

The Unquenchable Spark



THE UNQUENCHABLE SPARK

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Guerrillas in Southern Kiangsi

Chen Yi

Nearly dawn,
Our men wake early;
Dew-drenched clothes and bedding are chill even in summer;
In the trees cicadas shrill,
Grass clings to our clothing.

Nearly noon,
Our bodies cry out for food;
Three months have we been cut off from supplies;
We can count the few grains of rice in our bags;
So we boil a mess of herbs.

The sun is sinking west;
We meet to discuss our plan of operation;
There is no news of the scout who left this morning,
It's already past the time for his return,
We must move our headquarters at once.

Marching at night is hard;
Ten days we have pressed on through endless rain;
Halting in the open without tents,
We shelter beneath big trees till dawn,
Dozing off we wake suddenly.

When the weather clears,
We pitch camp under the moon;
The gentle breeze brings slumber;
A great host of dark pines soar like serried clouds;
We dream of the enemy's movements in our sleep.

We must not joke aloud;
Consulting together we keep our voices low;
Outside the forest there may be enemy scouts,
Once a man coughed and revealed our position;
We must learn from our mistakes.

We are short of grain,
For three months we have tasted no meat;
In summer we feed on berries, in winter bamboo;
Hunting wild boars we pant over the mountains,
And after dark catch snakes.

The enemy searches the whole mountainside,
Trees and grass are scorched and burnt;
Never before was savagery like this,
But our people resist with ever greater vigour;
We shall give battle again.

We pay close attention to tactics
And sit quietly assured;
When the enemy wants a battle, we won't fight;
When he's off his guard, we strike.
He can do nothing but obey our orders.

We put our trust in the people
And never forget their support;

They are second parents to us,
We are good sons in the fight,
The best soldiers for the revolution.

We must study hard,
To fall out of rank would be bitter;
A good groundwork laid today
Will bring us glory in the wars to come;
Then let us advance undaunted.

We shall not complain,
But march on steadily year after year;
A formidable foe has invaded us in the north;
But our great army has gone west across the Golden Sand River,
The resistance against Japan will surely grow in strength!

(Written in the summer of 1936)

BITTER YEARS OF STRUGGLE

YANG SHANG-KUEI

1

After the main force of the Red Army had started on the Long March, a Special Party Committee and a Sub-Military Zone Headquarters were set up to intensify the struggle in the Kiangsi-Kwangtung Border Region. Li Lo-tien, a staunch fighter from the border region, was appointed secretary of the Special Committee and concurrently Commander of the Sub-Military Zone. I was made the deputy secretary. Other leading cadres were allocated to various important duties in connection with the work of the Committee. Li Lo-tien led a battalion of soldiers and a group of cadres—more than five hundred all told—in a drive from the town of Yutu in Kiangsi to the Kiangsi-Kwangtung border. Our task was to join with the other armed forces there, intensify the guerrilla attacks and force the enemy to concentrate on defence of their own local position. This meant that we would co-operate with the Red Army on its Long March by detracting the attention of the enemy. We were also to strengthen and expand the guerrilla base and link up with the guerrilla forces on the Hunan-Kiangsi and Hunan-Hupeh-Kiangsi borders and in southwestern Fukien.

Work around the guerrilla base on the Kiangsi-Kwangtung border had been well carried out and the people in the area

were politically aware of the issues involved. This area was also the border between the region controlled by Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary forces and that dominated by the armies of the local Kwangtung warlords. Although they both wanted to crush the Communists, they disagreed on many other things. The Kwangtung warlords had already got a grip on the southern part of Kiangsi. A division of their troops occupied each of the towns of Tayu and Hsinfeng. Chiang Kai-shek distrusted them and was taking precautions against any further incursions to the north. The contradictions between the enemy could be used to further our interest. The region where we were fighting the enemy was mountainous and covered with dense forest, thus affording excellent cover for troop movement.

