

# THE ENEMY FROM WITHIN

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In late December 1939, 129th Division commander Liu Bocheng, on the pretext that Hou Ruyong's Hebei Special Operations 4th Column and Qiao Mingli's Hebei Populace Army sandwich-attacked Fan Zixia's "anti-Japanese guerrilla column on Peiping-Hankow Railway", ordered a siege campaign by relocating over 385th Brigade and western Hebei guerrilla detachment as well as borrowing the garrison brigade of central Hebei and the southern advance detachment of Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Military District. On January 12th, 1940, combined communist forces from southern Hebei subdistrict of Liu Bocheng's Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong District and central Hebei subdistrict of Nie Rongzhen's Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei District attacked Hou Ruyong and Qiao Mingli's army.

To lend support to the Duel Army in southwestern Shanxi, Liu Bocheng sent Chen Geng's 386th Brigade and 129th Division headquarters troops to Mt Taiyueshan area. Nie Rongzhen, from his military district, established a "Southern Excursion Detachment" against southeastern Shanxi on January 24th as well as a "Southern Advance Detachment" against Shi Yousan on January 30th. In collusion with Wei Lihuang who halted the movement of central government troops, communists concentrated on destroying Yan Xishan's provincial troops with additional reinforcements consisting of 344th Brigade, Shanxi-Henan Border Detachment, independent guerrilla detachment and 4th Regiment of Hebei Populace Army, and pressed Sun Chu and the provincial district government to western Shanxi.

Having defeated Hou Ruyong and Qiao Mingli's troops, i.e., the two arms of provincial government, Liu Bocheng, in late January 1940, visited Luu Zhonglin and Zhu Huaibing for neutralizing the opponents via divide-and-conquer strategy. In early February, Zhu Huaibing pulled out of Mt Taihangshan for the area south of [[Wuan-Shexian]] Highway and north of Zhanghe River. Shi Yousan, who maintained good terms with communists for one year, became the next target. On the pretext that Shi Yousan had instigated mutiny of a special task battalion of the Eastern Advance Column and defection of 5th Subdistrict commander Ge Guizhai [i.e., formerly a follower of Zhao Yunxiang] of Southern Hebei Military District, Liu Bocheng ordered Cheng Zihua's Southern Advance Detachment to launch an attack scheduled for February 11th. On February 9th, Shi Yousan suddenly scurried south. Cheng Zihua ordered the communist troops to chase and intercept. After one day's fighting, communists destroyed part of Shi Yousan and Sun Liangcheng's troops in Quzhou area. Shi Yousan crossed Zhanghe River between Daming and Linzhang, and consecutively Weihe River for Qingfeng-Puyang.

Southern Excursion Detachment crossed Zhengding-Taiyuan Railway into southeastern Shanxi in late January an early February. While Nie Rongzhen and Luu Zhengcao stayed on in

Wuxiang's 8RA headquarters and 129th Division headquarters consecutively, Zuo Quan directed Chen Zhengxiang's "Southern Excursion Detachment", with 1st Regiment of 1st Subdistrict, 5th Regiment of 4th Subdistrict as well as Central Hebei Garrison Brigade of two regiments, for campaigns against Yan Xishan's provincial troops and "red spear societies". Later in March, Zuo Quan further took Southern Excursion Detachment for the Cixian-Wuan-Shenxian-Linxian Campaign against Zhu Huaibing's 97th Corps in tri-provincial borderline before a victorious parade presided over by Peng Dehuai, Nie Rongzhen and Liu Bocheng.

Claiming preemptive strike before the government reinforcements of 41st Corps and 71st Corps were to come, Liu Bocheng and Deng Xiaoping devised Cixian-Wuan-Shenxian-Linxian Campaign and East-of-Weihe-River Campaign by pooling troops from Mt Taihangshan, southern Hebei, central Hebei and Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Military District. The strategy was to destroy Zhu Huaibing's army at the middle segment of the Hebei-Henan mountain road with 13 regiments, about three times superiority in strength, while neutralizing Lu Zhonglin and Sun Dianying at the northern and southern segments. The objection of overtaking the path was to cut off government's link with the Hebei Populace Army and other guerrilla units in northern China altogether. The battle plan was to attack 97th Corps' replenishment regiment, 94th Division of 97th Corps [which took part in 1937 Nankou Campaign] and Zhang Dongkai's New 24th Division of 97th Corps with three prongs headed by Li Da, Wang Shusheng and Gui Gansheng. In advance, communist troops, on the pretext of providing "manpower, technique and expertise", moved to station between Zhu Huaibing and Lu Zhonglin's troops on the narrow mountain road.

