

## THE LONG MARCH

### The fifth campaign

In autumn 1933 Chiang Kaishek launched his fifth and biggest extermination campaign against the Communists. This time he used a new method of attack worked out by a military adviser from Germany, General Hans von Seeckt.

Instead of invading the Red areas and trying to capture them by fighting battles, Seeckt's method was to surround the Jiangxi Soviet with half a million troops who then advanced very slowly, building blockhouses (*concrete shelters*), digging trenches and putting up barbed wire fences as they went. Seeckt's aim was to stop all movement into and out of the Soviet, starving the Communists of food, fuel, weapons and ammunition, and slowly reducing the area they controlled.

Seeckt's 'blockhouse strategy' was very successful. By October 1934 the Communists had lost over half their territory, 60,000 soldiers in the Red Army had been killed, and the area under their control was steadily shrinking as the Guomindang advanced.

### New Communist tactics

As you have read, the Communists survived the first four extermination campaigns by luring Guomindang units into their territory, and then smashing them in concentrated attacks. In the fifth campaign, however, they adopted different tactics.

The new tactics were suggested by a Russian agent who had been sent to advise the Jiangxi Soviet by the Russian government. His name was Otto Braun. Braun insisted that Mao Zedong's tactics were politically wrong: the Red Army should not retreat and allow peasants to be captured and killed by the Guomindang; he said. Instead, the Red Army should defend the borders of the Soviet by fighting head-on battles with the Guomindang.

Backed by twenty-four Russian-trained leaders of the Jiangxi Soviet, Otto Braun got his way. Mao Zedong's tactics were abandoned and Mao was expelled from the Party's Central Committee. Under Braun's leadership, the Red Army now began to defend its territory in pitched battles – but at great cost. In the Battle of Guanchang in April 1934 the Red Army lost 8000 men. And with the Guomindang's blockhouse rings cutting them off from the rest of China, they could not easily replace these men or their weapons.

By the summer of 1934 the Red Army was completely caged into Jiangxi, surrounded by four lines of blockhouses. Mao Zedong suggested that the Red Army should try to break through these lines to attack the Guomindang from the rear. But Otto

Braun and the Russian-trained leaders of the Soviet rejected Mao's advice. Instead they planned a retreat: the Red Army would try to break through the blockhouse lines and then head for the Communist base on the Hunan-Hubei border where their Second Army Group was based (see map opposite.)

### The Long March

On 16 October 1934 some 87,000 soldiers of the Red Army set out on the retreat planned by Otto Braun.

As they retreated, the Reds took with them all the equipment of the Jiangxi Soviet that would be needed for setting up a new government in Hunan-Hubei. Thousands of bearers carried office furniture, files, a printing press, radio equipment, gold bars, telephone wire, and so on. In addition, the Army took with it as much weaponry and ammunition as it could carry: 33,000 guns, 1,800,000 cartridges, 76,000 grenades, 38 mortars and 25,000 mortar shells.

It took the Red Army six weeks to break through the blockhouse rings encircling Jiangxi. But no sooner had they broken through than they were forced to fight a major battle when they reached the Xiang River (25 November–3 December). By the end of the battle, the Red Army had lost 45,000 men, more than half the number which had set out from Jiangxi.

Many of the Red Army commanders blamed Otto Braun for their great losses of men. The losses had been due partly to the amount of equipment they were carrying, which slowed them down, giving the Guomindang time to prepare attacks. Second, Otto Braun was leading the Red Army in a straight line, making it easy for the Guomindang to predict its movements.

When the Red Army reached the town of Zunyi on 9 January 1935, the leaders of the Communist Party held a meeting to work out better tactics. At the Zunyi Conference Otto Braun was suspended and military control of the Red Army was given back to Mao Zedong and Zhu De.

### Mao takes control

Under the leadership of Mao and Zhu, the Red Army now took a new direction – or rather, a series of directions. Twisting and turning, splitting into groups and reforming, it now went south from Zunyi, swung round through remote Yunnan province before crossing the wide River Yangzi into Sichuan province. The Army's new destination was Shaanxi province in northern China where another Soviet had control of the Yanan district.

As they trekked north, the Red Army faced many

great obstacles and carried out many daring acts. One of the most famous of these was the crossing of the Dadu River, when twenty-two soldiers swung across the river gorge on chains – all that was left of the suspension bridge across it – while under enemy fire. Their heroic action made it possible for the rest of the Red Army to cross the river.

The Long March of the Red Army took it over the Snowy Mountains – among the highest in the world – and through the treacherous Grasslands where hundreds of men drowned in deep marshes. Along much of the route they were continually harassed by

the Guomindang, by local warlords and by hostile non-Chinese tribesmen.

The Long March came to an end when the Red Army reached Yanan in October 1935. Fewer than 10,000 of those who had set out marched into Yanan. Over 9000 kilometres and 368 days of marching, hunger, enemy attack, disease, exposure, accidents and desertion had seen to the rest. However, the arrival of the Second and Fourth Front Armies which had undertaken their own long marches (see map) quickly restored the Red Army's strength to 80,000 men, making it once again a viable fighting force.



The route of the Long March

### Work section

A. Study the map above, then answer these questions:

1. Describe in your own words the Red Army's movements in between Jiangxi and Zunyi.
2. Describe how the Red Army's movements changed after leaving Zunyi.
3. Judging by what you have read in this chapter, why do you think the Army changed its movements in this way?
4. What might have been the result if the Red Army had not changed direction at Zunyi?

B. Read these comments on the Long March, then answer the questions which follow.

- A. 'Less than 20,000 survivors of the Long March reached the Shaanxi base . . . Chinese Communism had suffered a severe, but by no means decisive defeat at the hands of the Nationalists. As for the latter, their success since the launching of the 1928 Northern Campaign had been remarkable.'
- B. 'The Long March proclaims to the world that the Red Army is an army of heroes and that Chiang Kaishek and his like are perfect nonentities. It announces the bankruptcy of the encirclement, pursuit, obstruction and interception attempted by Chiang Kaishek.'

1. Using the information in this chapter, provide evidence to agree and disagree with each of the views expressed in sources A and B.
2. In the light of the evidence you have found, which of the two views do you think is more accurate? Explain your answer.