



## Shot and stabbed as he tried to document the Tiananmen Massacre: the 'unfortunate' death of Wu Guofeng

Wu Dingfu (lt) and Song Xiuling hold a portrait of their son Wu Guofeng (TOM PHILLIPS). Tom Phillips in Xinjin, Sichuan province 01 Jun 2014

Twenty-five years after the Tiananmen crackdown of June 4, 1989 the Communist Party continues to conceal the truth about the deaths of hundreds of victims including Wu Guofeng, a 20-year-old student who was among the first to die. Flames from burning vehicles cast an amber haze over Beijing and gunfire echoed through the night as Wu Guofeng ventured out onto the streets to take the photographs that would cost him his life.

Hoping to register the night's momentous events, the 20-year-old student grabbed his camera, mounted his bike and sped southeast towards the action. To this day the reasons why Guofeng's life came to a sudden and vicious end that night remain a mystery. The facts are that at 3am on June 4 a fellow student had returned to their university dormitory bearing terrible news: Wu Guofeng was dead.

Shot in the head, shoulder and chest by the advancing troops, and then deliberately skewered through the belly with a bayonet, he was one of hundreds, perhaps thousands of Chinese citizens slaughtered during the Tiananmen Square crackdown that took place 25 years ago this week. "I will never forgive them. It broke my heart," Song Xiuling, his 70-year-old mother, told The Telegraph in a rare interview on the eve of the anniversary. "It was so tragic. So heart-breaking."



June, 1989: the moment that became symbolic of the Tiananmen Square protests (AP)

"The Communist Party still dares not publish the truth," said Wu Dingfu, the dead student's father. "But one day it will emerge."

In the quarter-of-a-century since a night of carnage that is now simply known as the "June 4th incident", China's Communist leaders have fought tooth and nail to keep the truth about Tiananmen being known. Activists, relatives and lawyers have been harassed, detained and even thrown in jail in the lead-up to this year's anniversary for daring to speak out about the killings of young men and women such as Wu Guofeng, who had come to Beijing from rural China carrying his family's dreams of a better life.

Yet despite the threats and intimidation and despite Beijing's determination to wipe Tiananmen's victims from Chinese history. Some continue to denounce the inconvenient truth of June 4 1989. "You have tried to cover up the facts but we are here to tell the truth," said Ms Song, Wu Guofeng's mother, as four security agents loitered outside the home of her small suburban apartment in southwestern China in a black sedan. "We are not afraid. Why should we be afraid?" Wu Guofeng's path to an early grave begins in Xinjin, a once quiet rural community on the outskirts of Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, that has since transformed into a bustling town.

The second of three children, Guofeng was born here, nearly 1000 miles southwest of Beijing, in July 1968 to a cement factory worker and a part-time seamstress. His parents, Wu Dingfu and Song Xiuling, remember their son as a bookish but outgoing boy who excelled in Chinese and mathematics. His father called him "Little Glasses". "He loved reading. He read all kinds of books, even the Selected Works of Mao Zedong," his father recalled. "He was eager to learn."

Guofeng was also extremely ambitious. Wu Dingfu said he attempted to put his teenage son off applying to Beijing's prestigious People's University, telling him: "People's University is for the children of senior officials. You'll never get in." But not for the last time Guofeng ignored his father's advice: he had already set his sights on the university whose alumni include senior government officials, bankers and some of China's top academics.



Wu Guofeng pictured in Tiananmen Square (TOM PHILLIPS).

He achieved top scores in China's gruelling university entrance exams, becoming the best performing student in the whole town. In mid-July 1986, just days after Guofeng's 18th birthday, the acceptance letter arrived.

"I couldn't hold back the tears," his father remembered. "I cried. My throat closed up. I said: 'Well done. You have made it and you have proved yourself.'" At People's University Wu Guofeng became student number 6373115: a straight-talking undergraduate in the Department of Industrial Management who appears to have revelled in university life. In his first year he discovered a talent for photography, saving from his 80 yuan monthly allowance to buy a camera which he used to register hikes along the Great Wall and a visit to the Forbidden City.

In his second year he fell in love, starting a relationship with a female student that would last for the rest of his brief life. Guofeng's third year was to prove even more eventful. In April 1989, the death of Hu Yaobang, the popular, pro-reform leader, sparked mass demonstrations in Beijing and he found himself at the centre of the action. Guofeng became a member of the People's University Organising Committee and its hunger strike team, going five days without food in protest at the Communist Party's refusal to reform.

He described his political awakening and the remarkable scenes playing out on the capital's streets in a letter home to his parents. But having lived through Mao Tse-tung's devastating political campaigns and seen relatives suffer their brutal consequences, Wu Dingfu was terrified by his son's reports. "I wrote back that very night," warning him about Beijing's likely reaction to such a challenge, he said.

