

*M. Keenan**Ex 2403*

The True Nature of the Manchurian Incident

Written by HONJO, Shigeru
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Introduction

All the records and materials of my own in regard to the Manchurian Incident were incinerated during the air raids. I am obliged, therefore, in writing these notes, to rely on my memory. Moreover, as the Incident happened some fourteen years ago I cannot claim that the dates, places, sequence and other minor points are infallible. I am very sure, however, that there is no mistake in the true nature of the Incident and the quality of my conviction at the time I encountered it.

Chapter 1

General Situation Before the Outbreak of the Incident

I was appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the Kwantung Army in August of the 6th year of Showa (1931) when anti-Japanese movements in China which had steadily become aggravated were getting much worse in spite of Foreign Minister SHIDEHARA's (the present Premier) earnest co-operative policy. This tendency was especially strong in Manchuria, and unhappy incidents occurred day by day. Just before my arrival at the new post, moreover, serious incidents occurred one on top of another and remained unsettled. There were such incidents as the slaughter by the Jun-Ken unit of Captain NAKAMURA and Sergeant-Major ISUGI, who held proper visas, and the ill-treatment of Korean farmers at Wanpao-shan through the joint action of Manchurian Army, officials and people. I was in great anxiety over such a serious situation in Manchuria.

My anxiety was deepened all the more by my first inspection of the units under my command which was made just after my arrival. There is no doubt that according to the Commercial Lease which was acquired during Foreign Minister KOMURA's tenure of office subjects of the Japanese Empire had the right to dwell and trade not only in the areas belonging to the South Manchuria Railway Company (SMRC will be used in the following text) and commercial ports but also in the interior. Nevertheless I saw with my own eyes that even those who were engaging in the medical profession, a cultural work, dealing with inhabitants in Manchuria were unable to reside in the interior because they were subjects of the Japanese Empire. Such being the case, the Japanese residents in Manchuria were forced to assemble and to be cooped up in the above mentioned areas belonging to SMRC and commercial ports which were nothing but points and a line. As the insults and persecutions of Imperial subjects, moreover, spread to these areas, military protection was required even for boys and girls of primary schools on their way to and from school, and in the areas where no troops were stationed schools could not help being closed indefinitely or abolished. Accordingly, Imperial subjects in Manchuria comprising the Japanese and Koreans, who amounted to 1,200,000 or 1,300,000 several years before that time, went back to the homeland in succession. Consequently they amounted to less than 1,000,000 at the time when the Incident broke out, and most of them were second generation people who had no professions or homes to go back to.

According to the Imperial government's policy of avoiding friction with the Manchurian side as much as possible our Kwantung army exhausted every means in order to use caution in order to soften the feeling. For instance, our soldiers did not go out from the areas belonging to SMRC or commercial ports except when military maneuvers were held, and moreover, even during military maneuvers they did not carry ammunition. Nevertheless, when Japanese Army held maneuvers the Manchurian military authorities demanded to be notified in advance of the place and the date for maneuver ignoring the agreement regarding the right of non-notification. When we announced them in advance complying with this demand, they held maneuvers at the same time and place using our notification to their advantage and making our maneuver difficult or impossible to hold. There were, moreover, even some soldiers who conducted demonstrations and made threats to us taking advantage of our not carrying ammunition, and so they caused further trouble. They even prohibited us at last from holding maneuvers in the places which were not in areas belonging to SMRC or the commercial ports, and refused, furthermore, our request for the loan or transfer of specified places for maneuvers in place of the prohibited ones. Thus our drill upon which the Army itself depends was practically checked. In the meantime, violence and insults to Imperial subjects and soldiers were intensified everywhere. As these untoward troubles and breaches of the law arose in great numbers every moment was a crisis full of dynamite at the time I arrived at the post.

Chapter 2

Outline of the Incident

On the 18th of September (1931), the month after my arrival at the post, Manchurian troops who were stationed at Peitaiying in the suburbs of Mukden destroyed with explosives in the neighborhood of Rintiaokou, the South Manchurian Railway tracks which ran through the western border of that camp. Thus the crisis full of dynamite exploded at last.

