



THE BATTLE OF  
**SANGKUMRYUNG**

BY LU CHU-KUO

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The well-known battle of Sangkumryung, a battle which astounded the whole world, was fought in the autumn of 1952 by men of the Chinese People's Volunteers who were participating in the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea.

Slightly north of Kumhwa lay the several peaks of Sangkumryung, and the U.S. aggressors, eager to seize them, flung 60,000 troops against our positions there, an area totalling less than four square kilometres. They used innumerable types and quantities of their most highly-destructive weapons, and the fighting which ensued was exceptionally fierce. Nevertheless, the Chinese People's Volunteers, like a herculean giant, clung tenaciously to the position and struck successive fatal blows to the enemy's effective strength. In the one and a half months of fighting, the aggressors suffered a loss of over 25,000 men killed or wounded, and more than two hundred of their planes were downed. The victorious outcome of this battle holds an eminent place in the cause of safeguarding world peace, and once again it clearly demonstrated the quality of the Chinese People's Volunteers as a genuine people's army who were imbued with lofty spirit of patriotism and internationalism as well as endowed with indomitable will. A striking contrast was seen on the part of the U.S. imperialists, who, like a paper tiger, are superficially powerful but intrinsically weak.

A story devoted to this famous battle, this middle-length novel has made certain noteworthy achievements in the spheres of ideology and art. It enthusiastically sings the praises of the high morale and prodigious heroism of the Volunteers. It recounts the story of a gallant company whose responsibility it is to guard an important forward position. After inflicting heavy casualties on an enemy force superior both in numbers and equipment, they wisely withdraw to their tunnel position; and defying inconceivable hardships and tribulations, they hold the foe at bay for twenty days. Then, in unison with our main forces, they launch a counter-attack and succeed in recapturing the position at Sangkumryung, which, by that time, had become a focus of world-wide attention.

Thousands of heroes in the Volunteers contributed to the victory won on the stern ridges of Sangkumryung, and what this story tells is but part of the heroic exploits of a few of the many people involved. However, through his lively portrayal of these typical characters, the author presents a true picture of the whole battle and vividly mirrors the countless deeds of valour shown by the Chinese People's Volunteers on the battlefield in Korea.

This novel gives a realistic account of the persistent revolutionary heroism and noble spirit of self-sacrifice in the cause of peace and human progress displayed by the men of one company — communications men, messengers, cooks, new soldiers and veterans alike. It also brings to life the commanders and political workers of the Volunteers. Men like the company commander, who could always be found where the battle raged the fiercest, taking on the most difficult assignments himself, and showing a truly brotherly concern and affection for his men. Or

like the battalion political director — resolute, calm, politically far-sighted, consistently strong-minded and confident. Through such men as these we can clearly see that a Communist is a person made of special material whose fortitude will grow whenever a situation takes a turn for the worse. The novel emphatically declares: No hardship in the world can daunt a Communist! Wherever the intrepid Party member is, the revolutionary struggle will surely triumph!

## CHAPTER I

The first grey light of dawn was already filtering through the tunnel entrance as Company Commander Chang Wen-kuei hastily scrambled into his clothes. Completing his morning ablutions with water from a metal ammunition case, he moved a few steps away and walked outside. He stretched his arms, threw out his chest, and inhaled deeply of the cool, moist but fresh air of the morning.

It was a fine autumn morning. The scenery to the rear of the position fanned away like a water-colour. The endless, undulating mountain ranges were clothed in crimson-hued maple leaves, dotted here and there with a jade-green pine as well as some nameless trees whose leaves had the tint of a ripe orange — all these colours matched each other in perfect harmony. A thin morning mist, like some white kerchief of fine-spun silk, drifted above the beautiful mountain valley, and the long golden fingers of the rising sun caressed the mountain tops, transforming the whole Korean landscape into a kaleidoscope of dazzling colour.

Every sunrise Chang would stand outside the tunnel, feasting his eyes on the beauty of the Korean countryside which spread itself out in front of him. Just as, when a child, he used to station himself at the door to watch the hustle and bustle of his market town. He was a tall, sturdily-built man, but even the few wrinkles which

weather and war had engraved on his brow could not mask his ingenuous nature. With both hands buried deep in his trouser pockets, he rocked gently from side to side, curled back his tongue and softly imitated the chirping of a bird.

A grey lark winged its way over to alight on the twisted remains of a shell-torn tree. Flexing its small, reddish-coloured neck, it twittered happily, throwing an occasional watchful glance in Chang's direction. Suddenly, four mortar shells whizzed through the air and thudded down near the communication trench which led to battalion headquarters. There was a great flash, and the earth trembled. With a tremulous shudder the lark rose from its perch and whirred off to the north. Chang regretfully watched the small grey dot until it was swallowed up by the maple trees in the distance. Then he casually brushed the dust from his shoulders, removed his cap, and flicked the dust from that too.

Since his posting to the tunnel several months earlier, Company Commander Chang Wen-kuei had felt many changes within himself. Previously he had been like a carefree child, giving little thought to the world around him and caring only for the marching, fighting, and training of a soldier's life. Now for months on end he and his men had been confined to the tunnel in the daytime, with only a nocturnal excursion now and again to break the monotony. No Korean civilians were ever seen in that area — the very houses had long since been reduced to ashes — and even a glimpse of the sun became a rare thing. A few hundred metres to the south were the positions of the U.S. aggressors, whose planes and artillery beat a daily and deadly tattoo on the peaks of Sangkumryung. Dead, grassless ground, pocked with

craters of blackened earth, and broken only by the traces of the communication trenches. It was hardly surprising that Chang now regarded any of nature's offerings or tiny creatures as something novel, something to be treasured. Several weeks before, during the "Guard Against Germ Warfare Movement", he had acquired a small kitten — a little black thing covered with white patches — from regimental headquarters for the purpose, as he had put it, of "reducing the risk of vermin". Three days prior to that particular morning, however, as the kitten was basking on the sun-drenched slope outside the tunnel, it had fallen victim to an enemy shell. Wang Chi-pao, the company messenger, had been cursing volubly for three days; Chang too, although it was to himself, not openly.

Chang spat angrily and gave vent to a few choice oaths. Even a visiting bird is frightened away by the American shells! He swung round in annoyance and walked back into the tunnel.

A group of the men had just returned from their night's work of reinforcing the defence positions. Some were shaking the dust from their clothes. Others were filling their mugs from a large dixie of water which purred gently over the charcoal brazier. A few had already settled down comfortably on the straw mats, and by the light of an oil lamp were intent on the card game in progress. Without having to strain his eyes for a clearer view, Chang knew for certain that Liu Tsai-hsueh and Lin Mao-tien, the company's Card Kings, would be two of the four clutching the cardboard fans.

"Pooh! Stinking luck! First one I get is a deuce. Second's a deuce too. All three of 'em only make seven," wailed the tubby Liu Tsai-hsueh. He flicked his middle

finger hard against each card as he picked it up. A long thread of smoke from a hand-rolled cigarette curled upwards into his narrowed eyes, causing him to frown, and making his sparse eyebrows appear as one distinct line below the creases. He leisurely picked up the cards, the cigarette dangling loosely from his lips.

Lin Mao-tien, a machine-gunner, was a swarthy-complexioned man whose dark eyes seemed too large for his face. His eyebrows shot happily ceiling-wards as his fingers tightened on a Joker, plus several Aces and Kings. After he had taken up his twelve cards, he carefully placed his hand over the six cards remaining in the kitty and spoke to Liu:

"Right — Call! How much d'you bid?"

Lin knew that Liu, if his hand was a poor one, would make a grab for the kitty and then bid only fifty or sixty. Liu was inclined to "cheat" in this way.

Liu deliberated for a moment or two, arranging and rearranging his cards, before replying slyly:

"Pah! Can't bid a bloody thing. I don't have a single face card. Not even a pointer. Redeal 'em. Redeal 'em."

He bent forward, laying his cards down face up.

"Now, take a look at that!"

"Hang on a minute!" grunted Lin, as he carefully stacked his own cards and began to ruffle through Liu's discarded hand. "I trust you about as far as I can throw you."

He soon discovered a Two of Hearts hidden under the King of Diamonds. Caught red-handed, Liu quickly picked up the cards in the kitty and shuffled them in with his own.

"Aw!" he said, rising to his feet, "let's pack up. Anyway, it's time we hit the hay."

"Hit the hay! You're a bloody cheat, that's what you are! This game's going to be played through to the end." Lin's face was flushed with anger, and his dilated eyes blazed an open threat. As Liu shuffled sheepishly away Lin reached out and tripped him up. Liu went sprawling over the prostrate form of a platoon leader who was asleep nearby.

Startled out of his slumber, 2nd Platoon Leader Sung Chan-fang raised himself on one arm. He was a meticulous sort of person, who himself neither played cards nor smoked. His eyes widened as they lit upon the playing cards and cigarette ash scattered over his quilt.

"Liu Tsai-hsueh — You! —" He was both angry and amused. "If you've so much extra energy, you'd better save it for the enemy, huh!"

Liu quickly stubbed out his cigarette and popped his tongue out and in again in a gesture of self-reproach. He well knew that the platoon leader's indignation would fade as speedily as it had been aroused.

"All right, I apologize. Let's start a new game. The platoon leader's given me a telling off, so that should take the edge off your anger, eh!"

Company Commander Chang Wen-kuei sat on a hand-grenade case, his head tilted in amusement as he watched the two men. Liu's "cheating" seemed to increase in proportion to Lin's growing sense of the injustice of the game. Although Chang had never formally encouraged any "skylarking" in his company, he liked to see the men lively. Indeed, what would life be like if they sat around like stone statues day after day?

The men in Tunnel "A" were like one big family. Liu with his incessant clowning, and the easily-piqued Lin with his sharp and ready tongue, were real live wires

which this "family" couldn't do without. A born humorist, Liu never let the opportunity of a wisecrack escape him, regardless of time or place; and, as Lin was fond of pointing out, Liu was a bit of a trickster. Lin's peppery nature was such that losing his temper had become almost habitual. At the slightest provocation he would rant and rave, his eyes wide open, glaring a threat. In most cases, he would be at it with Liu. Both men were, however, the best of friends. Their bunks were always adjacent; when a card game was on, where one was you would find the other; and they were an inseparable team when it came to getting hold of a live prisoner — "catching a tongue" as the army men called it — or for "live target practice."

Liu and Lin were heatedly engaged in some new dispute when the telephone clamoured for attention. The operator rose from his seat on the mat, lifted the receiver from its cradle, and clamped it to his ear.

"Huh? — Yes, he's here — Right." He handed the telephone to Chang Wen-kuei, saying: "For you, Company Commander. The battalion political director."

"Look," Lu An-kuo's voice sounded loud and clear as it vibrated through the ear-piece, "Number 109 Commander's coming over to your position. I want you to take all necessary precautions." His voice dropped to an almost inaudible whisper as he continued, "Do your best to . . . er . . . to 'limit' his movements, eh! Inform me by 'phone as soon as he arrives there."

The suddenly changed tone seemed to indicate that the Number 109 Commander was within hearing distance.

"What!" asked Chang in surprise, as he bent over the telephone. "Number 109?"

"That's right. He'll be leaving here immediately."

In all truth, Chang was happy at the prospect of seeing the divisional commander again; but, on the other hand, he wished the intended visit would never come about. It would be a real morale booster for the troops, but coming to the tunnel was fraught with danger. . . .

"All right," he replied. He stood up and reflectively rubbed palm on palm. He then drew the back of his hand across his chin. No, he didn't need a shave. And the other men had had one when he did. Still. . . . He couldn't feel at ease about it. He called to the messenger.

"Wang Chi-pao, instruct the 1st Platoon and the squad up forward to check up and see if any of the men need a shave. If they do, have it done right away. The divisional commander's due to arrive here at any moment."

Chins and cheeks fell under close scrutiny. The hirsute Lin Mao-tien, who was still wrangling with Liu Tsai-hsueh, was quickly labelled a "must" for the barber. As a hot towel and lather were in turn applied to his chin, Liu grumbled to the barber: "See, this beard of mine grows faster than wild grass! I had a shave the same day as the others but now it's almost long enough to make braids!"

"My suggestion," Liu chimed in, addressing the barber, "is that you pluck out his stubble hair by hair. That'd save you a lot of trouble in the future, eh!"

The barber grinned as he took up his razor. Lin twisted round to glare at Liu.

"I'll settle accounts with you when I'm through here."

"Ah! It's nice to have no beard," Liu said banteringly in an undertone, still intent on his game of solitaire. "No scraping for me!"



"Maybe not," interjected Chang Wen-kuei as he shot a glance at Liu, "but for goodness' sake try to keep your witticisms to yourself when the divisional commander's here. Anyway, your head's so overtaxed that both you and your beard have stopped growing!"

A smirk of satisfaction spread itself across Lin's face, and his black eyes gleamed malevolently.

"An improper remark won't pass my lips. I promise," said Liu. His fingers laid down the cards in neat rows. "I'll just wrap myself up in a game of patience."

Chang carried out a circumspect tour of the tunnel, ensuring that all the weapons were in their proper racks and that all bedding was folded in the correct manner. He even remembered things like the charcoal brazier and the oil lamp. Everything was in order. As a final touch, he spent a few moments arranging two maple sprigs and several blue chrysanthemums in an empty "Tunghua" wine bottle placed in front of Chairman Mao's portrait. The wine had been sent over in honour of National Day, which the men had celebrated a few days previously, and the sprigs and flowers had been presented to them by the girls of an army ensemble which had recently visited the front lines.

Yes, everything was in order. Chang took a small mirror from his haversack, held it up and carefully examined his face. He walked confidently out of the tunnel to go and meet the divisional commander. When Tsui Hsin-wei, the divisional commander, was still a regimental commander, Chang had been his orderly. From long experience, Chang knew how much the divisional commander loathed any untidiness on the part of his subordinates. He still remembered the time when a battalion commander had come, unshaven, to attend a meet-

ing at the regimental headquarters. Tsui looked at the battalion commander, and then, in a tone which oddly combined seriousness and jocularly, called to Chang:

"Orderly, please ask the barber to come over here immediately. This officer is in need of a shave."

The battalion commander was greatly embarrassed. Never again did he appear unshaven. Occasionally Tsui would catch Chang with a collar button undone, and he would observe: "You seem to be reluctant to part with your 'guerrilla' habits, eh?"

Thus, this time, in expectation of the arrival of the divisional commander, Chang had made certain that both he and his company were spruce and tidy.

Chang hung around the tunnel entrance for some time but no one was seen approaching. He walked a little way along the communication trench and unexpectedly came face to face with the divisional commander as he rounded a bend in the trench. Beads of perspiration trickled down through the sparse grey hairs over the commander's forehead. In his hand he held a sturdy tree branch—a makeshift walking cane. His orderly was carrying the commander's jacket over his arm, and behind followed a medical attendant who had a red-cross satchel slung over one shoulder.

In response to Chang's salute the divisional commander reached out and grasped Chang's hand in a firm handshake.

"Well, what on earth are you doing out here?"

"I was waiting for you, Divisional Commander."

"Absolutely unnecessary. There's no call for you to be walking around outside. I'm quite familiar with the position here." He paused for breath, both hands resting on his "cane".

"Very good, Divisional Commander. Shall we go now? It isn't far."

"Right. Phew! It's quite a climb up here. And, curse my luck, this orderly of mine wouldn't even let me sit down for a breather!"

When they reached the tunnel the divisional commander stopped, his attention caught by the chiselled inscriptions on both sides of entrance.

"Well now, Chang Wen-kuei, look!" He read off the words. "'We Enter the Darkness of This Tunnel so That Our Motherland Might Live in the Sun.' Who in your company thought up this idea? It's only about a month since I was here last. And now you even have an epigraph at your door, eh!"

"The idea originated with our political instructor. A soldier in the 5th Squad, Liu Tsai-hsueh, did the engraving."

"Wasn't your political instructor wounded recently? Where is he now? Has he written to you?"

"Yes, he has. Claims that being in hospital is like confinement to barracks. The assistant instructor, Wang Hung-yuan, has taken over his duties. He was formerly my 1st platoon leader, but he has been promoted now."

"Ah, I see — Now, those characters at the top there — 'This Stronghold Is Our Home' — I think they're a shade too small. A little more breadth and they'd be just right."

"Yes, I agree. They are a bit on the small side. A lack of experience, I daresay. Please, Commander, won't you come in?"

The men were lined up in single file along one side of the tunnel. Sung Chan-fang, the 2nd Platoon Leader,

shouted "A-ten-shun!" and a sharp "click" followed as heels came together in unison.

"Ah!" said the divisional commander, smiling with satisfaction. "A real review, no less! At ease, men. At ease — Freshly shaved too, eh! Chang Wen-kuei, has all this been done on my account?"

Chang replied with a noncommittal smile.

"At ease, men," the divisional commander again instructed, and the 2nd Platoon Leader gave the order to fall out. Chang offered the commander a seat — an empty hand-grenade case — and then hastened away to report his arrival to battalion headquarters. Tsui Hsin-wei didn't sit down right away. Taking the two sprigs of maple from the bottle, he looked at them studiously for a moment and then observed: "H'm! They're withering. Next time I come over I'll bring some fresh ones. But even I myself can't tell exactly when the 'next time' will be! No, the best thing will be to have a few brought back when one of you goes to the rear. Compared with the rear, the forward positions here are as bare as a bald man's head!"

"Ho! Even on a bald man's head there's a chance of finding a hair or two; but in this place you won't see a single blade of grass!"

The droll remark fell instinctively from the lips of Liu Tsai-hsueh.

"Divisional Commander, won't you rest now?" bid Chang as he handed a mug of water to Tsui.

"Um? Ah, good!" said the divisional commander as he sat down. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and began to mop the perspiration from his brow. "Now, tell me how you're getting on here."

Chang's face lit up and he spoke enthusiastically. "Oh, fine. Everything's fine. Our cooks are really top-notch. They give us meat dumplings, meat pies, pancakes — something different every day. This morning, for instance, we had fried twists and noodle soup. Commander, why don't you stay and eat with us today? Wang Yung-fu is in charge of the kitchen, and you can sample his fare for yourself."

"True," interposed Liu Tsai-hsueh, "it's all right as far as grub's concerned." His tone was diffident as he continued to roll a cigarette. "But the tobacco ration's a bit scrimpy."

"Scrimpy!" Lin Mao-tien spat the word out with derision. "Why, with a whole tobacco factory behind you, you'd still not have enough! Commander, every non-smoker in the place gives him his ration, but he's always on the scrounge for more. He has a fag stuck in his mouth all day long. Look at his nicotine-stained fingers! Even on night patrol, right there under the noses of the enemy, he'll light one up!"

"Oh, go on. Go on. . . ." Liu's attempted denial was drowned in a burst of laughter from the other men.

"Liu Tsai-hsueh, is this true?" the divisional commander asked smilingly. "If you go on like this, I'll have to order you to stop smoking altogether."

Liu flushed with embarrassment and he didn't even dare to light the cigarette which he had just finished rolling. The divisional commander twisted round and spoke to Chang Wen-kuei.

"I'd like to have a look round from the observation post." He then addressed his orderly. "Here, let's have the binoculars. No necessity for your going up too."

A shaft from the tunnel led directly to the observation post, from where the whole position on Sang-kumryung, every trench, foxhole, and weapon emplacement, was as distinctly visible as the lines on one's own palm. The divisional commander peered through the binoculars for about two minutes, and then lowered the glasses and sat down on a rock.

"Chang Wen-kuei, do you know the real purpose of my coming here today?"

Chang remained silent for a moment and then answered frankly: "No, I don't."

"I haven't come on any routine inspection. Nor have I come on a casual visit. Why, if I were to run round inspecting every company I'd be worn down to a frazzle before I got half way through! I wonder if you're aware that the enemy are preparing a major offensive against this position? — Did you know this? It'll be no ordinary offensive, mark my words. They've been sending up division after division, and our observers' reports indicate that over 10,000 truckloads of ammunition have been brought in."

"That's right, their helicopters have been in and out four times already."

"Um-h'm! That was Van Fleet and Syngman Rhee. They came up to look the situation over and to decide on specific strategy for the attack. The build-up's been going on for several months now, and their whole might will be thrown against you in an effort to capture this position."

"Don't worry, Commander. We'll never let them take it!"

"Of course. We can't let that happen. However, they've massed an enormous force for this drive; whereas we,

on the other hand, cannot deploy a whole battalion or regiment in this confined area. So, a limited number of our men will have to stave off the enemy and annihilate their effective strength here. When the fighting starts, it's sure to be pretty fierce; and the battle's likely to be protracted. You should be mentally prepared for this ordeal. Fighting isn't like talking. Heaven knows how many thousands of tons of steel they'll pour down on these peaks."

"Commander, I've already discussed the matter with my men. We realize the strategic importance of this position, and we're determined to defend it to the last. As a key point on the central front, Sangkumryung ensures the safety of both the eastern and western lines; and from here we have complete control of the movements of the enemy to a depth of scores of kilometres. If they ever succeeded in capturing this position, they would use it as a jumping-off point for an assault on the main peak to our rear; and if the main peak fell into their hands, they would try to drive the wedge in deeper, greatly endangering our entire line of defence.

"Naturally, our enemy covets this important position. Their intention is also to step up military pressure here in the hopes of compelling us to yield to their demands in the talks at Kaesong. Further, they believe that if they can win a victory on this height it'll give them a stronger hand in demanding additional cannon-fodder from their satellites in the United Nations so as to extend their war of aggression. Failure on the part of you men here would mean a great loss of face before our motherland — before the whole world, for that matter — for the Volunteers. Safeguard World Peace — What do the words mean? As far as you are concerned, safeguarding world

peace means safeguarding this hilltop! Never consider it as just another hill. Our over-all defence network and the entire land of the Korean people is made up of a series of such hills!"

The two officers re-entered the tunnel unnoticed by the group of men who stood talking together. Among them was Liu Tsai-hsueh, who held the habitual cigarette in his fingers. He was gesticulating wildly as he rambled on in a low monotone.

"I tell you, it's a cert! We'll be seeing some action soon. Why d'you think the divisional commander came here personally? . . ."

The divisional commander looked at Chang Wen-kuei, who nodded his head and smiled. Liu suddenly stopped short, seeing that the divisional commander had returned.

"Well, what are you all talking about here, eh? Aren't you going to let me in on it too?" asked the divisional commander, looking directly at Liu.

"Er. . . Nothing. Nothing really, Commander," came Liu's ready reply. "We. . . Er. . . We heard that a delegation from home was coming to visit us, and we were wondering what they'd bring for us."

"Tobacco, I suppose," the divisional commander suggested humorously. "You seem to be very concerned about what the motherland might send you, but what do you have to offer the motherland in return?"

"We can fight! Commander, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, go ahead."

"When will we get the chance of some real fighting? We've been stuck in this tunnel for months, and aside from firing a blind shot now and again, or snatching an occasional prisoner, we just sit here twiddling our thumbs.

On other parts of the front our army has been scoring victory after victory. Wiping out a company here. Wiping out a platoon there. How about letting us see some action too?"

"You will. Believe me, you will. Keep your weapons well oiled — and wait!"

Long before breakfast was ready, the divisional commander had finished checking over all the ammunition and food supplies in the tunnel. Furthermore, he had made Chang take him to visit the squad on the forward position. Chang tried to protest, but he knew it was futile. His experience as the commander's orderly had taught him that when Tsui Hsin-wei asked for something, he meant it. No matter how dangerous the circumstances were, he had never once been able to prevent the commander having his own way.

"Comrade Chang Wen-kuei, this is not the time for us to take either a 'big step forward' or a 'big step backward'. We'll have to hold out on this impregnable line, matching our perseverance and technical know-how with the enemy's. And we will, perhaps, at a given time and place, have to match iron and steel with them too!"

The two men left the tunnel and hurried over a patch of scorched earth towards the communication trench. A gust of chill wind blew up, carrying away the greyish-black smoke of a recently fired shell, and heralding the approach of the Korean war's third winter.

Over a month before, the higher command had called on the troops to be prepared to smash a possible enemy "autumn offensive". Chang Wen-kuei had gone to attend the meeting of all officers of company level and above at regimental headquarters, during which the defence measures were discussed for a few days. After his return to the company he had led his men to make long-term preparations in all aspects. Now, after the divisional commander had come to the forward position to speak to him personally, Chang was really on edge. Why hadn't the commander called him to the divisional command post and spoken to him there? Why should such an elderly and high-ranking officer have taken the risk of coming personally to the company? Every word the divisional commander had spoken reflected his concern, confidence, hopes and encouragement. Thinking back to what the commander had said, Chang experienced mixed feelings of elation and slight apprehension. Elation because in this coming powerful attack he and his company would be able to win the great victory and honour which he had always been hoping for. Apprehension because the magnitude of the attack was likely to confront him and his company with a trial unimaginably difficult and never before experienced. His strong sense of honour and responsibility caused the youthful, sincere and courageous company commander many a sleepless night.

Normally, the company commander would go round every night to check the various sentry posts. Now, such visits increased in frequency. As he did his rounds

he could hear the roar of heavy artillery and the muffled explosions of hand-grenades coming in from the lines to the east and west. Each day, communiqués would be sent from battalion headquarters giving news of victories won by the brother units — and on the battle-chart the small blue flags representing the enemy-held positions were falling back steadily before the advance of their red counterparts. Our troops were attacking on both flanks; but all remained quiet on Sangkumryung. Chang linked the sudden surge of activity on the flanks with the remarks of the divisional commander. Evidently, the higher command was attempting to draw off enemy forces and thus sap the strength held in reserve for the assault on Sangkumryung.

Chang was a very early riser now. Every morning at three o'clock he would go outside to stand and listen, for ordinarily the enemy preferred the pre-dawn hours for their attacks. As usual, the enemy guns would be hammering away and Chang would keep an ear open for any shift in tempo or intensity which might be the precursor of an infantry charge. But as the days passed and nothing happened, Chang grew more restless and impatient. The knowledge that an attack was imminent but not knowing exactly when it was coming was unnerving and hard to bear. Unconsciously he began to develop a few of the eccentricities of the divisional commander. His hands clasped behind his back and a slight frown lining his face, he would pace up and down outside the tunnel entrance. Sometimes he would laugh at the absurdity of his self-generated disquiet.

Since the visit of the divisional commander, Regimental Commander Chang Kai had been twice to Chang's company, minutely inspecting every foxhole and machine-

gun position. Most of the stock of hand-grenades in the tunnel had been carefully primed; foxholes, weapon emplacements, and communication trenches had been inspected ten times over. But still the enemy did not attack.

