

Shu Yun

Shu Yun

Shu Yun

Shu Yun

INSIDE DOPE ON TEN LITTLE-KNOWN MYSTERIES CONCERNING THE SEPTEMBER

13 INCIDENT

June 25 2018

2021 marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Marshal Lin Biao in a plane crash in Mongolia, allegedly while seeking to defect to the Soviet Union after a failed coup attempt against Mao Zedong. The essay translated/paraphrased below, by the journalist Shu Yun (舒云), written in 2011 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary, identifies some “mysteries” or anomalies left unaddressed in the official account. All sorts of loose ends remain in any account of the affair, and there appears to be no hard evidence allowing the shaping the thing into a consistent and plausible narrative.

The account below focuses on the week or so leading up to the plane crash. But the “mysteries” surrounding Lin and his fate go back beyond the late summer and early fall of 1971. Lin Biao was perhaps the most successful Chinese soldier of the 20th century. Born in Hubei province in 1907, he was a student at Chiang Kai-shek’s Whampoa Military Academy in 1925. In 1927 he joined the Communist Red Army at its founding, and distinguished himself in the early battles against the Nationalists, in the War of Resistance against Japan, and in the so-called “War of Liberation” against the Nationalists following Japan’s surrender. His Fourth

Field Army defeated the Nationalist forces in the Northeast (Manchuria) and then swept south, crossing the Yangtze and wiping up the remnants of Nationalist resistance in Guangdong province.

But after that Lin went into a kind of eclipse. He had been wounded in 1938 and spent months recuperating in the Soviet Union. Some speculate that later in life he continued to suffer from the effects of that wound. In any case, in 1950 he declined command of the Chinese forces in Korea, and until the last years of the 1950s, despite being elected to high positions in the Communist party, remained politically inactive.

In 1959, though, following the purge of Marshal Peng Dehuai for opposing Mao's radical Great Leap Forward, Lin became Minister of National Defense and active head of the Party's Military Affairs Commission—that is, he was China's highest-ranking active soldier. In subsequent years he sponsored, or seemed to sponsor, a program in the army exalting the Thought of Mao Zedong and promoting the then-Maoist notion that ideological and political fervor were more important than modern weaponry and professional training as means to victory (these latter being “bourgeois” and “revisionist” (that is, Soviet) concepts, no match for the spirit of the “people”). In the early 1960s, as China was moving toward the Cultural Revolution, official propaganda summoned the “whole country” to learn from the PLA, especially its devotion to Mao's Thought, while Lin authorized the publication of the famous “little red book” of Mao quotations, introduced with an exhortation in Lin's calligraphy to study these. In 1965, on the occasion of the anniversary of VJ day, Lin delivered his famous thesis on “people's war,” against which the American imperialists and Soviet revisionists, for all their technological prowess, would be unable to prevail.

On May 16 1966, in a meeting that marks the formal beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Lin spoke accusing Mao's high-ranking targets of plotting a "coup" against the Chairman, alluding as well to other historical coups d'état in China and abroad. In a letter to his wife a few weeks later, the Chairman expressed some misgivings about "our friend's" obsession with coups, perhaps indicating that Mao had misgivings (justified or not) against Lin from the beginning

(<https://www.bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/MaoZedong/Letters/Mao%27sLetterToJiangQing-660708-Alt2.pdf>). Throughout the Cultural Revolution Lin delivered several public speeches praising the Chairman and roaring against Mao's enemies, rejoicing in the title of the Chairman's "closest comrade in arms." At the Ninth National Party Congress of April 1969, marking more or less a formal end to the Cultural Revolution, the Party adopted a new charter explicitly saying Mao was Chairman for the rest of his life and that Vice Chairman Lin Biao was his successor. Lin delivered the major address at that Congress.

And yet, well-researched biographies of Lin show him as chronically ill, hypocondriacal, and passive (for example, Frederic Teiwes and Warren Sun, 6 (Hilo: University of Hawaii Press, 1996)), a picture hard to square with the fire-breathing persona displayed during the Cultural Revolution. Later Chinese sources, including the piece by Shu Yun below, agree with this picture. This passivity is consistent with Lin's inactivity during most of the 1950s. Some Chinese sources suggest that Lin never wanted to assume active charge of the military, that he thought Peng Dehuai got a raw deal, and that the fanatical Maoism was a defensive measure based on a distrust of the Chairman's whimsical ways. But this still leaves unexplained his activism in the 1966-1970 period.

Even from the official sources it was obvious from the start that any alleged coup attempt by Lin was also a defensive measure, in anticipation of a coup by Mao against him. These sources also show the main planning of the coup did not involve Lin directly, but that if there was a plot it was organized by Lin's son, Lin Ligu (nicknamed "Tiger"), deputy director of the Air Force Command office. Indeed, the events leading up to the September 13 incident involve a kind of soap opera within Lin's personal household.

Shu Yun's and other unofficial accounts show Lin himself as thoroughly passive, with the active roles assumed by Lin's wife, Ye Qun, in concert with Ligu. Ligu had been responsible for devising the plan of the coup (if, indeed, there ever was such a plan), and he and Ye Qun were responsible for organizing the flight on September 13, after it was clear that any plans they had had been exposed. The plan to flee was revealed by Lin's daughter, Liheng (nicknamed Doudou). Apparently Doudou and her mother had never gotten along, and Doudou also had some issues with her brother as well. She revealed the plans for the flight not out of an ardent love for socialism and Chairman Mao transcending family ties, but because she feared that her mom and big brother were out to "kidnap" her dad.

Whatever the Lins were up to, Chairman Mao already seemed bent on getting rid of his closest comrade. A Central Committee meeting held at the resort area of Lushan in August 1970. The Central Committee had previously met in Lushan once, in the summer of 1959, and the outcome of that was the purge of Lin's predecessor as military commander, Peng Dehuai. Previous actions by Lin, probably beginning with his May 16 1966 speech on coups, may have made Mao nervous. Mao reportedly was also uneasy when Lin ordered a mass mobilization and the removal of disgraced high-ranking leaders from the capital in 1969, when there seemed a

high probability that China and the Soviet Union would go to war. Around that time official pronouncements showed an ambiguity about just who was in “direct command” of the army: one formula credited Lin Biao with this role, but another giving the honor to Chairman Mao. At Lushan Mao launched an attack on the “five big generals”: four of Lin Biao’s old Fourth Field Army subordinates, along with Ye Qun—all of whom had been placed on the Party’s Politburo in 1969. Their “crime,” apparently, was supporting a draft of a new PRC Constitution that included a provision for a State Chairman (i.e., President—as distinct from Party Chairman), a mostly honorific position Mao had held until 1959, when he resigned in favor of Liu Shaoqi, who became the main victim of the Cultural Revolution. The wording of the draft echoed the 1969 Party Constitution, naming Mao Chairman for life, with Lin Biao as his successor.

Another mystery, then, is why Mao was so bothered by this. He seems to have thought, somehow, that the provision was evidence that the crown prince was in too much of a hurry to replace the emperor. He demanded that the “big generals” make a self-examination, and obeyed grudgingly and tepidly. The generals were removed from their positions and arrested after the September 13 business, and in 1981 they (apart from Ye Qun, who, of course, was dead) were formally tried and convicted as members of Lin Biao’s counterrevolutionary clique; but there is no evidence that any of the four were involved in any “coup” or aware of Lin Liguó’s machinations.

The 1971 Lushan meeting also purged Chen Boda, a prominent radical ideologue who had once served as Chairman Mao’s personal secretary. Chen also had risen to Politburo rank during the Cultural Revolution. His crimes included supporting the provision for a State Chairman, and also, we are told, proclaiming Mao to be a “genius.” This, it was explained later,

is “fake Marxism”: *The people, only the people, are the true creators of history. In the following months there was a propaganda campaign encouraging the singing of the Internationale, the anthem of the world communist movement, which proclaims that the people liberate themselves, without any need for gods or heroes. Chen’s fall may actually have been a reflection of tensions and jealousies within the radical tendency itself, pitting Chen against Mao’s wife Jiang Qing and her cronies, later known as the Gang of Four. In any case, both Lin (publicly, anyway) and Chen were identified with the leftist or radical tendency among the Cultural Revolution Maoist coalition, and the denigration of geniuses and a toning down of the cult of Mao in subsequent months may reflect a (temporary) shift in the balance of power at the top of the regime toward the more “conservative” tendency, presumably reflecting the opinions of the country’s head of government, Zhou Enlai.*

Indeed, there is cause to wonder whether Zhou Enlai may have known more about the Lin family plans than has been publicly revealed, and that he may even have manipulated some of the actions of Ligu and his collaborators. What details there are of the alleged plot are set out in the “Outline of Project 571.” 571, wuqi, is homophonous with the term for “armed righteous rebellion,” righteous rebellion (qiyi) being a classical name for popular uprisings against tyranny and misgovernment. The Outline, more a manifesto than an operational plan, details the fickleness and cruelty of “B-52’s” (that is, Mao’s) method of rule, and the cruelty and folly of the policies associated with the Cultural Revolution. In the aftermath of Lin’s death this was widely circulated among the general population as evidence of just what a vicious traitor Lin was—although some who were young at the time report that the effect was to raise considerably their opinion of Lin. In fact, the Outline could serve as a kind of menu for the reform policies promulgated in the 1980s.

As Shu Yun details, the Outline itself is encased in mystery. As the conspiracy unraveled on the night of September 12-13, Lin's accomplices in Beijing attempted to flee and were killed or captured in the process. Before leaving they attempted to burn all their papers, but somehow a copy of the Outline, and that alone, was overlooked—to be discovered a few days later by a janitor cleaning out Liguó's offices. Hmm! No original has been produced. While the Outline probably does include some statements by Lin Liguó made in the course of the year following the August 1970 meeting. But it is at least plausible to speculate that the document itself was compiled by the victors, probably under the direction of Zhou Enlai, after the death of the Lins, with a view to discrediting the leftist line in the Cultural Revolution—in effect saying what almost everyone in the country by that point was thinking, but filtering the forbidden thoughts through the statement of a traitor. The Outline discredits the radical tendency, but also reflects poorly on Mao himself, and it's another mystery why Mao put up with that—and, for that matter, what accounts for the uncharacteristic bout of modesty that overtook him following the summer of 1970.

As an operational program, the Outline can only be described as half-assed. The guiding idea is to kill Mao and assume that the country will then rally behind the plotters, since Mao has antagonized all elements of the Party and society. The manner of disposing of the Chairman is vague. There seems to have been some idea of blowing up his train. Failing that, the idea apparently was to drop a bomb on Mao's house; and, in fact, he was evacuated from his residence on the night of September 12 and all flights from Beijing were grounded.

Things came to head as Mao embarked on a "southern tour" in late August, visiting military commands in central and southern China, asserting his own authority and criticizing Lin Biao.

