



# On the Long March as Guard to Chou En-lai

By Wei Kuo-lu

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## *I Become Vice-Chairman Chou's Guard*

In the autumn of 1933, our Party held the Second Meeting of Soviet Representatives at Juichin, the Red capital in Kiangsi Province. A big sports meet was held at the same time, including such events as marksmanship, track and field and various ball games. It was very exciting. At the time I was in the guards corps of the State Security Bureau and was posted as guard at the Representatives Meeting. On the last day of the meeting one of the Party leaders, a man with a long beard, made a very impressive political report. I felt a deep respect for this man as he seemed so well informed, and I wondered who he was. He did not look very old, even with his long beard. When I later inquired among some other comrades, I learned that he was Comrade Chou En-lai, Vice-Chairman of the Military Council of the Party's Central Committee.

One day in June 1934, not long after I had been posted to the State Security Bureau, Commander Li came up to me and said I was being transferred to General Headquarters to work, and asked me how I felt about it.

When I asked him what my work would be there, his only reply was a shake of his head. He was not sure, but said that I would find out when I got there.

I was anything but pleased with his answer. I thought that since he was the one who had notified me of my transfer, he certainly knew what work I was to do there, that he just didn't want to tell me. Then I thought there might be

a reason for him not telling me. When we were given lectures on classified information in the State Security Bureau, we were often told, "Don't pry for classified information, and guard against carelessness in your speech." So I replied dejectedly, "All right, I'll obey orders and go wherever I'm sent."

Commander Li could see I was not very happy and said with a smile, "Don't be upset! This was a sudden decision, and I really don't know why you're being sent to General Headquarters." After a moment he added, "Anyway, I think you'll be made a guard for one of the Party leaders."

That afternoon, after packing up my simple kit, I set off for General Headquarters with a letter of introduction. I kept wondering which Party leader I would be guard to, and what type of work would I be doing? Would I be up to it? . . . I was so preoccupied with my thoughts, even to the extent of wondering what type of gun I would be issued with, that I did not get a wink of sleep all night.

The next morning a staff-officer told me that I had been assigned to guard Vice-Chairman Chou and that he would take me to see him immediately.

"Vice-Chairman Chou?" All my doubts vanished in an instant. Excitedly pointing to my chin, I asked the staff-officer whether Vice-Chairman Chou was the one with the long beard.

"Yes," he replied. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, I do," I proudly declared. "Last year I heard him make a report at the Second Meeting of Soviet Representatives."

"Were you a representative?" the officer asked, surprise on his face.

I quickly explained that I was a guard at the meeting.

The staff-officer took me to the Vice-Chairman's office. Vice-Chairman Chou was at his desk examining some documents. His appearance had not changed at all since I last saw him, except for his grey uniform, which was now more worn out and faded. After the staff-officer had told the Vice-Chairman that I was the newly assigned guard, he went on to talk about some other matters. While they talked, I scanned the office. It was a typical Kiangsi-style room, not large but very well ordered and clean. The furnishings were simple: a few chairs; two desks, one with books, papers and magazines on it, the other for work, with a few writing brushes in a holder and a large brass ink-box. I was impressed how the Vice-Chairman who put all his energy into working for the revolution lived as simply as the rest of us.

When the staff-officer finished what he had to say and left, my train of thought was broken. I was left alone with the Vice-Chairman and felt quite ill at ease. The Vice-Chairman tidied up the things on his desk and then looked me over, asking me with a smile what my name was. I answered, "Wei Kuo-lu."

He stepped out in front of me and asked, "What unit have you been transferred from?"

"From the State Security Bureau."

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"Are you a member of the Party or the Youth League?"

I answered that I was a Party member. Though I felt a little embarrassed at answering, I was at the same time happy and felt at ease. After I had answered all his questions, I looked up and saw him nodding in satisfaction. He then called in the guard who was standing at the door, a comrade named Fan Chin-piao.

"You two can work out your respective duties between yourselves. When you don't have any work to do you should study. All right, show Comrade Wei to his quarters."

I saluted and followed Comrade Fan out of the office.

