

Prelude to War

Japanese Expansion

Japan controlled Korea since the late 1800's. Japanese troops had been located in this area to exercise trade with Manchuria for raw materials and finished goods. The Japanese Army wanted more of Manchuria's resources and didn't want to pay for them. In 1931, the Japanese army began to attack Chinese troops in Manchuria. When the war was halted with the influence of the League of Nations, Manchuria was in Japanese hands. The Japanese army controlled all of Manchuria.

The second Sino-Japanese War had begun. Large-scale fighting did not begin until 1937, when Japanese units were attacked. Japan seized the major coastal cities, and much of the countryside. The Chinese units, plagued by lack of supplies, corruption, and poor training, fell back on a wide front.

In December 1937, Japanese units were on the outskirts of Nanking. The Chinese Army put up a token defense, and its leaders fled. The city would be punished harshly when it surrendered. As many as 300,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians would be executed, and rape, theft, and abuse were rampant. This was known as the Rape of Nanking. Here is an account of the atrocities:

"Those suffered most from the barbarity were women. They were not only raped by the Japanese, they were often brutally killed by the Japanese after the rape. "Sometimes (Japanese) cut off their breasts to reveal their white ribs; sometimes Japanese pierce through their lower body with bayonets, let them cry in pain! Sometimes they sticks wooden sticks, reed pipe or carrots into their lower body and stir, until they are dead, Japanese soldiers clap their hands and loudly laugh alongside"

Another account:

"The bodies in the villages, piled up in tens or hundreds, laid in ditches, ponds, fields or among haystacks. The horror of the scenes is hard to describe. Especially women..., their faces were dark, teeth fell, cheeks broken, blood in their mouth, their breasts had been cut off, chest and abdomen had been pierced through, intestines dragged on the ground, lower abdomens had been kicked at, their bodies had been bayoneted randomly."

By 1938, Chinese and Japanese troops were fighting in stalemate. This stalemate would continue until the Japanese would advance against the Allies in 1941.

1. Why did Japan want to control Manchuria?
2. Explain some of the atrocities that occurred during the Rape of Nanking in 1937?