

September 18 remembered as war's start

A bell rang and a siren went off on Monday at the September 18 Incident History Museum in Shenyang, Liaoning province, to remember the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression 86 years ago.

Cui Junguo, who recently retired after serving at the museum for more than two decades, knows virtually every detail of the incident.

Behind the museum is an expressway linking Harbin with Dalian. More than eight decades ago, it was part of the South Manchuria Railway, where the incident occurred.

On Sept 18, 1931, members of the Japanese Kwantung Army stationed in northeast China blew up a section of the railway near Liutiaohu and falsely accused the Chinese military of doing it.

Using the incident as a pretext, the Japanese bombarded Shenyang and launched its invasion of Northeast China. By January 1932, all three provinces in the region were occupied by Japanese troops.

"It's painful when I hear the siren pierce the sky," said Cui, 60. "It's like you suddenly travel back in time."

The bell was rung 14 times, representing the 14 years during which the Chinese people fought the invaders. The period has been referred to as the darkest days of modern China. More than 80 years have passed, but the memory remains.

"No one in Shenyang gets married on Sept 18," Cui said.

People around China hold events every year to mark major incidents in the Japanese invasion, including the Lugouqiao (Marco Polo Bridge) Incident and the Nanjing Massacre.

"The way you treat history defines your future path," said Wang Jianxue, vice-chairman of the Society for the Study of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Historical Materials.

In late August, the documentary film *Twenty Two*, featuring the stories of 22 so-called comfort women – sex slaves for Japanese troops – became an unexpected hit. It is the first Chinese documentary to surpass 100 million yuan at the box office.

Another documentary, *The Truth of Harbin Unit 731*, was released by Japanese public broadcaster NHK. It revealed crimes committed by Unit 731, a covert biological and chemical warfare research and development unit of the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. The film triggered heated discussions among Japanese audiences.

"The history seems far away, but it is always with us. Only by remembering it

can we ensure the horrors are never repeated,” said Su Zhiliang, a professor at Shanghai Normal University.

Cui’s daughter became a guide at the museum five years ago.

“It is sort of an inheritance,” Cui said. “Telling that part of history is meaningful, and I believe she can do a good job.”