



Battle of the Hsisha Archipelago

(Reportage in Verse)

CHANG YUNG-MEI

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Archipelago**

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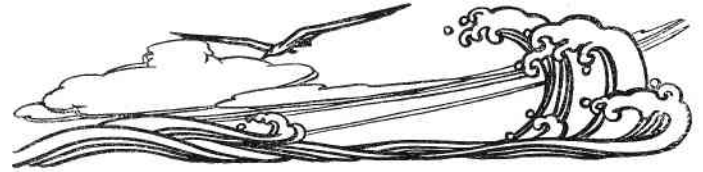
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Contents

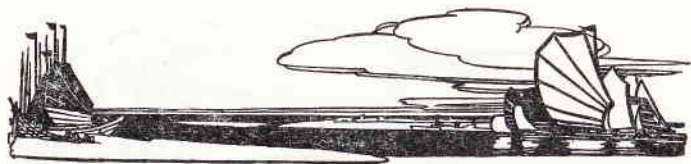
| | |
|--|----|
| Prelude | I |
| 1. Fair and Fertile Hsisha | 2 |
| 2. Our Fisherfolk Fight Back | 6 |
| 3. A Thrilling Naval Battle | 12 |
| 4. The Chinese Flag Flies High over Hsisha | 26 |

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Prelude

Guns thunder,
Smoke of battle fills the sky,
Loud roars the South China Sea
And the eyes of the whole world turn
To Hsisha — heroic archipelago.
Above surging waves, through wind and clouds
Stormy petrels soar to the sky
Spurred on by high resolve
On aspiring wings.
Fly on, stormy petrels!
Sing on!
Let us hear how Hsisha's armed forces and
civilians
Swept invaders from our land. . . .



1. *Fair and Fertile*
Hsisha

Sunlight shimmers on azure waves,
Wind from the ocean scatters foam on the reefs;
Golden the sand
And bright as jade the beach
Strewn with pearly shells,
Heaped with guano;
Wild apple foliage unfurls
Like big green parasols,
Antelope shrubs overspread
The rocks by the roadside;
All year round wild flowers bloom,
Red, white, yellow and blue;
And these islands abound in springs,
A hint of brine in their fresh honeyed sweetness;



Each drop of this milk of our motherland
Redoubles her sons' strength. . . .

Hsisha, lovely archipelago,
You are a handful of pearls
Scattered over the South China Sea.

In your territorial waters
Sport shoals of fish
Leaping for glee through the waves;
Horseshoe conch-shells,
Sea-cucumbers like flower petals
Can be seen as through a glass,
With marine plants stately as pines,
Or sturdy as willows,
And bright, many-coloured coral.
The calm sea,
A blue velvet canopy,
Conceals such fabulous treasures. . . .

Hsisha, rich archipelago
Loved by our people,
And looked on covetously by the pirates.

Ah, Hsisha,
Fair and fertile
Yet brave and martial
As the sentry posts

Guarding these strategic straits,
You stand sentinel between the clouds and waves.

From of old the Hsisha islands have been our
territorial waters,
These islands are covered with our forefathers'
footprints;
Countless generations
Of fishermen cast their nets here;
The fleets of countless dynasties
Moored in their bays;
Here are old Chinese stone inscriptions,*
Graves of our forbears,
Antique coins of the Yung Lo period,
Ming blue-and-white porcelain,**
A host of cultural relics, historical sites,
Firm proof of China's sovereignty over these
islands.

These remains conjure up for us
The campfires of our fishermen ancestors,

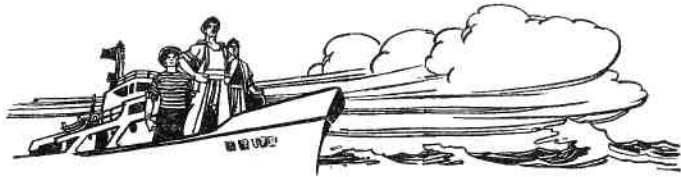
* Inscriptions on a stone tablet erected on North Isle which read: "Commemorating the inspection in the 28th year of the reign of Kuang Hsu [1902] of the Great Ching Empire."

