

Nanking, March 10, 1938.

The American Embassy
Nanking, China

Gentlemen:

I should like to make the following statements about damage done to and looting of property belonging to the American Church Mission and situated at #209 Peh Hsia Lu and # Tai Ping Lu, the former address being a residence compound and the latter a church and residence compound. It is my belief that the damage and the looting were due to Japanese military operations and Japanese soldiers.

On Saturday, December 11, 1937, at about 2 p.m., Mr. Cola Podshivaloff and I rode on our bicycles to the property mentioned above. On our way we stopped at the University Hospital where we heard the sound of heavy artillery fire and bombing in the direction of the southern part of the city. We also saw the smoke of burning buildings that had apparently been struck. When we passed our Church compound on Tai Ping Lu it was still intact; but when we reached the residence compound we found that the iron gate of the compound had been struck by a shell which damaged the concrete gate post and broke and twisted a part of the iron gate. We found fragments of the exploded shell lying about, and they were still warm. A Chinese hotel across the street was completely demolished at the same time, and two Chinese who were living in another hotel, adjacent to the one which was demolished, told us that it had happened a few moments before our arrival.

On Tuesday, December 14, 1937, in the company of Messrs. John H. D. Rabe and Lewis Smythe and a Chinese gentleman named Sun, I paid a hasty visit to our two compounds. On our way we saw no Chinese civilians or soldiers, but Japanese soldiers were entering and looting shops and houses along Tai Ping Lu. At our church compound we found that a shell had hit and demolished the main gate, and that the doors on two smaller gates were also gone. The parish hall had been hit by a shell and badly damaged, windows and doors in St. Paul's Church had been shattered and the roof tiles damaged. There were numerous holes in the compound wall and the concrete sidewalks caused by fragments of exploding shells. A large Chinese-style residence on the compound had also been hit and badly damaged, the roof having been caused to fall in several places. Upon entering our residence compound on Peh Hsia Lu I found that they residences had been entered and looted despite the fact that an official notice from the American Embassy was posted on the gate of the compound and an American flag was flying in the compound. I met two Japanese soldiers in the residence formerly occupied by Mr. Roberts. They were equipped with hatchets, and one of them was in the act of stealing a boy's bicycle from the house. When I appeared one of the soldiers hastily withdrew; the other, left the bicycle and also withdrew. This bicycle, as well as several others, were later stolen from the residences.

I also found a photograph album and some clothing lying on the compound, indicating that looting had been going on.

On December 17, 1937, I again visited the compounds and found Japanese soldiers on the premises and drove them off. They were armed with hatchets, and I found that the doors of the residences had been battered in and boxes and trunks pried open and the contents scattered over the floors.

Japanese soldiers were living in a Chinese hotel adjacent to St. Paul's Church. They had broken a hole through the wall separating the two compounds. They were using the well beside the church for washing vegetables, etc. One soldier was polishing his bayonet behind the church, and ran back into the hotel through the wall when I indicated that he had no right to be on our premises. I found another soldier looting the residence of our Chinese clergyman, this residence being American property and situated on the Church compound.

On December 23, 1937 I visited the Church compound and found Mrs. Ch'en, the widow of one of our Church workers and herself a nurse. She had taken refuge in the Church tower and saw the soldiers coming and going with loot they had taken from our property. She witnessed the theft of a piano from the residence of our Chinese clergyman.

On December 26, 1937 I again visited the Church compound with Mrs. Ch'en who wished to return to see if she could retrieve a few of her things which she had left behind. We found that the piano had been removed from our Parish Hall and placed out on the lawn near the residence of our Chinese clergyman.

On January 10, 1938 I visited our compounds in the company of the Rev. James McCallum of the Christian Mission who had been occupying a house on our Peh Hsia Lu compound. We found that the northeastern section of our big Chinese-style residence on the church compound had been burned down. The Parish Hall piano which I had removed from the lawn into the residence of our Chinese clergyman - it having suffered considerably from exposure to the weather and from careless handling by soldiers - was still present. I found a Japanese soldier looting in Miss Sims' residence on our Peh Hsia Lu compound and compelled him to leave. The porcelain bath-tub, several beds, and all mattresses had been looted from Mr. Roberts' residence, and all mattresses from Miss Sims' residence.

On January 15, 1938 I visited our compounds and found a Japanese soldier playing the piano in Mr. Roberts' residence.

On January 17, 1938 I visited our compounds in the company of Mrs. Paul Twinem. The Parish Hall piano, which I had placed in the residence of the Chinese clergyman on our church compound, was gone.

Between January 17 and January 26 I made several other visits to our compound, and on several occasions found soldiers in them and more and more articles taken from the residences.

On January 26, 1938 the greater part of the Chinese-style residence on our Church compound was burned down together with the contents.

On January 27, 1938 I visited our compounds in company with Mr. Ch'i, architect of the University of Nanking. We found the ruins of the Chinese-style residence still smouldering.

On February 2, 1938 I again visited the compounds.

On February 3, 1938 I found a Japanese truck transport unit parked in the street before our Church compound. They had taken some of the furniture from our premises and were using it on the street. Inside the compound I found a group of Japanese soldiers seated around a fire on the lawn. They were using a finely carved teakwood Clergy chair from the church to support the iron rod by which they hung their rice buckets over the fire to cook. The chair had been whittled in front and a piece hacked out of the back. In the remains of the fire I found burned pieces of furniture and the remains of a door lock.

Inside a small room of the Chinese-style residence I found another group of Japanese soldiers around a fire which they had built on the floor of the building. They were sitting on furniture which they had taken out of our premises. One soldier was in the act of carrying chairs out of our buildings presumably for fuel. I required the soldiers to leave and to pour water over the fires before leaving.

On a later visit shortly afterwards a Japanese soldier had re-entered the Chinese-style residence and built a fire on the floor to cook his food. I required him to leave after extinguishing the fire.

Soldiers had also built a fire in the Sacristy of the church. They burned festival silk hangings, a window frame, and partly burned a wardrobe for hanging vestments.

About February 10 I placed two servants on each of our two compounds to watch the premises. Since February 17, I have been living on our residence compound on Pih Hsia Lu. We have not been annoyed by soldiers since that time.

As I have stated above, it is my firm conviction that the damage to our buildings and the looting was done by Japanese and not by Chinese, since on none of my frequent visits to our compounds did I find any Chinese on the premises in the act of looting or destroying the property.

This misuse of our property took place despite the fact that there were official notices from the American Embassy at the gates of both compounds, American flags flying in each, and notices from the Japanese Embassy, in Japanese, certifying it to be American property and therefore not to be molested by Japanese troops.

Yours respectfully,

Ernest H. Forster