

## George Ashmore Fitch: Eyewitness of Nanking 1937-38



George A. Fitch was born in Soochow, China in 1883, the son of Presbyterian missionaries George F. and Mary McLellan Fitch. After receiving his B.A. from the College of Wooster in Ohio in 1906, Fitch attended Union Theological Seminary in New York. He was ordained in 1909 and returned to China to work with YMCA in Shanghai.

When the Nanking Massacre occurred, Fitch was the head of the YMCA in Nanking. He quickly became active in assisting the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone. Fitch's diary of events in Nanking was carried out by the first person able to leave Nanking for Shanghai after the occupation by the Japanese.

In 1938, Fitch traveled throughout the United States giving talks about the Nanking Massacre. He returned to China to serve with the YMCA and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, then went on to serve the YMCA in Korea and Taiwan until his retirement in 1961.

Source: Yale Divinity School Library, the Nanking Massacre Project website  
<http://www.library.yale.edu/div/Nanking/Fitch.html>

### Excerpt from George Ashmore Fitch's Circular Letter, December 24, 1937

Nanking, China, Xmas 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 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 unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, I am one of a very few who are in a position to tell it. It is not complete for it is 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 Xmas 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 has 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 at any time; though turning lust-mad, sometimes drunken soldiers out of houses where they were raping the women, is not altogether a safe occupation; nor does one feel, perhaps, 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 [rickshaw] 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 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 men 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 been well-nigh 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 burned, where are they going to live? They cannot continue much longer in their present terribly crowded condition; 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 they have come to protect and befriend, as they have 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.

To tell the whole story of these past ten days would take too long. The tragic thing is that by the time the truth gets out to the rest of the world it will be cold -- it will no longer be "news." Anyway, the Japanese have undoubtedly been proclaiming abroad that they have established law and order in a city that had already been looted and burned, and that the downtrodden population had received their benevolent army with open arms and a great flag-waving welcome. However, I am going to record some of the more important events of this period as I have jotted them down in my little diary, for they will at least be of interest to some of my friends and I shall have the satisfaction of having a permanent record of these unhappy days. It will probably extend beyond the date of this letter, for I do not anticipate being able to get this off for some considerable time. The Japanese censorship will see to that! Our own Embassy officials and those of other countries together with some of the business men who went aboard the ill-fated "Panay" and the Standard Oil boats and other ships just before the capture of Nanking, confidently expecting to return within a week when they left, are still cooling their heels (those who haven't been killed or wounded by Japanese bombs and machine guns) out on the river or perhaps in one of the ports. We think it will be another fortnight before any of them is permitted to return, and longer than that before any of us is permitted to leave Nanking. We are virtually prisoners here.

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 of one million 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 Hankchow Bay, attacking their flank and rear, was the crowning event in their undoing. It seemed inevitable that Nanking must soon fall.

On December 1st Mayor Ma [of Nanking] 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 was subsequently received. Gen. 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 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 a nothing compared with the difficulties we have since faced. But I must go on with my chronicle of events.

On December 10th, the refugees were streaming into the Zone. We had already filled most of the institutional buildings -- Ginling, the College and other schools, and now had to requisition the Supreme Court, the Law College and the Overseas Building, 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 upriver, 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. He was phoning from outside the city, of course; the messages were from Wilbur and Boynton. Earlier that day I had received another message saying that Marion was to be married on Dec. 18 in Hudson, Ohio, but it came to me second-hand and I did not get further details.

We were now a community of 27- 18 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; the Standard Oil and Asiatic Petroleum motor ship with many more, a hulk which had been fitted out as sort of a floating hotel and towed upstream with some 20 foreigners including Dr. Rosen of the German Embassy and some 400 Chinese, and other craft. 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. We were using the former residence of Gen. Chang Chun, recently Minister of Foreign Affairs, as headquarters, so were very comfortably fixed and incidentally had one of the best bomb-proof dugouts in all Nanking. 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 tremendous. No one will ever know what the Chinese casualties were but they must have been enormous. The Japanese say they themselves lost 40,000 men in taking Nanking. The general rout must have started early that afternoon. Soldiers streamed through the city from the south, many of them passing through the Zone, but they were well-behaved and orderly. Gen. Tan asked our assistance in arranging a truce with the Japanese and Mr. Sperling agreed to take a flag and message -- but it was already too late. He [Tan] fled that evening, and as soon as the news got out disorganization became general. There was panic as they made for the gate to Hsiakwan and the river. The road for miles was strewn with the equipment they cast away--rifles, ammunition, belts, uniforms', cars, trucks --everything in the way of army impediments.

