

## **Making it Through the Many Gates of Hell**

Interview with Zhang Quanyou

### Taken Prisoner at the Battle of Mount Zhongtiao

My name is Zhang Quanyou. I was born in 1930, now 72 years old. I am a native of Chenhezu, Cuimiao Village, Cuimiao Town, Xingyang City, Henan Province. In 1943, I fled to Xishan, and later joined the forces of Yang Zhenbang of the Kuomintang (KMT, Chinese Nationalist Party) and began to fight as a guerrilla. Not long afterward, however, I was taken as a POW by the Japanese at the Battle of Mount Zhongtiao. At the time I was only thirteen years old. On a morning day toward the end of the year, we had finished preparing our meal and were in the process of eating when the Japanese suddenly besieged us from all sides. Very soon our troops were thrown into disarray, and in the end I was captured by the Japanese. After my capture, Japanese soldiers first moved me to Pucheng (i.e., Puzhou), where I stayed for a night. Before dawn the following day, the Japanese lighted a fire, and we all thought that they intended to burn us to death, so we all huddled together. The Japanese didn't throw us into the fire but rather tied us up by the arm into groups of four. Along the way there was one person who attempted to flee; after the Japanese caught him, they stabbed him to death by bayonet. His corpse was thrown into the river. At the same time the Japanese also warned us that anyone who tries to escape will suffer the same fate. In the end, we were shipped off to Yuncheng by train.

We lived in Yuncheng for more than a month. Life was very difficult. We ate steamed buns made from sorghum and drank thin soup. We only had two or three *liang* (note: Chinese unit of weight, about 50 g) of food for each meal, not enough to fill our stomachs. During this time we were incarcerated, Japanese soldiers also interrogated us, asking us questions about the strength of our unit, our armaments, and the like. Regardless of whether they got an answer, beatings ensued. I was young at the time and didn't know anything, so I just cried. We had to get permission to go to the washroom. If we went anyway without permission, we would undoubtedly be hit or stabbed when we came back. One time, I saw with my own eyes a labourer going to relieve himself without asking for permission first. When he came back, he was bayoneted to death. I didn't have much of an appetite there, and after being exposed to the cold, I got sick. I felt cold all over and was shivering; moreover I had become slightly deaf. The Japanese, however, treated us as if we were their playthings, and they threw me around amongst themselves. One of them failed to catch me and I fell onto the ground. My head bled profusely. From then on, my sickness got worse. Later, a batch of workers was sent away, but because I was ill, they didn't let me go. When my condition gradually got better, they finally put me on a train to Taiyuan.

### Blood and Tears at the Taiyuan Prison

Upon reaching Taiyuan, I saw people such as Sun Xinhui, Ren Ziyan, Zhang Shixiang, Yan Laihuo, Guo Zhongyi, and Wu Zhixue. We were all incarcerated in the Taiyuan prison. When we first arrived, we had a lot of fleas on our bodies, so the Japanese made us take off our clothes, go into the steam room, and then put our clothes back on. We were always famished there too. Each day we only had some thin sorghum gruel and steamed corn buns. The labourers were granted one addition bowl of the gruel. After mealtime, we were forced to work, making balls of coal, putting the completed balls off to one side. In addition, the Japanese assigned us labourer numbers. I was

number 288. Every morning and afternoon, they grouped us together and did roll call, in order to see if we were all there. They didn't call out our names, only our labourer numbers, as if we were draft animals. If they had to call out a number twice before getting a reply, they would whip the person who replied too slowly; sometimes they would even use their bayonets. Even if a labourer got sick, he would usually try to conceal the fact and attempt to go on as normal. Those hospitalized had no hope of getting back out alive. The Japanese called the building out back a hospital, but every single labourer who had been admitted had not come out alive. Dead labourers would be moved outside and thrown into the well. The Japanese especially picked out a few dozen strong young labourers and made them carry the dead. I was a child, so they didn't make me go do that. Every day there were several dozen labourer corpses carried out and thrown into dried-up wells. Because there were so many corpses, they managed to fill up several wells. We had not been there for long, but already several hundred labourers had died. The prison was surrounded by an electric fence, and the walls were also very tall. At the same time, there were Japanese soldiers guarding the main entrance. There was no way we could've gotten out. One time, we went to a vegetable garden to pick grass. A labourer tried to escape, but before he even managed to run off, he was caught by the Japanese. Thereupon the Japanese nailed him up on the wall with large spikes to make an example of him; that sort of scene was cruel to the extreme. When we saw it, all of us could not help but shed tears. The spectators at the time also included many common folk. The Japanese were bullying us Chinese, not letting us respond and forcing us to allow them to oppress us. Even if they beat us, yelled at us, worked us as if we were oxen or horses, we still could not do anything and just had to bear it. Back in our dormitory, we could only gather together and cry. What else could we have done? Every time we went out to work, they Japanese would point their guns and bayonets at us.

After several months living in Taiyuan, we heard that they would be sending us home, but in fact they were going to send us to Japan. They tied us together by the arm into groups with ropes and marched us to the train station. When we boarded the train, the Japanese untied the ropes and then loaded us into the boxcars. On the train, I lay down near the door and managed to feel some of the breeze, not quite getting heatstroke.