The main force of the Red Army on the Long March had just passed through southern Kiangsi and the region of the Five Mountains. This had both alarmed and unsettled the enemy and in turn made our own rapid advance towards the Kiangsi-Kwangtung border much easier. In co-ordination with attacks launched by the main force of our Southern Kiangsi Military Zone, we made a drive to the west after a series of swift manoeuvres and crossed to the west bank of the Peach River. This brought us to Yushan Mountain where we joined up with other units. Among the leaders there, were Liu Fu-chieh, the county Party committee secretary; Yeh Ming-kuei, head of a work team; and guerrilla battalion commander, Tseng Piao. All were men of outstanding merit.

The main force of the Red Army had reached the area around western Hunan and eastern Kweichow by January of 1935. Chiang Kai-shek had ordered his troops to pursue and prevent its further progress. At the same time he was massing a huge force in an attempt to smash the Central Soviet Area. The situation in the Central Soviet Area became very tense. This tense situation also spread to the Kiangsi-Kwangtung

Border Region. The Kwangtung warlord, Yu Han-mou, had reoccupied the area of Tayu, Hsinfeng and Nanhsiung with a whole army, and he launched a general attack against the guerrilla area in February.

When the troops of the Southern Kiangsi Military Zone broke through the encirclement from the Central Soviet Area, Yuan Hsiao-hsien, the secretary of the Southern Kiangsi Provincial Committee, was killed. Liu Po-chien, head of the Political Department in the Military Zone, was seriously wounded and captured. Later, he was murdered by the enemy. This action reduced the unit from a thousand men to 350. Tsai Hui-wen, Commander of the Southern Kiangsi Military Zone, and Chen Pi-hsien, the secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Youth League, led the survivors to Yushan Mountain.

At the beginning of April, a number of others, including Comrade Chen Yi, arrived at our base. We learned that the Central Soviet Area had been completely overrun by the enemy. The scene of the struggle then shifted to the Kiangsi-Kwangtung Border Region.

Comrade Chen Yi quickly sized up the situation in this locality and made reports to cadre meetings at Talinghsia in Nanhsiung and Changling in Tayu. He pointed out that the whole revolutionary situation was on the decline after the Red Army withdrew from the Central Base, but we were now between two high tides. The Kuomintang, he said, would expose its true traitorous nature to the people of the whole country through its policy of continuing to fight the Communists and refusing to resist the Japanese imperialists. The people would then be aroused to opposition and an anti-Japanese war would break out. The people would then look to the Communist Party for leadership. This would be the beginning of a new upsurge in the revolutionary movement. He assured us

that the revolution had a very bright future. His report demonstrated the need to adopt new methods to meet new situations and to follow Chairman Mao's guerrilla tactics of "enemy advances, we retreat; enemy halts, we harass; enemy tires, we attack; enemy retreats, we pursue". It also pointed out that we must intensify guerrilla warfare, amass and preserve our strength, and, when we had gained a foothold, strike at the enemy at the opportune moment. In this way our forces would be enlarged. Comrade Chen Yi laid special emphasis on the following points: Correctly explain the situation to the troops and the people within the soviet area and give them a clear-cut policy to follow; and prepare them ideologically for the coming storm. They must, he said, be ready to withstand a long and bitter struggle in the enemy's rear.

The meetings laid down the policy of "relying on the masses, being steadfast in the struggle, amassing and preserving our strength and creating conditions in readiness for the new upsurge". This policy was decided upon at a time when the enemy was far superior to us in strength. The essence of this strategy was to preserve the backbone of the Party during the period when the revolution had sustained a setback; and to tie down a part of the enemy in the Kiangsi-Kwangtung Border Region. This strategy was also designed to co-ordinate the guerrilla areas and the revolutionary movement throughout the country in order to create the conditions necessary to meet the coming upsurge. Corresponding resolutions were printed and distributed throughout the ranks. After the meetings, we immediately reorganized our troops, dividing them into three detachments, which were located at Hsinfeng, Peishan and Sannan (the Sannan locality included the three townships of Tingnan, Chuannan and Lungnan). Each detachment was subdivided into units of ten to twenty men, which carried out operations throughout the guerrilla area.