At that time some of our forces which were practicing railway defense drill at a place not far from the spot hastily went there and drove out the hostile troops who were committing the outrage. At the same time we returned the attack of enemy forces that were covering the retreat of those who had committed the outrage, and with the assistance of units from the rear our army finally succeeded in bottling them up in Peitaiying.

Receiving an urgent dispatch concerning the above, I immediately issued the necessary order to the forces under my command stationed at various points to use force. This was done without having enough time to ask instructions from headquarters. Among forces under my control, however, there were some which started action before the arrival of my orders, and there were some that started attacks previous to the enemy's offensive.

In this way, the Kwantung Army took the offensive all along the line. Now, why did I arbitrarily issue orders to use force to the forces under my control? Why were there some forces which started activities before the arrival of my orders, and why were there some units which started attacks previous to the enemy's offensive?

It is needless to say that the first duty of the Kwantung Army was to protect the railway belonging to SMRC. And this Army was one which, stationed overseas, had also the duties of protecting the residents' lives and property, the interests of its own country and of defending the Army itself. These duties were not inferior to the first duty in importance. According to regulations, the responsibility and right of performing these duties were entrusted to not only me but to all successive Commanders-in-Chief of the Kwantung Army. The situation at that time, moreover, was so critical that we could not help believing that any new occurrence caused by the Manchurian side as mentioned above suggested Pan-Manchurian planned activity.

What further stirred up trouble was the blowing up of the railway line. As Rintiaokou was located near Peitaiying, Manchurian soldiers in that camp stole along the railway and frequently attempted to overturn trains by placing obstructions on the lines. But this was the first time that they had committed such an action as a blowing up. Japanese residents in Manchuria, decreased in number as they were, amounted to at that time about one million including Koreans, and the Imperial interests in Manchuria at that time really constituted a matter which would seal the fate of the Empire.

The military strength of the Kwantung Army which should protect not only all the lines of SMR but also the above mentioned interests and had to defend the Army itself was composed of one peace-footing division and six Independent Defence Battalions and numbered only 15,000 or 16,000. On the other side the military strength of the Manchurian side numbered as many as 200,000, and so it was evident that not only SMR but also our army, residents and interests would have been ruined if the army had idly hesitated. This was the reason why I issued to the units under my control orders to use force without asking for instructions from headquarters with the responsibility and the right which had been naturally given to me. This is why there were some forces which started activities before the arrival of my orders, and why there were some forces which started attacks previous to the enemy's offensive. At the same time, I believe that no matter what country it may belong to this is in keeping with the character of any army called upon to defend itself against a large force with far smaller numbers.

Since then the affair assumed increasing proportions and extended to such areas as Chinchow, Nonkiang, Harbin and Chichihar which were isolated from the areas along the SMR. Although this matter became the target of adverse criticism from all quarters, it could not be helped for an army, especially for an army inferior in strength, to try to defeat enemy forces previous to its attack, since the Manchurian Military occupied important positions, having a big army at its command and directed its attacking pivot toward the areas along SMR and districts of important interests or attempted to harass these areas persistently and, moreover, lives and properties of Imperial residents in the interior who had not been able to take refuge in the areas belonging to SMRC were at stake and petitions for aid had arrived frequently. It is still fresh in my memory that the military representative of the Lytton Investigation Committee truly understood this point very well when the committee made its field investigation.

In this way I did not avoid the use of force so far as it was unavoidable, but I did not hesitate to make efforts to avoid the use of force so far as it was avoidable. The peaceful settlement of the affair in Kilin province by persuading General Hsi Chia, Chief of the Staff of the Kilin

province army and the prevention from counter-attack of General Chang Hai-peng and Yu Chih-shan in Mukden province and General Chang Ching-hui, Commander-in-Chief of the Heilungkiang army and General Ma Chang-shan (rose in revolt later) in Heilungkiang province were the results of these efforts of mine.