### Loaded into the Boxcar Set for Tanggu

After getting off the train at Beijing, we were sent to the yard of the Qinghua Garden and spent a night there. When leaving Beijing, we were also tied together, but they only bound one hand, so I used my free hand to pick up a broken teapot from the road. On the second day we rode the train to Tanggu in Tianjin. The sun was especially strong on that day, and there were 70 or 80 of us crammed into the boxcar. We were hot and thirsty. It was so hot that I was sweating waterfalls, and I was so thirsty that I drank my urine. I didn't dare letting other people drink my urine; I used that broken teapot I picked up to collect my urine and drank it. On the way from Beijing to Tanggu, several dozen people from our section of the train alone died. When we reached Tanggu and got off the train, the bodies of the labourers were as flimsy as a bunch of noodles.

After reaching Tanggu, we lived in these big open shacks. Each shack had a passageway going through it. Large water jars were placed along these passageways, functioning as toilets. At night, when it came time for bed, the Japanese confiscated all our clothes for fear that we'd attempt to escape, giving them back to us in the morning of the next day. When we first arrived there, the Japanese told us that we were not allowed to keep our eyes open when we were supposed to be sleeping, and that we must ask for permission before going to relieve ourselves; otherwise we

would be beaten. One time, I moved my right arm and was whacked with a stick by the Japanese. The scar is still there on my arm. At Tanggu, we had thin sorghum gruel and steamed corn buns as before. We were only issued one bun per meal. One morning during roll call, a labourer burst out of his group and ran into the ocean, trying to escape. The Japanese saw, jumped in and pulled him back out, and bayoneted him to death. After doing nothing for seven or eight days, the Japanese took photographs of us and marched us onto a cargo ship.

### Hardships on the Way to Japan

The compartment of the ship was half-filled with coal, and the Japanese made us sit on top of the coal. At first, the labourers were allowed to relieve themselves above deck, but after that resulted in labourers accidentally falling into the ocean, we were forced to conduct all our business below deck, which was also where we ate. After seven or eight days at sea, we finally arrived in Japan. After disembarking, the Japanese made us bathe, and afterward they rubbed a black medicinal paste onto our bodies, purported to disinfect us. At the same time, we were stripped and brought to the steam room. After putting our clothes back on, we boarded a train for Tokyo. After reaching Tokyo, we rode a boat to a place called Mitsuhashi in the rural areas of Tokyo. There was a large metal bridge there. Finally, the Japanese brought us to a large courtyard not far from the bridge. There was a three-storey building in the courtyard. In total there were several hundred of us, and we all lived in that building, the walls of which were made of wooden planks. The courtyard was surrounded by an electric fence, and Japanese soldiers stood guard at the main entrance. When we had to relieve ourselves, we had to go out of the building and conduct our business in the yard. We ate sorghum noodles and clumps of corn noodles. A set amount was issued to the labourers, with that amount being one or two per meal. Our jobs were to unload ships at the dock and load up trains. The cargo on those ships was all from China; there was coal, rice, as well as soybeans and other foods. Sometimes we would also work in the factories. In summary, they would not let us rest.

After several months, there were suddenly a lot of planes dropping bombs near where we worked. One day, we were toiling away when we suddenly heard the air raid siren. The Japanese all ran and hid in the air raid shelters, while we hurriedly rode back by car to where we lived. At first, the Japanese returned fire with their anti-aircraft guns, but one day we saw a teeming multitude of planes circling overhead, dropping bombs one after another. At that time, much of Tokyo had been bombarded. Ships out at sea as well as vehicles on the ground were all in flames. On land, there was smoke billowing everywhere, and the factories were all burned to the ground. Next to where we lived was a river course, and even the small freighter that was on that river course had been set aflame. On the opposite shore there was a factory, which had already been bombarded beyond recognition. The only thing left standing was the building in which we lived. At that moment we were simultaneously happy and afraid. We were happy because we believed that the constant bombardment would soon force Japan to surrender, at which point we would be able to return home and be reunited with our families. At the same time we were afraid that the bombs would fall on our building and kill us all. The great fires burned for seven or eight days before they were extinguished. Immediately afterward, however, there was an earthquake. That day, we were in our building doing nothing when we felt an unusually fierce rocking, and we saw that the telephone poles outside were also rocking back and forth.

### More Hardships in Akita

After the bombardment that time, we were preparing to take a rest for a while, but the Japanese reallocated us to the docks in Akita Prefecture to continue working. Those who were reallocated along with me to Akita Prefecture included Wang Shixiang, Sun Xinhui, Zhang Wenzheng, and Yan Laihuo.

At Akita, we also lived in wooden buildings. The Japanese gave us sorghum, corn noodles and wheat noodles to eat.

