

Battle of Baizhangguan Pass

by Ah Xiang

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In mid-Sept, Zhang Guotao's armies regrouped respectively, with an aim for Dajinchuan River area. Xu Xiangqian, in crossing grasslands for a second time, noticed that the corpses of Red Army soldiers were unburied inside the tents that were made of twigs. After a short stay at Maoergai, Xu Xiangqian marched along mountain road to the west of Heishui. By end of Sept, Xu Xiangqian converged with Zhang Guotao's army at Dangba. On Oct 5th, Zhang Guotao convened a meeting of 40-50 senior leaders at a monastery and accused Mao Tse-tung of adopting a retreat approach of "flightist" and "rightist utopia" nature. Zhang Guotao claimed that he, having terminated the retreat ensuing from the defeat of anti-5th-siege, would advocate an "attack" approach by going south. Zhang Guotao, blaming Mao Tse-tung for clandestine runaway, proposed to establish an "Interim CCP Central" by following the example of Lenin breakaway from "Second Communist International".

Xu Xiangqian stated that a 1st Front Red Army corps-level officer (?) first echoed Zhang Guotao by listing numerous incidents on the long march. Zhang Guotao asked Zhu De & Liu Bocheng to give their opinions. Without obvious support from Zhu De & Liu Bocheng, Zhang Guotao made his "Interim CCP Central" ["Second Central"] restricted to his camp instead of reporting to the outside world.

Zhu De was said to have endorsed the Campaign of Suijing-Chonghua-Danba-Maogong, with two prongs moving along the banks of Dajinchuan River. On Oct 8th, Wang Shusheng moved with right column, while Xu Xiangqian and Chen Changhao moved with left column. 25th Division of 9th Corps under Wang Shusheng's right column encountered resistance from Liu Wenhui's Sichuan army at Guanyinqiao. 4th Corps of Red Army left column hence forcefully crossed the river from Dangba on 11th, sacked Suijing on 12th and Danba on 16th. Red Army 30th Corps sacked Chonghua on 15th, while 27th Division of Red Army 9th Corps defeated Yang Sen's 7th brigade at Lianghekou on the night of 15th, sacked Hubian on 16th, and defeated Yang Sen's 4th brigade and sacked Dawei on 19th. On 20th, Red Army 30th Corps sacked Maogong, with one of the two fleeing Yang Sen brigade intercepted by 27th Division of Red Army 9th Corps at Dawei. 27th Division of Red Army 9th Corps, traveling 250 kilometers nonstop, continued on to chase Yang Sen & Liu Wenhui's Sichuan Prov armies. This campaign cause the Sichuan Prov army a casualty of 3000.

In Oct, Chiang Kai-shek relocated his command center to Chongqing from Wuhan. Chiang Kai-shek intervened in Sichuan provincial affairs by re-organizing Sichuan Prov armies into Yang Sen's 20th Corps, Tang Shizun's 21st Corps, Pan Wenhua's 23rd Corps,

Liu Wenhui's 24th Corps, Sun Zhen's 41st Corps, Wang Zanxu's 44th Corps, and Deng Xihou's 45th Corps. Other than over 100 regiments, Li Jiayu's 104th Division had about 9 regiments, and numerous other temporarily-recruited divisions and brigades were organized.

Zhang Guotao's attempt for Chengdu Plains was frustrated by KMT forces and Sichuan Prov army at Baizhangguan Pass. Red Army 4th Front devised the Campaign of Tianquan-Lushan-Mingshan-Ya'an-Qionglai-Dayi with three prongs. Zhu De emphasized the need to protect Red Army against KMT planes on the open battlefield since those cities were situated in the open space to the southeast of Jiajinshan Mountain but to the southwest of Chengdu city. On Oct 24th 1935, Red Army crossed Jiajinshan Mountain and attacked Tianquan, Lushan and Baoxing which were guarded by Guo Xunqi, Yang Sen & Deng Xihou. Xu Xiangqian and Chen Changhao, as middle echelon, on Nov 1st, sacked Baoxing which was guarded by Yang Sen's three brigades. After defeating Liu Xiang's teaching brigade and one regiment, they arrived at Lushan city. On 7th, left echelon defeated Deng Xihou's army, took over Dashunchang, and arrived in Qionglai county. Right echelon took over Tianquan from Guo Xunqi on 10th. After Liu Xiang's relief army was destroyed, Sichuan army at Lushan city abandoned the city on 12th. Xu Xiangqian stated that in a matter of one dozen days, Red Army destroyed 5000 Sichuan army and shot down one plane, posing direct threat to Qionglai and Chengdu cities. Xu Xiangqian, against Zhang Guotao's emphasis on Xikang [Western Sichuan Prov], advocated an eastward charge at "Chuanxi [Western Sichuan] Plains" in Qionglai area via a stealthy march through the narrow road between Mingshan and Qionglai. On Nov 13th, 15 Red Army regiments pounded two Sichuan Prov regiments at Zhijiachang & Taihechang. On 16th, Red Army took over Baizhang Town, a town sitting on the main road linking Mingshan and Qionglai and overlooking the "Chuanxi [Western Sichuan] Plains".