In spite of these efforts on my part troubles spread all over Manchuria. Really inevitable as it was, the actual holder of power in Manchuria, General Chang Hsueh-liang's stay in Peking at that time deepened this inevitability. I had been with Jsuo-lin, Hsueh-liang's father, for three years as his military advisor. During this period of time I had rather close relations with him through seeing him all the time and was well acquainted with his sagacity. If General Hsueh-liang had been in Manchuria at that time, or if such a man as General Yang Yu-ting, who very well understood Sino-Japanese relations, had been in Manchuria, even though General Hsueh-liang was absent, the Incident would not have assumed such serious proportions even if we might not have nipped its outbreak in the bud, and on the contrary we could have made the Incident a stepping stone to restoring normal general relations between Japan and China changing evil for good. It is really a matter for regret whenever one considers the deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations since that time.

Chapter 3

Establishment of Manchukuo and Afterwards

As mentioned above, the Kwantung Army rose only in self-defence and took action only in self-defence. At first we did not, therefore, consider any aspect of the problem of Manchuria's future status. These activities of ours, however, did not fail to result in destruction of the Manchurian army as well as the status of Manchuria. We were unable to hope for the stabilization of life and public peace there when there was no order. How could we have expected the safety of our resident nationals' lives and property and of Japanese interests but by the stabilization of life and the public peace? For this reason I supported not only the district self-governing committee which was voluntarily organized by Yuan Ching-kai and others in Mukden within ten days after the outbreak of the Incident, but also the self-governing committees of various localities and thus gave impetus to self-government. In addition to this, I supported the Self-Government Direction Department which was organized by Yu Chung-han and others in Mukden in order to direct self-governing committees all over Manchuria and tried very hard to maintain and improve public peace and life.

Nevertheless as these organizations were only makeshift and temporary, some permanent organization had to be established. Indeed, a cry for this arose promptly and suddenly among the Self-Governing Direction Department, district self-governing committee circles, and military and civil notables and prominent men in all quarters who knew our activities well. It was, of course, a matter which we were longing for and so was quickly developed. I should like to speak here about our desire concerning Manchuria at that time. Co-existence and co-prosperity of Japan and China were absolute necessities for the defense of the Japanese Empire and China or Greater East Asia. At the same time they were the absolute necessities from the point of view of the existence for the Japanese Empire and this has been, I am sure, our true ideal towards China since

the Russo-Japanese War in spite of the warping of the original intention and the very opposite result reached because of the intervention of miscellaneous untoward events, etc. It is further recollected that since the period of the Ching Dynasty Japanese including ourselves took part in the efforts made for the self-stabilization of China though we were only their assistants. It is also recollected that those who most earnestly supported the reform movement since the time of Sun Wen and Hung Hsing were Japanese public-spirited men and that all the prominent figures in the reform movement were pro-Japanese notables or old civil and military government students to Japan. This applied to Manchuria most conspicuously and the Russo-Japanese War was fought only on this ground. Accordingly all that we expected of Manchuria after the outbreak of the Incident was not a matter of form, but nothing else than the permanent security and co-existence and prosperity of Japan and China based on the everlasting foundation of normal and harmonious relations between Japan and Manchuria which presupposed the stabilization and prosperity of Manchuria.

What concrete plan should we adopt? Should we desire General Chang Hsueh-liang's return? The motives which produced the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident existed during General Hsueh-liang's administration. Besides, after things had reached such a pass that the Japanese national feeling would not receive the General's return warmly. And even if they had welcomed his return, General Hsueh-liang's pride would no longer have made it endurable to accept this welcome. The Chang family was alienated from the people for the abundant reasons that the Chang family's misadministration for two generations since General Tsuo-lin's time and the enormous increase of expenses accompanying their policy of military and administrative advance into the areas inside the Great Wall etc. naturally made the extortionate taxation of Manchurian inhabitants inevitable. The Chang family's return to Manchuria was, therefore, impossible. How about then handing over Manchuria to the Nanking Government? Nothing could have been better than that from the point of view of the importance of Manchuria and the fundamental ideal as to relations between Japan and China. But the original cause of the Manchurian Incident truly existed in the Nanking Government's policy against Japan. Besides, the Nanking Government was still in the course of bringing about and continuing a state of confusion. Consequently judging from the situation at that time handing over Manchuria to the Nanking Government would have only meant giving impetus to the anti-Japanese movement and confusion in Manchuria. In the same as the former alternative, therefore, this case was not worth considering as an actual possibility.