I had not been at General Headquarters long when I noticed that Vice-Chairman Chou was going to meetings nearly every day. I did not know what was so important as to necessitate meetings for days and nights on end. In mid-September, after the meetings had been going on for about a month, I discovered that in every section of General Headquarters documents were being burnt late into the night for several nights running. I was sure that there was a connection between the meetings and the burning of documents. This meant that there was either going to be a battle or some other major activity, though no one said a word about what was going on. On the surface, everything went on as usual. Even the vegetable patch planted by the office workers of General Headquarters was tended as usual. . . .

In the end our suspicions were confirmed. Because Wang Ming had taken control of the Party Central Committee, and was carrying out a "Left" opportunist line, our revolutionary forces had suffered many losses and the Red Army was forced to evacuate the base and undertake the Long March.

At the beginning of October, Vice-Chairman Chou called Fan Chin-piao and me into his office and said we were to get ready to leave. He said that we would be marching a long distance, everything that was not absolutely essential was to be returned to the Supply Department. This was a worry, for what did the Vice-Chairman use that was not essential? He only had two blankets, a quilt, and the cover he put his change of clothes and a grey sweater into

to make a pillow. Although the big brass ink-box in his office was very heavy, it was indispensable. In the end, all we could really get rid of were the old books, papers and magazines on the desk.

Soon everything was ready, and on the afternoon of October 18 we set out from Juichin in the direction of Yutu. That marked the beginning of the world-renowned Long March.



## *Severe Punishment for Arsonists*

In November 1934, the Red Army reached a Miao-nationality region in Kwangsi Province.

As soon as we got into that area a strange thing started happening: fires broke out in or around our camp nearly every night for more than ten days. Though they started in the army camps, the fires would quickly spread to the Miao people's houses, which were made of thatch and wood, and cause a lot of damage. These fires became our greatest enemy, for not only did they endanger our army, they destroyed much Miao-nationality property and damaged our relations with the Miao people. Though the army and civilian organizations set up fire-prevention and fire-fighting squads to keep the problem in check, still we were all very edgy, and everyone was on the alert for fires or any enemy activity.

On one occasion we were camped at Lungpingchen, a medium-size, well-ordered market town where people of the Chuang nationality lived.

Vice-Chairman Chou had had little chance to rest since the Long March began, and he went to bed quite early that first night in Lungpingchen. After he had eaten and retired, we also went to bed. Tired out by the long day's march, I was soon fast asleep.

At about midnight, I was suddenly wakened by the shouts of the sentries and the crackling sound of fire. I leapt from my bed and rushed to the door. The house where Vice-

Chairman Chou was staying was in flames! The fire was spreading quickly and clouds of smoke billowed out of the doors and windows. I grabbed a blanket for protection and ran into the house. The place was full of smoke and flames and I could barely see a thing. The Vice-Chairman was already out of bed and I quickly led him out of the house, which was soon a blazing inferno.

Out of danger now, the Vice-Chairman sent us to see how the other leaders were and check on the situation in the rest of the camp. Just as we were about to go, the other leaders arrived posthaste, obviously concerned for Vice-Chairman Chou's safety. They began to study the cause of the fire, and ordered the troops to keep on the alert and strike at the class enemy's sabotage.

The streets were filled with people. Some were fighting the fire, others looking for people and moving things, while others were helping people save their property from the fire. . . . Comments about the origin of the mysterious fire could occasionally be heard above the din: "Whose carelessness is responsible for this fire?" "I think this fire was started by the enemy," etc.

Just then Vice-Chairman Chou came along and told me to find the staff-officer for operations. I should tell him to keep everyone on alert, double the sentries and have all those who were off duty assemble and await orders.

When I came back from seeing the staff-officer, I found some of the Party leaders including Comrade Teng Fa, Director of the State Security Bureau, standing outside holding a meeting in the open. Vice-Chairman Chou was saying, "Yes. I'm sure this fire was started by the enemy. The reactionaries want to use this type of despicable incident as proof of their slander that 'the Communists kill people and start fires,' hoping to upset and damage our

relations with the masses. . . . We must find the arsonist and uncover this plot!"

