

GEORG tried to prolong the festivity in order that the 3rd Brigade might weary of it and continue its march. At last he got fresh stamps on MA's passport and was able to drive on. All the bridges had been burnt, and it was a fearfully hard job getting the lorries over the canals in the darkness of the night.

They reached Yangi-hissar and found the town occupied. The drivers were amazed, and GEORG lost his head for the first time. He jumped down from his lorry and began shouting in Chinese:

»We belong to MA CHUNG-YING's army!«

Most fortunately, they cannot have understood what he meant. And when at the same moment he heard them talking Mongolian to one another he realized that they belonged to the northern army and cried out in Mongolian:

»We've got Mongolian passports from Peking. MA CHUNG-YING captured us, but we've escaped!«

He was taken to a Torgut officer and showed his Mongolian pass. Thus all ties with Big Horse were broken, and he disappeared from the scene as far as the expedition was concerned.

On the 21st the Torgut leaders invited the drivers to a big party, which calmed their nerves. They also received fresh passports in Mongolian. In the evening General BEKTEEV arrived in a Russian Ford lorry.

Soon afterwards the drivers were summoned to the Russian headquarters and subjected to the most thorough examination about all their experiences with Big Horse. At last the officer who was conducting the examination said to them:

»How in the name of reason can you possibly have managed to wriggle out of the robber-chief's hands alive?«

»We flattered Big Horse by saying pleasant things to him.«

Now Colonel PROSHKURAKOV reappeared and gave the following orders:

»You must stay with us for four or five days. Two of your cars will go to Korla and two will come to Kucha with us to carry forage.«

The safe arrival of TSERAT and JOMCHA in Korla has already been described. On March 22nd GEORG and EFFE loaded their lorries with hay and maize and drove to Bugur, which in the meantime had been taken by the Torguts. The Tungans' rear-guard had continued their retreat to Kucha.

Our drivers entered Kucha on the morning of the 25th in the company of the Torgut troops. When it became known that they had returned, hundreds of Turkis in white turbans gathered to welcome them. They were all delighted to see GEORG and EFFE alive. Everyone wanted to shake hands with them. It was almost as though GEORG and EFFE had won the war and put that plaguey Big Horse to flight themselves.

Not till the evening of March 27th did they get permission to leave Kucha.