

A MILITARY ANALYSIS OF THE BATTLE OF SHANGHAI

13 AUGUST - 8 NOVEMBER 1937

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ABSTRACT

Historians have treated the three-month battle of Shanghai, during the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, as a complete and sealed event. Many descriptions of the battle are incomplete in the manner in which they account for the eventual Chinese defeat. This paper seeks to probe tactical conditions of the battle more deeply and expand more fully upon the reasons why the battle unfolded as it did.

The decision of the Chinese to make a stand at Shanghai was deliberate and measured. The opening moves of the battle did not surprise either side. It was strategic, rather than tactical error, along with unfavorable weather conditions that caused the failure of the Chinese offensive.

While the number of combatants and the quality of their equipment were of great importance, enumeration and firepower alone can't explain why the Chinese defensive phase was so long. Instead, actual combat ratios together with a well-prepared defense acted with weather and terrain to slow the Japanese. The commitment of numerous combat forces and firepower could be interpreted as an effect of battle, not the cause of its outcome.

Chinese soldiers were motivated for reasons other than nationalism. Leadership, discipline and organization were matched on both sides of the battlefield. The Japanese eventually won the battle not only because of superior technology and equipment against a broadly committed force (as is often acknowledged), but also because of mobility achieved through the successful landing at Huangchow. Tactical analysis allows us to revise historiographical interpretations and draw new historical conclusions.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew Dwight Whitney was born to a military family in Nürnberg Germany on March 24th, 1965. He grew up at various Army posts throughout the United States. After serving as a Missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Taiwan, he returned to Brigham Young University (BYU), Provo, Utah, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in International Business and Asian Studies. While at BYU, he married the former Patricia Erekson who later had their first child, Lindsay, in 1988.

Upon securing commission in the U.S. Army through BYU Reserve Officer Training Corps, he entered the Regular Army as a Military Intelligence Officer in January of 1989. Since then he has served as a platoon leader, battalion and brigade intelligence officer, and a company commander in various locations including South Korea. He also completed Airborne and Ranger training at Fort Benning, Georgia. During this time, his wife and he had three more children, Brooke and Brett (at Fort Lewis, Washington,) and Tyler (at Yongsan, Korea).

After an assignment to the Atlantic Intelligence Command, Virginia, he was assigned to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. At Cornell, he attended the Chinese FALCON program and began work for a Master of Arts in Asian Studies. During this time, his wife gave him another child, Christian.

In July 2000, Matt and his family will move to Beijing, China where he will begin duty as a Foreign Area Officer.

To Brigadier General Wayne M. Hall, U.S. Army, (Ret.)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In a 1976 discussion on the significance of local perspective on the historiography of the Sino-Japanese war, Aron Shai wrote:

Thus the history of these struggles is an integral part of present and future developments. For the Western historian, however, the local wars in China are completed and sealed events. They should be investigated carefully, without emotions and most importantly, they should be analyzed objectively.¹

Shai is disappointed that the study of the Sino-Japanese war has not taken on a more local or tactical flavor. His disappointment stems from his reading of Chinese accounts of the battle, such as the biased *History of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945)* compiled by Hsu Long-hsueh and Chang Ming-kai as well as finding Western accounts lacking in such detail.² Shai says,

The military aspect of the war, which is a mere side-issue for Western diplomatic and political historians, is the core of such developments for the Chinese. Two-thirds of the official record is devoted to a detailed description of the various military operations of the war. The war meant 23 campaigns, 1,117 major battles and 38,931 engagements.³

Thus, while attempting to explain how vital the military account is to the Chinese, Shai also teaches us that the West must become more sensitive to specific battles in order to more fully and accurately portray Chinese history. In this way, Shai seeks to move us closer to Paul Cohen's "China-centered" approach.⁴ With some modifications, I concur with Shai's assessment.

¹ Aron Shai, "Review: Local Wars and the Question of Perspective: The Case of the Sino-Japanese War," *Asian and African Studies* II, no. 2 (Autumn 1976 : 263-270), p.270.

² Hsu Long-hsuen, and Chang Ming-kai Chang. *History of Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945)*, Translated by Wen Ha-hsiung, 2nd ed. (Taipei, Taiwan (ROC): Kuo fang pu. Shih cheng, 1971).

³ Shai, p.269.

⁴ Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China, American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past*, 2nd Edition ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

Historians' treatment of the three-month battle of Shanghai, during the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, as a "complete and sealed event" is a perfect example of his complaint.

Indeed, many historians have presented the conditions of the battle in great detail. Nearly each account describes the desperate fighting of numerically superior but out-gunned Chinese; the errant bombing of the International Settlement; and the never-ending reinforcements of technically advanced yet ruthless Japanese forces. There are views from Nationalists, Japanese, Communists, military observers, journalists, and other witnesses about the war. All of these views are similar in that they don't at all agree on whom started firing on August 13th, 1937; or on why Shanghai was chosen as a battlefield. Furthermore, with some notable exceptions such as the Hsu and Chang compilation, they all lack a tactical perspective.

Many of the accounts written by historians of the Republican period merely allude to relevant circumstances of the battle within a much broader context such as describing the entire war, debating international politics, or justifying a given country's course of action. Authors, seeking to describe the entire war, usually devote a whole chapter to the battle and include a significant amount of detail. Often, those writing brief accounts cite authorities that glance summarily over events, thus perpetuating a kind of circular reporting. Finally, few of these accounts actually satisfy a military analysis as to why the battle occurred the way it did. In all, they fail to *un-seal* the event and get past the superficial wrapping of assumption to the substantive gift of history. Instead, circumstances and statistics are provided, leaving the reader with an impression that the battle of Shanghai was a forgone conclusion, and thus, hardly worth the effort to study.

This paper seeks to probe the tactical conditions of the battle more deeply. In it, I hope to strip the veneer placed over the battle of Shanghai by well-meaning historians, and reveal some aspects of the battle that would cause one to re-think why and how it happened.

For instance, as I reveal that a battle with the Japanese in Shanghai was planned for a long time, some of the assumptions about why it was chosen as a battlefield will fall by the wayside. Instead of a rash decision, often cynically assumed as a desperate ploy to get Western powers into the battle, it may be seen as a legitimate opening move in a yearlong delay operation.

As I show that the battle of Shanghai did not contain surprise for the opposing forces and the opponents were more balanced than heretofore described, we will learn that numbers and firepower play a lesser role in the outcome of the battle than we thought. Instead, we will discover that weather, terrain, and leadership had both combat multiplying and equalizing effects on the forces involved. Though the outcome of this analysis may not contribute materially to the re-telling of the battle, they should serve to remove assumptions and allow a more substantive look at what happened. This then, is the search for history beyond assumptions in an endeavor to first, analyze various accounts of the battle and second, synthesize them into a common picture of the battlefield.

After presenting the historical interpretation from various sources about a given phase of the battle, I will attempt to draw facts from disparate resources together and describe how the battle unfolded. I will then try to provide a revised interpretation that could clarify, contradict or mitigate prevailing judgments. In so doing, I will attempt to highlight battlefield conditions that expand or diminish in importance as tactical analysis is applied.

Finally, a note must be said about the tone of the paper. To study the battle of Shanghai, where there are so many different viewpoints provided, I chose to use military doctrine as a framework to structure my thinking and the vocabulary of the battle. This had to be done in order to evaluate Chinese and Japanese operations against some type of standard from which unbiased judgment could be passed. I chose as my framework, *US Army Field Manual(FM) 100-5*.⁵ The reason I chose this document is that, although written in 1993, it contains principles of war that have been around for centuries. It provides a description of tactical concepts used by military planners not just in the US Army, but held to be true by almost every practitioner of the operational arts. Within the manual are concepts described by Sun Tzu, Napoleon and Clausewitz. Though it contains flaws and is continually being updated, in a small way, it is an active legacy of those same strategies and tactics that informed Chiang and Matsui. Hence, there is a military tone to this paper that I hope the reader will not find distracting.

Granted, non-military readers may find words such as "mobile defense," "center of gravity," "retrograde," and "movement to contact" a little cumbersome. Nevertheless, each of these words has a specific definition and attendant characteristics that assist the military analyst in describing the battlefield. When such a term is invoked, I will attempt to use footnotes to define and analyze the term in accordance with the manual and explain why it is relevant to the discussion.

⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army, (HQDA), *Field Manual 100-5 - Operations* (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 1993).

CHAPTER TWO:
THE ROAD TO WAR

Historical Interpretations – Surprise at Shanghai

In a book written to show that China had long sought an international coalition against Japan, Youli Sun includes a section on the Battle of Shanghai entitled, "Misconceived Campaign at Shanghai." The first words of her account are "After defeats in North China, Chiang decided to take offensive in Shanghai...."⁶ Such a reading can lead one to believe that the decision to carry the war to the Japanese in Shanghai was a quick one, hastily made as Chiang Kai-shek saw that events in the north weren't going his way.

In other descriptions of the battle historians seem to privilege eyewitness accounts of observers who were either unaware or chose to ignore the extensive preparations for a campaign in Shanghai. Hence, one author states, "The outbreak of hostilities in Shanghai... was as much a tragic shock as a moment of fulfillment to the intellectuals."⁷ In this category of interpretation may also be placed accounts of the battle found in the press and in official accounts from both sides that seek to place blame and fix responsibility for the ultimate cause of war. Each side has sought to excuse aggressive action by presenting itself as the guileless victim of a surprise attack.

⁶ Youli Sun, *China and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1931-1941* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993), p. 91.

⁷ Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance and Collaboration, Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.2.

There is also a category of international relations historians, who, while describing ongoing diplomatic overtures for peace in China, express a tone of surprise that hostilities developed to such extent at Shanghai.⁸

Even historians who seek to treat military aspects of the Battle of Shanghai tend to portray a hasty arrival of the conditions for battle. Michael Gibson, remarking on the period of early August, 1937 states, "Once the decision had been made to fight... the decision had to be made how to fight." Although he acknowledges that Chiang chose to move the battle to Shanghai, Gibson presents Chiang's decision to attack the Japanese and drive them out in a seemingly hasty context.⁹

The aforementioned platoon of historians presenting the assumption that the battle of Shanghai was a somehow serendipitous and unexpected event has a wide range of effects on historical analysis of the battle and the war. For instance, the following list of reasons is often given to explain Chiang Kai-shek's apparently quick decision to bring the battle to Shanghai: his belief in cyclical history; his desire to protect industry and economy; his desire for foreign intervention; his appreciation of the terrain; his need to draw Japan away from the north; and even his hope to protect private investments.¹⁰ Yet, the same historians who seek to develop an explanation

⁸ John Hunter Boyle, "Peace Advocacy during the Sino-Japanese Incident." in *China and Japan: Search for Balance Since World War I*, ed. Alvin D. Coox and Hilary Conroy, 245-264 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, Inc., 1978). Additionally, see *China and Japan at War 1937-1945 The Politics of Collaboration*, also by Boyle. One of the most thorough accounts of the diplomatic and military maneuvers between 1931 and 1937 is found in Samuel Wang's Thesis, "The Sino-Japanese War and the American Far Eastern Policy 1931-1941," Ph.D., (Cornell, 1947).

⁹ Michael Richard Gibson, "Chiang Kai-shek's Central Army, 1924-1938," Ph.D., (George Washington University, 1985), pp.379-381.

¹⁰ For a concise list of reasons Chiang may have chosen Shanghai, see: Lloyd Eastman, "Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945," In *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, Vol. 13, Republican China 1912-1949,

for the decision to fight in Shanghai hold that the decision was not in keeping with his national strategy of "trading space for time." They proclaim that it represented violations of Chiang's own strategic principles at best, and an unanticipated strategic tragedy at worst.¹¹ Hence, because of the apparent quickness of the decision and the rapid buildup of combat power, there is a danger that the motivations for choosing to fight in Shanghai will only be examined in context of a rash decision gone terribly wrong.

Similarly, historians covering the Japanese side of the event, while going into great detail concerning failed diplomacy leading to war, also present a picture of a rapid and sudden build-up of forces. Edwin Hoyt, in *Japan's War*, after re-telling the pivotal events leading to the battle provides a single sentence regarding the Japanese reaction and build-up of combat power. "On August 13th the Japanese cabinet authorized the sending of two more divisions of troops from Japan to Shanghai."¹² As do many of the diplomatic accounts, this reading of events presents the reader with an image of a conflicted Japan, uncommitted and unprepared for battle in Shanghai.

Part 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.551. For a very thorough assessment, see Ch'i His-sheng, *Nationalist China at War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), pp.40-49. Bolstering the most cynical reasons for choosing Shanghai, Gerald E. Bunker, in *The Peace Conspiracy*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972) p.34. says, "The shift of fighting to Shanghai indicates a shift of strategy on the part of the Chinese government. From then (August) until the end of the year the primary endeavor was to gain foreign support and intervention." For more political analysis on Chiang Kai-shek and his goals see Keiji Furuya, *Chiang Kai-shek, his Life and Times*, Translated by Chun-ming Chang, Abridged English Edition ed. (New York: St. John's University, 1981). and Pichon Loh, "The Politics of Chiang Kai-Shek," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 25, no. 3 (May 1966: 431-452).

¹¹ Sun, p.91.

¹² Edwin P. Hoyt, *Japan's War, the Great Pacific Conflict* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1986), p.153.

Perhaps the following study of events leading up to the battle, known in military circles as the "Road to War," will re-shape some of the historical perspectives just discussed.

The Road to Battle in Shanghai

Ever since the first battle of Shanghai in 1932, the Chinese had been wary of Japanese designs on the city.¹³ At the conclusion of the battle both sides agreed that neither side would militarily occupy a "neutral zone" that surrounded the city. There is, however, much evidence to indicate that both sides almost immediately set about pushing the limits of the pact, and in some cases defying it completely.

Within the letter, but certainly not the spirit of the agreement, the Japanese established a Marine garrison of nearly 3,000 combatants a full two miles off the coast of the Huangpoo in a salient jutting northward from International Settlement (see Map 1). Japanese assets in Shanghai were considerable indeed. To protect these assets they added military garrisons at either end of the four-mile long stretch of the Hongkew and Yangzepoo portions of the International Settlement they controlled. The Japanese also

¹³ In what was known as the Mukden Incident, the Japanese attacked and occupied Manchuria in September of 1931. The world and China were not at all pleased with this. To take some of the attention away from North China, in January, 1932, the Japanese set up the attack and murder of several of their own monks in Shanghai. Feigning outrage, the Japanese then lodged protest and gave the mayor of Shanghai 24 hours to respond. In opening moves that look remarkable similar to this second battle of Shanghai, the Japanese launched a flotilla and committed troops against the 87th and 88th Chinese Divisions. As the Japanese were unable to encircle or push the Chinese back, the build-up of combat power as well as casualties rose for four months. Sporadic firefights continued until the League of Nations led negotiations for a neutral zone around Shanghai. For more information on the 1932 battle of Shanghai and the trends of Japanese aggression that followed, please see, George Botjer, *A Short History of Nationalist China, 1919-1949* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1979), pp.117-134.

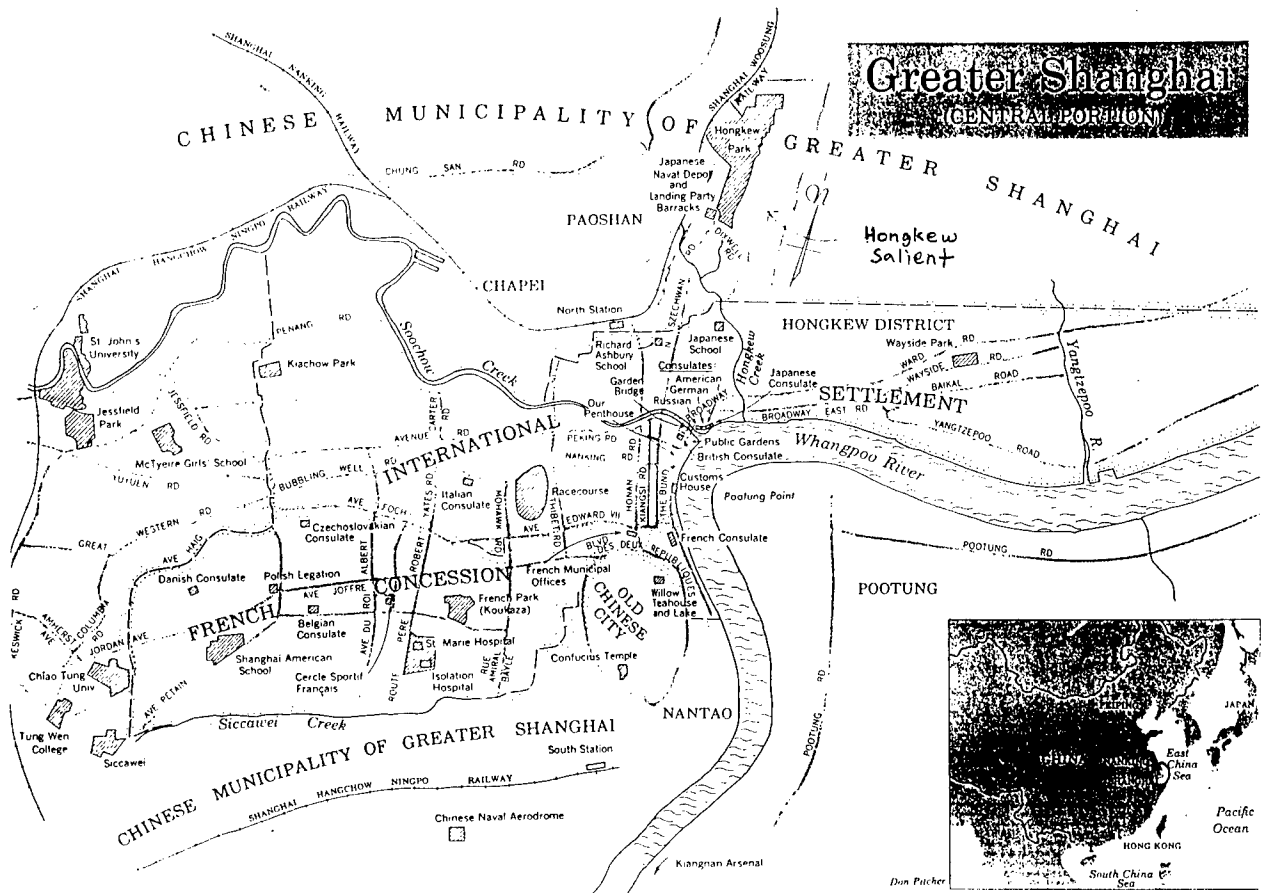
had an area chosen for hasty airfield and artillery positions within their portion of the International Settlement.

Underscoring Japanese preparations was an elaborate system of intelligence that included a series of Japanese aerial surveillance photographs of Chinese defenses taken between 1935 and 12 August 1937. Many of these photographs were of the Shanghai area.¹⁴ Also, during the years since 1932, Japan had established a training center on Formosa for the perfection of amphibious landings. George Botjer wrote that long before hostilities “Japanese preparations for the attack included a massive sea-lift to Tientsin and Tsingtao” (areas from which troops could be committed to Shanghai on short notice). Japan also “used conscript Chinese labor to build new airstrips on the outskirts of these cities. The plan was that the aircraft parked in such places as the erstwhile municipal golf course could be refueled and re-supplied with bombs and bullets from ships docked nearby.”¹⁵

Prior to August 1937, Japan was in the midst of a governmental identity crisis. Just 10 months earlier, there had been a failed military coup. The militarists, who after recent elections gained support of the 37 year old Hirohito, were unique among uniformed forces in the world. Within five years of commissioning, an officer could be considered for the Japanese elite Command and General Staff College. These young officers were given sweeping amounts of responsibilities at a very young age.

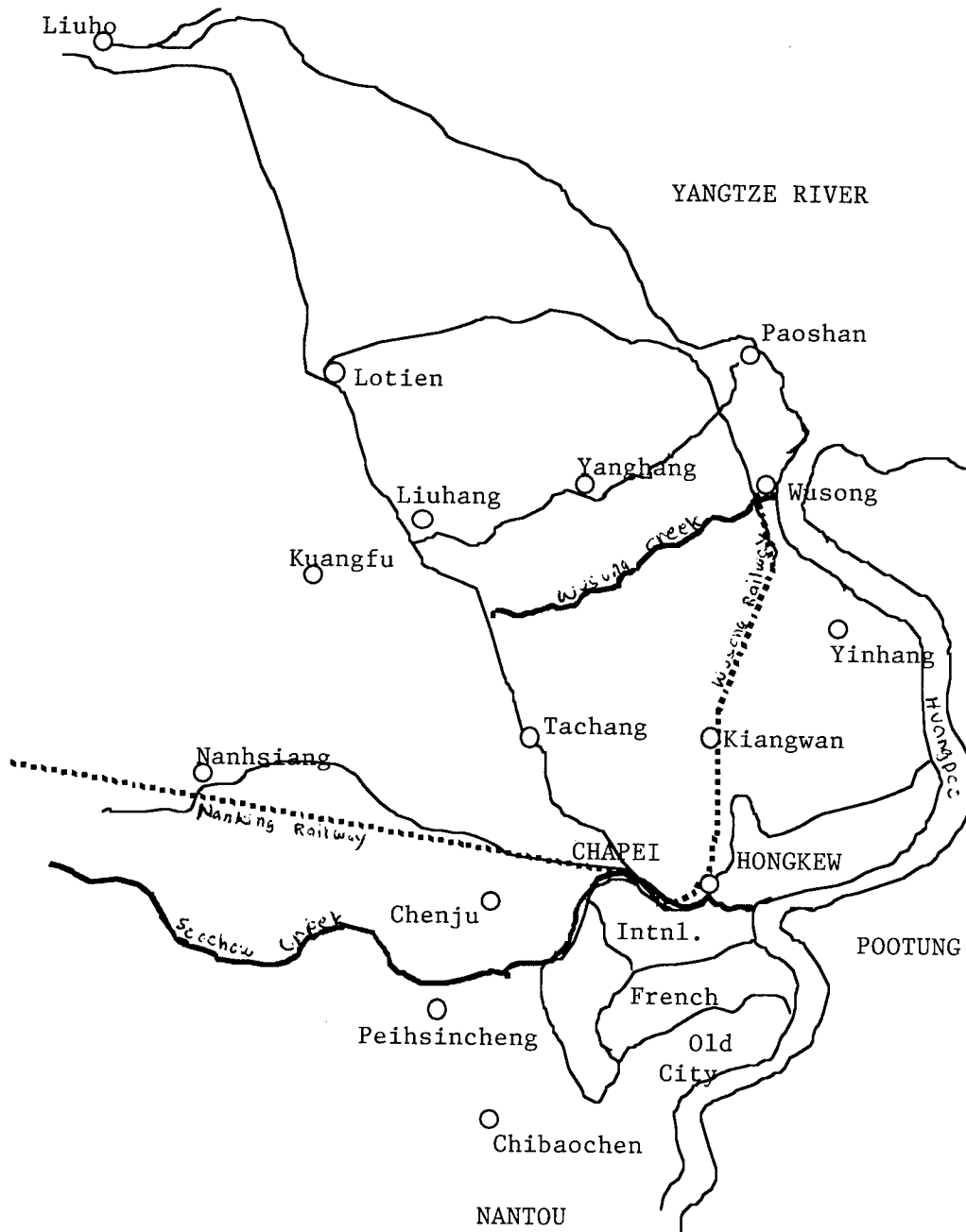
¹⁴ For actual photographs taken by Japanese surveillance flights, see Roy M. Stanley, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982).

¹⁵ Botjer, p.181.



Map 1- Greater Shanghai¹⁶

¹⁶ George Spunt, *A Place in Time* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), frontispiece. Most maps of 1937, including "The New Map of Shanghai, 1937" do not include the "Hongkew salient" as part of the International Settlement. Maps prepared by the League of Nations, however, recognized Japanese Control of the area in 1932. See William Francis Nolan,



Map 2 - Shanghai and Surrounding Area¹⁷

"America's Participation in the Military Defense of Shanghai 1931-1941," Ph.D., (Saint Louis University, 1978), pp.28-30.

¹⁷ Drawn with graphics program by author.

