

Minnie Vautrin: Eyewitness of Nanking 1937-38



Minnie Vautrin, an American missionary, moved to Nanking from Illinois in 1912 on behalf of the United Christian Missionary Society. She became chair of the education department at Ginling College. When most of the faculty left Nanking in 1937, Vautrin became acting Dean of Ginling and took charge of the campus for the duration of the Japanese siege and massacre.

During the massacre, Vautrin turned the College into a sanctuary for 10,000 women and worked tirelessly to help establish the Nanking Safety Zone. She saw much cruelty and violence, yet she met tasks with calmness and courage. She was called the “Goddess of Mercy” by the refugees. Her diaries, like Rabe’s, are a primary source of information on the Japanese atrocities in Nanking. Vautrin was awarded Order of Jade by the Chinese Nationalist government for her heroic sacrifices during the Nanjing Massacre.

Sources: *The Undaunted Women of Nanking- The Wartime Diaries of Minnie Vautrin and Tsen Shui-Fang* by Hua-ling Hu and Zhang Lian-hong, published by Southern Illinois University Press (2010), p.5-10
Chinese and Western Rescuers of the International Safety Zone Nanking, 1937-1938 published by The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center (2011), p.49

Excerpt from Minnie Vautrin Diary: Friday, December 17, 1937

Went to gate at 7:30 to get message to Mr. Sone who slept down in house with F. Chen. Red Cross kitchen must have coal and rice. A stream of weary wild-eyed women were coming in. Said their night had been one of horror; that again and again their homes had been visited by soldiers. (Twelve-year-old girls up to sixty-year-old women raped. Husbands forced to leave bedroom and pregnant wife at point of bayonet. If only the thoughtful people of Japan knew facts of these days of horror.) Wish someone were here who had time to write the sad story of each person—especially that of the younger girls who had blackened their faces and cut their hair. The gateman said they had been coming in since daylight at 6:30.

The morning spent either at gate or running from South Hill to one of the dormitories or front gate, wherever a group of Japanese was reported to be. One or two such trips were made both during breakfast and dinner today. No meal for days without a servant coming [to say,] "Miss Vautrin, three soldiers now in science building or . . ."

The afternoon spent at gate—no easy task to control the traffic, to prevent fathers and brothers from coming in, or others from coming in with food or other conveniences. There are more than 4000 on campus and when 4000 more bring in food the task becomes complicated, especially when we have to be very careful about those who come in.

The crowd coming in all day we simply cannot take care of—if we had room we do not have strength enough to manage. Have arranged with University to open one of their dormitories and they will have a foreign man on duty all night. Between four and six I took over two large groups of women and children. What a heartbreaking sight; weary women, frightened girls, trudging with children and bedding and small packages of clothes. Was glad I went along for all along the way we met groups of Japanese soldiers going from house to house, carrying all kinds of loot. Fortunately, Mary T. [Twinem] was on the campus, so I felt I could leave. When I returned she said that at 5 P.M. two soldiers came in, and seeing the big American flag in [the] center of Quadrangle they tore it from the stakes and started off with it. It was too heavy and cumbersome to take on bicycles, so they threw it in a heap in front of Science Building. Mary was called from front gate and when the soldiers saw her they ran and hid. She found them out in a room at the powerhouse and when she spoke to them they flushed, for they knew they were wrong.

As we finished eating supper, the boy from Central Building came and said there were many soldiers on campus going to dormitories. I found two in front of Central Building pulling on door and insisting on its being opened. I said I had no key. One said, "Soldiers here. Enemy of Japan." I said, "No Chinese soldiers." Mr. Li, who was with me, said the same. He then slapped me on the face and slapped Mr. Li very severely [severely] and insisted on opening of door. I pointed to side door and took them in. They went through both downstairs and up presumably looking for Chinese soldiers. When we came out, two more soldiers came leading three of our servants, whom they had bound. They said, "Chinese soldiers," but I said, "No soldier. Coolie, gardener"—for that is what they were. They took them to the front and I accompanied them. When I got to the front gate I found a large group of Chinese kneeling there beside the road—Mr. F. Chen, Mr. Hsia and a number of our servants. The sergeant of the group was there, and some of his men, and soon we were joined by Mrs. Tsen and Mary Twinem, also being escorted by soldiers. They asked who was master of the institution, and I said I was. Then they made me identify each person. Unfortunately there were some new people, taken on as extra help during these days, and one of them looked like a soldier. He was taken roughly over to right of road and carefully examined. Unfortunately when I was identifying the servants Mr. Chen spoke up and tried to help me; and for that he was slapped severely, and roughly taken to right side of road and made to kneel.