Liu Xiang had dispatched relief forces to Mingshan, including such Sichuan armies as headed by Wang Zanxu, Tang Shizun, Fan Shaozeng and Li Jiayue. Sichuan forces, totaling 80 regiments, built hundreds of blockhouses along the Mingshan-Qionglai Highway. 27th Division of Red Army 9th Corps destroyed 200 blockhouses along the road leading from Baizhang to Qionglai, but had to retreat due to fierce fightings. While Red Army 93rd Division faked an attack at Mingshan, Red Army 32nd Corps set up a trap for ambushing possible relief forces from Qionglai. On the early morning of Nov 19th 1935, over a dozen Sichuan Prov brigades attacked the Red Army from three directions of east, south and north, with a purported Liu Xiang order of retaking Baizhang at any cost and executing anyone who refused to advance. Xu Xiangqian memoirs stated that along the 5 kilometer arched path between Heizhu-guan [black bamboo] Pass and Baizhang Town, regiments and battalions of Sichuan Prov armies attacked the Red Army positions incessantly under the cover of cannons and plane bombing. Xu Xiangqian went to Li Xiannian's 30th Corps command center for directing the war. Red Army had occupied mostly low height hills in the area and engaged in zigzag wars for three days and three nights. When two brigades trespassed paddy rice fields for attacking Baizhang, Red Army collected a few machineguns and shot down most of the attackers in batches. On 21st, Red Army at Heizhu-guan [black bamboo] Pass retreated, and Sichuan army followed them to Baizhang. On 22nd, Baizhang was breached, and the lane by lane

fighting ensued.

After seven days and seven nights, Zhang Guotao's Red Army Fourth Front was reduced to 40000 from the original rank of 100000 plus. Xu Xiangqian claimed that Red Army had destroyed 15000 enemies at an own casualty of close to 10000 and that Red Army had to retreat when Chiang Kai-shek dispatched Xue Yue's Central KMT Army against them from the south. Xu Zhen claimed that Xue Yue killed 4000 Red Army soldiers and caught 1000 alive.

In late Nov, 30th & 9th corps evacuated to Mt Lianhuashan from Baizhang. Red Army 4th Corps retreated to north bank of Qingyijiang River under attack by Xue Yue's army. Red Army 33rd Corps maintained position against Li Baobing's Sichuan Army at Mt Dapaoshan. Zhang Guotao's 4th Front had to retreat to Tianquan-Lushan-Baoxing-Danba where severe cold winter limited their abilities to raise food and supplies.

On Nov 9th 1935, communists in Peking instigated student movements denouncing Chiang Kai-shek's "non-resistance-ism". In late 1935, Lin Yueying, aka Zhang Hao, a cousin of Lin Biao, returned to northern Shenxi Prov's Mao Tse-tung enclave from USSR. On Nov 25th, CCP Central held a Wayaobao Meeting and proposed "national united front for resisting Japanese invasion". CCP Central wired to Red Army Commander-in-chief [i.e., Zhu De] and Red Army 4th Front about Russian instructions and Wayaobao resolution. In comparison with Baizhangguan defeat, Mao Tse-tung had routed a Northeastern Army division at Zhiluozhen town. (Xu Zhen stated that Zhang Xueliang dispatched two divisions to Dagushan and Xiaogushan mountains where they were defeated by CCP forces.)

Hearing that Comintern had affirmed Mao Tse-tung's northern approach, Zhang Guotao backed down by seeking a reconciliation. Chen Yongfa claimed that Lin Yueying had proposed that both Zhang Guotao's "Second Central" and Mao Tse-tung's "Central" temporarily revoked themselves for ascription to direct leadership under Comintern. Xu Xiangqian pointed out that they had proposed a CCP Southwestern Bureau as a way to get out of predicament. In late Jan 1936, Zhang Guotao held a meeting at Renjiaba [to the north of Lushan city] and discussed Wayaobao Meeting resolutions. As a show of launching "national united front", Zhang Guotao delivered letters to Sichuan Prov military leaders. In early Feb, Xue Yue's KMT forces and Sichuan armies converged onto Tianquan and Lushan. Red Army evacuated after one week of fierce fightings. Xu Xiangqian stated that when 4th Front planned to evacuate Baoxing-Danba-Maogong for Kangding and Daofu, CCP Central sent over a new telegraph stating that Stalin had confirmed with Lin Yueying as to Red Army's possibly seeking assistance from Russian Red Army in New Dominion Prov.