

THE LONG MARCH

THE UNTOLD STORY

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Harrison E. Salisbury

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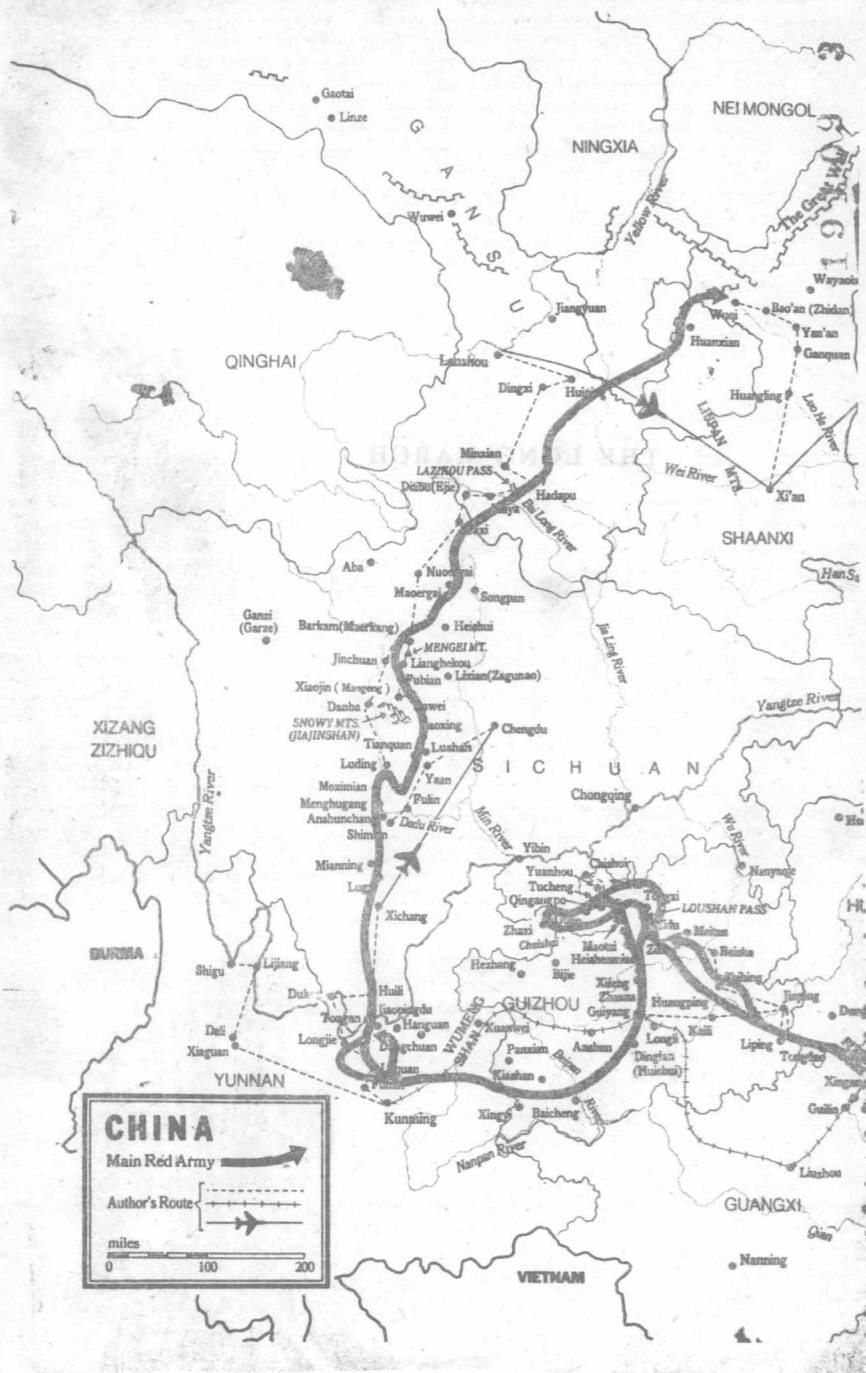
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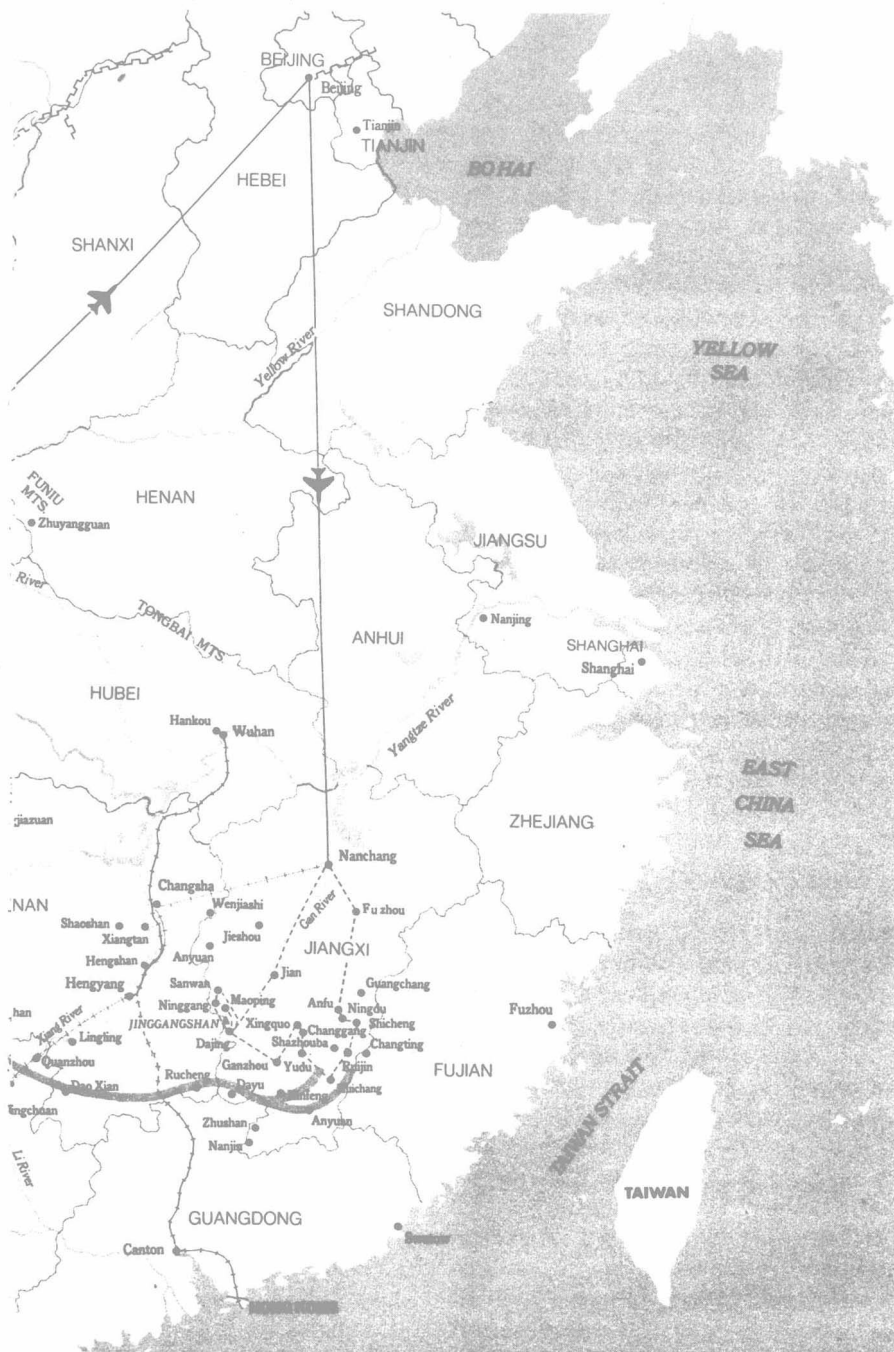
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**To the heroic men and women of China's Long March
and to my companions in our own Long March of 1984—my
beloved wife, Charlotte, my friend Jack Service, my two dear
Chinese comrades, General Qin Xinghan and Zhang Yuanyuan**

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BEHIND THE LONG MARCH

EACH revolution is carried out under its own legend. The American was fought with Valley Forge engraved in the hearts of the patriots, that ordeal from which George Washington and his men came forth steeled for victory.