One week later, the morning sunrise was accompanied by wave after wave of enemy planes and a hail of bombs began to descend on the bleak ridge. It continued non-stop for two days. Over four hundred bombs crashed down on the peaks within the company's defence lines, to say nothing of the rockets and incessant strafing.

The communication trenches which fanned out to the various weapon emplacements now had the appearance of a dismembered spider's web, and many of the foxholes had been swallowed up by bomb craters.

On the evening of the second day a pregnant quiet fell over the bomb-shattered ridge. There was even a lull in the enemy harassing fire. That night, Chang Wen-kuei didn't sleep at all. He sat glued to the field telephone, agitatedly grinding out cigarette after cigarette, although in the past he had never been a heavy smoker. Both battalion and regimental headquarters were calling in every half hour for a situation report. At two o'clock the divisional commander himself called on the telephone:

"Hello! Chang Wen-kuei? How's everything? Still quiet?"

"Very quiet."

"They'll probably be starting soon. What are you doing now?"

"We are going all out to reconstruct our defences. Everything was knocked to pot by the bombing."

"Good. Get every available shovel on the job, eh! I've already instructed the artillery units to be prepared to

give you supporting fire. They're ready and standing by."

"Hope things start rolling soon. I'm fed up with this interminable waiting."

"Keep calm, now. That's just your old impatience getting the better of you again! Once the fighting starts, don't pull back to the tunnel unless the situation grows too critical. And whatever happens, hold on to the tunnel! At all costs! As long as the tunnel is ours everything will be all right. Have you had any sleep tonight?"

Chang smiled and let the question hang.

"Look," continued the divisional commander, "try to get forty winks in, eh! After daybreak, I don't think the enemy will give you a minute's rest. All right then, I'll be awaiting news of your victory."

The assistant political instructor, Wang Hung-yuan, came in from outside. His grimy and dust-covered appearance told that he had just completed an inspection-round of the defences. He was of slight build, a little stooped. His black and bushy eyebrows were incongruously out of proportion to his narrow face, and a perpetual smile lingered around his lips. Looking at him, one would have the impression that he had come straight from school into uniform, although it was difficult to say exactly why.

"Company Commander, why don't you take a nap now? Better rest while the going's good. I'll take care of the 'phone."

So saying, he placed a folded quilt behind Chang and laid down a small bundle as a pillow. With his solicitude and concern for the company commander's welfare, plus his expression of good-natured helpfulness, it seemed

as though he still considered himself as only a platoon leader.

"I'm not the least bit tired," rejoined Chang Wen-kuei. "Feel like a kid sitting up to see the New Year in. And pretty soon we'll be having the firecrackers too! Could you ever go to sleep yourself? The divisional commander isn't asleep yet either."

Wang Hung-yuan meditated for a moment on Chang Wen-kuei's elated expression. Yes, he thought to himself, that's probably just how a kid looks at a time like that.

"Sitting up to see the New Year in!" he beamed. "Is this how one feels at such a time?"

"Dunno!" Chang Wen-kuei grinned. "Can't say I've ever done it. When I was a kid we were so poor we never had enough to fill the old bread-basket, never mind sitting up to see the New Year in! Just thought it might feel like this."

After a moment's silence he suddenly asked: "How's the work going out there?"

"The communication trenches are basically restored. The men are hard at it, stripped to the waist."

"Hang around here for a bit, eh! I'm going out to take a look."

He slipped into his shoes, sprang to his feet and hurried out into the night.

The men were really stripped to the waist. Listening to the short and heavy breathing one could tell that they were all soaked with sweat.

"Hey, Squad Leader! How about a smoke now, huh? Just a couple o' drags. I've already fixed up three fox-holes."

It was indeed the voice of Liu Tsai-hsueh. As he spoke, his shovel continued to grate noisily against rock and

earth and his stocky, sinewy frame coiled and recoiled like a spring of steel. Chang did not wait to hear if the 5th Squad Leader granted that particular request, and hurried on.

Lin Mao-tien, the machine-gunner, a head taller than the other men in the machine-gun pit, pushed and tugged at the swinging heavy weapon, and then patted down the earth at the lip of the pit where it wasn't to his exact specification. All the while he muttered in a low monotone as though the venom of some recent altercation remained undigested in his stomach.

"Say there, Lin Mao-tien, you'd better get a move on. It'll soon be dawn. Try to make a quick check of the other machine-gun pits too, eh!"

"All right, Company Commander. Whew! This work's a grind. Look at me! Soaked with sweat. Like I'd just stepped out of a bath. The devil take those damned Yankee soldiers!— Anyway, the more we sweat, the more they'll bleed!"

According to the lunar calendar it was the end of the eighth month. The silver crescent moon hung in the east, but its dim light failed to penetrate the insidious darkness which engulfed the earth.

Still the enemy remained dormant. But Chang Wen-kuei could visualize in his mind's eye the American general and colonels, ensconced in their grave-like pill-box, picking up the telephones to issue the order— Attack!

Chang paused for a moment's rest, his whole body seething with an irritating heat. Taking off his cap, he twirled it slowly on an upright index finger. A distant smile flitted across his face and he spoke in a low undertone.

"All right, we'll wait and see!"

At four o'clock that morning, not long after the men had returned from their work of rebuilding the defences, repeated salvos of shells began to whistle down on the position. Chang rushed to the field telephone and furiously cranked the handle. The familiar purr was not forthcoming. The line had been cut. He put back the receiver and, his ebullient heart held in check, tried to make a mental computation of the enemy shells as they exploded. In the first minute they threw in twenty salvos, ten shells or so to a salvo. After that, it became quite impossible to distinguish one salvo from another. Those who were standing in the tunnel found it difficult to remain on their feet; and when sitting down, they were shaken with violent jerks and their "points of contact" soon became insensible to all feeling.

The blast from the explosions that swept through the tunnel made the lamp wick flicker and suddenly die out completely. Wang Chi-pao, the messenger, flicked his lighter and relit the lamp. But it only went out again. Wang held the lighter flame close to the wick in an attempt to relight it. Chang called to him irritably:

"Don't bother with it. We'll economize on oil."

However, unable to hear the company commander's voice above the din, Wang persisted in his efforts to relight the lamp. Chang pulled hard on the messenger's arm and yelled into his ear:

"Leave the damn thing alone!— Let's see how long they can keep this up."

They kept it up for ninety minutes. Then, shifting range, their shells began to pummel the area behind the position. Second Platoon Leader Sung Chan-fang and the men of the 4th Squad, submachine-guns in hand, filed quickly out of the tunnel. In addition to the hand-



grenades tucked into his belt, each man carried a haversack full of grenades.

"Inform the battalion commander," Chang Wen-kuei called to the radio operator, "that one squad has been sent out."

Miao Hsiao-chun, the operator, held the portable radio close to his chest, afraid that it might be damaged by the barrage. Hearing the order, he immediately spoke into the microphone in a high-pitched, childlike falsetto:

"Tientsin, Tientsin, this is Canton. One of us has been out for business. Are you receiving me? — One — I say again — One! — Over!"

He listened for a moment and then turned to the company commander.

"Battalion headquarters acknowledges receipt of message. They report that our artillery units have opened fire on the road of the enemy's advance."

Chang hurried off to the observation post.

It was daylight, but a pall of heavy smoke hung over the two hillocks near the forward position, obscuring everything. Only the staccato of light and heavy machine-guns exchanging fire was heard. In the next thirty minutes there was the sound of three outbursts of grenades and bangalore torpedoes from the forward position, followed by the chatter of machine-guns from both sides, and the roar of enemy mortars.

Chang spoke to the messenger, who was standing at his elbow.

"Tell the assistant political instructor to report to battalion headquarters that heavy smoke has completely obscured the forward position, but, judging by the sound of things, we have repulsed three enemy attacks. The

fighting continues. Have the radio operator come up here, eh!"

In half an hour, Chang reflected, they've launched three attacks. I wonder how many they would manage in twenty-four? How many corpses do they mean to lay down before this ridge?

About ten minutes later a group of enemy soldiers came round the right-hand side of the hill up front, and amid the thinning smoke a large yellow flag came into view. Behind the flag the enemy soldiers moved forward like clusters of ants. Chang grew fretful and wondered whether it was possible that the squad up front had been wiped out. But then the explosion of grenades was heard from the forward position. No, the enemy were definitely starting a converging attack.

The radio operator came in with his portable radio.

"Large force of enemy troops in Zero zone," instructed Chang. "Contact artillery direct and call for fire!"

Small globules of perspiration gleamed on Miao Hsiao-chun's face as he rapidly retuned the transmitter.

"Huangchuang, Huangchuang — Large group of turtles in Zero zone — in Zero zone. Request you send both large and small wagons together."

Our howitzers, field artillery and heavy mortars roared into action. Their timing was amazingly correct. The shells landed squarely on target, and large numbers of enemy soldiers were blown to smithereens.

"Tell artillery: Well done!" Chang said with excitement, perspiration streaming down his face. "Maintain fire!"

Just as the radio operator was shouting out the message, Chang saw the enemy flag-bearer fall to the ground, dead. The huge yellow flag wavered indecisively for a

moment in the grey smoke and then toppled over to the ground. Like the quickening surge of water from a fractured dam the attackers fell back in retreat. Some darted here and there, others lay face down in the dirt.

Seeing the infantrymen retreat, the enemy's team of "watch-dogs" began to fire on their own men from behind. Chang muttered to himself:

"The dirty swine! The ones we didn't get are being killed by their own bullets!"

"What's that, Company Commander?" asked the radio operator, thinking that it was perhaps a new order.

"Nothing. Hsiao Miao, just come and see the fix they've in."

Miao stepped forward and looked out through the loophole. He pulled his shoulders up and cried:

"Oh-ho! What wonderful artillery! Their shooting's like a scythe through grass!"

An enemy officer was sprawled on the ground, holding a small white flag in his hand. He raised his arm and began to strike an American soldier who lay by his side with what perhaps was a pistol. The soldier crawled a few steps forward, picked up the saffron-coloured standard, put it on his shoulder, and advanced at a crouch. No longer was the flag held proudly erect. One corner dragged limply on the dusty ground. Later, shrapnel ripped through both flag and bearer. The shattered staff fell from torn fingers, and jagged pieces of the yellow silk fluttered into the air. Another unlucky soldier was forced by the officer to pick up one of the larger scorched black shreds which remained and hold it aloft as the offensive was continued.

Slowly the advancing enemy neared the edge of the hill. The heavy machine-gun nearest the observation post

began to chatter. A neighbouring company to the east and a platoon to the west also opened fire on them simultaneously.

"Hsiao Miao, tell artillery to fire on Zone One!"

Chang's eyes remained riveted to the binoculars as he spoke.

"Huangchuang, Huangchuang —"

At that moment an enemy shell fell directly in front of the observation post, tearing shivers of rock from the loophole, and obscuring everything before the binoculars. Caught by the vehement blast, Chang was lifted off his feet.

"The radio!" he screamed. "Pull it back!"

As he fell back a few steps the shriek of another oncoming shell split the air. Chang instinctively flung himself flat. This particular projectile landed even closer than its predecessor. The company commander was momentarily stupefied, but he could still hear the pitter-patter of shrapnel as it rattled against the wall of the observation post, and the voice of Miao:

"Zone One! Zone One! — Concentrated fire! Concentrated fire! Zone One! — Zone One —"

It took Chang Wen-kuei but a few seconds to come to. From somewhere nearby came the loud detonations of shells. Looking up, he was confronted by total darkness. The door had caved in.

"Hsiao Miao?" he called.

There was no reply. Chang pushed himself to his feet and switched on his flashlight. Miao was still sitting against the wall, his back to the door, his head leaning over the radio which rested on his knees, and his fingers tightly clutching the microphone. Chang called again:

"Operator! — Hsiao Miao!"

Miao answered without raising his head.

"Company Commander, our artillery units are firing on Zone One. They've opened fire — The radio's still intact — Our telephonist knows how to operate it — He picked it up —"

Chang veered the beam of his flashlight to Miao's back. A cold shudder ran over him. The jacket on the youngster's back had been blasted to shreds by shrapnel.

"Wang Chi-pao! Call the medical attendant! At the double!"

Wang stood up, grunted compliance and left.

Chang quietly removed the ear-phones from the operator's head and unclasped the fingers from the microphone. Lifting the radio, he set it down on the ground. He then took Miao in his arms and carried him a bit inside, away from the door. As Chang picked him up, the operator mumbled feebly:

"Don't bother — Don't bother — As long as we've the radio — It's all right —"

Good lad, thought Chang. Not even a moan! In the semi-darkness he placed his cheek close to Miao's and spoke softly, comfortingly:

"Hsiao Miao, Hsiao Miao, you aren't hit badly. You'll be all right soon. On your feet before you know it."

Wang Chi-pao came in with the medical attendant.

"Look, I want you to keep me constantly informed of Hsiao Miao's condition," Chang said to the medical attendant, and then he turned to Wang Chi-pao. "Bring the radio along and come with me back to the tunnel. Careful you don't drop it, eh!"

One company after another of the enemy troops hurled themselves against the position in several columns, a

squad or platoon to each. The first onslaught was thrown back by a co-ordinated defence using hand-grenades, hand-mines and bangalore torpedoes. Then their artillery spewed forth again in a "softening up" barrage, which was followed by a second wave. The battle raged for six hours. Enemy dead littered the forward area; and we too had our losses in killed and wounded. Chang Wen-kuei ordered replacements to leave the tunnel, in twos or threes as they were required.

About one o'clock in the afternoon 2nd Platoon Leader Sung Chan-fang sent a wounded man to ask for replacements. Originally, the tunnel had been able to boast a total complement of over a platoon; but now their number had dwindled greatly.

"Wang Hung-yuan!"

Chang had the predilection to address the assistant political instructor with the more intimate "Old Wang." After all, they were now of equal rank. But, when Wang had been one of his platoon leaders, Chang was accustomed to addressing him by his personal name. And, the old habit lingering on, he still continued to do so.

"Wang Hung-yuan, it's my turn now. You rest up at home and keep an eye on the tunnel, eh! If we can hold them off till dusk things are bound to take a turn for the better."

"Company Commander —"

Wang's tone and expression signalled disapproval, and Chang sensed what was coming. Chang pocketed several grenades and grinned broadly.

"All right, there's no time to start debating whose turn it is. You're a devil for discipline, so I can depend on you to defend the tunnel. Look after the radio, and . . . er . . . set your mind at ease, huh!"

He turned to the wounded man who had just come in to ask for replacements saying: "You people have been up there all this time and you're the only one wounded?"

"None of the wounded would agree to come down," replied the soldier. "And I'm going back!"

"No, you don't." Chang Wen-kuei looked at the man's broken arm. "You'll stay in the tunnel!" He bit his lip reflectively for a moment. Then, after hoisting several bangalore torpedoes on to his shoulder, he hurried out of the tunnel with the messenger Wang Chi-pao and three others, each of whom had a sack of grenades slung over their backs.

The forward position was like an inferno of smoke and fire. Bullets whizzed and shrapnel whirred above, below and on every side. Splinters, clods of earth and showers of stones scudded willy-nilly across the slope, and the slender radicles of uprooted trees hung broken and limp. The sun was completely obscured by heavy smoke.

What had once been communication trenches were now poor apologies for the appellation. The largest stretches remaining were nowhere more than two metres. Loose earth had fallen into every foxhole and some of the men were knee-deep in it.

"Hold fast, comrades! Hold fast!" yelled Chang Wen-kuei as he dashed up front, body bent. Reaching the spot where the fighting seemed most fierce, he slithered into an empty foxhole.

The enemy bombarded the position with 60 mm. mortars, rockets, recoilless guns and 50 mm. heavy machine-guns. Meanwhile, the remnants of the enemy forces were regrouping for another assault.

Chang laid out his hand-grenades along the front edge of the foxhole and put the bangalore torpedoes down on one side. A short distance away was the machine-gun pit of Lin Mao-tien. Lin's face was covered with sweat and dirt, and only his two large eyes were discernible. As he turned round he noticed the company commander.

"It won't do!" he shouted, "It won't do!"

"What won't do?" asked Chang sternly. He was expecting Lin to protest his going personally to the forward position.

"This earth here is as loose as I dunno what. Can't keep this machine-gun level — Oh, damn it! Even a tractor couldn't plough this deep!"

There was no response from Chang; he could see no way to solve the problem either. A nearby soldier, a grenade in one fist, made for the machine-gun pit by pulling himself along on his elbows.

"Here, Lin Mao-tien, I'll support it for you. I have to be on my gut to pitch grenades anyway, so it's all the same."

Chang looked at the soldier. His clothes hung in shreds, blood trickled down his face, and one of his feet was twisted. The ground over which he was crawling was streaked and smeared with blood.

"No!" answered Lin hastily. "It's all right, Comrade Hsu Cheng-pin. I've just thought of another way."

"To hell with your other way! Your aim will be off when the enemy come at us again and you'll lose the damn position. That's your other way!"

Ignoring his wounds, Hsu dragged himself on with redoubled efforts.

"Oh, go on, I was only kidding. I can manage all right."

"Look, Lin Mao-tien, are you a Volunteer or not? If sacrifices have to be made, they'll be made. Tell me, is the position more important or am I?"

As he spoke, he crawled up to the machine-gun, twisted over on to his stomach, and put one of the tripod's legs on to his back with his free hand.

"Comrade, you —"

The hard-boiled and easily-provoked Lin, who, in the past, had often been at verbal loggerheads with Hsu, now leaned over Hsu's prostrate form and sobbed like a wronged child.

"All right, all right. It's a war! Lin Mao-tien, look out! Here they come again!"

Giving Lin a nudge, Hsu hurled a grenade at an approaching group of enemy troops.

Screaming like deranged devils, and firing wildly as they came, the enemy moved up the slope. The knee-deep, loose earth was difficult to traverse, and it somewhat stayed their rate of advance. Chang Wen-kuei pulled up one of the bangalore torpedoes and flung it into a knot of enemy soldiers, killing about a dozen of them and sending them flying into the air. He glanced round and saw Hsu Cheng-pin frantically throwing grenades from his prone position under the machine-gun. Lin was crouched behind the gun, perspiration streaming down his face, his teeth clamped on his bleeding lip. Chang hurled another hand-mine and three grenades.

The enemy fell back once again.

"Whew!" gasped Lin Mao-tien, rubbing his eyes. "Hsu Cheng-pin, she kicks like a horse, eh! Rough?"

"Nah! Nothing to it," replied Hsu. He turned slowly. His voice grew weaker and weaker as he continued.

"I'm flat out o' grenades now — Here, let's have one of those empty mags. I'll load 'er up for you."

As Lin passed over an empty magazine he noticed that Hsu had again been badly wounded on the forehead. He immediately fished out a field-bandage from his pocket, and began to dress Hsu's wound.

"Oh, leave me alone, will you! It's only a scratch — Let it be, man!"

His voice was flagging. Before Lin had finished dressing the wound he noticed that Hsu's hands had become suddenly still. The drum magazine was only half full.

"Hsu Cheng-pin! Cheng-pin!"

There was no response. Lin held the back of his hand against Hsu's nostrils. He was still breathing. Lin gently shook him by the shoulder.

"Say something! Hsu Cheng-pin, say something, won't you!"

Hsu's eyes slowly opened, and with a smile he murmured:

"I — I'm afraid it's the end. My insides hurt like hell! Ah, the enemy's attack is still going on — I'm dying too soon — Look — right-hand pocket — address — home — Give to — company com —"

Suddenly, his voice found new strength.

"Lin Mao-tien, if you move me from under this gun, you'll never be able to face the motherland! — Never be able to face me! —"

So saying, Hsu's eyes closed and his head flopped loosely to the scorched earth. The magazine slipped from his fingers, rolled over and lay beside Lin's feet.

Lin left the magazine where it was. He took a small diary from Hsu's right-hand pocket. Flipping it open, he glanced through it. Lin crawled over to Chang Wen-

kuai, handed him the little blue book, and then returned to his post.

Chang noticed that the book's cover was stained with fresh blood. Inside there was a photograph, about four by four, of two chubby children nestling close to an old woman. The smaller child, a girl, was smiling innocently, a kitten held in her arms. A middle-aged woman and a boy of about twenty who was dressed in the garb of a student, were also in the photograph. On the reverse side were the inked words: "Brother, for mother and the children, fight bravely! Your young brother, Cheng-fang. July 1952."

Chang could clearly remember how, a short six months ago, this peasant lad from Szechuan as a young recruit just couldn't seem to learn the proper way to throw a grenade, how he had cringed at the noise of explosives, but now he proved himself such a brave soldier. Chang unscrewed the top from his fountain pen and scribbled a few impromptu lines alongside that simple message: "Comrade Hsu Cheng-pin courageously gave his life for the motherland and Korea on No. 1 position, × day, × month."

"Lin Mao-tien," he called. "That mag Hsu Cheng-pin was filling. Throw it over here!"

He handed the magazine, the diary, and the photograph to the messenger.

"Give these things to the assistant political instructor," he ordered, "and ask him to put them in some safe place. Get them to him quickly!"

The simple, glossy image of the old woman and the two young children had imprinted itself deeply on Chang's mind. He himself was parentless, childless; but somewhere deep down inside him he knew that Hsu's old

mother was waiting anxiously and with high hopes for news of victory on Sangkumryung. . . .

Two more attacks were repulsed. Lin's machine-gun now glowed red. He pulled the weapon back into the pit, urinated on the barrel, and then, with the gentleness of movement one would handle a sleeping infant, he placed the machine-gun down by the side of Hsu Cheng-pin.

Yet another assault was launched. Fighting was now going on in many parts of the broken or disintegrated communication trenches. Screams and the crack of hand-grenades were heard here and there. In some parts of the trenches, bayonet fighting was going on.

Chang swung round at the heavy tramp of hurried feet. Several carbine-carrying enemy infantrymen were running in his direction; but, perhaps because he himself was so covered in dirt and debris that he blended perfectly with his foxhole setting, he remained unseen, and their fingers rested unmoving on their triggers. He tossed out a bangalore torpedo at the enemy soldiers. So close was he to the blast that it almost sucked him out of his burrow.

The situation was now critical. Chang's nerves grew tense as he looked at the position and the few fighters left. Does it mean that this position is, after all, to be lost to the enemy? He knew that if that did happen, they'd soon recapture it—but he told himself, I'll die here before I retreat one inch! He'd written a pledge to the higher command and the divisional commander had had a personal talk with him. To lose the position to the enemy, impossible!

Then he thought of the weakly defended tunnel, and the words of the divisional commander: "As long as the tunnel is ours everything will be all right."

. . . These thoughts battled with one another in his mind. The situation allowed him no more time for consideration. Two courses of action faced him — One, stay at the surface position and fight it out to the death. Two, withdraw to the tunnel and prepare a counter-attack.

Before the enemy started another charge he clenched his teeth and made his final decision.

"Pass the order! All badly wounded pull back to the tunnel now. Everyone else prepare to withdraw!"

"Company Commander's orders! — Badly wounded are to pull back to the tunnel. . . ."

The order went from foxhole to foxhole. A few of the men who weren't wounded began to carry off the dead on their backs. Others, severely wounded, grimaced under the pain of the effort as they crawled off in the direction of the tunnel. Chang saw a wounded fighter, one hand clasped tightly to his stomach, and the other gripping a hand-mine, edging slowly forward on his behind, inch by inch. Meanwhile the enemy had begun another attack.

A short distance to the rear of this fighter the enemy troops had crept up to our position. One group was rushing forward. Lin Mao-tien swung his weapon round and fired burst after burst at them; but one machine-gun was inadequate to halt the enemy advance. Suddenly, the wounded man rose shakily to his feet, turned round and ran straight into the group of enemy soldiers with the hand-mine held aloft. A loud explosion followed and the enemy assault was checked.

Chang yelled his final order for the moment. "Give covering fire to each other as you move! Hit 'em as you withdraw!"

Lin followed the company commander towards the tunnel, halting every now and then to loose another burst of fire.

When Chang Wen-kuei, Lin Mao-tien, Liu Tsai-hsueh, and the young messenger, Wang Chi-pao, had pulled back to a shellproof shelter about thirty metres from the tunnel entrance, they saw a group of ten or so enemy soldiers closing in on the tunnel, pitching grenade after grenade. Another batch of them, automatic carbines in hands, were running over to assist. Obviously, for the moment, any attempt at entering the tunnel would prove futile. But it was equally impossible to carry on the fight from outside.

"Right," Chang hissed, "into the shelter! Protect the entrance with the machine-gun!"

The four men quietly entered the shelter. Lin adroitly set up the machine-gun at the mouth. He turned to the company commander. "Afraid we haven't much ammo left. Have to go careful."

"Right," replied Chang, "that one throwing the grenades — Let him have it first. Teach him to stick his nose in our tunnel!"

Lin fired a few short but deadly bursts. The enemy soldiers at the tunnel mouth — both the dead and those who were left alive, lay flat on the ground.

At this moment an American hand-grenade landed near the mouth of the shelter. It looked like a capped ink-bottle. There was no wooden handle on it. Liu Tsai-hsueh, standing beside the machine-gun, quickly picked up the grenade and tossed it back at the enemy. Casual-

ly, unflummoxed, he repeated this six times, as one would throw stones. The seventh one landed just a little out of reach and exploded before he could get to it.

Liu, who was thrown to the ground by the blast, was pulled back into the shelter by Wang Chi-pao. The machine-gun was also dragged back a little from the mouth.

Chang bent over to inspect Liu's wound. He found that the left shoulder of Liu's jacket was blasted to shreds and blood was oozing from the wound. Liu blinked and opened his eyes, but remained silent as Chang was dressing the wound.

"How is it?" inquired Chang. "Hurt much?"

"Doesn't hurt a bit. But that blast knocked me for six. I'd better lie here and rest for a while."

The company commander undid the buttons on Liu's tunic and checked for other wounds. Finding none, he breathed a sigh of relief.

After three or four minutes, Liu stood up shakily with Chang's help, and said with a grin: "Well, I guess those fellows don't pack enough powder into their grenades, eh!—Say, Company Commander, I . . . er . . . I'm gasping for a smoke — Wang Chi-pao, be a sport and roll me up one, huh? Been going at it hammer and tongs all day and haven't had the chance for even one puff!"

Wang started to roll a cigarette. Chang suddenly saw several enemy soldiers near the shelter mouth rise and break into a run.

"Lin Mao-tien! Don't let 'em get away!"

"B-lood-y swine!"

The two words rang clearly over the rattling of the machine-gun. Lin Mao-tien fired five shots and three

of the enemy soldiers went down. The other four managed to make a getaway.

