

# LIU HU-LAN

*Story of a Girl Revolutionary*

BY LIANG HSING



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# I

## FAMILY AND BACKGROUND

In the central part of Shansi Province lies a famous plain. To the east, the Taiyueh Range extends, hill after hill, as far as the eye can see; to the west, the great towering peaks of the Luliang Range shut off the land that lies beyond. For hundreds of miles between these ranges stretches the great plain, and through it the river Fen curves round Taiyuan and then pursues its winding course southward towards the Yellow River. The creative genius and wisdom of the peasants, utilizing the waters of the Fen, have transformed this region into the richest wheat granary of the entire province. All who look out over this vast plain at harvest time nod with approval at the golden ocean of heavy ears of wheat.

Here, on October 8, 1932, in the village of Yunchouhsi in Wenshui County, Liu Hu-lan uttered her first cry.

[ At this time, the peasants of the plain were also crying in despair. Despite such fertile land and such rich harvests, they were unable to straighten

their backs or hold their heads erect. They were crushed beneath the oppression of the landlords, the bureaucrats, the warlords and the Kuo-mintang reactionaries. These exploiters, large and small, were resorting to every foul means and underhand trick to squeeze out the last drop of the peasants' sweat and blood. The rich harvest reaped by the peasants' labour flowed like a river, like the Fen; but unlike the Fen, the harvest flowed northward, sifting through many hands and eventually reaching Taiyuan, the granary of the Yen Hsi-shan brigands who ruled the city. The peasants' sweat dripped on the wheat as they bent their backs in the field, and at home tears fell into their empty bowls. Such was the plight of the peasants.

One day at twilight little Hu-lan sat in her old Granny's lap, clasping her neck with her two small hands, while Granny rocked gently with half-closed eyes listening to the sweet childish voice singing a local ballad:

“The hills of Chiao-cheng,  
Oh, the stream of Chiao-cheng,  
It doesn't water the town of Chiao-cheng,  
It waters Wenshui;  
Doesn't water the town of Chiao-cheng,  
But waters Wenshui.”

The ballad tells of the poverty-stricken life of the peasants in the mountainous region of Chiao-cheng, north of Wenshui. Although the peasants of the Wenshui plain were supposedly endowed with the “Golden Rice Bowl,” their life was as hard as

that of the mountain folks. Granny stroked Hu-lan's hair gently as the song went on; the more she listened the sadder she felt.

"In the mountains of Chiao-cheng,  
There is nothing good to eat and drink,  
There is only buckwheat meal,  
And potatoes.  
Only buckwheat meal,  
And potatoes."

Granny sat motionless, listening to the song. After a long pause she heaved a deep sigh.

Outside it was getting dark, but to save lamp oil the family usually sat in the dark for quite a while. In the dim light, the childish treble sang on:

"The little grey donkey goes up the hill,  
The little grey donkey comes down.  
All my life I've never ridden  
In a fine carriage.  
All my life I've never ridden  
In a fine carriage."

When the song came to an end Granny became even quieter. She hugged Hu-lan tighter and smothered this favourite grand-daughter of hers with kisses. A long sigh followed. It was dark, and quiet reigned in the little home.

The year Hu-lan was born her father was a young peasant of twenty-eight. He and his elder brother lived with their father who had seen the better side of fifty. The three men had to work

✓ from morning till night to make ends meet. They neither sold their labour nor hired other hands to help them: the sweat of their own toil dripped on their own land. When the family expanded to eleven members, they owned about seven acres of land—not all in one piece, but scattered here and there in ten small lots; and it was not very good land either. This middle peasant household had a little farmhouse at the western end of Yunchouhsi Village. The eaves were low and the courtyard small; the only difference between them and the poor peasants was that they had a place to themselves and did not share their main entrance with other families. There was an inscription over the entrance too, although not painted ostentatiously in gold and red letters like those on the doors of landlords. The workers who built the farmhouse had inscribed the three characters "Peace is happiness." And this motto expressed the ideal of this middle peasant family, whose philosophy of life was: Live and let live. They were cautious and timid to a fault. Hu-lan's Grandpa was rarely seen on the streets passing the time of day with friends, and her father seldom went outside to chat with neighbours. The family went only from the house to the fields and back again; then very carefully they closed and secured the little door of their house.