Additionally, the command climate in the Japanese Military was to oppose any government that was not expansionist and militarist in nature. Part of the training curriculum and reading materials circulated among the regular troops was anti-government. If the cabinet didn't support a scheme of military domination, the military would simply circumvent the process and effect their own wishes through the Diet. According to David Lu, it was the Japanese "Cabinet's indecision and the Army's lack of control that pushed the unwanted war into full gear."¹⁸ One further trait of the Japanese military must be mentioned here: it had begun modernizing about forty years before China, and the results were soon to be known.¹⁹

On the Chinese side, starting the winter of 1935, a series of defensive works well within the neutral zone were secretly established. These were, "to annihilate the enemy garrison force in Shanghai by surprise with our numerical superiority when it became clear that war would be inevitable."²⁰ Under the watchful eyes of German advisers, (Colonel Bauer followed by General von Falkenhausen), General Chang Chih-chung ordered the Chinese to build a network of new roads, trenches, pill boxes with dual-purpose guns, and obstacles in a dual maginot-line style covering avenues of approach from Nanking to Shanghai (see Map 2 for area of operations). The German advisers and Generalissimo Chiang felt that forcing the enemy to commit in

¹⁸ David Lu, *From the Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961), p.17. For a very thorough account of the internal situation in Japan prior to the battle please see Parks M Coble, *Facing Japan : Chinese politics and Japanese imperialism, 1931-1937*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991). and James B. Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy, National Security and Foreign Policy 1930-1938*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).

¹⁹ Edgar Snow, E., *Scorched Earth* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD., 1941), p.45.

²⁰ Wei Ju-lin, *History of the Sino-Japanese War*, (Translated by Chang Chi-yün in committee led by LTC William W. Whitson for the US Military Advisory Group, in 2 vols. (Taipei, Taiwan: U.S. Army, 1967), pp.63-68. See Appendix for notes on this source.

more canalizing and restricted terrain would limit enemy mobility, armor, and indirect fire capabilities. The Nationalist Chinese official history states, "Other military measures along the Nanking-Shanghai Railroad included construction of necessary highways in the rear and improvement of means of signal communication and transportation for coast defense." To build this defense, a special trip for military cadre and staff officers was organized to go from place to place and "organize the common people and give them military knowledge for time of war."²¹

To fill the designated structures at a moment's notice, the Chinese stationed the German-trained and equipped 87th Division about 20 minutes by rail from Shanghai at Nanhsiang and points West. That such measures were not developed in other areas indicates that the Chinese had long planned to engage the enemy in terrain of their choosing. Japanese intelligence reported the pre-positioning of at least 3,000 troops of the 36th Division to Nanhsiang, 10 miles away. Chinese soldiers of an unidentified unit also manned a defensive position at the Chapei terminal, directly opposite the Japanese Marine Headquarters.

In addition to the units stationed close to Shanghai was the 20th Independent Brigade commanded by General Ching Sung. Together, the 87th, 88th and the 36th Divisions, these units were frequently referred to as "Chiang's own." The unit commanders had been trained at the Whampoa Military Academy and had all been modernized and equipped by Germany. The central army forces located in the vicinity of Shanghai prior to the battle were among the best Chiang had.²²

²¹ Ibid., p.64.

²² Gibson, p.383.

Once both the Japanese and the Chinese had built up sufficient combat capability in the area, it would take a catalyst of some kind to initiate decisive contact. Both the Japanese and Chinese had a history of trading accusations that the other side arranged pretext for war. Since 1931, a series of alleged kidnappings, murders, or military maneuvers had summoned enough righteous indignation to bring the countries in question to the brink of war. The July 7th Marco Polo bridge incident at Peiking, wherein Japanese and Chinese units clashed as the Japanese held night maneuvers in an area considered by both sides to be neutral terrain was no exception. Only this time, the event occurred after China had decided to fight. After diplomatic machinations of various kinds failed, and after the Chinese central government refused to allow the local government to address the situation, the Japanese attacked and took Peking.²³

The Chinese alleged that in mid-July, the Japanese had been repeatedly driving troops around Shanghai city, as well as holding night operations to the west of the city in hopes of provoking further incidents. But, the Japanese also had complaints to raise.²⁴ One evening, the Japanese claimed that one of their sailors had been abducted. One account says the sailor was eventually found in a brothel, and another says he had deserted and was later found in Hong

²³ Hata Ikuhiko, "The Marco Polo Bridge Incident, 1937," in *The China Quagmire*, ed. James William Morley, 233-286, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), states the Japanese view that since there were no ranking officers involved to maneuver units at the outset of the incident, there is no way it could have been a Japanese conspiracy. If that is true, it makes the Chinese treatment of the event all the more telling of China's early commitment to fight Japan. For a more detailed view of the Chiang's long-term plan to commit to war with the Japanese see James B. Crowley, "A Reconsideration of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident." *The Journal of Asian Studies* XXII, no. 3 (1963): 277-291.

²⁴ For an accounting of the various complaints and diplomatic messages that were transferred among China, Japan and their several allies, see Edward S. Rubinow, *Sino-Japanese warfare and the League of Nations*, (Geneva: Geneva Research Centre, 1938).

Kong and turned over to the Japanese Consulate. In any case, the season was ripe for such provocations. Certainly, many that study the actions and attitudes of the fast-rising, "hot blooded" Japanese officers would accept such claims.

On July 28th, part of the Chinese Peace Preservation Force attacked to the Japanese in North China attacked and killed their Japanese officers and massacred 230 Japanese Civilians. The hostile news from North China and the already aggravated tensions in the area were soon to manifest themselves as violence in Shanghai.

On August 9th, One young Japanese officer Naval Sub-Lieutenant Isao Oyama and his driver were driving near the Hungjao airdrome. In an altercation of some kind members of the Shanghai, Peace Preservation Force killed them. One Chinese soldier was also killed in the incident. United States military reports indicate that it was most likely the Chinese who did all the shooting. Some Chinese however allege that Oyama made himself a martyr so that the Japanese could have pretext for battle. This incident, hotly debated to this day, was the catalyst of the most lengthy and costly battle of the Sino-Japanese War. Four days later, shots were exchanged in Shanghai and the battle commenced.²⁵

Yet, it must be stressed that even weeks before the incident at the airdrome, the escalation of tension on both sides was far from complete. In late July, the Japanese began a wholesale evacuation of their civilians from the Yangtze River Valley. This was ostensibly done because of anti-Japanese

²⁵ C.J. Laval in *Perhaps a Baby Caused It*, in *The Far Eastern Review* (Shanghai: August, 1937) recounts the strange possibility that Lt. Oyama's curiosity was aroused by an unscheduled flight landing in Shanghai. The flight that landed that night carried Stirling Tatum, a flight instructor posted in Hong Kong who was on leave to see his baby born.

sentiment in the area. On August 7th, approximately 2,800 Japanese were escorted in their evacuation by over 30 warships, which made anchor outside Wusong on the 9th of August. Five troop transports accompanied these warships. It will be shown later, that a large portion of those ships and several thousand of the soldiers on the ships would soon be committed in Shanghai. While it has been noted, (especially by Dick Wilson, most Japanese and Communist authors, and some popular press of the day) that the Japanese Army was reluctant to get involved in central China, the Japanese Third Fleet commander in Shanghai requested immediate dispatch of ground forces. Not only was the operation funded, but also the reinforcements were granted in record time.²⁶

Also on the 7th of August, the Chinese responded to the Japanese buildup by dispatching the 20th Independent Brigade, wearing Peace Preservation Force uniforms, to well within the neutral zone. The Japanese "were not fooled by the disguises" and demanded that China remove all military forces, including the *Paoantui* (peace preservation force) from the city.²⁷ As the Chinese pondered the recent non-combatant evacuation of Japanese civilians; the presence of vast naval forces; Japanese insistence of the

²⁶ There seem to be a nearly equal number of accounts that lay blame on the Chinese and the Japanese as the aggressor. Several narratives are emotional eyewitness accounts such as that of Wilfred Chester, *China at Bay* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, 1938), p.154, who blames aggression on jealousy that the Japanese Navy must have had of their Army counterparts up North who were getting all the glory. In the face of this, the Navy at Shanghai was apparently desperate to get into the war. This suspicion is echoed by the Nationalist author, Wu Hsiang-hsiang, "Total Strategy Used by China and some Major Engagements in the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945," In *Nationalist China During the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945*, ed. Paul K.T. Sih, 37-82. (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1977), p.55. Such are the varieties of explanations on why hostilities began and who started them. The "jealous navy" argument dates as far back as 1932.

²⁷ Gibson.p.382. Gibson's footnotes reveal a remarkable difference in accounts, as the official KMT histories (the Wei and Hsu accounts) don't place the 20th Brigade at Shanghai until after The 20th of August.

withdrawal of all Chinese military from Shanghai; and an earlier demand that the Chinese stop all flights over Shanghai, they increased their vigilance. Whether they were right or wrong was no longer significant. It appeared to the Chinese that the threat of imminent invasion that had prompted the preparation of hardened defenses in the area since 1935 was now a reality.²⁸

For the Japanese side the buildup of local combat power and the emergence of unity of command unprecedented for China presented serious concern as well. Generals from all over China, even those who had been estranged from the Generalissimo for years, were arriving in Nanking to swear allegiance and place their troops under his command. "Chiang told a gathering of China's military, political and intellectual leaders that any more concessions to the Japanese would only lead to total surrender, and declared that China must be prepared to sacrifice and fight to the end unless Japan was willing to resort to the status quo as of July 7, 1937. With these words the stage for a total war was set."²⁹

The Chinese dismantled all navigation signs off the coast of the Yangtze and blocked the waterway at Chiangyin. Even the contents of the national museum of the Civic Center in Kiangwan were transferred to the interior for safety. Japanese intelligence recounts that for months, many forces had been secreted into the region during night maneuvers of the 36th, 87th, and 88th

²⁸ That the evacuation of civilians are, indeed, cause for concern, I cite the juxtaposition of the evacuation of civilians to the presence of the Japanese fleet as described by T.A. Bisson, in *Japan in China*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p.280. Bisson's opinion is contradictory to Dick Wilson, *When Tigers Fight* (New York: The Viking Press, 1982), p.33. who thinks that a NEO meant the Japanese wanted to avoid a fight. Military analysts will uniformly side with Bisson on this issue. (Additionally, Bisson has a comprehensive page on the positioning of troops in early August preparatory to engaging Japan in the Wusong-Shanghai area of operations.)

²⁹ Ch'i, p.41.

Divisions. Japanese propaganda asserts that "the Chinese went about this game in a very interesting manner.

In the course of these "maneuvers" the soldiers would cast off their uniforms, slip into plain clothes and, after the exercises were over, remain at certain appointed places. ... It was easy to conceal arms and ammunition in this manner, but it was not easy – in fact it was impossible – to conceal the identify of the men. They did not speak the local dialect, and on every forehead was an identical tell-tale difference of color, lighter above the brows than the lower section of the face, a clear indication that the headgear they were accustomed to wear was a cap – a soldier's cap.³⁰

Apart from such sensationalistic accounts, the same Japanese propaganda piece claims numbers to support its contention. Within the demilitarized zone were already 3,000 members of the Public Security Force, 2,000 regulars in Chapei, 1,000 in Kiangwan, 400 w/ armored cars in Tachang and 2,000 others near by.³¹ Japanese investigations revealed trenches and numerous gun lines linking the defense of the city. As the battle later developed, Japanese claims were verified. The locations given by the Japanese propaganda for the Chinese forward line of troops matched the locations of stiffest resistance to the Japanese advance. Hence, the propaganda piece was correct in its assessment of Chinese preparations.

From this point conditions for war quickly occurred:

August 7th Chiang Kai-shek and his top advisors formally determine to wage an all out war of resistance. All Chinese nationals were evacuated from Japan.

³⁰ The Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, "Why the Fighting in Shanghai." (Tokyo: 1937), p.14. Interestingly, this exact wording is found in the September-October, 1937 edition of the Far Eastern Review published in Shanghai. The article has no by-line and could suggest that Japanese propaganda was infiltrating foreign press during the battle.

³¹ Gibson, p.382. This accusation appears to be supported by Chinese officers such as Chang Po-t'ing, Chief of Staff of the 88th Division who admits that his 523rd Regiment was in the city by August 8th.

- August 8th Japanese evacuation of Hongkow completed.
- August 9th General Tsai Ting-kai arrives in Shanghai and calls on all men to come fight alien aggression under China's highest command. Japanese ships arrive off Wusong. Oyama is shot at airdrome.
- August 10th Investigation of the Oyama incident.
- August 11th Japanese demand withdrawal of the Peace Preservation Force and dismantling of all defense works *vic.* Shanghai. Changchihchung ordered to "push forward to the pre-determined line of siege in Shanghai with the 36th, 87th, and 88th Divisions." 22 Japanese warships and 5 transports leave Wusong and steam down to Shanghai bringing the strength of the Japanese Naval Landing Force to 9,000.
- August 12th Chinese blockade the Huangpoo south of French Concession by sinking steamers and large junks.³² Members of the international community are told to stay inside. This was the last day of considerable peace for the next three months. The municipal government was moved from offices near Kiangwan to an office adjoining the French Sector. Chinese Regulars were seen outside the city improving fighting positions. Chinese military officials sent the Japanese an ultimatum to depart neutral zone areas by 4:00 P.M. on the 13th of August or else they would be attacked.³³

The next day, August 13th, would mark the official commencement of hostilities. Yet, Gibson points out, "The August 13th date used by subsequent KMT historians to date the beginning of the fighting obscures the presence of the 20th Brigade in the city earlier."³⁴ In any case, the road had led to war. See Map 3 for the Chinese perspective of the disposition of forces on the eve of battle.

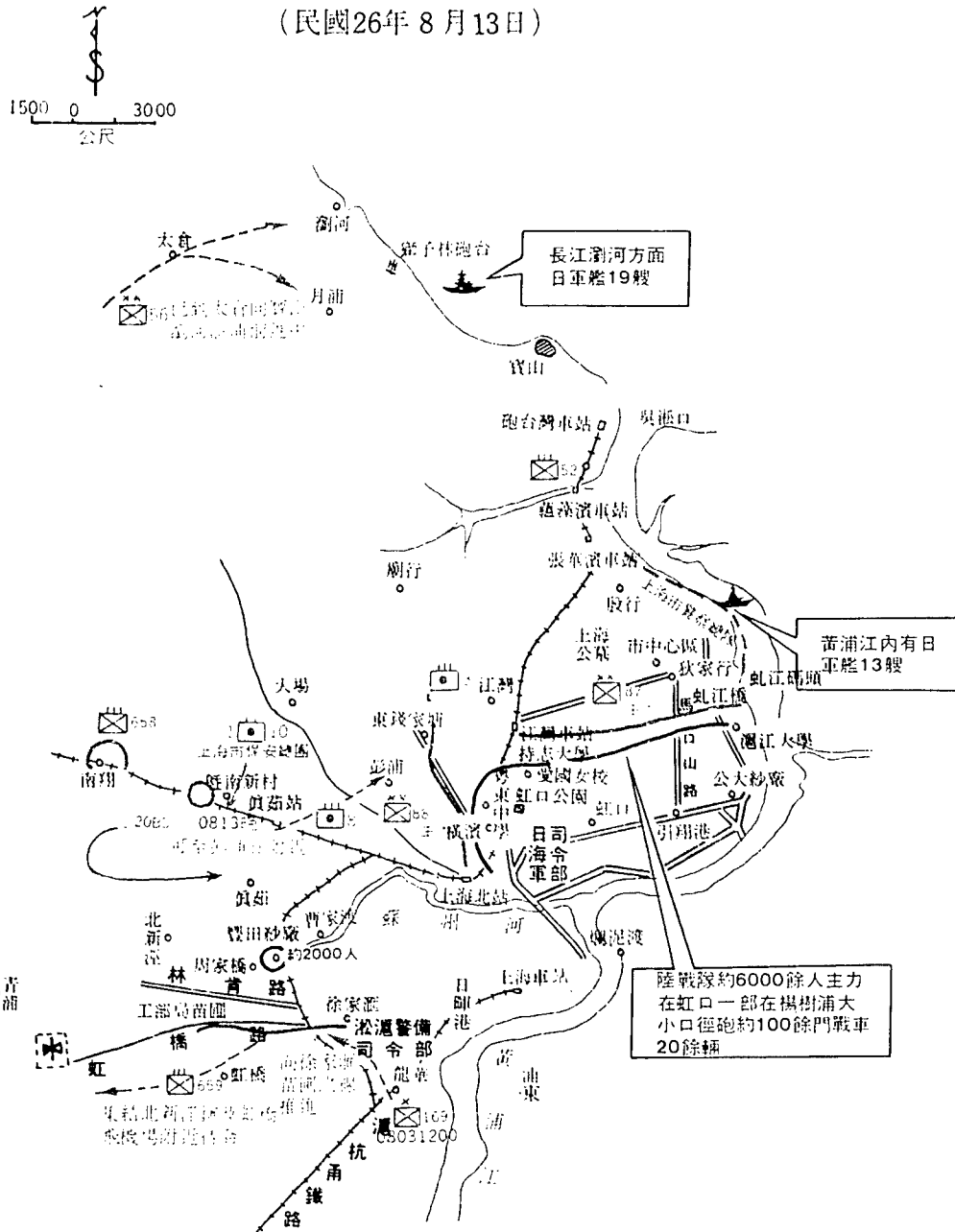
³² According to Wang Kuang, *Water Transportation during the Sino-Japanese War* (Taipei, Taiwan: China Maritime Institute, 1967). It took at least 51 large ships to accomplish this feat. Some were commandeered from the foreign settlements.

³³ J.D. Davidson-Houston, *Yellow Creek, The Story of Shanghai*, (London: Putnam, 1962), p.146.

³⁴ Gibson, p.382.

附圖 3 淞滬會戰國軍攻勢前雙方態勢要圖

(民國26年 8月13日)



Map 3 – Disposition of Forces on the Eve of Battle – 13 August 1937³⁵

³⁵ Chiang Wei-kuo, ed. *Kang Jih yü wu*. Vol. 3,5. (T ai-pei: Li ming wen hua shih yeh kung ssu, 1978), Map #3.

Revised Interpretation – A Deliberate Battle

The foregoing “road to war” presents a picture not often portrayed in many accounts of the battle. The battle of Shanghai is usually portrayed as a fluke of circumstance unshaped by the years of specific preparation leading to this very battlefield. Given statements about the use of terrain to restrict the movements of Japanese armor and judging from the momentum of years of planning and infrastructure development it is no surprise that Chiang committed to fight in this location. Nevertheless, there are many accounts that approach his decision to fight in the region as reactionary and rash.³⁶

I argue that while the calculus of battle is often random, the planning and pre-configuring of this particular battlefield, especially by the Chinese, betrays a somewhat contrary story. What is missing in many accounts of this battle is the nearly yearlong build up and planning for it. Once plans were laid and complex defenses were established or refurbished from the 1932 war, battle in the Shanghai became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although both the Lukouchiao and Oyama incidents make the Japanese appear conciliatory and unprepared for such events, the thousands of deployable soldiers and tons of

³⁶ For discussions on the various reasons Chiang may have had for allowing Shanghai to be a theater of operations, please see: Ch'i, p.45-49.; Y.C. Chiang, *Chiang Kai-shek's Fundamental Guideline for China's War efforts during the Sino-Japanese War: Resist to the Last and Fight to the Bitter End*. (Chinese Studies in History, 1986. XXI(3)), pp. 23-49.; Fei, and Li, *Discussions on Strategic Guiding Policies of the Guomindang and the Communist Part and their Mutual Relations during the War of Resistance Against Japan* (Republican China, 1989. IXV(2)), pp. 56-73.; Snow, *Scorched Earth*, p.59.; and Wu, pp.37-82. The argument not only splits along political lines, but military lines as well. One example of the debate in play is Wilson, p.33. who asserts, contrary to many, that the Japanese wanted to avoid war in Shanghai. Most do agree, however, that Chiang desired, prepared for and precipitated a face-off in the area. Of interest is that at the time, two of Chiang's most loyal commanders disagreed with the tactic to fight at Shanghai, while one of his most ardent critics supported it. Gibson, p.381 (footnote #16).

ordinance they had at the ready indicate otherwise. This was not a chance or serendipitous encounter easily avoided by diplomatic appeasement.

The above account mentions that between twenty and thirty thousand Chinese troops infiltrated Shanghai in the space of two days. Such movement cannot be accomplished without careful and deliberate planning. The very fact that it was surprising to the Japanese indicates that it should not be surprising to us. There was nothing sudden about the battle of Shanghai.³⁷

It must be remembered that in both Chinese and Japanese cases, the military arm of government was in charge. After such lengthy preparations had been made, troops had been deployed, and egos had been stirred, the only thing remarkable about the timing of this battle is that it didn't happen sooner. Although I don't deny that there was a process culminating at a point prompting the Chinese to go to battle with the Japanese, I assert that the decision to make a stand at Shanghai was a deliberate and measured one.

³⁷ Martin H. Brice in *The Royal Navy and the Sino-Japanese Incident 1937-41*. (London: Ian Allan, 1973) p.36. points out that "Shanghai would obviously be the next centre of tension" and the Royal navy adjusted accordingly.

CHAPTER THREE:
CHINA ON THE OFFENSIVE (AUGUST 13-23, 1937)³⁸

Historical Interpretations – Excuses for Failure

Caught off Guard

The idea that the battle of Shanghai was spontaneous gives flavor to the accounts of the battle. Historians and apologists have both invoked the idea that the unfolding of events was somehow unanticipated and thus led to dire and tragic circumstances. Hence, the two conditions most often cited as key players in the outcome of the offensive battle are surprise and Japanese firepower.

Those who hold that it was the Chinese who surprised the Japanese use language describing how hastily Japan had to react to the crisis. For instance, the *Cambridge History of China* includes the following: "The Japanese in their sector of the city ... were caught by surprise, and they rushed in reinforcements."³⁹ Referring to the events of mid-August, Hoyt states, "That night the Chinese National Defense Counsel ordered three divisions up to Shanghai to attack the Japanese."⁴⁰ Additionally, Edward Dryer, citing Crowley indicates that the "escalation of the fighting around Shanghai from 14 August surprised the Kone cabinet and the top echelons of the Imperial Army and Imperial Navy echelons."⁴¹

³⁸ The purposes of the initial Chinese operations in Shanghai were to seize, retain and exploit the initiative. This is the definition of "Offense" in military doctrine. HQDA, p.7-0.

³⁹ Eastman, p.551.

⁴⁰ Hoyt, p.152.

⁴¹ Edward L. Dryer, *China at War, 1940-1949* (London: Longman, 1995), p.216. One big problem with Dryer's account is that he states that on the 13th of August, two divisions under

On the other hand, those who hold that Japan surprised China often describe how China quickly sent entire divisions to the scene to react to the Japanese threat. For instance, Dick Wilson indicates that, "Jiang rushed four divisions of his crack First Army Corps together with an artillery brigade, into Shanghai the moment that fighting broke out."⁴² From the language of these accounts it would appear that surprise was a major player in the initial days of the Battle of Shanghai.

In any case, surprise is billed as a major player in most versions of the battle. It is usually used as an agent to cast one nation as the offender and the other as the offended.

Common Wartime Scapegoats

Additionally, some writers use typical wartime scapegoats such as firepower, tactical expertise or loss of will to explain reasons the Chinese offensive was stalled within two weeks of its start. Authors, usually in Chinese Nationalist accounts, especially tend to reflect the superiority of enemy firepower as predominant cause for failure at Shanghai.

The following accounts of the period 19 to 21 August is typical:

The Japanese continued to send in reinforcements and their naval gunfire and planes coordinated in their actions to hold firmly their positions; however our forces lacked powerful armor piercing weapons, and could not effectively neutralize the enemy ships and clear street obstacles. Hence, the advance was delayed.⁴³

General Matsui disembarked at Shanghai (p.217). As the paper will show, these units didn't arrive until the 21st-23rd of August.

⁴² Wilson, p.33.

⁴³ Hsu, p.203. One reason they were able to do this was because the American Consulate General was able to ensure that throughout the battle, both Japanese and Chinese forces would repair and maintain navigation signals along the Huangpoo and Yangtze. See the series of telegrams between Japan, Shanghai, the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Nanking and

In another example, the official Chinese account states:

Lacking an artillery force, we were unable to destroy the enemy defensive work and annihilate the enemy."⁴⁴ "Despite repeated local attacks, our firepower was inadequate and enemy reinforcement poured in steadily. In time, the situation again became a stalemate."⁴⁵

However, the point here is that it is not only Chinese historians who have perhaps over-stated the impact of Japanese firepower. Their interpretations, along with those of the press and many eyewitnesses place Japanese firepower at center-stage as the reason for the Chinese offensive loss. For instance, Bisson relates that enemy firepower prevented "consolidation of forces" on the 23rd of August. He comments, "At times during this period, Chinese troops pushed well into the Japanese lines, but were unable to consolidate their advances owing to the heavy shelling from the Japanese naval vessels."⁴⁶

Besides pointing to superior firepower and numbers as the Chinese do, Frank Dorn, former assistant military attaché recorded, "On August 13, elements of the 88th Division clashed with Japanese troops in the Chapei-Kiangwan area near the North Station. Both sides suffered some casualties, but neither was in a mood to continue the fight at the time."⁴⁷

Disappointed by the performance of the Chinese in what he thought was to be a key point in the battle, Colonel Stilwell recorded:

Washington DC in U.S. State Department, *Confidential U.S. Diplomatic Post Records*. (Shanghai: U.S. Consular General, 1937). This collection also includes State Department's first blush on the Lieutenant Oyama incident.

