

Marco Polo Bridge Incident

By Ah Xiang

Excerpts from Resistance Wars <http://www.republicanchina.org/war.html>

Japanese armies, which had stationed a *Ryodan* [brigade-conglomerate equivalent] in Tientsin [Tianjin] by citing the 1901 Boxer Protocol, had tripled the number of troops allowed under the protocol and been encroaching on Chinese towns and counties since the 1935 Ho-Umezu Agreement. After Japanese provoked the Second Fengtai Incident on Sept 18th, 1936, Japanese moved in to take control of Fengtai city, i.e., the nexus for three railways of Peking-Wuhan, Peking-Suiyuan and Peking-Liaoning. Song Zheyuan, to avoid frictions, had authorized a reroute of railway systems by building separate tracks around Fengtai. At Fengtai, Japanese army assigned a *Daidai* [battalion equivalent and higher] and frequently conducted exercises near Lugouqiao Bridge (Marco Polo Bridge or Roko Bridge) and Wanping Town. Japan's intention was to encircle Peking from the south and southwest and make the domain of Peking-Tientsin to the east of Yongdinghe River a self-enclosed neutralized and demilitarized area. Beginning from October of 1936, for months, Japanese had been surveying the area of Fengtai for building an airfield. After failing to get county magistrate Wang Lengzhai to sell the land as well as to coerce the landlords into selling the land direct, Japanese put the matter to the attention of Song Zheyuan. [1] Song Zheyuan, for avoiding the hassle, requested for a leave of absence for his hometown in Shandong Province. Japanese hastened their efforts of provocation by conducting military exercises near Wanping more frequently than usual, every two or three days and often nightly.

On June 25th, inside of Peking, Chinese police detected hundreds of plaincoats who came from Tongzhou and disguised as communists. After arresting a part of the group, Chinese side thwarted a planned sabotage. On July 6th, for ten hours, Japanese army failed to get permission to pass through the two citygate Wanping town [through which the road passed on to the ancient stony lion bridge] for a military exercise in Changxingdian, across the Yongdinghe River. [2]

On the night of July 7th, 1937, around 10:00 pm, one Japanese *Chudai* [company equivalent and higher] held a military exercise north of Lugouqiao Bridge. At around 11 pm, Japanese claimed that they were being shot at by Chinese soldiers inside of Wanping city, and that one soldier went missing and could have been abducted by the Chinese side. [3] Japanese demanded an entry into Wanping for a search, which Regiment Chief Ji Xingwen (219th Regiment, 37th Division, 29th Corps) declined. At 11:40 pm, Japanese director of military spy agency called upon the foreign liaison sub-committee of Hebei-Chahar Political Administrative Committee with the search request. Acting Committee Chairman Qin Dechun relayed the opinion that Japanese army had violated China's sovereignty in conducting exercises without Chinese consent but that local police could assist in locating the missing soldier after daybreak. Two hours later, Qin Dechun was awoken by a second call, stating that Japan demanded to enter Wanping or they would lay a siege. Qin Dechun immediately called Division Chief Feng Zhi'an and Regiment Chief Ji Xingwen as a precautionary measure. County magistrate Wang Lengzhai, who was also the commissioner for the third district of Hebei, was asked to go to Japanese camp for a liaison.

At 3:30 am, Ji Xingwen reported that one Japanese *Daidai* at Fengtai, with four mountain guns and a

machinegun company, was on the way to Wanping. At 4:50 am, on July 8th, Wang Lengzhai and Lin Gengyu, with two Japanese investigators, were allowed into Wanping. By 5:00 am, however, Japanese began to fire their first shot of siege into the town after surrounding Wanping from eastern, southeastern and southwestern directions. Other than attacking Wanping, Japanese, with armoured vehicles, mounted a fierce attack at Longwangmiao and the railway iron bridge to the southeast of Wanping. About two platoons of Chinese soldiers sacrificed their lives defending the eastern bridgehead.

Throughout the day, two sides exchanged fire intermittently. Ji Xingwen and Wang Lengzhai still refused the search request. In late afternoon, Japanese *Rendai* [regiment equivalent and higher] commander sent over a ultimatum, demanding that Chinese troops pull to the west bank of Yongdinghe River and that two Japanese representatives exit the town; otherwise, Japanese threatened to blast at Wanping. Past 6 pm, Japanese cannon fire destroyed the commissioner's office minutes after Wang Lengzhai vacated the building. Fightings ensued for three hours. At midnight, Regiment Chief Ji Xingwen ordered that a broad sword contingent recover the bridgehead after Deputy 110th Brigade Chief Heh Jifeng sent over a Changxingdian constabulary battalion as reinforcement. Taking advantage of rain and mist in the morning, one hundred and fifty commandos, under Battalion Chief Jin Zhenzhong and with blades, pistols and grenades, raided the beachhead at dawn and killed all Japanese.^[4] Both beachhead and Longwangmiao nearby were recovered.

With initial attacks beat off at heavy casualties, Japanese military spy agency orally reached three truce terms with Qin Dechun on the morning of July 9th, with a demand that Chinese constabulary force would control Wanping in lieu of 219th Regiment. However, Kawabe Shozo the brigade-conglomerate commander put aside the truce agreement and renewed the shelling of Wanping for one and half hours. The Chinese constabulary force, en route to Wanping for taking custody of Wanping, was attacked by Japanese as well. Past noon, on July 9th, truce monitoring teams discussed the issue of allowing the constabulary force into Wanping, with a prohibition of heavy equipment. Meanwhile, Kawabe Shozo sent Japanese 2nd *Daidai* to Shagang to the northeast of Wanping.

[1] Wu Xiangxiang, *op. cit.*, 1:361

[2] Shi Yu & Xu Hong, *Patriotic generals During Resistance War*, P 112

[3] For first shot, see Zhang Xianwen & Cao Dachen, p. 68. Also see Xin Haonian, *Which Is New China* 第六章 :

Note 2 据闻中国大陆已经有资料证明中共北方局曾令中共武装人员在芦沟桥两岸打枪，策动“芦沟桥事变”，以诱发日本的进一步侵略行动，目的仍然是在趁乱“图存”。因作者并未亲自看该资料，故仍按原历史定论予以阐述。可供参考者，是曾任日本关东军参谋的田中隆吉在东京国际军事法庭上的一段证词称：七月八日，我由内蒙化德乘飞机到天津。晚间在芙蓉馆辟室

茂川秀和（天津特务机关长）对酌，他说：“放枪的事是共产党干的……。”我和茂川曾在参谋部共过事，了解他一向和北平共产党方面学生交往密切，所以追问他一句：“那末，教唆他们干的元凶就是你吗？”他满脸通红地点头承认。后来因茂川害怕承担“第一枪”挑起战争、作为祸首的责任，又否认过隆吉的证词，所以，仅在注中予以说明。

[4] Zheng Yi, Ji Xingwen, page 335, *Records of Famous KMT/CCP Generals*

