

Battle of Peking & Tientsin

by Ah Xiang

Excerpts from "Resistance Wars" at <http://www.republicanchina.org/war.html> For updates and related articles, check <http://www.republicanchina.org/RepublicanChina-pdf.htm>

At Wanping, Cheng Xixian's constabulary brigade was in charge of the two gates, while 29th Corps soldiers, with bayoneted rifles, were still defending the bridges. The next day, 21st, Japanese planes flew to Lugouqiao area to check on Chinese military transfer. Under Song Zheyuan's order to have 132nd Division replace 37th Division, Zhao Dengyu's troops, which originally stationed at southern Hebei cities of Cangzhou, Hejian and Renqiu, had been concentrating towards the southern bank of the Yongdinghe River. On 22nd, portion of 132nd Division arrived at Nanyuan, to the south of Peiping.

On 23rd, Song Zheyuan was still persuading the soldiers of 37th Division under Feng Zhi'an as to the pullout from Peiping area. Against the Japanese demand that constabulary force take over Peiping, Song Zheyuan relocated Shi Zhengang's 27th Brigade of 132nd Division towards Peiping. On the night of 23rd, Xiong Bin came to see Song Zheyuan at Peiping for strengthening the fighting will of 29th Corps. The next day, Chiang Kai-shek asked Xiong Bin relay a wire, stating that Japan's shipment of mechanized troops on July 22nd meant a large-scale operation within one week.¹ By this time, Song Zheyuan halted the withdrawal of 37th Division but still requested troops of Central Army and 26th Route Army back away a bit on the pretext of lessening Japanese vigilance, In separate talks with foreign ministry representatives, Song Zheyuan stated that there was 70% chance of reaching peace with Japan. In Tientsin, on the afternoon of 23rd, the municipal office was still issuing updates on peace talks with Japanese. On 24th, professors of National Peking University issued a proclamation against Japanese aggression.

After reinforcing the Kawabe *Ryodan* in Tientsin with two *Ryodan* from Manchuria and 20th *Shidan* from Korean Garrison Army, Japanese decided to raise their par and expand war in North China without regard for truce already reached on July 19th. On the afternoon of July 21st, thousands of Japanese Kwantung Army departed Gubeikou Pass for Shahezhan Train Station, a stop on Peiping-Suiyuan Railway, between Peiping and Nankou Pass. 143rd Division Chief Liu Ruming was ordered to return to Kalgan immediately. At 5:10 pm, about ten minutes after Liu Ruming's train passed the station, Japanese sabotaged about five hundred meter long tracks. While Japanese garrison armies from Manchuria and Korea were converging onto Peking from three directions of north, east and south, three Japanese *Shidan* reinforcements from homeland, ordered to be done mobilization July 19th-20th, began to pack up for mission in China. Japan's mastermind for the 1931 invasion of Manchuria, Ishihara Kanji, being concerned about the threats of the Soviet Union, had

¹ Guo 1:334

tried in vain to delay the troop dispatch for about ten days. At Ishihara Kanji's urging, Fumimaro Konoe, back on July 19th, contacted Sun Yat-sen's Japanese acquaintances for talking to Nanking direct; however, Japan's militarists frustrated the secret initiatives by arresting the emissary on 23rd.²

In Peiping-Tientsin area, Song Zheyuan had retained pro-Japan officials and retirees, such as Chen Juesheng, Pan Yugui and Zhang Yuheng, in softening the Chinese stances with Japanese. Chen Juesheng, the bureau chief for Peking-Liaoning Railway, had been asked by 113th Brigade Chief Liu Zhensan of 38th Division to relay a warning to Japanese that Chinese army at Langfang would for sure shoot to stop Japanese troop movement along the railway.³ Mindful of Chinese troops at Langfang, Japanese reinforcements hence came over to Haiguangshi of Tientsin via the circumvential sea route. At Tientsin, Zhang Zizhong was employing retired general Qi Xieyuan for talks with Japanese. Though, Japanese Southern Manchurian Railway had already taken over Tientsin railway facilities for preparations of operating the railway system. Further, Japanese were forcefully taking over land in the outskirts for building two more military airfields. To avoid frictions with Japanese, Zhang Zizhong's 38th Division moved the camp outside of the city.