** Referring to the Ming Dynasty coins of the Yung Lo period (1403-24) and the ancient porcelain and other cultural relics discovered by the Chinese People's Liberation Army men and civilians on the Coral and other isles.

The cooking smoke rising in the Han and Tang
times,
The billowing sails of the Ming and Ching
dynasties. . . .

For these "thousand *li* of sands,
Ten thousand *li* of creeks"
In old Chinese folk-songs
Are part and parcel of our motherland.
Hsisha, Nansha,
Chungsha, Tungsha . . .
Are our people's fine fishing-grounds
And no pirates shall seize them!





2. *Our Fisherfolk Fight Back*

Our fishing-crews put out
To the open sea,
Skirting the Hsisha islands
Through wind and waves,
Casting their nets and lines,
Catching shellfish and sea-slugs,
While hard at work ready for combat.

Listen!
The doleful wail of a ship's siren:
A south Vietnamese vessel intrudes into our
waters!

These despicable Saigon puppets armed to the
teeth,
With their ludicrous show of force,
Are mayflies trying to topple a giant tree.
They are out to find oil, to grab fresh territory,
To loot our resources
For their anaemic bosses.
Their propellers churning up the sea
Seem to stab our fisherfolk's hearts.

Old Captain Ah-sha,
Tall and stalwart,
Firm as a rock,
Hands on his hips
Keeps close watch on the aggressors.
As his order rings out: "Warn them off!"
The signal flag is hoisted to express
The wrath and might of seven hundred million
people.
"We protest against this encroachment on our
waters
And order you to withdraw!"
Even iron and steel
Would quake at this warning;
The enemy vessel hurries to put about.

But the crafty scoundrels,
Shameless and overbearing,

Signal back a preposterous claim
That our Hsisha islands are Da Nang;*
And brazenly, a second enemy gunboat
Comes to support the first;
One blocks our way in front,
The other tries to ram us from behind
In a vain attempt to sink our fishing-boat.

Old Captain Ah-sha
Is the son of poor fisherfolk,
Whose people braved the storms for generations.
A local tyrant beat his father to death,
His mother fled out to sea,
And he was born when her boat reached the
Hsisha islands,
Named Ah-sha to recall that debt of blood and
tears.
Then Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist
Party
Rescued him from the sea of bitterness,
And a poor fisherman became the captain of a
boat;
Further tempering in the stormy years
Of the Cultural Revolution
Made him an intrepid fighter.
Facing the invaders

* An important harbour in south Viet Nam.

Ah-sha throws back his head.
"You pirates!
Scuttle us, would you?
Lets us show you
The seamanship and mettle of the Chinese
people!"
At a sign from him
The fishing-boat changes course,
Eludes both enemy vessels
And with three blasts of its siren sets the pirates
trembling.
The two gunboats narrowly miss
A head-on collision;
Backing hard they rock and toss,
Yapping recriminations
Like mad dogs.

Gallant fishing-boat!
It leads the mad bulls by the nose,
Playing hide-and-seek with them on the sea,
Just as our mobile guerrillas
Led former invaders a dance in the sorghum fields.

The enemy, one plot foiled, cooks up another:
The puppet commander dons the uniform
Of a customs officer
And brings a gunboat of puppet troops
Alongside our boat,

Posing as a "customs" patrol.
They clamour to come aboard and make a search,
Laying dirty paws on our bulwarks,
Ludicrous as the mottle-faced
Clowns in a circus.

Raising his megaphone to his lips,
Captain Ah-sha berates them:
"These are the territorial waters
Of the Chinese People's Republic,
Not your bandit headquarters at Saigon.
It is you who should be searched!
Clear off, you gangsters."

Enemy guns are trained on our fishing-boat,
The brigands brandish their weapons.
At a signal from Captain Ah-sha
Our militiamen man their posts,
All their rifles trained
On the puppets' hearts.
"Touch our boat, you devils,
And we'll hack off your claws!"

On one side, hard-working, honest fishing folk,
On the other, sea wolves armed to the teeth:
Head-on confrontation,
Fingers on the trigger
Amid the thunder of waves.

