



August 1937:

War and the Death *en masse* of Civilians

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On 14 August 1937, Shanghai awoke to the threat of a powerful typhoon sweeping along the China coast. For days, its trajectory had been uncertain, but by 12 August it was moving in a north-northwesterly direction, seemingly headed for the city. A week earlier, the city had suffered from another typhoon, with a deluge of rain and brutal winds that threw people on the Bund to the ground. The second typhoon came close, but failed to hit the harbor. It continued its course on the northern bank of the Yangzi River where it eventually dwindled. Yet clouds were not the only threat hovering over the city.

War was in the making between the Chinese and Japanese armies. On this fateful morning, despite the strong winds, Chinese pilots started dropping bombs on enemy lines. The Japanese had headquartered their command on the *Izumo*, a floating fortress with little military capability, moored in front of the Japanese consulate. As Chinese planes swooped over the Huangpu River in an attempt to hit the Japanese vessel, thousands of watchers crowded on the Bund hoping to see a fatal blow delivered to the Japanese flagship. They cheered and yelled each time a bomb exploded in the river around the ship. At 4:27, however, the short epic turned into a tragedy. Three bombs fell at the corner of Nanking Road and the Bund, followed by two more bombs in front of the Great World building in the French Concession, instantly killing 1,200 people and leaving hundreds of wounded on the ground. On the first day of the war, in a single stroke, Shanghai experienced its highest civilian war casualty. Worse, the Chinese pilots had killed their own people.

The history of civilian war victims is a topic historians have shunned in China beyond the conventional trope about the suffering of the Chinese people in the hands of the Japanese aggressor. Western historiography on war violence in China pales in comparison with the numerous studies on war violence in European wars or colonial wars in Asia.¹ If we except the path-breaking work of Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon on the “scars of war” and, more recently,

¹ For a comparative overview, see Christopher Goscha, “Bringing Asia into Focus: Civilians and Combatants in the Line of Fire in China and Indochina,” *War & Society* 31:2 (August 1, 2012): 87-105.

Beyond Suffering by James A. Flath and Norman Smith, the literature concentrates mostly on displaced populations.² The issue this paper attempts to raise is the fate of civilian population caught in the line of fire. More specifically, it examines several instances of mass killings that resulted from the indiscriminate use of aerial bombing. A major challenge in writing the history of death *en masse* is the lack of documentation as only operating administrations were in a position to document these events. In the Chinese municipality, the authorities just crumbled in the early phase of the war. Yet even in the foreign settlements, the archives often offer only short and terse reports that fail to convey a sense of what actually happened. Most of these documents are not yet available to the public at the Shanghai Municipal Archives. Fortunately, there is a way around this difficulty, which this paper fully explores. The foreign administrations produced many photographs that, combined with images from various sources (war correspondents, newspapers, private collections), constitute an invaluable visual record. Thus photographs provide the backbone of this paper, which I have supplemented with archival sources, to recapture the massive loss of civilian lives that occurred in the city and to recover the memory of events long dismissed and forgotten.

The August 1937 bombing represents a unique case of modern mass carnage among civilians in the history of the city. It presented the civil authorities and medical institutions with an unprecedented challenge in an already seriously strained situation. I shall examine the circumstances that led to the tragedy, the extent of the human disaster, and the ways in which the authorities coped with the sudden and unexpected mass of dead and wounded bodies. I will also address the sensitive issue of perception of this event by the local actors, both Chinese and Western, as well as its subsequent erasure from memory.

² Diana Lary and Stephen R MacKinnon, eds., *The Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001); James A. Flath and Norman Smith, *Beyond Suffering Recounting War in Modern China* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2011). See also Edward McCord, "Cries that Shake the Earth: Military Atrocities and Popular Protests in Warlord China," *Modern China* 31:1 (2005): 3-34.

The death of hundreds of Chinese civilians under Chinese bombs on the first day of the war was not – it could not be – a fact that fit into the strongly nationalistic narrative of the time, even today. When mentioned in local history books, the August 14 bombing of civilians is remembered as an incident, an unavoidable part of warfare, something worth a passing mention. I have never come across a text that addresses this event seriously to the full extent of its significance and its ramifications within the master narrative of war in Shanghai. These were non heroic “bad deaths”, yet they were also deaths that fit into a long sequence of violence against civilians, from 1932 to 1937, causing loss and trauma that remained subdued in the political discourse.³

War in the City

Up until the beginning of the month, the prospect of war in Shanghai seemed thousands of miles away. In early July, Chinese and Japanese troops had fought in the vicinity of Lugouqiao (Marco Polo Bridge) after a Japanese private went missing. There had been previous skirmishes and even frontal attacks between the contending armies in North China. The Chinese central government had heretofore opted to avoid full-scale war and accepted successive

³ Although China suffered as much as Russia, for example, during the 1937-1945 period, addressing the issue of death, trauma, and memory like Jay Winter for Europe, remains largely an open field. On China, see Lary and MacKinnon, *The Scars of War*. On Russia, see Catherine Merridale, “Death and Memory in Modern Russia,” *History Workshop Journal* 42 (October 1, 1996): 1-18. On war trauma on combatants and civilians, see Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War, and Trauma* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On the sequels of W.W.I., the reference works are Jay M. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Jay M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

compromises (loss of territory, demilitarization of large areas, etc.). In 1937, however, public opinion was highly incensed by the continued encroachment on Chinese sovereignty by the Japanese military. The central government under Chiang Kai-shek had run out of options. The regional armies in the North, only nominally under Nanjing's command, were prepared to take a stand and attempt to repulse any renewed Japanese invasion. Armies throughout the country were also ready to move north and join the patriotic defense of the homeland. In all the major urban centers, students, merchants, professionals, trade unionists, artists, and many common people voiced their anger against the Japanese attack. Anti-Japanese associations to save the nation (Fanri jiuguo hui) sprang up again after their demise under government pressure in 1932.

In Shanghai, feelings ran high. The city was home to a large Japanese civilian community – more than 26,000 residents – concentrated mostly in the Hongkou district of the International Settlement and northern Hongkou, the adjacent area that extended north into the Chinese municipality. Organized wholly under a single association, the Residents' association (Shanghai kyoryū mindan), the community and its leaders were unequivocally and extremely vocal against Chinese nationalism.⁴ They resented the anti-Japanese movements and boycotts that had punctuated Sino-Japanese relations since the infamous Twenty-one demands in 1915: the 4 May 1919 movement, the 30 May 1925 movement, the Jinan incident in 1928, and the movements of protest that followed the 18 September 1931 invasion of Manchuria. In 1932 when the Japanese Navy launched its first attack on the city, the Japanese civilians had been instrumental in helping the soldiers through the city, taking advantage of their position of superiority to brutalize ordinary Chinese citizens. In 1937, even if this was not their call, the local Mindan leaders were adamant in asking for Japanese army protection from Chinese nationalist

⁴ Christian Henriot, "Little Japan in Shanghai: An Insulated Community, 1875-1945," in *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842-1952*, eds. Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 146–69.

associations.⁵

On the Chinese side though, the city was not without military defense. Since soldiers were not allowed, the Chinese authorities partly circumvented the terms of the agreement by posting regiments of “peacekeeping forces” (Bao’andui). These were not strictly speaking military forces. In July 1937, the peacekeeping corps received reinforcements. The Japanese consulate protested, to no avail. While the military effort was concentrated on the northern front, the central government also started moving troops in the direction of Shanghai, short of the thirty- kilometer radius. This was a preventive move more than actual preparation for war. The over-extended Chinese military apparatus could not seriously afford to open a second front, especially in a city from which the government derived a substantial part of its revenue. Nor were the foreign powers present in Shanghai inclined toward a repetition of the 1932 incident, even if they had suffered far more lightly than the Chinese districts. War meant the stoppage of business and communications for all. In view of the rising tensions, the British, French and American consulates had called for a reinforcement of their military contingents in Shanghai. Yet, perhaps because war in Shanghai was still unthinkable, there was no advanced preparation for the safety of the civilian population and the large-scale disposal of the dead and wounded.⁶

In early August 1937, although there was no sign of direct military threat, the military build-up was unmistakable. Under diplomatic advice, the Japanese community throughout the lower Yangzi area regrouped in Shanghai from where, along with their local compatriots, they traveled back to Japan. The Japanese Navy reinforced its presence in the harbor with ships and more troops from

⁵ Mark R. Peattie, “Japanese Treaty Port Settlements in China, 1895-1937,” in *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895-1937*, eds. Peter Duus and Myers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 206.

⁶ On British organization on the eve of war, see Julie Rugg, “Managing ‘Civilian Deaths due to War Operations’: Yorkshire Experiences during World War II,” *Twentieth Century British History* 15:2 (January 1, 2004): 152-73.

the Third Fleet and from Japan.⁷ The strident anti-Japanese propaganda and calls to support the fighting armies in the north by Chinese associations created a tense atmosphere which the Japanese chose to interpret as a direct threat to their interests and local community. As in 1932, a minor incident was enough to trigger military violence. Five years earlier, the Japanese Navy had engineered an attack on Japanese monks by a paid Chinese mob. On 9 August 1937, Japanese marines drove to the Hongqiao airfield, an area protected by Chinese soldiers. When the car refused to stop, the Chinese military guards opened fire, resulting in two Japanese deaths. The incident caused an immediate uproar in the Japanese headquarters.

Threatening military action, the Japanese consul demanded the withdrawal of the Peace Preservation Corps and the demolition of the defense works erected by the Chinese.⁸ The local foreign authorities immediately jumped in to prevent the row from degenerating into an armed conflict.⁹ Since the shooting had occurred in the Extra-settlement road area, a portion of territory under Chinese administration, but actually policed by the Shanghai Municipal Council, the Shanghai Municipal Police took charge of the investigation. The consular body met in emergency to seek a solution that would appease both parties. Their initial efforts seemed to calm the mounting tension and reduce saber-rattling on both sides. This temporary lull was not to last. It only served to give a little more time for each party to get ready for a military confrontation. There were sporadic skirmishes around the North train station on the morning of 13 August, and then more serious conflict broke out later in the

⁷ Bradford A. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1939: A Study in the Dilemmas of British Decline* (Stanford University Press, 1973), 36.

⁸ Tianshi Yang, "Chiang Kai-shek and the Battles of Shanghai and Nanjing," in *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945*, ed. Mark R. Peattie, et al. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011), 146.

⁹ On Western involvement in diplomatic efforts, see Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1939*; Jonathan G. Utley, *Going to War with Japan, 1937-1941* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985).

afternoon. The Japanese Navy headquarters ordered a flag to be raised signaling war. Japanese marines launched several excursions from Hongkou while cannon from Japanese warships bombarded Zhabei, causing an immediate response by the peacekeeping forces, soon to be joined by regular troops. The Nationalist government itself had finally made the decision to stall the Japanese assault by opening a second front in the city.¹⁰

The Refugee Crisis

Shanghai was not one city. It was several cities in the same territory. The existence of two foreign settlements – the International Settlement proper and the French Concession, as well as that of the “External road areas” to the north (“North Hongkou”) and the west of the International Settlement beyond its official boundaries – defied any attempt to make Shanghai a single urban space. Shanghai was fragmented. The experience of war was not totally new to Shanghai, nor was the sudden and massive arrival of a destitute population a novelty. Over the past century, the city had received various waves of refugees due to natural disasters or, more often, human conflict. The foreign settlements had in the past been protected, since their extraterritorial status made them an island of relative protection in times of upheaval. To an area of less than six square miles, normally with a population of close to two million, war in 1937 brought utterly destitute refugees by the hundreds of thousands within just a few weeks. As one district after the other, within and on every side of the city felt the scourge of war, there was an almost total evacuation into the foreign settlements.

War started on 13 August 1937 in Shanghai, but the movement of population actually started well before and, as far as Zhabei, Hongkou, and even Yangshupu were concerned, it was almost complete by the time fighting eventually began. These populous districts were

¹⁰ Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism*, 197-199.

the primary military targets, along with Yangshupu, the city's large industrial district. In the 1931-1932 conflict, the population had been caught by surprise and stranded in the fighting areas. The foreign settlements had closed access to their territories as soon as the conflict had begun to prevent the inflow of the Chinese population, while the Chinese municipal authorities had organized the evacuation of civilians from the areas affected by fighting to the war-free districts of the municipality.¹¹ In 1937, the general configuration was radically different. The population was keenly aware that local tensions anywhere could easily escalate into a full – fledged conflict. Even a small local incident could trigger the instant departure of terrified residents. In late July, the disappearance of a Japanese marine – he had actually escaped to avoid sanctions after a night of drinking – caused thousands of Chinese to seek refuge in the International Settlement.¹² It is estimated that more than 50,000 left Zhabei between 26 July and 5 August 1937.¹³ This was the first stage of a massive movement of population affecting all the Chinese-administered districts.

All the interventions of goodwill and mediation by the foreign authorities notwithstanding, the residents of the previously targeted districts did not miss the first signs of military build-up. The wealthier residents began to relocate goods and family to the foreign settlements. When the Chinese mayor decided to abandon the Civic Centre in Jiangwan, panic prevailed and the flow of refugees-to-be quickly swelled and clogged the streets leading to the International Settlement. The displacement of population was not prepared or planned in any way, whether on the side of the residents or that of the authorities. The Shanghai Municipal Council and the French Municipal Council had no valid reason or pretext to stop the flow, as it unfolded before the beginning of hostilities. The population simply anticipated what was about to happen. That the movement was massive is quite clear from the well-known picture of the Garden

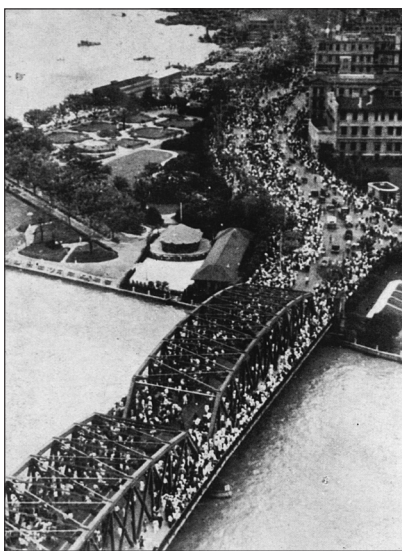
¹¹ Henriot, Christian, *Shanghai 1927-1937. Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization* (Berkeley: The University Press of California, 1993), 87-91.

¹² *North China Herald* [NCH], 26 July 1937; 29 July 1937.

¹³ *NCH*, 9 August 1937; 11 August 1937.

