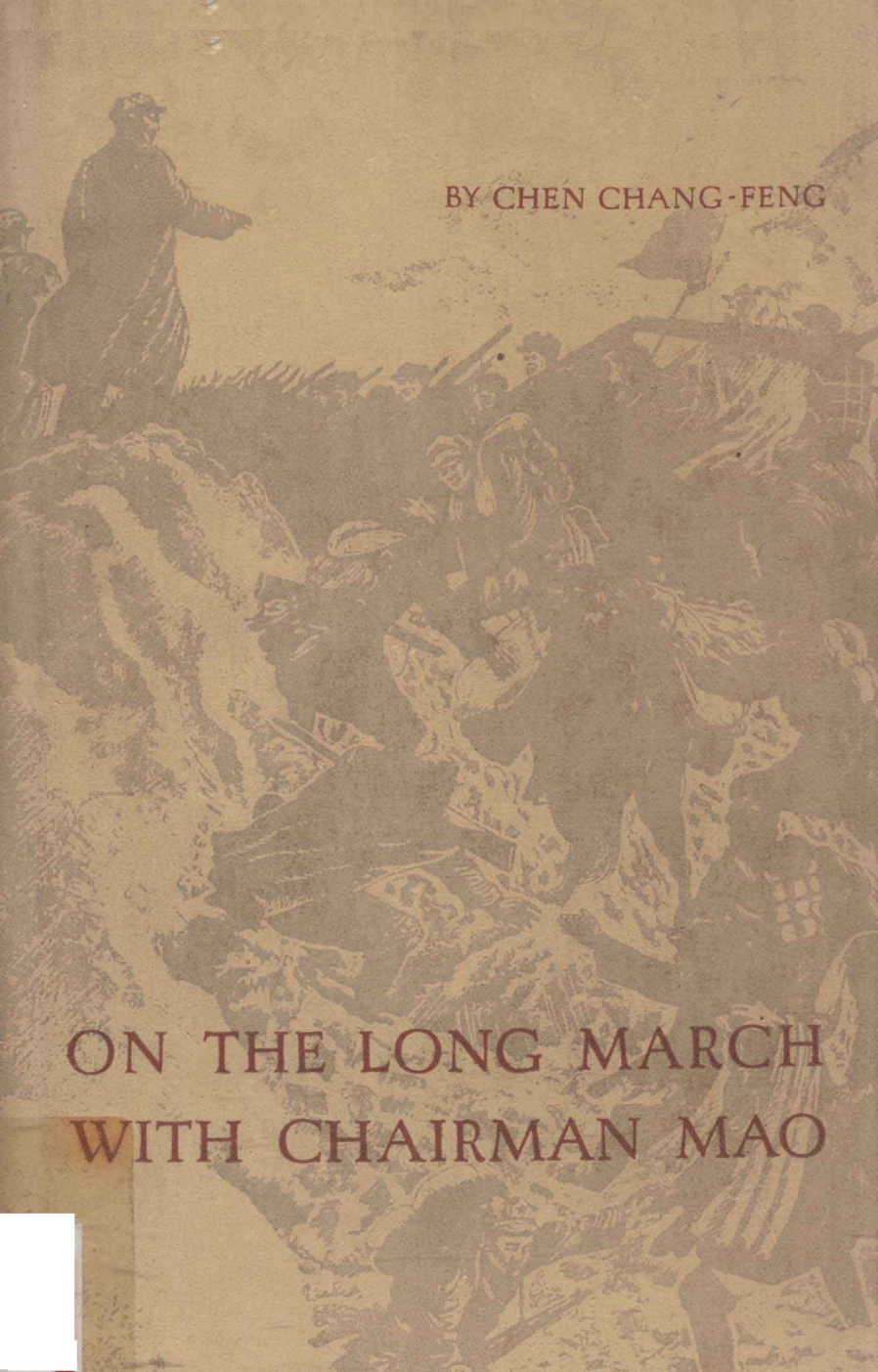

BY CHEN CHANG-FENG

ON THE LONG MARCH WITH CHAIRMAN MAO

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EDITOR'S NOTE

On the Long March with Chairman Mao is the reminiscences of Colonel Chen Chang-feng, now deputy commander of a sub-military zone, who worked with Chairman Mao Tse-tung from 1930 to 1936, first as an orderly and then as a bodyguard, and was with him throughout the famous Long March. Two articles are included in the book as appendices: "Happy Reminiscences," originally published by *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), in which the author describes his later meetings with Chairman Mao; and "About the Long March," a summary of the historical background of that great episode which we have written for the benefit of the reader.

