

So frequently and lightly have Japanese officials passed off the deeds of their armies in Nanking by references to the conduct of "every army in every war" and to the experiences of Belgium in particular, that I have been impelled to review the matter in order to satisfy my own curiosity. What is written here is based upon the following sources: (1) Memory of general textbooks; (2) memory of the Report of the Bryce Commission; (3) statements of German friends; (4) summary of the reports of the official Belgian Commission of Inquiry, as found in "The Times History of the War"; (5) "A Journal from Our Legation in Belgium", by Hugh Gibson, then Secretary to the American Legation in Brussels; (6) finally, and mainly, upon the articles "Belgium" in the Encyclopedia Britannica, written by Henri and Jacques Pirenne, the former a historian of worldwide reputation (See Eleventh Edition new volume numbered XXX, and Fourteenth Edition for an abridged and studiously moderate report).

What is said here applies only to the killing of civilians and the burning of houses during the entry of Belgium and the early weeks of occupation. It is alleged by the Germans that these acts were in retaliation for sniping or other firing by civilians. Against that allegation must be put considerable testimony of high quality that there was no such firing; the fact that some of the massacres occurred in places that already been quietly occupied for several days; the acknowledged fact that every commune published and distributed strong instructions against any hostile act whatsoever by a civilian; and no small amount of evidence from German sources that a program of terrorism was adopted in anger at the unexpected resistance of Belgium and in hope that the national spirit might be so broken as to shorten the unwelcome delay in the advance upon France (for instance, maps were issued to certain German officers, showing the towns to be burned). Some of the atrocities occurred in or near places in which there had been a spirited but brief stand by the Belgian armed forces; others did not.

There was much gross cruelty. Large numbers of persons were driven into burning houses; men were chosen casually from large numbers, shot en masse, finished off with clubbed rifles in sight of their wives and children, who then were ordered to bury the bodies; no small number of women and children were shot or burned deliberately, including 110 in Dinant alone. Various units of German troops were supplied with incendiary strips of chemicals.

Nowhere have I seen a satisfactory total figure, indeed any specific figure for the number of civilians deliberately killed. However, the latest article referred to above, reports for the four provinces of Namur, Brabant, Hainault, and Antwerp, 3208 persons. The fuller account in the Eleventh Edition new volume reports 1061 for Liege and over 800 for Luxembourg. Limburg, East Flanders, and West Flanders apparently suffered less grievously. The national total seems to be 5000 to 6000. The earlier article reports the deliberate burning of 3000 houses in Namur, 2000 in Liege, 1500 in Luxembourg.

We now estimate about 12,000 civilians killed in Nanking after the Japanese occupation; not to mention 25,000 to 30,000 unarmed and passive remnants of the Chinese defence forces, killed within or near the walled city after the occupation. It seems clear that Nanking alone suffered more than the whole of Belgium in wanton slaughter, and perhaps in deliberate burning (about which we are not yet ready to make a detailed estimate). The vista of cruelty over hundreds of miles in various parts of China is fearful. But it will never be seen in one conspectus.

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