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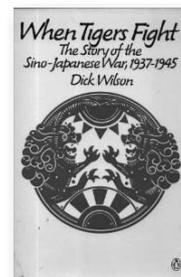
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## *When tigers fight: the story of the Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945*

by Dick Wilson

Hutchinson & Co. Publishers: London; 1982; 269 pp.; ISBN 0091457106;

Ursula Davidson Library call number: 541.6 WILS 1982



This recent donation to the Institute's library is a scholarly, very well researched account of a major conflict in the 20th century between two of Australia's current major trading partners (Japan and China) – a World War II conflict which is often overlooked from a Western perspective. The book deals with the societal, political, strategic and tactical aspects of an immensely complex situation – a China which was internally riven between the emerging power factions of the Communists and the Guomindong, set in long-term combat with Japan – a racially and geographically very close neighbour who, as an enemy, was at times indistinguishable on the battlefield as friend or foe!

Dick Wilson, a dedicated student of China and the Far East, has written seven other books on this broad topic, including *Mao The People's Emperor*, and, in this scholarly but readable book, he explains not only the enormous scale of the conflicts and the ruthless violence which both sides applied, but the underlying social attitudes and reasons as to why Japan felt it necessary to invade – within the context of “a quarrel between brothers” and a Japanese attitude of “the Chinese must be taught a lesson” (Wilson, pp. 3, 9).

This book's focus is explaining the reasons for, the conduct of, and the chronology of the Japanese campaigns – from 1937 when Japan activated serious military force against China, using a series of pretext-driven ‘incidents’; through the deliberate set-piece Japanese invasions and battles of the northern, southern and then central coastal regions of China; until the conflict altered with the reduction of Japanese military capability in China. This reduction was caused mainly by the constant Japanese fear of Russia, combined with the commencement of wider hostilities in the Pacific in 1941, triggered by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Indeed, after 1941, the Sino-Japanese conflict degenerated into a series of parallel and confusing battles as Japanese forces lost both focus and power within China itself.

There are 16 chapters which trace the chronology of the campaigns: the capture of Beijing and Shanghai in 1937; the staggering scale of battles such as Wuhan and Xuzhou (1938); the Battle of 100 Regiments (1940); the



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Revolutionary Army, China  
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Flag of the Imperial  
Japanese Army  
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series of three battles at Changsha (1940-1941); North Burma (1942-1944); and the final collapse of Japan caused by nuclear weapons dropped on the Japanese mainland, which negated ‘last minute’ offensives such as Ich-Go in 1944.

The probable unfamiliarity of many readers with even the names of many of these major campaigns illustrates the benefits to be obtained from reading this book. The scale of the Sino-Japanese conflicts is equal to any of the better-known (to the Western reader) events such as Stalingrad, Tobruk, Bastogne, Berlin; or Kokoda and Singapore. For example, within the larger battle for Xuzhou (1938), in the lesser battle for Taierzhuang, the Chinese deployed 800,000 troops and the Japanese Army suffered its largest loss in history of at least 20,000 killed or wounded (Wilson, p. 100).

The book reflects the author's extensive research and obvious familiarity with the topic. It includes an extensive bibliography, comprehensive referencing, relevant maps for each campaign, and a selection of photos of key incidents and personnel from war archives. It is, however, very typical of a book published in 1982, with dry and scholarly language, text style and presentation layouts.

The book's appeal, in the opinion of this reviewer, is based on a combination of: its scholarly research; its wide use of resources drawn from all levels and both sides of the conflict; its high-level analyses of the underlying political and social attitudes prevailing at the time; and its credible judgements as to the military capabilities, including similarities and differences, of both these societies and their armies across this long period of conflict.

This comprehensive treatment of a very complex situation is suitable for those wanting to understand Asia during the World War II period, and especially the recent histories of two countries which are our major trading partners. More importantly, it acknowledges why these two giant states remain wary of each other and why some of the wounds inflicted during the conflict may not have healed yet. This book is a worthy addition to our understanding of the Asian region, and the backgrounds and likely attitudes of two key economies, one an emerging superpower.

**Michael Hough**