⁴⁴ Wei, p. 65.

⁴⁵ Hsu, p.205.

⁴⁶ Bisson, p.282.

⁴⁷ Frank Dorn, *The Sino-Japanese War, 1937-41, From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p.69. Dorn's is the most widely studied account of the battle.

The northern and eastern boundaries of Hongkew have not been seriously attacked; the reason is unknown, because the Chinese, by attacking from the east, north of the Yangzepoo area, could have taken the Hongkew area under fire from both the front and the rear. East of Hongkew, the Chinese attacked due south against the Japanese positions which extended roughly along the north boundary of the Settlement. Quick action by the Chinese was indicated, with all the strength they could muster, since the Japanese naval landing party was sure to be heavily reinforced. However, the Chinese did not at once throw in enough troops to break down the resistance; the Japanese held on; and as time went by the chances for Chinese success dwindled.⁴⁸

He later added:

Penetration was enlarged somewhat on succeeding days, but the impetus was quickly lost, and the high-water mark of their effort was past. Elsewhere on the Yangzepoo front the Chinese made small gains, but a breakthrough at the river was never threatened at any other point.⁴⁹

While I completely endorse the Colonel Stilwell's assessment of the outcome, the tone of these military reports seems to indicate only that the numerous Chinese forces suffered from a loss of will and failure to coordinate simple military efforts. Combined with the official Chinese accounts, such reports reflect the Chinese Central Army at Shanghai as a battle-weary force, neither tactically nor technically sufficient to win in the attack.

In summary, many historical accounts of the initial Chinese offensive hold that the Chinese and the Japanese were surprised by the turn of events and thus crisis-managed their units to battle. They also indicate that the predominant causes for Chinese failure in the offense were lack of firepower, will, and tactical expertise. Perhaps revisiting the Chinese offensive from a

⁴⁸ Joseph Stilwell, *Situation Reports*, Restricted Military Intelligence Reports from the Military Attaché to the War Department #9579-9611 (Nanking, Shanghai: 1937), Report #9588, p.1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.2

tactical perspective will reveal a somewhat different, if not enhanced explanation.

The Chinese Offensive

The arrival of the Japanese Fleet on 11-13 August brought the city of Shanghai to a general panic. In what the North China Herald described as the biggest exodus in the history of Shanghai, countless thousands of refugees began attempting to flee the city to the south. Many, remembering the war just five years earlier, hastily grabbed a few belongings and joined a teeming throng of hopeful passengers seeking seats on trains to anywhere but Shanghai.⁵⁰ It was 90 degrees in the shade and a remarkably humid week. A typhoon was expected as well. In these crowded and miserable conditions, soldiers stood at the ready in heavy helmets and combat gear.⁵¹

At approximately 9:00 A.M. on the morning of the 13th, the first shots were fired. From a building near the Wusong rail terminal in Chapei, sniper and machinegun rounds were fired across the tracks at the Japanese. Throughout the day until 4:30 P.M., intermittent sniper fire was heard around Chapei, Hongkew and Yangzepoo. The Japanese organized search parties and began house-to-house searches in Chapei to try and unseat the alleged snipers. Two Japanese ships, moored on the other side of the Huangpoo, began shelling Shanghai University and the Civic Center. (A military interpretation could be that these were soon to become infantry objectives for

⁵⁰ For a detailed account of the plight of the refugees see Edna Lee Booker, *News is My Job*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1940), pp.293-303.

⁵¹ "Thousands Jam Many Roads to the Settlement," *The North China Herald*, 18 August 1937. Thus, on these first few days of war, the refugee population was at its most dense in the same locations that the fiercest fighting and bombing would take place.

Japanese reinforcements.) Several small-unit engagements in Chapei led to three destroyed bridges and further accusations from both sides about who really started matters. After what appeared to be a break for lunch, more Chinese sniper fire was alleged to be coming from Chih Chih University to the West of the Japanese controlled Hongkew salient. The Japanese attacked and held the university. Trains on the Nanking-Shanghai line were held up for 8 hours in support of incoming Chinese reinforcements. Nationalist historians relate that on the 13th, the Japanese attacked security elements of the 87th and 88th division throughout the Japanese defensive sector.

Here, an important tactical observation must be inserted. By the evening of the 13th, the Chinese 87th Division was oriented eastward against the river. The 88th was oriented to the west of the Hongkew salient, also facing east. The official history recounts that on the 13th "Our forces continued the advance." As referred to in the previous paragraph 'advance' indicates "pushing toward a pre-determined line of siege." Another official Chinese historian recounts, "Told that cleaning up the enemy base in Shanghai was the objective, we decided to stage an offensive action against the enemy Marine Corps HQ. The zone of attack was from Yangzepoo to Hongkew Park."⁵² Thus, only units from the 88th Division, or units not heretofore mentioned in the accounts could have been available for the westward attack. Since the account goes on to describe losses of specific unit commanders in the exploits of the day, one can conclude that it is fairly complete. Hence, to confirm Stilwell's assessment, it may be accurate to suggest that the Hongkew salient was never attacked from the east.

⁵² Wei, p.65; and Hsu, p.203.

The 13th of August was equally eventful at the national/strategic level. On that morning, Emperor Hirohito held an interview with General Matsui and directed him to lead the Japanese 6th and 11th Divisions against the Chinese as the Shanghai Expeditionary Force. That afternoon, Matsui remarked that the objective at Shanghai would not be met unless he pushed all the way to Nanking.⁵³ Later that night, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek issued the order to launch the "general offensive" at dawn on August 14th.

Almost poetically, on October 13th at 4:00 P.M. torrential rains announced the coming of a great typhoon due to hit Shanghai the next day. Fortunately, the rain put out some of the fires in Chapei and points northward. From midnight to 4:00 A.M., bombing and artillery preparation fire from both sides continued ceaselessly. Both sides were using mortars with effective ranges between one-half and three kilometers. They were also using towed howitzers ranging from 70 to 150mm. Many of these guns weighed upwards of 6,100lbs and could fire an 80-pound round almost seven miles. Hence, both sides were always within range of indirect fire, but units on the move (offensive or retrograde) would have a difficulty employing such assets.⁵⁴ That evening, members of the Chinese 88th Division launched a westward attack and re-took Chih Chih University.

During Saturday, the 14th, the Chinese 55th Division attempted to secure the opposite side of the Huangpoo so it could fire into the Japan's rear-area and artillery. Fire from Japanese naval guns suppressed this effort. Japanese

⁵³ A very detailed account on the enlistment of Matsui for this task is found in David Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971), pp.7-10.

⁵⁴ For a thorough description of the weaponry and the organization of both opposing forces see Stanley, pp.27-94.

reinforcements (up to "two divisions") were committed in great numbers against the Chinese who were already fighting from "house to house." The Generalissimo's order for a general offensive notwithstanding, it does not appear that the Chinese made any decisive push to engage the Japanese.

One reason for the possible reduction in the tempo of operations is that one of the most severe typhoons to ever hit Shanghai ripped through the area the morning of the 14th. From Chinese operational maps and the commencement of offensive action indicated on the 16th, it is clear that the 87th and 88th were waiting for reinforcements from the 36th and possibly the 98th Division before continuing the attack. On the afternoon of the 14th during two different air strikes, the Chinese airforce, attempting to bomb the Japanese flagship *Idzumo*, hit the International Settlement instead. As the area was crowded with refugees, nearly 1,200 people including many foreigners were killed. Every single account, (except those of the Chinese,) contains reportage of this tragic event known as "Bloody Saturday."⁵⁵

On the 15th, in retaliation, the Japanese refused to move the *Idzumo* away from the International Settlement and bombed many other Chinese cities including Nanking and Hongkew. The coordination of these efforts was remarkable in that each of three cities reported bombings at 2:00, 2:20, and

⁵⁵ Many eyewitness accounts detail the horrors of this event. Not only do the press and academic histories lament the event, but also autobiographical memoirs of many of the expatriots in the International Settlement contain remarkable details. The cause of the disaster has been attributed to a variety of reasons ranging from pilot error, to weather to, (as Madam Chiang suggested) Japanese anti-aircraft damage to bomb racks on the planes. For a very poignant account of a wedding held on the day of the bombing, see George Spunt, *A Place in Time* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), pp.351-355. See also the account of Percy Finch, *Shanghai and Beyond*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp.253-257. who was actually in the Palace Hotel when it was bombed. A similarly gripping account is found in the arrogant memoir of Harrison Forman, *Horizon Hunter, The Adventures of a Modern Marco Polo* (New York: National Travel Club, 1940), pp.187-199.

2:40 in the afternoon. The Japanese airforce, in about 20 sorties, bombed Chinese defenses outside the city. In the rains that continued throughout the day, a few Chinese planes attempted raids on the Idzumo again but failed. A curfew was issued and foreign women and children were ordered to evacuate the settlement. On this day, the 3rd and 11th Japanese Divisions, encompassing the Shanghai Expeditionary force departed Japan.

Many press reports were primarily concerned with mutually destructive bombings initiated by the Chinese and the Japanese from the 14th to the 19th of August. According to Colonel Stilwell's restricted report, the only change in the ground situation was that "the Chinese made gains at two points along the north boundary of the International Settlement east of Hongkew; they were later pushed back at one of these points. West of Hongkew, the positions were unchanged, and the Chinese appeared to have lost their chance for a quick decision, in view of the fact that Japanese army units were beginning to reach the scene."⁵⁶ The Chinese account of the period refers to a trading of attacks and counter-attacks on small objectives throughout the city.⁵⁷

On the 20th, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's operational guidance and task organization for battle was promulgated:

With the consolidation of the national's capital and the maintenance of economic resources as its objectives, the 3rd War

⁵⁶ Stilwell, Report #9584, p.4. Note that contrary to the report placing the 36th Division in reserve at Nansiang, Chinese operations maps indicate that the main effort into the settlement was led with the 36th Division. Later in the battle, Stilwell makes other clerical errors that confuse the identity of the 1st and 10th Divisions and places the 36th instead of the 56th Division across the river in Pootung. Hence, one must be careful to verify, confirm or deny all sources of operational reportage.

⁵⁷ John B. Powell, *My Twenty-Five Years in China* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1945), pp.302-304. tells the story of how a telegram from the visiting Eleanor Roosevelt prevailed upon the Japanese to finally move the *Idzumo*.

Area will swiftly destroy the enemy in the vicinity of Shanghai and break the enemy attempt to land along the coast." In the Wusong-Shanghai Siege Area, troops were to "Improve the defense works of the existing key localities. Attack gradually so as to reduce the size of the enemy's defense circle, prevent his reinforcements from increasing and achieve the aim of destroying the enemy. At the same time, construct defense works ... in order to consolidate the basis of the siege.⁵⁸

The above is included to give the reader a flavor of the type of guidance that was issued from the Chinese central command. With the order received, the Chinese used all their moments up to the 21st to reconsolidate their forces. On the 21st the Chinese continued the attack. Perhaps an anecdotal account of what happened to the 36th Division from August 18th to the 21st may be helpful to understanding the situation.⁵⁹ Under the command of Brigadier General Sung His-lien, The 36th ID (Infantry Division), along with the 87th and the 88th Infantry Divisions had taken up attack positions as part of Operation Iron Fist preparatory to attacking the Japanese settlement in Shanghai. After a few days of intermittent fighting, word was received that Generalissimo Chiang ordered the launch of general offensive operations. General Sung deployed his troops the best he could. At dawn on the 14th, fighting had been slow and uncoordinated. There was no unifying plan of attack. The 36th didn't appear to have any objective and had to wait for the disposition of the two forward divisions to be established. As of August 19th, Sung's primary units were still located in the vicinity of Kiangwan, 5 kilometers from the battle. It would not be until the 23rd that General Sung

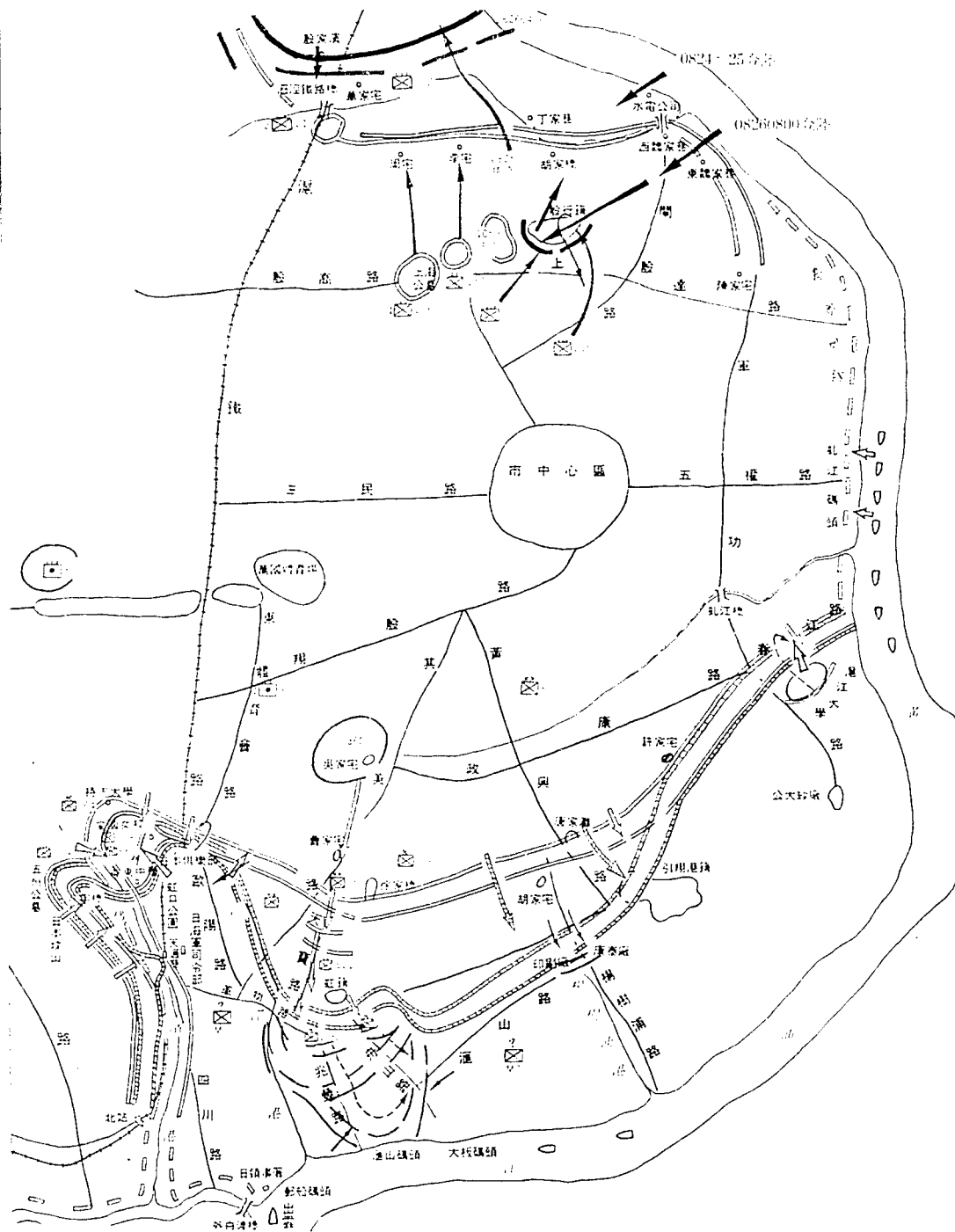
⁵⁸ Hsu, p.203-20.

⁵⁹ The 36th Division was destroyed in 1933 during the first Sino-Japanese war. After 1935 it was reconstituted and placed with the 87th and 88th Divisions (formerly the 1st and 2nd Guard Divisions) under Whampoa Military Academy Graduate and Nanking military elite, Chang Chih-chung. The 36th Division was destroyed completely by December 1937. (See Gibson, p.532.) This account of the possible movements of the 36th is the result of a synthesis of many different reports on the battle. A similar account could be derived for most units upon study of Chinese operational maps and various sources available.

would receive specific guidance and a task organization for battle. Even so, there they were – attacking.

To his right and left, the 87th and 88th Divisions respectively, suffered a similar situation. Both the 87th and 88th were considered by some to be the best units Nanking had to offer. They had both fought very successfully in Shanghai in 1932. Sung's men fought from house to house engaged in urban warfare against an enemy that was easily concealed and very well trained. The Japanese had already established a thorough defense with interlocking fields of fire. The defending enemy had years to drill and improve upon the defense of their settlement. Perhaps since the debacle in 1932, the Japanese refused ever to lose face in Shanghai again. Sung's soldiers were weighed down with uniforms and equipment wet from recent rains. Thus, he watched as the urban environment and the enemy defense, together with exhaustion and wet clothes, slowly robbed his troops of their motivation.

At this moment, one of the conditions General Sung had to come to terms with was maneuver space. Generalissimo Chiang had told his divisions to attack the Japanese Settlement. The closer they got, the more restricted their area of maneuver became. Thus, three divisions were converging under fire against a front no more than 6 miles wide. The Soochow Creek along with the border of the International Settlement formed a boundary on the right and the Huangpoo formed a boundary on the left. What is more, during their entire advance they were vulnerable to severe indirect fire from Japanese war-ships berthed on the river. The solution was to send the 88th to the west of the Nanking railway. The 87th would go to the extreme right, face the river and orient generally east/southeast. The 36th meanwhile, would be responsible for the main attack from Kiangwan in the center. (See Map 4)



Map 4 - Chinese Operations - 13 - 28 August 1937⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Chiang, *Kang Jih yü wu*, Map #5. The smaller battalion and brigade size elements to the north of the 36th Division belong to the 87th and 52nd Brigades; to the east, the 88th. Notice the arrows marking the main axis of advance for the 36th bypassing the Honkew Salient.

Meanwhile, the Inspector General for customs in Shanghai recounts his curiosity that the Chinese never requested, or even attempted a request to cross through the rented international district and effect an attack from the south-west thereby surrounding the Japanese. In view of the point that several trucks of reconnaissance troops were turned back from the U.S. sector, General Sung may have considered the advantage of disrupting the foreigners security for this particular purpose.⁶¹ But this part of the settlement was in the 88th Division's zone of attack and General Sung was powerless to effect it.

As a result of such constrained maneuver conditions, Major Li, Sung's forward battalion commander must have been anxious for an opportunity to advance quickly into some defined maneuver space. The advance seemed to slow in a line that started at the foreign concessions and bisected Chapei near the North Railway station. As infantry soldiers, they knew that to slow down or to stop under these circumstances meant to be targeted by indirect fire. According to some accounts, the two most notable advances in the line were dead center and to the east of the Hongkew salient, (on the 19th, the intersections of Haining and North Szechwan Roads and on the 20th, slightly to the east at the Wayside Police Station). Hence, subsequent reports and the Chinese operational map support the theory that the 36th Division followed Gee Mae Road as their axis of advance all the way into the settlement and made contact with the enemy head on. They never turned west to hit the

⁶¹ Frederick Maze, "Some Notes on the Japanese Hostilities at Shanghai, August to October, 1937" in "The Papers of Sir Frederick Maze relating to the Chinese Maritime Customs Service.", 1937. 17 pages, dtd. 7 October 1937. For detailed descriptions of how members of the International Settlement conducted the defense of their boundaries see General W. M. Greene, "China Service 1937-1939, Shanghai 1937," *Marine Corps Gazette* 49, no. 11 (1965): 62-63. and William Francis Nolan, "America's Participation in the Military Defense of Shanghai 1931-1941," Ph.D., (Saint Louis University, 1978).

salient at its weaker points, as that would have exposed their flank to the Japanese defense oriented northward. Thus, as he was well forward of friendly flank support, Sung's attack would place him at great risk no matter how he proceeded.

On August 19th, the vanguard of the Japanese Reinforcements dispatched six days earlier began to arrive. Some transports went beyond Wusong up the Yangtze to begin an attempt to roll up the Chinese left flank. Others landed at Shanghai. Though the accounts vary widely on how many troops actually landed that day, the Japanese had no doubt that they could push the Chinese out of the settlement and hold their positions.

Even so, on August 21st Sung commenced the attack. This he did with some notable success. After penetrating the Japanese portion of the International Settlement, Sung practically bypassed the settlement in favor of a grander objective, the Japanese Hui Shan wharves.

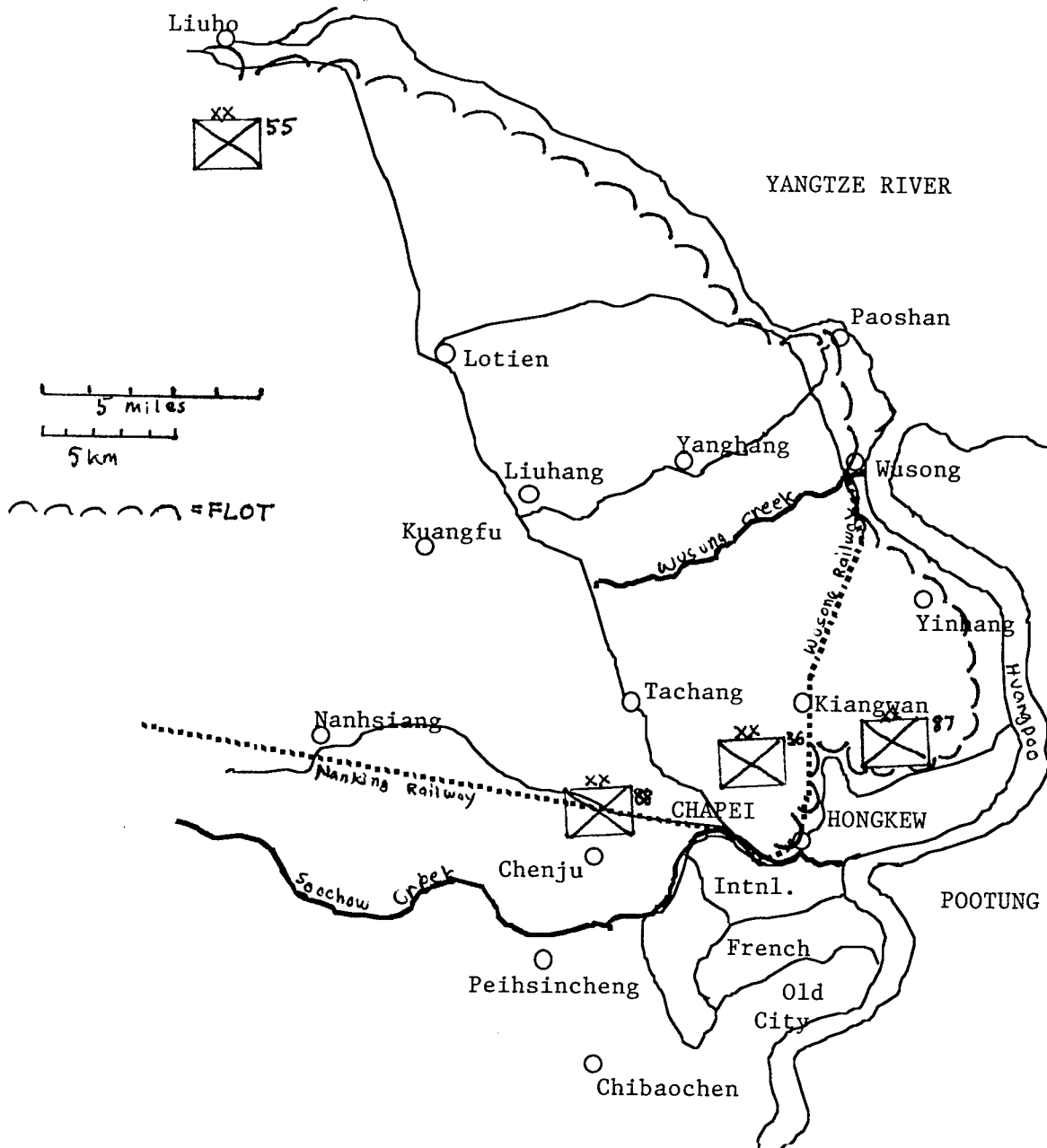
Accounts differ in how much progress he made. The most conservative estimate places the 36th about halfway between the settlement boundary and the Huangpoo. The Chinese account describes the terrible battle faced by Major Li's battalion:

The streets and alleys were filled with water as high as the waist. Our advance was thus difficult. ...300 officers and men of Li's Battalion ... dashed into the alleys and broke into house after house to root out the enemy. Suddenly, enemy tanks blocked the road exits and set fire to the houses. All officers and men of that battalion were killed.⁶²

Major Li was killed with his men. The Japanese counter-offensive period began immediately. By the 23rd, the Chinese had been pushed back to a

⁶² Wei, p. 65.

new line (shown on Map 5) and the offensive was over.⁶³ Japanese bombing with untold collateral damage was increased throughout the week, the devastation of which can not be overstated.



