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## THE NANKING SAFETY ZONE



IN THE HISTORY of every war, there are always a few rare individuals who emerge as beacons of hope for the persecuted. In the United States the Quakers freed their own slaves and helped establish the Underground Railroad. In Europe during World War II, Oskar Schindler, a Nazi, expended his fortune to save twelve hundred Jews from the Auschwitz gas chambers, and Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat, saved more than one hundred thousand Jews by giving them false passports. Who can forget Mies Giep, the Austrian woman who together with others hid the young Anne Frank and her family in an Amsterdam attic?

Dark times paralyze most people, but some very few, for reasons most of us will never understand, are able to set aside all caution and do things even they could not imagine themselves doing in ordinary times.

It is hard to talk about a bright spot in the horror that is the Rape of Nanking, but if one can, it is surely to shine a light on the actions of a small band of Americans and Europeans who risked their lives to defy the Japanese invaders and rescue hundreds of thousands of Chinese refugees from almost certain extermination. These courageous men and women created the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone. This is their story.

The decision to create a safety zone in the city of Nanking arose almost spontaneously, within weeks of the collapse of Shanghai. In November 1937, Father Jacquinet de Bessage, a French priest, established a neutral area in Shanghai to shelter 450,000 Chinese refugees whose homes had been destroyed by the invading Japanese soldiers. When the Presbyterian missionary W. Plumer Mills learned of Bessage's project, he suggested to his friends that a similar zone be created in Nanking. Mills and some two dozen other people (mostly American, but also German, Danish, Russian, and Chinese) ultimately designated a region slightly west of the center of the city as a safety zone. Within the zone were situated Nanking University, Ginqing Women's Arts and Science College, the American embassy, and various Chinese government buildings. In setting up the zone, the committee sought to offer refuge for noncombatants caught in the cross-fire between the Japanese and Chinese militaries. The foreigners had every intention of shutting the zone down a few days or weeks after the city passed safely into Japanese hands.

The idea was not universally accepted at first. The Japanese, for one, flatly refused to honor it. And as enemy troops approached the city, the zone committee heard urgent pleas not only from friends and family but from Chinese, Japanese, and Western officials to abandon the project at once and flee for their lives. In early December the American embassy staff insisted that the zone leaders join them onboard the USS *Panay*, a gunboat packed with diplomats, journalists, and Western and Chinese refugees as it prepared to move upriver away from Nanking. But the zone leaders politely declined the offer, and after giving them a final warning, the diplomats on the *Panay*

sailed away on December 9, 1937, leaving the remaining foreigners to their fate.

Interestingly enough, the *Panay* would later be bombed and machine-gunned by Japanese aviators. On the afternoon of December 12, Japanese aviators sank the gunboat without warning, killing two people and wounding numerous others, even circling over the area repeatedly as if they planned to exterminate the survivors, who hid under a thicket of riverbank reeds. The reasons for the attack were unclear. The Japanese later claimed that their aviators lost their cool judgment in the heat of battle and that fog or smoke prevented them from seeing the American flags on the *Panay*, but this claim was later proven to be demonstrably false. (Not only was the day of the bombing sunny and cloudless, but the Japanese aviators had received explicit orders to bomb the *Panay*, orders the aviators carried out reluctantly only after vehement protests and arguments.) Today some suspect that the bombing was a test to see how the Americans would react, while others believe it was the result of internal politics within the Japanese high command. But whatever the reason behind the attack, the city of Nanking turned out to be a safer place for the remaining foreigners than the *Panay*.

The first refugees to enter the Nanking Safety Zone were those who had lost their homes to aerial bombardments or had abandoned homes on the outskirts of the city in the face of the approaching Japanese army. Soon these first refugees packed the camps so densely that it was said that many had to stand without sleeping for several days until new camps were added. Once the city fell, the zone housed not just thousands but hundreds of thousands of people. For the next six weeks the committee had to find a way to provide these refugees with the bare necessities of survival—food, shelter, and medical care. The committee members also had to protect them from physical harm. Often this required on-the-spot intervention to prevent the Japanese military from proceeding with some threatened action. And through it all, though no one asked them to do so, they documented and broadcasted Japanese outrages to the world. In doing so, they

left a written record for posterity of what they had witnessed.

In retrospect, it seems almost miraculous that some two dozen foreigners managed to do everything they did while fifty thousand Japanese soldiers ripped apart the city. Remember, by occupation these men and women were missionaries, doctors, professors, and executives—not seasoned military officers. Their lifestyles had been sheltered and leisurely. “We were not rich,” one woman said of that period, “but a little foreign money went a long way in China.” Many were ensconced in luxurious mansions, surrounded by teams of servants.

Strangely, because of an incident in Nanking a decade earlier, most expected to have more trouble with the Chinese than the Japanese. Those who had been in Nanking in 1927 remembered that during the Nationalist invasion of the city, Chinese troops recklessly killed foreigners and besieged a group of them, including the American consul and his wife, in a house on top of Socony Hill. (“Would they kill us?” one woman wrote of that horrible time. “Would they torture us as in the Boxer? Would they do worse? Torture the children before our eyes? I did not let my mind touch what they might do to us as women.”) Indeed, one of the foreign eyewitnesses of the 1937 massacre admitted: “We were more prepared for excesses from the fleeing Chinese . . . but never, never from the Japanese. On the contrary, we had expected that with the appearance of the Japanese the return of peace, quiet and prosperity would occur.”

The heroic efforts of the Americans and Europeans during this period are so numerous (their diaries run for thousands of pages) that it is impossible to narrate all of their deeds here. For this reason, I have decided to concentrate on the activities of three individuals—a German businessman, an American surgeon, and an American missionary professor—before describing the committee’s achievements as a whole. On the surface, the three could not have been more different.

## THE NAZI WHO SAVED NANKING

Perhaps the most fascinating character to emerge from the history of the Rape of Nanking is the German businessman John Rabe. To most of the Chinese in the city, he was a hero, "the living Buddha of Nanking," the legendary head of the International Safety Zone who saved hundreds of thousands of Chinese lives. But to the Japanese, Rabe was a strange and unlikely savior. For he was not only a German national—a citizen of a country allied with Japan—but the leader of the Nazi Party in Nanking.

In 1996 I began an investigation into the life of John Rabe and eventually unearthed thousands of pages of diaries that he and other Nazis kept during the Rape. These diaries led me to conclude that John Rabe was "the Oskar Schindler of China."

Prior to the Rape, Rabe had led a relatively peaceful though well-traveled life. The son of a sea captain, he was born in Hamburg, Germany, on November 23, 1882. After completing his apprenticeship in Hamburg he worked a few years in Africa and then in 1908 moved to China, where he found employment at the Peking office of the Siemens China Company. In 1931 he transferred to the Nanking office, selling telephones and electrical equipment to the Chinese government. Bald and bespectacled, dressed in conservative suits and bow ties, he looked like a typical, middle-aged Western businessman in the city. Soon he became a pillar of the German community in Nanking, administering his own German school for elementary and junior high school students.

As the years went by, Rabe became a staunch supporter of Nazism and the representative town leader for the Nazi Party in Nanking. In 1938 he would tell German audiences that "I believe not only in the correctness of our political system but, as an organizer of the party, I am behind the system 100 percent."

