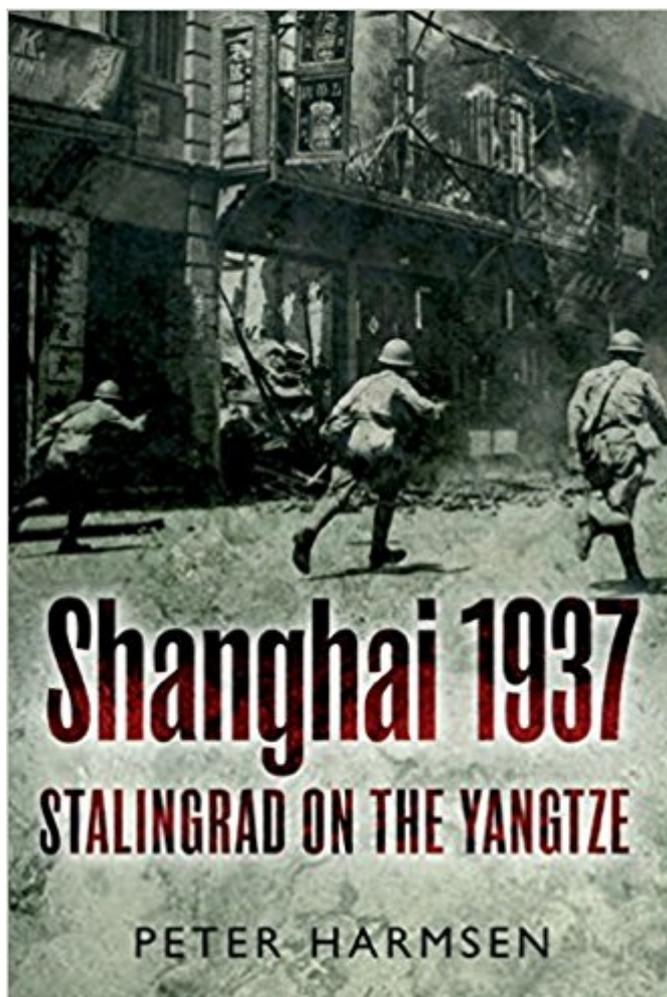


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Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad On The Yangtze



Synopsis

“In the voluminous literature on World War II, few books treat the Sino-Japanese War, and few of those are accessible to non-specialists. Thankfully, seasoned East Asian correspondent Peter Harmsen has written an engrossing study that goes far to fill the gap in the historiography of a neglected theater of operations and the first large-scale urban battle of the war.”

Michigan War Studies Review This deeply researched book describes one of the great forgotten battles of the 20th century. At its height it involved nearly a million Chinese and Japanese soldiers while sucking in three million civilians as unwilling spectators and victims. It turned what had been a Japanese adventure in China into a general war between the two oldest and proudest civilizations of the Far East. Ultimately, it led to Pearl Harbor and to seven decades of tumultuous history in Asia. The Battle of Shanghai was a pivotal event that helped define and shape the modern world. Actors from a variety of nations were present in Shanghai during the three fateful autumn months when the battle raged. The rich cast included China’s ascetic Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his Japanese adversary, General Matsui Iwane, who wanted Asia to rise from disunity, but ultimately pushed it toward its deadliest conflict ever. Claire Chennault, later of “Flying Tiger” fame, was among the figures emerging in the course of the campaign, as was First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. In an ironic twist, Alexander von Falkenhausen, a stern German veteran of the Great War, abandoned his role as a mere advisor to the Chinese army and led it into battle against the Japanese invaders. In its sheer scale, the struggle for China’s largest city was a sinister forewarning of what was in store for the rest of mankind only a few years hence. It demonstrated how technology had given rise to new forms of warfare, or had made old forms even more lethal. Amphibious landings, tank assaults, aerial dogfights and most importantly, urban combat, all happened in Shanghai in 1937. It was a dress rehearsal for World War II or perhaps more correctly it was the inaugural act in the war—the first major battle in the global conflict.