Word reached Lin's group that this was going on, moving Lin Liguo to action. But Mao also somehow apparently got word of this action, and returned unexpectedly to Beijing on the afternoon of September 12. This precipitated panicked moves by the plotters, aware now that their plans had been revealed. According to Shu Yun, Mao himself had his bodyguard, Wang Dongxing, notify Lin Liguo of his unexpected return to Beijing, putting Liguo into a panic. Lin Liguo flew to Beidaihe, a beach resort popular among the Party elites, near the town of Shanhaiguan (the eastern terminus of the Great Wall) where the Lins had a summer home, and told his mother they had better get out. That evening Lin Doudou, who had expected for some time that something dramatic was about to happen, spoke to the security people at the Lin household and later managed to get through by phone to Beijing, warning them that her mother and brother were about to abduct her dad. Ye Chun roused Lin Biao from his bed, where he had been sleeping after having taken sleeping pills, and she and Liguo put him in a car headed to the Shanhaiguan airport. The car ran a roadblock on the way, and gun shots were exchanged. Lin Liguo had taken Lin Biao's personal plane, a Trident jet, that afternoon from Beijing, and it had not yet been fully refueled. The plane left with most of the crew, including the co-pilot, missing. The takeoff itself was rushed and in the process a wing may have been damaged.

Ye Chun had told people that Commander Lin was going to fly to Dalian, in Manchuria. Other information implies the intended destination was actually Guangzhou, in the south, where the military forces were dominated by Lin's old Fourth Field Army subordinates. If they failed to rally support in Guangzhou, Ye Chun and Liguo seem to have intended to cross the border into Hong Kong. The official story, of course, is that they intended to defect to the Soviet Union, as the crash in Mongolia would indicate. So: another mystery.

The plane took a circuitous route, heading southward at first, and then turning north. It then seems to have followed an erratic course. Eyewitness and other testimony indicates that the plane was on fire prior to the crash, and the intensity with which it burned after coming to earth indicates that the quasi-official story, that it crashed because it ran out of fuel, is incorrect. Shu Yun seems to favor the hypothesis that it was hit by an air-to-ground missile after crossing over into Mongolia, fired by Soviet troops in Mongolia who mistook it for a surveillance aircraft (which would imply that if Lin were really defecting to the Soviet Union, the Soviets did not know about it, or at least had not alerted their military forces along the border that this was happening).

The role of the pilot, Pan Jingyan, is controversial. In the aftermath of the incident Pan's family were put under supervision as affiliated with a "counterrevolutionary," but Deng Xiaoping some years later told an American visitor that in his estimation, Pan was a "good man." One source says that Pan actually a long-time plant by Zhou Enlai in Lin Biao's entourage. In 1981 the PLA Air Force declared that Pan had died "of an illness," (or, alternatively, in the line of duty) and his widow was awarded a small sum. Shu Yun says that the manner in which Pan handled the crash landing was "almost suicidal," that he hit the ground in such a way that the fuel tanks would receive the main impact. Soviet investigators reached the crash site the next morning and retrieved the flight recorder and the cockpit voice recorder, and by the most credible accounts have not made public what was on them. There is, however, at least one story, probably fiction, which alleges the existence of a voice recording of what happened on the plane for its final five minutes. This alleged "black box" account, for what it is worth, indicates that the passengers thought the plane was headed to Guangzhou, only to discover that Pan had changed course and had left Chinese territory. That account also

indicates that the fire on the plane was caused by a bomb explosion, and that Pan in the last minutes was in contact with “Director Wang,” presumably Wang Dongxing. This raises the possibility that Pan had been told to take the plane toward the Soviet Union by way of Mongolia, perhaps to give credence to the notion that Lin was a traitor, not simply an ambitious plotter, and that Pan may have deliberately crashed the plane after it was on fire.

If I had the talent and energy to work this into a novel, I would have Zhou Enlai, eager to defang the leftist elements in the Cultural Revolution coalition, maneuvering to cause the elimination of Chen Boda in 1970 and goading Mao, if Mao needed goading, to begin attacks on the “five big generals.” He may have covertly also pushed Lin Liguo into thinking how to counter this or, if Liguo was already taking action, becoming aware of the plans and tracking the plotters the whole time. And he somehow arranged for the plane to cross into Mongolia, headed for the Soviet Union. In this fiction, someone would have had to have planted a time bomb on the plane prior to take off, since Zhou, in conjunction with Wang Dongxing, could not count on the Soviets’ shooting it down. Exactly what kind of mechanism would allow this to be done boggles the imagination, but, then, so does the whole episode, regardless of what actually happened.

Mystery No. 1

On September 12, 13:00, Mao Zedong suddenly returned to Beijing from his southern tour.

Why did Mao Zedong ask whether Beijing was secure?

Whenever he was in good health, Mao Zedong (毛泽东) would travel each year, returning normally toward the end of September. In 1971 he left for his Southern Tour¹ on August 15, but

¹ *Nanxun* (南巡)—the term used as well for imperial tours of inspection of the southern provinces.

returned to Beijing less than a month later. This was extremely unusual, and very worrying for Zhou Enlai (周恩来), who was then in charge of the Center's routine work.

At 13:10 on September 12 Mao Zedong's special train entered Beijing's Fengtai station;² there he summoned Li Desheng (李德生), the Commander of the Beijing Military Region in control of overall military forces; Ji Dengkui (纪登奎), third commissar of the Beijing Military Region; Wu De (吴德), second secretary of Beijing municipality; and Wu Zhongzhao (吴忠召), commander of the Beijing Garrison Command—all to come to the station. He first determined from Li Desheng that Beijing was secure. At the conclusion of the conversation he ordered Li Desheng to deploy a fully armed division at Nankou and wait and see what would happen (守株待兔).³ At that time the authority to deploy troops was in the hands of Mao Zedong. Lin Biao was unable to give direct orders to troops, or, if he did, he needed the permission of Mao Zedong.

At 15:36, Mao Zedong's special train left the Fengtai station, arriving at the Beijing station at 16:05. Mao's special train had never before entered Beijing during the daylight. Mao had originally planned to meet with Yang Dezhi (杨得志), Commander of the Jinan Military Region. But Wang Dongxing, director of the Center Work Office,⁴ phoned him and said that Yang Dezhi

² A suburban station one stop before the main Beijing station, for trains coming from the south and west.

³ Literally: stay by the [tree] trunk and wait for the rabbit. From a story in the *Han Feizi*: While a farmer was ploughing his field, a rabbit ran by, slammed into a tree trunk, and broke his neck. Thereafter, the farmer stopped working the fields, but, rather, sat by the tree all day waiting for another rabbit. Most explicitly the saying refers to one who doesn't bother to work, but waits idly for a stroke of luck. More generally, as here, it means to wait and see what happens.

⁴ Wang (1916-2015) was also commander of the Central Committee guards unit and, in effect, Mao's bodyguard.

was in the field. Therefore, after arriving at the Jinan station at five in the morning, the train left after only 50 minutes, going directly to Beijing.

According to the recollection of Zhou Fuming (周福明), Mao's barber: "On the evening of September 12, immediately after getting back from the Southern tour, the Chairman ate supper and went to sleep. Normally there would be some notification before the Premier would arrive, but this time he burst in suddenly, with a very serious expression on his face. I knew from my many years of working at the Chairman's side that this meant something big. The Premier said to me: Go wake up the Chairman right now. There's something I must report to him. After a while the Premier came back in and told me that Lin Biao was going to run away, but it was not yet clear what else was going on. For the sake of the Chairman's safety we needed to get away from here quickly. The atmosphere in the room was very tense. I quickly gathered some things together. Wang Dongxing said to me that for the security of the Chairman we would have to travel light, prepared to fight a battle."

The Central Guards regiment was put on alert and Zhongnanhai⁵ put on a war standing.

Why did Mao Zedong think he was not safe in Beijing?

Could it be that Mao already knew about the talk of bombing Zhongnanhai by Zhou Yushi (周宇驰), the deputy director of the Air Force office, and so decided to enter Zhongnanhai after dark?

According to the recollection of Wu Jicheng (邬吉成), the deputy director of the Central Guards' office: "The Central Guards Regiment had set up a high-powered machine gun company and heavy artillery company, stationed at two different places. The first was at the corner tower

⁵ "South-Central Sea (or Lake)"—a park adjacent to the Imperial Palace which contains Party and government offices and the residences of high-ranking Party leaders.

of the West China gate of the Imperial Palace, and the other was south of the Diaoyutai guest house. The deployment at the Diaoyutai was set up properly, but the machine guns actually could not be brought up the staircases of the building, but had to be pulled up. . . . I was asleep on the evening of September 12. Wang Dongxing called me personally and said Zhongnanhai had been put on first level combat alert. You must immediately put the Diaoyutai on first level combat alert. I immediately organized the machine guns behind the artificial mountain and quickly had some emplacements dug. I put up some roadblocks at the bridgehead, blocking off all roads leading between the buildings. The work was not completed until daylight.”

Mao Zedong’s Southern Tour was undertaken to beat the bush to arouse the tiger.

After the 1970 Lushan meeting,⁶ Lin Biao did not write a self-examination, nor did he do anything else. He told “Huang-Wu-Li-Qiu” (Huang Yongsheng (黄永胜), Wu Faxian (吴法宪), Li Zuopeng (李作鹏), Qiu Huizuo (邱会作))⁷ not to bother him anymore. But Lin Ligu (林立果),⁸ Lin Biao’s son, deputy director of the Operations Office at the Air Force Headquarters, was extremely active in the south. Intelligence sources came repeatedly into Mao’s hands. Mao began to wield the “three axes” and “throw stones,” starting up the “Criticism of Chen [Boda] (陈伯

⁶ Lushan, a scenic resort area in Jiangsu province, was the site of the Second Plenary session of the 9th Central Committee, in the summer of 1970. The meeting became the occasion for the surfacing of distrust between Mao and Lin Biao, although there was no public hint of this at the time. Lushan was also the site of an earlier Central Committee meeting in the summer of 1959, the occasion for the purge of Lin’s predecessor, Peng Dehuai, and Lin’s elevation to the top of the military, second only to Mao.

⁷ In 1971: Huang Yongsheng (1915-1983) was PLA chief-of-staff; Wu Faxian (1915-2004) was commander of the Air Force; Li Zuopeng (1915-2004) was commander of the Navy; Qiu Huizuo (1914-2002) was head of the PLA logistics branch. All had served under Lin Biao in the Fourth Field Army prior to 1949, and had been elevated to the Politburo at the 9th Party Congress in 1969.

⁸ 1945-1971. Nicknamed Laohu (老虎), “Tiger.”

达)rectification.”⁹ He “added in sand,” meaning that he increased the membership in the Military Affairs Commission. And he “dug in the corner of the wall,” reorganizing the Beijing Military Region.¹⁰ During the Southern Tour Mao said that at the summary meeting of the Criticize Chen Rectification, the five big generals¹¹ made a self-examination and they all considered the problem to have been solved. In fact that business at Lushan had not been solved. They were contrary and stubborn. Not even cadres at the level of the Second Bureau of the General Staff were told about it. What should be done? According to the recollection of Wang Dongxing, “The Center convened a North China conference and a meeting to report on the Criticize Chen rectification, but neither came to any good solution. On his Southern Tour Chairman Mao wanted to push for a deeper resolution of this problem in order to strengthen the solidarity of the Party. Mao Zedong himself said that his goal on the Southern Tour was to study what Chen Boda (陈伯达) had said on his various peregrinations.”