At intermittent intervals a few more hand-grenades landed near or around the mouth of the shelter, but no further casualties were suffered. However, the fumes which drifted into the shelter became almost overpowering. Liu spoke as he puffed hard on his cigarette.

"Company Commander, what's our next move to be? Shall we fight from here, or shall we try and make it back to the tunnel?"

Chang glanced at his watch. It was a little after three o'clock. To remain where they were was asking for it. One pack of properly placed explosive and none of them would get out of the shelter alive.

"We'll rest here for a while and then go back to the tunnel."

A harsh, scraping sound overhead told of the enemy's intention. They were laying an explosive charge over the shelter.

"It's time we got out of here — All set? Right, shoot straight and keep low to the ground. Try rolling."

"Company Commander, you and Lin Mao-tien go first. Wang Chi-pao and I'll cover you. Wang Chi-pao, let's go!"

Liu Tsai-hsueh took one last, lingering drag on his cigarette and then crushed it underfoot. Two grenades in one hand, and one in the other, he ran outside with Wang, throwing the grenades over the roof of the shelter as soon as he was clear of the mouth.

Lin held the machine-gun tightly by his side as he and Chang rolled quickly in a cloud of dust towards the tunnel entrance.



### CHAPTER III

Earth-filled jute bags were piled up at the tunnel entrance. Behind them lay a machine-gun. A sentry stood on guard, a submachine-gun cradled in his arm. The fighters called out as soon as they saw Chang Wen-kuei, an unmistakable note of relief in their voices.

"Hey! The company commander's back!"

For a few moments Chang remained outside the entrance, as if reluctant to go in. What would he report to the higher command? We suffered heavy losses, and so had to retreat to the tunnel! Could these words be allowed to pass his lips. He well knew that the higher command was fully cognizant of the situation and would not reprimand him for the withdrawal; but, on the other hand, he had a slight feeling of uneasiness and humiliation. For several years he and his company had been on active service, but never before had they suffered so heavily. Never before had they been forced to withdraw. And yet never before has the company succeeded in killing off so many of the enemy. A feeling of pride welled up in him—pride for what his company had achieved.

Meanwhile Liu Tsai-hsueh and Wang Chi-pao also rolled down to the tunnel mouth, so bespattered in dust that it looked as though they had just come off a wheat threshing floor. Chang and his men walked quickly into the tunnel. Pride and humiliation still wrangled for place in his breast.

Wang Hung-yuan, the assistant political instructor, was speaking over the radio. Strange, thought Chang, that

Wang, who used to stammer over the transmitter, should now rattle out his words with such fluency.

"Mister Li, Mister Li—Our manager has not yet returned. There may perhaps be some unfinished business —"

He swung round as Chang laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Mister Li," he gasped in astonishment, "Hang on a moment."

"Company Commander, is everyone back?"

"Um-h'm, all back. Is the battalion commander thinking of putting down an artillery barrage?"

"Yes, he is."

"Good. Take the chance of smacking them hard while they're still not properly on their feet."

Wang spoke again into the microphone.

"Mister Li—Our manager is back now. You can send the wagons over immediately."

Chang's eyes sparkled with amusement as he looked at Wang. Unable to control himself, he burst out in a fit of helpless laughter.

"What d'you find so funny?" asked Wang, puzzled.

"Eh?" He continued to chuckle. "Nothing. It's just that this code we're using tickles me. 'Manager!' 'Wagons!'—In time to come, when the war's long over, we'll think back to this strange language and laugh ourselves to death."

"Umph! Glad it amuses you. I've been sitting here worried stiff waiting for you, and —"

Chang interrupted him with a silencing hand:

"Listen!—Our artillery'll soon start."

He cocked his head to one side and raised his eyes, a cigarette left unlit between his fingers. Voices were hushed, and everyone waited for the surprise barrage

from our artillery. Sometime ago Chang had visited the artillery units, and he now imagined the scene — Red-faced, bare-shouldered artillerymen, their bodies glistening with sweat as with a well-practised ease they slipped round after round into the yawning, hungry breeches.

As the explosions of the heavy shells sounded above, the tunnel shook and the lamp recommenced its mad capers. Though the effect produced in the tunnel was identical as with enemy shell, Chang, this time felt much more at ease. He steadied the swaying lamp and held the end of his cigarette in the flame. Then, his eyes half closed, he puffed away contentedly. The source of his apparent tranquillity was difficult to determine. Was it the tobacco, or was it the artillery fire?

"You hear that, Wang Hung-yuan?" he asked, his eyelids still curtaining his eyes, "Sounds good, eh!"

"Company Commander, the battalion political director wishes to speak to you personally."

It was the telephonist. He had now taken over the radio operator's duties. Chang crushed out his cigarette and quickly slipped the ear-phones over his head.

Lu An-kuo's voice was extremely calm. He spoke slowly and deliberately, as though he was afraid Chang would not be able to hear him clearly.

"Manager Ma — Manager Ma — The business was admirably transacted — Our head manager is delighted. Do not think your capital is lost — Do not think so — I say again: Do not think so — I intend to call in at your shop — I will be there soon — Very soon — Very soon — Please be patient —"

Chang removed the ear-phones and stood up. He felt strangely lighter on his feet. All remnants of humiliation had vanished. The battalion political director had

known exactly what was going on in the company commander's mind, and his consoling words over the ether made Chang feel pleased as well as grateful.

"Well, Company Commander," queried Wang Hung-yuan, "did the political director have any new orders for us?"

"We may be throwing in a counter-attack soon," he replied. "The political director said he'd be over here soon." Then, unable to restrain himself, he added: "Regiment says we fought well. And I was getting all set to be put on the carpet!"

"On the carpet? Why?"

"The divisional commander told me repeatedly that the position mustn't be lost, but I finally had to pull back to the tunnel. Isn't that enough to have me put on the carpet?"

"This — nothing of the kind! — How many of the enemy were killed, tell me that! From the observation post at regimental headquarters alone they saw over twenty lorry-loads of enemy dead being carried off! You worry too much over nothing."

"Worry? Any company commander would be worried. This is a battle plus! Bag after bag of grenades — but still not enough! — Here, let's have a mouthful of that water —"

Lifting the enamel mug to his lips he swilled the dust from his mouth and then greedily gulped down the boiled water. A sudden drowsiness crept over him. Every bone in his body cried out for respite, for rest. He lay back on a folded quilt and closed his eyes. Suddenly his eyes sprang open and he sat bolt upright.

"What's wrong?" said Wang, taken aback by the company commander's abrupt movement.

"Eh? — Oh, nothing."

Now what, Chang asked himself, made me do that?

"Think I'll go and have a look round."

"My!" sighed Wang, relaxing again, "I thought something had happened."

The men who had recently come in from the forward position were spattered with mud, besmeared with blood, their dusty, tattered uniforms hanging on them like rags. Their faces, ruddy and glowing with health yesterday, now had a grimy, gaunt look. For the first time, Chang took stock of his own appearance. One lapel of his jacket had disappeared, and one of his trouser legs was torn neatly up the side. And my face too, he thought, can't be much cleaner than those I see before me.

"Well, comrades," he called cheerily, "over one thousand of the enemy fell before us today. Now, how about getting your faces washed. You'd look more like real victors then!"

"As the old saying round home goes — 'If they bring the present to our door, we cannot but accept' — But your own face, Company Commander, is just as dirty."

Liu Tsai-hsueh's eyes twinkled humorously as he cleaned his rifle. Surprisingly enough, his omnipresent cigarette was absent.

"Bit of soap 'n water'll soon put that right."

"Aw! Let's get the weapons cleaned up first," said Liu. "Our faces can stay dirty for a bit longer. We aren't going to a wedding!"

"And when the weapons are cleaned, what're you going to do?"

"Don't know and don't care what anyone else plans to do, but I'm going to get down to a game o' cards. Right, Lin Mao-tien? Seems ages since I played last, and

my fingers are just itching to get hold of those cards again."

"I ain't playing. Cards! That's all you can think about — Anyway, I can't. That machine-gun of mine lifted the skin clean off my hand."

Lin's right hand was swathed in bandages. Liu reverted to the former topic.

"Company Commander," he beamed, "I'll not only scrub my face, but when this battle's over I'll even have a shave and go to see the divisional commander."

Liu grinned at Lin and the other men chuckled. Chang tried to keep a straight face, saying "All right, comic, enough," but his smile widened as he spoke and he too joined in the laughter. Everyone in the tunnel was in high spirits.

Soon the conversation turned to the post-battle routine of "who fought well" and "who deserved a merit". Chang walked off and went to see how the wounded men were faring.

The medical attendant, a mug of soup in his hand, was feeding one of the wounded with a spoon. Other wounded men were also sipping soup, some lying on their stomachs, some with their backs propped against the tunnel wall. A few lay on the ground, moaning softly and gritting their teeth against the pain. Miao Hsiao-chun, the radio operator, lay face down in a corner. He was cursing in a low, sing-song voice.

"Yankee devils — Your day's coming — We'll see it soon —" Poor kid, Chang thought as he looked sympathetically at him, back must hurt like hell — Doesn't want to moan — Might affect others — But his pain is intolerable — Curses instead — Probably helps too —

Chang went around to see each fighter's wound and then began to speak. His tone was benign, comforting.

"Comrades — Try to stick it out a little while longer. As soon as reinforcements come up from the rear you'll be transferred to a hospital."

"Company Commander, isn't this our home? We don't want to be transferred anywhere!" insisted Miao with some heat. His voice had surprising volume, causing Chang to start slightly.

"We can still clean weapons. We aren't going to any rear!"

"All right, all right, I'll see that you aren't sent back — We'll be launching a counter-attack soon."

"Company Commander, how's my radio doing? Can the telephonist handle it all right?"

"You young rogue! Yes, the radio's holding out fine, and the telephone operator's quite the expert now. You just try and recover as soon as you can, and when your wounds are healed up the radio will still be waiting for you."

Miao smiled and called out to Chang as he was leaving:

"When will they be healed up?"

When Chang returned to the men's quarters all the weapons had been cleaned, and the men were busy washing themselves. To save water, they had shared but one basinful, and the "water" which half filled the basin now had the colour and consistency of well-mixed mud. By some inexplicable means or methods, Liu Tsai-hsueh had manoeuvred Lin Mao-tien — bandaged hand and all — into a game of "Play the Fool". A gramophone had been produced, and it now filled the tunnel with song:

*See the Five-Star Red Flag unfurled in the breeze,  
Loudly rings our song of victory.*

*Sing of our beloved Motherland,  
Growing richer and stronger every day.*

Here and there in the tunnel a voice took up the song. Soon, everyone had joined in. Dissonant, raucous, but more heart-warmingly significant than the dulcet tones of the greatest choir. Chang squatted down beside the gramophone, a faraway look in his eyes as he watched the record spinning swiftly on its turntable. He sang in a low bass, his mind unwittingly retracing the chiselled words of the couplet at the tunnel entrance: "We Enter the Darkness of This Tunnel so That Our Motherland Might Live in the Sun."

Motherland! Oh, motherland! Do you know how your sons are fighting and shedding their blood on this Korean battlefield? Do you realize what the word "motherland" means to them? Do you know how dear your memory is cherished in their minds? My Motherland, not a single Volunteer had brought dishonour to your great and noble name!

For a long time this particular record had been with the men of Chang's company. Over and over again it had been played, especially in the slow hours preceding an attack, but they never tired of it. It was, to them, the voice of their Motherland.

"Is it dark outside yet?" Chang called to the man on watch at the tunnel entrance.

"No, not yet, Company Commander, but it won't be long before it is."

Chang was well aware that it wasn't even five o'clock yet; but he was impatient for darkness to fall. Battalion headquarters had given him notification that a counter-attack was to be launched that evening, and they had

asked that he regroup all of his men who weren't wounded and act in co-ordination with the forces coming in from the rear to recapture the main peak position. The exact time of the attack had not been specified — battalion was, perhaps, "playing safe" in not giving this information over the radio — but their instructions had been precise enough: "As soon as our troops retake the hill to your right rear, your men will move into action."

So the regrouping began. In addition to the assistant political instructor, the radio operator — the former telephonist — and the medical attendant, only about one squad remained. As a rule a wounded man could not serve as an active combatant but Liu Tsai-hsueh insisted on taking part in the battle, claiming:

"Oh, go on! I can run. I can eat. I can toss grenades. You call this being 'wounded'? . . ."

If Chang had pressed the point and given him an order, Liu would have acquiesced, abiding by military discipline — but, not wishing Liu to feel put out, he had merely nodded his agreement. Lin Mao-tien's hand was badly burned, but, of course, at a time of emergency like this, he couldn't be classified among the wounded. As to several others, who were more seriously wounded than Liu but could still go on fighting, Chang refused to allow them to participate in the actual attack, but approved of their remaining at the tunnel entrance with the assistant political instructor to guard against any emergency.

Chang's briefing was terse.

"We achieved a lot today, but our position is now in enemy hands. Do we need our brother troops to recapture it for us?"

"No! — No!"

"No, we don't. True, there's not many of us, but I think one of us is equal to ten of the enemy. We are confident we can recapture the position ourselves. As soon as our artillery fire has made a break in their defences, we'll pounce. It's only fifty or sixty metres to the top of the hill. . . . Right, get your gear together and fall in here."

As he finished speaking, he slipped his pistol from its holster and handed it to Wang Chi-pao.

"Give it another clean, eh!"

"But, Company Commander — I've cleaned it twice already!"

"Another cleaning won't harm it! Anyway, you've nothing else to do, have you?"

In less than five minutes preparations for the attack were complete. Liu Tsai-hsueh had two haversacks slung over his shoulders, and his injured left arm rested lightly on the submachine-gun which hung round his neck. Five hand-mines were hooked to his belt. He looked even dumpier than usual.

"Ho!" he joked to Lin Mao-tien as they walked along the tunnel, "I don't think those 'peanuts' you have there will be enough to satisfy our hungry enemies. See! I've two bags of 'steamed bread' for them. Best on the market, I tell you."

"Oh?" purred Lin, turning round, "and what d'you think these are?"

Eight hand-grenades nestled between belt and stomach.

After the men had fallen in, Chang divided them into three groups. Sung Chan-fang, the 2nd Platoon Leader, was appointed 1st group leader. Liu Tsai-hsueh was put in charge of the second group, and Chang himself took over the third and the "heavy weapons section" as well.

The last consisted of one man — Lin Mao-tien. He would act as both machine-gunner and his own "Number Two".

"Company Commander," quipped Liu, grinning from ear to ear, "doesn't Lin Mao-tien play the role of the leader of the 'heavy weapons section'?"

Chang left the question unanswered. He gave the men instructions on the order in which to leave the tunnel and the formation and position of each group during the attack. Then he said: "Right. Stay in that order. Lie down where you are and try to get some sleep. No one is allowed to speak for the next hour."

The men lay down as commanded, but no one really went to sleep. Liu, with his small arsenal suspended from front and sides, could only lie on his back. Lin had his trappings on front and back and was, therefore, obliged to lie on his side.

Liu never let a minute pass without squirming and fidgeting, so restless that Lin could stand it no longer.

"What're you trying to do, eh?" he asked irritably. "You're twisting about there like a bloody maggot!"

"No talking allowed. Company Commander's orders," grunted Liu in reply.

"Well — You just try and keep still, huh!" retorted Lin in a low voice.

Liu started to jerk and twitch again, every movement fanning the flames of Lin's annoyance.

"Look, I told you —"

"Sorry," whispered Liu, "but this arm of mine's hurting like hell. Feels like the damn thing's on fire. Bear up. It's only for an hour."

Lin swallowed what other complaints he might have had.

The company commander closed his eyes and tried to force himself to sleep. But it was hopeless. The coming attack weighed too heavily on his mind. With great strength of will, however, he did manage to lie still until the sixty long minutes had dragged away. Then he sat up. He hoped that the other men would sleep a little longer, but as he moved someone else noticed him and stirred. One after another the men sat up, wide awake. No one, it appeared, had been able to sleep.

"Everyone get enough sleep?" asked Chang purposely.

"Um! Plenty," the men replied in unison.

"Ahaa!" groaned Liu Tsai-hsueh, "I'm 'liberated' at last. These hand-mines weighed on my gut like a ton o' lead. Could hardly breathe."

"Company Commander," suggested the usually taciturn Sung Chan-fang, leader of the 2nd Platoon, "sitting here like this gets on the nerves. Why don't we sing something. We could sing softly."

"All right, a song then."

Sung requested the soldiers to rise and prepared to lead the "choir".

"Bra-ve-ly — H'm! Wrong key — One, two, Bra-ve-ly —"

His efforts as a choirmaster were not, to say the least, very successful — his timing now too slow, now too quick — but after a while the men just sang on in total disregard of his flailing arms. Two songs in about five minutes completed the programme, and after that the men lounged about where they were.

Sung walked a few steps in the direction of the company commander, paused uncertainly, and then turned back. He repeated this three times. Noticing his odd

behaviour, Chang spoke to the assistant political instructor:

"Say, Wang Hung-yuan, just look at Sung Chan-fang!"

"What's the matter with him tonight? He's acting very strangely."

"Hard to say. Why, he even asked to sing! Funny — Shall I go and find out?"

When Sung approached for the fourth time Chang called to him:

"Second Platoon Leader, something on your mind?"

"No — Nothing at all."

However, he didn't move away. After hesitating for a few moments he spoke again:

"Company Commander —"

"Ho!" joked the assistant political instructor, "blushing too, eh!"

Chang tugged on Sung's sleeve.

"Come on, man, out with it! Here, sit down."

Sung sat down, his hands tugging nervously at the lower corners of his jacket; and then he gave voice to what was in his mind:

"I — I've been meaning to have a talk with the assistant political instructor, but I — Well, I mean I didn't dare to — I know I'm not fit to be a Party member yet, but — Oh, I just can't keep it in my mind like this! I'd like to ask the Party branch to help me with my problem. I'm a member of the Youth League, and I've won several merits in action. Who can say that isn't something! But I'm still not a Party member. I know that a Party member by no means lives better than others but should take the difficulties on himself, should try to be always in the front of the battle. But that's what I

want to do. I'll fight to the end for the cause of communism!"

"Yes? Is that all?" asked Chang. "Nothing else?"

"No. Nothing else."

"You aren't very straightforward, you know. Keeping things to yourself like this. What you ask is nothing to be ashamed of. Why blush about it? What's there to be afraid of?"

Sung lowered his head and didn't reply. Wang Hung-yuan, the assistant political instructor chimed in:

"You haven't gone unnoticed by the Party branch. The company commander and I have frequently spoken about you. When this battle's over, the Party branch committee will consider the question of your membership — Fight well, and don't worry about it, eh!"

"Very good," mumbled Sung. "Can I go now?"

"All right."

Sung took a piece of paper from his breast pocket and handed it to Wang. Then he rose, saluted, and left.

Wang unfolded the paper. It was an application for Party membership. Holding it under the lamp, he and the company commander read it together.

I request that the Party decide by my action in this coming counter-attack whether or not I am worthy of becoming a Party member. And if I should be killed, I request that the Party branch still consider my application for membership.

*Signed:* Sung Chan-fang.

"He's a good comrade," said Chang to Wang. "Bit too quiet maybe, but that's neither here nor there. We'll see how he does in this battle tonight."

At seven o'clock the radio operator called to Chang.

"Artillery reports that preparation will be completed for barrage in five minutes. Rockets will also be used."

Rockets! Chang Wen-kuei's eyes lit up. He ordered the men to remove the jute-bag barricade at the tunnel entrance, and instructed those who would leave first to line up along the wall.

Deafening, earth-shaking blasts were heard from outside. Our rockets were coming in! Complete darkness engulfed the tunnel as the lamp went out, and every man was roughly shaken by the violent blast.

"My cap!" someone shouted. "I've lost my cap!"

"Oh, shut up!" bid another voice through the darkness.

A hushed silence fell over the tunnel. Following the rocket barrage, more artillery of various calibres opened up. When the lamp resumed its unsteady, dim light, the men looked at one another in surprise. Everyone was bareheaded. The blast had blown their caps off. There was a hurried scramble to regain the headgear, and each man ended up with something on his head. Not his own in most cases, but at least — a cap.

As the shells continued to crash down in rapid succession Chang, pistol in hand, stood waiting. His mind went back to the time when he was a platoon leader. Only one 60 mm. mortar in the whole platoon — Special permission to be had before a shell could be fired — Only a few mountain artillery shells available for an attack on a city — Ah! But now things were different. Ton after ton of machined steel pouring down on the enemy from scores of heavy guns. Who would ever have imagined it! The divisional commander had said: "At a given time and place we will, perhaps, have to match iron and steel with them too!" — Without this iron and steel what would we have to face here today? . . .

The fall of fire slowly crept towards the rear of the enemy; explosions were no longer seen on the hilltop to the right rear which the enemy had taken. Now the spasmodic chatter of machine-guns came from that quarter. Shells were also thinning out on the main peak defended by Chang's company.

Chang stood at the tunnel entrance, his eyes on the hilltop to the right rear.

"Prepare to attack!"

Hearts pounded as the men waited with bated breath for the final command. Suddenly, from the hilltop came a series of short, sharp explosions — hand-grenades. As Chang barked out a husky "Right — Out!" Sung Chan-fang and the 1st Team dashed outside.

The hilltop, only sixty metres from the tunnel, now seemed a long way off. The men's path was strewn with enemy dead, steel helmets, smashed carbines and the twisted remains of the steel plates and rails which the enemy had used as roofs for their pill-boxes. Crouched almost double, they ran over the loose, quicksand-like earth. Stumbling, slipping, slithering, they moved on. Chang went down three times, hard. His hands were smudged with blood and he felt the pains going right into his heart as he scrambled on over the broken rocks and crumpled steel, not knowing whether he was running or crawling.

Enemy flares whizzed into the air and night became as day on the entire slope. At this moment Chang found himself in an enemy pill-box that our artillery had bombarded heavily. The pill-box, originally a shell crater, had been roofed by the enemy with steel plates and surrounded with sand bags. About a dozen enemy soldiers lay as sudden death had left them, oddly grotesque. The



wooden stocks of several machine-guns were still smouldering. Chang crawled forward and peered out over one of the battered corpses.

Dominating the hilltop was a large rock, over eight metres high, under which we had formerly had a shelter. The enemy had built the shelter into a fortification almost impervious to the heaviest artillery fire. As the men advanced, the shelter's whole armament spluttered into action and at least five light machine-guns, two heavy machine-guns, and two bazookas rained down a hail of deadly fire. Bullets buzzed viciously over the napes of the men's necks, and the searing flames from the bazooka shells whipped at their faces. The fighters took cover in the craters and shattered pill-boxes.

A constellation of flares lit up the sky and a curtain of lead and flame pinned Chang and his men to the ground. Endless, devastating fire — it seemed that it could go on till daybreak without letting up for an instant. If Chang had ordered the men to advance they would not have hesitated. But would that have been any solution?

The attack was impeded. Chang heard Sung Chan-fang mutter a few words, blurred and indistinct from where he lay in a crater to Chang's right front. Soon a fighter, a bangalore torpedo in his hands, ran forward from crater to crater. But just as he leaped out of the third crater he suddenly straightened up and then his legs gave way under him. Forcing himself to his feet, he flung the bangalore torpedo at the enemy pill-box. The distance, however, was too great. It exploded in front of the pill-box. There was a momentary lull in the enemy's fire, and all our men made use of it to creep a metre or so nearer.

Another soldier from the 1st Team dashed out with a bangalore torpedo; but he fell immediately he left the crater, never to move again.

In the glaring light of the flares Sung Chan-fang, the 2nd Platoon Leader, was seen scrambling out of the crater. He was also carrying a bangalore torpedo, his body bent under the weight as he went up the slope. Suddenly he fell flat at a spot a little farther from the first wounded man. Chang knew in his heart that the 2nd Platoon Leader had been hit, but he hoped against hope that he had only flung himself down. This was the third attempt. If the enemy pill-box could not be put out of action quickly it would make things extremely difficult for the second and third groups who were following behind.

Sung dragged himself on and heaved the bangalore torpedo at the enemy. But it too fell short. Then he pitched in several hand-grenades and hand-mines which succeeded in silencing two of the enemy machine-guns; but the fire was still heavy. Sung lifted up his head and edged forward inch by inch.

"Lin Mao-tien, draw their fire on us!" ordered Chang when he noticed the tremendous difficulty with which Sung Chan-fang was creeping forward.

When Lin's machine-gun stuttered into life and the enemy swung a bazooka and a heavy machine-gun round to meet the challenge. A criss-cross of fire raked the air above Sung as he wriggled on, flat to the ground. But he kept crawling on. Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly. So slowly that it was difficult for anyone to believe that he would ever reach his objective.

As Chang watched, a cold sweat trickled down his goose-pimpled flesh. He could no longer hear the bullets whizzing past. His whole being was concentrated on the

comrade out front, who, at any moment, might die — and upon whom depended the outcome of this attack.

Gradually, Sung moved forward, forward. . . . When he was about four or five steps away Sung, raising himself with an astonishing effort, hurled his last remaining hand-mine. From the awkward way he threw the hand-mine and the way he slid to the ground again it was evident that quite a few bullets had found their mark in his body, his arms. . . . Obviously, he was hardly able to move a step forward.

Following the explosion, the guns in the enemy pill-box fell silent. Sung twisted round under the light of the flares to glance at Chang and the others who were by now advancing quickly. A surprising quiet had fallen over the hilltop and as the men stumbled forward their movements could be clearly heard.

The silence was suddenly shattered as a heavy machine-gun unexpectedly began to fire again from the pill-box. Sung saw someone fall. He cursed loudly and, propelled by a force from some unknown source, sprang to his feet, tottered, made for the aperture and flung his body against it, blocking the fire. Chang rushed up the incline and tossed a grenade into the pill-box as those behind him advanced, cheering wildly.

Close to this pill-box were three more in a row; but being lower down, they were easily taken with grenades and hand-mines alone. Grenades were showered down on them — Lin Mao-tien laid aside his machine-gun to join in, a curse escaping his lips each time he raised his arm.

Amidst the flashes of light the forces from the rear moved forward through the position, where explosions still rent the air. A radio operator, his portable radio

looking like an army pack on his back, yelled into the microphone as he staggered on:

“Shenyang — Shenyang — We have arrived Canton —”

In the rear came men carrying bazookas, heavy machine-guns, recoilless guns . . . all proceeded at a brisk pace.

Enemy mortars cracked into action and in the light of a spluttering flare a man was seen to stumble and fall. He was a tall man, and he held a pistol in his hand.

“Commander!” someone shouted as he went over, intending to help him up.