Guerrilla operations were to closely co-ordinate with political and educational activities and work among the masses. Our purpose was to strike at the enemy when possible, organize the masses, spread knowledge of our aims and carry on a persistent struggle against all retarding forces. When the situation became tense, comrades from the Special Committee and the headquarters of the Sub-Military Zone were assigned to the small guerrilla bands to form small, efficient working teams which would accompany the guerrilla unit. Their task was to lead the small guerrilla band to a particular district where it could operate independently.

A communication system was established with Yushan Mountain as the centre, its purpose being to co-ordinate the activities of the various guerrilla bands. One line of communications stretched from Yushan Mountain to Sannan, another from Yushan to Plum Mountain and then extended to Peishan. These were the main lines. Each guerrilla area had also its own branch lines. During that period, the communication network was our lifeline and therefore only the most loyal and trusted comrades were assigned to such duties.

2

1935 was the hardest year in the three years of guerrilla war in the south.

The pressure exerted on us by the enemy forces surrounding the Kiangsi-Kwangtung Border Region increased tremendously. The army of the Kwangtung warlord, Yu Han-mou, and the Kiangsi Security Corps were both ranged against us. Later on the enemy's 46th Division was also assigned to the region. At times a dozen or more regiments were concentrated in an encirclement campaign against the guerrilla areas. Our guerrilla base in the Kiangsi-Kwangtung Border Region extended for

more than a hundred *li*.¹ It was narrow and pencil-like in shape. The Peach River was to the east, to the north was the Changshui River, and the Tienshui River flowed on the southern side. The enemy held all the crossing points on these rivers. These points made up the main line of their blockade. Yushan Mountain was flanked by roads on the south, east, west and northwest sides, and there were enemy pillboxes along these roads. These formed their secondary line of blockade. Another network of pillboxes was built from the roads into the foot of the mountain. Each hamlet was fortified, and a line of pillboxes led from the hamlet into the mountain. This was the enemy's third line of blockade. Yushan, Peishan and the other areas were isolated from each other and completely surrounded. The enemy resorted to desperate and inhuman measures to annihilate us. They carried out a "scorched earth" campaign, cut down all trees, burned all houses and killed everyone they caught. Every day they probed the mountains or laid waste huge tracts of forest. They also enforced a tight economic blockade against us. They started it by combining several hamlets into one fortified village. The local people were forced to move from their own homes into these enemy-controlled posts. They carried out a policy of isolating us from the masses through which they hoped our forces would wither and die from starvation. They clamped down on the free sale of foodstuff and goods in the public markets. Each local resident was allowed a limited ration of grain, vegetables, oil, salt and other daily necessities. Anyone caught with more than his allotted ration was accused of assisting the "bandits" and punished accordingly. The enemy started a brisk propaganda campaign in conjunction with their military offensive and economic blockade. They strength-

¹ 1 *li* = $\frac{1}{2}$ kilometre or roughly $\frac{1}{3}$ mile.

ened the reactionary rule over the people by means of their tightly controlled *pao chia* system.¹ They widely distributed leaflets and posters, slandering us as "dangerous bandits". They also posted public notices offering thirty thousand silver dollars for the capture of Comrade Chen Yi, and similar "reward" for the capture of the high officials of the Special Committee. They cunningly attempted to undermine our guerrilla units by offering to pay money for every gun, hand-grenade or bullet turned over to them. Sometimes they even took members of our families prisoner, and then released them in the hope that we would worry and weaken in our determined stand. Using our armed guerrilla detachment as the backbone, we co-ordinated its activities with those of the undercover peasant-guerrilla units and the revolutionary people in small-scale, interspersed raids which were supported by the local people. Most of the young people living in the mountains were members of our undercover units. They collected information for us, carried out sentry duties, protected the local people, ensured production and co-ordinated closely with the guerrilla detachment in raids. These young people were exceptionally active in assisting the revolution.

