehammer, which he seemed to be holding in readiness to smash the landlord's head like a melon if he should try to run away. They approached the entrance to the district office cave, with most of the population of Shajiadian crowding behind them and others still coming. Huaizong had been thoroughly hated in the old society and he was called openly by the name that had been whispered with a curse before liberation—"Stinker."

"Has he gone bad again?" shouted a voice from the crowd. "Why don't you tie him up?"

"We would have done it long ago if we had a rope," grated the peasant with the big fist.

They hauled the landlord on to the level elevation in front of the cave, then the first peasant released Huaizong's shirt.

"What's wrong?" asked Shang, the district clerk.

"Make him speak!" said the first peasant. He glared angrily at the landlord. "What was the rumor you told Zhengwa's mother? Tell us!"

The color drained from Huaizong's face. He stole a glance at the people filling the courtyard and stammered, "Just a chance remark..."

"A chance remark?" the big-fisted peasant lumbered forward to demand. "Then what are you afraid of? Speak up!"

But the shameless rogue wouldn't utter a syllable.

Standing under the glaring midday sun, the people in the courtyard were perspiring freely. Very few of the villagers had brought their straw hats, because at the sound of the shouting they had rushed out to investigate. Yonggong suggested that they return home for lunch and let the government men take the landlord into the cave for questioning. With a great roar, the crowd responded that they didn't mind the sun, and the clear high voices of Lanying and Yinfeng could be heard yelling for Huaizong to "confess!" Yonggong hastily turned to Shang, the xiang leader and the xiang Party secretary.

"You can't get any ivory from the mouth of a pig. Why should we let him spread the rumor he told to Zhengwa's mother among the people here? Question him, tie him up and send him to the district security assistant in the Second Xiang," he suggested.

Shang and the xiang leader looked at one another. They didn't know what rumors Stinker had been spreading, and Yonggong's method

sounded safe enough. But Defu didn't think much of that idea. The moment he had seen the landlord being pulled into the courtyard, the rage within him burst into flame. His eyes, gleaming with hatred, never left the landlord's ashen face. He sent Old Wang, the cook, for a rope, then pushed his way to the leading cadres. He suggested that the rumor should be exposed to the people.

"Hu Zongnan's hundreds of thousands of men don't scare us," the militiaman said loudly. "Is this dog's rumor going to do it?"

"No!" yelled the crowd, and Lanying called out, "Let's hear what sort of thing he's been bleating!"

The xiang leader, the xiang Party secretary and Shang agreed with Defu's proposal. Since the people had all turned out, it wouldn't be good to let them go home without knowing the cause of the commotion. Shang asked the two men from Gongjia Gully to explain. After a brief argument between them, the one who had dragged Stinker by the shirt was allowed to make the report.

When the landlord had learned that the Field Army had not taken Yulin, said the peasant, that Hu Zongnan's army was coming up from the south, that the personnel and families of government rear line organizations were moving towards the Yellow River, and that various government units and the people were beginning to leave Zhenchuan, his satisfaction exceeded all bounds. He lost the hangdog expression he

had assumed in January when the peasants had settled their accounts with him. Grinning, his head high, he went swaggering about the village. After the village and xiang cadres left to attend the preparation for battle meeting in the district, the landlord had approached the mother of Zhengwa, a youngster serving at the front with the civilian service units. He said that the government was in a panic. He was afraid that the Field Army had been defeated at Yulin, that it couldn't stand up under the fire of the enemy's reinforcements and would probably cross the Yellow River into Shanxi....

"I said 'afraid,' didn't I?" the landlord interposed craftily. "I too am afraid something like that might happen...."

The rest of his words were drowned out by a great hoot of derision from the crowd. The people knew from the very fact that Secretary Jin and co-op manager Feng had gone to Cedar Rise to organize grain supplies that the Field Army was not preparing to cross the river. In the hubbub that followed the landlord's statement, many voices were heard saying that Stinker wasn't "afraid," he was "hoping." The hammer-fisted peasant angrily grabbed him.

"You're afraid?" he demanded. "Tell me, did you or did you not say, 'The moth tries to extinguish the oil lamp, but the flame kills it?'"

"I never said it. It's all something Zhengwa's mother made up...."

"So you never said it to her! You were strutting around the village, so happy you were talking to yourself! You were crazy with joy. Didn't you see me there at the foot of the slope? I ask you: Didn't you sneer at my brother and say, 'Sweep the cave and courtyard clean. Chairman Mao will be coming this way soon'!? What did you mean by that? You're celebrating too early! Do you think we can't fix you right now?" Stinker lowered his eyes and attempted to look pathetic with such transparent hypocrisy that the men wanted to beat him, and the women spat at him.

"Naturally he hopes the Field Army will leave for Shanxi," cried the peasants. "We divided his caves and divided his land. If Hu Zongnan comes, he can get them back!"

"You're dreaming!" Yinfeng shouted at the landlord. "Hu Zongnan is the moth. Watch the way we burn him to a crisp!"

"What else did he say?" Shang asked the two men from Gongjia Gully.

"Isn't that poisonous enough?" said the man who had been giving the report. "Everyone knows Zhengwa's mother is fainthearted. She's been a widow since she was twenty-five and her whole life has been her boy. She never thought about whether Stinker's lie was believable or not, she only worried that her son, as a supply ser-

vice worker, would go with the Field Army into Shanxi. Always sighing, burning incense in the temple, she had our whole village upset; but no one knew what was wrong with her. Later, after a lot of questioning, we finally found out it was his work!" Furious, the man gave Stinker a resounding slap on the face.

The whole courtyard rang with cries to hit him again, harder, to tie him up. Old Wang, trying to force his way through the crowd, called to Defu and threw him a rope over the heads of the people. Carpenter, Ba Hu, the two men from Gongjia Gully and many others pushed forward to help the militiaman. Yonggong too grabbed the rope. He had been afraid Stinker's rumor was that Chairman Mao was leaving, but he hadn't thought the landlord would be so insane as to claim the Field Army wanted to cross the Yellow River! The xiang Party secretary stopped the enraged men.

"Not so fast. Let me explain clearly to everybody first." He then urged the people not to be like Zhengwa's mother and be taken in by rumors. The Field Army has not been defeated, he said. Not only is it not going to cross the river, but it has everything ready to wipe out the enemy which it is deliberately letting advance. Although the civilian service workers would remain with the Army, he guaranteed that the village personnel would take care of all the families whose menfolk were away at the front.

"We made all our plans this morning and we'll get them going this afternoon," he concluded.

The crowd roared its approval. In the rearmost ranks. Yinfeng's father was smiling and shouting to Old Zhen how ridiculous Zhengwa's mother was for having taken the word of a landlord....

Twisting the rope in his hands, Defu addressed the people. He requested that in the future if they caught any more rumor-mongers, they should bring them to the district too. "If our Field Army were going to withdraw across the Yellow River, wouldn't we get rid of the grain now filling the three caves of our station?" he reasoned. "Would we keep it for that bastard Hu Zongnan?"

"Right!" bellowed Carpenter. This was his chance to bring home a point to the local people for whom he was responsible as Shajiadian Village administration clerk. "Just keep your eye on our grain station. Only if our superiors give orders for us to give out the grain among you for safe-keeping should things be considered really tight. You can rely on what I'm telling you...." Many of the peasants were not listening to him. They were watching Defu uncoil the rope.

"Turn around," the militiaman ordered the landlord who had been his master a few years before. "Put your hands behind your back." And as he bound the prisoner's arms, he demanded, "Are you going to the county to complain about me again this time?"

The courtyard rang with the peasants' laughter. A year and a half ago, in March 1946, Defu had also tied up the landlord. The ill-fated truce had just been made with the Kuomintang, and Huaizong returned late one night from the as yet unliberated town of Zhenchuan. Defu, afraid that Kuomintang agents might take advantage of the peace atmosphere to slip in and create troubles, was patrolling with two other militiamen. He ran into Stinker, who refused to submit to a search of his person.

"You Communist military are all going to be reorganized into the Generalissimo's forces and both sides must act in a democratic manner," he announced haughtily. "I have the right to come and go as I please. You have no right to search me."

This speech had brought sparks from Defu's eyes. Stinker was an open member of the Kuomintang and had always been hostile to everything in the Border Region. Now he had the gall to act high and mighty. But Defu couldn't out-talk him, and since Huaizong wouldn't be searched, the militiaman asked that he go with them to the district office for questioning. Stinker said he wanted to get some sleep; he'd go the following day. Defu lost his patience. He was sure the landlord was carrying counter-revolutionary material. Afraid that if he let him go home, Stinker would hide it, Defu tied him up and searched him. He found a book on the landlord's person,

but when they took him to the district office and looked at the book in the light, it turned out to be only an ordinary novel. Stinker raised a big fuss about this "outrage" and the next day lodged a complaint against Defu with the county government. He wanted to know whether the Border Region militia had been ordered to arrest people without cause....

"Are you going to the county about me again?" queried Defu as he tightened the knots. "Has your 'Generalissimo' reorganized our forces yet? You think that your papa Hu Zongnan is coming and you can play the big shot again? If you still want to swill down a few more years' food, you'd better be careful what you say and do!"

Stinker blinked rapidly. He seemed to be concocting some scheme. The crowd shouted for Defu to tie him tighter.

"He won't get loose," said Defu. He pulled the knots with all his strength, then asked district clerk Shang, "When shall we send him over?"

"Our superiors have told us time and again that neither the xiang nor the districts should hold prisoners," Yonggong reminded them. "The earlier we get him to the security section of the county the better."

The two men from Gongjia Gully promptly volunteered to take him. At such a critical time, they said, no good could come of letting his type run around loose. In fact if the authorities

hadn't prevented it, when the accounts were settled in January, the people would have trampled him to death!

After a moment's thought, Shang said, "Our district head and security assistant have just gone into the countryside to handle the battle preparation work. They have no time to settle this even if we send him to them. I think we should hold him temporarily here in the district while we send them a letter asking for instructions. This is war-time. We won't be wrong to hold him over."

"That's right," the xiang leader and the xiang Party secretary agreed. "It's better than shifting him up and back and giving him a chance to escape."

"There are two other dogs in Gongjia Gully who have to be watched!" Defu reminded them. He was referring to two of Stinker's relatives.

The man who had brought the landlord said that after the affair of Zhengwa's mother was discovered, the two relatives had been compelled to find a guarantor who gave security to the chief of the anti-traitors team that they would not run away nor spread rumors, that they would work with the people in preparing for battle....

Stinker was locked in the cave which sometimes served as the district jail, and the people then left the courtyard. The xiang and village men hurried back to their battle preparation work. Shang wrote a letter to be dispatched to district

head Zao and district security assistant who were in Second Xiang. After drinking their noonday soup, Defu and the grain station men returned to their posts.

The atmosphere was changed, like the tension before a gathering storm. While two of the districts within the administrative region were distributing among their peasants the grain from the Gaojiabu bins, the High Temple and Shajiadian districts continued mobilizing. All afternoon, not one person delivered grain to the Shajiadian station. Towards sunset, when there was little danger of enemy planes, the Field Army's rear line organizations stationed in the district of Shajiadian began moving north. Although from the direction they were taking they didn't seem to be heading for the Yellow River, at least they were going to a place of greater safety. One of the comrades passing through Shajiadian with the organization personnel told Defu the enemy had not yet reached Suide in the south, but that the personnel had been ordered to circle around to the rear of our forces coming down from Yulin. The enemy must be pressing close in the south, Defu thought....

Carpenter, Lanying and Yinfeng mobilized the entire village's men, women and children and took them to clean out the cliff caves to be used as hiding places. While the others were hard at work, Defu, Yonggong and Ba Hu sat idle in the

grain station. It was the kind of idleness that got on one's nerves, for they were confronted with three caves full of grain. Since no grain was being delivered and no one was calling for grain, Yonggong wanted to send a letter to Commissioner Ge in Zhenchuan reporting the situation and asking for instructions. Defu thought that wasn't necessary yet. Their superiors had told them to wait for word. What was the use of being panicky?

Old Zhen was concerned about the grain section and he came running over from the co-operative. Defu told him not to worry about the fodder section. Wheat stalks and hay made a big pile but didn't cost much. He said the old man should dispose of the co-op merchandise first because when orders did come to wind up the grain station, they would probably have to invite him to lend a hand.

In the meanwhile, Defu and Ba Hu helped Yonggong straighten out the station accounts. At sunset they went down to the district office for their evening-meal. The others had already returned from the cliff hideouts.

As the grain station men entered the compound, Carpenter and Old Wang, the cook, shouted to them from the door of the district office.

"Would you say that Stinker is human?"

"What?" The men were surprised. "What harm can he do locked up?"

“We ought to give that kind of scum an early start to meet the king of hell!” Old Wang glared balefully at the privy in the corner of the compound. The others followed his look. There was a lock on the door. Stinker was being detained in the privy.

The district had no regular jail, and the cave in which occasional prisoners were kept was actually a small storeroom. For several years prisoners, some bound, some unbound, had been held in that cave, and nothing ever went wrong. Who would have thought that Stinker, locked up only for an afternoon, could do so much damage? When Old Wang had gone in to get rice for the evening meal, his first scoop brought up a large chunk of stool! Hastily, he looked in the flour container. Stinker had urinated in it!...

“That son of a bitch!” raged Defu. “What a swine! The last time the enemy was in Suide, didn’t Hu Zongnan’s men spill the peasants’ rice and flour all over the ground and piss in their vinegar and soya oil vats? This son of a bitch is made from the same mold as Hu’s bastards!”

Ba Hu clenched his fist. He wanted to give Stinker a beating, but Yonggong restrained him.

“If you do, when we have to send him on he’ll pretend he can’t walk, and we don’t have the people to carry him...”

“Hasn’t the messenger come back yet?” asked Defu. “Why aren’t we shipping Stinker to the district head?”

“The messenger’s back,” said Old Wang in a low voice. “District head Zao sent a letter saying to hold him here a couple of days because prisoners held by the security section have already been moved elsewhere. As soon as he has the guerillas organized, he’ll send someone to fetch him.”

“What about district clerk Shang?”

“Secretary Jin sent a message too. He says they’re too busy right now. He sent Shang to work in Fifth Xiang, but he can start back tomorrow morning...”

Defu told Old Wang in a whisper to be careful that Stinker didn’t run away. Then they all had dinner. It was dark by the time they finished.

Influenced by the departure of the Field Army’s rear line organizations, when night fell every family set to work hiding things which might be useful to the enemy. Courtyards were illuminated by lanterns and torches casting fitful shadows. The accounts of the grain station having been cleared, there was nothing further for Defu and the others to do that night. They prepared to go home to conceal their own families’ articles.

“We’d better sleep a little less tonight,” said Defu. “After we fix things up at home, we ought to help the short-handed families of army men and civilian workers at the front. Uncle Carpen-

ter, what have you arranged with Lanying and the women?"

Carpenter told him the names of the six families who still needed assistance. The men agreed to help two families each, then separated to return to their homes.

As Defu strode through the silent gorge, he thought to himself: "Tomorrow's the day the enemy has set to reach Suide. It's a flat run from there to Zhenchuan. But we still didn't hear any artillery today. Does that mean that Hu Zongnan's 36th Division wants to wait till his main forces on the southern front move up before they strike at Zhenchuan from the north? What is our Field Army's plan anyhow?"

The moving out of the rear line organizations and the fact that Secretary Jin and his group were so rushed made him suspect that the Field Army would really come south quickly....

"Defu."

Yinfeng was calling to him from Lanying's courtyard gate. "Wait a minute. I want to ask you something."

Defu turned. "What is it? Are you afraid?"

"Afraid of what?" Yinfeng's voice had its usual firm tone, though she spoke hurriedly. She looked to see that there was no one around, then came close to him. "What did you say to Secretary Jin?" she asked with an effort. "I came back with him

from the Fourth Xiang yesterday. On the road, he said I..."

"What about you?"

"He said I—he said I—Anyhow he didn't say I was bad. He said I should do my work well..."

"Then take his advice," Defu said. He was trying to put his affair with Yinfeng out of his mind for a while. There was a fierce struggle ahead in which he would have to prove himself....

"People are worried," she said hesitantly. "They're afraid you can't handle the grain station. But you must—"

"I know. I can only do my best. You go on back. Don't you have to help the neighbors hide their stuff tonight?"

Yinfeng smiled happily in the dark. She squeezed his hand and said, "Lanying has told me to help two families... She released him and walked back to the compound. She looked around as she reached the gate, but Defu had already crossed the ridge and was descending the slope on the other side.

The Unexpected Happens

After a period of busy activity which lasted half the night, the lamps of Shajiadian gradually were extinguished. By the time the early risers left their beds the following morning, the cave home of every family was prepared. Grain, clothing, spinning-wheels, looms, farm tools—all were hidden away. Only essential cooking utensils remained for the preparation of dry rations, after which the people would be ready to pick up and leave at any time. Then came the surprising news which startled the entire village.

Stinker had escaped....

“But how could he get away?” everyone wanted to know.

The privy in which Stinker had been locked had been built by a landlord with some idea of sanitation. Back against the wall of the compound, the privy contained a sloping chute which

led to a deep pit on the outside of the wall. A large flat stone with a square opening formed the seat. Stinker, after fraying open on the edge of the stone the rope which bound his hands, removed the seat and slid down the chute into the twenty-five-foot deep pit. Luckily for him, the accumulated excrement was no higher than his waist, and he clambered out and ran. In the morning, when Old Wang, the cook, looked into the privy and saw the removed stone seat and the pieces of rope, he was frantic. He rushed all around the village, shouting for the government men.

A crowd quickly gathered before the pit. Stinker's plunge had splashed its contents all over the place. A trail of filth marked the direction in which he had run—not through the village, but over the hill to the south.

"What shall we do?" Old Wang was very upset. "The district has no regular jail. When we locked him in the storage cave, he made a mess of it. Who would have thought that he could lift a hundred pound stone and risk drowning in the offal pit?"

Old Zhen shook his head. "Incredible! I'd never have believed a landlord could be so base!"

"There's nothing incredible about it!" Defu's eyes flashed with anger. "The landlord is our enemy to the death. He'll do anything. We weren't careful enough. Old Wang, don't take it too hard. It's not your fault alone, we all should have thought of the chute..."

A general discussion followed. The peasants agreed that Stinker probably would not dare return to his home in Gongjia Gully to change his clothes nor would he try to reach Hu Zongnan's forces, still a long way off. Most likely he was hiding somewhere where he could await the arrival of the enemy. Someone recalled that Stinker's uncle lived in Zhenchuan, where the situation was complicated. The uncle was a landlord whose accounts had been settled by the peasants last spring. That sounded like the logical place for Stinker to go undercover....

"Right!" Defu cried. "Uncle Carpenter, you go to Gongjia Gully and make contact with the xiang government. Ba Hu, we two will see where this trail leads." With the latter, the militiaman pursued the course of the malodorous footprints up the southern hill.

Bemoaning the unfortunate escape, the crowd broke up. By then, the whole village was aroused and talking about the event.

At breakfast time, having finished his battle preparation work in the Fifth Xiang, district clerk Shang returned to Shajiadian. When he learned what had happened, he was so angry he couldn't speak for several minutes. Probing into the causes, it seemed to him that none of the men were blameless. Stinker was different from the usual run of law-breakers, said Shang. He should never have been held in the storage cave in the

first place. To lock him in the privy after he had befouled the rice and flour was a bad case of snap judgment.

"But since you put him in the privy," he asked Old Wang, "why didn't you watch him during the night?"

"I was careful, like Defu told me," said Old Wang distractedly. "I looked in on him a couple of times before midnight. But later I was so worn out, I slept like the dead..."

"What were the rest of you doing?" Shang demanded of Yonggong.

Yonggong told him how they had mobilized the entire village to conceal articles useful to the enemy. "If we had ever imagined that something like this might happen," he said painfully, "Ba Hu and I would have found time somehow to stay in the district office and take turns to watch him!"

"What about Defu? He tells other people to be careful; where was he? I suppose he was off with Yinfeng—"

"No," interrupted Yonggong. "Defu has been obeying the district head about that since he's come back. He didn't see her last night. The truth is the truth. You shouldn't wrong the boy."

"Good clerk Shang," Old Wang said unhappily, "you have no reason to blame Defu. He was up all night helping everyone hide their things. Blame me. Even though I was dead tired I had no right to sleep. Ai!" he hit his head with his fist, fiercely.

“And the people have been paying me wages out of their hard-earned money! I deserve to die!”

Defu and Ba Hu followed Stinker's trail over the south hill to the small river leading to Gongjia Gully. There, the landlord had washed himself and his clothes. Then he had continued over hills and through gorges, working his way west. They dropped the trail when it reached the borders of Zhenchuan County. Sure that he had gone into the city, they went back to the xiang government office at Gongjia Gully. The leader of the xiang anti-traitors team and a militiaman eating breakfast were about to go back to the district office with Carpenter for a letter of introduction to the Zhenchuan authorities. They would ask permission to search the house of Stinker's uncle. Defu and Ba Hu smoked their pipes until the men finished eating, then all four came to the district office together.

Yonggong sighed as Defu concluded his recital.

“Ai! Stinker has gotten away. He'll be a big trouble-maker when the enemy comes! He's sure to—”

“Regrets are no use!” Defu cut in. “Naturally it's no good that he's escaped. But even if we don't catch him it won't be so terrible! He and those sons of bitches Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Zongnan sooner or later are all going to meet the same fate. We'll wipe out the enemy just the same! Clerk

Shang, please hurry with that letter and let these men get started.”

Shang had been intending to criticize Defu, but when he saw how hard he was working, and observed his eyes, bloodshot from lack of sleep, he changed his mind. In a bad humor, he took up his writing brush, and the others stood quietly until he finished. Defu escorted the two men from Gongjia Gully to the outskirts of the village, where he told them what things to watch for. By the time he got back, Shang had finished another letter, reporting the escape of Stinker. The district clerk directed Carpenter to have it delivered to district head Zao....

As a result of the turmoil caused by this turn of events, it was nearly ten o'clock before the villagers were able to complete their morning meal. Then every family in Shajiadian set to work preparing dry rations. The village was pervaded with the aroma of roasted wheat kernels and wheat cakes. No one came to the grain station; an oppressive silence hung over everything. For two days now grain porters had stopped coming to Shajiadian, and enemy planes seldom appeared. Judging from the distant roar of bombing and strafing, the people and material moving towards the Yellow River had become the new target of the enemy planes.

August 15. This was the day on which two armies of Hu Zongnan, driving from the south

and west, had fixed for their juncture at Suide. In mid-morning, an unprecedentedly intense concentration of high explosives could be heard booming in the distance. The people at first assumed it was an artillery barrage of our Field Army against Hu Zongnan's 36th Division to the north; but then they realized that the sound was coming from the east and northeast—a continuous sound, now further, now nearer. Obviously the enemy was using the planes and the bombs which America had sent them to blockade the fording places on the Yellow River and to bomb our boats.

Why was it that our Field Army still hadn't attacked the 36th? In the hearts of the villagers, worry began to edge out their anxiety to recapture Stinker.

Since there was nothing to be done at the grain station, Defu napped in the cave of the district Party committee. A short while later, Ba Hu joined him in slumber. Yonggong thought it remarkable that they should be able to sleep under such circumstances. Having recently returned from the front, perhaps they didn't mind the noise of battle, but the over hundred piculs of grain piled up in the station—that was nothing to be sneezed at! Muttering to himself, "How will the fighting really turn out?" Yonggong walked from the district office to the grain station, from the grain station to the district office. Shortly before noon, the

news Yonggong had been dreading most finally was transmitted to Shajiadian. Lanying, Yinfeng and a few other women had rushed into the district office to report it. When he heard what they had to say, Yonggong was convinced that matters had taken a serious turn for the worse, and he hastily roused Defu and Ba Hu.

Defu sat up. His lids still heavy with sleep, he saw the women gathered beside him. They seemed quite upset.

"What's the matter?" Defu rubbed his eyes.

Yonggong answered solemnly, "They've heard that Chairman Mao is going towards the Yellow River!"

"I don't believe it!" Defu jumped to his feet. "Whose wild stories have you been listening to now?"

"Women like to believe silly gossip," Ba Hu said lazily, his eyes still half closed. He rolled over and went back to sleep.

All talking at once, the women began to relate how they had heard this news. Yonggong told them to be quiet. Let Lanying speak for them.

"You few men are responsible for such a large amount of grain, Defu, it's not good always to be so casual about things," said Lanying. "The mother and sister of one of our women just came here from their village near Mizhi. Someone saw Chairman Mao on the Suide-Mizhi Highway yesterday afternoon, and south of Mizhi he was

turning off to go east. The people there thought it odd. If he were going to meet our forces, why didn't he go north through Mizhi?"

"That's right!" said Yonggong in a voice that trembled. His face was white. "Aiya, if Chairman Mao is leaving, things must be very bad..."

"You say the mother comes from near the city?" asked Defu. "How do you know whether she's honest?"

"Right!" Ba Hu had gotten up again as Lanying was speaking. He asked with distrust, "Why should they run more than fifty li from their home? Bring her in here for questioning!"

"She's a poor peasant just like us," Yinfeng hastily explained. "Her son is a squad leader in the militia. He sent her and his sister here so that he wouldn't have to worry about them while he was fighting the enemy..."

"Don't be so suspicious," said Lanying. "This isn't like Stinker's case. The old lady warned her daughter not to repeat this, but she called us together and told us, privately."

"Who saw him?" queried Defu. "They shouldn't say just anyone is Chairman Mao!"

"You're impossible!" said Lanying. "What village doesn't have a picture of Chairman Mao? Who wouldn't recognize him? The old lady says somebody saw him."

He was riding an iron-gray horse; his face was all smiles and he had an easy manner...

"Perhaps it's true then," said Ba Hu, looking at Defu.

Shang, Old Zhen and Carpenter, having already questioned the old woman about conditions in her region, had come in and listened during the discussion. Defu asked them what they thought about this story.

"It's true," affirmed Carpenter, an "old Yanan man." "Her description fits him all right. There were many other mounted men with him. In all the years I was in Yanan, there were never so many big leaders together except in Yangjia." He sighed deeply. "Cross the Yellow River quickly," he prayed. "Then we can rest easy about you."

Old Zhen clucked his tongue sorrowfully. "He started a little late. The enemy occupied Suide today and he left that neighborhood only yesterday afternoon, he's too close to them. Suppose they find out and chase after him?"

"We'd never let them catch him," said Shang. Something else was troubling him. "If the boats at the ferrying points have been bombed to bits, what will happen? Can it be that Chairman Mao hasn't foreseen it? If he wants to cross the Yellow River, why didn't he leave a few days ago when it was easy? The enemy action began some time ago. It wasn't that he didn't know. Why did he wait till the enemy came so close before he left?"

Defu could see that Shang didn't entirely believe this story of Chairman Mao's departure

either. "There's still another thing," Defu added. "Chairman Mao is only a few dozen li from the enemy. Why would he set out in broad daylight?"

"Sure!" agreed Shang. "When he was seen south of Mizhi, the sun hadn't set yet. Probably he didn't start till late afternoon when the enemy planes stop coming..."

Defu thought for a moment, then said with conviction, "Chairman Mao definitely doesn't intend to cross the river! He has some kind of a plan. If you don't believe it, wait and see! What was it that Feng said the other night when he came back from Zhenchuan?—One tiny plan by Chairman Mao can beat one hundred thousand soldiers of Chiang Kai-shek!"

Shang and Old Zhen nodded. The women had gradually lost their disturbed expressions during this conversation. They looked affectionately at the large picture of Chairman Mao hanging on the wall. His expression, so impressive, so noble, seemed to say: "I shall not leave northern Shaanxi. I shall be with you in a firm, determined struggle and we will wipe out the invading bandits of Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Zongnan!"

Yinfeng turned to look at Defu, who was calmly filling his short-stemmed pipe. His steadiness delighted her. She admired his good sense. She loved him more than ever since he returned from the front....

Ba Hu and Carpenter were concerned over what plan Chairman Mao could have, with tens of thousands of the enemy drawing near. Yonggong raised his head and stared at the leader's picture.

"Chairman! You're no ordinary person. You mustn't make a mistake!"

"Don't worry on his account," said Defu. "He certainly isn't an ordinary man, or he wouldn't have that spirit! He can't do anything that doesn't succeed. What we have to worry about is our work. It's peculiar that there still hasn't been any activity on the northern front. Hasn't the Field Army caught the 36th Division yet?"

Someone said that either the Division had remained in Yulin to hold the town, or, fearing the strength of our Field Army, it had withdrawn into it. In either case, said others, if our Army can't come to grips with the 36th, why is it still hanging around up north? Who is going to protect Zhenchuan if Dong Zhao and Liu Gan's forces come swarming up from the south?

"I think our Field Army has decided to wipe out the 36th Division. They're just waiting for their chance," ventured Shang. "When the men we sent into Zhenchuan after Stinker come back, we should have some news..."

"They'll be here before evening," said Defu, "so let's all keep calm."

The gathering broke up.

The report which the old lady brought of the tense atmosphere south of Mizhi, plus the unsettling silence on the northern front had a disquieting effect on the Shajiadian villagers. That afternoon, several of the women who were pregnant or who had recently given birth and were unable to travel quickly because of their condition, expressed fears that hiding in the prepared cliff caves would be troublesome and possibly dangerous. All those who had relatives in the northern villages or in the Gumu District of Jiaxian County, began to move out of Shajiadian.

There was also a more direct reason for this exodus. Lanying's prospective in-laws in the Gumu District sent a young nephew to fetch her and her family to their village. The boy said that the rear line organizations of the Field Army had set up there, and that from today onward all their grain was to be delivered to the Cedar Rise section. Secretary Jin and the others were hard at work organizing the grain delivery system. This meant that the Field Army had not succeeded in its plan to wipe out the 36th Division and that it probably would be coming south....

But as leader of the women in Shajiadian, Lanying could hardly think only of herself and be the first to run. She refused to leave. Naturally, her mother also insisted on remaining. They told the nephew that if it became necessary they would find their way to the in-laws' village themselves.

After discussing the situation with Carpenter, Lanying mobilized Yinfeng and the other women of the association. To anticipate any eventuality, they worked all afternoon urging those women who had recently given birth or who were in advanced pregnancy to move to villages north of the highway, even if they had no relatives there.

Yonggong's wife had born a child a little more than a month before, and the wife of Ba Hu was in her seventh month. Both of their mothers lived in the northern villages. The wives wanted to go, but because their husbands were working in the grain station there was no one to escort them. Lanying and Yinfeng asked Carpenter to talk to Defu about this problem.

The grain station was idle, and Defu and his two helpers were rechecking the grain when Carpenter called him out. Defu thought they should refer the matter to Shang. Together they sought the district clerk.

"You know that Yonggong and his wife have a flock of kids and he's always worried about them," said Defu. "We ought to let him and Ba Hu send their families to a place of safety, to save any trouble in the future..."

"Suppose people suddenly come for grain from Zhenchuan or Wulongbu, then what?" said Shang. "You don't want to listen to Yonggong's complaints."

“Yonggong is busy with his accounts. He hasn’t had time to think about this,” Defu explained. “Lanying told Carpenter to ask me about it. When we’re busy I don’t let them attend to their families, but we’re not busy yet. Suppose it gets dangerous here? If their families are still in the village, they’ll want to look after them, no matter how busy we are. I don’t have to take any time off. My own affairs are simple enough. If grain should have to be shipped, Old Zhen, Zhang and Carpenter can help me. Besides, there’s you and Old Wang...”

Defu was insistent, and Shang was forced to agree. “All right, let them go then and come right back!”

Returning to the grain station, Defu told Yonggong and Ba Hu to set out at once. Yonggong promptly turned over his account books to Defu, took up his pipe and hurried through the door. Ba Hu maintained the unflurried air he had acquired in the army.

“What’s all the excitement?” he drawled. “Who would escort her if I hadn’t been discharged from the army? When the enemy gets close, she can go herself. I’ll take care of the grain station here with you.”

Yonggong would still have his mother to take care of the house for him after he sent off his wife and children, but he, Ba Hu, had only his wife.

Besides, although they were poor, someone had to look after their little merchandise stand.

Courage and carelessness were two different things, explained Defu. He wasn't excited, he was only getting ready against the time when there would be a rush of work. He urged Ba Hu to go home and help his wife pack. They could lock the door of their house and leave.

"Since you have been discharged, you can't neglect her," said Defu. "She's seven months pregnant. "Hurry up!" He dragged Ba Hu to his feet. Only then did the ex-soldier knock the ashes out of his pipe and depart.

All afternoon, whether from Wulongbu or from Zhenchuan, not a single person came for grain.