Book Information

Paperback: 312 pages

Publisher: Casemate; Reprint edition (May 11, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1612003095

ISBN-13: 978-1612003092

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 123 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #79,463 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in [Books > Travel > Asia > China > Shanghai](#) #29 in [Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Historical Maps](#) #93 in [Books > History > Asia > China](#)

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enhances the bare facts with material gleaned from multiple diaries, reports, newspaper and magazine articles, books, and other accounts from combatants and civilians of all nationalities. In addition to on-the-spot impressions from a surprising number of Chinese and Japanese foot soldiers, the book also features eyewitness reports from and about foreigners living and working in the cosmopolitan city at the time. As the author notes, the battle of Shanghai was front page news throughout much of the world, and numbers of journalists from around the globe covered the fighting from both sides of the line while crossing in and out of the safety and comfort of the international concessions. Besides using many contemporary documents as sources, Harmsen has chosen to illustrate the book with an especially noteworthy selection of very striking wartime photographs. An engaging account of a little-known battle. A practically nothing else in English tackles this topic at this level. ... (Stone & Stone Second World War Books) A rattles along like a modern techno-thriller and moves gracefully between descriptions of the tactical battlefield and the impact on the company, platoon or individual to the strategic machinations of the "top brass" and the movement of armies and divisions. Whilst the book piqued my interest in the pre Second World War Sino-Japanese conflict it stands very successfully as an excellent piece of military writing in its own right. One only has to be interested in warfare to appreciate this book. It is supported as is usual by a centre of black and white pictures showing Shanghai in the thirties and scenes from the conflict. A Also there are a number of maps to allow you to follow the general course of the action. Overall this book is highly recommended. For wargamers it has got all the makings of an excellent campaign or demonstration game - naval gunnery support, tanks, direct tactical air support, two evenly matched forces, Marines, the what if scenario of conflict spreading into the International Settlement (other colonial powers had troops and naval forces in Shanghai), German military advisors and of course a cavalry charge! For military historians it is an interesting insight into the development of the tactical use of military technology in the lead up to the Second World War. And, finally, it is damn good read! A (Wargamer) A has all the elements of a fabulous historical novel. A Yet from

another angle it is a historical minefield. The seamless way in which Harmsen weaves Chiang's international political maneuvering into battlefield strategy, combining the perspectives of regular privates and commanding generals, along with civilians and combatants, suggests his narrative was of long gestation. One of the really remarkable features of "Shanghai 1937" is the huge collection of high-quality photographs, all of them in-period and directly relevant to the action, in three 16-page inserts. Also, one cannot help noticing that many of them are credited to the "author's" collection. Few who have read the book have failed to be gripped by the narrative. (Taiwan Today) What's special about this book is its comprehensiveness, shifting between Chinese, Japanese and foreign points of view to describe the causes of the battle, Chiang Kai-shek's strategy, the Chinese army's attack, the stalemate and the fall of Shanghai. The photos selected for the book also illustrate the operations on the two sides as well as the conditions endured by the people of Shanghai. In addition to accounts by participants on both the Chinese and Japanese side as well as contemporary newspaper reports, the book also uses the memoirs of numerous foreigners. In this respect it is richer than a lot of works in the Chinese language. (Shenzhen Special Zone Daily) All through the 1930s an extremely bloody war was fought in China. It was a war that involved great power interests, clashing ideologies and local interests. This entire complex and bloody jigsaw is the topic of China expert Peter Harmsen's book on the battle of Shanghai in 1937. There are not very many books on this topic and this period, which has been a neglected chapter in western history writing. Therefore, Peter Harmsen has written an important book. It's about events that happened more than 70 years ago, but it's relevant for the present age because the same great power interests are at work today. The book is extremely readable and deserves praise for telling the story of a forgotten aspect of the global showdown of the 1930s (Politiken). This is not traditional war history, but an extremely dramatic documentary thriller. It's based on facts, collected in meticulous and time-consuming fashion from diaries, newspaper articles, books and memoirs, but in contrast to much other war literature, you get so close to the actors, from generals to Chinese and Japanese privates and civilians, that as a reader you have to constantly remind yourself that this was real, involved a million soldiers, and was to lead to the global changes of the next ten years. Peter Harmsen has written a book that has many qualities and extremely high information and entertainment value. It's about time that we reach a better understanding of the causes of World War Two, a chain of events where the battle of Shanghai had a much bigger impact than military historians in the west have realized so far. Shanghai 1937 is not only an invaluable piece of military history, but also a book with