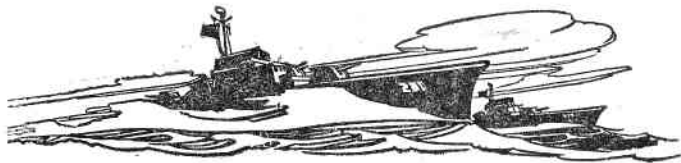


Our militia are men of iron,
Rock-solid as the Liulien Mountains*
Confronting raging typhoons;
And their good old captain,
A tower of strength,
Fears not the stormiest seas.
“Open fire, you dogs,
And we’ll ram your powder-room!
The fish will die to break the net:
We’ll gladly take you to the bottom with us
To defend our China seas.”

The puppet crews panic,
Blanching, they shake with fright;
For the bosses’ bloodstained bank-notes
Cannot buy courage and strength.
The people whose cause is just
Can prop up the sky;
They have the courage, the resolve
To make revolution,
Like Li Yu-ho** who held high his red lantern
They stand firm in the flames of war.

* In Hainan Island, Kwangtung Province.

** Hero of the modern revolutionary Peking opera *The Red Lantern*, a working-class heroic figure whose name is a household word in China today.



3. *A Thrilling Naval Battle*

Cleaving waves huge as houses,
Climbing the crests of high billows,
Ploughing up foam like white pear blossom in
front,
Trailing behind it a myriad snowy ribbons,
With the glorious banner of the people's army
Streaming proudly in the wind,
All guns at the ready,
Bravely defending both bulwarks,
Engines roaring,
Radar scanning,
It speeds forward,
A flotilla of new China's young navy,
Battle-ships of the working class!

Riding the raging wind,
Pursuing the scudding clouds,
Ploughing through the angry waves,
The flotilla in strict formation
Holds steadily on course.
The young flotilla commander
Buffeted by the wind stands straight as a palm-
tree,
Keen eyes fixed ahead,
As if able to pierce the far-stretching clouds and
mist.

This commander, Chung Hai,
From the River Hsiang's banks in Hunan
Grew up nurtured by
The sunshine and dew of Shaoshan.*
It was there
By the threshing floor and lotus-pond
Beside Chairman Mao's old home
That he put on the red scarf of a Young Pioneer;
And there, by the former peasants' night-school
Where our great leader battled,
He made his pledge and joined the Communist
Youth League.
The wind and waves of the sea,

* Birthplace of the Chinese people's great leader
Chairman Mao Tsetung. It is in Hsiangtan County, Hunan
Province.

Years of naval service,
Tempered his fighting spirit,
Making him a man of steel;
And by tireless study,
Ceaseless search for the truth,
He became a member of the Communist Party,
Dedicated to the service of the world's people.

Now the young commander, emboldened
By these stirring memories,
As he watches the bright clouds fleet by
Has a vision of the green pines
And red walls of Tien An Men,
Near Chungnanhai bathed in sunlight,
Where our great leader Chairman Mao
Scanning the far horizon
Charts our vessel's course
With the compass
Of revolutionary truth,
Encouraging army and people to battle on.

The commander's glance turns to the calendar
Where the majestic Mount Lushan is pictured:
Riotous clouds sweeping past,
Sturdy pines standing erect,
All the beauty of perilous heights. . . .
The gusting wind carries
A resounding cry to his ears:
"Drive away the invaders from Hsisha!"



Revolutionary seamen and Communists
Must give their lives to defend
Chairman Mao's revolutionary line!"
Loud the bugle sounds the charge,
Battle-drums are rolling;
Songs in praise of our motherland
Echo to the clouds!
We can pick up the Kunlun Mountains,
Step over the South China Sea:
No obstacle on earth deters our fighters!

Speeding past the Hsuanteh Isles
Towards the Yunglo sea,*
He seems to hear
The fishermen's accusations
And the angry cries of the seamen:
"Four more Saigon gunboats
Have encroached on our waters!"

The commander and political commissar
Immediately muster their men.
"The Chinese people are not to be trifled with!
Our victimized fisherfolk look to us for support.
We demand not one foot of foreign territory,
Nor will we let brigands seize one inch of our
land."

* Both Hsuanteh Isles and Yunglo Isles are part of
China's Hsisha Archipelago.

"Hsisha has belonged to China
Since time immemorial;
This is acknowledged by all."
"Quick! To the rescue of our fishing folk.
We will give our lives to defend our sovereignty!"

