

CHAPTER 13: WHAT TRANSPIRED AT LUGOU BRIDGE

1. EVOLUTION OF THE LUGOU BRIDGE INCIDENT

Indications of premeditated shootings

The incident took place on the evening of July 7, 1937. The 8th Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment, China Garrison Army (Japanese), was conducting maneuvers on vacant land located 12 kilometers west of Beiping, on the left bank of the Yongding River, north of Lugou Bridge. The soldiers had just completed their exercises when, at about 10:40 p.m., shots suddenly rang out from a spot close to the Dragon King Temple on the riverbank.

Just then 8th Company Commander Shimizu Setsurō, 1st Platoon Commander Noji Ishichi, Sgt. Iwatani Heiji, and Squad Leader Anbo Kiyoji noticed the exchange of flashlight signals between Chinese troops on the embankment and others on the fortified town walls at Lugou Bridge.^{1,2,3} Then more shots were fired, a dozen or so, this time raining down on the Japanese soldiers, who ducked to avoid them.

The fact that signals were exchanged between the embankment and the town walls is of primary importance because it suggests that (1) Chinese troops on the embankment were in collusion with at least some of their comrades inside the Lugou Bridge fortress, and were in close communication with them, and (2) the shots fired at the Japanese soldiers were not accidental, but a deliberate, premeditated crime.

The company that was attacked soon regrouped, but then one soldier was reported missing (he rejoined his unit 20 minutes later). Company Commander Shimizu dispatched Sgt. Iwatani and two buglers on horseback to Fengtai to inform Battalion Commander Ichiki Kiyonao of the incident. Furthermore, once Col. Mutaguchi Ren'ya, commander of the 1st Regiment in Beiping, received telephone reports from the battalion commanders, he issued orders that negotiations with the commander of the Chinese garrison be held at Lugou Bridge at daybreak. Mutaguchi also contacted the Special Service Agency in Beiping, which made the decision, informed by a non-escalation policy, to dispatch both Japanese and Chinese envoys to the site of the incident.

The Chinese envoys were Wang Lengzhai, mayor of Wanping, and Lin Gengyu, a member of the Hebei-Chahar Political Council. On the Japanese side, Sakurai Tokutarō and Teradaira Tadasuke, advisors to the 29th Army, representing the Special Service Agency, were joined by Maj. Shakudō

¹ 1st Lt. Noji Ishichi, Infantry, "Jihen hottan no omoide" (Recollections of the outbreak of the incident), Kaikōsha Special Bulletin, July 1938.

² Anbo Kiyoji, "Rokōkyō jiken no kaisō" (Recollections of the Lugou Bridge Incident) *Shichū Hoichikai Kaihō* (China Garrison Army Infantry Association Newsletter), May 1987, special issue commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Lugou Bridge Incident.

³ Shina chūton hohei daiichi rentai (1st Infantry Regiment, China Garrison Army), *Rokōkyō fukin sentō shōhō daiichi gō* (Detailed Report No. 1 on fighting near the Lugou Bridge).

Shōji, commander of the Beiping Military Police Detachment. As he was responsible for local security, Regimental Commander Mutaguchi was required to remain in Beiping. In his stead Lt. Col. Morita Tōru accompanied the others to Lugou Bridge. Sakurai immediately proceeded, alone, to the site of the incident to negotiate the opening of the gates. The envoys departed from the regimental headquarters at 4:00 a.m. on July 8. Meanwhile, without returning even a single shot against the Chinese, the 8th Company at Lugou Bridge proceeded two kilometers eastward to Xiwulidian, where it joined the 3rd Battalion, which had arrived from Fengtai. Together, those units occupied Yiwenzi Hill. No sooner had they done that when, at 3:25 a.m., three shots were fired from the direction of the Dragon King Temple. On the basis of a telephone report received from Battalion Commander Ichiki about those shots, Regimental Commander Mutaguchi stated that “at 3:25 a.m., the distinction between friend and foe was already clear.” He added how insulting it was for the Chinese to fire unlawfully *twice*, fully aware that they were aiming at Japanese soldiers. He then gave permission to commence hostilities. At that time, care was given to confirm the time the order was issued, 4:20 a.m., due to its great importance. This was further evidence of the strictness of Japanese military discipline. On the way back from Xiwulidian to Yiwenzi Hill, Battalion Commander Ichiki encountered Lt. Col. Sakurai Tokutarō, an advisor to the 29th Army, who had arrived from Beiping by automobile. From him Ichiki learned that Qin Dechun (mayor of Beiping and deputy commander of the 29th Army) had told Sakurai that there were no Chinese troops whatsoever outside the Wanping walls, and that the shots may have been fired by bandits, who could be considered fair game.