Decades later his granddaughter, Ursula Reinhardt, insists that Rabe saw the Nazi Party primarily as a socialist organization and did not support the persecution of Jews and other ethnic groups in Germany. This may well be true. During his

visits to various ministries in Nanking, Rabe repeatedly summed up his Nazi philosophy in socialist terms: "We are soldiers of work, we are a government of workers, we are friends to the worker, we will never leave the worker's side in times of crisis."

When most of his fellow German nationals, on the advice of friends and embassy officials, departed China long before the Japanese military reached the gates of the city, Rabe chose to stay and was soon elected the head of the Safety Zone. In fact, even when Japanese embassy officials met with him and suggested more strongly that he leave, he remained. Dispatched by his superiors to protect Rabe during the fall of Nanking, Japanese Major Oka asked him: "Why in the devil did you stay? Why do you want to involve yourself in our military affairs? What does all this matter to you? You haven't lost anything here!"

Rabe paused for a moment, then gave Oka his answer. "I have been living here in China for over thirty years," Rabe said. "My kids and grandchildren were born here, and I am happy and successful here. I have always been treated well by the Chinese people, even during the war. If I had spent thirty years in Japan and were treated just as well by the Japanese people, you can be assured that, in a time of emergency, such as the situation China faces now, I would not leave the side of the people in Japan."

This answer satisfied the Japanese major, who respected the concept of loyalty. "He took a step back, mumbled some words about Samurai obligations, and bowed deeply," Rabe wrote of the incident.

But Rabe had an even more personal reason not to walk away and protect himself—he felt responsible for the safety of his Chinese employees, a team of Siemens mechanics who maintained the turbines in the city's main power plant, the telephones and clocks in every ministry, the alarms in the police stations and the banks, and an enormous X-ray machine at the central hospital. "What I only had a premonition of then," Rabe wrote, "—but what I now know—is that all of them would have been killed or severely injured if I had left their side."

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Earlier that year Rabe had endured countless air raids in Nanking with scarcely more than a foxhole and a few planks of wood for protection. Clothing was also scarce, especially after Rabe made the mistake around late September of storing his entire wardrobe on the *Kutwo*, a ship used to transport German nationals out of Nanking, for safekeeping. Upon its arrival at Hankow, the *Kutwo* dumped its unclaimed luggage, leaving Rabe with only two suits, one of which he gave to a Chinese refugee whom he believed needed it more than he did.

But his biggest concern was not for his own personal safety or well-being but for the establishment of the Safety Zone. The committee members wanted the zone to be free of all military activity, but the Japanese army refused to recognize it as neutral territory, and the committee found it next to impossible to dislodge Chinese General Tang Sheng-chih's men from the area—especially because Tang's own villa stood within it. For Rabe the final straw came when the Chinese army not only refused to evacuate the area but erected its gun turrets on streets inside the zone. Losing his patience, Rabe threatened to quit his position as head of the Safety Zone and tell the world the reason why unless Tang evacuated his troops from the area immediately. "They promised me that my wishes would be respected," Rabe said, "but the fulfillment itself took a bit longer."

Rabe sensed the need to call on higher authorities for help. On November 25, he wired Adolf Hitler to request the fuehrer's "kindly intercession in asking that the Japanese government grant the building of a neutral zone for those who are not fighting to battle for Nanking." At the same time Rabe also sent a telegram to his friend General Counsel Mr. Kriebel: "Asking cordially for support of my request of the Fuehrer . . . which otherwise would make a terrible bloodbath unavoidable. Heil Hitler! Rabe—Siemens representative and head of the International Committee in Nanking."

Neither Hitler nor Kriebel replied, but Rabe soon noticed

something unusual in the Japanese bombing pattern in the city. Before he sent the telegrams, Japanese planes bombed areas within Nanking indiscriminately; afterwards they attacked only military targets, such as military schools, airstrips, and arsenals. Wrote Rabe, "This . . . was the goal of my telegram and it made quite a lasting impression on my American colleagues."

But his triumph was short-lived as one crisis loomed after another. Originally Rabe and his colleagues hoped to reserve the empty buildings in the zone for the poorest citizens of Nanking. To avoid a rush of people, the committee had pasted posters all over the city, urging refugees to rent housing from friends. But so many people surged into the area of two and a half square miles that Rabe soon found himself with fifty thousand more residents than he had expected even in the worst-case scenario. The refugees not only packed the buildings but spilled forth onto lawns, trenches, and bomb dugouts. Entire families slept in the open streets, while hundreds of mat dwellings mushroomed next to the American embassy. By the time the city fell, the Safety Zone—its borders lined by white flags and sheets marked with the red cross symbol within a red circle—was a swarming "human beehive" of 250,000 refugees.

Sanitation soon posed another nightmare. The filth in the camps—especially the toilets—enraged Rabe, and it took a tirade on his part to get the refugee center on the Siemens grounds in acceptable order. Afterwards, when Rabe inspected the Siemens camp, he found not only were the toilets in better shape but every wall on the Siemens grounds had been repaired. "Nobody would tell me where the beautiful new bricks came from," Rabe wrote. "I determined later on that many of the newer buildings in the area were considerably shorter than before."

But the shortage of food created the worst headache of all for the zone leaders. In early December the mayor of Nanking gave the International Committee thirty thousand *tan* (or two thousand tons) of rice and ten thousand bags of flour to feed the population. But the food was stored outside of the city, and

the committee lacked the necessary trucks to bring it into the zone. The Chinese military had already commandeered most of the vehicles in the area to transport twenty thousand men and five thousand cases of Peking Palace treasures out of the capital; desperate civilians and individual soldiers had stolen virtually all the rest. With no alternative open to them, Rabe and the remaining foreigners drove frantically through Nanking, using their own automobiles to haul as much rice as possible into the zone. As the Japanese bombarded the city, the foreigners continued the deliveries; one driver actually lost an eye from flying shrapnel. In the end the zone leaders secured only a fraction of the total food available—ten thousand *tan* of rice and one thousand bags of flour—but the food went far to stave off hunger for many of the refugees in the zone.

On December 9, recognizing the dire situation ahead, the committee tried to negotiate a three-day cease-fire (see chapter 3), during which the Japanese could keep their positions and the Chinese could withdraw peacefully from the walled city. However, Chiang Kai-shek did not agree to the cease-fire, prompting the Japanese to begin a furious bombardment of Nanking the following day. On December 12, the committee was again approached by the Chinese military, this time to negotiate a surrender, but again the plan fell through.

From that point on, there was little Rabe could do that day but watch and wait for the inevitable. He recorded the events as they unfolded, hour by hour. At 6:30 P.M. on December 12 he wrote: "The cannons on the Purple Mountain fire continuously—there is lighting and thunder all around it. Suddenly, the entire mountain is in flames—some houses and munitions depots are also on fire." At that moment Rabe recalled an ancient Chinese saying that portended the city's doom: "When the Purple Mountain burns . . . then Nanking is lost."

