WE WERE WITNESSING one of the most spectacular excavations of this century. The sight of these powerful figures of men and horses, all life-size, reaching out from the rough, wet earth, was unforgettable. There, semiburied in the reddish soil of China's Yellow River valley, were hundreds of battered but beautiful terra-cotta statues of armed warriors, servants, and horses pulling manned war chariots—the retinue of unified China's first emperor.

Standing in the rain, we were moved almost to tears, as one is when confronted with great art. Some of the astonishingly realistic figures were upright, intact, and poised, as if waiting for a command to attack. Others lay pathetically smashed and scattered; they had been broken and their weapons stolen four years after the emperor's death, when soldiers of the succeeding reign looted and burned this part of the ruler's grave site.

Here and there a hand stretched out of the soil, and a booted foot struck out from its cold turf-prison. Helmeted heads fallen from proud, broken bodies looked up from their ancient grave with fierce eyes brought glisteningly alive by the rain.

We were seeing the first evidence of a stunning archeological discovery. Experts estimate that the figures are the vanguard of an army of 6,000 created 2,200 years ago. It was buried in a huge roofed gallery to guard the tomb of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, the man who unified China, built the Great Wall, burned books valued by Confucius, and declared himself China's first sovereign emperor.

The history of China in all its struggles and glory is being unfolded by such archeological findings. Here, the grand army we were viewing was only the first revelation. Less than a mile away, the tomb itself is still to be entered. It may hold the greatest imperial secrets and the richest treasures in the history of China.

The underground army we saw was discovered in the spring of 1974 by peasants and workers of the Yen Tsai commune in Lin-T'ung county. So far, less than a tenth of the three-acre site has been excavated. Many wonders lie ahead.

I was accompanied to the excavation by my father, Chester Romming, and my daughter, sister, and nephew. Our family group had been invited because my father, a retired Canadian (Continued on page 448)
WITNESSING one of spectacular excavations tury. The sight of these men and horses, all lined up in the rough, wet earth, here, semiburied in the Yellow River valley, erred but beautiful terra-bec-warriors, servants, and red war chariots—the na’s first emperor, we were moved almost to tears. We confronted with great, gloriously realistic figures and poised, as if waiting for us. Others lay pathetically altered; they had been pons stolen four years earlier, when soldiers of the red army commandeered the site. And stretched out of the ground, the stills from its cold clay heads fallen from the top, looked up from their eyes, bringing to life an ancient, nervous evidence of a stunscovery. Experts estimate the vanguard of an army 2,500 years ago. It was a gallery to guard the army, the man who built the Great Wall, burned books, and declared himself an emperor. In all its struggles and by such archaeological mystery we were viewing. Less than a mile still to be entered. It is full of secrets and the history of China.

The site was discovered in 1974 by peasants and commune in Lin-t’ung n a tenth of the three-vated. Many wonders to the excavation by mining, and my daughte...
Dazzling sepulcher of the first emperor appears in legendary splendor, as visualized by a modern Chinese-American artist, Yang Hsien-min. In the inner sanctum, as yet unexcavated, a wooden dragon—beast of good fortune—bears the copper coffin across a China in miniature, expressing for all time Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's power over his dominions.

"The Yellow River and the Yangtze were reproduced in quicksilver and by some mechanical means made to flow into a miniature ocean," wrote the Han Dynasty historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien a century after the first emperor's death. Guarding this glory, painted terra-cotta soldiers proved no match for torch-bearing looters, who, according to Ssu-ma Ch'ien, desecrated the tomb in 206 B.C. invaders would have had to pass booby traps of hair-trigger crossbows to reach this prize.

Battle ready, an army of 6,000 takes position for eternity in a three-acre, flat-roofed vault (following pages fold out). Alert terra-cotta horses, their forelocks curled, their tails knotted, draw wooden chariots, hitched with leather harnesses and brass fittings. Soldiers in painted armor carry real bronze swords, spears, and crossbows. Iron farm tools, silk and linen fabrics, and jade pieces are stored nearby.

