

Mao Tse-tung's Thought in Command Of Our Battle

—The story of the heroes of the No. 32111 Drilling Team who displayed proletarian revolutionary heroism in their battle against a sea of fire

DARE to scale a mountain of swords and dare to brave a sea of raging fire. This describes the heroic mettle of the people of our country in the great era of Mao Tse-tung.

Workers of the heroic No. 32111 Drilling Team take the study of Chairman Mao's writings as the first need of their lives. They master Mao Tse-tung's thought and make it their souls, make the implementation of Chairman Mao's directives their conscious action and regard the interests of the revolution as the first thing in their lives. With their blood and lives, they have quenched a blazing sea and safeguarded state property!

"Imprint Chairman Mao's Instructions in Our Minds, Infuse Them in Our Blood, and Express Them in Our Actions"

At 1 a.m. on June 22, 1966, the site of the gas well where the No. 32111 Drilling Team worked seethed with activity. Comrades of the No. 1 and No. 4 squads who were on duty were carrying out a shut-in well pressure test; their intent eyes were fixed on a well-head, as great beads of sweat rolled down their cheeks. Should the test succeed, the installations at the top of the first high pressure, high output gas well, which they had drilled on a new geological structure, would soon be changed and the well would go into operation. Then these oil workers would lose no time in sending the good news to their great leader and to the people of the whole country.

At this moment when all hearts were astir, the scene in which the workers had received their glorious task once again flashed through their minds. Early one morning in February this year, the great leader Chairman Mao's militant call to the workers and staff on the oil front to find more oil and natural gas was passed on to them through their leading organization. It was already four in the morning. Could relaying the news be deferred till dawn? No! There should not be a minute's delay, not even a second! All the workers and staff immediately gathered for an emergency meeting on the site. Chairman Mao's militant call instantly stirred everyone's heart, and shouts of "Long live Chairman Mao!" resounded in the starry sky.

It was at this rally which brimmed with confidence and strength that the oil workers made their solemn pledge to the Party and Chairman Mao:

"We'll imprint Chairman Mao's instructions in our minds, infuse them in our blood, and express them in our actions."

"We are Chairman Mao's oil workers who will find more oil and natural gas for the motherland. Once the order is given, we'll march forward even to the ends of the earth, never being weak-kneed and never frowning."

They began their march over mountains that morning to the new well site hundreds of miles away. As soon as they reached their destination, they flung down their knapsacks and, putting all thoughts of their living quarters and food out of their minds, started work even though it was dark. They vowed that they would find more oil and natural gas field for their motherland. They said:

"We can die and we can shed our blood. But if we fail to fulfil the task of finding more oil and gas, we would rather die on the derrick floor and be buried in the oilfield!"

Braving the winds and living in the wilderness, they worked day and night, outpacing time. Putting three months' work into 30 days, they succeeded in drilling, at the highest speed and with the best quality, the first high pressure, high output gas well on a new geological structure where bourgeois "authorities" had considered that there was no natural gas at all, thereby catching a big "gas tiger."

The well was drilled at a time when the great proletarian cultural revolution was in high tide and when a new all-round leap forward was emerging on all fronts throughout the country. The natural gas which had slumbered underground for ages has now been tapped and has become an important rich possession for the motherland and a new force in the country's socialist construction.

The good tidings soon spread far and wide. Highly elated, the people passed on the word.

It was late at night on June 21. Chang Yung-ching, the deputy leader of the No. 1 squad who had refused to leave his work despite illness, once again studied Chairman Mao's brilliant work "Serve the People" before he went to the well site to take over his shift. On the top of the page he printed in a clear hand: "Everyone of us revolutionaries should serve the people wholeheartedly as long as he lives." Then he changed into

his work-clothes, put on his aluminium helmet and strode to the brightly lit well site.

After looking at the manometer, he told the comrades in a quiet but determined voice: "This is the first wildcat (exploratory well) drilled on a new geological structure, and we do not have all the information about the formations. Pressure has risen rapidly tonight. We must remain at our posts and be responsible to the Party and the people without any reservation whatever. Our hearts should be like screws fastened to the well-head. We must stand our ground no matter what happens!"

