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11
APRIL 12, 1943

471

VI-73-C-24
With the Chinese Guerrillas¹

WE HAD WALKED SINCE DAWN, up jagged mountains, down into valleys, up again along narrow paths where no animal could go. We halted in villages where the gutters ran green with filth that bred a dozen diseases and where the people came in crowds to ask for medicine to cure the many sicknesses that made their lives a burden. Once we crossed a motor highway along which Japanese trucks sometimes ventured if they felt lucky. In the afternoon we stood on a pass on the crest of a range and looked down on glory. Below us lay a natural basin of gold and azure. A long azure lake reflected the azure sky. Fields of ripe grain gleamed like liquid gold. A few small white villages, set in green foliage, sparkled like jewels. Above and about this vision towered threatening, black jagged peaks.

"The hospital is in that temple," one of our guards said, pointing. He was from a guerrilla army and had guided us up to this mountain fastness in central Anhwei, where the guerrillas had a base hospital.

An hour later we were walking through the basin toward the temple. Over its colored tiled roofs with curved corners were ancient gnarled trees. On the paths before it stood lines of men in faded blue uniforms. Each man held a small triangular paper banner of welcome, and when we came in sight they began singing the guerrilla marching song.

One of them came down the path to welcome us. He saluted with his left hand. His right arm was crooked rigidly against his breast and the fingers of the hand were stiff and bent like the claws of a bird. His face was of striking beauty, finely chiseled and sensitive. The black eyes sparkled with eagerness. The countenance showed intelligent awareness of a high order. The impression given by the whole face was one of spirituality.

He led us up to the rows of men awaiting us, and as we came near we saw that most of them were crippled. Some were on crutches, some were without an arm or a leg, some had stiff legs or arms, and one man's leg had been fractured and had knit together at an angle. Others had arms in slings, crippled hands or bandaged heads. Almost all were maimed for life, and that was a tragedy. For good doctors could have prevented such deformities. And almost all of them were in their early twenties. Looking at their faces, we saw that they were pale and thin from undernourishment and suffering.

That evening I sat across a table from some of these men. Facing me was the man of striking beauty. To my questions he answered:

"My name is Chen Fang-chuen and I am twenty-six. I have been in this army since the fall of Nanking. No,

I cannot read or write. Before I joined the army I was a poor peasant. We did not have enough food or clothing, so how could I study? Then, after I was in the army, I was always at the front. I have been wounded three times. When I lay in the hospital, there were only other wounded men like myself and we had no means of learning. Now we have some textbooks and we ask each other about the characters. We try to learn some each day; some learn one or two, some learn five. But we never know if we are right because there is no educated man among us."

"How did you get that stiff arm—and that hand?" I asked.

"It was like this—" he began:

"There was a drizzling rain. One night our commander said we were to attack the enemy coming from Hweiyuan. The news passed through our hearts and the hearts of our people so that we all forgot the bad weather. It was the tenth of August. Our commander said: 'Wherever you go, victory will follow. The enemy from Hweiyuan city has sent a column against us. They have a hundred puppet troops with them led by the traitor Chang Tien-tsu. They will have one heavy machine gun and three light machine guns, rifles and hand grenades. They think they can surround us before daybreak and attack us at dawn. But their action is always slow. At six they plan to surround us here at Changchuan and begin fighting at six-thirty. So they will have to start marching at two or three in the morning. We will keep them marching all day in the heat and then we will give them a welcome. Now, tonight we and all the civilians will leave Changchuan and move to Sunyingtze, and we must ask the pardon of the Imperial Army because we will not be here to receive them. They may feel poorly about that.'

"We all laughed.

"We moved out that night and when the enemy came to Changchuan next morning there was not even a shadow to be seen except one very old man. They asked this old man about us but he said he had never seen us, and he was so old that he forgot if he had ever heard of us. Then they marched on to Sunchaochuan, thinking they would surprise and exterminate us there. We were not there either, so they fired off their guns to make a big noise. They think that frightens the people into telling them the truth. Some of the people then said that we were in another village further on. It was noon, and very hot, when they reached that village. Sweat was pouring down their faces. They were tired but ashamed to lose face by going back to Hweiyuan. So they marched on to another village, where they called all the people to a mass meeting and told them that the Imperial Army had come to protect civilians

¹ Extract from a book, "The Battle Hymn of China," to be published in the late summer by Alfred A. Knopf.

from bandits and that after they completed their task they would withdraw.

"The civilians made them welcome and some of them kindly told them that we were at Neuwangmiao but pleaded that they never betray who told them. So the enemy marched toward Neuwangmiao. It was in the middle of the afternoon and by this time we felt that they were so tired that we ought to give them some kind of welcome.