At 13:00 on August 15 1971, Mao Zedong, feeling ill, departed from Beijing by train. With him were only Wang Dongxing and a few others, but the security measures were very great. There were 100-some cadres from the Central Guards regiment, under the command of Chen Changjiang (陈长江). Each man had two weapons, a handgun or an automatic rifle and his own

⁹ Chen Boda (1904-1989) was Mao’s one-time secretary and a Marxist propagandist, arguing for the more radical interpretations of Marxism and Mao’s Thought. He headed the Central Cultural Revolution Group during the Cultural Revolution, and at the 9th Party Congress in 1969 was elected to the Politburo. He was purged a year and some months later at the Lushan plenum in August 1970, for reasons that remain obscure, condemned as a “phony Marxist political swindler.” It is also unclear how much truth there is to the allegations that he and Lin Biao (or Lin Biao’s family) colluded with him.

¹⁰ These phrases all refer to intrigues by Mao, in the months following August 1970, to dilute the control of Lin Biao over the army.

¹¹ “Five big generals”: Huang, Wu, Li, Qiu, along with Ye Qun (叶群, Lin Biao’s wife, who also served on the Politburo and acted as Lin Biao’s personal and political secretary and also secretary to the Military Affairs Commission..

sidearm. In addition, there were also several light machine guns. Before departure Mao specifically asked Chen Changjing whether there was ammunition for the weapons.

On August 16, following a directive from Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhang Chunqiao (张春桥)(first secretary, Shanghai), Ji Dengkui (second political commissar of the Beijing Military Region), and Huang Yongsheng (PLA Chief-of-Staff) went to Beidaihe¹² to make a work report. They discussed propaganda, routine work, production, military affairs, and other matters. At the conclusion of the report Zhou Enlai said: Chairman Mao has mentioned that the Party Center has decided to convene the Third Plenum or the Ninth Central Committee sometime around National Day and afterwards convene the Fourth Session of the People's Congress. Lin Biao was greatly startled by these words: Prior to the Ninth Congress there had been the 11th Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, which had kicked out Liu Shaoqi (刘少奇).¹³ Was the Third Plenum of the Ninth going to kick out Lin Biao?

On the same day that Zhou Enlai made his report to Lin Biao, Mao's train reached the Wuchang station. He met with Liu Feng (刘丰), political commissar of the Wuhan Military Region, telling him "don't indulge in plots and tricks." The following day Mao met with the responsible person for the Henan Revolutionary Committee, Liu Jianxun (刘建勋), and others. Liu Feng was also present. Mao said: "At this Lushan meeting they launched a surprise attack, engaged in underground activities. They had a plan, an organization, a program. That was to

¹² Beidaihe is a beach resort on the Bohai gulf in northeastern China. The Party elite regularly vacation at Beidaihe, and most years around August hold informal meetings to discuss current events and upcoming actions. Lin Biao's summer place was near Beidaihe.

¹³ 1898-1968. Liu ranked second in the Party after Mao, and served as head of state from 1957 until sometime in mid-1969s. He was widely assumed to be the successor to Mao as head of regime, but became instead the main target of the Cultural Revolution.

oppose the line of the Ninth Congress and to overthrow the three items on the agenda of the Second Plenum. Some people think that I'm old and will be off to heaven pretty soon. They are anxious to become the State Chairman.¹⁴ They want to split the Party and are eager to seize power. This Lushan Plenum was a struggle between two lines.”

Liu Feng had not before heard Mao Zedong make such serious allegations about the Lushan Plenum. Mao said: “What’s this ‘greatly establish, specially establish’?¹⁵ In name they mean me, but I don’t know who they really want to ‘establish.’ In fact, they want to establish themselves. What’s this about how the Liberation Army was founded and is guided by me, but is personally commanded by Lin Biao?¹⁶ Is the Founder unable to exercise command? I don’t think that you, Huang Yongsheng, will be able to order the PLA to rebel. Beneath the army there are divisions and regiments. There are also the political and logistic organs. If you try to get the army to do bad things, will they listen to you?” Mao ordered Liu Feng not to transmit the contents of his talk, especially to keep it absolutely secret from Beijing. From August 18 to 24 Mao stayed indoors. He was testing Liu Feng, seeing whether he would leak the contents of the talk to Lin Biao. Liu Feng had been a political commissar of the Wuhan air force. During the first phase of the Cultural Revolution Lin Biao had spoken to Liu Feng and to Zeng Siyu (曾思玉),¹⁷ and this

¹⁴ The draft of the new PRC Constitution drawn up at the 1970 plenum did not include the office of State Chairman, the position held by Mao until 1959 and subsequently by the disgraced Liu Shaoqi. Had there been a State Chairman (“President”) in the early 1970s it certainly would have been Mao, but Mao seemed to think Lin Biao aspired to that honor. It’s unclear what the underlying dispute really was, since the Chairmanship of the PRC is very much an honorific office, entailing very little actual power.

¹⁵ The phrase “greatly and particularly establish” (大树特树) was actually articulated by Yang Chengwu (楊成武) (1914-2004), in 1968 acting Chief-of Staff of the PLA. He was removed from office in 1968, and the phrase condemned. The general circumstances of that phase of the purge remain unclear, as does Chairman Mao’s dislike for the phrase.

¹⁶ During the months following the 9th Party Congress in the spring of 1969, until the September 13 incident, official statements carried two different “formulas” describing the PLA, used at varying times. One held that the army was “founded and commanded by Chairman Mao,” the other that it was “founded by Chairman Mao and directly commanded by Vice Chairman Lin Biao.”

¹⁷ 1911-2012. In 1971 he was commander of the Wuhan Military Region.

had been printed up as an article. Nevertheless, Liu Feng did not leak the contents of the talks. It was only on September 6, when Deputy Chief of Staff Li Zuopeng was visiting Wuhan with a military delegation from North Korea, did Liu Feng tell Li Zuopeng when he met him at the station.

Mao Zedong Orders that Hua Guofeng Serve Concurrently as First Commissar of the Guangzhou Military Region

On August 25, Mao Zedong had Wang Dongxing summon Hua Guofeng (华国锋),¹⁸ who was then head of the State Council General Work Office, to Wuhan. On August 27, Mao took Hua with him to Changsha to have a talk with Pu Zhanya (卜占亚), responsible person for Hunan province. The next day Mao called Ding Sheng (丁盛)(leader of the Guangzhou Military Region), Liu Xingyuan (刘兴元) (political commissar, Guangzhou Military Region), and Wei Guoqing (韦国清) (responsible person for Guangxi) to Changsha for discussions. Mao declared that Hua would serve concurrently as first political commissar of the Guangzhou Military Region. The Guangzhou region was the old base of Lin Biao's Fourth Field Army. Mao wanted to increase his own control over the Guangzhou region.

According to the recollections of Chen Changjiang, the following day Wang Dongxing told him that Mao had argued face-to-face with several people. Mao bluntly said to Ding Sheng and Liu Xingyuan: "You're both intimate with Huang Yongsheng. With that much interaction with him, once Huang falls, you're done for as well.!" "I don't believe that your soldiers will rebel. I don't believe that your Huang Yongsheng will be able to order the Liberation Army to rebel!"

¹⁸ 1921-2009. In the wake of the September 13 incident Hua was charged with conducting the official investigation. After Mao's death in 1976 Hua was elevated to Chairman of the Central Committee and, in effect, head of the regime. But by the early 1980s he had been displaced by Deng Xiaoping.

Beneath the corps there are divisions, regiments, and also the logistics and political organs. If you try to lead the army into doing bad things, who will obey you? “What’s the good of hailing some 29-year old [i.e., Lin Ligu] as a transcendent genius?”¹⁹

We don’t know whether Mao’s “prophylactic” was effective or not. Those vassals, including Lin Biao’s old subordinates Ding Sheng and Liu Xingyuan, kept their mouths tightly closed. During the 77-year old Mao’s “travel through the vassal states,” he did not take an airplane, but each of the vassals had to take a plane to meet him. The Air Force commander, Wu Faxian, knew who had taken all the special planes and guessed the unspoken reason for this. But what was the key concern at Beidaihe? Lin’s wife Ye Qun (叶群)²⁰ and Lin Ligu were like ants in a frying pan. They clearly understood that Mao Zedong’s talks had something to do with Lin Biao, but they were unable to overhear what was said and those who did know what was going on avoided them. From August 16 to September 6 Mao had ordered that his comments be embargoed. He did not display the big stick. The “snake” at Beidaihe did not move, and neither did the “tiger.” What was the point of that? It was an opportunity for some to “establish merit.” It was necessary to let Beidaihe know. The Guangzhou Military Region was the Fourth Field Army’s final base on its march south. Lin Biao was the commander of the Fourth Field Army. He had high prestige in the Fourth Field Army. It was impossible for all of his old subordinates to “embargo” Lin Biao. When Mao had Ding Sheng and Liu Xingyuan return to Guangzhou to transmit the secret talks, he expected that someone would make them known. He was beating the bush to arouse the tiger.

¹⁹ Which is something Ligu’s dad seemed to believe.

²⁰ 1917-1971.

On September 2 the responsible person for Jiangxi province, Cheng Shiqing (程世清), told Mao that Zhou Yushi (周宇驰) [one of Lin Liguó's deputies at Air Force headquarters] had come to Nanchang twice in July. He also brought in an amphibious truck and wanted Jiangxi to safeguard it. He also brought in an airplane at the end of July. He also said that Lin Biao's daughter, Lin Doudou (林豆豆),²¹ had wanted him to tell the Chairman that in a lot of things, including that at Politburo meetings, Ye Qun was deceiving the Chief (Lin Biao). Lin Liguó also did not know what his subordinates were up to. Mao kept looking out the window, saying nothing.

At midnight on September 3 Mao's train reached Hangzhou. Before leaving Changsha Mao had told Hua Guofeng to go back to Beijing and "speak to no one but the Premier." In Shaoshan Wang Dongxing, Hua Guofeng, and others discussed Mao's words. It seemed that as Mao saw things, everything had to be told to Zhou Enlai.

On September 4 Zhou Enlai received a draft of Mao's comments. It seemed that this was intended to test Zhou Enlai. During the half-month and more of Mao's Southern Tour, no one dared to tell Lin Biao what Mao was saying. Zhou Enlai passed his test.

Beidaihe receives some intelligence; the "snake" stirs, and so does the "tiger."

On September 5, Sheng Ting and Liu Xingyuan returned to Guangzhou from Changsha. According to Mao's instructions they convened a meeting of 2000-some cadres of the Guangzhou Military Region at the division-level and above, and conveyed the contents of Mao's words. This did not happen in any other provinces during the Southern Tour. Gu Tongzhou (顾同

²¹ 1944- "Doudou," "Little Bean," is her nickname. Her formal name is Lin Liheng (林立衡).

舟) told Zhou Yushi (周宇驰) and Yu Xinye (于新野) about the talks. On September 6 Zhou and Yu took a plane to Beidaihe and reported to Lin Liguo. On the same day, Li Zuopeng heard the news from Liu Feng and was very startled. He returned to Beijing on the same day and made a secret report to Huang Yongsheng about what Mao had said. That evening Huang Yongsheng told Ye Qun all about the situation.²²

On September 17 1971 Gu Tongzhou was isolated and put under investigation. He was arrested in July of 1980 and in March of 1982 sentenced by a military court to 11 years' imprisonment, followed by three years' suspension of political rights. His crime was collaboration with the enemy. He had told Beidaihe what Mao had said on the Southern Tour, provoking them to move at once to assassinate Mao Zedong and carry out a counterrevolutionary armed coup. Li Zuopeng was not guilty of that crime. He had made an honest report to Huang Yongsheng. Huang Yongsheng was chief-of-staff; he had the higher rank. Li was deputy chief-of-staff. Naturally he had to tell what he knew. Li demanded that Huang not tell any of this to Beidaihe, but as soon as he returned to the Western Hills he had phoned Ye Qun. Therefore Huang's guilt was the same as that of Gu Tongzhou.