At dusk, a letter arrived from the xiang government at Gongjia Gully. Stinker could not be found. His uncle and other suspicious characters had been arrested in Zhenchuan by the county government and moved to the Wuzhuang District. Only their wives and children were permitted to remain at home. The letter also stated that Hu Zongnan's 36th Division was moving south along the west bank of the Wuding River, and that its advance units had reached the salt flats, fifteen li from Zhenchuan. If the enemy didn't ford the river during the night, it would cross the following morning to occupy the city.

The situation was rapidly becoming worse than anyone had expected....

The Front Line

When the roosters crowed for the second time the following morning, Defu, with two hand grenades in his pocket, was preparing to leave for Zhenchuan. There was still no order from Commissioner Ge about disposition of the grain station, but from the west again came the muffled booming of artillery, Defu decided he simply had to go and see for himself what was happening.

“Sound out the situation as you go along the road. Don’t plunge ahead blindly,” Yonggong urged him. “If our government left Zhenchuan during the night, you’re liable to run into trouble if you go barging in...”

“If you’d listen to me, we two would go together!” said Ba Hu. He also held two hand grenades.

But Defu was adamant. "Both of you wait here patiently. If porters come from Wulongbu, issue grain to them. Even if the Committee in Support of the Front has left Zhenchuan, unless the enemy has captured the place, there's bound to be some of our people left. I'm not a child; don't worry about me!"

He put in his pocket the letter of identification which district clerk Shang had just finished writing to the Zhenchuan Committee, and set out. Descending into the ravine, he left the village.

Defu followed the gurgling stream to the gorge and then turned west. The gorge was dark in the shadow of threatening rain clouds, and strewn with stones and boulders. Picking his way carefully across the uneven ground, Defu advanced towards Zhenchuan—a city in the process of being abandoned, or perhaps one which was already abandoned.

Can it be that, a man, in the early hours of the dawn, going to a place which may be filled with dangers, was not even a little afraid? Yes! Not in the least afraid! Defu thought of the grain in the Shajiadian station grain produced by the year-round sweat and toil of the peasants, grain which they were sending for food to their warriors fighting the enemy, grain which he must not let fall into the enemy's hands. There was no room in his mind for fear!

He traveled quickly and passed through several little villages where white plumes of smoke were beginning to rise from the stoves being lighted for the morning meal. He paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead as he approached a hamlet on the edge of the flats of the Wuding River. Inquiry revealed that the local Party special committee still remained, and Defu knew then that the enemy had not yet entered Zhenchuan. Crops were growing lushly on the fertile flats. A light mist hung over the river—everything was the same as usual. He could see the brick-faced caves and the tile roofs of Zhenchuan shining through the green foliage of trees which ringed the city. The shimmering white Xianyang-Yulin Highway stretched straight as an arrow to Zhenchuan's south gate.

Defu went along a path through the fields of crops towards the east gate. He met a few people coming towards him, carrying their belongings. They said that the enemy was still west of the Wuding River, that eighty percent of the inhabitants had left Zhenchuan during the night.

Yet when he entered the east gate, he found the town very crowded. The streets and lanes were filled with civilian grain porters, jammed with men and animals like a market day at noon. No wonder nothing had been done about the little grain station at Shajiadian. They still hadn't finished moving the grain supplies from Zhenchuan!

Everyone was dirty-faced, exhausted. Men, holding their carrying poles and sitting on their empty sacks, were leaning against shop doors, snoring. Some were chewing roasted rice and wheat kernels which they carried in little bags. Donkey drivers were feeding hay to their animals. A few squatted before their beasts, and while mixing fodder into the hay with one hand, stuffed dry rations into their own mouths with the other. Winding his way through the mass of men and animals, Defu looked in vain for grain carriers from Shajiadian.

Suddenly, a few dozen paces ahead of him, a comrade in a brown army uniform announced, "Attention, third company of peasant comrades. Prepare to go with me to load grain!"

At once the sleepers were awakened and the dry rations were put away. Carrying poles sprang up vertically like a forest of young saplings to block Defu's path. He waited until the men counted off and departed. Then he was able to proceed.

He came to the cross-road of the city's one and only wide street, running from north to south. It too was thronged with men and donkeys. He squeezed his way through to a comrade in the coarse blue uniform of a government man and asked directions to the office of the Committee in Support of the Front. The comrade looked him over carefully for a moment, tested

him with a few questions, then swung his arm towards the north.

“The first inn with guards in front of it!”

When he reached his destination, Defu looked through the door at the large inn yard. It was empty except for Comrade Ge’s big mule, already saddled and obviously ready to leave. Hastily, Defu handed his letter of identification to the guards. One of them questioned him, then told him to wait while he inquired inside.

Before long, Wu Zhong, Comrade Ge’s tall escort came out with the guard. He was laden with equipment—carbine, Mauser pistol, knapsack and flashlight. He smiled when he saw Defu and warmly shook his hand.

“The Commissioner is talking to some of the army leaders. He asks if you’ll wait a while.” Still holding Defu’s hand, Wu Zhong led him into the courtyard.

The cave and buildings were quite deserted. There was neither furniture nor people. Defu couldn’t understand why Commissioner Ge should remain after all of the government personnel had left. Wu Zhong explained that some men were still in the city, helping clean out the granaries. When that job was over, they would all go to Cedar Rise.

“Don’t you know that the enemy reached the salt flats yesterday afternoon? That’s only fifteen li from here. If they weren’t separated from

us by the Wuding River, they'd have been here this morning."

"What the hell is going on?" demanded Defu. "Doesn't the Field Army want to wipe that bunch out? Why did it let them come so far south?"

Wu Zhong slapped his thigh in exasperation. "That son of a bitch 36th Division is fast and slippery. We couldn't pin them down!"

Lowering his voice, he told Defu what he had just heard Commissioner Ge and the army leaders saying about developments of the past few days. The facts were no longer a military secret. After the Field Army had deliberately broken its encirclement of Yulin, it immediately took up positions forty li south of the town to await and destroy the 36th, worn out from its forced march through the desert. Just the Fourth and Sixth Regional Regiments were dispatched to the west bank of the river to cut off any enemy soldiers who might try to escape. But the wily Hu Zongnan's division crossed the river in full strength and, sweeping the two militia regiments before it reached the salt flats. Only before dawn this morning were our regiments able to wade across to the east bank from a point lower down.

Now they were guarding Zhenchuan long enough to get the last of the grain removed....

"So that's it!" Defu said gravely. But he was not alarmed. The 36th Division was no stranger to him. When he had been a stretcher bearer in the

eastern Gansu and western Shaanxi campaigns, he had heard of the savageness of this enemy unit's attacks. It had been in constant pursuit of the Field Army all that time.

"If it weren't for their dodging around so, we would have had the grain out of here long ago," said Wu Zhong. "Last night from the west bank, they lobbed mortar shells at our carriers groping through the dark down the east bank road..."

Comrade Ge and three army officers came out of the cave and walked across the courtyard towards the gate. Ge was much thinner than when Defu last saw him.

"Aiya!" said one of the gray-uniformed army men as he looked at the sky. "Is it going to rain?"

"A light rain won't matter," said another. "It'll keep the enemy planes away. But if it rains hard, neither we nor the enemy will be able to move."

"It's going to rain," said the third gloomily, who wore a brown uniform. "Our grain porters won't reach Shajiadian until night, at the earliest. Commissioner Ge, can you supply us partially from some grain station that's a little nearer? From Wuzhuang, for instance?" Ge clapped him on the shoulder. "I'm afraid not. Shajiadian is nearest to the front now. We've got to clean it out first. If your men in charge of the grain porters organize and lead them well, it won't be too late if they get there tonight. Last night I was really worried, but those peasants paid no attention to the shells the

enemy was firing at them from the other side of the river. Not one of them ran away. When they get to Shajiadian they won't have to load grain the way they did here—right under the nose of the enemy. Even if it rains, once they reach there and get the grain loaded, it won't matter if the situation changes suddenly. Well, goodbye. See you soon!"

Ge shook hands with each of them, then all saluted and the men departed. Turning around, he saw Defu and Wu Zhong approaching. He greeted Defu warmly, and placing a hand on his shoulder, led him into the cave office.

Defu's face burned a little. After hearing Comrade Ge's remarks to the army officers, and learning how calm the grain porters and all the men were, he was sorry he had not remained in Shajiadian and continued with his work till further orders.

"We don't know what's happening. I came because we're worried about the grain," he explained in embarrassment, when they entered the cave.

"I'm glad you've come." Ge did not criticize. He asked with a smile, "Did they finally decide to put you in charge of the grain station?"

"When there's no ox, a donkey must be used. There just wasn't anybody else...."

Ge laughed. "The situation's all right. We planned twice to strike, but we weren't able to.

We're still going to hit them! You men shouldn't get upset. We've already assigned one hundred piculs of your grain to the Field Army. Their porters will probably pick it up tonight. I've written to vice-head of the county Guo, asking that your district Party secretary return to help you organize the grain disposition. How much do you have left?"

"About 120 piculs of millet and wheat, and a dozen or so piculs of black bean and sorghum..."

"That works out fine," said Ge. "There's an army unit that wants 10 or 15 piculs this afternoon. If you have anything left over and things look bad, distribute it among the villages north of the main road for safekeeping. Do you think your men can manage all right?"

"Sure!" Defu responded promptly. He hesitated a moment, then asked, "Did the enemy from the south occupy Suide yesterday?"

"Yes. And they've moved up another twenty or thirty li beyond it."

"Then they'll be able to join forces soon. How are we going to fight them? We heard that Chairman Mao was seen south of Mizhi, going east..."

Ge was pleased with Defu's keen interest in the military developments and smiled approvingly. Afraid that the Commissioner might misunderstand and think he was wavering, Defu explained that while some people thought Chairman Mao

might cross the Yellow River, he personally didn't believe it.

"What do you think?" Defu looked at the Commissioner's smiling face and waited for his answer.

"You're right!" was Ge's satisfied reply. "Chairman Mao will never abandon us. Things are difficult, but with Chairman Mao's leadership, we're sure to win!" Gesticulating vigorously, Ge told Defu about the emergency distribution of the grain stored at Zhenchuan, and recommended that the men in the village grain station should think over these experiences and learn from them.

From Ge's tone and manner it was clear to Defu with what contempt the Commissioner regarded the onrushing enemy. Confidently, Defu took his leave. Wu Zhong saw him to the gate of the inn yard, and Defu set off in a swinging stride for Shajiadian. He was now rather looking forward to the impending battle.

Walking south down the main street, Defu noticed that the crush of civilian grain porters had thinned out considerably. All the storehouses of the Zhenchuan depot had distributed grain simultaneously, and with all the porters being promptly on hand to receive it, the grain had been quickly disposed of. Then, at the next intersection, he saw a great crowd of people, those in the rear standing on tip-toe and craning their necks.

“What’s going on?” he wondered. He hastened towards them. He could hear the tread of marching feet and the sound of hoofbeats.

“The Fourth and Sixth Regiments...”

“They crossed over from the west bank of the river. The horses’ legs are all muddy...” the onlookers were saying quietly.

Defu mounted the steps of a store to get a better look. The regiments were marching in from the west and turning south into the main street. Civilian grain porters and their pack animals were squeezed to both sides of the big main street to let the soldiers go by. The regiments had been recently formed, based on the self-defense corps of the various counties, and nearly all the soldiers came from the Suide Region. This chance meeting allowed many of the civilian grain porters just returned from the Yulin front to see their sons, brothers, sons-in-law.... All along the big south street, grain porters waved their hands, called to the soldiers by name. At most they only had time to shout a word or two.

“Hushuan! Ma’s better now. Don’t worry...”

“Hey! Mandun, I took care of that business you wrote about. It’s all right...”

“Diezhu! Your wife has another little one! They’re both doing fine...”

And Hushuan and Mandun and Diezhu called back, smiling, rifles gripped in their right hands, waving with their left, their feet tramping on,

without stopping, without resting; the soldiers marched by without a backward glance. Many of the people standing on the sidelines watched this scene with moist eyes.

There were seven or eight men from Shajiadian in the regional regiment. Defu's brother Degui was in the Fourth Regiment, and Defu hoped to get a glimpse of him. In the ranks he saw a youngster from Shajiadian, a boy who had served under him in the village militia. Defu called him just as he was rounding the corner. He turned his head and spotted Defu. Time did not permit them to exchange more than a laugh, but how hearty and strong that laugh was!

This moving meeting of the civilian grain porters and their brother soldiers at what was now the front, following so soon after Comrade Ge's inspiring words, gave Defu a new strength: "Things are difficult, but with Chairman Mao's leadership, we're sure to win!"

He recalled Ge saying that an army unit would call for 10 or 15 piculs of grain at Shajiadian in the afternoon. Ge probably was referring to these militia regiments. Defu decided he could watch no longer; he couldn't wait to see his brother. He forced his way through the crowd, turned right, and soon left Zhenchuan through the east gate.

Defu cut directly cross-country. By the time he was halfway home, he could see the troops

turning off the north-south highway and heading east.

Many people were waiting for Defu at Sha-jadian. District clerk Shang, Yonggong, and Ba Hu from the grain station, Carpenter, Lanying and several others all gravitated to a height at the mouth of the ravine when they figured it was about the time for Defu to be coming back. From there they could see the road running through the upper reaches of the wide gorge.

Yinfeng had taken up her watch long ahead of everyone else. When the others arrived she had already been standing for some time. She did not speak to them, nor had she any desire to leave, but kept her long-lashed eyes fixed steadily on the gorge road. Though her parents said that she was using her work as an excuse to be with Defu constantly, that she "was becoming more and more brazen," ever since the day she had talked with the district Party secretary, Yinfeng seemed to have found a sense of determination. She no longer avoided Defu even in the presence of Shang and Yonggong. She was seriously considering whether bringing her relationship with him cleanly into the open wouldn't be the better course. Yinfeng had been the most concerned person in the village when she learned that Defu had left for Zhenchuan before dawn.

At about mid-morning, Defu appeared, striding through the upper gorge. Carpenter, with his

long legs, went bounding down to meet him first, while the others slid and jumped in happy pursuit. Before he reached the village, Defu was surrounded by a large throng demanding: "What's the situation in Zhenchuan?" "Where is the enemy now?" Yonggong shouted from afar, "What about our grain station?"

Defu's excitement hadn't waned although he had been walking for thirty li. He told the villagers how the enemy had not been hit on the northern front, how orderly the civilian porters had been when moving grain at Zhenchuan and how well the troops had covered them, what directions Commissioner Ge had given for the station in Shajiadian, and how the Field Army was preparing to strike the enemy 36th Division. At this point, the villagers sighed with relief.

"As long as our Army is here, what do we care about the 36th Division!" bellowed Carpenter. "We wouldn't give a damn about it even if it was a 'seventy-two' division!"

Defu borrowed Old Wang's lined jacket to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, and Yinfeng slipped her handkerchief to Lanying, who handed it to Defu. The latter was still telling everyone what he had learned from Comrade Ge, waving his arms for emphasis.

"Our place here has become the frontline! Comrade Ge says we've got problems, but with Chairman Mao's leadership, we're sure to win!"

Defu wiped his brow and absently returned the handkerchief to Lanying, as if he didn't know that it actually had been given to him by Yinfeng.

"Break it up, people, let Defu get something to eat," said Old Zhen concernedly. "He's been sixty li since this morning. That's plenty...."

Talking earnestly, the crowd dispersed, and Defu walked with Shang, Yonggong and Ba Hu towards the district office. As they strolled, Shang told Defu that district head Zao had sent a message ordering Defu and Ba Hu to join the guerillas after they wound up the grain station; Zao wrote that he had already organized over twenty men. To this Defu made no reply. The pressing difficulty was the grain station. Joining the guerillas would come later.

It began to drizzle just as Defu started to eat. Someone shouted that our troops were coming through the upper gorge and instantly Shajiadian came noisily bustling to life. As though welcoming honored guests, the people all stood ceremoniously along the slopes, looking towards the gorge with dancing eyes, while a string of children shot into the gorge like an arrow. From the village's focal point at the mouth of the ravine Carpenter's stentorian throat blared an order.

"Every family hurry and sweep your homes clean! Our troops have halted on the market grounds. They're going to live in our village!"

Defu listened, bowl in hand. Then he told Yonggong and Ba Hu to go down to the gorge and help Carpenter lead the comrades directly to the homes, not to let them stand out in the rain. He himself would quickly finish his meal. If more troops should come to bivouac east or north of Shajiadian they might decide to draw grain at the village.

A few minutes later, Yonggong and Ba Hu, along with Carpenter, Lanying and Yinfeng began leading in groups of the soldiers. Every family had cheerfully rushed through a quick job of house-cleaning, and now, laughing and smiling, young and old turned out to greet their rifle-bearing guests. Defu brought his bowl out and continued eating as he stood with Shang and Old Wang outside the big gate of the district government compound. Up from the ravine came Carpenter and several commanders, followed by administrative personnel, guards and many mules and horses. Carpenter took them directly to the great compound next to the grain station. This compound had belonged to a landlord and was now occupied by former hired hands' and poor peasants' families. Among the cadres, Defu noticed the two gray-uniformed men Comrade Ge had seen off at Zhenchuan that morning.

After the troops had been quartered, Yonggong and Ba Hu returned to the district office in high spirits. The latter was delighted to have

found many former comrades in arms whom he hadn't seen since more than a year ago when he got his discharge.

"This is regional headquarters we have here in our village," said Ba Hu quietly. "From the looks of things, all the villages to the north are filled with troops of the Fourth and Sixth Regiments."

Yonggong crinkled his eyes joyfully. "There's still no sign of the enemy from Suide. Maybe we're going to wipe out the ones in Zhenchuan first."

Defu advised them to calm down, that our leaders certainly had a plan. He set his bowl on the table and wiped his mouth with the palm of his hand. Then he told them to come along with him to the grain station to prepare to issue supplies.

The troops stationed in and around Shajia-dian kept sending men through the intermittent drizzle to draw grain. While the tired troops slept all afternoon, Carpenter and the girls took wheat kernels from the quartermaster and distributed them among the local households to be converted into dry rations for the men. At the station Defu and the others continued issuing grain until dusk, when the porters stopped coming. Yonggong calculated that they had already distributed about 18 piculs, and that aside from the hundred piculs of millet and wheat they were reserving for the Field Army, there were less than ten piculs left.

"Good!" said Defu with satisfaction. He thought of the instructions Comrade Ge had given for the disposal of the remaining supplies.

According to peasant porters working with the troops, Hu Zongnan's 36th Division had entered Zhenchuan at about noon. The enemy had set up a line of outposts running to the river flats, and not a peasant was to be seen anywhere along the slope.

Defu organized the villagers to help issue the hundred piculs of grain during the night. Acting on Commissioner Ge's recommendation to learn from the experience in Zhenchuan, Defu decided to weigh the grain instead of measuring it for the sake of speed when the Field Army would come. Two scales from the fodder section, which had finished issuing all its supplies, were brought over to the grain section. Several lanterns were borrowed, wicks prepared and the lanterns filled with oil, then hung inside the grain cave and at its entrance. Lanying and Yinfeng offered to help, but Defu told them to work with Carpenter looking after the troops. Then Defu conferred with Shang. They agreed that they needn't wait for the district Party secretary to return, but that they should immediately divide all the men into two teams: Defu, Yonggong and Ba Hu should continue working together, and handle the millet; Shang, Old Zhen and Carpenter should distribute the wheat. Old Wang would look after the oil

lamps, adding oil and trimming wicks. The division of labor settled, all that remained was to wait for the civilian grain porters....

Around supper time, Party secretary Jin arrived. Between perspiring and having been caught in the rain, his hair was soaking wet. In his hurry, he had forgotten to bring a straw hat. The men were delighted to see him back.

“The Wuzhuang people relayed Commissioner Ge’s message to me very late,” he said. “I was afraid I’d hold you up. Have you prepared everything?”

Shang and Defu explained what they had done.

“Fine!” Jin was pleased. He removed his homespun blue cloth knapsack. “I’ve got some news for you. The enemy who occupied Suide yesterday are not moving towards Mizhi and Zhenchuan along the highway.”

Startled, his listeners stared. “Where are they heading for?”

“Dong Zhao’s First Division is holding Suide. The remaining live and a half brigades under Liu Gan are all rushing towards the banks of the Yellow River.”

The riddle was solved at last. “Aiya!” Defu cried, “you see how great Chairman Mao’s plan is! He’s lured a big section of the enemy over to the east so that our Field Army will have a clear field against Hu Zongnan’s 36th Division in the west! Isn’t that right, Secretary Jin?”

“Right! That’s exactly the reason he pretended to be going to the Yellow River!” Jin replied cheerfully. Young Defu’s clear-sightedness surprised him.

The men told Jin of the stories circulating about Chairman Mao leaving the previous day, and how worried they had been. Jin laughed.

“We’re always shouting, ‘Protect Chairman Mao, protect the Party Central Committee.’ They’re staying right here with us in northern Shaanxi. They don’t need the Field Army to protect them; in fact they’re co-operating with it! Our job right now is to help our Field Army to wipe out Hu Zongnan’s 36th Division, no matter what the difficulties!”

“Good!” Every man’s confidence had increased a hundredfold. They were ready to work right through the night distributing grain as soon as the civilian porters arrived.

It was dark by the time the secretary started having a bite to eat. All day there had been black tumbled clouds overhead, with occasional showers in the afternoon. Now the rain began falling in a tremendous downpour....

Rainstorm

In the pitch black night, heavy rain fell on the mountain ridges and in the valleys. Water poured in a steady stream from the eaves of the cave homes; the courtyards turned into little lakes; the yellow earth mountain roads of northern Shaanxi became quite impassable. Old Zhen, in traversing even the short path from the co-operative to the district office, slipped and skidded several times.

By about 10 p.m., the rain still hadn't let up. Jin and Defu sat on the high threshold of the district office, talking as they watched the endlessly descending sheets of water. The light of an oil lamp on a table behind them illuminated the forms of Yonggong, Ba Hu, Carpenter and Old Zhen, sleeping with their clothes on. It didn't seem likely that the grain porters would come in

such a storm, and Jin had told the cadres to get some rest while they waited. Although the enemy occupied Zhenchuan, because our Fourth and Sixth Regiments were nearby and the headquarters was stationed right in the village, the men slept more soundly than they had for several days.

Jin and Defu discussed the grain station. Actually, work there had virtually halted since the fourteenth; everyone was preparing for the coming battle. Jin spoke of the military situation. He completely approved of Defu having ordered Yonggong and Ba Hu to move their women and children out of Shajiadian. Jin said that this battle probably would be a very big one; that after the grain station was wound up, there would be new tasks in support of the front.

“At Cedar Rise, I heard that the enemy is boasting this time they’re going to finish us off in northern Shaanxi. Hu Zongnan has only three strong divisions. The First is holding Suide, in the south; the 36th is occupying Zhenchuan to the west; the Ninetieth left Suide today to blockade the fording points along the Yellow River. They’re trying to lock us up in a great encirclement. Three of their brigades under Liu Gan bypassed Mizhi and went directly to Jiaxian County in an attempt to catch Chairman Mao and the Central Committee...”

“Aiya, the enemy sure has plenty of crafty schemes!” Defu looked at Jin in astonishment.

“That they do, but they’re going to fall into their own trap.” Jiu set his jaw. “I hear that if we fight well this time, the enemy will collapse. They’ll never be able to stage another attack.”

“Then the 36th Division isn’t the only enemy force we’re preparing to hit?”

“Of course not,” laughed Jin. “Figure it out for yourself—if we wipe out the 36th Division, do you think Liu Gan and Dong Zhao will stand idly by? For that reason when I got ready to come back, vice-head of county Guo instructed me to hold you men ready for other duties after you wound up the grain station. So you won’t be joining district head Zao and his guerillas, nor can Yonggong and the others trot off to be with their families. You have to win them over to this idea, and get ready to cope with new jobs....”

“Just a minute....” Defu rose to his feet and walked over to where the men were sleeping. He saw that Yonggong had covered his middle with an end of the thin quilt. Relieved, Defu returned to his seat on the threshold.

“What are you worried about?” Jin asked. “I’m going to tell everyone anyhow after we close down the grain station.”

“I wasn’t afraid of them hearing,” Defu explained. “I wanted to make sure Yonggong was covered. His stomach is bad and the weather is rotten. It’d be a nuisance if his

stomach started bothering him at a time like this. You were saying...?"

It was obvious that Comrade Jin's words had increased Defu's awareness of this campaign's importance. Like all Party leaders, Jin, of course, was delighted to see a comrade under his leadership devoting all his attention to his work. He patted Defu's thick, strong shoulder.

"Do you think when the going gets rough they'll be able to stick with you on the job?" he asked affectionately.

Defu considered for a moment. "I think so," he said. "There's no question about Ba Hu. Carpenter is very progressive too, and he's got guts. Yonggong will be all right if he doesn't get sick. He's a Party member, and now that his wife and children are safe, there shouldn't be any problems. There's only Old Zhen; he's pretty old. I'm afraid he won't be able to keep up with us. Aren't there some things in the co-op that have to be moved north? I think we ought to ask him to deliver them after we finish at the grain station."

"All right," Jin consented. "You make sure to win them over and everything will work out."

He went on to say that according to vice-head of county Guo's calculations, as soon as we struck at the 36th in the west, the large body of the enemy in the east would turn this way. Guo figured that any place along the road from Wulongbu to Zhenchuan might turn into a battleground. Therefore

Jin wanted Defu to be fully prepared and lead the others in supporting our fighting forces. This, he said, was what the regional Party committee meant in its directive when it referred to a time of testing the government personnel and people of the Suide Region.

“Let me tell you something,” said Jin, and he proceeded to relate an account he had heard from a group of grain porters of how wounded soldiers were transported across the Yellow River from a rear line hospital in Wulongbu. “Most of the strong young men in that section were serving away from home as grain porters. But when the call for help went out, in every village along the highway to the fording point, every available man, woman and child from fourteen to forty volunteered. They moved those soldiers from village to village. Even housewives carried stretchers. Some of the stronger men carried the wounded on their backs. The people made up a slogan: Don’t leave one wounded soldier on the west side of the river...”

Defu listened, entranced. “Those government men there really did a wonderful job!”

He told Jin of the courageous civilian porters from the Yulin front proceeding to Zhenchuan to pick up grain, how they had disregarded the enemy lobbing mortar shells at them from across the Wuding River.

"Yes," said Jin. "That's just the spirit we need here to help our army fight!"

"We'll give everything we've got," Defu said confidently. "We're not going to fall behind anybody."

It was still raining very heavily; the earth and the sky were black. The storm showed no sign of abating. Jin shook his head anxiously.

"Tough," he mumbled. "How can our troops get into position tonight? This rain came at the worst possible time..."

"I wonder where Chairman Mao is right now," Defu said with deep concern. He watched the torrents cascading from the sky.

"Chairman Mao..." Jin turned and looked at Defu. The secretary had heard about the fearlessness of Chairman Mao when the three enemy brigades were not far behind him, how he had calmly and openly traveled in broad daylight. Jin was unwilling to tell this to Defu for fear of worrying him. When Jin had left Cedar Rise a comrade from Wulongbu said that Chairman Mao had turned north from that city shortly after noon. The civilian grain porters who crowded the streets all had seen him, and they were anxious about his safety.

But Jin only answered, "We don't have to worry about Chairman Mao. He acts according to his plans. I think we two ought to get some sleep. The porters won't be able to reach here tonight."

"You turn in first. I want to wait a little longer and see when this rain finally stops." Defu couldn't get the grain porters out of his mind.

"Go to sleep." Jin got up and pulled Defu by the hand. "It's such a big rain that even if it stops the mountain roads will be too slippery for travel. There's no use staying up for nothing. We've got hard work ahead tomorrow."

They both retired. The rain continued to pour....

The lamps of Shajiadian gradually went out. Only the paper windows of the caves occupied by the headquarters section in the big courtyard next to the grain station continued to show light. As villagers living in that compound said later on, in one of the caves they heard something like a bird twittering all the time and an occasional clacking noise. This, of course, was the radio station that headquarters had set up, keeping constant contact with higher and lower command units. On the narrow strip of mountainous country between the Wuding and Yellow Rivers, both sides had concentrated tens of thousands of men. The quiet of this rainy night was only the brewing of still more activity to come.

The rain slackened in the middle of the night, then stopped completely towards dawn. Defu was the first one up in the district office. He was awakened by the sound of people walking and talking in the street.

Perhaps it was because he had never shouldered as heavy a responsibility as the grain station before, perhaps he had been stimulated by Jin's description of the coming developments; in any event, Defu had slept poorly. He had slept very little the past two nights. His eyelids seemed glued together; he slept fitfully and woke suddenly. He knew when the rain had lessened; he knew when it stopped. As soon as people began to stir in the village, he could sleep no longer. What time it was, he had no idea. He only knew the cocks hadn't crowed yet. He got out of bed and lit the lamp....

Someone pounded on the gate and shouted, "Is this the district government office?" "Yes, right here!" Defu ran barefooted to open the gate. He thought to himself—"those civilian grain porters must have had a hard time...."

But when he let the caller in, he saw a young comrade carrying a flashlight, with a Mauser pistol strapped to his side. Since the young man wore a gray uniform, he couldn't be leading porters for the Field Army, which wore brown. From the fact that the comrade's uniform was quite dry, Defu concluded that he must be with the troops which spent the night in Shajiadian.

"Who's in charge of the district?"

"I'm the district Party secretary." Awakened by the noise, Jin stood on the threshold of the cave. "What's up?"

The other men in the cave had also arisen. They too assumed that the porters had come for the grain, and they all came running out. The young comrade turned his flashlight on the men at the doorway, then walked over to Comrade Jin.

“My commander would like to talk to you.”

“Good,” said Jin. “Wait till I get my hat.” He went back into the cave.

Standing in his bare feet beside the comrade, Defu asked what the district secretary was wanted for. The other men gathered round to listen.

“You civilians shouldn’t be asking so many questions,” the young soldier replied with a wave of his hand.

“We’re all government personnel here,” Shang explained. “We work in the grain station....”

But just then Jin came out, and the soldier went off with him. The men followed as far as the compound gate. Lamps were glowing in many of the cave homes along the ravine and a plume of white smoke rose from the cave where the troops had set up their kitchen. Food was being prepared for them.

“They’re getting ready to move,” said Ba Hu. He could tell this from his previous experience in the army.

“Maybe they’re going to attack Zhenchuan,” Yonggong surmised. “The clouds are blowing south. It looks like it’s going to be clear....”

"That's probably it," Carpenter nodded. "If they sent for Secretary Jin, it must be to start some kind of mobilization."

Defu recalled how anxious Secretary Jin had been the night before during the rainstorm, and he didn't dare to be too hopeful.

"I'm only afraid the Field Army couldn't march last night..." he said.

"We'll know the whole story when Secretary Jin comes back," said Shang.

Somewhere a cock crowed, and all the neighboring roosters took up the cry. Nights are short in summer; dawn follows quickly after cock's crow. Where were the Field Army's civilian porters who were supposed to call for the hundred piculs of grain? Defu remembered Commissioner Ge's instruction to distribute the remaining grain among the villages north of the highway if the situation took a turn for the worse. Then another thought came to him—if the Field Army hadn't been able to move, could it be that these regional troops were getting ready for a possible attack by the enemy now in Zhenchuan?

The bugles blew reveille and before their last echoes died away, whistles began to shrill. Lamps were lit throughout the village, flashlights came into play all along the ravine. Two shadowy figures could be seen carrying a lantern and walking up the ravine. The men peered through the dimness.

“Lanying and Yinfeng.” Defu was the first to make them out.

“What are they doing up so early?” Carpenter wondered. “Can they be looking for me? Why, they are! You see, they’re coming this way...”

A moment later, the girls came rushing up the stone-flagged slope to the district office.

“What’s going on?” they asked excitedly. “The troops are going to leave...”

The men surrounded them. “How do you know?” “I heard the comrades living in our compound talking,” replied Yinfeng. “They said the enemy is coming...”

Startled, the men looked at one another. “How can the enemy be so crazy?”

“Did you hear clearly?” Shang asked Yinfeng. “Is the enemy coming? Or is the Field Army coming and the Fourth and Sixth Regiments moving out to make room for it?”

“Tell us how you heard it,” said Defu.

“It’s the enemy that’s coming,” said Yinfeng positively. “I heard someone knocking at our compound gate. When I got up and opened it, a comrade with a rifle came in and showed a sheet of paper to the troops living with us—”

“He was passing around the order,” Ba Hu interrupted.