Bridge (Fig. 1). This bridge was the main avenue through which Zhabei, Hongkou, and Yangshupu residents could move into the International Settlement. It was also the most favorable spot, since the Bund and its garden offered enough space to accommodate the large influx of population.

Fig. 1



Réfugiés de Hongkew sur le Garden Bridge

For the vast majority of refugees, the escape was made on foot. In groups, in families, or alone, these residents marched toward the foreign settlements with little more than what they were able to carry. Whatever else they possessed they left behind at home. What the photographs show us are people with small “bundles,” such as a woman with her child or a son with his elderly mother. There is no need to stretch our imagination to guess that they carried only clothing and very basic necessities. When refugees started to pour into the International Settlement, the authorities there were adamant about keeping some areas clear, especially in the evening. Spatial order had to be maintained at all times. It made little sense under

the circumstances, but the police had instructions to clean out the Bund where refugees had congregated and to push them into the back streets. The North China Herald published a picture showing people who had been compelled to settle in a small street for the night.¹⁴ The following morning, the Bund would be occupied again. It remained a major concentration point for refugees in the early days of the war.¹⁵

Yet the massive arrival of refugees required emergency arrangements to accommodate them in surroundings with the minimum facilities for survival. Daytime temperature averaged 29.6 degrees in August 1937, with peaks at 36 degrees. The establishment of camps was initially the result of a proliferation of initiatives by all kinds of institutions and associations. The press noted that most conspicuous in mobilizing to help the homeless refugees were the provincial guilds and the benevolent societies.¹⁶ Vacant land and unoccupied buildings like guildhalls and schools offered temporary shelters for the refugees in search of a place to rest and protection from the summer heat. Among the large premises that could house refugees were the movie theaters and amusement centers. The Embassy Theater on Bubbling Well Road was turned into a refugee camp, as was as the Great World, one of the largest and most impressive entertainment complexes in Shanghai.¹⁷ It would become one of the main killing grounds on 14 August 1937 when two bombs exploded at its doorstep.

¹⁴ *NCH*, 25 August 1937.

¹⁵ Christian Henriot, "Shanghai and the Experience of War: The Fate of Refugees," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 5:2 (October 1, 2006): 215-45; Christian Henriot, "Wartime Shanghai Refugees: Chaos, Exclusion, and Indignity: Do Images Make up for the Absence of Memory?," in *Images in History: Pictures and Public Space in Modern China*, ed. Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Berkeley: IEAS Research Monographs, 2012), 12-54.

¹⁶ Feng, *Elites locales et solidarités régionales*, 92-93.

¹⁷ *NCH*, 25 September 1937.

War in the Air

The use of airplanes in warfare was not new to Shanghai. Since the 1920s, regional warlords had acquired planes from abroad, which they had used for transport, reconnaissance, and more rarely actual fighting.¹⁸ After the establishment of the nationalist government in 1928, Chiang Kai-shek initiated a policy of modernization and unification of the Chinese armies under his command. As part of this effort, his German military advisors urged him to start building a small air force.¹⁹ Yet the lack of funds and the persisting competition with regional armies failed to secure the development of a unified and substantial air force, a fundamental weakness for which the Chinese army paid dearly in 1932 in its first encounter with the Japanese. While many factors came into play in the military victory of the Japanese during the first Sino-Japanese conflict in Shanghai in 1932, the use of aircraft proved to be immensely instrumental in the Japan's overwhelming military superiority.

In 1932, the central squadron of the Chinese air force consisted in eighteen planes. In Canton, the military authorities also had a small force, but they failed to send their planes to assist the 19th Army despite repeated pleas by its commander.²⁰ Unfortunately, their small number as well as their pilots' lack of training limited their use to a couple of sorties. Moreover, a Japanese combined military and naval flying corps launched two bombing raids against the Chinese airstrips (Hongqiao, Suzhou and Hangzhou) that practically destroyed the three centers.²¹ There was no further attempt by the small Chinese air

¹⁸ On early military air force and aviation in China, see "Chinese aircraft and aviation facilities", May 1927, AIRS5/865, National Archives (U.K.).

¹⁹ Bernd Martin, *Die Deutsche Beraterschaft in China 1927-1938: Militär, Wirtschaft, Aussenpolitik* (The German advisory group in China: military, economic, and political issues in Sino-German relations, 1927-1938) (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1981).

²⁰ Donald A. Jordan, *China's Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 108, 117.

²¹ *NCH*, 1 March 1932.

force to engage their adversaries. Chiang Kai-shek chose to save them from inevitable destruction. As a result, the Japanese had a free rein in aerial combat. The sky was theirs throughout the conflict and they took full advantage of this tactical supremacy.²²

The Japanese maintained a rolling thunder of aerial bombing which, in its effects on the population, could not have been far different from the experience of Londoners during the *Blitz*.²³ Aware that the Chinese did not possess the required weaponry for aerial defense, the Japanese aviators made frequent rounds of reconnaissance before attacking.²⁴ The Japanese Navy had the *Notoro* seaplane carrier from which it launched navy bombers for reconnaissance flights over Chinese positions and of course actual bombing.²⁵ By the end of the battle, around 200 planes, half of the total Japanese air force, was present in the theater of operations. Total dominance in the air and on the water gave the Japanese military a considerable advantage. It could decide when and where to concentrate its strikes and launch decisive operations.²⁶

The lessons of this experience were not lost. In the 1930s, aircraft manufacturing companies, mostly American or European, vied for foreign markets. China was a potentially lucrative market. In 1933, James H. Doolittle, the representative of a large American aircraft manufacturer went on a tour around the world to promote the sale of the Curtiss Hawk. He arrived in Shanghai in April where he put on a number of demonstration flights. According to Xu Guangqiu, Doolittle startled the Chinese by his skills and exploits above the rooftops of Shanghai. The Curtiss Hawk was equipped with a powerful 700-horse

²² On the Japanese use of the air force in Shanghai in 1932, see “The Japanese air force and the invasion of China”, WO106/5566, National Archives (U.K.).

²³ Amy Bell, “Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-1945,” *Journal of British Studies* 48:1 (2009): 153-175.

²⁴ *NCH*, 2 February 1932, “The Bombing of Chapei” (30 January 1932).

²⁵ Jordan, *China's Trial*, 46.

²⁶ This was one of the major lessons drawn from this conflict by a military officer. Juewu Zhang 張覺吾, *Song Hu kangzhan suo de zhi jingyan yu jiaoxun* 淞滬抗戰所得之經驗與教訓 (Nanjing: Shoudu zhongyang lujunguan xuexiao, 1933), 31.

engine and could fly at a top speed of 200 miles an hour. It was the fastest pursuit plane in Asia. Doolittle's demonstration paid off. The Chinese central government placed an order for 50 aircraft that were delivered six months later. China finally had the nucleus of a technologically advanced air force.²⁷

Eventually, China acquired 120 planes altogether in 1933 and 215 more the following year. American manufacturers managed to build close and useful contacts with Chinese high-level officials. They proved capable of matching the requirements of the Chinese military and garnered most of the purchase orders. Each year, between 80 and 90 per cent of aircraft purchases were from American companies. The build-up of a national air force proceeded at a forced pace. By mid- 1935, the Nationalist air force already had about 500 airplanes.²⁸ The Chinese government also decided to start its own aircraft-manufacturing factory. After prolonged bidding and negotiations, it settled for a proposal by the Curtiss-Wright Corporation. The factory opened in October 1934 and produced various models based on American designs. By the end of 1936, the factory had managed to manufacture a total of 127 airplanes.²⁹ On the eve of the Sino-Japanese war, the Chinese air force consisted of nine groups and four independent squadrons and possessed about 600 aircraft, although not all of them were serviceable.

At the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937 the Hawks were the primary fighter in the Chinese Air Force. They served as multi-purpose aircraft and were considered the Chinese Air Force's frontline fighter-pursuit aircraft. Of a total of about 600 combat aircraft, 300 were fighters and the remainder light bombers and reconnaissance aircraft.³⁰ The Hawks III equipped the 4th and 5th Pursuit Groups involved in the fighting in Shanghai. They were fighter-bombers manned by a single pilot. They could fly at 12,500 feet and at

²⁷ Guangqiu Xu, *War Wings: The United States and Chinese Military Aviation, 1929-1949* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 65.

²⁸ Xu, *War Wings*, 66.

²⁹ Xu, *War Wings*, 70.

³⁰ Yang, "Chiang Kai-shek and the Battles of Shanghai and Nanjing," 153.

a maximum speed of 240 miles/hour at 11,480 feet. They were armed with Browning machine guns in the fuselage for attacks on other fighters or bombers. They could carry a 500-pound bomb on an under-fuselage hard point or two 116-pound bombs under each lower wing. This point will have a particular importance in the analysis of the dreadful bombing of August 14 in the foreign settlements.

When war erupted in Shanghai, the Chinese Air Force was active on the front line in North China. The central government had ordered all units to get ready to fly ground support missions for the army in the North, with the Zhoukou Air Base in Henan Province as their rear base. With the Japanese attack on Shanghai on 13 August, the Chinese high command realized that a full-scale war was in the making. On Chiang Kai-shek's orders, the Shanghai area replaced North China as the major battlefield for the Chinese Air Force. The 2nd Bomb Group, 4th Pursuit Group, and 5th Pursuit Group were ordered to move to Jining, Qianqiu and Yangzhou before noon on August 14. The Central Aviation School near Hangzhou was also ordered to establish new provisional squadrons. Instead of fighting a defensive war, the Chinese command immediately directed all the air units in the Eastern China bases to launch attacks on the Japanese positions in Shanghai.

Besides fighting the Japanese, the Chinese pilots had to face strong winds and unstable weather from the typhoon that was closing in on the city on the same day. The grim weather, however, played in favor of the Chinese pilots. The Japanese planned to launch bombing raid attacks on Shanghai and Nanjing from Taiwan, but the passing typhoon made it impossible for their fighters to take off from the carrier Kaga. The turbulent winds actually grounded all the Japanese planes in the Shanghai harbor. The Japanese bombers were hardly operational against the type of aerial attacks the Chinese pilots were launching. Moreover, they soon became prey to the more maneuverable pursuit aircrafts in the hands of their opponents. The Curtiss Hawks III clearly outperformed their Japanese counterparts.³¹ For the first wave of attacks, except for a couple of Japanese

³¹ Hagiwara Mitsuru, "The Japanese Air Campaigns in China, 1937-1945," in *The Battle for China*, ed. Mark R. Peattie, et al., 240.

floatplanes, the Chinese planes had a field day.

The Chinese air force launched its attacks despite the bad weather. About forty planes arrived over Shanghai, which was covered in thick cloud. The first air raid by Chinese airplanes took place in midmorning, when twenty-one Northrop Gamma bombers attacked the Japanese ships at Wusong. Using Curtiss Hawk III biplanes as both bombers and fighters, another eight planes (each with one 500-pound bomb) of the 5th Pursuit Group took off from Yangzhou to launch the second wave of attacks against the Japanese ships near Nantong, on the northern bank of the Yangzi River. Few people in Shanghai realized the extent and unforeseen scale of operations that had begun in the city. In the afternoon, the Chinese Air Force attacked again. This time, three Hawks III from the 24th Squadron (5th Group) provided air support for the Chinese 87th Division to attack the Gongda Cotton Factory.³²

The Curtiss Hawk fighters began bombing the Japanese Marine headquarters at the Gongda textile mills, the Japanese cruisers and supply ships at Wusong and the Japanese warship *Izumo*, moored next to the Japanese consulate on the Huangpu River. The *Izumo*, a former Imperial Russian warship captured during the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, served as the headquarters of the Japanese Navy in Shanghai (Fig. 2). It was toothless as a fighting unit but useful as a monument to commemorate the country's victory over a Western power. As the pilots dropped their lethal cargo over the Huangpu River, they met with a barrage of sustained anti-aircraft projectiles from the *Izumo* proper and nearby Japanese vessels. Despite the potential danger, thousands of people had gathered on the Bund to watch the war show. The rooftops and terraces of the buildings along the Bund were crowded with expectant observers.³³

The bombs missed their intended target, the *Izumo*, and exploded in the river, creating huge geysers of water and tidal waves that

³² See the visual reports by French policemen, Louis Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937* (Shanghai: Service de police, December 23, 1937), Annexe X, 635PO/A-87, Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes.

³³ See the photographic reportage, *NCH*, 15 September 1937.

Fig. 2



showered on the enthusiastic Chinese spectators watching from a distance of less than 2,300 feet. It was not just water, however, that fell from the sky. Shrapnel from the shells shot by Japanese anti-aircraft guns also rained over the heads of the audience. People ducked and ran for cover. Yet this failed to deter most from remaining close to the scene of operations. Moreover, due to the inflow of refugees from the districts north of Soochow Creek, the Bund and its open spaces were crowded by a mass of powerless humanity who probably did not take in the full measure of the risks and, on the contrary, may have experienced the attempts to sink the *Izumo* not just as a show, but as symbolic revenge against the Japanese whose actions had plunged them into sheer misery.

Death from the Sky

The first tragedy occurred at 4:27 as recorded by the clock of the Palace Hotel, stopped by the explosion. A group of airplanes appeared in the sky heading down the Huangpu River. Immediately, the *Izumo*

let loose a barrage of anti-aircraft shells that soon dotted the sky with rings of smoke as the guns tracked the progress of the small air fleet. Shrapnel started raining over the city. Six of the airplanes escaped Japanese firepower by vanishing into the thick clouds. The four machines that made up the rear, however, dropped their bombs as they flew over the Bund. Two exploded in the river, creating a tidal wave that swept far into the Bund. The other three fell on Nanking Road.