CONTENTS

I. EARLY DAYS

I was born in the village of Lingnao, in Ningtu County, Kiangsi Province in the autumn of 1915. Ours was a very poor family. When I was eleven, mother died. My father supported the family by working for the landlords. Because of our poverty and the oppression we suffered at the hands of the landlords and local despots, I have hated this rapacious class of exploiters from the bottom of my heart ever since I was a child.

In 1928 our village suddenly buzzed with talk about a "Red Army" that had appeared in the nearby village of Wangfang as if from nowhere. It was passing Ningtu, heading for Juichin and Tapoti. This news stirred the whole village, and as it spread around, it took on the proportions of a legend. The poor were glad. They said these troops helped the poor. They were called the Communist Party or the Red Army, they would square accounts with the rich and throw the gold and silver of the landlords and despots on the streets so that the poor could pick it up for themselves. The rich were scared. They called these men cut-throats and bandits. I was only thirteen at the time. I knew nothing of politics, but I agreed immediately with what the poor people said. Those

few words: "Down with the rich! Up with the poor!" burned themselves into my memory.

Several days passed. Some of the village pedlars who had been to Changting in Fukien Province gleefully recounted what they had seen. The Red Army had captured Changting, fought the local despots and overthrown the landlords. The poor were given land; now they were standing on their feet for the first time.

This news made me happy and I waited impatiently for the day when these soldiers of the poor would come to our village.

That New Year's Eve our house was searched and ransacked. We owed the local despot some money, and everything we owned – from the tiny plot of land on the wild heath to the tattered quilt in my room – was taken away. It was only thanks to the neighbours who begged pity for us that we were left a single broken saucepan for cooking rice in. Our life became harder than ever. Luckily I got jobs herding cattle for other people. But I lived worse than the animals. When an ox or a horse finishes its work, it gets its fodder, but sometimes our whole family starved with not even a drop of gruel between us.

What should I do? Join the Red Army! The idea suddenly came into my mind, and the more I thought about it, the more determined I was to do it. Just after the New Year the night of the second day of the First Moon was pitch-black. I and a neighbour, a youngster named Wen, slipped out of the village secretly without even telling our families and headed for Changting. We were determined to find and join the Red Army.

We travelled on for I don't know how many days or how far without meeting a single Red Army soldier. We were famished but never thought of turning back. On a hill about fifteen *li*[1] from Changting we came upon two soldier sentries with red stars on their caps. The Red Army at last! We immediately went up to them and declared that we had come to join the Red Army. After questioning us in detail, they pointed to Changting and told us that if we wanted to enlist, we should go there to the Red Recruiting Corps.

At Changting we found the Red Recruiting Corps stationed by a stone bridge. We were so happy that we wanted to join right away, without even listening to their explanations. We never expected that after going into our cases they would shake their heads and say "No." I was too young and could hardly shoulder a rifle, they said. Tears came to my eyes. But I wouldn't give up. "I must join the Red Army!" I cried out. "If you don't let me join, I'll stay right here where I am!" At last, seeing that I was so set, they relented, and ever since that day I have been a member of our glorious people's army.

I was posted as a bugler with the headquarters of the Fourth Army of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, under the command of Comrade Chu Teh. Later I became an orderly. One afternoon at the end of March 1930, when the headquarters was in Paisha Village, Yungfeng County, Kiangsi, Adjutant Officer Liu told me that I would be transferred. At that time

[1] A *li* is approximately one-third of a mile.

I did not fully understand the meaning of the word "transferred." So I asked him what it meant.

"Transferred means that you'll change your place of work," said Liu, looking at me intently as if there were something important which he could not tell me at once.

"Where'll I be transferred to?" I asked Liu again. I wasn't too pleased because I was well satisfied where I was.

"You'll go to the Front Committee as orderly for Commissar Mao," he said with a smile.