“Right,” said Yinfeng. “After they read it, he left. I went back to our cave, and as I was going in, I heard the men talking in the next cave. One com-

rade said, 'Hey! That 36th Division is pretty fast. So now they're going to dash out here?' Another comrade said, 'They know our outfit is no match for them!...'”

“Doesn't that mean our troops are going to leave?” asked Lanying.

There was no doubt about it. The girls were right. But why was the enemy in such a hurry to come to Shajiadian? The first thing the men thought of was the grain station. They guessed that after occupying Zhenchuan and finding it empty, the enemy might have decided to come after the grain in Shajiadian. The civilian grain porters hadn't arrived in time because of last night's rains. The men were very worried. Yin-feng and Lanying said that was just the reason they had come to report the news....

Yonggong turned anxiously to Shang. “Can't these regiments hold out?” Yonggong always relied completely on the military forces for everything.

“How can local units stand up against the enemy's major strength?” replied Shang.

“Ai!” Yonggong sighed disappointedly. “If they could only hold out for a little while until the civilian porters picked up our grain, and then left, that would be fine.” Suddenly he remembered what Defu had said, and asked him, “Didn't you say the local units stayed in Zhenchuan yesterday until the porters had cleared out all the grain?”

“Maybe that’s what they called Secretary Jin to talk about,” said Carpenter. “What do you think, Defu?”

Everyone looked at Defu, standing in his bare feet like a stone pillar. Defu finally grasped the full meaning of the words Jin had spoken to him the night before—there would be plenty of difficulties even before the 36th Division was wiped out.

“Let’s wait until Secretary Jin comes back and tells us the set-up. Then we can talk some more.” Defu was already prepared for any eventuality. He spoke calmly and slowly. “I think the regiments probably won’t protect us. They covered the porters taking grain out of Zhenchuan because the city was separated from the enemy by the Wuding River. But from Zhenchuan to here is a flat open stretch. Unless our Field Army can get here, the Fourth and Sixth Regiments won’t be able to stand up against the 36th...”

“Maybe only the headquarters section is moving out first, and leaving the regiments to cover us,” hazarded Ba Hu.

Old Zhen had been listening carefully. He heaved a deep sigh. “Right now the important thing is how soon the civilian grain porters can arrive!” he said.

Defu urged the men not to lose their heads. “At any rate, I figure the enemy won’t dare to set out until daylight,” he said. “The earliest they could

get here would be nine or ten in the morning. If only the porters come, even if the regiments pull out, we can issue grain just like they did in Zhenchuan until the enemy gets here. The rain puts us in this pickle; but there's no use talking about that."

He related the story Secretary Jin had told him of how wounded soldiers were moved from the Wulongbu hospital.

"You see how the government men and people over there solved problems!" Then he asked, "Do we have more trouble than civilians working at the front? They have no day and no night. They eat one meal and miss the next. We few cadres run a village grain station. What does a little trouble like ours amount to?"

Defu turned to Yonggong and Carpenter. "Don't always be expecting the best and you won't get flustered when trouble comes. When the local units leave we're not going to drop the grain station and run after them, are we?"

"Of course not!"

Carpenter said he would stick to the end, no matter how difficult or dangerous things became; he was only guessing whether the regiments would protect them, he wasn't afraid. "I'm no model," he told Defu, "but you are. This time I'm going to try to be like you!"

"I'm only worried that we may lose the grain," Yonggong explained.

"It's up to us to do our best," said Defu. "As long as we do what's right by Chairman Mao and the people, even if we do lose the grain we can still hold our heads up. Secretary Jin will be back pretty soon. No matter what the situation is, not one of us must show any panic. Don't make him lose faith in us. What do you say?"

"Right!" chorused the others. Old Zhen's voice was among the rest.

"We can't ask an old man like you to keep up with us," Defu said courteously. "Secretary Jin and I were talking about you last night. You ought to move the things in our co-op away."

"No," Old Zhen said firmly. "I tied up the things that have to be moved last night. Let Zhang take them away. I'll stay here and tend to concealing the rest. Then I can help you."

"All right," assented Defu. "Clerk Shang, I think we ought to get a meal going. We won't have much time to eat once the porters get here."

Shang and Old Wang had been saying nothing all this time. They had been standing off to one side, with their eyes fixed on the road along which Jin would return.

"Noodles would be quickest," Shang said to Old Wang. "Go back and get the fire started."

Deeply stirred by all they had heard, Lanying and Yinfeng volunteered, "We'll help Old Wang with the cooking."

“Secretary Jin is coming!” announced Shang. Everyone looked. Jin was striding rapidly up the stone-flagged walk.

In times of battle, the situation fluctuates rapidly and often. After the bugles sounded mess call, and the streets of Shajiadian were full of bustling soldiers, the men all crowded into the caves that housed the district government to hear the report of the district Party secretary.

“The regional regiment headquarters section has just received a message,” Jin was saying. “A part of the enemy 36th Division is advancing east from Zhenchuan towards Wulongbu, to tie in with Liu Gan’s brigades moving north from Suide. Our Field Army couldn’t set out last night because of the big rain. The Fourth and Sixth Regiments can’t stand up against the 36th Division, and they’ve been ordered to leave Shajiadian, because it’s on the main highway to Wulongbu and right in the enemy’s line of march. The porters who were supposed to call for the hundred piculs of grain for the Field Army were held up by the rain too. They’re now in Wuzhuang District, fifty li north of here. Even if they rushed to Shajiadian, they couldn’t get the grain out in time. Commissioner Ge has sent me a telegram through the headquarters section of the regional regiments, saying that the civilian grain porters aren’t coming...”

“Aiya!” cried several of the men. “What’s going to happen to our grain?”

“Stop your sighing,” said Defu. “Let Secretary Jin finish!”

Jin continued. “Commissioner Ge has ordered us to mobilize all the people north of the Zhenchuan-Wulongbu Highway to come and draw the grain, and distribute it for safekeeping among themselves. We should give out as much grain as possible. The telegram says that if by nightfall the enemy doesn’t occupy Shajiadian, and if they haven’t destroyed the grain, or if they haven’t destroyed it all, we should keep on giving it out. At the same time, we should send someone to Cedar Rise to report, so that, if necessary, porters can be sent from there. The commander of the regional regiments and the political commissar say our grain station men will have a hard time, but they should be bold. Don’t run too far away when the enemy comes. Once they’ve passed, come back and see what they’ve done to the grain.”

Turning to Defu, Jin said, “You remember what I talked to you about last night. Now the time has come for us to be tested. What do you think? Do you believe you can carry out your job?”

“What about it?” Defu asked the men. “Do you still mean what you said just now?”

“Of course we mean it!” they responded.

Pleased, Jin asked Defu, “So you’ve talked to them about this?”

Defu nodded. Pointing at Lanying and Yin-feng, he said, "They told us the troops were leaving, and we all talked it over. You'd better get started with the mobilization work!"

"That's right," Jin agreed. He directed Shang to go to Fifth Xiang and begin mobilizing, Carpenter to go to the xiang government in Gongjia Gully and tell the xiang leader and the branch Party secretary that one should handle Fourth Xiang and the other Sixth Xiang, after which Carpenter should return to help at the grain station. Old Zhen couldn't move very fast because of his age; Jin sent him to help the government personnel in a nearby village with the mobilization. Jin said he need not return, then ordered: "Everyone set out at once!"

"Things have to be cleaned up in the district office—" Shang began.

"You don't have to bother about that," said Jin. "Defu, Yonggong and Ba Hu can help me do that before the grain porters come. I'll stay till the last possible minute, then I and Old Wang will take our documents over to the Fifth Xiang government. We'll have our district office there temporarily. If anything comes up, you can get in touch with me there..."

Shang, Old Zhen and Carpenter departed. Lanying and Yin-feng, after rolling up their sleeves and washing their hands, went to help Old Wang prepare breakfast. Jin remembered he had to get

in touch with Zao, and told Defu and Yonggong to start packing up the things in the district office, while he got off a letter to rush to Second Xiang.

Everyone was plunged into such intense activity that the second call of the cocks went unnoticed. The sky was becoming lighter all the time. The bugles of the troops sounded assembly, and the militiamen poured into the great gorge. Ba Hu, who had been out finding a messenger for Jin's letter, returned and said the Fourth and Sixth Regiments had come through the gorge, then left the main road and headed north.

The Leaders

Although all preparations had been made beforehand, the peasants were very uneasy when the troops left. Some of the families in Shajiadian cooked breakfast before dawn, but had no time to eat it; others didn't even bother to cook. Everyone was busy sorting over the articles they still hadn't concealed. People who ordinarily didn't consider their possessions particularly numerous, now suddenly seemed to find themselves swamped with worldly goods—bedding and clothing and utensils. Many hated to abandon the odds and ends useful in daily life; even mulberry twig baskets were not considered expendable. A few even thought it necessary to bury their bellows and cheap earthenware cauldrons. Returning from Second Xiang, Carpenter began shouting as soon as he reached the ravine—

women and children should get started sooner because they couldn't travel quickly. He said that the peasants from two of the neighboring villages had left at dawn, right after the troops; the people of Gongjia Gully had gone long ago too. But the inhabitants of Shajiadian were watching Secretary Jin. They said that only when he departed would they take their bundles of clothes and bags of dry rations and hide out in the cliff caves; or perhaps they would drive their oxen, donkeys and sheep north, in the wake of the local units....

At the district office, all was in readiness for departure. Two large bundles had been made of the official documents; charts indicating the disposition of personnel, population, land holdings, labor power, and animal power, as well as the pictures of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Chairman Mao and Commander-in-Chief Zhu De were included too. Defu, with Yonggong and Ba Hu, had carried tables, benches, and the personal effects of the district men to nearby homes for concealment in their underground cellars. As Carpenter entered, the men were eating the food Lanying and Yinfeng had helped Old Wang to prepare.

Carpenter compared the situation in Shajiadian with what he had just seen in other villages, and said, "Secretary Jin, sooner or later you'll have to leave. I think you ought to go right after breakfast. The villagers won't go until you do."

“No! I’m waiting till the peasants from north of the highway come, and then I’ll help you give out the grain. When the enemy gets close, we’ll leave together. You’d better have something to eat.” Bowl in hand, Jin addressed the girls, “You two tell the people not to wait for me, then hurry back and eat so that you can set out with them quickly.”

Lanying and Yinfeng clapped the flour from their hands and prepared to depart, but Defu asked them to wait a moment.

“Secretary Jin,” he said, “I know you want to stay here to give us courage. You don’t have to! We’ll do whatever has to be done, after you go. I’ll send Carpenter with a report to you tonight. In the first place, it’s more important for you to take the documents away than to help with the grain. In the second place, if you don’t leave, many of the people will think it’s not time for them to go either.” He turned to Yonggong and Ba Hu. “What do you think?”

“That’s right,” they replied. Both of them were perspiring from the hot noodles they had eaten. “As you pass through the villages, tell them to hurry and pick up our grain,” they urged Jin.

“Then you girls better have a bite to eat and leave,” said Defu.

Lanying and Yinfeng looked at Jin. “What shall we do?”

"You two can go." Jin was still determined. "Old Wang, take the documents and go first. I'll leave with the others later."

Carpenter had just filled his bowl with noodles.

Now he too joined the argument. "Secretary Jin, why be like that? What Defu says is right. It's all the same to us men whether you stay or go. But it makes a big difference to the women and children. If they wait too long and can't get away in time, things might be pretty bad."

"Of course!" Yinfeng and Lanying chimed in. "They'll all go as soon as they see you leave...."

"Tell them I'm not leaving until the enemy approaches the village! That being the case, I think you two needn't come back here to eat after you've spoken to them. Just take off. They'll leave too when they see you going. Why should they wait for me? All right, all right! Hurry, now!" Jin, chopsticks in hand, poked the girls' shoulders to hasten them along. His resolution and calm were unshakable.

Defu understood the secretary's motive: Jin was the local Party leader. He was asking personnel of this village to perform a difficult and dangerous task. He had to stand by them firmly during the first tense stage. Then, when trouble or danger arose in the future, thinking of their leader would encourage their determination.

Since the men couldn't change Jin's mind, they dropped the subject. Defu had no alternative but

to tell the girls to leave at once. Old Wang felt badly that the girls didn't have time for even a bite, after they had worked so hard helping him prepare the meal. They wouldn't starve, said the girls; they had some dry rations.

"Where will you men hide out?" Lanying asked Defu.

He looked from Yonggong to Ba Hu to Carpenter, then offered tentatively, "I think the hills northwest of here would be best. From there we can keep in touch with our people north of the highway and still see what's going on in the village. We don't have any dry rations, but there are a couple of families in a hamlet up there, so food and drink shouldn't be any problem. How does that sound?"

"Good!" said Carpenter, his mouth full of noodles. "There are plenty of little paths in the hills. We can work our way safely through all those small hamlets to the government offices either in Fifth Xiang or in Fourth Xiang."

"Suppose the enemy comes straight across the hills?" Yonggong demanded doubtfully.

"Don't be scared," said Ba Hu. "Just stick with us and everything will be alright. If they come in through the hills, we'll work our way north; then, after they've gone, we'll work our way back."

"That's fine." Jin was well satisfied with the ex-soldier's confident air. "Let's do it this way then—be fairly mobile; keep in close touch with

us. What's the matter?" This last was to Lanying and Yinfeng, who were still standing by, listening. "Why haven't you gone yet?"

"Let us hide out in the hills too," Lanying suggested. "Why should we be stuck in the cliff caves with the old folks, babies and the women? We won't be able to make a move. If we go with these men, maybe we can help them."

This proposal had been in Yinfeng's mind for some time, but she was afraid Defu wouldn't approve. She glanced at his serious face, then said to Lanying: "If we go, others will want to go too, for sure. It'll hold the men back if there are too many women along..."

Although she addressed her words to Lanying, everyone knew she was actually talking to Defu, and all looked towards him. Because of his relationship with Yinfeng, Defu didn't dare to express himself; instead, he, in turn, looked at Jin. The secretary asked the girls how many women would probably want to go along with them? The girls figured—of the women who were young, without infants, and who were particularly energetic, there were about seven or eight.

Lanying went a step further. "We may not stay with the men. If the Field Army comes down and fights here, we may have other work to do, like taking care of the wounded. Anything would be better than tucking us away in those cliff caves."

“Very good,” said Jin. “But you must operate the same as you did last time when the wounded came through Shajiadian—get everyone to work together; don’t go running around by yourselves. You mustn’t separate yourselves from the people.” Recalling the situation between Yinfeng and Defu, the secretary asked her, “Will your parents let you go off with the men?”

Yinfeng reddened slightly. “It’s all right. They’re too busy to try to control me at a time like this. Anyhow, there’s no guarantee that if I go to the cliff caves....”

The others couldn’t help laughing.

“They are too busy,” Lanying agreed. “We came here before dawn, and now the sun is already up, but they still haven’t called her. Well then, Defu, after we talk to the villagers, we’ll go into the hills!”

“Bring some dry rations for us too,” smiled Defu. He was very glad that the girls were going along.

The girls promptly departed. Carpenter, Ba Hu and Old Wang had high praise for their spirit. With many of the village government men and more useful peasants away at the front, the work Lanying and Yinfeng were doing was proving extremely valuable. Formerly, Yonggong had regarded the enthusiasm of Yinfeng at her job with reservations. Suspecting that it was only because she wanted to be near Defu, he seldom

had a good word to say about her. Now, for the first time he trusted her and joined in the compliments of the others.

Defu only laughed softly, and said, "Let's stop the chatter, and eat. They'll be coming for the grain soon..."

Peasants arrived from the nearest village after the men finished their meal, but before the usual breakfast hour. There were about fifty of them, young and old, carrying sacks and rope. Headed by their administration clerks, they came noisily trooping up the ravine. Just at this time, word came that the enemy had set out from Zhenchuan and had entered the big gorge. The Shajiadian villagers, informed by Lanying and Yinfeng that the district Party secretary was remaining with the grain station men, began to move out. Leading children, carrying bundles, driving oxen, pulling donkeys, group after group left the village.

Jin sent Carpenter to stand lookout on the hill south of Shajiadian, and ordered Defu to go with Yonggong and Ba Hu to issue grain at the station. After a last-minute checkup of the district office with Old Wang, Jin turned the official documents over to the old man and directed him to deliver them to Shang at the district headquarters in Fifth Xiang, then wait there. Wang departed and Jin headed for the grain station. On the slope he saw an old woman of about sixty carrying a cotton-padded vest in one hand and a bulging sack in

the other. She was teetering rapidly up the slope ahead of him. Quickening his stride, Jin caught up with her.

“Old lady,” he said courteously, “everyone else has gone to hide in the cliff caves. What are you doing here?”

The old woman was panting from her climb. “I’m Shi Yonggong’s mother, and I’m bringing him some dry rations and this vest. He has a bad stomach. I’m afraid that the chill in the early morning and late evening...” She continued her quick steps as she talked.

“Take my advice, old lady, and leave right away. Give your packages to me. I’ll deliver them for you.”

“There are a few things I want to tell him...”

“He’s got no time to talk to you.” Jin walked ahead of her up the path. Leaning forward as they mounted the incline, he explained, “With all these people coming for grain, you’ll never be able to squeeze your way through the crowd. You tell me, then I’ll speak to him. You’d better hurry and hide. The enemy will be here soon. Don’t you know that?”

“I’m not afraid.” The old lady stopped listening and concentrated on climbing.

Peasants laden with sacks of grain began descending from the station, while another large group, carrying rope and white sacks, came up from the ravine. Jin’s inquiry revealed that they

were from a village in Fourth Xiang. Streams of people, moving in opposite directions, forced the old lady against the wall of one of the compounds lining the narrow path. A few recognized her as Yonggong's mother and urged her to take refuge, but she paid no heed. It occurred to Jin that she probably wanted to tell her son where she had concealed some valuables, or maybe she was even carrying it in the little bag. Making no further effort to convince her, he hurried on ahead.

The courtyard of the grain station was full of people. Some were tying filled sacks; others were just entering the station; still more were pouring through the compound gate. Jin stepped up on the high threshold and shouted to those in the rear to wait outside the compound; crowding would only slow everyone down.

The grain station cave consisted of a line of three large rooms connected by doors. In the middle room, Defu and Ba Hu, perspiring freely, were weighing sacks, while Yonggong recorded the name of each porter and the amount of grain he had drawn. Peasants who had filled their sacks from the bins in the side rooms crowded into the center room, waiting their turn at the scale. Only one scale was being used; another was lying idle off to one side. Jin surveyed the scene, then addressed Yonggong, "Let me keep the books. Your mother is outside looking for you. Go out

and speak to her and hurry back. Then we'll work two scales!"

Intoning figures and writing at the same time, Yonggong was shocked to a halt by Jin's words. "Aiya! Hasn't she left yet?" He hurriedly turned his place over to the secretary and pushed his way out through the crowd.

Defu clucked his tongue regretfully: "Why couldn't the old lady have come earlier, instead of waiting till the busiest moment?"

"Yonggong was always worrying too much about his family," grumbled Ba Hu as he manipulated the scale. He was still tied to his mother's apron strings... "What's so important that she has to tell him at a time like this?"

"Forget it," said Defu. He peered at the scale and read off the measurements.

Jin could write much faster than Yonggong. He told the peasants to work one scale themselves and he would record the readings from both scales at the same time; they would try to distribute the grain quickly, so that not one person who came to Shajiadian would have to leave empty-handed. This announcement was greeted with shouts of approval. The way Jin had remained and threw himself into the work drew many respectful glances, and made Defu and Ba Hu increase their efforts.

One man, well over fifty, dragged to the scale a sack so filled with grain that he couldn't lift it onto the weighing hook. It weighed in at 130 lbs.

"You're no youngster," Defu said to him. "That sack's too heavy for you. It'll drag you to the ground before you're halfway home. If the enemy comes along, you'll have to drop it and run. Spill some of it back and we'll weigh it again."

The man looked again at Jin, working at full speed. "Write it down!" he insisted stubbornly. "If I fall, I'll get up again. I'm going to carry this sack home!" He set his jaw, and staggered out with the bag in his arms, urging his comrades to carry as much as they could manage....

The man's spirit was fine, Jin said to the peasants, but they shouldn't try to tote too much because the enemy might be coming very soon. "If you see that he's having trouble on the road, help him out a little."

"Don't worry," they replied. "We won't lose him. Let's get on with the weighing."

With two scales in operation and Jin keeping the records, the peasants from the first village quickly completed their drawing. As the men from Fourth Xiang were taking their turn, Yong-gong finally returned. He was holding the cotton-padded vest and the bag of dry rations. The sight of the district Party secretary busily making entries of the readings from two scales simultaneously brought a flush of embarrassment to

Yonggong's face. Ba Hu shot a glance at the things in Yonggong's hands.

"What did she have to say that took so long?"

"What else!" said Yonggong dejectedly. "She was afraid that if I caught a chill my stomach would act up. She really..."

"Don't talk," interrupted Defu, sliding the weight along a scale. "Put your things down and pitch in!" Peasants from two more villages arrived when the drawing by the men from the second village was half completed. In the vicinity of the grain station, the waiting crowds were greater and more dense than on market day.

Suddenly someone shouted, "Coming this way, coming this way!" and people began to run in all directions.

The peasants inside the cave also became upset, thinking the enemy troops were coming, and got ready to flee too. How could they have gotten here so fast?

Jin wondered. Then there was a droning sound, growing in volume. It was a plane "coming this way..." "Don't be afraid!" called the secretary. "Who'll go outside and organize those people? Let them take shelter under the trees and beside the walls, and come for their grain in small groups."

"I'll do it!" said Ba Hu.

"Right," Defu consented. Then he said to the peasants in the cave, "Suppose everyone helps weigh the grain he draws, how will that be?"

“Good!” Several men waiting their turn came forward and took up the scales.

There was a note of menace in the droning of the plane as it circled above Shajiadian. Most of the village’s inhabitants were already gone, and Ba Hu directed the men who had come for the grain to places of relative safety beneath the trees, alongside walls and in the gateways of deserted compounds. Then the plane flew away and the men gradually emerged again and came towards the grain station. Standing on a mound wall outside the gate, Ba Hu shouted for them not to come all at once. He conferred with the administration clerks of the different villages, and arranged that the men should come a batch at a time, to avoid any panic in case the plane returned. The grain continued to be parceled out in this way—fast but orderly.

About a half hour later, when only a handful of peasants from the last two villages had not yet drawn their grain, Carpenter came tearing in from his post on the hilltop.

“The enemy is at Gongjia Gully! They’re only five li from here!”

“Are they coming across the hills or through the gorge?” asked Jin.

“The whole lot of them are coming through the gorge,” Carpenter panted. “The gorge is filled with khaki. A small group in front is moving very fast!” “That’s their advance guard!” said Ba Hu.

"We can't finish!" Jin exclaimed. "Put things in order, quick!"

Men with sacks which hadn't been weighed dumped back their contents and ran out with empty bags. While Carpenter and Ba Hu swept up the grain littering the floor, Jin and Defu closed and sealed the two side storerooms, then all four men boarded up the windows of the cave. Yonggong hastily made a package of the record books. Defu locked the door and took the books from Yonggong. All hurried down into the ravine. They were the last to leave the village.

Halfway through the ravine, they suddenly heard a voice urging, "Faster, faster! The enemy has reached the upper gorge!"

A man over seventy was leaning on his staff, on a mountain path above them. He was a native of the village, with a long white beard that always aroused considerable admiration. Very concerned, Defu and Carpenter hailed him.

"Why haven't you gone into hiding?"

"Never mind about me. Hurry up and run!"

"What's the old man like usually?" Jin asked the men. "Why hasn't he left?"

"He's all right. He's been a poor peasant and hired hand all his life," Defu replied. "One of his sons is in the Fourth Regiment. He probably thinks it would be too hard for him to hide in the cliff caves. Maybe he feels he's so old the enemy won't bother him if he stays in the village."

“Aiya! Run!” shouted Yonggong, and sprinted as fast as his legs would carry him. Far off in the upper gorge the enemy’s advance guard had made its appearance.

But Jin merely lengthened his stride, and the others had to resist any impulse they might have had to race ahead of him. He led them past the rear of a row of houses into the gorge, then across the stream where it made a turn, and through a small gully into the hills.

Soon they stopped and squatted down in a field of high sorghum on the hillside northwest of Shajiadian. Yonggong, looking very embarrassed, was already there waiting for them.

The enemy’s advance guard consisted of one platoon. It marched along the empty little street without stopping, but the men kept peering from left to right, talking as they walked. Then they reached the main highway again and followed it to the northeast. Five pairs of eyes were watching them through the sorghum stalks, staring at their American type service caps, at their shorts—these soldiers of Hu Zongnan just didn’t look like Chinese. Only their leader wore long trousers, but he had an American helmet liner on his head. The advance guard was soon out of sight down the highway.

Equipped with various types of American arms, the enemy’s main body came into Shajiadian. Group after group of men and pack animals

came out of the gorge and marched through the village's narrow street, then, twisting and turning like a great snake, reentered the continuation of the gorge. The rifles, ammunition, knapsacks, bayonets and kettles with which these foreign-looking soldiers were laden clattered in discord with the artillery barrels creaking on the backs of the pack animals. Mounted men followed, some of them wearing dark glasses, gleaming in the sun. Behind these men was a long column of foot soldiers, whose end was nowhere in sight.

Carpenter said in a whisper, "The enemy's not stopping anywhere. Maybe the grain station will be all right today."

"Wait and see what happens when their troops in the rear come up," Jin replied softly. He observed Defu repacking the bundle Yonggong had tied together so hastily. "Don't bother with that. Let those two keep a lookout while we cross to the other side of this ridge and figure out how much grain we just distributed."

Holding the bundle in his arms, Defu instructed Carpenter and Ba Hu to be careful not to attract the attention of the enemy by moving around too much, then he and Yonggong set out with Secretary Jin.

They climbed to the top of the ridge and began their figuring in a dense mulberry grove. Jin read off the figures in a low voice and Yonggong calculated them on the abacus, while Defu squatted

and stared at the latter's flying fingers to check whether he made any mistakes in manipulating the beads. They could hear the enemy tramping through the gorge. Occasionally a plane swept across the sky, and Yonggong automatically raised his head to look.

"Just keep your mind on your abacus," Defu said. "The plane can't see you in a thick grove like this."

The results of their calculations showed that they had disposed of more than 23 piculs; over eighty piculs of grain remained in the station. In other words, one day's provisions for nearly twenty thousand soldiers were still in danger.

Jin sighed. "That's that. I'm afraid Commissioner Ge or vice-head of county Guo may want to get in touch with our district, so I'd better get over to Fifth Xiang. I can tell you this: the Fourth and Sixth Regiments are resting there; don't be afraid. They say that pretty soon the enemy won't ever be able to act so high-handed again. You men stay here and keep an eye on that eighty piculs of grain. Save as much of it as you can...."

Defu tied up the account books. He was deeply impressed by the example the district Party secretary had set for them all that day.

"Just leave it to us! Even if it's only one measure full, we'll save it if we can," Defu promised. "You don't know these mountain paths. Do you want one of us to go with you part of the way?"

“No. There’s no enemy north of the highway. I can’t go wrong if I just keep heading north.” Again Jin raised the question of the grain station, “The commander and the political commissar of the regional regiment both told me this morning—grain is victory; grain is the life of our fighters! I hope you all can stick it out. If possible, I’ll be back tonight or tomorrow morning.” To Yonggong he said, “I notice you’re a little shaky. Can you stay with them to the finish?” Yonggong appeared very ill at ease. “I’ve never been to the front; I have no experience. But my home is here. Where else would I go?”

“That’s wrong!” said Defu. “This isn’t the time to talk about home. What did Secretary Jin just say? We’ll die for that grain if we have to!”

“Yes,” said Jin sternly. “You’re not remaining here to look after your home! What did your mother tell you that took so long?”

Now that a show-down had come, Yonggong’s usual apparent stability and thoroughness proved to be a sham. “It was all because of my stomach trouble!” he stammered awkwardly. “Defu, you know what my mother is like. She even wanted to talk to you, but I forced her to go. That’s what took so much time. You don’t have to worry about me, Secretary Jin. As long as I’m with Defu, I’ll stick to the end.”

“It’s true,” Defu confirmed. “His mother is like that. With all of us together, he’ll be alright.”

Jin was convinced. He reminded them that “Communists are made of special stuff,” and urged them to win the full support of Ba Hu and Carpenter. After telling them what points to pay particular attention to, he departed. They accompanied him a short distance and pointed out the paths he should follow. They watched him until he was out of sight....

Panting heavily, Carpenter came running towards them.

“Something terrible has happened! Stinker Huaizong and more than a hundred of the enemy have moved into the village! They’re grabbing chickens, looting the houses; they’re turning the whole village upside-down! The grain station is finished this time!...”

Eighty Piculs of Grain

People had forgotten all about Stinker Huai-zong in the excitement of the past two days. He dropped completely out of sight after the fifteenth, only to suddenly reappear on the streets of Zhenchuan, like some slimy insect from under a wet rock, when Hu Zongnan's 36th Division occupied the city. When the Eighth Route Army first came to the region in 1937, Stinker was the one who had said, "I'd rather hear Japanese artillery than the sweet words of these Eighth Route men." So you can imagine the glee with which he greeted this day for which he had waited so long. Adding the humiliation he had recently suffered at Shajiadian, it is even easier to imagine his frame of mind when he returned to the village along with a hundred or more of the enemy.

Defu and Yonggong quickly followed Carpenter back to his observation post in the sorghum field. They could see enemy soldiers moving in and out of courtyards ail over the village; many of them had already gathered outside the district office and grain station compound. Wearing his army knapsack, Ba Hu approached the government men. He was purple with fury.

"The enemy is going into the grain station yard," he hissed. "It sounds like they're breaking the door down..."

Defu ground his teeth. "Where's Stinker?"

"He's the one who's leading them in. They're dragging the old man along..."

Because of the walls around it, the men couldn't see what was actually happening in the compound. Was the enemy about to burn those eighty piculs of grain?

Were the soldiers going to remain in the village? Defu cursed himself for being careless and letting Stinker escape that night. The havoc the landlord was now bringing on the village wouldn't have happened otherwise.

"Stinker Huaizong, you son of a bitch," swore Defu bitterly, "after we wipe out the enemy, we'll get you just as sure as you can't grow two heads!"

"They may want to torture the old man to say where we've gone," hazarded Carpenter.

Yonggong was alarmed. "No doubt about it! The old man won't be able to stand rough han-

dling, and I saw him watching you come up the hill. We ought to move back to another peak. That Stinker is pure poison. He'll lead the enemy up here to grab us..."

"You two take the account books, then, and wait for us on that hill back there," said Defu.

"Balls!" Ba Hu exploded. "I can keep watch here alone! Give me another hand grenade. You go too," he said to Defu. "With these grenades I can take care of myself if the enemy comes. I'll give you all cover while you get away!"

Even as he spoke, one group of enemy soldiers began to climb the hill east of Shajiadian, while another group started up the hill west of the village. The situation didn't look good to Defu. In the first place, the enemy would soon be on the same level as the place they were hiding; they could be easily spotted if they had to leave the sorghum field. Secondly, even though the old man was tough, there was no guarantee that he couldn't be tortured into talking.

"We'll all go," said Defu. "It'll be safer if we move back a peak. We're too close to them here. It's dangerous to even speak loudly."

Ba Hu didn't agree. "They can't sprout wings, can they? When I see them coming this way, I'll still have time to get away."

"You listen to me." Defu's only thought was for the eighty piculs of grain. "Our duty right now is to watch the grain station, not to fight. If the

enemy sets fire to the grain station, we'll be able to see it from the hill further back. At that time we can decide what to do. Let's go!"

Yonggong and Carpenter also urged Ba Hu to follow orders. Finally, the four men withdrew through the sorghum field.

When they reached the knoll where they had seen off Secretary Jin a short while before, the village was no longer visible. Even the grain station courtyard was obscured by the sorghum field. They crouched in a patch of corn and watched the enemy columns that had ascended the two hills; one column turned southeast, the other moved towards the southwest. Ba Hu said the enemy was setting up outposts; they had no intention of searching the hills. He still wanted to return to the sorghum field where he could observe the whole village. The depredations of the enemy enraged this maimed veteran. He begged permission to throw just one hand grenade to shake them up a bit. Defu refused. He reminded Ba Hu that "Grain is victory; grain is the life of our fighters."

"If they set fire to the grain, that will be another story. If they don't, we can settle Stinker Huaizong easily enough as soon as they leave, and carry out our orders to rescue the grain!"

Four pairs of eyes bored in the direction of the grain station, but still no smoke arose. Could it be that the enemy had been informed by Stinker, and specially sent the hundred soldiers to seize

the remaining grain? Yet surely Hu Zongnan's 36th Division wasn't crazy enough to let half a company remain here alone overnight?