In February, Raymond J de Jaegher, riding on bicycle, attempted to circumvent around Japanese blockade for Shunde to the southwest so as to further trek towards Free China for a meeting with Father Vincent Lebbe who was running military field hospitals with clergymen, nuns and parishioners of the "Congregation of St. John the Baptist". With a communist-stamped shire-level pass, which barely allowed limited village-to-village movement, Jaegher was constantly intercepted by teenager sentry when entering and exiting villages and underwent two arrests during the first day. Five days later, Jaegher sought the help of a banditry chief to pass through the vacuum area. After hiding away the bicycle, Jaegher pretended to Japanese guards as one of the Polish clergymen to enter Shunde where a Polish priest operated an ophthalmology [[]] since 1930. Disguising as a priest from Luan area and making his eyelid swollen and bloody via some cosmetic surgery, Jaegher, who already travelled 300 miles, continued on towards Wuan and Mt Taihangshan, not knowing he was walking into the eye of the storm.

About five to six days later, Jaegher passed interspersing communist and government holdouts to reach Kouzhen where locals informed about Vincent Lebbe's whereabouts. Trekking back towards Hebei, Jaegher passed under one of Zhu Huaibing's castles which the guide pointed out the communists wanted to take out as a thorn in the flesh. With communist and government troops aligned on two sides of mountain road, Jaegher smelled the powder, worried about the locals' rumor of massive communist attacks, and felt elevated wherever he spotted wall slogans touting "one nation, one soul and one leader". Having missed Lebbe, Jaegher returned

southwestward. At a hilltop village in southernmost Hebei, Jaegher received a welcome from Lu Zhonglin and his Catholic cavalry. Having learnt that Lebbe was possibly in southern Shanxi, Jaegher moved south towards Shexian, crossed Qingzhanghe and Zhuozhanghe rivers, walked down a mountain pass guarded by Sun Dianying's New 5th Corps, and on February 28th, surprisingly ran into Lebbe at the northern Linxian outskirts. When news came that twelve St John brothers were buried alive by communists, Lebbe, who had illusion with communists in initial years and was personally befriended by Zhu De, collapsed.

On March 5th, two hours past midnight, communists launched a general attack. Li Da's central prong, with Youth Column, Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Contingent and Garrison Brigade of central Hebei, broke through the weakest link of Zhu Huaibing's defense line. Gui Gansheng and Zhou Xihan's right prong, consisting of New 1st Regiment of 386th Brigade, independent detachment and division-subordinate special task regiment, moved in to cut off 97th Corps' possible retreat path after persuading Sun Dianying's troops to move aside. The next morning, central prong and left prong [which consisted of a unit from Herald Detachment of 129th Division] pincer-attacked 97th Corps, and pressed Zhu Huaibing on a fleeing to the south of Zhanghe River and Linxian. Communist troops launched transcendental chase to intercept 97th Corps. After an ambush to the south of Linxian, Zhu Huaibing fled to Xiuwu County with 2000 remnants.

On March 7th, doubting Linxian county capital could be defended, Lebbe, Jaegher and 200 medical staff sought asylum with Sun Dianying's command center at Yaocun town. At night, Liu Bocheng's communist troops surrounded Yaocun and cut off links with New 5th Corps troops in other villages. On 8th, communist troops, having left Lu Zhonglin untouched initially, turned north to launch a blitz attack. After consecutively routing Zhu Huaibing and Lu Zhonglin's troops in the middle and northern segments, communists converged upon New 5th Corps at the southern tip of the mountain road. At night, Sun Dianying, still in high spirits, told the priests that he would order all his troops to break out for converging with Wei Lihuang's central army in Shanxi the next night but suggested to Lebbe to have two nuns leave the military beforehand. On the early morning of 9th, Jaegher brought out two nuns by pretending to be hostages held by the central army. Two hours after Jaegher left, communist troops struck on Yaocun with full weight, completely routed New 5th Corps before its planned breakout, arrested Lebbe and then chased the unknown Westerner behind Jaegher's footsteps.

