Chapter I

The Death of a City

"However decisive the defeat experienced by a state may be, still the retreat by the army into the interior, its fortresses and its national levies must be brought into operation."

—Von Clausewitz

In July, 1937, the Japanese concentrated their troops about the crenelated battlements of Peiping and invaded China south of the Great Wall. Quickly they overran most of north China, thrust into the Yangtze Valley and captured and raped the Chinese capital at Nanking.

During this process the invaders dealt out body blows to the Chinese Army from which, at the time, it seemed it might never recover. At Shanghai, during three months of heroic and costly resistance under the guns of the Japanese Navy, no less than seventy-eight Chinese divisions, unprotected by planes and without tanks, had been chewed up piecemeal and nearly decimated. There had been no time adequately to rebuild this destroyed force. The country lacked trained reserves, and replacements in the depleted divisions often did not know how to fire rifles. As a consequence, China, which was placing its faith in ultimate victory on a long war, was in a very dangerous position. The problem in its simplest terms was how to gain time to build up a new army and to arouse a traditionally non-militaristic, nonnationalistic race to resist.

To accomplish this, Generals Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi, provincial militarists from the southern Province of Kwangsi, who had in the past often opposed Chiang Kai-shek in civil war, were ordered to hold the city of Hsuchow at the junction of the north-south Tientsin-Nanking and east-west Lunghai Railways. For four months throughout the winter and spring of 1938, Generals Li and

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Pai held off the Japanese attacking the city from both the north and the south. Behind the screen of their resistance, Chinese troops were redisposed, levies were summoned from the far-off provinces, new cadres were trained, a plan for a long war was laid down and the long-sleeping people of China were further awakened.

When China saw Generals Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi desperately holding their positions against all Japanese assaults, you