



Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze

Peter Harmsen

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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, often, 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.

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, in theaters around the world. 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.

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 the continent 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.

Written by Peter Harmsen, a foreign correspondent in East Asia for two decades, and former bureau chief in Taiwan for the French news agency AFP, *Shanghai 1937* fills a gaping chasm in our understanding of the Second World War.

REVIEWS

"...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. ...engaging account of a little-known battle. ...practically nothing else in English tackles this topic at this level. ..

Stone and Stone

"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

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

This is 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.Org

...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

"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

"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

“... 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. ... 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!”

Wargamer

“...has all the elements of a fabulous historical novel. ... 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

”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

"... 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(Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)

"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(Denmark)

"...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

"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)

“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)

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Omar Hinojosa:

In this period globalization it is important to someone to obtain information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information much easier to share. You can find a lot of sources to get information example: internet, newspaper, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher that print many kinds of book. The particular book that recommended for your requirements is Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze this reserve consist a lot of the information from the condition of this world now. That book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. Often the writer made some exploration when he makes this book. Honestly, that is why this book suitable all of you.

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