To enjoy such everlasting protection, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti ordered building to begin on his tomb the moment he became king of Ch'in at 13. Some 700,000 conscripts worked 36 years on the project, so history tells.
ambassador who was born in China in 1894 and served there as a teacher in the 1920's and as a diplomat in the '40s and '50s, was a longtime friend of the late Premier Chou En-lai."

We drove to the site from Sian, 40 miles to the east, accompanied by the mayor of Sian and several other officials. About 20 miles out we stopped at a 20th-century restoration of an ancient pleasure palace at the foot of Black Horse Hill to pick up archeologists Ch'en Hsueh-hua and Tu Pao-jen, who would show us around the dig. Their hair was still wet from bathing in the same soothing hot springs that the first emperor enjoyed when the pools were part of one of his luxurious palaces. Now the inlaid marble pools are open to all.

We followed a dirt cart path to the site. There, in the middle of a peaceful field, the earth had been sharply slashed open and rolled back to reveal a dramatic tableau resembling an ancient battleground.

**Imperial Tombs by the Hundreds**

In this area of Shensi Province in the Yellow River valley, China's earliest emperors lived and died. From the time the king of the feudal State of Ch'in conquered his rivals and became emperor in 221 B.C. until the fall of the imperial dynasties in 1912, the Chinese emperors ruled over what they called Chung-Kuo, the "pivotal kingdom." The seat of their power in Shensi Province is now an archeologist's paradise, with hundreds of unexcavated imperial tombs filled with royal riches and art treasures. Among these tombs, that of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti will undoubtedly prove to be the most wondrous. He spent 36 years constructing a subterranean palace in which he could spend eternity.

The terra-cotta figures of the emperor's legions were entombed some 4,500 feet east of Mount Li, the tumulus where the emperor was buried. His magnificent burial chamber was described by Ssu-ma Ch'ien, China's great early historian, about 100 B.C.: "As soon as the First Emperor became king of Ch'in, excavations and building had been started at Mount Li, while after he won the empire, more than 700,000 conscripts from all parts of the country worked there. They dug through three subterranean streams and poured molten copper for the outer coffin, and the tomb was filled with models of palaces, pavilions, and offices, as well as fine vessels, precious stones, and rarities. Artisans were ordered to fix up croustwos so that any thief breaking in would be shot. All the country's streams, the Yellow River, and the Yangtze were reproduced in quicksilver and by some mechanical means made to flow into a miniature ocean. The heavenly constellations were above and the regions of the earth below. The candles were made of whale oil to ensure their burning for the longest possible time."

Does the huge tumulus rising above the grainfields still enclose this microcosm of China? The only recorded doubt is cast by Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself, who tells of a "desecration" of the emperor's grave four years after his death by troops of Gen. Hsiang Yu. No systematic excavation has been attempted. There is good reason to be hopeful.

The position of the underground guards east of the tomb leads to speculation that, in keeping with Chinese ideas of symmetry, equally spectacular treasure-houses may lie the same distances west, north, and south of the tomb, perhaps containing arrays of lifesize statues of the officials, ministers, and ladies of the first imperial court. The emperor's warriors carried real weapons and the horses pulled actual chariots. Who knows what gold, jade, precious jewels, and silks may adorn courtiers in three other such vaults?

When we visited the site, 591 men, 24 horses, and four chariots had already been excavated, and hundreds more lay waiting to be rescued. No two men looked alike.

Skeletons found in the royal tombs of the Shang Dynasty (1700-1100 B.C.) show that live warriors, women, servants, and horses had been buried with kings and high-ranking officials. The practice of live burials had been stopped for centuries, but Ch'in Shih Huang Ti revived it symbolically.

Archeologist Ch'en drew our attention to the fact that each face of the pottery figures had distinctly different characteristics. "We believe this is because the emperor ordered the artists to model realistic portraits of each warrior, servant, and footman in his live honor guard, so they could continue to guard him after death." Part of the sculptor's inspiration, and certainly the models' willingness to pose, must have lain in the knowledge that the instead

All this looks as if it took centuries, but with magnificently, pure li round the jowline mark of A.D. 61. The

448

National Geographic, April 1978
that the finished creation would be buried, instead of the people themselves.