formidable powers of empathy that at times make the reader feel like an actual participant in the bloody events. (Jyllands-Posten) "an arrow straight account of the pyrrhic battle for much of the city challenges the notion that the Second World War began in 1939 and he has a point. I am pleased to have read it. If you are looking to expand your world knowledge to the Middle Kingdom, have a look at this book. If the advance of the Japanese interests you it might make a nice change not to read about endless embarrassing retreats of colonial armies for a while. (War in History Online) "The author has processed a huge number of original Chinese and Japanese sources, interviewed survivors and collected an impressive number of photos and a large array of useful maps. This gives the narrative substance and credibility. At the same time, it's also a very objective and nuanced account. With his book, Peter Harmsen fills a huge historiographical void. The story is told in a highly riveting manner. Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze is almost impossible to put aside once you have started, and even harder to put aside after you have finished the last page.

(Weekendavisen) "One of the most sobering things about reading history is realizing the ease with which the deaths of a millions can be forgotten in only a few decades. I am currently reading Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze, by Peter Harmsen. I recommend it heartily. Even if you thought you knew all there was to know about the Second World War, if you haven't read up on the Sino-Japanese conflict, you've missed one of its principal roots. The Japanese were in real danger of losing the Battle of Shanghai, in part because the Chinese Army was advised by German officers, some of whom were Jewish and fleeing from Hitler." (The Belmont Club) "There is no doubt that one of the most important historical accounts of the year is Peter Harmsen's book about the war between China and Japan. It's an original and thorough work which turns the prevailing consensus of the past generations upside down and questions what many historians have so far taken for granted. It's impossible not to become more knowledgeable from reading Harmsen's book... The complicated strategic material is reinforced with contemporary testimony and anecdotes throughout." (Kristeligt Dagblad (Denmark)) Japan attacked China in 1931 but the Sino-Japanese War did not begin proper until 1937 and is a period or subject which historians rarely visit. The author of this work not only takes on the complicated task but does it in a masterly manner. Pre-war China is often seen as undeveloped but in this work the city of Shanghai is painted as a vibrant, cosmopolitan place thriving with banks and commerce. The Japanese attack changed all that and the brutality which came in the wake of the attack is described here. The Chinese tried valiantly in some cases to defend their country but to no avail and the price they paid was high. This is a great narrative and