Such was the conservative middle peasant family in which Liu Hu-lan was born and brought up. But although it was fairly peaceful in their small courtyard, great changes were going on in the big world outside.

In 1936, when Hu-lan was four years old, the reactionary Kuomintang government was ignominiously selling out the country. The Japanese imperialist army had crossed the Great Wall and was invading North China. The Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, under the leadership of Chairman Mao Tse-tung, had concluded its Long March of 8,000 miles and had come to the North to resist the Japanese. On February 17, 1936, they crossed the Yellow River through northern Shensi and marched eastward to fight the invaders. On March 2, they occupied Fenyang and made the Yen Hsi-shan brigands in Taiyuan tremble.

Fenyang and Wenshui were neighbouring counties, only a few dozen miles apart. Guerilla detachments of the Red Army rapidly penetrated to the mountains west of Wenshui County, and although the Red Army did not enter Yunchouhsi the peasants spread tales about it—of how the Red Army had surrounded Wenshui, and how in Kaisanchen, a town north of the county seat of Wenshui, they had confiscated eight hundred piculs of grain from the local despot Tu and distributed them to the poverty-stricken peasants. Hearing such accounts, the listeners clenched their fists in excitement and prayed that the Red Army would soon come to their village.

The Red Army scored victory after victory and extended its sphere of action. But in order to urge the Kuomintang to end the civil war so as to fight the Japanese, it withdrew to the western banks



of the Yellow River. After the outbreak of the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression, the Red Army, reorganized as the Eighth Route Army, once again crossed the Yellow River. From then on it stood in the forefront of the War of Resistance, its roots planted deep in the Northwest and North China, and continued to develop and swell its ranks.

Underground members of the Communist Party of China in Wenshui rallied the local people and organized a guerilla corps to fight the Japanese marauders. In January, 1938, after the Japanese had occupied the county seat, this guerilla corps engaged the Japanese invaders in battle for the first time in Hsicheng Village, only seven miles or so from Hu-lan's home. The day the peasants had been looking forward to for so long had dawned, and they actually saw their own people fighting the Japanese! Armed peasants shuttled through the streets of the villages on Wenshui plain. One unit of fighting men had hardly left the village when another arrived. Everywhere there were meetings and singing. In this period nearly all the villages on the plain became guerilla bases in the war against the Japanese invaders.

By the time the Japanese attacked Wenshui County, the county government of the Yen Hsi-shan brigands had long since scurried away, vanishing like smoke. To carry on the war of resistance, the people in the rear of the enemy formed a new anti-Japanese democratic county government. Ku Yung-tien, a young communist, was appointed magistrate of Wenshui County.

Gathering together, the peasants of Yunchou-hsi excitedly discussed this great event. One of them shouted down the rest and asked knowingly: "Do you people know how old this Magistrate Ku is?"

Everyone turned to look at him, but nobody could answer. Delighted with his knowledge, the speaker crooked his forefinger, making the sign for nine and exclaimed: "Ha, I'll tell you. This much—nineteen!"

There were many exclamations from the people gathered there. Six-year-old Hu-lan, who had edged herself in among the grown-ups, gazed at the crooked forefinger of the speaker, her eyes blinking in her little round face; and imitating the grown-ups she also said: "Nineteen!"

Nineteen? Yes, nineteen! But this nineteen-year-old youth was already a veteran Red Army cadre, steeled in battles. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and with the help of his comrades, Magistrate Ku performed his duty well.