Steel May Melt in Fire, but Not the Red Hearts Of the Oil Workers

As he finished speaking, and they were carrying out the shut-in well pressure test and getting ready for the open flow test, an imported seamless pipe on the side of the well-head suddenly burst and there was an earth-shaking explosion. This was caused by the powerful onrush of the "gas tiger" and the rapid rise of the gas pressure due to the well's extraordinarily high output and the extremely high gas pressure — so great that it was nearly double that of the old gas well nearby.

The high pressure gas current which rushed out from the explosion point carried with it the rocks and mud on the ground and swept through the derrick and diesel engine shack like tens of thousands of exploding shells. It smashed the explosion-proof bulb under the derrick floor and immediately caused a raging fire. So big was the blaze that it could be heard 20 *li* away and seen from 40 *li* away.

The powerful gas flame wave fanned out, swept the well site with the force of a typhoon, and rushed all the way to a nearby hill and back. It roared skyward and on the ground. In no time, there was a sheet of flame some 50 metres in length and width and 30 metres high. The 40-metre-high steel derrick was burnt and collapsed in three minutes. The diesel engine melted and became a shapeless mass of iron. On a hill slope dozens of metres away, rocks became red hot and trees were reduced to cinders.

The big natural gas field was threatened with destruction.

Red-hot fire can melt steel and rock but it cannot burn out the red hearts of the oil workers who are loyal to Chairman Mao, to Mao Tse-tung's thought, to the Party and the people.

At this critical point, the comrades working at the well site, who were faced with the sudden attack by the blazing inferno, completely disregarded the threat to their own safety. No one thought of death. There was no change of expression and no quickening of the pulse as they fought the fire. All that was in their minds was how to put out the fire, save the gas well and safeguard state property.

This was "the Battle of Sangkumryung" on the industrial front.

The deputy leader of No. 1 squad, Chang Yung-ching, a model Communist and a demobilized P.L.A. man, rushed to open the No. 4 valve, in the same way he headed for the enemy in a bayonet charge he had on the battlefield.

Nos. 4, 5 and 8 were all safety valves. By opening these valves and channelling the natural gas away from the well site, it would be possible to diminish the fire.

But the raging flames generating a simmering heat lay in the way to the valves. When Chang Yung-ching broke through to the explosion point, a powerful gas flame wave hit him with the impact of a thousand *jin*. A huge man, his body was shaken and he was flung into the inferno seven metres away.

A few days earlier, Chang Yung-ching had insisted on being released from the hospital, although he had not fully recovered from an illness. When the doctor refused, he said: "Now is the crucial time for us oil workers to carry out Chairman Mao's instruction to look for gas and oil. Mai Hsien-teh remained in battle even though he received a brain wound. My battle post is not on this bed but at the well site." Three days after he came out of the hospital, he gave his life for the cause of the Party.

Wang Ping, a demobilized P.L.A. man and deputy chief driller, saw Chang Yung-ching fall; he dashed across to the No. 4 valve without hesitation. He had hardly taken a few steps when he too was hit by the wave of heat and fell by the derrick.

This Communist Youth League member had been forced by the old society to be separated from his own flesh and blood until 1964, when with the help of the government he was reunited with his parents. Full of love for the Party and the deepest hatred for the class enemies, Wang Ping grabbed the steel leg of the derrick over the well with all his might and firmly pulled himself up onto his feet. His whole body was enveloped in flames, but once again he hurled himself over to open the valve. Right until the raging flames swallowed up his life, he stood upright with his arms stretched forth as if he was holding out his devoted heart and marching forward for ever!

Nineteen-year-old driller Wang Tsu-ming was in charge of the No. 2 valve. When he took over his shift he told the squad leader: "The Party can rest assured that even if the sky falls I shall be able to stand up to it. To make revolution one must not be afraid of death; to fear death one cannot make revolution." This young hero lived up to his words. In the raging flames he remained on his feet holding firmly to the hand-wheel and sacrificed himself by the side of the valve. He was like a sturdy young fir tree standing on a high mountain!