Stern warnings are flashed
Again and again to the pirates;
But relying on their greater tonnage
The Saigon warships
Persist in their provocation:
Time and again they try to ram our vessels,
But for all their savagery and craftiness
They can only scratch the bulwarks.

Our commander draws his pistol,
His eyes flash fire!
The crew take up shells,
Their hearts ablaze with hatred,
Hatred fierce enough to set fire
To the South China Sea!

But putting away his pistol and breathing hard,
The commander controls his anger.
"We must not fire the first shot.
We'll abide by strict discipline in fighting the
brutes."

Calm and unruffled our heroes,
While all is panic on the enemy ships:
Their crews grab life-preservers,
Their officers life-belts,
As breaking formation they head
For their harbour, Da Nang.
"The pirates are fleeing!"
"No!
Watch out for new tricks."

Even as this warning is given
The enemy double back,
Their warships converging on us,
All spitting fire.

South China Sea,
Remember
The crime of these Saigon puppets!
South China Sea,
Bear witness
That it was they who fired the first shot,
Who opened fire on our ships and on our island!
These pirates it was who kindled
The flames of aggressive war.

**We will not attack
Unless we are attacked;**

If we are attacked,
We will certainly counter-attack.
Goaded beyond endurance our army and people
Strike back in self-defence.

Belching flames and smoke
Shells hurtle through the air!
Great jets of water spring up to the sky
As, in orderly formation,
Running the gauntlet of a heavy bombardment,
Our flotilla speeds into action.

Fire!
Our artillery roars:
Avenge our slaughtered Chinese and Vietnamese
brothers!
Fire!
Our artillery roars:
Our sovereignty is not to be violated!

Fire!
Ah-sha brings his fishing-boats to join battle.
By skilful co-ordination
They draw the enemy's fire
And inflict casualties on the puppet crew.

Fire!
Punish the dastardly traitors of Viet Nam,

As the Vietnamese people's forces have punished
them.

Forward!
Deep the militant friendship
Between the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples.

Fire! Forward!
The people's shells seem to have eyes,
Each shot is dead on target:
The enemy flagship catches fire,
Their command is paralysed,
Their ships lose contact,
Their whole formation breaks up,
Each ship dashing for safety.
Shot and shell rain down
On the milling troops on deck,
But where can they hide?
The sea yawns like an abyss.

Fiercer the fight now,
Our flagship leading the way,
Its guns red-hot,
The shells expanded by heat
Hard to pull out of the barrels.
The political commissar of the ship darts
forward,
With powerful, callused hands

He rips out a smoking shell.
Like men possessed the gunners
Rush up fresh ammunition and ram it in,
Their hands a mass of blood-blisters,
Oblivious of pain,
Their whole hearts set on defending our great
motherland!

But what sound is this?
Giant waves pound
The deck of our gallant flagship.
Clouds gather
And press in round the tall mast.
The heroic gunboat is on fire,
The flames fanned by the roaring wind.
Chung Hai orders: "Extinguish the fire!"
The fearless seamen rush forward
Though acrid smoke blinds them,
Though flames lick over them,
Their one thought:
"Quick!
Put it out!
We are ready to give our lives.
Faster!
With our sweat and blood
We will douse the flames!"
They have ardour enough to drain the sea
To save their burning ship.

As they fight the flames, ahead
Looms up enemy Gunboat 10!
Adjusting his helmet Chung Hai
Shakes his iron fist.
"Comrades!
Though our ship is on fire
We must smash the enemy.
We have the courage,
The enemy are cowards.
We'll go alongside,
By close combat make their guns useless,
And by fighting on our own terms
Win victory!"

Fighters of the working class
Are of matchless mettle,
For we fear neither hardship nor death
And are closely linked with the people.
This it was that enabled us
To topple the Three Mountains,*
To resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea,
To win victory at Chenpao Island,**
And to defend our coast against aggression.

* Referring to the forces of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism which oppressed the Chinese people.

** Chenpao Island in Heilungkiang Province has always been Chinese territory. In March 1969 the Soviet revisionists sent their troops to encroach on this island, only to be duly punished by the Chinese army and people.

