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China: Ichang Battle

JAPS LOSE offensive in drive on Chungking. Fourteenth U. S. Air Force aids Chinese advance on 300-mile front.

It is difficult to assign relative importance to battles taking place on the many and widely separated fronts of this global war, in which geography must be the first yardstick. Measured by the number of troops involved or the toll of the dead and wounded, there are almost daily engagements on the Russian front which dwarf the 19-day



Gen. Chiang Kai-shek: Capital Saved

conquest of Attu, yet the U. S. capture of this bleak Aleutian island will doubtless rank as the outstanding battle of the last fortnight, for the strategic value of the position gained. Similarly, last week's Chinese victory over the Japs in the vicinity of Ichang must go down in history as one of the significant battles of this world war. China herself has called it the biggest victory in the six years of the war with Japan.

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The Battle of Yichang

Several weeks ago the Japanese stepped up the fighting in China on a big scale, which observers interpreted as a last-minute attempt to knock China out of the war before the Allies could lend effective aid. Chances of such a knock-out looked good: China was rather effectively cut off from Allied aid by a coastal blockade and the closing of the Burma Road; her troops had been fighting almost constantly for six years; her national resources were close to the bottom of the barrel; and her politics suffered from the clever "Japanization" already accomplished in much of her lost territory. Chances looked still better when a strong Jap army pushed through China's rice bowl provinces to within less than 260 miles of Chungking, China's provisional capital and the headquarters of her Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. This threat to the capital was as big politically as militarily, for had Chiang Kai-shek been driven westward into the mountains of Tibet, he might have lost more than another chunk of China; he might have lost his political hold on the Chinese people.

He lost neither. After two weeks of retreat, his armies, under the leadership of Gen. Hsueh Yueh, "the Little Tiger," suddenly took the offensive some 35 miles southwest of Ichang, and in a brilliant action recaptured Yuyangkwan. Then this Chinese force, expected at most to hold the approaches to Chungking, pushed on to encircle and begin the destruction of five more Jap divisions at Changyang, and to hurl the enemy back at several other important points along a 300-mile front. By week's end the Chinese had annihilated 30,000 of Japan's defeated army of 100,000, and were directly across the Yangtse River from the important Jap base of Ichang. Everywhere the ground forces were aided by roaring squadrons of Liberator bombers and Warhawk fighters of the 14th United States Air Force.