Slowly, the sun rose to the noon zenith.

Although it was already autumn, it was very hot in the middle of the day. The ground, soaked with the heavy rain of the night before, steamed beneath the merciless sun, adding to the men's discomfort. They had only eaten a few noodles at dawn, and after running around all morning they were absolutely parched. Defu, who hadn't had a good night's sleep in several days, suffered a nose-bleed. The men urged him to go and rest in the hamlet where the girls were staying, and ask them to borrow some green mung beans to make a thirst slaking soup for all to drink. Defu told Yonggong and Carpenter to go; he would remain with Ba Hu.

"After you finish drinking, bring back a jug for us," said Defu. His nose was bleeding profusely.

"Mm," Yonggong looked at Defu's bloodshot eyes. "You've got a fever. If you're not careful, you'll affect your sight." Yonggong was deeply moved by the way Defu was sticking it out in spite of his suffering. Recalling the instructions Secretary Jin had given on his departure, Yonggong said solicitously, "I'll keep watch here with Ba Hu. You go to that mountain hamlet and rest awhile. Cooking in this noonday sun will only make your fever worse...."

"I'm all right," Defu insisted. "Take off with the account books. Tell the girls to put plenty of green mung beans in the soup. They bring down fever."

Yonggong and Carpenter knew how stubborn Defu could be once his mind was made up, so they wasted no more time. Carpenter asked Ba Hu whether they should take his knapsack with them. Keeping his eyes riveted on the movements of the two enemy squads on the south hills, the ex-soldier only shook his head. Yonggong and Carpenter set out.

They were back in less than an hour. Defu saw them first as their heads emerged in the cornfield on the ridge of the hill further back. Strange that they should return so soon. Had something gone wrong? Had another group of the enemy come out of Zhenchuan and cut across the rear hills? Then the heads of two girls appeared to be floating along the tops of the corn tassels. Lanying and Yinfeng—immediately followed by Old Zhen of the co-operative. They had all come. What was going on?

Yonggong and Carpenter were in the lead, and each was carrying a jug.

The girls had prepared the green mung bean soup even before the cadres had arrived in the mountain hamlet. Old Zhen was there too because he had found the road to his destination cut off by enemy troop movements, and he had wound his way to the hamlet by a circuitous route. Every-

one was very upset when not one of the grain station men had arrived by noon. Finally, Yonggong and Carpenter showed up. The inhabitants of the hamlet immediately produced two jugs which the girls filled with green mung bean soup; then the girls, Old Zhen and the men all hurried to join Defu and Ba Hu.

“When Yonggong told them that Stinker Huai-zong had come back to our village, about seven or eight of the women wanted to come with us,” Carpenter was saying, “but Lanying insisted that only she and Yinfeng should return.” As he set down the jugs, the girls had already caught up. Yonggong urged them to crouch down—there were enemy troops on the south hills.

Defu was pleased by the girls’ thoughtfulness in preparing the green mung bean soup, but he criticized them for having deserted the other women.

“Secretary Jin told you two not to go running around by yourselves. What have you come dashing up here for?”

“The women all said that with Stinker bringing soldiers in, there was no telling what damage they’d do to our village,” Lanying replied apologetically. “After you finish your soup, we’ll take the jugs right back.”

“How did you get such a bad nose-bleed?” It made Yinfeng’s heart ache to see Defu in such a condition. She no longer concealed her feel-

ings towards him in the presence of others. She handed him her handkerchief. "Here, take this and wipe your face..."

"Who would have thought Stinker would pull a trick like this?!" Old Zhen drew near, leaning on a staff.

Taking the handkerchief from Yinfeng, Defu said to Old Zhen, "Why didn't you stay in the hamlet? If the enemy decides to come up this hill, an old man like you wouldn't be able to move fast enough."

"Never mind. We're a good distance from the gorge here. I just had to see you. Finish your soup quickly."

Yonggong poured a bowl for Ba Hu. The ex-soldier sat on his knapsack like a sentry on duty, concentrating his full attention on the enemy on the south hills while watching for any signs of smoke from the grain station.

The burning noonday sun poured down on the mountain knoll as the men squatted in the cornfield drinking the green mung bean soup.

The 36th Division was the most powerful of Hu Zongnan's three major forces. During the War of Resistance against Japan, it served as a Kuomintang outpost against the Communists. From its station at Lochuan, it specialized in raiding the liberated areas. Its anti-communist indoctrination was extremely virulent. This division became insufferably arrogant after Hu Zongnan's

attack on Yanan and launched its raids with the utmost savagery. In the past two months alone it had twice ripped through the great forest on the Shaanxi-Gansu border and had made a swing through the desert outside the Great Wall. Now that it had succeeded in relieving Yulin and followed with a crafty occupation of Zhenchuan, its insolence knew no bounds.

Over three thousand men of a brigade of this division had set out from Zhenchuan. They were driving directly on Wulongbu in order to join forces there with other Hu Zongnan troops moving up from the south. Following the main road, the vanguard of the marchers from Zhenchuan had reached Shajiadian at midmorning, and it wasn't until afternoon before they had all passed through. Then, the hundred enemy soldiers whom Stinker Huaizong had induced to stay in the village joined the tail of the long column of men and horses and moved off with it towards the east.

Defu and the others, concealed on the hill north of the gorge, finished their green mung bean soup and made arrangements for the evening meal. Old Zhen and the girls left for the little hamlet from which they had brought the jugs. Defu and the village men crept back to the field of high sorghum and surveyed the scene: all the enemy had already left Shajiadian, no new invaders were coming through the upper gorge. The

only one in sight was the white-bearded old man. From the mouth of the ravine, he was staring up at the hill on which they were hiding. The men emerged from the sorghum and stood at the edge of the steep incline.

"What are you waiting for?" the old man shouted, waving his hand urgently. "Come and see what the enemy has done to our village!"

Defu turned the packet of account books over to Yonggong. He said that Yonggong and Carpenter should remain on the hill, one watching the upper gorge, the other keeping a lookout on the lower. He and Ba Hu would go to the village and question the old man. Ba Hu entrusted his knapsack to Carpenter, then hurried down into the gorge with Defu.

When they reached the village, the old man, leaning on his staff, hobbled out to greet them. He was rubbing his face, one side of which was swollen from enemy blows.

"Bandits! Just bandits!" Shaking his head, the old man said bitterly, "They cleaned out dozens of homes. Cauldrons and bellows, they smashed to bits. They unearthed a few hidden cellars and stole everything that had any value. The rest, they spilled all over the ground. Stinker pointed out to the enemy the homes of five or six Communists and government men. There, they destroyed even the doors and windows...."

“What about the grain station?” asked Defu. “Did they destroy the grain station?”

“They didn’t touch the grain. They only broke open the door to have a look...”

“Why?”

“They said they wanted it for other troops that are coming soon. They told Stinker to find people to guard it...”

Ba Hu clenched his fists. “The cocky bastards!”

“What about Stinker?” Defu was anxious to learn the whole picture. “What did he say? Where has he gone?”

“He scurried up the gorge even before the enemy left. They said that if he takes good care of the grain, they’ll make him head of our district. He almost flopped to the ground and kowtowed, begging them not to leave, to search for you. He said you were in the hills near here. He said he’d be back tonight with men to guard the grain station. It looks to me like the enemy hadn’t expected to find so much grain here. They said they had to go east. They told Stinker to report the situation to Zhenchuan...”

The old man kept shaking his head mournfully. He was worried that Stinker really would come back with a gang before nightfall. In that case the grain would be lost to us. He didn’t say a word about how the enemy had beaten him; he only sighed over how they had wrecked the village.

“How will our people be able to live when they move back? You better go see what the enemy did to your homes!”

“Never mind!” Defu comforted him. “We’ll fix them up again after we’ve wiped out the enemy. The most important thing is that the grain is still here. Old Grandpa, we’re going to the grain station first. We’ll talk some more in a little while.” Turning to Ba Hu, Defu said, “Let’s hurry. Don’t be angry. Just getting angry won’t do any good!”

In the ravine, they found millet and flour scattered everywhere. Torn containers littered the ground. Through the open gates of the compounds that lined the ravine, they could see the bright colors of women’s and children’s clothing and smashed furniture flung in disarray about the courtyards. Ba Hu’s cellar had been discovered by the enemy too. All of the merchandise he and his wife had bought with his army discharge bonus to set up a little business was gone. Only the splintered pieces of his wooden case remained. Ba Hu stood stock-still, trembling with fury. His eyes practically flamed.

“You dirty Stinker Huaizong! The next time I catch you, I’m going to hack you into little pieces!”

“Never mind about your stuff now,” Defu pulled him along by the arm. “Where can he run to after we settle with the enemy? Let’s get to the grain station!” The first thing they saw when they reached their destination was that the lock on the

door had been changed. The broken remains of their original lock were lying near the threshold.

“Hey! Those rats are smart operators!” Ba Hu picked up a big stone and advanced on the new lock.

Defu stopped him. “Leave it alone. If we break this, where will we get another one? Even if we could, the enemy would smash it anyhow when they came back. We can see in through the cracks.”

They peered into the dim recesses of the cave. Everything was still intact. Measuring implements lay in the middle room just as they had left them. The seals on the two side storage rooms were unbroken.

The eighty piculs of grain now had two contending sets of masters.

“If Stinker doesn’t show up with his gang by tonight, the grain is ours again!” said Defu. “Ba Hu, let’s go!” The white-bearded old man met them at the compound gate.

“Why have you come here again?” Defu demanded. “Just look at what the enemy’s done to you! We’ll help you up the hill and send you to rest in the little hamlet. Many of our women are there. They can look after you. You can’t stay in the village. It’ll be bad for you if the enemy finds you here again....”

“No!” The old man shook his head resolutely. The way they had ignored their own homes and cared only about the public grain had made a

great impression on him. His eyes were misty with tears and his throat hoarse as he said, "I won't be a burden to anybody! I'm over seventy. How much longer have I got to live? If the enemy kills me then that will be the end. If they don't, I can watch what Stinker and his gang do and then tell you about it when you come again!" With his sleeve he wiped the tears that rolled down his bruised and swollen cheeks. "You just keep your minds on doing your jobs..."

Defu was so moved he didn't know what to say. Ba Hu looked at the old man's puffed cheeks.

"Why did the enemy hit you?"

"Why?" the old man said angrily. "They asked me when the men in charge of the grain station had left, where had they gone? I pretended to be deaf, said I didn't know. Stinker said to hit me a couple of times and I'd hear all right. They hit me and he hit me, then they asked again. I still didn't know. Stinker told them that I had a son, an old militiaman, who was now in our army. The dog even said that you had purposely left me here to spy on them. He wanted them to shoot me..."

Ba Hu ground his teeth. "Stinker Huaizong is rotten to the marrow of his bones!"

"Why didn't the enemy do what he said?" asked Defu.

"They saw that I'm only a crippled old man. Besides, they were afraid that firing might alarm some of their own soldiers..."

"Come on, then," Defu urged him anxiously. "That Stinker's heart is too black. It would be dangerous for you to stay here. We'll get you to a safe place if we have to carry you."

"No!" The old man was as firm as a rock. "I'm not afraid! The swine said I'm your spy. All right, I'll really spy for you. You'll see. Leave here, quickly!" Nothing they said could convince him. Finally, filled with admiration for the old man, Defu and Ba Hu were forced to leave him behind.

They walked back through the village. Every home had been despoiled by the enemy. Only the big mansion of the landlord who had fled to Yulin remained unmolested. At the mouth of the ravine, Ba Hu suggested that they take another look at Defu's home. Defu refused. It was no use, he said. Besides, Yonggong and Carpenter must be worried about them.

They ascended the hill.

On learning the situation, Yonggong and Carpenter were consumed with hatred over the savagery of Stinker and the enemy soldiers. They could see from the hill that Defu's cave home too had been reduced to a gaping black hole. Defu told them not to be unhappy about the wrecked dwellings; the important thing was to get hold of the grain as soon as it was dark.

All afternoon they remained on the hill watching the upper gorge for signs of enemy troops. By sunset, none had appeared; in fact there hadn't

been the shadow of any person of any kind all along the road. Had Stinker been nabbed by our people on his way to Zhenchuan? Or had he failed in his mission after reaching the city? Regardless of the reason, the enemy hadn't come. Defu dispatched Carpenter to report at Fifth Xiang. He told him to stop and eat first at the mountain hamlet, and ask the girls to bring food for the rest of them.

"Let them bring an extra portion. We can send it down to the old man."

"Why not just give him my share? I'll tell the girls about it and go right on. Secretary Jin must be very anxious to get word from us. I can eat in Fifth Xiang after I see him." So saying, Carpenter set off on his long crane-like legs.

In times of battle, the local government men were so busy they hardly had time to draw a full breath. When Carpenter started out from Shajidian, Secretary Jin had long since left Fifth Xiang.

A short time after Jin had reached the temporary district headquarters, a message had come from vice-head of county Guo, ordering him to go at once to the village of Aijia and call a meeting of the cadres of all districts north of the highway. Since the stretcher teams attached to the Field Army only operated near the frontline, it was necessary to organize additional local teams to continue relaying the wounded from village to village towards the rear. Under the present cir-

cumstances, the importance of this job eclipsed that of saving the grain in Shajiadian.

The fighting was about to start.

After a short stop in the mountain hamlet where the girls were staying, Carpenter descended into the gorge. Before long, he was stopped and questioned by one of our scouts, then taken to the nearest village to prove his identity. Finally, he was permitted to go on. It was already dusk when he reached Fifth Xiang headquarters. The regional militia which had been resting there all day was just pulling out towards the east. He found only Old Wang in the district office, the latter having been directed to remain by Secretary Jin, specifically for the purpose of waiting for him. The two men talked briefly, then Carpenter gulped a few mouthfuls of water and, without stopping to eat, rushed off with Wang to Aijia Village.

Aijia was full of brown-uniformed troops. The Field Army had already arrived. It was pitch dark. In that confusion of noisy milling men, it was impossible to locate anyone. Mules and horses were massed on the river flats in the gorge; village government men were busy leading the troops to temporary billets which the local residents provided by doubling up with their neighbors. After much fruitless inquiry, Carpenter and Old Wang at last managed to get hold of the village administration clerk. Trailed by a whole string of government men, he barely had time to talk. In a few

breathless phrases he told them that Secretary Jin had held his meeting and gone. Jin and men from north of the highway would be moving from village to village; it might not be possible to catch up with them in the course of one night. So far as raising people to carry off grain from Shajiadian was concerned, with the arrival of the Field Army, no village cadre and people from either the Fifth or Sixth Xiang would be available. Secretary Jin had left word that if the grain was still intact Old Wang should report to vice-head of county Guo at Cedar Rise and that Carpenter should go to the two villages near the highway and try to mobilize people himself. The more grain they could dispose of, the better....

There was no help for it. Carpenter and Old Wang separated and went their different ways. Carpenter ran around half the night. He didn't get back to Shajiadian until cock's crow.

It had been a bleak and gloomy night for the plundered village of Shajiadian. Although it was a straight run of only fifteen li from Aijia along the gorge flats, here people's hearts were uneasy, and the village presented a disordered scene. Many people returned from the cliff caves and the mountain hamlet after dark to cook some food for the old women and children staying in the hideouts. When they discovered their stoves smashed beyond repair, the village resounded

with sighs and curses. In addition, seven secret cellars had been unearthed by the enemy.

After eating, Defu, Yonggong and Ba Hu had gone down into the village with Old Zhen and the girls. Old Zhen brought food for the white-bearded old man, while the others helped the families whose cellars had been plundered to set in order what was left. Apparently it was difficult for the enemy to locate cellars hidden in the courtyards or outside the compounds. Defu went from home to home to check on which cellars were comparatively obvious. He had the villagers move the articles from these to the cellars more artfully concealed. It was well on into the night before this work was finished.

Two men, sent to inquire about the village by district head Zao in Second Xiang, hallooed for Defu from the south hill. Defu went up to parley with them. The hills near Zhenchuan in the west and Wulongbu in the east were lit with strings of flaming dots. These were the campfires of the enemy. Night makes distance look shorter, and from Shajiadian, midway between these two towns, the enemy appeared to be very close by. Defu and the two men tried to calculate in just what places were the enemy encamped.

The three of them descended into the village when Carpenter shouted to Defu that he had returned. Everyone was delighted to hear of the arrival of the Field Army and of the prepara-

tion for battle. Defu remembered Secretary Jin saying that pretty soon the enemy would not be so cocky anymore. The regional militia leaders had evidently told him that the Field Army was coming....

“Good!” Defu clenched his fists hard. He was very aroused. “They’re busy in those villages; we’ll do our best here! Now we’ll see whether Stinker Huaizong gets to be district head! Now we’ll see who eats those eighty odd piculs of grain!”

The men from Second Xiang happily set out to report the good news to district head Zao. Defu told Lanying, Yinfeng and the other women to help with the cooking. As soon as the men Carpenter had mobilized arrived, they would begin issuing grain....

Turmoil

This was the most hectic day of all. As it turned light in the east, Defu and the others were eating breakfast in the district office. Suddenly the whole village was thrown into an uproar. Some of the villagers still hadn't returned to their hideouts, and they ran about confusedly. Everywhere rose the cry, "The enemy is coming!"

The eaters flung down their bowls, snatched up their packages, ration bags and parcels, and dashed out of the compound gate. Panting, Old Zhen came running up to report: about a dozen enemy cavalymen had already galloped up the flat road in the big gorge and had continued on past the village. Ba Hu said they were the enemy's cavalry scouts. There was no doubt about it—enemy troops would be coming to Shajiadian earlier than they had the day before.

Defu shouted for Carpenter to go up the hill and stand watch. He ordered Yinfeng and Lanying to return to their little mountain hamlet at once. It was almost dawn. The first group of peasants arrived to draw grain.

At eight a.m. they were still issuing grain. The situation was getting more tense by the minute. Enemy planes had already made their appearance, also earlier than the day before. Leaning on his staff, the white-bearded old man came to the grain station and urged them to leave immediately. Yonggong was trembling with fear. His hands shook so that he was totally unable to record the figures. Planes were the inevitable foreshadows of the enemy's foot soldiers. A few moments later, shouting, Carpenter came running down from his observation post. The handful of peasants still waiting to draw grain waited no longer. They disappeared in a flash.

The men closed down the grain station in the same manner as the previous day, then moved out quickly.

By the time they reached the mouth of the ravine, the enemy had entered the other end of the village. Carpenter's long legs took him in a quick dash through the village to the gorge, but Defu, Yonggong and Ba Hu saw that they couldn't make it. Engulfing the little street like a tidal wave, enemy troops had cut them off to the north. Defu promptly wheeled and led the men to the

southern hills. His idea was as a last resort to join up with district head Zao's guerillas in Second Xiang. But after traversing two hills, they found the gorge at their route to the south also filled with enemy soldiers, whose vanguard had already reached the top of Wujia Hill. Sandwiched in between the two gorges, they were confined to a stretch of mountains only three li wide. They couldn't cross the north gorge and keep an eye on the grain station, nor could they reach the guerillas in the south. If the enemy should decide to come up these hills, the men's only hope would be to hide in some crevice.

At this point even Ba Hu began to get worried; he said they couldn't stay where they were. Yong-gong could only pant breathlessly and beg Defu to find a hole in which they could conceal themselves. There were many such places in the hills, but Defu didn't think the time had come yet for anything so desperate. He kept looking all around, trying to find some other way out. The enemy had divided into two columns, and this one in the southern gorge was already climbing the hills. Defu thought it probable they had learned that the Field Army was moving south and were afraid their road from Zhenchuan to Wulongbu would be cut; that to prevent this, they were moving into high positions midway along the highway. That being the case, by burying themselves in a hole the men might miss the opportunity to break out.

Ba Hu agreed with Defu's conjectures. Dragging Yonggong along, they pushed towards the east where the distance between the two gorges was wider and at least they wouldn't be so close to the enemy. Then they could decide on the next step.

They covered four hills without a pause. The ridge on which they stopped afforded a good view of the north. Defu's analysis had been correct. The enemy had passed on beyond Shajiadian and was climbing the high Zhanggao Hill.

Shortly before noon, from Zhanggao Hill came the chattering of machine-guns; rifles popped like roasting beans on a griddle; interspersed was the crump, crump of mortar fire. Temporary district headquarters in the Fifth Xiang was right down the north slope of that hill. There was no need to guess—the enemy and our Field Army had begun their engagement.

Defu told Ba Hu to keep watch from the ridge, while he and Yonggong stayed in a cornfield and noted the final grain issues in the account books. Considering the dangerous position they were in, plus the fact that the fate of the grain was still undecided, to Yonggong's mind Defu was being over meticulous. Uneasily, he watched Defu unwrapping the books. He had no alternative but to take up his pen and make the entries, one by one. Just as they finished and the books were again being wrapped up, the firing on Zhanggao Hill diminished, then stopped completely. Join-

ing Ba Hu on the ridge, they could see the enemy troops from Wujia Hill climbing the paths up Zhanggao Hill; north of the highway, other forces were also heading in that direction. The latter unquestionably belonged to the Field Army. Both sides were maneuvering....

Defu couldn't forget the grain station. With the other two men, he mounted to higher ground and looked towards the west. The hill south of Shajiadian and the hill with the little hamlet north of the gorge highway both were covered with troops. But because the enemy and our Field Army both wore nearly the same color uniforms, at a distance of three or four li, it was impossible to make out which side was which. If our Field Army forces were on the hill north of the highway and Hu Zongnan's men were on the hill to the south, since they were separated only by the gorge, Defu wondered why hadn't even a single shot been fired? He talked it over with Ba Hu. Ba Hu figured it this way: if both places were held by the Field Army's men, they were cutting off the enemy's retreat. Encirclement was a favorite tactic of the Field Army. If both heights were held by the enemy forces that definitely meant they had decided to use Shajiadian as a base. Stinker Huai-zong and the enemy would have already taken over the grain station. This reasoning sounded correct to Defu. Holding the account books, he turned and looked in all directions. The enemy

were to the east and the south. North of the highway was the Field Army; the grain station was to the west. But it was precisely the situation in the west they couldn't be sure of.

"Let's go back two ridges to the west," he suggested, "and see who's actually holding those heights near Shajiadian. What do you say?"

"Let's go!" Ba Hu agreed. He pointed to a ridge. "From there we'll be able to make out who's holding that hill south of Shajiadian."

"Take it easy, you two. Don't be so rash," Yonggong interposed quickly. "It's the enemy for sure! After Stinker reported in Zhenchuan that our village has so much grain, after so many enemy troops have come, do you mean to say they wouldn't want the grain? If we go to that ridge above Shajiadian and the enemy spots us, won't we be just asking for trouble? Defu, what you said before is right. We ought to stay here for a while and see if we can get to the north side of the gorge. Our people are sure to be over there...."

"I don't believe the enemy's got many men out here," said Defu. He thought Yonggong's fright was making him exaggerate the enemy's strength. He asked Ba Hu, "Would they pull all their troops out of Zhenchuan and drop it? Would they come out here with their whole force?"

"Suppose both of you wait here while I go and have a look," Ba Hu offered. "One man makes a

small target. Even if it is the enemy, it won't make any difference."

"I'll go," said Defu. He handed the account books to Yonggong. "Right now both sides are moving around in the Zhanggao Hill section. The enemy to the south won't come this way. If they do, there are some cliff caves further west. You can make a run for them..."

"That's right. You let me go," Ba Hu said stubbornly. He gave his knapsack to Yonggong and prepared to leave.

Defu held him by the sleeve. They argued who should go; each had his reasons. Defu was in charge of the grain station; besides, he was a Communist. He felt he should go personally to investigate the situation. But Ba Hu thought that as a former army man he shouldn't give way to someone who had only been a militiaman.

"You don't trust me, is that it?" he demanded.

Defu decided he couldn't let Ba Hu think that, and they couldn't go off together and leave Yonggong behind alone.

Still holding Ba Hu's sleeve, he said, "All right, but don't be too careless. Watch your step. If their hats or uniforms look like the enemy's, don't go any closer..."

Yonggong had the account books in one hand and the knapsack in the other; under his arms were the ration bag and vest which his mother had given him. Suddenly he shouted:

“Look! Look over there!”

A long thin column of brown-uniformed men was winding in an easterly direction.

“Who are they?”

Yonggong rushed over between them. “They’re not the Field Army. The Field Army is to the north. How could they be coming from the southwest?”

That was a question. Defu and Ba Hu hesitated, then peered again to the west. All those troops that had been on the two hills north and south of Shajiadian were gone except for a few men stationed as outposts. Like the clouds in the sky, the soldiers had been in constant motion. You took your eye off them for a minute, and they disappeared.

The sudden appearance of troops to the southwest of Shajiadian made matters even more confusing. How, actually, could the Field Army come south across the gorge? Could it have moved so fast? Or could the enemy have sent forces north up the Wuding River valley road from Suide to take over the occupation of Zhenchuan so that the enemy in the latter city was able to bring out the entire 36th Division for its eastward drive? Defu recalled the talk he had with Jin two nights before, when the secretary told him of the enemy’s scheme to surround and annihilate the Field Army. But that was all Defu knew. He had no information about the plans of our forces. There was no use in making any snap judgments.

Ba Hu still wanted to go. Defu considered this proposal as he surveyed the scene, but Yonggong was unalterably opposed.

“You mustn’t risk it,” he begged. “If they’re our forces, Carpenter and the girls are over there. Nothing will happen to the grain station. If they’re the enemy, what good will seeing them do? We ought to wait and see how things stand this afternoon, then make up our minds. There are only three of us left. If we scatter we won’t be able to get together again. We won’t be able to talk things over together...”

“Well then, what shall we do?” Ba Hu urged Defu.

Defu originally was going to let him go, but the near hysteria of Yonggong gave him pause. If something should prevent Ba Hu from coming back and an emergency should develop, meeting it alone with Yonggong really wouldn’t be so good.

“We won’t do anything now,” he said finally, but the grain in Shajiadian was still on his mind. Who had it now—Carpenter, or Stinker Huaizong?...

Nearby was a watermelon patch belonging to a brother-in-law of Ba Hu. The ex-soldier picked two melons and divided them among the men to quench their thirst.

At noon the silence around Zhanggao Hill was broken. The booming of heavy artillery announced the commencement of a large-scale battle. Firing

started first from the Field Army forces in Fifth Xiang, immediately followed by the salvoes of the enemy on Zhanggao Hill. Planes appeared, artillery thundered. Column after column of black smoke of exploding shells mingled with the fine yellow dust shot aloft by the earth-rocking blasts, and together formed a murky curtain that blotting out a big portion of the sky. Planes darted in and out of this haze, spraying their machine guns against the hillside emplacements. On the slopes, machine guns, rifles and hand grenades blended into a gibbering roar....

A column of enemy soldiers began moving up the hills to their east, and the men withdrew further west. They reached a little village which was completely deserted. The three men concealed themselves amid the crops of a field, and while watching the developments on Zhanggao Hill, conferred on a plan of action. They agreed that if the Field Army should drive south across the gorge they themselves would take that opportunity to dash for the north side of the highway. Once there, they could inquire about the status of Shajiadian.

But all their bad luck seemed to be concentrated in this one day. A great rumbling of sound began rolling in from the south, echoing the artillery fire around Zhanggao Hill. Because their view was obscured by a high peak, at first they thought it was the commencement of

another barrage, but soon they realized it was a thunderstorm.

The wind rose wild and blew dark tumbling clouds towards the northwest. Lightning flickered brightly through continuous thunder, and raindrops big as copper coins poured in sheets from the ominous sky, striking painfully against their faces. As the storm rose in fury, the artillery fire waned, then stopped completely. On Zhanggao Hill men and animals were dashing about. Disappointed, the men watched for a while, then headed for a small cave specially dug by the local peasants for shelter against the sudden mountain storms. The rain was coming down so heavily now that as they ran across the two ridges separating them from their destination, the men couldn't raise their heads.

They plunged into the cave shelter. Outside, through the leaden dimness, they could barely make out the crops on the hill slope driven flat against the ground by the pelting rain. Little rivulets sprang up everywhere; it was a cloudburst. The thunder, the swishing of the rain, the rushing mountain cataracts, combined into an infernal uproar. In the shelter, the men had to shout to make themselves heard.

Even before he paused to wipe the rain and perspiration from his face, Defu tore open the account book package. Not bad. Because he had protected it with his body against the wind and

rain, only some of the page edges were a bit damp. He wrung out the cloth which had enveloped the books and then re-wrapped them. With Ba Hu, he urged Yonggong to put on his vest to ward against his delicate stomach taking a chill.

The cave shelter was so small that the men had to squat hunched over to fit into it. Through the torrential rain, they could see countless streams of muddy water racing down the hillside to turbulently join together in the ravines and gorges below.

"What are we going to do?" Yonggong asked gloomily. He had put his vest on. "A big storm like this. Even when it stops, the water in the gorge won't go down right away. How can we get across the highway?"

"There's no use grumbling every time we run into a little trouble. Let's do things step by step," said Defu. "We're not so badly off in this cave. What about all those comrades in the Field Army? Where can they get out of the rain in the middle of a battle?"

"They'll be all right!" Sitting on his wet knapsack, Ba Hu laughed as he filled his pipe. With his usual unperturbed air, he shouted cheerfully, "Our local people are working as guides; they're sure to take them into the villages. It's Hu Zongnan's men who are in a bad fix. They're up on the hills with their pack animals and equipment. Where can those bastards go in a hurry? They'll

be sopping wet and won't have anything to eat. When this storm is over it'll be just the right time to finish them off...." A clap of thunder drowned out the rest of his words.

Watching the pouring rain, Defu could hazily picture the battlefield stretching from the Wuding River to the Yellow River. The enemy occupied Suide and Jiaxian. The Field Army was lined up against Hu Zongnan's 36th Division in this region. Where was Chairman Mao during this big storm? Defu remembered Secretary Jin telling him how important this battle was going to be. But just as it started, it was halted by the storm.

"It's a tough situation," Defu pulled out his short pipe and tamped in some tobacco. "It depends on how long the rain lasts...."

The men ate Yonggong's dry rations. The rain continued unabated until late in the afternoon, then stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

But the mountain streams and cataracts, if anything, seemed to roar even louder. Past experience had shown that after the sky cleared these waters usually raged as long as the storm itself, sometimes longer. Emerging from the shelter, the men found a sea of mud. Merely standing on the hill slope was difficult. They would have to wait till the water drained off and the ground became somewhat firmer before they could climb to a peak and have a look around.

At dusk they took off their shoes, rolled up their trousers, and slipped and skidded to a mountain knoll. The situation had changed radically. All along the range from Zhanggao Hill south to Wujia Hill was a wide row of yellow tents. It was as though a temple fair had been transported to the hilltops. Pack animals and troops could also be seen. These were the enemy forces. On the hills of Shajiadian and to the southwest of it there were only soldiers but no tents. Ba Hu said these were probably the men of the Field Army. In view of the present conditions, Defu announced he definitely would have to take a closer look at Shajiadian.

"If you had let me go earlier," Ba Hu berated Yonggong, "maybe we wouldn't have had to go running around blindly all day!"

"How could I know?" Yonggong argued stubbornly. "Defu didn't want to go either...."

"Only because you were so damn mulish!"

"Stop your quarreling," said Defu. "It's getting dark. Let's go back and see."

It was hard going over the slippery ground. By the time they had traversed the two li along a winding path to the heights above the village, night had fallen. Suddenly, on the north slope a figure appeared coming towards them. Ba Hu shouted. It was Old Zhen of the co-operative.

Holding a staff with one hand and carrying his shoes in the other, the old man was startled.

“Aiya! What are you doing here?”

They discovered that Zhen had never reached the girls in the mountain hamlet. He had gone to see his wife in the cliff caves and then had stayed there because he couldn't get across the gorge. When the artillery started on Zhanggao Hill, he had climbed a hill to see the developments. The storm was much fiercer than he had expected; he was unable to return to the cliff caves and had to hide in a shelter cave all afternoon. Now, with the paths so slippery, getting back to the cliff caves was out of the question. He was taking advantage of the darkness to see what was happening in the village....

“You've been close to here all the time. Couldn't you tell whose troops they are?” Defu was surprised.

Old Zhen sighed and shook his head. “Both sides moved around so fast it made my eyes blur. I couldn't tell one from the other.”

“Now what do you think?” Yonggong demanded of Ba Hu triumphantly.

Ba Hu was positive. “They're our men! Pluck out my eyes if I'm wrong! Do you think I can't even see that much?”

“Stop your wrangling. We'll go to the village and take a good look!” said Defu.

The four men advanced.