I knew the Front Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, but who Commissar Mao was, I wasn't quite clear. He must be a leading officer, I reckoned, otherwise he couldn't have an orderly. But what sort of man was he? Was he good tempered?

Adjutant Liu, seeing my hesitation, patted me on the shoulder and said encouragingly: "You're a lucky little devil. Commissar Mao is a wonderful man. You'll certainly have a wonderful future if you work with him!" Then he handed me a letter of introduction, told me to pack up my things and be off. I had little to carry. All I had weighed just about three catties[1] all told.

The Front Committee was in the same village, so I was soon there. I was a bit nervous. A comrade named Wu took me to the Commissar. He lived in a typical Kiangsi wooden house with two rooms, one a bedroom and the other an office. We entered through the bedroom. In it was an ordinary wooden bed

[1] A catty is equal to about 1.1 lb.

covered with a cotton sheet. It didn't even have a pillow. I grew less nervous. Judging from the room, the Commissar must be living as simply as all of us, I thought. Two men were talking together in the office. Comrade Wu indicated the man in the chair and whispered: "That's Commissar Mao." I looked at him curiously. His grey uniform was the same as ours. The only difference was that the pockets on his coat seemed to be especially large. His black hair contrasted sharply with his fair complexion. Maybe he was a bit too thin. His eyes seemed to be very big and keen. He seemed to be about forty at most. Talking to a man opposite him, he gesticulated with his hands; his voice was gentle. Although I didn't understand what he was talking about, I felt he was very sincere. A little time later, his visitor stood up to go. He too stood up. It was only then that I saw he was quite tall. As soon as the visitor went out, Comrade Wu said to Commissar Mao, pointing at me, "I have found an orderly for you."

Although I felt a bit shy, I didn't forget the manners which I had learned at army headquarters. I advanced a step, saluted and said "Report!" in a loud voice. Commissar Mao looked at me and smiled kindly. That smile swept away all my reservations.

"What's your surname?" he asked.

"Chen," I replied loudly, like a real soldier.

"What are you called?"

"Chang-feng."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen." By this time my voice sounded a bit more natural.

"Why did you join the Red Army?" Commissar Mao asked me like a school teacher questioning a pupil.

"The Red Army is good. It fights the local despots!" I was still standing straight at attention. Commissar Mao made me sit down and asked with interest, "Are there local despots in your home village?"

"Yes," I said, "I was driven away by them myself."

And I told him in detail how I had lived with my family and how I had run away and joined the Red Army. He listened to me attentively, sometimes nodding and smiling slightly. This put me at ease, and I felt I could get along with this man very well; so I talked on at great length. It was only when Comrade Wu nudged me that I realized I had talked too long. I felt a bit embarrassed and stopped.

"Well," said Commissar Mao. "Now you'll have to work and study hard." After a pause, he asked, "Can you write your name?"

I stood up and twisted the edge of my jacket in embarrassment. "I've never been to school. I don't know how to write," I replied.

Commissar Mao smiled and stood up.

"Then you'll have to learn to write — your own name and the names of other people. You'll like that, won't you?" He turned and addressed Comrade Wu.

"This is a new comrade, you must do your best to help him." Then he turned back to me, "If there is anything you're not clear about, just ask them."

As I went down the stairs with Comrade Wu, he said to me:

"Why did you gabble on so? Don't you know how busy he is?"

I shook my head.

"He's a busy man," Wu continued. "Remember not to make a noise when he's reading. Besides he always works late into the night. You must get him his breakfast, but not too early, mind!"

"Yes," I replied.

I was very happy and so excited that I didn't sleep a wink the whole night.

The next morning I took a wooden bucket to fetch water which I took to be my daily routine. I was stopped by Comrade Wu.

"What are you doing?"

"Fetching water for Commissar Mao," I said confidently.

"Didn't I tell you Commissar Mao slept late?" Wu was impatient. "You're not to wake him up!"

I nodded and put down the bucket.

For some days after that I would set Commissar Mao's washing water for him by his door early in the morning without making a sound and then sit in a small hammock near the landing waiting there for his orders. But Commissar Mao rarely called me and I sat in this way for several days.

One day after washing, however, he asked me:

"Chen Chang-feng, why do you always sit there without stirring?"

I held the hammock still and answered, "I am afraid if I go away you'll not find me if you want me."

