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"The Battle for Manchuria and the Fate of China: Siping, 1946 (Book Review)" by Harold M. Tanner

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Another startling weakness, which undoubtedly is not Bowker's fault, is that his endnotes are not included in the book. They exist but to see them the reader is directed to the publisher's website or Bowker's personal website. The decision to omit them from the book presumably reflects the publisher's concern about the cost of including seventy-three more pages in the book, but it was a disservice to both the author and his readers.

There is little in this book that will interest students of Canadian military history. To be fair, it was not on the whole an interesting or at least encouraging decade for the armed forces, as the King government spent the decade cutting the defence budget in the naïve hope that the armed forces would not be needed again in the foreseeable future. At the same time, even though the army was used on a number of occasions to suppress strikes, the only strike that Bowker discusses is the Winnipeg General Strike, in which the army was not involved (although veterans were).

These are quibbles, however. Bowker, who is recently retired from a distinguished career in the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs but is also a qualified academic historian with a particular interest in Canadian social history, has written a highly readable and generally thorough and fascinating account of the 1920s, showing the tremendous impact of the Great War on Canadian society. It will be widely read and enjoyed by both historians and the general public.

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The Battle for Manchuria and the Fate of China: Siping, 1946. Harold M. Tanner. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013. Pp. 266.

Following the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), China again descended into the throes of civil war. The forces of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) and Mao Tse-tung's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clashed until 1949 when the leadership of the KMT were finally routed and forced to flee to Taiwan. The ensuing political and historical dialogue in the West of "who lost China?" resulted in much finger pointing and revisionist analyses of the Chinese Civil War. Tanner's *The Battle for Manchuria and the Fate of China: Siping, 1946* tackles a specific argument of the revisionist school: that but

for American General George C. Marshall's imposition of a ceasefire agreement between the KMT and the CCP following the Second Battle of Siping in 1946,¹³ the KMT could have destroyed the CCP forces in Manchuria and achieved a decisive victory that could have changed the outcome of the Chinese Civil War. Tanner cautions against the use of revisionist history, successfully refutes the hypothesis, and provides a comprehensive history and analysis of the Second Battle of Siping in the process. Tanner explains, "if you want to draw a 'lesson of history' from some event that occurred in the past, the first step might be to understand what actually happened" (p. 221).

Tanner's work is the first book-length treatment of the Second Battle of Siping in the Western world. Only Carol Wetzel's 1972 PhD dissertation, "From the Jaws of Defeat: Lin Piao and the 4th Field Arm in Manchuria," came close, but her work was much narrower in scope and could not benefit from the significant growth in Chinese-language scholarship since Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the 1980s. Tanner, proficient in English and Chinese, has made excellent use of these sources—including articles, memoirs, and official histories—and has produced a nuanced, thorough, and interesting description of the battle that makes a welcome addition to the scholarship on this critical period in the Chinese Civil War, and more generally, the Cold War.

Much of this Chinese-language material has been published in China in the past decade and will consequently be brand new to the Western reader. Tanner also makes good use of KMT and American archival records, held in the United States and Taiwan. However, he was unable to access CCP archives and is necessarily forced to rely upon primary and secondary source documents published in China with at least the tacit approval of the CCP. Tanner does not evade this shortcoming, and expressly states when access to such records would be particularly informative. He also clearly states when a memoir was written well after an event and the likely influence of the political climate in China at the time of writing on a particular version of events. The net effect of this absence is therefore minimal—the narrative remains comprehensive and balanced—and simply means

¹³ There were, in fact, four battles for Siping, a small city in the plains of Manchuria. Although Tanner explains all four, the focus is on the Second Battle of Siping, the battle in which the CCP conducted a positional defence against the advancing KMT forces in order to gain an advantage at the bargaining table.

that opportunities for further research remain when such archival materials become available to researchers.

Tanner begins his book by providing an excellent description of both the physical and human terrain in Manchuria. He provides a useful selection of maps, although they do not include all of the locations referred to in the narrative, and a detailed map of Siping and its outlying areas is not provided. After outlining the history of foreign influence in the region, he begins his detailed analysis in December 1945, the beginning of General George C. Marshall's mission in China to resolve the conflict between the KMT and the CCP. From then on, Tanner skilfully weaves a narrative that balances the points of view of Marshall, the KMT and CCP leadership at the bargaining table, and the military commanders on the ground in Manchuria. He reveals a suitably dynamic environment where plans were frequently modified in light of changing political and military circumstances. In doing so, he shreds any preconceived notion of a monolithic CCP acting with uniform support from the Soviet Union (descriptions of specific interactions between the Soviet and CCP forces are particularly interesting), or of any meaningful solidarity between Marshall and Chiang Kai-shek. Tanner is at his best when describing the interplay between these military and political leaders at all levels and stages of the battle.

As far as the events on the battlefield itself, Tanner's narrative is effective and compelling. Although the Second Battle of Siping is not particularly complicated in terms of firepower and manoeuvre, the events leading up to the battle are more complex. The withdrawal of the Soviet invasion force, the deployment of the CCP and KMT forces into Manchuria, and their early engagements were, at times, very chaotic. However, Tanner gets his reader to the start-state of the battle with all of the necessary tools and with minimal fuss. He discusses issues of recruiting, supply, and evolutions in tactics and doctrine. That said, this is a "top down" analysis of the battle, and although there are glimpses into the lives of the soldiers and civilians, it is hardly the focus. Those looking for a soldier's eye view of the battle will be unsatisfied; Tanner rarely ventures below the brigade level.

After concluding his analysis of the battle and the interplay between various leaders, Tanner returns to the issue of whether or not the Second Battle of Siping could have been decisive had the KMT pursuit of the defeated CCP forces not been stymied by Marshall's ceasefire agreement. In short, it appears that CCP casualties in the

Second Battle of Siping, along with the military prowess of the available KMT forces, have been greatly exaggerated. Furthermore, the KMT were hard-pressed to manage CCP guerrilla operations further to the south, and they were generally concerned with the potential reaction of the Soviet Union if they were to pursue the CCP forces further north. Although we can never know the outcome of a hypothetical, Tanner convincingly shows that the argument that the KMT could have fatally crushed the CCP in Manchuria is dubious, at best. The final chapter also includes some insightful passages regarding war and memory, as Tanner briefly describes how the battle has been remembered in China as well as the West.

Tanner's book makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge of a critical period in the Chinese Civil War and the Cold War more generally. In making solid use of available Chinese-language documents, providing a compelling narrative of the battle and an effective description of the interplay between the leaders involved, and dispelling one of the revisionist myths associated with the Second Battle of Siping, it stands as the authoritative text on these events until such time as the relevant CCP archives become available to researchers.

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