On a rise less than two hundred paces from Shajiadian, they could see fires in the village

reflecting red on the southern hill slope. But because of a thick growth of trees in front of them and the way the ravine twisted, the village itself was not visible. The men stood and listened intently. They could hear the noises of pack animals and the sound of men's voices. While they couldn't distinguish the words, the accents didn't sound like those of local people.

"Go slow," Old Zhen advised calmly. "We can't hear what they're saying, and there are fires lit all over the village. It won't be wise to go barging in."

Yonggong looked tensely at Defu. The latter was conferring with Ba Hu.

"The enemy have set up their tents on the hills to the east. Is it because they know the Field Army is close after they've exchanged fire with it and are afraid to lose the hilltops if they come down into the gorge here?"

Ba Hu pondered silently. It was very strange. The troops in the village didn't sound like they arrived there before the storm. Then were they really enemy forces? In the darkness, the rushing mountain torrents howled like the wind, and overhead black clouds again gathered. Another rainstorm might start at any minute.

Ba Hu growled an oath, thrust his knapsack at Defu and pulled out two hand grenades.

"All of you stay here while I have a look! If they're enemies and you hear these grenades

go off, make for the shelter cave and wait for me there....”

“No!” Defu didn’t trust Ba Hu’s rashness. “I’ll go and see how the land lies. But first we’ll have Old Zhen and Yonggong move off with the account books. After that maybe you can use those grenades....”

Old Zhen disagreed. “Neither of you go. Let me take a look. I’m old. It doesn’t matter whether I live or die. You’ve got the grain station records. If I’m captured, after the water goes down in the gorge, you can take them over to Secretary Jin. There are only a few dozen piculs of grain left in the village, but those records account for about a thousand already given out. Listen to me. Don’t sacrifice the big for the small!” Staff in hand, he began walking towards the ravine. Defu took him by the arm.

“Dear Old Zhen....”

“We’re wasting time talking!” The old man shook off Defu’s hand and staunchly strode away.

The three men looked admiringly after the bent figure disappearing into the night. The booming of the waters in the gorge was like solemn music playing a prelude to the old man’s death. Whether Shajiadian contained the enemy or forces of the Field Army was of vital importance not only to the grain station but to the outcome of the entire battle. Old Zhen was swallowed up by the twisting ravine.

Silently, the men waited. Defu thought of how the old man had applied to join the Party. He vowed to sponsor him if they both should be alive when the fighting ended.

About, five minutes later, they heard Old Zhen's deliriously happy shout:

"Comedown! They're ours! They're ours!"

The men sighed with relief, then practically flew into the ravine. There the ground was even more slippery than the slope, and they fell several times in their rush to see the grain station.

The village was filled with Field Army soldiers in brown uniforms. Campfires in the compounds, on the terraces, on the grass fields were surrounded by soldiers drying their clothing and equipment. The main street was as jammed as on a market day. Men were carrying bags of grain, obviously brought from the station. Old Zhen was lost in the crowd. The men pushed ahead towards the station but found their road blocked by masses of soldiers and peasants. The latter were people from neighboring villages who were serving as guides to the Army.

"The Shajiadian people have come back," one of them called.

"They know the paths around those parts best..." said another.

Three soldiers promptly approached the men and questioned them. The men explained that they were in charge of the grain station. The

soldiers were skeptical. Defu showed them the account books and the guides confirmed the Sha-jiadian men's identity. Just as the soldiers were about to let them proceed, two officers with pistols strapped to their waists came over from the direction of the district office.

"Not so fast!" one of them shouted. "The army got here this morning, but we haven't seen a sign of any grain station people all day. Now the grain is almost all given out. What are you going to take charge of?"

"You shouldn't be so strict with the local government people," the other man said. "The enemy came through here first. These men couldn't tell what was happening. They probably didn't dare to come back..."

"That's exactly right!" Defu was worried. "If the grain is handed out without keeping records, how can we make a proper account?"

The friendly officer's voice was calm and unhurried. "Nothing will go wrong. We couldn't find you, so when the civilian porters arrived our quartermaster men distributed the grain. There's not much left now; you might as well let them finish the job. You men can act as guides." He turned to his companion. "These comrades are all doing excellent work. I hear that before they left, they straightened out the grain station spick and span..."

"It's because we wanted to put things in order that we didn't get across to the north!" Ba Hu added.

Defu persisted in his inquiry. "Comrade, after the grain is finished, will you give us the receipts?"

"We will." The officer who originally had been so brusque changed his tone. "Your village administration clerk, a very tall fellow, is here. He said it would be alright to turn them over to him."

Of course, that must be Carpenter. Defu was delighted. To Yonggong and Ba Hu he shouted, "We'll be guides, then!"

"Right!" Ba Hu affixed his knapsack to his back as though ready to set out at once.

Yonggong mumbled, "We haven't eaten all day..."

"Have you forgotten what Secretary Jin said?" demanded Defu sharply. "Communists are made of special stuff! If you hadn't been so scared, we could have come back this morning! Others had to give the grain out for us; there's nothing left for us to say. We'll be guides to the army even if we don't eat! You can't sit back and leave everything to the army. Even Chairman Mao doesn't want the Field Army to protect him!"

The army officers completely approved of Defu's words. The one who had asked them to be guides added, "Whatever unit you're attached to will feed you. We haven't eaten since early this morning either..."

Defu, Yonggong and Ba Hu were then assigned to three different units. Shortly afterwards, men came to bring them to their respective groups. Defu went off with a comrade towards the gorge. Halfway through the ravine, he met Yinfeng, followed by several soldiers. Oddly enough, she recognized him a good distance away, though she could only see him faintly in the light of a nearby campfire.

“Defu,” she called, “where have you been? I’m taking these comrades to your house to get some bottles of cooking oil out of your cellar...”

Ah, how she laughed—contentedly (because Defu had finally returned), proudly (because she was carrying out her promise to help the army). And before he had a chance to reply, she was gone around a bend in the ravine. What satisfaction this chance meeting gave to Defu! Only then did he realize that he actually hadn’t thought of her all day! Apparently Carpenter and the girl in the mountain hamlet had come back. But the people in the cliff caves were still cut off by the mountain torrents. Defu’s mother was among them...

With the army comrade, he entered the gorge. Reflecting the glow of the campfires, the turbulently flowing river tossed with whitecaps. Everywhere were soldiers, mules, and oilcloth-covered equipment. Defu was led into what had been the village’s little stone restaurant. A number of offi-

cers were crowded around a military map which they were discussing in the light of two candles.

Outside, the rain began to fall again.

The Final Test

That day, the Field Army had deployed its forces like this: the Third Column, together with the Fourth and Sixth Regiments, was lined up west of the enemy's 123rd Brigade near Wulongbu; the Second Column, the Model Brigade and the New Fourth Brigade were concentrated near Zhanggao Hill to stop the enemy's 165th Brigade which was driving east after having gone through Shajiadian; the First Column occupied Shajiadian and a wide stretch running ten li to the west along the big gorge, thus cutting the escape route of the division headquarters of the 36th Division and the 165th Brigade, and preventing the enemy regiment still in Zhenchuan from linking up with the main enemy forces. The storm had stopped the battle before it could be fought to a finish. Moreover, the mountain tor-

rents which resulted, isolated from one another various units of the First Column in the hills and villages in and around Shajiadian.

The torrents diminished very slowly; then, at night there was another shower, and they rose again. It was pitch black. The yellow soil of the tortuous mountain paths became such mud bogs that any movement of troops was impossible. Those soldiers who had come to Shajiadian first escaped the rain in caves and houses; some of the later arrivals squeezed under the mule and ox shelters. But the vast majority simply had to take it under the open sky. The downpour had put out all the campfires, but every so often a flash of lightning would reveal dripping soldiers standing quietly in the rain.

Fortunately, the storm passed quickly. The village again turned into a noisy hive of activity. Units on the surrounding heights sent men to cook food on the Shajiadian stoves. Carpenter, Yinfeng, Lanying and Old Zhen kept running around helping the troops find things they needed. It was well past midnight before the village gradually quieted down. The skies cleared; the mountain torrents shrunk. Everyone waited for the order to go into action.

When the rain had washed out the battle on Zhanggao Hill and Hu Zongnan's 156th Division discovered they were confronted by the superior Field Army, they dropped everything

and spent the whole night concentrating their strength. They pilfered blankets and mattresses from the peasants' homes and spread them on the slippery mountain paths to give themselves footholds. Entire companies were swept away by the rushing waters while crossing streams, but even this did not stop the 123rd Brigade from pulling back from near Wulongbu and rushing west to link up with the rest of the enemy forces. Hu Zongnan's officers forced their men at pistol point to join arms and cross the racing streams. Cursing, they mercilessly pushed the men into the raging torrents.

This mad dashing about on the part of the enemy was impelled by the revelation that they were in danger of being isolated into small units and then being destroyed piecemeal. The five and a half brigades trailing Chairman Mao and the Central Committee had failed to rendezvous with the 36th Division. Instead, they were sixty li south of Wulongbu, on the banks of the Yellow River. This large force of enemy soldiers had reacted exactly as Chairman Mao, now near Jiaxian, anticipated they would. As a result, the Field Army had the wily 36th Division right in the palm of its big hand!

Before dawn, the First Column received orders to split up and move back north of the gorge. The storm had soaked the equipment; men and animals were exhausted. They had to have

some rest before they would be fit to fight again. When all the units had gathered at the assembly point, it was announced that since the Column was returning to the other side of the gorge, those guides who had been engaged to lead the way south of the highway would no longer be needed.

Defu stood with the account books under his arm at the former fair grounds and took leave of the battalion to which he had been attached. He had spent the night with the men of the battalion and already was their good friend. After the commander learned that Defu had been in a stretcher team with the Field Army for three months, besides being a strong young man who was a clever and able Party member, he became very fond of Defu. He was sure his troops would soon be coming south across the gorge again to fight, and he wanted Defu to stay with them. But Defu said he had to straighten out the grain station records; there was nothing to do but leave him behind. The battalion political instructor placed both his hands on Defu's shoulders and gave him some last-minute advice.

"Comrade, the enemy to the east and west are all going to converge in this region. Once we leave, you'd better straighten out your books fast and get to a safe place..."

"I know," Defu nodded. Carrying his books, he walked rapidly away.

As the sky began to lighten, the village was full of moving men and horses. Where could he find Carpenter at a time like this? He decided to take a look at the grain station.

The station had long since been vacated. Though Defu could see in the dim recesses of the storerooms that all the grain had been issued, grain spilled on the floor had not yet been swept together. Walking about the station, Defu estimated he still could sweep up another picul. The army comrades had been in too much of a rush to have had time to sweep, but he was in charge of the station; how could he let this grain go to waste? He ran back towards the ground where the troops had assembled, hoping to find Yong-gong and Ba Hu and get their help.

"Defu, I was just looking for you." Carpenter came down the stone-flagged slope from the district office, "They want to give an ordinary receipt..."

"Why?"

"The quartermaster seal isn't here. If we want a formal receipt, I have to go with them to get it."

"How about the figures? What's the total?"

"Sixty-five piculs. I don't remember the fraction."

"Right." The total was approximately correct. Defu spoke fast, "You go with them to get an official receipt. We can still sweep up another picul

at the station. I'll do it with Yonggong and Ba Hu, and we'll hide it!"

Carpenter strode Inwards the district office, then turned back and shouted, "Defu! Defu! The grain porters who came last night are all from our district. The men from our village who went to the front are all here!"

"That's fine!" Defu called over his shoulder. "I've got no time to talk to you now!"

"There's something important," Carpenter caught up and whispered, "One of them brought word that he saw Secretary Jin. He said our district office has moved to Aijia. Secretary Jin wants all of you to go there when you've finished. He's got work for you..."

"Good," Defu nodded. He trotted off towards the gorge.

The floods were nearly all gone. A large group of people were gathered outside the big gate of the co-op compound. The old folks, women and children had come back from the cliff caves. They had learned that our forces were in the village, but returned only in time to see the troops depart. Talking excitedly, they said they had passed the boulder-strewn river flats and had seen the shorts-clad corpses of the Hu Zongnan soldiers who had been swept down by the mountain torrents. Yinfeng's father had picked up an army helmet. The top of it was caked with mud.

Old Zhen urged the villagers not to go to their homes, but to return at once to the cliff caves. The enemy was very close at hand. Once our forces left, the enemy could arrive much quicker than they had two days before....

"Have you seen our other two men?" Defu asked him.

"Ba Hu went off with the troops. Yonggong is talking with his mother at the end of the village," said one of the by-standers.

Old Zhen could see that Defu was in a rush. He asked quickly, "What's wrong? Hasn't the grain all been given out? What do you want them for? That young Ba Hu is too careless...."

Defu had no time to answer. He flew to the end of the village. He was afraid Yonggong's mother would talk him into going to the hiding place of his wife and children. The villagers watched Defu tearing away with the books under his arm. None of them had any confidence in him when he first took over the grain station. Now he was bringing the job to a successful conclusion....

Thinking of how bold but steady Defu had been these past few days, how he had subordinated all his own personal interests to those of the public good, Old Zhen couldn't help saying, with a sigh, "It wasn't easy! He stood firm no matter what happened. His selfless spirit of 'all for the revolution' is really something wonderful!"

One of the other villagers remarked that on the day of the big rain Defu's mother had gotten chilled and became very ill. She groaned all night and kept calling for him.

Defu reached the end of the village in practically one breath. Yonggong was indeed talking with his mother, and she was indeed urging him to take refuge with his wife and children in another village. But Yonggong had been insisting that he had to discuss this with Defu first. "I'm a Party member," he told his mother, "not like Ba Hu; but Ba Hu himself has gone with the Field Army as a guide." Because Defu had criticized him the night before, Yonggong's expression became a bit strained when he saw him running up.

"Quick!" Defu shouted. "There's still a picul of grain scattered on the station floor. We two have to sweep it together and hide it."

Yonggong's mother asked, "Where will you go when you've finished?"

"Secretary Jin sent word for us to go to Aijia. There's work for us," Defu said hurriedly. He urged the old lady, "Please don't worry about him anymore. You just look after yourself. We men can run much faster than you when we have to." Then, to Yonggong he said, "Hurry up. Today is different. We can't afford to delay one second!"

"Ma," Yonggong said agitatedly, "then you go back to the family."

“No, if you won’t go with me to their village, I’ll hide out in the cliff caves...” The old lady sighed faintly. She wanted to leave Defu a few instructions on how to take care of her son, but he obviously had no time to listen to her....

By now, the last of the Field Army troops had left Shajiadian. Carpenter went with them, saying that after he got the formal receipt for the grain, he would await Defu and the other government men in Aijia. The old folks, women and children were congregated in front of the co-operative’s gate. When they saw that the troops were all gone, they departed in groups for the cliff caves. Some of them told Defu that his mother was sick, but that she was being looked after. They suggested that if he had time, he should go and visit her. Defu’s entire mind was intent on sweeping up the grain. He didn’t even pause long enough to ask the details of his mother’s illness; he listened abstractedly for a moment, then walked on.

Lanying, Yinfeng, and a number of other young women were conferring with Old Zhen, also outside the co-operative, as they waited for a word with Defu before returning to the mountain hamlet.

The sky was quite bright now. With the Field Army gone, Shajiadian had again become a danger spot.

When Defu announced that he and Yong-gong were going to sweep up the grain station,

the girls immediately insisted on going along to help. They all started talking at once: "The more hands, the faster it's done. We'll finish it up and leave together..."

This prospect was very pleasing to Yonggong; he looked at Defu. The latter stared at these young, dear girls, then said firmly: "We don't want you! If the enemy shows up, you won't be able to run fast enough. It's too risky! The more people, the bigger the target. Just the two of us can get around much easier." To Old Zhen he said, "Ba Hu has left. Could you keep a lookout for us on the north hill?"

The old man was so thrilled he couldn't answer for some time. "With such a big battle going on," he thought, "what difference would it make if they didn't sweep up that last picul of grain? If anything should go wrong they might be in a hopeless situation." But seeing how determined Defu was, he knew nothing he would say could do any good.

"All right, then, give me the account books. You go, now!"

As Defu handed the package to Old Zhen, Yin-feng took him by the sleeve. For the first time in public she looked at him longingly.

"We'll be waiting for you in the mountain hamlet.

Defu and Yonggong went off to the ravine. Halfway through, they again met the white-bearded old man.

"Why have you come here again?" he demanded.

But Defu only waved towards the grain station and urged Yonggong to hurry. They reached the station and swept the grain into a pile as the sun ascended to the hilltops. Enemy planes appeared; the sound of machine-gunning could be heard in the sky. The old man was worried about them staying so long in the grain station. Leaning on his staff he slowly mounted to the door of the cave.

"Children, don't you want to live? Leave, quickly!"

"Let's go," said Yonggong uneasily. He paused with a wicker scoop in his hands.

"Keep working!" Defu insisted, scooping up grain like a machine and dumping it in a basket. "Old man, please go down. We've got someone keeping watch for us on the north hill."

The two men carried the filled basket to a concealed cellar in a neighboring courtyard and poured in the grain. They emptied basket after basket; finally, they even concealed the station's equipment.

The job was finished, but the danger expected was about to come.

By the time Old Zhen and the girls shouted that enemy forces coming from the west had

entered the upper gorge, it was already too late. Enemy troops also appeared in the lower gorge from the east, and soldiers topping the southern heights began firing with a machine-gun at Old Zhen and the girls on the opposite north hill. Defu and Yonggong sealed the cellar and ran towards the center of the ravine. Hearing the enemy in the gorge, they whirled and headed into a gully of castor oil plants. Defu let Yonggong take the lead. They planned to follow the gully to where it met another ravine further down, and there cross the ravine and go north. But when they reached the mouth of the gully, the enemy was already coming up the ravine from the east. As Yonggong dashed out, he was greeted by a burst of rifle fire. He immediately drew back.

“One rush and you’re over!” Defu pushed him, wanting to get Yonggong out of danger first. “Get across fast and keep running!”

Yonggong scooted like a rabbit and got safely across. But this made the enemy bring their machine-gun into play, and now the mouth of the gully was sealed tight. Defu was stuck. He pulled back and plunged into a patch of castor oil plants. Then he spotted a cave shelter built as a refuge from the mountain storms, high up one of the steep side of the gully. He scrambled into it and rearranged the thick mass of vines overgrowing its opening. Enemy troops were marching on the ridge directly over his head.

“There aren’t any soldiers,” he heard one of them yelling hoarsely. “Just some peasant making a run for it! ...”

“Keep moving, you men!”

Apparently their main job was to get into positions against the Field Army. They wouldn’t take time off to come down into the gully and search for him. Defu put the grenades he had tightly clenched in his hands back into his pocket and settled himself more comfortably. Peering through the vines, he could see the enemy crossing the mouth of the gully and climbing the opposite ridge. They were wearing American-style service caps and shorts. Their faces and legs had been burned black by the sun; they really looked outlandish and Defu even hated their appearance. Then he heard troops and animals thudding above his head. The enemy was rounding the ridge and moving on towards Shajiadian.

The extent of enemy activity far exceeded anything Defu had imagined. None of the comrades in the Field Army battalion he spent the night with knew he planned to sweep up the grain station (in fact, he hadn’t known it himself), and so they didn’t tell him in any detail how heavy the enemy drive might be. That this was a big enemy operation might have been induced, however, from the fact that the First Column had deemed it wiser not to meet the enemy pincers from east and west alone, and to withdraw to north of the gorge

for rest and reorganization. Occupying Zhanggao Hill was the enemy 123rd Brigade which had pulled back from Wulongbu; to the south was the division headquarters unit of the 36th Division; the enemy 165th Brigade was moving west to link up with the regiment coming out from Zhenchuan. In other words, Shajiadian was surrounded. From within the cave shelter, Defu, listening to the enemy movement and to the sound of near and distant firing, was able to evolve a rough idea of the general picture.

He had no regrets whatsoever at having remained behind to sweep up the grain. He was happy that Yonggong had gotten away and prayed that he would reach Aijia safely. He hoped, also, that Old Zhen and the girls would get back to their mountain hamlet without mishap, without having to run through any enemy machine-gun fire. And himself?

"Being the only one left, it will be easy to manage," Defu said meditatively. Even if he had to sit it out till dark, he would find some way of getting across.

The cave was quite muddy as a result of the previous day's rain; it was dark and damp. Defu had run in perspiring heavily. He was all right at first, but gradually he began to feel cold. He would be sure to get sick if he stayed in that hole too long. Moreover, this was the height of the

rainy season. The little cave wouldn't be much of a shelter against a real storm.

After a while, the noise of the men and animals walking on the ridge above him died away. He parted the vines and looked out. The ridge opposite was deserted too. If he could get back into the gully and follow it to the ravine, he might eventually be able to get to the gorge and across. Because Secretary Jin had sent word that there was work waiting for him, he decided to risk it.

Defu crawled out of the cave, took out his two grenades, and hooked a finger of each hand through the loops of the firing pin strings. He slid back down into the gully, and ran, crouching, through the waist-high tangled patch of castor oil plants.

Running, running! With only a dozen paces left from the mouth of the gully, he suddenly heard a shout from the ridge above and to his rear.

"Who's there?"

"We'll shoot if you run!"

From the sound, there were only two or three of them. Defu took a deep breath and sprinted towards higher ground near the mouth of the gully, noisily scattering castor beans in his wake. His main thought now was not to get out of the gully but to reach a level where he could cope with the enemy on better terms.

A rifle cracked behind him, once. Defu whirled, drew back his arm, and a heavy black object sailed

through the air and landed on the ridge in front of his pursuers. The two Hu Zongnan soldiers who were in the lead froze stupidly for a second, then turned and scrambled in panic, spoiling the aim of the third soldier, just then drawing a bead on Defu. Shifting the remaining grenade from his left to his right hand, Defu was ready to fling it when the one on the ridge exploded. A great cloud of dust and smoke seemed to spring out of the very ground, obliterating the three soldiers....

Defu released his breath, then leapt down into the ravine. Now he followed the shortest and most direct route, disregarding the regular path. He saw a shoe which Yonggong had lost in his flight a few paces to one side, but didn't pause to pick it up. His only worry was that the enemy would pursue him and shoot from behind before he could have a chance to fight back.

But when the next shot came, it was from a rise ahead of him. A bullet ripped through the loose sleeve of his shirt, and Defu saw the enemy soldier ramming another cartridge into the breech of his rifle. Defu immediately threw his last grenade, bent forward and raced on. He had already jumped down a small embankment by the time it went off, and could no longer be seen from where the soldier had been standing.

Here the ravine became very deep and narrow. Defu could hear the voices of enemy soldiers high

up along the hill slopes. He was empty-handed now; he couldn't afford to stop for any reason.

Defu ran steadily through the twisting ravine for about two li. His whole body was drenched in perspiration that soaked through his clothes. Thirst burned like fire in his throat and stomach. When he felt he had left danger far enough behind, he scooped some muddy water from a puddle and drank. A lovely coolness enveloped him. Standing up, he wiped the sweat from his face, neck and chest. He looked carefully around at all the landmarks. The big gorge wasn't much further.

He slowed his pace to a walk and began considering just where to cross the gorge. Which path was closest, the most concealed? If he should meet any more of the enemy, what would be the best means of flight?

"Don't move!"

As Defu turned a corner of the narrow ravine, there were two enemy plain-clothes men right in front of him, their pistols pointing at his chest. Defu sighed. So he couldn't escape them after all.

They searched him from head to foot, but only produced his short pipe and a tobacco pouch which Yinfeng had embroidered and slipped him surreptitiously when he had gone off with the stretcher teams, and a box of matches. All were in a worn and battered condition. They examined his hands and feet—covered with thick calluses.

They removed his white towel turban and looked at his forehead—there was no telltale line that comes from long wearing of an army cap.

“Peasant. Young. Make a good recruit,” the shorter plain clothes man grinned, revealing repulsive false teeth made of brass.

“Turn him over to company headquarters for questioning. We still have to scout.”

“Finished!” the defenseless Defu said to himself. He was beginning to get worried. “What’ll I do if they put an enemy soldier’s uniform on me?... As they led him up the slope, his fingers were busy retying his turban, but his brain was quickly preparing a story.

The eastern face of the mountain ridge was covered with men in khaki uniforms. Defu couldn’t understand a word they were jabbering. On the plateau to the south, many pack animals laden with gun barrels and baggage were grazing on a young growing millet. A long snaking line of enemy soldiers, coming from the direction of Shajiadian’s south hill, was blocked by the mass of feeding animals. On this side, columns of enemy soldiers were cutting through fields of crops to climb towards the peak, which was the highest in the neighborhood and formed a triangle with Wujia and Zhanggao Hills. Defu could hazily make out some men already on the peak, peering towards the north through field glasses. They appeared to be officers.

Defu's captors led him higher. Now he could see the whole range south of the big gorge. Every bit of it was occupied by enemy soldiers.

When they reached the ridge, the two plain-clothes men left. Defu found himself gradually surrounded by a bunch of enemy soldiers. The sergeant began to question him.

"Where are you from?"—Bojia.

"What do you do?"—Shepherd.

"Where are your sheep?"—Drowned by a torrent during the storm.

"Where were you running to?"—No place. Just running....

"Crap!" A savage-looking soldier with a service cap cocked over one eye spat contemptuously. He pushed the cap to the back of his head. "A pack of lies! This guy's too sure, too steady!"

The sergeant stopped him. "What's your hurry?" He continued with his questions, even more calmly than Defu.

"You're a shepherd. Why should you run?"

"Afraid."

"Afraid of who?"

"Afraid of you soldiers."

"You don't have to be scared of us. Work for us as a guide."

"I don't know these parts so well."

"How far is Bojia from here?"

"About ten li."

“About ten li and you don’t know your way around?” The sergeant’s cruel eyes were skeptical.

“I know the roads, but not the backcountry.”

“This guy has got an answer for everything!” snorted one of the listeners.

“Put a uniform on him and let him start work!”

By then, the animals blocking the path had been led to one side, and most of the soldiers surrounding Defu fell back into formation and marched on. Only about a dozen sun-blackened men remained. The sergeant pointed at a sack of grain.

“Let him carry that,” he said to a corporal, “and take him to work on the fortifications. Give him a uniform tonight.”

Defu glanced at the sack. It was bulging, heavy with grain. Judging from its many careful patches, it evidently had been stolen from some poor peasant. Two soldiers lifted the sack onto Defu’s shoulders and escorted him down the slope.

As Defu trudged with his burden, the recollection of a contemptible figure flashed through his mind, a man who had been captured by the enemy during the Agrarian Revolution and turned traitor. Because he feared for his life, the man had helped the enemy. In the winter of 1943, he confessed at an anti-traitor mass rally. Over ten thousand people spat at and reviled him. Defu had been among the first to raise his fist again and again while shouting political slogans. He hated

the traitor so that day, he had wanted to rush from the crowd onto the platform and smash the shameless wretch. And now, he himself was carrying grain for the enemy!

Pangs of shame gripped his young, honest heart. Was he docilely going to help the enemy build fortifications too? He thought of the solemn, kindly face of the district Party secretary, and his ears rang with Jin's final words:

"Communists are made of special stuff..."

"No!" In his heart, Defu made a vow to the distant Secretary Chin: "I'm not afraid to die! Though I've done my best, I've fallen into the enemy's hands. But they won't get a word out of me; when the time comes, I'll fight them to the end! If I live, I want to be able to look you in the eye; if I die, I'll do it in a way to bring honor to the Party!"

Defu and his captors descended the slope towards the long column of enemy troops which had detoured around Shajiadian's south hill. With the pack animals out of the way, the troops resumed their march. They were led by a civilian. Defu was deep in thought, planning how to sell his life dearly, when he was startled by a familiar voice.

"Hey! That's Shi Defu from Shajiadian! Why haven't you shot him?"

"Enemies are bound to meet," according to the old saying. Defu raised his head and stared. It was Stinker Huaizong. Defu's eyes shot fire. He

could fool the Hu Zongnan soldiers no longer. He dropped his grain sack, and before the soldiers could stop him, flung himself at the hated landlord. Unfortunately, Defu was without a weapon, but he managed to punch Stinker's face in a way to bring blood spurting from the landlord's nose before he was overwhelmed by a gang of enemy soldiers.

"Drag him over there and tie him up!" The sergeant's beady eyes seemed ready to jump out of their sockets.

Defu was hauled to one side while a group of soldiers crowded around Stinker. Defu could hear the latter bawling something hoarsely. But now his hands were tied before him while his upper arms were pinned behind his back. He could only turn his neck and glare with loathing in the landlord's direction.

Tightly trussed, Defu was pulled to a plowed field east of the plateau. Stinker and the troops to whom he was playing guide went on their way. The enemy sergeant came striding over with a wide leather belt in his hand.

"So you're a Communist!" The sergeant bared his teeth in a snarl and whipped the belt down on Defu's head. "Are you a shepherd?"

"Since you know, why ask me?" said Defu coldly.

"Good!" yelled the sergeant. He ordered two soldiers to cut some mulberry switches, then described to the other soldiers just what sort of

a man Defu was. Listening, their jaws dropped in amazement.

The switches were cut and given to four men, on the sergeant's directions. Defu was forced face down on the ground, while two men stood on each side and flailed him with the switches. At first the pain was like being cut with hot knives. Defu gritted his teeth and held on. Before long, his perspiration had soaked through his thin clothes; his back and buttocks felt paralyzed. One thing was clear: his short life would soon be ended!

"The four soldiers beat him till their arms hung exhausted by their sides. The sergeant raised Defu's deathly white face with his foot. Defu's head was dripping with perspiration.

"Now will you talk, now will you talk, now will you talk!" The sergeant's voice rose to a scream.

Defu didn't utter a sound. He wanted to curse the enemy, but he didn't have the strength. The sergeant ordered the beating to continue. A corporal suggested to shoot him and be done with it. The sergeant wouldn't listen.

"I want to see how tough he is!"

Again the switches sang through the air. Defu's swollen flesh was beginning to split and bleed. They could kill him, but he wouldn't cry out! Just then, the two plain-clothes men who had caught him came running up.

"Get going, fast! There's enemy movement north of Shajiadian!"

“What are you getting excited about? We’ve got troops on the hills around Shajiadian.”

“Our troops have been ordered to pull out and come this way!”

The plain-clothes men turned and rushed up the slope. Instantly, the enemy squad was in an uproar. Again the corporal demanded that Defu be shot; again the sergeant refused.

“That would be letting him off too easy!” His little eyes glared at the prostrate form. “Take him along. We’ll let him dig fortifications....”

Escape

When Old Zhen and the girls had stood guard on the hill northwest of Shajiadian for the men in the grain station, they too were in great danger. They assumed that as on the previous two days the enemy would again come from the west. Much to their surprise, the enemy suddenly began converging towards them from three directions—east, west and south. Fortunately, the sorghum field in which they were standing gave them good concealment. They got safely across the ridge without stirring up the enemy machine-guns and soon reached the mountain hamlet.

Everyone bemoaned the bad luck of Defu and Yonggong. Old Zhen said if he had thought things were going to turn out this way, he would have insisted that Defu forget about that last picul of grain, whether Defu liked it or not.

Yinfeng could see the beloved image of Defu floating before her big, tear-blurred eyes. Only by a great effort was she able to prevent herself from weeping openly. Lanying and the other girls comforted her. Defu had been at the front, he had experience, they said. He probably managed to cross the gorge with Yonggong further down and had reached Aijii.

By noon, there was still no sign of Defu. Old Zhen clasped the account books under his arm, took up his staff and headed for Aijia. Yinfeng was already beyond caring what others might say, or what her parents hiding in the cliff caves would do when they found out. She told Lanying and the girls to wait for her—she was going to Aijia with Old Zhen. A world without Defu was something she couldn't bear to think about....

They found Aijia jammed with Field Army soldiers. Even the temple and its outdoor stage were occupied. After considerable difficulty, they managed to locate Old Wang and Carpenter, both of whom were very worried about Defu and Yonggong. After Carpenter had picked up the grain receipt, and hours passed without the men appearing, he knew something had gone wrong. Old Wang figured Defu was resting in the mountain hamlet. Defu had labored so hard to finish his dangerous job. He was only human; why shouldn't he rest? Or perhaps he had some instructions to give to Yinfeng and the girls.

“Does he know that Secretary Jin has work for him?”

“He knows. I told him,” Carpenter said, and he disagreed with Old Wang’s guess. “Defu isn’t like that. He always sticks straight to the job. He wouldn’t even go to see his mother though he knows she’s sick. At a time like this he wouldn’t be hanging around with Yinfeng.”

