

had been constructed by White Russian mechanics at Urumchi, had been driven by a Chinese chauffeur by way of Davan-ch'eng and Toqsun to Su-bashi, where the supply of petrol had run out and the car itself had been smashed up and left by the wayside.

On the same day, March 12th, this driver came to our prison and gossiped. He assured me that Qara-shahr had fallen, and that SHENG SHIH-TS'AI's victorious army would enter Korla in a few days. MA CHUNG-YING's defeated army had that very day begun to straggle into the town in groups. Possibly they would continue their flight to Kucha at once. What luck that we had not fallen in with these wild, starving bands on our return journey to Korla! As the main body of MA's army would be swamping Korla at any moment, general looting might be expected.

»It will be best for you to keep your gates barred», the driver observed. »And when the northern army comes in pursuit of MA you'll be in a hole, for you'll be regarded as enemies», he added. This driver was no fool. He understood the situation perfectly.

In the evening two fresh soldiers announced themselves. They were in full marching order and had orders from commandant HUANG to supervise the unloading of all four lorries and to sleep on two of them during the night.

Now it happened that the greater part of our funds, a matter of several thousand silver dollars, was kept in tight rolls in two secret drawers in the bottom of lorry No. 1. So if MA took all the cars we should lose all our silver. How could we get it out unobserved by the vigilant soldiers who were watching us?

All the baggage was taken off and piled in the yard. The soldiers saw that all was going well, and their attention flagged. When it had grown nicely dark GEORG asked the two supervisors into the drivers' room, treated them to tea and cigarettes and told them hair-raising stories of adventure. One or two of the engines were set going »to see that everything was in good order for MA» as he explained to the soldiers, but really so that the roar might drown the noise that could not be avoided when the secret drawers were broken open. When this had been done, the silver rolls were taken, a few at a time, to a big lumber-room with an earthen floor beyond our kitchen and buried by lantern-light in a hole dug in the floor. The hole was filled in, the earthen floor trodden level and a ragged straw mat placed over it.

The manoeuvre succeeded; the noise of the motors was silenced, and in its place the long-drawn, deep snores of the soldier supervisors resounded through the yard. I suspect that the beverage GEORG had given them was not merely tea.

March 13th had come! To judge from all that we had already seen and heard, this day was to be a critical one for us. As prisoners, we could only hear through gossip what was happening in the little town.