

THE SACK OF NANKING

Fifty thousand blood-crazed beasts in Japanese uniform roamed China's fallen capital for four weeks in a mad saturnalia of butchery, rape and pillage without parallel in modern history. That story, suppressed by the Japanese military who chased news correspondents and foreign officials out of Nanking, is told for the first time by one of the few Americans who remained, a "go-between" for the U. S. Government with 20 years of service in China. He saw roped bundles of humanity saturated with gasoline and ignited for a Nipponese holiday.

THE occupation of Nanking by the Japanese army in December, 1937, resulted in the greatest authenticated massacre in modern history.

Old men and old women, babes in arms and babes unborn were not spared. I saw 20,000 men, women, and children of all ages, thousands of civilians along with surrendered soldiers, done to death. The newly-paved streets of Nanking were splashed with blood for four weeks after Japanese troops broke through the ancient thick walls.

These helpless thousands fell before blasts from batteries of machine guns, at the points of bayonets, under the heavy butts of rifles, from the explosion of hand grenades. More terrible still, roped bundles of live men were saturated with gasoline and ignited to satisfy the fiendish pleasure of 50,000 Nipponese soldiers filled with uncontrollable impulses to destroy everything before them.

Why has the full story of this greatest of all mass murders not been told before? The answers are surprisingly simple: All communications with the outside world were cut immediately when the Japanese entered the city.

OldMagazineArticles.com

Nanking

Newsmen found it useless to remain and Japanese army officials were delighted to assist their departure, realizing even then that their troops were getting out of hand and that much blood must inevitably flow. Stories that seeped out through Shanghai only hinted at the truth. Missionaries looked to the future and wisely remained silent. Business men of ten nations found themselves deserted by their diplomatic representatives and were not so foolish as to bluff without a vestige of backing. This, then, was Japan's private party—an intimate "family affair."

Although a state of siege had existed for four weeks, order was maintained inside the walls up to the day Japanese troops marched in. Even while air battles raged overhead and shells from warships and heavy artillery dropped down to kill hundreds of innocent victims, there was a minimum amount of hysteria and a complete absence of looting or damage to either foreign or native property. Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers paid for what they took, and respected the rights of civilians even in the midst of battle. Throughout the siege they remained in unbroken ranks under cool, even if hastily-trained officers.

There were warnings by Japan to evacuate, of course, and most foreigners did. We who remained—18 Americans, five Germans, two Russians, an Englishman and an Austrian—were fully aware of what might be in store for us. But our job was here; the Chinese with whom we had worked and traded in times of peace were compelled to face the worst. To us it seemed cowardly to run. Although members of our Embassy staff were ordered to leave, it was with their moral backing that we refused to join the exodus.

By wireless and messenger service we arranged with both Japanese and Chinese military commands to respect an International Zone for refugees roughly two and one-half miles square. This territory embraced American-maintained Ginling College and Nanking University and their grounds, the Chinese Supreme Court Building and the Nanking Law College. Here we stored 2,000 tons of rice, 10,000 large bags of flour, and were assigned 450 Chinese policemen to maintain order. City Mayor Ma gave us 50,000 Chinese dollars for refugee supplies and at the same time relinquished control of the area into our hands.

On December 10 the Generalissimo

Nanking

decided that Nanking could be held no longer. Under General Tang, Minister of Defense, 25,000 soldiers were left to slow the Japanese advance until Chiang's army of 200,000 men could escape. The withdrawal was cleverly planned and executed in orderly fashion. For two days the Japs wasted ammunition on an army that didn't exist. Before they realized the situation it was 100 miles away, marching in unbroken ranks toward a new defense line previously decided upon.

By December 12 a downpour of incendiary shells was starting fires throughout the city. High explosive and incendiary bombs were falling from the sky simultaneously. We could see two Japanese blimps hanging over Sun Yat-sen's tomb on Purple Mountain, undoubtedly directing the fire of guns beyond. That afternoon it became apparent that the small defending force could not hold the invaders off longer. General Tang took flight without making adequate provisions for withdrawal of the 25,000 men. Within a few hours it was apparent to even the coolie-privates that there was no central command. Panic was the inevitable result. It was then that 30 days of death began.

