

Crossing The Yangtze River

by Ah Xiang

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On Jan 1st 1949, Mao Tse-tung issued a call in "Exerting the revolution to the end" on New Year Day speech. From mid-Jan to early March, communist troops converged around Zhoukou of Henan Province for one month long political studies. Communists re-organized fighting flanks by naming CCP Central Plains Field Army to People's Liberation Army 2nd Field Army [2FA]. Former organization of "zong dui" was officially converted to corps. Qin Jiwei's 9th "zong dui", at Suxian of Anhui Province, was renamed to 15th Corps under 4th Army Group of PLA 2FA. In late Feb, PLA command center named 15th Corps as 2FA's herald troops for the Yangtze crossing. Departing Zhoukou on March 5th, Cui Jianguo's 45th Division, Zhang Xianyang's 43rd Division, and Xiang Shouzhi's 44th Division made a stealthy march towards the Yangtze bank through Mt Dabieshan. 23 days later, after a trek of 750 kilometers, 15th Corps arrived on the bank on March 27th after routing the cities of Yingshan and Luotian in Hubei Province and Taihu and Wangjiang in Anhui Province en route.

KMT troops, after the calamity in Xu-Beng Campaign, had basically abandoned positions north of the Yangtze Bank. Chiang Kai-shek claimed that he had delayed the resignation of presidency because he was too concerned with the fate of Du Yuming's army group to shake up the soldiers' will.

Liu Ruming, in his memoirs, pointed out that the KMT government had contemplated upon a Huai-he River Campaign after the debacle of Xu-Beng Campaign. However, the rumor of Chiang Kai-shek's stepdown and the weak military to the north of Yangtze had doomed any resistance as unrealistic. By late 1948, Liu Ruming, with his troops renamed to 8th Army Group, was ordered to abandon Bengbu for Wuhu on the southern Yangtze Bank. Most of the troops walked their way while the command center took the train. Passing through Hefei of Anhui Province, Liu Ruming heard about communist ambushing the provincial staff while en route to Wuhu. The whole city of Hefei was abandoned. Having heard about coming presidential stepdown from Hebei Radio Broadcasting Bureau Chief, Liu Ruming hastened his way towards the Yangtze bank where Corps Chief Wang Xiushen picked him up for river crossing. With Li Zongren assumption of presidency, Liu Ruming stayed on at Wuhu. Speculators knocked on his door for a persuasion, including Li Xingzhong. At Nanking, Gu Zhutong [Gu Mogong] advised Liu Ruming as to detaining 'Democratic League' members should they come to sow dissension. Liu Ruming was then ordered to relocate towards the Yangtze segment in southern Anhui Province and western Jiangxi Province. The winding defense line extended hundreds of kilometers, from Tongling to Guichi, Dongliu, Datong, to Hukou-Jiujiang. 68th Corps command center was set at Zhide, while 55th Corps command center at Qingyang. While visiting Nanking, Liu Ruming was told by Li Zongren that he was welcome to visit him any time. Communist cannons repeatedly blasted at the southern bank. At one time, one KMT Navy ship joined in to counter-attack the communist positions till it was hit by cannon fire one night. When Nanking-Shanghai-Hangzhou Garrison Command Center was set up by Tang Enbo, Liu Ruming nominally tacked on the deputy post. In early April of 1949, 74th Division Chief Li Yizhi called from Datong about an invitation from a

navy commander by the name of Lin. Liu Ruming rode on a truck for 40 minutes and then rode on horse for one and half hour for the meeting. Liu Ruming repeatedly declined an invitation to go on board the ship. Days later, news came that Lin had defected to the communist camp with the ship.

On March 28th, communist 45th Division of 15th Corps eliminated a battalion from KMT 119th Division of 68th Corps at Huayangzhen town and the beachhead, and captured some boats and 100,000 kilograms of rice.¹ With Huayangdu crossing under control, communists claimed to have fired the first shot of Yangtze Crossing Campaign.