All figures stand about six feet tall. They look as alive today as their models were 22 centuries ago. Some appear fierce; others, proud and confident. A few seem to be on the verge of a smile.

The horses stand four abreast before their royal war chariots. Some are incredibly intact, while others sag against one another with broken backs and necks, though their magnificence remains undiminished. Artistically, their classic simplicity and smooth, pure lines have survived the test of time. A thousand years later, the clean, curved jawline of these early creations became the mark of the famous T’ang Dynasty horses (A.D. 618-907), which are still imitated today.

The tails of the Ch’in horses are knotted at half length. The manes are short, standing straight at the crest of the neck, except for the forelocks, which were left long and parted in the middle to curl around the front of each ear. The ears are set forward and appear tense, indicating alertness.

Troops Arrayed for March to War

The pottery legions were interred in standing position in battle formation, 15 to 20 feet underground (following pages). They occupied a roofed-over area extending 700 feet east to west and 200 feet north to south. They were arrayed in the same way that the emperor’s live honor guard used to line up before it set off on a military campaign.

There are 11 corridors filled with men and horses. In some the men march rank on rank. In others horses draw royal chariots. Each
chariot contains three or four men and is pulled by four magnificent horses accompanied by 12 soldiers. The army carries real swords, spears, and crossbows.

The floor of the immense underground gallery is still covered with earth, but archaeologists say it was paved with cord-impressed bricks. Pillars, long since collapsed, once held up the roof of the underground battlefield. Without any pits: the east, where the main digging is going on, the west, and two middle pits, where work is confined to probes to estimate the size of the pottery army. All are unprotected from the elements.

Six archaeologists, including Mr. Ch'en and Mr. Tu, are directing as well as working on the excavation site. Their labor force consists of peasants and commune workers, who earn extra money helping on the dig.

So far, workers have uncovered five sloping passageways leading to the east pit, where they have already unearthed more than a thousand relics. Besides the pottery men and horses with wooden chariots, they have found gold, jade, bamboo, and bone artifacts, as well as linen, silk, pottery utensils, bronze objects, and iron farm tools.

Important to students of military technology was the discovery of arrowheads and metal swords treated with a preservative that prevented corrosion for 22 centuries. Analysis revealed that the swords are an alloy of copper, tin, and 13 other elements, including nickel, magnesium, and cobalt.

One of the officials with us, Li Chi-tao, of the Standing Committee of the Shensi Revolutionary Committee, said, “Eventually we will erect a museum on the site, and the pottery army will stand once again—-clean and proud—on its original ground.”

Pines and Blossoms Mask Burial Hill

We drove three-quarters of a mile west to Mount Li. The exterior of the emperor’s tomb-mound gave no hint of its mysterious interior. The tumulus, standing unimposing in a cornfield, looked slightly off balance from perfect symmetry. Pine trees and pink wild flowers hid the original three-layered shape, constructed in conformity with symbolic patterns representing the harmonious cosmos. In the surrounding fields, peasants were going about their planting as usual, unconcerned that their long-horned water buffalo and small tractors were plowing venerated land.

Mount Li was explored by Victor Sagal in 1917 as “the thousand feet high . . . thousand feet with three such hills massed on top.”

Mr. Ch'en Chien, who was originally closed area, a stone tablets, temples. All tell to be in the square more times. Beyond lay an rectangular base, with a total area encircled. The walls were adorned with and invading the silvery tower below.

Today, in the

National Geographic, April 1978

China’s Incred
was the discovery of rowheads and metal artifacts that predated the 1st century B.C. Analysis of these artifacts reveals an alloy of bronze and copper, with traces of tin and iron. The rowheads were found in a pit near the eastern boundary of the site, suggesting they were part of a surrounding wall that protected the burial mound.

Mount Li was visited by three French explorers early in the 20th century. One of them, Victor Sagalen, described the mound in 1917 as “the most monumental of all those that exist in China…one hundred and fifty feet high…each of the sides more than a thousand feet long. The form is well designed with three successive undulations…as three hills massed on top of one another.”