In the flames of war
Our ship races to meet the test;
But as it speeds forward
The driving-engine breaks down.
“On with the assault!
The greater the difficulties,
The greater our resolution!”
Chung Hai orders:
“Man the helm!”
At once five seamen spring forward,
Raise the hatch of the helm
And swift as lightning leap down;
Together they set their shoulders to the wheel,
Mastering the mighty ocean,
Struggling against the swiftly racing tide.

Chung Hai takes his stand on the bridge,
Speeding his ship to the fray,
Steady as a mountain.
Wind and waves
Make martial music,
The seamen’s battle-cries shake sky and sea.
“Forward,
Firm and brave as the mountain pine!
Forward,
For victory in the revolution
We must scale perilous heights!
Forward,



Cutting through wind and waves!
Forward, forward, for-ward!"
Like a fiery raging dragon
Our flagship closes with the enemy.
Chung Hai roars:
"Now! Hand-grenades!"
He pulls the fuse, swings his arm,
And hurls a hand-grenade at the enemy!
Boom!
The enemy bridge collapses
In eddying smoke.
Then our men follow Chung Hai's lead:
Their hand-grenades whizz
Through the air
Exploding on stem and stern,
Starboard and larboard!
The pirate's guns are silenced,
Its mast is snapped and splintered;
The enemy captain and crew
Like scalded rats
Skelter for cover;
The ugly puppet flag
Like a dead crow, smoking and singed,
Flops into the angry waves.

See!
Three badly mauled enemy vessels are making off,
Listing and wrapped in smoke.

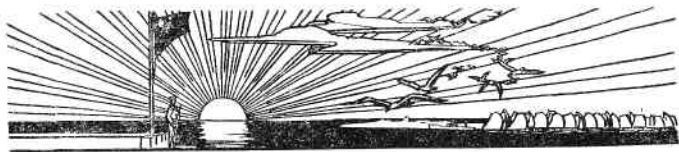
Gunboat so sinks like a stone —
More scrap-iron dumped on the bed of the South
China Sea!
The Saigon puppet navy
Has received its due deserts!
Our brave flagship extinguishes the flames,
Repairs the driving-engine
And, undamaged,
Puts back in triumph.

Shout for joy, giant waves!
Sing, stormy petrels!
Sing this fresh feat of arms by our gallant seamen:
In less than thirty minutes
They won victory
In this battle in self-defence!
The people's navy of new China
Used no "Komar-class gunboats,"
No "Styx surface-to-surface missiles";
Outmatched in size and outnumbered,
It drubbed the strong enemy force
And in this brief encounter put to shame
The puppet lackeys and their imperialist bosses.

Shout for joy, giant waves!
Sing, stormy petrels!
Sing this fresh feat of arms by our gallant seamen:
In less than thirty minutes

They won victory
In this battle in self-defence!
The people's navy created
And directed by Chairman Mao
Has boldly defeated the enemy in close combat,
Using hand-grenades against gunboats —
A new page in the annals
Of people's war at sea.





4. *The Chinese Flag Flies High over Hsisha*

In the morning breeze
Our troopship speeds ahead,
Its hold packed
With soldiers and militiamen;
For to free China's treasure islands
Army and people battle shoulder to shoulder.

A new recruit, Ah-chun,
A Li youngster from Hainan Island,
Back against the bulwark,
Hugs his rifle to him;
Under brows as arched
As the Five-Finger Mountain*

* In Hainan Island, Kwangtung Province.

His big eyes sparkle like stars
Ablaze with passion;
His plump cheeks are ruddy
As ripe coffee-berries.
In the Cultural Revolution
On his left arm Ah-chun wore
A Red Guard armband,
And his hand now gripping the rifle
Wrote poems and essays to denounce Lin Piao.
Today, with his hot blood
He means to write
A new big-character poster
On the sky above the Pacific:
Chinese territory is not to be violated!
Invaders who play with fire
Will burn their own fingers!

The sea starts to heave and toss
And the young recruit
Begins retching,
His head swims. . . .
The political instructor
Helps him overcome his nausea;
Ah-chun munches some biscuits,
Sips a little hot water,
Then tells his comrades-in-arms:
"Now I know the sea's temper
I can lick sea-sickness.