On September 6 Beidaihe received "intelligence" separately from Gu Tongzhou and Huang Yongsheng. This caused the "snake" to move, and also the "tiger." At that time Mao Zedong was in Hangzhou. Mao lodged at his favorite place on West Lake, Building Number 1 of Liuzhuang. That's where he stayed every time he came to Hangzhou and he had held many meetings there. Building Number 1 actually consisted of four buildings connected to each other. It had a large

²² Other sources claim that Huang Yongsheng and Ye Qun were carrying on a torrid love affair [揭秘：叶群和黄永胜之间特殊关系的史料来源] <http://history.people.com.cn/n/2014/0331/c372327-24785096.html>, March 31 2014. An alleged transcript of one of their phone conversations has them sounding like a couple of addled teenagers. This was also a widely accepted rumor among well-connected public opinion in Beijing in the aftermath of the September 13 incident, and possibly before.

courtyard, with ancient cedars reaching to the sky. Opposite there's a smallish mound, the Thunder Peak Pagoda. According to the memory of Chen Changjiang, the serving staff were all fresh faces and not very well trained. There had also been a change of the guards at the periphery. The experienced people from the provincial public security services had been pushed to the side. Those responsible for providing personal services to Mao were all selected by Chen Ligeng (陈励耘), commissar of the Fifth Air Force. He held top power in the provincial military district and the security services. When Mao held discussions with the responsible person of Zhejiang province, he asked bluntly: Do you have relations with Wu Faxian? Wu Faxian had sought out several people at Lushan, and one of them was you, Chen Ligeng. There was also Wang Weiguo (王维国) from Shanghai and Gu Tongzhou from Guangzhou. What were you all up to? Chen Ligeng could only stammer.

Mao Zedong suddenly changed trains at Hangzhou

On the evening of September 8 Lin Liguo returned to Beijing from Beidaihe with Lin Biao's "handwritten instructions." The instructions consisted only of one vague sentence: "Act according to the orders of Comrades Lin Liguo and Zhou Yushi."

At one [AM] September 9, Lin Liguo, Zhou Yushi, and Jiang Tengjiao (江腾蛟)(political commissar of the Air Force) held a discussion at the Western Suburbs air field. They decided that they would take action in Shanghai. Jiang Tengjiao would use a rocket launcher to attack Mao's train. It was just at this time that Mao, in Hangzhou, decided to change trains. When the train was approaching the vicinity of Shaoxing, Wang Dongxing, on the pretext of getting shade from the sun, had the train put under an awning. As Wang Dongxing remembers it: "There was a good comrade at Hangzhou who sent someone secretly to inform Chairman Mao that an airplane

had been equipped at Hangzhou. Someone else said a train was blocking the main line to the Jianqiao airfield at Hangzhou, preventing people from getting through. A few other of the working personnel waiting on Mao Zedong also reported suspicious things.” “As I think of it today, the situation then was extremely dangerous. Chairman Mao, however, did not tell me the whole of the danger he was in. The venerable old gentleman didn’t say a word. He was waiting for the opportunity to act.”

At lunchtime on September 9 Mao Zedong suddenly announced they were going to Shanghai. The guards with him were not prepared for this. Before lunch they had played some basketball with the soldiers stationed there. They were covered with sweat and their newly-washed clothes were still wet. The troop commander Chen Changjiang ordered that the wet clothes be bundled up in raincoats. At 13:40 the train returned to Shaoxing and arrived back at the Hangzhou station at 14:50. At 16:00 Mao’s train left Hangzhou, with no one told anything about it. At 18:10 Mao’s train arrived on a specially-reserved line at the Gangqiao air field in the western part of Shanghai. Mao’s attitude seemed normal, except he remained on the train, prepared to depart at any time.

According to Wang Dongxing: “I deployed the entire Shanghai garrison around the periphery. Chairman Mao’s guards and their cadres surrounded the train, preventing any leakage. There was a fuel depot for the Gangqiao field 150 meters from our train. If the depot had caught on fire there was no way for our train to escape. Therefore, I sent two special sentries to stand guard there.” Did Wang take these precautions because Lin Ligu and others had previously secretly mentioned setting fire to the fuel storage at Gangqiao?

Mao would have departed Shanghai that same day if did he not have to wait 15 hours to see Xu Shiyou (许世友).²³ On the morning of September 11, after Mao had finished talking with Xu Shiyou and Wang Dongxing, he quietly left Shanghai returning directly to Beijing.

Who was the “inside line”?

Without some sort of “inside line,” could Mao have acted so adeptly against Lin Liguo and his crowd? The main members of Lin Liguo’s “little circle” were Zhou Yushi, Yu Xinye, Liu Beifeng (刘沛丰), Cheng Weizhen (程洪珍), Li Weixin (李伟信). The “iron rod” Zhou Yushi and Yu Xinye killed themselves. Liu Peifeng died at Öndörkhaan. The only ones left alive were Cheng Weizhen and Li Weixin. Cheng Weizhen’s spirit was broken in prison, any appreciation he might have received from Lin Liguo lost. He returned alone to his home town of Ningyang, in Shandong. He never married, but lived with his older brother and his wife, earning a living as a watchman. It’s said that in 1996 that he fled to the mountains and killed himself by drinking fertilizer. He was 52 years of age.

Li Weixin was Lin Liguo’s personal secretary. Cheng Hongzhen was not present when Lin and the others drafted “Project 571,”²⁴ while Li Weixin poured the tea and served the snacks.

²³ 1905-1985; at that time, Commander of the Nanjing Military Region, which included Shanghai.

²⁴ 五七一工程—*wuqiyi gongcheng*. *Wuqiyi*, 571, is homophonous with 武起義, armed righteous rebellion. This was a the supposed plan by Lin Biao (but drafted by Lin Liguo) to murder Mao (by rather half-assed methods: shooting a rocket at a train, bombing his home in Zhongnanhai, so forth). The bulk of it details the damages to China wrought by Mao (code name: B-52) and his Cultural Revolution to China and the Chinese people. For a text, see <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/space/林立果“五七一工程”纪要全文>. There is a great deal that remains specific about it—not so much that Lin Liguo (again, in a rather half-assed way) was plotting some kind of coup, probably in collusion with his mom (but not, evidently, his dad). But this particular text was discovered, allegedly by accident by a janitor cleaning out Liguo’s offices, several days after the September 13 incident; and unlike the other papers by the plotters, it had not been burnt. The criticism of Mao in the document anticipates in detail the judgments of the liberal-democratic wing of the reform movement of the 1980s. At least one of the many students “rusticated” during the Cultural Revolution claims, when the document was finally revealed to the public some months later, that he really came to appreciate the Lins: “This was the most important document of the 1970s. It brought about the collapse of the deification of Mao Zedong.” (<http://blog.sohu.com/s/MTU4NzcwNTc0/306927159.html>) Some writings that dispute the official story assert, I think plausibly, that the document was compiled after the fact, perhaps based upon various statements Lin Liguo had made during the year prior to the alleged coup attempt (there

Everything we know about “Project 571” rests on the sole testimony of Li Weixin. He said Lin Ligu said Lin Biao knew about “Project 571.” “I heard Yu Xinye talking about how Huang Yongsheng had agreed to go to Guangzhou with them.” The discovery of the “Project 571” also has to do with Li Weixin. He was responsible for burning the documents and was the last to leave the quarters at the Air Force Academy. According to the reminiscence of Wang Shude (王树德), commander of the guards contingent, on September 13 all five of Lin Ligu’s living quarters in Beijing were secured. What is confusing is why, three days later, after all the rooms had been swept and cleaned by Wang Lanyi (王兰义) and others, all of a sudden “Project 571” should be discovered right there lying on a table. Even the condoms had been burnt. Why was such an important piece of evidence left lying around?

Li Weixin is a native of Shanghai. He joined the army in 1950, when he was 16. He was a skilled artist. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution there were giant portraits of Mao Zedong by Li Weixin all over the headquarters campus of the Fourth Air Force. When Lin Ligu was in Shanghai, Li collected Mao badges for him. As his personal secretary, Li Weixin seems to have been as close to Lin Ligu as his shadow. He was more qualified than Cheng Hongzhen (程洪珍) to make a report about things.

At dawn on September 13 Zhou Yushi and others hoped to escape by helicopter, but the pilot, Chen Xiuwen (陈修文), boldly caused the vehicle to crash. Zhou Yushi shot the heroic

is even the claim that the existing original of the document, which as not been shown publicly, is in the handwriting of Zhang Yufeng (张玉凤, b. 1944), Chairman Mao’s last mistress (<http://www.linbiao.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=1388>).) It is at least curious that the victors would choose to bring these criticisms—expressing what many were thinking but were no one dared say—out into the open. One line of speculation may be that the document is basically the work of Zhou Enlai, hoping to weaken the radical leftists around Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing.

Chen Xiuwen, and Chen was later awarded the title of Martyr. Zhou Yushi, Yu Xinye, and Li Weixin agreed to kill themselves. Zhou and Yu died, but when Li tried to shoot the gun was empty, and he was imprisoned in an underground cell in the Beijing military district. He was interrogated by Zhang Huishan (张辉灿), head of the Operations Office of the Beijing district. Li hurried to state, "I want to see Director Wang." Zhang asked him, "Which Director Wang?" Li said, "I want to see Wang Dongxing." Zhang reported this immediately to the commander of the district, Wu Zhong. According to the memory of Li Weisai (李维赛), Wu Zhong's secretary, "Wu Zhong (吴忠) and Wu De went together to the underground cell to interrogate Li Weixin."

In 1981 an Air Force court martial convicted Li Weixin of participating in a counterrevolutionary group, plotting to overthrow the government, and of attempted defection to the enemy. He was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, to be served in the Lanqiao prison in his hometown of Shanghai. After his release he and his old lady²⁵ got divorced, and he joined a world-class overseas Chinese architectural firm, designing buildings all over the world. He has had a certain success in his profession.

Mystery 2

At 16:00, Lin Ligu suddenly decided to return to Beidaihe.

Who had revealed the news of Mao Zedong's secret return to Beijing?

Lin Ligu did not know when Mao Zedong was returning to Beijing. At 22:00 on September 11 Lin got a phone call from Wang Weiguo, first commissar of the 4th Air Force, saying that Chairman Mao had left Shanghai at noon. Lin was not particularly disturbed because he did not

²⁵ 老婆. On the mainland, a common familiar term for wife, evidently not as insulting as the English version.

think that Mao would return to Beijing before September 25, so he still had time. But Mao suddenly arrived in Beijing on the 12th, and Lin Liguo found out the news.