Fierce flames can burn down iron and steel but they cannot burn up the red hearts of the oil workers. Such brave warriors as Lo Hua-tai, whose job was to operate the manometer; Wu Chung-chi, who was in charge of the engine house; and Teng Mu-chuan who had rushed to take over the No. 1 valve, were engulfed in the angry flames as they stayed steadfast at their



Heroes of the No. 32111 Drilling Team, armed with Mao Tse-tung's thought, dare to scale a mountain of swords, dare to brave a sea of raging fire

posts to the very end and heroically fought on until they had given their very last measure of blood for the Party and the people.

The courageous and self-sacrificing spirit of the martyrs, their heroic spirit of daring to fight, daring to take on anything and daring to risk all will always inspire each and every one of our revolutionary fighters and will live in the hearts of hundreds of millions of people for ever!

Comrades of Squad No. 4 who had rushed to save the well-head were all burnt by the fierce flames. Huang Cheng-hou was swept into a ditch by a tremendous gas flame wave. Not far from him was a water-pipe valve, and he dug his hands into the earth and dragged himself over to it. Just as he got hold of the wheel to open the water-pipe valve, his hand became fused to the red-hot water-pipe valve. Despite excruciating pain, he stuck to it and opened it.

Jan Shu-jung, thrown from the sea of fire by a wave of gas, remembered that his class brother Wu Chung-chi was still in the engine house and twice turned and rushed in search of his class brother in the raging fire. He was seriously injured, but covered himself with glory.

Deputy commander and chief engineer Chang Chung-min, a member of the mining area's Communist Party committee working on the site, had all his hair burnt off, his face and chest were also burnt and both hands nearly burnt to the bone. But he forgot about his agonizing pain and thought only of: Quickly finding

the source of the fire and at the critical moment between life and death, a Communist could only advance, not retreat. Once again he staggered and stumbled into the sea of flames. The comrades from behind rushed to carry him out. But still, this hero anxiously shouted: "Don't bother about me! Quick! Quick! Shut No. 3 valve quickly!"

Flames Were Combat Orders

No. 3 valve was right in the centre of the sea of fire. With this valve shut, the source of the gas could be cut off and the fire put out.

Armed with Mao Tse-tung's thought, comrades of the No. 32111 Drilling Team deliberately went, so to speak, into tiger-infested mountains, knowing there would be tigers, and rushed into the sea of fire, knowing they would get burnt. When one fell, more charged forward in his wake.

The explosion awakened all the comrades in the living quarters. Grabbing padded quilts and clothes, gunny sacks and anything that could possibly extinguish fire, they ran to the well site like a ferocious tiger hastening down a mountain to get at its prey. How they wished they could devour the fire in one mouthful and instantly smother it with their own breath.

The waves of gas were roaring and spurts of flame were rocketing while these heroes wrestled with the inferno.

The flames were combat orders. People rushed to wherever the danger was the greatest and wherever

thing hung on a single thread. The fire site was turned into a battle ground, and the sky-rocketing fire was the enemy. At this moment, everyone felt that Chairman Mao was by his side and Mao Tse-tung's thought was in command of the battle.

Lei Hung-ping, a worker who was recently elected a deputy instructor, was the first to rush into the fire, with a wet padded quilt covering his head. The moment he managed to get into it, he, together with the wet padded quilt, was thrown aside by the powerful gas flame wave several metres away. Then he and all the others made several successive attempts to charge but were swept back by the current.

Seeing that shutting No. 3 valve was impossible, Lei Hung-ping, together with the other comrades, turned to open the No. 8 safety valve on the right side of the well site in an attempt to get the natural gas out. But scarcely had he succeeded in rushing to the front of the valve when he was choked by the poisonous hydrogen sulfide fumes.

Lei Hung-ping was carried from the fire by chief driller Chang Chih-chieh. The thing uppermost in his mind after he regained consciousness was, "What is most demanded of a cadre is to give the lead at the crucial moment of life and death. Even if I have one breath left, I will make the charge."

Lei Hung-ping lost consciousness three times, but each time he got to his feet again with a strong will and rushed into the fierce flames. Covered by water gushing from the hoses, he and several other comrades finally broke open the No. 8 safety valve.