That night after the meeting, three suspicious-looking characters were picked up in Lungpingchen. After an investigation by the security department, it was discovered that they were criminals hired by the Kuomintang and sent as agents disguised as Red Army soldiers. It was they who had set all the fires.

The next day, after discovering the cause of the fires and capturing those arsonists, the State Security Bureau held a mass meeting in the town at which the policy of the Red Army was explained and the enemy's plot fully exposed. The people were incensed at learning the facts behind the fire, and they demanded that the three culprits be executed on the spot. After this was done, Vice-Chairman Chou instructed the Supply Department to investigate the situation of the arson victims and give appropriate assistance.

The enemy's demoniac plot was uncovered and the Red Army heightened its awareness of the many dangers that lay along the road of the 25,000-li (12,500-kilometre) Long March.

## *Husking Rice*

In December 1934, the Central Red Army reached Kweichow. The Kuomintang reactionary propaganda and disruption by local reactionary forces made the people hesitate to approach us at first, and we often found villages empty. Added to this was the more crucial problem of food. Even water mills and stone grinders, essential for our rice-husking, had been hidden or destroyed on the orders of the enemy, who hoped to starve out the Red Army soldiers and end the Long March.

One day, when we had set up camp, we were able to obtain some unhusked rice. But without anything to grind it with, we still went hungry. Some comrades were so tired by the day's march that they simply lay down and went to sleep when they saw there was nothing to eat. Vice-Chairman Chou was very worried by this problem and decided to hold a meeting of cadres. He said, "We can't let the men go hungry, we must get every comrade something to eat. If there's nothing to grind the rice with, then we'll have to get everyone to use stones and pieces of tile and husk it by hand!" It was agreed that every man was to husk enough rice for three meals.

After the meeting, Vice-Chairman Chou had me find him two pieces of tile, and he got his share of rice and began to husk it himself. I thought how busy he was with other things, and said to him, "You needn't bother with this. We'll do your share."

Without raising his head he asked, "Why shouldn't I husk rice too?"

With utter conviction I said, "You're a Party leader and you've got more important work to do!"

"It's precisely because I am one of the leaders that I should be husking rice." As he spoke he raised his head and, seeing my troubled expression, said consolingly, "I'm the one who suggested that everyone husk the rice by hand, so shouldn't I also take part?"

What more could I say?

Following Vice-Chairman Chou's call to husk rice by hand, everyone went to work with tiles or stones, and some with only their bare hands. We continued to work on cheerfully even if we got blisters and cuts. After two hours of strenuous work we had overfulfilled our plan and had plenty of rice to eat. Later, when the people of the village saw for themselves that we paid fairly for what we bought, observed discipline, spoke politely and that we did not beat or swear at people, they no longer believed the lies spread about us by the Kuomintang reactionaries.

## *At Tsunyi*

It was early January 1935. After crossing the treacherous Wuchiang River and defeating two divisions of the warlord Hou Chih-yen's forces, we headed straight for Tsunyi, the second largest city in Kweichow Province.

During our march, there was a constant fall of light mist-like rain, bearing out the saying: "There are not three clear days in a row in Kweichow." Though the rain was not heavy, it soon turned the dirt roads and paths we were walking on into mud, making it very hard going for us. Vice-Chairman Chou used a stick and marched along in his soaking clothes like the rest of us. The whole area was hilly; as soon as we struggled over one hill we would come across another. Going uphill was difficult enough, but going down was much more so. Sticks were of little use to us, one careless step resulting in a slippery fall and we were all soon covered in mud.

Three days after crossing the Wuchiang River we received some news from the troops up ahead: Our spearhead force had captured Tsunyi. This good news gave us all new energy and we quickened our pace. By morning the rain had stopped and the sun, of which we had seen so little up to now, appeared in the east. The good weather added to our feeling of elation as we headed towards Tsunyi.

When we were about two or three kilometres from the town, an order came from up front: tidy up and prepare to enter the city. We threw away our walking sticks and

scraped the mud from our clothes. Some men even changed into fresh uniforms. Spruced up and in orderly ranks, our troops looked very smart and impressive as we set off into the city.