Mao never moved according to a set schedule, and this was especially true on this last Southern Tour. According to Chen Changjiang: “Prior to the Southern Tour Chairman Mao gave strict orders not to reveal his movements to anyone.” Who, then, could have revealed the news of Mao’s secret return to Beijing to Lin Liguo? The importance of this revelation cannot be underestimated; it was the direct cause of the activation of Project 571! If Lin Liguo had not known of Mao’s return to Beijing, he would not have taken Lin Biao’s special plane to Beidaihe. How could Lin Biao set the plot in motion in just half a night?

According to Lin Doudou, “When Mao Zedong returned to Beijing, he had Wang Dongxing notify Ye Qun.” So the one who revealed the secret was Mao Zedong himself. When Ye Qun learned Mao had returned to Beijing, she immediately told Lin Liguo, and Lin Liguo decided to fly to Beidaihe that evening.

Around 18:00 on September 12, Pan Jingyan (潘景寅) [Lin Biao’s pilot] received orders to fly to Beidaihe. Zhang Yaosi (张耀祠) says: “The September 13 incident was very sudden. Why was it so sudden? Lin Liguo planned to murder Mao Zedong in Shanghai, but this was no longer possible. Before the plan could be implemented, Mao suddenly returned to Beijing. Lin Liguo was very tense. It was all their idea, not Lin Biao’s. Lin Liguo and his crowd could not bring it about. They were babies overestimating their own strength.”

Mystery No. 3

Around 21:50 on the 12th, Lin Doudou made a report to the Central Guards.

What was her original intention in notifying the Central Guards?

Lin Doudou says: At 21:00 on September 12, Ye Qun called me to her living quarters to watch a movie. That was the first I knew that Lin Liguo had come back. At the same time, Lin Biao's clerk, Zhang Hengchang (张恒昌), told me that he had heard the Director (Ye Qun) tell the Chief (Lin Biao) that it was no good to go to Guangzhou; it would be better to go to Hong Kong. The Chief did not say a word. I immediately asked Lin Liguo where they were going, and he immediately answered Guangzhou. Lin Doudou hoped that Lin Biao's bodyguard, Li Wenpu (李文普), would report this to the Central Guards troops. But Li did not believe her. He said, "The Director says they're going to Guangzhou and Lin Liguo also says they're going to Guangzhou. There's nothing wrong with going to Guangzhou. Isn't it a regular thing, nothing to get excited about?" Doudou thought that since Li Wenpu didn't believe her, she had better explain things to the Central Guards regiment. Li Wenpu immediately agreed. He said, "When you talk to (Deputy Commander of the Central Guards Regiment) Zhang Hong (张宏), tell him I agreed to your calling him. I'll have Liu Jidun (刘吉纯) accompany you, and he will tell Zhang Hong to get hold of me immediately."

According to Lin Doudou's memory: When I went to report I was thinking to have the Central Guards find out proper ways to handle this tense situation. Also, I could connect with the Center through the Central Guards regiment. Since everything was being handled through the personnel of the Lin Office, the problem might be solved; but it would not be good if the Center were unaware of too many things. On August 26 1972 Premier Zhou met with me and said, You did the only thing you could at the time. He presented me a commendation; but the pictures of the corpses around that crashed plane was unbearable to look at.

Zhang Hong immediately reported to Zhang Yaosi: According to Lin Biao's daughter, Lin Doudou, Lin Ligu is planning to take the airplane now at the Shanhaiguan Airfield to flee abroad. It's not clear just where he intends to go.

As Zhang Yaosi remembers it, "Zhang Hong telephoned me and said that Li Doudou said that Lin Ligu and Ye Qun were discussing taking Lin Biao and fleeing this evening. They also wanted to send a plane to bomb Zhongnanhai in order to assassinate Chairman Mao. Lin Doudou reported this immediately directly to me so I could protect Chairman Mao. I got the phone call at the office of the secretary of Wang Dongxing's office. Wang and his secretary Gao Chengtang (高成堂) were both present. When Zhang Hong completed a sentence, I would repeat it out loud, so they both could hear it clearly. Wang Dongxing immediately telephoned Premier Zhou and reported to him."

Lin Doudou had flown to Beidaihe on September 7. She had been feeling a little unwell and at first did not want to go. Ye Qun said that Lin Biao was seriously ill—so she had to come. As soon as Doudou reached Beidaihe, Ligu began talking to her about Guangzhou or Hong Kong. He also said that he was going back to Beijing to see the dentist. Doudou made it clear that she was opposed to this. She believed that the Chief should not go anywhere, that he was safest at Beidaihe. Ligu's face showed he was discouraged by Doudou's strenuous objection. He didn't leave that day. But on the 9th Ligu flew back to Beijing.

Lin Doudou says: "After September 7 I separately sought out Li Jidun (the head of the guards detachment), Li Wenpu, and Lin Biao's clerks Chen Zhanzhao (陈占照) and Zhang Hengchang (张恒昌). I talked with Li Wenpu more than with the others. That's because Lin Biao trusted Li more than he trusted Lin Ligu and Ye Qun. I asked Li Wenpu to keep a close eye on the situation. There could be a sudden change of the organizational working personnel. It was

especially important to prevent anyone without personal access to Lin Biao from giving him medicine. It was necessary to safeguard Lin Biao's mental awareness and physical security. At first Li Wenpu did not believe me when I said that Lin Liguo wanted to take the Chief to Guangzhou, and especially that he wanted to take the Chief to Hong Kong and to injure Chairman Mao. But later he began to feel that something was not right about the situation, and he told me that Lin Liguo and Ye Qun were keeping close watch over Lin Biao's rooms."

Li Wenpu corroborated Lin Doudou's theories. "On the morning of September 12, I was on the porch taking the air. Lin Doudou suddenly came up and said to me, 'Lin Liguo is up to no good. He wants to hurt Chairman Mao. He wants to take the Chief to Guangzhou, and if things should not work out take him to Hong Kong. You should not let the Chief get on a plane.' There were bad feelings between Doudou and Ye Qun, and she also had some contradictions with Lin Liguo. Ye Qun was always saying that Lin Doudou was mentally ill. Now she had become a big 'plotter.' That really startled me. At first, I thought this was just more of the contradictions between the Lin mother and daughter. I asked Doudou what proof she had. She had none, so I believed her all the less. I'd been in the Lin Office a long time and there had never been anything so alarming. That was one of the reasons." At that time Lin Wenpu considered, "What reason could I have for preventing the Chief to get on the plane? If he wants to get on, then I'll let him get on—OK? For something this big, why don't you go report to Lin Biao yourself? Should Lin Biao say anything, all those in the Lin Office would obey his orders. You don't dare talk to Lin Biao yourself, but you want me to prevent him from getting on a plane. You're foisting all the responsibility onto us, the lowest level of working personnel. I've never done any such thing, and I'm not going to take that kind of responsibility."

On the evening of September 12, Li Wenpu was on watch in the Duty Office. Lin Doudou called him into the small latrine and once again urged that Lin Biao not be allowed to get on the plane. Lin Wenpu said again, if there is no proof of anything, how can I prevent the Chief from getting on the plane? To be the companion of a lord is like being the companion of a tiger. From Li Wenpu's perspective, he was unwilling to report to Lin Biao something that seemed unbelievable.

Mystery No. 4

In the middle of the night, Ye Qun suddenly wanted to go to Dalian.

As she was getting ready to depart, did Ye Qun phone Huang Yongsheng?

Ye Qun and Lin Ligu originally planned to fly to Guangzhou at 7:00 on September 17. On the evening of the 12th, Ye Qun arranged the engagement ceremony for Lin Doudou and Zhang Qinglin (张清林) and was showing two movies. She then made a phone call. Ye Qun talked for half an hour to Yu Yunshen (于运深), the secretary who had remained in charge at Maojiawan. Yu said that those in charge of the children had been asking what to do with the birds and turtles.²⁶ Ye Qun said to send them to Jiang Qing (江清). Ye Qun also talked for half an hour to Hu Ming (胡敏), the wife of Qiu Huizuo, saying that Hu Ming had chosen a very good name for her granddaughter.

Around 22:30, Zhou Enlai phoned Ye Qun, and they spoke for half an hour. Zhou asked Ye Qun whether or not she had arranged for an airplane. Ye Qun said No, but then immediately changed that to yes, saying it was for her son. According to Qiu Huizuo, Ye Qun said: "101 (Lin

²⁶ I assume the reference is to pets kept in the compound for the amusement of the children of the personnel stationed there.

Biao) wants to move around. He'll go to Dalian for a few days, and then return to Beijing for the Third Plenum. I'm reporting this specially to the Premier." The Premier asked, "When does he want to go?" Ye Qun replied, "This evening. We're getting ready to leave now." The Premier said, "It's unsafe to fly at night. Don't take a plane. We've only recently imported the Trident and the pilots are not yet fully familiar with it. Wait until daylight tomorrow, and then it will be OK to fly." Ye Qun said: "You know, it's hard to persuade that hothead (Lin Biao) of anything." The Premier said, "You must do as I say for safety's sake. You need patiently to do the job of persuading him." Zhou Enlai also said, If it's necessary, I'll go to Beidaihe and talk to Comrade Lin Biao. Ye Qun strenuously urged him not to.

Zhou Enlai ordered Wu Faxian to prepare two air crews, and demanded that Wu Faxian accompany him to Beidaihe. Wu also telephoned Ye Qun and reported that the Premier was coming to Beidaihe. Shi Niantang (时念堂), the commander of the 34th Wing, quickly organized two special crews and stood by for orders in the waiting room. But Zhou Enlai did not go to Beidaihe. Was he bluffing?

At that time Lin Liguo got a call from Zhou Yushi, saying that all flights from the Western Suburbs field had been grounded. Ever since September 2, when she learned of what Mao had said on his Southern Tour, Ye Qun had been uneasy. She knew that Mao wanted to cut Lin Biao down. Ye Qun tried to call Huang Yongsheng to feel out the situation in Beijing. Huang was then at the Great Hall of the People attending a meeting convened by Zhou Enlai. After Zhou received the report from Beidaihe he demanded that no one at the meeting leave the room nor receive any phone calls. At the same time guards were posted at the door. Therefore, the First Military Station could not reach Huang, and that made Ye Qun even more anxious.

According to Li Wenpu: “Around 23:00 Ye Qun called me into Lin Biao’s bedroom. She first spoke a few words to Lin Biao and then told me to come forth. At that time Lin Biao had already gotten out of bed and had put on his clothes. He said that he had been unable to sleep. He said to get ready, we’re about to leave.” Ye Qun was not even wearing an overcoat, and she and Lin Liguo lifted Lin Biao, who was heavily dosed with sleeping pills, off the bed. A few minutes later they left in the “Great Red Flag.”²⁷

At an emergency meeting of the Politburo Zhou Enlai said: “At 23-some hundred hours, I got a report from the guards detachment at Beidaihe. It said that Ye Qun claimed that Premier Zhou had given permission for the Chief to depart for Dalian this evening. After saying this she got in the car and left.” “At 23-some hundred hours, Lin Doudou called from the guard station at Beidaihe and said that they (Ye Qun, Lin Liguo, and others) have taken Daddy away in a car.” “Lin Doudou said that yesterday evening Lin Biao had already taken sleeping medicine and that he was being helped by two others to get into the car.” “That fellow (Lin Biao) has a very stubborn temperament. It’s hard to persuade him to do anything. But for the sake of security, I ordered the guards to go after him and bring him back. No matter what he should not go anywhere at night. If there’s a problem, who’s going to take responsibility?”