A tiger from the mountains
Can become a dragon on the sea."

For this new recruit Li Ah-chun
Is determined to fight in the van
To free the islands;
And as the bell's sudden clanging
Sounds the alert,
Gone is his last trace of nausea.
At that call to arms
Our intrepid soldiers and militiamen
Spring up gripping their rifles
And bound to the deck
As if the companionway were level ground.

The blue ocean seems swathed in gauze,
At the horizon shimmer morning clouds,
While dimly discernible ahead
Lies a pale grey streak,
One of the treasure islands,
A star on the map of our motherland,
Seized now by the Saigon puppets!

.....
At the thought of those brutes
Trampling over our coral reefs,
Ah-chun's heart contracts.
Striding up to his officer
He vehemently asks for an assignment:

"Give me our country's flag!
As long as I have breath
I shall plant it on the island
To bring in the dawn of freedom
To the whole archipelago!"

The officer claps his hand on Ah-chun's shoulder,
Stirred by his eagerness.
Less than a year in the army,
This young fellow has already won a citation:
One night during a hurricane
He rescued two children from a raging flood.

Solemnly, the officer hands him the flag;
Earnestly, he gives him his orders.
Infinite our Party's trust
In the new generation raised under the red flag —
The revolution's future is in their hands!

Our big guns roar,
Pounding and pulverizing
The enemy's position,
As soldiers and militiamen in rubber boats
With flying oars pull for the shore.
Bullets pierce one of the boats,
Ah-chun leaps into the sea;
Holding high the flag in one hand,
He swims with the other arm

Till the militia platoon leader overtakes him
And tows him through the waves.
They climb the reef,
Gain the beach,
Their courage redoubled;
And when the bugle sounds the charge,
Waves leap and crash,
The islands quake,
While wind gusts through the trees
Like a myriad galloping horses.

An enemy bullet hits
The standard-bearer in the arm,
Pain racks him.
The young Li fighter's hot blood
Drips like red blossoms on the battlefield,
Bringing spring to this ancient island. . . .

Grasping the flagstick,
Straining every nerve,
Spurred on by the banner fluttering overhead,
Ah-chun presses stubbornly forward.
"Dear motherland!
To shed our blood for you,
To die for you,
Is our greatest happiness,
Our greatest glory."



Raising aloft the flag,
Regardless of danger,
He races on and on;
The new recruit holds high his country's flag,
And his country's flag spurs him on,
Spurs on all his comrades to storm the enemy
post.

Bathed in the splendour of the flag, Ah-chun
Races to the gate of the enemy headquarters.
There they make a human ladder,
The platoon leader at the base,
And Ah-chun mounts over his comrades' shoulders
Up, up to the roof of the fort!
With one hand the young fighter tears down
The vile flag of the Saigon puppets,
With the other he plants firmly on the roof
Our country's five-star red flag!
The dawn of the South China Sea
Lights up his towering figure,
The tabs on his collar, the red star on his cap. . . .

Our flag floats in the breeze, the bugle sounds,
Our heroes mop up the last pockets of resistance.
Our flag floats now over all the Hsisha islands;
Soldiers and militiamen raise their guns
And cheers rend the air like thunder.

With one heart they defend these islands,
United as brothers they build up these islands.

High floats our flag,
High and proud in the east wind,
Calling on us to fight on,
To liberate Taiwan Province.
Every inch of our land,
Every drop of our country's water,
Must be returned
To our people who have stood up!

High floats our flag,
Resplendent against the sky,
Calling on us to continue the revolution,
Be vanguards in the campaign
To expose and condemn
Lin Piao and Confucius,
Smashing the enemy's dream of restoration.

High floats our flag
Above the South China Sea,
Above tiers of pale green,
Deep blue, orange and crimson.
See!
The sun has risen!
The sun has risen to shine
On the glorious Hsisha Archipelago,

Our rampart in the South China Sea.
Listen!

Everywhere there is singing —
Over rivers, lakes and seas,
Over plains and mountains,
From Party and government,
Army, civilians and students,
From east to west, north to south,
One mighty chorus:
"Red in the east rises the sun. . . ."

Peking, March 10, 1974

