

Battle Of Mingguang-Bengbu

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On Dec 12th, 1937, Li Zongren departed for the post of commander of the Fifth War Zone shortly after saying encouragement words to Tang Shengzhi the Nanking garrison commander. Before Li Zongren arrived in Xuzhou, he already made arrangement for tactician Xu Zuyi, a graduate of Baoding Cadet and Japan's Infantry Cadet, set up command center in Xuzhou. Fifth War Zone was in charge of the segment of Pukou to Jinan along Jin-Pu Railway as well as the coastal defense line from Wusongkou mouth to Yellow River mouth in the north. On Jan 17th, at the Guide Meeting, the Military Committee relocated Sun Zhen's 22nd Group Army and Han Deqin's 24th Group Army to strengthen the Fifth War Zone for sake of impeding Japanese beyond the Yellow River at the north as well as inducing Japanese towards Tientsin-Pukou Railway from the south so as to delay a Japanese push to the west of Yangtze. In addition to 3rd Corps-conglomerate, 51st Corps and 3rd Group Army, troops under the Fifth War Zone would be Liu Shiyi's 31st Corps [Guangxi native soldiers of Li Pingxian's 11th Group Army], 24th Group Army consisting of Miao Zhengliu's 57th Corps and Han Deqin's 89th Corps [converted from Jiangsu Province constabulary forces], and Yang Sen's 20th Corps [24th Group Army] at Anqing. (Among miscellaneous provincial armies to serve under Li Zongren, Zhang Zizhong, Pang Bingxun, Sun Lianzhong, Liu Ruming & Sun Tongxuan belonged to Feng Yuxiang's Northwestern Army lineage, while Deng Xihou, Wang Zanxu & Yang Sen belonged to Sichuan Province armies. The rest would be Yu Xuezhong & Miao Zhengliu of Northeastern Army, and Xu Yuanquan of Zhi-Lu-jun Army. **Sichuan Province armies, with such martyrs as Rao Guohua & Wang Mingzhang, had sacrificed tremendously for the country during the resistance wars.**)

Japanese, equivalent to 8 divisions, in mid-December, crossed the Yangtze for the north at Nanking, Zhenjiang & Wuhu. Along Jin-Pu Railway, Japanese encountered resistance from miscellaneous provincial armies under the command of Li Zongren. Li Zongren promptly relocated 31st Corps to Mingguang & Chuzhou to stop 3 division equivalent Japanese from marching northward along the railway.

Li Zongren pointed out that Japan must aim for Jin-Pu Railroad before thrusting westward against Wuhan of Hubei Prov. Terauchi Hisaichi proposed the attack at Xuzhou for controlling Long-Hai and Jin-Pu railways in late 1937. Before the fall of Nanking, Li Zongren already figured out Japan's next move. (Don't forget that Heh Yizhi was working for Li Zongren as an interpreter inside of Japanese army.) **Li Zongren's strategy was to procrastinate Japanese**

invasion forces along Jin-Pu Railway as long as possible.

On Dec 22nd 1937, Oskar Trautmann delivered to China Japan's new demands which Germany told Japanese ambassador in Berlin that China might not accept. On Jan 13th, Chiang Kai-shek dispatched a representative for seeing Oskar Trautmann in regards to Japan's stringent demands, and on Jan 16th, Japanese prime minister issued a statement that Japan would no longer treat Chiang Kai-shek's government as a party. On Jan 18th, Chiang Kai-shek issued a public statement as to fighting to the end.

In Dec, Japanese attacked Mingguang for sake of taking over Bengbu of Anhui Prov. Li Zongren personally trained 31st Corps per his memoirs. Further, Li Zongren stated that a Guangxi native soldier, who had fled from Japanese captivity in Shanghai battle, had told a story that he witnessed a Japanese killing a fat Chinese peasant, cutting off elbow meat, and barbecuing it at the camp. 31st Corps soldiers were indignant about Japanese atrocity. Li Zongren speculated that those Japanese might belong to an ancient Japanese tribe called "[Xia \[shrimp\] Yi \[barbarian\] Zu \[tribe\]](#)".

On Jan 15th, 26th Ryodan of Japanese 13th Shidan attacked north from Chuxian. Japanese had to attack the midway strategic Mingguang for sake of taking over Bengbu of Anhui Province. Chinese troops fought mobile wars and then pulled back to the west of Chihe River. After hitting Mingguang [Jiashan] empty, Japanese Central China Front Army, on Jan 26th, ordered to push on towards Dingyuan, Huaiyuan and Bengbu with three prongs. On 28th, the northern prong crossed Chihe River at Mingguang, took over Linhuaiguan on Feb 1st, and Bengbu on Feb 2nd; the middle prong crossed the river at Chihezhen on 29th, and took over Fengyang on Feb 2nd; and the southern prong crossed river at Daqiaozhen and took over Dingyuan on Feb 2nd. On Jan 18th 1938, Li Zongren ordered that 31st Corps evacuated from Mingguang for a western move, while relocating Yu Xuezhong's 51st Corps to north bank of Huai-shui River from coastal Qingdao.