Qin Jiwei and political commissar Gu Jingsheng received the order of completing the preparatory work for river crossing within 15 days, i.e., before April 11th.² Soldiers practiced swimming and paddling on Puhu Lake, while boats and ships were assembled. Paddling speed reached 70 meters per minute. On April 12th, CCP military committee notified the army of a delay of river crossing to April 21st. Deputy commander Guo Tianmin for 4th Army Group and commissar Gu Jingsheng for 15th Corps went to Tongcheng for attending division chief meetings as to river crossing. On April 17th, 2FA ordered that 15th Corps crossed the Yangtze for Quexiangkou and Maolinzhou, at a segment of about 10 kilometers along the bank. On April 19th, Qin Jiwei convened a regiment chief meeting after moving command center to Chenshichong the day earlier.

On the afternoon of April 20th, Mao Tse-tung ordered the start of Yangtze Campaign on the excuse that representatives of Li Zongren's Nanking Government refused to sign "domestic peace agreement". Communist troops facing the KMT positions in Puzhen and Jiangpucheng towns on the northern bank of Nanking city immediately blasted the KMT hill positions, and cut off the highway between the two towns.³ After two days of fightings, PLA destroyed one KMT regiment at Jiangpu, took over Height Dadingshan and Height Erdingshan near Puzhen, and drove off the remnants to the other side of the Yangtze by the night of April 22nd.

At about the same time, 9:00 am on April 20th, communist battery at Sanjiangying of southeastern Yangzhou, blasted at British frigate Amethyst which sailed upstream on 19th. British warship was damaged and then got stranded when sailing towards the southern bank. At about 1:30 pm, another British warship came to the relief by destroying two communist cannons. Communist battery counterattacked the second warship, injured the captain, and drove it away. Communist battery then attacked the stranded warship again till rising tide saved the ship. British Far East Fleet, with flagship London and a cruiser, came to the relief as well. On the early morning of April 21st, on the Yangtze river course around Jiangyin, communists battery again inflicted heavy damages onto the British warships, injured the deputy fleet commander, and forced the warships into a retreat towards Shanghai. Altogether, British Royal Navy incurred 42 deaths, 50 wounded, and 103 missing.⁴ Communist claimed that British consul's notice to PLA Commander-In-Chief Zhu De was not received on time. Later, on April 23rd, British diplomat failed to locate the appropriate PLA commander for assistance with stranded warship, and after 103-day standoff, fled Nanking on July 30th by taking advantage of the cover from a passenger ship "Jiangling Liberated", ending in continuous communist artillery attacks along the Yangtze that unfortunately sank the passenger ship.

On April 21st, 1.2 million PLA troops, in three clusters, launched the Yangtze River Crossing along the 500 kilometer long bank, from Hukou in Jiangxi Province to Jiangyin in Jiangsu Province. 2FA, with 3 army groups or 9 corps, acted as the western cluster in Zongyang and Wangjiang area of Anhui Province. Qin Jiwei's 15th Corps was to control beachhead positions at Xiangshan and Huangshan, 16th Corps of 5th Army Group was to attack Dongliu to the left, and 14th Corps of 4th Army Group was to breach KMT positions between Pengze and Madang. Beginning from 15:00 pm, communist

artillery took out howitzers, the lighthouse at the Yangtze customs and the ammunition depot. By 19:30 pm, shiploads of PLA soldiers lined up on both sides of Huayang river mouth. Boats set sail at 23:00 pm with the help of northeastern winds. Midstream, KMT forces lit up the skies with tracers and blasted at the communist boats. Communist troops then blew up the sails for a forceful crossing. At about 100 meters to the bank, KMT forces fought back with flame throwers. With artillery support, communist forces took over beachheads, then took over Mt Xiangshan and Mt Huangshan, and drove off KMT troops by 3:00 am of April 22nd. KMT 68th Corps abandoned the Yangtze defense positions, mountain guns and howitzer. PLA 45th Division, after river crossing, attacked KMT's Madang garrison and assisted 13th Corps in blasting at KMT warships in the river. On April 23rd, 132nd Regiment of Qin Jiwei's troops sacked Zhide city, with a bounty of over 1000 prisoners from KMT 143rd & 81st Divisions, regiment chief Du Shaonan, deputy regiment chief Zhang Wenhan, and nine cannons.⁵