At 8:00 P.M., Rabe watched as the skies to the south of the city glowed red with flames. Then he heard frantic knocking on both gates of his house: Chinese women and children were begging for entrance, men were scaling the garden wall behind

his German school, and people were cramming themselves into the foxholes in his garden, even ducking under the giant German flag he had used to warn pilots from bombing his property. The cries and knocking increased until Rabe could bear it no longer. He flung open the gates to let the crowd in. But the noise only intensified as the night wore on. Exasperated, Rabe donned a steel helmet and ran through his garden, yelling at everyone to shut up.

At 11:30 P.M., Rabe received a surprise visitor. It was Christian Kröger, a fellow Nazi Party member in his midthirties who worked for the German engineering firm of Carlowitz & Company. The tall, blond engineer had come to China to oversee the construction of a large steel mill but found himself, like Rabe, in the midst of Nanking's insanity. The International Committee had appointed Kröger its treasurer.

Kröger had stopped by to tell Rabe that Chungshan Road was littered with weapons and supplies that the Chinese military had left behind during its retreat. Someone had even abandoned a bus, offering it for sale for twenty dollars.

"Do you think someone will take it?" Kröger asked.

"But Christian, how can they?" Rabe said.

"Na. I ordered the man to come into my office in the morning."

Finally, the din around his house began to diminish. The exhausted Rabe, who had not had time even to change clothes for two days, lay back in bed, trying to relax as the society he knew and loved collapsed around him. He knew that the Ministry of Communication building was burning down and that the city would fall any minute. Rabe reassured himself that things would only get better, not worse, from this point on. "You don't have to be scared of the Japanese," his Chinese colleagues had told him. "As soon as they have taken over the city, peace and order will prevail—the rail connections with Shanghai will be quickly rebuilt and the stores will return to their normal functions." Before he fell asleep, Rabe thought, "Thank God that the worst has been overcome!"

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The next morning Rabe awoke to the sound of yet another air raid. Apparently not all of the Chinese army had been forced from the city, he thought. It was only 5:00 A.M., so he lay down again. Like most people in the city, Rabe had become so jaded by air raids that the blasts no longer bothered him.

Later that morning Rabe explored the city to check out the extent of the damage. In the streets lay numerous Chinese corpses, many of them civilians who had been shot in the back. He watched a group of Japanese soldiers push their way into a German coffeehouse. When Rabe chastised them for stealing, pointing to the German flags on the house, an English-speaking Japanese soldier snapped: "We are hungry! If you want to complain, go to the Japanese embassy. They will pay for it!" The Japanese soldiers also told Rabe that their supply column had not arrived, and they could not count on the column for any nourishment even if it did arrive. Later Rabe learned that the soldiers looted the coffeehouse, then set it afire.

Worse was to come. In the distance, Rabe saw Japanese soldiers marching north from the south side of Nanking to occupy the rest of the city. To avoid them, he immediately drove north and reached the main street of the city, Chungshan Road, stopping at the Red Cross hospital in the Foreign Ministry. The Chinese staff had fled the premises, and bodies were everywhere—clogging the rooms, corridors, and even the exits from the hospital.

That day Rabe encountered the remains of the Chinese army—hungry and exhausted stragglers who had failed to cross the Yangtze River to safety. Driving through Shansi Road Circle, he met four hundred Chinese troops, all of them still armed, marching in the direction of the advancing Japanese army. It was then that Rabe had a sudden "humanitarian impulse" that was to haunt his conscience for months, if not years, afterwards. Warning them about the Japanese troops to the south, Rabe advised the Chinese soldiers to throw away their machine guns and join the refugees in the Safety Zone. After a short discussion, they agreed and followed Rabe into the zone.

Similarly, when hundreds of Chinese soldiers found themselves trapped on the northern side of the city, unable to secure

passage across the river, many broke into the Safety Zone, begging the American and European administrators to save their lives. The committee members were uncertain as to whether they should help them. After all, they had created the zone as a sanctuary for civilians, not soldiers. The committee tried to resolve the dilemma by addressing the issue with Japanese army headquarters but got no further than a captain on Han Chung Road.

Moved by the plight of the soldiers, the committee eventually caved in to their pleas. Like Rabe, they told the soldiers that if they laid down their arms, the Japanese might treat them mercifully. Then they helped the soldiers disarm and housed them in various buildings within the neutral area. In the confusion, many of the soldiers stripped off their uniforms and mingled with the civilians in the zone.

The next day John Rabe wrote a long letter explaining the situation to a Japanese military commander. He begged the Japanese to exercise mercy toward the former soldiers and to treat them humanely according to the recognized laws of war. To Rabe's great relief, a Japanese officer promised him that the lives of the Chinese soldiers would be spared.

But relief turned into horror when the Japanese betrayed Rabe and seized the disarmed soldiers for execution. If Rabe had hoped that the Japanese would not be able to separate the troops from the hundreds of thousands of civilians, he was sorely mistaken. The Japanese detected virtually every one of the former soldiers by examining their hands, knowing that the daily use of guns caused calluses on certain areas on the fingers of soldiers. They also examined shoulders for backpack marks, foreheads and hair for indentations from military caps, and even feet for blisters caused from months of marching.

During a staff conference the night of December 14, the committee learned that the Japanese had rounded up thirteen hundred men in a Safety Zone camp near the headquarters to shoot them. "We knew that there were a number of ex-soldiers among them, but Rabe had been promised by an officer that afternoon that their lives would be spared," George Fitch, the

YMCA representative, wrote in his diary of the incident. "It was now all too obvious what they were going to do. The men were lined up and roped together in groups of about 100 by soldiers with bayonets fixed; those who had hats had them roughly torn off and thrown to the ground—and then by the lights of our headlights we watched them marched away to their doom."

"Did I have the right to act that way?" Rabe wrote later of his decision to quarter the soldiers in the zone. "Did I handle that correctly?"

For the next few days Rabe watched helplessly as the Japanese dragged thousands more soldiers from the zone and executed them. The Japanese killed thousands of innocent men who happened to have calluses on their fingers, foreheads, or feet—men who were ricksha coolies, manual laborers, and police officers. Rabe later witnessed the Red Swastika Society, a charitable Buddhist organization in the city, pull more than 120 corpses from a single pond. (In a later report, Rabe pointed out that several ponds in Nanking actually disappeared because they were so filled with corpses.)

As both head of the International Committee and local head of the Nazi Party, a position that was certain to carry some weight with the Japanese authorities, Rabe wrote letter after letter to the Japanese embassy. At first he was unfailingly polite, toning down his anger because of his perceived obligation, as a German citizen and Nazi leader, to maintain the relationship between the two embassies. He asked the American members of the committee to let him review their letters to the Japanese embassy so that he could "put some honey" into them as well. He maintained his polite tone in his personal visits to the embassy.

In turn, the Japanese diplomats received Rabe's letters and visits with gracious smiles and official courtesy, but in the end he always received the same answer: "We shall inform the military authorities." As days passed, each bringing its own unrelenting onslaught of fresh atrocities, Rabe's written

communication to the Japanese grew increasingly hostile, punctuated with exclamations of outrage:

All 27 Westerners in the city at that time and our Chinese population were totally surprised by the reign of robbery, rapine, and killing initiated by your soldiers on the 14th!

We did not find a single Japanese patrol either in the Zone or at the entrances!

