



THE STORY OF IRON MAN WANG

Wang Chin-hsi studying Chairman Mao's works.

On the derrick platform.

IN 1959, while Wang Chin-hsi was a worker at the Yumen oil field in northwest China, he came to Peking to attend a national conference of labor heroes. He saw buses in the streets with big inflated bags on top.

"What are those things for?" he asked.

"Coal gas to run the motors," he was told. "Our country's short of oil."

"I'm an oil driller and that hit me hard!" Wang said at a later conference. "Imagine a big country like ours without oil — and I had the nerve to ask why!"

During the conference he learned that a new oil field had been discovered in the northeast. This was Taching. He immediately asked to go there and help open it up.

As soon as they got off the train near Taching, Wang and his fellow workers went to headquarters and demanded where the well site was. When he was told, he and his comrades headed off across the prairie. "Let's get the rig set up and begin drilling," Wang said. "Nobody's going to call us 'oil poor' anymore!"

In the old society Wang Chin-hsi was a beggar at the age of six, leading his father who had been blinded by the brutal treatment of a landlord. At eight, barefooted and his body wrapped in a tattered old sheepskin, he had herded a landlord's cattle and sheep in the



mountains, and was often beaten. At fifteen he was pressganged to work as a coolie at the Yumen oil field. Here he was also beaten, sometimes with whips and metal clubs, by overseers, oil-field police and American technicians. His body was seldom without welts and bruises. Only in new China, when the country was freed from the system of exploitation of man by man, did he come to know the dignity of being a master of one's own country.

Now, in answer to Chairman Mao's call, a campaign was about to start to give China a real oil industry. "I wish I could smash the strata with my fist and make the

oil flow!" Wang said when he saw the wide empty prairie at Taching, covering a vast pool of oil.

Taching in March was still freezing cold. Thousands of people came to that empty prairie with no roads, no houses, not enough trucks and equipment, and hundreds of other problems.

In line with Premier Chou En-lai's instructions, the oil field Party committee called on the workers and staff members to study Chairman Mao's *On Practice* and *On Contradiction* and apply the principles in them to their work. Wang Chin-hsi and his team spent several nights discussing what the principal contradiction was and

how to cope with it. "There are all kinds of difficulties in opening up an oil field," they concluded, "but the biggest difficulty confronting us is our country's shortage of oil. This is the principal contradiction. If we don't solve this contradiction, the imperialists and modern revisionists will use it to get a stranglehold on us. No matter what it takes, we must get this oil field producing as quickly as possible."

Wang and his team were told to wait around until the drill rigs arrived. But other equipment had come and when he saw it piled high at the station without enough hands to move it, he and his crew pitched in to help. When the first rig arrived a few days later it weighed 60 tons and could not be unloaded from the train because there were not enough cranes and tractors. "Well, men," Wang said, "if conditions are right, we'll go to work. If they're not right, we'll make them right and go to work anyway. We'll move that rig even if we have to carry it or drag it."

Ropes, crowbars, iron tubes, wooden poles—every tool they could find. Pulling, shouldering, prying, lifting. Wang began a work chant that later became a song:

*When we oil workers give a roar,
Even the earth shakes three
times.*

*When we oil workers push and
pull,*

Sky-high troubles bow and bend.

Hai-so, hai-so, hai-so, hai-so!

Throughout the day the chant went on—and the monster rig moved, off the train, out of the station, onto the prairie, out to the drill site. By nightfall, the 40-meter derrick stood upright to challenge a prairie that had been flat since time began.

The next problem was water for the drilling. Pipelines, of course, were not yet laid.

"Can't waste time," Wang said. "We'll carry it here with whatever we've got."

Wang Chin-hsi (with raised arms) and fellow workers moving the first drilling rig in the pioneering days of the Taching oil field.

"Nobody ever drilled for oil with water brought in with basins and pails!" someone said.

"Well, in our country we're going to do it!" Wang replied. And with the help of a few peasants, they broke the ice on a nearby pond and carried water in basins, pails, kettles, old fire extinguisher cases, even their metal work helmets. Wang, a pail in each hand, was always trotting and running. In this way they accumulated 100 tons of water and began drilling. On April 14, 1960, Wang climbed onto the platform, grabbed the lever and shouted, "Begin!" Six days later, Taching's first well came in amid wild cheers.

Man of Iron

On May 1, when Wang's team was moving their derrick to a new site, a shifting drill pipe struck him in the leg and knocked him unconscious. When he came to and saw the men crowding around him with tears in their eyes, he said, "What are you crying for? I'm not made of clay. A little knock isn't going to break me. Let's get this derrick moving." He got to his feet to direct the work, while the blood stained his trouser leg.

Wang was sent to the hospital. But as soon as he was able to get around on crutches, he left the hospital and, in the rain, walked back to the second well.