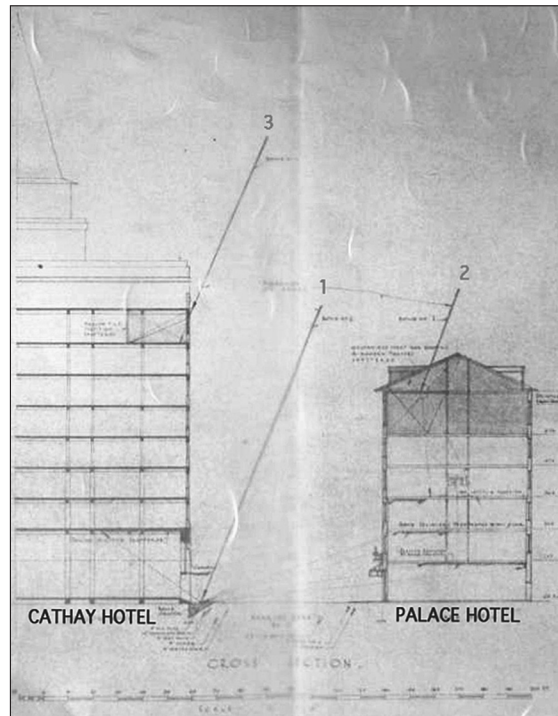
The first bomb struck the roadway right in front of the entrance of the Cathay Hotel, opening a crater four feet deep and five feet large.³⁴ The second went through the roof of the Palace Hotel across the street, crashing through about three floors. A third one damaged the seventh floor of the Cathay Hotel (Fig. 3). The deafening explosions created an indescribable scene of carnage and death. For ten minutes after the bombing, people just ran for shelter as planes roared overhead while the *Izumo* kept firing anti-aircraft shells. Some sought refuge in the most awkward places, as under cars parked nearby. As the explosive fumes slowly lifted, all along the full stretch of the two hotels, the pavements and roadway were littered with gravel, splintered wood, and stones detached from the facades. The most hideous spectacle, however, was that of dismembered bodies of passers-by struck in their tracks, heads, legs, and arms lying far from smashed torsos.³⁵ Damage from bomb splinters was registered within a radius of 500 feet. Wooden parts of buildings, rickshaw and cars within a radius of 300 feet caught fire.³⁶ The arcade of the Cathay Hotel was blown to pieces far inside the building, the windows of even the farthestmost interior shops smashed to fragments. Crushed masonry swayed, broke loose and eventually

³⁴ « Palace and Cathay Hotels, Nanking Road (C) 2 », Works 55/23, National Archives (U.K.).

³⁵ Visual sources have been a major source to write this paper. Most of the photographs are extremely graphic. Only a few were ever published. Most stayed in official documents or archives. All the material used in this paper is available on the Virtual Shanghai platform [hereafter quoted as “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” accessed May 22, 2014, <http://www.virtualshanghai.net/Photos/Images>.+ ID number], though most images are under restricted access due to their nature.

³⁶ Report (undated [1938]), Work 55/23, National Archives (U.K.).

Fig. 3

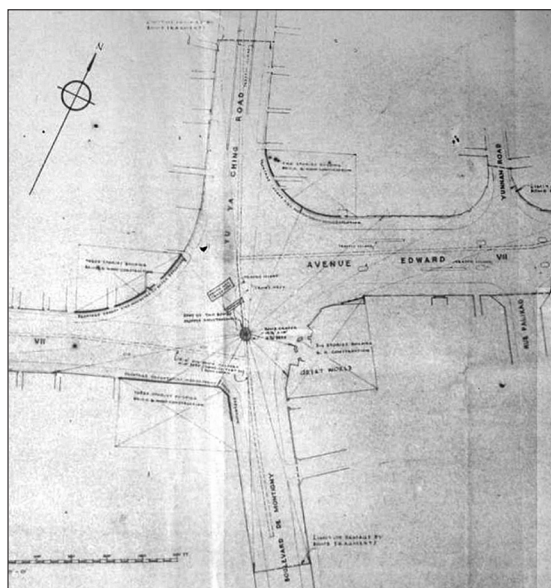


crashed upon the pavement, carrying along windows and plate-glass doors as they fell. The blazing cars let out smoke that swirled over twisted bodies. Most were empty parked cars, but a couple of them carried passengers who were instantly incinerated in their vehicles.

The Nanking Road bombing, however, was not the sole disaster that struck the city on that fateful day. A few minutes later, at 4:30 pm two more bombs fell at a major intersection between Boulevard de Montigny and Edward VII, in front of the Great World amusement center, right on the boundary between the two foreign settlements (Fig. 4).³⁷ The intersection between Montigny and Edward VII was usually a very busy place. It marked the beginning of one of the city's busiest commercial districts in the city, with numerous, shops, restaurants,

³⁷ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 1366.

Fig. 4



and entertainment facilities. It was hardly one block away from the racecourse and its recreation grounds. At any time during the day, a constant flow of traffic went through the intersection. On 14 August, it was packed with people attending to their business or shopping, even more than on a normal day (Fig. 5-8). As mentioned above, tens of thousands of residents from the threatened districts north of Soochow Creek had flocked to the foreign settlements. The French Concession had received a large share of these refugees. The Great World itself had been turned into a huge refugee camp. The size of the building notwithstanding, the high concentration of people made it almost unbearable to stay indoors on a hot summer's day. Cords ran along the balconies of the buildings and served to hang washed clothing and sheets (Fig. 9). A large population of about 10,000 refugees made idle just loitered around the Great World to escape the stuffy and crowded building.³⁸

³⁸ *NCH*, 1 September 1937.

Fig. 5



Fig. 6

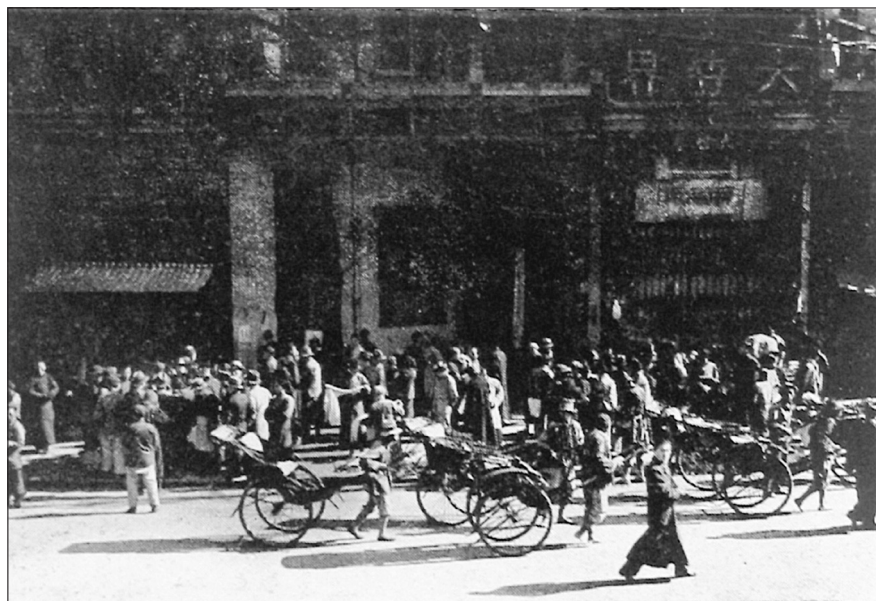


Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



The first bomb dropped almost at the center of the intersection. The second bomb, a report noted, exploded in mid-air a few feet above the ground thereby causing destruction over a far wider area than if it had struck the roadway.³⁹ The first bomb opened a gaping crater approximately 20 feet long, 10 feet wide and 6.5 feet deep.⁴⁰ The large intersection was reduced to shambles within a split second. Glass and wood splinters were strewn over the entire intersection (Fig. 10). Several vehicles, most with their occupants, were hit as they were making their way around the police traffic post in the middle of the intersection. Only the charred skeletons of their passengers remained, petrified in death. Altogether, eleven cars were destroyed, leaving thirteen dead, two grievously wounded, and five lightly injured.⁴¹

³⁹ Report (undated [1938]), Work 55/23, National Archives (U.K.).

⁴⁰ Letter, R. Jobez (chief of French police), 24 May 1938 in Report (undated [1938]), Work 55/23, National Archives (U.K.).

⁴¹ Report, police detective, 19 August 1937, U38-2-1153, SMA.

Fig. 10



The tramway coming up Boulevard de Montigny was stopped on its tracks not ten meters away from the entrance of the Great World, its travelers fortunately safe from the shock wave from the explosion. Yet many received fragments from the bombs and exploded buildings. The traffic post in the middle of the intersection was still standing, but was totally wrecked. The policemen who monitored the traffic were all killed. The facades of several buildings facing the crossing were badly scorched, with the building facing the Great World, next to the Qingxuguan Daoist temple, seared by fire. The blast blew away all the windows in the Great World itself up to the fourth floor. The advertisement boards on the first row of balconies just disappeared, as did all the shades that protected the ground-floor shops from the sun (Fig. 11-12).

The official explanation for the accidental bombing was that there had been a malfunction of the bomb racks due to Japanese antiaircraft fire, and that the pilots had been injured and incapacitated. I shall discuss this issue below. The likelihood of two planes, or even more, being shot and damaged at the very same time is debatable. The

Fig. 11

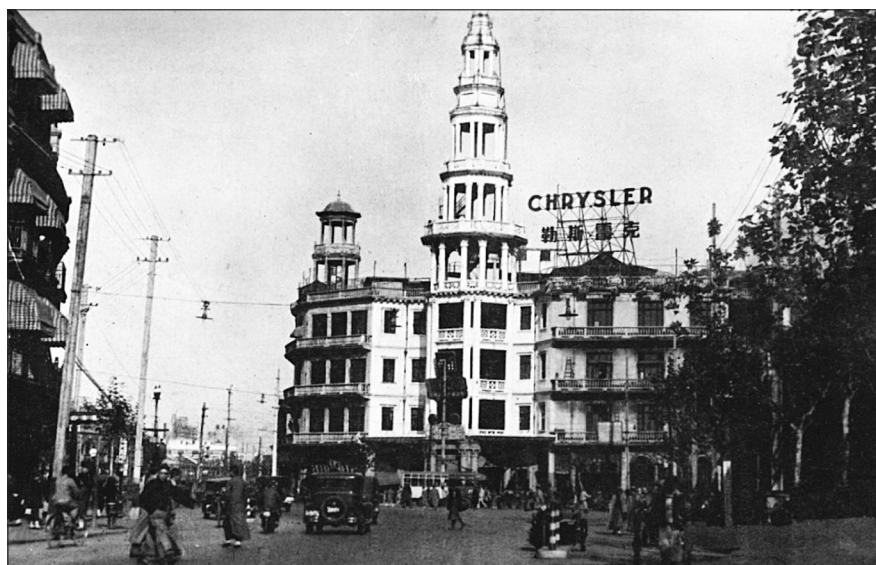


Fig. 12



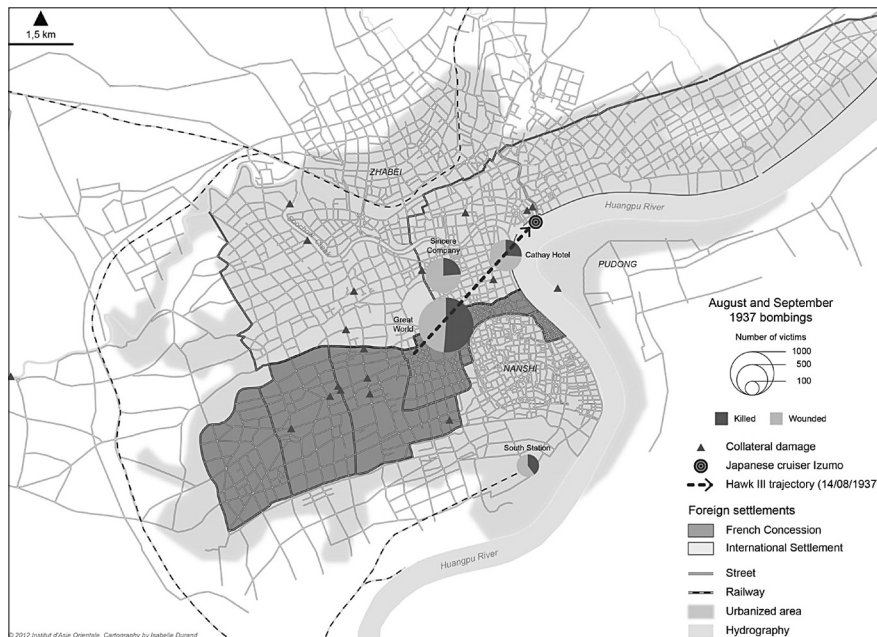
Chinese planes that maneuvered over the *Izumo* flew at such a height that accurate bombing could hardly be expected. Given their speed, the pilots had a short window of opportunity in which to drop their bombs. An experienced pilot, Claire Lee Chennault, who then served as an advisor to the Chinese Government to help it develop its air force, stated that the Chinese pilots were trained to bomb from 7500 feet, but with the thick clouds blocking their vision in the sky, they were forced to drop the bombs from a lower altitude. The Chinese dropped their bombs at 1500 feet without adjusting, or perhaps in misadjusting their bombsights. The young Chinese pilots were simply too inexperienced to make the kind of adjustment needed for accurate bombing under difficult circumstances, given the haste with which they were sent to the front.

Reports on similar attack flights reveal a discrepancy between the trajectory followed by the bombers and the sequence of bomb dropping. Chinese pilots came from the west, from their air bases inland, and flew over the city in an eastward direction. They first passed over the foreign settlements before reaching the Huangpu River, not the other way around. In the case of the Great World bombing, the pilot was flying westward indeed, but banked sharply to the north as if intending to return to the Bund. French policemen assumed the pilot was attempting again to drop his bombs either on the Japanese ships or on the Racecourse.⁴² The Chinese pilots also favored horizontal tactics conducted in a gradual descent rather than steep dives, which would have made them more vulnerable.⁴³ The pilots or the bomb racks could of course have been hit by anti-aircraft shot from a distance by the *Izumo*, as claimed by Chinese officials, causing the bombs to fall accidentally. The issue with this explanation is one of timing, distance, and number of bombs. The distance between the targeted *Izumo* and the corner of Nanking Road and the Bund was a mere 2,300 feet, and from the Great World to the warship it was 1.4 miles. At the speed at which the bombers were flying, it would have taken them 10-12 seconds to cover this distance (Fig. 13).

⁴² Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, 12 and Annexe X.

⁴³ Mitsuru, "The Japanese Air Campaigns in China, 1937-1945," 244.

Fig. 13



Without all the relevant details on flight conditions (speed, altitude, and wind), it is quite a challenge to determine the extent to which the accidental bombing of the foreign settlements was due to damaged bomb racks or to a miscalculation of the timing for dropping the bombs.⁴⁴

Bombs may leave quite a long trail before hitting the ground depending on the altitude at which the pilots release them. From 20,000 feet, a 500-lb bomb would travel approximately 6,500 feet forward before impact with a regular wind (less than 50 miles/hours).⁴⁵ The trail would decrease with altitude. If the planes that

⁴⁴ Even with relevant data, calculating the course of a bomb requires elaborate mathematical skills. Crystal Pepper and Chris Wilson, “Aerial bombing techniques”, unpublished paper, 30 March 2009.

