

Revolutionary Memoir

Chairman Mao's Inspection Tour Of Nanniwan*

by Tung Ting-heng

NANNIWAN in July 1943. Lush green paddy-fields; maize and soy bean crops swaying in the gentle breeze. A bumper harvest was in sight. With the cherry-apple, maple and chestnut trees on the hills as a backdrop, the farmland below made picturesque Nanniwan more attractive than ever.

As we were hoeing in the fields of maize one sweltering day at noon, a messenger from brigade headquarters came along and, out of breath, shouted from a distance: "Hurry, the Brigade Commander wants some of you men to go back to headquarters!" Having wiped the sweat off my face, I put my hoe on the ground and asked: "What's up?" "I've no idea either, you better hurry," he replied.

I was then head of the Fourth Section of the 359th Brigade Headquarters. I reckoned that something important must be happening. Otherwise, the Brigade Commander would not have sent someone to walk more than ten kilometres to get us back. This thought gave wings to my feet and in no time I "flew" back to Golden Basin Bay, seat of the brigade headquarters.

Brigade Commander Wang Chen broke the news the moment we entered the cave: "So you're back. Get things ready, Chairman Mao will be here tomorrow!" I was overjoyed at the news. Just to make sure, however, I asked: "Did you say Chairman Mao will be here?" "Yes, Chairman Mao," the Brigade Commander smiled, "You must be excited!"

I really was excited and for a while did not know what to say. We got busy at once after

the briefing without so much as eating lunch, some comrades went to clean up the caves, others to put things in order in the newly built houses. Comrades of the cooking squad went to the kitchen garden for fresh vegetables, to the pig-sty for fat hogs and rounded up the chickens. Someone said: "Let's show Chairman Mao something of everything we've raised and grown." Someone else disagreed: "Impossible! There's no room for so many things even if the whole cave's at our disposal!"

Transferred from the anti-Japanese front in north China to the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region three years earlier on the order of the Party Central Committee and Chairman Mao, the 359th Brigade originally had been one of the Eighth Route Army's main forces. Then, the Kuomintang reactionaries had besieged the Border Region with an armed force of 300,000, coupling this with military attacks

* Nanniwan is located southeast of Yanan in north Shensi. Because of the attacks by the Japanese invaders and the encirclement and blockades by the Kuomintang reactionaries in the middle of the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan, in 1941-43, the Liberated Areas had enormous financial difficulties. In response to a call by Chairman Mao, government organizations, schools and armed forces in the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region and other Liberated Areas launched large-scale production campaigns that resulted in both the army and civilians successfully tiding over the difficulties. The Eighth Route Army's 359th Brigade moved into Nanniwan to engage in a campaign for large-scale production. Because of its remarkable production and self-sufficiency achievements, it became one of the best known army units at that time.

and economic blockades, and clamouring that they intended to "starve the Eighth Route Army to death and destroy it by siege." The task entrusted to us by Chairman Mao was to rely on our own efforts and develop production. This was why we had come to Nanniwan where, with rifle in one hand and hoe in the other, we launched a campaign for production in a big way. We reclaimed the wasteland, raised sheep and cattle, set up our own factories and transformed hitherto deserted Nanniwan into a place abundant in many things. And Chairman Mao was now coming to see what we'd done and surely would be pleased by it.

That evening we naturally recalled how things were three years before. Nanniwan had been overgrown with wild plants and at night when we went to sleep in shacks made of branches and twigs, we always had to be on the alert lest leopards or wolves broke into the shelters. After dusk, there was not even an oil lamp for light and we had to hold meetings in the dark. There wasn't enough food and we had to go into the mountains for wild plants. The daily meal consisted of these wild plants mixed with black beans, sweet potatoes or pumpkins. The covering for our winter padded clothes was of homespun wool coarser than gunny sacks and quilted with ox hair and sheep fleece. When new, it looked like a coat all right, but after it had been worn a few days it began to change shape and looked exactly like a half-filled cloth bag. In summer, every one had only one pair of trousers and many comrades had to go without a spare one for a change. We had no socks and had to make do with rugs in which we wrapped around our feet and tied with a string. There was no tooth brush, let alone tooth paste, and we had to use a towel to clean our teeth with a pinch of salt on it. . . . Actually, quite a few comrades doubted at that time if we could make anything out of the barren land which was Nanniwan. But now when we looked at it, there was plenty to eat and wear and for daily use, with lowing cattle and sheep grazing in the fields and sties full of fat hogs. In addition, we also had set up a textile mill, an iron works, a carpentry's shop, a farm implement factory, a shop pickling vegetables and places making various other things. Made to supply the army, the cloth, towels and soap from our own

