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China: One-Two Punch



Hata: Japan Will "Fight Any Nation"

To the colossal giant that is China, furious little Japan delivered a one-two punch last week. Small divisions of the Emperor's troops first took Canton, "The New Orleans of China," then Hankow, China's "Chicago." So easily did both fall that Britons in Hong Kong declared darkly: "It looks like dirty work."

Canton: "The New Orleans of China" fell almost without a struggle. Landing in Bias bay, about 125 miles away, a Japanese force of 60,000 men split into three prongs, then thrust through 120,000 poorly-trained Chinese soldiers. The northern prong, a motorized column, reached Canton in 10 days with the loss of only 200 lives.

Fearing the worst, Chinese had begun to move out days before. Canton's population shrank from 1,000,000 to 50,000. When the first Japanese entered the city, houses were deserted, stores empty and streets littered with belongings which had tumbled from the high-piled carts of fleeing Chinese.

Chinese soldiers had planted dynamite in the city's reservoir system, power plant, factories and public buildings. Before the Japanese arrived, explosions tore at the city. On the first morning of occupation, a square mile of Canton's modern downtown section was spouting flames as high as 100 feet. North of the city, thousands of refugees straggled toward Changsha, between Canton and Hankow.

Hankow: Denying that Chinese commanders had sold out to the Japanese, enraged Cantonese blamed their city's fall on the fact that the crack troops which normally protect the city had been withdrawn by dictator-general Chiang Kai-shek to defend Hankow, 550 miles to the north.

That city fell just four days after
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Canton. Chiang himself gave orders to abandon it, then made a night flight with his wife toward Changsha. In Hankow, the explosions and fires of Canton were repeated.

Hong Kong: Japan thus took the last two great metropolitan areas of free China. Last week, her soldiers claimed nearly 250,000 square miles of Chinese territory, and were stretched over a front 3,000 miles long.

Japan's sudden thrust, American columnists declared, was inspired by Great Britain's capitulation to Adolf Hitler at Munich. Around Canton, Japanese soldiers were just five miles from Hong Kong, the British island-port which is the gateway to trade in south China.

A year ago, Japan might not have dared to challenge British interests so directly. But in Tokyo last week, a patriotic society put a five-column advertisement in the *Yomiuri*: "Now is the time for the Japanese . . . to come to know . . . they need no longer be afraid of Great Britain." At his Kiu-kiang province headquarters, General Shunroku Hata, in charge of the Canton and Hankow campaigns, spluttered: "Japan is prepared to fight any nation . . . to protect her national rights."

As a port, British Hong Kong became dependent on Japanese administrators, who will henceforth control south China trade from their offices in Canton. As a strategic base for the protection of British interests in China and the Pacific, Hong Kong seemed to lose all value. Military-minded newspapermen guessed that Japan could take it in three weeks.

To Chinese also, the loss of Canton was a serious blow. For months, the city had been the chief port of entry for munitions going to Chinese troops. Henceforth, Chinese fighters could only expect munitions to come over slow overland routes from French Indo-China and Soviet Siberia.

Only consolation for the Chinese lay in the fact that Chiang's 1,000,000-man central army was still intact. Newspapermen were first puzzled by the easy fall of Canton and Hankow, then remembered that Chiang has always saved his best troops from sieges, throwing them into action only at Shanghai last year. Even Japanese admitted that Chiang would continue to fight guerrilla campaigns meant to exhaust the men and money of Japan.