⁴⁵ *Terminal Ballistic Data, Vol. 1 Bombing*, Office of the Chief of Ordnance (Washington D.C., 1944), 10.

attacked the *Izumo* flew at 1,500 feet, their margin was quite narrow – with a trail of probably less than 3,000 feet – and it may explain the gap between their intended target and the actual bombing site at a distance of 2,300 feet. After all, some bombs did explode in the Huangpu River during the attack. But had the pilots flown at 7,500 feet, as they were trained to do, they would not have been quite on target, except for the bombing of the Great World. The distance – 7,545 feet – is quite close to the trail (6,000 feet) from this altitude. It is almost impossible to make a final judgment on this as we clearly have two parallel cases, one a fairly accurate sighting, though with a mishap, one probably a mishandled maneuver. It was definitely more likely that human error caused the bombs to be released prematurely.

The last point that needs to be raised is that of the number of bombs dropped and their size. The Curtiss Hawks III were equipped with hard points to carry either a 500-lb. bomb under the fuselage or two 100-lb bombs under the wings. There is an absolute certainty that three bombs were dropped at the corner of the Bund and Nanking Road. In the case of the Great World, the French police claimed with little doubt that two bombs fell, one of which exploded before hitting the ground.⁴⁶ This issue is fundamental because if the explanation of bomb racks being damaged on two different planes is hard to believe, that of bombs racks being damaged on three or four different planes would constitute an impossible coincidence. From the size of the crater opened in the ground by the bomb near the Great World, there is little doubt that it was a 500-lb bomb, whereas the bombs dropped in Nanking Road were more probably in the 100-250 lb range.⁴⁷ We also know the radius within which the bombs killed people and projected pieces of everything around. The killing range of a 500-lb bomb was

⁴⁶ Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, 12.

⁴⁷ *Terminal Ballistic Data, Vol. 3 Bombs, Artillery & Mortar Fire & Rockets*, Office of the Chief of Ordnance (Washington D.C., 1945), 34. In the aftermath of the bombing, the agents of the Bureau of Public Works in the French Concession collected ten pieces of rocket and five steel fragments on the scene of the Great World.

140 feet.⁴⁸

While two of the bombs hit buildings (Cathay and Palace Hotels), one exploded in the street. While this bomb sprayed rubble all over, the buildings absorbed a large part of the energy and bomb fragments. Not so near the Great World. The bomb neatly fell right in the center of the intersection. It could not have been dropped with more efficiency in terms of killing power. If there were two, the lethal capacity was magnified as the shock wave from the blast and the hundreds of fragments traveled freely through the air, toppling, smashing, and killing every unlucky passer-by within a 300-foot radius. The U.S. Army has produced detailed technical studies of the impact of the various types of bombs used in W.W. II. A 500-lb bomb would project 13,600 effective fragments within a 100-foot radius.⁴⁹ Given the high concentration of people near the Great World at the time of the bombing and the short distance of most from the point of impact, the killing power of the bomb was tremendous. If two exploded, the mid-air burst was even more lethal.

The number of casualties was considerable. Near the Great World, the rescuers picked up 435 dead bodies on the spot, on the French Concession side. Another 139 injured died on their way to hospital. Finally, 87 injured succumbed to their wounds while under treatment. There were 563 men, 51 women, and 47 children among the victims. On the International Settlement side, on the northern part of Edward VII and Yu Ya Ching Road, the rescuers picked up 425 dead bodies. Of those who were injured and survived, there were 534 on the French Concession side and 305 in the International Settlement. Most of the victims were Chinese. Only seven foreigners died in the Great World bombing.⁵⁰ Altogether, the misguided bombs left 1,106 dead and 830 wounded. In Nanking Road, the bombs had killed about 150 people and wounded more than 430 others. Altogether, on a single day and within minutes, the two accidental bombings killed more than 1,200

⁴⁸ *Terminal Ballistic Data, Vol. 1 Bombing*, 72.

⁴⁹ *Terminal Ballistic Data, Vol. 1 Bombing*, 88.

⁵⁰ Report (undated [1938]), Work 55/23, UK National Archives; Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, 10-11.

persons and seriously injured about 1,400. This is the mayhem that the unprepared civil authorities and medical facilities in the two foreign settlements had to deal with. The challenge was totally unexpected. A disaster of this magnitude was never on anybody's watch list, even with war looming over the city.

Rescue Operations

In Nanking Road, after the loud explosion a heavy silence fell as the reality of the carnage hit the dazed spectators who had been spared. From the lobby of the hotels, people gazed with horror on the instantaneous annihilation of one of the city's most popular corners. The bombs had just mowed down 580 people. For an instant, there was the complete stillness of bewilderment and disorientation. Then people turned their attention to those who had survived the blast and started to provide assistance. They dragged victims into the lobby of the two hotels. The wounded had been stunned by the intensity and violence of the explosion, but as they awoke to their wounds and mutilations, cries of agony and calls for help filled the tense atmosphere.

Voluntary helpers provided first aid. Some filled their car with the wounded and drove them to hospitals with the dim hope that their badly injured passengers would make it. Soon, all were covered in blood. The police and fire brigade rushed to the scene in minutes. The Shanghai Municipal Police barred the entrance to Nanking Road at both ends. At Szechuen Road, a large truck blocked traffic into Nanking Road. A detachment of the Shanghai Volunteers Corps also helped during the latter stage. Rescue work proceeded at a faster pace when the police and ambulance workers arrived on the scene. The wounded received medical assistance *in situ* or were dispatched to hospitals. The priority was to sort out those who could be helped. Then all that needed to be done was to evacuate the dead: "the living received all the attention for the first hour and then the dead were

piled into household moving vans and carried off”.⁵¹ It took about two hours to clear the street of mangled and disjointed human remains. To reach the victims caught in the upper floors of the Palace Hotel, the Fire Brigade elevated a tall ladder because the bomb had destroyed the stairs.

More than 400 people were carried to the Chinese Lester Hospital on Shantung Road. The physicians on duty were expecting the massive inflow of wounded. On 14 Saturday, they were standing on the roof of the hospital when the bombs were dropped in Nanking Road and near the Great World. They had been at tea when the roar of aircraft engines had brought them out to watch the aerial maneuvers.⁵² Soon the place was overflowing with injured and mutilated bodies. All the waiting rooms, outpatient department, corridors and space available, even out in the courtyard, were packed with people awaiting medical treatment. The place was strewn with people sitting and lying. There was blood everywhere. It was difficult even to move among the wounded to pick out those to be prepared for the operating tables and the medical staff chose the likeliest candidates at hand. No less than twenty-one physicians were kept busy at seven operating tables crowded into the four operating theaters. It was emergency surgery, with the wounded made ready for operation on the spot with no time for preparation. “It was a ghastly business”, noted one physician, but there was hardly any choice. By 10:30 pm, all the more severely wounded people had been attended to.⁵³

By 7 pm, about 50 had died of their wounds. By the following morning 105 more had died. There were only ten foreigners among the wounded, most of them Russians who were lightly injured and transferred to the Country Hospital where all foreign cases were treated. Beside the permanent staff of the hospital, many doctors volunteered to tend to the wounded. Four operating theaters were in full swing until late in the night.⁵⁴ Running against time, the doctors

⁵¹ *North China Daily News* [NCDN], 15 August 1937.

⁵² NCDN, 22 August 1937.

⁵³ NCDN, 22 August 1937.

⁵⁴ NCDN, 15 August 1937.

simply could not attend to all those who required medical attention. They had to turn away many that were but slightly hurt and had to wait until the following day to have the bits of shrapnel and splinters taken out. To give proper medical treatment to the more serious cases, the medical staff moved all those that could be moved, dispatching them from the Lester Hospital to the Rue Montauban Hospital, the Moulmein Road Hospital or the main Red Cross Hospital on Avenue Haig.⁵⁵

The news of the second bombing at the Great World reached the authorities within minutes. A British fireman and assistant station manager happened to reach the intersection right after the explosion. Although not fully aware of the extent of the disaster, he jumped out of his car and ran to a nearby shop to call the central fire station and ask for as many ambulances and other vehicles as were available. He later reported that all the people in the shop had been killed, except for a man with both legs cut off and one arm in shreds who managed, despite his condition, to pull out the 5-cent coin that allowed the fireman to make the phone call that set in motion the massive rescue of the surviving victims of the bombing. The critically wounded man died soon afterward.⁵⁶ On the French side, the policemen who were on watch duty on the roof of the Mallet police station were immediate witnesses to the dropping of the bombs in the Great World area. The firemen were the first to reach the site of the explosion, arriving within minutes.⁵⁷ The chief of police arrived about thirty minutes later and at once took in the inadequacy of the rescue operation under way. He immediately made a phone call to mobilize the largest number of vehicles possible and even commandeered all passing vehicles. Removing the wounded with a few ambulances would not do. Eventually, twenty-six official cars, vans and trucks rushed to the site and made rounds to the various hospitals.⁵⁸

Quite strangely, the fate of the wounded in terms of rescue

⁵⁵ NCDN, 22 August 1937.

⁵⁶ NCDN, 22 August 1937.

⁵⁷ Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, Annexe I.

⁵⁸ Report, Chef de la Garde, 14 August 1937, U38-2-1153.

and delivery to a medical facility depended on where they had been standing or walking at the time of the explosion. Since the bombs had hit exactly at the boundary between the two settlements, the rescuers each attended to their own side of the intersection. The dead were removed and placed in different sites depending on which side of the street they had been picked up. By virtue of the invisible but real jurisdictional boundary that existed between the International Settlement and the French Concession, the north-south divide at the crossroad of Edward VII and Montigny/Yu Ya Ching created two autonomous spheres of intervention by uncoordinated policemen, fire brigade personnel and teams of rescuers. The fact the bombs fell right at this intersection made the fragmented political geography of Shanghai more obvious and its absurdity even more manifest.

Near the Great World, bodies could be seen all around, scattered on the pavement along the buildings, dozens crammed around the traffic light, rickshaw pullers still holding their bars.⁵⁹ More than 300 bodies were piled up at the entrance of the Great World, another 100 on the opposite corner. The shrapnel killed people in the Montigny Avenue 650 feet away from the point of impact.⁶⁰ The sheer number of dead and wounded raised an extraordinary challenge to the rescuers. From the photographic record, it seems the rescuers chose to evacuate first the hundreds of bodies packed before the entrance of the Great World, which they sorted out to look for survivors. Firemen also worked to stop the fires in the vehicles and buildings nearby.⁶¹ The more dispersed dead bodies were taken away at a later stage. The rescuers were literally soaked in blood as they worked for hours collecting the wounded, then all the dead bodies. The task was daunting. Some men covered their face with a handkerchief to avoid the stench of burnt flesh and torn bodies. From the visual record, it appears that the police checked the bodies before rescuers were allowed to remove them.⁶²

⁵⁹ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 59, 982, 15139, 27623, 27626.

⁶⁰ Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, 4-5.

⁶¹ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 26627.

⁶² "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 25219.

Blood filled the road and gutters, especially in front of the Great World where about three hundred bodies lied in a pool of blood, amid their few precious belonging, boxes, bundles and birdcages.⁶³ The police paid its own toll. Near the Great World, four Chinese policemen were killed and six – three Chinese, two Vietnamese, and one French – were seriously wounded.⁶⁴ Even many in the protection of their homes were mowed down.⁶⁵

The rescuers carried out house-to-house searches looking for victims buried in debris and extricating the survivors and the dead. Firemen, police, Red Cross workers, Chinese Boy Scouts and many other rescuers searched for hours for victims in the ruins. The bodies were most horribly mangled, some without heads, or limbs and otherwise mutilated. As in Nanking Road, but magnified by the extent of the carnage, horror set in as the cries of hundreds of the wounded pierced the air acrid with bomb smoke and the smell of burned flesh. In front of the Great World, a man sat, wholly naked but alive, his clothes gone with the blast.⁶⁶

Some of the victims, mostly those bodies that remained in enough good condition for it, were put into coffins before removal.⁶⁷ The two major associations involved in the management of death in the city, the Shanghai Public Benevolent Society and the Tongren fuyuantang, brought in several hundred coffins. Yet the number of victims far surpassed the number of coffins available. The authorities, concerned primarily with the speedy removal of the dead bodies had no option but to have them taken away *en masse*. It was a grizzly job. There was not even enough appropriate equipment to pick up the dead and wounded. Doors blown free from their hinges were turned into stretchers. Bodies were picked up by hand and placed into bamboo matting or a thick tarpaulin rescuers used to lift them up

⁶³ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 15140, 25218, 25220, 25234, 27615.

⁶⁴ Rapport annuel 1937, 2. Service de police, U38-2-2090, SMA.

⁶⁵ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 25760, 27727.

⁶⁶ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 27729.

⁶⁷ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 15141, 27629.

onto the trucks.⁶⁸ Victims were taken away literally by the truckload and remained uncovered in broad daylight. There was no time for any dignified treatment of the victims.⁶⁹

In the French Concession, the Bureau of Public health had established an emergency plan as soon as fighting started in Zhabei and set up a crisis office to serve as a contact and coordinating point in case of an emergency.⁷⁰ All hospitals and medical staff were duly registered, each with their phone number, to be called in any emergency. Facing a major humanitarian crisis, the authorities implemented the emergency plan they had just prepared. The wounded were sent to the sixteen hospitals commandeered under the emergency plan (Fig. 14).⁷¹ The largest facility, the Sainte-Marie Hospital, received about 450 seriously wounded, while the Orthodox Russian Hospital also received a group of 35 badly wounded persons. At the Jesuit-run Aurora University, the staff organized a temporary hospital to accommodate 200 patients. The small Sisters' Hospital provided treatment to a group of more lightly wounded victims. The Red Cross had established an emergency facility at the corner of rue Montauban, in the Saint Joseph parish.⁷² About 250 wounded underwent treatment by a team of Chinese physicians from the Chinese municipality. The main Red Cross Hospital on Avenue Haig accommodated 200 wounded. Finally, all eleven Chinese small hospitals in the French Concession contributed their share of treating the wounded.⁷³

As can be seen from the various reports, the capacity of the local hospitals was stretched to the limit. Even in peacetime, their rate of occupancy was quite high. The sudden influx of hundreds of wounded requiring immediate treatment strained the medical

⁶⁸ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 27735.

⁶⁹ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 27736, 27737, 27614, 27622.