On July 25th, Japanese 20th *Shidan*, which had newly arrived from Korea six days ago, pushed their way along the railway towards Langfang, a city between Peiping and Tientsin, where 226th Regiment of Liu Zhensan's 113rd Brigade stationed. 11th *Chutai* of Japanese 20th *Shidan* forcefully moved into Langfang train station, and dug positions around the station. 226th Regiment destroyed Japanese armored vehicles in heavy fighting overnight. Twenty two Japanese planes repeatedly bombed Chinese positions at dawn. At noon, on July 26th, 3rd Battalion of 226th Regiment retreated to Huangcun after fighting Japanese reinforcement of 77th *Rentai* for the morning.

At 11 am, Kazuki Kiyoshi reported the fighting to Tokyo and received clearance to resorting to force against Chinese troops. Japanese Interim Airforce was reassigned to the North China Army. In the afternoon, Kazuki Kiyoshi issued a weird ultimatum to 29th Corps concerning 37th Division, demanding that troops from 37th Division pull out from different areas in and outside of Peiping, i.e., Lugouqiao Bridge and Babaoshan, Peiping, and Xiyuan no later than noon of July 27th and 28th, respectively, and threatening with unilateral action if otherwise. The ultimatum also threatened to bombard Peiping should Chinese troops fail to evacuate within two days. Meanwhile, on 26th, Japanese Kwantung Army units moved to Changping area, to the northwest of Peiping, and posed to cut off

² Wu Xiangxiang, *op. cit.*, 1:374

³ Previously, Liu Zhensan managed to have Chen Juesheng change the Japanese train schedule to have a stop at Langfang so that the train would not arrive at Peking at 9:18, i.e., a timestamp that was symbolic of China's humiliation in the loss of Manchuria on Sept 18th, 1931; additionally, Chen Juesheng played a role in diffusing the tension after Japanese military spy agency abducted 29th Corps political commissar Xuan Jiexi. See Liu Zhensan Supplementary Speech, "About Chen Juesheng and the Prologue to Start of Resistance War on July 7th, 1937", in "Compilations About Late General Song Zheyuan", vol. 1-2 (Biographical Writings Press, Taipei, 1985), 2:1086.

Peiping-Suiyuan Railway. On the night of 26th, at 10:20 pm, Kazuki Kiyoshi issued the order of general attack at 29th Corps, effective noon of 27th, which was later modified to exclude Peiping owing to the delay in evacuating Japanese nationals from the city. Japanese military headquarters in Tokyo, on July 27th, specified the scope of operations to be the Campaign of Peiping-Tientsin.⁴

During the Langfang Battle, the 2nd *Daitai* of 2nd *Rentai* under Japan North China Kawabe *Ryodan* was ordered to go into Peiping via Fengtai. Liu Ruzhen's 679th turned around at Tuanhe to go back to the defense of Peiping. At Guanganmen Gate, at 7 pm, on July 26th, Liu Ruzhen's troops faced off with 26 trucks of Japanese 2nd *Chutai* attempting at entry into Peiping. After allowing in half of the Japanese, Liu Ruzhen ordered a sudden attack at the Japanese and almost wiped out the whole column. One Japanese negotiator, who was blasted at by Japanese artillery during the initial Wanping Siege, was bayoneted off the citywall. Fighting at Guanghuamen ceased at 10 pm, with remnants either going to Japanese embassy at Dongjiaominxiang Legation Quarters or going back to Fengtai past midnight.

On July 27th, at 8:40 am, Japanese cabinet approved the Second Mobilization; at 9:40 am; Army Minister submitted the request to Hirohito; and at 11:50 am, the Second Mobilization Order was issued, calling for an assembling of 209,000 troops and 54000 horses within ten days to two weeks.