Yesterday, in broad daylight, several women at the Seminary were raped right in the middle of a large room filled with men, women and children! We 22 Westerners cannot feed 200,000 Chinese civilians and protect them night and day. That is the duty of the Japanese authorities. If you can give them protection, we can help feed them!

If this process of terrorism continues, it will be next to impossible to locate workers to get the essential services started.

Gradually Rabe and the rest of the International Committee begin to read the real message in the diplomat's answers—it was the military, not the embassy, calling the shots. Fukuda Tokuyasu, secretary of the Japanese embassy, told Rabe as much by saying: "The Japanese army wants to make it very bad for the town, but we, the embassy, will try to prevent it." During the great Rape some Japanese embassy officials actually suggested that the International Committee seek publicity in Japan directly so that public opinion would force the Japanese government to take action. But at the same time another embassy official urged Rabe to remain silent, warning him that "if you tell the newspaper reporters anything bad, you will have the entire Japanese army against you."

Finally, with only his status as an official of an allied nation for protection, Rabe did what now seems the unthinkable: he began to roam about the city, trying to prevent atrocities himself.

Whenever he drove through Nanking, some man would inevitably leap out and stop the car to beg Rabe to stop a rape in

progress—a rape that usually involved a sister, a wife, or a daughter. Rabe would then let the man climb into the car and direct him to the scene of the rape. Once there, he would chase Japanese soldiers away from their prey, on one occasion even bodily lifting a soldier sprawled on top of a young girl. He knew these expeditions were highly dangerous (“The Japanese had pistols and bayonets and I . . . had only party symbols and my swastika armband,” Rabe wrote in his report to Hitler), but nothing could deter him from making them—not even the risk of death.

His diary entry on January 1, 1938, is typical: “The mother of a young attractive girl called out to me, and throwing herself on her knees, crying, said I should help her. Upon entering [the house] I saw a Japanese soldier lying completely naked on a young girl, who was crying hysterically. I yelled at this swine, in any language it would be understood, ‘Happy New Year!’ and he fled from there, naked and with his pants in his hand.”

Rabe was appalled by the rape in the city. In the streets he passed scores of female corpses, raped and mutilated, next to the charred remains of their homes. “Groups of 3 to 10 marauding soldiers would begin by traveling through the city and robbing whatever there was to steal,” Rabe wrote in his report to Hitler.

They would continue by raping the women and girls and killing anything and anyone that offered any resistance, attempted to run away from them or simply happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. There were girls under the age of 8 and women over the age of 70 who were raped and then, in the most brutal way possible, knocked down and beat up. We found corpses of women on beer glasses and others who had been lanced by bamboo shoots. I saw the victims with my own eyes—I talked to some of them right before their deaths and had their bodies brought to the morgue at the Kulo hospital so that I could be personally convinced that all of these reports had touched on the truth.

As he walked through the burning wreckage of his beloved city, Rabe could read, on almost every street corner, beautiful

Japanese posters that proclaimed: "Trust Our Japanese Army—They Will Protect and Feed You."

Determined to save Chinese lives, Rabe sheltered as many people as he could, turning his house and office into sanctuaries for Siemens employees and their families. Rabe also harbored hundreds of Chinese women on his property, permitting them to live in tiny straw huts in his backyard. With these women Rabe developed a warning system to protect them from Japanese rapists. Whenever Japanese soldiers scaled the wall of his yard, the women would blow a whistle and send Rabe running out into the yard to chase the offenders away. This happened so frequently that Rabe rarely left his home at night, fearful that Japanese intruders would commit an orgy of rape in his absence. He complained about the situation to Japanese military officers, but they failed to take the matter seriously. Even when Rabe caught a Japanese soldier raping a woman in one of the backyard straw huts, a military officer did nothing to punish the rapist except slap him across the face.

If Rabe was frustrated by the futility of the situation—by the limitations of what he and some twenty other individuals could accomplish to protect hundreds of thousands of civilians from more than fifty thousand Japanese soldiers—he did not show it. He knew it was crucial to hide any sign of weakness from the Japanese and to overwhelm them with "a domineering presence and energy."

Fortunately, his status as a Nazi caused several Japanese soldiers to hesitate before committing further mayhem—at least in his presence. George Fitch, the local YMCA secretary, wrote that "when any of them objects [Rabe] 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!" The Japanese soldiers appeared to respect—at times even fear—the Nazis of Nanking. While the Japanese privates did not hesitate to beat up the Americans, charge at them with bayonets, or even to push one American missionary down a flight of stairs, they exercised considerable

restraint in their dealings with Rabe and his countrymen. Once, when four Japanese soldiers in the midst of raping and looting saw Eduard Sperling's swastika armband, they screamed "Deutsche! Deutsche!" and ran away. On another occasion, the swastika probably saved Rabe's life. One evening Japanese soldiers broke into his property, and Rabe confronted them with his flashlight. One of them reached for his pistol, as if to shoot Rabe, but stopped when he realized it would be "bad business to shoot a German subject."

If the Japanese respected Rabe, the Chinese refugee community revered him. To them he was the man who rescued daughters from sexual slavery and sons from machine-gun fire. Rabe's very presence sometimes touched off riots in Safety Zone camps. During one of his visits to the zone, thousands of Chinese women flung themselves to the ground before him, weeping and begging for protection, declaring they would rather commit suicide on the spot than leave the zone to be raped and tortured.

Rabe tried to keep hope alive for his refugees in the midst of their terror. He hosted little birthday celebrations for the children born to refugee women living in his backyard. Each newborn received a gift: \$10 for baby boys and \$9.50 for baby girls. (As Rabe explained in his report to Hitler—"Girls in China aren't worth as much as boys.") Typically, when a boy was born, he received Rabe's name, and if a girl was born, she received his wife's name, Dora.

Rabe's courage and generosity ultimately won the respect of the other members of the International Committee, even those fundamentally opposed to Nazism. George Fitch wrote to his friends that he would "almost wear a Nazi badge" to keep fellowship with Rabe and the other Germans in Nanking. Even Dr. Robert Wilson, a man thoroughly repulsed by Nazism, sang Rabe's praises in letters to his family: "He is well up in Nazi circles and after coming into such close contact with him as we have for the past few weeks and discover[ing] what a splendid man he is and what a tremendous heart he has, it is hard to reconcile his personality with his adulation of 'Der Fuhrer.'"

## THE ONLY SURGEON IN NANKING

It is not surprising that Robert Wilson stayed in Nanking when virtually every other surgeon left, for Nanking, the city of his birth and boyhood, had always commanded a special place in his heart. Born in 1904, Wilson was reared by a family of Methodist missionaries who had shaped many of Nanking's educational institutions. His uncle, John Ferguson, founded the University of Nanking. His father worked as an ordained minister and middle-school instructor in the city, while his mother, a college-educated Greek scholar who spoke several languages fluently, ran her own school for missionary children. As a teenager, Robert Wilson even learned geometry from Pearl Buck, who would later win the Nobel Prize in Literature for her novels about China. Thriving in this environment, and displaying exceptional intellectual promise, Wilson won, at age seventeen, a scholarship to Princeton University. Upon graduation from college, he taught Latin and mathematics for two years at a high school in Connecticut, enrolled in Harvard Medical School, and then served as an intern at St. Luke's Hospital in New York, where he courted and married the head nurse. But rather than pursue a career in the United States, Wilson decided that his future lay in his hometown of Nanking, and taking his bride with him, he returned in 1935 to practice medicine at the University of Nanking Hospital.

