

**Document 9.7: “Jiajin Shan” (“The Great Snow Mountain”), an anonymous account describing a segment of the Long March, 1934–35**

**Great Snow Mountain**

Jiajin Mountain is blanketed in eternal snow. There are great glaciers in its chasms and everything is white and silent. We were heavily burdened because each man had to carry enough food and fuel to last ten days. Our food was anything we could buy – chiefly corn, though we had a little buckwheat and some peppers. We carried our food in long cloth pouches over our shoulders. General Zhu carried his food like everyone else. He had a horse but he gave it to sick or wounded men to ride.

We would not have suffered so much, or had such heavy losses in life, if we had been able to buy rice. The change from rice to a corn diet gave our men diarrhoea and other stomach disorders. The corn passed straight through them – they couldn’t digest it at all. Another torment was lice. Wherever we slept in the huts of the people, the lice seemed to come up out of the earthen floor to settle on us. Everybody had lice, everybody hunted lice.

Dong Biwu—the “old Dong” who had encouraged the “little devils” in Xikang with his story of Monkey—described the crossing of Agnes Smedley:

“We started out at early dawn. There was no path at all, but peasants said that tribesmen came over the mountains on raids, and we could cross if they could. So we started straight up the mountain, heading for a pass near the summit. Heavy fogs swirled about us, there was a high wind, and halfway up it began to rain. As we climbed higher and higher we were caught in a terrible hailstorm and the air became so thin that we could hardly breathe at all. Speech was completely impossible and the cold so dreadful that our breath froze and our hands and lips turned blue. Men and animals staggered and fell into chasms and disappeared forever. Those who sat down to rest or to relieve themselves froze to

death on the spot. Exhausted political workers encouraged men by sign and touch to continue moving, indicating that the pass was just ahead.

“By nightfall we had crossed, at an altitude of 16,000 feet, and that night we bivouacked in a valley where there was no sign of human life. While most of us were stretched out exhausted, General Zhu De came around to make his usual inspection. He was very weary, for he had walked with the troops. Yet nothing ever prevented him from making his rounds. He gave me half of a little dried beef, which he had in his pocket. He encouraged everyone and said we had crossed the worst peak and it was only a few more days to Mougong.

“To avoid enemy bombers, we arose at midnight and began climbing the next peak. It rained, then snowed, and the fierce wind whipped our bodies, and more men died of cold and exhaustion.

“The last peak in the range, which we estimated to be eighty *li* (twenty-seven miles) from base to summit, was terrible. Hundreds of our men died there. They could sit down to rest or relieve themselves and never get up. All along the route we kept reaching down to pull men to their feet only to find that they were already dead.”

The most detailed reminiscence of this, the cruelest hazard of the Long March, was penned by Colonel Zhang Guohua, the orderly to the head of the Supply Section of the Third Red Army Corps. Already ill when he crossed the Dadu [River], Colonel Zhang worsened during the days immediately prior to the assault on Great Snow Mountain, with bad vomiting and diarrhoea. He ate nothing for several days. But he insisted on not being left behind, and set out with a stick: a comrade carried his rifle. He tells the story:

“Early next morning, the bugle sounded. The troops began to advance towards the mountain. Clinging to their sticks, the men climbed steadily up the narrow, twisting goat track. Soon the sun rose. Looking up from the base, we could see the summit of the mountain glittering and the troops advancing like a dragon wriggling heavenward. We

started, the weather was cool and the ground relatively flat and I had a comparatively easy time of it. As time went on, however, it grew worse with me. After covering a certain distance, I had to purge, and then I had to have a rest. Gradually I dropped behind. Clenching my teeth, I clambered up. When I reached a great pine tree, I felt my head spinning and could not move another inch. So I sat down to rest. Li Jiusheng, the young carrier, two chests suspended from his shoulder pole, came swinging past me. We used to make fun of each other. Seeing me in such a state, he called out: 'How now, Zhang Guohua! Let us have a competition. Step on it! To the other side of the mountain and meet the comrades of the Fourth Front Army!'

"I felt greatly troubled. Who didn't want to go! But damn my legs! At this moment they just wouldn't move. 'Come on, get up', I prompted myself. 'Just go slowly. Almost all comrades of our unit have gone ahead.'

"I pressed at the stick with great effort and stood up, only to sink down immediately. Looking up, I saw I had made only a trifling progress on the steep slope. Alas, would this state continue? I was in a dilemma when the groom, Old Wang, came up leading a dark brown mule. At a glance I knew it belonged to my chief.

"Get up on it! This section of the road is reasonably level', said Old Wang.

"I hesitated and made no answer. Frankly, how I longed to get a lift on a mule. But how could I ride? I had nothing on me. The Supply Section head must be very tired carrying my rifle. Instead of taking care of him, I had let him take care of me. I looked at the mule, then at old Wang, and for a long moment could not utter a word.

