

# COMMEMORATING JULY 7, 1937: THE DAY ON WHICH THE CCP INITIATED HOSTILITIES AGAINST JAPAN

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On November 7, 1931, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) established the Chinese Soviet Republic, naming Ruijin in Jiangxi province as its capital. Chiang Kai-shek's subsequent encirclement campaigns severely weakened the Communist forces, who were compelled to flee to Yan'an, a withdrawal that later became known as the Long March. However, in 1934 the Communists were still in Ruijin and on April 26, 1934, they declared war against Japan.

In any case, it was on that date that the CCP formally commenced hostilities against Japan. But for quite some time, the Communists' military achievements were inconsequential. On July 7, 1937, however, they concocted a scheme (the Marco Polo Bridge Incident) that succeeded in embroiling Chiang Kai-shek's forces in a full-scale war. That day, therefore, marks a triumph of manipulation for the CCP, and the beginning of its rise to power and eventual sway over China.

## **The Marco Polo Bridge Incident**

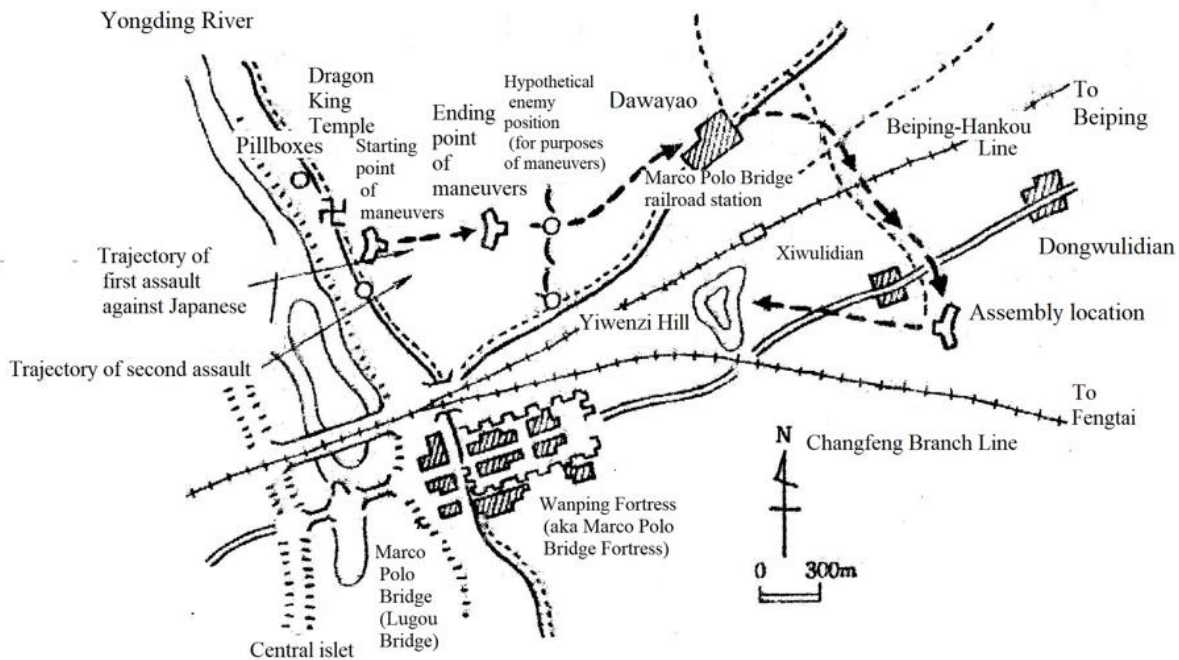
On July 7, 1937, Company 8 of Japan's China Garrison Army, 135 members strong, was engaged in maneuvers on the banks of the Yongding River near the Marco Polo Bridge. The Japanese had given advance notice of the maneuvers to the Chinese 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army. They commenced maneuvers with their backs to the riverbank near the Dragon King Temple, where pillboxes, erected years ago by Chinese troops were located. Suddenly, at 10:40 p.m., when the men of Company 8 were on the point of completing maneuvers after advancing about 400 meters, three shots were fired at them from a light machine gun operated by an assailant or assailants situated in a temporary encampment in front of them. Then more shots rang out; this time they seemed to come from an embankment near the pillboxes to the south of the Dragon King Temple. Then a volley of about a dozen shots ensued; the Japanese soldiers could hear the bullets whizzing over their heads. Company Commander Shimizu immediately ordered his men to hit the ground and sent an urgent report to Battalion Commander Ichiki. A regimental order was issued, instructing the men to assemble at Yiwenzi Hill and await further orders. But at 3:25 a.m. on July 8, shots were again fired from the direction of Dragon King Temple. Orders to counterattack were issued at 5:30 a.m.