The first two years for the Wilsons were perhaps the most idyllic of their lives. Time was marked by a slow-paced charm—dinners with other missionary couples, elegant teas and receptions at foreign embassies, parties at sprawling country villas staffed with private cooks and coolies. In the evenings he read ancient Chinese in its original text and studied under a private tutor to expand his knowledge of the language. He also took every Wednesday afternoon off to play tennis. Sometimes he and his wife would go to the lake together and have dinner on a boat, inhaling the perfumed air as they drifted through watery lanes of red lotus blossom.

War, however, shattered forever the timeless serenity the Wilsons had enjoyed in Nanking. After the Marco Polo Bridge

incident in July, the people of Nanking began to carry gas masks in the street, along with chemical solution and layers of gauze, fearing a Japanese poison-gas attack. By August 1937, when the Japanese started to bomb the capital, his wife Marjorie had boarded a gunboat with their infant daughter Elizabeth and arrived safely at Kuling. But Wilson, fearing his wife and child would starve to death if the war continued, insisted that they return to the United States. Mrs. Wilson complied with his wishes and went back to work at St. Luke's in New York while her mother cared for the baby. But there was no question that Dr. Wilson himself would stay in Nanking. "He saw this as his duty," his wife recalled, almost sixty years later. "The Chinese were his people."

No doubt to dispel loneliness that autumn, Wilson moved into the house of J. Lossing Buck, the former husband of Pearl Buck, and the house soon filled up with his friends: the surgeon Richard Brady, the United Christian missionary James McCallum, and other people who would later serve as members of the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone. Like Wilson, many of these men had sent their wives and children away from Nanking.

When he wasn't busy with patients, Wilson often wrote letters home to his family. Most contained gruesome descriptions of the victims of Japanese bombs, such as the girl who had crouched with her back to an explosion, only to have her buttocks ripped off. From the casualties of war he dug out a growing heap of shrapnel and bullets—enough, he wrote cynically, to open "a respectable museum" before the war was over.

Even though he knew that the Japanese had no qualms about bombing hospitals, Wilson continued to go to work. On September 25, in one of the worst air raids Nanking had ever experienced, the Japanese aimed two 1,000-pound bombs at the Central Hospital and Ministry of Health, despite the presence of a large red cross clearly painted on one of the roofs. The bombs landed only fifty feet away from a dugout where one hundred doctors and nurses were hiding.

Wilson did everything possible in the hospital to minimize the risk of attracting Japanese bombs. Heavy black curtains

were drawn over the windows to hide lit rooms from Japanese aviators. But the city crawled with rumors of spies guiding pilots to key targets with red and green lanterns at night. During one raid a stranger crept into the hospital with a red-shielded flashlight instead of a green- or black-shielded one and aroused suspicions when he tried to open a window that had been securely shut to prevent the seepage of poison gas. He raised even more eyebrows when he asked a Chinese aviator patient a number of unusual questions about the flying height and range of Chinese bombers.

As autumn drew to a close, Wilson found himself tremendously overworked. More people needed medical attention than ever before—not only civilian victims of Japanese bombs but veterans from Shanghai. There were approximately one hundred thousand wounded Chinese veterans in hospitals between Shanghai and the city of Wuhu. Trainload after trainload dumped them off at the station in Hsiakwan, the northern Nanking suburb. Some lay dying on the floor of the station, while others limped aimlessly through the capital. Soldiers who healed were returned to the front, but those who lost arms or legs, those crippled beyond hope, were simply turned loose with two-dollar compensations and instructions to go home. Home was far away for most soldiers. Few had the money or physical energy to get there. Abandoned by their leaders, stranded in the Shanghai-Nanking area, thousands of Chinese veterans—blind, lame, rotting away from wounds and infections—were reduced to begging in the streets.

As the situation worsened, the staff at the hospital shrank. Chinese doctors and nurses fled the city, joining the hundreds of thousands of Nanking residents in their westward migration. Wilson did all he could to dissuade his medical staff from leaving, insisting that under martial law they would have nothing to fear after the city fell. Ultimately, however, he was unable to convince them to stay. By the end of the first week of December there were only three doctors at the University of Nanking Hospital: Robert Wilson, C. S. Trimmer, and a Chinese physician. When Richard Brady, the only other American surgeon in the city, left Nanking because his little girl was seri-

ously ill in Kuling, Wilson was the only person left to perform the hourly amputations. "It is quite a sensation," he wrote on December 7, "to be the only surgeon in a big war-torn city."

A week later, Wilson nearly lost his life. On the afternoon of December 13, he had decided to perform a delicate operation on a patient who had suffered severe eye injury from a bomb. Wilson had to remove what was left of the eye in order to save the other one. The eyeball was halfway out when a shell landed fifty yards away from Wilson and exploded, shattering the windows and spraying the room with shrapnel. No one was killed or injured, but Wilson noted that the nurses were "naturally pretty shaky" and wanted to know whether they should continue the operation. "There was obviously nothing else to do," Wilson wrote, "but I don't think any eyes have come out that fast."

By nightfall of December 13, the Japanese had seized complete control of the ancient capital. Wilson saw Japanese flags fluttering all over town. The following day the conquering army began to take over the hospitals in the city. They broke into the main hospital of the Chinese army—located within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and run by Safety Zone members who had organized themselves as a chapter of the Red Cross—and trapped hundreds of Chinese soldiers inside. The Japanese forbade doctors to enter the hospital or send food to the wounded soldiers, who were later marched out and systematically shot. After three out of four Red Cross hospitals fell in this manner to the Japanese, the International Committee concentrated its efforts on the University of Nanking Hospital.

During the first few days of occupation, Wilson watched the Japanese soldiers loot and burn the city. He saw them rob the University of Nanking Hospital and, frustrated that he could not stop all of the thefts, mentally aimed a "swift kick" at a soldier who tried to steal a camera from a nurse. He also watched soldiers burn a heap of musical instruments in the street and wondered whether the destruction of property was a Japanese plot to compel the people of Nanking to buy Japanese goods later.

Wilson even witnessed the ransacking of his own home. Venturing to his house to survey possible damage, he caught

red-handed three Japanese soldiers in the process of looting it. They had broken into the attic, opened up a big trunk, and strewn its contents all over the floor. One of them was peering into a microscope when Wilson walked in. Upon seeing him, all three soldiers ran down the stairs and out the door. "The crowning insult was on the second floor where one had just finished depositing his calling card on the floor of the toilet within a foot of the toilet bowl," Wilson wrote. "He had covered it with a clean towel which had been left hanging in the room."

But nothing of the looting could compare to the rape and murder that he witnessed in the city. Even Wilson, now a jaded war surgeon, found the intensity of the atrocities shocking.

*December 15:* The slaughter of civilians is appalling. I could go on for pages telling of cases of rape and brutality almost beyond belief.