“Rejoin your company. Quick! — I can manage.”

He rose to his feet and called out: “Messenger, see if you can find Chang Wen-kuei.”

“I’m here,” answered Chang. As he hurried a few steps forward he found it was no other than the battalion political director, Lu An-kuo. But from his voice, hoarse from shouting, it was hard to tell who he was.

“Ah! — The Ninth Company will be moving on. You will remain here and get things organized for the battle tomorrow. I’ll be staying here with you.”

“Right — But aren’t you . . . ?”

“No. I’m all right. Just shook me up a bit — The speed’s terrific. See! They’re engaging the enemy with grenades on the forward position now.”

On the hilltop of the forward position flames blazed up. The counter-attack was nearing its end.

Another short-handed platoon was assigned to Chang Wen-kuei’s company for the task of defending the hilltop.

Chang led the battalion political director to the spot where Sung Chan-fang had died. He carried Sung’s body into the shelter. With the help of his flashlight he saw that the front of Sung’s jacket was a burnt and blackened mess; but his face, now pale and dust-covered, had a serene

look. His full lips were clamped tightly together and his eyes were half open. Chang took out his handkerchief and wiped the dust from his dead comrade's face. His mind went back to the time, not too long before, when Sung had been speaking to him about the Soviet film *An Ordinary Soldier*.

"Company Commander, to die like Matorosov would be a really glorious death."

"Yes," Chang had replied, "but we must live to see our victory."

It had only been a film then, but now — now it was a fierce battle.

Aware of what was going on in Chang's mind, Lu An-kuo, the battalion political director, asked:

"Was he a Party member?"

"He was in the Youth League," answered Chang, glancing up from his squatting position. As he looked up he saw a deep gash on Lu An-kuo's forehead.

"Political Director, you're hurt!"

Lu raised a hand to the wound.

"It's nothing. Must've been a piece of flying rock — Did he ever say anything to you about joining the Party?"

"Yes, he did. Right before we put in the attack. Wang Hung-yuan and myself were the only members of the Party branch present at the time, and we were going to consider his application as soon as the battle was over."

"Take it up right away."

"Very good. I'll see to it immediately."

Chang stood up and started to bandage the political director's forehead.

"I'm thinking of burying him here beside this rock," he said. "Then we'll always remember how this position was taken."

"Good."

Chang ordered two soldiers to dig a grave near the rock, in a spot where neither shell nor bomb was likely to disturb it. Sung's body was shrouded in a quilt brought over from the tunnel and lowered into the grave. Then, after the earth was firmly trampled down, Chang and the battalion political director turned back and headed for the tunnel.

#### CHAPTER IV

In defence of the ravaged earth on this hilltop position, in defence of the entire front line of the Chinese and Korean people's armies, and in defence of the justice and peace of humanity, the troops carried on this fierce battle — a battle unparalleled in history.

Since the fighting had begun, enemy artillery had poured tens of thousands of shells on to the few hilltops in the area of less than four square kilometres which made up the position. The earth had been churned up over and over again, the rocks had been pulverized, and the few peaks had been lowered by several metres. If one had taken up a handful of the powdered earth it would have been difficult to tell which was there in the greatest proportion — stone or steel.

After our men had recaptured the position that first night, it had changed hands three times within five days. By day, the enemy would throw in whole regiments and battalions and at a cost of thousands killed or wounded would succeed in becoming the temporary masters. But

by night our shock teams would drive them back after bloody fightings. On the bald peaks they hurtled back dozens of enemy assaults and held out until they were forced to withdraw to the tunnel.

Nominally, there were four companies in the tunnel; but in actuality there was less than thirty men. The bandage on the battalion political director's head was grimy with the smoke of five days of fighting. He had cut several slits in the band of his cap, enabling him to pull it further down on his head; but the blood-crusting bandage still peeped out from underneath. An empty wooden flour box served as his only "desk", and its meagre space was almost completely taken up by his accoutrements — an oil lamp, registers (listing the names of Party members, Youth League members, cadres, ordinary soldiers, and wounded), an empty mug, a cigarette case, and a rather ponderous-looking diary. Lu An-kuo sat with his legs crossed, and although he was as exhausted as anyone else in the tunnel, his appearance gave no hint of it. His back was straight, his eyes reflected a mental calm and confidence, and his cracked lips were set determinedly together.

He, and he alone, knew the truth: the situation in the tunnel was critical. The regimental commander had just told him over the radio that the see-saw battle for the surface position marked the termination of one stage, and that the enemy's strength had been seriously weakened. In the rear, he had said, our forces were being massed, artillery was being concentrated, and munitions were being brought in — all in preparation for a final counter-offensive. Meanwhile, he had instructed Lu, the tunnel must be held. It would serve as the base for the final offensive.

And what of conditions in the tunnel? The water supply was completely exhausted; the seriously wounded groaned with pain; the "active" list consisted of twenty-odd men, the lightly wounded included; they were completely cut off from the rear; and the enemy would surely think of every possible way to try to destroy the tunnel. These problems weighed heavily on the mind of this member of the regimental Party committee, Lu An-kuo. True, he reflected, the higher command could still be contacted by radio — but, trapped as they were under the feet of the enemy, the distance seemed as that to the end of the earth. How many more of these long days of tribulation did he have to go through?

Chang Wen-kuei came over and sat down beside Lu. "Political Director, are we putting in a counter-attack tonight? I'll get the shock teams organized."

"No," answered Lu, shaking his head, "not for the time being. We'll fight from the tunnel mouth."

"But when will we counter-attack? Tomorrow? The day after?"

Lu sat up and then after a pause replied:

"We have to hold on here for a long time."

Noticing Chang's look of uncertainty, Lu continued:

"It'll be necessary for us to hold the tunnel for a considerably long time. You have doubts about the possibility of this?"

"No, but — but what's it all about?"

Lu went on to explain the new development of the battle to Chang: "There must be changes in the way of fighting. Our forces are being massed in the rear for a decisive blow. We must hold the tunnel to the last. There are a lot of difficulties, but they can be surmounted."

“But right now — ”

“Right now we’ll have to reorganize our units and brief the men on the new developments, and explain everything in detail. We’ll call a Party meeting immediately.”

Quiet and orderly, the men sat down in front of the Party flag and a large picture of Chairman Mao, each man clutching a weapon. Many of the Party members were wounded, with bandaged shoulders, hands and heads. The sprigs of maple in the two vases, completely wilted and withered now, were still there.

Lu spoke in the capacity of a member of the regimental Party committee, because the men present came from several different battalions.

“As a representative of the Chinese Communist Party Committee of ××× Regiment, I hereby announce the establishment of Number 1 Tunnel Party Branch. . . .”

He paused to run his tongue over his cracked lips, and his steady, penetrating eyes swept over his listeners. Then he gave an elucidative account of the situation, tasks and problems facing them.

“ . . . So at present, comrades, we are like a nail which pins the enemy down to the position. They can neither move forward, nor back. Now we’ll let them announce their ‘victory’. As one might do when catching a mad dog, we will first wear them down, and then — then we will deliver the death blow! We will teach them that even greater military force cannot force us to yield one inch of ground. We will expose to the world to ridicule what they have bragged and shatter their dream of military ‘victory’. However, everything will depend on whether or not we can remain in possession of the tunnel — Whether or not we can stay on our feet at the spot which stands right in the heart of our enemy. Comrades,

our Party branch is facing formidable difficulties, and every Party member will have to undergo the most exacting and rigorous of tests, but the tunnel must be held as long as there’s a breath of life left in any of us! Remember, we are not alone. Our whole army is with us! Our whole motherland is with us! . . .”

When the meeting ended, Lu briefed all officers of company level on the mission. Chang Wen-kuei was assigned as “commanding officer” of Tunnel “A”, with the responsibility for all tasks concerning attack and defence of the entrance. Wang Hung-yuan, assistant political instructor, was made the “hospital director”, responsible for the wounded men in the tunnel. Lu himself became the “political commissar” of Tunnel “A”, and, concurrently, the plenipotentiary of the regimental Party committee, taking over-all charge of the tunnel. The other two assistant company commanders became mobile officers. After he had made the assignments, he said:

“Now, let’s not be so tensed up, eh! Brighten up. Be cheerful. It’ll add much to the men’s morale.”

After a visit to the wounded men Lu returned to his “desk” and noticed the young radio operator busily binding a hand-grenade to his radio. Lu sensed immediately what was in the youth’s mind, but he questioned him about it in a deliberately severe tone.

“What are you up to there?”

“Haven’t we been ordered to hold the tunnel to the last man?” the operator answered solemnly and resolutely. “If my number’s up then I’m going to blow my radio to bits. Don’t want the enemy to get it.”

“That your only reason?”

"Yes, Political Director," answered the boy as he continued to wind the cord round the radio. Watching the youngster's naive conduct, he knew that this attitude of resoluteness was prevalent throughout the tunnel and he felt his heart go out to him.

"Don't be silly," said Lu in a tone which mixed derision and concern. "Why, with so many of us here, how could the enemy ever get in? Take that grenade off. I can guarantee that your radio will come to no harm."

The radio operator glanced up at Lu, uncertainty written all over his face.

"Take it off!" ordered Lu. "There'll be a sorry mess if it goes off accidentally, eh! — You kids!"

Smitten by the political director's carefree manner, the operator laughed and began to undo the cord.

The men in the tunnel were divided into four squads which, in composition, roughly conformed to the companies they had had before. A Party group was set up in each squad, and Youth League members were to be allowed to attend Party group meetings. Everything was prepared for the struggles which lay ahead.

Chang Wen-kuei transferred his "command post" to a spot just inside the tunnel entrance. His seat was an empty hand-grenade case covered with an old jacket, and he sat there quietly waiting, his loaded pistol at his side. Nearby, a special radio operator sat ready, microphone in hand. He was on a direct channel to the artillery unit.

Lin Mao-tien had one machine-gun set up at the entrance guarded with sandbags, and another, with a fully loaded magazine affixed, lying nearby. His old companion, Liu Tsai-hsueh, sat next to two cases of primed

grenades and a stack of bangalore torpedoes. He had three submachine-guns at his disposal.

"Section Leader."

Ever since the night of the counter-attack, Liu Tsai-hsueh had been addressing Lin Mao-tien as "Heavy Weapons Section Leader", and Lin had now grown more or less accustomed to the title.

"Um? What d'you want now?"

"Well, I've been thinking that we two ought to cooperate more. I don't think we'll be getting any of the *Chien Chin* brand for the next four or five days, so why don't we both sparingly use the tobacco we have. If you give me what you have left over, I'll pay you back twice as much later on. Anyway, being without a smoke doesn't bother you much."

"Humph! — Let's talk about it later."

"I tell you, if you are a smoker and have no tobacco it can really get you down. During the fifth campaign I even smoked tree bark and grass — The taste's still in my mouth. No, just can't get along without a smoke. Why, I've heard of people smoking even cotton wool and paper!"

"Pooh! I've never heard of any such thing."

"Huh! What's the matter with you? I can smell the gunpowder on your breath! All right, if you don't want to talk about that, let's talk about something else."

Before another word could be said, five or six hand-grenades exploded in quick succession in and around the mouth of the tunnel.

"Call for artillery!" rapped out Chang Wen-kuei.

The operator's simple request — "Hammer the roof!" — was speedily complied with and the shells began to whine down overhead. The enemy were either killed or fright-

ened off—no one could see the actual results—but, anyway, no more grenades were thrown.

Lin wiped the dust from his machine-gun.

"Swine!" he snarled. "What good do they think their grenades will do them!"

"They just came to 'check sentries'," joked Liu. "Afraid we'd both fall asleep. Br-rr-ump! Sounds like the water when you're boiling meat dumplings—Say, we haven't had meat dumplings for a month o' Sundays."

"Oh, put a sock in it, huh!" Lin said impatiently. "Keep an eye on the enemy. Just my stinking luck to have you here. There's no end to your drivel."

"All right. I won't let out a peep. We'll sit here like a couple of clay statues."

A green helmet suddenly popped up and down behind the mound of earth not far from the tunnel entrance.

"Hey!" whispered Liu, now unable to maintain his promised silence. "Did you see what I saw, 'Section Leader'?"

"Don't flap. I'll take care of him."

Again the helmet was seen bobbing up. An American soldier moved out, carrying a large pack of explosive. He ran a few quick steps, flung himself to the ground, and then crawled forward, his head pushing the pack of explosive in front, obviously using it as cover.

Liu chuckled and called to Chang Wen-kuei in a low voice:

"Company Commander, come over and see what he's up to now."

As Chang walked over, Lin fired a short burst, aiming at the enemy soldier's posterior which could be seen projecting over the pack of explosive.

An agonized "Ah-a-a-a!" followed, accompanied by the threshing of arms and legs. Some minutes later another American soldier crawled out and began to pull the other man away by the legs.

"Hold it, Lin Mao-tien," said Chang enthusiastically as he drew his pistol from its holster. "I'll see to this one."

Chang fired one shot at the second enemy soldier. He jerked and keeled over, the bullet lodged in his brain. As the other one tried to roll off to safety Lin put a bullet straight through his steel helmet.

"That's the best way to deal with those swine," Lin said as he turned to Liu. "During the movement for sniping practice some time ago our cultural instructor commented that this method was 'Getting two birds with the one stone!'"

A harsh, scratching sound was suddenly heard outside. "Lin Mao-tien, listen!—What's that?"

Lin merely waved his hand, bidding silence. Seconds passed, and soon a roll of barbed wire slowly descended in front of the tunnel entrance. But as it was too big and since part of it was entangled in a tree stump, it failed to lodge itself in the entrance.

"Ho! They're trying to plug us up. Let me fix 'em, Company Commander."

So saying, and without waiting to explain to Chang, Liu picked up a bangalore torpedo and spurred forward. He pushed the bangalore torpedo into the coil of wire, released the fuse, and hurried back into the tunnel.

The enemy barrier disappeared in a tremendous roar, and pieces of twisted wire showered down into the dust at the entrance.

"Damned idiots," sneered Liu, gasping for breath, "damned idiots."

Three more hand-grenade assaults followed. Each time, the enemy threw in a dozen or so grenades from a respectable distance and then took to their heels.

Evening was fast approaching when one of the assistant company commanders went to relieve Chang with the message that the political director wished to speak to him.

Chang went to see Lu An-kuo and gave an animated account of the afternoon's events:

". . . So, in all, they made six attempts. But not once did they succeed in getting close to the entrance."

Lu listened unsmilingly, not giving one word of commendation.

"Only six attempts? Not enough, you think?"

"No, it isn't that," Chang thought Lu's words implied that they had achieved very little. "You see, we only managed to kill two of the enemy."

"Um!— You miss my point," said Lu quietly. "Six attempts in the few hours of one afternoon — If that continues, it wouldn't take too many grenades to pile up a sufficient amount of earth at the entrance to bury us in here. Further, they're sure to think up some other methods to try and destroy us — The regimental commander has ordered that a small raiding party be sent out tonight. Even if we only succeed in knocking out one pill-box, killing off a few of the enemy, or throwing a few grenades around, that'll still be all right. We must fight outside the tunnel, not allowing them any breathing space in which to consider the question of our destruction."

"Good!"

Chang was excited about the idea and said entreatingly: "Let me go! All right?"

"H'm!— I don't think so. After all, you are the military commander of the tunnel — "

Here he paused, and Chang Wen-kuei waited impatiently for him to continue.

"Well, for the first raid it'll be all right for you to lead the party. It'll give the men more confidence after they've seen you in action, eh!"

"Good. I'll get a party together right away," said Chang as he stood up to leave.

"There's no great hurry. It's only six o'clock. Set out after ten. The enemy aren't so watchful then — You'd better first think over who you're going to take!"

Chang jotted down three names on a piece of paper, two of which were Chang himself and Wang Chi-pao, the messenger. He stopped for a moment, and then quickly wrote a fourth name: Liu Tsai-hsueh.

"Liu Tsai-hsueh's wounded, isn't he? Can he go?"

"He's as brave as they come — Let him go on the first one."

"Well, well," laughed Lu, "you're a real sectarian. These four men are all from your own company."

"I . . . er . . . I don't know the other men very well," explained Chang, flushing with embarrassment.

"Fine. That's settled then. Now, you'd better get a couple of hours' sleep. I'll call you about nine. Just look at your eyes — bloodshot to blazes! It must be days since you slept last."

"Isn't it the same with you?"

"Hah! I'm the 'political commissar', and can never find time for sleep. Now, sleep! That's an order."



"All right," replied Chang as he turned to go, "I will lie down for a while."

"Hold it! Just lie down here. I can make sure you sleep then."

Only when he laid his head on the political director's leather satchel did Chang realize how tired he was. It was the first time he had lain on a bed in seven days, and experiencing a sudden feeling of pressure on his eyes and a spinning sensation in his head, he went off to sleep.

When his eyes blinked open again he noticed that an old coat had been flung over him. Feeling as though he had been asleep for several hours, he stretched his legs and, too lazy to look at the watch on his wrist, called to Lu who was busily writing at the wooden flour box.

"Political Director, is it time yet?"

"Why, you've only been lying there for ten minutes!" replied Lu, glancing at his watch. "Sleep! Don't bother about the time. I'll call you!"

"Oh, all right," came the reply.

Chang turned over and was soon asleep again.

At eight o'clock, Chang Wen-kuei woke up for the fourth time. This time his patience was worn out; he sat up and complained: "It's hopeless. I can't sleep any longer. An hour seems like a year."

Now he was aware of the pressure of some hard object under him which dug into his back. Fumbling behind, he laughed as his fingers fell on Lu's pistol.

"What are you laughing about?" asked Lu looking up from his work.

"See what I've been sleeping on! And I wasn't even aware of it!"

"If I had your chance, I could sleep on the edge of a knife for two days running! — All right, if you don't want

to sleep you can sit in here for the next half hour. Don't wake the other three up yet."

Lu continued with his writing.

"Is that a diary you're writing up, Political Director?" asked Chang.

"Well. It is a diary, and yet it isn't a diary."

Chang didn't ask any more questions. Noticing the political director's red and swollen eyes, his cracked lips, the bandage which stuck out from underneath the battered cap, and listening to the scratching of Lu's pen as he wrote, Chang thought to himself: Indefatigable, that's what he is — If he wasn't here, how could I hold on all alone?

At nine o'clock Chang called the other three men and briefed them on the mission. Every man carried a supply of hand-grenades and hand-mines. Besides, Chang and Liu each carried a submachine-gun. Chang secured the equipment on his body and then rolled over on the floor.

"Right," he said as he got up, "each man will do the same. We've got to make sure there's no telltale noise when we move."

When Liu Tsai-hsueh's turn came his hand-grenades clacked together and Chang told him to rearrange them.

"Aw! They won't hear anything anyway," answered Liu inadvertently.

"Never mind whether they'll hear anything or not. You fix 'em properly, eh!"

"Oh — All right then."

Everything in order, Liu went back to his place and sat down on the mat. Someone nudged his arm, and a freshly-rolled cigarette was held out to him. It was Lin Mao-tien.

"Here, smoke this — Just my lousy luck that I can't go too."

"Look, Lin Mao-tien" — he refrained from using "Section Leader" on this occasion — "you and your machine-gun will have to guard the entrance — Anyway, there'll be plenty more chances."

Liu lit the cigarette and, once he drew on it, his throat felt parched with an unquenchable thirst. But, unwilling to offend Lin, he smoked it nevertheless.

At ten o'clock, Lu walked with the four men to the tunnel entrance and shook hands with each one. Lin Mao-tien followed behind, standing to one side near the barricade and watching as Liu walked out into the darkness.

Once clear of the tunnel the four men crawled off in two different directions. As Chang's chest touched the ground the thought flashed into his mind: Ah! Back on the old position again — Seems like years since I was here last.

Now his eyes were fixed on the path leading to the enemy pill-box ahead. Jagged pieces of steel and rock tore at his knees and elbows, and more than once he had to skirt around the remains of some wrecked weapon. He crawled on with bated breath and now and then would pause to look over towards Liu Tsai-hsueh. There, the two dark shapes could be seen slowly advancing. Afraid that an unexpected flare might suddenly shoot up, Chang listened attentively for the report of a Very pistol.

A deathlike silence prevailed, broken only at intervals by the odd shell which whined above. Chang Wen-kuei could now see the rough outline of the sandbags which surrounded the enemy pill-box. From inside came the sound of talking and sighing. Moving a little way for-

ward, he was able to hear the language being spoken — it was Korean. Chang was not particular about who the enemy were, American troops or puppet troops. He moved a step or so nearer and lobbed two hand-mines into the pill-box. At almost the same moment, explosions were heard at Liu Tsai-hsueh's objective.

Chang was thinking of returning to the tunnel when he noticed two carbines lying on top of the sandbags. Pretty well smashed up, he said to himself. Anyway, I'll take 'em back. Good effect on the men's morale. He snatched the carbines and scrambled back to the tunnel entrance with the other man.

Enemy machine-guns opened up, blazing away wildly, and clusters of incandescent flares lit up the sky. Lu An-kuo, waiting at the mouth of the tunnel, met only Chang and the other fighter. Wang Chi-pao and Liu Tsai-hsueh had not yet returned.

"What's happened to the other two?" asked Lu.

"They'll be here in a minute," answered Chang. "They did the job all right. Be here soon."

An interminable thirty seconds elapsed, but there was still no sign of them. Chang grew worried.

"First time we go out, and this has to happen!"

"Wait a bit longer," said Lu consolingly. "Nothing can happen to them."

Lin Mao-tien, remaining behind the sandbags, seemed more worried than his superiors; he could no longer withhold his reproof.

"Those two! — What the hell can they be up to? I bet it's that Liu Tsai-hsueh trying to pull some of his fancy tricks again!"

Another half minute or so went by, and then someone was heard approaching. Three figures emerged out of

the darkness—and the two in front seemed to be holding hands! Wang Chi-pao was the first to enter the tunnel. He panted as he spoke, his childlike voice pitched high with excitement.

“At last — We’ve made it — Commander, we’ve brought a live one for you.”

Only then did Chang realize they had captured a prisoner.

“Where’s Liu Tsai-hsueh?” asked Lin with anxiety.

Right at this moment, Liu strode into the tunnel.

“Whew!” he grinned. “Quite a tough job. This fellow here slowed us down to a snail’s pace. One pushing him, and one dragging him.”

Lin took the submachine-gun from Liu and his voice had a happy ring.

“Liu Tsai-hsueh — You! — We didn’t know where you’d got to — Worrying us like that!”

They walked back into the tunnel and Lu called to the other men, as if announcing the victory of a battle.

“Listen, comrades! — Our ‘commanding officer’ and three other men have destroyed two enemy pill-boxes, caught one prisoner, and captured two rifles.”

Loud cheering burst out as he held the carbines aloft (the stocks of both had been snapped off). Someone wound up the gramophone, and the song boomed out:

“Bravely — Vigorously —”

Frightened out of his wits at the sight of this group of men who, with smoke-blackened faces and tattered uniforms, were glorying in triumph, the captive began to sob.

“Humph!” muttered Wang Chi-pao, looking askance at the weeping captive. “A real sissy. What’re you crying about, eh? We Volunteers don’t mistreat our prisoners.”

But the prisoner continued to weep. The four men who had just returned victoriously from the raid sat down beside the battalion political director. Liu Tsai-hsueh accepted the cigarette which Lu offered him. He looked at it, and remarked: “*Ta Sheng Chan!* — Ho! Real officer’s mess!”

He classed all machine-made cigarettes as “officer’s mess”, and all hand-made ones as “general mess”. Such a treat was enough to throw him into raptures of delight.

He puffed away as he spoke.

“. . . Wang Chi-pao and I popped in a few grenades. Then we heard this one crying in the pill-box. At first, I was for letting him have another one, but it sounded exactly like some Korean kid crying in there. We dragged him out. On the way back, Wang had to keep one hand clamped over the kid’s mouth as he pulled him along. I pushed from behind, watching our rear at the same time. Every time bullets started their mad buzzing the prisoner just froze to the ground.”

Liu’s tone revealed his satisfaction with the night’s work, and his jocular manner kept the other men laughing.

“Strange though,” Liu went on, “we’re supposed to be fighting Yankees, but what do we find? — Puppets!” He glanced at the prisoner. “Look at him. Still crying.”

Lu took a good look at the prisoner — His face was thin and pallid, and he appeared to be no more than about sixteen — and then spoke to the radio operator:

“Report the results of the engagement to regimental headquarters — Two enemy pill-boxes destroyed, one prisoner taken, two rifles captured, and no casualties suffered.”

To Lu’s question of whether or not anyone in the tunnel could speak Korean, one of the assistant company com-

manders replied: "Yes, there's a man in my company who's from the Korean national minority in the Northeast. He's wounded though."

The soldier — one of his hands was bandaged — was called over, and Lu asked him to interpret his questions.

"Find out his name and unit, and how many men they have."

After speaking to the prisoner for some time in a language none of the others could understand, the acting interpreter gave his reply.

"All he knows is that he belongs to the Second Squad of the Sixth Company. He's not even sure which regiment he's in. Says he was still in the recruit depot at Fusan until the day before yesterday, and was only sent over here last night, and today he's a prisoner. He's only fifteen. Claims that there's only one company of puppet troops guarding the position on the hilltop. About a hundred Yankee devils — 'counter-attack troops' he calls them — are dug in in the gully to our south."

Lu noted down the details of the prisoner's statement.

"Ask him what the percentage of new troops is in his company."

After questioning the prisoner, the wounded man replied: "He says that everyone's new in his squad except their squad leader. All of the men are either over forty or in their early teens, and none of them have ever been in battle before."

"Right," said Lu, "take him away. Tell him he won't be harmed; but that he'll have to grin and bear it like the rest of us in here."

"Well," snorted Lu after the prisoner had left, "so Syngman Rhee's drawing in even the old men and kids as cannon fodder for the Yankees — Operator, report the

prisoner's statement in full to regiment; and tell artillery to shell that gully to the south. If the Yankees like that 'safe' spot so much, we can easily arrange to have them take up permanent residence!"

When the distant rumble of the artillery was heard, Lu rose, stretched, and then rubbed his sleepy eyes with the backs of his hands.

"Political Director, the regimental commander wishes to speak to you personally."

The operator turned up the volume, removed the ear-phones and handed them to Lu. As he bent over the radio, Lu's eyes shone happily, and every now and then he would smile and nod, as though the regimental commander was sitting opposite him. After a few minutes, he spoke into the microphone:

"Yes, everything's understood — All our comrades here send you their regards — Well, you've had a hard job."

Lu turned to Chang Wen-kuei.