The opinions of notables and interested persons on the Manchurian side were similar to our own opinion mentioned above. Then Mr. Yu Chung-han and others finally boldly advocated the establishment of a new state. This proposal was unanimously supported on the instant and I, of course, also agreed to it.

In history China has never occupied Manchuria substantially, notwithstanding the fact that Manchuria once occupied China completely. The majority of the inhabitants in Manchuria are, it is true of the Chinese race, but most of these people have settled in Manchuria for several or more than ten generations and so, they are rather more Manchurian than Chinese in their life and sentiment. As the topography of Manchuria is, moreover, a basin surrounded by great ranges of mountains and great rivers, it is naturally suitable to build as a state.

If such a state could be built, then the ideal would be carried out for the first time. In this way on 1st of March of the 7th year of Showa (1932) the independence of Manchukuo was declared, which placed its basis on the way of the King, as its skeleton, as this is the essence of Oriental morality, and racial co-operation, as its flesh, as this advocated the equality of all the inhabitants rejecting the conception sense of the superiority of the strong, and the conception of oppressing the weak and racial discrimination.

This being so I expected independent Manchukuo, as mentioned above, to develop peacefully and soundly. I also expected, of course, that the profound relations between Japan and Manchuria, existing from the time before the Middle Kingdom was established as a state, to become normal and unshakeable. I expected not only this but also that, having this foundation, Manchukuo would become outwardly an impregnable fortress for the defence of the Orient and inwardly a wedge and model for the co-existence and co-prosperity between Japan and China, and at the same time it would become a modern state worthy of praise from the whole world, not to speak of the whole Orient. In order to accomplish this purpose, it was my belief that the people of Manchuria should not fail to cope with the difficulties of the time of transition and that the Japanese Empire also should not spare sacrifices no matter how great they might be.

Just after the declaration of the establishment of the state, on the 9th of March, Pu Yi, the former Emperor Hsuan Tung of the Tsing dynasty, was installed in office as Administrator of Manchukuo. From the very fact that the foundation of the establishment of the state was based upon the co-operation of races, it is clear that Pu Yi's installation did not mean the restoration of the Jsing dynasty but, on the contrary, it rather precluded the restoration, both legally and in sentiment. In fact, Pu Yi was called and installed in the office of Administrator because of his personal character and the Manchurian people's retrospective sentiment for Manchukuo because he was a descendant of the Jsing dynasty which came from Manchuria.

After one year's tenure of office I resigned from the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Kwantung Army. Consequently all major affairs in Manchukuo, not to speak of the execution of the monarchical rule, happened after my resignation. For this reason I am not qualified to write about the situation in Manchukuo after that time. It is a matter for regret that conditions in Manchukuo since then up to now have diverged so greatly from my hopes and expectations and so definitely from the true idea of the original Japanese policy toward Manchuria and China. This was owing to the gradual increase in the number of Japanese Manchukuoan officials, the lack of harmony with Manchukuoan officials caused thereby and the frequent changes in the executions of our policy toward Manchukuo, etc.

(Written in early October, 20th year of Showa. (T.N. 1945)

Translation Certificate

I, William E. Clarke, of the Defense Language Branch, hereby certify that the foregoing translation described in the attached affidavit is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, a correct translation and is as near as possible to the meaning of the original document.

/s/ William E. Clarke

Tokyo, Japan
Date 15 Dec 1947