*December 18:* Today marks the 6th day of modern Dante's *Inferno*, written in huge letters with blood and rape. Murder by the wholesale and rape by the thousands of cases. There seems to be no stop to the ferocity, lust and savagism of the brutes. At first I tried to be pleasant to them to avoid arousing their ire, but the smile has gradually worn off and my stare is fully as cool and fishy as theirs.

*December 19:* All the food is being stolen from the poor people and they are in a state of terror-stricken, hysterical panic. When will it stop!

*Christmas Eve:* Now they tell us that there are twenty thousand soldiers still in the Zone (where they get their figures no one knows), and that they are going to hunt them out and shoot them all. That will mean every able-bodied male between the ages of 18 and 50 that is now in the city. How can they ever look anybody in the face again?

By the end of the year his letters carried a fatalistic air. "The only consolation is that it can't be worse," he wrote on Decem-

ber 30. "They can't kill as many people as there aren't any more to kill."

Frequently Wilson and the others saw the Japanese round up Chinese soldiers, shoot them, and stuff the bodies in dirt air-raid shelters that doubled as mass graves. But Wilson heard that many Chinese people were executed not because they posed any threat to the Japanese army but because their bodies served a practical purpose. After the fall of Nanking, the big trenches that the Chinese had built for tank traps were filled to the brim by the Japanese with the bodies of dead and wounded soldiers. When the Japanese failed to find enough bodies of dead soldiers so tanks could pass over them, they shot nearby residents and threw them in the trenches as well. The witness who told Wilson the story borrowed a camera so that he could take pictures to confirm his statements.

There was very little Wilson could do to prevent these murders. The Japanese soldiers he confronted often made a point of conspicuously playing with their weapons—loading and unloading them—in order to intimidate him and other foreigners. Wilson fully expected to be shot in the back at any moment.

One of the worst scenes Wilson saw in Nanking—a scene he would remember for the rest of his life—was a massive gang rape of teenage girls in the street. A group of young women between the ages of fifteen and eighteen were lined up by the Japanese and then raped in the dirt, one after another, by an entire regiment. Some hemorrhaged and died, while others killed themselves shortly afterwards.

But the scenes in the hospitals were even more horrifying than those in the streets. Wilson was mortified by the women who came to the emergency room with their bellies ripped open, by the charred and horribly disfigured men whom the Japanese tried to burn alive, and by numerous other horrors he barely had time to describe on paper. He told his wife that he would never forget the woman whose head was nearly cut off, teetering from a point on her neck. "This morning came another woman in a sad plight and with a horrible story," a hospital volunteer wrote of this woman in his diary on January 3, 1938.

She was one of the five women whom the Japanese soldiers had taken to one of their medical units—to wash their clothes by day, to be raped by night. Two of them were forced to satisfy from 15 to 20 men and the prettiest one as many as 40 each night. This one who came to us had been called off by three soldiers into an isolated place where they attempted to cut off her head. The muscles of the neck had been cut but they failed to sever the spinal cord. She feigned death but dragged herself to the hospital—another of the many to bear witness to the brutality of soldiers.

Yet in the midst of their pain and suffering, Wilson was amazed by the willpower of some of his patients. In a letter to his family dated New Year's Day 1938, he told an incredible account of survival. Chinese soldiers burned down the home of a twenty-nine-year-old woman in a tiny village south of Nanking, forcing her to head for the capital by foot with her five small children. Before nightfall a Japanese airplane dove down at them, strafing the family with machine-gun fire and sending a bullet through the mother's right eye and out her neck. She fainted in shock but awoke the next morning, lying in a pool of blood next to her crying children. Too weak to carry her youngest child, a three-month-old baby, she left it behind in an empty house. Yet she somehow found the strength to struggle on to Nanking with her four remaining children, making her way successfully to the hospital.

Wilson and other volunteers stayed in the hospital until they wavered on the verge of collapse. The International Committee could have used medical help from outside the city, but the Japanese would not permit doctors or medical volunteers to enter Nanking. So the burden of caring for the sick and administering the zone fell on this tiny beleaguered committee of no more than some twenty individuals. They worked in shifts to ensure that the hospital was guarded from the Japanese by at least one foreigner twenty-four hours a day. Some of them became so overworked that they succumbed to colds, flu, and various other illnesses. During the massacre the only other Western doctor in the city, C. S. Trimmer, struggled with a fever of 102 degrees.

The University of Nanking Hospital swiftly became another refugee camp because Wilson refused to discharge patients who had no place to go. Patients who did leave the hospital were accompanied by foreigners to ensure that they returned home safely. James McCallum acted as the hospital chauffeur, driving patients about town in unpainted, patched-up ambulances. Survivors of the massacre remember that the exhausted McCallum pressed cold towels against his face to stay awake as he drove patients home. But when even cold towels failed to keep his eyes open, McCallum resorted to chewing his tongue until it bled.

Few people in Nanking pushed themselves as hard as Wilson did in the hospital. When the massacre and rapes gradually subsided, several of the other physicians went to Shanghai every weekend to recover from the strain. But Wilson continued to operate on patients relentlessly, day and night, around the clock. His selflessness was remembered almost sixty years later by survivors who spoke of Wilson with great reverence, at least one of them discussing in detail the preparation and successful result of his operation under Wilson's hands. He operated for free, because few patients had money to pay him, but the surgeries exacted a terrible price from his own health. In the end, his family believes that only his faith as a devout Methodist, combined with his love for China, gave him the courage to survive the Rape of Nanking.

## THE LIVING GODDESS OF NANKING

Wilhelmina Vautrin (or Minnie Vautrin, as most people called her), by occupation head of the Education Department and dean of studies at Ginling Women's Arts and Science College, was one of the few Western women in the city during the first few weeks of the Nanking massacre. Years later she would be remembered not only for her courage in protecting thousands of women from Japanese soldiers but also for the diary she kept, a diary that some historians believe will eventually be recognized, much like the diary of Anne Frank, for its impor-

tance in illuminating the spirit of a single witness during a holocaust of war.

Vautrin, the daughter of a blacksmith, was fifty-one years old in 1937. Raised in the tiny farming community of Secor, Illinois, she was sent to live with neighbors when her mother died six years later. In their homes Vautrin was often treated little better than a servant or field hand, and she found herself herding cattle during the bleakest months of winter. Despite the impoverishment of her childhood, she was able to work her way through school, graduating with honors in 1912 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Tall and handsome in her youth, with long dark hair, she was a vivacious and popular woman who attracted numerous suitors. But by the time she graduated from the University of Illinois, she had made up her mind to forgo marriage. Instead, she joined the United Christian Missionary Association and moved to Hofei, a city in the Anhwei province of China, where she worked for seven years as the principal of a girls' school and learned to speak Chinese. Then Vautrin moved to Nanking, to the position she held at the time of the massacre.

Vautrin was clearly very happy in Nanking. On visits to her hometown in Illinois, she talked incessantly of China—its culture, its people, and its history. She gave her family silkworm cocoons and taught them how to cook and eat Chinese food. In her diary, she never ceased to marvel at the beauty of the Nanking landscape. An avid gardener, she planted roses and chrysanthemums at Ginling College, visiting greenhouses at Sun Yat-sen Memorial Park, walking down the fragrant lanes of plum and peach trees near the Ming Tombs.