Trucks and cars jammed, were overturned, caught fire; at the gate more cars jammed and were burned --a terrible holocaust -- and the dead lay feet deep. The gate blocked, terror mad soldiers scaled the wall and

let themselves down on the other side with ropes, puttees and belts tied together, clothing torn to strips. Many fell and were killed. But at the river was perhaps the most appalling scene of all. A fleet of junks was there. It was totally inadequate for the horde that was now in a frenzy to cross to the north side. The overcrowded junks capsized, they sank; thousands drowned. Other thousands tried to make rafts of the lumber on the riverside only to suffer the same fate. Other thousands must have succeeded in getting away, but many of these were probably bombed by Japanese planes a day or two later.

One small detail of three companies rallied under their officers, crossed the San Chia Ho three miles up the river and tried to attack the Japanese forces that were coming in from that direction, but were outnumbered and practically decimated. Only one seems to have succeeded in getting back. He happened to be the brother of a friend of mine and appeared in my office the next morning to report the story. A fellow officer had drowned while the two of them were trying to swim the small tributary to the Yangtze which they had crossed before on rafts, and before daylight he had managed to scale the wall and slip in unobserved.

So ended the happy, peaceful, well ordered, progressive regime which we had been enjoying here in Nanking and on which we had built our hopes for still better days. For the Japanese were already in the city and with them came terror and destruction and death. They were first reported in the Zone at 11:00 that morning, the 13th. I drove down with two of our committee members to meet them, just a small detachment at the southern entrance to the Zone. They showed no hostility, though a few moments later they killed twenty refugees who were frightened by their presence and ran from them. For it seems to be the rule here, as it was in Shanghai in 1932, that any who run must be shot or bayoneted.

Meanwhile we were busy at headquarters disarming soldiers who had been unable to escape and had come into the Zone for protection. We assured them that if they gave up their equipment their lives would be spared by the Japanese. But it was a vain promise. All would have preferred to die fighting than be taken out and shot or sabred or used for bayonet practice, as they all were later.

There was still some shell fire that day but very little that landed in the Zone. We discovered some fragments of shrapnel in our yard that evening; Dr. Wilson had a narrow escape from shrapnel bits that came through the window of his operating room while he was operating; and a shell passed through one of the new University dormitories; but there were no casualties. The Communications Ministry, the most beautiful building in all Nanking with its superb ceremonial hall, was in flames, but whether from shell fire or started by the retreating Chinese we do not know.

On Tuesday the 14th the Japanese were pouring into the city -- tanks, artillery, infantry, trucks. The reign of terror commenced, and it was to increase in severity and horror with each of the succeeding ten days. They were the conquerors of China's capital, the seat of the hated Chiang Kai-shek government, they were given free reign to do as they pleased. The proclamation on the handbills which airplanes scattered over the city saying that the Japanese were the only real friends of the Chinese and would protect the good, of course, meant no more than most of their statements. And to show their "sincerity" they raped, looted and killed at will. Men were taken from our refugee camps in droves, as we supposed at the time for labor -- but they have never been heard from again, nor will they be. A colonel and his staff called at my office and spent an hour trying to learn where the "6,000 disarmed soldiers" were. Four times that day Japanese soldiers came and tried to take our cars away. Others in the meantime succeeded in stealing three of our cars that were elsewhere. On Sone's they tore off the American flag, and threw it on the ground, broke a window and managed to get away all within the five minutes he had gone into Dr. Thompson's house. They tried to steal our trucks -- did succeed in getting two -- so ever since it has been necessary for two Americans to spend most of their time riding trucks as they delivered rice and coal. Their experience in dealing daily with these Japanese car thieves would make an interesting story in itself. And at the University Hospital they took the watches and fountain pens from the nurses.

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Durbin, of the *N.J. [New York] Times*, started for Shanghai by motor that day, though none of us had much faith he would get through. I hurriedly wrote a letter for him to take, but he was turned back at Kuyung. Steele of the *Chicago News* managed to get out to the river and reported that a number of Japanese destroyers had just arrived. A lieutenant gave him the news of the sinking of the Panay but had no details, nor did he mention the other ships that were sunk. After all their efforts to have us go aboard, finally leaving us with a couple of lengths of rope by which we could get down over the wall and to the river -- it was ironical indeed that the Panay should be bombed and we still safe.

Mr. Rabe, our Chairman, head of the Siemens China Co., and Smythe, our secretary, called at military headquarters in the hope of seeing the commanding officer and stopping the intolerable disorders but had to wait until the next day as he had not yet entered the city. Their calls were quite useless anyway.