The arrival of Old Zhen and Yinfeng confirmed Carpenter’s worst fears. He clapped his hands together in anguish and looked at Old Wang. Old Zhen told them what had happened. It was now clear that Defu was neither in the mountain hamlet nor in Aijia. What reason did they have for hope?

Yinfeng broke down and wept. Then she swallowed her sobs, and when she spoke her voice was hoarse but confident.

“He’s so strong. He’d die before he’d let the Party lose face!”

Old Wang sighed. “But what about Yonggong? A wife, a mother, a bunch of kids! Even in ordinary times he’s always thinking about them. If he got into a tough spot...”

“We don’t have to worry about that yet,” said Carpenter. “There’s no use talking about things before they happen!”

What to do? To search for the two or rescue them was out of the question. District Party secretary Jin and district clerk Shang had long since

been transferred by Commissioner Ge to Cedar Rise. Finally, Carpenter gave the grain receipt to Old Zhen and told him to deliver it and the account books to the district government men in Cedar Rise and report what had happened. Old Wang would remain in Aijia, while Carpenter and Yinfeng would go back to the mountain hamlet—perhaps the men had hidden out in some cave, and would be able to get through after the enemy passed on....

Yinfeng and Carpenter returned to the mountain hamlet. At dusk there was still no news of Defu or Yonggong.

The whole afternoon of the 19th of August, to the east as far as Zhanggao Hill, south to Wujia Hill, all the way to Shajiadian in the west, crisscrossing the heights to a depth of over a dozen li, Hu Zongnan's 36th Division dug fortifications. They built artillery emplacements, machine-gun nests, rifle positions, communication trenches, even brick cooking stoves.... Only when the sun was setting behind the hills west of the Wuding River did they again assemble in their various units.

Defu dug no fortifications for the enemy that afternoon. Blood from his lacerated back kept running down into his shoes, and he was trailed by a swarm of green-headed flies. Under orders from the sergeant, the corporal brought him to a knoll, put a shovel in his hands and ordered him

to dig a trench. Defu had already given up any hope that he might live. He saw that all around the enemy soldiers had stacked their rifles and were hard at work digging, with the sweat pouring down their backs. He figured he was going to be killed sooner or later, that it would be better to die sooner and put an end to his torment. The idea was to crush a few enemy skulls with the shovel, then jump off the cliff! He asked the soldiers to free his bound arms. They refused. They said he could kneel and dig. He said he couldn't do that because of the pain in his thighs. The sergeant ordered the men to force him down. Defu flung the shovel aside.

"I'm in hell already so the devil himself can't scare me! Do anything you want! I won't dig!"

Furious, the sergeant howled for the men to tie Defu's hands behind his back and drag him off to one side. The soldiers should do the digging themselves. When they finished they were to bring Defu back with them. Then the sergeant went away with a soldier carrying a sack of grain. Defu lay in a patch of black beans all afternoon.

"When is the Field Army going to strike?" he wondered, peering at the hills north of the gorge.

At sunset, the soldiers prepared to return from their work, and the squad which had been guarding Defu came to get him. They thought he was dead at first, but he stirred when one of the soldiers poked him. He was in an uneasy slumber.

This was the longest rest he had had since the crisis started on the fourteenth. The sun had dried his wounds and adhered them to his clothing. He had been dreaming that he was serving as guide to the Field Army and that it was just about to wipe out the enemy. But when he awoke, there surrounding him were soldiers with American-style service caps cocked over their eyes. They raised him to his feet.

Carrying their arms and equipment plus their shovels, the enemy troops marched off. The squad guarding Defu lagged behind. The men cursed their sergeant as they walked.

"This fellow's no Communist bigwig. One shot and he's finished. What's the use of keeping him?"

"Our sergeant is an odd duck. There's no telling what goes on in his mind!"

"What mind?!" This from the corporal who twice wanted Defu shot and who twice was overruled by the sergeant. He was very annoyed. "He doesn't give a damn about anything. If we're hungry, he doesn't feel it. Son of a bitch! When we were crossing the grasslands from Jingbian, he said we could rest when we got to Yulin. Son of a bitch! He fooled us into carrying stuff like pack animals; but when we reached Yulin, he said we had to go to Zhenchuan. At Zhenchuan he said we have to go to Wulongbu. Last night in that bloody rain it's a miracle we weren't all drowned..."

“Corporal,” said a soldier cautiously in a Henan accent, “you mustn’t let the sergeant hear you talk like this.”

“Son of a bitch! I’ll tell it to him to his face! Didn’t he give us a cock and bull story? All he worried about during that big rain was to get himself into a tent. Son of a bitch! Hurry up!” The corporal gave Defu an angry push.

Defu stumbled and nearly fell. Apparently there was a real conflict between the enemy officers and men. The latter were hungry and tired, and nightfall was approaching. Could it be that he still might find a way out? Was there still hope for escape? Defu’s mind began racing again.

“Corporal, my arms are dead numb. At least untie my wrists and I’ll be able to walk a little faster. You’ll be able to eat that much sooner....”

A number of enemy soldiers immediately supported this proposal.

The corporal asked Defu, “Will you go along quietly then? You won’t pull any more tricks?”

“I’ll go along quietly,” Defu changed his stubborn manner, he pretended to be quite docile, and added sympathetically, “I don’t blame you men a bit. All this trouble is because that rotten Chiang Kai-shek plotted with America to make a civil war....”

“None of your propaganda!” the corporal shouted. “Just behave yourself and we’ll untie

you. When we get to the hill top, we'll give you something to eat too."

"I'll behave." Defu had accurately spotted tiredness and hunger as enemy weak points.

The cautious soldier from Henan untied his wrists. That afternoon he had saved the last few drops of water from the muddy liquid brought up to the soldiers from the river, and he gave Defu a drink. Defu was very grateful, and thereafter had kept looking thankfully in the man's direction. He noticed that the man was also stealing sympathetic glances at him. Defu modified his categorical hatred of all those wearing the American type service cap.

"Go on!" said the Henanese.

At first, Defu didn't realize that his wrists were free. The tight rope had practically cut off the circulation in his arms; he was paralyzed from the elbows down. It was several minutes before the blood came back into his fingers and he was able to move them again. He requested that they loosen the bonds on his upper arms. The corporal refused. He prodded Defu with his rifle butt, urging him to walk faster. Defu decided he'd better not press the point.

It was already dusk. Field kitchen stoves were spurting red flames, while white smoke arose from the newly lit campfires. Enemy soldiers were gathered in every hollow of the hillside. Neighing and whinnying, pack animals were rounded up

for the night. There was enough noise and color and crowding for a country carnival after dark. On the slopes, great flowing masses of humanity blotted out the original lines of distinction between fields and paths. Within this seething movement were several middle-aged peasants who had been caught during the afternoon. They were compelled to carry water and firewood up the hill, the "firewood" actually being the smashed remains of peasants' chairs, tables, door frames, chests of drawers, spinning wheels and weaving sets. They dropped their eyes when they met Defu.

"Don't step on those telephone lines!" the soldier escorting them yelled.

Guarded by the squad, Defu continued plodding up the slope. Off to one side he suddenly observed a group of young women. Their bobbed hair was all awry; the blouses and trousers of several of them had been ripped.... They were surrounded by a bunch of leering soldiers. Some of the men guarding Defu went over for a look. They said the women were "girl cadres." Defu's heart went out to them. This meant that a number of villages had failed to properly conceal their grain, clothing and furniture; that the older folks, women and children had not hidden themselves in time. They had fallen into the enemy's hands. Raging inwardly, Defu was led into a wide gully.

Here, hundreds of pack animals were noisily munching green millet. Defu's guards asked for directions to the brigade's intelligence company, then mounted a knoll to the north. It was completely dark now. Fires could be seen burning on many peaks to the east and to the south. Not far off ringing axes were chopping wood....

Except for a path into the gully, the knoll was covered with khaki-uniformed enemy soldiers. There were heaps of wheat stalks, some of which had already been spread as bedding. Many sat cradling their rifles and eating thick wheatcakes which had been dropped by planes during the day. Along the east and west sides of the slope field stoves had been built and were being tended by captured peasants. A number of tents stood on several wide clearings on the top of the ridge. Lights were burning in all the tents; someone was telephoning in one, what sounded like a phonograph was playing in another. Defu had once heard a phonograph in the Shajiadian landlord's house; he guessed the tents must be for the big shots. "Those bastards take good care of themselves wherever they are!" he muttered.

He wondered whether this could be brigade headquarters. There was the web of telephone lines, the great herd of pack animals, and now this row of tents. Besides, the squad guarding him was part of the brigade's intelligence company.

Tensely, Defu devoured the surrounding scene with his eyes.

Halfway up the knoll, they were confronted by the vicious sergeant.

“Why are you coming back so late?”

“The prisoner couldn’t walk fast!” The corporal saluted, but he was obviously annoyed with his superior.

Just then an officer walked over. The sergeant snapped his hand up in salute.

“Reporting to the captain! The prisoner has been brought here. That’s the guy. He’s real tough. We couldn’t beat a sound out of him.”

The captain turned his flashlight on Defu, then nodded several times.

“Local government men. Not as important as the other one. That bird is at least a district officer. He pretended he’s illiterate; he even got the peasants to identify him as a felt maker. Of course the Communists prepared the whole business! There’s no hurry. All of you eat and get some rest. We’ll look into this fellow tomorrow. Tonight Platoon Two is on guard duty. It will be responsible for both of the prisoners.”

The captain spoke in an ordinary routine voice. He departed.

The corners of the corporal’s mouth drooped. More trouble. His squad was part of Platoon Two.

"Why untied him? Eh? Who did it?" screamed the sergeant, glaring. He had noticed Defu's wrists.

The men fell silent. They looked at their corporal.

"He didn't run away, did he?" the corporal replied indifferently. "He couldn't walk well, it was dark and we were in a hurry to get back. With his hands free he walked faster...."

"Tie them up!" The sergeant stared at the corporal with open enmity.

Two soldiers hurried to bind Defu's wrists. Defu said nothing—he was thinking of what the captain had said. Who was the other captured comrade? Secretary Jin and the rest were up north in Aijia. It couldn't be any of them. District head Zao and his men were fighting as guerillas in the south; could one of them have been caught by the enemy? No matter who it was, he now had a comrade in distress. With the two of them working together the chances of escape would be better! From what the captain said, they weren't going to finish him off tonight. The enemy soldiers were exhausted. This would be just the time to make a break! But suppose the Field Army decided to launch a night attack?

A man wearing a white shirt was being dragged up the eastern slope. He was a head taller than Defu. Defu's heart contracted. A great deal

depended on this man in his plan to escape! The man was brought forward.

Oh! The fellow really was a felt maker! Defu had been through such a turmoil the past few days, he had forgotten about him. He was one of the men district head Zao had sent with a message two nights before. His name was Zhang Heming, about thirty, a felt maker from Fourth Xiang, a very clever person. Because felt making was light work, his hands were not calloused like a peasant's. No wonder the enemy thought he was an office worker.

The prisoners looked at each other. Both fully understood.

Heming's arms and hands were also tightly bound, but Defu could tell from the way he walked that he probably had not been beaten much. The two men were then tied to either end of a few feet of rope and led off towards the western slope.

"Even if you kill me, I'm still a felt maker from Yulin!" Heming said loudly to his captors.

Defu realized he was being tipped off to his comrade's story. Felt was a Yulin specialty and the town was occupied by the Kuomintang. Being just across the border of the liberated areas, people in Yulin spoke with almost the same accent as people here. Heming could therefore play his role quite convincingly. As a matter of fact, Defu knew him to be an active Communist.

The sergeant cracked Heming a resounding slap across the face, and the latter said no more. "That bastard is cruelest of the lot!" thought Defu.

They had walked about thirty paces when the sergeant pointed out the sector which the platoon was to guard. He warned the soldiers that it was difficult terrain, that they should be especially watchful of the prisoners during the night. Then he turned and left.

The squad marched on past men cooking on a temporary field stove, proceeded a short distance down the slope, and halted. They had reached their destination.

Soldiers munching tough wheat cakes hailed the squad; there was an exchange of much swearing and laughter. Defu seized on this moment to look the land over. Further down the slope was a small knoll through which snaked a dark communication trench. Other trenches branching from it led to the fortifications on the cliff side. Below the cliff was a knoll grooved with dry cuts leading into a big gorge. Defu knew this cliff. It was about fifty feet high. With the aid of a small mattock and by grasping the vines and sour date trees that comprised its sparse vegetation, the peasants had climbed it during the winter off-seasons while hunting for fuel. Now, its ground had just been softened by the rain. Rolling down the cliff side probably wouldn't kill a man.

The prisoners were ordered to sit. Heming complied, but Defu because of his wounded back could only slowly ease himself into a lying position. With pity in his eyes, Heming looked at Defu. Though it made him more uncomfortable, Heming leaned as far back as he could so that the rope connecting them should not pull his injured comrade.

The soldiers of the guard squad drew their share of wheat cakes and began to eat. Defu said he was hungry too.

“So you haven’t forgotten?” said the corporal angrily, his mouth full. But this fellow was more human than the sergeant. He glared at the prisoners for a moment, then ordered one of his men to give Defu and Heming each a wheat cake.

The man told Defu to sit up. Clenching his teeth against the pain, Defu struggled into an upright position. He figured that since the enemy was giving them food, their hands would have to be untied. But the soldier had no such intention. He wanted them to draw up their legs, grip the wheat cakes between their knees, then lean forward and eat. Defu said it was impossible. The soldier told the felt maker to try. Defu gave the latter a wink, and the clever Heming, who could, as a matter of fact, have eaten in that manner, poked at the wheat cake with his mouth and sent it rolling on the ground.

“Hands aren’t wings, are they?” Defu demanded. “We’re not going to fly away if you untie them...” “Huh!” grunted the soldier as he chewed, “I’m not going to untie you no matter what you say. Why should I risk my neck?”

“Corporal, maybe we have to die, but not by starving to death! Didn’t you promise to feed me?” Defu reminded him.

“Take their ropes off,” said the corporal reluctantly. “When they finish, tie them up again.”

The soldier with the wheat cakes slapped Defu on the head with one of them, saying he was a real “trouble maker,” and waited while two other men untied the prisoners. But it wasn’t because Defu was a “trouble maker” that the corporal was behaving this way. The corporal explained he only wanted the prisoners to eat quickly so that his men could get some rest sooner. Defu had no illusions about the corporal’s feelings towards him. Twice the corporal had recommended that he be shot. They were being untied only because the corporal was at odds with the sergeant and he was trying to get on the good side of his men.

“Eat hearty, master felt maker from Yulin,” said Defu to Heming. “If we’re going to die, let’s do it on a full stomach!”

“Stop your damn gabbing and eat!” snapped the corporal.

Defu ignored him. Lying on his side again, Defu gripped the wheat cake with both hands

and bit into it. His mouth was dry and parched, and the wheat cakes the planes had dropped were nearly an inch thick, hard and sour. Swallowing was difficult, but to build up strength in case an opportunity to escape should arise, Defu forced himself to eat. He was calling on Heming to eat well for the same reason.

From half a dozen yards up the slope came the call, "The soup's here!" There was a noisy clanking as the enemy soldiers unfastened their tin cups and scrambled to the soup cauldron.

"Don't grab! Don't grab!"

"This isn't from America. There's plenty of it!" "Hey! Hey! If you knock the cauldron over, nobody will get any!..."

After a riotous interval, the soldiers came trooping back, each carrying a cup full of soup. The corporal had not joined the rush; the Henan soldier had gone for him, and now respectfully presented him with a cup. Defu had only contempt for that kind of person. He wondered why the Henanese was playing up so to the corporal.

Again Defu sounded off. "Corporal, my mouth is so dry I can't swallow..."

The corporal exploded with a foul invective. "We beat you half to death and you don't make a sound! But you're plenty loud when it comes to eating!"

"This chap wants everything!" one of the men laughed coldly. "They're eating American canned stuff up in the tents. How'd you like some of that?"

Each soldier busied himself with his own soup. Defu made no answer to the sarcastic wisecrack. Again he pressed the corporal. The latter was very irritated.

"Can't you wait till the men finish theirs? You're a real pain in the ass!"

"Fine!" Defu said to himself. "I don't want you to like me; as long as you feed me that's all I ask!" The last time he ate was when he was with the Field Army battalion. That was a whole day ago.

In the pale light of a new moon, the Hu Zongnan soldiers joked about their "Three Flavored Soup" as they drank. Defu was surprised. Where could they find the ingredients for an expensive soup like that way out in the country? When the soldiers finished, they gave each of the prisoners a cupful. Defu painfully raised himself and squatted beside Heming. His soup was composed of millet, wheat grains and pumpkin all boiled together! Except for what the planes occasionally dropped, the enemy's only food was what they could scrape off the countryside. Defu drank, very pleased that he had prevented the grain of the Shajiadian station from falling into the enemy's hands. He understood even more clearly now the importance of the leadership's call to conceal everything.

Heming, not having been injured, could eat more quickly. He soon finished and the enemy soldiers, ignoring his request for more, promptly retied him, while urging Defu to hurry. Defu continued chewing, unruffled. He wondered about Heming. The other night when they were trying to figure out the disposition of the enemy troops according to the fires they could see from the hill south of Shajiadian, Heming had been so calm and competent. Why did he now seem such a dunce, so simple-minded? Was he just acting, or was he really depressed? Defu thought he'd better set him an example to stir up his fighting spirit.

He demanded more soup.

"How much does it take to satisfy you?" said the corporal nastily.

"I'm very hungry," Defu replied boldly, "and tomorrow I'm going to die! You mean to say you won't let me eat my fill? You men may be wearing American-style uniforms, but you're still Chinese, aren't you?"

These cutting words coming from a youth so rustic in appearance startled the enemy soldiers. They looked around at the rakishly cocked American type service caps. Evidently ashamed, for a moment no one spoke. Finally, it was the Henan soldier again who came up with another cupful of soup.

"I can't finish this," he said to the corporal. "Can I give it to him? He's going to die soon..."

The corporal looked at Defu speculatively, then nodded. The Henanese poured his soup into Defu's cup. Yet even as Defu was thanking him with his eyes, the man gave him a kick.

"This is the last you'll get!" said the soldier from Henan. Seeming quite uninterested, he walked away.

Defu wondered as he drank the second soup. There was an honest Henan face beneath that American-style service cap. What was going on in the man's mind? Why was he being so kind? And why was he so servile to the corporal, so respectful? The kick he gave was a fake; it didn't hurt a bit. Defu didn't understand. He had heard that Hu Zongnan's 36th Division was given the strongest anti-communist indoctrination. When Defu was serving in the stretcher teams after the Panlongzhen campaign, a prisoner captured from another of Hu Zongnan's divisions had warned, "You may have licked us, but you'll never beat the 36th!" Defu didn't dare think too well of the soldier from Henan....

Then the ugly big sergeant came swaggering down the slope. "Which one of you untied him again? Eh?" "The corporal told us to do it. He said let him eat faster so we can get some rest..." a frightened soldier hastily reported, while glancing at the corporal's darkening visage.

"If he gets away, whoever untied him will be shot!" snarled the sergeant. He shouted to all the

soldiers on the slope to get ready for roll call, then gave the corporal special instructions to be followed during the night. This was the command post. If the prisoners escaped, he himself would have to pay with his life. The sergeant eyed the corporal balefully, then with an air of being very busy, rushed off.

Two soldiers hurried over to tie Defu's hands. "Let him finish the cup!" snapped the corporal. He stared venomously after the retreating figure of the sergeant and said in a low voice, "If you were squad leader I suppose you'd keep the prisoners tied and feed them yourself? Did you order me not to let them eat? If I die, you'll go with me! Last night I nearly drowned in the mountain torrent, and you hit me! Let's see you hit me again!" Raging like a madman, he turned on Defu, "You dirty bastard! Hurry up and eat! I don't want any more of you goddam nonsense!"

Several of the soldiers expressed sympathy with the corporal. They said the sergeant was too extreme.

"While we were sweating on the fortifications, there wasn't a sign of him!"

"He was down in the valley with the brigade junior officers rounding up women!"

"Soldiers like us aren't supposed to have any tools!"

Defu burned! These swine had to be wiped out, that's all there was to it! His mind rioted with pic-

tures of trampled crops, good fields crisscrossed with trenches, furniture broken into firewood, old peasants turned into water carriers, raped and insulted women.... He looked at the dark hills to the north. Was the Field Army all prepared? This was the enemy's brigade headquarters, their command post. They were worried about the prisoners getting away. Well, he was more determined to escape than ever!...

Suddenly, from one of the tents on the ridge came the sound of a woman's voice. "Listen, listen!" the soldiers called to one another, and the men on the slope fell silent. In the stillness of the night, the woman's voice was penetrating and sharp. But she spoke in an accent which Defu couldn't understand. He could only make out an occasional phrase, "National Army," "Communist Bandits"....Mao Zedong and Peng Dehuai were mentioned, as were Zhenchuan, Cedar Rise, Shajiadian... Some of the military units of both sides...

Do the enemy officers bring their wives along? She's a loud-mouth show-off. The whole hill can hear her! Defu was puzzled.

After a while she talked of something else, and the soldiers resumed their chatter. There was no woman in the tent and the music Defu had heard earlier hadn't come from a phonograph—both were broadcasts from the Nanking radio station. The soldiers animatedly discussed the "news."

“Mao Zedong and Peng Dehuai crossed the Yellow River. We couldn’t catch them...”

“How come our Ninetieth Division didn’t get to Jiaxian till this morning?”

“Has our division become part of an army-corps? The radio said the ‘Zhong Sung Army-Corps had advanced to the east of Shajiadian from Zhenchuan.’ Is that us?”

“Hey,” a soldier came up the slope and spoke to Heming. “How far is Cedar Rise from Shajiadian?”

“Twenty to thirty li.”

“Bah!” the soldiers snorted in disbelief. They thought Cedar Rise was only a few li north of the gorge. Otherwise, why build fortifications here? One soldier angrily punched the felt maker.

“Can’t you ever tell the truth?!”

From the soldiers’ elated conversation, Defu could see that the enemy had been completely taken in by Chairman Mao’s strategy. He was sure Chairman Mao hadn’t crossed the river into Shanxi; Commander Peng Dehuai certainly couldn’t have gone. But the enemy was living in the same dream world as the landlord, Stinker Huaizong. They had swallowed all the lies of the broadcast. They said the Field Army had lost more than half of its men at Yulin, that it was “crippled” and didn’t dare launch another attack, that Commander Peng Dehuai had taken the Model Brigade and the newly organized Third Column

with him across the river, that four broken-down brigades were surrounded in the neighborhood of Cedar Rise; that two of these had tried to “escape” south by going west of Shajiadian the previous night, but were afraid the enemy marching up from Suide would cut them off and had retreated to their original positions before dawn, and so on, and so Defu listened silently with joy in his heart. He drank his soup and forced down the tough wheat cake, building up his strength for an escape. The soldiers bound him again, the corporal ordering them to make especially tight knots which he wouldn’t be able to work loose.

Bugles sounded on the ridge for roll call. One soldier remained behind to guard the prisoners; the rest ran to assemble on the south ridge. The guard ordered the captives off to one side, then he spread a bundle of wheat stalks for his bed. Before his hands should become too numb, Defu hastened to loosen Heming’s ropes. But by the time the felt maker was reaching to reciprocate, the guard had finished and returned.

The soldiers came back from roll call in high spirits. Their days of exposure to the sun and rain were over, they said. No longer would they have to climb the hills of north Shaanxi. Only “mopping up” remained, and the Ninth Division wouldn’t be needed for that. The tail end of the broadcast had said the “Nationalists” had restored their administrations throughout the province of

Shaanxi; not one county seat remained in communist hands. Defu marveled at the gullibility of these Hu Zongnan soldiers. How could they be duped so easily by Chiang Kai-shek's blather?

All right! thought Defu, gazing at the black hills across the gorge. We'll see who wipes out who!

After a boisterous interval, the soldiers settled down to sleep in the manner their sergeant had directed. Defu lay between the corporal and the felt maker. Strong winds blew on the hills at night, and the soldiers covered themselves with their blankets. Defu was afraid if he caught a chill in his stomach it would hinder his escape. He asked the corporal for a cover. At first the corporal refused, saying there weren't any extras, then he asked whether anyone had a spare. Again it was the Henan soldier who without a word produced a thin coverlet—a curtain stolen from some peasant's door. Defu saw then that the Henanese had been lying on the other side of Heming. The soldier spread the curtain over the two prisoners as high as their waists. Looking at the man's decent face, Defu thought of a character in a play he had seen—a good man who had been persecuted and forced into the reactionaries' army. Could that be the case with this fellow?

Night—deep and limitless night. Campfires still flickered on the nearby hilltops, but conversations died away. The snuffling of the pack animals carried distinctly across the distance....

Defu could see only one fire on the hill to the west. Still further to the west, where the gully with the castor oil plants was, it was pitch black. Every few minutes, he quietly raised his head to look. Seven or eight captured peasants were squatting around a field stove. A sentry patrolled back and forth, his bayonet gleaming as he passed the stove. Lamps still burned in the tents.

Up until midnight, Defu made no move, for fear that the enemy were not yet sleeping soundly. From Defu's tenseness Heming could tell what was in his mind. Heming nudged him from time to time to indicate that he was waiting for a signal.

By about one in the morning, snores were rising in concert all along the slope. The lamps in the tents had been extinguished; no one was to be seen around the field stove. There remained only the sentry, steadily patrolling his beat. It took him about sixty seconds to march to the furthest point of his orbit, turn around, and walk back. As the sentry began one of his outward tours, Defu edged closer to the felt maker. The corporal did not stir when the pressure of Defu's chest was removed from his shoulder. Defu turned his head and whispered.

"Heming, let's run for it!"

"Which way do we run?"

"To those trenches, then over the cliff."

The sentry was coming back. Defu poked Heming; both men became silent. They waited till the sentry began marching away again, then Heming felt for the knots at Defu's wrists.

Again the sentry marched back. Fumbling with the rope around Defu's wrists, Heming grew tense every time the enemy soldier walked in their direction. Besides, the knots were very tight; it was painfully slow work. A half hour later, he still hadn't opened them. Heming's forehead was wet with perspiration. Although his ropes had been loosened by Defu earlier, Heming could only move his hands awkwardly. Somewhere a rooster began to crow. Defu was ready to burst with anxiety. Then the Henan soldier sleeping next to Heming rolled over.

He sat up. They were finished. He lifted their coverlet and felt their ropes. Strange, he didn't utter a sound. Well, it didn't matter. Unless they could get away at once, they were doomed anyhow. Because of the impression the man had made upon him, Defu decided to risk it. He started to plead in a low tone, "You—" The Henanese placed his hand over Defu's mouth....

The sentry began walking over. Slowly and calmly, the Henan soldier replaced the coverlet. The sentry squatted beside him and whispered so as not to disturb the sleepers.

"What's up?"

"I felt them move. I wanted to see if their ropes were all right."

"You're too simple. There's no way out of here. Besides, they're tied. They can't get away. You're always doing all the hard jobs. Go to sleep!"

"The sergeant said if they escape, our corporal will be shot. I'm afraid to really sleep..."

"Ai!" The sentry sighed. He stood up and walked away.

Defu and Heming, who had been desperately pretending to be deep in slumber, only then dared to release their breaths. During the first tour the sentry made after he resumed his patrol, the Henan soldier untied Heming; during the second, Heming released Defu; during the third, the prisoners stole softly past the sleeping men and slipped into the communication trench.

Because of Defu's injuries, Heming was the more agile of the two. Even before Defu reached the end of the trench, he could hear the sound of vines and brambles ripping Heming's clothing as the latter sped down the steep incline. Without regard to where the sentry might be, Defu clambered out of the trench, shielded his face with his arms, and raced downhill as fast as his legs could carry him.

An instant later he tumbled full tilt into a large puddle. He was covered with mud. The water, eating into his open wounds, cut like knives.

As Heming hauled him out, clods of earth came rolling down. The Henan soldier was sliding towards them. His American style service cap was gone; his bald head was bare. In one hand he carried a rifle. Happy and grateful, the two men welcomed him.

“You’ve been so good to us...”

“Keep moving, fast,” panted the Henanese. To Heming he said, “Get rid of that white shirt. It makes too good a target...”

Heming ripped off his shirt. With the Henan soldier he supported Defu, and all three ran together. They hastened through a winding ravine over uneven ground. Before long they reached a deep gully. Running was a great effort for Defu. When he spoke to Heming, he could barely catch his breath.

“Never mind about me! Take him to where this forks off. Then follow the north branch and go straight to the Field Army and report. I can go over the rise myself and cut past Shajiadian to the mountain hamlet. Old Zhen from our co-op is there with our grain station account books. I can see him on the way. I’ll go on and look for the Field Army from there...”

“But you can’t run very fast,” protested Heming. “It’ll be light soon...”

“It doesn’t matter,” Defu cut in decisively. “That’s just the reason we have to take different roads and look for the Field Army separately!”

The fugitive Henan soldier was in a new world. He hadn't the least idea of what was happening, and Defu's words startled and worried him.

"That way won't be any good," he pleaded. 'He's not from around here. If he loses the road we'll be in trouble!"

Defu laughed. "Heming won't lose the road, he's one of our guerillas. You'll be safe going with him. We're all one family..."

His jaw dropping; in astonishment, the Henan soldier stared at Heming. As the latter took him by the hand and started off, he kept looking back over his shoulder at Defu rather longingly, as though there was still something he wanted to say. But Defu had already cut across the gully and was arduously climbing the slope. It was three li nearer to the mountain hamlet by this route. He hoped Old Zhen hadn't lost those account books....

Love and Hate

Carpenter and Yinfeng climbed to the peak behind the mountain hamlet and looked around. The great swath of gleaming fires covering the hills to the southeast was just like what people had often imagined Hell to be. Both the upper and lower gorge rang with intermittent rifle shots, sharp and echoing. Carpenter said the shooting must be because of clashes between scouting patrols. Fearing that enemy plain-clothes men might sneak into the hamlet during the night, Yinfeng and about a dozen local young women stayed with Carpenter, maneuvering around the hilltop, till the early hours of the morning.

Yinfeng kept her eyes on those fiery hills to the southeast. She didn't say a word all night. The strong stubborn figure of Defu never left her

mind; her ears could hear only his firm tones—"Do your work well...." "Nobody can stop us from getting married...." "Once the revolution succeeds, there's nothing we can't do...." Defu was always busy for the revolution, too busy in fact to court her properly....

And now? Would he be able to get out of that hell? Would he still be able to do his "work well" until the "revolution succeeds"? Yinfeng closed her eyes, and she could see the virile Defu—leading the peasants in shouting political slogans at the mass meeting to square accounts with the landlords, roaring his name out at a mobilization rally for army volunteers, working all day and then staying up half the night on patrol.... Once, on the way home from Zhenchuan, he had met an old man carrying a heavy sack of grain. Though they were utter strangers, Defu took that sack and toted it twenty li, all the way to Shajiadian....

"He can't die! He has to live!" she whispered fiercely. This was not a purely personal prayer, for Yinfeng had felt for a long time that even after they married Defu would not belong to her alone. He belonged to the people!

Defu barely recognized the hill east of Shajiadian; it was so furrowed with trenches. He came to one wide ditch, deep as a man, where the excavated damp earth had been loosely piled on both edges. Leaping across in the dark, Defu missed

his footing, and slid heavily into the ditch. He sprained his ankle....

Defu rubbed his foot and swore. "Now how can I run?"

But he had to keep going. He dragged himself out of the ditch and hobbled on till he reached the familiar ravine. He decided to go through Shajia-dian, into the gorge, and then across to the mountain hamlet.

A ghostly silence pervaded the village. With most of its compound gates and cave doors gaping blackly open, it looked as though no one had lived there for years. The street and compounds were filled with debris. In the east, the sky was turning light, and Defu could see scattered tables, stools, clothing, blankets.... Obviously, the enemy soldiers had wrecked and plundered the village. Suddenly Defu noticed a man seated leaning against a gateway, with a long white beard down to his chest.

"He sure is a tough old fellow," thought Defu, drawing close. He whispered to him, "You wouldn't go up into the hills; at least you ought to hide in one of the caves. Why are you sleeping out here? Grandpa, grandpa, grand—"

Defu squatted beside him and shook him. The old man was already stiff. Looking closer Defu saw a pool of blood beneath his feet.

“Ah!” Defu sighed and stood up. He recalled what the old man had related during the meeting to settle accounts with the landlord last spring.