In the summer of 1937, while vacationing with friends in the seaside summer resort of Tsingtao, Vautrin heard that a Japanese soldier had disappeared a few miles south of Peking. The disappearance triggered several battles between the Chinese and Japanese in the area, prompting a friend of hers to comment darkly that the assassination of only two people in Sarajevo in 1914 had eventually culminated in the deaths of more than 11 million people.

Still, Vautrin refused to join the other Americans evacuating

Nanking, and so the American embassy lent her a new nine-foot American flag to lay flat on the center of the grassy quadrangle of Ginling College to protect the campus against Japanese pilots. The embassy staff also gave her and the other International Committee members lengths of rope to knot into ladders and told them that once the *Panay* departed with the American embassy officials, and the Chinese military slammed all the gates shut, their only hope of escape would be over the city walls.

But Vautrin hardly had time to think about running away. With most of the faculty gone from Nanking (most had abandoned their homes to flee to cities like Shanghai and Chengtu), Vautrin was now the acting head of the institution. She labored to prepare the campus for female refugees and to evacuate wounded soldiers from the area. To disguise their identities, she burned their military papers and garments in the college incinerator. Under her direction, furniture was moved into attics, safes were emptied, dorms were cleaned, and valuables were wrapped in oil paper and hidden. Meanwhile, posters, signs, and armbands for the Nanking Safety Zone were created and distributed among volunteers. Vautrin also commissioned the sewing of a second American flag, this one twenty-seven feet long, but the Chinese tailor who put it together accidentally sewed the blue field with the stars on the lower, left-hand corner instead of the upper.

By the second week of December the gates of Ginling opened for women and children. Thousands of people poured in. Refugees were passing through the city at the rate of one thousand a day. Many of them, exhausted, bewildered, and hungry, came into the Safety Zone camps with only the clothing on their backs. "From 8:30 this morning until 6 this evening, excepting for the noon meal, I have stood at the front gate while the refugees poured in," she continued. "There is terror in the faces of many of the women—last night was a terrible night in the city and many young women were taken from their homes by the Japanese soldiers."

Vautrin allowed the women and children to come in freely but implored older women to stay home to leave space for the

younger ones. Few women took her suggestion, and most begged just for a place to sit on the lawn. By the night of December 15, the population of the camps at Ginling had swelled to more than three thousand people.

The next day Japanese soldiers stormed the college. At 10:00 A.M. on December 16, more than one hundred Japanese troops burst onto the Ginling campus to inspect the buildings for hidden Chinese soldiers. They demanded that every door be opened, and if a key was not forthcoming, a Japanese soldier stood ready with an ax to break down the door by force. Vautrin's heart sank at the thought of the Japanese finding the hundreds of padded garments stored in the Geography Department office upstairs, but fortunately an attic packed with two hundred Chinese women and children diverted the Japanese soldiers' attention. (Vautrin later buried the garments to hide them from the Japanese.)

Twice that day the Japanese seized servants on campus and started to drag them away. They certainly would have been killed if Vautrin had not rescued them with cries of "No soldier—coolie!" Only later did she learn that the Japanese had trained at least six machine guns on the campus, with many more soldiers on guard outside, ready to shoot anyone who attempted to run away.

That evening Vautrin saw women being carted away in the streets and heard their desperate pleas. A truck went by with eight to ten girls, and as it passed she heard them scream, "Jiu Ming! Jiu Ming! (Save our lives!)"

The following day, December 17, 1937, was even worse. The migration of women into Ginling only intensified as Japanese soldiers flooded the city. "What a heartbreaking sight!" Vautrin wrote. "Weary women, frightened girls, trudging with children and bedding and small packages of clothes." If only someone had time to write the story of each refugee who came in, she thought—especially the stories of the girls who had blackened their faces and cut their hair. As she accommodated the stream of "wild-eyed women," she heard stories of the Japanese raping girls as young as twelve and women as elderly as sixty, or raping pregnant women at bayonet point. The harried Vautrin

spent the entire day trying to secure food for the refugees, direct Chinese men to other camps in the Safety Zone, and run to areas on campus where Japanese soldiers had been sighted.

But nothing prepared Vautrin for the encounter that awaited her that evening. Two Japanese soldiers were pulling at the door of the Central Building, demanding that Vautrin open it immediately, but when she insisted that she had no key and that no soldiers were hiding inside, a Japanese soldier slapped her in the face and also struck the Chinese man next to her. Then she saw two Japanese soldiers lead away three bound servants from the college. She followed them to the front gate, where the Japanese had forced a large group of Chinese to kneel beside the road. The Japanese demanded to speak to the master of the institution and, learning that it was Vautrin, ordered her to identify every kneeling person. One man in the party spoke up to help Vautrin, and for this he was slapped severely.

In the midst of this ordeal, three committee members drove up: the YMCA secretary George Fitch, the Nanking University sociology professor Lewis Smythe, and the Presbyterian missionary W. Plumer Mills. The soldiers forced the three men to stand in line and frisked them for pistols. Suddenly they heard screams and cries and saw the Japanese dragging women out of the side gate. It was only then that Vautrin realized that the entire interrogation was a ploy to keep the foreigners at the front gate while other Japanese soldiers searched the campus for women to rape. "Never shall I forget that scene," she wrote, remembering her rage and helplessness: "The people kneeling at side of road, Mary, Mrs. Tsen and I standing, the dried leaves rattling, the moaning of the wind, the cry of women being led out."

For the next few months, Vautrin often found herself one of the sole defenders of the refugee camps at Ginling College. Japanese soldiers constantly harassed the refugees there by rounding up men for execution or women for military brothels. Sometimes their recruitment tactics were brazen. On at least one occasion Japanese soldiers drove up to campus with a

truck and asked for girls. Most of the time, however, the kidnapping of women for rape was done covertly. Soldiers jumped over bamboo fences at night or broke open the side or back gates to seize random women in the darkness—expeditions that began to be known throughout the populace as “the lottery.”

On New Year’s Day 1938, Vautrin rescued a girl whom a soldier had dragged into a bamboo grove north of the library. On several occasions her heroism nearly cost Vautrin her life. Many of the soldiers were “fierce and unreasonable” toward her, brandishing bayonets reddened with fresh bloodstains. Vautrin wrote that “in some cases they are defiant and look at me with a dagger in their eyes, and sometimes a dagger in their hands.” One time, when she tried to stop Japanese soldiers from looting, one of them aimed a gun at her.

Sometimes in her dealings with the Japanese, Vautrin made mistakes. Just as Rabe and the other committee members had been duped by the Japanese into handing over men for execution, Vautrin appears to have been duped into delivering innocent women into the arms of Japanese soldiers. On December 24, Vautrin was summoned to her office to meet with a high Japanese military officer and an elderly Chinese interpreter, who discussed with her the Japanese army’s need for prostitutes. “The request was that they be allowed to pick out the prostitute women from our ten thousand refugees,” Vautrin later wrote of the meeting in her diary. “They said they wanted one hundred. They feel if they can start a regular licensed place for the soldiers then they will not molest innocent and decent women.”