On Wednesday [December 15th] I drove around to my house, which is just outside the Zone, to see if everything was all right. Yesterday the gates were intact, but today the side gate was broken in and the south door open. I had not time to investigate but asked a friendly looking major who had just moved in across the street to keep an eye on the place, which he promised to do. A staff officer from the Navy was waiting for me. He expressed his deep concern over the loss of the Panay, but he too could give no details. The Navy would be glad to send a destroyer to Shanghai with any of the members of the American community who wished to go, also to send radio messages of purely a personal nature. He seemed somewhat disappointed in the brevity of the message I wrote out: "Wilbur National Committee Y M C A, Shanghai: All foreigners Nanking safe and well please inform interested parties."; also when I told him that with the exception of a couple of newspaper men the rest of us wished to stay in Nanking.

I offered to drive him back to his ship -- he had been obliged to walk the four miles in -- but half way we were stopped by an army major who told us that no civilians were allowed further north as they were still rounding up some Chinese soldiers and it was unsafe. We happened to be beside the Ministry of War at the time and it was all too evident that an execution was going on, hundreds of poor disarmed soldiers with many innocent civilians among them, the real reason for his not wanting me to go further. So Mr. Sekiguchi of K.I.J.M.S. Seta had to walk the rest of the way. But that afternoon I stole a march on the surly major; I went to Hsiakwan by back roads. At the gate I was stopped but I had Smith of Reuters and Steele with me who were leaving on that destroyer, so we were finally allowed to pass. I have already described the conditions at that gate -- we actually had to drive over masses of dead bodies to get through. But the scene beggars description. I shall never forget that ride.

At the jetty we found Durbin of the *Times* and Art Menken of Paramount Films, with whom I had just made that trip to the northwest, to Shansi and Sian, already there, for they were going too, and I had promised to drive Durbin's car back to the American Embassy for him. Mr. Okamura of the Japanese Embassy, just arrived from Shanghai, was also there and gave us the names of the killed and wounded on the Panay and the Standard Oil boats, so I offered him a lift back to the city. But at the gate we were stopped again, and this time the guard positively refused to let me enter. No foreigners were allowed to enter Nanking, and the fact that I had just come from there made no difference. Even Mr. Okamura's appeals were in vain -- the Embassy cuts no ice with the army in Japan. The only thing to do was to wait while Okamura took one of the cars to military headquarters and sent back a special pass. It took an hour and a half; but I had the November *Reader's Digest*, the last piece of mail to reach me from the outside, with me so that time passed quickly. But the stench at the gate was awful--and here and there dogs were gnawing at the corpses.

At our staff conference that evening word came that soldiers were taking all 1,300 men in one of our camps near headquarters to shoot them. We knew there were a number of ex-soldiers among them, but Rabe had been promised by an officer that very afternoon that their lives would be spared. It was now all too obvious what they were going to do. The men were lined up and roped together in groups of about a hundred

by soldiers with bayonets fixed; those who had hats had them roughly torn off and thrown on the ground, and then by the light of our headlights we watched them marched away to their doom. Not a whimper came from the entire throng. Our own hearts were lead. Were those four lads from Canton who had trudged all the way up from the south and yesterday had reluctantly given me their arms among them, I wondered; or that all [tall] strapping sergeant from the north whose disillusioned eyes as he made the fatal decision, still haunt me? How foolish I had been to tell them the Japanese would spare their lives. We had confidently expected that they would live up to their promises, at least in some degree, and that order would be established with their arrival. Little did we dream that we should see such brutality and savagery as has probably not been equalled in modern times. For worse days were yet to come.

The problem of transportation became acute on the 16th, with the Japanese still stealing our trucks and cars. I went over to the American Embassy where the Chinese staff were still standing by and borrowed Mr. Atcheson's car for Mills to deliver coal. For our big concentrations of refugees and our three big rice kitchens had to have fuel as well as rice. We now had 25 camps, ranging from 200 to 12,000 people in them. In the University buildings alone there were nearly 30,000 and in Ginling College, which was reserved for women and children, the 3,000 was rapidly increased to over 9,000. In the latter place even the space was taken. We had figured to sixteen square feet to a person, but actually they were crowded in much closer than that. For a while no place was safe, we did manage to preserve a fair degree of safety at Ginling. To a lesser degree in the University. Miss Vautrin, Mrs. Twinem and Mrs. Chen were heroic in their care and protection of the women.

