

Letter from Dr. George Fitch - Y.M.C.A. Nanking Jan 6, 1938

Dear -----,

Our consular representatives are here at last -- the first to come of any consuls: Allison, Espy and McFadyen. And were we glad to see them! They arrived at 11 and had tiffin with us and brought us a lot of news from the outside world. We gave them an earful too! The British and German officials will come on the 10th, but we have no information as to when any of the rest of our community are to come. Many of course will never return. There is so little left to bring them back. For Nanking has been systematically looted and burned until it is only a skeleton of its former self. Most of the foreign properties are still standing, though almost without exception they have been looted, and so are most of the government buildings, but most of the shops and many of the homes of the Chinese have been burned out -- after the victors had taken everything from them that they wanted.

The Y.M.C.A. went with the rest, deliberately fired. I got there just an hour or so after it had been started. I wonder if that brief note of mine in which I mentioned that it had "gone up in smoke" ever reached you? We have had no letters for weeks.....

At present we are virtually prisoners here. We cannot even go outside the walls to Hsiakwan. That can't last forever, though..... On the whole we have fared pretty well - our foreign group of 22, I mean, as far as food and material comforts go. But Nanking has been a hell on earth if there ever was one. I never dreamt anything could be quite so hellish in this modern age. I am glad I stayed, of course, for aside from escaping the bombing of the Panay our group here has been able to perform a service that the city, the people, would have been worse off without. Though we sometimes wonder if anything could possibly be worse. Nor is it all over yet. Only this noon, while Allison and the rest were still here and Okasaki, the consul-general from Shanghai had just come in for a brief call, three of us had to hurry off to chase soldiers out of Brady's house; and from there to the office where we were stopped to oust soldiers in the Rural Leaders' Training School; who were demanding women both places within the Zone where soldiers are now supposed to be prohibited, and both places flying the American flag and showing posters from the Japanese embassy. And yesterday soldiers held up our gateman at the point of the bayonet and made him open the house so they could loot, both morning and evening; and they were there the day before too. But these are mere trivialities. Things are incomparably better than they were --- and that is something to be thankful for.

Yes, my house has been looted. I wish you could see the mess it is in. But practically every foreign house has been looted, even some of the embassy houses. I was fortunate in that I brought over a number of trunks to Buck's house, where I've been staying for the past month, so I really haven't lost such a frightful lot. Some places have

suffered much worse, even those houses in the Zone -- mine is outside. And the Russian Embassy was burned to the ground just the other day. I started writing my story of the rape of Nanking the other day..... It won't be pleasant reading! I've not exaggerated --- simply told a few of the things that have happened here, that have come to my personal attention.

Dr. Fitch's Account of the Rape of Nanking - First Installment

Nanking, X'mas Eve, 1937.

What I am about to relate is anything but a pleasant story; in fact, it is so very unpleasant that I cannot recommend anyone without a strong stomach to read it. For it is a story of such crime and horror as to be almost unbelievable, the story of the depredations of a horde of degraded criminals of incredible bestiality, who have been, and now are, working their will, unrestrained, on a peaceful, kindly, law-abiding people. Yet it is a story which I feel must be told, even if it is seen by only a few. I cannot rest until I have told it, and perhaps fortunately I am one of a very few who are in a position to tell it. It is not complete -- only a small part of the whole; and God alone knows when it will be finished. I pray it may be soon --- but I am afraid it is going to go on for many months to come, not just here but in other parts of China. I believe it has no parallel in modern history.

It is now X'mas eve. I shall start with say December 10th. In these two short weeks we here in Nanking have been through a siege; the Chinese army has left, defeated, and the Japanese have come in. On that day Nanking was still the beautiful city we were so proud of, with law and order still prevailing; today it is a city laid waste, ravaged, completely looted, much of it burned. Complete anarchy has reigned for ten days -- it has been a hell on earth. Not that my life has been in serious danger any any time; though turning lust-mad, sometimes drunken soldiers out of houses where they were raping the women is not, perhaps, altogether a safe occupation; nor does one feel too sure of himself when he finds a bayonet at his chest or a revolver at his head and knows it is handled by someone who heartily wishes him out of the way. For the Japanese Army is anything but pleased at our being here after having advised all foreigners to get out. They wanted no observers. But to have to stand by while even the very poor are having their last possession taken from them --- their last coin, their last bit of bedding

(and it is freezing weather), the poor ricksha man his ricksha; while thousands of disarmed soldiers who had sought sanctuary with you together with many hundreds of innocent civilians are taken out before your eyes to be shot or used for bayonet practice and you have to listen to the sound of the guns that are killing them; while a thousand women kneel before you crying hysterically begging you to save them from the beasts who are preying on them; to stand by and do nothing while your flag is taken down and insulted, not once but a dozen times, and your own home is being looted; and then to watch the city you have come to love and the institution to which you had planned to devote your best years deliberately and systematically burned by fire --- this is a hell I had never before envisaged.