A wide avenue leading toward a city gate and opening on the Yangtze River was packed for three miles with soldiers, refugees, and military equipment. The fleeing thousands were mad with fear; they fought each other for room to run. The thoroughfare quickly became a tangled mass of human beings, heavy military equipment, and personal belongings. An ammunition truck caught fire and exploded, then rickshas, automobiles, and carts started going up in flames. At the gate itself more cars jammed, caught fire. The momentum of the rushing mob pushed hundreds into roaring flames. Overhead, Japanese planes, unmolested, now daringly swept low, to mow down refugees and soldiers alike with wide-open machine guns. For the weak, the aged, and the wounded, there was no escape. They were crushed to bloody masses by the mob where they lay fallen.

Approximately half of those soldiers must have escaped. Many were drowned, however, when overcrowded junks capsized and sank along the waterfront. Hastily-constructed rafts of lumber also capsized and dumped their loads in the icy water. Swimming survivors were relentlessly sprayed with bullets by the swooping

Nanking

planes. The muddy Yangtze flowing by Nanking's walls carried a thick scum of corpses southward to the Yellow Sea that night.

During the afternoon a detail of three companies rallied under young officers and attempted to attack Japanese troops three miles outside Nanking. They were surrounded and completely annihilated—with one exception. A young friend of mine escaped and turned up with the story at the Zone office two days later.

I climbed over mountains of dead on December 13 to see smoking ruins along that wide and formerly impressive avenue of which all China had been proud. Charred bodies were everywhere, in places piled six and eight deep. At the gate the smell of death—a terrible smell I shall never forget—was almost overpowering. Looking back toward the city, the scene was a jumbled one of corpses, twisted automobile chassis, the still mouths of guns, thickly-strewn shells and cartridges, and blood-soaked bundles of bedding.

On the top of the wall a three-block-long row of improvised ropes dangled in the wind. Made of puttees, shirts, quilts, even ammunition belts, they had been used by the soldiers in scaling the 60-foot brick and stone barrier when flames enveloped the gateway. I saw scores of broken bodies of young men lying below, tragically demonstrative of the haste with which their tools of escape had been fashioned. A few were still alive, evidenced by a twitching arm or leg here and there, as I looked down on them.

So ended the peaceful, well-ordered regime China had been enjoying in Nanking, and on which the Republic had built its hopes for the future. When I returned to the Zone late that day the Japanese were pouring into the city from breaches in the walls. Faster and faster they came and all through the night—thousands of men, tanks, artillery, infantry, trucks. Little did we know then of the terrors that were ahead. We were naïve enough to believe the handbills dropped throughout that day from airplanes: "Remain in your homes," they had said. "Your neighbors from Japan want to help you restore order and peace." Instead, for the defenseless Chinese residents, it was the beginning of four weeks of hellish brutality and beastliness.

We met the Japanese as they entered. The Zone agreement was explained to them. Promises were secured that sol-

Nanking

diers who turned their guns over to us would be spared. Quickly the news spread throughout the city. By 10 o'clock that night all of us were hard at work disarming Chinese men and boys who sought our promised protection. Large piles of guns were heaped at each Zone entrance. A few yielded their arms only after prolonged argument and elaborate promises on our part. How we were to regret those assurances later!

I saw the Japanese enter the government building district, mowing down civilians who fled at their approach. To run was to be plugged instantly. Many were shot in seeming sporting mood by the Japs. I saw them laugh at terror plainly visible on faces of coolies, merchants, and students alike. It reminded me of a picnic of devils; such slaughter was their diabolical pleasure.

A Japanese colonel and his staff called at the Zone office next morning (December 14) and asked us to turn over 6,000 soldiers he said we were hiding. Of course the number there was much smaller, but since they had succeeded in finding civilian clothing we could not locate them. The officers left with threats, but four times that day squads of soldiers came and attempted to get our automobiles away. They succeeded in stealing three in another part of the Zone while we argued with those in our office.

American flags were tacked onto all American property throughout Nanking. There was nothing we could do when they were deliberately torn off and trampled in the dirt before our eyes. At the Zone hospital soldiers forced their way into the wards and jerked fountain pens and watches from the nurses' uniforms. While this was going on a delegation from military headquarters arrived to offer all foreigners transportation to Shanghai aboard a destroyer. Their anger at our refusal was obvious. They had not counted on foreign observers while they were "bringing order to Nanking."

Outside the Zone the destruction of life was increasing hourly. Women were hunted down in all Chinese homes. If resistance was offered against rape the bayonet was theirs. Sixty-year-old women and 11- and 12-year-old girls were not immune. They were thrown to the ground and raped openly in the December sunlight. Many were horribly mutilated. It was awful, too, to hear the screams of women coming from houses with barred doors.