The old man had been a strange one, very argumentative. He said he had suffered all his life, but just as he was approaching the end of his days, Heaven had sent Chairman Mao, and at last he was able to draw a full breath. That was why, in the winter of 1937 when the Eighth Route Army had marched into their region, although he had gotten very sick he hadn't died. The others laughed and teased him. They said millions of people were drawing their first full breath; why was it that not one of them had even a belly ache that winter? He had been worse off than any of them, but the Communist Party brought him happiness which made his illness grow milder day by day, explained the old man. It amounted to extending his life span. Defu was only fifteen in 1937, working as a shepherd for Stinker in Gongjia Gully. He remembered the tragic scene when the Shajiadian landlord evicted the old man for debt from a home his family had lived in for generations. Then, when the Eighth Route Army first came, the landlords became frightened and relaxed their pressure somewhat. Later, during the rent-reduction struggle, the old man's debt, along with all the others' old usurious debts, was canceled. But it wasn't until last spring, when the old man got all the sordid story off his chest at

the accounts-settling mass meeting, that he really felt satisfied.

Recalling how the old man had refused to reveal the hiding place of the grain station men when the enemy punched his face three days before, and how in the past two days he had repeatedly risked his life for their sake, Defu was extremely moved. He addressed the motionless figure as if the old man were still alive.

“Grandpa, you’ve got one son at the front carrying grain, and the other is in the army. Your womenfolk are all hiding out in the cliff caves. I want to take you to a quieter spot. But it’ll be daylight soon, and I have to find the Field Army in a hurry. They’ll avenge us!...”

At dawn, with tears in his eyes, Defu left Shajiadian. Because of his injuries, he was afraid he couldn’t go straight up the steep slope to the mountain hamlet. He guessed there wouldn’t be any enemy in the big gorge at this point, and decided to follow the road for about one li to a place where the ascent was easier.

Before he had gone two hundred paces, he suddenly saw a number of men in brown uniforms coming around the bend ahead of him. In the distance he couldn’t make out whether they were friend or foe. He plunged towards a fissure in the cliff face to give himself time for a more careful look. But four men came running quickly; one was pulling the bolt of his rifle.

"Neighbor, hey, neighbor, don't run away!"

As soon as he heard "neighbor," Defu's whole body was bathed in warmth. Only our side addressed peasants in that affectionate manner. Perspiring freely, he turned around. They were men of the Field Army, and they had already caught up.

"Why are you running? How did you get so muddy?"

"See if he's carrying anything on him."

"Why don't you speak instead of just wiping your tears?"

"Say—that's Defu from Shajiadian!" A guide from a neighboring village came hastening over. He had drawn grain at Shajiadian only two days before. Now he asked in astonishment, "There were several men at your grain station. What are you doing here alone?"

Defu couldn't say a word. There seemed to be a great lump in his throat. He had never been this way before. When the enemy had beaten him cruelly he had appeared to be physically incapable of weeping. Rushing to bring an important report to the Field Army, it never even occurred to him that he might cry. But after a day and a night of torment in the enemy's hands, and then the shock of coming upon the tragically murdered old man with the white beard, the sight at last of our own soldiers made him so happy he couldn't control his tears.

The soldiers examined him. They were startled by the wounds on his back and the marks the rope had left on his arms. A comrade carrying a leather dispatch case approached from the upper gorge.

“Company Commander Liu,” he called, “let the troops rest here. The men behind haven’t caught up yet.” He looked at Defu. “Aiya! Who beat him like this?”

Defu grasped the man’s hand with both of his own. “Staff Officer Huang, let me go with you and get my revenge!”

“Eh?!” Huang’s eyes went wide, then he peered closely at the mud-spattered face. “Isn’t your name Shi Defu? Ah...”

“You know him?” Company Commander Liu was having trouble following.

“This comrade was in the stretcher teams with us for three months, through the forests of east Gansu and across the desert around the three border cities. He made an excellent showing.” Huang turned to Defu. “What happened to you?”

“The enemy beat me. I got away over the cliff,” Defu said shortly; then he pressed, “Let me go with you. I want revenge. I was just looking for our army!”

“That’s impossible. You’ve been hurt too badly. We’re going to fight. You won’t be able to keep up...”

"I escaped from the enemy brigade headquarters," Defu insisted. "I know where their command post is!"

"What!" chorused Huang and Liu. "You've come from the headquarters of the 165th Brigade? Where is it?"

Defu thought for a moment, then he stated its distance from its surrounding landmarks with such exactitude that the officers were able to locate and mark it on their military map. Huang immediately wrote a report and told Liu to dispatch a man with it to headquarters' command.

"We'll avenge you!" said Liu excitedly. "I guarantee it. We've got guides. You don't have to take us there."

"I'll write a note for you. You take it to the rear and find Staff Officer Shao," added Huang. "He'll get you to the first-aid station. The weather's hot. You can't let those wounds go without dressing any longer." His injuries were rather serious, and his sprained ankle made walking slow and painful. Defu had no choice; he'd have to stay behind. As he got ready to leave, he reported the trenches he had seen on his way. The officers said they already had that information. Their scouts had located all the enemy fortifications along the front during the night.

Defu grinned. "All right, where's the rear?"

"In the mountain hamlet," said the guide from the neighboring village. "A bunch of

young women from Shajiadian are up there. Go on, get going."

Only then did Defu think of Yinfeng. But an instant later the bent figure of Old Zhen with the grain station account books under his arm replaced her in Defu's mind. Staff Officer Huang finished writing his note, and handing it to Defu said that after his injuries were dressed he would be sent to a small field hospital. From there, if necessary, he could go to the large hospital of the Field Army. He told Defu not to hesitate to speak up. They would definitely give him the same treatment as any wounded soldier.

"Aiya! Please don't write that!" cried Defu frantically. "In the first place, all my grain station records are in someone else's hands. In the second place, my district Party secretary has got work waiting for me!..."

"Are you crazy? What kind of work can you do in your condition?"

Word was brought that all the rearguard men had caught up; the army was going to continue its march. Huang and Liu hastily bid Defu farewell; the latter stepped off the road in front of a big boulder and watched the troops stride by. Every soldier who saw his condition drew a sharp breath of surprise. Some of the guides from north of the gorge recognized him.

"What in the world happened to you?" a few asked.

“Got beaten up by the enemy!” Defu responded simply, almost cheerfully. It was very odd. The tears he had just shed seemed to have washed all the black mood out of his body. Elated, he watched the men of the Field Army marching past. “Now we’ll see whether Hu Zongnan’s bandits are really as tough as they think they are!”

And there was Ba Hu, his knapsack on his back, walking ahead of one of the units!

“Ba Hu! Ba Hu! Ba Hu...”

“Oh! What’s wrong with you?!...” Ba Hu had no time to say any more. The unit behind him was moving up quickly. He turned his head back several times as he marched away.

Troops, stretcher teams, troops, stretcher teams, followed one after the other. After a long while, when the sun was fully up, Defu was left alone in the gorge. He broke a branch from a tree, and using it as a staff, started out. His sprained ankle had swollen and he walked very slowly. As he entered the ravine leading to the mountain hamlet, the sun was crimsoning the hilltops. Suddenly, from the direction of Shajiadian came the wild chatter of machine-guns, interspersed with the crumping bursts of hand grenades....

The full-scale battle had finally started.

Step by step, Defu trudged painfully on. Walking a while, resting a while, he slowly mounted a knoll. It had taken him half the morning to cover only three li.

East and south of Shajiadian for a radius of over ten li, yellow dust, smoke and flame rose to the heavens.

Heavy guns of many calibers drowned out the sound of rifle fire. Two planes, bombing and machine-gunning, circled over the battle zone. Defu could see numerous telephone lines spreading out like a web from the mountain hamlet.

"That's right," he thought. "This is the rear. It may even be the command post."

Suddenly, from the neighborhood of the mountain hamlet, artillery opened fire. Probably because the guns were so near, their sound blotted out all else. The ground shook and shells whooshed over Defu's head. A minute later, enemy shells came whistling back. An artillery duel roared into full swing. Two fighter planes skimmed over, circling and machine-gunning, followed by two heavy bombers sailing up from the south. The latter circled too, then dumped their explosives. Some landed uncomfortably close to Defu, prone in a black bean patch, and their tremendous bursts nearly deafened him.

The planes seemed to be in a great hurry; they flew off after only a short interval of bombing and strafing. Soon, this side stopped firing, and the enemy artillery at once became quiet too. Defu got to his feet and looked around. Except for crops swaying in the slight summer breeze, he could see no other activity. Defu was puzzled.

“Wasn’t this supposed to be the rear?” He wondered whether these powerful field-pieces could reach enemy headquarters. The thought stirred him into action. Although it took all his will-power to conquer his pain, he rushed towards the slope. Bending forward, his arms dangling loosely at his sides, Defu ran through the black bean patch, across a cornfield, through a stretch of tall sorghum....

A few minutes later he stood beneath a big tree in the mountain hamlet. Utterly exhausted, he panted, gasping for breath. Not a soul was in sight, but from the compound of a nearby cave home he could hear a man shouting into a telephone.

“...They didn’t hit anything. ...Yes... I said—I said the enemy’s artillery position must be very close to the command post of their 165th Brigade.... What?... Coordinate fire with our forward position mortars? ...In a little while? All right... Very good...”

“What are you doing here?” Defu turned to find a comrade had come up behind him.

“Where’s Staff Officer Shao?” Defu pulled out his note from Staff Officer Huang and handed it over. “I’ve just escaped from the enemy. I know where the command post of their 165th Brigade is....”

The comrade quickly read through the sweat-soaked note. “Good, good...” Supporting Defu

with two hands, he led him across the compound into the cave.

Staff Officer Shao—a vital wiry person—upon hearing the comrade's report and after reading the note, was completely delighted. He urged Defu to explain how he knew that his place of captivity was the command post. Defu told him about the converging telephone lines, the row of tents, the radio, what the enemy sergeant had said.... Everyone nodded and smiled. So this was the source of Staff Officer Huang's note to headquarters' command! Shao questioned Defu closely on where the telephone lines were most numerous....

"There's a little bluff near the mouth of the gully. The enemy dug a small cave in it. All the lines lead in there."

"How far is it from the mouth of the gully?"

"About ten paces. Below that is a place where all the enemy carry red cross kits. And below that—"

"Good. Wait a minute, comrade." Shao was satisfied. He turned to the telephone operator. "Get me 201, quick!"

The connection was made, and Shao picked up the receiver. "201? Shao speaking. That comrade who escaped from the enemy is here.... Reliable. He brought a note from Huang, and he's got injuries from a beating. He knows where the

enemy telephone center is.... All right?... Right.... Right.... Right.... Very good.”

Shao put down the phone. He looked at Defu's wounds, then asked warmly, “Can you go up the hill and help us direct our artillery fire?”

“Of course. Even if it kills me I'll be happy if I can help you shoot straight!” Defu said excitedly, thinking of the cruel excesses of the Hu Zongnan gangsters.

Shao immediately ordered two comrades to help Defu up the hill. The three men left the hamlet, went through a communications trench and climbed to the artillery position. It was manned by the mountain gun battery of the First Column's Eighth Brigade. The battery commander and the political instructor, who had already been notified by Staff Officer Shao, received Defu with open arms. By this time, Eighth Brigade infantry had driven the enemy back a distance, and the western front was temporarily quiet. Artillery duels had shifted to the Zhanggao Hill region, where four planes were wheeling and diving....

Defu stood on the edge of the gun emplacement looking through a pair of field glasses whose focus the battery commander had adjusted for him. He pointed out the locations of the tents, the wide gully where he had seen the mass of pack animals and where the telephone center was. The others followed his directions through their own glasses. From Defu's descriptions, the

battery commander and the political instructor agreed that the enemy 165th Brigade had concentrated all its ammunition as well as its entire headquarters' complement on the eastern knoll of the same hilltop from which enemy artillery fire had just responded to their trial shots. Their superiors had ordered the artillery battery to find and destroy enemy headquarters command—the nerve center of the brigade. Then our infantry could cut the enemy into sections which it could surround and destroy piecemeal. Now that vital target had been clearly identified.

Sweating ammunition men began to bring up the heavy shells; gunners calculated the range. The commander of the powerful mountain battery wanted Defu to return to the hamlet before they opened fire. Defu refused.

"I want to watch!" This would be the release of his pent-up hatred!

"Comrade," said the battery commander, "the pounding is terrific. Maybe you..."

"You're not afraid; neither am I. Aren't we all the same?"

The telephone rang. His field glasses slung from his neck, the commander picked up the receiver. "Yes. We're ready..." He looked at his wristwatch. "Right, right.... Say, that comrade doesn't want to go down. ... He wants to watch. Uh-huh.... Good.... Good...."

The commander put down the phone and turned to Defu. "You can stand over there."

Defu walked a few paces away and climbed to the edge of the gun emplacement pit. With only his head showing, he looked over the top at the bald yellow peak in the distance. He thought of the enemy sergeant who had ordered him to be beaten. Defu ground his teeth.

"You didn't kill me after all. Now let's see how you bastards like being on the receiving end!"

Ten minutes passed. The battery commander raised his signal flag. Defu covered his ears with his hands. Then several mountain guns thundered in unison. Flames belched from their barrels and shells hurtled through the air with a ripping sound. To the east, the south and the southeast, more Field Army artillery joined the barrage. The terrible withering fire all converged on the yellow hilltop and its hollowed ridge. The enemy artillery never even had a chance to come into action. Great clouds of smoke and dust billowed into the sky and hung like a pall over the hilltop. With his naked eye, Defu could see nothing but a huge yellow haze!

He remained until the order came to cease fire. Only then, supported by two comrades, did he return to the hamlet. It was as if he had successfully completed a difficult mission. Defu had gotten his revenge; he felt light and happy.

As Defu paused to rest a moment in the shade of the big tree, Staff Officer Shao, grinning broadly, rushed up and threw his arms around him.

“Wonderful! Now our infantry can cut through! We can finish the first stage of the battle!” Shao cried triumphantly. But then he started to talk of sending Defu to have his wounds attended to, and he became worried.

“We can’t spare a single army man, and all our pack animals are needed to carry equipment. It’s the same with the peasants—every able-bodied man is hard at work.”

Defu was unperturbed. “Where is the first-aid station?”

“The next village north of here...”

“You don’t have to escort me. I’ll get someone from my village to go along.”

Defu understood that everyone was busy with the battle. “There are some Shajiadian women and girls here...”

“Not anymore,” a comrade interjected. “When our troops came down, all the girls volunteered as nurses. They went over to that big village.”

Defu’s eyes shone with pleasure. The girls hadn’t just been talking; they really were supporting the front.

“First, you find a place where you can get some rest,” said Shao, after he thought a bit. “I’ll tele-

phone the first-aid station and see whether they can send a stretcher team down for you.”

“No, no! You don’t have to do that!” Defu grabbed Shao by the arm. “After I rest a while, I’ll work my way there slowly myself. There was an old man here with our grain station account books. I want to ask some of the local people if they know where he’s gone first...”

“You go,” said Shao to a comrade beside him. “Find some of the hamlet folks and bring them here. I’ve got to make a phone call.”

Shao went back into the compound, and the comrade trotted off towards the upper end of the hamlet. A few minutes later he returned, followed by an old man and several old women. When the comrade told them that a Shajiadian youth had escaped from the enemy after having been beaten, they guessed it was Defu. Now they anxiously asked Defu whether his wounds were serious. Defu said he didn’t know. They opened his bloodstained shirt and looked at his back, then cried out in shocked dismay. A few of the old women began to weep.

“Dear old friends, don’t cry,” said Defu. “Do you know where the old man with the grain station account books went?”

“You didn’t have to worry about that,” the local old peasant replied pityingly. “He took them up to the district government and turned them over...”

“Good!” Defu was completely relieved. “Now is there a cave where I can rest awhile on the kang?”

The peasants said they had turned over all the caves at this end of the hamlet to the army; they themselves were doubling up in a compound in the upper end. Defu didn’t want to disturb the army men. He said he’d go along with the peasants. After a rest and something to eat he would go on to the first-aid station.

His telephone call completed, Shao came running out. “Comrade Defu, I really owe you an apology. All of the stretchers have gone to the front. If you’ll wait until afternoon, we’ll do our best to find some way to send you over. Will that be all right?”

“It doesn’t matter,” replied Defu. “If I rest all morning, I can go myself.”

Staff Officer Shao wanted to send two messengers to look after Defu’s needs and prepare food for him, but the old folks wouldn’t hear of it. The army was busy fighting, they said. They would take full responsibility for Defu.

When Defu entered a cave in the peasants’ compound, twenty to thirty women—some local, some from Shajiadian—crowded in after him. All were carrying either infants or pregnantly protruding abdomens. They set up a clamor at the sight of Defu’s wounds; they wept and cursed the enemy. From them Defu learned how frantic Yin-feng had been when there was no news of him.

Nevertheless, in spite of Lanying's urging that she continue to wait here, this morning Yinfeng had insisted on going with the other girls to the next village to work as a nurse. Defu thought of her adorable ruddy face, and he smiled with pride and happiness.

"And what about Carpenter?" he asked.

"He's busy too," replied one of the women. "Didn't you men spend two mornings giving out grain for the peasants to hide? He went off with the army to collect it again."

All of this news was a great satisfaction to Defu. The only thing that worried him was the fact that Yonggong had not reached Aijia. When they ran into the enemy, Defu had let him run first; still, Yonggong hadn't gotten away. Yonggong was so timid, so many things bothered him. Defu hated to speculate on the possibilities. He thought of Yonggong's wife and old mother, his large brood of children. If anything happened to Yonggong, it would be up to the people to take good care of them....

The Shajiadian women had all come from the cliff caves. Because the caves were south of the gorge, the women hadn't dared to remain. They had come north and scattered among various villages. One of them told Defu that his mother was a little better. A neighbor's wife was looking after her, and they had gone north together. Defu barely listened. He was thinking of Yong-

gong's mother. She was always so concerned about her son!

The women got busy. Some cooked rice gruel for Defu; others found clothing into which he could change. He went into an adjoining cave with the old man, who helped him put on the clean clothes. The kang there was already spread with five layers of quilts for Defu to sleep on. A number of women suggested that egg fluid was very effective for broken, swollen skin. Defu was afraid that a home remedy would make him worse; he told them to ask some of the army men. They soon returned with word that if the dressing was first washed with boiled water, and their own hands were cleaned thoroughly, applying egg fluid with fresh cotton would be useful. The women promptly ran around the hamlet and collected about two dozen eggs with which they treated Defu's injuries.

By the time this was over and Defu had finished the rice gruel, it was noon. Everyone went out and left Defu alone to sleep.

For Victory

In the morning, the various fighting units of the Field Army began coming to grips with Hu Zongnan's 36th Division. By noon, the Division was cut into several sections, each of which was encircled.

The 165th Brigade fell into confusion after its command post was destroyed by the artillery fire which Defu had helped direct. The brigade headquarters command, plus a regimental headquarters command, fled to Wujia Hill; another regimental command and what remained of two other regiments were cut off and surrounded on a nearby hill. Even worse was the condition of the enemy 123rd Brigade on Zhanggao Hill on the eastern front. Carved up into many pieces, it was separated from the 36th Division headquarters by

two Field Army brigades and a distance of seven or eight li.

At one p.m., from a village twenty li due north of Shajiadian, the General Headquarters of the Northwest Field Army issued the order of Peng Dehuai, Vice Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army:

"...The destruction of the 36th Division will mark the beginning of the change of our strategy in the Northwest; from strategic defense we are switching to strategic counter-attack. It will mark the beginning of the retaking of Yanan and the liberation of the entire Northwest. Our leaders and men at the front must fight boldly. Their task today is to completely annihilate the 36th Division before dusk."

Shortly thereafter, Staff Officer Shao received instructions by telephone to move the artillery battery to the hill south of Shajiadian—the quicker the better.... He conferred with the battery commander. They needed a good guide, and they needed him in a hurry. After a brief discussion, they went to the compound where Defu was resting; but the women wouldn't let them enter the cave. Defu mustn't be awakened, the women whispered. He had just fallen asleep; he had stopped groaning only a minute ago....

"It doesn't matter," the battery commander said to Shao. "He only has flesh wounds and a bad ankle. If he rides a mule he can go."

“Why didn’t you give him the mule to ride to the first-aid station?” demanded one of the women. This remark immediately aroused the indignation of another woman.

“What are you saying?! Those animals all have to be used for the fighting!”

Staff Officer Shao laughed amiably. “Right! What this aunty says is correct!” Then he asked the women, “What do you say—should we let Defu suffer a little pain and be a guide for the artillery so that we can wipe the enemy out fast? Or should we let him sleep and let the enemy get away?”

“It’s for you that we’re fighting!” the battery commander added.

The women were silent.

“If there’s a mule to ride, my old man could go,” suggested an old lady. “How would that be, comrade?”

“I’ll go!” The old timer in question hobbled forward. “I guarantee to lead you right to any place within twenty li of here...”

“Nothing doing!” snapped the battery commander. He was perspiring with impatience. He pushed open the door of the cave. Defu’s better than an old man for this job no matter how you look at it!...”

Shao and the battery commander entered the cave, the women crowding in behind them.

Shao shook Defu gently. Defu raised his head and peered sleepily at the staff officer.

"Has the stretcher come from the first-aid station?"

"I'm terribly sorry. They've been too busy at the front."

"That's all right. The front is the important thing." Defu sat up. "The women used egg fluid to wash my wounds and they don't hurt anymore. I feel much better. You've come to see me—doesn't that hold up your work? Have we finished off the enemy already?"

They told him about General Peng Dehuai's order, and how the artillery battery needed a guide to move to its new post. Defu put both hands down on the five thicknesses of quilts, and quickly pushed himself to his feet.

"Let's go! Not one of the enemy must get away!"

Shao could see that the women's ministrations had made a different person out of Defu, and he was deeply moved. "The people are splendid," thought Shao. "That's why we can be sure of victory."

The women looked at Defu with loving concern. "You're all for the revolution, and of course that's fine. But we're afraid your wounds will keep getting worse...."

Defu cut them short. "My skin may rot but my bones are still strong!" He repeated the quotation Secretary Jin had taught him, "Communists are

made of special stuff!... Comrade Shao, are your men all ready?"

"They're getting ready now," Shao responded cheerily. He was surprised that a Party member in a little village should know that phrase.

Just as Shao had stated, the artillery battery comrades were busy loading and tying their equipment on the backs of their pack animals. Shortly afterwards, the battery assembled in travel formation. At their head, on a sleek, shiny mule, sat Defu. He rode high on a thickly folded quilt. All the men and animals were camouflaged with branches; Defu too had a ring of willow encircling his head. They looked like the ancients decked out for a ceremony of prayer to the rain dragon. A group of women stood beneath a big tree, eyeing Defu admiringly. Filled with an anticipation of victory, they watched the battery descend into the ravine, the camouflage branches joggling on the men and animals....

At the front, the men and their leaders were carrying out General Peng Dehuai's order with courage and withering fire. Fierce battles raged east and south of Shajiadian. In the air, the four enemy planes had become six; on the ground, artillery and machine-gun fire was immersed by wave after wave of a single refrain roaring from thousands of throats—"Charge!" It was a sound that stirred one to forget hunger, pain or fear.

Only one thought existed—wipe out the enemy! The artillery battery had gone through the ravine and traveled a short distance inside the gorge when it was spotted by two enemy fighter planes. The men were old hands at air raids—they were out of sight before the planes had finished their first strafing run. The soldiers and their animals were safely concealed, but Defu's mount had bucked in fright and tossed him to the ground, injuring his elbow. Fortunately, the comrade leading the mule had held tightly to the reins, and Defu escaped being trampled. Several comrades felt his elbow to see whether it had been dislocated.

The battery commander came running up. "Comrade Defu, are you all right?"

"I'm all right. Don't bother about me."

A number of men berated the comrade who had been leading the mule, and the commander glared at him indignantly, demanding to know whether he was afraid. Defu hastily took the comrade's side. The mule had been terrified by the noise of the diving and strafing planes, said Defu. Anyone who wasn't tied on like a gun barrel would have been thrown off. It wasn't the comrade's fault.

The political instructor hastened over too. After inquiring about Defu, he conferred with the battery commander. Marching through the gorge, they would find it difficult to avoid air

raids. Ahead of them, the gorge stretched wide and open.

"There's a path we can follow," Defu suggested. "It detours two or three li."

"But can we get the animals through on it?"

"I think so. Our peasants often cross to the fields on the hills here with donkeys carrying manure."

"Good. Take us along the path then."

Several comrades wanted to lift Defu onto the mule again, but he refused to ride. He asked that they find him a stout stick and let him walk. The path was bumpy and steep; a fall would be dangerous.

"Can you walk on that sprained ankle?" asked the political instructor.

"Sure. If this will help us clean up the enemy, what do I care about a little pain? Come on!"

"Fine!" shouted the artillerymen. "He's a fine comrade! We'll see to it that he's avenged!"

Leaning on a staff, Defu walked vigorously in spite of his limp. He led the artillery battery into a narrow, twisting gorge. The battery commander kept looking at his wristwatch—they had set out at five after two; the air raid had delayed them twenty minutes.... It was three fifteen by the time they reached the foot of the hill south of Shajiadian.

On the hill, the gun positions had already been prepared for them, and telephone lines had been

connected. People were waiting for them on the slope, and both groups hailed one another when the battery came into sight. The commander told Defu to remain in the ravine and rest. The battery continued up the hill.

By three forty the guns were mounted on their carriages and were ready to commence firing. Only the order was awaited. Then Defu appeared, grasping his staff and panting heavily.

“What are you doing here?” demanded the battery commander, fretful for Defu’s sake. “You should be resting down below, so that if an order comes to advance you’ll be in condition to guide us again!”

“I couldn’t sit still down there,” Defu replied casually. As a matter of fact, with war cries at the front shaking the heavens, and here the artillery ready to open up, it was impossible for him to remain quietly in the ravine.

The artillery battery was set up on the upper slope of the private cemetery of Shajadian’s landlord family. A well-tended grove of cedars served as an effective screen for the saddle and pack animals. This time, Defu had no field-glasses. He stood on the top of a high grave mound and surveyed the surrounding hills. All was quiet where the enemy 165th Brigade command had been, but Wujia Hill was partly obscured by a cloud of dust and smoke.

The telephone rang, and a moment later the first salvo thundered. Pillars of smoke arose from the temple on Wujia Hill. "A hit! A hit!" shouted the comrades looking through their field-glasses. Observing them and then peering at the target, Defu was so thrilled he could barely keep his footing on the grave mound.

After the third salvo, the telephone rang again. The commander spoke briefly, listened, and hung up.

"Comrades!" he announced. "We've got them running south! The fighting on Zhanggao Hill will be finished soon too. On this front we have to pour it on hard! The 36th Division headquarters has fled from Wujia to Feng Hill. It's their last stand. Our infantry has cut them off southeast and southwest and is closing in. Our orders are to go southeast to Hejia Ravine and help the infantry. Comrades, victory is before us. Let's look sharp now. Get the pack animals ready, fast!"

The artillerymen responded with alacrity.

"How do we get to Hejia?" the commander hurried over and asked Defu.

"We have to go back into the ravine," Defu replied tensely. He flung down his staff and rushed to help the men put the shells into the carrying cases.

The political instructor stopped him. "You don't have to do that, comrade."

"I think you'd better do what we tell you," said the commander. He had four heavy artillery shells in his hands. "Your guide work is important! You've been badly hurt. After all, how much strength have you got? If you tire yourself out and we're delayed, then what?"

The stern light in the commander's eyes cowed Defu a bit, and he picked up his staff. Although Defu couldn't see the battlefield in the southeast clearly, he stared impatiently towards it.

As soon as the animals were loaded, the battery descended into the ravine. It was nearly five p.m. Defu led them quickly through the narrow pass. The sound of artillery and light arms gradually grew fainter as they traveled.

The commander was in a tearing hurry, but the path was too small. It was even more precipitous and uneven than the one they had come on. They had to stop and repair it several times before the animals could proceed. In spite of his painful ankle, Defu was always well in the lead. Time and again, he had to wait for them to catch up. Seeing the commander personally wielding a shovel where the steep cliff side jutted into the narrow pass, watching him wiping the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, all Defu could do was to refrain from taking the shovel into his own hands. Defu was much more adept at it than any of the artillerymen.

Though they pushed on as fast as they could, they didn't reach the big road below the hill of Hejia until six p.m. The sun was setting as they climbed to their destination which was on a wide level plateau. The communications men were removing their wires.

In the rosy light that bathed the plateau, many prisoners captured by various units were assembled. Groups of them sat beneath the trees listening to the words of comrades who specialized in handling prisoners. As the artillery battery climbed into sight, someone shouted: "The artillery is here at last!"

"Tell them not to come any further!" cried an officer with a southern accent. "Assign a guide to lead them to the camping area. Let them go first!"

A comrade ran up to greet the battery commander. "The battle is practically over. Now enemy forces under Liu Gan are coming this way. Our men are mopping up and taking prisoners; we have to pull out right away. The administrative units are leaving any minute, and the prisoners have to be sent north. We'll give you a guide. You go straight to Reed Knoll. It's too crowded here...." He turned and walked away before the commander or the political instructor had a chance to ask him any questions.

The battery commander relaxed and heaved a comfortable sigh. Affectionately, he grasped both of Defu's hands.

"We certainly owe you a lot today. Come with us to Reed Knoll and rest. We'll see to it that you get to the first-aid station. All right?"

"We'll get you there tomorrow at the latest," guaranteed the political instructor. "You'll be able to eat with us. Don't hold back..."

Defu stood and pondered. The battle was over. He thought of Yonggong; there was still no telling what had happened to him. If he, Defu, went off with the battery, it would be difficult to guess when he could return to Shajiadian. He ought to get word to Yinfeng and his mother somehow too, so that they wouldn't worry. But suppose he left the battery? Liu Gan's troops were moving up. There was sure to be a great confusing movement of men and animals. Where could he go?

"All right," he decided. "I'll go along with you."

A middle-aged local peasant came up to serve as guide. The political instructor led him to the rear of the column, the battery about-faced and started down again. Defu mounted his mule and rode beside the commander. The two men chatted amiably.

From the ravine, they marched into the big gorge.

Night had fallen, and the iron shoes of the mules struck sparks on the stony road.

Shajiadian glowed red in the dark as they approached it through the upper gorge. Fires were burning everywhere. The commander told

Defu that the troops were cooking. The battery soon entered the village. On the slope, in the courtyards, on both sides of the street—Shajadian was filled with sleeping soldiers. Seated on his mule, Defu could hear comrades running back and forth, shouting that they were unable to find any grain.

“Not one peasant has come back...”

“Where have they all gone?...”

“What are we going to do? The men haven’t eaten all day...”

Defu made up his mind—he wasn’t going to Reed Knoll. “Comrade Battery Commander,” he said, “help me dismount, quick!”

“What’s up?”

“I’ve got to find grain for them. There’s not a soul left in the village. How can I watch the troops go hungry before my eyes?”

“Oh!” The battery commander was hard put. Should he let him do it? Defu was seriously hurt and he had had an exhausting day, pointing out their target and acting as guide. Still, the commander knew how difficult it was for the troops when they couldn’t find any local people.

“Can you make it?” he asked. “You don’t want to work yourself into a collapse!”

“I don’t collapse that easily!” Defu was in a lather of impatience, he was practically ready to throw himself off the mule. “My guess is that you’re a Party member too. I don’t have to explain.

Just help me get down!" Then he shouted towards the village at the top of his voice, "A Shajiadian man has come back!"

The battery commander was a tough soldier. His character was a little like the powerful steel field guns whose fire he directed. He was seldom moved emotionally, but he was moved now. As he supported Defu down from the mule, he almost wept. He tightly grasped Defu's hands in his own and looked around at the weary fighters sleeping under the sky.

"Comrade," said the battery commander in a voice that trembled, "our victories come to us the hard way! There are plenty of bitter struggles ahead. My name is Li Zhengming. I hope you'll live for the sake of the Party and the people. Maybe in the future we can meet again..."

Then Defu was surrounded and swept away by a crowd of happy, shouting comrades.

At the same time it was engaged with the enemy 36th Division around Shajiadian, the Third Column of the Field Army, in combination with the 4th and 6th Regiments of the Suide Region, launched operations to stop the 12th and 55th Brigades under Liu Gan driving west from Wulongbu in an attempt to rescue the 36th. The Third Column fought fiercely. It scattered Liu Gan's detachment of personal guards and very nearly captured the scoundrel himself. But the enemy 90th Division, leaving one regiment behind

to hold occupied Jiaxian, came up in full force along Liu Gan's right flank. The Third Column was unable to halt the westward advance of the enemy relief troops.

In the vicinity of Shajiadian, after the fighting on Feng Hill was concluded, the battlefield had been hastily combed for enemy arms and equipment, and prisoners were rounded up, then the Field Army troops made camp for the night. It was dark, the men were tired, and they had to prepare for more fighting.