We keep asking ourselves "How long can this last?" Day by day we are assured by the officials that things will be better soon, that "we will do our best" --- but each day has been worse than the day before. And now we are told that a new division of 20,000 is arriving. Will they have to have their toll of flesh and loot, of murder and rape? There will be little left to rob, for the city has well nigh been stripped clean. For the past week the soldiers have been busy loading their trucks with what they wanted from the stores and then setting fire to the buildings. And then there is the harrowing realization that we have only enough rice and flour for the 200,000 refugees for another three weeks and coal for ten days. Do you wonder that one awakes in the night in a cold sweat of fear, and sleep for the rest of the night is gone? Even if we had food enough for three months, how are they going to be fed after that? And with their homes long ago burned, where are they going to live? They cannot much longer continue in their present terribly crowded conditions; disease and pestilence must soon follow if they do.

Every day we call at the Japanese Embassy and present our protests, our appeals, our lists of authenticated reports of violence and crime. We are met with suave Japanese courtesy, but actually the officials there are powerless. The victorious army must have its rewards --- and those rewards are to plunder, murder, rape, at will, to commit acts of unbelievable brutality and savagery on the very people whom they have come to protect and befriend, as they so loudly proclaimed to the world. In all modern history surely there is no page that will stand so black as that of the rape of Nanking.

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You will recall, those of you who have read earlier letters of mine, that our International Committee for Nanking Safety Zone had been negotiating with both the Chinese and Japanese for the recognition of a certain area in the city which would be kept free of soldiers and all military offices and which would not be bombed or shelled, a place where the remaining two hundred thousand of Nanking's population could take refuge when things became too hot, for it had become quite obvious that the splendid resistance which the Chinese had put up for so long at Shanghai was now broken and their morale largely gone. The terrific punishment which they had taken from the superior artillery, tanks and

air forces could not be endured forever and the successful landing of Japanese troops on Hangchow Bay, attacking their flank and fear, was the crowning moment in their undoing. It seemed inevitable that Nanking just soon fall.

On December 1, Mayor Ma virtually turned over to us the administrative responsibilities for the Zone together with a police force of 450 men, 30,000 piculs (2,000 tons) of rice, 10,000 bags of flour, and some salt; also a promise of a hundred thousand dollars in cash, 80,000 of which we subsequently received. General Tang, recently executed we have been told, charged with the defense of the city, cooperated splendidly on the whole in the very difficult task of clearing the Zone of the military and anti-aircraft, and a most commendable degree of order was preserved right up to the very last moment when the Japanese began, on Sunday the 12th, to enter the walls. There was no looting save in a small way by soldiers who were in need of provisions, and foreign property throughout the city was respected. We had city water until the 10th, electricity until the following day, and telephone service actually up to the date the Japanese entered the city. At no time did we feel any serious sense of danger, for the Japanese seemed to be avoiding the Zone with their air bombs and shells, and Nanking was a heaven of order and safety as compared with the hell it has been ever since the Japanese came. It is true that we had some difficulty with our trucking the rice was stored outside the city and some of our drivers did not relish going out where the shells were falling. One lost an eye with a splinter of shrapnel, and two of our trucks were seized by the military, but that was as nothing compared with the difficulties we have since faced.

On December 10, the refugees were streaming into the Zone. We had already filled most of the institutional buildings -- Ginling College, the War College and other schools, and now had to requisition the Supreme Court, the Law College, and the Overseas buildings, forcing doors where they were locked and appointing our own caretakers. Two Japanese blimps were visible just beyond Purple Mountain, probably to direct artillery fire. Heavy guns were pounding the south wall, and shells were dropping into the city. Several shells landed just within the Zone to the south the following morning, killing about forty near the Bible Teachers' Training School and the Foo Chong Hotel. Mr. Sperling, our inspector, a German, was slightly injured, at the latter place where he was living. The U.S.S. Panay moved up river, but before it left I had a 'phone call (the last city gate had been closed and we had forfeited our right to go aboard the gunboat) from Paxton of our Embassy giving me the last two navy radiograms to reach Nanking.

We were now a community of 27, 13 Americans, 5 Germans, 1 Englishman, 1 Austrian and 2 Russians. Out on the river was the "Panay" with the two remaining Embassy men, Atcheson and Paxton, and half a dozen others..... All were looking forward to an early return to the city. How many of them have met their fate we do not know, but it will be a long time before any of them get back now. And what a Nanking they will see !

On Sunday the 12th, I was busy at my desk as Director of the Safety Zone all day long. Airplanes had been over us almost constantly for the past two days, but no one heeded them now, and the shell fire had been terrific. The wall had been breached and the damage in the Southern part of the city was enormous.

(End of first installment).