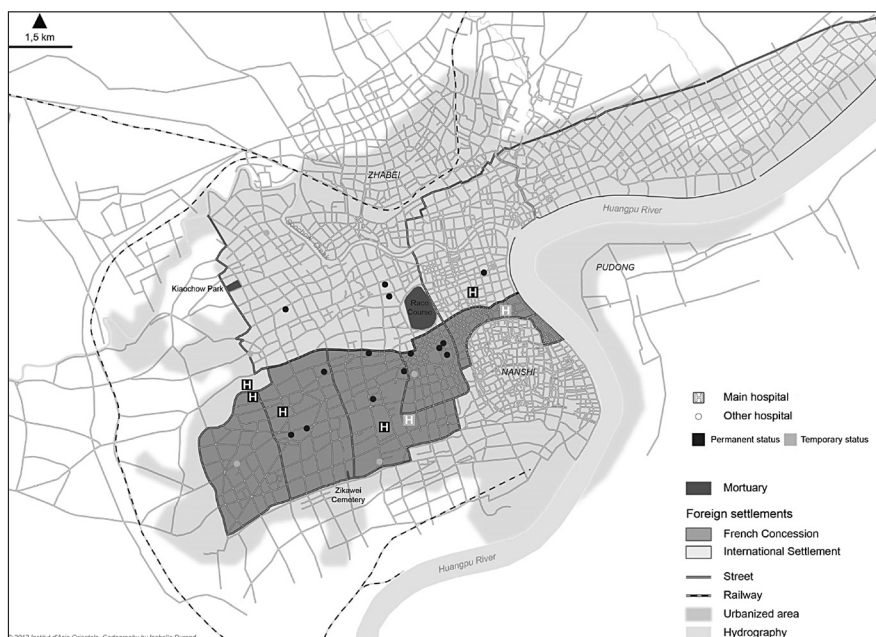
⁷⁰ Report, Bureau de l'hygiène publique et de l'assistance, 16 August 1937, U38-5-1667, SMA.

⁷¹ Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, Annexe VI.

⁷² "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 15142.

⁷³ Report, Bureau de l'hygiène publique et de l'assistance, 16 August 1937, U38-5-1667, SMA.

Fig. 14



resources available. Moreover, many of the wounded required heavy surgery, for which only few hospitals could provide adequate facilities and qualified surgeons. The medical staff worked non-stop to operate when necessary or to dress wounds for the more lightly wounded. At the Sainte-Marie Hospital, all eight French and Chinese surgeons treated patients until two a.m. by which time all in-patients had been treated. At the Russian Hospital, physicians worked through the night.⁷⁴ In view of the massive number of wounded, the seriousness of the injuries to be treated, and the limited size of available staff, especially for war surgery, the fairly quick pace at which the wounded were treated – within 10-12 hours – is a testimony, first to the efficiency of the evacuation and distribution of the victims among pre-determined hospitals. It is also a testimony to the unlimited courage

⁷⁴ Report, Bureau de l'hygiène publique et de l'assistance, 16 August 1937, U38-5-1667, SMA.

and dedication of the medical staff and all the volunteers who helped in the rescue and transportation of the wounded. Yet, all the medical reports emphasized the terrible physical damage wreaked on the victims, which explains why so many did not survive despite medical treatment.⁷⁵

In the French Concession, the 1,400 victims of the bombing near the Great World were evacuated and transported to hospitals or to the cemetery in less than two hours. In terse administrative language, the French police report noted: “The bomb had fallen at 4:45 p.m. and by 7:00 traffic had returned to normal”.⁷⁶ The Director of Public Health was less positive, even if he too pointed out the speed with which the municipal services had dealt with the disaster. Traffic was not the only or even the main issue. The bombing had left all sorts of debris, but also body parts, fluids, blood, etc. The main concern of the Bureau of Public Health was to sanitize the place and prevent any risk of an infection. The staff worked hard through the day and night, and by 1 a.m. the authorities declared the place safe.⁷⁷ Within less than two days, the road was repaired, electric wiring was reestablished and all traces of the tragedy, except on the facades of the buildings, had nearly disappeared for a paltry cost of 2,300 yuan.⁷⁸

Disposal of the Dead

In the days that followed, the police worked to identify those who had been killed near the Great World, at least in the French Concession. The Shanghai Municipal Police did the same for all the foreigners killed on Nanking Road or near the Great World, but for lack of proper archives we do not know whether their investigation included the Chinese victims. The process of identification of

⁷⁵ Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, Annexe IV.

⁷⁶ Rapport annuel 1937, 4. Service de police, U38-2-2090, SMA.

⁷⁷ Report, Bureau de l’hygiène publique et de l’assistance, 16 August 1937, U38-5-1667, SMA.

⁷⁸ Report, Bureau des travaux publics, 16 August 1937, U38-4-2476, SMA.

unnatural deaths was part of the regular work of the French police, for instance in the case of suicides. The police used to make a thorough investigation, even checking on the whereabouts of the victims after their admission to hospitals. After the bombing, detectives were assigned a number of cases for which there was some hope of finding and notifying the families of the deceased.⁷⁹ Yet, the task at hand was of another scale. In terms of sheer numbers, the identification process would have taken days. Mostly, however, the policemen had little to start from, except the documents or objects they could find on the dead bodies. This is what they actually did as every piece of belonging and clothing was collected, disinfected and given to the associations in charge of refugees.⁸⁰ Yet, out of hundreds of corpses, they were able to collect useful items for only fifty bodies. The police actually identified no more than thirty-six individuals and found a relative or institution for only nine people. The other bodies carried nothing or all their belongings had been lost in the blast.⁸¹ All the foreigners, however, were identified through their cars, their documents or their occupation their uniform.⁸²

On the following day, the authorities in the French Concession became deeply concerned about the disposal of the dead. At 9:30 am, Marcel Chaloin, French vice-consul, Dr. Rabaute and his assistant, Dr. Palud, heads of the Bureau of Public Hygiene and Assistance, Robert Jobez, deputy director of the French Special Branch (Services politiques et Sûreté), Wang Rendong (王任董), district attorney of the 2nd District Court, a representative of the Jiangsu Superior Court, and two Chinese coroners undertook the grim task of visiting all the places turned into temporary mortuaries for the victims of the bombing.⁸³ The largest concentration was located in the Zikawei Cemetery where 451 corpses – 400 men, 23 women, and 26 children – had been lined up in

⁷⁹ Report, police detective, 19 August 1937, U38-2-1153, SMA.

⁸⁰ Report, Service de police, 17 August 1937, U38-5-1667, SMA.

⁸¹ Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, Annexe IX.

⁸² Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, Annexe V & Annexe VII.

⁸³ Shenbao [SB], 16 August 1937 [355:280].

a vacant space.⁸⁴ Only three were identified. The other locations were mainly hospitals where the injured had died during or after medical treatment: Sainte-Marie Hospital (48), Red Cross Hospital (54), Tongren fuyuantang (29), Maresca Hospital (3), Medico-legal Institute (5).⁸⁵ The distribution of the victims by sex and age revealed a ratio seriously skewed towards adult men. That there were only 65 children is not surprising. The bombs fell in a location where few children would be outdoors. The low proportion of women (41), however, is more difficult to explain. There was a substantial imbalance of the sex ratio in the Shanghai population. Men outnumbered women due to the influx of large numbers of male migrants, but in the last population census in 1935, the sex ratio in the International Settlement and the French Concession were 156 and 141 to 100 respectively. Most of the people killed near the Great World remained unidentified. Aside from the uncertain origin of the dead themselves, most victims were people who had been uprooted from their homes and had crowded into the amusement center-turned-refugee camp, or dislocated families and persons lost in the exodus. Many dead bodies were disfigured beyond recognition even by those closest to them. By joint agreement, the French and Chinese authorities decided to have the corpses buried without delay.

It would appear that the authorities in the International Settlement were in less of a hurry than the French to have the bodies from the two bombings buried. After actual removal from the site, the dead bodies were entrusted to the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery. The open coffins of those killed and encoffined in situ were lined up for public view near the Racecourse where the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery maintained a temporary mortuary. It is not clear whether all the dead collected both around the Great World or near the Palace Hotel found their way to this place. It is highly unlikely. The sheer number of bodies— 600 altogether — meant that they could hardly be displayed in a single place. A number of the bodies were

⁸⁴ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 25222.

⁸⁵ Minutes, Vice-consul Marcel Chaloin, 15 August 1937, U38-5-1667, SMA; Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, Annexe II.

badly mangled, and the authorities would not place them on public view. From the pictures taken by the *North China Daily News*, the number of coffins presented to the public looked far more limited than the hundreds of actual victims.⁸⁶ The display of the bodies also caused protests. Two days after the bombing, a foreign resident who lived in the Race Course Apartments wrote to the Public Health Department about the “very large accumulation of corpses” around his building. Although he noted the praiseworthy efforts of the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery, the embarrassed resident felt that the work was done “in a somewhat leisurely manner”. The Public Health Department, while acknowledging the exceptional circumstances that interfered with the normal routine of the benevolent society, also directed the association to bring in additional staff to cope with the additional work.⁸⁷ Yet, handling the dead bodies of the Great World bombing was just one small part of the grim job performed by the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery. Fighting in the city and the mass of incoming refugees just pushed the number of dead to be collected to unprecedented levels.

There were pressing constraints that made it necessary to dispose of the dead bodies without delay. There was no facility to preserve the corpses from decay in the hot and humid Shanghai weather. Only a few, mostly foreigners and municipal employees, were sent to a proper funeral home. Those who were encoffined in situ through the service of the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery received light and cheap coffins, but they were buried individually. By way of expediency, however, most corpses were loaded onto trucks and delivered to a cemetery pending further processing. Nothing has come up, in the archives, on how the Shanghai Municipal Council eventually disposed of the dead bodies found on its territory. In the French Concession, the authorities had the victims of the Great World bombing buried in two large mass graves in the Zikawei Cemetery.⁸⁸ Altogether, 560 corpses

⁸⁶ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 2409.

⁸⁷ Letter, foreign resident, 17 August 1937; Letter PHD-SPBC, 17 August 1937, U1-16-2457, SMA.

⁸⁸ Report, Bureau de l’hygiène publique et de l’assistance, 16 August 1937, U38-5-

were buried, a sad and dehumanized pile of bodies thrown pell-mell into a pit.⁸⁹ There was no authority, organization or collective action, unlike in Blitz-struck England, to prevent their undignified burial in mass graves.⁹⁰ A few days later, the French Bureau of Public Hygiene and Assistance issued a note to define clear procedures for handling cases of people killed or injured through collateral damage in the settlement. The unidentified dead took two different roads. The Chinese were sent to the Zikawei Cemetery pending further identification, while foreigners were sent to the mortuary on Route Delastre.⁹¹ Ethnicity drew a clear line when it came to war casualties.

The Carnage in Print

The massive loss of life that resulted from the accidental dropping of bombs on Chinese civilians generated two very different strands of reaction in the press and among officials. The main English newspaper, the *North China Daily News* (NCDN), made it the headline of its Sunday edition on 15 August: “600 persons killed in air raids on Shanghai”. The paper was far off the mark, but even the authorities had not yet a full count of the victims. Its main sub-titles conveyed the extent of the disaster: “Chinese bombs dropped in foreign areas”, “Nanking Road corner and Great World turned into shambles by missiles of death”, “Hundreds are rushed to hospitals”. The following day, the event was still on the first page with more news about the incident and its consequences. Its parent review, the *North China Herald* posted similar titles: The main focus of the argument in these papers was first the horror of war on innocent people: “modern aerial warfare with all its terror descended on Shanghai yesterday when the Chinese for the first time used airplanes to bomb the Japanese cruiser

1667, SMA.

⁸⁹ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 25221.

⁹⁰ Rugg, “Managing ‘Civilian Deaths due to War Operations,’” 163-168.

⁹¹ Service memo no. 39, 19 August 1937, Bureau de l’hygiène publique et de l’assistance, U38-5-1667.

Izumo”.⁹² The *China Weekly Review* published its own account of the events under “Shanghai experiences horrors of modern warfare to a pronounced degree”.⁹³

The *NCDN* also printed four large pictures of the bombing on Nanking Road. Two showed the entrance of the Cathay Hotel and the extent of material damage. In one, an officer of the Shanghai Volunteers Corps stepped over the rubble, with two burned cars behind him, while in the other several officers made their way into the hotel lobby. The next two pictures showed the same scene taken from a slightly different angle, looking west into Nanking Road. The two shots were taken from the side of the Palace Hotel and show parked cars, one still burning. Yet the most striking features on the three pictures was the obvious display of corpses and body parts all around. These were ghastly views meant to convey the horror of the day to the readers. They were plain and graphic pictures of the brutality of war.

The second line of reasoning in the press stemmed from the need to protect the sanctity of the foreign concessions and keep the fighting at a reasonable distance. The *NCDN* published a strongly worded editorial. Expressions like “Shanghai mourning”: “ghastly first act”, “horror-stricken population”, “horrible slaughter of peaceful civilians”, fearful holocaust”, soul-wracking”, “crime against civilization” peppered a text that denounced the failure of the foreign governments to perceive the dangers hovering over Shanghai in the previous two weeks. The paper extended its “deepest sympathy” to the relatives of the victims with the hope it would not be ‘too empty a gesture’. The editorial went on to note that Shanghai had not learnt the lessons of 1932. It called all the authorities to bring their influence to bear on the Japanese and Chinese governments to avert a further extension of the war. The following day, the *NCDN* still gave the priority to the aftermath of the bombing. The head title read “Death roll mounts in Air Raid,” followed by a sub-heading “Nearly 1,200 killed in Saturday’s tragedy.”⁹⁴

⁹² *NCH*, 15 August 1937.

⁹³ *China Weekly Review* [CWR], 21 August 1937, 423.

⁹⁴ *NCDN*, 16 August 1937.

The British ambassadors in both Nanking and Tokyo made representations to the Chinese and Japanese governments to express their concern about Shanghai being turned into a theater of war.⁹⁵ The British, French, and American governments lodged a vigorous protest with the Chinese Foreign Office against the bombing in the foreign settlements. The authorities in the International Settlement asked the residents to turn off all unnecessary lights at night and to keep away from doors, windows, and outer wall in the event of air raids. All radio stations, newspapers, and cinemas relayed the message.⁹⁶ In the French Concession, a curfew was enforced requiring all residents to stay indoors from 10 pm to 5 am, unless they obtained passes from the police.⁹⁷ The Shanghai Municipal Council adopted a similar measure only three days later.⁹⁸

To prevent the repetition of such a dreadful accident, the Shanghai Municipal Council pressed the Japanese authorities for the removal of the *Izumo* from her position near the Japanese consulate-general. The commander-in-chief of the Japanese Third Fleet, vice-admiral, Hasegawa Kiyoshi, rejected all demands to move the *Izumo* and blamed the “blind bombing” by Chinese air forces for the damage done. He steadfastly maintained that his sole responsibility was the protection of Japanese nationals and properties. To perform his duties, he was entitled to carry out independently and at his own discretion all necessary operations. Since the lives of Japanese nationals remained under the threat of Chinese attacks, which no other foreign power would have condoned, Hasegawa regretted that he was unable to comply with the proposals to shift the *Izumo* to a more remote location.⁹⁹ On September 8, the three admirals present in Shanghai, Jules Le Bigot, commander of the French naval forces, Charles Little, commander of the British China Fleet, and H. E. Yarnell, commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet jointly addressed a memorandum to the

⁹⁵ NCDN, 15 August 1937.