Map 5 - Chinese Forward Line of Troops (FLOT) as of 23 August 1937

⁶³ Stilwell, Report #9588 p.2. (Provides dispositions of units as of 21 August.)

Between the 21st and the 23rd, Japanese reinforcements poured into the area. Between 5,000-9,000 troops landed at Wusong supported by naval gunfire. The line around the settlement didn't change between the 23rd and 24th, but the Japanese had advanced on Lotien by the 26th. These landings were opposed and proved much more difficult than the Japanese had anticipated. The Japanese had learned in 1932 that they didn't want to get stalled in the trenches west of the Shanghai-Wusong railroad. So they tried everything they could to outflank the Chinese from the North.

The Japanese, having achieved some success with Lotien as their main effort, found indications that the Chinese felt threatened in their continued massing of forces at Shanghai and that they were contemplating withdrawal of the area. This initial success caused the Japanese to focus the rest of the battle on the very section of terrain they had sought to avoid. Nevertheless, the landing at Wusong-Shanghai was anything but easy for the initial Japanese reinforcements. One Japanese account notes, "the enemy's superior strength and the difficult terrain combined to arrest the Expeditionary Army's advance."⁶⁴

One Chinese account describes the landing and the attack of the Japanese in Liuho and Wusong similarly:

In the night of August 22, the enemy's 3rd and 11th Divisions made a forced landing on the northern flank of Wusong ... attempting to advance toward Tachang Chen and to hit the left flank of our force laying the siege.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Government of Japan, "China Area Operations Record, July 1937 November 1941 (Japanese Monograph No.70 and 179, Central China Area Operations Record, 1937-41)" found in Donald S. Detwiler and Charles Burdick, *Wartime Asia and the Pacific 1937-1949* Vol. 8 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1957), p13.

⁶⁵ Hsu, p.206.

Chinese activity, especially in Shanghai proper, decreased significantly between August 25th and 29th. On the 29th, the city was reported to be “getting back to normal.” The press reported that volunteers returned to old jobs on the 30th and on the 31st, the “first peaceful night was passed.”⁶⁶ By August 30th, Colonel Stilwell reported the following:

The Japanese landing continued at Liuho and Wusong, and by August 30th it was estimated that some 20,000 troops were ashore. ... Stiff resistance was offered by the Chinese to the Japanese advance toward the south, but the indications all pointed to a re-distribution of Chinese strength on a north-west to south-west line running generally from Taitang to Nansiang and thence to Chapei. The Chinese threat against Shanghai was definitely ended by the arrival of Japanese army troops, and a new phase began with the change in disposition of the Chinese troops.⁶⁷

The period of Operation Iron Fist had ended. By offensive standards it was a failure because it did not achieve the objective of driving the Japanese out of Shanghai. The next section seeks to explore some of the lesser known reasons for failure.

Revised Interpretation

No Surprise in August

While the previous chapter underscores the lack of spontaneity associated with the battle of Shanghai, I would expand the point to include the beginning of the Chinese offensive operation as well. Though there are notable exceptions, (such as accounts provided by Botjer and Fu)⁶⁸ most

⁶⁶ *The North China Herald*, August - November 1937 vol.204, p.349.

⁶⁷ Stilwell, Report #9588, p.4.

⁶⁸ Botjer, p.181. and Fu, 2. Of over 50 accounts, these are the only non-Chinese, academic accounts I found that proclaim the Japanese as the aggressors at the Battle of Shanghai. On a macro-level, Botjer and Fu are correct. The Japanese were, indeed the foreigners landing on

evidence points to the fact that it was the Chinese who struck first. Because the Japanese were unable to respond effectively to the many disparate Chinese attacks until the 19th of August, we can safely say that it was the Chinese who achieved surprise, minimal though it was.

Further, the previous discussion of the secret insertion of the 87th and 88th Divisions into the area of operations indicates that at least until the 13th, the Chinese had counted on surprise as a key element of their attack. The Japanese, on the other hand, didn't have surprise on their side when they counter attacked. In each case, the Chinese knew from whence they would be attacked and adjusted for it. In fact, this battle indicates that the Chinese shaped the battlefield in such a way as to engineer where their opponents would strike. Thus, contrary to some claims that the Japanese surprised the Chinese, I believe if surprise is to be used as an explanation for success or failure in this offensive, it was the Chinese who had the slight advantage.

However, pondering the sheer logistical feat of moving a division, we may further minimize the element of surprise on behalf of the Chinese. One can see from the flavor of the foregoing account that it was not as easy as it sounds for Chiang to "rush" or "order" entire divisions into action without extensive and obvious preparation.

On the Japanese side, surprise was also not a factor. The Japanese actions described above, (such as dispatching two divisions from Japan as early as August 13th, evacuating civilians, and coordinating limited counter-attacks) betrayed their own plans for engaging the Chinese and likewise

Chinese soil and invading. But as to the events of 13-14 August, most accounts agree that Japanese brinkmanship does not equate to armed aggression and did not present the catalyst for war.

dispelled any claim they may make that the Chinese surprised them thereby stalling their interior advance. Hence, the foregoing historical claims that the battle of Shanghai somehow caught its participants unawares are flawed. For these reasons, I believe surprise should be moved from center-stage to a supporting role in the description of this battle.

Failure at a Strategic Level

Ironically, many of the shallowest reasons for the Chinese failure to win in the attack are given by military sources. To recap the above historical interpretations, both Stilwell and Dorn reveal a disappointment in the Chinese failure to execute and succeed in the attack. The Chinese are criticized for losing the initiative, yet there is no reason given. In fact, Stilwell went so far as to express his ignorance as to why the Hongkew salient was not attacked from the east. The failure to exploit the attack is described as a loss of will or a tactical blunder. As if in answer, the Chinese accounts claim that it was superior firepower and technology that hindered their advance.

The foregoing discussion on the offensive battle however reveals that there is more to the story. While indirect fire and armor assets may have added to the Japanese defense, several other conditions contributed to the stalled Chinese offense. While Stilwell and Dorn may criticize the tactical employment of Chinese divisions, answers to why the Chinese did not exploit the attack may lie in a closer reading of the events that shaped the battlefield.

Disposition of Forces

To begin with, Stilwell was right when he questioned the disposition of forces in the attack. Tactically speaking, the employment of the 87th Division is one that students of this battle should question. Even Chinese operations maps reveal a gaping hole in the offensive zone of attack. Perhaps it was for reasons of poor coordination or lack of mobility that none of the Chinese attacking forces were able to achieve a favorable force ratio (to be discussed in chapter four) for the attack. However, to characterize the intermittent fighting as a loss of interest as Dorn put it, or to place the failure at levels of Division and below as Stilwell indicated, is to forget some of the conditions with which these commanders had to contend.

Chinese accounts above refer specifically to orders moving units into siege lines followed by decisions to attack and annihilate the enemy. There is intermittent sniper fire (perhaps covering unseen reconnaissance probes,) followed by preparation of the objectives with indirect fire. This presents a very typical approach to the attack. But in every case, forces were not consolidated in time. The Chinese forces never achieved the tempo necessary to conduct an attack and see it through to full exploitation.⁶⁹ I argue that the unfolding of this attack, in connection with belated offensive orders and vague guidance from the central command reveal more of a hasty attack or "attack from the march" situation than a deliberate attack scenario. Tactically, it

⁶⁹ One example of an excuse for failure to exploit the success of an attack was the rationale offered by the KMT history regarding the 36th Division's sacrifice near the wharf. They apparently seized the wharf but later decided it was not strategically significant and relinquished it. This is amazing to me inasmuch as it was the only time they actually achieved the objective Chiang had asked them to achieve. More likely they were too vulnerable upon penetration and, absent reinforcements or a supporting flank, had to withdraw. That same wharf would be used two days later to disembark thousands of more Japanese reinforcements.

appears that the forces were not arrayed properly before they got into the fight. Hence, tempo was unattainable. My reasons for this supposition follow.

Strategic Misfires

The Chinese account indicated that on August 18th, they “ceased attacking for the time being to reorganize the battle lines.”⁷⁰ In fact, a careful reading of the Nationalist history reveals a common theme: the inability to consolidate forces in any meaningful way. Stilwell would criticize this as a command and leadership flaw. While his criticism may be true, I believe it was the Chinese high command that set the conditions for failure.

Indeed, it was not until the 19th that the serious drive forward commenced. But I argue that even then, the attack may have been premature. To illustrate, in the previous chapter the presence of the 20th Separate Infantry Brigade and elements of the 88th Division was confirmed in Shanghai as early as the 7th and 8th of August. According to Gibson, they had been deployed as part of the Operation “Iron Fist,” a plan to drive the Japanese out of Shanghai.⁷¹ The commitment of these forces followed by Chiang’s order for the commencement of a “general offensive” a full week later indicates several issues that many historical accounts leave out.

The account seems to indicate that the Chinese high command issued guidance to the commander of the 88th Division regarding the employment of the 20th Brigade as early as the 7th of August. In the mean time, the remainder of the Chinese forces was to deploy to battle positions and commence the

⁷⁰ Wei, p65.

⁷¹ Gibson, p.382.

attack. This they did possibly by conducting a forward passage of lines through the 20th Brigade. Hence, from the 13th to the 18th of August, they conducted what could be described as a movement to contact followed by a hasty attack.⁷² In a movement to contact, as soon as forces arrive at the battlefield they are hastily deployed for the attack. This is a risky method of offense as it guarantees that forces will be committed in piecemeal fashion and without unity of effort. In an attempt to overcome this problem, on the 18th the Chinese stopped to "consolidate" forces.

This must have had a confusing effect on the Division commanders. On the 7th, Chiang issued the execution order for Operation Iron Fist, and on the 13th he issued a vague order for the commencement of the "general offensive" at dawn on the 14th. On the 16th, Chiang was reported to have ordered his Shanghai forces to drive the "Japs into the sea." Then, on the 20th, his execution order for the attack was promulgated. Hence, four different attack orders were given at four different times. In the mean time, at least five divisions were on the move to their respective battle positions with the understanding that the fight was already on.

Hence, it is my belief that well meaning commanders committed their forces to battle too early, without waiting for second echelon units to arrive and thus a unified effort throughout the front was never developed. Divisions as units of military power capable of independent and self-sufficient action were executing the orders they were given without the strategic guidance

⁷² A movement to contact is an offensive operation designed to gain initial ground contact with the enemy. It usually occurs when *both* elements are moving. It is followed by a hasty attack, which is a form attack where the attacking unit has not made extensive preparations. It is conducted with the resources immediately available in order to maintain momentum. HQDA p.7-3.

necessary for an integrated and successful battle. The result was intermittent and indecisive commitment using only the forces at hand. Once the forces were consolidated on the 19th, it was too late for decisive action. The Japanese reinforcements had arrived.⁷³ Hence, while the criticism of Stilwell and Dorn are correct in a sense, it must be considered in light of the broader picture and must then be leveled at the strategic rather than tactical level of command.

The other dissatisfaction I have of Stilwell's comments is that he presents the Hongkew salient as an obvious target. The Chinese on the other hand may have assessed the wharves as the center of gravity upon which hinged the continuation of subsequent Japanese reinforcements.⁷⁴ Although, the Japanese had maneuver forces and headquarters buildings in the Hongkew salient, this may not have been the object of the Chinese attack. To blame the Chinese for not taking advantage of a seemingly perfect opportunity, may be to deny them credit for properly assessing the enemy center of gravity and using deception as a means to attack it.

⁷³ What might have been: Chiang issues single and unified operations order. The 20th Regiment, commencing on the 14th fights a series of deception battles. From the 14th to the 18th, major subordinate units mass on the border of Hongkew and encourage the Japanese to deploy their defense on a wide front. Once massed, the Chinese execute the operation Iron Fist on the 20th, while Japanese reinforcements are debarking and vulnerable.

⁷⁴ "The Center of Gravity," a principle borrowed from physics and introduced by Carl von Clausewitz is the "hub of all power and movement upon which everything depends." Modern military commanders learn about this principle as:

"that characteristic, capability, or location from which enemy and friendly forces derive their freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight. Several traditional examples of a potential center of gravity include the mass of the enemy army, the enemy's battle command structure, public opinion, national will, and an alliance or coalition structure. The concept... is useful as an analytical tool to cause the commander and his staff to think about their own and the enemy's sources of strength as they design the campaign and determine its objectives. The essence of operational art lies in being able to mass effects against the enemy's main source of power."

In this case, General Sung may have thought that the ability to land troops at the wharf was Japan's Center of Gravity. Time proved Song's assessment to be correct. HQDA, p.6-7.

Acts of God

My last argument with authors reporting the beginnings of the battle of Shanghai is their neglect of weather and its effects on operations. Not to minimize the effect that Japanese firepower had on attacking units, weather had a profound effect on the day to day battle of Shanghai. Even so, it is interesting to note that only a few press reports and four historians mention the weather and its effects on the battle. For the eyewitness writers, such as Rhodes Farmer, the weather was a major player.

A typhoon screamed through Shanghai on Saturday morning, August 14, 1937. The flogging rain that accompanied the gale drove the soldiers to shelter in Chapei and no doubt saved a few lives on that account. But the typhoon was a killer. ...When I reached the Cathay Hotel corner on my way to the *North-China Daily News*, the typhoon was screaming down Nanking road at a good 80 miles per hour. Human scarecrows seeking sanctuary from the dives of Hongkew were being tossed around like leaves...⁷⁵

A storm of such magnitude as to douse fires the night before and fill the streets to waist-high a few days later would certainly interrupt the tempo of the attack. Indeed, harsh weather is usually on the side of the attacker as it covers the sound of approaching forces. For infantry this is especially true as rain can soften the ground and wind can drown out the sound of stealthily moving soldiers. In fact, given the right amount of poor weather, it may have actually given the attacking Chinese a slight edge on their operation. Unfortunately for the Chinese at Shanghai it may have been too much of a good thing. Had the Chinese been able to mass at the beginning of the storm and attack before the heaviest rains, mobility lost in flooded streets and muddy paddy dikes would have been a great burden to any counter-attacking Japanese force. As it was, the swollen river and its tributaries assisted the

⁷⁵ Rhodes Farmer, *Shanghai Harvest* (London: Museum Press Limited, 1945), pp.38-9.

Japanese landing party and slowed the Chinese attack. Yet for all of its effects, hardly any account mentions weather.

In sum, typical considerations invoked for success or failure during the offensive phase of the battle of Shanghai include the presence or absence of surprise, tactical incompetence, firepower, and will. The synthesized account offered here presents us with additional evidence that should be considered, namely: lack of surprise, strategic confusion, and weather effects. Contrary to the historians cited above, I believe that the opening moves in the battle of Shanghai did not surprise either the Japanese or the Chinese. Also, in spite of difficult circumstances, commanders sought to do their duty to the best of their abilities within the confusing framework offered them by the turn of events, the disposition of forces, and staggered guidance from the top. Finally, I find the aforementioned historians fail to include weather as a possible cause for battlefield effects.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE CHINESE MOBILE DEFENSE (AUGUST 24 – OCTOBER 25, 1937)⁷⁶

Historical Interpretations

Although this is the longest and perhaps most heroic portion of the battle it seems to have the least written about it. Even in narratives designed to treat the battle specifically, discussion is often limited to a few paragraphs. Most accounts describe the situation by mid-August in terms of quantity of technically superior Japanese forces against a numerically superior Chinese force sufficient to render the outcome of a stalemate for two months a forgone conclusion. Reports usually express Japanese surprise and annoyance that their forces were not enough to obtain the expected quick decision. Again, while most of these accounts are correct, they do not always accurately ascertain other reasons the Chinese defensive was so successful.

⁷⁶ Defenses are described as “mobile” or “area” defenses. As the name implies, a mobile defense is characterized by employing a combination of fire and maneuver, offense, defense, and delay to destroy the enemy and defeat his attack. This kind of defense is fairly modern in conception. Most defenses in WWI were area defenses. An area defense is characterized by denying access to designated terrain for a specific time to retain ground using a combination of defensive positions and small mobile reserves. This type of defense is the type people usually envision when they think of an enemy in a trench or a fortress of some kind. Having arrayed their forces and committed some to the mobile-counterattacking portion of the battle, the Chinese appeared not to have a strategy to achieve concentration of forces as part of their efforts. Perhaps due to German influence, the concept of strong defensive belts very much dominated Chinese thinking, (especially once the battle turned from a mobile to an area defense). If, however, instead of applying reinforcements uniformly across the battlefield, suppose that in early September, the Chinese ignored Tachang and Kiangwan and placed the additional 40,000 troops at Liuho. They could have marched them south along the coast and cut off the Japanese and contained them until more forces could arrive. Such a strategy accepts risk but offers maneuver options the Chinese lost as time wore on. HQDA, pp.9-0 - 9-2.

The Japanese Outnumbered

One commonly held judgment about the fighting at Shanghai upon which every historian agrees is that vast numbers of Chinese met fewer yet more adequately equipped Japanese on the field of battle. Marvin Williamsen points out that one of the most glaring conclusions about the Sino-Japanese war was the "great disparity in combat power between the Chinese and Japanese armies."⁷⁷ Indeed, historians from every viewpoint seem to provide a summary such as:

Japanese planes and warships subjected the front to incessant bombing; by now over 200,000 Japanese marines had joined the battle. Facing them, aside from an elite German trained corps of 25,000, were 500,000 poorly equipped Chinese soldiers who fought heroically, stubbornly holding on to their defensive line.⁷⁸

Accounts such as this focus the reader on the preponderance and apparent effectiveness of Japanese indirect fire against a more numerous and valiant (albeit outgunned) Chinese force. Another example of such writing is found in Colonel Stillwell's own reports. Most of his SITREPs, (Situation Reports) after August 21st provide a paragraph that enumerates the Chinese Divisions participating in the battle along with raw numbers of the opposing Japanese. For example, Colonel Stilwell's report states that on August 21st there were six Chinese Divisions facing 8,000 Japanese in the Shanghai area of operations. Both Chinese and the Japanese accounts also cannot resist emphasizing the numbers of forces involved.

⁷⁷ Marvin Williamsen, "The Military Dimension, 1937-1941." In *China's Bitter Victory, the War with Japan, 1937-1945*, ed. James C. Hsiung and Steven I. Levine, 135-156 (Armonk, New York: East Gate, 1992), pp.151-2.

⁷⁸ Fu, p.4.

For this reason, determining the actual number of forces involved is problematic. To illustrate the difficulty of enumeration, consider the following:

Japanese sources claimed that on August 23rd, they successfully landed 50,000 troops at Wusong. The Chinese on the other hand, put the number at 10,000. Military observers and the press gave a third estimate that about 20,000 troops landed during the first two days. Bergamini, writing from General Matsui's perspective noted that from the 23rd to the 30th of October, the Japanese were able to place approximately 35,000 troops ashore. Thus, the variance between the four accounts shows that anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 Japanese landed at Wusong in a two-day period.

The problem gets even more severe over time. According to Stilwell, by the 4th of September the Japanese had about 30,000 soldiers in Yangzepoo alone. Thus, while we know the Japanese Third Fleet had provided some reinforcements and that at least another 44,000 troops in two divisions had arrived from Japan, the estimated number of reinforcements that landed by September 7th varies between 70,000 and 100,000. We do know that as of the 2nd of September, due to the slow progress of troops in the vicinity of Lotien, Matsui requested two additional divisions from Japan. Since preparation and travel time for such reinforcements ranged from five to seven days, we can conclude that in the early weeks of fighting, the Third Fleet probably had more soldiers involved in the operation than previously thought.

Numbers of Chinese forces are equally elusive. By September 4th, Stilwell reported that the Chinese had over nine divisions engaged (approximately 100,000). Two weeks later, both Stilwell and Chinese historians reported that 26 Chinese divisions were in the fight against 80,000

Japanese. Stilwell also gave the raw numbers of Chinese to be about 200,000. If that is true, then the average Chinese division was activated at about 70-percent strength.⁷⁹ After recounting the events between August 23rd and October 25th, we will return to the thorny question of such numbers and see if we can extract meaning from it.

The Chinese Outgunned

Apart from the possibly mind-numbing litany of numbers just covered, it seems that many historical accounts of the defensive period have another common trait. They neglect some conditions that bear directly on the outcome of the battle while lavishing attention on others whose effect may not be as significant as heretofore imagined. One example of the type of account that may need modification is that of the sensationalistic passage in Herryone Maurer's account describing "Japanese Panzer divisions" bearing down upon the Chinese lines.⁸⁰ The majority of accounts of the battle seem to follow Maurer's lead in spirit if not in deed. Accepting without criticism the constant Chinese explanation that the key factor was enemy firepower, such accounts as the following are typical:⁸¹ "...but their (Japanese) planes controlled the skies and their artillery was preponderant."⁸² And from Williamsen:

⁷⁹ Assuming a Chinese Division has 11,000 men, dividing 200,000 by 26 yields an average of 7,690 troops per deployed division. Since we know the initial three divisions were at full strength this means that some follow-on divisions had even less than 70 percent strength upon mobilization.

⁸⁰ Herrymon Maurer, *The End is Not Yet* (New York:Robert M. McBride & Co, 1941), pp.1-16.

⁸¹ Both the Hsu, and Wei accounts blame superior enemy technology and firepower for everything from failed attacks and defenses to the Chinese inability to bring forces into the theater of operations and consolidate for action.

⁸² Frederic Wakeman, *The Shanghai Badlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.6.

“Japan’s complete control of the air prevented the Chinese from engaging in aerial reconnaissance or using the firepower of airborne artillery. Japanese commanders continually added more armor and firepower to their forces. About two hundred new tanks and one hundred additional aircraft arrived on Chinese shores during the first half of September.”⁸³

As with the numerical figures, my objective is not to dispute these claims. But a reading of the following account of the battle must not be so informed by this single glaring truth as to dim the presence of equally valid points mitigating against the strength of the Japanese. I encourage the reader to study the forthcoming account with an eye toward noticing how participants and subsequent historians have alluded to such battlefield factors as technology, firepower, and the combination of weather and terrain. After the account, we will return to these comparatively neglected or over-nourished characteristics and see if they merit more or less consideration than they’ve been given.

The Chinese Mobile Defense

On the night of August 22nd, 1937, elements of the 3rd and 11th Japanese divisions, under the command of General Matsui landed along the Yangtze River north and northwest of Wusong. At some places, they were able to penetrate about four miles inland on several avenues of approach before the Chinese 56th, 57th and 11th Divisions stopped them and pushed them back. But on the 23rd Japanese reinforcements continued to fill the coast from Liuho, to Wusong to Shanghai. On one occasion, a hidden Chinese artillery position at Wusong killed several hundred debarking Japanese troops before it was neutralized. August 23rd was a particularly bad day for General Matsui

⁸³ Williamsen, p.143.

because the Emperor's wife had a cousin killed in the first moments ashore. During landing operations at Paoshan five days later, another 200 Japanese were killed by Chinese coastal defense.

Chinese operations maps note that on August 23rd, three regiments including engineers from the 11th Japanese Division landed off Shengshiachiao; and that on August 25th, 2,000 Japanese troops land in the Liuho area. (See Map 6.) Another regiment followed by 1,000 troops landed north of Paoshan on the 26th and September 1st respectively; the main forces effecting landings at Paoshan and Wusong from August 23rd to September 7th. Keep in mind however, this build-up of combat power by the Japanese did not go unopposed.

The Chinese account indicates that on August 24th the Chinese launched a number of offensives. The same account blames the effects of Japanese indirect fire for the failure of the attacks. Nevertheless, Japanese reinforcements continually arrived and broke through Chinese defenses along the coast.

In sum, the last half of September saw many Japanese landings along the coast. Each landing had as its immediate objective the dominant city controlling inland avenues of approach: Liuho, Paoshan and Wusong. From each of these immediate objectives, the Japanese would attempt to attack secondary objectives inland and further south such as Lotien, Chiangchia, and Yinhang. The action to the north occurred at the same time that Japanese forces in Shanghai were trying to force Chinese forces out of Chapei using intermittent indirect fire and attacks by small elements. The effort against Chapei, if successful, would open up the Chinese right flank while efforts from the north, would roll down on the Chinese left flank. Thus, the Japanese were

attacking the Chinese at oblique angles of their main defensive line. Because the Chinese held at Lotien with the 11th Division, the Japanese were unable to link their front line trace to Wusong.⁸⁴ As of the 1st of September, the Chinese reserve line was Liuho – Lotien – Chapei. As the press indicated, the fighting continued at Lotien from Aug 25th until September 14th, with the Chinese and the Japanese trading possession several times.

Many press reports also indicated that the Japanese initiated a “big push” September 1st but within 24 hours of commitment were profoundly disappointed with their progress. Chinese planes actually enjoyed an upper hand in bombing for three days, (probably because the Japanese were attempting to move their anti-aircraft artillery assets forward at the time). The Chinese had even successfully barred Japanese landing in Shanghai for a time. Plainclothes soldiers in Hongkew made “much trouble for the Japanese forces in town.” Even so, during the first week in September, the Japanese achieved most of their immediate objectives except at Lotien.