That morning the cases of rape began to be reported. Over a hundred women that we knew of were taken away by soldiers, seven of them from the University library; but there must have been many times that number who were raped in their homes. Hundreds were on the streets trying to find a place of safety. At tiffin time Riggs, who was associate commissioner of housing, came in crying. The Japanese had emptied the Law College and Supreme Court and taken away practically all the men to a fate we could only guess. Fifty of our policemen had been taken with them. Riggs had protested, only to be roughly handled by the soldiers and twice struck by an officer. Refugees were searched for money and anything they had on them was taken away, often to their last bit of bedding. At our staff conference at four we could hear the shots of the execution squad nearby. It was a day of unspeakable terror for the poor refugees and horror for us.

I dashed over to my house for a few minutes on the way to tiffin at Prof. Buck's where I was living with six others. The two American flags were still flying and the proclamations by the Embassy still on the gates and front door; but the side gate had been smashed and the door broken open. Within was confusion. Every drawer and closet and trunk had been opened, locks smashed. The attic was littered ankle deep. I could not stop to see what was taken but most of the bedding was gone and some clothing and food-stuffs. A carved teak screen had been stripped of its embroidered panels, a gift of Dr. C. T. Wang, and a heavy oak buffet battered in.

Yates McDaniel of the Associated Press, the last of our newspaper men, left in the afternoon by another destroyer for Shanghai. With him I sent another short letter which I hope got through.

Friday, December 17. Robbery, murder, rape continue unabated. A rough estimate would be at least a thousand women raped last night and during the day. One poor woman was raped thirty-seven times. Another had her five months infant deliberately smothered by the brute to stop its crying while he raped her. Resistance means the bayonet. And the hospital is rapidly filling up with the victims of Japanese cruelty and barbarity. Bob Wilson, our only surgeon, has his hands more than full and has to work into the night. Rickshaws [rickshaws], cattle, pigs, donkeys, often the sole means of livelihood of the people, are taken from them. Our rice kitchens and rice shops are interfered with. We have had to close the latter.

After dinner I took Bates to the University and McCallum to the hospital where they will spend the night, then Mills and Smythe to Ginling for one of our group has been sleeping there each night. At the gate of

the latter place we were stopped by what seemed to be a searching party. We were roughly pulled from the car at the point of the bayonet, my car keys taken from me, lined up and frisked for arms, our hats jerked off, electric torches held to our faces, our passports and purpose in coming demanded. Opposite us were Miss Vautrin, Mrs. Twinem and Mrs. Chen, with a score of refugee women kneeling on the ground. The sergeant, who spoke a little French (about as much as I do), insisted there were soldiers concealed there. I maintained that aside from about 50 domestics and other members of their staff there were no men on the place. This he said he did not believe and said he would shoot all he found beyond that number. He then demanded that we all leave, including the ladies, and when Miss Vautrin refused she was roughly hustled to the car. Then he changed his mind: the ladies were told to stay and we to go. We tried to insist that one of us should stay too, but this he would not permit. Altogether we were kept standing there for over an hour before we were released. The next day we learned that this gang had abducted twelve girls from the school.

Saturday, the 18th. Marion's wedding day. At breakfast Riggs, who lives in the Safety Zone a block away but has his meals with us, reported that two women, one a cousin of Wang Ding, our Y M C A secretary, were raped in his house while he was having dinner with us. Wilson reported a boy of five years of age brought to the hospital after having been stabbed with a bayonet five times, once through his abdomen; a man with eighteen bayonet wounds, a woman with seventeen cuts on her face and several on her legs. Between four and five hundred terrorized women poured into our headquarters compound in the afternoon and spent the night in the open.

Sunday, the 19th. A day of complete anarchy. Several big fires raging today, started by the soldiers, and more are promised. The American flag was torn down in a number of places. At the American School it was trampled on and the caretaker told he would be killed if he put it up again. The proclamations placed on all American and other foreign properties by the Japanese Embassy are flouted by their soldiers, sometimes deliberately torn off. Some houses are entered from five to ten times in one day and the poor people looted and robbed and the women raped. Several were killed in cold blood, for no apparent reason whatever. Six out of seven of our sanitation squads in one district were slaughtered; the seventh escaped, wounded, to tell the tale. Toward evening today two of us rushed to Dr. Brady's house (he is away) and chased four would be rapers out and took all the women there to the University. Sperling is busy at this game all day. I also went to the house of Douglas Jenkins, of our Embassy. The flag was still there; but in the garage his house boy lay dead. Another servant, dead, was under a bed, both brutally killed. The house was in utter confusion. There are still many corpses on the streets. All of them civilians as far as we can see. The Red Swastika Society would bury them, but their truck has been stolen, their coffins used for bonfires and several of their workers bearing their insignia have been marched away.

