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THE SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL MEDAL OF 1937

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The death and destruction that racked the International Settlement of Shanghai between August and September 1937 had its origins in events far to the north six years earlier.

In September 1931 a stretch of the South Manchurian Railway near Mukden was blown up and with it the train carrying the Governor of the three northern Chinese provinces, Chang Tso-lin. This led to a clash between the Chinese Army and the Japanese units in Manchuria — the Kwantung Army. The Japanese were victorious and went on to occupy strategic points in the region, finally setting up the puppet state of Manchukuo.

In effect, the unofficial Sino Japanese War had begun. It was to last until 1945.

Little repercussion was felt in distant Shanghai. However the following year a Japanese monk was killed and four others beaten up by a Chinese 'mob' in the International Settlement. Using this as a pretext the Japanese Landing Force in Hongkew — the Japanese section of the settlement — was reinforced. The leader of the Nationalists, Chiang Kai-shek,

having little success in his opposition to the enemy in Manchuria, decided on a show of force against those in Shanghai; by February 1932 reinforcements had swelled the Japanese military presence to over 6000 men who were in action at Hongkew and in the surrounding countryside.

The Shanghai Municipal Council reacted by mobilising its Volunteer Corps of 2300 civilians and police but this was soon stood down as regular troops arrived from Britain, the USA, Italy and France.

The Chinese eventually withdrew and an uneasy calm settled over the area. The Shanghai Volunteer Corps was upgraded with new units formed from the White Russians and Jews, as well as the acquisition of new and more modern arms.

The lack of success of the Nationalist forces had, by 1937, placed the position of Chiang Kai-shek in jeopardy and he essayed once again against the Shanghai Japanese. He occupied the Chapei Demilitarised Zone which abutted Hongkew, erected forts at Woosung and placed a boom of junks across the

The Emergency Medal 1937



Whangpoa River, effectively cutting off Shanghai from Nanking and Central China.

The fuse was alight — on 9 August 1937 it exploded.

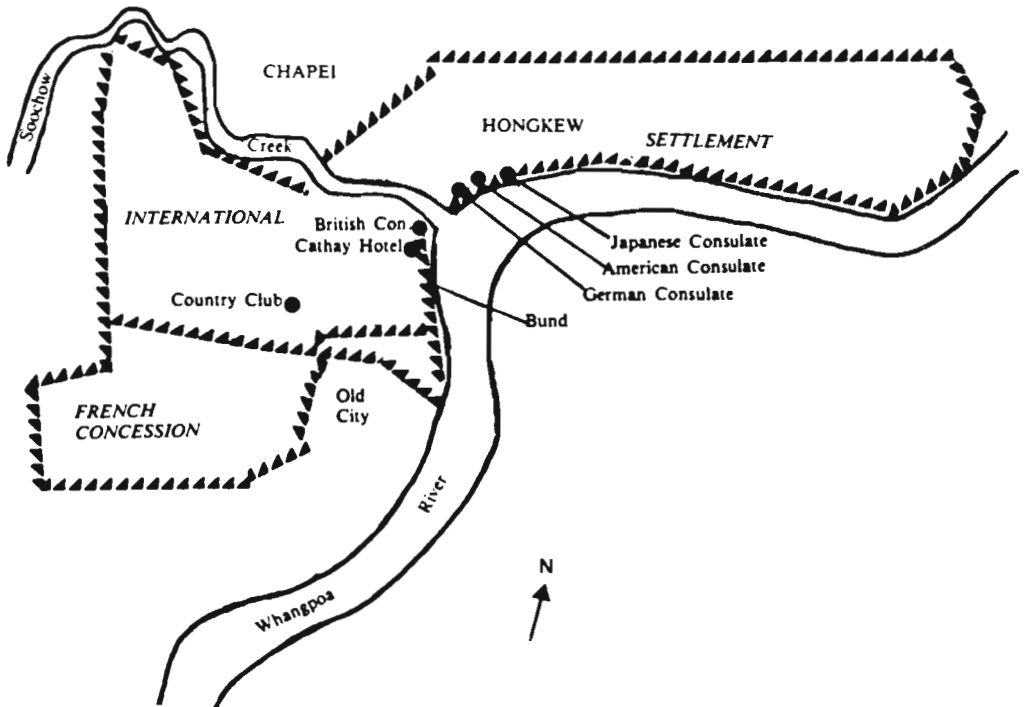
A Japanese officer was killed by a Nationalist sentry outside the perimeter of the settlement; the Japanese demanded the removal of all Nationalist troops to a distance of 30 miles from Shanghai; the Chinese refused and fighting began on the 13th. The SVC was again called to arms, consisting now of British, American, Russian, Jewish, Filipino and Portuguese Portuguese numbering about 2000. In the French concession, their nationals and Annamese units also responded.

The influx of refugees into the settlement had now become a torrent and the facilities of the Council were sorely taxed. The Nationalists had recently acquired some modern aircraft and ten 2000 pound bombs. On the afternoon of the 13th the drone of aircraft was heard in the skies over the foreign enclave; Japanese

encampments and the cruiser *Idzumo* were the targets. The bomb aimers were ill trained; they missed. Three of the big bombs landed in the densely overcrowded International Settlement. The first landed at the junction of Nanking Road and the Bund damaging the Cathay and Palace Hotels, littering the streets with hundreds of dead and wounded. Two others scored a direct hit on an old theatre which had been converted into a refugee centre. The carnage was catastrophic; in all 1740 people including 26 foreigners were killed and over 2000 injured. Two days later HMS *Cumberland* and the USS *Augusta* were hit, both sustaining casualties. The Country Club was converted to a hospital and the evacuation of the families of foreign nationals began.

The Shanghai Volunteers and Red Cross were hard pressed, and even several days later “the streets were filled with the odour of humanity, both dead and living”.

SHANGHAI 1937



The fighting between Chinese and Japanese in Hongkew grew in intensity and soon there were over 30,000 Japanese troops involved. The number of refugees rose day by day with their position becoming intolerable; Father Jaquinot, a French priest, set up a refugee camp and this was negotiated as a neutral zone; by 9 November when it was placed under the control of the International Red Cross, it held over a quarter of a million destitute Chinese with tens of thousands in satellite camps in the surrounding countryside.

At this stage the Japanese troops had risen to 200,000 and the Nationalist forces "stole away". Casualties on the Japanese side were at least 20,000 with the Chinese far exceeding this figure. Japanese control was extended into the surrounds and on 15th November they took over the Jaquinot Zone.

The emergency was over but Shanghai was now isolated in a sea of Japanese; this control became complete with Japan's entry into World War II.

Sporting prize medal awarded by the Shanghai Russian Regiment, dated 1935. Awarded for Athletics 1935-36. The front of the medal is enamelled in red, yellow and blue.



The Shanghai Municipal Council Medal of 1937 (The Emergency Medal).

Those who served the Council in the crisis were awarded a medal which was gazetted in December 1937 and presented in July 1938.

It consists of an eight pointed bronze star, 40mm at its widest and suspended by a bronze ring attached to the apex of a ray.

Obverse: A central raised area bears the Council Crest.

Reverse: The legend 'FOR SERVICES RENDERED AUGUST 12 TO NOVEMBER 12 1937'. The medals were issued unnamed.

Ribbon: Vertical stripes of white/red with a narrow central black line and narrow black/white edges.

References:

Yellow Creek, the Story of Shanghai: Brigadier J. V. Davidson-Houston; Putman, London 1962.

The Fall of Shanghai: Noel Barber; Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, New York, 1979.

The Middleton Family Medal Group: W. J. Mira; Australian Coin Review, March 1982.

