

4. STRENUOUS JAPANESE EFFORTS TO CURB ESCALATION

Japanese policy from the outset: avoid escalation

What was Japan's response to the Lugou Bridge Incident?

On July 8, the day after the incident, central Army authorities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided upon a policy of non-escalation and local resolution. At an extraordinary Cabinet meeting on July 9, Army Minister Sugiyama Hajime pressed for the dispatch of three divisions to China. But Foreign Minister Hirota Kōki (and every other Cabinet member, for that matter) opposed his plan on the grounds that doing so might lead to a full-scale war. Also influencing that position was the fact that some Cabinet members had heard that a ceasefire had been negotiated locally. The more intransigent arguments of some members were overruled by a general determination to avoid escalation of the hostilities. We must appreciate the peaceful intentions of the Japanese government at that time.

Negotiations among Matsui Takurō, head of the Special Service Agency; Imai Takeo, an Army representative; Qin Dechun, commander of the 29th Army; and Lt.-Gen. Feng Zhi'an, commander of the 37th Division produced the following cease-fire agreement at 2:00 a.m. on July 9.

- (A) Both sides shall cease firing immediately.
- (B) Japanese troops shall withdraw to Fengtai; Chinese troops shall withdraw to the right bank of the Yongding River.
- (C) Responsibility for the defense of Wanping Fortress shall be assigned to the North Hebei Frontier Security Corps; the 37th Division, whose anti-Japanese sentiment is relatively obvious, shall be situated elsewhere.

At the time, the Kawabe Brigade was preparing to initiate an attack on Wanping Fortress at daybreak on July 9. However, upon receiving the news that the ceasefire negotiations had been successful, Commander Kawabe Masakazu ordered his men to halt all attack preparations. Then he instructed them to assemble near Lugou Bridge to ascertain whether Chinese troops were honoring the agreement. Kawabe also ordered a strict prohibition against taking any hostile action toward the withdrawing Chinese troops, and against entering Wanping Fortress once the Chinese had finished retreating.

However, Chinese troops did not withdraw as promised during the negotiations. Instead, they continued to engage in provocative acts, and rumors began to circulate that the Central Army was advancing northward. On July 10, the Konoe Cabinet made a provisional decision to dispatch two brigades from the Guandong Army, one division from Korea, and three divisions from Japan proper, to the Beiping area. On the following day, July 11, the Cabinet decided to dispatch three divisions from Japan as an immediate measure. That decision was made public.

However, when a ceasefire agreement was reached locally at 8:00 p.m. on July 11, the Japanese government postponed the mobilization of divisions from Japan. It also dispatched Shibayama Kenshirō, head of the Army Ministry's Military Affairs Section, and Nakajima Tetsuzō, head of the Army General Staff's General Affairs Bureau, to China to re-emphasize the government's non-

escalation policy. However, an Army representative in Nanjing reported that air units and four Central Army divisions had been ordered to converge on the northern border of Henan province. Therefore, it was decided to have the Manchurian and Korean units proceed as planned, and an order to that effect was issued on July 11.

The local ceasefire agreement read as follows:

1. The representatives of the 29th Army hereby express their regret to the Japanese military, and vow that they shall punish those responsible and ensure that incidents of this sort do not recur.
2. As Chinese troops are stationed too close to Japanese units at Fengtai and are liable to cause incidents, they shall not be stationed on the east bank of the Yongding River near Lugou Bridge; Chinese security forces shall maintain order there.
3. As this incident was for the most part engineered by the Blue Shirt Society, the Communist Party, and other anti-Japanese groups, exhaustive preventive measures shall be taken in the future.

Japanese abort two mobilizations

However, the Chinese soon violated the ceasefire agreement. At 10:00 a.m. on July 13, a repair detail from the 2nd Battalion, Tianjin Artillery Regiment was ambushed by Chinese troops while passing through the Dahong Gate in Beiping. Four Japanese soldiers were killed by an explosion. This happened less than 40 hours after the ceasefire agreement was signed. On July 14 the Tianjin Garrison Cavalry was en route to Fengtai via Tongzhou. Private Kondō, who was delayed when his horse lost a shoe, was attacked and brutally murdered by Chinese troops. Six bullets from a light machine gun hit him, killing him instantly. After he breathed his last, they split his head in two with a Chinese broadsword so that his brains spilled out, and slashed his right leg off. It was an unspeakably horrific way of murdering someone.