OldMagazineArticles.com

Nanking

For one day we succeeded in keeping raiding squads out of the Zone, but they became more persistent with each visit. On the second night of occupation a large group of officers and privates forced their way past us and began rounding up men and boys who looked physically fit, taking many civilians with a few soldiers. Under the glare of our automobile headlights they were tied in groups of 40 or 50 with ropes. The defiance in the faces of these Chinese, even as they were led away on that last death march, is the greatest proof I could offer that China is at last a nation as we "patriotic" westerners understand the word.

The Japs hadn't even the nicety to lead them out of earshot. We could plainly hear the rapid fire of the machine guns ten minutes later, snuffing out the lives of young students with whom we had worked for years, and to whom we had pledged the Zone's protection. What use was it, I could not help thinking that night, to teach such students the superiority of western thought and culture, when western arms and ammunition were used to snap out their lives before they had a chance to apply our teachings?

Mass executions were still under way next morning when Zone officials assembled for a conference. We could hear the guns going somewhere near. Perhaps the military commanders did not realize the atrocities their soldiers were perpetrating! It was decided to call upon them, explain the situation tactfully, and ask that something be done to curb the actions of these men running wild on the streets and through the battered homes. But two hours later the officials were back with disheartening news. They had been unable to see anyone higher in rank than a corporal. He was unable to speak English, German, or French. They were unable to speak Japanese. There had been much bowing and smiling by all concerned, but we could still hear those machine guns, punctuated now and then by anguished screams.

On December 16, rape began in earnest. The Japs seemed to have renewed their determination to reduce both human lives and all Chinese property to absolute waste. More than 100 women—seven of them librarians from the university library—were snatched out of the Zone and hauled away in army trucks. Others were running frantically along back streets, darting into doorways seeking

Nanking

escape when a Jap was sighted. On that day, too, 50 of our Zone policemen were led away and shot. When an American protested he was held by privates and slapped by an officer. In spite of such indignities none of us actually feared for our lives, but it was maddening to see the people, with whom we had years ago cast our lot, slaughtered before our very eyes.

By this time we had established 25 camps within Zone territory, with terrified refugee populations ranging from 200 to 12,000 in each of them. In scattered buildings 40,000 more were housed; 9,000 women were segregated in one building in an effort to prevent their being assaulted.

On December 18 there were few American flags that had not been torn down throughout Nanking. English and German flags had gone days before. At the American School (for children of Embassy officials, businessmen, and missionaries) Chinese watchmen were told they would be killed if flags were tacked up again. Fires were raging in all sections of the city, and soldiers were openly threatening to burn everything after the residents were killed. "These are conquered people," a Japanese major said to me. "Why should they expect favors?"

Refugees—even those in our camps—were robbed of everything they possessed, meager as these possessions were. Bedding, fuel, clothing, all money down to the last copper pennies, even handfuls of dirty rice were snatched from them by the soldiers. Death was the sure retort to any whimper at the taking. When soldiers began confiscating stores of rice we were rationing to our food kitchens inside the Zone, we closed them and hid the rice.

Japanese Embassy officials on December 19 promised early restoration of order. As proof of this they wrote out important and official-looking documents to post on foreign properties. These were promptly torn off by Jap soldiers and the wild party continued unabated. Foreign and Chinese houses alike were entered as many as ten times daily by different foraging parties. Glass knobs from doors, toilet and light fixtures, even locks were dug out with bayonets and carried away.

Bloated, rotting dead bodies were everywhere; on the streets, in houses, filling every lake inside the walls, piled high along the river outside. Dogs wandered from carcass to carcass. The stench was overpowering.

OldMagazineArticles.com

Nanking

There was no escaping it; our clothing became saturated with the odors. When Chinese Red Cross sanitary squads attempted to rid the streets of bodies, wooden coffins they constructed were taken from them and used for "victory" bonfires by soldiers. Scores of Red Cross workers, clothed in regulation uniforms, were slain. Their bodies fell on those of corpses they had been removing.

On December 20, Zone officials called again at the Japanese Embassy. Authenticated lists of brutal violence were presented. If they could do nothing with the military, could they not send a true story of what was happening to the Government in Tokyo? Surely the Japanese nation would not countenance such slaughter. We were assured they would "do their best." An Embassy attaché came into the conference room to announce, jubilantly, that 17 special civilian policemen were arriving on a cruiser that night and that order certainly would be restored. Seventeen policemen and 50,000 murder-and-loot-crazed soldiers!

On Christmas Eve all of Taiping Road, Nanking's most important shopping street, was in flames. I drove through showers of sparks and over embers and charred bodies to see the Japs, torches in their hands, setting fire to buildings after loading mer-

continued...