⁹⁶ NCDN, 15 August 1937.

⁹⁷ NCDN, 15 August 1937.

⁹⁸ NCDN, 18 August 1937.

⁹⁹ NCDN, 15 August 1937.

belligerents asking them to refrain from fighting in the city and to evacuate their respective vessels, including the *Izumo*, and batteries. They emphasized the prominent risks to civilians and properties in the foreign concessions in a general conflict.¹⁰⁰

Despite all these pressures, the Japanese command resisted the idea of moving the *Izumo*. On the contrary, it argued that the “overt bombing of the Settlement by Chinese aircraft [...] was evidence of the ruthless Chinese determination to destroy Japanese lives and property in Shanghai”. It claimed that, in view of the 50,000 Chinese troops massed near the city that threatened Japanese lives, Japan could not cease “invoking her right to self-defence”. The Japanese communiqués, in Shanghai as in Tokyo, put the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the Chinese government which was described as being in violation of the previously signed military agreement. The Japanese government blithely ignored past compromises and China’s fundamental right to assert her sovereign rights. All the Japanese authorities deigned to offer was a lame promise to do their “best for the protection of foreign interests in China.”¹⁰¹

Failing to hit the *Izumo* from the sky, an attempt was made from the river. All day long, Japanese seaplanes had been raining scores of bombs on the Chinese troops concentrated in Pudong. On 16 October, at around 9:00 pm, as heavy shelling was aimed by Japanese vessels against the Chinese positions in Pudong, a small Chinese vessel tagged along a group of commercial launches, then suddenly veered away to close in on the *Izumo*. It fired at close range several torpedoes that exploded in the river near the Bund. It also hit the *Izumo* and inflicted serious damage to its hull, even if it failed to sink the Japanese cruiser. Yet the message was heard this time and the Japanese command eventually decided to move the *Izumo* downriver where it would receive better protection from Japanese warships.¹⁰² It was a minor victory, but a symbolically significant one for the

¹⁰⁰ *NCH*, 8 septembre 1937, 380 ; Lettre, Vice-amiral Le Bigot-Consul de France, 17 août 1937, 635PO/A/84, ADN.

¹⁰¹ *NCDN*, 16 August 1937.

¹⁰² *NCDN*, 17 August 1937; *CWR*, 21 August 1937, 425.

Chinese.

For the Chinese authorities and opinion leaders in Shanghai, the involuntary massacre of Chinese civilians was a huge embarrassment. Whereas the English-language press splashed huge headlines about the bombing and its terrifying consequences, the Chinese newspapers in Shanghai went almost mute. They could not completely ignore the issue, but they chose to focus on the great battle being fought between the valiant Chinese soldiers and the villains of the Japanese army. The *Zhongyang ribao*, the official organ of the central government, made no mention of the bombing in its 15 August issue, whereas a week later it was quick to report the bombing of the Sincere Department Store which it attributed to Japanese aircraft.¹⁰³ The *Shenbao*, the major local and national newspaper, headlined the presumed destruction of three Japanese gunboats by the Chinese Air Force, a major achievement in its very first engagement. Further down the page, under “Shanghai local news”, it reported that a stray bomb had hit and wounded “several hundreds of pedestrians.” The Nanking Road and Great World bombings were not singled out but reported as part of various cases of bombings that had struck civilians in the city, “with no less than 300 victims”. The source of the bomb was not made explicit, but the newspaper pointed the finger at Japanese planes. The paper reported on the organization of rescue, though in few details, then went on to report on fighting in Pudong. In its inside pages, the newspaper gave a fuller account of the Great World tragedy (canju 慘劇), acknowledging that two bombs – given at 100 lbs each had unexpectedly dropped from the Chinese planes engaged in a fierce battle. The *Shenbao* also endorsed the official explanation of the accident as being caused by the pilots’ injuries and a dysfunctional bomb rack. On the following day, it reported the number of dead and their burial by the Tongren fuyuantang in the French Concession.¹⁰⁴

The famous journal, *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), published its first issue after the event on 1 September. It was a double

¹⁰³ *Zhongyang ribao*, 15 August 1937; 24 August 1937.

¹⁰⁴ *SB*, 15 August 1937; 16 August 1937; Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, 14-15.

issue as the journal anticipated difficulties and reduced its periodicity. As in previous issues, it opened with photographs. On the war in Shanghai, the pictures showed Chinese soldiers in combat, wounded Chinese civilians, and four pictures of the bombing of the South Station on 28 August by Japanese planes. There was no photograph, nor any mention of “Bloody Saturday” or even the bombing of the Sincere Department Store on 23 August. In the captions, the journal referred to “hundreds of deaths” in the South station bombing and similar incidents in Beixinjing.¹⁰⁵ Yet there was no report about the war in Shanghai and the various instances of misguided bombings. In the following issues, the journal published pictures of fighting in Zhabei and of Chinese soldiers in the Baziqiao Cemetery.¹⁰⁶ The *Dongfang zazhi* never mentioned the bombing incidents in its subsequent issues, even when it provided a summary of the war in its November issue.¹⁰⁷

In the initial official report of the Chinese authorities about the bombing, the squadron commander explained that when the Chinese bombers had attempted to attack the *Izumo*, they had met with a hail of shells from anti-aircraft guns. One airplane had gone missing, while two bombers had been damaged, with their pilots wounded. They had barely managed to land in Zhabei. There must have been a mistake in communication here as landing in Zhabei was impossible. It could only have been Hongqiao. The same report stated that the bombs had been dropped accidentally due to the bomb racks being damaged by anti-aircraft guns. General Chiang Kai-shek himself ordered a thorough investigation and promised punishment if it was found that the bombing was due to poor marksmanship.¹⁰⁸ On 15 August, in a Central News Agency dispatch the Chinese authorities admitted the accident. They “expressed deep regret that such an accident should have helplessly occurred and resulted in the death of several innocent

¹⁰⁵ *Dongfang zazhi*, 34, 16-17 (1 September 1937).

¹⁰⁶ *Dongfang zazhi*, 34, 18-19 (1 October 1937).

¹⁰⁷ *Dongfang zazhi*, 34, 20-21 (1 November 1937).

¹⁰⁸ *NCDN*, 15 August 1937.

people”.¹⁰⁹

In reply to a telegram from the Eleanor Roosevelt, the U.S. First Lady, leading that the foreign concessions in Shanghai be spared the dreadful impact of war, Song Meiling replied in soothing terms that “no one deplores more than we do the terrible and tragic accidental dropping of bombs from two damaged airplanes”. She said that Chiang Kai-shek was shocked at the news and had ordered an investigation as he had specifically ordered that no bombs should be dropped south of Soochow Creek.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Chinese government’s official was made clear in an editorial in the *Zhongyang ribao*. The killing of Chinese and foreign civilians in the foreign settlements was very unfortunate, but it was an unavoidable sacrifice given the way in which the Japanese were using the protection of the foreign settlements, despite the 1932 precedent and warnings about their subsequent military build-up, which the Shanghai Municipal Council had never objected to. The Chinese authorities promised to do their best to protect foreign interests, but said that such accidents could happen again.¹¹¹

The Chinese government never wavered on this line of explanation, which most Western newspapers in Shanghai also adopted.¹¹² Nothing more was heard of the investigation, if it was ever carried out. The national Air Force needed all its pilots and the accidental bombing was better forgotten. This was not the time for self-pity, even less for self-castigation. The need of the hour was to mobilize the Chinese people and all the military might the Chinese military could muster. Indeed the Chinese pilots fought bravely in the subsequent weeks and months against a vastly superior opponent in terms of training, maintenance and production. The Chinese lost a large part of their air force in the early month of the war over the Shanghai area. On 18 August, Chiang Kai-shek commended the Chinese pilots for the excellent resistance they had put up against

¹⁰⁹ Fabre, *Rapport sur la catastrophe du 14 août 1937*, 14.

¹¹⁰ *NCDN*, 17 August 1937.

¹¹¹ *Zhongyang ribao*, 18 August 1937.

¹¹² *CWR*, 21 August 1937, 423.

Japanese onslaught. He ordered that the salaries of the pilots taking part in the defense of the country be doubled, and that monetary awards be disbursed to the injured and pensions given to the families of pilots killed in action.¹¹³ In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, the Japanese authorities informed the Consular body that they would refrain from flying aircraft carrying bombs over the International Settlement, south of Soochow Creek. The Chinese authorities refused to agree to the same procedure. Yet, as we shall see, the Japanese air force actually continued to fly planes with their lethal cargo over the area.¹¹⁴

Civilians under Fire: the Bombing of the Sincere Department Store

There was hardly anything the authorities could do to protect the civilian population. Danger came from the sky, sometimes unexpectedly. Aside from curfew – a measure aimed mostly at controlling the population and avoiding the disruption of public order – the main disposition was the production of sandbags to block up alleys, street corners, windows and erect barricades for protection against the impact of exploding bombs or shells. The ability of sandbags to absorb shock proved far superior to any other material against surface deflagration, even if they did not provide bombproof shelters.¹¹⁵ Sandbags became a standard feature of Shanghai streets and buildings.¹¹⁶ The Public Works departments of both municipal councils produced almost all the sandbags used to protect properties and lives. In the International Settlement, the Public Works Department filled no less than 114,000 bags for the protection of

¹¹³ *NCDN*, 19 August 1937.

¹¹⁴ *NCDN*, 17 August 1937.

¹¹⁵ *The China Press*, 9 September 1937.

¹¹⁶ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 15147, 15149, 15185, 25209, 25226, 25646.

civilians and 31,000 for the British and American forces.¹¹⁷

The people killed and wounded near the Great World or on the Bund, however, were not the only victims of the fighting. Throughout the morning and the afternoon of 14 August, projectiles hit a number of persons although they were located in areas remote from direct fighting. Stray bullets, pieces of shrapnel, and even smaller misguided missiles hit the territory of the two settlements, both in areas where fighting was actually taking place as in Yangshupu and Hongkou, and in parts of the city remote from the fighting. The French police counted several cases of collateral damage to buildings and persons. The wounded were taken to hospitals.¹¹⁸ In the days that followed, aerial attacks by the Chinese Air Force continued unabated. Anti-aircraft and machine guns welcomed the Chinese planes whenever they came within range. Fragments of anti-aircraft ammunition fell in various parts of the city and caused the death of three Chinese and serious injury to nine others at the corner of Moulmein and Weihaiwei. A woman was killed and six others injured at the corner of Albert du Roi and Joffre. Minutes later, shrapnel cut short a rickshaw puller on the move on Bubbling Well Road, near Moulmein.¹¹⁹ Sixteen Chinese were killed on Pudong when bombs exploded over the S.S. Suiting (China Navigation Company) at the Watung Wharf. Four more were wounded.¹²⁰

With a much clearer sky, the Chinese planes attacked from a greater height. On 16 August, when two flights of bombers came over Shanghai, still intent on sinking the *Izumo*, crowds of spectators still turned out in the streets to watch them until showers of shrapnel from the firing put up by the Japanese warships began to fall in the streets. The 14 August accidental bombing did not change the approach taken by the Chinese attackers. The bombers crossed the International Settlement from the direction of Hongqiao, swinging northward on reaching the river, and began to unload their cargo near the *Izumo*.

¹¹⁷ *The China Press*, 9 September 1937.

¹¹⁸ *NCDN*, 15 August 1937.

¹¹⁹ *NCDN*, 16 August 1937.

¹²⁰ *NCDN*, 16 August 1937.

The bombs missed their intended target, but inflicted damage on a Japanese submarine and two other gunboats as the bombers continued down the river dropping more bombs on Japanese positions.¹²¹ Even after it had been moored further down river, the *Izumo* remained a target of choice for the Chinese pilots, with repeated attempts to sink it from the sky.¹²² Four Russian were killed on Broadway, between Minghong and Boone, during a heavy bombardment. They were struck by fragments of anti-aircraft missiles from the *Izumo* in the vicinity of the Savoy Hotel. In addition a large number of Chinese were killed on the same road. Although the Chinese planes missed the *Izumo*, they hit the Japanese consulate, causing several light casualties among the consular staff.¹²³

Indirect victims did not all result from bombings. Feelings against the Japanese ran high. On the morning of the fateful 14 August, a party of seven Japanese that had landed on the jetty on the Bund were vilified, then chased by the Chinese crowd. While most managed to escape or find protection in nearby taxis that sped off, one Japanese was cornered and badly beaten. When a policeman rushed to the scene, his efforts to save the man proved fruitless against the attackers. Only with the arrival of a contingent of policemen did the crowd start to disband.¹²⁴ A few days later in the French Concession, Sakanishi Takaichi, the Japanese employee of the Magasin Franco-Japonais went out to buy bread for his colleagues. When Sakanishi failed to return, one of his co-workers, Baba Toraji, went out in search of him. Both were surrounded by a crowd of angry Chinese at the intersection of Joffre and Cardinal Mercier, near the Cathay Theater. In the course of the beating that followed Sakanishi was critically injured, his skull fractured by blows from his attackers. Baba was found dead nearby. Both young men, 19 and 21 respectively, fell victim to the pent-up anger of the mob just a few feet away from their shop. In other parts of the settlements, the beating of alleged traitors

¹²¹ NCDN, 17 August 1937.

¹²² *The China Press*, 9 September 1937.

¹²³ NCDN, 17 August 1937.