Japanese soldiers’ patient restraint over seven hours

When the Ichiki Battalion was on the point of initiating an attack on Chinese troops near the Dragon King Temple, the first group of envoys arrived at Yiwenzi Hill. Lt. Col. Morita Tōru, acting regimental commander, ordered Capt. Kubota, commander of the Infantry Gun Detachment, to refrain from loading ammunition. Lt. Col. Morita was unaware that after the envoys had departed the regimental commander had authorized Battalion Commander Ichiki to engage in hostilities. As acting regimental commander, Morita planned to base his negotiations with the Chinese on a non-escalation policy. However, Capt. Kubota, determined to follow the orders of his immediate superior, bade his men to load the ammunition and gave the order to fire. At that moment, Lt. Col. Morita bravely stepped in front of the infantry gun, which was about to go off, and prevented it from firing, risking his life to avert a crisis.^{4,5,6}

Incidentally, Lt. Col. Morita was the commander of soldiers who became known as the Three Human Bombs, due to their heroic actions during the First Shanghai Incident in 1932 (see Chapter 10, Section 5). He later died in action at Nomonhan in August 1939. His courage and boldness

⁴ 1st Infantry Regiment, China Garrison Army, “Rokōkyō fukin sentō shōsai hōkoku dai’ichi gō” (Detailed Report No. 1 on action in the vicinity of Lugou Bridge).

⁵ Terada Kiyoshi, *Dai’issen no mita Rokōkyō jiken ki* (Lugou Bridge Incident as seen from the front line).

⁶ Hibino Shirō, *Ichī gunjin no shōgai: Morita Tōru shōshō den* (Career of a military man: Maj. Gen. Morita Tōru) (Tokyo: Nihon Shokan, 1943).

were certainly in evidence at Lugou Bridge, as was the sincerity of the Japanese soldiers there, and their determination to prevent the incident from escalating.