In the midst of this procedure, during which we prayed most earnestly for help, a car drove up in which was G. Fitch, L. Smythe and P. Mills—the latter to stay all night with us. They made all three of them come in, stand in a line, and remove hats, and examined them for pistols. Fortunately Fitch could speak some French with the sergeant. There were several conferences among [the] sergeant and his men again and again, and at one time they insisted that all foreigners, Mrs. Tsen and Mary must leave. They finally changed their minds when I insisted this was my home and I could not leave. They then made foreign men get into car and leave. As the rest of us were standing or kneeling there we heard screams and cries and saw people going out at the side gate. I thought they were taking off [a] large group of men helpers. We later realized their trick—to keep responsible people at front gate with three or four of their soldiers carrying on this mock trial and search for Chinese soldiers while the rest of the men were in the building selecting women. We learned later they selected twelve and took them out at side gate. When that was complete they went out front gate with F. Chen—and we were sure we would see him no more. When they went out we were not sure they had left but thought they might be on guard outside, ready to shoot any who moved. Never shall I forget that scene—the kneeling at [the] side of [the] road, Mary, Mrs. Tsen and I standing, the dried leaves rattling, the moaning of the wind, the cry of women being led out. While we were there in silence, "Big" Wang came, and said two women had been taken from East Court. We urged him to go back. We prayed most earnestly for Mr. Chen's release and for those who were carried off—those who had never prayed before I am sure prayed that night.

For what seemed an eternity we dared not move for fear of being shot; but by a quarter to eleven we decided we would leave. Du, the gateman looked stealthily out of the front gate—there was no one. He stole to the side gate—it seemed to be closed, and so we all got up and left. Mrs. Tsen's daughter-in-law and all the grand children were gone—I was horrified, but Mrs. Tsen said calmly she was sure they were hiding with the refugees. In her room we found everything in confusion and realized that it had been looted. We then went to Central Building and there found Mrs. Tsen's family, Miss Hsueh, Miss Wang and Blanche Wu. Then Mary and I went down to the Practice School. To my surprise there we found Mr. Chen and Miss Lo sitting silently in my sitting room. When Mr. Chen told us his story, I realized that surely his life had been saved by a miracle. We had a little meeting of thanksgiving. Never have I heard such prayers. Later, I went down to the gate and stayed in Mr. Chen's home all night—in room next to gate house. It must have been long after midnight when we went to bed—and I venture none of us slept.

Source: P43-45 *The Undaunted Women of Nanking- The Wartime Diaries of Minnie Vautrin and Tsen Shui-Fang* by Hua-ling Hu and Zhang Lian-hong, published by Southern Illinois University Press (2010)

Minnie Vautrin Diary: Friday, May 13, 1938

Spent morning - or what was left of it in trying to work out a curriculum for J--S. middle grade work for this autumn.

Here are two typical cases that came to my office this morning –

Giang Lao Tai and daughter called. Her story - Has son of 53 who has had T.B. for years. He has a wife and son. Has another son of 33 who was earning \$50 per month running a machine in a rice hulling shop. This son has a wife and four children from 3-10 years of age. All nine were dependent on this one son of 33. Eight of the family evacuated north of river last fall and used up everything they had. The son of 33 was killed by the Japanese soldiers.

Then came a person telling me the story of Liu Lao Tai - a woman of almost 50 living down near San Pai Lou. She has three sons and two daughters-in-law. Four nights ago two soldiers came to her door about ten p.m., unable to push the door in they forced their way in through a window and found themselves in Liu Lau Tai's room. They demanded her daughters-in-law and when she refused and started to go for a military police, they cut two gashes in her face and one in her heart. She died from these wounds.

These two tragedies were told me today. Almost every day I hear others as heartbreaking. One cannot wonder that people ask you most pitifully, "How long will this terrible situation last? How can we bear it?"

Source: P65-66 *American Missionary Eyewitnesses to the Nanking Massacre, 1937-1938* published by Yale Divinity School Library