¹²⁴ NCDN, 15 August 1937.

or Japanese residents continued. An unlucky Portuguese and one Filipino met the same fate as they were mistaken for Japanese. Many instances of mob attack were registered in the foreign settlements during these days, with the police opening fire on crowds to stop beatings. Most victims ended up in hospital in serious condition.¹²⁵ At the Lester hospitals, doctors reported that at the time of the bombings, the hospital received daily an average of 15 Chinese, mistaken as spies or Japanese, who were badly beaten up by angry crowds. Several died of their injuries.¹²⁶

The extent of civilian casualties in the very early part of the hostilities in Shanghai cannot be fully measured. Most aerial attacks and their related victims were not accounted for, except in broad terms in the press. Many instances of smaller-scale killing went unreported. Yet, in the French Concession alone where the police dutifully recorded each and every case of death or injury, the first week of fighting in the area most remote from the theater of operations produced a death roll of 2,214 people. Even if we subtract the victims of the Great World bombing, more than 1,000 residents fell victims to air raid and shrapnel wounds. Many hundreds more were injured.¹²⁷ When Japanese troops landed south to attack the Chinese position in Nanshi, the exchange of fire caused many projectiles to land in the settlement. In the few weeks of fighting in late 1937, 36 residents were killed, while 117 were wounded.¹²⁸ Sapajou, the Russian cartoonist of the *North China Daily News*, summed up most eloquently the absurdity of the war fought over the head of Shanghai residents, the anxieties it created while the world (and even onlookers from the relative safety of the foreign settlements) watched.¹²⁹

Shanghai had barely recovered from the frightful bombing of the Palace and Cathay hotels and that of the Great World when another

¹²⁵ *NCDN*, 19 August 1937.

¹²⁶ *NCDN*, 22 August 1937.

¹²⁷ *NCDN*, 29 August 1937.

¹²⁸ Rapport annuel 1937, 7. Service de police, U38-2-2090, SMA.

¹²⁹ *NCH*, 16 August 1937; 30 August 1937; "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 27804, 27807.

disaster struck the major commercial thoroughfare of the city. On 23 August, two bombs fell from unidentified planes. The first one hit the Sincere Department Store at the corner of Chekiang Road, while the second one pierced through the three floors of a US Navy warehouse behind the I.C.I. building on Szechuen Road, but harmlessly fractured upon the hard concrete ground floor. More damage was caused by the sprinklers against fire than by the bomb itself. A sickening detonation, however, shook the Sincere Department Store, which let a large spout of smoke and threw debris all around. The three lower floors of Sincere and adjacent Wing On took the full force of the blast.¹³⁰ The timing of the bombing was perhaps the only element that prevented the explosion from causing a greater massacre than the one that actually happened. It was a few minutes before 1:00 pm when the planes let loose their lethal cargo. Many people had gone out for their lunch break, while the number of customers must have been smaller than usual due to the wartime impact on spending. Even then, Nanking Road remained a busy street at all times. Scores of cars and buses actually lined the street at the time of the explosion, whose passengers fell victim of flying pieces of metal and other projectiles.

The bomb that struck the Sincere Department Store turned Nanking Road into a charnel house. 173 people died instantly in the street, in the bombed building, and in the shops nearby. Another 549 people were wounded.¹³¹ The No. 1 bus was just passing Chekiang Road when the terrible explosion occurred. The windows of the bus were shattered and the bus itself was severely damaged. The bus driver never stopped, despite the shock, and managed to steer the bus away from the site of the explosion. While many passengers escaped, many more lay on the ground, killed by the objects projected by the deflagration.¹³² A rickshaw puller struck by shrapnel just crumbled into his vehicle, as if resting, but dead on the spot.¹³³ The Sikh policeman who monitored the traffic light at the corner of Nanking

¹³⁰ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 1070, 15157.

¹³¹ *CWR*, 21 August 1937, 442; 25 August 1937 ; 4 September 1937.

¹³² *NCDN*, 24 August 1937.

¹³³ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 27793.

Road and Chekiang Road was killed in his booth.¹³⁴ The full width of the show windows of the Sincere Department store was a confusion of bloodstained merchandise and mutilated bodies. Shop assistants and customers killed in the instant of buying lay on each side of the smashed counters. When the time came to take stock of the extent of the damage, the ghastly horror of the bombing was evident all around. Within a radius of more than 100 yards, Nanking Road and the three streets that converged on to the intersection were littered with glass, window splinters and shell fragments. Tens of bodies lay in widening pools of blood. Human remains, pieces of men and women who had been walking a moment before, were plastered against the nearby vehicles.¹³⁵

The police immediately threw a cordon at Fukien Road on the east and Wing On Road on the west so that traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian, was stopped to facilitate rescue work. Within five minutes, the Fire Brigade, ambulances, police, the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, boy scouts and the coolies of the Public Works Department were again throwing themselves into the piles of wreckage, which covered the street and the heaps of mangled bodies.¹³⁶ The task of providing rescue was made far more difficult than a week earlier because of the enormous amount of materials under which the dead and the wounded were trapped.¹³⁷ Smoldering embers threatened to burst into fire. The crumbled stairs also made it impossible to reach people trapped on the upper floors. The rescuers used ladders to reach the victims.¹³⁸ The shattering of the building by the blast showered dust over everything and turned bodies into mummy-like figures. It made it harder to discern human bodies, unless they moved or called for assistance. The rescuers listened for moans and hurled debris aside to free the victims and give them first aid as can be seen in a picture of a policeman

¹³⁴ Ibid., ID 27792.

¹³⁵ *CWR*, 28 August 1937, 442.

¹³⁶ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 15159.

¹³⁷ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 27632.

¹³⁸ *NCDN*, 24 August 1937; “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 15161.

helping a woman in shock.¹³⁹ The lightly wounded were dressed up and taken away to hospitals for further treatment.¹⁴⁰

The victims of the bombing were barely distinguishable and could hardly be sorted out. Truck and ambulances filled with the dead, the dying, and the wounded made rotations between the site of explosion and the various hospitals and mortuaries. All the Chinese dead were placed in coffins (although the visual record show bodies removed on trucks and transported to the Kiaochow Park (Jiaozhou gongyuan) pending identification by relatives.¹⁴¹ Those who were not taken away by their families were entrusted to charity organizations for proper burial.¹⁴² Altogether 137 bodies were removed to the temporary mortuary arranged on Kiaochow Road. Yet we do not know how the authorities eventually disposed of the remaining bodies.¹⁴³ While the rescuers took care of the victims, the fifty coolies of the Public Works Department began to clear the wreckage.¹⁴⁴ There was a considerable amount of materials of all kinds on the street around the department store.¹⁴⁵ By 3:30 both the buildings had been boarded up to prevent shattered concrete from falling onto the street, the streets had been washed free of blood, and the wiring of the tramway had been repaired. Nanking Road was open again to traffic, though only to public transportation.¹⁴⁶

The Lester Hospital received 200 bloody victims, many of whom were quickly disposed of in the mortuary when diagnosed as dead. The lightly wounded were sent out to emergency hospitals while the medical staff concentrated on the seriously wounded. There was less frenzy than on 14 August, as the number of victims paled in comparison with the bloodbath of a week before. Somehow, too, the

¹³⁹ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID15160.

¹⁴⁰ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," 27638, 27640.

¹⁴¹ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 27636, 27637.

¹⁴² *Zhongyang ribao*, 25 August 1937.

¹⁴³ *NCDN*, 25 August 1937.

¹⁴⁴ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 27633, 27634, 27790.

¹⁴⁵ "Virtual Shanghai - Images," ID 27789.

¹⁴⁶ *NCDN*, 24 August 1937.

medical staff had learned, though unwillingly, to cope with a large-scale emergency situation. The four operating theaters were again working at full speed. Throughout the afternoon, more victims came in as more bodies were found in the rubble at Sincere or Wing On. Chinese streamed through the corridors in search of lost relatives or friends. When they failed to find their loved ones, the next step was to pay a visit to the mortuary. The *NCDN* reported with sympathy about the grief-stricken and fearful faces of all those who ran from one place to the other with the hope of finding a friend or a relative.

In view of the increased demand on hospital beds, the Shanghai Municipal Council made arrangements to collect information every morning about the number of vacant beds in the hospitals in the International Settlement. The information was distributed among its various services and all those concerned in order to secure more rapid admission and a better distribution of casualties. Fortunately, there was no other opportunity to test the scheme as no mass deaths happened again in the foreign settlements. Hospitals remained under high pressure due to the high number of people under the stress of war, especially refugees, and the victims of stray bullets and other projectiles. Compared to 1932, too, regular civilian hospitals no longer admitted Chinese soldiers who were sent to field or rear military hospitals or to emergency Red Cross hospitals in the city.

There was much at stake in the proper identification of the bombs dropped on the Sincere Department store. Since one had remained almost intact, a clear verdict was expected. Yet China and Japan made contradictory claims, each accusing the other. American and British naval officers pieced together the collected fragments. The projectile was of considerable size, almost four feet long with a 16-inch diameter at its base. A preliminary examination by the naval officers produced a unanimous view that the aerial missile weighed 1,000 lb.¹⁴⁷ Yet a later expert assessment by British officers brought the size down to 750-lb.¹⁴⁸ The bomb was taken to the Central police station,

¹⁴⁷ *NCDN*, 24 August 1937.

¹⁴⁸ « Nanking Road and Chekiang Road – Glancing hit on façade of Sincere building (C) 1 », Works 55/23, National Archives (U.K.)

pending its transfer to the US Navy as “Exhibit A” of the incident. The bomb had fallen just yards away from the center of the British and American governments in Shanghai, the location of the Japanese embassy press bureau, the Central police station, and the headquarters of the Shanghai Volunteers Corps.¹⁴⁹ The Japanese authorities denied any responsibility in the bombing. Two of their experts examined the fractured bomb the same afternoon at 5:00 pm and found it to be not of Japanese origin. The weight was much less than originally claimed, about 500 lb., while the size was ascertained more accurately as being forty inches and its diameter as being seventeen inches. It actually came closer to the most standards bombs used by both contending armies. The Japanese experts pointed out an inscription “SSTN” which, according to them, ruled out any bomb used by the Japanese army. They also observed that the bomb was of an obsolete type no longer in use by Japanese planes.¹⁵⁰

The Chinese Central News Agency issued a lengthy statement giving the official assessment of the projectile. It declared that the bomb was definitely Japanese. There had been no Chinese planes flying over the International Settlement at the time of the bombing, whereas Japanese aircraft had been seen bombarding Chinese positions in Pudong. The Chinese experts also claimed that despite the distortion from the fragmentation of the bomb, they identified an inscription with two English letters “SS” followed by a trademark sign, which they identified as inverted Japanese characters. Moreover, they also pointed out two yellow lines around the inner part of the bomb. They claimed that ‘yellow’ was a favorite color with the Japanese while the Chinese bombs, as a rule, were painted red.¹⁵¹ A “Letter to the Editor” by a Chinese reader later pointed out that at the time of the bombing, no anti-aircraft had been heard from the Japanese warships, whereas any approach by Chinese planes was always greeted with a volley of intense firing.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *NCDN*, 24 August 1937.

¹⁵⁰ *NCDN*, 24 August 1937.

¹⁵¹ *Zhongyang ribao*, 25 August 1937; *NCDN*, 24 August 1937.

¹⁵² *Zhongyang ribao*, 28 August 1937.

The *Shenbao* provided a lengthy report of the bombing, sparing no details about the human disaster. It was the first report in which the newspaper provided a thorough account of the mass killing of civilians, with lots of statistics, locations, etc. For the first time also, it published photographs of the scene, including one showing blown off hands and arms on a truck.¹⁵³ The newspaper also went to great length about the origin of the bombs. On the unexploded one, it followed the expert assessment made by the Chinese government.¹⁵⁴ It followed up on this issue with a full article, asserting with certainty that the bomb was Japanese.¹⁵⁵ The Chinese press went along the Chinese official interpretation. The Japanese were deemed to be indisputably responsible for the accidental bombing. The *China Weekly Review* also published five very graphic images of the victims of the Nanking Road bombing. The images illustrated a text that denounced the extreme violence to which ordinary Chinese were being subjected. The first two weeks of fighting had left more than 2,000 killed and an equal number more or less seriously injured, many crippled for life, in the foreign concessions, an area supposed to be “outside” the zone of hostilities.¹⁵⁶

There was no further discussion of the origin of the bomb, although it is unlikely that military experts would not pursue the issue, if not to distribute blame, at least for their own knowledge about the impact of bombing on buildings. All through the war in Shanghai, British military officers examined bombed buildings and wrote reports about their findings precisely on such issues.¹⁵⁷ The two department stores remained closed for five full days, but on 29 August both reopened their doors as other official institutions started to move back to their premises on the Bund, a sign that they no longer felt in harm’s way. As business resumed throughout the foreign settlements, large crowds gathered again in Nanking Road and the Bund, open

¹⁵³ *SB*, 24 August 1937 [355:324].

¹⁵⁴ *NCDN*, 24 August 1937.

¹⁵⁵ *SB*, 25 August 1937.

¹⁵⁶ *CWR*, 4 September 1937, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Work 55/23, National Archives (U.K.).

again to rickshaws.¹⁵⁸

Civilians under Fire: the Bombing of the South Station

The last major instance of mass deaths took place at the end of August, when Japanese planes bombed the South train station in Nanshi. Although the Shanghai Municipal Police had reported an easing of tension after a fortnight of fighting and the apparent removal of military lines to the north of the city, the Japanese launched a carefully planned assault south of the city. To assist the progress of their troops, they started bombing the whole southern part of the city. This last incident is the least documented of all the cases of bombing of civilians in Shanghai, even if it produced a most famous photograph.

On 28 August in the early afternoon, as hundreds of people cluttered the platforms waiting for the next train to take them out of the city, twelve Japanese planes circled over the South station before dropping eight bombs.¹⁵⁹ The South station was the main gathering place for refugees seeking transportation to the interior since the outbreak of hostilities. The North station was clearly in the middle of the fighting zone and all trains had been suspended. Many refugees had been patiently waiting for days for seats on the Hangzhou-bound trains. A large number of refugees crammed the office to purchase tickets and a larger crowd was gathered on the platform in hope of their impending departure from the war-torn city. Death put a final stop to their fateful journey. Although the main building itself was only slightly damaged, all its windows and doors were shattered to pieces. One of the bombs struck a nearby warehouse, causing a huge fire, soon amplified by an incendiary bomb that struck a transportation

¹⁵⁸ *NCDN*, 30 August 1937.

¹⁵⁹ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 27821.

company and set the surrounding houses on fire.¹⁶⁰

The station was worst hit as four bombs landed in and around the main building and the railway tracks. One of the bombs exploded a short distance from the station, wrecking a water tower close to the tracks. Another one struck and tore down the overhead bridge that ran above the tracks.¹⁶¹ Heavy smoke went up high into the sky when the station caught fire, along with houses all around. Four other bombs struck other places on Guohuo Road, two blocks to the north of the station, Sanguantang Road, and the Luojiabang area.¹⁶² Blood, mutilated bodies and wreckage strewn the whole area around the station. Many would-be travelers were killed by shrapnel or pinned down by debris. At the same time, terror and panic reigned in the streets nearby as additional bombs exploded one after the other. Fortunately, no bomb fell directly on the station building in which hundreds of terror-stricken refugees had sought shelter.