"Regiment has assigned two mountain artillery pieces and three heavy mortars to protect the tunnel entrance. They'll drop shells in at irregular intervals. The regimental commander has announced merits for the four of you, and commended us on our success and for the important information we got from the prisoner. He also mentioned that the divisional commander sends us his best wishes."

"Was that the regimental commander himself speaking?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'd like to hear his voice again. Was he very hoarse?"

"Quite hoarse, but he seemed to be in extremely high spirits."

Lu went round to the various parts of the tunnel to announce the awards which the regimental commander had made. Then he turned to Chang Wen-kuei.

"We'll send out another raiding party before three o'clock. New men this time, eh! Every able-bodied man in the tunnel should be given a chance of having a crack at the enemy."

"Very good, a party will be on its way at three."

Chang looked down at his watch. It was already twelve o'clock.

Midnight! In the motherland, people were safely asleep. But there on the Korean battlefield the bitter and bloody struggle continued. For the men in the tunnel, there was no night, no day.

## CHAPTER V

Three days had passed since the withdrawal to the tunnel. The five artillery pieces which were protecting the tunnel kept up their incessant fire, but the enemy took advantage of every lull to shower the tunnel mouth with hand-grenades and packs of explosive. True, no one was hurt; but the loose earth and shattered stones which kept piling up ever higher meant another added task. Each time our artillery put to flight the enemy soldiers who had come to throw in the grenades, two men would go out and work with shovels to clear away the rubble. It became a regular procedure; and so dangerous was it to be in the open that scarcely a day passed when someone wasn't either killed or

wounded. So it went on—shovelling, shovelling, and more shovelling. The pile of earth and stones had reached such a height that nearly half of the entrance was blocked. To prevent the enemy rolling grenades down the sloping earth into the tunnel, it was decided to dig a small trench across the entrance.

That morning at about eleven o'clock the enemy again began to attack with hand-grenades. Chang Wen-kuei was about to send out men to dig when suddenly the rumble of heavy artillery was heard. The first thought that jumped to his mind was that it was our own artillery, but a glance outside showed that the main peak, where our men from battalion headquarters were dug in, was being furiously bombarded and a thick, black smoke almost hid the peak from view. To the right and left rear, on the two hills which the enemy had already taken, large numbers of enemy soldiers were moving around, bodies bent. Those in the gully to the right rear were assembled, all crouching on the ground, and Chang guessed that there must have been about a whole battalion of them.

Well, thought Chang, it looks as though this is meant for battalion headquarters. His immediate reaction was to radio for artillery to bombard the enemy already in close formation, but, on second thoughts, he hurried inside to see Lu An-kuo.

After having reported the situation to the political director, Chang made known his own plan, ending with:

"In this way I think we could wipe out the whole enemy battalion."

"Good. We'll do exactly that. Get the machine-gunners together now," responded Lu enthusiastically. "To co-operate with the artillery in smashing a whole bat-

talion would really be something for the men in the tunnel."

Chang returned to the tunnel entrance. With him were five light machine-gunners and one heavy machine-gunner. The heavy machine-gun which had lain unused for days was now set up on top of the barricade alongside two light machine-guns. The other three machine-guns were supported on the shoulders of three men behind the gunny-bag barricade. Cases of ammunition were piled up behind them, and every wounded man who could drag himself that far now sat loading up empty magazines. It had already become a rule in the tunnel: The task of reloading magazines is a duty to be carried out only by the wounded. It was well nigh impossible for any able-bodied man to even lay hands on an empty magazine. The wounded men formed themselves into two transport lines.

"Line up on your targets! Ready — "

The thought of annihilating a whole enemy battalion caused Chang's voice to waver with excitement. He called to the radio operator:

"Tell artillery to fire on Zone Seven and Zone Eight — Quick now!"

The first few shells — heavy mortars — fell a little to the front of where the enemy troops were gathered. Like maggots in a manure pile, they began to squirm in panic. Then, about a dozen shells fell squarely on target. Rifles and steel helmets, together with human bodies, spouted up into the air like water from a fountain.

"Fire!"

The six machine-guns spoke at once like a gust of wind raging out of the tunnel mouth, and the spent cartridges clinked musically against one another. Caught

between the artillery and the machine-guns, the enemy scrambled wildly, pushing and pulling one another like a group of crazed drunkards.

"Tell artillery to keep hammering 'em! Hit 'em! Hit 'em!" Chang screamed out, seeing the enemy's plight. He took over one of the light machine-guns himself, and the violent vibration seemed to relax and stimulate his muscles. Then the enemy began to fall back.

"Tell artillery to track them! Fire on Zone Four and Zone Six! Use more H.E.! Use more H.E.!" Chang yelled to the operator from behind the machine-gun.

Simultaneously, the six machine-guns converged to cut off the enemy's line of retreat, and enemy dead tumbled like water-melons down the slope into the ditches below.

"Ammo! Fresh mag! Quick!"

With lightning speed, the wounded men passed the magazines forward, and it soon became evident that the enemy's planned attack on the main peak of the battalion headquarters had been completely thwarted. Following this, however, the tunnel was subjected to a ferocious assault of enemy grenades. Clouds of smoke and dust enveloped the entrance, and Chang called out as he emptied his last magazine:

"We'll take a break for a while — Operator, ask artillery to clear these swine away from our door, eh!"

After the smoke had cleared, the only enemy troops that could be seen were the few who were dragging away their wounded.

"All other machine-guns will be moved back into the tunnel. Lin Mao-tien, you'll be responsible for clearing up the remnants out there."

Chang patted Lin's shoulder and wiped the perspiration from his own forehead as he spoke.

"Look, Company Commander! Each out there has one man dragging him — They look like stuck pigs — But there's one there, just one, who has two men carrying him! Must be an officer, or they wouldn't be so damned particular. I'll polish off that scum first. Let him go to direct the battles in the underworld!"

Out of curiosity Chang glanced at Lin's "target". The two enemy soldiers who were carrying the officer kept stumbling and falling in their panic to get away safely. Lin waited for them to fall, and then, before they were properly on their feet, he squeezed the trigger and they slumped to the ground. He smiled with satisfaction, and trained the machine-gun on a new target.

"Has the enemy pulled back yet?" asked Lu An-kuo as he walked up to the tunnel entrance.

"Ho! These six machine-guns have given them hell. Why, there's not more than a company left of their battalion!" replied Chang, beaming with delight.

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he saw the implication of what he had said. His face reddened, and he added: "Of course, the artillery was the main thing. One shell of H.E. can knock off dozens of them."

Lu gazed out and remained silent for some time. Chang was puzzled by his reticence.

"Chang Wen-kuei," he finally said, "you must keep yourself doubly on the alert now. The enemy are going to do everything in their power to get revenge. Be ready for instant action, because they don't like to lose something for nothing."

An hour passed, and then the enemy began to fire on the tunnel with chemical projectiles, 81 mm. mortars, and grenade launchers. Through the rifts in the smoke two platoons of enemy troops could be seen moving towards the tunnel. Meanwhile, our artillery fire followed.

Regardless of casualties, the enemy troops, under the eye of their team of "watch dogs", pressed on towards the tunnel entrance. They had even dug a position for rocket artillery about fifty metres from the tunnel entrance. Some bullets from the enemy carbines whined into the mouth of the tunnel. Meanwhile, our machine-guns and submachine-guns were meeting the challenge.

When the enemy barrage let up, their infantrymen came closer to the tunnel, and those carrying packs of explosive ran with hurried steps, bent under the weight. Chang spoke one word "Grenades!" and the hand-grenades flew out. Many of the enemy soldiers were killed, but others crept still closer. It was only a matter of minutes until one of them might succeed in getting near enough to threaten the tunnel with the explosive.

Some of the men at the entrance had been wounded. Several had been killed. Seeing that it was a matter of life or death, Chang snatched up a bangalore torpedo and ran towards the entrance. He had gone but a few steps when another soldier threw down his submachine-gun and pulled the bangalore torpedo from Chang's hands.

"Company Commander! —"

The soldier pushed Chang roughly down and ran outside.

In the deafening roar which followed both the enemy and their explosives were blown to smithereens; but as the soldier was on his way back to the tunnel the enemy

flung grenades at him from above and he was hit. He writhed on the ground for several seconds, and then, after more grenades had rained down, he lay still.

When our artillery began to fire again, one of the men in the tunnel dashed outside, emptied the magazine of his submachine-gun at the enemy above, and then dragged his dead comrade back into the tunnel. Chang hurried over and both men carried the body inside. Unable to remember the name of the man who had just given his life, Chang asked Liu Tsai-hsueh: "What squad was this man in?"

The answer came from another soldier who stood nearby.

"He belonged to our guard company."

That's right, Chang suddenly remembered, we've men from four different companies in the tunnel now! Here's this man, cares so much for an officer he hardly knows — But I myself? Seems I'm acting more or less differently towards those who aren't from my own company —

He lifted the dead hero in his arms and carried him into the interior of the tunnel, his head nodding regretfully as he went.

At about three in the afternoon the enemy again began to throw grenades. These grenades, however, exploded with only a muffled pop, and the black smoke which rolled into the tunnel had the pungent stench of sulphur.

"Sulphur bombs! Watch out!" shouted Chang Wen-kuei.

When the radio operator called for artillery support his voice had an unusual nervousness.

"Hammer quickly! — Hammer quickly! — Hammer quickly!"

The tunnel was soon filled with the black, yellowish smoke and the oil lamp became but an indistinct blur overhead. Lying flat on the ground, the men covered their mouths and noses with soapy towels which they had prepared beforehand.

Lin Mao-tien, still behind his machine-gun at the entrance, also had a soapy towel in his pocket; but he couldn't use it. If the enemy were to take advantage of the smoke to throw in explosive, there was no telling what the result might be.

The acrid fumes made his head throb painfully, as though it was being slowly inflated, and his throat felt as if he had swallowed a red-hot coal, but the machine-gun continued to fire non-stop. After he had emptied the magazine, Lin staggered dizzily, almost collapsing completely as he bent down to pick up the spare machine-gun lying nearby. However, he somehow managed, with all his might, to get it in place and open fire. His Number Two rapidly slipped in another magazine for him.

By the time the fourth magazine was clipped in, the smoke outside the tunnel was beginning to clear. Tears streamed from Lin's eyes, but he could make out the blurred shape of the body of an enemy soldier lying on top of the mound of earth. His head had been smashed to a pulp, his helmet had rolled off to one side, and his hands still clutched a pack of explosive.

Lin loosed several more bursts, but before the fourth magazine was empty something smacked him hard on the head and he fell back unconscious, face upwards. His Number Two jumped up and took over the machine-gun.

The men in the tunnel were fanning furiously with blankets and various articles of clothing, holding the wet



towels over their faces and coughing loudly. Gradually, as the smoke thinned, the light grew brighter.

Lin lay beside Chang Wen-kuei. His eyes had not yet opened, his jaws were clamped tightly together, and his breathing was dangerously feeble. The medical attendant had already administered the necessary medicines and had given him a heart stimulant.

Liu Tsai-hsueh squatted down beside his old companion and felt his hand. He then smoothed down Lin's uniform jacket and laid a hand on his forehead.

"If we had a wet towel to put on his head, it'd help," the medical attendant said quietly.

"Um — Except that we haven't seen a drop of water for the last three days," replied Liu in a tone of indignation.

"You — You think he'll get over it?" he asked.

"There's a chance."

The medical attendant held his hand under Lin's nose for a moment and then said: "His breathing's improving."

After some time Lin slowly opened his eyes and looked round.

"Liu Tsai-hsueh," he muttered faintly, "where are we?"

"In the tunnel. See, the company commander's here."

Chang Wen-kuei bent over and held Lin's hands in his own.

"Lin Mao-tien," he said, "can you see me? — No, don't say anything. Just lie here for a while and you'll be all right."

"Um-h'm! — I won't — won't speak. Company Commander, those devils — Did they pull back?"

"They did. You got that one very nicely. Now, keep quiet, eh! Close your eyes and try to rest."

Lin complied and closed his eyes, but kept on talking.

"No experience — No experience — If the enemy try that again there should be a man there to hold a towel over my nose and mouth — That'd do the trick."

Chang glanced round, and then nodded his head. He felt regret that he had not been there with a wet towel for him.

"Water!" gasped Lin. "My mouth — dry — can't stand it — If — if no water — Piss'll do — Liu Tsai-hsueh, get me some, huh! — Ugh! This thirst —"

Liu rose, really intending to search round for the urine. Chang looked up at him and shook his head in disapproval.

"All right, he'll look for some for you. Keep quiet now."

Chang then spoke to the medical attendant.

"Don't you have any medicine — some sort of harmless liquid, I mean — that he could have?"

"Nothing here at all," replied the medical attendant as he rummaged in his bag. Then, holding up half a tube of toothpaste, he said: "I'll give him some of this. It might help."

He squeezed a little of the toothpaste into Lin's mouth. Lin's eyes flickered open.

"Mmmm! Let's have a bit more, eh?"

Now Lin had completely come to and instantly he struggled to sit up. Both Chang and Liu helped him up.

"Feel better?" asked Liu.

"I'm all right — damned Yankee devils! — we'll even the scores up with you! — Company Commander, let me go out on the raid tonight. I'd like to see who's the toughest — us or them!"

"All right. But I think you'd better rest up for today. I'll definitely let you go tomorrow."

"I can't wait till tomorrow!" Lin retorted angrily. "Look what the devils have done to me! Can I wait another whole day? — If you don't let me, then I'll go myself. You can put me on a charge when I get back."

Liu Tsai-hsueh and Wang Chi-pao helped him away.

Just before it got dark, the enemy launched another attack on the tunnel. This time they used flame-throwers. Fearful of getting too close, they directed the jets of flame at the sides of the tunnel. The searing flame roared round the entrance, scorching the earth and sending pieces of red-hot rock and stone scuttling before it.

Chang's whole body was bathed in perspiration from the intense heat and his heart felt as if it was about to burst. Nevertheless, he rushed up to the entrance and joined the two other men in hurling the grenades.

"It's all right! Hold on, comrades, hold on! — Our artillery's started to fire. Hold on! — Let the devils have it! Fight on! — They've no other way to deal with us — Keep the machine-gun going! — Hold on! —"

Hold on. . . . Hold on. . . . Waves of heat swept into the tunnel and the temperature soared to steam-boiler proportions. Inside, the other men flung themselves flat on the damp ground.

"Hold on! — Hold on!" called the political director as he walked back and forth along the tunnel. "We'll be all right. They can't frighten us!"

Finally, in the face of hand-grenades and the artillery fire, the enemy withdrew. Chang and the two other men were sprawled unconscious on the ground. Chang felt as though a thousand blazing braziers were closing in on him. Not more fire! Not more fire! his delirious brain com-

manded him to shout; but his vocal chords refused to function. It seemed that some invisible hand was throttling him. With great effort, he opened his eyes, but no one was to be seen — Only the sun, which, to his deranged mind was but another gigantic fire. His mind swam. Again he was back in his childhood, tending the landlord's cattle. One of the cows had gone astray and couldn't be found. The landlord seized the switch from his hand and began to beat him. He cowered, writhed, twisted, but there was no escape. His whole body was ablaze. Fire! . . . Fire! . . .

Wang Chi-pao and Liu Tsai-hsueh lifted their delirious company commander and hurried to see Lu An-kuo.

"Political Director, our company commander —" started Wang Chi-pao, but his tearful sobs stifled the remainder of the sentence.

Somehow, Chang was pulled back from the brink of death and a few hours later he was almost his normal self again. At eight o'clock the same evening he sat with the political director going over the battle plan. Still weak and dizzy, he half leaned against the wall for support.

"Political Director, we must hit them really hard tonight. Let them think they can gas us with their sulphur bombs, or roast us with their flame-throwers, or, to say the least, that we're too weak to fight on. But they can expect more hard blows from us; they can expect three more 'dead-men's dug-outs' tonight!"

"All right, but we'll send the raiding party out much later than usual. That'll catch them unawares."

"Oh, yes — let Lin Mao-tien go this time. What do you say to it? He said that if I didn't agree to his going,

he'd go by himself, and I could put him on a charge when he came back."

As he spoke, Chang did his best to conceal his own desire to go out with the raiding party that night. Lu remained silent for sometime before he spoke.

"It's easy to understand how the men feel at present. They have intense hatred for the enemy! You too, I should think. Don't you feel like going out and getting a few of them with your own hands?"

"I certainly do, Political Director!— Can I go with the raiding party then?"

Chang's face brightened up and he sat erect, as though he was ready then and there to grapple with the enemy.

"Yes, you'd like to go," said Lu with a smile. "So would I. But this is no matter of personal revenge— It's revenge for all the men in the tunnel we're after. I'll agree to Lin Mao-tien being included, but I refuse to let you go. Carrying out raids is, of course, important; but the defence of the tunnel is even more important."

Chang didn't reply, and an anguished look came into his eyes.

"Have you noticed that the men have become silent today?" asked Lu. "Why, they never play the gramophone now, and no one ever sings or plays cards. This makes me feel more ill at ease than any sulphur bombs, and if it continues it's going to have a bad effect on the fighting spirit."

"Yes, I have noticed it, and there's no use trying to hide it—I myself have been growing more. . . . Well, more impatient."

"This problem will first have to be solved with the cadres, Party members, and Youth League members. It must be clearly understood that we are not waiting here

for death in the tunnel. What we're waiting for is victory! From now on, you and I will have to try and sing more, to crack more jokes— Right, you'd better go ahead now and get tonight's raiding party organized. And call a meeting of the Party branch right away, eh! That's all."

"Very good. Lin Mao-tien can go then?"

"Certainly. Let him be group leader."

For the men in Tunnel "A" each passing second brought new trials and tribulations, but not for one moment did their singing and laughter cease.

Chang had a mouth-organ, given to him by a girl in the art troupe at army headquarters. She had spent three days teaching him how to play the instrument and had extracted from him a solemn guarantee that he would "learn well and practise hard". On her return for a performance some time later, after listening to Chang's successful rendering of a few simple melodies, she had praised his "musical aptitude" and had talked encouragingly of his becoming "the musician of the company". For safe keeping the treasured mouth-organ had been put away, carefully wrapped in a square of white parachute silk, and in the fierce fighting of the last ten days or so it had been completely forgotten. Now Chang pulled it out of his haversack, and the first tune he attempted was *The East Is Red*. His tongue, stiff and numb, moved sluggishly and even he himself was struck by the uncertainty between the high and low notes. It isn't, he thought, as good as it used to be. If that girl was here now she'd be sure to give me a rap on the knuckles for backsliding! He tried again, this time with *The Dance of Youth*. How good it would be, he thought, if the art troupe was here to perform for us; but then, his thoughts turning to the enemy outside, he faltered and stopped.

His hand fell to his knee, clenching the mouth-organ tightly, and he sat silent for several minutes. Then, after a quick glance at the faces of the other men, he started to play again. No one could tell what the tune was supposed to be.

Blood oozed from his cracked lips — it had been five days since they had last tasted a drop of water — and stained the mouth-organ red, but he continued to play. He was almost too weak to speak, but he continued to play. Let the sound of our music be carried to our people at home! Let the sound of our music scare the guts out of the gangsters crawling on the position outside! The man in the tunnel had battled through an ordeal of blood and fire, but they were fighting on to victory.

Water! The water supplies had run out days ago. Even the water in their bodies seemed to have seeped away in the blistering heat of the enemy flame-throwers. True, a few tubes of toothpaste remained, but they were set aside for the wounded. Racked with thirst, the men could do nothing but stick their parched tongues on the moist and muddy walls of the tunnel. Even urine was out of the question — not one man in the tunnel could produce a drop. They were forced to fast too, for without water the dry hardtack couldn't be chewed or swallowed.

His eyes closed, Chang blew away on the mouth-organ. Liu Tsai-hsueh and Lin Mao-tien sat nearby over a game of cards. Liu had long since given up talking about tobacco — the thought of water now predominated.

"I can tell you, 'Section Leader', as soon as I get out of this tunnel I'll polish off two big jars of water — There! Ace o' Clubs — Beat that!"

"Humph!" retorted Lin, as he trumped the Ace with a Three of Hearts, "I've given up thinking of water. Only makes it worse."

"Just think, if our factories could make shells filled with water, then regiment could lob a few over. That'd put us straight, eh!"

Lin flared up angrily. The mere mention of the word "water" seemed to aggravate his thirst.

"Oh, quit harping on it, huh! If you let out even the first syllable of that word again, I'm chucking this game in."

"All right, all right. Keep your hair on! Going without water for a few days hasn't made your temper any better, has it?"

Although the word "water" was now taboo, Liu could think of nothing else. They played two more games and then Liu rose, saying: "'Section Leader', I'm going to see what can be done."

A few minutes later he came hurrying back with two handfuls of uncooked rice.

"Here," he said, pouring some of the rice grains into Lin's hand, "try this! It's just the job. Cools, fills, and quenches the thirst."

Lin gulped down three mouthfuls.

"Mmm!" he agreed, "it's great!" He offered some to Chang Wen-kuei, who, after a few trial grains, also started to munch the raw rice.

Liu forsook the card game and walked along the tunnel announcing his discovery.

"Comrades, try eating raw rice for your thirst! It tastes good and works wonders!"

This caused quite a stir and nearly everyone made a bee-line for the rice sacks. The medical attendant made

loud protests, saying that the uncooked rice would make them ill, but his remarks went unheeded. As if greatly offended, he marched indignantly off to see Lu An-kuo.

"Political Director, they won't listen to me. A man can die from eating uncooked rice."

With things as they were, could Lu stop the men eating the rice? He had to put him off by saying:

"All right. No one is to eat more than one handful. That's an order. See that it's carried out."

Water, water! The problem filled Lu's mind to the exclusion of everything else. He was, in fact, even worse off than the other men. Each and every day he had to attend meetings, ponder over the problems facing them, give talks, reports. . . . His lips were now parched, cracked, and almost completely numbed. Others could lick the moist walls or eat raw rice, but such small comforts were denied him. He held out doggedly, knowing that dozens of pairs of eyes were watching him and that he must set a good example.

Of course, the mud and raw rice could not really solve the problem; it could only temporarily fool mouths and stomachs.

"We've got to find a way out," Lu muttered to himself. He sent for Chang Wen-kuei.

"Chang Wen-kuei, we can manage everything else, but without water we won't last much longer. Is there water anywhere in the nearby gullies? If there is, we've got to get some, and we'll sacrifice our old skins for it if necessary!"

"Political Director, there's no water round here. Didn't you know? There was a water-hole —"

"A water-hole?" Lu quickly interjected. "Where?"

"Well, it's not really a water-hole — We started to dig a tunnel once down in the gully, and we'd gone over a metre before we realized that the place was too low. So, a small pit was left and during the heavy rains it filled up with water. Later on, the men used to wash their clothes there. Daresay it's all dried up by now."

"H'm! I think it might be worth a try. Even some muddy water would be better than nothing! Pick two men who know their way around and send them down there. I'll leave this for you to handle. If *it is* dried up, we'll have to ask the higher command to send men down here with something to quench the thirst. But that'd mean they'd have to pass right under the noses of the enemy for a kilometre or so, and they might do so at a cost of several lives without being able to reach us."

"True. Every single day we can hang on here means fewer casualties for the lads in the transport corps. But if the worst comes to the worst, we'll have to ask the higher command for help."

"Good. Now, don't let news of this leak out, eh! Otherwise, if it doesn't come off, some men will be disappointed round here."

Chang personally hunted round till he found an empty can. It had contained kerosene for the lamps, but had long been empty. He called Wang Chi-pao, the messenger, aside and handed the can to him.

"You remember that water-hole where we used to wash our clothes?"

"Water-hole? — Can't say I do," replied Wang after a moment's thought.

"Where we left off digging that tunnel."

"Oh, that! 'Course I remember."

"I want you to take this can and fetch some water from there. Even muddy water will do."

"Last time I was there, there was only a puddle of water left, and that's probably dried up by now. Anyway, I'll have a try. If our luck's in I'll bring some back."

Chang tied the can firmly to Wang's back and gave him a bowl to use as a ladle. Then, after deliberating for a few seconds, he instructed Liu Tsai-hsueh to get his submachine-gun and go with Wang to give him protective fire.

"If there's water," Chang impressed on them as they were at the tunnel entrance, "bring it back no matter what happens. Every man in the tunnel will be waiting for this can of water. Make sure the stopper's all the way in, eh!"

"Right."

Wang Chi-pao walked a few steps and then turned back.

"Company Commander," he said in a low tone. "I've two packs o' tobacco in my haversack. Go ahead and smoke it. I don't smoke anyway. Or let Liu Tsai-hsueh have it."

It was obvious that the youngster wished to say more. But he turned away abruptly.

"Me!" exclaimed Liu Tsai-hsueh, shaking his head. There's as much chance of me copping it as you! he thought. But he went on: "All right—Maybe I can't smoke now, but when this battle's over I'm going to open up a tobacco factory!"

As an enemy flare faded in the sky above, the two men slipped out of the tunnel and melted away into the night. After the stale air in the tunnel, which had reeked

of carbon-dioxide and powder fumes, Wang revelled in the cool breeze which fanned against his face.

With Liu at his heels, Wang crawled along for some distance towards the deserted tunnel and then stopped dead as more flares went up. The hilltop became as bright as day, even a needle would have been clearly visible. Wang hugged the ground, not moving a muscle, as the enemy machine-guns opened up. Bullets hissed over his head and peppered the earth a few inches from his face. Not far from where he lay there was a shell crater; if only he could creep over to take cover in it. No! he thought. I'll lie still and they might take me for a corpse. The least movement, and our chances of ever getting to the water-hole are shot!

Another enemy machine-gun rattled and a sharp, searing pain shot up Wang's right leg. Have I really been hit? he thought. This was his first wound since joining the Volunteers. In his mind's eye he pictured the other wounded men he had seen and his leg began to throb painfully. It felt like it was on fire. At this point, he really missed the tunnel. There he could have got good treatment for worse wounds than this; but here, under enemy fire, he could not move.

His trousers, soaked with blood, stuck to his flesh. Panic seized him. Will I ever get back to the tunnel alive? Will I ever see the company commander again? Will I be able to get water for my comrades who are dying of thirst? They're waiting for me now in the tunnel, eating raw rice, licking the clammy stone walls. . . . He bit down hard on his jacket sleeve and tried to squirm even closer to the ground.

After the flares had flickered out and the firing had ceased, Wang again began to crawl forward, but pain and

exhaustion slowed him down. Liu was right behind him, and he kept prodding Wang's foot and urging him to move faster. Unwilling to say anything about his wound, Wang gritted his teeth and crawled on. . . .