"The Communist Party is utterly ferocious and has no shame," Wu Dingfu told his son. "I told him you should never get involved in politics. Politics is cruel and cold-blooded and the Communist Party especially so." He signed off with one final word of parental advice. Getting mixed up in politics will only "bring you deadly consequences," he warned. The letter went unanswered.

As late May came and the protests appeared to subside Wu Guofeng began planning a trip home. In a telegram, that arrived in Xinjin on May 31, he told his parents he was preparing to return. "Send money as soon as possible," he wrote. It was the last Wu Dingfu and his wife would ever hear from their son. On June 2 Communist Party elders met in Beijing to discuss plans to drive protestors from Tiananmen Square and snuff out what they had labelled "counter-revolutionary turmoil".

"Those goddam bastards! Who do they think they are trampling on sacred ground like Tiananmen so long?" fumed Wang Zhen, China's hardline vice president, according to leaked minutes published in the Tiananmen Papers. "Anybody who tries to overthrow the Communist Party deserves death and no burial." The following night, at around midnight, Wu Guofeng, left his university dormitory, around six miles northwest of Tiananmen Square, after hearing gunshots and set off on his final bike ride across Beijing.



A student asks soldiers to go back home as crowds flood into the central Beijing (AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

Twenty-five years on, the exact sequence of events surrounding his killing remains shrouded in mystery. The Communist Party has never permitted an independent public inquiry or truth commission into the events of June 3 and 4.

However, an official document, issued by Wu Guofeng's university department and dated June 13, 1989, suggests he went out alone after spending the evening playing mahjong, a popular Chinese game, with fellow students. "As far as we are aware no classmates went along with him," says the handwritten report, entitled "On the unfortunate death of Wu Guofeng and his funeral arrangements".

From his dormitory, Guofeng is believed to have headed south-east towards the intersection between Xidan Avenue and West Chang'an Avenue, the giant boulevard that leads east towards the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square. At around the same time thousands of army troops were forcing their way down that same route towards Tiananmen Square.

Wu Dingfu believes his son was deliberately targeted by army shooters who shot him in the chest, shoulder and back of the head after noticing the flash of his camera. Clinging to life, despite the gaping wound to his head, he was then skewered with a bayonet after refusing to surrender his photographs to the soldiers, his mother believes. "As if it was not enough to have killed him, why did they have to stab him too?" she said. Ultimately, however, neither can be sure. Wu Guofeng was cremated before an official post-mortem could be conducted.

The two-page university document - the only official recognition ever given to the family of their son's killing - states: "Until now nobody has been able to provide the place, time or any other details of the incident involving Wu Guofeng". Twenty-five years later that remains the case. At some point between midnight - when he left the dormitory - and 3am - when news of his death arrived back there - Wu Guofeng's mangled body was delivered to the Post and Telecommunications Hospital, around 2.5 miles northwest of Tiananmen Square.



Pro-democracy demonstrators on the day before the massacre started (MARK AVERY/AP).

Photographs that relatives managed to obtain before Guofeng's body was destroyed show him lying in a hospital corridor on what appears to be a wooden table covered by a blood-soaked sheet.

Beneath pine green football shorts, crimson streaks course across his thighs; his hands have been folded across a chest wound at awkward 45 degree angles. Another image shows a piece of red cloth that has been packed into the back of his skull. In Xinjin, Guofeng's parents slept, oblivious to the Colosseum-like fate that had just befallen their son. Only four days later did a local Communist Party official deliver the news.

"He said our son had taken part in counter-revolutionary riots," said his father. "I said I didn't believe that. The students were just marching and striking. They didn't have any guns or weapons so how could you possibly say they were rioting? Students are students. Being patriotic is not a crime." Guofeng's death was the first in a series of devastating calamities to afflict his family. His younger brother died of renal failure in 2002, followed by his grandmother and grandfather who had been left heartbroken and distraught by the government's refusal to recognise his killing. In 2003, his father was diagnosed with kidney cancer. His mother says even today she suffers from constant insomnia.

Like the families of other Tiananmen victims, Wu Guofeng's parents have also been forced to live with the bullying of China's security services. Still, they refuse to be cowed. Asked if she had a message for China's president, Xi Jinping, Wu Guofeng's mother was blunt: "I would ask him to publish the truth - he can't keep lying to people all over the world." Wu Dingfu said he regretted that in 1989 he had not been able to jump on a plane to Beijing to rescue his boy from the army onslaught.

But he admired his late son's attempt to change Chinese history and planned to spend the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen killings celebrating Guofeng's life as well as mourning his premature death. "Though it has brought us tremendous pain we still feel proud," he said, sitting beside a black and white portrait of Wu Guofeng that is the centre piece of a small shrine in their sitting room. "His body has been destroyed but the spirit will live forever. The spirit of June 4 will last forever."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10868220/Shot-and-stabbed-as-he-tried-to-document-the-Tiananmen-Massacre-the-unfortunate-death-of-Wu-Guofeng.html>