Despite claims to the contrary by the Japanese military, Chinese spokesmen emphasized that the area was devoid of any Chinese troops and denounced the bombing as nothing but the wanton killing of innocent civilians. Neutral foreign observers who toured the streets of Nanshi also confirmed that there was not a single Chinese soldier in the area. The Chinese authorities accused their enemies of a deliberate action aimed at terrorizing the civilian population or as sheer retaliation for the considerable loss of soldiers in Hongkou during the previous weeks of fighting. The Japanese had warned of an impending raid in the morning to blow up a Chinese blockade on the Huangpu River. Reporters and photographers had congregated on the roof of the Butterfield and Swire Building. By 3:00 pm, however, no attack had materialized and most had given up and left when the unexpected bombing of the South Station occurred. One of them, H. S. “Newsreel” Wong (Wang Haisheng), a Chinese photographer with the Hearst Metrotone News raced to the scene and filmed the

¹⁶⁰ *NCDN*, 29 August 1937.

¹⁶¹ “Virtual Shanghai - Images,” ID 27818.

¹⁶² *NCDN*, 29 August 1937.

carnage, taking the picture that would make him world famous.¹⁶³ *Life Magazine*, which published the picture in its 4 October issue, claimed that more than 136 million people saw it (Fig. 15). The baby received first-aid assistance on site before being rushed to a hospital.¹⁶⁴

Fig. 15



¹⁶³ John Faber, *Great News Photos and the Stories behind Them* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 1978), 74.

¹⁶⁴ *Life Magazine*, 4 October 1937. For a discussion of the famous image, see Paul French, *Through the Looking Glass: China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 192.

The students of the Datong College were the first on the scene to provide first aid to the victims and help them on to the trucks that arrived shortly after. The wounded were rushed to nearby hospitals, but a large number came into the foreign settlements to seek medical treatment. Rescue work was made hard by the obstacles resulting from the bombing. Blazing fires consumed scores of houses around, while the electrical and phone wires dangling from broken poles constituted impassable barricades until removed. The dead were placed in coffins provided by charity organizations pending their removal and burial. Yet again the amount of available coffins in a context of near continuous mass deaths had strained the resources of these organizations to the limit. Two days later, sixty corpses were still lying on the station platforms. By the end of the day, however, they had all been evacuated. Piles of luggage, never to be claimed, were lying on the platform in front of the booking office where refugees had congregated to purchase their passage to safety.¹⁶⁵

One significant difference in rescue work between the Chinese municipality and the foreign concessions was the lack of proper institutional organization. The municipal authorities were either absent or overwhelmed, and assistance to the dead and wounded relied almost entirely on charity organizations. Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, the municipal government had drastically reduced its staff to 25 percent of its original size, with salaries limited to a living allowance.¹⁶⁶ The municipality was in financially dire straits. There was no medical assistance scheme for the wounded. Most victims were taken to the foreign concessions for treatment. The Lester Hospital received about 100 patients, mostly women and children, which kept the operating rooms busy well into the evening. Yet due to the sheer number of incoming victims, about a half were sent to the Police Hospital, Saint Elizabeth's, Saint Luke's, and the Russian Hospital. Several patients eventually succumbed to their wounds.¹⁶⁷ A foreign resident who happened to be living in the Lester Hospital

¹⁶⁵ *NCDN*, 30 August 1937.

¹⁶⁶ *SB*, 16 August 1937 (355:280).

¹⁶⁷ *NCDN*, 29 August 1937.

recalled seeing “men, women, children, even babies [...] being brought in blood-soaked, some of them disemboweled, legs and arms torn to pieces”. He bitterly denounced what amounted to the mass murder of innocent civilians for which, in view of the past accidents, there was no longer any excuse. It could only be a deliberate and intentional action.¹⁶⁸

According to the *Shenbao*, 112 people were killed and 170 were wounded in the bombing of the South Station.¹⁶⁹ The wanton violence brought upon powerless refugees stirred strong indignation among foreigners. The *Shanghai Evening News* published an editorial describing the event as murder.¹⁷⁰ All missionary organizations joined hands to make strong representations to their respective governments, especially in the United States. While there are no figures, it appears that the number of women and especially children was especially high compared to the previous bombings in the foreign settlements. The bombing of the South station produced the single iconic image that electrified public opinion all around the world and tarnished the image of the Japanese army for the rest of the war. The crying baby on the devastated platform, made the cover of the next issue of *Life Magazine*. It was bound to become the very symbol of Japanese military brutality. Still today, with many unfortunate misuses, it remains an unavoidable visual representation in textbooks, photographic histories and of course web sites related to the Sino-Japanese war.

After two weeks of intense fighting over the city, the sense of immediate danger receded. Although fighting continued much longer in Zhabei and Hongkou, the most massive military effort had moved to the region north of Shanghai and closer to the Yangzi River. Air raids were no longer expected. The authorities of the foreign settlements released the men who had acted as volunteer drivers with

¹⁶⁸ NCDN, 30 August 1937.

¹⁶⁹ SB, 30 August 1937 [355:357]. The Chinese authorities later claimed 700 dead, but the high figure is unlikely in view of corroborating information from independent press sources. *Zhongyang ribao*, 29 August 1937; *CWR*, 2 October 1937, 92.

¹⁷⁰ *Shanghai Evening News*, 30 August 1937.

the ambulance service or the truck brigade that transported the dead and wounded during the previous two weeks. While returning to their respective occupations, they remained on “reserve” to be called by phone in case of necessity. The Fire brigade carried out the same streamlining of its volunteer staff since fires had decreased in number. The press reported the return to business of Chinese shopkeepers and merchants in the Central district, even if bigger companies were still struggling to get going.¹⁷¹ Soon, the terrifying events that had punctuated the initial two weeks of the war would pass into memory and, for lack of some form of official recognition and commemoration, slip into obscurity. In the event, no official acknowledgement of the fallen civilians was ever granted.

Yet fighting continued for many more weeks, near or in the city. The Chinese withdrew to a new strategic line on 13 September five kilometers behind their original positions, forming a straight line from the North train station to Luodian. Nevertheless, air raids and shelling would occasionally cause the destruction of lives and properties in the settlements. On 10 September, a heavy shell from Pudong landed at 5:30 am at the corner of Kiangse and Foochow Road, not far from the entrance to the Shanghai Municipal Council. The early hour, however, prevented a massive loss of life. Only two Chinese and one Indian were hit.¹⁷² Zhabei, Pudong, and the southernmost part of Nanshi remained the targets of bombing or the source of shelling for weeks. Antiaircraft fire flew over the foreign settlements, occasionally running short of its target and causing more or less serious damage where it fell.¹⁷³ On 18 September, the sixth anniversary of the invasion of Manchuria, the Chinese Air Force carried out a series of spectacular and destructive raids by moonlight on Hongkou and Yangshupu.¹⁷⁴ The air raids persisted well into October, with sustained shelling from anti- aircraft guns whenever the Chinese bombers

¹⁷¹ *NCDN*, 31 August 1937.

¹⁷² *CWR*, 18 September 1937, 42.

¹⁷³ *CWR*, 18 September 1937, 43.

¹⁷⁴ *CWR*, 25 September 1937, 56.

appeared in the sky.¹⁷⁵ The North train station, in particular, remained a major magnet for bombing and shelling as the Japanese failed to dislodge the Chinese troops bunkered in the area.¹⁷⁶ It was not until the Chinese troops withdrew from Zhabei on 26 October that war effectively left Shanghai for good thus almost completely removing the risk of further collateral damage from shelling or bombing.¹⁷⁷

All around the city, civilians fell victim to Japanese bombings, some fully unrelated to military targets, some due to the presence of Chinese military installations in the vicinity. For the Japanese command, any area where Chinese troops were concentrated, where military supplies were gathered and distributed, or where military communications were centralized, was a hostile base.¹⁷⁸ Chinese civilians often paid the price for actual or perceived Chinese military presence in and around Shanghai. On 5 September, a formation of 20 Japanese planes bombed two villages, Beixinjing and Zhoujiaqiao, near the western border of the International Settlement, leaving 49 dead and 130 injured.¹⁷⁹ Train stations could easily slip into the category of “hostile bases” and many became the target of repeated attacks. On 8 September, 300 refugees lost their lives in an air raid that destroyed their train in the Songjiang station.¹⁸⁰ Unfortunate locations, like the refugee camps outside the city, met with similar fates in part because of the movement of troops in their environs. On 6 September, heavy damages were inflicted on a refugee camp west of Shanghai, leaving 50 dead and more than 100 wounded.¹⁸¹ One month later, another camp near met the same fate, with high casualties.¹⁸² There is no way to know how many civilians fell victim to the war around Shanghai. The count was not made or when it was made, it

¹⁷⁵ *CWR*, 9 October 1937, 101.

¹⁷⁶ *CWR*, 16 October 1937, 129.

¹⁷⁷ *CWR*, 30 October 1937, 186.

¹⁷⁸ *CWR*, 11 September 1937, 25.

¹⁷⁹ *The China Press*, 6 September 1937.

¹⁸⁰ *The China Press*, 9 September 1937.

¹⁸¹ *CWR*, 11 September 1937, 25.

¹⁸² *CWR*, 16 October 1937, 129.

was for propaganda purposes as in the list established by the China Information Service.¹⁸³

Conclusion

The sequence of bombings that struck and created havoc in the very heart of the city in August 1937 had no precedent in Shanghai, although five years earlier the Japanese Navy had used aerial bombing on Zhabei to dislodge the Chinese troops. The civilian population had fled, but many had remained trapped in the battle zone. Over three weeks of fighting, about 4,000 civilians had lost their lives in the affected districts (Zhabei, Hongkou, Yangshupu) and the surrounding towns and villages.¹⁸⁴ This was of course a terrible human disaster, with an even larger number unaccounted for, but it was a population stranded in the middle of a battle zone, with hardly any hope of receiving help from outside, except for volunteers who drove up to these areas to collect all the living. Medical assistance was just not feasible.

In August 1937, war broke out again in the same areas, north of the foreign settlements. The foreign authorities, although seriously concerned, expected that as in 1932 the conflict would be limited to the Chinese districts. They proclaimed the strict neutrality of the territories they administered with the clear intention to remain immune from the war about to rage over the city. Yet in 1937 the military configuration had changed drastically. The Chinese government made it clear that its army would take all necessary measures to battle with the Japanese, especially in view of their use of the International Settlement and the Huangpu River as a rear base for their operations. Furthermore, in 1937 the Chinese Air Force had grown to a very substantial size and become an instrument of choice

¹⁸³ *CWR*, 2 October 1937, 92.

¹⁸⁴ Christian Henriot, "Beyond Glory: Civilians, Combatants, and Society during the Battle of Shanghai," *War & Society* 32:2 (2012): 106-135.

in the confrontation with the Japanese. Even if the foreign settlements were never targeted as such, the air space over the city became a single battleground.

The series of disasters that struck in the first weeks of battle posed an unparalleled challenge to the authorities in terms of crisis management. Within minutes on 14 August they had to deal with major physical damage in the most central areas, with destroyed buildings, disrupted traffic, and tons of wreckage to remove. Yet the highest challenge was the number of victims – by the thousands – calling for immediate medical assistance for those who had survived and ways to dispose of the bodies and human remains of those who had died in the bombings. The strategic choice made by the authorities was to have everyone and everything removed as quickly as possible. For the wounded, the issue was of course to provide them with medical treatment as early as possible to lessen their suffering and give them a chance to survive. To move the wounded, the rescuers had to make do with whatever mode of transportation was at hand. Trucks carried more people than did ambulances.

Shanghai offered the best medical infrastructure in China, with a concentration of most hospitals in the foreign settlements. Even if they were overwhelmed by the sheer number of patients requiring assistance almost all at the same time, the medical staff was able to attend all patients in about six hours. Of course many died for lack of timely medical assistance. Yet, somehow, the surviving victims of the bombings in the city were the “lucky” ones as they benefited from rapid and efficient rescue services and received proper medical attention, even under duress. No such conditions existed in the area around Shanghai. There, scores of villages were bombed and shelled, leaving hundreds or thousands of victims for whom there was no hospital and no medical assistance. They perished miserably in their burning homes. Only a few were taken to overflowing Red Cross units.

Yet, despite all goodwill, many victims succumbed to their wounds. Hundreds had died in the very moment of the blasts. In a hot summer day, dead bodies could not be left in open air to decay and increased the risks of epidemics. The authorities had no qualm about

the means of removing the dead. What mattered was speedy removal from the scene and the restoration of normal conditions in the city. The bodies were gathered in remote places like the Zikawei cemetery, the Kiaochow Park and the rather centrally located Racecourse. Here the lack of documentation does not allow us to examine how each foreign authority eventually disposed of the dead bodies. While in the French Concession, the municipal officers lost no time in having them all buried the very next day, the Shanghai Municipal Council seem to have delegated the grim task to the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery, which caused delays in the burial of the victims. The difference in treatment clearly reflected the nature of power in each foreign settlement, with a system of command that was much more assertive in the French Concession.

The civilians who died in the first bombings were quickly forgotten and left hardly any significant trace in the collective memory. As C. T. Wang, the Chinese ambassador in Washington stated, “Civilian lives had been sacrificed for the good of the defense of democracy against Japanese militarism.”¹⁸⁵ The bombing of Chinese civilians by Chinese pilots was a blemish that made the events of 14 August 1937 something that could not fit into the official war narrative, then and now. Only a limited number of people witnessed the various sequences of massacre. As soon as the bombings occurred, the police cordoned off the areas. The municipal staff in both settlements were mobilized to wipe away the consequences of the bombing. Those who passed through these areas only the day after could hardly imagine the extent of the carnage. The Chinese press, as I discussed, chose to publish very little on the August 14 bombings and failed to relay a real sense of the tragedy to the population. It became more vocal with the bombing of the Sincere Department Store and the South Train Station, but even here the ongoing battle between Chinese and Japanese troops largely overshadowed these events. The bombing incidents probably paled in view of the enormous casualties of the Shanghai Battle – some 260,000 soldiers – even if the latter never received an appropriate recognition of their sacrifice. These civilian

¹⁸⁵ NCDN, 17 August 1937.

deaths, however, are also part of the untold misery of the Shanghai people during the war. There was nothing spectacular or heroic about these deaths. They were “accidents” that killed and maimed thousands of people whose voice was never heard.