It was already afternoon when Chairman Mao, Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh, Vice-Chairman Chou and the other leaders entered the city. Bright slogans covered its walls, and the people lining the streets applauded. At intervals from the crowds came the shouting of slogans: "Long live the Communist Party of China!" "Warmly welcome the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army!" Our proud force entered the city in well-ordered ranks, singing the militant song "The Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention."\* It was the first time since we left the Central Base Area in Kiangsi Province to begin the Long March that we experienced such a feeling of harmony between the army and the people.

Tsunyi was a flourishing commercial centre on the road from Kweiyang in the south to Chungking in the north. It was divided into the new and the old cities, the new city being the main business district and the old city the residential quarter. The army command and guards lived in the old city. We were billeted in a beautiful roomy house said to have been the residence of the warlord Po Hui-chang, a terror in Kweichow. We had converted it into the temporary office of the Red Army General Headquarters. That night, after settling in we prepared a room for Vice-Chairman

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\* The Three Main Rules of Discipline: (1) Obey orders in all your actions; (2) Don't take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses; and (3) Turn in everything captured. The Eight Points for Attention: (1) Speak politely; (2) Pay fairly for what you buy; (3) Return everything you borrow; (4) Pay for anything you damage; (5) Don't hit or swear at people; (6) Don't damage crops; (7) Don't take liberties with women; and (8) Don't ill-treat captives.

Chou to sleep in. The room we fixed up was in a mess, with things strewn all over the place, a sign of the great haste and disorder in which the previous occupant had fled.

The Central Committee used the breathing space afforded by our victorious entry into Tsunyi to hold an enlarged meeting of the Central Political Bureau in order to save the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and the Chinese revolution. At this meeting Chairman Mao carried out a resolute struggle against the "Left" opportunist line in the Party. The Chairman's correct political and military line was reaffirmed and taken as the basis for the Red Army's operations. The influence of the third "Left" opportunist line in the Central Committee led by Wang Ming was ended and the new leadership of the Central Committee with Chairman Mao as head was established. This was a change of the greatest historical importance for the Party, for it saved the Red Army, the revolution and the Party itself. It also ensured the successful completion of the Long March. From this time on we would march from victory to victory under the wise leadership of our great leader Chairman Mao, and this was vital for the Chinese people and the revolutionary people of the world.

Vice-Chairman Chou, like the other Party leaders, was so busy day and night during this meeting that he forgot all about food and sleep. When he was not in a meeting or otherwise busy, there were invariably streams of people wanting to speak with him and ask his advice. Witnessing the constant hard work and bitter struggles our leaders engaged in, our admiration for Chairman Mao, Vice-Chairman Chou and the others grew. We understood and appreciated their devoting all their strength and effort into correcting the mistakes of Wang Ming's "Left" opportunist line and changing the trend of the Chinese revolution.



After the Tsunyi meeting, the Central Red Army, under the wise leadership of Chairman Mao, crossed the Chihshui River four times, and also the Wuchiang River in the south. It launched feint attacks on Kweiyang, directly threatening Kunming, and after three months of fighting on the move, eluding and diverting the enemy, finally manoeuvred across the Golden Sand River from Yunnan. After this crossing we managed to shake off the enemy and frustrated all his encirclements, pursuits, obstructions and interceptions, and so achieved decisive victory in the strategic shift. Later we forced the Tatu River, and passed over the snow-capped mountains and trackless grasslands. Finally, after overcoming Chang Kuo-tao's flightist policy and his plot to split the Party, we triumphantly completed the Long March.

The history of the Long March and the whole Chinese revolution testifies to the great truth that only by acting in accordance with Chairman Mao's revolutionary line can the revolution develop and succeed. If we depart from or go against Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, then the revolution will suffer setbacks and defeat. It is just as Chairman Mao taught us: **"The correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything."** This is a scientific conclusion based on the experiences of the Chinese and world revolutionary struggles, and based also on a deep historical experience achieved at the cost of the lives and the blood of countless revolutionary martyrs.