

Miner Searle Bates: Eyewitness of Nanking 1937-38



Miner Searle Bates was a missionary and professor of history at the University of Nanking. He was also member of the International Committee of Nanking Safety Zone. Only two days after the fall of Nanking, Bates lodged his first protest letter to the Japanese Embassy and continued to do so throughout the Nanking massacre. Bates was a major moving spirit behind H. J. Timperley's (*Manchester Guardian* journalist) book, *Japanese Terror in China* (New York, June 1938). Except for seven brief trips to Japan and one to Spain to attend conferences, Bates remained in Nanking from 1937 to 1941, fearlessly challenging the activities of the Japanese authorities, especially narcotics-trafficking.

Source: *American Missionary Eyewitnesses to the Nanking Massacre, 1937-1938* published by Yale Divinity School Library, p.2

Excerpt from Miner Searle Bates' letter to the Japanese Embassy on December 27, 1937

Beginning more than a week ago, we were promised by you that within a few days order would be restored by replacement of troops, resumption of regular discipline, increase of military police, and so forth. Yet shameful disorder continues, and we see no serious effort to stop it. Let me give a few examples from University property [the University of Nanking was within the Zone]....

Last night between eleven and twelve o'clock, a motor car with three Japanese military men came to the main University gate, claiming that they were sent by headquarters to inspect. They forcibly prevented our watchman from giving an alarm, and kept him with them while they found and raped three girls, one of whom is only eleven years old. One of the girls they took away with them.

Stray soldiers continue to seize men to work for them, causing much fear and unnecessary inconvenience. For example, a soldier insisted on taking a worker from the Hospital yesterday; and several of our own servants and watchmen have been taken.

Several of our residences are entered daily by soldiers looking for women, food, and other articles. Two houses within one hour this morning.

...Yesterday seven different times there came groups of three or four soldiers, taking clothes, food and money from those who have some left after previous lootings of the same type. They raped seven women, including a girl of twelve. In the night larger groups of twelve or fourteen soldiers came four times and raped twenty women.

The life of the whole people is filled with suffering and fear — all caused by soldiers. Your officers have promised them protection, but the soldiers every day injure hundreds of persons most seriously. A few policemen help certain places, and we are grateful for them. But that does not bring peace and order. Often it merely shifts the bad acts of the soldiers to nearby buildings where there are no policemen....

While I have been writing this letter, a soldier has forcibly taken a woman from one of our teachers' houses, and with his revolver refused to let an American enter. Is this order?

Many people now want to return to their homes, but they dare not because of rape, robbery, and seizure of men continuing every day and night. Only serious efforts to enforce orders, using many police and real punishments will be of any use. In several places the situation is a little better, but it is still disgraceful after two weeks of army terrorism. More than promises is now needed.

With respectful distress and anxiety,

Note: Underlines are added by the editor.

Source: *Human Rights in the Asia Pacific 1931-1945: Social Responsibility & Global Citizenship* by Ministry of Education of BC, p.54-5

Circular letter to friends of Miner Searle Bates on April 12, 1938

Dear Friends,

This note is written from Shanghai. After long effort I was able to secure military passes for a visit of ten days on behalf of the International Relief Committee and other organizational enterprises as well as for family reasons.

Without wishing to frighten you I desire to give you information in advance that will prepare you for possible shocks in the summer. It may be that the problem here presented will not result in serious consequences, but we have had to face that possibility.

There is in active preparation for publication in England and America a book by Mr. H.J. Timperley, experienced correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, which will probably be entitled "The Japanese Terror in China." Mr. Timperley is a journalist of the highest character who has been in close touch with Christian leaders in Peiping and in Shanghai over a long period of years. He has secured from the relief groups here a large body of documents and letters which indicate the actual character of the warfare carried on in China. That material is presented in a fair and essentially constructive way.