The Japanese took Wusong. They also effected a link-up with the two regiments that had landed at Shihtzulin. The Chinese account states that “both sides fought in confusion along the coast.”⁸⁵ Again, invoking superior Japanese firepower as the cause for failure, a Chinese source includes valuable information about the effects of terrain in the outlying areas north of the urban portions of the city:

Only a portion of our Yangtze River Right Bank Garrison Force reached the battlefield to defend the line from Wusong. ...The heavy fighting lasted for 14 days with heavy casualties on both sides and no progress. In an area where the field of fire was

⁸⁴ Note that some confusion for analysts could emerge because both the Chinese and the Japanese units at Lotien were called “11th” Divisions.

⁸⁵ Wei, p.66.

wide, concealment poor and movement to contact difficult, repeated struggles continued in the net-like river area. Our forces conducted night attacks, whereas the enemy forces conducted daylight counterattacks. Despite enemy reinforcements from the 13th and 9th Divisions, the superiority of artillery and naval gunfire, high morale and plenty of personnel, our forces fought against the enemy in a stalemate resulting in prohibitive losses.⁸⁶

During this time also, another Japanese division was landing at the Shanghai Wayside wharf. Though Chapei was all but emptied of Chinese forces except for a regimental size unit designed to hold the right flank, the Japanese direction of attack was into Kiangwan. According to Stilwell, this was a diversionary attack because later that day, eight more transports landed at Wusong and Pootung. On September 4th, the Chinese were able to kill 200 members of the Japanese regiments attempting to land.

On September 6th, the Japanese opened up with preparatory fire at 2:30 in the morning. On this day Paoshan fell. It was said to be the beginning of a Japanese general offensive. On the 7th and 8th the Chinese counter-attacked and reclaimed Paoshan only to lose it again on the 9th. Though they were unable to re-take Paoshan, they were able to take and hold Yuehpoo. The following remarks by Stilwell indicate the effectiveness of the Chinese mobile defense:

By September 8th the whole operation from the Japanese point of view, was shifting rapidly from a flank attack south from Liuho and Lotien to a frontal push at all points. Chinese attacks had prevented the Japanese from getting up momentum at any vital point, and by September 9th, the twenty-seventh day of fighting, the Japanese gains were relatively very small. It was apparent that without a serious advance in the near future, more reinforcements would be needed to get a decision.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Hsu, p.206.

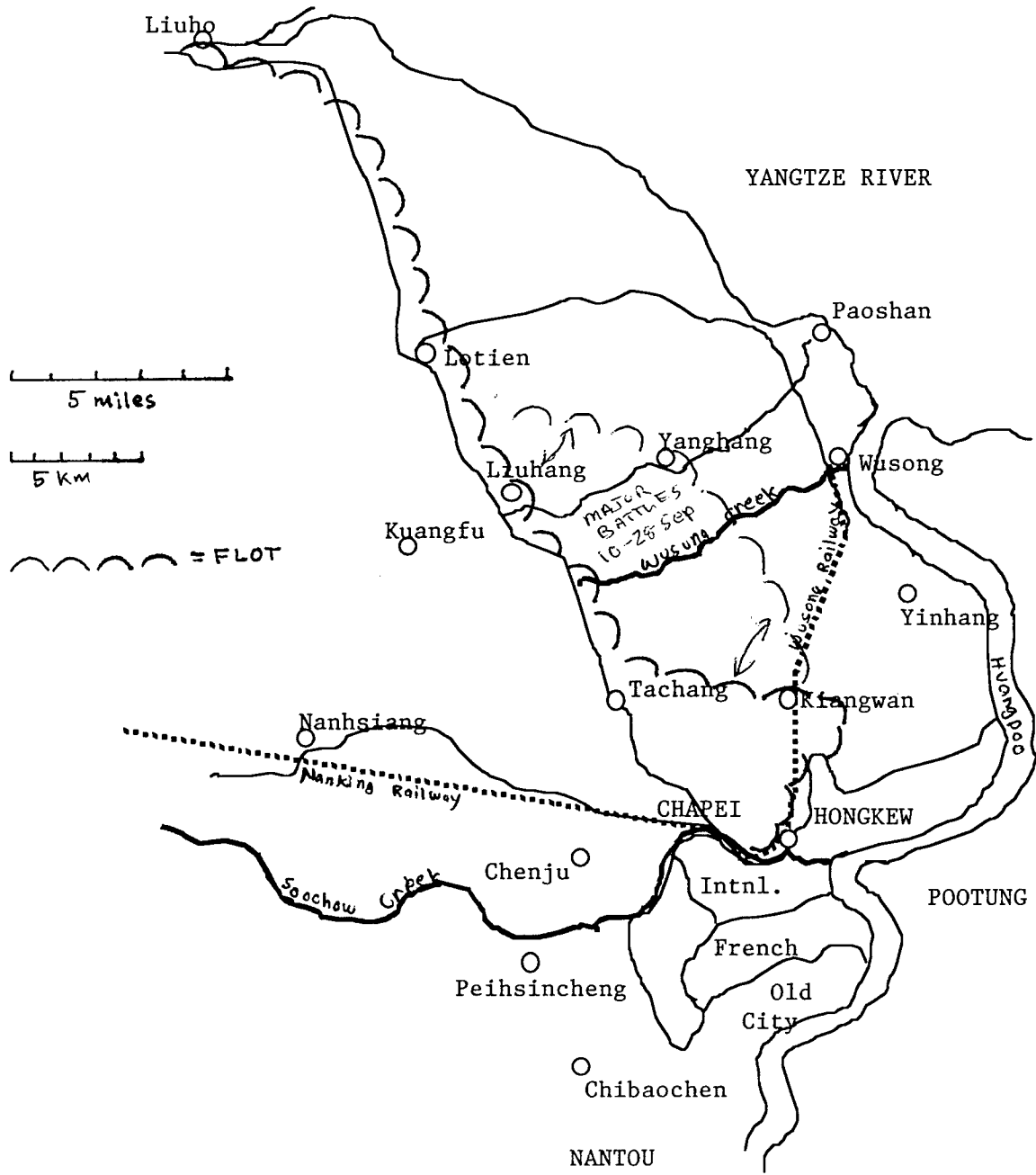
⁸⁷ Stilwell, Report #9590, p.7.

By September 10th, the new Chinese line was Liuho – Lotien – Liuhang – Kiangwan – Hongkew – North Station. (See Map 7) The Chinese strength had grown to approximately 110,000 against 70,000 Japanese. On the 11th, the Japanese landed the Formosa Independent Brigade on three different airfields in and around Shanghai. This force consisted of a large force of Marines, 100 aircraft and 200 tanks.⁸⁸

Two interesting and contradictory items appear at this point in the Chinese record. The official Republic of China compilations mention that because of the arrival of enemy reinforcements of the Japanese 13th Division the Chinese line was repositioned on the 17th of September. The tactical account mentions no such 13th Division and repositions the forces as of September 14th. One possible reason regarding the presence of the 13th Division is that the strategic writers may have had more solid definition on enemy disposition from national intelligence sources than did their tactical counterparts. As to the discrepancy concerning the date of the repositioning of Chinese forces, two possible explanations exist: 1) perhaps guidance published by Generalissimo Chiang on the 6th of September rendered results sooner than the strategic narrative acknowledges, or 2) the tactical situation demanded faster withdrawal than the strategic account admits.

Another important event that occurred on September 14th was that Chiang Kai-shek himself assumed tactical command of the battle. By this time, rumors were being substantiated that those officers who were guilty of miscalculation of military tactics would be sent before a tribunal.

⁸⁸ Japan, "China area Operations Record", p.13.



Map 7 - Chinese Forward Line of Troops as of 10 September 1937

Those officers who were grossly negligent were executed. Both the China Daily Herald and the New York Times reported this possibility. Severe discipline of officers up north showed commanders that they had to deliver in the Shanghai operation. Possibly because of this type of pressure, the command authority of the Shanghai front was restructured four times within in a three-month period.⁹⁰

Synthesizing the various accounts, between September 14th and the 17th, the new Chinese line was North Station - Kiangwan - Liuhang - Liuho.⁹¹ American press reported that an orderly withdrawal to prepared positions on the new line was effective on the 14th. A Chinese military spokesman informed the North China Herald: "As the purposes of the operations have now been accomplished, it is no longer necessary for our troops to operate under the guns of the enemy fleet, and in accordance with the general strategic plan our forces retired by stages to our first defensive line."⁹²

⁹⁰ See "China to Execute Shirking Officers", *The New York Times*, 10 October 1937. Additionally, *The Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, Vol. III. 6 vols., ed. Howard L. Boorman and Richard C. Howard, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp.197-8. reveals that 10 officers were executed as a result of the collapsed defense at Shanghai and that our own General Sung of the 36th Division was relieved of command. (Sung was later reinstated and became a three-star general. In 1949 the Communists captured him. He was pardoned 10 years later and sat on the 5th through the 7th Central Committees. As of 1984 our hero was living in the USA. See Wolfgang Bartke, *Who's Who in the People's Republic of China*, Vol. 2 (P-Z), 2 vols. 3rd ed. (New York: K. G. Saur, 1991), p.525. For his biography in Chinese please see Huang To, ed. *Chin-jih ti Chiang-ling (Today's Military Leaders)*, Reprinted by The Center for Chinese Research Materials, Association for Research Libraries, (Washington D.C. 1969. Shanghai: T'ung-i ch'u pan she, 1939), pp.319-325. This account was probably published underground in Shanghai during Japanese occupation.

⁹¹ Compelling evidence that this defensive line (as well as each subsequent line) was part of a master-plan for defense in the short term and an orderly withdrawal in the long term is found in Alan Gaylord Young, "The Nationalist Hegira, Retreat and Mobilization under Kuomintang Rule in China, 1937-1939." MA, (Cornell, 1978).

⁹² *The North China Herald*, 14 September 1937, p.421.

To describe the frustrating effect the Chinese defense had on Japan, General Stilwell reported:

Thus, just one month from the beginning of the action, the Japanese had succeeded in making good their defense of the Settlement, in putting ashore some 60,000 men, and in pushing the Chinese back an average of four and one-half miles. The break came under pressure of converging attacks from Yangzepoo and Yanghang. The Chinese, however had surprised everyone by the tenacity of their resistance and in their new line, where the fire from the Japanese fleet would be negligible, and with continually increasing numbers, it could be argued that they were in a position to do materially better than before.⁹³

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese not only opposed the landing of Japanese reinforcements during this period, but also that they conducted numerous counterattacks in disparate locations. Early in September, they counterattacked in Shanghai and Lotien. On the 7th, they counterattacked at Paoshan and held it again for nearly a day. On the 8th, they retook Yuehpu and counterattacked to prevent the Japanese from taking Kiangwan. From the 15th to the 17th in driving rain, they seized back terrain in the vicinity of Hongkew, Liuhang and Kiangwan. Most of the counterattacks occurred on exactly the same days as the Chinese were repositioning their line. The mission of defense notwithstanding, overall, the Chinese conduct of operations from August 13th to the end of September was offensive in nature.

In fact, the guidance beginning the "defensive phase" that was issued on September 6th was predominantly offensive. It included such phrases as (paraphrasing) "while the enemy is surrounded," "maneuver superior forces," "disrupt command, communications and control," "capture positions while enemy fires aren't coordinated," "strengthen preparation for the

⁹³ Stilwell, Report #9590, p.8.

attack," and "attack landing forces." The only phrases that sounded remotely defensive in nature are "restrict development," "fall back," and "build and improve defenses."⁹⁴

To illustrate the attitude of this new defensive posture, by September 17th, there was still a sizeable salient in Kiangwan and the Chinese had attacked and took back Lotien. The press reported, "Despite a steady downpour of rain, the Chinese troops were said to have broken a mechanized Japanese attack. Counter-charging, they drove out the Japanese, who had entered the town with armored cars and tanks. Lotien has changed hands countless times in the five weeks of battle."⁹⁵

More rain from the 15th to the 17th and the beginnings of an epidemic of cholera characterized conditions in Shanghai during mid-September. By September 17th, more than 1,000 cases were reported in the city and 50 persons had already died as a result.⁹⁶

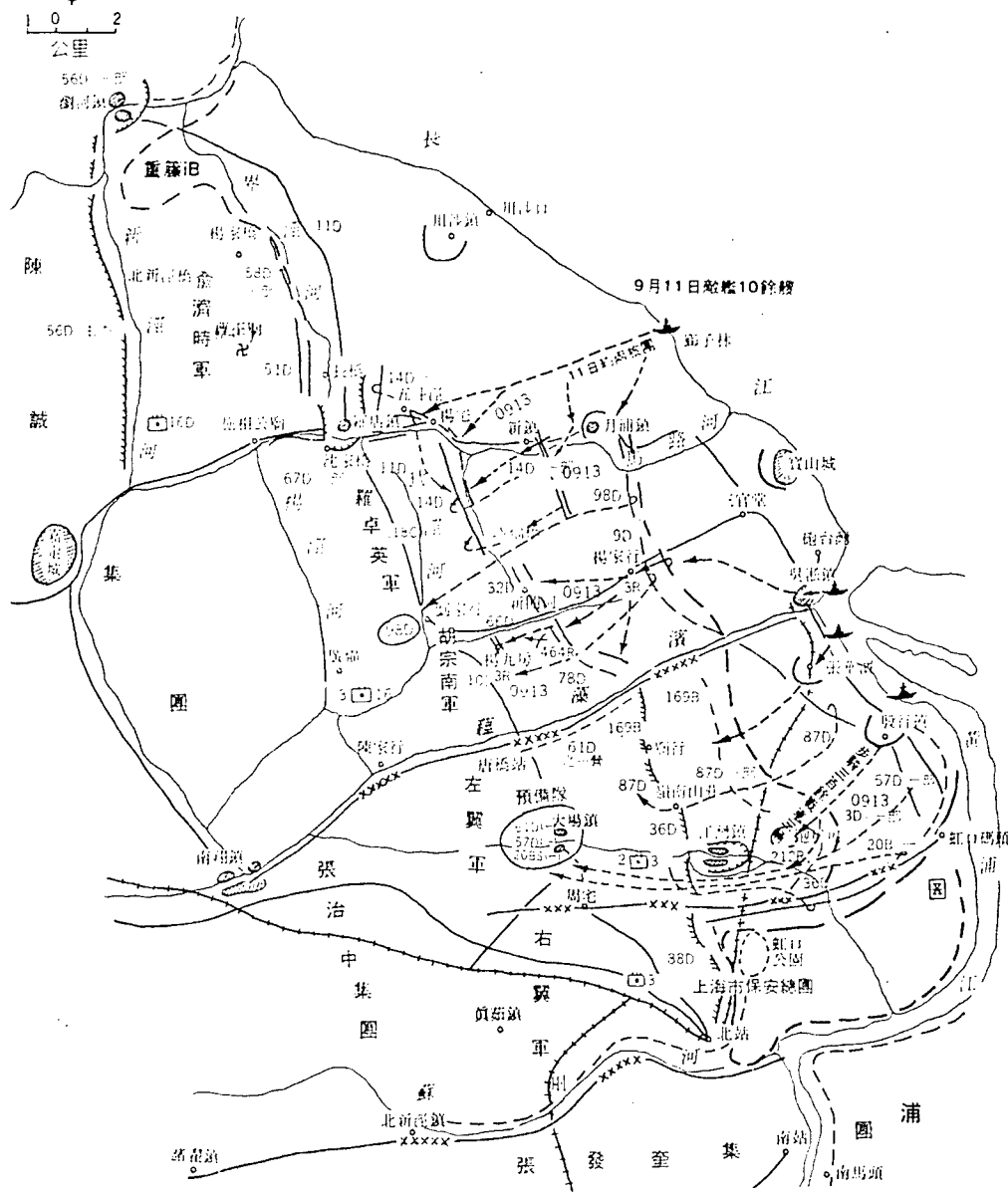
Japan made slight advancements the next day, but ships carrying reinforcements were held up by fog. The Chinese record indicates that the Japanese forces had swelled to 100,000 and would add another 100,000 by the end of the month; and goes on to state that both sides fought bitterly and the Chinese effected sequential withdrawals beginning on September 30th. Maps 8 and 9 show the action from the 11th to the 30th of September. Map 8 gives a clear picture of the Japanese reinforcements arriving and attempting to take the Kiangwan/Tachang area. Map 9 shows the more concentrated effort up north once the Chinese took back Lotien.

⁹⁴ Hsu, p.206-7.

⁹⁵ "50 Die of Cholera in Day at Shanghai," *The New York Times*, 17 September 1937.

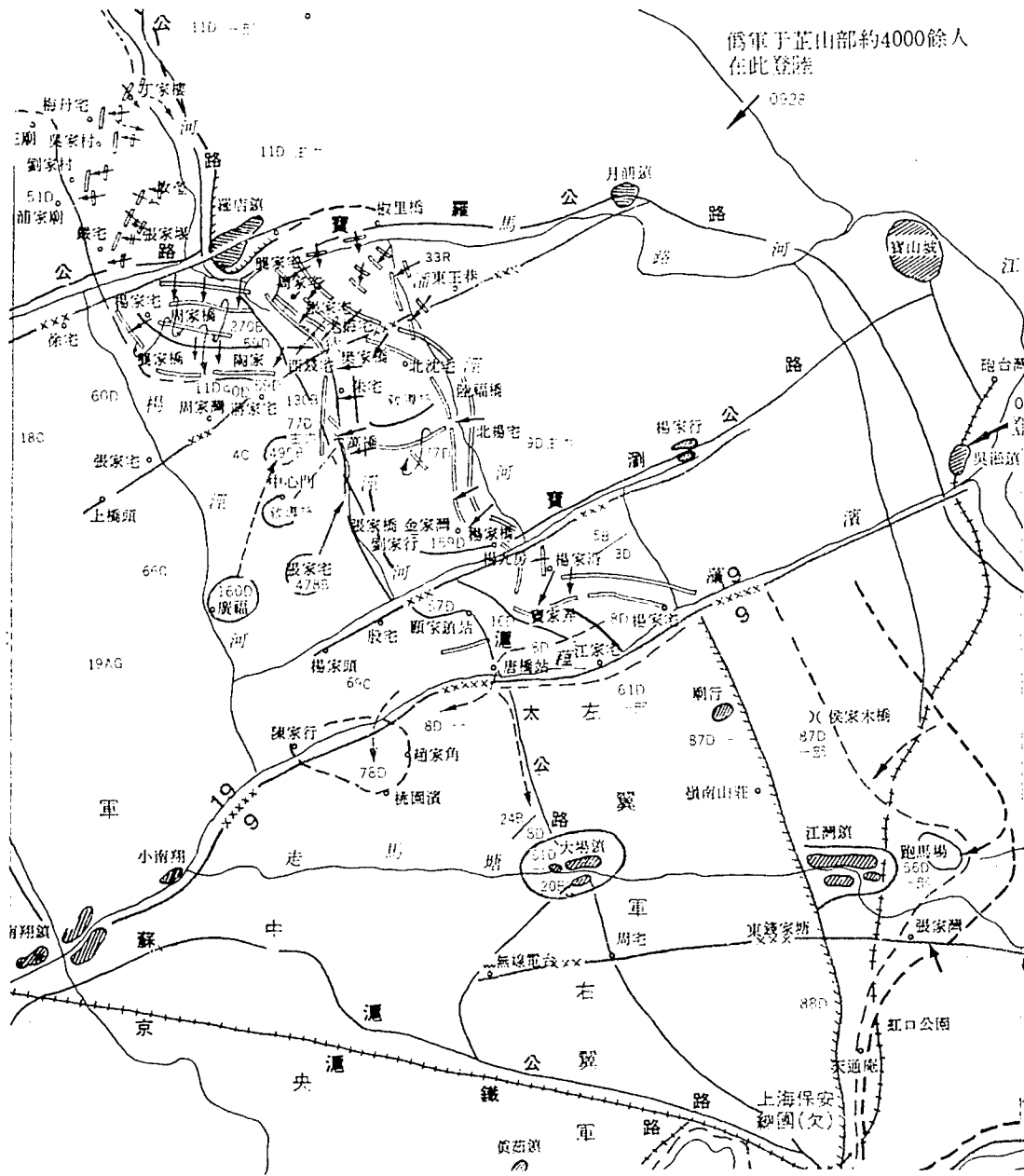
⁹⁶ It is interesting to note that apart from the press and Stilwell's general reports, Botjer, p.182. was the only historian to mention Cholera.

附圖 8 淞滬會戰國軍守勢時期戰鬪前狀況要圖
(民國26年 9月11日至14日)



Map 8 - Chinese Operations from 11-14 September 1937⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Chiang, K ang Jih yü wu, Map #8.



Map 9 - Chinese Operations - 14 - 30 September 1937⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Chiang, K ang Jih yü wu, Map #9.

At this point, from the period of 18-30 September, "stalemate" best describes the situation. Accounts continue to vary in their appraisals of the number of troops committed except to say that both sides continued to reinforce. There was sporadic fighting north of Hongkew and in Chapei. The Japanese made several attacks but continued to have no real advances. On September 24th Stilwell reported that he predicted the Japanese were building up and repositioning forces for a converged attack at Kiangwan. The area of Kiangwan and Tachang stood as a great insult to the Japanese. This salient in the Chinese defensive line was seemingly unbreakable. The wet ground of the rice fields slowed the mechanized forces and cholera began striking Japanese soldiers in the settlement. It was reported in the New York Times that 300 urns were brought ashore for the remains of Japanese cholera victims. In this environment of stalemate and disease, the Japanese fomented a profound hatred for their enemy. The soldiers were now engaged in positional warfare, using trench mortars and howitzers during the day and resorting to hand to hand combat at night. Map 10 shows the severe bend in the lines due to the Chinese hold of the Kiangwan salient. The Chinese defense, in blue, is arrayed along the road that links hardened positions from Tachang to Nanhsiang and then north through Chiating.

The Japanese continued bombing activity on a "lavish scale." All accounts, however, lament the total lack of concern shown for collateral damage to non-military targets. In fact, as Stilwell noted, "The Japanese targets have on many occasions had no military significance whatever; their victims have been largely civilian, and the destruction they have accomplished outside of the large cities has not been commensurate with the cost of the bombs."



Map 10 - Chinese Operations - 1 - 17 October 1937⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Chiang, *Kang Jih yü wu*, Map #10.

He also remarked that he assumed the Japanese were counting heavily on the moral effect they expected to accomplish. Hence, the bombings may have actually had a reverse effect than the one intended. Most authors remark that ruthless Japanese bombing galvanized the wounded population against them and unified a heretofore-divided nation.¹⁰⁰

During the last days of September, the stalemate, now with 200,000 Chinese facing 80,000 Japanese combatants, persisted. On September 28th tanks were used at Kiangwan and Lotien, but on the admission of the Japanese "only small gains effected." According to Stilwell, "Advances were now measured in yards instead of miles and kilometers and the Japanese have been dragged down to trench warfare by the vigorous Chinese resistance."¹⁰¹ On the 29th of the month, General Matsui warned that their general offense had not really yet started.

The New York Times headline for Saturday, October 2nd: "Shanghai Defenses baffling Japanese." To summarize the activity during September, I provide an extended quotation from Colonel Stilwell's military report, probably filed by Captain Roberts who was sent to Shanghai as an observer:

Up to date the Japanese had shown nothing brilliant in their performance. The entire Chinese artillery opposed to them amounted to less than 2000 guns, and with the support of all the guns of their fleet it was to be expected that the Japanese could land troops at will. ... In 1932 with the small number of Chinese opposed to them, the Liuho attack was a wide envelopment; in 1937, with a considerably larger Chinese force at hand, it was

¹⁰⁰ This echoes my personal axe to grind against Air Force tacticians who labor under the myth that one can advance a tactical or strategic goal using air power alone, thus causing untold damage without gains. This may be the first of many recorded instances where no advantage was gained until the commitment of ground troops. We learned this in Vietnam and Kosovo. We could have learned it from Shanghai.

¹⁰¹ Stilwell, Report #9599, p.7.

not. As a result the extended Chinese line held, and vigorous attacks at other points force the Japanese to divert troops there to resist them.

Instead of continuing to press the envelopment strongly, they weakened it, and at once found themselves forced to make frontal attacks everywhere in order to gain ground. The Chinese have learned something from their German instructors; they have not sat passively on the defense but instead have counter-attacked vigorously on numerous occasions and, aided by the heavy rains and the character of the terrain, have made the Japanese progress painfully slow. In spite of inadequate auxiliaries, they have given ground only under heavy pressure and made the Japanese pay heavily for their gains.