Mr. Ch’en explained that the tomb-mound was originally built in the center of an enclosed area, a “spirit city.” It contained sacred stone tablets, inscribed soul tablets, and prayer tablets. All these constructions were meant to be in the “inner city,” within a walled square more than a quarter mile on each side. Beyond lay an “outer city,” guarded by a high rectangular stone wall, 23 feet thick at the base, with watchtowers at the corners. The total area enclosed was more than 500 acres.

The walls and temples have almost disappeared, and the sacred objects above ground have long since been carried away by vandals and invading armies, but the earth still protects the silent splendor of the inner sanctuary below.

Today, in the People’s Republic of China, Ch’in Shih Huang Ti is a household name to most of the 850 million people. But Ch’in was a tyrant who buried 460 Confucian scholars alive, let thousands of workers perish while building the Great Wall, and spent more than 30 years building his tomb with forced labor. Why is this once despised prince being hailed as a man whose “positive efforts hastened the progress of history”?

This question burned on our minds as we drove back to the ancient city of Sian. Formerly known as Ch’ang-an, meaning “eternal peace,” the city served as China’s capital during various dynasties between the 11th century B.C. and the 10th century A.D.

The rain had let up, and people were drying their clothes on bamboo poles in front of cozy brick and adobe homes with curved “dragon back” tiled roofs. The tinkling of thousands of bicycle bells from rush-hour traffic mingled with the clatter of horses’ hooves, the jangling horns of our cars, and the roof-corner wind chimes that drive away evil spirits.

New Capital Populated by Royal Edict

From Sian we drove along the south bank of the Wei River near Hsien-yang, where 22 centuries ago the first emperor erected a new and splendid capital city. To his new
metropolis he transported 120,000 wealthy families from all parts of the empire, thus enfeebling the feudal aristocracy by removing them from the land and people that gave them power. To demonstrate his vast wealth and omnipotence, he built replicas of the palaces and villas they had left behind.

Nothing remains today of their great homes or of the emperor's 270 elaborate palaces and gardens, which were joined by covered passageways that lined the main streets. The greatest of the palaces was the A-fang, constructed by hundreds of thousands of laborers.

In his later years Ch'in Shih Huang Ti became obsessed with security and changed his sleeping quarters every night. The palaces were supplied at all times with servants, concubines, and food, so that all would be constantly ready for him, and no one except his chief eunuch, Chao Kao, and Prime Minister Li Ssu knew where he slept. Any person who revealed the emperor's whereabouts was put to death, along with his whole family.

New Image for an Old Despot

We returned to Sian and soon arrived at our hotel, a modern version of an ancient palace, guarded by stone lions and surrounded by lush gardens. At dinner, after toasts with mao-t'ai, a strong Chinese spirit, we talked about Emperor Ch'in. I asked our interpreter from Peking, Miss Lu Wen-ju, if she thought the emperor was cruel or unjust.

"As we look at him now, we can say that he was cruel. But remember, it was not unusual in those days to hold entire families responsible and to punish them all for the sins of one member," she said. "But we must consider that Ch'in did many progressive things and was the first to unify China."

China was split into warring states when the 13-year-old future emperor inherited the throne of the kingdom of Ch'in, in 246 B.C. The young king spent the first 25 years of his reign in ruthless battles and, finally, in the words of the ancient historian Su-ma Ch'ien, conquered all China "like a silkworm devouring a mulberry leaf." After he had overrun six kingdoms, the legends of his supernatural power became so strong that the other kingdoms submitted.

Ch'in Shih Huang Ti built the Great Wall by joining walls and ramparts that had been erected earlier by the contending feudal states. Six became the lucky number of Ch'in, which is why, according to legend, the emperor had the Great Wall built wide enough for six horses to gallop abreast along the top. The wall was primarily constructed to protect his newly formed empire from the nomad "barbarians" of the Asian steppes.

The emperor created the nation's first standing army, perhaps numbering in the millions, to guard the wall from northern invaders, while a crew of forced laborers—prisoners of war, exiled Confucian scholars, and so-called criminals—extended it to roughly 1,500 miles. Thousands, perhaps millions, of those unfortunate men perished. Their bones were crushed and buried beneath the massive gray rocks—earning the wall the grim sobriquet of "the longest cemetery in the world." When we walked along the top of the wall, their spirits still seemed to cry out in the sharp, perpetual wind, haunting the thousands of grim watchtowers that stand stark and foursquare along the parapets.