will expand the understanding of war in the Far East (Gun Mart Magazine) "It is not often that one discovers a great significant event in history that is both overlooked and underwritten. The battle of Shanghai in the summer and fall 1937 is one such event. In "Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze" by Peter Harmsen, he takes the casual reader as well as the avid military history enthusiast on a horrific journey down the blood-soaked alleys and war-ravaged suburbs of one of China's greatest cities. well-written. It has a treasure trove of rare photos of the battle and is exhaustively researched. Harmsen has earned his stripes in uncovering this event from an academic military standpoint. Along with accurately placing units in their order of battle, he also succeeds in humanizing these units with individual stories "Shanghai 1937" is a must-read for anyone interested in military history or a genuine fascination of the nationalist era in Chinese history. (Sampan (New England)) "In the voluminous literature on World War II, few books treat the Sino-Japanese War, and few of those are accessible to non-specialists. Thankfully, seasoned East Asian correspondent Peter Harmsen has written an engrossing study that goes far to fill the gap in the historiography of a neglected theater of operations and the first large-scale urban battle of the war. Historians of this battle do have certain advantages. Since Shanghai was a cosmopolitan city with a large contingent of foreign residents that stayed for the duration, scholars possess an additional source of primary documents and valuable eyewitness accounts. Harmsen takes full advantage of these. a compelling, quite detailed narrative history of an understudied war. gives easy entry into the secondary literature on the Sino-Japanese War. (Michigan War Studies)...presents a gripping chronology of two sides locked in a horrific death dance. genuinely shines by interlacing the chronology with plenty of personal anecdotes and quotidian details an important reminder between Champagne brunches, art openings and fashion shows rivers of blood once flowed beneath our feet. (City Weekend Shanghai) Harmsen, a two-decade veteran of east Asia, demonstrates a breathtaking command of the battle itself from the 10,000 meter, panoramic view of the terrain and history, down to the platoon level Japanese and Chinese grunts fighting, bleeding, starving and dying, and the types of knots that the Japanese used to tie their helmets on. (Asian Review of Books)" Largely ignored in the West, Japan and China fought a horrible large-scale battle for the city of Shanghai from July to November 1937... Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze relates the story of this awful months-long battle and its effect on later events... This book is meticulously researched, and vignettes are included from generals and privates alike. Civilian accounts, the bulk of them from residents of the International Settlement, abound. Most of the sources are translated Chinese works. The author weaves them together in a

way that gives a sense of the battle's breadth and horror. Readers interested in the history of the Sino-Japanese fighting of the 1930s will find this book a valuable addition to their libraries." (Military Heritage) a compelling account of this major but often overlooked battle, told from both sides of the conflict and covering every level of the conflict, from the experiences of the private soldier to the problems faced by the senior commanders on both side as well as the eyewitnesses from the international community in the city. The text is supported by a series of maps that help illustrate the course of the battle, and by photographs that show the impact of urban warfare on one of Asia's most prosperous and cosmopolitan cities. (History of War)... succeeds in describing the experiences and perceptions of officers and soldiers on both the Chinese and Japanese side, the suffering of the common people, the war in the eyes of the westerners, and the German advisors' role, presenting a complete, multi-faceted and objective vista of the war... Shanghai 1937 excels at describing the events from the point of view of the common people, using their diaries and letters to describe the war as seen from the ground level, how it began and evolved, and how it affected their lives and spirits. In this respect, it is more original than many works in Chinese, while also being much more readable... A moving and fluent narrative which describes a desperate and bitter battle in vivid prose. (Journal of Studies of China's Resistance War Against Japan)"Peter Harmsen judiciously narrates the 1937 Battle of Shanghai, employing numerous Chinese and Japanese memoirs... Harmsen argues plausibly that this bloody three-month battle, pitting 750,000 Chinese against 250,000 Japanese, cemented the transformation from localized "incidents" to international war... Harmsen crisply narrates the battle, weaving together large unit movements and personal vignettes from mid-ranking officers and enlisted men. Clear maps illustrate each phase of the fighting, as do many fine photographs." (Journal of Military History)"Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze and Nanjing 1937: Battle For a Doomed City are not only meticulously researched, but are gripping reads as well. And if we are fortunate, Harmsen will continue writing these histories. A golden age of Chinese military history is still far away, but if books like Harmsen's continue to be published, a golden age of China's World War II history may be just around the corner." (Strategybridge.com)

Peter Harmsen, a foreign correspondent in East Asia for two decades, is former bureau chief in Taiwan for the French news agency AFP.

Fans of accomplished writers such as Max Hastings and Antony Beevor will find much to like in this arresting and informative book about the outbreak of total war between China and Japan in 1937.