Mystery No. 5

Why was there never any careful appraisal of Li Wenpu’s bullet wound?

Why did Li Wenpu get out of the car after Jiang Zuoshou (姜作寿) blocked it?

According to Lin Doudou: When I made a report at the detachment of the Central Guards Regiment, I said to Li Wenpu: “I spoke to you several times saying you should be alert and not numb and passive. You have to make sure nothing will happen this evening. Can you guarantee

²⁷ 大红旗. A China-made luxury limousine.

that the Chief was not forced into the car?” Li Wenpu said: “I can guarantee it. You should relax.” I said again, “Are you sure?” Li said, “No problem. There are too many of us. If Lin Ligu really wants to run away, we’d be able to stop it; nor can we let him take away the Chief by force.” I said, “I told Zhang Hong to take some soldiers and to put up a blockade. Before these troops can do that, no matter what you must do everything possible to keep the Chief out of the car. If not, there will be trouble.” Li said, “Until Zhang Hong puts up the blockade, I guarantee that the Chief will not be taken into the car.” I asked Li if he was carrying his weapon. He said, No. I scolded him: “You usually carry your weapon. Why don’t you have it now?” Li said, “It’s in the barracks. I’ll go fetch it right away.”

In the trial of the “Two Cases”²⁸ in 1980, the Judicial Office of the General Political Department travelled to Lüliangchang Mountain in Shanxi to seek out Li Wenpu. According to one of the investigators, Li Hanlao (李唤劳), “It had been 10 years, but Li Wenpu was consistent in what he had said before. He said that before all this happened he did not know where they were going.”

Li Wenpu repeatedly emphasized that he wanted Zhang Hong to give him a phone call, because he wanted to know the attitude of the Center. However, Zhang Hong did not call him nor did he bring any troops. Ye Qun was eager to leave immediately; a nervous and indecisive Li Wenpu called Hu Ping (胡萍), the Air Force deputy chief-of-staff, and asked where they were going. Hu said he didn’t know. Li once again called Zhang Hong. But just as he hung up he was rushed out by Lin Ligu. Before getting in the car, Li did not know what the upper levels had in mind.

²⁸ That is, the joint trial in December 1980 of the “Lin Biao clique,” the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing and her allies), and other persons (especially Chen Boda) associated with the radical tendency in the Cultural Revolution.

As the Great Red Flag rushed down the mountain, Jiang Zuoshou, commander of the 2nd battalion of the Central Guards Regiment, was setting up a roadblock. Ye Qun had the car break through it. If Jiang had not acted quickly, there certainly would have been a crash. In fact, Jiang only wanted to ask them where they were going. Every time Lin Biao went on a trip he would be accompanied by the 2nd battalion. Li Wenpu misunderstood the situation. He saw the guard troops with their backpacks on the side of the road and thought there was no directive from the Center. Who would dare block Lin Biao's car? The upper levels definitely must have decided "do not let him leave"! Li's brain was all confused. He and Lin Doudou had spoken so many times, but the Chief (Lin Biao) was nevertheless in the car. If something should happen, he'd have his head cut off. Li told the judicial inquiry: At that time, I wanted to get out of the car and ask what was going on. I was secretary of the guards and had the authority to handle anything affecting Lin Biao's security. But the car not only did not stop, but I also got shot.

Did Li Wenpu shoot himself?

The Great Red Flag rushed past the guards, but then suddenly came to a halt. Li Wenpu jumped out of the car. At that time there was the sound of five shots. Li fired once; Lin Liguo, inside the car, fired once; Xiao Qiming (萧奇明), commander of the middle company of the 2nd Battalion, fired three times. Seeing that the car had narrowly missed running over the brigade commander, Xiao Qiming was extremely angry and ran after the car. Just at that moment the Great Red Flag stopped and he fired three shots at the driver through the window. He wanted to kill the driver, but he had forgotten the Great Red Flag had bullet-proof glass, so the bullets remained embedded in the driver's window and did not penetrate the glass.

According to the report of the Central Guards Regiment to the Center, Lin Liguo fired a shot inside the car. The bullet struck the roof and fell to the floor and the cartridge remained in the

car. According to Jiang Zuoshou: The Central Guards Regiment has target practice every day and is able to trace the path of a bullet from the marks it makes. If Lin Ligu had fired his gun and it hit the roof of the car, it could only fall downward. There was a bullet wound in Li Wenpu's left shoulder. The cartridge was found on the floor of the car but the bullet was never found.

Around midnight on September 13 Li's wound was treated by Lu Zhengwu (陆正武), a military doctor with the Central Guards. Zhang Qinglin, a former surgeon, probed the wound and declared "You shot yourself." Li did not contradict him. He was sent to the 281 Hospital in the Beijing military district and was examined by Li Taihe (李太和), a surgeon. When Li Taihe saw Li Wenpu sitting on the bench he saw he was still wearing a small pistol. It was extremely small, like a toy. Along with Li Wenpu there were several armed "bodyguards." Li Wenpu said that he also belonged to the Guards Regiment, that the gun had gone off when he was cleaning it. When Li Taihe heard this he thought Wenpu was lying—who'd be cleaning a gun that late at night? Taihe continued, How far away was it? Wenpu said not too far. One of the bodyguards exclaimed, He shot himself. The bodyguard confiscated Wenpu's gun.

Why did Li Wenpu secretly keep several sheets of paper?

The operation on Li Wenpu's wound took more than two hours, and during that time Lin Biao's airplane had taken off. The nurses in the operating room noticed that Li seemed distressed when he heard the sound of the airplane: Didn't you stop it from taking off? Why has it taken off? During Li's several days' stay at the hospital he was guarded by four men from the Central Guards Regiment. The commander, Jiang Zuotao (姜作寿) says that if Li Wenpu were an enemy, he could not be allowed to run away, nor could he be allowed to die.

Li Wenpu said very little. Li Taihe brought him his medicine. After he had taken it he said Thank you in a low voice. Taihe saw that his hair was too long and offered to give him a haircut. The guard said the barber shop was too far away. He said a trim would be enough. Every day Li Wenpu sat at a table writing. He was not clear on how he was going to be treated and those treating him did not understand the situation either.

Prior to National Day [October 1] the Central Guards unit returned to Beijing and also had Li Wenpu discharged from the hospital. Li asked about filling out a discharge form, but the guard said it was not necessary. Early the next day Li Taihe arrived at the hospital room and was going to examine Li Wenpu once more. He had not expected that Wenpu would have already left.

A nurse, Yang Jialan (杨桂兰) made up the bed and discovered that Li had left several sheets of paper. Written on them were there questions about the flight of Lin and Ye, Tiger Lin, the gunfire? She immediately took these sheets of paper to her instructor, Zhang Shuying (张淑英), who gave them in turn to the hospital's political committee. Finally a chief held a study session for all those who had seen the papers, sternly ordering them not to say anything about them to outsiders. Zhang Shuying asked what was going on. He told her to have faith in the Party Center, to have faith in Chairman Mao.

Why was there no final conclusion about Li Wenpu's wound?

Lin Liguo was seated behind Li Wenpu. When Li was wounded he was standing outside the right door of the car. If he had been facing the door Lin's bullet would have had to have pierced the front of Li's chest and exited his right shoulder. If Li had his back to the door, Lin's bullet would have travelled from Li's back to his left shoulder. How could the path of the bullet be from the breast to the left shoulder? When the car came to the roadblock set up by the Central Guards, Li then

believed what Lin Doudou had said. He decided to pretend the gun had gone off accidentally, giving himself a wound. Where should the wound be? With the gun in his right hand, he could only aim toward the left—from the breast into the left shoulder—that was the only way he could wound himself.

Yu Yunshen, the secretary of the Lin Office, was at the Maojiawan headquarters when the September 13 incident took place. On the morning of that day he was imprisoned at the headquarters. He heard that Central Document 57 said “Lin Biao himself fired at his bodyguard of many years,” and could not believe it. If Lin Biao wanted a pencil someone else had to pick it up for him, and also he carried no weapon. How could he have shot his bodyguard?

Li Wenpu said: “During the investigation no one said that I shot myself.” Later the theory was that Li had been shot by Lin Ligu. The car was there; the people were there; and it was easy to trace the trajectory of the bullet. The doctors who treated Li’s wound were not the only ones to figure this out. In fact, the forensics were very clear.

Around midnight on September 13 Zhou Enlai got a report from the Central Guards detachment stationed at Beidaihe. “At the halfway point Li Wenpu, Lin Biao’s old bodyguard, currently head of the Guards office, jumped out of the car and was wounded.” These matters still await investigation. What is there that is unclear? According to Zhang Yaosi: I did not inspect the Great Red Flag. In the past we were disinclined to pursue this. Under those circumstances he could not have shot himself. At that time, we doubted that he (Li Wenpu) had shot himself. I didn’t want to go along with them. There would be time for this later. Zhang Hong said: It was a misfire; nothing else to say. It didn’t need investigation. The Center had already issued its document and its official account and everyone went along with the Center. Wang Dongxing was even more dismissive: Forget about it, it’s nothing, don’t worry.

Mystery No. 6

The military bulletin of Pan Jingyan's death by illness.

Did Pan Jingyan not know that the destination was outside the country when Lin Biao's plane took off?

At 0:22 hours on September 13, Lin Biao's limousine arrived at the Shanhaiguan airport. At that time the Trident was still fueling up. Lin Biao and the others used the workers' small boarding ladder to enter the plane. If Pan Jingyan had known of all this beforehand, he would certainly have had a proper boarding ramp ready. At 0:32 five crew members were still not aboard; nor had the airfield given permission to take off. But Ye Qun said that some people wanted to hurt Vice Chairman Lin and demanded that Pan Jingyan take off immediately. He naturally felt compelled to fly the plane.

After the September 13 incident the Central Politburo held an emergency meeting. Zhou Enlai said: "Lin Biao's plane was forced to take off. It first flew along the path from Beijing to Shandong and showed up clearly on the air force's radar. But when nearing Chengde, the plane gradually lost altitude and was seen only once by the radar station at Chengde. It had turned sharply to the north." While in the air the plane traced out a slow "question mark," so it would seem that Pan Jingyan did not know the destination.²⁹

On November 16 1980, the *People's Daily* carried a Xinhua report on the right lower corner of the first page: Yesterday morning the Central Committee Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping met

²⁹ This is hard to follow. The plane took off from Shanhaiguan, and the closest route to Shandong would be directly across the Bohai Gulf. Probably the plane was following a regular flight path, which perhaps would be from Shanhaiguan west to Beijing and then south to Shandong (and further on, to Guangzhou or Hong Kong). But Chengde is north of Beijing and not on a direct line between Beijing and Shanhaiguan. Perhaps the plane seemed to be on a southward course, but then turned north in the Chengde air sector, at which time it was temporarily lost to radar.

with Earl Fair (?—厄尔费尔), editor of the American *Christian Science Monitor*, and his wife, answering questions brought up by his guests. On November 24 the *People's Daily* on its front page published “Deng Xiaoping Answers Reporter’s Questions.” Directly addressing China’s investigation of the “two cases,” Earl Fair asked: “According to the investigation, the plane crash was a natural accident. Was it because the plane had not been properly maintained?” Deng Xiaoping answered, “In my judgment the pilot was a good man. That is because the plane had a large quantity of secret materials concerning the Party and state and [Lin Biao] was prepared to take them to the Soviet Union. When the pilot and crew members found this out, there was a fight and the plane crash landed. The pilot was killed.” Deng did not answer the question asked, which was how the airplane came to crash. He also said “the pilot was a good man.”