Meantime, on March 4th, at 1 am, communist forces launched a blitz attack at Shi Yousan to the east of Weihe River. Cheng Zihua and Song Renqiong, in lieu of past mistake of destroying government troops with insufficient forces, took the action of concentrating 17 regiments for a four-prong attack. From the west, Hebei-Shandong-Henan Detachment, as northern Henan strike force, attacked Shi Yousan in Liugeji and Huangcheng, to the south of Qingfeng. The Herald Column and Fan Zhuxian Column as northwestern Shandong strike force, Eastern Advance Column, Liu Zhiqi Detachment of central Hebei and Zhao Chengjin & Tan Guansan Detachment as central strike force, and independent brigade of 115th Division and 5th Detachment of the Penetration Column as western Shandong strike force, attacked Gao Shuxun's troops in

Guacheng, Liutaji and Puxian, respectively. A penetration force first breached Liutaji, causing a collapse of government troops' defense line. Communist forces then chased towards the bed-dry Yellow River, and continuously attacked government troops from Puyang to Dongming. Government troops, on 11th, retreated to [[long-hai]] Railway. On 15th, Ding Shuben's troops retreated to Fengqiu, northwest of the former Yellow River bends.

On March 9th, Wei Lihuang, though ordered by Chiang Kai-shek to counter-attack communist troops, requested with Zhu De for a truce instead. Wei Lihuang personally visited Zhu De to persuade the 8RA for a retreat to the north of Zhanghe River. An agreement was reached to use Lin-Dun Highway and the tri-provincial area of Changzhi-Pingshun-Cixian county line as the demarcation between communist and government troops. In April, communist forces engaged in another campaign against Shi Yousan and Ding Shuben's troops. Claiming that Shi and Ding attempted to fight back towards southern Hebei, communist forces destroyed the bulk of Ding Shuben's troops in Xiaohanji on April 6th and forced the remnants into western Henan. Two days later, communist forces attacked and destroyed part of Shi Yousan's troops, and pressured Shi Yousan to Caoxian and Dingtao area. Hence, communists frustrated government troops' links among Mt Taihangshan, southern Hebei and western Shandong

In central Hebei, Jaegher checked out the evidence of communist live burial of seventy persons in one single village before Heh Long's forces left for northwestern Shanxi in February 1940, including a conservative gentleman by the name of Yuan Xiaoyan. For the months of May to July, communists purged 360 persons in Boye, 1700 in Dingxian, 1200 in Anping and 2000 in Shenxian. Among the victims would be 25-year-old Wang Qisen, a Sichun Middle School graduate, who declined to flee and then disappeared right after the marriage even though Jaegher had warned him that over 300 Sichun graduates were killed by communists in one county alone. Three weeks later, Jaegher located the body after accidentally learning from a peasant about the turned soil in his field.

Father Lebbe, who was already scheduled for a medical checkup before the war, stayed under communist captivity till late April. Communists denied having Lebbe till Chiang Kai-shek delivered a strong-toned message to 8RA commander Zhu De. Lebbe, after release from over forty days' imprisonment, later walked to Luoyang from Linxian without help from the 200-member medical staff which was either captured or killed or dispersed by the communist forces during the war. On June 13th, Chiang Kai-shek sent a plane to fetch Lebbe to Chungking where he died eleven days later.

In June, communist forces, headed by Yang Yong, Yang Dezhi, Xiao Hua and Chen Zhaidao, launched a new round of attacks at Shi Yousan and Sun Liangcheng's troops. After fighting for dozens of days, Shi Yousan and Sun Liangcheng were evicted from western Shandong and pressured back across the Yellow River to the northern bank. On July 16th, the Military Council, in light of continuous communist attacks and de facto expansion, approved the troop buildup of

18th Group Army [i.e., 8RA] by three Corps of two divisions each plus three replenishment regiments while allowing the New Fourth Corps to expand to two divisions.