This is not dry, old-school military history, but an attempt to show war as it was experienced by the participants, from the generals bent over their maps at headquarters, right down to the lowly "grunt" in the muddy trenches. Copious use of diaries and memoirs ensure that authentic voices permeate the entire narrative. The author does not shy away from showing the horrific aspects of modern war as it was unleashed on Shanghai during the battle. It is a depressing fact that civilians became victims from the very first day of the fighting, not just as a collateral damage, but because they were directly targeted by the Japanese invaders. Years of accumulated rage and hatred between China and Japan was let loose when war broke out between the two nations. If one wants to understand why memories of the war still linger in the collective minds of the two peoples even today, there is no better place to start than this book. One thing that surprised me as a German was the extent of the involvement of German officers in the early stages of the war against Japan. Originally sent to China as advisors to Chiang Kai-shek's army, they became respected teachers to an entire generation of Chinese officers. Many of the Germans became deeply involved in the battle for Shanghai. This is a fact that is not often if ever mentioned even in German accounts of the years before and during the Second World War.

It is popularly believed that WWII began in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland but the author believes the beginning was actually in August 1937 when the Chinese Army was forced to attack the Japanese who were escalating their buildup on the mainland to free itself from the ever increasing menace of foreign domination. After you read this intriguing book you may agree with the author. Mr Harmsen, a foreign correspondent in China and the Far East for twenty years, has done a splendid job in recreating the events leading up to as well as the key events of this little known battle. This overview presents not only the strategic but also the tactical and human interest aspects of this nearly three month campaign that pitted the larger Chinese force against a well defended and motivated enemy with superior air and artillery support along with technological advantages. The Japanese also had a more coherent battle plan that along with the other advantages just mentioned would inflict huge losses on Chiang Kai-shek's best divisions and force them to give up on trying to retake this key city though partisan actions would continue, giving the Japanese little rest while they controlled the city. This battle story is infused and enhanced with many first hand accounts of leading officers, front line soldiers and civilians who were caught up between the warring sides. These individual accounts add to the appeal and truly enhance the overall readability of the story. I would have preferred greater tactical details on the order of a David Glantz presentation, yet I was still impressed with this book. The author has done a nice job of presenting the prewar background,

main events of the three month urban struggle, many first hand accounts, post battle life in the city and the long term impact this battle had on the participants for the rest of the war and beyond. In addition to battle events, the author also presents a realistic description and appraisal of the flaws and virtues of command relationships and their decisions and the impact those decisions had on and off the battlefield. The combine package gives the reader a good overall understanding of the book. This book also has a few good maps, an Order of Battle, a decent Notes Section and a helpful Bibliography if you want to extend your research. If you have an interest in the Far East and how the antagonism between China and Japan grew into a major confrontation, this book will go a long way to inform and is recommended.

The Battle of Shanghai is oddly one of the best documented, but also least remembered battles from the period before America's entry into World War II. Peter Harmsen, in *Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangzi*, seeks to make use of the former to rectify the latter. Mr. Harmsen made use of a wide variety of sources, including from the Chinese and Japanese combatants, as well as from third-party observers in the International Settlement. The result is a nuanced and complex picture showing the horror of total war in one of the world's most populous metropolises. Harmsen does a great job moving from the politics at the top to the fighting man at the bottom. He builds a steady narrative that takes us through the battle as it develops. Of particular interest to me was the fact that Shanghai was a battle of Chinese choosing. In the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Japanese armies swiftly occupied much of northeast China. Chiang Kaishek wanted to make a stand where his troops would have a tactical advantage. Given the Japanese superiority in tanks, aircraft, and artillery, urban combat in Shanghai gave his troops the best chance of success. Later, as the Japanese were clearly winning the battle, Chiang kept his troops in combat to try to generate sympathy on the global stage. One of the things I really appreciated about Harmsen's narrative is his demonstration of the brutality on both sides; the radicalization of the Japanese as they executed prisoners in gruesome ways and the Chinese, often civilians, that took brutal revenge when the opportunity presented itself. It is a grim picture of modern war. *Shanghai 1937* will give the reader a new perspective on World War II in Asia and the Pacific. The text is accompanied by a good number of photographs and maps.

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