The men billeted in Shajiadian itself belonged to the 9th Regiment of the 8th Brigade. Most of them had been unable to find any grain; a few began to boil pumpkin for soup. Defu's announcement was greeted with joy. Scores of comrades thronged around him, requesting that he show them where the grain was.

"You've got to dig!" Defu scolded. He pointed in a wide circle with his staff. "The grain wasn't moved far. If it's not in the secret caves, it's in the cellars. I can't believe with so many people you haven't been able to find any!"

In the dark, many comrades cried in reply, "Since when have we soldiers had the right to dig up the peasants' things!"

"Aiya!" Defu was very dissatisfied. "Are you just going to stand around and starve? Come with me!" A crowd of delighted comrades trailed after him. Three or four flashlight beams lighted his

way as though he were an important leader. Defu said they should dig up his family's grain first, then that of other Communists. If this should prove to be insufficient, they could turn to the homes of the ordinary peasants. The government could find means of replacing the grain after the enemy left. Defu asked the comrades what they thought of his suggestion—was it in keeping with “policy”? A comrade walking beside him slapped him affectionately on the back. Defu flinched, and when questioned gradually told the story of his recent ordeal. The comrades were more strongly drawn to him than ever.

The caves and compound where Defu lived were filled with troops. As he entered the courtyard, they asked him what he wanted. One of the comrades who had come with him, explained.

“Go look somewhere else!” said the soldiers. “All the grain from this place is in the pot already!”

“What do you mean by digging up the peasants' grain without permission?!” demanded a comrade at Defu's side.

Another comrade was curt and to the point, “You've broken regulations!”

“We wrote a draft they can collect on it. What regulations did we break?”

“The owner of the house is here with us. Who did you give the draft to?”

The argument waxed hot. A soldier pushed his way forward and asked Defu, "Neighbor, how much grain did you have in your cellar?"

"Forget it." It seemed to Defu that the quarrel was growing worse. He turned to the comrades with him. "We'll search elsewhere. The tougher things get, the more we all have to work together. All this squabbling is only delaying the fighters from eating..."

"Nothing doing!" insisted the soldier. "Nobody's going to pin any labels on us! Tell us how much grain you had!"

"Speak up!" A comrade behind Defu prodded him. "Otherwise they'll say we're bluffing!"

"Let's get this clear!"

"We had five tou⁷ of millet and six tou of black beans..." said Defu.

"That's right! That's correct!" soldiers all over the courtyard shouted. Immediately, several of them played their flashlights on the cellar in the corner of the compound, and one soldier climbed down and fished out a grain receipt from an empty jug. He showed it to Defu and his comrade—it was also correct!

The serious atmosphere dissipated at once. Everyone laughed. The comrades who had come with Defu smiled and said it was an ingenious method; the soldiers replied that naturally getting

7. Approximately one peck.

permission from a native of the village was much better. Explanations were given on both sides; Defu accepted the draft and led his group off to dig for grain.

Defu reflected on how different these men were from the Hu Zongnan soldiers who had been his captors the night before! Walking along, he looked at the fighters lying out in the open, waiting for food without a word of complaint, and his heart was flooded with warmth—they were all for the people....

Under his direction, the army comrades unearthed cellars and secret caches, and after removing the grain, sealed them up again. They collected a total of over seven piculs, including the one Defu had concealed with Yonggong at the last minute clean-up of the grain station. The army comrades gave him an itemized receipt. Defu didn't seem the least like an injured man as he led them vigorously from place to place, intent on seeing to it that the fighters should not go hungry. He congratulated himself on having helped the villagers move their grain to safer concealment, after checking all the caches and cellars on the night of the seventeenth. Otherwise he wouldn't know so readily just where to dig.

But in spite of everyone's haste and enthusiasm, it wasn't until nearly midnight that all the troops had finished eating.

Defu was very satisfied. With the exception of Yinfeng's family, all the grain was taken from the homes of Party members. Defu had been a little hesitant about digging at her place. In view of his relationship with her and the fact that she had applied to join the Party, there should have been no question about it. Only two nights ago, she had quite properly led Field Army men to his house for a jug of cooking oil. But her parents were so narrow-minded. He wondered whether taking their grain wouldn't prejudice them against him still further, make them even more opposed to his match with Yinfeng. But after thinking it over, Defu had decided it was wrong of him to consider the problem only from the point of how it might affect him personally....

As he sat on the threshing ground, eating with a company quartermaster, an army comrade approached him and addressed him in a local accent.

"Neighbor, there's a girl named Shi Lanying in your village. Do you know where she's gone?"

Defu stared in surprise. "Where are you from, comrade?"

"Majialiang. My name is Ma Jinbao."

"Oh...." This must be Company Commander Ma Jinbao, Lanying's fiancé! What a fine-looking fellow he was! No wonder Lanying had looked so happy that time she came back after

visiting him.... Defu couldn't be bothered with eating any more.

"I heard that Lanying was at the first-aid station, only five li from here, working with the nurses. She's probably still there now. If you want to see her, I'll take you there when you've finished eating." Defu forgot his pain in his eagerness to bring joy to the couple. Lanying and Yinfeng were such good friends. The older girl was like a sister, always helping Yinfeng to progress.

Company Commander Jinbao's laugh was a bit strained. "We're too busy. That's not possible. As long as I know she's all right..."

Several comrades laughed with him. This was the first time they had heard that Comrade Jinbao's future wife was from Shajiadian. Defu told him how excellently Lanying was doing in her study and in her work. He praised her so highly that Jinbao became embarrassed. The company commander rather regretted having asked about her in the first place.

Just then someone was heard calling Defu's name.

"He's over here," a comrade shouted. "He's here, eating!"

Defu promptly began shoveling down the contents of his bowl with the twigs he was using as makeshift chopsticks. He presumed the troops would start moving again after their meal and that he was needed for some information. A bodyguard armed with a Mauser pistol and a

carbine came up. He said the regimental officers were inviting Defu to eat with them in the district office where they had set up their headquarters. The bodyguard, a shining faced youngster whose appearance belied his utter fearlessness, started to haul Defu by the arm.

“No, no, no...” Defu felt he would be ill at ease eating with high-ranking cadres, and resisted the other’s friendly urgings.

“They say you must come,” the youngster insisted, still pulling. “They say you really helped us a lot tonight. They heard that you were beaten by the enemy, and after you eat they want the medics to put some medicine on you...”

“All right. I’ll go for the medicine.” It hadn’t occurred to Defu that he could be treated here. He was very pleased. “I wanted to get these wounds fixed all day, but I didn’t have any time. Wait till I finish eating and I’ll go with you.”

The company commander asked the bodyguard, “Have they got any special food to give him?”

“They’re eating the same as the rest of us, but there’s some American canned stuff that was picked up after the fighting...”

Urged by the company commander and the quartermaster, Defu gave in. Walking with the bodyguard, he recalled how he had asked his captors for soup and how a Hu Zongnan soldier had jeered at him about eating American canned

goods. Now they were wiping out the Hu Zongnan forces and he was going to eat some after all. He felt a kind of triumphant pride!

The regimental officers had already finished eating when Defu entered the district office and the table had been cleared. The kang was crowded with spread maps which the commanders were examining in the light of candles held by a couple of junior officers.

Leaning over a map, one of the officers was saying, "Liu Gan's 12th Brigade is here; his 55th Brigade is there; the 90th Division is on this side. Although Dong Zhao's First Division is advancing along the highway, they're traveling on foot too. They probably will reach Zhenchuan by tomorrow morning. Tonight our forces will rest where they are; we'll march before dawn. Let each battalion dispatch men to collect grain...."

The bodyguard had asked Defu to wait at the door. When the officer finished speaking, the bodyguard reported to the regimental commander. The latter, a pistol strapped to his side, at once came forward and warmly shook Defu's hand.

"We're very grateful to you! Thank you very much for your help!" And he said with added emphasis, "We've heard about what you've done. Good! Good comrade! Good government worker!" He lifted Defu's shirt and looked at the wounds on his back, then he said to the body-

guard, "Take him and give him something to eat. After he's finished, have them dress his injuries at the infirmary. He can sleep there tonight; let him travel with the medics." The regimental commander turned back to Defu. "The enemy is moving up from the east and the south. It would be dangerous for you to remain here. You go with us and we'll get you to a hospital..."

The commander was so competent and cheerful, and he spoke with such decisiveness, it was impossible for Defu to doubt a word he said. The other officers looked at Defu affectionately. They asked him how old he was and said he was a very promising young man.

"He's a model of the Party and the people!" beamed the regimental commander. "Go and eat, quickly. We still have some things to discuss here."

Defu hesitated. "Comrade," he said, "going with you -would be fine. But one of our grain station men has disappeared. And then there's the draft the troops gave me tonight for the grain. I really ought to report these things to my district office."

"Where are you going to find it in all this confusion?" laughed the officers.

"Comrade," the regimental commander said seriously, "fulfilling responsibility is a very good thing. But one has to be flexible according to the situation. If you go running blindly about and the

enemy nabs you again, that won't be so good! Go on and eat now..."

Defu had no choice but to go with the body-guard into the next cave where the food was being prepared. Later, his wounds were dressed in the infirmary. Before dawn, he set out together with the troops.

From Victory to Victory

Lanying and Yinfeng didn't finish help tending to the wounded at the 8th Brigade first-aid station until very late at night. Then, in the starlight, the medical unit, like all other units which used pack animals to transport heavy equipment, moved north to make room for the slowly withdrawing Field Army troops. Superior enemy forces, coming from two directions, were bearing down. The nurses urged the local women volunteer assistants to travel with the medical unit; they could return home after the enemy left. Many of the women departed with the medics, but Yinfeng remained behind. She had learned of Defu's whereabouts when the first-aid station sent a stretcher for him to the mountain hamlet after the battle. Then the stretcher had returned empty; Staff Officer

Shao and his entire unit were gone. All Yinfeng knew was what the stretcher bearers had learned from the women in the hamlet—after noon, Defu had gone off with the artillery battery as a guide to the hill south of Shajiadian.

There is nothing unusual about a girl being in love; but when this love is combined with a revolutionary determination, when these elements strengthen and develop each other—a powerful force is created. (This was something Yinfeng's mother had never understood; to her, Yinfeng was simply "bewitched.")

Yinfeng insisted on staying behind. She wanted to see Defu's wounds, she wanted to know how serious they were. They must be serious if a stretcher had to be sent for him; yet he had found the strength to act as guide for the artillery battery. What a lovable boy he was! Even if he should be crippled, thought Yinfeng, or be minus an arm like Ba Hu, or even if his face should be disfigured, she still would love him. Of course this would make winning over her parents even harder!

Lanying could tell what was going on in her friend's mind. She decided to go with Yinfeng to Shajiadian. If Defu could not be found, they would catch up with the medical unit together. Though separated from Shajiadian only by five li, they discovered that traveling alone at night was out of the question. They were challenged by sentries as soon as they tried to leave the vil-

lage. There was a strict military curfew; batches of prisoners were still being escorted north. They had no choice but to remain in the village until dawn.

At daybreak they arrived in Shajiadian. Not only the artillery, even the infantry had gone. Old folks, women and children from all the surrounding villages, realizing that the cliff caves were no longer safe, were trooping through the gorge past Shajiadian on their way north. The girls couldn't find a shadow of Defu. Everyone said a large enemy force was approaching. They heard it was a few dozen li long....

The girls spent all morning in Shajiadian looking for the white-bearded old man. He might know about Defu. But combing the whole village produced no sign of him. Finally, from the pool of dried blood outside his compound gate, they concluded the old man probably had been killed by the enemy. But if he had stubbornly met his end, where was his body? The girls searched high and low, and at last found it bricked up with stones in a cache above the old man's cave home. They assumed the Field Army troops had brought it to this temporary haven. They wept as they viewed the determined expression on the old man's face through the cracks between the stones.

Now there was no way of inquiring where Defu had gone. They set out in pursuit of the 8th Brigade medical unit.

On the road the girls were overtaken by army comrades leading peasants who carried small field pieces. The men walked very quickly, as though the enemy were right behind them. Their shoulders swollen by the pressure of the heavy weights, the peasants were dripping perspiration. The army comrades took turns at shouldering the carrying poles to spell the peasant porters. They told the girls the enemy had already come past Feng Hill in the south, and in the east they were spreading north from Zhanggao Hill. Machine-gun fire could be heard....

The girls were swept along in the stream of hurrying porters through the big gorge that led north to Cedar Rise. They caught up with the 8th Brigade medics in a village past Aijia. The Field Army had already set up a rear line defense along that line. It was nearly noon when the girls arrived. The medical unit was just about to move to the rear of the combat troops. Had the girls come any later, they would have had a great deal of trouble finding it.

Most exasperating of all, the girls learned that Defu had come through this very village about breakfast time. The 9th Regiment had sent him by stretcher to the Brigade medics for them to give him the necessary papers to get into an army hospital. Before leaving with his introduction, Defu had turned over to the local women the grain draft the 9th Regiment had given him in Shajia-

dian the previous night. He told them to give it to Lanying for transmission to the district government. He left word for Lanying that he had seen Jinbao in Shajiadian and that the latter had asked about her. Defu had also deputed the women to tell Yinfeng to do a good job of supporting the army; she shouldn't worry about him, that the doctors said he would be well in two or three weeks; if the enemy was gone by then, he would come back. The only thing that bothered him was not knowing what had happened to Yonggong....

After Yinfeng inquired in detail about Defu's wounds, she sighed faintly. The stone which had been weighing on her heart for two days dropped away, and she felt much easier. She left with the other women to continue helping the nurses in the medical unit.

The destruction of the 36th Division was such a heavy blow to Hu Zongnan that he concentrated all his northern forces in a wild drive against the Northwest Field Army. Liu Gan and his five brigades were pulled back from the banks of the Yellow River; after passing Shajiadian, they split up and advanced towards Cedar Rise. Dong Zhao's 78th Brigade had returned from Wubu to join with other units of the so-called "Ace First Division." The latter had gone along the Wuding River from Suide to occupy Zhenchuan, and from there had moved north into Wuzhuang District, intending to encircle the Field Army from the

west. In only three days, the Hu Zongnan forces had been forced to drop their claim of “complete administrative control in Shaanxi Province,” and to begin a new dangerous gamble.

Lying on a stretcher, Defu continued towards Cedar Rise. This was on his way to a Field Army hospital in Jiaxian County. The roads and paths were crowded with women and children leaving the threatened villages, and the stretcher bearers often had to wait some time at the crossroads to get through. The result was that they didn't approach Cedar Rise till past noon. Fortunately, it had been cloudy all morning and no planes had appeared. But just as they drew near Cedar Rise things grew very tense. Machine-guns began to chatter on the hills to the south.

Peasants, leading their children and carrying baskets full of personal belongings, were fleeing south from Wuzhuang District in the face of Dong Zhao's drive along the Field Army's right flank. When they heard the firing to the south, they all turned and ran north. Because this was mountainous terrain and cross-country travel off the roads was not feasible, the narrow paths up to Cedar Rise were jammed tight. The stretcher bearers were from the western border area of Shaanxi. Unfamiliar with local terrain, they were very worried. They asked Defu whether there wasn't some other route to get him to his destination.

“No. We’ve got to go through Cedar Rise,” Defu explained. “Going down the other side of the hill from Cedar Rise is a broad river valley. That won’t be so crowded...”

When they finally got through to the village they found that all of the service and administrative units had long since left. A newly arrived combat unit was re-laying telephone wires. Defu’s stretcher was placed by the side of the road in the middle of the village, while the two bearers entered a compound to ask the peasants for a bowl of rice gruel. This they gave to Defu to eat with some dry ration. They themselves dined on cold water and popped rice.

An endless stream of refugees flowed through the village. At the crossroads in the center, many people went north; others turned east towards the river valley.

A peasant of about fifty, a piece of boiled pumpkin in each hand, came walking against the current, eating as he walked. An army comrade strode behind him. As they neared Defu, the latter recognized the peasant. The man was a native of Cedar Rise who came to sell salt in Shajiadian every market day.

“Uncle,” Defu hailed him. “When did Secretary Jin and the others leave here? Where did they go?” The peasant halted. The pumpkin slices poised in his hands, he stared at Defu in stupefaction. “You?! Aiya, when Old Zhen of the co-op came and told

Secretary Jin what happened, they all figured you were finished! How is it you're still alive?"

"Where did they go?" Defu didn't want to talk about himself. "What did they go to do?" he pressed.

"They were up at the crack of dawn and headed north. Government men from every xiang were called to collect grain for the army...."

"Finish what you've got to tell him and let's go!" the army comrade urged the peasant.

The peasant offered Defu the piece of pumpkin he had not yet bitten into. When Defu refused, he put it on the stretcher beside Defu's pillow and walked away.

Defu heaved a small sigh. That night Secretary Jin had told him how important it was to wipe out the 36th Division. Now there was sure to be more fighting. All the district and xiang men were busy collecting grain for the army, but he couldn't take part in the work. He remembered what the commander of the artillery battery had said on parting—there are plenty of bitter struggles ahead....

The sound of firing came nearer. People said that the Field Army was slowly withdrawing in the face of the enemy advance, that they were separated from the enemy only by a gorge. Defu was concerned about Lanying and Yinfeng. He wondered whether they had gotten back to the 8th Brigade medical unit. While he was still munching

his dry ration, the bearers picked up the stretcher and set out again.

Leaving the village the bearers turned the stretcher around so that Defu would be traveling feet first. Then they descended the hill.

Jiaxian County began at the foot of the hill. Soldiers posted at a fork in the road were urging the refugees to follow the gorge to the east. In the river valley ahead, there were a number of small villages where they could stay. But the old folks and women, seeing that the telephone lines led towards a hamlet, wanted to go there so that they could be under the protection of the troops. Although the villages in the river valley were fairly close together, the refugees didn't think they would be safe because they clustered around a town—a probable enemy objective. If the soldiers were billeted in all the hamlet's cave homes, they would gladly live in the compounds or in the open fields if necessary, said the peasants, just so long as they could be together with the army.

Employees of the county office of abandoned Zhenchuan circulated among the refugees, explaining the situation—there were no longer any enemy in Wulongbu; there was only one enemy regiment in Jiaxian, and it didn't dare to come out. Besides, Field Army troops were close to the town in the river valley....

“If you believe in our army's strength, you should believe its word.”

“The further south east you go, the safer you’ll be. The enemy’s concentrating all his forces to come this way....”

“We’re telling you this to help you, not to hurt you!”

Convinced, the mass of refugees continued along the gorge. Defu’s stretcher bearers, who had been resting, now prepared to climb the hill ahead. Sentries checked everyone carefully, even army comrades. At the fork in the road the sentries examined Defu’s letter of introduction to the hospital and his travel permit. The stretcher was allowed to proceed.

Dark clouds concealed the sun completely, but Defu and the stretcher bearers estimated it was the time when the peasants usually had their noonday rest.

Though the hill they were climbing was only on the other side of the gorge from Cedar Rise, it was enveloped in an entirely different atmosphere. Peaceful, serene, even the crops seemed to have another look about them. It was as though the entire area had just been painted in bright fresh water colors. Troops occupied the surrounding hills, but not a sound could be heard. There was a deep, soft stillness everywhere. Telephone lines snaked along the ground in all directions. From the stretcher, Defu observed the solemn mien of the sentries at the various cross-

roads. He guessed that they must be performing some very special duty.

The road skirted a mountain hamlet, then swooped down again close to a village. As the stretcher team drew nearer, Defu could see many sleek saddled horses and mules tethered all through the village. Guards were posted at close intervals. In the ravine leading past the village, sentries stood a few dozen paces from each other. The first one stopped the stretcher bearers and courteously questioned them. After looking over their credentials, he said in a low voice, "The medical department is in the next village. Try to go a little faster."

The stretcher bearers increased their pace. They knew there must be an important military organization in the village, and they gave up their idea of resting after coming down the hill. Defu was very excited. Raising his head, he suddenly saw a group of men coming out of a large compound gate. Most of them wore the brown military uniform; the uniforms of some were gray. The men shook hands with each other and said goodbye. Guards began untying the horses and mules.

About a dozen people descended the slope. At their head was a tall, stalwart man in the gray uniform of an ordinary government official. As he walked he listened carefully to the respectful words of a comrade walking beside him. From

time to time, he nodded his head. Among the group, Defu first recognized Comrade Zhou Enlai, whom he had heard address the victory rally at Zhenwudong. And then he realized who the man strolling at the head of the procession must be. Defu's whole body glowed with warmth. In a voice that he checked just in time from becoming a shout, he cried: "Chairman Mao!..."

A grove of date trees blocked his view. The stretcher continued on.

Chairman Mao and the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in order to make it easier for the Northwest Field Army to wipe out the 36th Division, had drawn Hu Zongnan's main forces to the fording point of the Yellow River near Jiaxian. Their original plan was to lure the enemy still further to the north of Jiaxian. But because of the heavy rains of the eighteenth, they were unable to cross the swollen Jialu River which ran through their northern route and emptied into the Yellow River to the east. Moreover, Liu Gan and his 90th Division had already reached a point twenty li south of Jiaxian, and his advance unit was only a hill away from the Central Committee and the guard force accompanying it. Chairman Mao therefore turned west and followed along the south bank of the Jialu River to a village twenty li behind the headquarters post of General Peng Dehuai. That morning, Chairman Mao together with Comrades Zhou Enlai and Ren Bishi

attended a meeting of officers of brigade rank and above called by the headquarters command.

Spirits were particularly high at the meeting because of the great victory over the 36th Division. The commanding generals were full of confidence. The peasants had been completely mobilized to support the front, and they were requesting that the Field Army continue to lure the enemy north and demolish Liu Gan and Dong Zhao; better still, capture one of them alive. The chief problem of the Field Army at the time was that it lacked grain. Three thousand piculs were required before it could fight another battle, and they were needed immediately. Chairman Mao asked detailed questions of Comrade Liu Jingfan, vice-chairman of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region and concurrently commander of the Northwest Field Army service force, and of Suide Region's Commissioner Ge. They indicated seven districts in Mizhi and Jiaxian Counties where they suggested grain could be raised.

After understanding the entire situation, Chairman Mao agreed to this proposal. He pointed out that Hu Zongnan would not necessarily risk a very deep penetration, and that the enemy might stage a general withdrawal before the grain was collected. In any event, the meeting decided that the Zhenchuan independent battalion should escort the grain-raising cadres to the seven districts that same night, and

directed the 4th and 6th Regiments of the Suide Region to protect those who went to the countryside east of Mizhi.

It was this meeting that was breaking up as Defu went by on the stretcher. The military officers were returning to their respective posts. The officer speaking to Chairman Mao was Comrade Liu Jingfan. He was replying to a question of the Chairman as to the morale of the civilian porters. Walking behind Liu was Commissioner Ge, but Defu did not see him.

At the next village, about 10,000 civilian grain porters were waiting for the determinations of the meeting. This sea of people was getting ready to move when Defu arrived. In and around the village, in the gorge and on the slopes—everywhere were strong young peasants. Those whose headkerchief towels were knotted in front were from north Shaanxi; those whose head coverings were knotted behind came from along the Yellow River in the Shanxi-Suiyuan Border Region. Above, the sky was dark and ominous, but as yet no rain fell. An eagle soared majestically between two peaks.

The stretcher bearers placed Defu down a dozen paces off the road that ran beside the river flats. Getting through this crowd would be difficult with a stretcher, and the bearers needed a rest after their last forced march. Taking Defu's letter

of introduction, they wended their way towards the village in search of the medical department.

Defu could hardly lie still on the stretcher. He was seized with the same excitement he had felt when he attended the victory rally at Zhenwudong after the Panlongzhen campaign. But this was no victory rally, for the enemy was sweeping up from the south. Defu knew that here he was witnessing the beginning of a great new drive! The troops were holding the front; the masses were taking care of the rear, and Chairman Mao was here too! For the sake of the people he was staying and fighting it out in northern Shaanxi, and right on the front line of the battle! Defu was very agitated. Did he have to be sent to the hospital on a stretcher on account of a few little flesh wounds?

The doctor who dressed his wounds at the infirmary of the 9th Regiment had warned him that he couldn't recover for three months if he didn't go to a hospital. "In the hospital you'll be cured in three weeks," the doctor had said. "You may understand fighting in the revolution, but you don't know anything about medical science...."

"I don't believe it!" Defu still didn't want to go to the hospital. It wasn't stubbornness; seeing Chairman Mao here, he felt that even dying for the revolution would be a small matter!

Suddenly, he was aware of a tenseness spreading among the men near the bend in the gorge. The words flew in a low tone from one person to the next:

“Chairman Mao!”

“Chairman Mao!”

“Chairman Mao!”

And then he appeared. The masses along the river flats separated to make a path for him. Chairman Mao walked slowly, chatting with Comrades Zhou Enlai and Ren Bishi. His iron-gray horse and the other mounts were led by comrades a short distance behind. Smiling his characteristically kindly smile, with wise and shining eyes Chairman Mao looked at the endless sea of honest peasant faces stretching on both sides of him. The strength of these peasant masses was the infallible basis of the victory of the People's Liberation Army.

Defu had long since left his stretcher and stood up. Now, not satisfied with his view, he climbed to the top of a big boulder. It was slippery and he slid off. He climbed up again. His mouth was open in a wide, happy smile. He had never dreamed that he would be so close to Chairman Mao. He could see Commissioner Ge too, walking with dignity in the rear of the group.

Chairman Mao stopped and stood among the people. He seemed about to speak to them. Defu was deeply moved to see how stirred he was.

Chairman Mao stretched forth his powerful hand in a habitual gesture, and to the thousands gazing at him with boundless veneration, he called:

“You’re being put to a lot of trouble, friends! Victory depends on you!”

Tears sprang to the eyes of many of civilian porters. Not knowing what to say, the peasants nodded awkwardly. A broad-faced man about forty who was a bit more outspoken than the others, from their midst then shouted with pride in his leader:

“What does it matter if we put out a little effort? The Chairman’s strategy is great...”

Chairman Mao smiled.

“It’s the strength of the people that’s great. Without the people’s strength, any strategy is useless.” Chairman Mao turned towards Comrades Zhou Enlai and Ren Bishi, and they smiled in grave assent.

His powerful figure leaning slightly forward, in his usual solicitous manner he asked the peasants about their livelihood and how the army was looking after them. They all expressed their satisfaction.

“Our fighters are just like one family with us...” Staring, Defu strained to hear every word Chairman Mao said. Then, somewhere among the thousands, a man raised the rallying cry, “Long live Chairman Mao!” Defu shot up his arm and joined in the shout:

“Long live Chairman Mao!”

“Long live Chairman Mao!”

“Long live Chairman Mao!”

And the cry spread—from the roofs of the caves to the cliff-side shelves, from the hill slopes to the rolling fields. There was a forest of clenched fists, rising and falling, as far as the eye could see. People were jumping with excitement. The strident yells of peasants rocked the hills. Wave after wave of “Long live Chairman Mao!” thunderously drowned out all other sound.

And the clear Hunan accent of Chairman Mao was like a bright responding clarion. “Long live our civilian porter comrades!” he cried several times; then he and his close comrades in battle waved their hands to the cheering masses, and walked on through the crowded gorge and up a stony road. Only after Chairman Mao and his companions had mounted their horses and departed did the tumultuous shouting gradually die away.

Chairman Mao was gone—but he left with the people an unforgettable inspiration and encouragement. This was the most potent of all mobilizations for battle.

Shortly afterwards, the thousands of civilian porters and the cadres in charge of raising grain set out for the seven districts of Mizhi and Jiaxian Counties. The two stretcher bearers returned from the medical department and said Defu was

to go to Field Army Hospital Number Three. It was twenty-five li away, but they could make it before dark if they hurried. Seeing the army of grain porters marching off, Defu was reluctant to be left behind. Finally, however, in response to the urging of the stretcher bearers, he got back on to the litter, and they continued their journey.

At a crowded crossroads, Defu suddenly saw Secretary Jin. He shouted to him and bid the stretcher bearers to halt.

Jin was holding a staff in his hand. His home-spun blue cloth knapsack was on his back. He was busily making last-minute arrangements with the group of civilian porters who were about to depart with him. Hearing his name called, he looked all around, then, seeing no one, returned to the business at hand. Defu frantically asked the bearers to set the stretcher down, and again he shouted with all his might. Jin was already lost in the crowd.

“Secretary Jin! It’s me—Shi Defu!”

“What? Where are you?”

“Over here—”

Jin squeezed his way out of the mass of porters and rushed to Defu’s side.

“Aiya! You’re still alive! Lie down, quickly. Don’t get up.”

He squatted beside the stretcher and seized both of Defu’s hands in his own.

"I'm alive, but Yonggong is gone..." Defu said unhappily.

"Humph," Jin looked annoyed. "He's here..."

"What! Then he got away?"

"That night he nearly died of fright! He spat blood a couple of times as he ran. He didn't even go to Aijia; he went directly to his father-in-law's village and stayed in the old man's house. Today, the leader of Fifth Xiang and the political instructor finally got him to come here with them. I criticized him and ordered him to collect grain with the others. Whether he remains in the Party or not depends on how he acts this time," Jin said solemnly.

Then the secretary's face brightened and he said animatedly, "Let me tell you. Commissioner Ge heard Vice-Chairman Liu say that Vice Commander-in-Chief Peng Dehuai knows all about how a few village government workers saved over a hundred piculs of grain in Shajiadian so that the army was able to eat when it got there. General Peng was full of praise for you men! How are your injuries? Not serious, I hope?"

"Flesh wounds. They don't matter. I don't want to go to the hospital, but the army comrades insist," Defu said briefly, then he hastened to ask, "Did Old Zhen turn over the grain station account books?"

"He gave them to district clerk Shang some time ago. He and Zhang, that kid who's his

clerk, are moving all the co-op stuff north. You mustn't think of work anymore. Let me see your wounds...."

"There's nothing to see. They're all bandaged anyhow. Stinker Huaizong told the enemy who I was, and they beat me!" Defu ground his teeth.

"Aha! So that was his work, eh? Good! Our district guerillas have nabbed him. District head Zao and the others brought him in this morning. We sent him on up north."

"What!" Defu sat up in pleased surprise and struggled to get off the stretcher. "Where are they?" Jin pushed him back. "Lie down now. Old Zao and the rest are going out with the civilian porters too. They've got no time to talk to you. I'll tell you about them, briefly. With only about twenty guerillas they rounded up over one hundred and seventy enemy deserters. They picked up more than one hundred small arms and about thirty horses and mules besides. Stinker was running for Mizhi with a few dozen enemy soldiers when they caught him...."

"District head Zao is really all right at a time like this!" chortled Defu.

Jin smiled. "Yes, Old Zao is a good comrade! Last night they heard that Liu Gan had arrived with reinforcements. The guerillas had exposed themselves and become too big a target, so Zao sent word to the county Party committee, and

brought his men up here during the night. They lost thirty prisoners on the road....”

“Comrade Jin! Comrade Jin! Everyone’s here now. Let’s go!” came a shout from Jin’s group of porters.

“Coming, coming!” Jin called back. Affectionately, he shook both of Defu’s hands. “Go to the hospital and have a good rest. We’ll have a long talk when you come back. The district we’re going to is more than a hundred li from here. I’ll be seeing you.

Jin stood up, took a last look at Defu, and walked away. Envyng the district Party secretary his opportunity to work right up until victory, Defu stared after his retreating figure. An instant later, Jin was swallowed up by the bustling crowd and was gone.

The military situation developed entirely in accordance with Chairman Mao’s remarkable foresight.

On the 23rd of August, People’s Liberation Army generals Zhen and Xie led their forces south across the Yellow River along the section that stretches several hundred li from southern Shanxi to northern Henan. The eastern column of the army pressed on to Luoyang; the western column drove towards Dongguan Pass. Hu Zongnan grew panicky; Chiang Kai-shek hastily took a plane to Xian, while Hu Zongnan’s major northwest forces under Liu Gan and

Dong Zhao were floundering around on the line between Wuzhuang and Cedar Rise, way up in northern Shaanxi.

Three days later, Liu Gan and Dong Zhao began a general withdrawal. By then the grain raised in the seven districts of Mizhi and Jiaxian Counties was pouring into the quartermasters of the Northwest Field Army. The latter then split into two columns and raced ahead of the enemy towards the south. On the tenth of September, the columns rejoined outside of Yanzhuan, five hundred li south of their starting point. Another three days after that, when the Field Army's battle positions were all prepared, the Hu Zongnan forces finally caught up.

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth of September, four Hu Zongnan brigades were annihilated in the famous battle of Zhagou.

But that is another story.

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