On July 27th, at 3:00 a.m., before the expiration of noon deadline, Japanese attacked Chinese troops in Tongxian County; and Japanese cavalry, assisted by 18 planes, raided Tuanhe at 6:00 am, rendering heavy casualties onto Chinese troops. At noon, Chinese troops abandoned Tongxian County after wrestling fighting for the morning. In late afternoon, Song Zheyuan officially declined Japan's ultimatum and issued a statement of self-defense. By this time, Song Zheyuan had to request with Nanking for Sun Lianzhong's reinforcement troops to come to Baoding. Chinese troops took initiatives in launching recovery battles against Fengtai and Babaoshan. On the night of 27th, full-scale fighting broke out all around Peiping and Tientsin.

On July 28th, at dawn, Japanese, totaling three infantry *Rentai* and one cannons *Rentai* from 20th *Shidan* and Kawabe *Ryodan* attacked Nanyuan from four directions after a 'campaigning oath'. College graduates' training corps suffered heavy loss defending the southeastern corner. In early afternoon, Deputy Corps Chief TongLinge ordered that Nanyuan be abandoned. On the way to Dahongmen, TongLinge was killed by bombing and shooting from Japanese planes. Zheng Dazhang's cavalry, after incurring a casualty over half, retreated to Gu'an. Division Chief Zhao Dengyu, while retreating towards Peiping direction with bodyguards and student soldiers, sacrificed his life after being ambushed by

⁴ Wu Hsiang-hsiang, op. cit., 1:376

1st *Rentai* of Japanese Kawabe *Ryodan* which set up machinegun blockade at Dahongmen. Total Chinese loss exceeded 5000 troops during the Nanyuan-Dahongmen engagements.⁵

Deputy 29th Corps Chief Qin Dechun took initiative in dispatching a brigade and a cannons battalion to the recovery of Fengtai, to the west of Tientsin and Langfang. While Kawabe Ryodan was away for Nanyuan battle, part of 37th Division raided Fengtai. By noon, Japanese were pressed to the southeastern corner of the city. The news of Fengtai Recovery reached Paris and gave Wellington Koo a boost in spirits. At 3:00 pm, Japanese relief army came over to assist the remnants at Fengtai.⁶

At the same time of attacking Nanyuan, Japanese attacked and took over Beiyuan, Xiyuan and Qinghe, towns to the north and west of Peiping. 11th Mixed *Ryodan*, departing Gaoliying, took over Qinghe and pressed the 1st Brigade of Shi Youshan's Hebei Constabulary Force to Huangshi; and 1st Mixed *Ryodan*, departing Shunyi, took over Shahe. Japanese planes bombed train stations at Changxindian, Baoding and Shijiazhuang, and chased both passenger and cargo trains along the railway tracks, inflicting heavy damages and injuries.

At the urge of Japanese for 'protecting the ancient city', Song Zheyuan ordered an evacuation out of Peiping. At 9 pm, on 28th, Song Zheyuan relocated his command center for the south of Yongding-he River and then moved on to Baoding city [which was Chiang Kai-shek's order right after the eruption of Lugouqiao Incident]. 38th Division Chief Zhang Zizhong, with Liu Ruzhen's regiment which changed into police uniform, was ordered to stay put in Peking to maintain order.

Revised Apr 8th, 2007 on basis of <http://www.republicanchina.org/Battles-of-Peking-Tientsin-v0.pdf>

⁵ Song Zheyuan's The Story of 29th Corps' Fight, in Lugouqiao, published by Guilin Qiandao Bookstore, Sept 1937, p 45-46

⁶ Chiang Kai-shek had secret order for the 29th Corps to take out Japan's embassy in the event of war eruption. Qin Dechun, for avoiding damages to Peiping, decided to attack Japanese at Fengtai, instead. Note that Qin Dechun might have mistaken the exact date of his attack to be 25th.