Although not legally responsible for this enterprise I have been connected with it from the first, have checked over the plan and various phases of its development, and have also examined a final draft of the complete manuscript. Moreover, the book uses a statement which I prepared on the 15th of December to be utilized by the various correspondents leaving Nanking on that date. It also includes my letter of January 10th describing in general terms the terror of the preceding weeks in Nanking. The appendices contain many letters to the Japanese Embassy during December. Although my name is not used it will be perfectly obvious to the Japanese officials in Nanking and Shanghai, if not in Tokyo, that these documents are from my hands. Dr. Smythe will be less critically involved through his signature upon various documents and case reports coming from the office of the Secretary of the International Committee.

The book is not geographically limited in scope and contains a fair amount of material from other cities and regions in China. However, the Nanking items have the most bite in there because of the concentrated cruelty in our city. It is therefore probable that the Japanese authorities will be acutely resentful toward the small group of missionaries in Nanking, and perhaps toward me in particular. Mr. George Fitch will also be seriously involved because of use of his diary; and Mr. John Magee because of the employment of some of his pictures.

We originally gave our approval to the production of a book along these lines with the expectation that our material would be drawn upon for facts, but would not appear in recognizable units. However Mr. Timperley and his consultants in Shanghai found themselves drawn more and more toward the use of entire documents or considerable selections from them. They desired the directness and authenticity of firsthand materials, and likewise they were critically pushed for time by their friends in London and New York who were their agents in approaching publishers. No one of us would have done the whole thing in exactly the way that has actually been adopted. However, all the missionaries concerned in the Nanking material and a considerable group of mission leaders in Shanghai have carefully considered the whole problem and are convinced that it is right and desirable to go ahead with publication.

We feel that there is a certain moral necessity to make known the terrible facts in a constructive way. Only ourselves or people working with us can do that. Others are gaining access to the materials more and more freely by

indirect means and are bringing them out in semi-commercial form. On the one hand this will perhaps lessen the intensity of the Japanese attacks upon us while at the same time it impels us to seek a comprehensive and good-spirited account of the experiences of the Chinese people. I need not discuss all the general principles and issues involved which you can imagine or think out for yourselves.

It is possible that there may be retaliatory restriction upon individuals or upon groups of missionaries. We do not believe however that such action is a certainty. Perhaps it is not even a probability. Most of the fears of the past year have never become realities in the form that we anticipated. On the positive side we hope definitely to exercise some deterrent restraint upon the management of the Japanese forces in other parts of China during the remainder of the struggle. Moreover, the people of the rest of China, of the Orient, and of the other parts of the world have a right to know this significant chapter in the experience of our times. The book will be translated into several languages, and after that translation has been paid for all profits will go into the International Relief Fund.

I am sorry to inflict such a lengthy statement upon you, but it may be of value to you in considering other problems of publicity than the present one. Moreover if serious difficulties arise for some of us you will understand the background and the consideration that we have given to the issues. I do not feel that timidity as such has accomplished anything whatsoever in the world that we confront. Let us do what we consider to be our duty. Do it in a good spirit and accept the consequences likewise.

Note: Underlines are added by the editor.

Source: *American Missionary Eyewitnesses to the Nanking Massacre, 1937-1938* published by Yale Divinity School Library, p.63-5

Digital image of **January 10, 1938 Letter from M.S. Bates to friends regarding Nanking situation up to 31 December, 1937** on Yale Divinity School Library, the Nanking Massacre Project <http://divdl.library.yale.edu/ydlchina/images%5CNMP0113.pdf>

Digital Image of **April 2, 1938 Letter from M.S. Bates to Rev. J.C. McKim, c/o Dr. John Wood, 281 Fourth Ave, New York City, regarding New York Times stories on Nanjing atrocities (3 pages)** on Yale Divinity School Library, the Nanking Massacre Project <http://divdl.library.yale.edu/ydlchina/images%5CNMP0085.pdf>

Digital image of **M.S. Bates article "Japanese Propaganda in the Mirror of Events" written in January 1938** on Yale Divinity School Library, the Nanking Massacre Project <http://divdl.library.yale.edu/ydlchina/images%5CNMP0114.pdf>

[More M. S. Bates documentation in digital image on Yale Divinity School Library, the Nanking Massacre Project website <http://www.library.yale.edu/div/Nanking/findingaid.html>]