

The same day orders had come through from Urumchi that our wireless apparatus should be returned to us. We were only requested not to use it for the next ten days. Curious. Did this mean that the war would be over in ten days? They might just as well have said that we were at liberty to use it at once, for when CHEN examined it he found it to be damaged and hardly usable.

We did not know at all where we were to go. Kashgar or Urumchi? In any case, we had not enough fuel. We heard that thirty Russian lorries at Qara-shahr had no petrol, and were therefore not to be counted. But large supplies were expected from Russia, and we hoped to get our share of this.

### THE END OF OUR CAPTIVITY

YEW and I had just written a long telegram in English to LIU WEN-LUNG, the head of the provincial government, and to SHENG SHIH-TS'AI as general in command at Urumchi, giving an account of the expedition's task and expressing our desire to go to the capital. I had even translated it into Russian, and was just going to headquarters to get it sent off when four Russian colonels came into the mess — NAREIKA, SALOMAKHIN, NIKOLAEV and FEODOROV. And now there happened another of those marvellous episodes, like an incident in a fairy tale, in which this expedition had been so rich.

Colonel NAREIKA, who acted as spokesman, assumed a serious mien and said, looking at me:

»A wireless message has just arrived from SHENG TUPAN, in which he says that he cannot take the responsibility for your going to Urumchi now, because Russian motor-cars are sometimes fired upon from ambushes among the rocks along the road between the capital and Qara-shahr. Your journey to Urumchi must therefore be put off. You and your expedition have the right to go to Lop-nor to investigate the possibilities of irrigation. You had better stay at Lop-nor for two months, and then you can drive to Urumchi.»

I could not believe my ears, and had to support myself with my elbow on the table in order not to tumble off my chair. But I betrayed nothing. Taking from my pocket the telegram in Russian to LIU WEN-LUNG and SHENG SHIH-TS'AI, I replied:

»What a strange thing! I had just written this telegram to SHENG TUPAN, and was just coming to you to get it sent off, and now you come in with an answer from him! Please read it. As soon as our lorries and drivers have returned to Korla we shall prepare for the journey to Lop-nor. We shall stay there for two months. Then we shall return to Korla; and I hope we shall then hear something further about SHENG TUPAN's wishes and get the quantity of petrol we need for our trip to Urumchi.»