

Campaign Of Zao-Yi [Zaoyang-Yichang]

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Li Zongren, before April 1940 Japanese blitz campaign against Zaoyang-Yichang, had already been informed of this scheme which Nishio Toshizo & Itagaki Seishiro first devised in the aftermath of Hitler's Sept 1939 invasion. However, both the Military Council and the Fifth War Zone mistakenly thought it was merely a replay of Japanese East-of-Xianghe-River Campaign (Suixian-Zaoyang Campaign).

In mid-April, Japanese began the troop concentration in Zhongxiang, Suixian, Xinyang area by abandoning Macheng in eastern Hubei Province, Fengxin (Fengchuan) and Jing'an in northern Jiangxi Province, and pooling troops from 3rd Shidan, 13th Shidan and 39th Shidan, and units from 6th Shidan, 34th Shidan, 40th Shidan and 101st Temp Mixed Ryodan, as well as detachments loaned from 15th Shidan and 22nd Shidan of Thirteenth Army in lower Yangtze. On May 1st, Zaoyang-Yichang Campaign was launched into full swing. Japanese launched a three-route and five-prong attack at Zaoyang. From Xinyang, 3rd Shidan, augmented by Ishimoto Shitai and Ogawa Shitai, attacked west along the northern ridge of Mt Tongboshan. On May 2nd, Japanese left prong from Zhongxiang, i.e., 13th Shidan, to be further augmented by Kurahashi Shitai, attacked towards Zaoyang along the eastern bank of Hanshui River. Two days later, on 4th, the middle prong of 39th Shidan and Ikeda Shitai attacked from west of Suixian county.

Li Zongren made 84th Corps of Huang Xiangqi's 11th group army guard Xiang-Hua Highway, Xu Shaozong guard east bank of Xianghe River with Wang Zanxu's 29th group army, Zhang Zizhong guard the west bank with his 33rd group army, and Sun Lianzhong's 2nd group army defend north of Mt Tongbaishan. Li Zongren stated the frontal attack was a fake, while Japanese thrust was directed at Xu Shaozong to the east bank of Xianghe River. Xu Shaozong retreated into Mt Dahongshan. Japanese pushed on to take over Shuanman and planned to encircle Chinese forces with the north route. Li Zongren ordered a northward withdrawal of Huang Xiangqi's 11th group army. On May 5th 1940, Chinese forces withdrew from Zaoyang which was located to the west of the entry point for the valley between Tongbaishan and Dahongshan ranges. Japanese intruded into Zaoyang on 8th and fought against 173rd Division which was providing cover to the hind. Division Chief Zhong Yi and majority of 173rd Division soldiers sacrificed their lives in Xinye County. KMT guerrilla forces between the two ranges and near Mt Queshan harassed the Japanese coming from eastern Henan Province of Xinyang.

Li Zongren, on May 6th, ordered that Zhang Zizhong cross Xianghe River [Han-shui River] to cut the waist of the Japanese on east bank of Xianghe River. On early morning of 7th, Zhang Zizhong, leaving a will to Feng Zhi'an, led his special task battalion and two regiments under 74th Division [? 38th Division of 59th Corps per Wang Jianji & Wang Yuanchao's "100 Years Of China", Red Flag Publishing House, China] for a crossing of the river at Guanzhuang of Yicheng county, and cut the Japanese apart at Nanguadian.

On May 10th, Japanese encircled another empty city at Tangbaipan. Chinese forces mounted a counter-encirclement and attacked Japanese positions by pressing them to the center from two wings. Fierce fighting continued till 11th when Japanese began to retreat. 31st Group Army attacked 3rd Shidan from east, south and north. After three days' fighting, on May 15th, 3rd Shidan broke out of the encirclement at heavy casualties under the support of 100 planes and 200 division-subordinate armored vehicles.

Sonobe Waichiro, after deciphering Zhang Zizhong's telegrams, exerted 13th Shidan and 39th Shidan to attacking south while having 3rd Shidan act as rearguard at Zaoyang. 39th Shidan broke through the line at Qujiawan and attacked Fangjiaji. Huang Weigang's 38th Division followed Japanese southward, while Zhang Zhizhong led special task battalion and two regiments towards Fangjiaji. On the morning of 14th, Zhang Zhizhong incurred a casualty of 1000 in the hands of 39th Shidan while side-attacking Japanese at Fangjiaji. Zhang Zhizhong retreated to Nanguadian (Xinjiexiang) on 15th. On the night of 15th, 39th Shidan pressed on against Nanguadian from Fangjiaji and Nanying, and attacked Chinese position from west and north. At dawn, the next day, 5000 Japanese encircled Zhang Zizhong's troops and broke through the defense line of 74th Division. 74th Division launched numerous counterattacks. By noon, Japanese closed in towards command center at Nanguadian. Russian adviser petitioned Zhang Zizhong for a withdrawal which he flatly denied. By the afternoon of 16th, special task battalion joined the battle. Zhang Zizhong sacrificed his life after suffering heavy injuries in multiple parts of the body.

13th Shidan and 39th Shidan then went north to Zaoyang to assist 3rd Shidan in counterattacking Chinese forces. Fifth War Zone relocated troops to the western bank of Baihe River. On May 21st, 3rd Shidan traced Chinese troops to Xinye, 13th Shidan to the eastern outskirts of Laohekou, and 39th Shidan to Fancheng. 39th Shidan, while crossing Baihe River, lost a Rentai commander and over 300 troops. On the night, Sonobe Waichiro ordered a halt of campaign and a fallback to Zaoyang area.

On May 31st, at 7:30 pm, 39th Shidan, after blasting at the western bank of Hanshui River for one and a half hours, forcefully crossed the river at Wangji. At midnight, 3rd Shidan crossed the river to the southeast of Xiangyang. On the night of June 4th, 13th Shidan, augmented by Ikeda Shitai and Kansui Shitai, crossed the Hanshui River at Jiukou and Shayang, to the south of Zhongxiang, for pincer-attacking Chinese troops at Jingmen and Dangyang. On June 8th, Ikeda Shitai breached the defense line of Xiao Zhichu's 26th Corps, took over Shashi and Jiangling

(Jingzhou), and then attacked Yichang along Shashi-Yichang Highway. On 10th, Japanese attacked towards Yichang which was defended by 199th Division and 18th Division of 18th Corps outside and inside of the city wall. 18th Corps, having arrived two days prior, fought on against three Japanese Shidan and plane bombing till 4 pm of June 12th.

With Yichang lost, Li Zongren's 5th military zone had to climb high mountains to reach Badong of Sichuan Prov. Military Council re-organized 6th War Zone for defending Chongqing by taking advantage of the Three Gorges. [Chinese_Tank_Forces_and_Battles_before_1945_ed.htm](#) stated that "Yichang was the most notable city they [Japanese] captured. They attacked from the north eight times between 1938 and 41 and got push[ed] back." During the Changsha Battle in Sept 1940, Chinese forces attacked Japanese at Yichang for distracting its forces. And, in Nov, Japanese, for celebrating Whang Jingwei's puppet government, conducted a sweep campaign against Suixian-Zaoyang. From Nov 24th to 30th, Japanese retreated again after leaving thousands of corpses.