Although the assault on the Japanese commenced at about 10:40 p.m. on July 7, at which time about a dozen shots were fired on them from the direction of the Dragon King Temple, not until 5:30 a.m. on the morning of July 8, did the Japanese return fire, after they were again shot at. By then seven hours had elapsed from the time the first shots were directed toward them.

## **Assailants were 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army soldiers, but ...**

Now on the counterattack, the Japanese swept Chinese troops from the area extending from the Dragon King Temple to the riverbank. They then proceeded to take control of the central islet in the Yongding River, and then the river's left bank. As soon as the conflict arose, negotiations between the Japanese Special Service Agency in Beiping (Beijing) and 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army officials began. Qin Dechun, mayor of Beiping (and also deputy commander of the 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army), insisted that on the night of July 7 not one Chinese soldier had ventured outside the walls of Wanping Fortress (the Marco Polo Bridge Fortress), suggesting that perhaps it was bandits who had fired the shots. But an examination of the corpses of Chinese troops on the riverbank near the Dragon King Temple resulted in the discovery of a notebook containing the names of the men's immediate superiors, among them 37<sup>th</sup> Division Commander Feng Zhi'an, 110<sup>th</sup> Brigade Commander He Jili, 219<sup>th</sup> Regiment Commander Ji Xingwen, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Commander Jin Zhenzhong. Since Jin was commander of Chinese

## Map of Marco Polo Bridge and environs on July 7, 1937



troops stationed at the Marco Polo Bridge Fortress, we know that the Chinese involved in the attack were, without a doubt, members of the 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army.

Was this a deliberate attack against Japan's China Garrison Army on the part of the 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army? Perhaps we should believe what Deputy Commander Qin Dechun said about not intending to allow his men to venture out beyond the confines of the Marco Polo Bridge Fortress walls.

In any case, according to the cease-fire agreement reached on July 11, the Chinese were to apologize to the Japanese and punish those responsible for the attack. Article 3 of the agreement states that the Chinese were to make a concerted effort to restrain anti-Japanese groups, such as the Blue Shirts Society and the CCP. Perhaps the Chinese suspected the CCP of having provoked the incident.

### CCP infiltration tactics

The Communists' most effective strategy (and one that has become its standard operating procedure) is infiltration – insinuating themselves surreptitiously into opposing organizations. Once they have done so, they gather information and use other deceitful means to influence their unsuspecting victims. These are the very same tactics used by the Comintern, and involved planting more than 100 spies or agents in unwitting organizations (such as the US Department of State, beginning in the 1930s).

The 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army played the oblivious host to a great many secret CCP members and Communist sympathizers; notable among them was Deputy Chief of Staff Zhang Kexia, as well as the deputy chief propaganda officer and the chief intelligence officer. Communist cells had been formed in several 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army units. The names of many of these undercover Communists have been verified. We also know that the aforementioned Zhang Kexia had even formulated an operation plan (dated May 23) whose objective was to annihilate the Japanese forces, but it never saw the light of day.

On July 6 Marco Polo Bridge Fortress Brigade Commander (and secret CCP member) He Jili instructed Battalion Commander Jin Zhenzhong to “monitor Japanese troops and counterattack tenaciously if they take the offensive.” Also, at an officers’ general meeting He ordered his men to open fire if the Japanese came within 100 meters of their camp. By doing so, the secret Communists were committing a crime of conscience, promoting a crisis mentality and creating an atmosphere that would induce their men to shoot the Japanese. Even though we cannot be sure exactly who fired the shots, we do know that a skirmish between the Chinese and Japanese occurred because Chinese soldiers under the command of Jin Zhenzhong shot at the Japanese.

### **Irrefutable evidence points to CCP**

Some historians speculate that the clash at Marco Polo Bridge was an accident. However, this conclusion is unimaginable. On July 8, the day after the skirmish, the CCP’s Central Committee dispatched a lengthy telegram from Yan’an. It proclaimed the CCP’s resolve to engage in a full-scale war. It was sent to Chiang Kai-shek, other Chinese leaders, newspaper companies, Nationalist government officials, military officials, and major Chinese organizations. In the annals of CCP history, it is referred to as the July 8 telegram.