When our guerrilla forces engaged in raids they followed the tactics of lightning attacks and ambushes. When the enemy searched the mountains for us, they would arrive at dawn and return at dusk. The guerrilla units combatted this by taking

¹ *Pao chia* was the administrative system by which the Kuomintang reactionaries enforced their fascist rule at the primary level. The system provided that the *pao* and *chia* were to be organized on the basis of households; there was to be a head of each household, of each *chia* which was made up of ten households, and each *pao* which was made up of ten *chia*. Neighbours were required to watch each other's activities and report to the authorities, and if one was found guilty, all others were to be punished. Various counter-revolutionary measures for exacting compulsory labour were also carried out through this system.

up positions on their return route and ambushing them. They would then cut off the enemy rear column and pick up the stragglers. Sometimes, when the countryside afforded favourable cover, we would fall upon the whole enemy column and wipe it out. At other times, when we found the enemy plundering one of the hamlets, we would make a lightning attack. Then, before they had time to recover from the attack, we would fade into the hills. Although the guerrilla units were tightly encircled and under a heavy blockade, they would sometimes infiltrate through the enemy lines and attack and disrupt their main positions in the rear. Such places were usually only lightly garrisoned. Places like Wuching and Chinglung fell prey to our attacking guerrilla units. The raid on Wuching had immediate consequences. The enemy's "suppression campaign" was being ruthlessly carried out at that time. Responding to a request by the underground Party branch, our detachment made a forced march under cover of night to Wuching, more than one hundred *li* away. It arrived at dawn and completely wiped out the puppet Self-Defence Corps and the enemy's district office. Chiu Kuei-hsing, the commander of the local Self-Defence Corps, was killed during the course of the raid. Following the battle, our men posted notices bearing misleading names of numerous detachments and units. The local people added fuel to the fire by deliberately spreading rumours about a huge guerrilla force. The enemy became unnerved by the reports which drifted in. They were confused about the actual number of the guerrilla troops in their rear.

Apprehensive that they were in grave danger from large forces behind them, they had no alternative but to recall their troops from the mountains and take up defensive positions. As soon as the Kuomintang troops started shifting back to their centre, the guerrilla forces disappeared. Our ability to

successfully carry out guerrilla tactics improved with each battle. We learned to employ new and better means of attack and mastered the subtle art of deception. For instance, we would stealthily set up an ambush near an enemy pillbox and then send out one of our men to lure the enemy into the open. Once they were outside the pillbox it was an easy matter to overcome them and take over the pillbox. Our aim was always to force them into a position where they were compelled to fight on our terms, then we would press our advantage and wipe them out. Another method of capturing a pillbox was to disguise ourselves as pedlars. The enemy troops could usually be lured from the pillboxes to make purchases. Then we would capture them and take control of the position. By adopting these tactics, we commanded the initiative in our struggle against the Kuomintang. The enemy was temporarily stronger than ourselves. In such circumstances we utilized the flexibility of our small units to confuse, disperse and tire them in a succession of raids. Our overall scheme was to defeat their superior forces with our smaller units, and turn a series of tactical victories into a great strategic victory.

Such tactics gave rise to a number of questions concerning troop movement. Our guerrillas usually dressed like the local peasants, a towel tied around the head and a pair of straw sandals on the feet. It was sometimes inadvisable to carry a long rifle on the shoulder, so our guerrillas would saw off the stock and conceal the weapon under their loose clothing. We directed that all movements must be calculated very carefully when on an assignment. Time must be allowed for the return trip to the cover of the base before the sun rose. Otherwise, the raiders would be without the protection of the revolutionary masses. If discovered, the enemy could quickly contact their various posts and concentrate a huge force to encircle the guerrillas. Such a dangerous situation was to be