He went right to work, hobbling around on his crutches. Several days later, the well blew with a deafening roar, bushings and parts shot up into the sky and oil, gas, water and mud blasted out. Unless the well were capped, the derrick would be destroyed and fire break out. There was no barite to use and Wang ordered cement. Bag after bag was dumped into the mud tank, but there was no mixer and the cement sank to the bottom. Wang suddenly threw away his crutches, jumped into the waist-deep tank and began mixing the cement with his arms. Several young men also jumped in. The mixture worked and, after a three-hour battle, the well was stopped. When Wang was helped out of the tank, his leg hurt so much that he collapsed.

Wang Chin-hsi seldom left the well site, even for meals or sleep. He ate cold corn cakes at the well and slept in the open with his sheepskin coat pulled over him.

Once he said, "I'd give twenty years of my life to get this oil field going."

His determination and ability to take hardship so moved some nearby peasants that one of them said, "Your team leader must be made of iron!" The name stuck and spread all over the field. Slogans began to appear: "Learn from the Iron Man! Be a Man of Iron!" These slogans still inspire today's oil workers.

On June 1, 1960 the first train of crude oil rolled out of Taching. By 1962 the field was in full production. In 1963 China became basically self-sufficient in petroleum. Never again would she depend on imported oil.

More Struggles

In the autumn of 1962 the revisionist Liu Shao-chi and some of his followers visited Taching. They called the campaign to bring in oil as "sheer chaos" and "not the way to build industry". They tried to slow things down to an "orthodox" pace by cutting back the financing. Furious, Wang Chin-hsi said, "What's wrong with a campaign to bring in oil? How do you get an

At a celebration meeting, Wang Chin-hsi (right) and other labor heroes on horseback with leaders holding the reins for them.



oil field going quickly without hurrying? How are we going to deal with imperialists, revisionists and other reactionaries if we don't get oil in a hurry?" In spite of Liu Shao-chi, the Taching workers kept up their speed.

In China's countryside, Liu Shao-chi was urging the peasants to "go it alone", a move which

He's got fame, reward and position, all vested interests which keep him from wanting to make revolution anymore." Lin Piao and his followers sent an "investigation team" to Taching, bent on proving that Taching's achievements were phony.

One night in a packed meeting room many oil workers who had

room where they tried to force him to sign a statement admitting that Taching was not a red flag. "I didn't have much schooling," Wang shouted in rage, "but I can read these words. You're not going to make me sign even if you put a knife to my throat!"

In May 1968 when the Taching revolutionary committee was set up, Wang Chin-hsi was elected a vice-chairman. In April 1969 he was chosen to attend the Ninth National Congress of the Party, and there he was elected a member of the Central Committee.

A Selfless Spirit

News of the discovery of a new oil field kept Wang Chin-hsi sleepless with excitement for several nights. At a meeting called by the Taching revolutionary committee to discuss how to assist in opening up the new field, Wang said, "The new field must be built up at high speed. Chairman Mao said we must be prepared against war and natural disasters, and do everything for the people—and more oil is part of this. Let's give them the best of everything, people, materials and equipment. We must make sure that whoever we send can cope with the hardest problems and come out the winner." Wouldn't this slow down Taching's own rapid expansion? "No," said Wang. "It may mean a heavier load for us but it's an honor to shoulder heavy loads. It will be a challenge to expand Taching and help open up new oil fields at the same time."

On November 15, 1970 Wang Chin-hsi died of gastric cancer at the age of 47. His last words to his fellow workers were, "Comrades, study Chairman Mao's works well. Unite to win still greater victories. Never forget class struggle. The Taching red flag was raised by Chairman Mao. Keep that red flag flying."

In response to a call from the Taching Party committee, a mass movement to learn from Iron Man Wang spread. More and more Iron Man-type workers and cadres are emerging to speed the growth of China's oil industry.



"Whoever dares to slander Taching will get smashed!"

would break up the collective ownership of the people's communes. At the field, Wang Chin-hsi went around to the drill teams to explain Chairman Mao's teachings about the communes and why **"only socialism can save China"**. At the call of the oil field Party committee, he helped organize the oil workers' families into worker-peasant villages, the first ones in the Taching oil base. (See p. 21)

During the cultural revolution which began in 1966 Liu Shao-chi's revisionist line came under fire. Wang was among the most active in criticizing it. Then Lin Piao and members of the "gang of four", class enemies hidden in the Party, took up where Liu Shao-chi left off and launched a new attack on Taching. Chang Chun-chiao, one of the four, said, "Iron Man Wang is behaving very poorly.

taken part in the pioneering campaign talked about how they had opened up the field, exposing these enemies' talk as slander. One man jumped up and interrupted by shouting, "As a red flag, Taching is a fake, Iron Man Wang is a phony!"

Wang Chin-hsi removed his sheepskin coat, stood up and said, "It doesn't make any difference whether I'm made of iron or clay, but nobody is going to call the Taching red flag a fake. Taching is a red flag because its working class built it up the way Chairman Mao said it should be built. Whoever dares to slander Taching will get smashed!"

Unable to make Wang knuckle under, the anti-Taching forces incited some people into seizing him and locking him up in a secret