

七十一

On a bridge near Shi Gu
was a plaque on an arch
told how red army soldiers
crossed here in their march
six thousand mile trek
lead by Zhu, Zhou, and Mao
through the heartland of China
such a contrast to now



Chapter 71– The Long March

In the 1920's the Republic of China government was in turmoil. For a short period of time in 1924, the KMT (the Nationalists) aka 國民黨 Guómíndǎng and the CCP (the Chinese Communist Party) 中国共产党 Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng –closed ranks in an attempt to rid China of the warlords. Together, they formed the KMT-CPC Alliance a.k.a. the “First United Front” (聯俄容共 Lián É Róng Gòng), and they created the National Revolutionary Army.

But this was not what the leader of the Nationalists (KMT), Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石 Jiǎng Jiè shí), had in mind. He decided to end this alliance by purging all communists from the ranks - starting with the 1926 Canton Coup (中山艦事件 Zhōng shān Jiànshìjiàn). On April 12, 1927 Chiang Kai-shek then ordered the Shanghai Massacre (四一二反革命政變 Sì-yī-èr Fǎn Gémìng Zhèngbiàn). With the help of Big Eared Tu (杜月生 Dù Yuèshēng), leader of the Green Gang (青幫 Qīng Bāng), a ‘criminal organization and secret society’, 1000 Communists were arrested, 300 were executed and 5,000+ “went missing.” In the “White Terror” that followed, more than 10,000 Communists in Changsha, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Xiamen were executed. This series of events were the spark that ignited the Chinese civil war between the Communists and the KMT. It was a war that never officially ended. To this day, no peace treaty or armistice between these two warring parties has ever been signed.

In 1931, the Chinese Soviet Republic (中華蘇維埃共和國 Zhōnghuá Sūwéi'āi Gònghéguó) a.k.a. “the Jiangxi Soviet” was established by Mao Zedong, Zhu De, and others in the city of Ruijing (瑞金), in Jiangxi (江西省 Jiāngxī Shěng), a land-locked province north of Guangdong and west of Fujian. It was sort of a country within a country. Máo Zédōng was elected as Chairman. Zhū Dé was his second in command. Deng Xiaoping and Zhou En Lai also joined Mao in Ruijin. Mao, Zhu, and Zhou enjoyed long and supportive relationships throughout the revolution.

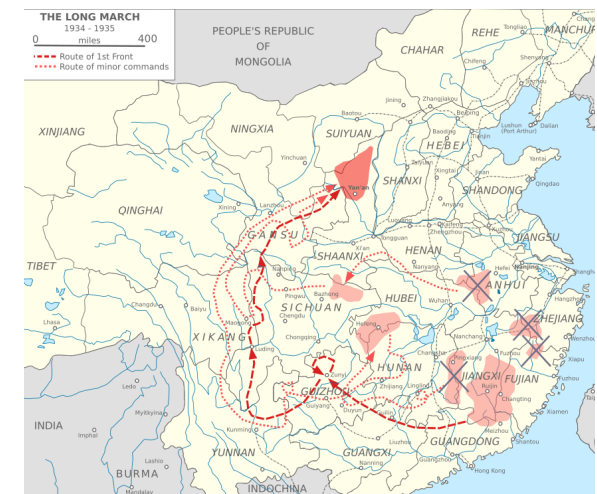
By 1934, Chiang Kai-shek's five “Encirclement Campaigns” planned on dealing the death blow to the Communists in Ruijin, but spies informed the Communists, and Zhou En Lai (周恩來 Zhōu Ēnlái) came up with a plan. In the late afternoon of October 16, 1934, amidst a confusion caused by a strong rear guard, the main body of 84,000 soldiers of the Red Army under the command of Bó Gǔ (博古) and German Communist Otto Braun (Chinese name 李德 Lǐ Dé) began its strategic retreat from Jiangxi. Several thousand troops stayed behind to serve as the rear guard for the retreating forces. Among them, 29 year old Máo Zétán (毛澤覃), younger

brother of Mao Ze Dong, was executed by the KMT. Chiang's annihilation campaigns had taken their toll on the communists, and the communists decided that their only play was to abandon their southern bases and regroup in Shaanxi, Gansu, & Ningxia in northern China.