Smythe and I called again at the Japanese Embassy with a list of fifty-five additional cases of violence, all authenticated, and told Messers. Tanaka and Fukui that today was the worst so far. We were assured that they would "do their best" and hoped that things would be better "soon", but it is quite obvious that they have little or no influence with the military whatever, and the military have no control over the soldiers. We were also told that seventeen military police had recently arrived who would help in restoring order. Seventeen for an army of perhaps fifty thousand. Yet we rather like the three men of the Embassy. They are probably doing their best. But I had to smile when they asked my help in getting cars and a mechanic for them after so many of ours had been stolen. I felt like referring them to their own military, but instead I took them around to the American Embassy and borrowed our Ambassador's and two others for them and later sent them our Russian repair man.

Monday, December 20th. Vandalism and violence continue absolutely unchecked. Whole sections of the city are being systematically burned. At 5 PM Smythe and I went for a drive. All Taiping Road, the most important shopping street in the city, was in flames. We drove through showers of sparks and over burning embers. Further south we could see the soldiers inside the shops setting fire to them and still further they were

loading the loot into army trucks. Next to the Y M C A -- and it was in flames -- evidently fired only an hour or so ago. The surrounding buildings were as yet untouched. I hadn't the heart to watch it, so we hurried on. That night I counted fourteen fires from my window, some of them covering considerable areas.

Our group here at the house drafted a message to the American Consulate-General in Shanghai asking that diplomatic representatives be sent here immediately as the situation was urgent, then asked the Japanese Embassy to send it via navy radio. Needless to say it was never sent.

December 21. Fourteen of us called on Tanaka at 2:30 and presented a letter signed by all 22 foreigners protesting the burning of the city and continued disorders. More promises. Rabe fears for his house, for buildings are burning across the street from him. He has over 400 refugees living in mat sheds in his garden. The problem of feeding is becoming serious--some refugees, hungry, started rioting in the University. Our coal will soon be finished, but Riggs is scouting for more. The Japanese have sealed all supplies of coal and rice. Soldiers came into our place today, over the wall, and tried to take our cars while we were all out, and at another time they nearly got Sone's truck from him. Rabe had a letter today from Dr. Rosen of the German Embassy, through Mr. Tanaka, saying he was on the H.M.S. "Bee" at Hsiakwan but not allowed to land and asking about German properties. Rabe replied that he was glad to be able to inform him that two houses were not looted, the Ambassador's and his own, and that two cars will still left. (There are over fifty German residences in Nanking.)

December 22. Firing squad at work very near us at 5:00 AM today. Counted a hundred shots. The University was entered twice during the night, the policeman at the gate held up at the point of a bayonet, and a door broken down. The Japanese military police recently appointed to duty there was asleep. Representatives of the new Japanese police force called and promised order by January 1st. They also asked for the loan of motorcars and trucks. Went with Sperling to see 50 corpses in some ponds a quarter of a mile east of headquarters. All obviously civilians, hands bound behind backs, one with the top of his head cut completely off. Were they used for sabre practice? On the way home for tiffin stopped to help the father of our Y M C A writer who was being threatened by a drunken soldier with his bayonet, the poor mother frantic with fear, and before sitting down had to run over with two of our fellows to chase soldiers out of Gee's and Daniel's houses, where they were just about to rape the women. We had to laugh to see those brave soldiers trying to get over a barbed wire fence as we chased them.

Bates and Riggs had to leave before they were through tiffin to chase soldiers out of the sericulture building--several drunks. And on my arrival at office there was an S O S call, which Rabe and I answered from Sperling and Kroeger who were seriously threatened by a drunk with a bayonet. By fortunate chance, Tanaka of the Embassy together with some general arrived at the same moment. The soldier had his face soundly slapped a couple of times by the general but I don't suppose he got any more than that. We have heard of no cases of discipline so far. If a soldier is caught by an officer or M P he is very politely told that he shouldn't do that again. In the evening I walked home with Riggs after dinner -- a woman of 54 had been raped in his house just before our arrival. It's cruel to leave the women to their fate, but of course it is impossible for us to spend all our time protecting them. Mr. Wu, engineer in the power plant which is located in Hsiakwan, brought us the amazing news that 43 of the 54 employees who had so heroically kept the plant going to the very last day had finally been obliged to seek refuge in the International Export Company, a British factory on the river front, had been taken out and shot on the grounds that the power plant was a government concern -- which it was not. Japanese officials have been at my office daily trying to get hold of these very men so they could start the turbines and have electricity. It was small comfort to be able to tell them that their own military had murdered most of them.