Even if forced back from their present line, they can take up another a short distance beyond, which will reduce still further the effect of the supporting artillery of the Japanese fleet. Unless some factor ... intervenes, the Japanese are faced with position warfare and must change their tactics to get a quick decision.¹⁰²

This quotation by Roberts reveals certain optimism about the Chinese position. While including both weather and terrain effects, he shows us that the Japanese advance was so slow that they realized that a change of pace and perhaps tactics would be necessary if they wanted to win at Shanghai.

Hence, at the beginning of October, the Japanese started a major offensive – again. The Japanese continued to struggle to gain ground at Kiangwan, Liuhan and Lotien. Japanese bombs obliterated Chapei but the Chinese right flank still held. Though the Japanese had started to make small gains by the 4th and 5th of the October, reports have the Shanghai line unmoved by the attempt. On October 7th, 10 more Japanese transports arrived and offloaded reinforcements. Frank Dorn placed the Chinese strength at this time at 500,000, with the Japanese at 200,000. Long after the battle closed, the legacy figure of half-a-million Chinese against 200,000

¹⁰² Stilwell, Report #9595, p.6.

Japanese would characterize the entire battle in most historical accounts written down to this day.

On the 9th, General Matsui announced that the "General Offensive will soon be underway." It is no wonder he announced his intentions publicly as the Japanese were moving so much more slowly than anticipated that on October 6th Japan was considering relieving Matsui of command.¹⁰³ It rained on the 10th and things were generally quiet across the front. On the 11th, the weather improved and General Matsui gave another warning that the big push was coming. Even so, a Japanese offensive didn't materialize for over a week.

From October 13th to the 20th the Chinese reported that they had successfully repulsed Japanese landings and conducted very effective air raids with 20 Chinese sorties. On the 14th, 16th, 17th, and 18th the Japanese attempted attacks in various locations and to a degree the Chinese repulsed each one.¹⁰⁴ But, on the 18th, a large force of 1,400 Chinese was isolated at Tachang and attacked. Every man in the unit died as well as 3,000 attacking Japanese troops. The following testimonial of a Japanese signal soldier, Nohara Teishin shows how the Japanese eventually responded to the need to change tactics. It also describes the conditions of fighting in October rather vividly. Nohara was a member of the 35th Regiment that went into action on the 3rd of October.

At the beginning of the war, the enemy was quite strong, and Japanese soldiers simply formed a line and, when officers gave the order advanced. Our Thirty-Fifth Regiment was almost annihilated that was in the early battles. At a terrible place we had our toughest fight. The enemy was under cover shooting at us through loopholes in walls so our dead just piled up. We

¹⁰³ "Japanese for Change in Shanghai Command," *The New York Times*, 6 October 1937.

¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to note that these Chinese successes are mentioned in U.S. press and in Stilwell's reports but NOT in the abridged and consolidated official Chinese account.

were in the open fields. "Charge! Forward! Forward!" came the orders, so you'd run a bit, then fall flat, calm your breathing, then charge again. Out of two hundred men, only ten or so weren't killed, wounded, or just worn out. Soldiers were expended like this. All my friends died there. You can't begin to really describe the wretchedness and misery of war. ... (The Third Battalion commander, Colonel) Shinkai told (the regimental commander) these methods wouldn't work, that the Imperial Army wasn't marching across China in a flag-taking competition. "If you expend your soldiers here, you cannot continue afterwards." Thanks to Shinkai, from then on even if it took two or three days to outflank a position, we adopted new tactics. He made us dig trenches all around. It was a kind of mile strategy, attacking only after approaching in trenches. ... But the battles were always severe. There are many creeks in central China. ... Cholera soon spread.¹⁰⁵

Chinese successes notwithstanding, the Japanese finally began to achieve their objectives on October 11th. From the 7th to the 12th, the Chinese held the enemy from what appears to be static defensive positions. At this point the nature of the battle seems to have changed somewhat from mobile to area defense. The Nationalist record says that "our forces resisted gallantly and conducted counterattacks."

On October 12th, the Chinese were able to counterattack the Japanese while crossing the Yuntsaopin (known to Western reporters as Wusong creek,) and re-take Kuangfu. But on the 14th, the Japanese attack had continued and penetrated Kuangfu again. The Japanese attack seemed to stall on the 15th and still hadn't obtained Tachang. On the 16th the Japanese complained that the Chinese were using gas. There was actually much better evidence that the Japanese were using gas by this time.¹⁰⁶ Apart from a series

¹⁰⁵ Haruko Taya Cook, and Theodore F. Cook. *Japan at War, an Oral History* (New York: The New Press, 1992), pp.31-2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.44-46, Tanisuga Shisuo, a "Gas Soldier," said,

We used poison gas in China from the very beginning. It wasn't employed openly since the Geneva Convention forbade it. We took special care to pick up the expended canisters and remove all traces of its use from the battlefields...Each squad carried two or three "Red Canisters," filled with a gas... Once I got the command "Use Red

of maneuvers to re-take Tachang and Kuangfu, (both sites changed hands twice over a two-week period until October 22nd,) no major Chinese counterattacks were mentioned until October 19th.

Along most of the front except in the Kuangfu/Kiangwan salient, most of the Chinese had withdrawn to another prepared defensive line. At 7:00 P.M., October 19th, the Chinese attacked to attempt to regain some ground. The attack was not effective because the Chinese stalled on the same river Japan had encountered just days before. Chinese failure in the counterattack notwithstanding, after a two-week battle covering an eight-mile front, the Japanese were still not able to permanently secure their main objective, Tachang.¹⁰⁷

Canister!" when I was at the front in China. I held up a piece of tissue paper and watched how it fluttered in the wind. I was glad to see conditions were favorable... "Perfect," I thought. I shouted the order, "Take out the canisters!" I had the men put on their gas masks and fix bayonets, then ordered them to crouch down and wait. One after the other, I threw the canisters toward the enemy. ... Their soldiers and most everyone else had already run off. ... An old grandmother had failed to get away because of her bound feet. She was trying her best, but she looked like a duck, taking tiny clumsy steps and shaking her tail as she ran. She was wracked by coughing. "She's not even dead yet," I thought to myself. "How strange."

The Chinese also claimed the Japanese were using gas first on the 8th of October. ("Poison Gas Charges Renewed by Chinese, *New York Times*, 8 October, 1937.)

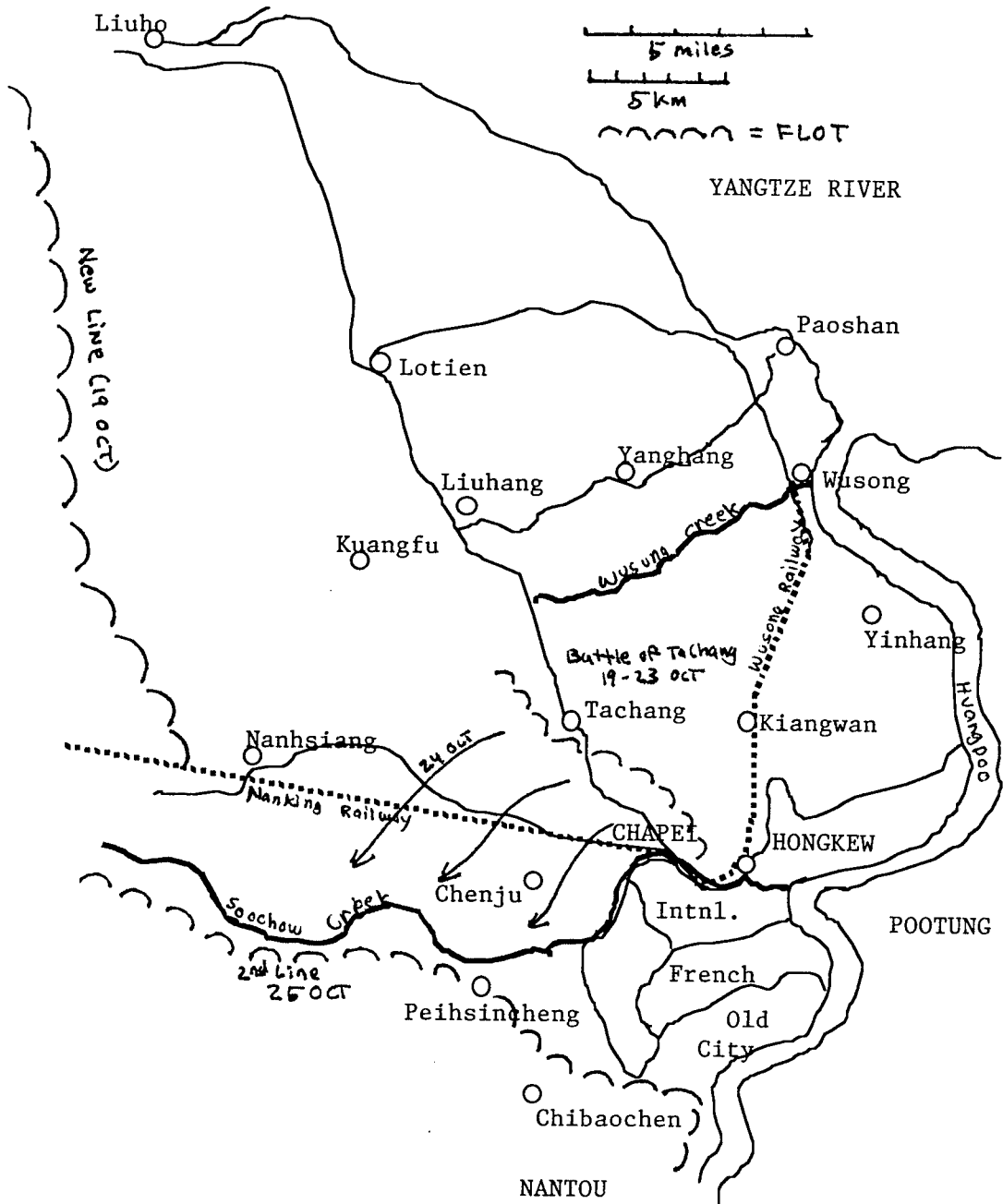
¹⁰⁷ Returning again to the concept of "center's of gravity" the following quotation from Stilwell about the battle may be in order:

Instead of adopting tactics that might break down the entire defense, the Japanese objective seemed to be to get to Tachang and so cause the Chinese to evacuate the Kiangwan salient and get out of Chapei, a maneuver which if successful would simply push them back on their right to a new position and leave their general line intact.¹⁰⁷

Stilwell's comment makes us wonder if the Japanese ever really identified the Chinese center of gravity? Why did the forces choose the targets they chose? Were they designing fire and maneuvers according to a plan that embraced the concept of centers of gravity? Or were they merely fighting a war of endurance and emotion that hinged around the challenge of a salient they couldn't break? We could ask similar questions to the Chinese when considering the sacrifices they made at Kiangwan and Tachang in October: Why wasn't the salient withdrawn and the enemy met or channeled elsewhere? If it was reinforcements that continued to plague China, why weren't more forces deployed to the other side of the Huangpoo instead? The asking of such questions reveals the validity or

On September 20th, in Tokyo, the order for the 6th, 18th, and 114th Divisions as part of the 16th Army to land at Hongchou was given. The Japanese would soon outflank the Chinese. On the 21st, the Chinese consolidated forces and launched a major counterattack. Indicating the need for rapid reconsolidation of combat power in the midst of battle, the 48th, 97th and 98th Divisions organized raiding parties to attack the enemy at Kuangfu. The Chinese attack was unsuccessful and on October 23rd the Japanese, (under cover of smoke that the Chinese thought to be gas,) were able to cross the river and force the Chinese back to the Tachang line. By the 25th the Japanese held Kuangfu and Tachang. (Four days later on October 29th, Lieutenant General Chu Yao-hua, the commander at Tachang felt such keen responsibility for the fall of Tachang that he killed himself.) The Japanese had finally conducted a converging attack from Wusong and Shanghai to collapse the Kiangwan salient. This protrusion in the Chinese defensive line had stood for over seventy days. On the 25th, the Chinese withdrew to a prepared defense on the south of the Soochow River. This signaled the end of the defensive battle and presaged the imminence of retrograde operations. See Maps 11 and 12 for the depiction of the taking of Tachang and the Chinese withdrawal to subsequent lines.

the inappropriateness of certain strategies and expose errors that can be avoided if one analyzes both friendly and enemy centers of gravity.



Map 12 - Chinese Forward Line of Troops - 23 October 1937

Revised Interpretation

As noted before, I agree with historical conclusions about the battle showcasing numerically superior forces against well-equipped forces. I admit that these two combined elements made for a very long and drawn-out battle. But, if we draw conclusions about numerical superiority too soon in the battle, we could get a skewed and incomplete vision of how things really happened.

Battlefield Math

Returning as promised to the enumeration issue, we find that data from Colonel Stillwell's August 21st report provides a good example to work with. He indicated in his report that by the 21st, there were six Chinese Divisions facing 8,000 Japanese in the Shanghai area of operations.

Though that is an absolutely true statement, what does it really mean? Without further analysis, it may lead the non-military reader to false conclusions about the reasoning and planning and effect of a given combat action. It is instructive to dissect Stilwell's statement. He starts by mentioning six Chinese divisions. His report indicates that these divisions are 36th, 55th, 56th, and 57th, 87th, and 88th Divisions. The first question to answer is "What is a division?"

The 87th and 88th divisions as organized by German advisors were not as large or self-sufficient as the typical Japanese division. The table below (Table 1) reviews three comparisons of Chinese to Japanese divisions:

From this table we see that in all cases, the Chinese division has about half the manpower and not more than a third of the firepower possessed by a Japanese division. It is therefore not advisable to count "divisions" on both sides as equal units.

Given the above data, at strength, Stilwell's six divisions should represent nearly 66,000 Chinese against 8,000 Japanese, (or 8:1) odds. Reportage like this would make anyone wonder why the Chinese didn't just summarily knock the Japanese into the river.

However, maps and the same attaché report say that the 55th, 56th, and 57th divisions had been deployed to positions as second echelon forces rather than as committed forces. They were intentionally positioned far from the action in Shanghai to act as counterattacking or blocking forces on the flanks. The 55th division went south to Putung. and the 56th went north to Liuho and Wusong. The 57th only deployed as far as Tachang.

The 36th Division, (sometimes considered part of the 87th and 88th Division), was placed as a tactical reserve at Kiangwan. Thus, out of the six divisions Stilwell counts as "facing" the Japanese, only the 87th and 88th Divisions were available for actual commitment to hostilities. Counting the 36th Division as half-committed (as a follow-on unit as Stilwell understood it to be) our ratio at the front is thus 27,500 Chinese to 8,000 Japanese (or 3.5:1). This is still enough to succeed in the attack against a defending enemy if firepower is equal. But there are still further aspects to take into account.

For instance, most military planners acknowledge that combat effective units are usually maintained at 90% strength. In wartime, many divisions are forced to deploy below strength. Additionally, the disposition of the 87th and 88th Divisions on and prior to August 21st bears on our calculation of force ratio. The 87th was deployed in the eastern portion of the area of operations (from the university up the bank of the river toward Wusong).

Table 1 – Comparison of Chinese and Japanese Divisions¹⁰⁹

	Personnel	Rifles	Machine Guns	Artillery	Tanks
JN DIV (Chiang) ¹¹⁰	22,000	9,500	600	108	24
CH DIV (Chiang)	10,923	3,800	328	46	None
JN DIV (Hoyt) ¹¹¹	22,000	Not stated	Not stated	Organic implied	Organic implied
CH DIV (Hoyt)	11,000	1/3 of JN	<1/2 of Japanese	Not organic	None
JN DIV (Stanley) ¹¹²	22,000	9,500	600	108	24
Ch DIV (Stanley)	10,923	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated
Average Difference	11.051	Approx. 6017	Approx. 286	62	24

The 88th was bisected by the Soochow creek with it's remainder spread all the way across the Yangzepoo front and up the east bank of the Huangpoo. Hence the number of forces actually available to engage Japanese forces diminishes even further. Conservatively estimating a reduction due to

¹⁰⁹ For detailed descriptions of the Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) for a Chinese division after German modifications please see U.S War Department, Strength, General Disposition and Control of Chinese Army Units (Nanking: 1935), Reports #9093, 9011, 9238, 9245, and 9982. To compare a modified division with a 1927 Chinese division, one may also consult the January 19, 1927 Report #6033 of the same source. These reports give detailed numbers on everything one could want to know about a unit from the type of weapons systems to the number of cooks and clerks.

¹¹⁰ Wego W.K. Chiang, *A Strategical Analysis of the Sino-Japanese War*, in Symposium on the History of the Republic of China, Vol. 4, Session I, 24 August 1981 (Republic of China: Taipei, 1981), p.8. (As an aside, this account along with the discussion notes that follow, holds evidence of Chiang's long-term designs on Shanghai as a battlefield in order to change the Japanese orientation from north-south to east-west.)

¹¹¹ Hoyt, p.150.

¹¹² Stanley, pp.27-94.

firepower, disposition of forces and probable mobilization strength we could say that the forces actually arrayed against the Japanese concentrated in Honkew was 20,000 Chinese to 8,000 Japanese, (or 2.5:1).

Finally, the mission of the forces in question must be assessed. Today, military planners prefer to engage a defending enemy with strength of at least 3:1. Since ancient times it was recognized that one must have a superior force ratio to succeed in the attack. Sun-tzu, the ancient Chinese military strategist, is attributed with military advice such as, "The art of using troops is: when you outnumber the enemy ten to one, surround him; when five to one, attack him. ...And if our forces are concentrated at one place while his are scattered at ten places, then it is ten to one when we attack him at one place. This means we will be numerically superior.¹¹³ In other words, for every Japanese defender, one should attack with at least three to five (optimally speaking, 10) offenders. Yet, this preceding analysis reveals that the Chinese had only 2.5 to every one Japanese soldier. Granted, these calculations reflect some hyperbole in that our account shows the 36th Division committed on August 21st. Adjusting accordingly, the combat ratio between the Chinese attackers and the Japanese defenders during the critical phase of the Chinese offensive was about 3:1.

After chapter two's discussion concerning the staggered start and movement to contact conditions, this evaluation of combat ratios should complete the process of dismantling assumptions made by oft-cited battle-

¹¹³ Sun, Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by Wusun Lin (Beijing: People's China Publishing House, 1995), pp.30, 38. A very thorough and engaging study of how the Chinese and Japanese invoked Sun-tzu; and how the Chinese under German influence used Clausewitz to formulate military doctrine is found in Bi Jianxiang, "On the strategies of East Asian Limited Wars: States, Militaries, Technologies." Ph.D., (Carleton, 1996). Determining any particular adherence to strategy is outside the scope of this paper.

field strength figures of overwhelming Chinese forces arrayed against a far less numerous foe. Whereas all accounts report numerically superior Chinese at least until the 4th of September, we can see that from August 23rd to September 4th, the notion of a vastly outnumbered Japanese force is simply incorrect. It was not until after the 5th of September as additional Chinese forces were committed to the battle that such judgments hold up.

From the above, we can conclude that numbers alone are not enough to fully explain the various successes or failures on the battlefield. As mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter certain items were repeatedly mentioned throughout the battle, while others were seemingly neglected. Although weather, terrain, firepower, and will were mentioned by all sources, the challenge is to properly assess the degree to which each of those elements really bore upon success or failure in the battle.

Weather and Terrain

First, to review the effects of weather and terrain. While absent from most accounts of the offensive phase, the characteristics of terrain and weather were mentioned often as contributing to the success or failure of both sides in the defense. From the early September defense of Wusong to the fight for Lotien and the Kiangwan salient, weather and its effects on the terrain played a major role. Revisiting the press account of the battle for Lotien we read, "Despite a steady downpour of rain, the Chinese troops were said to have broken a mechanized Japanese attack." In this case it may have been more accurate to say that the Chinese were able to break the Japanese mechanized attack *because* of the rain, not in spite of it. Weather and its effects on terrain, as well as the characteristics of the terrain bore heavily on delaying

the Japanese offensive that was to start on October 10th, as well as most other Japanese attacks southward from the Yangtze.

Yet, while acknowledging effects of terrain and weather in a battle so dependent upon mobility, one must examine the degree to which it impacted units in the field before determining which side it "favored." My primary argument here is with Chinese official accounts that often refer to weather and terrain as inhibiting to Chinese success. To begin with, while many in logistical circles would agree that the largest force had more terrain issues to overcome, the same planners would also agree that the Japanese mechanized forces and towed artillery would have an especially difficult time traversing muddy rice fields and enemy trench-lines. Hence, I would argue that taking into account the size of the Chinese force and the fact that Japan had more artillery and mechanized stock to move, terrain and weather during this phase of the battle favored the defense and contributed to the equalization of Chinese manpower to Japanese firepower.

Terrain offered the defender of a city some urban concealment along with great observation and fields of fire outside the perimeter. The wide-open spaces outside defended perimeters and beyond Chinese trenches provided plenty of time to mass effective fire against an opponent.

The terrain also contained numerous natural and man-made obstacles to provide a defending force the alternate blessing or curse of countermobility. Thus, terrain favored the prosecution of an area or positional defense but made a mobile defense, which relies on fire and maneuver quite difficult. Since the Chinese and the Japanese found themselves on both sides of the equation throughout the battle, neither side can ultimately claim that terrain was against them. Adding in the effects of weather, however, we have shown

that it had a great neutralizing effect on Japanese technology. Thus, it is my belief that weather and terrain effects during this phase slightly favored the dismounted Chinese infantry.

Firepower and Air-superiority

The other issue at hand is firepower and air superiority. At the beginning of this chapter, several accounts reviewing the overwhelming nature of Japanese firepower were given. The specific accounts provided by observers and participants however tell a slightly different story.

For example, the first Chinese Nationalist account in describing the fighting for Wusong gave us the typical line about "the superiority of artillery and naval gunfire...." But once we depart from Chinese sources we find that by early October the Chinese were in a new line where, according to Stilwell, the "fire from the Japanese fleet would be negligible." The press reports mentioned the involvement of Japanese armored cars and tanks at Lotien, yet also mention that the Chinese broke the mechanized attack. Even at the end of September, when the Japanese were making good progress, Stilwell indicates the ineffectiveness of Japanese targeting and bombing. Though the results were horrid, they didn't produce military outcomes. Above, Carlson and Dorn are cited as criticizing the Japanese inability to synchronize creeping fire forward of advancing infantry. And, on September 28th, the Japanese admitted that the tanks used at Kiangwan and Lotien only effected "small gains." Thus, many accounts of the battle of the defensive period minimize the effect of Japanese firepower. There are other items, not mentioned above that also bear on the issue of firepower.

From a military perspective, naval gunfire called against area targets in 1937 was not known for its accuracy. Additionally, infantry, as Carlson indicated, was capable of taking cover and rising again as soon as fire are lifted or shifted. Hence, the presence of such weaponry did not presuppose its effective use. Referring to the Japanese, Snow acknowledged an entire list of weaknesses (often assumed to be strengths by historians partial to the official Chinese account):

At Shanghai, however, where over half a million troops included some of China's best divisions, the artillery barrage failed to dislodge the defenders and the tank advance was repulsed again and again. Artillery was rarely coordinated with tanks and was used as a moving screen for an infantry advance only once or twice.

Marksmanship of both artillery and air bombing was ineffective in another duty, foreign observers noted. It failed to interdict roads leading into front-line positions. Until a few days before the end of the battle, the Chinese were still using motor transport close to their advances positions, although with about 500 planes in the air between Shanghai and Nanking, and practically no opposition, the Japanese had every opportunity to decommission them.¹¹⁴

From the above we see an observer's assessment of the lackluster performance of Japanese indirect fire and air assets. Wakeman supports Snow in the implication that the Japanese airforce wasn't all it was cracked up to be. He adds the detail that the Chinese were able to shoot down 47 Japanese heavy bombers over Shanghai within four days.¹¹⁵ Turning the analysis completely upside down, Evan Carlson cites three examples of Chinese hot-shot pilots who inflicted multiple damage on Japanese targets through precision flying and calm under fire.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Snow, p.54.

¹¹⁵ Wakeman, p.141.