That pilot, Pan Jingyan, was not in fact a good man. Let’s compare the two pilots involved in the September 13 incident. The helicopter pilot, Chen Xiuwen, did not attempt to flee, but made a circle and crash landed. But Pan Jingyan met his death at Öndörkhaan in Mongolia. Mao Zedong said “Lin Biao’s gang had a lot of help.” That “help” was the pilot Pan Jingyan. Pan Jingyan’s widow Sun Xiangni (孙祥凝) relied on Deng Xiaoping’s “good man” judgment to make a petition that year, getting Pan Jingyan mentioned in a military bulletin as a “revolutionary soldier who died of illness.”

How could Lin Biao have issued two vertically inscribed hand-written orders to Huang?

At the site of the helicopter crash at Huairou the Beijing Guards detachment found a letter and “written orders” from Lin Biao to Huang Yongsheng. According to Qiu Huizuo: “Premier Zhou summoned Public Security head Li Zhen (李震), Wu Zhong (the head of the Central Guards), and a dozen others to the Fujian Hall. There was large enamel box on the middle of the long

rectangular table. Inside the box was a large black volume; there were two sheets of white paper on top of the volume, on which were glued a large number of torn pieces of paper making up a letter. This was written by Lin Biao to Huang Yongsheng, written with a red pencil. It looked like Lin Biao's writing, but a close look also left room for doubt. At that time someone (not Huang, Wu, Li, or Qiu) said, 'Is this his handwriting?' I also approached the table for a closer look, and after examining it I shook my head, expressing doubt. Huang Yongsheng sat there stewing, not saying a word."

Lin Biao's letter had been transmitted to Huang Yongsheng by Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff Wang Fei (王飞). Both Wang Fei and Huang Yongsheng denied having seen that letter. Why would it have been transmitted by Wang Fei? What was Zhou Yushi doing with Lin Biao's letter? There was a tape recorder on the helicopter and it had been turned on during the confusion, playing a covertly recorded telephone conversation between Ye Qun and Huang Yongsheng. Lin Liguó's backup plan was to go to Guangzhou. Should Huang, Wu, Li, and Qiu refuse to go along, instead of having them "kidnapped," would that recording be enough to threaten them?

On the evening of September 8, after landing at the West Suburban Airfield, Lin Liguó gave Hu Ping a horizontally inscribed "handwritten order from Lin Biao." The "written orders" were on the person of Zhou Yushi, who showed them to Jiang Tengjiao, Lu Min (鲁珉), Guan Guanglie, Liu Shiyong, Cheng Hongzhen, and others. The last time the "handwritten orders" were used was at 03:15 on September 13, allowing Zhou Yushi to commandeer, without authorization, a helicopter. How could Lin Biao have issued two "handwritten orders"? Why have these vertically inscribed handwritten orders not turned up after 10 years of investigation?

The handwriting on Lin Biao's orders and his letter to Huang Yongsheng is hard to decipher. The phrasing of the orders is obscure. "I hope you will act in accord with the orders of Comrades Ligu and Yushi." Whom was this addressed to? Act in accord with what orders? Lin Biao was not a deputy: his orders were orders. He would not have said "I hope." If these were really written orders from Lin Biao, why didn't Huang, Wu, Li, and Qiu, who held the positions of top command in the military, take any action? And would Lin have sent his written orders through a "baby"? In his later years Lin Biao did not write anything himself. Ye Qun even had Lin's confidential secretary, Li Genqing (李根清), learn how to imitate Lin Biao's hand. Ye Qun, Lin Ligu, Zhou Yushi, and Yu Xinye all practiced imitating Lin Biao's signature.

Mystery No. 8

Lin Biao's plane had been forced to take off.

Why didn't the Shanhaiguan Airfield prevent the takeoff?

According to Tong Yuchun (佟玉春), deputy chief of staff of the Shanhaiguan station: At 0:06 on September 13 there was a third telephone call from Li Zuopeng, first political commissar of the navy. He said that the airplane must follow the orders of Beijing, of Premier Zhou, Chief of Staff Huang, Deputy Chief of Staff Wu, and myself. No one else was authorized to give permission to take off. Li Wanxiang (李万香), a scheduling officer reported that two fuel trucks had been ordered. "At 0:15 I walked over to the docking area. At 0:22, when I was about 100 meters from Lin Biao's plane, I saw Lin Biao's limousine rush up and park beside the plane. I immediately began to run toward the plane. Lin Ligu and Liu Peifeng got out of the car, and then so did Lin Biao and Ye Qun. Ye Qun shouted: They want to harm Vice Chairman Lin. We need to get away. Quickly bring up the fuel truck! Lin Ligu also shouted that the plane was about to leave! They didn't wait for the mobile ramp but climbed onto the plane using the

workers' ladder. At that time a jeep drove up. Seven or eight people from the Central Guards regiment got out. They had no response whatsoever, but stood there stupidly looking at Lin Biao get on the plane. Lin Liguo was making a telephone call from beside the plane. Afterwards it seems it must have been to Zhou Yushi, ordering him to 'come north.' The crew chief, Tai Qiliang (郜起良), also climbed down from the plane and tried to call the co-pilot Chen Lianbing (陈联柄). I tried to stop him, saying that without permission from Premier Zhou the plane was not to take off. Tai Qiliang did not say anything, and Lin Liguo pushed him back onto the plane. Tai Qiliang seemed hesitant, turning his head and looking around him several times." Tong Yuchun was worried. He ordered Wang Xuegao (王学高), head of the fuel office, and Wang Jingzhi (王敬之), head of the fueling team, to bring up a fuel truck and to park 50 meters from the start of the taxiway. No matter what, the plane would not be permitted to take off. If there had been two trucks there, it certainly would have blocked the path to the take off. But two cadres found an excuse to get out of the truck and the old soldier had the truck park halfway to its destination. Only the young soldier, Liu Saner (刘三儿)³⁰, was willing to have the truck block the runway, as had been ordered.

The three engines³¹ on Lin Biao's plane started up. The noise was exceedingly loud. Tong Yuqun fired three shots into the air and some guards came rushing up. By that time the plane's parking lights had been turned off but the running lights had not yet been turned on. The plane taxied swiftly down the runway, relying on its headlights. Someone hollered from above, "Get

³⁰ Or, possibly, "Liu Sar" (Beijing pronunciation)—"Number 3 Son."

³¹ The Trident has three engines (whence the name?) located in the rear: one in front of the tail, and one on each side of the tail.

the fuel truck out of the way!” Liu Saner heard this and hurried to clear the road; but even so the 30-meter right wing struck the tank of the truck. Maybe because he was too flustered, Pan Jingyan barely missed hitting a large pile of rocks on the side of the runway. He jerked the plane into a 90 degree turn and then yanked it back 90 degrees, causing it to move in an arc. One wheel ran into the beanfield beside the runway. During the daytime there been heavy rain at Shanhaiguan and the field was all muddy. Pan Jingyan opened the throttle and the plane moved with a wild roar from east to west back onto the runway, leaving a trail of mud more than 20 meters long. The plane took off. More than 20 days later, when the beanfield was harvested, the farmers found rubber from the plane, a lamp casing, and several dozen pieces of broken glass. Tong Yuchun believes that when the plane collided with the fuel truck the right wing was severely damaged. There were two fuel tanks on the left wing, and given a flight of 2000 kilometers, the high altitude, and a multitude of other complex factors, it was highly possible that there could have been a fire during the flight. Might that have been the cause of the crash?

Zhou Enlai said: “After Ye Qun and the rest reached the Shanhaiguan field they chose to fly off in a great hurry. Under the conditions at that time, it was very hard for the basic level units to prevent them.” “They did everything they could possibly think of. The plane forced its way into the air.”

Mystery No. 9

Did Lin Biao’s plane crash because of lack of fuel?

Did it actually take on fuel at Shanhaiguan?

The fuel gauge of a Trident 1E registers 23.5 [metric] tonnes. It actually carries 21 tonnes, 2,361 kilograms less than capacity. Its maximum range is 4,205 kilometers. When Pan Jingyan got his orders to fly to Shanhaiguan, he told Li Ping (李平), the crew chief, to add 17 tonnes of fuel. But

the fuel truck ran out at 15 tonnes. After the flight to Shanhaiguan there were 12.5 tonnes left. Pan Jingyan told Li Ping to add 17 tonnes. There was sufficient pressure [in the tank] to refuel quickly, but at the first attempt to refuel at Shanhaiguan the fuel spigot did not fit the mouth of the Trident's tank. If someone crawled out on the plane's wing the spigot could be forced in, but this was too slow. Pan Jingyan said to wait until morning to see about it.

After Lin Biao's plane took off, Li Desheng ordered the Air Force to conduct an investigation: how much fuel did it carry? What was the rate of fuel consumption while in flight? How far could it fly? Shanhaiguan reported that it had not added any fuel. Is this really so? At 23:54 on September 12 Pan Jingyan received a call from Lin Ligu on a secure phone to "leave immediately." He ordered up two fuel trucks from Li Hailin (李海彬), the responsible person for the requisitions office of the 34th division. At the same time, he ordered three crewmen to gas up the plane. The records of the requisition office at Shanhaiguan show that at 23:55 Li Hailin ordered up two fuel trucks. At 23:56 the Li Wanxiang (李万香), the duty officer at the requisition office, ordered the two trucks to refuel the plane.

In order to protect the plane, coordinated speed was an absolute necessity. According to Li Renjie (李仁杰), deputy commander of the Shanhaiguan station: "The maximum capacity of the fuel trucks at the field was eight tonnes. On that evening two four-tonne capacity trucks were available, and could get to the airplane in four or five minutes." Because of the pressure to refuel, both trucks were used at the same time. Two crewmen, Li Ping and Zhang Yanwa (张延奎), took a minute or two to climb onto the plane's right wing, each working his own fuel truck. Director Ma of [Beijing's] Western Suburbs Airfield said it would take 15 to 18 minutes to add 2.5 tonnes of fuel. Li Renjie said that four tonnes could be added in half an hour. Lin Biao's plane had

about 20 minutes to refuel prior to its forced takeoff. Given there were two trucks to do the job, was this enough time to add 4.5 tonnes?

According to Li Hailin, On the evening of September 12, after arriving at Shanhaiguan Pan Jingyan convened an evaluation meeting. When he got to Li Hailin's requisition office he lay down on Li's bed and they engaged in idle chatter. There was nothing at all unusual. Twenty minutes after Pan ordered the fuel truck he said that there was enough fuel and went to the area where the plane was parked.

Tong Yuchun (佟玉春), at the time deputy chief of staff at the Shanhaiguan station, says: "At the time some said the plane did not take on any fuel, while others said it had." The usage of the fuel truck was strictly monitored—how could there be this kind of confusion? If there had been a refueling, would this mean that someone was supporting the "defection"? The final story was that the plane had *not* refueled at Shanhaiguan. Whether or not Lin's plane had been refueled at Shanhaiguan is a key question. Why, after 10 years of investigation, had no one looked at the log book kept on the fuel trucks at Shanhaiguan?