When they finally reached the unused pit, Wang plunged both hands into the muddy water. Then, overcome by a sudden spell of dizziness, he slumped to the ground.

"Young Wang! Young Wang!—What's up?" whispered Liu with anxiety through the darkness, shaking him. "Get a move on—Fill the can!"

"It's—It's nothing."

Wang raised himself, pulled the bowl from his pocket, and handed it to Liu.

"Here, you fill it. Mind you don't spill it down my neck, huh!"

Liu slung his gun over one shoulder, groped round with one hand for the small opening on the can, and then started to scoop up the muddy water. The puddle was so shallow that the enamel bowl grated on the rock bottom and less than half a bowl could be taken out at one time. Meanwhile, Wang stealthily opened up his field dressing and then started to rip his trousers down towards the wound. Hearing the noise, Liu paused for a moment and then asked: "Here, what're you doing?"

"Nothing."

The answer came through clenched teeth, and, sensing that something was amiss, Liu put the bowl down and reached out, saying: "Nothing? Then what are you tearing there?"

When he touched the field dressing and the sticky blood on Wang's hands, he jerked back in dismay.

"Where are you hit?" He was both indignant and anxious. "You silly kid. Why the blazes couldn't you have told me earlier?"

"Oh, it's nothing. I've been wounded on the thigh. Here, tie it up for me, will you?"

He handed the field dressing to Liu, and then with difficulty ripped the cloth from over the still bleeding wound.

"Tighter!" he groaned, as Liu pulled on the bandage. "It's a machine-gun bullet, not like the ordinary one—Feels like the damn thing's burst in there—Make it as tight as you can."

"Don't worry, eh! I'll have this can filled up in a tick, and once we're back the medic'll look after you. Hold on!"

After the bandage was in place, Liu said: "Let me have the can. I'll carry it back."

"No, I can manage."

"None o' that, now! You're wounded. I can crawl faster than you. We'll have to get the water back as quick as we can, won't we?"

Wang untied the can. Liu strapped it on his own back, and then, scooping up another half bowl of water, he drank it down greedily.

"Give me some too, Liu Tsai-hsueh. I'm dying of thirst."

"Not for you, lad," he said, pulling Wang away from the pit. "You can have boiled water after we get back. Do as I say now. Get going. Quick!"

Liu would have liked another drink himself, but he took no more.

The return journey was even more trying, as they had to go uphill. They moved side by side, and Liu, with

his submachine-gun clutched in one hand and the can of water on his back, helped Wang along.

The enemy machine-guns began to fire wildly again and they both rolled into a shell crater. When the shooting had stopped, they continued crawling forward; but Wang could hardly move. He was soaked in sweat, and his leg pained terribly. Liu had virtually to drag him on, inch by inch.

More flares lit up the sky and again the machine-guns let loose a deadly hail. A bullet smacked into the can and water started trickling down Liu's neck. Pain gnawed at his heart as he thought: "Damn it! You devils rob us of what we got after all that trouble!"

After the flares had died down, Liu tried to help Wang out of the crater. He found that he couldn't move him. Putting his mouth close to the boy's ear, he said in an undertone: "Come on, lad. Stick it out. We're nearly home."

Receiving no reply, he tugged on Wang's arm.

"Young Wang! — Does it hurt much?"

"Go on — without me," answered Wang, his voice barely audible. "I — hit again, my head and back. Go on! They need water in the tunnel —"

"Come on, I'll drag you."

"No, I can't move. Tell company commander, my mission's not carried out. Sorry, I've let the comrades in the tunnel down."

Wang's voice faded into nothingness. His hands grew cold and stiff. Using every ounce of his energy, Liu dragged the body forward for about twenty metres; but he couldn't keep that up. He laid the dead youngster in a shell crater, and crawled on alone.

Enemy flares were going up every few minutes. Glancing at his watch, Chang Wen-kuei made an estimate of the time it should take the two men to get to the water-hole.

He felt a cold shiver run down his spine when he heard the sound of machine-gun fire. And a short while later machine-guns were heard again.

They were due back at any minute; but there was still no sign of them. Twice Lu An-kuo came over for news, but the men had not returned. The thought that both of them might have been killed began to take shape in his mind.

At last! A solitary figure, a can tied to his back, crawled into the tunnel. Chang called out: "Young Wang, where's Liu Tsai-hsueh?"

"It isn't Young Wang. It's me. He was killed on the way back."

Then, after pausing for a moment, he said: "Company Commander, take my gun, will you?"

Chang took the weapon from Liu's hand, saying: "Get up, can't you. You don't have to stay there on all fours. You aren't wounded too, are you?"

"No. But a bullet got the can. If I stand up, the water's going to run out. It's been dribbling down my neck all the way back. It's a great loss!"

Two soldiers hurried over and untied the can, holding it horizontally. Gingerly, they carried it away, as though it was some fragile treasure that would shatter at a touch.

Liu stood up and then told the company commander how Wang had died. In conclusion he said:

"Just before he died, he asked me to tell you that he was sorry not to have completed the mission. Said he'd let the men down."



"Poor kid — He gave his life to get us water — What more could he have done? Liu Tsai-hsueh, if we can't hold this tunnel, it'll be us that's letting him down! — Where's his body?"

"Left him in a crater. Couldn't manage it — Company Commander, let me go and fetch him, eh? Here, let's have my submachine-gun and I'll go right now."

Chang didn't answer right away. Every single man in the tunnel was irreplaceable, and if Liu ventured out he might never return. But could he tell him not to go? Wang's body couldn't be left out there in the shell hole!

"Right, go then," he said finally, after reflection. "Here, take my pistol — It's handier. And be as quick as you can."

Liu accepted the pistol and left.

"Water! — Water's here!"

"Hah! Water!"

The men jostled round as the dark, muddy liquid was slowly poured out. It filled one metal ammunition case and half a wash basin.

Lips smacked and eyes lit up with longing, but no one attempted to take a drink.

The charcoal brazier, long out of use, was lit once more; and the singing of the water as it came to the boil was music to the men's ears. Someone put a record on the gramophone, and a new atmosphere filled the tunnel.

Liu was back with Wang's body before the water had boiled. Chang, who had been waiting at the entrance, took over the corpse in both arms and carried it back into the tunnel, slowly, as if it were a slumbering child.

The men stood up, took off their caps and stared mutely at Wang's face, which was still smeared with fresh blood. The gramophone was silenced, and the only sound in

the tunnel was the gurgling of the water on the fire. Still carrying the body, Chang walked stiffly up to the political director.

Lu An-kuo stepped out from behind his "desk", produced his handkerchief and carefully wiped the blood from Wang's face with it. He spoke in a deep voice:

"Don't feel sad, comrades. The enemy have done all they can to strangle the life out of us, but we mean to live on! For the sake of every one of us here, and for the sake of victory at Sangkumryung, Comrade Wang Chi-pao has sacrificed his life. We shall never forget him. We must hit back even harder at the enemy to avenge the death of Comrade Wang Chi-pao. Not a single drop of our blood is shed in vain. The harder things become, the more we are asked to give — the closer we are to final victory!"

Lu wrapped his overcoat tightly round Wang's body. Chang carried his dead comrade-in-arms who had always kept so close to his side into the deepest recesses of the tunnel.

After the water was boiled, each squad came for its share. One mouthful for everyone, three for every casualty. The men insisted that the political director and the company commander share half a bowl between them. Thirsty enough to have drunk down every drop in one gulp, Lu took but one mouthful and handed the rest to Chang. He, in turn, only took one mouthful. Ah! It was brackish and it was foul, but how welcome it was!

Lu offered what was left to the radio operator, who sat beside him.

"No," said the man, shaking his head, "I've had my share. I'm not thirsty."

"Not thirsty! Anyway, you'll drink it. You've been talking away all day there till your lips are covered with blood. Drink it!"

When Chang returned to his post at the entrance, Liu handed him a bowl, saying: "Here, Company Commander, you have this. I drank my fill at the water-hole."

Chang took the water and offered it to the other radio operator who was on a direct channel to artillery. But he also refused to touch it.

"I'm ordering you to drink it!"

The operator grinned and took the bowl.

"Company Commander, I can go for a whole day on just one mouthful."

"And if you don't even have that one mouthful?"

"Then I'll keep going just the same!"

And they did keep going. Doggedly, tenaciously, the men in the tunnel held out.

## CHAPTER VI

Second by second, through these interminable days of incredible hardships, the men in the tunnels at the front suffered and endured. Every man was confident of final victory, and they fought on resolutely and stubbornly to hasten the coming of that glorious day.

While the men were shedding blood for even a mouthful of water, while flame-throwers seethed at the tunnel entrances, while sulphur fumes choked them and poisoned the very air around them, the entire Chinese People's Volunteers and the whole Korean nation from the banks

of the Yalu River to the front were doing all that was humanly possible to support the defenders of this hilltop position — a position less than four square kilometres in area.

At night, along the winding roads of northern Korea went an unending stream of lorries loaded with ammunition. Seen from the mountains, the headlights of countless transport vehicles gleamed in the night like the bright lights of a city.

Mobile artillery was dispatched to the front, and units nearby did their best to spare every gunner, sapper and stretcher-bearer they could. As if drawn by a lodestone, the reinforcements converged on the centre of the conflict.

Day after day, night after night, up the twisting mountain trails near the front filed transport teams made up of office workers from the rear. Never pausing, they ran the blockade of enemy gunfire and bombing to carry the tons of much-needed ammunition.

Korean women and white-bearded old men trod paths pitted and scarred from continuous bombardment, carrying back to the rear dead and wounded Volunteers who had shed their blood to defend the Korean soil.

"All for the front! All for the tunnels!" Old and young alike had thrown themselves into this fierce, relentless struggle.

It was over ten days since the regimental commander, Chang Kai, had been able to have a good night's rest. The telephone, it seemed, was never out of his hands. Recently, the continuous additions to his artillery and transport corps had meant a great increase in his responsibilities.

His chief concern was that the tunnels at the front should hold out. Any damage inflicted on the tunnels by the enemy, each report of casualties there, disturbed him deeply. It was not that he didn't have confidence in each fighter: he well knew that the tunnels would not fall as long as breath remained in even one of our men; but they were hemmed in under enemy guns and menaced by hunger and thirst—For the men in the tunnel, it had been several days now since any food or water had passed their lips. In a few of the tunnels, the men could occasionally manage to get some water from outside; but for the others not even urine was available. Under conditions such as these, it was difficult to hold out—there are limits, after all, to human endurance.

To ease the plight of the men and so as to enable them to fight better, the regimental commander had tried, in the last two nights, to have two transport teams sneak through the enemy-held territory to deliver supplies to one of the tunnels. Heavy losses had been sustained on both attempts. Nevertheless, they had succeeded in getting some of the urgently-needed supplies to that particular tunnel.

That morning, divisional headquarters had forwarded a citation to his regiment from the higher command, and a letter of encouragement to the troops fighting in the tunnels. Shortly afterwards, the divisional commander had telephoned.

“Comrade Chang Kai, have you thought of any way to get supplies through to the tunnels?”

“Judging by the last two nights, the cost is too great.”

“If it's at all possible, go all out to get the supplies through. Send the citation and the letter too. The higher command of the Volunteers and our army commander are

both very much concerned about this problem. The cost mustn't be considered if supplies can be sent in. In this way you'll be increasing the strength of the men in the tunnels enormously; and it'll show every man there that the whole Volunteer Army is supporting them and thinking of them.”

“Right. Tonight we'll send supplies out on a large scale. I intend to start with a consignment of turnips. They satisfy both hunger and thirst.”

“Good! I won't be able to come over to speak to the transport men myself; but please tell them I'm counting on them, and thank them in my name.”

The regimental commander immediately instructed the supply department's assistant chief-of-staff to summon the best men on the transport teams to headquarters. He himself drew up the plan of action.

One of the transport men was Wang Yung-fu, who had been head of the cooks' section in Chang Wen-kuei's company. When the rest of the front-line troops had gone over to tunnel warfare, his section had been drafted to the rear to help with transport. Wang was not a strong man and he had chronic indigestion; but on each trip during the last few days he had carried six cases of mortar bombs. This load, weighing ninety kilogrammes, would normally have had to be lugged by a strong horse. His officer advised him to take less, but Wang answered: “However hard it is for me, it's much worse for the men in the tunnels. They're drinking urine and eating raw rice, but still they fight on! Every extra round of ammo we send over means greater security for them. If we can cut down by even one day on our preparations, that'll mean a day's less hardship for our comrades there. Our

work for the battle on Sangkumryung cannot be compared with the work for any ordinary battle."

But his muscle-wracking exertions had so exhausted him that he was now spitting blood. He kept this to himself, however, and expectorated unobserved or into his handkerchief.

Wang Yung-fu sat down in the darkest corner of the command post. This was his usual place in company gatherings, for though he could work with the best of men he disliked speaking at meetings. And now that he was constantly spitting blood, it would be awkward for him to sit anywhere near the front.

While the regimental commander briefed the men on their mission, a soldier next to Wang nudged him and whispered: "Coo! The regimental commander's aging fast, eh! Isn't thirty yet, but he looks well over forty."

A light from the open door fell on the regimental commander's face, emphasizing the deep lines graven there. Instinctively, Wang raised a hand to his own face. Two weeks of this campaign had taken more out of them than a year would normally. What, he thought, must the company commander and the other men be going through during this time!

The regimental commander personally handed them the citation from the higher command and a pile of letters of commendation. In conclusion he said: "Your task is extremely important. No matter how tight the enemy blockade, you must try to get through! The divisional commander is counting on you to carry out this mission successfully. In the name of the divisional commander and the whole regiment, I wish you success!"

Wang Yung-fu took the citation and the letters, and his answer came from his heart: "Don't worry, Com-

mander. No matter how fierce the enemy barrage, we won't be stopped!"

That night, Wang Yung-fu received orders to take supplies to Tunnel "A". He put the stack of written orders and letters in his breast pocket, and flung the sack of turnips over his shoulder. Two other men were going with him, and he was the group leader. Before setting out, they rolled in the mud to camouflage themselves; and, after each man had taken a few grenades, they set out for the front.

Enemy flares rose one after the other into the air and machine-guns and mortars fired incessantly. For a moment Wang wondered: Can we make it? Then, pulling himself together, he fingered the papers in his pocket and went calmly ahead.

Formerly, the regiment and battalion command posts had been connected by a deep communication trench, in which Wang had always felt safe and secure. But now hardly a trace of the trench remained — Enemy shells had pounded in its sides and flattened it out till it looked like a shallow, dried-up river bed.

Wang and the two others followed this open track. Sand and gravel found its way into their shoes and the mere act of walking soon became difficult.

"How many shells have the devils fired!" Wang said to himself with indignation. "But even though they've smashed this trench, they can't cut communications between the front and the rear."

After they had passed the hilltop of the battalion headquarters and gone downhill, they entered the area within the field of enemy machine-gun fire. Our defence line lay on this slope which the enemy was shelling. To avoid

the enemy fire Wang and the other two men were constantly having to throw themselves flat on the ground.

"Who goes there?" a sentry called softly, peering out of a foxhole.

"Wang Yung-fu. We're taking stuff through to the tunnel," answered Wang in the same low voice.

"Well, Old Wang! Are you off now?"

The sentry was an old friend of Wang.

"Um! — Time we were off. Must be after eight. And the sooner we get there the better."

"Which tunnel are you going to?"

"Tunnel 'A' — Er — Mind you don't fire on us when we're on the way back."

"Right. I'm off duty soon myself, but I'll tell my relief. Keep your wits about you — The enemy has sewn things up pretty damn tight. They stay up on the heights at night, too scared to come down, and just fire blindly."

The sentry sounded a little worried, for he knew that more than half of the transport men who had gone out in the last two nights had not returned.

"Well, they can come down if they like tonight. We've brought grenades along."

Wang and the others had gone only a few steps when they pulled up in surprise at the loud roar of artillery.

"Our neighbouring troops down the line are giving them hell again," exulted the sentry. "They're attacking every night now, tying down enemy troops and guns so as to help our men in the tunnels."

Wang said nothing. He was listening intently. The sound of the heavy guns was followed by the distant chatter of machine-guns and the explosions of grenades.

"The whole front's supporting us!" he said, turning round. "For this reason alone the enemy's bound to

lose." Then he called: "Come on!" and led the other men down the slope.

The low ground at the foot of the hill was exposed to the heaviest enemy fire. Shells crashed down around them every few minutes. Each time Wang scrambled to his feet he would call back to the other two men: "Are you all right?" And not until their answer came — "Yes. Go on!" — would he again creep forward.

It was hard going, groping through the darkness under enemy fire and weighed down by the heavy sacks. Wang tripped and lurched into a crater, painfully cutting and bruising his knees and hands. He bit his lip, patted his breast pocket, then struggled to his feet and hobbled forward on his numbed legs. Four times he fell. His sweat-stained uniform was soon in shreds and blood trickled down his torn legs. Worst of all was the agonizing constriction in his chest. He longed to cough, but here under the very noses of the enemy that would have been inviting destruction. So, with a supreme effort, he controlled himself.

As they were passing under an enemy-occupied height, another flare whizzed up and Wang flung himself down. Under the powerful glare, he flattened himself against the ground as if trying to burrow his way into the loose soil.

Enemy mortars began to rake the valley, the deafening noise making Wang's ears buzz, and clods of earth and pebbles rained down on him until he was almost completely covered. Then something like a stone plopped down in front of him and he saw that it was half a turnip. Puzzled, he asked himself: Now where in the hell could that have come from? After a moment, when he calmed

down and his mind became clearer, he suddenly realized that one of the others must have been killed or wounded.

The flares died out, but the shelling was still going on. Braving the enemy fire, Wang turned and crawled frantically back. One of his men, still prone on the ground, grabbed his arm and whispered: "Group Leader, where are you going?"

"Liu Tien-teh?" he gasped. "Are you all right?"

"Um-h'm!"

"And Chang Huai-yi?"

"He's right behind me."

Saying no more, Wang continued to crawl back. After he had gone about a dozen metres he saw the form of the man on the ground. "Come on!" He waited anxiously for a reply, but none came. Reaching out, he felt for the sack on Chang's back. It had been ripped to pieces, the turnips were scattered around him, and the torn sacking was saturated with sticky blood. He raised his fingers to the man's nose—he was breathing no more.

Wang lay still beside his dead comrade for half a minute or so, hesitating. His mind revolted at the thought of leaving him there; but what else could be done? The men in the tunnel were desperately awaiting their arrival.

Enemy guns kept firing as Wang crawled back to the side of Liu Tien-teh.

"Group Leader, is Chang Huai-yi following?"

"No—He's done for. . . ."

Both men lay absolutely silent for a while, and then Wang said: "Let's go on. Quick! While the firing isn't too heavy."

As they started forward, Liu staggered and sprawled on the ground. Wang helped him up, saying encourag-

ingly: "Steady now. The going gets better after we get over this next gully."

"Group Leader, I've caught one in the foot."

Wang's eyes opened in alarm. They hadn't even gone half way, but one of the three was already killed and another wounded!

"Right," he said, "you make your own way back slowly. I'll go on alone."

"Group Leader, I'd rather die than turn back! The tunnel matters more than I do."

There was no time for argument. Wang put a supporting arm round the wounded man.

"All right. Come on—Here, I'll help you. We'll get there even if we have to crawl the whole way!"

The two men pressed on under the lash of enemy fire. Any second might mean death for them; but not for one moment did they consider themselves. Their only concern was the tunnel, the glorious task to which they had been assigned—support to the fight on Sang-kumryung!

Through the fire, smoke and explosions of enemy shells they continued resolutely forward. And, as Liu Tien-teh crawled and staggered on, smears of blood were left behind on the scorched earth.

## CHAPTER VII

At least once every evening the regimental commander would hold a radio-conversation with the leading cadres in the tunnel. When this practice first began, Lu An-

kuo would take up the microphone himself; but noticing Chang Wen-kuei always sitting nearby, a wistful look in his eyes, he finally conferred the franchise on him. At first Chang hesitated to accept the offer, but Lu clamped the ear-phones on his head, declaring: "I listen in, or you listen in, it's the same thing."

Lu fully understood the direct, artless way in which Chang's mind worked; and he knew that every word of comfort and encouragement from the leadership would take a deep and immediate root in the company commander's mind. Needless to say, Lu himself could gain solace and stimulation from the remarks of the regimental commander which came crackling into their beleaguered tunnel through the tiny instrument, but, being in the position he was, it was typically characteristic of him to give such pleasures to others while he himself shouldered responsibility for tasks of a grave or even onerous nature.

In his daily discourse the regimental commander never said very much: he encouraged the men in their fight to hold the tunnel, and would occasionally relate some interesting anecdote concerning the battle. Our howitzers had brought down an enemy plane; or a man in X Company, with only three shots, had detonated a bomb slung on the underbelly of an enemy aircraft, blowing the plane to pieces. There seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary about these stories, but the regimental commander's epigrammatic presentation invariably caused Chang to shake with uncontrollable laughter. When the talk ended, Chang would take great delight in repeating the stories to Lu, always ending up with: "Well, the regimental commander's spirits are certainly high."

Lu could understand the regimental commander's feelings very well. He knew that the commander had cudgelled his brain over each tunnel they were holding; and Lu was aware that every laugh concealed a deep concern and anxiety; but he never hinted anything of this to Chang. On the contrary, he would relate the regimental commander's stories in a light-hearted and merry manner, frequently embellishing them for added effect. In short, no matter what heavy burden weighed on his heart he never once showed a trace of what he was feeling.

One day, after a radio-conversation with the regimental commander, Chang told Lu in a surprised voice: "Political Director, the rear's sending someone over with things for us!"

A worried frown creased Lu's forehead.

"Tell the regimental commander we don't need anything. We still have some water, so we can carry on."

"But they're already on the way. They might reach here — Several trial attempts have been made." Chang's voice rang with hope but a trace of doubt was also discernible.

Didn't need anything! There was, indeed, a great deal that they needed; but Lu was unwilling to have the transport teams risk an excursion through enemy lines.

"How many men?" he asked.

"Three."

Well, thought Lu, if things go well perhaps at least one of them will succeed in getting here. He went to announce the news to the other men in the tunnel.

"Regiment has sent someone over with supplies for us. Now, comrades, how about preparing a welcome."

There was very little to prepare, except to tighten up belts and put the bedding in order. Lu instructed Chang

to be doubly attentive at the tunnel entrance, in order that no one would open fire by mistake.

Groups of men, in twos and threes, began to saunter up to the tunnel entrance one after the other, standing around and peering out into the night. Previously, such casual visits had been strictly forbidden, but that night Chang relaxed the regulation.

The "hospital director", Wang Hung-yuan, also came out to the entrance. Wearing a white mouth-cover, and with a red-cross satchel slung over his shoulder, he really looked like a medical attendant.

"Well, Wang Hung-yuan, now that you've become a director, you seem to have forgotten us," joked Chang. "It's been days since we saw you last."

"Been up to my ears in work," replied Wang.

Then, although the question hadn't been asked, he went on to supply an answer: "Imagine it, I couldn't even tell you what mercurochrome is, but I've been made 'hospital director'! Anyway, I'll just do as I'm ordered. I want to fight, but I'm not allowed to."

"But what are you doing out here? Can the 'hospital' manage all right without you, eh?"

"Ever since the wounded men heard that someone was coming in from the rear, it's been: 'Director, how about the comrades who are bringing stuff, aren't they here yet?' So I thought I'd better come along too to welcome our guests. I can tell you, being a director's no easy job. Haven't they arrived yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Company Commander, listen!—That's pretty heavy firing going on out there. How will the transport men get through?"

Wang idled around for some time and then walked off, mumbling to himself: "H'm, seems strange to me!"

Enemy artillery and machine-guns kept up a sustained barrage and flares were going up almost continuously.

Liu Tsai-hsueh ambled up to Chang's side, and after a long silence said: "Company Commander, you think it's because they can't find the tunnel that they aren't here yet? How about letting me go out and take a look round? I could slip out every couple o' minutes or so."

Chang reflected for a few moments and then gave his permission.

After some time the enemy flares increased in number and the barrage around the tunnel entrance became even heavier.

"Ho!" cried Liu, "they're afraid we're planning another raid."

Chang told Liu not to risk going out any more, adding: "You'd better stay in here. Anyway, I don't think the higher command would send anyone who didn't know the way."

At about ten o'clock someone was heard softly clapping his hands outside. Liu hurried out and soon returned with a man who was carrying a large sack on his back.

"At last! You're here at last!" Liu, greatly delighted, ran off to report to Lu An-kuo.

After they had gone under the light, Chang looked at the man and to his astonishment saw that it was Wang Yung-fu, who had formerly been the cooks' section leader in his company.

"Old Wang, it's you! Oh-ho! Let's go to see the political director right away."

Chang whacked Wang on the shoulder and excitedly shook his hand, at a loss for words.



"Who are you? Afraid I don't know you." Wang threw Chang a puzzled glance. He was quite taken aback by the dishevelled appearance and the hoarse, grating voice of the man before him.

"Old Wang! You don't even recognize me? I'm Chang Wen-kuei."

"Company Com . . . Company Commander! It's you? Really you? — No one'd ever recognize you."

Wang almost fell on Chang Wen-kuei. He grasped the company commander's two hands and said in a tone of mixed grief and joy: "Ah, you've changed, changed. Just look at how you've changed. Who else from our company's here?"

"Both Lin Mao-tien and Liu Tsai-hsueh are inside. Getting a welcome ready for you. The assistant political instructor is our 'hospital director' now."

"And how's Wang Chi-pao? Where's he?"

Chang didn't reply. Wang looked at him, sighed softly, and asked no further questions.

"Ai!" he said, "the tunnel's changed too. Why, when I used to bring grub here I could walk right in with a carrying-pole on my shoulder, but now the entrance is more like a well. Hardly able to see it. Took me ages to find the place. The paths are different too now."

"Weren't there three of you?" asked Chang.

Wang nodded, saying: "First, we'd one killed and one wounded. Then a machine-gun got the wounded man too."

The two men said nothing more. Arm in arm, they walked on through the tunnel.

"Band!" called Lu An-kuo as he came over to welcome Wang. At his command, a mouth-organ began to play.

"Company Commander, that man coming over. . . . Is it the political director?"

"It is."

"I recognize him by his walk and build."

"Well," said Lu warmly gripping Wang's both hands at the same time, "in the name of Tunnel 'A', and for all the comrades here, I give you our thanks."

Wang was dumbfounded for a few moments.

"Political Director," he finally stuttered, "you people've had a hard time here."

"Political Director," said Chang, "this is our cooks' section leader."