¹¹⁶ Evans Fordyce Carlson, *Twin Stars of China, A Behind the Scenes Story of China's valiant Struggle for Existence by a Marine who Lived & Moved with the People* (New York:

Armor, when provided as a reason for Japanese success also has its profound limitations. As has been stated, because of paralyzing weather and terrain, armor was not mobile much of the time. The armor mission according to Stanley was to breach obstacles in direct support of infantry. Hence, when it was employed it was deployed in two-tank teams in support of advancing infantry. Armor units were always task-organized and parceled out to the infantry units they supported. Most military planners will concur that the tanks' worst enemy besides other tanks, is dismounted infantry. Infantry soldiers can get around blind spots of a tank and finish it with a well placed grenade. Causing a tank to throw a track is just as good as killing it. Thus, a review of Stanley's *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* will cause one to doubt immediately the effectiveness of Japanese armor, which was a largely experimental novelty in the battle of Shanghai. It will also cause one to reject out of hand Maurer's notion of "Panzer Divisions" swooping down upon the poor Chinese.¹¹⁷

The problem with such interpretations as Maurer's are that they are often appropriated by other historians and thus perpetuated by well-meaning authors as the *truth*. In this instance, Dick Wilson cites Maurer to describe how "men stood before tanks." After the sensationalistic sound-byte, he leaves the issue and allows the reader to form the worst possible conclusions about the strength of Japanese armor at the battle of Shanghai.¹¹⁸

In closing the discussion on firepower, taken together with weather and terrain effects, one could draw a conclusion quite contrary to official

Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), pp.14-5. This account details the author's personal experience while trooping the lines behind the Chinese defense. It reveals much of the high morale and standards of conduct of the Chinese soldier.

¹¹⁷ Stanley, pp.27-40. Not to be overly harsh, but just glancing at the tanks pictured in the volume renders Maurer's assessment humorous.

¹¹⁸ Wilson, p.37.

Chinese accounts: Japanese firepower wasn't as overwhelmingly superior as is often indicated. Though I understand why an official history would invoke superior enemy firepower as a reason for failure, it is less clear why other historians undertaking to summarize the battle would lift that claim for use along with enumeration as primary causal agents in their own accounts.

Preparation

Finally, having described enumeration, firepower, terrain and weather as important considerations in battle, one more aspect of this defensive battle is not treated with the fullness I feel it deserves. That aspect is Chinese preparation. Although I very much agree with Stilwell's and Dorn's charge that Chiang's orders were vague, if not totally useless in their absence of an executable plan, it must be pointed out that his commanders on the ground conducted one of the most thoroughly brilliant defenses I have ever studied. While I don't believe this can be attributed to Chiang's leadership, it was certainly his desire. US Marine, Evans Carlson, during the September-October 1937, visited the successive lines of prepared defenses. (What I wouldn't give to have seen what he saw!) A network of new roads was constructed from each battle position to its subsequent position. Bridges were wired to blow once crossed. A steady stream of supplies from the field and combat trains was moving towards the Shanghai front. Successive sentry lines had a sign and counter-sign pass system, and the Chinese had ensured that all friendly elements knew what they were.¹¹⁹ For the military analyst with any field

¹¹⁹ Carlson, pp.16-21.

experience, these are not details an untrained or poorly led army would attend to. This defense was well prepared.

In summary, listing numbers of forces involved or broadly describing Japanese firepower can not adequately describe this phase of the battle. Hopefully, this approach lifted the reader beyond the criticisms of Stilwell or Dorn and placed him or her next to Sergeant Teishin as he tried to advance on the Chinese position at Kuangfu; or next to corporal Zhou as he watched two more Japanese transports land after his last round was fired. While not minimizing oft-cited conditions such as the number and efficiency of forces involved, it is hoped that as historians evaluate the battle of Shanghai they will apply aspects of enumeration, weather, terrain, firepower, and preparation to their analysis thereby informing their opinions and enhancing their understanding of what really happened.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CHINA'S RETROGRADE OPERATIONS (OCTOBER 26 – NOVEMBER 8)¹²⁰

Historical Interpretations

The Loser as Incompetent

The last portion of the battle of Shanghai, just as it signaled the collapse of the defense and the eventual retreat to Nanking, seems also to signal to historians that it is time to criticize Chinese leadership and fix blame for such a dramatic loss. One of the common comparisons is between the professionalism and leadership abilities of the Chinese as compared to Japanese officers. As expressed by J. Gunnar Andersson, many historians come down on the side of the Japanese and agree that it was the "more skillful leadership of the Japanese troops," that facilitated Japanese success.¹²¹

Although historians have slightly differing opinions on the quality of the Chinese as compared to the Japanese army, most seem to fall in line with the criticisms that Soviet advisors, Colonel Stilwell and Frank Dorn have passed along and perpetuated through the years. For example, Dick Wilson cites from a Russian source the following account describing the experience of

¹²⁰ Because a retrograde operation is defined as a maneuver to the rear or away from the enemy, it is clear that some of the operations already conducted fall in this category. For each movement to a secondary or tertiary fighting position, the purpose was to improve the current situation or prevent a worse situation from occurring. The objective in every case was to gain time, preserve forces and to avoid combat under undesirable conditions. Chiang would have described this as his ultimate strategy of "trading space for time." Thus, according to *FM 100-5*, the criteria for retrograde operations are met – especially in the planned and careful withdrawal of 23-25 October. HQDA. *Field Manual 100-5 - Operations*. Washington DC: Department of the Army, 1993. p.11-1.

¹²¹ J. Gunnar Andersson, *China Fights for the World* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1939), p.164.

Soviet advisors as they criticized the close intervals of Chinese tactical formations: "Close formations are good food for machineguns, flamethrowers, and artillery. We recommend that the commanders shift to small group tactics. This would diminish the losses."¹²² Wilson points out that General Bai, a member of Chiang's Staff, credited by the Germans as the only one humble enough to accept instruction, actually scoffed at this advice.¹²³

General Bai was reported to have said "Chinese soldiers are used to close formations and the feeling of close fellowship. Besides such a close order ensures better control."¹²⁴ In my opinion, Wilson gives a very fine account of the Battle of Shanghai, but in this case he perpetuates the attitude of 1930's era western observers that the Chinese military was outmoded by the times and not capable of learning. He goes on to attribute Chinese success to nationalistic spirit and Japanese leadership failure. At least to his credit, perhaps influenced by Snow, he is the only historian to recently call into question the professionalism and competence of Japanese forces as well as Chinese.

Other authors blame Chinese leadership (in particular Chiang's) for failure in the battle. Stilwell, Dorn and Williamson all blame the micro-managing central command for conducting tactical command at the national level. Referring to the guidance of September 6th, Dorn wrote "The tone of each order and the detailed action prescribed for each senior commander destroyed all individual initiative as surely as if it had been so designed."¹²⁵

¹²² Wilson, p.47.

¹²³ Snow, pp.177-8.

¹²⁴ Wilson, p.47. Both Wilson and his counterpart, Edgar Snow, relate that it wasn't until 1940 that the Chinese army started making real progress toward tactical modernization. Ironically, Snow mentions that it was General Bai who led the effort. Snow, pp.175-6.

¹²⁵Dorn, p.73.

He also wrote that some of the guidance Chiang published was designed specifically so that he could take credit for success and lay blame for failure.¹²⁶

Courage: Their Only Virtue

While blaming the leadership, authors unanimously extol the traits of the Chinese soldier. Almost all accounts of the last two phases of the battle describe the motivation, will and bravery of the soldiers in conflict. Most authors are particularly in awe of the fighting spirit of the Chinese.¹²⁷

Describing the violent character of both sides in the battle, Dick Wilson recapitulates:

It was no longer," an eye-witness said, "a war between armies, but between two races. With mounting fury the two giants, like two men who have started a boxing match and who suddenly find themselves convulsed with hate, sprang at each other's throat in a tussle in which the only prize was death." A Chinese military historian described it as "the bloodiest battle ... since Verdun."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.72.

¹²⁷ One reason for this is that officers on both sides were capable of instilling a great deal of "will" in their soldiers. I include the following long quotation from *FM 100-5* to demonstrate how relevant this seemingly ancient concept is even today:

Will is the disposition to act toward achievement of a desired end state. It is an expression of determination, the articulation of choice and desire. A platoon takes the hill because it wants to take the hill. The squad defends its position because it wants to hold the position.

War is a contest of wills. Combat power is the product of military forces and their will to fight. When will is lacking, so is combat power; when will is strong, it multiplies the effectiveness of military forces.

Ultimately, the focus of all combat operations must be the enemy's will. Break his will and he is defeated. When he no longer wants to fight, he cannot fight. Conversely, if his will remains strong, even though physically weakened and materially depleted he re-mains a formidable opponent.

Leaders are the main source of will. They inspire their soldiers with the desire to win, to accomplish the mission, and to persevere in the face of all difficulties. When the will of the enemy commander is broken, his force quickly disintegrates. Analyzing and attacking the underpinnings of his will therefore is key to victory. (See HQDA, p.6-7.)

¹²⁸ Wilson, p.37.

Indeed, the Chinese were fighting for their very homeland. One soldier told Evans Carlson that they were fighting for their national salvation. "The enemy want to take our homes. If we work together, we can defeat him."¹²⁹ Other historians have noted that the Chinese soldiers excelled at hand-to-hand combat when pitted against the Japanese, and further that their morale and calm under fire was unflappable. Not a single account fails to mention the courage or determination with which they fought.

Thus, historians often make judgments about the leadership and will of contending armies. They characteristically judge that the "winning" army has better leadership and competence than the "losing" army. In this case they also judge that the losing force had unprecedented ardor in the face of an overwhelming enemy. With that in mind, perhaps the best way to assess the quality of tactical leadership is by assessing the quality of various operations and engagements. The retrograde phase of the battle offers us a great opportunity to perform such an assessment.

Chinese Retrograde Operations

The Japanese began their major offensive through Tachang on October 20th. They were within six kilometers of Nansiang by the end of the day. By the 23rd their attack had been pushed to its maximum intensity and they were only two kilometers from Nansiang, their objective. Why, when progress had been so slow for so long were they suddenly able to gain four kilometers in one day? Because on October 23rd, the Chinese having long planned to withdraw brought in security elements to cover the egress of their main

¹²⁹ Carlson, p.11. An example of an eyewitness who attributes nearly all Chinese valor to nationalism is I. Epstein, *The People's War*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939).

forces, and early in the morning of the 26th, after a 100 sortie Japanese air-attack, the Chinese executed their plan. They withdrew their forces to a further pre-determined line of defense. But before the Chinese left, "dare to die" teams from remainder of the 88th Division were left to cover the withdrawal. On the same night, the Chinese backed quietly out of North Station and Chapei for the first time during the battle. They displaced to a prepared position three miles west. An eyewitness recorded the stealthy withdrawal with amazement:

I saw their (the Japanese) plans go wrong one morning in October, 1937, and if it had not been for the fact that dead and dying men were all about, the episode might have been funny. The Chinese armies had just started their retreat from Chapei, or rather they already had retreated during the night and the Japanese didn't find it out until the following morning. Only a few men had been left behind to start firing what remained of the city once the Japs woke up and realized that a withdrawal had taken place. It was almost noon before the Japanese had sufficiently recovered from the surprise to start and advance. In the mean time the Chinese had gained much valuable time and were able to reach new positions on Hungjao on the outskirts of Shanghai. If the Japs had not been caught napping they could have forced the retreating Chinese out of the entire area then and there, and the second battle of Shanghai in that decade might have been over. As it turned out, the fight was prolonged almost another two weeks, all because the Jap's plans were upset. Chinese rear guard had enough time to set fire to Chapei, creating a solid wall of fire eight or nine miles long between their retreating main armies and the Japanese forces. It was three days before the flames had subsided enough so that the Japs could complete occupation of the evacuated Chinese positions.¹³⁰

As recorded above, this withdrawal must have had a profoundly annoying effect upon the Japanese, who for over two months had sought to turn the Chinese at their right flank in Chapei. Instead, the city was left in

¹³⁰ Carroll Alcott, *My War with Japan* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), p.229-30. No doubt these commanders had Sun Tzu's words in mind, "So subtle is the expert that he leaves no trace, so mysterious that he makes no sound." Sun Tzu, p.38.

silence and the pivotal flank merely moved with it's own line safely out of range.

Another description of the withdrawal from Chapei specifically points to the professionalism of the way the Chinese handled the withdrawal. This is an eyewitness account of the retreat from Chapei:

The Chinese divisions which, deeply dug in, had held up the Japanese for more than two months, had slipped out during the night under cover of darkness, and in the opinion of European and American officers on the spot the retreat was accomplished with exemplary regularity and was so dogged and complete that the Japanese found simply nothing in the way of military supplies.¹³¹

Behind in Chapei, the Chinese left only the famous "lone battalion." Numbers of men in this battalion vary depending on the account. US accounts say it was 500. The Chinese account recalls 800 men. For four days, inside a bank warehouse in Chapei, these men held off unrelenting Japanese attacks. The actual nature of the attacks seems never to be disclosed. Mostly reports seem to indicate indirect fire or small-unit penetrations. Commissioned to cover the withdrawal from Chapei, the men in the battalion vowed to remain until the last man was killed. The British pickets become well acquainted with these troops as the bridge across the Soochow next to the warehouse went right up to their portion of the International Settlement.

There are countless anecdotes recounting the heroism and even humor of this battalion as well as the support it earned from the members of the local girl-scouts, foreigners, and citizens alike. Eventually, under the searchlight of a Japanese machine-gun post, the men of the battalion accepted the invitation to withdraw into the Concession leaving Chapei deserted. But the Japanese

¹³¹ Andersson, p.171.

victory was mitigated by the fact that the Chinese flank was still not exposed. It was now three miles away.¹³²

During this time, withdrawing elements from Chapei were engaged in intermittent fighting in Hungjiao on October 26th. Retreating troops heading west from Kiangwan were pursued and pressured as they crossed the Soochow creek on October 30th. However, once the Chinese took up prepared positions on the south side of the creek, the Japanese remained on the north side attempting to work out solutions for crossing over to continue the attack.

The Japanese found a solution and started ferrying troops across the creek in sampans that belonged to locals. It rained on November 2nd which some accounts say slowed the crossing operation somewhat, but by nightfall Japan had 8,000 men across and were building bridges for the rest. The consequences of a Japanese penetration across the Soochow would be enormous. It would effectively narrow the avenue of egress for Chinese forces trying to withdraw from Pootung and Nantou. By the 4th, the Japanese had 10,000 troops across on a "five mile front over a depth averaging three quarters of a mile." Chaing had still not ordered the evacuation of the troops in Pootung and Nantou. Time was running out to safely withdraw Chinese forces from these sites because a Japanese pincer force would soon land on the north side of Hangchow Bay, twenty miles to the south and change the landscape of the battlefield forever.

¹³² This event captured the world's attention. From October 29th to October 31st, 1937, the New York Times ran stories updating the status of the "Lone Battalion." An interesting account in English is found in Harriet Sergeant, *Shanghai, Collision Point of Cultures, 1918/1939*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1990), pp.307-8. For an account in Chinese see Lü Han-hun, *Pa pai chuang shih* (T ai-pe, ROC: Huang kuan ch u pan she, 1976).

The man chosen to lead the Japanese landing force in late October was General Yanagawa Heisuke. He had been in charge of the Japanese army stationed in Taiwan since 1935. While in Taiwan, he developed many of the leading amphibious landing techniques used by the Japanese. To describe the situation with better words, I include the following by David Bergamini:

Early on the morning of November 5, 1937, Yanagawa's task force steamed under radio silence into Hangchow Bay, a finger of the China Sea some 40 miles south of Shanghai which reached into the China coastline along the underbelly of Chiang Kai-shek's southern flank. The transports with over 60,000 men aboard hove to and waited for dawn off the waterfront of the little walled town of Chinshanwei. ...On the muted ships over the grumble of taut anchor chains could be heard the work chants of the awakening town, and the "heya-hoa" of coolies shouldering produce and refuse to and from the central market place.

First light revealed a dawn fog clinging to the yellow waters of the bay. General Yanagawa decided to wait for it to lift. ...Yanagawa donned a white surgical mask ... stepped onto the nets of the waiting assault boats and ordered the first wave to cast off and make for the beaches.

The Chinese soldiers in the area were taken completely unawares. By noon, most of Yanagawa's three and a half divisions were ashore. ... The next morning Yanagawa had clouds of advertising balloons wafted aloft on an onshore breeze. They dangled scrolls of false intelligence: "A Million Japanese soldiers have landed at Hangchow bay."¹³³

The above illustration not only captures the feeling of the moment, but indicates that the landing went unopposed. At a much lower level, Corporal Ashihei Hino memorialized a most riveting personal account of this landing in the Japanese wartime classic, *Earth and Soldiers*. This account was later translated and combined with another of his journals to make up the volume entitled, *Wheat and Soldiers*." A short excerpt from the day of the landing follows:

¹³³ Bergamini, p.15-16.

“Over the side, quickly,” shouted the section commander. Instantly, I was in the water. It reached to my knees and I gasped from the shock of contact with its icy cold. None of us was wearing shoes. We had been outfitted with some especially heavy socks that had rubber soles. Now we knew the reasons. Mud!¹³⁴

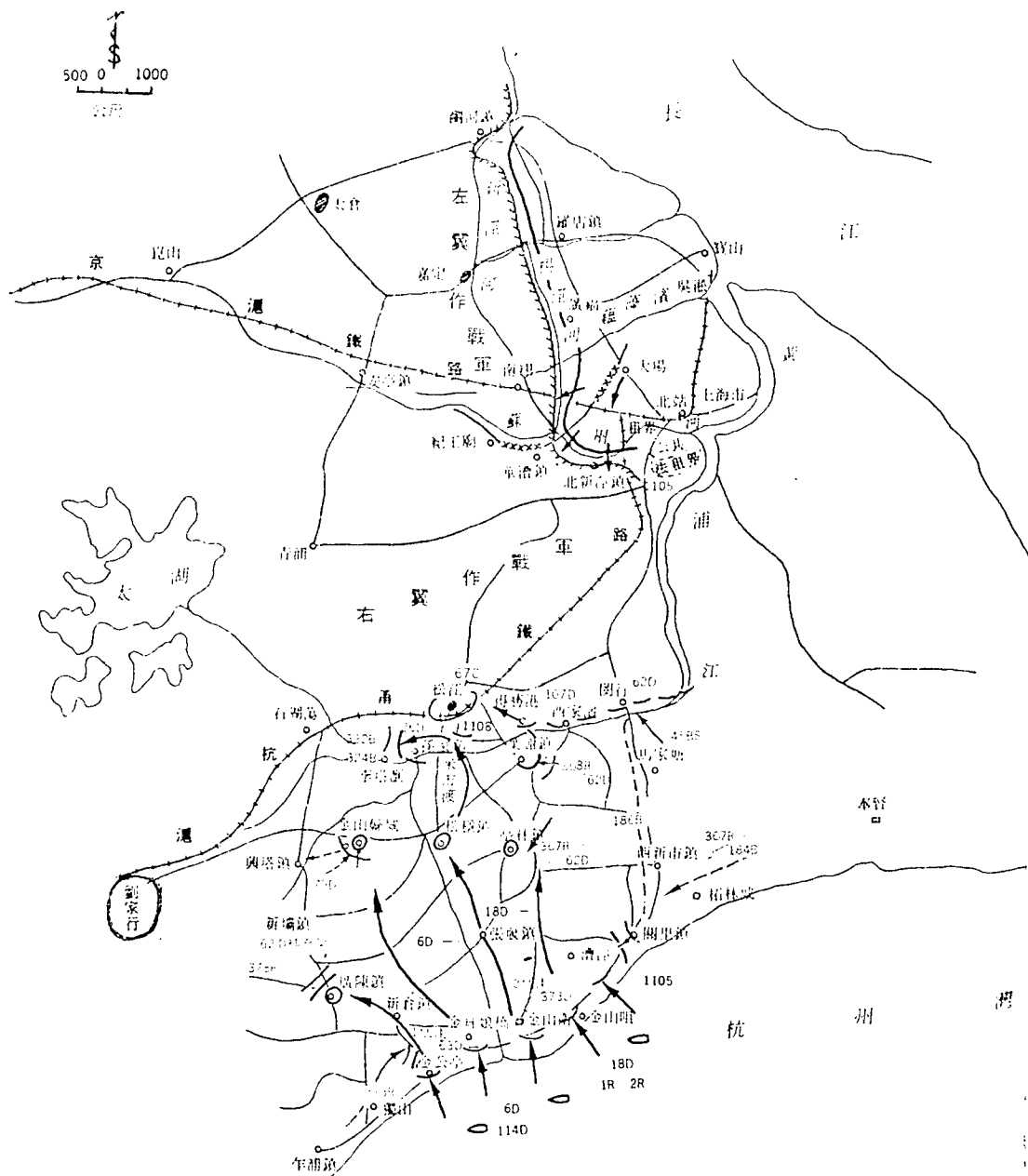
Even this personal account of a soldier reveals the careful training and logistical preparation that went into such landings. Later in the volume Hino confirms Bergamini’s account: the landing was unopposed. See Map 13 for the Chinese depiction of the landing of General Yanagawa and his move northward. Although they didn’t arrive at the battle in time, the Chinese map shows the 63rd and 62nd Divisions arrayed against the Japanese force.

Although some elements of the Chinese forces were available for contact, they were not deployed to meet the enemy. Carlson reported that in one of the changes of command that occurred in the last three months, the commander in Hangchow had been transferred with his forces to the Shanghai theater. The Manchurian troops ordered to replace him failed to arrive before the others departed. They were moving in that direction and were able to conduct movements to contact and withdrawals in order to buy the troops in Pootung some time.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ashihei Hino, *Wheat and Soldiers*. Translated by Baroness Shidzué Ishimoto (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1939), p.46.

¹³⁵ Carlson, p.26. Other accounts assign blame for the unopposed landing to the intrigue of a Warlord commander who promised allegiance and then withheld it at the last moment. This theme is repeated in Spunt’s *A Place in Time*, Gibson’s thesis, and Finch, p.258.

附圖 12 淞滬會戰杭洲灣北岸日軍登陸作戰經過要圖
(民國26年11月5日至8日)



Map 13 - Chinese Operations - 5-8 November¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Chiang, *Kang Jih yü wu*, Map #12.

Yet, one of the items I discovered in researching the American press went wholly unreported by military observers and historians alike. Back on August 28th, 1937, there had been a report in the *New York Times* saying that "the Japanese were reported to have landed troops yesterday at Chapu, forty-five miles southwest of Shanghai, to take part in operations against the Chinese forces on the main battlefield."¹³⁷ Nothing I have seen concerning the rest of the battle throws any light on this force. Perhaps it was they who gave Japanese intelligence the information they needed to ramp up for an amphibious operation of such a grand scale starting on October 20th. Hence, on Map 13, while the presence of forces opposing the landing of the Japanese is puzzling, there is also a notable absence: The Chapu Detachment.

We do know that on November 8th, the Japanese landing party was said to be merging with forces from Chapu and convergence in the Shanghai area was imminent. The 10th Army under Yanagawa marched to the south bank of the Huangpoo and made contact with Japanese elements in Shanghai.

On November 8th, the Chinese forces prepared to depart from their positions. Finally, on the 9th they received the evacuation orders. But according to some, it was already too late. In the words of Williamsen:

Attacking simultaneously along the entire length of the Shanghai front, the Japanese pounded the exhausted, nearly starving Chinese forces with artillery as well as aerial and naval bombardment. The battlefield at Shanghai was fast becoming a killing ground.

There should have been an orderly, planned, retrograde operation, a movement to the rear to prepared defensive positions according to a prearranged plan rehearsed through war game maneuvers before the war began. Instead there was chaos. Chinese units seem to have been virtually blown back by the superior killing power of Japanese arms. As decimated units

¹³⁷ "Japanese Menace Vast Chinese Area," *The New York Times*, 28 August 1937.

pulled back piecemeal, the defensive line dissolved in panic and disorder. Wounded troops were abandoned where they lay, and a number of officers deserted their hapless soldiers. Chiang Kai-shek ordered retreat only after the rout had begun, and by the time his orders reached the line units on November 8th, it was too late to reestablish command and control. The battle of Shanghai ended in an uncoordinated nightmare of death, confusion and fear.¹³⁸

This sordid account of panic under pressure to withdrawal may be true for the forces to which it applies but I am not convinced that it is typical. Other reports indicate that even though there was a gap to the west of less than 20 miles wide, the Chinese lost no time getting out in an orderly fashion. Said Stilwell, "By November 8th, date of writing, the bulk of the Chinese had moved through the gap and a junction of the Japanese Chapu detachment and the Japanese south of Soochow Creek was imminent. ... Estimated strengths at Shanghai, 175,000 Japanese and 350,000 Chinese."¹³⁹ On November 9th, the New York Times reported, "At 10 o'clock this morning the Chinese were marching in orderly formation, hurrying southwestward just beyond Sicawei Cathedral, west of Shanghai. These apparently were the last troops withdrawn from Pootong and Nantao."¹⁴⁰ It is true that later that afternoon Carlson and Snow reported on watching the withdrawal from the wall of the French Concession. They did see the Japanese close with and destroy several retreating Chinese units. Indeed, their accounts could be extrapolated to support Williamsen's claim of an absolute rout. However, even though all agree that the evacuation order was issued too late, for the vast majority of Chinese forces involved this was not a rout. See Map 14 for a depiction of the evacuation of the Chinese toward Nanking.

¹³⁸ Williamsen, pp.145-6.