Given the state of communications at the time, it would have been impossible to prepare a detailed report describing the events that began on July 7. That report would have had to be written on July 8, the day on which the Japanese first responded to the attack, and then transmitted to relevant destinations throughout China. Ensuring that the report arrived at its destinations *before* the July 8 telegram was disseminated was an absolute impossibility. The only explanation is that the incident was planned in advance and implemented as planned.

In fact, the Japanese military intercepted a telegram that serves as evidence that the Communist scheme had been implemented and was proceeding on schedule. Col. Akitomi Shigejiro, head of the Beijing branch of the China Expeditionary Force’s Intelligence Section reported that “after the incident broke out, in the middle of the night, one of our telegraph operators in the Special Intelligence Group in Tianjin intercepted an emergency radio transmission. He said that the transmission seemed to originate from a signaling station somewhere on the Beijing University campus, and that its destination was a signaling station at Chinese Communist Headquarters in Yan’an. The content of the telegram was “Success!” in Chinese (*Chenggong le*), repeated three times.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, those who heard the intercepted transmission had no idea what it meant. But we now know that it was reporting to Yan’an that the plot laid at the Marco Polo Bridge had met with success! The state of communications in that era was such that even the transmission of a simple concept like that required a significant amount of effort. In any case, the process of reporting the incident and preparing the July 8 telegram (in essence, a call to full-scale war) was completed on July 8. The message then went out to all destinations of any consequence throughout China.

### **Why the CCP needed to initiate the Marco Polo Bridge Incident**

The CCP’s most important objective was inciting warfare between Japan and China. But at that time the CCP was in a weak position; its only options were to join forces with the Nationalist Party and then somehow arrange for the Nationalists to wage war against Japan. In December 1936, the Xi’an Incident had brought success to the CCP in that it forced Chiang Kai-shek to ally himself with the Communists in waging war against Japan. Most people believe that Chiang’s acquiescence created the Second United Front, but they are laboring under a misconception, since that alliance wasn’t formed until September 1937.

It is true that Chiang Kai-shek acquiesced to collaborating with the Communists in an effort to oppose the Japanese, but he made harsh demands of the Communists. We know that in June of 1937 the CCP was confronted with a major crisis. Edgar Snow, an American journalist who had earned the trust of Mao Zedong after visiting

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<sup>1</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, 08 September 1994, evening edition.

him in Yan'an and interviewed him there, was familiar with the inner workings of the CCP. Snow wrote the following about the CCP.

Following Chiang's release the Communists were in fact soon again placed at his mercy and left with no choice ... but to try by propaganda means to break out of their isolation onto the national scene. But by June 1937 Chiang Kai-shek ... again was blockading the Reds. (...) Once more they now seemed to face the choice of total surrender or encirclement and disaster, or retreat to the northern desert.<sup>2</sup>

Second United Front, indeed! The CCP had been driven to the brink of extinction. The Communists turned to what was very likely their only option: concoct a scheme to ignite a war between China and Japan. The thought surely occurred to adroit conspirator and CCP kingpin Mao Zedong. What is more, he had the secret weapon he needed to carry out his scheme in the form of an infiltration unit. He used that weapon to set off the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which ballooned without any direct involvement of the CCP.

However, 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army officials were not terribly anxious to enter into combat with the Japanese. For that reason, four days after the incident, Deputy Commander Qin Dechun and Matsui Takuro, head of the Special Service Agency, signed a local ceasefire agreement. The agreement comprised three articles. I have already mentioned Article 3, but here I would like to cite Article 1, which reads as follows:

1. Representatives of the 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army shall offer an apology to the relevant Japanese military personnel, shall punish those responsible for the incident, and shall promise to make a concerted effort to prevent a similar incident from arising in the future.

One might surmise that the Japanese were able to pressure the 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army into accepting the agreement because the former had superior forces. But that was not at all the case. The China Garrison Army had 5,700 soldiers stationed between Tianjin and Beijing, while the 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army had 150,000 men at its disposal. Moreover, Japan's total military strength in terms of troops (including soldiers stationed in Japan proper, Manchuria, Korea, and Taiwan) amounted to 250,000, as opposed to 2.1 million for the Chinese. The Japanese military's primary concern, Soviet troops deployed in the Far East, numbered 400,000. Anyone who claims that "militarist Japan" possessed a colossal military force is laboring under a delusion. It is important to understand that the Japanese had absolutely no reason to provoke a war under these circumstances. In the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Japanese military and government policies were totally consistent: no military expansion.