The wall was reconstructed in the 15th century during the Ming period and recently by the People's Liberation Army. A serpentine miracle of engineering, it snakes like a dragon's back, rising over the loftiest summits and plunging into the deepest ravines. It is the longest fortification in the world.

Making China a Nation

Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's reign over a unified China lasted little more than a decade, but in that time he accomplished the sweeping changes that made his dynasty a turning point in history. He radically altered the political and social structure of the state by destroying the ancient feudal system and establishing a centralized empire. He codified the laws and standardized weights and measures and the system of writing Chinese characters, so that the written language could be understood all over China.

To ensure communication and the transport of food and other essential goods to all parts of his empire, the emperor ordered a vast network of roads built, radiating from the capital, and he standardized the axle lengths of wagons and chariots to enable vehicles to travel in the same ruts. By a series of canals, he began what was to become the greatest inland water-communication system in the ancient world. Some of these canals are still
used, and one can still travel from north to south by water. Ch'in Shih Huang Ti also reclaimed wasteland for the cultivation of crops and introduced irrigation systems still in use.

Confucians Feel Emperor's Fury

The emperor's military government was progressive, but it was also ruthless. He felt that the scholarly but conservative Confucian philosophy, which supported the old feudalistic system of the previous dynasty, was a threat to his authoritarian, centralized rule. He not only burned all books of the Confucian school, except for those in the imperial library, but also buried alive Confucian scholars who, after warnings, still openly opposed his reforms. The emperor's eldest son, Fu-su, attacked his father's decision to kill the scholars and was exiled to the northwestern frontier where he spent the rest of his life helping direct the building of the Great Wall.

I asked one of our Chinese companions why he thought the emperor had killed the scholars. His reply probably reflected not only the attitude of the Ch'in Dynasty but also of China today, where Confucianism is again officially disapproved.

"Confucian scholars," he said, "were most conservative. They believed what Confucius approved must always be right and that the old ways of the Chou Dynasty were too sacred to be changed. How can progress be made if nothing can be changed?"

In spite of all his power and success, the emperor could not rest and traveled almost compulsively on his newly built roads.

DAGGER DRAWN, an assassin lunges at Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. The emperor leaps behind a column while he draws his own weapon. The attacking warrior, Ching K'o, had come as a friend, bearing the head of a slain enemy in a box but concealing his dagger in a rolled map. Although he and other would-be assassins failed, they caused the ruler immense concern. To prolong existence, he increasingly sought guidance from mystics; ultimately he even sent missions overseas in search of magical life-enhancing elixirs.

PHOTOGRAPHIC, April 1978
Sometimes he disguised himself as a peasant to find out what the people thought of him. Because of several assassination attempts, he lived in fear of his life and was prey to gross superstitions.

**Futile Quest for Immortality**

Historian Edward Thomas Williams tells how the emperor spent his last years seeking the fountain of youth. “Charlatans and practitioners of the occult and black magic enriched themselves by exploiting his credulity. Magicians told him of the three fairy islands in the Eastern Seas where old age and death were unknown” because their inhabitants had discovered the elixir of immortality.

Determined to find it, the emperor sent a fleet of vessels loaded with precious gifts in search of the Islands of Immortals. After some time, Captain Hsu returned to say that he had met one of the Immortals but that he had refused to part with the elixir because the gifts were too cheap.

“What do you desire?” asked the captain.

“Young men and maidens and craftsmen of all sorts,” replied the Immortal. So Captain Hsu set off again with 3,000 of the empire’s finest young people. They sailed away and never returned. Maybe they did find the fountain of youth, but a legend says that they colonized Japan. And indeed a surviving monument in Japan today bears a Chinese inscription about Hsu Fu, a Taoist priest who was on the voyage. He died there in 179 B.C. He is believed to have established in Japan a region known as the “Kingdom of Chin.”

The emperor continued to live and work in guarded secrecy.  