He smiled as if talking to a child. "From now on you must not just sit there doing nothing. When there

is nothing for you to do here, you go and study with the others. There isn't much for you to do here."

At that time battles were being fought every day. We were constantly on the move. We'd seldom stay at a place for more than a month.

Commissar Mao's life was very simple and I soon got to know his habits. His personal possessions included only two blankets, one cotton sheet, two grey uniforms, just as we privates wore, a worn overcoat, and one grey woollen sweater. Then he had a broken umbrella, a bowl for eating and a knapsack with nine compartments for his maps, documents and books. When we were campaigning or on the march, he carried the knapsack and umbrella himself. I would carry the rest. When we came to our camp site, I would find two wooden boards, put them together and spread the blankets and sheet on them, folding up his uniforms to make a pillow. This was his bed.

He slept very little. We had a small lamp; during the march this was used as a torch to light the way, but when in camp it was set on a brick or stone for use in his office. After supper he would light this lamp, open up his knapsack and take out his maps, documents and books, papers, and writing brush and sometimes work till dawn.

At that time I was a youngster and couldn't sit up all night without sleep. When Commissar Mao was reading or writing, I would sit beside him, but very soon I'd doze off snoring away with my head on his desk. We would both smile whenever he woke me up and told me to go to bed.

On summer nights he would ask me to fetch some water.

Then I'd take the little wooden dipper and bring some cold water. Because we didn't have a basin, he would soak the towel in the dipper and rub his face and sometimes his body to freshen himself up. Then he'd feel hungry, and I'd warm up the "rice sandwich" (two layers of rice with cooked vegetables in between) left in the bowl since the afternoon for him to eat.

Sometimes he couldn't finish his bowl of rice so I would cover it up with a piece of paper for him to eat at the next meal. Once I threw away the rice he had left and the next day he asked:

"Chen Chang-feng, where is the rice I left yesterday?"

I told him what I had done and he criticized me.

"There is a struggle for every grain of rice that the people grow. In future you mustn't throw away what I leave. Keep it for the next meal."

At one time we were marching and fighting every day Commissar Mao did not even have time to get a sip of hot water. I grew worried. So I was always trying to get a thermos bottle for him. Often we captured a place and war booty came to us, but Commissar Mao never kept anything. He would always send what he got to his subordinates or the hospital. In the winter of 1931, when we captured Chian in Kiangsi, I found a thermos bottle there in the house of a local despot who had run away. I was overjoyed at this stroke of luck but I was afraid the Commissar would find out about it. On the march I used to get someone else to carry it for me so that he would not know about

it. With that bottle I was always able to keep some hot water ready for him, but it was still difficult to prepare him a quick meal. His small bowl could not hold very much rice. It was enough for a supper, but on the march it was not of much use. Often we would be on the march again immediately after a battle. Then when we took a rest and ate our meal, Commissar Mao would still have to eat his cold "sandwich."

In November 1931, the Central Workers' and Peasants' Democratic Government was founded in Juichin and he was elected Chairman of the Republic. That's when we began to call him Chairman instead of Commissar Mao. But he still used his little bowl at meals. It was only in February 1934, when we captured Changchow, Fukien, that I managed to find a real three-decker enamel container for his food.

II. A VISIT HOME

Whenever we captured a county seat or town, Chairman Mao would send people or go himself to the local government office to get enemy documents and archives, and then to the local post-office to buy newspapers and magazines. Often we'd go with empty hands and come back loaded with packages of books and magazines. In the evening, Chairman Mao would mark them with red pencil so that we could clip and keep what was needed.

One day we came to Hsinfeng County, Kiangsi. We had been there several times before, so the local people knew the Red Army. All the shops were open and many people came out to welcome us. As soon as we settled down in our billet, Chairman Mao called me: "Come, Chen Chang-feng! To the post-office!"

To my mind at that time a post-office was just a shop for buying and selling books.

When we got there Chairman Mao began to browse through the piles of books and papers. Sometimes he would pick one up and hand it to me. We had paid for what we wanted and when I was packaging up our purchases I asked him: "Chairman Mao, what does a post-office do?"

"Oh, they do a lot of things," he answered. "They deliver letters and newspapers; handle telegrams and