factories also were available to civilian consumers. One folk song described Nanniwan as the south China countryside in northern Shensi where food crops grew in abundance and cattle and sheep grazed everywhere.

Chairman Mao, this was the broad avenue we had blazed according to your instructions! With you Chairman Mao, neither difficulty of any kind nor the enemy, however ferocious, could ever deter us.

We arose at dawn the next day, excited and everybody smiling. We kept looking at the road to Yen-an. Our place, we reckoned, was 30 kilometres from Yen-an and if Chairman Mao had started at breakfast, it would take him a little more than three hours to arrive on horseback, but only an hour by car.

We waited around until noon but Chairman Mao had not come. One comrade said: "Chairman Mao is far too busy. Maybe something important has kept him and he isn't coming at all!" Another argued: "Don't talk nonsense, Chairman Mao said he'd come today, so he's sure to turn up." In fact, even that comrade wasn't so sure himself.

At this moment a car drove up with Chairman Mao all smiles and getting out and coming into our midst. We started cheering as he shook hands with all of us one by one. To Brigade Commander Wang Chen he said: "Your crops are growing fine!"

The guard who accompanied Chairman Mao on the tour told us that Chairman Mao had inspected the crops along the way and had talked with comrades working in the fields. That was why they had taken the whole morning to get here.

It was about lunch time. The Brigade Commander asked Chairman Mao to take a rest in the newly built house and told me to go to the kitchen and see if lunch was ready. Chairman Mao said with a smile: "Lunch immediately upon arrival. This means that you've plenty of food grain!" As he was talking, he went straight to the newly built houses and caves with the Brigade Commander and the Political Commissar for a look around.

I wanted to follow Chairman Mao and the others on his inspection but I had to rush to the

kitchen to see how things were going. In high spirits, the cooks were busy around. There were a great many dishes being prepared of food produced by ourselves, fried, stir-fried or stewed.

While lunch was being served in the room where Chairman Mao had had a rest, I went up to him and asked if there was any particular dish he fancied, adding that we were in a position to offer whatever he liked. He chuckled: "You've so many dishes here already that I'm afraid I won't be able to try them all!"

I told him: "All the food here was produced by us." But before long I found out that I was talking too much since the Brigade Commander was telling Chairman Mao about production in Nanniwan.

"What about the daily ration, edible oil and vegetables?" Chairman Mao asked.

"An average of 25 grammes of oil for everyone, vegetables are not rationed and one can eat his fill," replied Brigade Commander Wang Chen.

"Better food on Sundays?"

"We usually have rice or flour for lunch and there is pork or mutton from time to time, shared by several units at one time," Deputy Political Commissar Wang En-mou said.

Revealing his sense of humour, Chairman Mao remarked: "The Kuomintang wants to destroy us by a siege and starve us to death. The longer the siege the more weight you'll put on. Their siege is so effective that you comrades here are no longer suffering from rickets." Hearing this, all of us burst into laughter.

All through lunch, the brigade's commanding officers reported to Chairman Mao on how production was going in the armed forces. They told him that when they first arrived everyone cultivated an average of one-fifth of a hectare, but this year, it was two. The watchword the year before had been "Not a grain of food, an



Fighters of the Eighth Route Army reclaiming land at Nanniwan.

inch of cloth, a single cent from the government!" and for the current year it was "Two years' crops enough to last three."