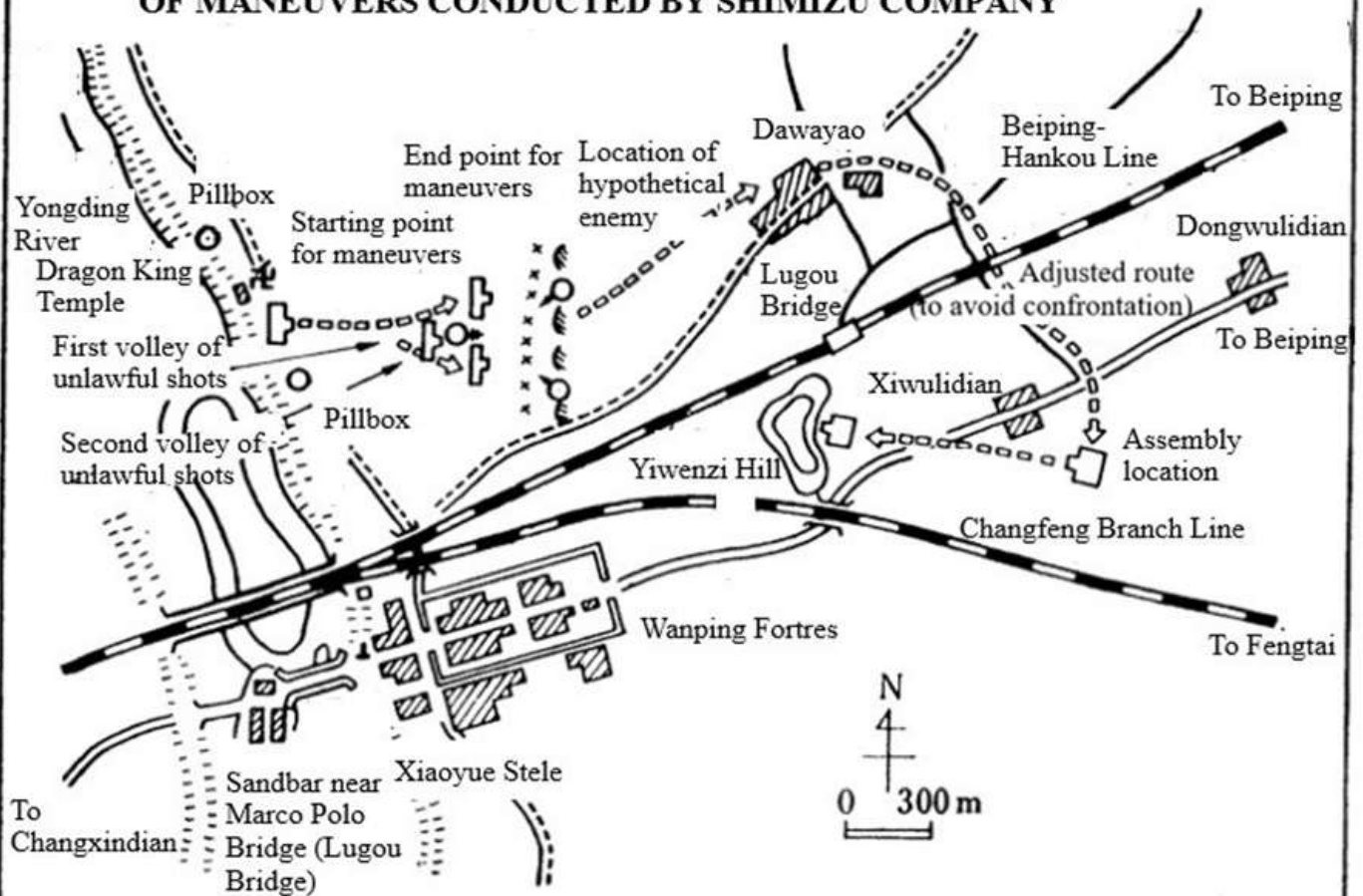
Realizing that it would take time to obtain Lt. Col. Morita's consent, Battalion Commander Ichiki called a halt to the attack and arranged for his men to have breakfast. At that time envoys were negotiating with Jin Zhenzhong, commander of the Chinese garrison (whose rank was equivalent to that of a battalion commander) at Lugou Bridge.

However, Chinese troops at Dragon King Temple, mistakenly attributing the failure of the Japanese to attack for cowardice, suddenly unleashed a fusillade of bullets on the Japanese. Finally, the Japanese counterattacked, at the stroke of 5:30 a.m. on July 8. For a full seven hours after experiencing the initial, unlawful attack, they had demonstrated restraint and prudence. They had not fired a single retaliatory shot, but once they did attack, the Japanese quickly annihilated the enemy at Dragon King Temple and advanced to the right bank of the Yongding River.

While checking the bodies of the enemy troops after the battle, the Japanese discovered a notebook. It contained the names of its owner's immediate superiors: Song Zheyuan, commander of the 29th Army; Feng Zhi'an, commander of the 37th Division; He Jili, commander of the 110th Brigade; Ji Xingwen, commander of the 219th Regiment; Jin Zhenzhong, commander of the 3rd Battalion; and Geng Xixun, commander of the 11th Company. This evidence demonstrated beyond a doubt that the men who fired on the Japanese were regular soldiers attached to the 29th Army. It also belied Qin Dechun's claim that there were no Chinese troops outside Wanping's walls, as did statements made by Jin Zhenzhong during negotiations.

I have provided an overview of the situation prevailing at the time of the Lugou Bridge Incident. It should be perfectly clear who was responsible for the unlawful firing. The seven hours of restraint and control exhibited by the Japanese units are proof that Japan had absolutely no intention of starting a war.

LUGOU BRIDGE INCIDENT: MAP SHOWING IMPLEMENTATION OF MANEUVERS CONDUCTED BY SHIMIZU COMPANY



LUGOU BRIDGE INCIDENT: MAP SHOWING COURSE OF BATTLE ON JULY 8