"Old Wang seemed to have guessed what was on my mind. 'Hey, you!' he urged. 'I have brought the mule at the order of the Supply Section head. Mount quickly. You'll be all right after we've scaled this mountain. The Fourth Front Army is waiting for us on the other side and there'll probably be a base hospital there.'

“My tears flowed. Old Wang helped me mount the mule and I continued to advance uphill.

“The higher we went, the narrower the path became. The slope was getting steeper, the air thinner. It was very dangerous to ride, so I dismounted and, grasping the tail of the mule, continued to struggle upwards. On this path rising through the somber, virgin forest, were several other comrades who like me, were ill. They climbed, gritting their teeth, following closely the footsteps of the comrade in front.

“At 11 A.M. we had, after much difficulty, reached to within six *li* of the summit when the bugle sounded for a rest. All sat down on the side of the path. Some ran down to the gully to drink water. Others took out their rations and began to eat. We would give the final battle to the snow mountain after we had eaten.

“Though this section was not long, every step demanded the strength of my whole body. I purged less frequently, but I felt awfully weak, as if I had not eaten for a long, long time. The air suddenly became thinner when we were some two hundred meters from the summit. Breathing became more difficult. With head spinning and eyes blurred, I could hardly stand, let alone go forward. ‘Now I am done for’, I said to myself. But immediately thought: ‘Am I going to be defeated when the summit is in sight? I must not fall, for that would be the end of everything.’

“I controlled myself with the utmost effort. I was struggling desperately when, luckily, comrades from the signal squad came up and gave me a hand. Just at this moment there was a thud from behind, followed by an outcry. I looked back. A carrier had fallen to the track, pole and all. Steadying my gaze, I saw that it was the young comrade Li Jiusheng who, so short a time before, had challenged me to a competition. Tears stood in my eyes for the comrades around. I was wracked with grief. We had lost another close comrade-in-arms.

“The Supply Section head, hearing what happened, quickly hurried back and, with tear-filled eyes, buried Li Jiusheng’s body. The two chests left by Li Jiusheng suspended from his shoulder pole, he came toward me, took me by my arm and walked with me.

“Without warning there came a blast of wind. The sun was quickly shrouded by a heavy black cloud, and soon the whole sky darkened. Rain, intermixed with hail, came pattering down. The storm gathered force, and hailstones, the size of potatoes, beat down on us. The men covered their heads with basins, or shrouded them in quilts. I struggled with all my might to fold up two sheepskins. One I gave to my chief; the other I wrapped over my head.

“Eventually the storm passed. Strewn on the track were ice and snow which were soon trodden into a lane as deep as a man’s height as the troops proceeded. On both sides of this lane lay numerous dear comrades who, for the future of the people of the motherland, had struggle until they breathed their last. They sleep everlasting on this snow mountain. ‘The nation’s heroes are immortal.’

“My chief, pole on his shoulder, leading me by the hand, continued to advance towards the last stretch.

“‘It is no easy task to carry on the revolution’, he kept saying to me. ‘And aren’t those comrades who now lie on the roadside heroes who sacrificed themselves for it?’

“As he talked, I saw his eyes redden. A few hot tears fell on my hand.

“‘We are still alive,’ he went on, ‘we mustn’t slacken our effort. We must take up the cause of the martyrs and continue to struggle.’

“Hearing his words I was too moved for speech. Though I had not eaten for days and was wracked by illness, I was a Communist. I was still quite young. But so long as I had one breath left in me, I would exert my last ounce of strength to scale the mountain. Gritting my teeth, I climbed and climbed and at last was at the summit.

“The Supply Section head gave a happy laugh. ‘Ha-ha! No matter how high the Jiajin Mountain, it could never restrain the firm will of our heroes. Now, Zhang Guohua, you have triumphed; you have made it!’

“Of course, now that I had reached the mountain top, I was overjoyed. But I was absolutely exhausted. Everywhere were snow and hailstones. There was a structure as high as a table, piled with stones. Here, I thought, I would rest. I was on the point of sitting down when I found myself being pushed, and I ran staggering downhill for thirty or forty paces. When I halted I looked around; it was my chief who had pushed me.

“‘Now you can sit down and rest’, he said with a smile. ‘But I could not let you rest at the summit.’

“So saying, he trudged off to take care of other comrades.

“I looked at his retreating figure with gratitude. Then I leaned against a rock to rest. Shoving a handful of snow into my mouth, gradually I felt better. The mountain was wrapped in a mist. The sun shone brightly at the summit. I rose, and supporting myself on my stick, walked slowly downhill, leaving the lofty snow mountain behind me.”

Source: “Across the Snow Mountain.” *Stories from the Long March*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1958. 79–84.