Thursday, December 23. Sone was the one to get manhandled today. At Stanley Smith's house he found an officer and soldier who had just removed the American flag, also the Japanese proclamation, forced



the refugees living there out, and said they must use the place as a registration center. He must have had a pretty uncomfortable time of it, for he was finally forced to sign a paper giving them the right to use the place for two weeks. And Sone is not a man to take things lying down. A protest to the Embassy finally got the soldiers out of the place. Seventy were taken from our camp at the Rural Leaders Training School and shot. No system -- soldiers seize anyone they suspect. Calluses on hands are proof that the man was a soldier, a sure death warrant. Ricksha [rickshaw] coolies, carpenters and other laborers are frequently taken. At noon a man was led to headquarters with his head burned cinder black, eyes and ears gone, nose partly, a ghastly sight. I took him to the hospital in my car where he died a few hours later. His story was that he was one of a gang of some hundred who had been tied together, then gasoline thrown over them and set fire. He happened to be on the outer edge so got the gas only over his head. Later another similar case was brought to the hospital with more extensive burns. He also died. The first man had no wounds but the second did. Still later I saw a third with similar head and arm burns lying dead on the corner of the road to my house, opposite the Drum Tower. Evidently he had managed to struggle that far before dying. Incredible brutality.

Friday, 24th. Mr. Tang of the U.S. Embassy reports that the Chinese staff and their relatives living in the Embassy, were all robbed last night by an officer and his men; Paxton's office door was bayoneted, three cars stolen from the compound and two more this morning. Later I had the pleasure of telling Tanaka that Menken's car, which I had promised him the use of yesterday, was among those stolen. Registration of Chinese started today. The military say there are still 20,000 soldiers in the Zone and that they must get rid of these "monsters". I question if there are a hundred left. Anyway, many more innocent must suffer and all are fearful and nervous. The Chinese Self Governing Committee, formed day before yesterday at the invitation of Tanaka, may be helpful in this; but there are spies already at work. We caught one here. I just saved him from a bad beating, so locked him up in our basement and later turned him over to the Chinese police. What will they do to him? Strangle him, I suppose -- but I have told them to be careful. Constant interference from the Japanese today: more of our sanitary squad taken, also the policeman at the University gate, and they are constantly trying to get our trucks. They also sealed up one of our coal depots but Riggs finally managed to talk them out of that.

Christmas Eve. Kroeger, Sperling and Dr. Trimmer in for dinner with us -- a good dinner, too, with roast pig and sweet potatoes. Rabe did not dare to leave his house as Japanese soldiers come over his wall many times a day. He always makes them leave by the same way they came instead of by the gate, and when any of them object he thrusts his Nazi armband in their face and points to his Nazi decoration, the highest in the country, and asks them if they know what that means. It always works. He joined us later in the evening and gave each of us a leather bound Siemens diary. We sang Christmas songs with Wilson at the piano.

Christmas Day. A perfect day too, so far as weather is concerned. And conditions also seem slightly better. There were crowds on the streets with quite a number of stalls selling things. But at tiffin time while we were sitting at roast goose, with Miss Vautrin, Miss Bauer, Miss Blanche Wu, and Miss Pearl Bromley Wu as our guests, we had to answer three calls for help and turn soldiers out of Fenn's and the Chinese faculty houses and the sericulture building. That day, too, the American flag was taken from the Rural Leaders Training School. Seven soldiers spent the night and the night before in the Bible Teachers Training School and raped the women, a girl of 12 was raped by three soldiers almost next door to us and another of 13, before we could send relief. There were also more bayonet cases; Wilson reports that of the 240 cases in the hospital, three fourths of them are due to Japanese violence since the occupation. At the University, registration commenced. The people were told that if any ex-soldiers were there and would step out, they would be used in the labor corps and their lives would be spared. About 240 stepped out. They were herded together and taken away. Two or three lived to tell the tale and by feigning death after they were wounded, escaped and came to the hospital. One group had quite a number of cases where men faced the execution squad, escaped with only a wound or two, perhaps lying all day and into the night covered by the corpses of their comrades to escape detection, and then getting to the hospital or to friends. A rash bit of carelessness on the part of the Japs.