As Chairman Mao listened, he kept smiling and nodding his approval. He said: "Difficulty is no unconquerable monster. When everybody starts taming it, it gives in. With everybody relying on his own efforts, we can have all we want, things to eat and wear and for daily use. Right now we have no aid from the outside world and even when we have in the future, we must still rely primarily on our own efforts. We must not do like the Kuomintang does; those people have to turn to foreigners even for the supply of cotton cloth."

He was discussing work rather than eating his meal.

The lunch over, he continued his talk for a while with Commander Wang Chen, Deputy Political Commissar Wang En-mou and other senior brigade officers. After that he left the cave and inspected places around Golden Basin Bay. As he walked along, he said that on the way he had got out of his car to examine the crops and found them growing very well. Only some bean shoots were infested with worms. He told us that caution should be taken to get rid of them and protect the young plants.

When Chairman Mao got to the communications company, rows of newly opened white-washed caves came into view. He asked where the lime had come from. Commander Wang Chen told him we quarried stones from the mountains and had our own kiln to make lime ourselves. Chairman Mao asked if all the tables in the caves had been made by the fighters themselves. Commander Wang Chen said yes. Chairman Mao picked up an exercise book from the table, looked at what was written inside, felt the thickness of the "paper" and said happily:

"Is this birch bark? It certainly looks like a sheet of real paper."

Commander Wang Chen said: "We comrades here prefer to call it the glossy paper that costs nothing."

"Here you have everything that costs you nothing," Chairman Mao said with a smile, "You comrades have created everything with your own hands to meet your own needs."

Commander Wang Chen said that birch bark could also be used to make lunch-boxes and rain-hats. He showed a rain-hat made of the same hanging on the wall to Chairman Mao who examined it carefully and spoke highly of the workmanship.

When the Chairman came into the kitchen, Li Chin-shan, an old cook who was chopping away, immediately put down his knife and held Chairman Mao's hands in his own which were all wet, not knowing what to say.

"What are you preparing?" the Chairman asked.

"Stir-fried cucumber, also turnip soup," Li Chin-shan replied.

"How many people do you serve?"

"Not many, forty or so."

"Yours is a painstaking job," the Chairman said by way of encouragement.

Li Chin-shan said that the job of the comrades who worked in the fields and whose hands were worn was even more painstaking than his.

Chairman Mao encouraged him further: "A cook's job is very important because only when the comrades eat well and have good nourishment can they exert themselves in production."

Chairman Mao went from the kitchen to look over the pig-sties. Old Tu who was busy inside just smiled when he saw the commander coming with someone. He did not know Chairman Mao nor did it occur to him that Chairman Mao would come to see him. Coming close to the sty and seeing the relaxed plump hogs and litters of squirming sucklings, the Chairman called out to Old Tu:

"You old comrade there, these hogs you have raised are fat and good!"

Digging inside the sty, Old Tu didn't hear what the Chairman said. So Commander Wang Chen added: "Comrade Tu, here is Chairman Mao. He says the hogs you've raised are fat!"

It was then that Old Tu became aware of Chairman Mao's presence. With his pick still in one hand, he hastily saluted before replying: "I never raised hogs before. They're not fat enough."

Chairman Mao shook hands with him, asking how old he was, where he came from and when had he started to raise hogs.

The old man replied that he had only two years' experience at this and was still finding his way. The Chairman said: "Old comrade, yours is a glorious job. Raise fat hogs so that the comrades can eat better. How about it?"

"Yes, yes," Old Tu answered gleefully.

Chairman Mao waved at Old Tu before heading towards the field to the west of the barracks. On the not far off slopes there were flocks of sheep and cattle grazing, maize, millet and beans swaying in the gentle breeze, deep green rice shoots alongside a bubbling stream, and vegetables. All kinds of things were growing.

Chairman Mao walked on and on without getting tired. Accompanied by the brigade's senior officers, he walked along the path in the fields, talking, inspecting fighting Nanniwan, beautiful Nanniwan. . . .