The French stormed the Bastille and in Petrograd in 1917 it was the Winter Palace. There were only seven prisoners in the Bastille; the Bolsheviks walked into a Winter Palace defended only by a handful of teenagers and some women. Never mind. These became the symbols of revolution.

China's Long March of 1934 was no symbol. It was a great human epic which tested the will, courage, and strength of the men and women of the Chinese Red Army.

It was not a "march" in the conventional sense, not a military campaign, not a victory. It was a triumph of human survival, a deadly, endless retreat from the claws of Chiang Kai-shek; a battle that again and again came within a hair's breadth of defeat and disaster. It was fought without plan. Mao was excluded from the preparations and was only told at the eleventh hour. In the end, it won China for Mao Zedong and his Communists. No event in this century has so captured the world's imagination and so profoundly affected its future. It led in a straight line from the shallow river of the Yudu in southern China, crossed by the Red Army on October 16, 1934, to the proclamation by Mao, from the rostrum of Tiananmen Square in Beijing on October 1, 1949, of the People's Republic of China—that is, to the triumph of Communism in a land inhabited by one-quarter of the human inhabitants of the earth.

It was a long time coming. The descent of the empire of the Qings was slow and painful, eroded by weakness from within and by brute western military, technological and economic power from without.

Revolution took a hundred years to succeed. First there were the Taipings and their mystical pseudo-Christian uprising of the 1850s. Then the Heavenly Fists, the Boxers, in 1900, again mystical, fanatic, xenophobic. Finally, in 1911 Dr. Sun Yat-sen's democratic, ill-articulated revolutionaries brought down the old Empire and China plunged into a chaos as had not been seen since the time of the Warring States 400 years before Christ.

Between October 16, 1934, and October 1, 1949, China's stage was filled with heroism, tragedy, intrigue, bloodletting, treachery, cheap opera, military genius, political guile, moral goals, spiritual objectives, and human hatred. Shakespeare could not have written such a story. It is not yet finished. Perhaps it never will be.

The first word of this remarkable drama was brought to the world by Edgar Snow when he visited Mao Zedong and the Communists in their sanctuary in the loess hills of northern Shaanxi in 1936. They had arrived there a year earlier after more than six thousand miles of marching, fighting, starving, and freezing through the roughest wrinkles of the globe—the backcountry of China—crossing twenty-four rivers and, as Mao calculated, one thousand mountains.

On the main march of the First Front Army, some 86,000 men and women were said to have started out. Possibly 4,000 arrived with Mao a year later, October 19, 1935, in northern Shaanxi.

I first read of the Long March on the pages of Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*. Most Chinese heard of it from the Chinese edition of his book. It captured my imagination as it did the imagination of thousands. "Some day," Snow wrote then, "someone will write the full epic of this exciting expedition." He once hoped to write this story, but for many reasons never did.

After years of effort, I first got to China in 1972. A bit later I put before the late Zhou Enlai a proposal to retrace the route of Mao's Red Army and write the story of the Long March. Jack Service, the old China hand, joined me in this proposal, which was made again and again over a period of a dozen years.

Nothing came of it. These were the last turbulent years of Mao Zedong, years of the Cultural Revolution and of the Gang of Four. Mao's comrades of the Long March, the men who had been tightly bonded by hardship and sacrifice, were in disarray. Many were dead. Many had succumbed in the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. Some had been murdered. Many still languished in jail. In those years, to have been a hero of the Long March meant that you were labeled an archvil-

lain by those struggling to inherit Mao's power.