"Our commander picked three of the best platoons, and I was among them. We had three light machine guns and we found good positions close to the path leading to Neuwangmiao. Many civilian men came with us to carry away our wounded and to help in other ways if they could, and some had spears and big swords. The enemy came along. By that time they had been marching for about twelve hours. Our machine guns went rat-a-tat-tat and many of the enemy fell. Some turned and began to run, but some stood stubbornly and fought, and before long everybody was fighting except those enemies who were carrying away the wounded and dead. But soon they all began to retreat and we followed after them. Soon they began to leave their dead and wounded behind. We followed them for hours, right up to near Hweiyuan. I did not go so far, for I was wounded. But others told me about it."

"That was a warm welcome, and it was a very polite farewell," I said, "for you escorted them right up to Hweiyuan."

The man smiled, then added: "Now, it's like this—the lessons of this battle are many. First, a guerrilla unit in a certain place should continue moving to new locations, particularly if it is close to the enemy. We did right there. Second, our intelligence service was slow. Our reserve units were not kept informed and did not quickly join in the fighting to completely exterminate the enemy. That was a weakness. Third, after opening fire we did not charge quickly and many of the enemy escaped. These were the lessons we learned."

"So!"

"Yes," he said.

"So that's the way you got this stiff arm and crooked hand!"

"Yes. I was wounded twice before but they were unimportant."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Do some kind of work. I'd like to go to the training camp and learn to read and write and do political work of some kind. I could go into transport work though I cannot carry. I'd like to learn the radio and receive and send messages to the whole world. We don't learn much about the world up here. Except for the Japanese, you are the first foreigner I have ever seen. Do all your countrymen look like you?"

I answered his question and turned to another man, thinking to get the story of how he was wounded. But

by this time the room was filled with men, some sitting on the floor, some on benches, some standing. The candle light flickered on interested, excited eyes.

Instead of answering my question about his name, the man I turned to question asked: "You are an American—why do you speak English?"

We discussed this and then I turned to ask him a question about his wound, but he asked:

"Is it true that you have a machine that you can write on with all your fingers and that it goes very fast and you do not even watch what you hit?"

I asked my secretary-interpreter to bring my typewriter, and when it came I opened it and put in a sheet of paper and wrote. Gasps of astonishment resounded through the room. I wrote the names of men and gave them to them. They gazed in astonishment.

Voices asked: "How much does such a machine cost and do all Americans work it?"

I told him the cost, and the man of striking beauty said:

"You must be very rich!"

I denied this and then someone asked: "How much money does an American worker earn?" This aroused a tumultuous debate about the wealth of American workers. I explained the cost of living and how the money was spent. One man said: "I think you mean they earn three or five dollars a *month*, not a day." I explained.

Questions poured in upon me from every direction and I dispensed wisdom right and left. I told the distance to America; what an ocean liner and a factory looks like, how fast trains go, how moving pictures work and what they look like, what a piano is, demonstrated my camera after which it went from hand to hand and from eye to eye. I drew maps, talked about phonographs, discoursed on the origin of malaria, typhoid, dysentery and cholera and how to avoid them; talked on the virtues of democracy; I told them that the earth is round and that once I left China, visited the Soviet Union, Germany, France and America, and came back to China; told them what I saw in the Soviet Union and in Hitler's Germany—and answered their questions about how the workers and peasants live in all these countries.

The hours passed, the table was covered with peanuts and peanut shells and our tea bowls were filled time and time again. Midnight came and passed and I said that all men should be in bed. But they said that I was the first foreigner that had ever come to them and that if I was rich enough to do all the things I had done and go where I had gone, they did not see why I came to the enemy rear. Then they asked me my age and if I had children and why not and why my parents had not arranged a good marriage for me.

One remarked admiringly: "You have the spirit of a Bolshevik."

"No," I answered, and he replied, "Yes."

Then he said: "Sing us some American songs."

APRIL 12, 1943

473

So I sang them some American songs and they sang me some songs.

When I could go no further I said to the soldier:

"I came to get stories of the wounded, but it has been like fighting a battle."

"We would put you in our guerrilla intelligence service," he said.

"Thank you. But now I will go to bed."

"Tomorrow there will be a big mass meeting and all the people will be there. We want you to speak on the strength and weaknesses of the Japanese, and on the strength and weaknesses of the Chinese in this war."

"When, and for how long?"

"Tomorrow morning. Three hours will be long enough—can you finish in three hours?"

"Oh, quite! Do I have to sing some songs also?"

"Yes."

"Tomorrow evening our garrison in one of the villages will give you a dinner, and we would like

you to speak to the men on the international situation."

"For how long?"

"For as long as you want. There will be questions afterwards."

"I can well imagine! My God!"

"What did you say? Oh—are you a Christian?"

"No."

"Why not?" His face lit up with the happy anticipation of another long discussion. All the men had come back and were leaning forward, their eyes gleaming. I said something about getting a little rest, then dragged myself to my room to the luxury of a board bed piled with yellow rice straw, fresh and sweet. In my honor they had piled on a lot. Bending down to unwrap my puttees I felt dizzy. At last I climbed up on the rice straw and sank down, saying to myself—

"Woman! You came to get stories from the wounded—a fat chance!" and then sank into oblivion.

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