

Evacuation From Xuzhou

by Ah Xiang

Excerpts from "Resistance Wars: 1931-1945" at <http://www.republicanchina.org/war.html> For updates and related articles, check <http://www.republicanchina.org/RepublicanChina-pdf.htm>

On April 3rd, having reversed earlier decision as to a limited war under the constraints of second-tier troop buildup, Japanese General Headquarters decided on a Xuzhou Campaign to eliminate the Chinese crack forces as a face-saver for the Imperial Japanese Army. On April 7th, after consultation with chiefs of staff for North China Front Army and Central China Front Army, Japan issued Continental Order 84, accompanied by campaign guidelines from the Chief of General Staff. Japanese planned a seven-prong attack at Xuzhou with five Shidan from the north and two Shidan from the south, totaling 300,000 reinforcements from Peking-Tianjin area, and Shanxi, Anhui & Jiangsu provinces.

On April 23rd, the Chinese General Headquarters combined the ideas of "flexible offense" and "flexible defense" and issued new directives. Troops were divided into five blocks, including southern Shandong army group, western Shandong army group, south-of-Huai army group, north-of-Huai army group, and reservists. The southern Shandong army group consisted of Fan Songpu's right flank of 46th Corps; middle flank headed by Tang Enbo; left flank headed by Sun Lianzhong; Shi Yousan's forward troops of 69th Corps, 9th Cavalry Division, and 13th Cavalry Brigade; and Hanzhuang canal defense troops headed by Sun Zhen. Tang Enbo's total troops included 20th Corps-conglomerate, 27th Corps-conglomerate [92nd Corps], Chen Guangyu's 50th Division [22nd Corps], and 139th Division [Li Zhaoying p 755]; and Sun Lianzhong's troops included 2nd Group Army, Yu Xuezhong's 51st Corps, Lu Han's 60th Corps, Zhou Yan's 75th Corps, Zhang Zhen's 110th Division, and 93rd Division [[Gan Lichu p 878]]. On 25th, Fifth War Zone issued battle order No. 6 against two Shidan equivalent Japanese troops in Linyi, Yixian and Zaozhuang area.

To the south of Tientsin-Pukou Railway, Japanese assembled strong forces for a western move against Hefei of Anhui Province in early May. [[Yoshizumi]]'s 9th Shidan and [[Ogisu]]'s 13th Shidan breached the positions of Zhou Huang's 7th Corps on northern bank of Beifeihe River and western bank of Wohe River on May 5th, and forced Feng Zhian's 77th Corps & Yu Xuezhong's 51st Corps into a retreat towards Anhui-Jiangsu border. Liao Lei, for filling the vacuum in southern segment of Jin-Pu Railway, ordered Division chief Yang Junchang to the relief of Suxian and Mengcheng with two regiments. 9th Shidan then marched northwestward along the highway towards Mengcheng which was defended by Deputy 173rd Division Chief Zhou Yuan under 48th Corps and one regiment of soldiers. After battles lasting one day and one night, Japanese took over Mengcheng on the morning of 9th. On May 9th, deputy Division chief Zhou Yuan died in defending Mengcheng, with only 21 soldiers escaping alive at night.

On May 11th, with 16th Shidan [[Nakashima Kesao]] already on the west bank of the Canal, 28th Ryodan of Japanese 16th Shidan was trucked over to cross the Canal at Jining as well, and then attacked Yuncheng to the west. On 12th, the bulk of Doihara Kenji's 14th Shidan crossed the