At the same time, deputy team leaders Peng Chia-chih and Liu Shou-jung, together with comrades Hu Teh-ping and Hsu Kuang-yi, formed a combat group on the spur of the moment and went to open the No. 5 safety valve on the left side of the well site.

The fire was too ferocious for them, and their five attempts all failed. So Peng Chia-chih and Hsu Kuang-yi, carrying the hoses with them, charged into the sea of fire to provide a cover for the comrades in front of them. The burns on their skin caused them great pain, the hydrogen sulfide made it difficult for them to get their wind back and the gas flame wave was so strong that they could not stand upright. But when they thought of the comrades in front of them who could not go on for a single second without the water, they gritted their teeth and carried on the struggle.

Just as they were about to lose consciousness, team leader Chou Wen-hua and other comrades rushed forward with something to shield them from the flames. The few precious seconds thus won kept them on their feet to cover the comrades in front who managed eventually to open the No. 5 safety valve.

While a Man's Life Is Precious, the Party's Cause Is Even More So

The safety valves on the two sides were forced open, and some of the gas was let out of the well site. Battling

forward in victory, the courageous fighters concentrated their forces to launch a general offensive on the No. 3 valve.

The moment a passage was made in the raging sea of fire by the seven or eight hoses pouring powerful water columns on the fire, these brave fighters, their heads covered with soaked padded quilts or wet gunny sacks, rushed in.

But the fire had badly spoiled the shape of the valve. Despite using every ounce of their strength, the comrades who had succeeded in getting to the burning hot hand-wheel, failed to turn it. A second group of comrades dashed to the spot with a couple of large tongs. Such force was applied that the tongs became crooked and bent; the wheel turned only twice.

One comrade after another lost consciousness because of the raging fire, the poisonous gas and the thin air. The fire was great, but the wisdom of the workers armed with Mao Tse-tung's thought was even greater; the fire was towering high, but the determination of our oil workers towered even higher; the fire was red, but it paled before the red ideology of the oil workers who are loyal to Chairman Mao, to Mao Tse-tung's thought, to the Party and the people. Stubbornly the comrades fought on; as one fell, others stepped into the breach.

Hsu Kuang-yi, a new hand who had come from a village only six months earlier, was felled by the poisonous gas fumes after battling for two minutes. Hu Teh-ping carried him out on his back. The moment Hsu came to, he jumped up and again dashed to the fire site. He seemed to have heard the loving voice of our great leader: "Young fellow, charge! Be resolute and unafraid of sacrifice, you will surmount every difficulty to win victory."

Hu Teh-ping also fainted at this time. When he came to and saw that his comrades, one group after another, were rushing in, he was filled with strength. He sprang up and joined his comrades and dashed into the roaring flames to turn the wheel of the No. 3 valve. He thought:

"It is now the moment of putting myself to the test, the moment the Party needs me most! While a man's life is precious; the Party's cause is even more so. I am going to shut this valve as long as I can move. To stick it out one more second, to turn the valve once more means one more contribution to putting out the fire!"

Learn From the Example of Heroes, Follow the Heroes' Path and Perform Heroic Deeds

The No. 3 valve was finally shut down. Gas was stopped from gushing to the explosion leak. The fire over the site slackened.

But inside the well, the pressure continued to rise swiftly and the well-head was in imminent danger of exploding. Ignoring their searing burns, the crew members continued to battle. They were reinforced in their efforts to protect the well-head by seasonal

workers, members of their own families and members of people's communes who had hastened to the site from all over.

Mou Mao-hsiu, a worker's wife, was rushing water to the fire when suddenly someone shouted to her: "Your husband Heng Szu-shu is injured!" She abruptly recalled what her husband had told her that morning before going to work: "We're out for the 'gas tiger' today! If anything should happen, remember to save the state's property first." Without the state's interests, she continued in her mind, there can be no personal interests. She just could not dash off to see her husband and stayed on to carry water.

A little later, somebody urgently cried out again: "Mou Mao-hsiu! Mou Mao-hsiu! Hurry up and go to your husband! He's hurt badly!"