In 1972 a special investigation group of the Chinese Air Force issued a report: The Trident IE consumes an average of four tonnes of fuel per hour. It is 1100 kilometers from Shanhaiguan to Öndörkhaan in Mongolia. The flight lasted less than three hours. It was flying at 3000 meters and the fuel consumption was relatively large, using from 9.5 to 10 tonnes. Therefore, at the time of the crash, Lin's plane had 2.5 tonnes of fuel left, more or less.

Not counting any fuel added at Shanhaiguan, this estimate also neglects an important consideration. The Trident IE's maximum load is 65 tonnes, capable of carrying 115 persons. Lin Biao's plane only had nine people on board. If we figure their average weight at 120

catties,³² that eliminates 13 tonnes. If there were only 12.5 tonnes of fuel, that means there would have been room for 8 tonnes more. Lin Biao's plane was carrying 21 tonnes less than its maximum load. Should we reduce the rate of consumption by one third? Also, as the amount of fuel decreased during the flight, the lighter the plane became and the lower the rate of consumption.

It's 290 kilometers from Öndörkhaan to Ulan Bator, about the same as from Beijing to Shanhaiguan. It's only about a 20 minute flight. The Soviets figure the plane had enough fuel to reach Ulan Bator; otherwise it would not have caused such a large fire. Why make the lowest estimate for fuel consumption? Must we opt for a suicidal crash landing?

Mystery No. 10

Lin Biao's black box³³ is in the hands of the Soviets.

Did Lin Biao's plane catch fire after crossing the Mongolian border?

At 02:27, when Lin Biao's plane was 115 minutes into the flight, it crashed at Öndörkhaan, 360 kilometers after crossing the Mongolian border. All nine persons aboard were killed

³² Or 120 *jin* (斤). A jin is about 1.32 pounds or .66 kilograms.

³³ There is, though, a source claiming to be a transcription of conversation on the plane during the last five minutes of the flight (<https://www.chinesepen.org/blog/archives/13785>), the document dated November 8 2014. It's unclear whether it purports to be from the cockpit voice recorder or a tape recorder on the plane that somehow survived the crash. At the beginning of the recording, Lin Liguó asks (very conveniently) what time it is. It is 2:27. He asks where they are, and is told they are over Hunan and should arrive in Guangzhou in about two hours. Suddenly there is the sound of an explosion. Ye Qun asks what is going on, and someone tells her there seems to be a fire. Liguó asks the pilot, Pan Jingyan what is happening, but Pan does not answer. Rather, he is on the radio calling "Director Wang"—presumably Wang Dongxing, although Dongxing's name is written 汪 and the transcript has 王—and the two words are pronounced in different tones. Liguó says: That was a time bomb. Someone wants to hurt the boss. The plane is losing altitude (how would the voice recorder show that?). Pilot Pan says, Oh, hell! (糟糕). Pressed further, Pan says they are over Mongolia—before takeoff Director Wang had phoned him and told him to fly toward Mongolia. Ye Qun says: If we enter Mongolia, we will be considered traitors. Liguó adds: If we die here, we will forever be marked as traitors. Pilot Pan says: I was a fool; I apologize to the boss. He says the plane is out of control, and over the plane's speaker tells everyone to remove their shoes and brace for a crash. His last words: Vice-Chairman Lin, Jingyan is ashamed and apologizes to you.

This makes a nice story, and provides a more or less plausible explanation for the events. But it seems way too pat. One wishes the Russians would actually release the black box and the voice recorder.

Had the plane been shot down? By whom: the Chinese, the Mongols, or the Soviet military in Mongolia? Wu Faxian proposed intercepting it, but Mao Zedong said: “The rain’s going to fall, women will marry—let him go.” According to Lu Min, head of Air Force Operations, “There were no ground-to-air missiles deployed along the route taken by Lin Biao’s plane.” China’s ground-to-air missiles had a range of only 40 kilometers. This was very clear to the Air Force’s Deputy Chief of Operations, Lin Ligu. He would not charge into the mouth of the cannon.

Lin Biao’s plane was at an altitude of 3000 meters. Subtracting the elevation of the land below—600 meters above sea level—the plane was about 2400 meters off the ground. The range of the radar on the border was only a few dozen kilometers. At 1:55 the plane passed boundary marker 414 crossing over the Mongolian border. It dropped to 2500 meters, flying in a zig-zag pattern.

Was the plane shot down by the Soviet Union?

According to the memoirs of R. Shs. Kudashev (Chinese name: Gu Dashou (顾达寿)), former councilor to the Soviet embassy, *My Career in China*, Lin Biao’s plane was “forced down at Öndörkhaan in Mongolia. The Mongolian air force radar had discovered a plane used by the Chinese military entering into Mongolian territory and mistakenly thought it to be a surveillance plane.”

Intelligence from the Eighth Technical Investigation Regiment reveals that the Mongolian military radar detected Lin Biao’s plane when it crossed into Mongolian territory, but the Mongolian military decided not to take any action, for reasons that are no longer known.

There are units on the Mongolian border capable of firing guided missiles. If anyone had actually fired one, it would have been the Soviet military stationed in Mongolia. The job of the Soviet military there was to observe China. When Lin Biao’s plane crossed the Mongolian

border it presented a large target and it was flying slowly. Could it be that the Soviet army mistakenly thought it was a surveillance craft and hurriedly fired a missile at it? That would explain why after the September 13 incident the Soviets were so quickly present at the scene of the crash and confiscated the engines and the black box. It could also explain why the plane burned so intensely as the residual fuel caught fire upon impact.

Was Lin Biao's plane flying toward the Soviet border?

It has been 40 years since the September 13 incident, but neither the Mongols nor the Soviets have made public the plane's route. On September 1 2004, retired KGB head [Zagewozidin (扎格沃兹丁)], interviewed by the Moscow reporter for Phoenix Television, said that the ordinary residents of the area said that the plane was flying toward the Soviet border.

Although the flight came to an end shortly after crossing the [Mongolian] border, Chinese radar had lost any trace of it. However, we can make estimates based on the flight times. Three points in time are known: the flight took off at 0:32 hours, crossed the border at 1:55, and crashed at 2:27. That is to say, the plane flew for 82 minutes over Chinese territory and 32 minutes in Mongolia. Two-thirds of the flight were over China, and one-third of the flight came after crossing the border until arriving at Öndörkhaan. This is what generally accords with the known points in time.

A look at the map shows that Chita, in the Soviet Union, is 800 kilometers distant in a straight line from the 414th boundary marker on the Mongolian border. Chita is 600 kilometers from Öndörkhaan. The plane was flying at a rate of 500 kilometers per hour. How could it travel 1400 kilometers in half an hour?³⁴

³⁴ Logic or relevance of this paragraph is not clear, at least to me.

Naturally, the direction of the crash was from north to south, not along its flight path from south to north. But we can't infer simply from this that the plane was attempting to return, since as the plane was crashing the pilot could have put it on a new course.

Did Lin Biao's plane catch fire prior to the crash?

Why did Pan Jingyan crash-land when he still had several tonnes of fuel left? The fuel tank on the wing and on the body of the plane were level. When the body of the plane hit the ground the fuel remaining in the wing tanks caught fire. Pan Jingyan's choices seem almost suicidal.³⁵ Did he deliberately cause the tanks on the fuel to collide with the ground? Li Ping (李平), the duty officer for the 8th Technical Investigation regiment of the Northern Air Command, says that the plane caught fire as it was crossing the border. Because he was the first to report on the plane's crash Li Ping was awarded a Third-Class Meritorious Service medal and was presented with a notebook costing 97 cents. But could Lin Biao's plane have travelled 360 kilometers while on fire prior to crashing?

According to Air Force Deputy Chief-of-Staff Wang Fei: After Lin Biao's plane had left, Mongolia received some intelligence that a large target was encroaching from China. This had

³⁵ There is reason to speculate that it was suicide. Pan Jingyan was probably not in on the Lins' plot. Deng Xiaoping later told the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* that his "personal judgment" was that Pan was a good man. In the aftermath of the September 13 incident his family were under a shadow as affiliated with a "counterrevolutionary element," but in 1981 an Air Force panel declared that Pan had been killed in the course of duty, and his family were awarded RMB 500. There are also claims that Pan was a plant by Zhou Enlai in Lin's entourage. All sorts of puzzles remain. The prior indications was that Ye Qun and Lin Liguang had intended to fly to Guangzhou, and if they could not rally support there, perhaps flee to Hong Kong (or perhaps eventually Taiwan?). The alleged "black box" transcript, for what it's worth, indicates that Pan had deceived his passengers, pretending to set a course for Guangzhou but in fact heading to Mongolia and maybe on to the Soviet Union. The transcript also indicates that Pan remained in communication with "Director Wang," presumably Wang Dongxing. Had a Zhou-Wang combine somehow been able to communicate to Pan, in the very short time available, that he should pretend to fly south, but actually fly to Mongolia or Russia—thereby thoroughly discrediting Lin by making him out to be a traitor? The transcript also has a bomb explosion onboard. The intensity of the flames after the crash is evidence that the plane did not run out of fuel, but rather was either shot down (by the Chinese, Mongols, or Russians—which?), or destroyed by a time bomb (which Pan may or may not, probably not, have known about). But how was it planted, again, given the short time available? There is much about the whole affair that does not really hang together.

two kinds of significance. If it was an attack plane or some kind of bomber it was necessary to prepare immediately for war. But then there was no more news. “When I came down from the Air Force Operations room, there was the report from the area that a large sized target had caught on fire (while in the air) and had crashed. It did not first crash and then catch fire. That piece of intelligence was very reliable; it came from technical investigations. The Mongolian border guards saw it and made a report—they were not clear about what was happening, but that a large, unknown object had caught fire in the air, had fallen, and had been destroyed. This was not seen on the radar, but with the naked eye.”

According to He Dequan (贺德全), at the time head of Air Force intelligence, the 8th Technical Investigation Regiment heard a communication from the Mongolian side that “an airplane is now overhead...Its course is not clear but it has crossed the border. . . A large-sized target has caught fire in the air and has crashed.” [Lahama--拉哈玛], a Mongol, was the first to discover the crash of Lin Biao’s plane. She saw a large airplane, in flames, flying north from a southwestern direction, circling the Tumen mountains, then following the Zasen Valley [扎森山谷] toward the southwest. In less than 20 minutes after she first saw it, it crashed. Several eyewitnesses at Öndörkhaan also say that first they saw the plane on fire in flight and only later did it crash.³⁶

Early in the morning of September 15, at 05:00 or so, the Chinese border guard examiners made a report: A large aircraft had exploded at Öndörkhaan. Mongolia, the Soviet Union, and China all stuck in their hands, increasing the complications surrounding the September 13

³⁶ For a very long defense of the official line, see Wang Haiguang, “Dissection of the Mysteries Concerning the September 13 Incident: A Critique of Shu Yun’s ‘Ten Big Mysteries About September 13’” <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/70293.html>

incident. Zhou Enlai concluded that it was a deliberate crash, turning that international incident into a domestic incident.