"I know him as Old Wang, and now he's our guest," replied Lu.

Lu and Chang helped Wang put the sack down, and then two soldiers came over and carried it farther inside.

The "band" continued its unmusical accompaniment as the "political commissar" and the "commanding officer" walked with Wang past the two lines of men who stood still and stiff at attention.

"Lin Mao-tien, it's our Old Wang!" hissed Liu Tsai-hsueh, almost unable to control the impulse to rush out and greet the new arrival.

A soldier standing next to Liu angrily jabbed him, and whispered in a piqued tone: "What d'you mean, *your* Old Wang! — He's *everybody's* Old Wang!"

The men began to applaud and Wang was called upon to make a speech. Hitherto, besides talking on his kitchen experiences to other cooks, Wang had never spoken in public; but now he could not resist saying something.

"Comrades!" He coughed, flung out his arm affectedly, in the manner of the political director, and then con-

tinued, "The commanders know that you men in the tunnel are having a hard time. A few days ago they had us organized into teams, to try and get stuff through to the tunnels. Today, we — Today —"

On the verge of saying that three of them had started out, he paused to cough and then went on: "Today, I've brought a citation from the higher command of the Volunteers, and I've also brought a bag of turnips for you. And I'll come again in the future. Never mind if the enemy try to block the way. No matter if there be mountains of swords or streams of boiling oil, I can still get here!"

He coughed again. His stock of ideas on what to talk about was now exhausted. He had to wind up his speech by saying:

"The commanders at regiment said to give you their regards and they wish you all the best. They hope you'll win many more victories in this battle. That's all I have to say."

Loud applause thundered through the tunnel, and the welcoming formalities were ended. Standing in front of all the men, Wang ripped open the bag and tipped the turnips out on the ground. A piece of shrapnel partly embedded in one of the turnips glittered dully in the light.

After Lu had read out the citation and the letters, he sat down to chat with Wang and Chang Wen-kuei. The other men gathered round them in a tight circle, listening to the news. Liu Tsai-hsueh tried to elbow his way through to the front, intent on sitting next to Wang. After he had trod heavily on someone's foot he was roughly pushed aside, but he succeeded in making an inroad from another quarter.

"Commanders," Wang was saying, "a lot more new artillery has come in. Takes a couple o' dozen men to push one of those things up a bit of a slope! Our lorries come and go in the daytime now — I tell you, there're crates and crates of shells all over the place — and the enemy planes can't do a damn thing about it. With the anti-aircraft guns we have now, they're scared to come too low. Our brother units have come over to join us, and there's so many people about that it looks like a regular fair!"

The men exchanged happy glances as they listened. Liu Tsai-hsueh tugged on Wang's sleeve, about to ask him a question, but Chang Wen-kuei forestalled him.

"Old Wang, tell us what the comrades in the rear think about us here."

"Well, everyone says that you're having a hard time. Whenever we meet anyone from our brother units the first thing they say is: 'Really something is Sangkumryung!' But we there are a long way from Sangkumryung. It's you men here that're really something."

"No, I don't mean that. I mean, do they have much confidence in us?"

"Confidence? Why shouldn't they have much confidence? Do you know that the radio stations back in the motherland are broadcasting every day about Sangkumryung? Perhaps the whole world knows about Sangkumryung by now. The enemy've made terrific efforts, fought so long, and suffered over ten thousand casualties, but still they can't take the tunnels. If they keep fighting on, what'll come of it for them? The devils should be ashamed of themselves. I heard they've been bragging about 'the greatest offensive ever' and 'occupying the

communist army's positions' — Rubbish! Beats me how they're going to eat their words."

"Eat their words?" laughed Chang. "They'll use their usual old methods — end up just cursing us."

"Let 'em. No matter how much they curse, it'll do them no good. Say, I heard you'd caught a prisoner. Can I take a look at his ugly phiz?"

"He's inside. Just a kid Syngman Rhee's dragged off to fight."

"Oh — To hell with seeing him then. If it'd been a Yankee soldier, I'd like to have told him a few things to his face."

After they had been talking for some time, Wang picked up the empty sack and said:

"Time I was getting back now. I'll be here again tomorrow with some more stuff."

"Right. We'll come and see you off," said Lu.

Everyone rose, applauding, and the mouth-organ started up again. Lin Mao-tien and Liu Tsai-hsueh followed behind Wang, both feeling very much put out because they hadn't managed to have a chat with their old friend who had gone through such great difficulties to get there.

"Commander," Wang remarked when they reached the tunnel entrance, "you'll all have to stick it out here for a few more days, but it won't be too long. I'll have something nice in the pot to welcome you back!"

"Old Wang," Liu called, taking the opportunity of getting a word in, "let's have a bit of a yarn next time you come over."

"Definitely. Definitely. I'll be back. Say, Liu Tsai-hsueh, I suppose you're so hungry now that your craze for tobacco's gone, eh? You still have your squabbles with Lin Mao-tien?"

"No, not any more. Why, Lin Mao-tien's the 'leader' of the heavy weapons section now."

"All right," interrupted Chang Wen-kuei, "don't take up Old Wang's time there. You'd better get started now. Be careful!"

"I'll be all right. As long as we can keep sending things to you I won't worry at all."

Wang picked up the sack and walked out of the tunnel entrance. He had to go back the way he came, through the net of enemy fire and flares.

Henceforth, despite the enemy's persistence in their vain attempts to destroy the tunnel, the men were able to receive a supply of foodstuffs from the rear, though they had to distribute water by the mouthful, turnip by the slice, and biscuits by the lump. Besides turnips, our men occasionally received a bag of steamed buns. The fact that things were arriving regularly was of great importance; and after some time each man in the tunnel was allowed a daily ration of one steamed bun and one slice of turnip. Compared with the hardest times, one might even have said that they were now quite "well-to-do"!

The commanders in army and division pooled their extra allowances and bought apples for the men in the tunnels, and every apple bore the signature of one of the donors. When these "Commander Apples" reached Tunnel "A", everyone, including Lu An-kuo, felt reluctant about eating them. Later, when news of this reached the ears of the divisional commander, Tsui Hsin-wei, through the medium of the men on the transport teams, he sent a personal order: "The apples must be eaten." The men in Tunnel "A" kept a few of the apples as souvenirs, and passed the rest of them on to the wounded.

So, life in the tunnel went on, the minutes of each slow, interminable day dragging on. No one could tell whether it was day or night, and everyone lost track of the date, except Lu, who continued to make daily entries in his diary.

One evening at about eight o'clock, as was his practice, he opened up his diary; and, as he noted down the date — "October 25" — he suddenly remembered: Today's the second anniversary of our leaving our country to fight! He put his pen aside and called Chang Wen-kuei over.

"Chang Wen-kuei, do you know what day it is today?"

Chang remarked the political director's animated expression, and began to rack his brains; but for the life of him he couldn't see what the other was getting at.

"It's October twenty-fifth!"

"Really?"

"Really. See, the longer you live, the duller your old brain gets."

"H'm!" muttered Chang, as he glanced round the tunnel. "What can we do about it, though? Stuck here in the tunnel, any sort of celebration's out of the question. If we were anywhere else, Political Director, we could really have ourselves a time of it."

"Even in the tunnel I still think we can celebrate. Why, an important day like this, we'd have to kick ourselves if we didn't! Remember the day we left? Remember the meeting when we took the oath?"

"Certainly do. I remember it was snowing heavily. And now . . . now here we are in the tunnel."

Chang took a cigarette from the political director's case and lit it. He drew on the cigarette and continued: "As far as having a hard time of it goes, things then weren't much different. But then we had nothing but rifles,

whereas now we have submachine-guns, and the rifles are only used to sound air-raid alarms or for harassing fire. Yes . . . well, Political Director, how d'you think we'll be celebrating October twenty-fifth next year?"

Next year! At that moment Lu wasn't only thinking of the next year; he was thinking much farther ahead into the future. Never for a moment did the thought of final victory leave his mind: at that time, when he had sat in the snow munching some hurriedly-parched flour; or now, when he had to gnaw on raw turnip and drink muddy water. It was precisely his thoughts of this future which enabled him to lead the men of Tunnel "A" with such dogged persistence in their fight; and it was precisely his thoughts of this future which made him insist on holding a celebration under such terribly adverse conditions. He did not answer Chang's question directly.

"Um! — How d'you think we'll be celebrating it next year?" he asked.

"For one year now we've held this position, and the enemy hasn't been able to advance an inch. Last autumn they were ranting and raving about a large-scale offensive; and now, this year, they've flung everything they've got against a position as small as this one. And all they've had for their trouble are bashed and bloody heads! Right now we have enough strength to stalemate them. And very soon we'll have enough strength to shove them back. When that time comes, Political Director, we'll have a celebration that really is a celebration!"

Chang looked up at Lu and couldn't repress a chuckle.

"Ha! If we appeared at the celebration dressed as we are now it'd be a scream."

"Anyway, next year's next year," said Lu. "Let's talk about it then. Now, let's discuss the meeting we plan to have."

Naturally enough, for the celebration-meeting the men were to gather in front of the picture of Chairman Mao Tse-tung. And on this occasion, two mouth-organs were provided for the band. In honour of the event each man could have one extra slice of turnip, and the "Commander Apples", which had been set aside as "souvenirs", were to be passed out. Also, the political director would say a few words.

It was almost time for the meeting to begin. All the wounded men who could hobble or be helped along were in attendance. Two more oil-lamps had been lit, marking the significance of the meeting. The leaves on the sprigs of maple had disappeared, and only the naked branches remained.

Lu An-kuo, acting in the double capacity of chairman and master of ceremonies, bid the "band" play *The Battle Song of the People's Volunteers*. Chang Wen-kuei, the conductor, led the "band" as he played his mouth-organ. After this, Lu spoke again.

"We are holding this meeting today in celebration of the second anniversary of leaving our country to participate in this war. Now, to cherish the memory of our motherland, let us sing our national anthem."

The men rose to their feet. Those among the wounded who were unable to stand by themselves leaned against the wall for support. Everyone turned to face the picture of Chairman Mao.

*Arise, all ye who refuse to be slaves!  
With our flesh and blood  
Let us build our new Great Wall. . . .*

Their singing rang out, forceful and vigorous, especially when they came to the line:

*Braving the enemy's fire, march on!*

As the last notes faded away, Lu glanced round and noticed Wang Yung-fu standing at the end of the line. Wang, a frequent visitor now, stood stiff and erect, small beads of perspiration dotting his face.

"Put your things down, Old Wang," said Lu. "I'll see you as soon as the meeting's over."

"Political Director, I've brought some gifts from the motherland over today. A People's Visiting Delegation from Home has arrived."

This information caused the men in the ranks to break-up and everyone, including the wounded, started to push their way over to Wang. Liu Tsai-hsueh and Lin Mao-tien ran exploratory fingers over the bag. All the men spoke at once.

"Old Wang, what do the delegates look like?"

"What sort of gifts are they, Old Wang?"

"Come on, Old Wang, tell us. Quickly!"

"Yes, tell us every detail, Old Wang. . . ."

Wang Hung-yuan rushed off immediately to inform the severely wounded.

"A visiting delegation has come from the motherland!" he cried. "A visiting delegation has come from the motherland!"

"What is it? What's happening?"

The men at the tunnel entrance had dispatched their envoy to inquire into the cause of the uproar!

"Quiet there!" yelled Chang Wen-kuei, stamping his foot in a futile attempt to quell the din. "Q-u-i-e-t!"

Wang Hung-yuan — the "hospital director" — and the medical attendant tried to stem the sudden surge of

wounded men who crawled and dragged themselves over towards Wang Yung-fu; but they failed.

"Old Wang! Old Wang!" the wounded men called as they crawled forward, "let's see the things!"

The hubbub intensified in volume, and the "Chairman", Lu An-kuo, decided to close the meeting then and there and let things take their course.

In the middle of the crowd Wang Yung-fu was being pushed and squeezed until he could hardly breathe. Pinned in on every side, he was unable to untie the bag which was still slung over his shoulder.

"Political Director," Wang appealed, "Political Director, such a mix-up — It's hopeless!"

Lu An-kuo instructed the cadres to restore order, and gradually the men quietened down. Then, as Wang began to take out the gifts from the bag, the men pressed forward again, trying to see what they were.

"Keep order, keep order!" Wang Yung-fu flung his arms protectively round the gifts. "There's something for everyone."

"Sit down! Sit down! No one's allowed to stand," ordered Lu, and the men obeyed.

"Hey! Can't see a damn thing from here," the wounded men complained from their prone positions in the rear. An opening was made for them and they crawled to the front. The hubbub had subsided by now.

"Where are the visiting delegates at present?" asked Lu.

"At the regimental command post. They wanted to come over to the tunnels to see the men, but divisional headquarters wouldn't agree."

"What do they look like? What do they look like?" Wang was bombarded again with questions.

"H'm!" answered Wang, scratching his head. "Hard to say exactly. . . . Some short, some tall. . . . Some in blue-coloured clothes, some in army uniforms."

"Did you see them?" Lu inquired.

"'Course. They came personally to give me the gifts, and they shook hands with me."

"Right, comrades," a voice sang out, "let's shake hands with Old Wang. That'll be the same as shaking hands with the delegates from the motherland!"

Again the men closed in on Wang Yung-fu, and the handshakes were hearty and prolonged.

"Did the delegates have anything to say to you?" Lu asked.

"They wanted me to tell you that they bring the warmest wishes of the motherland to all the comrades in Tunnel 'A', and they said: 'The victories won in the battles at Sangkumryung bring glory to the whole motherland, and the heroes fighting in the tunnels are noble examples of the people of our land.' — They said they're going to remain at the regimental command post until they can carry the news of final victory back to the motherland."

"Did they inquire specifically about our tunnel?"

"Yes, they asked about your tunnel."

"Operator, get through to the regimental command post."

Lu picked up the microphone and spoke excitedly into it:

"Please tell the comrades of the delegation from home that the men in Tunnel 'A' have received the gifts from the motherland. As long as our motherland is with us we shall persist, no matter what difficult days lie ahead.

We men in Tunnel 'A' salute the motherland! We salute the comrades of the delegation!"

As Lu spoke he raised his hand in a salute. Every last man in the tunnel did likewise.

Wang Yung-fu carefully laid the gifts down one by one on a bed. Lu picked up a smooth, black briar, and tears welled up in his eyes as he read the words inscribed on the stem: *Motherland — My Mother!*

The political director and Chang Wen-kuei personally distributed the gifts to the men. Before accepting the gift, each man saluted the picture of Chairman Mao. The seriously wounded men, when their turn came, insisted on sitting up.

"But you're wounded," protested Lu. "No one's going to blame you for receiving the gifts lying down!"

"No, we shouldn't do so, Political Director, for that would be disrespect to our motherland!"

Eventually Chang and Lu had to help each man into a sitting position.

Matches flared and cigarettes were lit — despite the cracked and bleeding lips — and even many of the non-smokers were to be seen with a cigarette between their fingers. Liu Tsai-hsueh was in his element, crunching down noisily on sweets as he puffed away contentedly, first on a cigarette, and then on a pipe. Soon the tunnel was filled with smoke and the sound of coughing came from every quarter.

"Well, comrades," remarked Lu, "the gifts have arrived. How shall we express our gratitude to the people of the motherland?"

"Let's go out on another raid!"

"Another raid? That's a good idea," replied the political director. Then, turning to Wang Yung-fu, he said:

"Old Wang, you'd better be starting back. We'll be going into action again soon."

"Political Director, I don't want to go back just yet. I want to join you in the raid. If I return empty handed, I'll be ashamed to meet any of the comrades on the delegation."

"Good, I can let you have some hand-grenades, Old Wang," said Liu Tsai-hsueh, by way of welcome. He had already started on his second cigarette.

When the raiding party assembled at the tunnel entrance, the men's cheeks bulged with sweets from the motherland.

## CHAPTER VIII

Wang Yung-fu came in one night on one of his regular visits to Tunnel "A". Oddly enough, this time he was not carrying the customary sack. The men at the entrance called out to him in happy, questioning voices, but Wang didn't even reply. He hurried inside to see Lu An-kuo and Chang Wen-kuei.

Spitting out a tiny paper pellet, Wang began to tear away the oiled-paper covering, saying: "Orders. Orders. The regimental commander wouldn't let me bring anything else but this note. I worried every bit of the way, thinking that I might not make it here."

After he had passed the slip of paper to Lu, Wang removed the small bundle, wrapped in a handkerchief, which was fastened to his belt. Inside were two dumplings.

"Commanders, I've brought mutton dumplings for you."

In a place like the tunnel, mutton dumplings should have been the very acme of allurements; but both Lu and Chang gave them hardly a second glance. Their eyes were riveted on the written words:

Lu and Chang:

Chang Wen-kuei will report here immediately with two other men. I have a task of the utmost importance for him. Best regards to all the comrades there.

Chang Kai.

The order was in the regimental commander's handwriting, and the two men read it over at least five times. The corners of Lu's mouth rose slightly in a smile of excitement, but Chang was quite surprised.

"Political Director, why are we wanted back there now after we've held out for so long? I refuse to leave until we've recaptured the position, no matter what happens!"

"Comrade, it isn't that you are being requested to go there to rest. See — 'task of the utmost importance' — In all likelihood you will be asked to bring back reinforcements for the tunnel. Things should start moving soon. Right, go and get ready now. Not a minute should be wasted."

"Commanders, the dumplings! The dumplings! Eat up," said Wang Yung-fu.

"Dumplings? I'll take care of them. Now, you'd better tell your company commander everything you know about getting through the enemy-held area, and see that you get him back safely. Messenger, take these dumplings along to the wounded."

Less than thirty seconds later Wang was explaining everything to Chang, Lin Mao-tien and Liu Tsai-hsueh.

". . . And as soon as you hear a flare going up, hit the ground. Don't wait until it lights up. Best thing to do is to get into a crater if you can. Keep perfectly still there. Then, as soon as the flare fizzles out, get up and start moving. Make sure there's nothing on you that might rattle, and don't wear a cap — Less easy for them to spot you when you're lying down then."

Chang brought his pistol with him, the others had their hand-grenades fastened securely, and, bareheaded, the three men followed Wang to the tunnel mouth. All the fighters in the tunnel were at the entrance to see them off.

"Now, Chang Wen-kuei," said Lu as he grasped Chang's hand in a firm handshake, "don't worry your head about the tunnel, eh! We'll be all right. My only hope is that you'll be as quick as you can in getting to regimental headquarters and back with the reinforcements for the counter-attack. We'll have a welcome waiting for you."

"Be back before you know it. Before you know it."

"When you get to the rear and see the battalion commander, please give him my best regards; and ask him to give me details of the situation there. Then my mind will be more at ease."

Outside, the moon had long disappeared and the dark sky hung like an upturned army dixie over the men's heads! They spaced themselves out and moved on over the spongy earth, their shoulders hunched, slipping and stumbling as they went.

Flares hissed into the sky and Chang quickly dived into a nearby crater. One of the men — nobody could



tell who it was — knocked against a rock and made a noise. Enemy machine-guns and mortars opened up in the general direction of the sound and the four men were soon covered in dust and earth. An incendiary bomb plummeted down about three metres from where Chang lay and several of the white-hot sparks landed on his left sleeve, which began to smoulder dangerously. Unconscious of the pain, Chang slowly and matter-of-factly pushed his arm into the loose earth, smothering the tiny flames.

After firing for about five minutes the enemy guns fell silent. The flares slowly turned dark-red and then died out.

Chang scrambled up and started forward; but feeble as he was, the exertion was too much for him. His eyes swam, his body went suddenly limp, and he collapsed. He lay sprawled on the ground, his breath coming in short, hard gasps.

"Company Commander," whispered Lin Mao-tien, who had crawled up from behind, "are you wounded?"

"No," gasped Chang, shaking his head, "my legs've gone wonky on me."

"Come on, I'll give you a hand."

"Don't bother. Keep up with Old Wang. I'll catch up."

After Liu Tsai-hsueh had also gone past, Chang Wen-kuei struggled to his feet. He opened his eyes, got his bearings, and then stumbled on. In his mind he outlined the way he must take: Down the slope. Follow the stream, and then up another hill. The former battalion headquarters to the left. . . .

However, on that particular night the ditch seemed much farther off than usual, and enemy machine-guns

opened up seven times again before he reached a stream. Crossing the stream and walking a short distance, he would then reach the slope where his own men were dug in.

The water in the stream flowed with only a gentle murmur, as though it too was unwilling to be heard by the enemy. For Chang, who had only just left the tunnel, the sound of running water had an almost tantalizing fascination. It was a risk, he knew, but two weeks without water compelled him to disregard it. He bent down and scooped up the water in his cupped hands. It tasted of cordite and blood. As he gulped it down, enemy mortar bombs began to fall nearby, several of them rather close. The ground beneath him shook violently and his whole body soon went numb.

He drank two more handfuls of water and then splashed across the stream. A voice barked out at him from behind a large boulder: "Who goes there?"

"Chang Wen-kuei," came the feeble reply.

"Company Commander, you had me worried," rapped out Lin Mao-tien. "Old Wang and Liu Tsai-hsueh gave up waiting for you and they must be almost at battalion headquarters by now. If we hurry, we might catch up with them."

"Right. Come on."

But Chang had to cope with two very recalcitrant legs. His feet felt like blocks of concrete, buried deep in the loose earth and refusing to budge. His ears were still ringing from the blast of the mortar bombs. Lin Mao-tien kept urging him on.

"Hurry, their mortar fire's getting heavier."

On the slope running up to the main peak where battalion headquarters was situated, many new com-

munication trenches and foxholes had been dug. Our fighters, wearing cotton-padded coats, crouched watchfully behind their machine-guns. As Chang crossed one of the trenches a voice called out warningly: "Steady on there, comrade, you're knocking that earth down our necks."

Chang breathed easier. The voice made him feel at home. He was back among his own.

Normally, it would have taken about ten minutes to cover the distance to the hilltop; but now it took the two men much longer. Chang paused to rest six times on the way, totally disregarding Lin Mao-tien's constant entreaties. But when Chang stopped again for the seventh time Lin tugged angrily on his sleeve, grumbling: "Come on! They're sending in another barrage."

Just at that moment seven mortar bombs thudded down not too far behind them. Chang rose to his feet and then hurried on after Lin.

The battalion commander was standing in front of the command post, his features veiled by the darkness. As soon as he saw Chang he said: "Regimental commander says you're to report to the divisional commander right away. He has inquired three times already about you. The divisional command post is still in the old place."

"Right. Will you let the battalion political director know that we've arrived safely?"

There were many questions which Chang wanted to ask, but before he could say anything else a telephone call came through for the battalion commander and he went inside to answer it.

Wang Yung-fu broke three branches from a tree and handed one to each of the three men.

"Well, I've something else to do now," he said. "Better make your own way there."

Chang took the branch in his hand. So trees were still to be found here! He ran his fingers along the branch and felt the few dried-up leaves. Ah! The leaves are falling already!

"Lin Mao-tien, Liu Tsai-hsueh, come on. Let's go and see the divisional commander."

The divisional command post seemed to be crammed with portable radio transmitters and telephones. Three telephones stood side by side on a table, one hung on a post near the bunk, and yet another lay beside the divisional commander's pillow. In an adjacent room four radio operators sat at their sets and their voices could be clearly heard.

"Nanking. . . ."

"Liuchuang. . . ."

The divisional commander was speaking into a telephone. From what he was saying it was apparent that he was criticizing someone, but as was his habit on such occasions his tone remained well modulated and carried no hint of censure.

"Now, let's not beat about the bush — Getting a call through on this line is as difficult as crossing the snow-covered mountains and grassland — Better come straight to the point — Um-h'm — Ah — Uh? — No, no, that simply won't do. Not one shell less. I want everything sent over."

No sooner had he replaced the telephone in its cradle than the duty staff officer handed him another one.

"Commander of the artillery regiment wishes to speak to you."

Chang Wen-kuei did not want to enter right away. He stood at the door and watched. The divisional commander appeared to have aged considerably in this battle. His face, once full and glowing with health, now had a sunken, drawn look. Two dark semi-circles shadowed his eyes and silvery threads glistened in his hair under the light. However, he was still neatly attired; even the button on his collar was fastened. Noting this, Chang suddenly wished that he had washed his face when passing the stream. Too late now, though, he thought. It wasn't that he was afraid of being upbraided—he knew that the divisional commander would not mind the "beard" problem for men who had just come from the tunnel—but a neat and tidy appearance, he felt, would have cheered the commander up no end.

After one more telephone call the divisional commander was left free for the moment. "Find out if Chang Wen-kuei's here yet," he said to a staff officer. "It's taking them an awful long time. I hope they haven't run into trouble on the way."

Chang stepped into the room.

"Divisional Commander, we're here. We arrived some time ago."

The divisional commander rose from his bunk and returned the salute, saying: "Did you all get here?"

"Yes," replied Chang, still standing at attention. "All three of us are here."

"You look as though you'd just come straight out of a comic opera!" the divisional commander remarked as he came forward to shake hands with the three men. "Your clothes hanging on you like chainmail. A bit at

the back and front, and a bit at the left and right. Things've been pretty hard, eh?"

Liu Tsai-hsueh rose to the occasion in his usual jocular way.

"Must've been harder for you, Commander. This is a new fashion we're wearing—'Tunnel Style'!"

"Hah! 'Tunnel Style', eh!" the divisional commander laughed. "Best the world's ever seen. Now, as punishment you'll smoke a Chunghua cigarette. Here—You rascal! Still full of life."

Tsui Hsin-wei liked to see his soldiers optimistic. The staff officers in the command post readily joined in the laughter. It was the first chuckle they had heard from the commander in a long, long time.

The two staff officers who had been yawning sleepily by the charcoal fire volunteered their seats, and Chang and the other two men sat down.

"Chang Wen-kuei," said the divisional commander, "I called you over here because I wished to see you about something. But it has meant a trip of several kilometres for you, so I hope you've no complaints about that."

"No, no. We wanted to see you ourselves, and if you hadn't sent for us. . . ."

"Fine. Rest for ten minutes or so now, and get a bit of food into your stomachs—Isn't it about time to eat? I wonder what we have for supper?"

The orderly came over with a basinful of sliced steamed buns and began to toast them over the brazier on a wire grid. The slight hissing from the bread and the singing wheeze of the boiling kettle held great attractions for the three of them. Only twenty days ago, reflected Chang, we enjoyed such comforts in the

tunnel, but never have I appreciated them as much as now.

"Careful now," exhorted the divisional commander, as he watched the three men wolf down the slices of toast, "too much of that can upset the stomach."