Yellow River at Puxian [Puyang] and took over Dongkou to the north of Heze. On 13th, Japanese went south to surround Heze. After city defense was breached on 14th, 23rd Division commander Li Bifan committed suicide. To the north of Huai River, Japanese 9th Shidan, after crossing Beifeihe River, took over Baishan, a midpoint between Yongcheng and Suxian [Suzhou]; and 13th Shidan, ahead of the arrival by Luo Qi's 95th Division, took over Yongcheng. Liu Rumeng's 68th Corps, having moved from Heze to cover the southwestern area of Xuzhou and stationed his army at Xiaoxian and surrounding hills, observed that a Japanese Rentai equivalent column, from Mengcheng direction, rushed their way towards Dangshan and Huangkou segments of Longhai Railway. When a second Japanese column, with hundreds of horses and trucks, passed through the Wazikou Pass, Li Jintian Brigade ambushed them. At 3 pm, on 14th, [[Long-Hai]] Railway was sabotaged to the east of Wangge by Iwanaka Shitai which was embedded with 13th Shidan, i.e., Japan's 1st Tank Battalion. On the morning of 15th, another segment of [[Long-Hai]] Railway was sabotaged near Huangkou by Imada Shitai which was embedded with Japanese 16th Shidan, i.e., Japan's 2nd Tank Battalion.

With Japanese encirclement tightening, Li Zongren issued redeployment orders and divided his troops into four blocks for breakout: Sun Lianzhong and Yu Xuezhong, as southern Shandong army group, were to defend Xuzhou as rearguard troops; Tang Enbo and Liu Rumeng, as [[Longhai]] Railway army group, were to break out from the southwest of Xuzhou; Liao Lei, as north-of-Huai army group, was to break out towards western Anhui Province from Suxian and Guzhen area; Li Pingxian, as south-of-Huai army group, was to defend Guanting-Shucheng-Huaining line in southern Anhui Province; Han Deqin, as north-Jiangsu army group, was to persist in Huaiyin-Donghai area; and Shi Yousan, as penetration force, was to fight guerrilla wars in mountains around Feixian County of southern Shandong Province.



陆军第二十三师师长李必潘

Chinese troops began to break out through the slack areas at nights by taking advantage of Japanese cowardice over night-time fighting as well as ignorance over geography. Li Zongren ordered an evacuation on a southward train at 11:00 pm, on 18th. Close to the midnight, Li Zongren, with 1000 people, including news reporters, departed Xuzhou. 171st Division chief Yang Junchang, under heavy Japanese attacks, evacuated from Suxian without a prior approval. Japanese, after sacking Suxian, pressed northeastward against Xuzhou. 50 kilometers away from Xuzhou, Li Zongren's train had to stop when engineering soldiers sabotaged railway track upon news of the fall of Suxian County. About 5 kilometers to the north of Suxian, Li Zongren split with Tang Enbo's army and went eastward to circumvent Suxian after Li Zongren dissuaded Tang Enbo from re-taking Suxian and ordered Tang Enbo to move to the west for preserving the strength. Li Zongren's 1000 column had to evade Japanese planes on the road, and at one time, left a village without finishing cooking, only to escape a blanket bombing by twenty planes, after leaving village a distance of 1-1.5 kilometers. To the southeast of Suxian, Li Zongren's column passed a Japanese cavalry in hundreds without any detection. Li Zongren met with one regiment of soldiers from 7th Corps at the bank of Wohe River after one whole day trekking. After burning all trucks, they crossed the river to the south to enter the territory of 21st group army. About 110 reporters, international and domestic, as well as military attaché of consulates, and condolence delegation representatives, finally relaxed in freedom. Among the visitors to Xuzhou would be American [Stilwell] and Russian (Cui-ke-fu, i.e., someone under Russian General Zhukov [Zhu-ke-

fu)).

Liu Ruming's 68th Corps, part of [[Longhai]] Railway army group, went for Woyang to the west. After Xuzhou Retreat, Zhang Lanfeng, a graduate from Japanese cadet academy, had requested with Liu Ruming for staying put in eastern Henan Province for guerrilla warfare. Also fighting guerrilla warfare behind the enemy lines in Shandong and Jiangsu provinces would be Shi Yousan's 69th Corps which consisted of 181st Division and Gao Shuxun's New 6th Division, as well as Han Deqin's 24th Group Army.