Our job at the dock was still unloading ships and loading trains – loading and unloading coal, salt, rice, sorghum, and other such cargo. Sometimes the ships would be outfitted with cranes, and we would use them to unload large packages of cargo. Other times, we could only unload the cargo using baskets. The baskets were not very big; we would first load them up with shovels and then carry them on our backs by tying them to our shoulders, transporting them to the ships or trains. If we let go, all the cargo would fall out by itself. Once while we were loading and unloading a train, we saw that the cargo onboard was all copperware from China – copper paper, copper pots, copper cash, copper steamer trays, and the like. When we saw the copperware while unloading the cargo, we could not help but think of our loved ones back home; it felt like we had returned home. Whenever we thought of such things, everyone would not be able to help but begin weeping and wailing. (Note: Recalling this sad scene from over fifty years ago, the old man was unable to keep his eyes from welling up. Although the old man's eyes were filled with tears, he nevertheless persisted in recounting to us the history, written with blood and tears and so extremely filled with sorrow and humiliation, of those labourers.) But the Japanese foreman did not allow us to cry, beating, whipping, or bayoneting all who did. Therefore, during that period, we Chinese indeed experienced misery and suffering to the extreme. Each day we toiled for more than ten hours and were forced to eat our meals right where we worked, without respite. In addition, the Japanese not only treated Chinese as sub-human, they also treated us very unkindly. Another time, while we were unloading soybeans, I saw a labourer who was so hungry that he started eating the soybeans. A Japanese policeman saw this and the labourer stopped, but the policeman beat the labourer to death anyway. There, we Chinese labourers were like colonial slaves, getting insulted and beaten at the whim of the Japanese. Moreover, when we were beaten we were not allowed to resist. Anyone who dared to resist would be bayoneted by the Japanese.

### When the Light at the End of the Tunnel was Seen for the First Time, the Wind and Waves Start up Again

I remember that we had lived in Japan for two years before it surrendered. On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the day Japan surrendered, we did not actually hear the news. A Korean labourer found out when he read the newspaper, and proceeded to tell the rest of us. Later, planes dropped notices, and we managed to see for ourselves. From then on, we began to resist, refusing to go to work, but the Japanese foreman still forced us to go. They ordered us to work but we still refused, and thus an antagonism between the two sides was formed. Because of this, our leader Feng Junxiang led us to struggle with the Japanese. We had just regained our freedom for a few days, and now the foreman was ordering us back to work; at this, everyone rushed outside and beat him. Some labourers brandished sticks, others had metal shovels, and still others had poles. As a result of this, the Japanese were none too happy and drove us all to the Akita Prefecture prison.

After getting off, the interpreter first spoke to us and then led us into the prison. There were many small cells inside. The doors for the cells were four or five inches thick, and on each door

was a small “window.” Inside, the floors were all cement, and each cell had a urinal. Some cells held two people while others held three. When the interpreter was about to put us into the cells, we huddled together and had a discussion. Ultimately, our leader said to us that we must persist in resisting; even if we were to die, we must all die together. They must not be allowed to separate us into different cells and “deal with us” one by one. Thus, we huddled together tightly and stood our ground. The interpreter saw this and could not do anything about it, so in the end we did not get separated; instead, we got to stay anywhere within the prison – in the corridors, in the cells, even in the doorways. We lived in the prison for several months. Our food each day was still sorghum noodles and corn noodles. During mealtime, the Japanese would give us our food in buckets and allow us to divide it amongst ourselves. While we were incarcerated, some Chinese exchange students came and saw us twice. They told us that China was currently in negotiations with Japan with regard to the issue of sending us back home. They told us that our days of hardship were over and that we would soon be able to return home.

### Returning Home After the Victory

I remember that we returned to our homeland in January, 1946. The Japanese drove us to the Kyushu docks, whereupon we were shipped back home.

After disembarking at Qingdao, the Kuomintang (KMT) did not allow us to leave but drafted us into the army instead. We had just returned from Japan after such great suffering, and here we were, getting drafted. Everyone was unwilling to become conscripts, and the KMT had to let us go. Ultimately, the Red Cross certified our return to the country. At that time, the railway between Qingdao and Zhengzhou was not operational; thus we took a small boat to the Port of Lianyungang. When we were in Qingdao, we had thought that we would be able to ride the train through Xuzhou to Zhengzhou after arriving at the Port of Lianyungang. When we actually got to the Port of Lianyungang, however, we discovered that there was in fact no train service between the Port of Lianyungang and Xuzhou. Because of this, we proceeded on foot to Xuzhou. At Xuzhou, we encountered the KMT again, and they cut up the clothes we wore back from Japan. Ultimately we rode the train from Xuzhou to Zhengzhou, and we subsequently returned to Xingyang County. At that time, Xingyang County was occupied by the KMT.

When I first returned home, my brother had gone off to join the army, and my sister-in-law had passed away. Only my mother and my brother’s daughter were left in the family. Our family was very poor then, and life was hard. After the liberation in 1948, I found work with peasant associations and was responsible for organizing peasant associations. I became a member of the cadre. During the Cultural Revolution, it was discovered that I had spent time in Japan, and I was labelled a Japanese spy. I was paraded through the streets wearing a high hat and a plaque. The Red Guards also interrogated and beat me all day. Calamity befell me once more.

(Interview conducted by Wang Liuchu, He Hai, Li Aijun on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Transcript compiled by Li Aijun)  
Translated by Lang Foo on July 22, 2006