A few moments later the orderly came in carrying a small bucket, which he set down in front of the fire.

"Hah!" exclaimed Tsui, as he removed the cover, "noodle soup again!"

The orderly held out his hands palms upward in a gesture of helplessness.

"Seems to be the only thing this kitchen can turn out. We've asked them to change, but they don't know how to."

"Noodle soup. A time-honoured tradition throughout our entire division," said the divisional commander with a smile. "We eat it every meal, from divisional headquarters to the companies. Guests not excluded. Why, we're famous for our noodle soup!"

Chang, however, accepted the soup without a sign of surprise. Perhaps he had been accustomed to it formerly.

The orderly filled up a bowl and passed it to the divisional commander, who, in turn, handed it to Chang. An aroma of tinned beef and pepper filled Chang's nostrils. During the meal the divisional commander enumerated the many kinds of food he had eaten during army service.

"I've eaten with many army units in my day. One will have turnip soup with every meal, another will have rice soup, and only once in a while do they ever see noodle soup. But they don't refer to it as noodle soup. Instead, they call it soupy noodles — Anyway, to

tell you the truth, I'm quite partial to this fare. Real home cooking, eh!"

The divisional commander's comments throughout the meal put Chang in a comfortable frame of mind. It seems, said Chang to himself, that our commander is still in high spirits.

After eating only one bowl of the soup, the commander put the empty bowl on the table, lit a cigarette, and watched the other men as they ate. The rest of the staff in the command post, with the exception of the radio operators and telephonists, were also having supper, noisily gulping down the noodles.

A sudden thought came to Chang's mind: The comrades in the tunnel, right at this moment, will be carefully slicing up and dividing their ration of turnips! He slowly put the bowl on the table and then bent over to poke idly at the charcoal in the brazier with an iron poker.

"What!" exclaimed Tsui. "Only two bowls and you're full already?" He flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"I've had enough. Can't eat another bite."

"Have some more, my lad. If I'd just come out of the tunnel I'm sure I could polish off at least ten bowls. Are you thinking of the men back at the tunnel?"

"Eh? — No, not at all." Chang shook his head but did not look up.

"You shouldn't," said Tsui sympathetically. "Their days of hardship won't last much longer!"

At this moment a staff officer came over to report to the divisional commander.

"Regimental Commander Chang 'phoned in to report that the enemy are again attempting to destroy Tunnel 'A'. They're using pack explosives. . . ."

An involuntary shiver ran through Chang Wen-kuei's body and the poker slipped from his fingers. His eyes opened wide as he turned to the speaker, who continued with his report.

"So far, the enemy have thrown in explosives fourteen times in succession. The men in the tunnel, in co-operation with our artillery, have replied with several volleys of automatic fire and have captured two wounded enemy soldiers. The tunnel entrance is said to have partly collapsed, damaging two light machine-guns. . . ."

"And now?" Chang hastily interjected.

The staff officer shot Chang a glance, and then, turning again to the divisional commander, added: "At present they are carrying out repairs on the entrance."

A tranquil smile flitted across the divisional commander's face as he looked at Chang. Then he spoke to the staff officer:

"I see. Well, there seems to be no cause for alarm."

Chang, on the other hand, was worried and extremely anxious. It seemed that the tunnel had been exposed to ever greater danger since he had left.

After Liu Tsai-hsueh and Lin Mao-tien had had their fill of what was on the table, the divisional commander instructed them to leave first for regimental headquarters.

"You can sleep well there, and I personally guarantee that no one will be throwing grenades at you!"

Chuckling, the two men walked out of the command post.

The divisional commander sat down at the fire wiping his swollen eyes with a handkerchief.

"I suppose, Chang Wen-kuei, that the men in the tunnel must be growing rather impatient by now, eh?"

"No, we weren't worried. We knew that our commanders wouldn't forget us, and that sooner or later we'd get out."

"Not worried? Not worried, eh? If you could only have seen your face a few minutes ago!—Frankly, my own impatience was beginning to get the better of me. I had full confidence in you men there, but I was still somewhat worried. Although I've been fighting for quite a number of years now, I can tell you that never before have I been so worried about you. Every time an enemy attack on the tunnel was reported I felt, in my heart, much the same as you did just now. Each day I had to give the army commander a situation report on the tunnels, and he himself was continually ringing me up: 'Tsui Hsin-wei, make sure that some batteries, first-aid equipment, and turnips are sent through. How are the men there getting along? . . .' Ho! Even the smallest matter didn't slip his mind. Anyway, you people won through. You held out. I can tell you, Chang Wen-kuei, the enemy are frightened out of their wits by now. Soon they'll be nothing but raving lunatics! All day long they curse us: 'Ferocious communist army! Savage communist army!'—Our artillery, they claim, results in 'inhuman devastation'. But still they refuse to withdraw their ugly snouts from Sangkumryung. They cling on and suffer the drubbing we hand out. All right! We'll give it to them where it hurts."

"Our success is a result of the higher command's correct leadership," Chang put in.

"No matter whether the merit should go to the higher command or you men there, the point is that you've held on as long as you were required to."

Chang gleefully rubbed his hands together, and asked: "Are we going to launch a general counter-attack then? When?"

"Don't get excited! — The day after tomorrow."

"But why have I been called back here then?" inquired Chang worriedly.

"Your regimental commander and I have settled it between ourselves. Tomorrow night you will take a full company of men through the enemy lines to the tunnel. If the initial move of the counter-attack is launched from the tunnel itself it will mean fewer casualties and the chance of victory will be greater. But getting a company of men through is not an easy job. My purpose in asking you to come here is to make clear that when you cross the enemy lines, no matter how heavy the enemy fire is, you must not give yourselves away. Even if a man is hit, he must not utter a sound. As company commander, your responsibilities will be beyond the ordinary; any carelessness on your part will result not only in the loss of more lives of our men, but also in the miscarriage of our over-all plan of counter-attack. And you are probably aware that any setback we might suffer at Sangkumryung will add to the enemy's arrogance. The task of holding the tunnel has been carried out well; but this particular job is of even greater significance. You must take greater care in carrying it out!"

Never before had Chang seen the divisional commander so serious. The kindly gleam in his eyes, normally present when he was addressing his subordinates had disappeared. The divisional commander's voice and expression were enough to suggest the gravity of the coming mission.

"I assure you, Commander," Chang said as he stood up automatically. "If only I'm not killed. . . ."

"Sit down," the divisional commander interrupted. "I don't want you to guarantee with your life that the task will be accomplished. I want you to think how you can get through alive. If you get yourself killed, you won't be able to accomplish anything, will you?"

Chang silently resumed his seat.

"When you're talking to the men," the commander went on to say, "don't let the word 'death' fall from your lips. 'Dying' won't solve any problem. Brief them fully on the route to be taken and the position of the various enemy weapon emplacements. You should make full use of the intelligence of your men so that everyone of them will get through to the tunnel safely."

"Very good, Commander. There's three of us, so each man can lead one platoon. Then we'll be able to space ourselves out. The smaller the target, the better."

"And if one of the three is put out of action, how will you maintain connection?"

"We'll take some raw rice along, and those in front can leave a trail with it."

"And the problem of a wounded man maybe crying out?"

"I'll stress it when speaking to the men that, in the spirit of being responsible to the whole army and to the motherland, they should, in event of being hit, do everything in their power to bear the pain in silence."

"Right. You've a lot of work ahead of you before setting out. I know that things haven't been easy for you in the tunnel and that you must be dead tired; but you'll have to grit your teeth until the final counter-attack."

"Hardship and tiredness don't matter, Commander. I know that our divisional commander is at it night and day too, the same as we are."

"Um — All right, you can go ahead with your plans. Is there anything else you will need before the counter-attack?"

"Ammunition's the main thing. In attacks in the past we've often run out of ammunition and had to withdraw to the tunnel. And only one company of men won't be able to carry very much of it."

"That can easily be taken care of. We plan to transport ammunition in the daytime."

"The daytime! But enemy artillery will block the transport lines, won't it?"

"Don't worry. You see, the strength of our own artillery has been increased several times; and we can control the enemy fire. Look —" The divisional commander rose and spread out a map on a bunk. "See that. We have so much artillery now, more than you could ever have dreamed of. It has all been brought up while you men were holding the tunnel."

Chang looked down at the map and blinked his eyes in surprise at the many clusters of red flags which represented artillery units.

"The fire-power we have concentrated here is capable of knocking out over half of the enemy defences. Once you've captured the position, our artillery can send down a wall of fire which the enemy will never get through, even if they should suddenly sprout wings. Then, with the position in our hands, we will continue to reinforce you; and make it quite clear to the enemy that they will never get close to our position even if they should throw in another two divisions."

"There'll be no problem then. Once we've taken the position I swear that we won't retreat one inch!"

"Good. Heavens! The things we've learned during this battle. 'Tunnel warfare' — a new discovery in the history of warfare. In all military history there has never yet been a form of defence which hasn't eventually crumbled. But now we can declare, with the utmost certainty: Even the fiercest enemy is impotent before our system of tunnel defences!"

"And my troops?" asked Chang, veering the topic of conversation. "Where are they?"

"Your men have been picked out already. They are only waiting for their new company commander to assume his post. When you and the other two fighters get these men back to the tunnel, eighty per cent of your task will already have been accomplished."

"We'll do it, I give you my word. When do we set out? Tomorrow night?"

"Not tomorrow," said the divisional commander, glancing at his watch, "but tonight! It's already four thirty. Another day! You'd better go back and sleep for a while. The regimental commander will introduce you to your company in the afternoon."

"Only four thirty?"

Apparently, Chang was worried about how he was going to pass the long hours between four thirty and nightfall.

The divisional commander walked to the door with Chang when the latter was leaving, and in an undertone which was edged with excitement he said: "Fight well! After we've recaptured the position, the army commander has yet another slap up his sleeve for the enemy."

Chang followed the orderly out of the command post. Somewhere in the distant rear, a cock crowed. It was a sound Chang Wen-kuei had not heard for several months.

## CHAPTER IX

On the way back Chang Wen-kuei had to crawl approximately three-fifths of the distance, mortar bombs peppering the ground around him. His knees and elbows were soon a patchwork of scratches and bruises, and needle-like pieces of stone and shrapnel tore at the lacerated and bleeding skin. Cordite-smelling dust and grit clogged his mouth, gagging him. His clothes were soaked with perspiration. At last he was close enough to see the dark tunnel entrance and he raised his arm several times in an effort to attract attention. He felt so weak that he could hardly move a single step forward. He took a breath to steady himself, struggled to his feet and stumbled forward on pain-numbed legs. He painfully dragged himself a few steps nearer, and managed to reach the mound of earth at the tunnel entrance before his whole body crumpled up under the effort and he sprawled headlong on the ground. One of the men on guard at the entrance scurried out to help him inside.

"Who is it?" asked Lu An-kuo, as he rose from the hand-grenade case — Chang's old seat.

"Me. . . ."

"Our commander's back!" shouted the sentry.

Lu ran over to Chang, put a steadying arm round his shoulder, and sat him down on the seat he had just vacated.

"Sit down — Easy now — Here, bring over that last bowl of water we've left."

"Never mind. I . . . I've some here. . . ."

As he gasped out his words, Chang reached for the canteen which was slung at his back; but he was too weak to reach it.

". . . I've brought back a company."

Only then did the thought strike him: Enemy firing blindly all the way — Never let up — How many casualties? —

"Stay where you are — Easy, easy now — I'll see to getting the men in here."

So saying, Lu turned and strode past the defences at the tunnel mouth. Chang leaned back against the hard wall. The very sight of the battalion political director had a soothing effect on his mind: he now felt safe, secure. Then the strain of two nights spent crawling under enemy fire and the day he had spent mobilizing the men began to tell. He could not help closing his puffed-up, tired eyes. His fingers gave up the attempt to reach the water-bottle, and he dropped off to sleep.

He didn't wake up until Liu Tsai-hsueh — the last man to come in — walked over to report.

"Company Commander. Report: Three men killed, one man wounded."

"Where's the wounded man?" Chang asked anxiously.

"I brought him in on my back."

"Oh! —"



The thought flashed into Chang's mind that the divisional commander would at that moment be sitting by the radio in the command post, hungry for information, for news.

"Political Director," he said, "will you let the divisional commander know we've arrived? The suspense must be killing him by now."

"Not me," Lu said. "You speak to him yourself. At a time like this he'll be delighted to hear your voice."

After Chang had made his report over the radio, the divisional commander's voice came crackling through the ear-phones. He was greatly excited.

"It's a miracle! A miracle!— This'll go down in history as a miracle! From my heart, my congratulations to every comrade. . . ."

So tightly were the men packed into the tunnel that no fresh air could circulate. Everyone was seated, huddled together. Because of this lack of fresh air, Chang had forbidden the men to smoke; and no man was allowed to move without express permission.

Chang and the political director were seated side by side. Lu's comment for that day had already been entered in his diary: "We have reached the final day in our task of holding the tunnel."

"Er, Political Director."

"Um-h'm?"

"Oh — Nothing," said Chang with a smile. "It's just that I'm feeling so happy now. We'll go out and fight shortly, and never again will we have to stand guard on our tunnel. Twenty days we've been in here."

"Do you think, then, that in the days to come things won't be so hard?"

"No — Whether things are hard or not won't bother me much. But being stuck in a tunnel like this, it sort of gets on your nerves."

"This is our last day as far as this battle is concerned. But taking the war as a whole, this is the first time our tunnel is put to a test like this."

"You think there's still a possibility of us having to hold out in the tunnel?" asked Chang in bewilderment.

"Um — Perhaps. The possibility's there. War's like that. Personally, I'd very much like to see the enemy move up several more divisions. I'd willingly stay here another twenty days to let them exhaust their last ounce of strength on our position, if the enemy want it that way."

"H'm, your idea sounds all right," Chang nodded after a moment's reflection. "But for myself I want to fight my way out of here. And I hope it's the last day."

"The last day," said Lu, grinning. "Why, you're like a kid: Find it hard to go for one day without seeing the sun. Right?"

There was no reply, and Lu continued: "It's the last day all right. As soon as we get out there, the enemy'll have no way of pushing us back. We've sapped their strength."

Taking out his mouth-organ, Chang began to play softly, his body swaying from side to side with a gentle, boyish motion.

"All right, never mind the music. You've a lot of fighting ahead of you tomorrow. Better take a snooze while you can."

"Very good," replied Chang, obediently pocketing the mouth-organ, "I won't play. But I've had enough sleep already."

Lu busied himself writing up his notes, and Chang sat watching him for some time. Then Chang's head began to droop and he lay down beside the political director. His body curled up and he was soon fast asleep.

The final day of the gruelling and seemingly endless tribulations had come. Shortly after darkness had fallen the defences at the tunnel entrance were dismantled and removed. In fully battle array, the men lined up against the tunnel walls. No one spoke; not even a cough disturbed the silence. Chang Wen-kuei kept glancing down at the luminous dial of his watch, cursing the hands for moving so slowly.

Then, suddenly, the men heard the sound of their beloved rocket artillery. This time the rocket barrage was much more prolonged than ever before, and as salvo after salvo crashed down the flash of the explosions lit up the inside of the tunnel. The men who were ready for the final counter-attack held their caps firmly on their heads as the blast swept inwards. Every man was benumbed by the violent trembling of the earth, and showered with the grey dust which came cascading from the tunnel roof; but he didn't care. Every man was almost deafened by the tremendous roar of the heavy artillery shells which succeeded the rockets; but no one cared.

From the main peak position where battalion headquarters was located several green signal flares shot up into the air. Chang waited until the last shell had left our guns and then led the shock platoon out of the tunnel.

On the hilltop it was unusually quiet. Not even a machine-gun fired. It was a distressing silence. Was

it possible that all the enemy had either been killed or frightened away by our artillery? Or was it that the enemy were lying in wait, planning to catch our attacking troops by surprise? Where were the remaining enemy fire emplacements located? It was impossible to tell.

Chang ordered two squads to approach the hilltop from the flanks. Then he called to Liu Tsai-hsueh:

"First Squad Leader, take your men straight up the hill and make a head-on attack. Take no heed of any firing on your flanks."

Liu beckoned to the men in his squad and moved off at the head of a group.

Everything was still quiet. Chang and the others followed close behind Liu's group.

All of a sudden the rattling of enemy light and heavy machine-guns shattered the stillness. Following this, a series of blinding flashes was seen on both sides of the hilltop position: the groups on the flanks were throwing in hand-grenades. Meanwhile, when the enemy on the flanks were distracted by our men who made a feint attack, Liu Tsai-hsueh and his squad, at the front of the hill, braving the cross-fire from the enemy's machine-guns, edged nearer and nearer under cover of the dense flame and smoke created by their own hand-grenade attacks, and successfully approached the enemy fire emplacements. Then the ear-shattering blast of a hand-mine was heard, and the fire emplacement in the centre was struck dumb.

"We've broken through their frontal position! H-a-a-a!"

Chang and the other men advanced up the slope at the double. Liu Tsai-hsueh's squad had suffered several

casualties at the moment of the attack, and he himself had a flesh wound in his leg. They had taken two enemy emplacements on the hilltop. By the time Chang reached the top of the hill, Liu was grappling on the ground with an enemy soldier, pummeling the man's head with a hand-grenade.

"Quick!" yelled Chang Wen-kuei. "Wipe out the enemy on the flanks. Use the hand-mines!"

Throwing hand-mines from above to destroy the enemy emplacements was an easy job for the men and, as one explosion followed another, the enemy machine-guns fell silent.

No sooner had our shock platoon gained a foothold on the hilltop and sent a signal to this effect than the enemy launched an attack, employing their "counter-attack troops", about one company strong, who had been kept hidden in shellproof shelters in a gully on the other side of the hill.

Judging from their past experience, the enemy thought that the shock troops which had just captured the position must have suffered heavy casualties after fighting their way up the hill and not many men could have come through alive. So they attempted to launch a surprise counter-attack upon our men, whom, they felt, must have been reduced to a state of exhaustion, and recapture the position. Little did they dream that these intrepid shock troops had suddenly appeared from the very bowels of the earth under their feet! And little did they dream that two more platoons were still being held in reserve in the tunnel!

After the first enemy counter-attack had been hurled back, Lu An-kuo decided to send up another squad to the position. Leading the squad was Wang Hung-yuan, the

assistant political instructor. After repeated requests from Wang, Lu had agreed to let him take part in this final counter-attack.

"What's this, Wang Hung-yuan? You've given up your job as 'director'?" quipped Chang.

"That's right. No more of that for me. At a time like this, fighting's more important than being a 'director'." Wang heaved a deep sigh of relief. "Phew! A 'director'! If I'd had to keep that up, it would have been the death of me!"

"You got here just in time. When they throw in another attack, take your squad and circle round to their rear quarter. Then we'll sandwich the devils. That'll put an end to their little game."

"Right. I'll get ready now."

"Be careful, eh! Tell the men to scatter out, and give the enemy the idea that you're there in force! Don't get too close. With the enemy in a panic each one of you will be able to do the work of a whole squad."

"Right."

"Good. Get ready then."

Chang had the fire emplacements fixed up and ordered preparations for a fresh charge. He also sent a man down with a message for the political director about his plan for the next step: after this enemy company was wiped out, he wanted to take advantage of the situation to send one platoon to capture the small hill to the front. The reason this idea had occurred to him was because, while he was at the command post, the regimental commander had told him that if they succeeded in capturing the main peak without too many casualties they should continue to take the offensive. But if this was not possible, the commander had said, they must hold

the position until the troops came in from the rear and continue the attack afterwards.

Judging the battle as a whole, after capturing the main position, the taking of the forward position out front wouldn't be too much of a problem. The forward position had been within the defence lines of his company, and Chang didn't want to lose any time in recapturing it and "liberating" the men who had been holding out in the tunnel there. And now, he felt, opportunity was knocking!

He was outlining a plan of attack in his mind when Lu An-kuo unexpectedly jumped into the dug-out.

"Chang Wen-kuei, I fully agree with your idea. You can push on, and I'll take full responsibility for this position."

Scattered out in a disordered fashion, enemy troops moved in for a second counter-attack. Chang waited until they were almost on top of the position before he screamed out the command: "Fire!"

Anguished shrieks mingled with the sound of submachine-guns, hand-grenades, hand-mines and bangalore torpedoes. Trapped in the overwhelming enfilade, the attacking troops flung themselves to the ground. Chang stood up, raised his pistol aloft, and led his men in a charge on the bewildered enemy.

As they tried to beat a hasty retreat, the enemy troops ran straight into a hail of hand-grenades and bullets from Wang Hung-yuan's squad in their rear. The earth-shaking uproar from our side mixed with the enemy troops' screams as they ran for their lives, turning the battle-ground into a scene of fury and fire. The "sandwich" operation succeeded in utterly routing what was

left of the enemy, and our fighters pressed on like waves at their heels.

Down the slope the enemy went. They scrambled wildly back to the hill in front, completely disorganizing and paralyzing their own defences there. Pummeling the enemy from higher ground, Chang's men had little trouble in putting themselves in control of the position. Hand-to-hand fighting did not last long before everything quietened down.

After he had ordered the men to reconstruct the defences, in case of an enemy counter-attack, Chang hurried off towards the tunnel directly below, the one which had been held by his company's 1st Platoon.

He had seen this spacious "home in the hill" hewed out of the hard rock, and on many occasions had briefed his men and held training classes in its interior; but now he was astonished to find that he hardly recognized the place. Formerly, it had been one of the most spick-and-span spots in the company lines; now it was littered with old rags and filthy lumps of cotton.

A blackened oil-lamp cast its dim reflection on the grimy faces of the men inside who were now scarcely more than skin and bone. At the sight of these beloved men who had gone through untold hardships and privations, Chang could not help stepping forward to warmly embrace each man in turn. He thought: if we in Tunnel "A" were swimming against a stream, these men here had an ocean to contend with!

This particular tunnel had had even fewer men than Tunnel "A", and it was so far from the rear that the men on the transport teams had very seldom succeeded in reaching it. For food and ammunition the defenders

of this tunnel had had to rely mainly on what they could wrest from the enemy. But they had stood firm in their defence. How this group of men, who, it seemed, could have been whisked away by the first puff of wind, had run the gamut of enemy flame-throwers and shells and had clung on tenaciously through the long and bitter days, defied the imagination. How this group of men had thwarted every attempt the cruel and cunning enemy made to destroy their tunnel, also defied the imagination.

"Comrades, the position's ours! . . ."

Chang repeated the phrase over and over, but the men never tired of hearing it. Afterwards, he put his arm round the shoulder of the 1st Platoon Leader, who had been in command in the tunnel, and spoke in a low, emotion-charged voice:

"In the name of every man in the company, I thank you. You have upheld the honour of our company."

The platoon leader, his eyes fixed on Chang, made no reply. Chang saw tears glistening in the man's red-rimmed eyes.

"What! Sad?"

"No — Happy, Company Commander. Happy! Is this really the final counter-attack?"

"It is," Chang nodded. "As soon as the troops come in from the rear, you men'll be able to go back and rest — Good. Stay in here for the present. I've got to go up there. Those swine might come at us again."

"I'll go up with you, eh?"

"Won't be necessary. We've enough men up there."

A look of entreaty came into the platoon leader's eyes as he said: "It isn't that, Company Commander — I . . ."

I just want to go up and take a look round. I've forgotten how many days it is since I last laid eyes on the position. . . ."

"All right. Come on!"

The two men walked out of the tunnel arm in arm.

Outside, an artillery battle was raging. The whole sky seemed to be aglow with a bluish phosphorescence emanating from a million flashes. Shells cleaved their way through the air in a whining criss-cross, exploding with a low, rippling rumble.

"Company Commander," said the 1st Platoon Leader, standing stock-still in astonishment, "will you just look at our artillery!"

"They fire one shell, and we answer it with ten. Platoon Leader, with this kind of soldier, defences such as these, plus artillery like this, what enemy is there who can withstand our attacks?"

Gradually, the enemy artillery abated; while our own batteries laid down a "wall of fire" between our troops and the enemy positions.

On the way to the hilltop with Chang, the platoon leader suddenly bent down and took up a handful of earth. His fingers tightened on the grey-brown powder, loath to release it.

"Company Commander, the enemy paid a terrible price for their attempt, but they didn't succeed in taking away even one handful of our earth."

Meanwhile the troops from the rear had begun to mow on to the position. With them came stretcher-bearers. One man, a submachine-gun slung across his chest, came over to Chang and the platoon leader and asked: "Which one of you is Company Commander Chang?"

"That's me — What is it?"

"I'm the assistant company commander from Third Company, X Regiment. Orders from higher command are that all comrades who are holding the tunnels will move back to the rear. The positions will be handed over to us."

"Well, your company moves fast!" replied Chang admiringly.

Then, turning to the 1st Platoon Leader, Chang said: "Go back to the tunnel and see to the removal of the wounded by stretchers. I'll be back as soon as I've given our brother troops details of the situation here. Be quick, eh! It'll be difficult for us to move after daylight."

"Very good."

As soon as Chang returned to the main peak position he went to report to the political director. He had just finished speaking when a thunderous roar was heard from further down the hill. Chang gave an involuntary shudder, and asked: "Political Director, what's that?"

"It's our sappers. They're blasting out new tunnels."

"Chang Wen-kuei," Lu An-kuo went on to say, after a brief pause, "this battle has really proved the great value of our tunnels. There's no telling what the cost would have been without them. And now the tunnels serve to strengthen our positions. And in the days to come, as a base for our attacks, they'll be of even greater value."

From the distance came the "clang-clang-clang" of sledge-hammers as they beat down on steel boring drills.

A cold, biting wind had sprung up. Chang Wen-kuei raised his face and felt a few soft, powdery flakes brush against it.

Snow! Ushering in the winter of 1952.

It was the third winter of the war — the third winter of anguish for the enemy on the battlefield of Korea.

Drafted at the Kumhwa front in Korea on November 25, 1952. Fourth version completed in Peking on July 19, 1953.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lu Chu-kuo comes from Yiyang, Honan Province, born into a poverty-stricken family in the county city in 1928. While a student he was very fond of reading Chinese classical novels and modern literary works, thereby developing a keen interest in literature.

He joined the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1948 and served as an army correspondent. He participated in the Huai-Hai Campaign in 1948 and took part in the crossing of the Yangtse in the following year.

After the U.S. imperialists launched the war of aggression in Korea in 1950 he went to the Korean front twice as a reporter. Upon his return he wrote two medium-lengthed novels — *Wind and Storm on the Eastern Front* and *The Battle of Sangkumryung*.

He now spends most of his time editing material for *People's Liberation Army Literature*.

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