Not much chance to write history under those circumstances. Even with Mao's death in 1976, and the arrest and trial of Qiang Jing, Mao's widow, and her associates in the Gang, the path back to the Long March did not swiftly reopen. Only with the gradual ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping, the rehabilitation of the old heroes, their assumption of high positions in government, and, most important, the evolution of a new and (relatively) realistic attitude toward history, did retracing the Long March begin to seem plausible.

Much had changed during those years, but not my resolve to record the story of the Long March if humanly possible. In August 1983, word finally came from Beijing: The door to the Long March was open! The resources, the archives, the historical materials, would be put at my disposal. I could travel the *Chang Zheng*, the journey of 25,000 li, every li of it. Two men, I later learned, were largely responsible for this decision: General Yang Shangkun, Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Huang Hua, former Foreign Minister.

On March 1, 1984, my wife, Charlotte, and I flew to Beijing and embarked on a whirlwind round of interviews with surviving senior generals, widows of Party figures (some of them victims of the Cultural Revolution), archivists, and historians. Soon Jack Service joined us. After a month in Beijing we set out on the route of the March, accompanied by General Qin Xinghan, deputy director of the National Museum of Military History in Beijing, a specialist in the Long March, and Zhang Yuanyuan, a senior interpreter from the Foreign Office.

We flew to Nanchang, capital of Jiangxi, the province from which the Long March started. We explored the remote mountains where the Communists sank their first roots, and we interviewed dozens of survivors of the March, men and women, soaking into our brains the crises and conflicts that gave birth to what could as well have become the Fatal Retreat.

That was the start. We followed on the route of the Red Army. Not every li of the way. We skipped a bit here and there, particularly some of the zigzags in Guizhou, taking side excursions over the terrain traveled by the secondary armies, tasting the sheer exhaustion of the Red Army's travel by climbing the spiky trail that leads from the crossing of the Golden Sands River past Fire Mountain and Lion's Head not far from Tibet, emerging from the mountains by mule and horseback, and moving up to the Great Snowies, the roads in late May leading through fields of snow, on to the terrible Grasslands, where, as at Passchendaele,

men had slipped into the bottomless muck and dragged down to eternity anyone who tried to lend a helping hand.

The journey covered 7,400 miles on the roads and trails—jeep, mini-bus, command car—and took two and a half months. Then more and more interviews, and another trip to China, in autumn 1984.

Only the journey over the actual ground could convey a feeling of what Mao and his men and women endured. This is still backcountry. No cities. No foreigners. In town after town, no one could remember a foreigner ever visiting.

No one, foreign or Chinese, had made the trip. No one is likely soon to repeat it as we did.

Here, then, is the record of the Long March of fifty years ago, pieced together from hundreds of interviews, documents, archives. I put to the Chinese every hard question I could think of. They did their best to answer, sometimes going back again and again to the records until they ferreted out the missing fact.

The story is an epic. Not only because of the heroism of the simple soldiers and their commanders but because it became, in effect, the crucible of the Chinese Revolution. It forged the brotherhood that fought Chiang Kai-shek to a standstill and came to power under Mao's leadership.

That this brotherhood disintegrated in the madness of Mao's final years adds a note of tragedy to the heroic drama. But now, amazingly, the survivors have come to the top. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping they have moved China onto what they call a "new Long March," one as difficult as the original and one which may become the great social and political experiment of our times. But that and the debacle of the Cultural Revolution and the Gang of Four constitute another tale. This is the story of the Long March—all of it that I could assemble together with the help of Chinese historians and the survivors themselves.

Here and there, more episodes may float to the surface. But enough is told here to demonstrate that this human undertaking has no parallel. In it there is a little, perhaps, of the exodus of the Jews, a little of Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, of Napoleon's march on Moscow, and, to my surprise, some echoes of America's winning of the West, the great cavalcade over mountain and prairie.

But no comparison fits. The Long March is sui generis. Its heroism has fired the dreams of a nation of 1.1 billion people and set China moving toward a destiny no man can yet divine.