*(Continued on page 450)*

SHOWCASE OF SUCCESS, the imperial capital of Hsien-yang boasted many luxurious palaces that were copies of royal residences in conquered states. Defeated leaders lived nearby, virtually under house arrest. From his capital by the river Wei, the emperor constructed a network of roads across his nation; his canals linking major streams are used today. In other acts to unify China, he standardized laws, script, coinage, weights, measures, and even the gauges of chariot wheels. Yet for all his power, he lived in fear for his life, moving constantly from palace to palace in utmost secrecy.
WITH THE CRACK OF A WHIP or the thrust of a spear, the new regime wielded merciless force to consolidate total power in the hands of the emperor. He sent 700,000 conscripts to build his Great Wall (**left**) as a defense against nomadic tribesmen of central Asia. The laborers linked older barriers across mountain passes into one 1,500-mile barricade, the longest fortification on earth. To protect himself from dissidents within, the emperor ordered the burning of thought-provoking history and philosophy books and the killing of 460 Confucian scholars. Some were buried alive, and others, according to legend, were buried to their necks and decapitated (**below**).
(Continued from previous page)
handful of his ministers knowing very well how secret that, when the eastern province of the cortege knew it, the youngest son, Hu-ha Kao, and Prime Minister Mi to prevent his death a secret reasons.

Chief eunuch Chérick in gaining power as the emperor feared that his enemies would obeyed the dying emperor's exiled eldest son. Instead, the eunuch plotted to have Li Suo to send a fake order to commit suicide. This order was then schemed to be weak and corrupt, to make it appear as if they could not carry it out.

While all this was going on, the emperor was traveling to Hsien-yang, the emperor's body. It was the chief eunuch and his consorts who were allowed to put some of the emperor's body to the decomposing emperor's body.

Grim Fate Revealed

The first emperor's remains were laid to rest in his palace, and he was buried in a grand ceremony in the palace he had spent his life constructing. Su-ma C'o, the faithful pallbearer in the sepulchral chamber, was one of the new emperor's closest associates. Since the door of the tomb was sealed, the emperor's remains were not discovered until they were finally opened. Chinese scholars and educators, whatever may be the case, are inspired by the Chinese people's reverence and respect, and by the accomplishments of their imperial forebears.
with only a handful of his most trusted eunuchs and ministers knowing where he was. His life was so secret that, when he died during a journey to the eastern provinces, no one in the imperial cortège knew it, except for the emperor’s youngest son, Hu-hai, his chief eunuch, Chao Kao, and Prime Minister Li Ssu. They kept his death a secret for their own ambitious reasons.

Chief eunuch Chao Kao had been steadily gaining power as the emperor grew weaker. He feared that his power would end if he obeyed the dying emperor’s decree, appointing his exiled eldest son, Fu-su, as emperor. Instead, the eunuch plotted with Prime Minister Li Ssu to send a fake order to Fu-su to commit suicide. The son immediately did so. They then schemed to give the throne to the weak and corrupt youngest son, Hu-hai, whom they could control.

While all this was going on, a weird procession was traveling hundreds of miles back to Hsien-yang, the capital, with the dead emperor’s body. It was midsummer, and the chief eunuch and prime minister were obliged to put some rancid fish on a cart following the imperial chariot to hide the odor of the decomposing corpse.

**Grim Fate Rewards the Faithful**

The first emperor’s putrefying body was at last laid to rest in his magnificent sarcophagus, and he was buried with full pomp and ceremony in the splendid subterranean palace he had spent much of his lifetime constructing. Su-ma Ch’ien relates that after the faithful pallbearers had placed the casket in the sepulchral chamber and were arranging the furniture on their way out, the new emperor, Hu-hai, ordered the great jade door of the tomb sealed, and the men were buried alive. Since they alone knew how to penetrate the intricate tomb, the dead emperor presumably would thus be safe from grave robbers.

Perhaps the remains of the pallbearers will be found when the emperor’s tomb itself is finally opened. Chinese archeologists, historians, and educators are pressing forward, whatever may be revealed, in the belief that the Chinese people should learn both the evils and accomplishments of their ancient imperial forebears.