In the years gone by, Hu-lan had often seen the peasants sigh and had noticed the long faces of her parents. Theirs was such a hard life under the ruthless reactionary rulers of the old society. As the landlords used their position and power to dodge the taxes, the greater part of the burden arising from the requisition of grain, money and troops fell on the poor and middle peasants. Hu-lan's middle peasant family found it hard to struggle along.

Then the communists came. Under the direction of Magistrate Ku, a Rational Assessment Committee was formed in Wenshui County in 1938. The situation became quite different once the system of rational assessment was put into practice. The peasants' burden was lightened while the landlords were made to pay their due share of taxes. Hu-lan saw smiles on the faces of her family, and heard them praise the Communist Party, the Eighth Route Army and Magistrate Ku in Wenshui County.

The irrigation system of Wenshui was a fairly good one. But whenever the time came for the land to be watered, Hu-lan would see the peasants staring enviously at the water flowing into the fields of landlords. Once, tugging at her father's jacket and lifting her little head, Hu-lan asked: "Dad, Dad! Why don't we water our land now?"

Always a man of few words, her father said nothing. He sighed and patted his daughter on the head, his eyes still fixed wistfully on the water flowing into the field of a landlord. In the old society, the water for irrigation was controlled by the feudal powers, who decided whose land should be watered first and for how long. Every year during the watering season, Yunchouhsi had to wait until all the neighbouring villages, strongholds of feudal power, had irrigated their fields. But even then it was only after the landlords of the village had finished their watering that Hu-lan's family and the other peasant households could have their turn. After the War of Resistance, irrigation work at Wenshui was neglected. It was only after

the Anti-Japanese Democratic County Government was established that dykes which had collapsed were repaired and the administration of water distribution passed into the hands of the people. A democratic and fair method was worked out, which brought smiles to the faces of the peasants, including Hu-lan's parents. Once again, nodding their heads in approval, they praised the Communist Party, the Eighth Route Army and Magistrate Ku of Wenshui.

One day Ku himself arrived at Yunchouhsi. Smiling villagers soon surrounded him, and Hu-lan too squeezed into the crowd to look at the young county magistrate. Ku was saying to the peasants: "The Anti-Japanese Democratic Government has issued a directive on the reduction of interest, stipulating that interest must not exceed 10 per cent per annum. This order was issued long ago but has not yet been put into practice in the villages. Why? It's because the administrative power in some of our villages is still completely in the hands of feudal landlords. It's these people who are concealing the order, because once it is made known, they themselves will get less interest...."

Ku called on the peasants of Yunchouhsi to rise and struggle for the democratic right to resist Japanese aggression and raise their standard of living. The peasants nodded their heads repeatedly, feeling that every word uttered by this young county magistrate went to the root of their troubles. The young people of the village determined to follow Magistrate Ku to fight the

Japanese. Among them was a certain Chen Teh-chao who later became the head of that district. This was the first batch of partisans from Yunchouhsi.

One day Hu-lan heard some villagers discussing sadly the brave way in which Comrade Ku had sacrificed his life on the battlefield. Ku had by then risen to the position of a special commissioner. When the battle was raging, some one said to him: "Special Commissioner, you'd better take cover." He smiled and replied: "Fighters of the Eighth Route Army never flinch from their duty." And so he shed the last drop of his blood on the soil of Wenshui.

That was a glorious example of how a communist should live and die. The people of Wenshui and the peasants of Yunchouhsi took this to heart, and so did little Hu-lan. Ever after she always remembered that this was the way to live and die for the people.

## II

# LIVING AMONG SIMPLE HEROES

Once the people of Wenshui realized that the Communist Party and the Eighth Route Army were their protectors, they made every effort to support them. The peasants of Yunchouhsi were no exception. Thanks to their active and continuous support, the Eighth Route Army was able to deal blows at the enemy from this village.