1

A WALK BY MOONLIGHT

THE October sun flooded the whitewashed hospital room and outside in the compound under the broad-leaved camphor trees there was a flurry of movement, shouted orders, the sound of a bugle, and a tramp of feet that sent small spirals of dust into the still air. Within the room, the patient, emaciated, his left leg in a cast, craned his neck, trying to see what was going on. Something was up, that was plain, some new movement of the Red Army about which he had not been informed. A nurse was passing his door and he called out: "What's happening?"

"I don't know, Commander," she replied, glancing outside. "We haven't been told."

Chen Yi cursed as he had a hundred times since he had been carried from the front in Xingguo county six weeks ago with a bullet wound in his hip which refused to heal. Splinters of bone kept working out and when he asked for an X-ray the doctors put him off with excuses: the X-ray machine was out of order, there was no power for it, the batteries were too weak.

Chen Yi was a sanguine man of thirty-three, a native of Sichuan, outgoing, known for his sense of humor, a senior commander of the Red Army, but today he was out of sorts, irritable, restless, worried. Something was going on and he couldn't figure out what. He twisted in bed, frustrated by his wound. A few minutes later the nurse appeared again. "There is someone to see you, Commander," she said, hurrying to punch up his pillows and straighten the sheets. Chen Yi looked over her shoulder and saw his old friend and comrade Zhou Enlai entering the room. Later on, Chen Yi would recall the date of Zhou's visit. It was October 9, 1934—the second day in the tenth lunar moon in the Year of the Dog—the day he was told about what was to become the Long March.¹

Yudu was a drowsy town of less than ten thousand in southern Jiangxi on the banks of the Yudu River. Not much happened there: a ferry across the river, a market. In October of 1934 there was a feeling of well-being about the place, tempered with a little nervousness. The weather was pleasant: warm days, cooler nights, hardly any rain. Most of the crops were in and only the late rice, some buckwheat, and sweet potatoes still awaited harvest. The soybeans—vines, roots, and all—were drying on the gray-tile roofs, twisting over the winged roof ends. Red earthen jars stood against the courtyard walls, filled with bean paste. In the corners were heaps of bitter melons, green with red seeds, orange pumpkins, and strings of drying red peppers. The peasants knew now that there would be enough food until the next crop began to come in, but there was an edge of unease in Yudu. The Red Army had imposed heavy requisitions of rice in the summer and there had been an unusual drive for recruits. The harvest had been generous and people were taking a breather in the eternal cycle of planting and harvesting, of harrowing and transplanting, but something seemed to be in the air. No one knew just what. The autumn moon festival was behind them and the red fortune paper over the door lintels and the guardian door posters, fierce and frightening, had tattered a bit. People hoped they would still protect them against bad luck.²

Liu Ying was spending a few weeks in Yudu rounding up new recruits for the Red Army, one of the many young women engaged in the work. Liu Ying was twenty-six years old and a tiny woman, a scant five feet tall, petite as a child's doll. Helen Snow once said that she could not imagine how Liu Ying avoided being blown away during the Long March.³ Later on, when Liu Ying married Luo Fu, a top Party leader, he said the same thing. Small Liu Ying was, but she possessed a spirit of spun steel, and Mao Zedong had taken her under his wing. One day he came to the Communist youth league office, a bodyguard at his side. He spoke to the little army recruiter privately and told her she must leave Yudu immediately and report for duty at Ruijin, headquarters of the Central Soviet Area in southern Jiangxi, for a very special job.

"I told him that I couldn't leave," she recalled fifty years later. "I hadn't finished my job. I had to get more recruits to fill my quota."