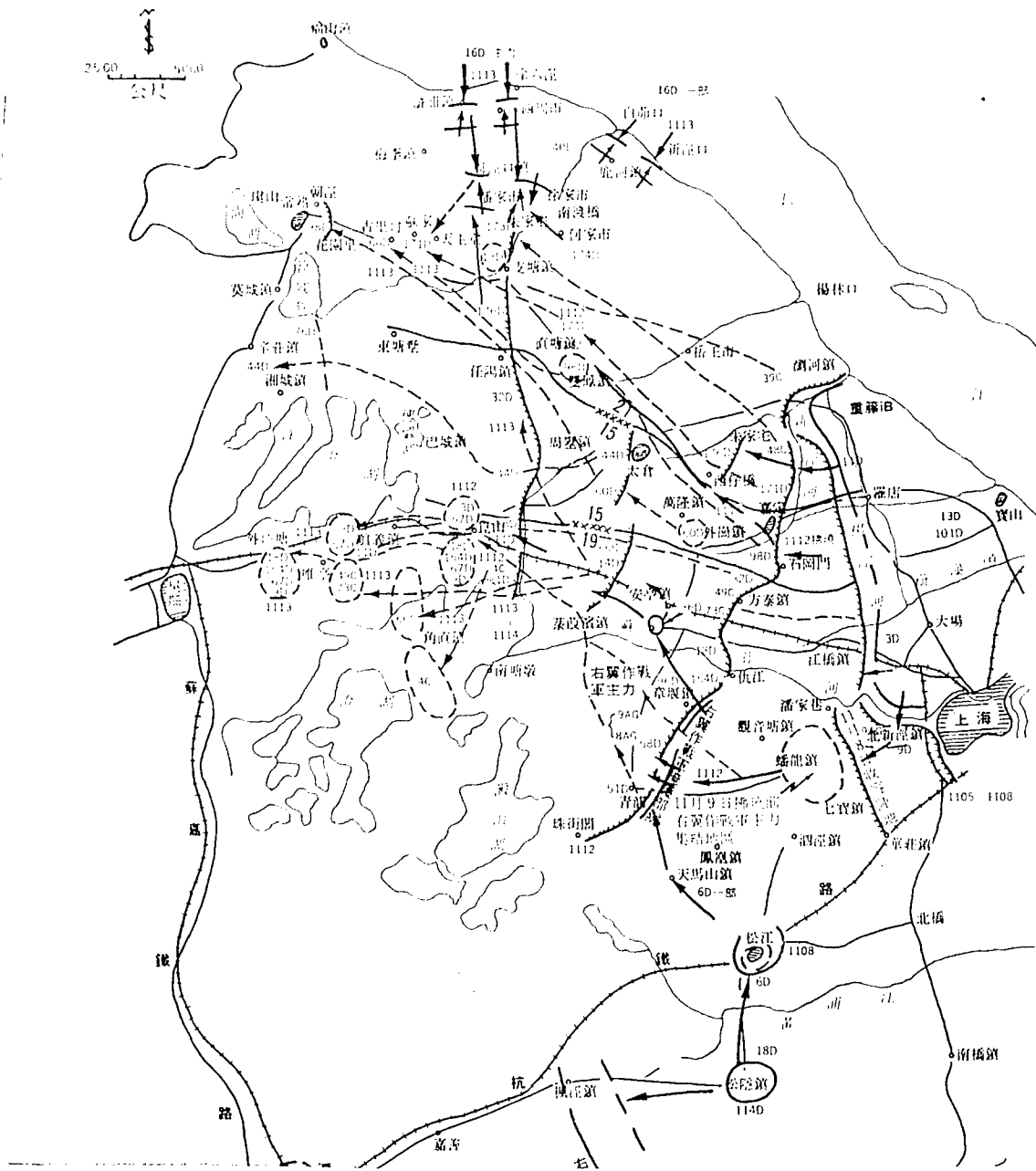
¹³⁹ Stilwell, Report #9607, p.8. (Also note that this is the first time the Japanese Chapu detachment appears in any of the studied accounts.)

¹⁴⁰ "Chinese in Orderly Retreat," *The New York Times*, 9 November 1937.

附圖 14

淞滬會戰國軍向吳福線轉進戰鬪經過要圖

(民國26年11月5日至14日)



Map 14 - Chinese Operations - 5-14 November¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Chiang, Kang Jih yü, Map #14.

So ended the battle of Shanghai. In this controversial battle, where everything from the national strategies and objectives of both sides, to whom started firing is debated, it is not surprising that casualty and loss figures are also cause for dispute. One estimate of losses was 61,700 Chinese killed as compared to only 5,173 reported by Japanese sources. The official estimate of China, ROC is that China lost 180,000 troops and Japan lost 50,000.¹⁴² Nearly every account reports that in spite of tremendous loss the result of the battle was a galvanized and battle-hardened China prepared to see the war through to the bitter end.¹⁴³

Revised Interpretation

Balanced Competence and Shared Weakness

I am not inclined or qualified to say that the commitment of forces in the battle of Shanghai was morally justified or even very smart. That is for strategic planners, political analysts and students of national agendas to sort out. Indeed, there is no shortage of opinions on the losses. Nevertheless, the military question at hand is "was the battle prosecuted in a professional manner?" My answer is that both sides had very competent officers and motivated soldiers. I would modify accounts that criticize Chinese leadership to include a more balanced view of reciprocal Japanese failures and more incidents of Chinese success.

¹⁴² Orient Lee, "The Second Sino-Japanese War, July 7, 1937 – August 15, 1945: A Preliminary Summary" 1980 3, no. 3 (1980): pp.1465-1469.

¹⁴³ Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder out of China* (New York: William Sloan & Associates, Inc., 1946), p.52. and Louise Anna Strong, *China Fights for Freedom* (London: Lindsay Drummond LTD., 1939), pp.102-103.

The irony is that my answer does not depend upon national or strategic planners such as Chiang Kai-shek; the much ballyhooed 87th and 88th German-trained Divisions; or a notion of Chinese submission (or lack thereof) to the ideas of advisors from Germany, Russia or the United States.¹⁴⁴ It is the juxtaposition of Japanese field commanders against their ordinary Chinese counterparts that informs my answer.

For one, leaders on both sides proved that they were capable of adaptation. They undertook to adjust their tactics as they gained experience. This didn't require weeks or months of training or advisement from foreign observers. Both the Chinese and the Japanese in the field acknowledged the aforementioned soviet criticism and adjusted accordingly without waiting for the Command and Staff school to pass them the answer. Consider the following from Andersson:

At first there were many defects in the leadership of the Chinese troops. Divisions from Kwangsi ... arrived at the front full of eagerness to meet the hated aggressor at last. Untrained in modern trench warfare these soldiers dashed forward in mass formation against the Japanese lines in an attempt to break through thanks to their overwhelming numbers. After their first sanguinary lessons the newcomers soon adapted themselves to the methods of the war of positions, and the Chinese soldier's many goodly qualities, his tenacity and endurance, combined with his fantastic self-sacrifice, rendered him an adversary who time after time forced the Japanese generals to express an appreciation for his unexpectedly stubborn defense.¹⁴⁵

This shows that the Chinese were quite pragmatic about tactics and able to adjust them according to the situation at hand. That the Japanese made similar adjustments has already been indicated by the testimony of the

¹⁴⁴ Note that excepting for the forces in Chapei, most of the well organized, retrograde movements were conducted by non-Whampoa divisions. Hence the habit of placing a premium on "Chiang's Own" may be misguided.

¹⁴⁵ Andersson, p.67.

Japanese signal soldier in mid-October. Both forces had leaders that saw a need to alter strategy, acted on that need, and then worked to affect change in the course of the battle. Officers and troops on both sides should be judged competent. The aforementioned prepared defenses witnessed by Carlson and the orderly withdrawal described by most accounts seems to support the idea that the Chinese force was very professional and quite adept at leadership. However, should one remain unconvinced that the Chinese and Japanese were at least equally competent, perhaps a few sources demonstrating Japanese *incompetence* will allow us to level the playing field somewhat.

A refreshing and rare example that performs such a function follows. I include it here to bolster the point that the Japanese forces had leadership weaknesses too and that those weaknesses are not usually placed in historical accounts. I could only find a few such accounts. For instance, Wilson wrote of the Japanese forces:

The Japanese soldiers proved themselves brave in the field, but their officers often betrayed a lack of resourcefulness and initiative. Observers formed the impression that the Japanese army had been trained to fight by rote, following a formula of infantry advancing only after preliminary aerial and artillery bombardment. In Shanghai the Chinese had shelters to hide behind, and once artillery fire had lifted they were able to pour out and resume their defensive fire.

Another weakness noted was Japan's inability to organize a creeping artillery barrage ahead of advancing infantry ... Captain Carlson, the American observer, even concluded that the Japanese military machine, regarded as so formidable since its victory over Russia in 1905, had been revealed as a 'third rate army when judged by European standards.' This was an exaggeration, but Edgar Snow, who was also there, argued that the offensive spirit of the Japanese infantry was not, when faced in Shanghai with a brave and determined enemy on roughly equal terms, 'nearly as formidable as widely advertised.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Wilson, pp.48-9. See also Snow, p.54. Snow also remarked on pages.52-3 that "Many an observer here revised his estimate of Japan as a military power, and for the first time some

This selection invokes observations by Snow and Carlson as well as interpretations by Wilson. It suggests that the generally held opinion of superior Japanese leadership may be misplaced and perhaps ought not be used as a common theme in describing the battle of Shanghai.

Might we now, strip away the assumed superiority of the Japanese officer as compared to a Chinese officer? Accounts of their selection and training reveal similar backgrounds with one notable exception: The Japanese officer actually had much less experience than the Chinese did.¹⁴⁷ When considering the motivation that every historian including the Japanese ascribe Chinese soldiers during this battle, along with as the remarkable and silent withdrawals into prepared deliberate positions described above, one sees a superbly disciplined and coordinated force. In sum, professionalism and competence among field officers are either balanced between the two forces or slightly in favor of the Chinese.¹⁴⁸

Now let us revisit claims that Chinese leadership at the national level contributed to the failure of the defense. Indeed, at the strategic level, one could say that in ordering such a defense to be built and maintained, Chiang

began to believe in the possibility of an ultimate Chinese victory.... These landing operations revealed what some observers considered one of the signs of Japan's weakness as a military power.

¹⁴⁷ For extended study of the training of Japanese and Chinese officers, I recommend sections from the following: Chang Jui-te, "Nationalist Army Officers during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 4 (1996): 1033-1056.; Haldore Hanson, *Human Endeavor, The Story of the China War* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1939).; F.F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956).; along with the Dorn and Snow accounts.

¹⁴⁸ Debate on the subject of the quality of the Chinese soldier existed among eyewitnesses of the time. Criticisms by Anatol Kotnev, *The Chinese Soldier* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Ltd., 1937). and Lawrence Rosinger, *China's Crisis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), pp.124-138. were refuted by Walter Mallory, "Japan Attacks: China Resists," *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 1 October 1937 (1937): pp. 129-142. and Julius Eigner, "The Chinese Soldier Today," *The China Journal* 1937, 227-230 (see also Review on Kotnev, p.224).

also foreordained its eventual collapse as part of his worst-case scenario. But Chiang's leadership had profound effects at other more operational and tactical levels as well. We have already read how General Chu felt so strongly about his role as a leader in the defense, that when it collapsed, as all long-term defenses ultimately will, he committed suicide.¹⁴⁹ Some of the common claims stated previously are that because of poor command guidance and leadership from the center, China had a special disadvantage that their stereotypically organized counterparts didn't have to deal with.

In a certain way, this is true. The Japanese didn't have Chiang Kai-shek. I am not at all impressed with Chiang's military abilities or personal mastery of the operational art. In fact, his guidance was so vague as to prevent a judgment either way. In this regard, I align with Dorn and Stilwell. In rare cases where guidance was specific, it only assigned areas of responsibilities for general military operations. It is also true that all guidance issued was terribly disjointed and devoid of integrated planning. It was filled with vaunted platitudes such as "stand to the last man," and it did nothing to further the actual goal of the military.¹⁵⁰

Even so, the criticism of Chiang's command from the center is a double-edged sword. For one, critics complain that his orders are full of "hedging expressions" and "heroics" and devoid of a tactical plan. True enough, but there is a place for such a superficial plan, especially when issued from a head of state or national command authority. Such guidance can *either* be interpreted as a constraint that limits the actions of subordinate

¹⁴⁹ "Chinese General Suicide; Held Defeat His Fault," *The New York Times*, 29 October 1937.

¹⁵⁰ English translations of Chiang's operational guidance may be found in, the Hsu account as translated by Wen.

commanders, or it may be viewed merely as a vague and incomplete product, designed to assure subordinates of a leader's presence while allowing them maximum latitude to plan and conduct operations at their own level. The critics can't have it both ways.

The second edge of the sword is that although Dorn complains that Chiang's command structure was designed so he could take credit and not blame, and that his orders represent a kind of national level micro-management, this criticism is not relevant to this battle. The reason for this is that in describing conditions that only applied to the Chinese one must be sure that they didn't also apply to Japan. Bergamini refutes this by making exactly similar complaints about Hirohito, thus canceling them out as valuable points of analysis for why the defense failed.¹⁵¹

Courage Under Fire – Another Perspective

The concept of leadership brings us to will. As described above, the Chinese soldiers were seemingly endowed with a special amount of courage and determination. In fact, one of the enigmas of the battle of Shanghai is that those soldiers it did not kill, it actually made stronger. Witness the will of the "dare-to-die" teams and the "lost battalion" in Tachang, or the "lone battalion" in Chapei. These are groups of people literally forged and fused together through mutual trial and hardship. If they had not had the corporate experience of enduring mutual privation up to and during the point of their collective sacrifice, then they never would have had the will to continue

¹⁵¹ Bergamini, p.12. It is important to note that national-level commanders put out guidance from time to time. Often it is glib and vague. Eisenhower's operations order for Operation Overlord (D-Day) was one paragraph. In all of these cases I believe much of the plan of execution was left up to operational and tactical commanders.

collectively. Sociologist Charles C. Moskos, in an article about why men fight, wrote that in WWII studies showed that combat motivation was not so linked to cultural, formal socialization and ideological factors as it is on the "crucial role of face-to-face or 'primary groups'. The motivation of the individual combat soldier rests on his solidarity and social intimacy with fellow soldiers at small-group levels." Moskos went on to state that "combat motivation arises out of the linkages between individual self-concern and the shared beliefs of soldiers" as shaped by "the immediate combat situation."¹⁵² This shows that at the tactical level, flags, causes or ideals cease to be the primary motivators they appear to be in nationalist rhetoric, the press and official history.

More succinctly, men are willing to die in protecting themselves or their comrades. Hence, the locus of the will to lay down one's own life (or to kill the enemy) is actually found at the tactical level and nowhere else. More appropriate to this study, John Keegan, discussed what created the will of British and German soldiers to "jump parapet" (leave their own trench) and travel across "no mans land" to an enemy trench oriented the wrong direction that would place them in even more danger once they arrived. The keys to the "will to combat" in trench warfare are: inspired "leadership," "the morality of courage," and "compulsion."¹⁵³

The above motivations for the will to fight are important to our study because they bear directly on the leadership involved and romanticized interpretations given of the battle. This is not in any way to minimize the

¹⁵² Charles C. Moskos, "Vietnam: Why Men Fight." In *The American Military*, ed. Martin Oppenheimer, (Aldine Publishing Company, 1971), pp.18-20.

¹⁵³ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), pp.269-79.

heroism or courage of those who fought the battle of Shanghai, but rather to cast their motivations in a more accurate light.

While the anecdote of the soldier who told Carlson he was fighting for his home was repeated in at least two other accounts studied, the sense of nationalism that such a story engenders was undoubtedly broadcast throughout the ranks of the Chinese army. But, as has been stated, that account does not represent what led these men to engage in hand to hand combat after their ammunition was gone. Perhaps Keegan's perspective of leadership, courage and compulsion can help further explain why soldiers were willing to fight and die in this manner. Having already addressed competence of leadership, one may find examples of inspiring leadership in the officers who fought and died with their men at Tachang; or stood resolute with the lone battalion; or felt failure so keenly that they killed themselves. Additionally, the morality of courage has long been a highly instilled value in both Asian nations. And so from leadership and courage we turn to Keegan's third element: "compulsion."

At this point it is important to remember the German influence on the Chinese. Since 1928, Germany had been the primary player in the development of Chiang's army. It was the German advisor Von Falkenhausen who recommended the defenses at Shanghai. Though he was a great proponent of mobility, he also saw the need to rely on trenches as they had in Europe. Hence the hybrid-mobile/area defense strategy may have been in large part a German maneuver. Some sources even attribute Chinese aggressiveness at Shanghai to German encouragement.¹⁵⁴ That established, it

¹⁵⁴ Billie K. Walsh, "The German Military Mission in China, 1928-38." *Journal of Modern History* 46, no. September 1974 (1974), p.509. and Gibson, p.382-5. For an account of German

could be assumed that the Germans trained the Chinese in their version of trench warfare. Hence a Chinese trench battle may have been prosecuted very similarly to a German one.¹⁵⁵

According to Keegan, both the Germans and the British had designated "battle police... to see that no stragglers are left in the trenches and to send any so found up to their companies."¹⁵⁶ Additionally, Williamsen presents the terrible medical conditions on the battlefield. Not many wounded could expect to live.¹⁵⁷ Hence, once a Chinese soldier was placed in this situation, given all we now know about self-concern, the immediacy of battle, the desire to protect peers, leadership, honor and compulsion, it becomes less difficult to understand how his "will to combat" was magnified so greatly.

More than the will of the Chinese soldier was formed in this battle. A deep antagonism toward the Japanese along with a strong survivalist instinct added to it and the three became catalysts that translated a vague feeling of nationalism into tactical action. Indeed, by all accounts, the will and determination that was infused into China as a result of the battle at Shanghai translated itself into a form of nationalism that was prepared to make any sacrifice for any length of time to win. Thus, without defending the principles

and Soviet dealings in China during the time, including attempts at mediating the war please see John P. Fox, *Germany and the Far Eastern crisis, 1931-1938 : a study in diplomacy and ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).; James Liu, James "German Mediation in the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-38," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (1949): pp.157-171.; John Garver, "Chiang Kai-shek's Quest for Soviet Entry into the Sino-Japanese War," *Political Science Quarterly* 102, no. 2 Summer 1987 (1987): 295-316.; and Yu Chudodeyev, "Soviet Military Advisers in China," *Far eastern Affairs* 2, no. 1988 (1988): pp. 96-102.

¹⁵⁵ Please see Keegan, Chapter 4, *The Somme, July 1st, 1916*. In this chapter, Keegan describes many details of trench warfare that probably applied to the Chinese and Japanese in the battle of Shanghai.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.277-278. By way of "compulsion" it should also be remembered that by now the central command was executing officers who shirked their duties. See *The Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, p.198.

¹⁵⁷ Williamsen, pp.143-53.

of “trading space for time,” or “fighting to the bitter end,” (both common mantras in Nationalist apologetics for Chiang’s strategy) I conclude that the genius of Chiang may not have been his strategy of attrition, but rather his ability to appropriate and re-deploy the powerful effects of will engendered by the battle of Shanghai for future engagements.

In summary, the last days of the battle of Shanghai revealed desperate and heroic measures. Many have passed lightly over the mechanics of courage and will without stopping to assess their real sources. Many have also rushed to judgment and stereotyped the quality, professionalism, and leadership of the two armies. The Chinese are often found wanting when the two are compared. I believe this is false. I think this assumption occurs because the Chinese are reputed to have lost this particular battle, *ipso facto* their army must be inferior in leadership, competence and professionalism. While I am sure that training and battlefield experiences were not equivalent, I find the Chinese army at the battle of Shanghai to be equal in discipline, capability and leadership to the Japanese.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

In his chapter about falsehood and the recounting of battles, war correspondent Jack Belden describes the experience of going to a Division tactical operations center and asking the intelligence officer about the situation. The officer handed him a ream of transcripts of telephone conversations and raw reports and said, "This is the only thing that contains any truth in it. We are making out a report now, but it is already so different from what happened that in a few days it will be an unrecognizable legend." Belden goes on to quote Tolstoy:

In every description of a battle there is a necessary lie, resulting from the need of describing in a few words the actions of thousands of men spread over several miles and subject to the most violent moral excitement under the influence of fear, shame and death. ... Make a round of the troops immediately after a battle, or even the next day of the day after, before the reports have been drawn up, and ask any of the soldiers and senior and junior officers how the affair went: you will be told what all these men experienced and saw, and you will form a majestic, complex, infinitely varied, depressing and indistinct impression; and from no one – least of all the commander in chief – will you learn what the whole affair was like.¹⁵⁸

Even in my very limited tactical experience, these words are perfectly true. The "truth" is a very elusive thing in history and perhaps even more so in military history. So it is with the battle of Shanghai. While it is hoped that the foregoing account is as accurate as possible, the odds are slim that it is without serious errors in some areas. Even so, in seeking to probe the tactical conditions of the battle more deeply I believe there is enough evidence to

¹⁵⁸ Jack Belden, *Still Time to Die*. (New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1943), pp.4-5.

show that revisions of many historical interpretations of the battle are in order.

First, the "Road to War" showed us that the decision to make a stand at Shanghai was deliberate and measured, instead of a spontaneous rush to answer a sudden threat.

Second, the opening moves in the battle of Shanghai did not surprise either the Japanese or the Chinese leading to the failed offense. Furthermore, blunders at the tactical level did not cause the Chinese to fail.

Third, listing numbers of forces involved or broadly describing Japanese firepower does not adequately describe why the defensive phase of battle was so long and difficult. A simple nod at enumeration and firepower is insufficient to describe why this phase was so drawn out.

Fourth, while nationalism and the rhetoric of cause have been given as the reasons for the valor of the Chinese soldier, the retrograde operation demonstrated different sources of courage. Also, historians that equate technology with professionalism or assume that the ultimate loser in battle must have had inferior organization and leadership have been shown to be too hasty in their judgments.

The foregoing historiographical conclusions can provide us with new basis for historical conclusions about why and how the battle unfolded as it did.

First, since the road to the battle of Shanghai was a long and deliberately traveled one, we know that Chiang did not rashly choose Shanghai merely to gain foreign support. This area had been preordained years before as a killing ground of Japanese soldiers.

Second, the Chinese were unsuccessful in their initial offensive phase because their forces were committed piecemeal by the strategic commander. Poor weather, ineffective disposition of forces, and weak strategic guidance prevented the Chinese from gaining the initiative.

Third, actual combat ratios together with a diligently prepared defense enabled the Chinese defensive phase to go much longer than the Japanese had expected. When the effects of weather and terrain were added to the situation, the length and tragic scale of the battle can be much more clearly understood. Not discounting the vast number of Chinese troops involved or the great power of Japanese technology, we see that it was other conditions that led to the commitment of these forces at such a grand scale. In other words, the commitment of numerous combat forces and firepower could be interpreted as an effect of battle, not the cause of its outcome.

Fourth, the resilience of the Chinese defense may be explained on the basis of sound leadership, the importance of honor, pressures of battlefield immediacy, unit solidarity and compulsion in the trenches. The Chinese retrograde operation shows that in the areas of leadership, discipline and organization, the two armies that fought at Shanghai were quite similar.

In spite of these revisions that seem to privilege the Chinese situation, the Japanese eventually won the battle of Shanghai. They won not only because of superior technology and equipment against broadly committed forces (as is so frequently acknowledged), but also because of mobility achieved through the successful landing at Huangchow. The Japanese didn't display any superior leadership or organization, let alone tactical brilliance. They won because no defense can or should last indefinitely and because they

executed a flanking movement that so thoroughly changed the conditions of the battlefield that the fight had to be moved elsewhere.

In conclusion, just as Aron Shai described how battles are “sealed and complete,” the historical accounts of the Battle of Shanghai are nearly always presented as forgone conclusions. They are commodified and presented to readers as “all wrapped up.” This is especially true of the accounts set within broader historical works. These commodified accounts are a-historical in a sense that they deny the complexity of the very history they seek to present.¹⁵⁹

In proving these accounts incomplete in some areas and misguided in others, I believe that I have answered Shai’s concern at least in regard to the Battle of Shanghai. I used military tactical analysis as a framework from which to dissect the accounts, ask more informed questions and reveal weaknesses. From this example we can see the benefit of performing tactical analysis on battles long sealed up in books purported to contain history.

Military analysis forces us to re-evaluate the causes and effects of warfare without the benefit of a strategic net. Thus, causation may no longer be reduced to the constituent elements of circumstance, but must be analyzed against an entire array of battlefield conditions. The objective of finding history through a military analysis of the battle of Shanghai notwithstanding, we have at least learned much more than we used to know about one of the most incredible defensive battles ever waged on this planet.

¹⁵⁹ I am Grateful to Professor Vivienne Shue of the Government Department, Cornell University for this idea.

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