Mou Mao-hsiu's heart throbbed, the water almost spilt out of the container she was holding. She thought to herself: Should I go? At this moment, she saw some of the injured men pick themselves up from the ground and rush in front of her to the fire. Such heroism sustained her, and she became calm. "No, I cannot leave my post. **Wherever there is struggle there is sacrifice.**"

She quickened her steps as she brought water and barite powder to extinguish the flames.

In the heat of the battle, deputy chief driller Wang Yu-fa, a Communist Youth League member, grabbed up a wet cotton-padded quilt, threw himself towards the raging flames under the floor of the derrick and covered the well-head with the quilt. It was immediately burnt. He tried with another one and it was also burnt up.

At this crucial moment, his mind was clear: once the well-head exploded, the drilling equipment in the well, weighing dozens of tons, would all blow sky-high and the entire big gas field would be destroyed. More lives would be lost among the several hundred class brothers putting out the fire.

An orphan in the old society, a boy who took care of ducks for a landlord, Wang Yu-fa, after he started working, had written in his diary with deep feeling:

"The Party has given me my life. Every cell in my body belongs to the Party. I can give up everything — all, except the interests of the Party."

In the midst of the scorching flames, he told himself: "Wang Yu-fa, you are the son of a hired farm labourer. You are a child brought up by Chairman Mao. You can give up your life, but you mustn't lose your revolutionary soul!"

His blood pounding in his veins, he grabbed another soaked quilt and rushed, stumbling, into the flames. The large sodden quilt slipped down from the burning well-head, which was almost as high as Wang himself. With all his strength, he again put the quilt up. It slipped again, bringing him down with it.

At that moment, his ears rang with Chairman Mao's call to be "determined to vanquish all enemies and never to yield." The noble images of heroes Huang Chi-kuang and Chiu Shao-yun passed before his eyes.

He was filled with infinite courage and strength. He jumped up, wrapped the quilt around himself, and threw himself on the burning well-head shouting: "Go ahead and burn! Go ahead and burn!" He lost consciousness for a second time.

That was how the young man, who learnt heart and soul from the example of heroes, followed the heroes' path and performed heroic deeds.

"Comrades, We Have Won!"

After a 30-minute life-and-death struggle, the big fire was finally put out by heroes who had been armed with Mao Tse-tung's invincible thought and who gave their own lives and blood and used the collective bravery and wisdom to protect vital state property. They had made an imperishable contribution to the Party and the people.

After the fire, deputy team leader Peng Chia-chih, walking through the crowds and the smoke-clouded well site, shouted:

"Comrades of Team 32111 fall in!"

Behind the broken derrick, by the side of the burnt-down pump room, heroes walked out and lined up in rows. They looked like a rock on the sea coast, standing there proudly at the well site. When they thought of their fallen and injured class brothers, tears welled up. Yet sadness immediately turned into militant strength.

"Comrades, we have won!"

"We have beaten the fire!"

The heroic acts of these brave men and women who protected state property give the people boundless pride and encouragement. The brilliance of their communist ideas reddens the surrounding high peaks, and brightens the blue sky overhead!

This is another resounding paean to the victory of the great thought of Mao Tse-tung.

Once again our oil workers testify by their own deeds: Fighters nurtured by Mao Tse-tung's thought possess the greatest and farthest-reaching ideal, and embody the richest spirit of sacrifice and fighting power. They are all-conquering in the face of obstacles and enemies. They can create miracles of any kind in the world!

The titanic heroic deeds of the No. 32111 Drilling Team were soon told to all those engaged in oil production and in the surrounding cities and countryside. Millions of people praised them as Chairman Mao's good fighters, as the best sons and daughters of the motherland, as a collective Huang Chi-kuang, a collective Chiu Shao-yun, a collective Ouyang Hai, a collective Mai Hsien-teh. . . .

On the same day after the fire was extinguished, scores of trucks loaded with personnel, derricks and instruments sped to the well site in proud array, after making their way over the mountains.

The "gas tiger" has been subdued. New derricks have been erected in this place of heroes. Bathed in the shining rising sun, they stand there to welcome new victory!

(*"Renmin Ribao" and Hsinhua correspondents*)