On April 23rd, communist troops lined up on the northern bank of Pukou for attacking Nanking the KMT capital. Communist artillery spent hours hitting about seven to eight KMT warships for clearing the river. By noon, warships fled downstream. Communist troops, at Pukou train station, held an emergency meeting as to a frontal attack at Nanking by citation of two prong success in river crossing by PLA 2nd and 3rd Field Armies in Hukou of Jiangxi Province and Jiangyin of Jiangsu Province. With ships and boats already towed to the southern bank, communist troops did not have any means for river crossing till a reconnaissance team brought back a ship from the southern bank as well as the news that KMT government had abandoned the Nanking city. By the dawn of April 24th, Wu Hualong and Song Xianzhang's communist troops took over the custody of the presidential palace, and nearby heights. KMT temp 4th Division abandoned the garrison position.

American warships sailed downstream to Wusongkou river mouth. Ambassador Stuart stayed put in Nanking and was said to have held two rounds of talks with communist diplomat Huang Hua.

Liu Ruming claimed that Yangtze defense collapsed as a result of breach in Digang and Jiangyin, respectively. By noon of April 22nd, Liu Ruming received a call from Yang Chen of Nanking-Shanghai-Hangzhou Garrison Command Center, with an order to retreat to the south of Zhejiang-Jiangxi Railway where the Second Defense Line troops were deployed. Liu Ruming ordered that 68th Corps depart along Fuliang, Leping, Yingtan and Yiyang, and 55th Corps depart along Qingyang, Shidai, Taiping & Weizhou. While converging at Jingdezhen Town, 68th Corps was attacked by Chen Geng's communist troops. More skirmishes occurred at mountain roads and river crossings. By the time 66th Corps arrived at Leping, one division equivalent had been lost. Liu Ruming and 55th Corps passed through Lanxi & Longyou and arrived at Quzhou without much mishap. On Zhejiang-Jiangxi Railway, Liu Ruming did not locate any Second Defense Line troops but miscellaneous army units, with dozens of numberings, streaming southward. Upon arrival at Jiangshan, i.e., KMT spy chief Dai Li's hometown, Liu Ruming had the telegraph bureau send out several telegrams but received no response. At a river crossing, Liu Ruming encountered army depot superintendent Tang Xiao and about 20 trucks of about 1 million silver yuan. Military appropriation officer requested for some aid by explaining to Tang Xiao that 68th & 55th Corps had not received stipend for one whole month. Tang Xiao disbursed KMT "Golden Yuan Certificates" and 500 silver yuan. At Jiangshan, Liu Ruming read about some rumor on Nanchang Daily to the effect that Liu Ruming had already defected to the communists at Digang which was about 15 kilometers away from Liu Ruming's Yangtze defense line. At Yingtan, 68th Corps Chief read about some local post stating that rebel Liu Ruming's troops had come south. Hearing that communist troops closed in towards Jiangshan, Tang Xiao and his trucks drove off. Liu Ruming and his army left for Pucheng. At Pucheng, county magistrate claimed that he just received order from the governor that KMT "Golden Yuan Certificates" would no longer be accepted as legal tender.

Over two weeks after abandoning the Yangtze Defense, Liu Ruming still failed to hear from the Defense Department or anybody. At Yong'an, 55th Corps Chief had to execute several soldiers for using some shop's umbrella in a rainy day. Liu Ruming's 8th Army Group then had a stopover at Liancheng where county magistrate helped him in sympathy after being told of the execution of soldiers at Yong'an.