December 27th. The third week of Japanese occupation begins and is celebrated with the arrival of a Nisshin Kissen ship from Shanghai. Four representatives of the company called at my office and promised that a regular service will soon be established on the river. A number of ladies are in the party and are taken on a sight-seeing trip of the city. They distribute a few sweets to some children and seem tremendously pleased with themselves, also with Japan's wonderful victory, but of course they hear nothing of the real truth, nor does the rest of the world, I suppose. The soldiers are still completely out of control, and there is no co-operation between the Army and the Embassy. The Army even refuses to recognize the new Self-Governing Committee which was called into being by the Embassy, and its members are deliberately slighted. They are told they are a conquered people and should expect no favors. Our list of disorders and cruelty keeps mounting and those we never hear of must be many, many times what are reported or observed. A few of today's: A boy of 13 taken by the Japanese nearly two weeks ago, beaten with an iron rod and then bayoneted because he didn't do his work satisfactorily. A car with an officer and two soldiers came to the University last night, raped three women in the premises and took away one with them. The B T T S [Bible Teachers Training School] was entered many times; people were robbed and 20 women were raped. The hospital superintendent was taken by soldiers in spite of Miss Bauer's protests. The burning of the city continues, and today two of the Christian Mission School buildings in the south part of the city were fired, also Kiesling & Baders (German restaurant). But Takatami, chief of the Embassy police, calls and now promises protection for all foreign buildings and starts out with Sperling to inspect German properties. Personally I think he is promising far more than he can deliver. What a list of claims Japan will have presented to her and it all seems so utterly useless, for there are hundreds of foreign properties in Nanking and almost all of them have been looted by her soldiers. And the cars that have been stolen. I think I almost forgot to mention that yesterday Smythe and I called at the British Embassy which is in the far north western part of the city, out of the Zone. All the cars, eleven of them, had been taken by the soldiers, also a couple of trucks, but fortunately the servants had fared fairly well. Every block or so, one now sees abandoned cars – stolen cars that have been run to ruin. Ten stripped of their tires and batteries and anything else useful and left where they were, usually overturned.

There was one bright spot today, though, and that was the arrival by the N K K boat, through the Japanese Embassy, of a letter to me from Dr. Fong See -- the first letter to come to any of us in all these past three or four weeks. He wanted to know if we might not be in need of funds for our relief work and offered to hold some of the money that was coming in in response to our appeal through the Rotary International. That's Fong all over. And we'll need additional funds all right – many, many thousands. I have a nightmare every time I think of what we'll soon be needing; where are we going to get it?

December 28th. What we feared -- bad weather: A steady drizzle and then snow. The poor refugees living in huts, many no larger than a pup tent, will have a miserable time of it, for most of these huts are not rain proof. And then there is the sticky mud. But we have certainly been fortunate in having had ideal weather up to this. I inspected some of our camps today. The crowding in most of them is terrible and of course it is impossible to keep them clean. Our camp managers and their assistants, all volunteer workers, are doing a splendid job on the whole in maintaining discipline, feeding the people and keeping things fairly sanitary. But how [long] must we maintain these camps? When are the people going to be permitted to return to their homes -- those who have any homes left? When will order be established?

I went over to our Y M C A School today for the first time. It is located not far beyond my residence. Everything had been turned upside down, and many of the instruments of the physics laboratory deliberately smashed. On the athletic field was a dead cow, half eaten by the dogs. The Embassy proclamation had been torn from the gate.

December 29th. Weather better today, fortunately. Registration continues, most inefficiently, and the people are given no information as to where and when to appear. More taken as ex-soldiers. Women and old men come kneeling and crying, begging our help in getting back their husbands and sons. In a few cases we

have been successful, but the military resents any interference from us. Word came through from Hsiakwan by a representative of the Chinese Red Cross Society that there are approximately 20,000 refugees along the river front. The supply of rice we let them have before the Japanese arrived is nearly exhausted and there is great suffering. They ask to come into the Safety Zone but we are already too crowded. Anyway, the Japanese wouldn't permit it nor will they permit us to go out there and render help. For the time being they will have to get along as best they can.

Guards are at last posted at the various foreign embassies. But why wasn't it done two weeks ago? Our homes are still left unprotected; and the few guards posted at some of our camps are sometimes more of a nuisance than a help. They demand fire and food, beds and other things from the people.

December 30th. I called in the Y M C A servants today, 18 of them, and paid them up to the 15th of next month and told them that they must now try to find other work. It was a hard job. Some of them have been with the Association for many years and are fine, faithful fellows. Wong Ding and I hope it may be possible to start something in a small way in the old school buildings if and when we get order established, but few of our members are left and it will be a difficult matter to build up a new constituency from the material that is now in Nanking. Wong Ding has done a splendid job as assistant housing commissioner, and so has Y.S. Chang. as one of the camp superintendents, while our servants have all been doing their bit in one way or another.