Author, Sun Shu Yun, started her book "The Long March" by saying, "Every nation has its founding myth. For communist China, it is the Long March, . . ." (红军长征 Hóngjūn Chángzhēng.) The Long March is truly an amazing story of perseverance, commitment, and resilience replete with stories of heroism, self-sacrifice, and suffering which has been told to generations of Chinese children. Mao, himself, was in terrible shape from a bad bout of malaria and had to be carried on a litter by two soldiers at the beginning of the Long March. A very pregnant, He Zizhen (贺子珍), Mao's 3rd wife, accompanied him. The child she bore during those early days of the Long March was given away to a family in Fujian. He Zizhen was one of only about 35 women who started out on the Long March.

For a guerrilla army, the Red Army, was way too laden with "stuff." Besides printing presses and an x-ray machine that required 20 people to carry, this retreating military carried a library of books and documents, food, weapons, ammunition, and gold so they could pay their way. New recruits were expected to always abide by the 8 primary rules:

- 1) Speak politely and help people whenever you can
- 2) Return doors and straw matting to their owners [doors were used as beds]
- 3) Pay for any damage caused
- 4) Pay a fair price for all goods
- 5) Be sanitary; build a latrine away from houses
- 6) Don't take liberties with the women
- 7) Don't ill-treat prisoners
- 8) Don't damage the crops



Bo, Braun, and Zhou took their retreat south and then due west, where the crossing of the Xiang River (湘江 Xiāng Jiāng) in Hunan proved to be a major obstacle. The Red Army lost over half of its forces by January of 1935 – many due to the fighting, but probably just as many to desertion. The original 84,000 soldiers were soon whittled down to around 30,000.

In late January, in the province of Guizhou, there was a famous meeting of the Chinese Communist Party called the Zunyi Conference (遵义会议 Zūnyì huìyì.) Those in attendance were definitely among the who's who of the early Chinese communists including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, Lin Biao, and Deng Xiao Ping. It was as a result of this meeting at Zunyi that Mao Zedong emerged as the unequivocal leader of the Chinese Communist Revolution.

From Zunyi, Mao and the Red Army took a surprising turn south and crossed the Jīnshājiāng (金沙江), an upstream branch of the Yangtze River in Yunnan in May of 1935, much to the surprise of Chiang Kai-shek. Mao's capture of the Luding suspension bridge over the Dadu River on the border of Tibet is legendary, although Deng Xiaoping once told Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Carter, that capturing the bridge at Dadu was really no big deal, but it did make for some great propaganda.

From Dadu, Mao led the Red Army through the “Snowy Mountains” (玉龙雪山 Yùlóng Xuěshān), in Yunnan in early June of 1935. His troops struggled and many died as a result of the thin air, exposure, and frostbite while crossing a snowy pass of about 14,000 feet with heavy packs. The Snowy Mountains were just the first of several mountain passes the Red Army troops traversed. These mountains were followed by the “Great Morass” (若尔盖湿地 Ruò ěrgài Shīdì) aka Zoigê Marsh, a 10,000 foot high swampy plateau in northern Sichuan where it rained every day. This wet grassland proved incredibly difficult to navigate and thousands of troops were lost.

Long March – a poem written by Mao Zedong October 1935

Red Army unafraid of the journey
Torrents of water, jagged mountains abound
Five ridges flow like rippling water
Wu Meng mountains roll, mounds of clay
Jinsha waters spray cloud cliffs
Freezing cables of Dadu Bridge
Thousand li snow in Minshan
Faces of the three armies illuminate

红军不怕远征难
万水千山只等闲
五岭逶迤腾细浪
乌蒙磅礴走泥丸
金沙水拍云崖暖
大渡桥横铁索寒
更喜岷山千里雪
三军过后尽开颜



Local people in China's far west were sometimes openly hostile to the Red Army and other times Mao's army was met with incredible hospitality and open arms. As much as Mao would have wanted, the soldiers did not always abide by the eight primary rules and occasionally resorted to theft and threats in order to survive.

In October 1935, 8,000 people, about 10% of the original 84,000 marchers arrived in Yan'An, in the province of Shaanxi. Even though, at its roots, the 6,000 kilometer "L" shaped Long March was a retreat, it was quickly rebranded as a regrouping and reforming against unsurmountable odds. Mao, Zhou, Deng and company were able to transform a retreat into an epic victory over the hearts and minds of the Chinese people.

In his book, Red Star Over China, Edgar Snow added to the story of the Long March. Snow traveled many months with Red Army troops in 1936 and was able to spend ten days almost exclusively with Mao as he narrated his autobiography. Snow used his conversations with Mao and other leaders to write the first detailed account of the Long March from the perspective of a westerner. Through Snow's account, both Chinese and foreigners alike, began to take a serious look at the Chinese communist movement.