Chinese 31st Corps pulled back to Huainan-Bengbu railway to the west, while 51st Corps resisted Japanese at the Huai-shui River. On Feb 2nd, 26th Ryodan of Japanese 13th Shidan, which briefly crossed the Huai-shui River with one Daitai at Linhuaiguan, was beat back by 340th Brigade under Mou Zhongheng's 114th Division of 51st Corps after a four-hour battle. At Bengbu, Huai-shui River Bridge was blown up on 2nd. On Feb 3rd, 26th Ryodan, with two Daitai, crossed the river at Bengbu on wooden boats. 342nd Brigade of 114th Division, with the relief of 113rd Division, drove the Japanese back across the river. Japanese, on Feb 8th, blasted cannons at riverbank defense works while planes dropped bombs on Xiaobengbu, a town to the north of Bengbu and Wohe-Huashui rivers. . At night of 11th, at 11 pm, Japanese crossed the river again and took over Xiaobengbu. 337th Brigade countercharged against Japanese and recovered the town and riverbank by one past midnight. On Feb 10th, Japanese crossed the river

again and took over Xiaobengbu after wrestling fights throughout the day. Meantime, Japanese crossed the river at Linhuaiguan on Feb 10th. 114th Division, after an unsuccessful counterattack by 340th Brigade, pulled back the next day at a casualty of over 2000.

On Feb 13th, Zhang Zizhong's 59th Corps, with 38th Division and 180th Division, came to take over 51st Corps' defense positions around Guzhen. At this time, 21st Group Army [7th Corps] relocated over to Hefei of Anhui Province from Shanghai battleground. Li Zongren ordered 7th Corps to attack Mingguang and Dingyuan from Hefei and 31st Corps to attack Shangyao and Fengyang from Huainan Railway. On Feb 15th, Zhang Zizhong ordered a reinforced regiment to recover Xiaobengbu. Japanese, after pulling back to the southern bank of Huai-shui River, engaged in seesaw warfare with 31st Corps. Hence, Japanese dared not push north along Jin-Pu Railway and had to stop at the bank of Huai-shui River.

Han Fujū

Han Fujū tried to keep Shandong Province as his private domain by negotiating with Koiso Kuniaki & Nishio Toshizo for a compromise. Japanese demanded that Han Fujū declare independence. Li Zongren paid a visit to Jinan to strengthen Han Fujū's determination. **Li Zongren assured Han Fujū by citing his forecasts about the wars in China and possible outbreak of wars in Europe as a corroboration that China would ultimately prevail over Japan in a world-wide war.** After Li Zongren analyzed the conflict between two factions of Japanese militarists [i.e., southern move against Britain-US versus northern move against USSR], Han Fujū repeatedly asked Li Zongren, "Your honor, when do you think the European War might erupt?" Li Zongren claimed that his talk of sustained warfare could have strengthened Han Fujū's confidence but might have led to Han Fujū's narrow-minded belief that he should preserve his troops for a long time period.

The good outcome of talks between Japanese and Han Fujū would be Japan's abstaining from an attack at Shandong Prov. When Han Fujū refused to cooperate with Japan, Japanese army crossed the Yellow River at Qingcheng & Jiyang on Dec 23rd 1937. Japanese intruded into Jinan on 27th and Tai'an on 31st. Han Fujū, to preserve his troops, continued the retreat without putting up fight and abandoned Dawenkou on Jan 2nd 1938. Japanese intruded into Jining on Jan 5th. Li Zongren immediately ordered that Han Fujū retreat along Jin-Pu Railway and set up defense positions. However, Han Fujū fled towards western Shandong Province without reporting to Li Zongren. Along Jin-Pu Railway, only small amounts of troops resisted Japanese, which somehow delayed the advance. In mid-Jan, Chiang Kai-shek assembled generals of 1st & 5th military zones for a meeting in Guide, arrested Han Fujū, and executed him in Wuchang after a military trial. Han Fujū, as a precaution, had brought a whole regiment to the meeting.

At Guide Meeting, Chiang Kai-shek conferred the provincial chair of Henan Province onto Cheng Qian and the provincial chair of Anhui Province onto Li Zongren. Since Anhui Province

Chair Jiang Zuobin immediately left his post, Li Zongren had to go to Lu'an [Liu'an] for reporting to the post, which diverted his efforts as commander of 5th military zone. In early June, after one week stay in Lu'an [Liu'an], Li Zongren returned to Xuzhou for directing the fight against Itagaki Seishiro and Isogai Rensuke. Back on Jan 12th, Japanese 5th division-conglomerate under Seishiro landed in Laoshan-wan Bay and Fudao of Qingdao. After the relocation of Yu Xuezhong's army, mayor Shen Honglie had only 500 marines under his command. Itagaki Seishiro then marched southwestward against Linyi via Gaomi, Zhucheng & Juxian. Li Zongren claimed that radical Japanese officers who participated in Feb 26th 1936 coup had mostly served under Itagaki Seishiro and Isogai Rensuke.