Some have expressed their doubts about the rationale behind the Japanese stationing their troops in China. However, this decision was in accordance with the Boxer Protocol, signed after the Boxer Rebellion of 1901. The stationing of Japanese military personnel in China was a sanctioned, lawful measure intended to protect Japanese nationals residing in that nation. There was absolutely no ulterior motive. Unilateral assaults on soldiers who are legally stationed in China were, in the context of international law, acts of aggression on the part of the Chinese. And the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, initiated by the CCP, was an act of aggression committed by China against Japan.

### **Violations of the ceasefire agreement; Comintern directives**

On July 19 the three articles of the ceasefire agreement were further refined to include the following items, which the Chinese were expected to fulfill:

1. Make a concerted effort to suppress CCP plots.
2. The police shall discharge promptly any employee or staff member deemed unsuitable for Japanese-

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<sup>2</sup> Edgar Snow, *Random Notes on Red China (1936-1946)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), xi.

Chinese collaboration.

3. Exercise strict control over staff members of organizations under the jurisdiction of the Hebei-Chahar Political Council,<sup>3</sup> as well as members of organizations established in other regions who harbor anti-Japanese sentiments.
4. The Hebei-Chahar Political Council shall expel the Blue Shirts Society, the Central Club Clique, and other anti-Japanese groups.
5. There shall be strict control of anti-Japanese diatribes, of organizations that convey anti-Japanese propaganda, as well as anti-Japanese movements, popular and otherwise.
6. There shall be strict control of anti-Japanese activity on the part of Chinese military personnel and educational institutions under the jurisdiction of the Hebei-Chahar Political Council.

If these provisions had been adhered to, the CCP's plot, which was close to fruition, would have been ruined. Desperate, the Communists caused incidents that violated the agreement. Chinese troops committed assaults, major violations of the agreement – first the Langfang Incident, followed by the Guang'anmen Incident. Finally, on July 27, the Japanese government decided to dispatch three divisions from Japan, and on July 28 notified the 29<sup>th</sup> Route Army that Japan would declare war against China.

By violating the ceasefire agreement in this way, the CCP accomplished its objective of causing the outbreak of a full-scale war between Japan and China.

This outcome was not simply a policy decision of the CCP; it was heavily influenced by instructions from the Comintern, which was then promoting the spread of world communism. The gist of instructions from the Comintern, dated July 1937 and found in the archives of Japan's East Asia Development Board, was as follows:

1. Avoid local resolutions at all costs; take action that will result in full-scale war between Japan and China.
2. Use any and every means to accomplish the aforementioned objective; eliminate key individuals who agree to local resolutions and make concessions to the Japanese, thus betraying the cause of liberating China.
3. Manipulate the lower classes of Chinese and incite them to act in such a manner as to force the Nationalist government to open hostilities.
4. The CCP shall expand the boycott of Japanese goods to all of China, and threaten with boycotts any third-party nations coming to Japan's aid.
5. In addition to cooperating with Nationalist government forces, the Red Army shall engage in partisan activities.
6. To acquire party strength superior to that of the Nationalist Party, the CCP shall recruit low-ranking officers, non-commissioned officers, and rank-and-file soldiers from the Nationalist forces, as well as members of the general public.

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<sup>3</sup> A semi-independent entity in North China nominally, but not actually controlled by Chiang Kai-shek.

## **Guilt feelings toward China grossly misplaced and dangerous**

It was the CCP that plotted and triggered the Second Sino-Japanese War, with the support and encouragement of the Comintern. Nevertheless, there are far too many Japanese who, convinced that Japan invaded China, are suffering from pangs of guilt. However, as I have demonstrated herein, the truth is the polar opposite.

Writer Murakami Haruki, who seems to believe that Japan was an aggressor in China, has been quoted as saying, “Our only choice, really, is to keep apologizing until the other country (China) is willing to concede that ‘well, the Japanese have offered apology after apology. Their apologies are far from adequate, but at this point, why don’t we just forgive Japan?’” Such drivel is nothing more than blatant proof of his ignorance.

China takes advantage of these feelings of guilt, which are rooted in ignorance, but still harbored by many Japanese. They become the motivation for demand after unfair demand issued by the Chinese.

If we continue to embrace these guilt feelings in our desire to be fair, we must prepare ourselves for further impositions from China on Japan – perhaps attacks on the Senkaku Islands, and possibly even Okinawa. What we should regret is not Japanese aggression against China, since there was none, but the fact that CCP schemes compelled Japan to wage war with China.