But Mao was firm. She must return. Liu Ying was puzzled, but she made her way back to Ruijin. It was a forty-mile walk and it took her two days, just a short stroll compared with those she would soon be taking.⁴

A short, stylish man with a bullet-shaven head sat behind a fine teakwood desk in an imposing building overlooking a lake in Nanchang, capital of Jiangxi province. A smile of satisfaction played over his thin lips as he picked up *Minguo Ribao*, the local Nationalist daily. His eye roved past the main news story about the award of contracts for constructing a railroad bridge, past the welter of advertisements for sex tonics, "female" remedies, and jewelry, and focused on the main editorial. The date was October 10, 1934, Double Ten, the anniversary of the founding of the Nationalist regime, and the editorial was dedicated to the problems of the day. It warned of natural calamities, of the imminence of a second World War. The Communist bandits had taken advantage of China's plight to run rampant. People should turn to morality, stop drinking and dancing, and strive for the survival of the homeland, of China. Fortunately, the situation here in Jiangxi was improving rapidly. The Communist bandits would be wiped out within the year. They were surrounded on all sides and had to rope their soldiers together to keep them from running away. "The day of their collapse is not far away."

The reader of the newspaper lightly licked his lips. These were words of which he approved. In fact, they were words that he himself had dictated. His name was Chiang Kai-shek. He was forty-eight years old and he had come to Nanchang to direct his Nationalist Army in the mopping up of the "Red bandits." Things were going well. A couple of days later, Chiang ordered up his personal plane and prepared to take off on a quick inspection trip to Shaanxi, Ningxia, and Sichuan.⁵

The Communist Third Army Group was encamped in the area of Shicheng, a bit north of Ruijin, the Central Soviet Area's capital. A compact, salty man named Kong, then twenty-three, who all his life would remain a plainspoken revolutionary soldier, was head of the Third Army's scouting detachment. The Army was resting. It had been pulled out of line two weeks earlier after a hard and not very successful battle. Now it was being prepared for new operations. These were very secret. Kong's comrades only knew that soon they would be on the march again. (Later on, this secrecy would be much criticized as counterproductive.) Kong knew a good deal more, because he was a scout, but he wasn't talking about it. Like so many of his comrades, Kong came from a very poor peasant family, one of five brothers and seven sisters. His family had opposed his joining the Red Army. His parents uphe'd

the traditional Chinese precept that you did not use good iron to make nails, nor send good men into the army. But Kong joined anyway. He wanted land; the Red Army promised it.

In Kong's first battle the Red Army smashed the Eighteenth Nationalist Division and captured its general; a big, red-faced, hated man from Hunan named Zhang Huizhan. Fifty years later, Kong recalled every detail of it: the rally on the mountain slope (no town square was big enough) where Zhang was hauled up before a crowd of peasants, poor townsfolk, young Red Guards with red-tasseled spears, and angry, battle-weary Red Army soldiers. Zhang stood on the platform wearing a dunce cap, arms bound behind his back, and the crowd shouted for his head. Presently it was chopped off, put on a raft, and floated down the river Gan as a warning to other Nationalist generals. The memory of the event so stirred Kong that as he told his story he burst into doggerel that had been sung on the occasion: "We're so happy. We fought at Longshen and captured the head of the tyrant Zhang."⁶

There was almost nothing that the tall, soft-spoken, rather elegant young man named Wu did not know about what was afoot with the Red Army in that October of mysterious comings and goings and growing excitement in the soviet base area and its capital at Ruijin. The base had been set up five years earlier by Communist forces led by Mao Zedong and his ally Zhu De. Their association was so close that the army was known to the peasants as the "Zhu-Mao" army and many, many firmly believed Zhu-Mao was one man. This was not entirely illogical. In fact, on one occasion Zhu De, the big, slow-moving, earthy Communist general, explained that you could not separate Zhu from Mao. This was a rather elaborate Chinese pun, because *zhu* means pig (in another ideograph) and *mao* means hair.⁷

Wu knew everything or almost everything that was going on, because he was serving as interpreter for a man called Li De, the representative of Moscow's Comintern to the Chinese Revolution. Li was now and had been for more than a year directing the Chinese Red Army with a dismaying absence of success.

Wu Xiuquan was twenty-eight years old. At nineteen, he had gone with a hundred other young Chinese to the Soviet Union, there to remain five or six years, studying the language, studying revolution, and studying military science. He had been back in China for three years and had been serving as interpreter since Li De's arrival in the soviet area, in October 1933.