On July 19 a supplementary agreement detailing the implementation of Article 3 of the ceasefire agreement, which concerned the elimination of anti-Japanese activity, was signed. In addition to suppressing anti-Japanese campaigns organized by the CCP and similar groups, the Hebei-Chahar Political Council would remove 37th Division troops from Beiping. Song Zheyuan, commander of the 29th Army, planned to move the 37th Division to the west bank of the Yongding River, and then to Baoding. Thereafter, security forces would take on most of the responsibility for maintaining order within Beiping.

However, on July 20, the following day, Chinese troops at Wanping Fortress, who were scheduled to withdraw and be replaced by security forces, suddenly attacked Japanese troops with a volley of artillery fire, perhaps out of resentment. Japanese soldiers responded by firing at the Wanping Fortress walls. On that same night, in response to the illegal Chinese attack, the Japanese government approved the deployment of three divisions from Japan. Central Army authorities had decided upon this mobilization on the previous day, on condition that they would be demobilized immediately if the situation improved, even if the improvement came after the mobilization order was issued. This was the second deployment decision. But on July 21, Shibayama Kenshirō, head of the Military Affairs Section, who had been dispatched to the area, returned to Tokyo with his colleagues. There he announced that the Tianjin Garrison could operate effectively with

reinforcements from Manchuria and Korea, and that there was no need to mobilize any divisions from Japan. The Tianjin Garrison's Chief of Staff also informed that the Hebei-Chahar Political Council was seeing to the application of the supplementary agreement of July 19, and that the 37th Division in Beiping had begun to withdraw to Baoding. Consequently, Army authorities decided to postpone deploying divisions from Japan.

Thus the decision to deploy divisions from Japan proper was twice made, and then twice canceled.

Three weeks' adherence to non-escalation policy: an exercise in futility

Unfortunately, Japan's goodwill and patience proved futile. Japanese soldiers were twice victims of surprise attacks launched by Chinese troops. On July 25 Chinese troops surround and attacked a Japanese signals company dispatched to repair electrical lines in Langfang. On July 26 Chinese troops on Beiping's city walls fired indiscriminately at the 2nd Battalion, Tianjin Garrison commanded by Maj. Hirobe Hiroshi, as the latter was passing through Guang'an Gate. This occurred even though an agreement had been reached with the Chinese to allow Japanese soldiers to pass through, to protect Japanese residents of Beiping. The Guang'an Gate Incident prompted Chief of Operations Ishiwara Kanji, the key supporter of non-escalation efforts, to utter the following heart-rending words: "Delay will lead to utter ruin." At that point, Japanese forces had no choice but to abandon the non-escalation policy. On July 27, central Army authorities issued an order to mobilize three divisions from Japan, for the third time. The Cabinet immediately approved the order and proceeded to seek imperial sanction.

Specifics of the deployment were (1) provisional mobilization of the 5th and 6th divisions, and full mobilization of the 10th Division, (2) full mobilization of the 20th Division, and (3) deployment of three independent armored companies, one tank battalion, and other units. Both houses of the Diet also passed resolutions expressing gratitude to the Army and Navy.

For a full three weeks following the Lugou Bridge Incident, the Japanese took the Chinese army's assurances in good faith. They endured insult upon insult and exhibited restraint. However, after 21 days the Japanese had no choice but to abandon the policy to which they had been so firmly committed: avoiding the use of armed force. In the early morning of July 28, the Tianjin Garrison notified the 29th Army of its intention to commence hostilities, and proceeded to launch a full-scale assault.

Chinese troops immediately fell into confusion and fled southward. By July 29, the Japanese had completed their sweep operations.