The force active in the locality of Wenshui at the time was a local armed unit—the Sixth Detachment. Once, more than one hundred men from this detachment set out to wage guerilla warfare against the enemy and, through over-confidence, failed to realize some Japanese troops were on their track. By the time they entered Yunchouhsi for a rest, the enemy was very close. Fortunately, at this critical moment the peasants learned of the proximity of the Japanese and warned their own men in good time. They immediately took up a favourable position on the surrounding dyke, so that the enemy troops who arrived soon after found

themselves in an extremely unfavourable position. When the battle started, the Sixth Detachment put up a stubborn fight, making things hot for the Japanese and their puppet garrison troops. Our main force, stationed in South Huchiapao Village, nearly three miles to the east, heard gunfire and were worried; but as they did not know the position of the enemy, they did not venture out. (At this crucial moment the villagers of Yunchouhsi came to the rescue again. Risking his life a peasant ran out of the village through a hail of bullets and reported the situation to our troops in South Huchiapao Village. They came at once, attacking from the rear, and routed the enemy. The Japanese suffered heavy casualties in this encounter and quite a number of the puppet garrison troops were taken prisoner.

Not long afterwards, the Japanese raided the village, only to find the place deserted. The villagers had guessed that the enemy would return to avenge themselves, and all the inhabitants, old and young alike, had left the village bag and baggage. Mad with anger, the enemy troops could find no one on whom to vent their fury. At last they discovered one old man who had remained to watch over the place. The Japanese ordered him to find food and drink for them, but as they drove the old man through the village street, he suddenly freed himself from their grasp and plunged headlong into the well outside Hu-lan's house. This heroic tragedy happened right in front of her door!

The fact that the feudal forces in Yunchouhsi were weaker than elsewhere in the neighbourhood was, of course, an advantage for revolutionary activities. And since the interests of the masses were safeguarded in the revolutionary struggle, they gave their wholehearted support to the revolution. Such being the case, many anti-Japanese partisans took to stopping over in this village and the villagers for their part were very glad to give them cover.

Chen Teh-chao, a young villager who had joined the Communist Party in 1940, gradually expanded the Party organization in the village, and group activities started. The Japanese who had occupied the Wenshui area were conducting a campaign to "enforce public order." When it became too hot in other villages the leading members of the Wenshui Party Branch and District Party Branch concealed themselves in this village.

Pointing to Yunchouhsi, the enemy would say: "That's a little Yen-an."

The neighbouring village of Paohsienchuang was weak politically, and the small Party group there often had to go to other villages to hold a meeting. Yunchouhsi was the place they frequented most. Comrade Han Ju-fan of Paohsienchuang was then Party secretary of the fifth district of Wenshui, but although the Japanese tried many times to catch him, thanks to the protection of the Yunchouhsi villagers he slipped through their hands every time. Hu-lan heard whispered tales of his



adventures from the peasants who loved to describe his many escapes. One day a group of Japanese gendarmes came to the village to arrest Han. At once the villagers thrust a manure basket and pitchfork into his hands, and disguised as an old man collecting manure, he left the village safely. On another occasion he was caught just outside the village by three plain-clothes agents of the enemy. Luckily the incident was seen by a villager who immediately dashed into the fields nearby to report it to the partisans lying in ambush there. They rushed to his rescue and the three plain-clothes agents of the enemy were caught.

Reminiscing of the War of Resistance, the villagers of Yunchouhsi would say proudly: "So many cadres came and went, but there was never a mishap!"

The War of Resistance steeled and transformed the Chinese people in the course of struggle. Hu-lan's father was also swept by the war out of his limited world, the small courtyard of his house.

Many a time Hu-lan saw her father don his padded jacket, put some food in his pocket and walk out of their small courtyard after sunset. With other villagers he went in secret to the western mountains to deliver public grain and other supplies to the Anti-Japanese Democratic Government. One dark, stormy night in 1940 over a thousand peasants from Wenshui climbed the western mountains to deliver the grain. Nearly a score of them lost their lives on the way. They sacrificed their lives for the liberation of the Chinese nation.