When I called at the Japanese Embassy this afternoon they were busy giving instructions to about 60 Chinese, most of them our camp managers, on how the New Year's was to be celebrated. The five-barred flag [flag of Beiyang government (1912-1928) of the early China Republic and used by collaborationist Chinese army during Japanese invasion] is to replace the Nationalist flag, and they were told to make a thousand of these and also a thousand Japanese flags for that event. Camps of over a thousand must have 20 representatives present, smaller camps 10. At one o'clock New Year's Day the five-barred flag is to be raised above the Drum Tower, there will be "suitable" speeches and "music" (according to the program) -- and of course moving pictures will be taken of the happy people waving flags, and welcoming the new regime. In the meantime, the burning of the city continues, three cases of girls 12 to 13 years of age being raped or abducted. Sperling has a busy time chasing soldiers out of houses in the immediate vicinity of headquarters. The sericulture building (a part of Nanking University: American property) has a cordon thrown around it while soldiers engage in a man-hunt, etc. etc.

December 31st. A comparatively quiet day. For the first time no cases of violence were reported for the night. The Japanese are busy with their New Year's preparations. Two days of holiday are announced. We dread them, for it means more drunk soldiers. Refugees are advised to stay indoors. Rabe invited our household to his house after dinner and lighted his Christmas tree for us, and each of us received a New Year's card with our Zone emblem -- a circle with a cross within it in red -- signed by all 22 of the foreign community in Nanking. He also entertained us with stories of some of his experiences in South Africa. On his walls hang some magnificent trophies of his hunts.

New Year's Eve. Thoughts of home and loved ones come crowding in. What wouldn't I give for a letter from "home". My last from Mrs. Fitch was dated October 28th as she was about to sail from Yokohama; from Marion the same day but written just before she had joined up with Mrs. Fitch on the President Hoover; from Albert and Edith long before that. Kempton of course I had seen on that airplane trip of mine back from Sian the latter part of November, and I suppose he is still in Changsha. Evidently we are going to have to exercise patience a while longer for the Japanese Embassy tells us that it will still be weeks before the postal services are re-established here. They also tell us that it will be a month, at least. before any of us is allowed to leave the city on a visit to Shanghai.

There is perhaps no purpose to be served by going further with this story and telling of acts of horror that have been committed since. It is now the 11th of January, and while conditions are vastly improved there has not been a day that has not had its atrocities, some of them of a most revolting nature. With the arrival of three representatives of the American Embassy on the 6th and of three of both the British and German Embassies on the 9th we feel a little more assurance that conditions will still further improve. But only last night I drove past four new fires that had just been started and saw soldiers within a shop just starting a fifth. There has not been a day since December 19th that fires have not been started by the Japanese soldiers. And Kroeger, who managed to slip out of the East Gate the other day, tells us that all the villages as far as he went, some 20 miles, are burned, and that not a living Chinese or farm animal is to be seen.

We are at last in touch with the outside world through the radio and that is a great blessing; for last Sunday I got our house connected up and we now have electricity. Fortunately too for our stock of candles and kerosene was just giving out. At our committee headquarters we had current a few days earlier. Only the Japanese are supposed to have current [electricity], though, so we are not advertising the fact. Then we have seen a couple of issues of a Shanghai Japanese paper and two of the Tokyo Nichi Nichi. These tell us that even as early as December 28th the stores were rapidly opening up and business returning to normal, that the Japanese were cooperating with us in feeding the poor refugees, that the city had been cleared of Chinese looters, and that peace and order now reigned. It is typical of the lies Japan has been sending abroad ever since the war started.

I have written this account in no spirit of vindictiveness. War is brutalizing, especially war of conquest, and it would seem to me from my experiences in this, as also in the Shanghai War of 1932, that the Japanese army, with no background of Christian idealism, has today become a brutal, destructive force that not only menaces the East but also may menace the West some day, and that the world should know the truth about what is happening. How this situation should be dealt with I shall leave to abler minds than mine to consider.

There is a bright side in our story, of course, and that is the wonderful spirit of service that has been shown by our Chinese and foreign friends alike and the intimate fellowship we have enjoyed in our common cause. Our hearts have been frequently warmed, too, by the innumerable times the refugees have expressed appreciation for what we have tried to do, and our losses and inconveniences seem so trivial when compared with what they have suffered. Then our three German friends on the committee have won both our admiration and affection. They have been a tower of strength -- without them I don't know how we should have got through.

What of the future? The immediate future is anything but bright, but the Chinese have an unsurpassed capacity for suffering and endurance beside their many other good qualities, and right must triumph in the end. Anyway, I shall always be glad that I threw in my lot with them.

Signed G.A. Fitch

Note: Underlines are added by the editor.

Source: P80-103, *American Missionary Eyewitnesses to the Nanking Massacre, 1937-1938* published by Yale Divinity School Library

Digital image of **Dr. George Fitch letter to friends on January 6, 1938** (4 pages) on Yale Divinity School Library, the Nanking Massacre Project <http://divdl.library.yale.edu/ydlchina/images%5CNMP0335.pdf>

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