Strangely enough, Vautrin granted the request. Perhaps she had no choice in the matter, or perhaps she actually believed that once the Japanese left with the prostitutes for their military brothel they would stop bothering the virgins and respectable matrons in the refugee camps. Whatever the reasons behind her decision, it is safe to assume that Vautrin made it under pressure. She waited while the Japanese conducted their search and after a long time they finally secured twenty-one women. How the Japanese were able to distinguish these

women as prostitutes Vautrin does not say, but she did mention that the Japanese were dissatisfied with the result because they were convinced that more prostitutes were hiding somewhere in the zone. "Group after group of girls have asked me if they will select the other seventy-nine from among the decent girls—and all I can answer is that they will not do so if it is in my power to prevent it," she wrote.

A week after the city fell, the Japanese began a systematic effort to regulate activity within the zone. The commander of the military police of the Japanese army made a proclamation, effective December 24, dictating that all civilians obtain passports (also called "good citizen's papers") from the issuing office of the Japanese army. No one was allowed to get a passport for someone else, and those without passports would not be allowed to live within the Nanking city walls. The military posted bulletins in the streets notifying people to register or face the risk of being executed.

On December 28, registration of the men began. At Ginling College they formed lines of four, received copies of forms, and marched to a house at the northeast corner of the campus where the Japanese recorded their names, ages, and occupations. Vautrin noticed that the men who arrived for registration were mainly old or maimed because most of the young men had already fled the city or been killed. Among those who showed up, more men were taken away as ex-soldiers, leaving behind old men and women who wept and kneeled before the Safety Zone leaders, begging them to secure the release of their husbands and sons. In a few cases the zone leaders were successful, but they noticed that the Japanese military officials were growing increasingly resentful of their interference.

When the turnout of men for registration disappointed the Japanese, they tried to intimidate the populace into compliance. On December 30, they announced that all who had not been registered by 2:00 P.M. the following day would be shot. "This proved to be a bluff," one missionary wrote of the incident, "but it frightened the people." The next morning huge

crowds of people dutifully appeared at the registration areas, many of whom had risen before 3:00 A.M. to ensure their place in line. The Draconian threats of the Japanese had instilled such fear that by January 14 the authorities succeeded in registering at least 160,000 people.

Then registration began for the women. At 9:00 A.M. on December 31, thousands of Chinese women gathered in front of the Central Building of Ginling College, where a Japanese military official lectured to them. Speeches were given first in Japanese, then translated into Chinese by an interpreter: "You must follow the old customs of marriage," Vautrin recalled them saying. "You must not study English or go to theatres. China and Japan must be one." The women were then marched single file in two lines through frames set up for selling rice, where they were given tickets. Vautrin observed that the Japanese soldiers seemed to get a great deal of amusement herding the women about like cattle, sometimes putting the stamp on their cheeks. The soldiers also forced the women to smile and look happy for Japanese newsmen and photographers, even though the mere prospect of registration had made some women literally ill with fear.

At times the Japanese registration of Chinese women seemed to Vautrin nothing less than a full-scale inspection of the most attractive candidates for rape. On the very first day of female registration, the Japanese scrutinized certain women in the zone and tried to take them away. They had singled out twenty girls, no doubt for prostitution, because they had curled hair or dressed too well. But all were released, Vautrin later wrote, "because a mother or some other person could vouch for them."

After registration, the Japanese tried to eliminate the zone itself. In late January the Japanese announced that they wanted everyone out of the camps and back into their homes by the end of the month. February 4 was given as the deadline for evacuation. When the deadline arrived, Japanese soldiers inspected Ginling College and ordered the remaining girls and women to leave. When Vautrin told the inspectors that they could not leave because they were from other cities or their

homes had burned down, the Japanese announced that the military police would assume the responsibility of protecting them. Vautrin was wary of these promises, and even the Chinese interpreter who came with the Japanese to deliver their messages whispered to Vautrin that he felt the young women were not safe and should continue to stay where they were.

The sheer number of refugees eventually overwhelmed Vautrin. Hundreds of women crammed themselves into verandas and covered ways head to feet, and many more women slept outside on the grass at night. The attic of Ginling's Science Hall housed more than one thousand women, and a friend of Vautrin's noted that women "slept shoulder to shoulder on the cement floor for weeks on end during the cold winter months! Each cement step in the building was the home of one person—and those steps are not more than four feet long! Some were happy to have a resting place on the chemistry lab tables, the water pipes and other paraphernalia not interfering at all."

The Rape of Nanking wore down Vautrin physically, but the mental torture she endured daily was far worse than her physical deterioration. "Oh, God, control the cruel beastliness of the soldiers in Nanking tonight . . ." she wrote in her diary. "How ashamed the women of Japan would be if they knew these tales of horror."

Under such pressure, it is remarkable that Vautrin still found the spirit to comfort others and give them a renewed sense of patriotism. When an old lady went to the Red Cross kitchen at Ginling College to fetch a bowl of rice porridge, she learned that there was no porridge left. Vautrin immediately gave her the porridge she had been eating and said to her: "Don't you people worry. Japan will fail. China will not perish." Another time, when she saw a boy wearing an armband marked with the Japanese symbol of the rising sun to ensure his safety, Vautrin scolded him and said: "You do not need to wear this rising sun emblem. You are a Chinese and your country has

not perished. You should remember the date you wear this thing, and you should never forget." Again and again, Vautrin urged the Chinese refugees on campus never to lose faith in their future. "China has not perished," she told them. "China will never perish. And Japan will definitely fail in the end."

Others could see how hard she was working. "She didn't sleep from morning till night," one Chinese survivor recalled. "She kept watching and if Japanese soldiers came . . . she would try her best to push them out and went out to their officials to pray them not to do so much evil things to the Chinese women and children." "It was said that once she was slapped several times by beastly Japanese soldiers," another wrote in his eyewitness account of the Nanking massacre. "Everyone was worried about her. Everyone tried to comfort her. She still fought for the cause of protecting Chinese women with courage and determination from beginning to end."

The work of running the zone was not only physically taxing but psychologically debilitating. Christian Kröger, a Nazi member of the International Committee, claimed that he saw so many corpses in the streets that he soon suffered nightmares about them. But in the end, under unbelievable circumstances, the zone saved lives. Here are some startling facts:

—Looting and arson made food so scarce that some Chinese refugees ate the Michaelmas daisies and goldenrod growing on the Ginling College campus or subsisted on mushrooms found in the city. Even the zone leaders went hungry from lack of meals. They not only provided free rice to the refugees through soup kitchens but delivered some of it directly to refugee compounds, because many Chinese in the zone were too scared to leave their buildings.

—Bookish and genteel, most of the zone leaders had little experience in handling a horde of rapists, murderers, and street brawlers. Yet they acted as bodyguards for even the Chinese police in the city and somehow, like warriors, found the physical energy and raw courage to throw themselves in the line of fire—wrestling Chinese men away from execution sites, knocking

Japanese soldiers off of women, even jumping in front of cannons and machine guns to prevent the Japanese from firing.

—In the process, many zone leaders came close to being shot, and some received blows or cuts from Japanese soldiers wielding bayonets and swords. For example: Charles Riggs, a University of Nanking professor of agricultural engineering, was struck by an officer when he tried to prevent him from taking away a group of Chinese civilians mistaken as soldiers. The infuriated Japanese officer “threatened Riggs with his sword three times and finally hit him hard over the heart twice with his fist.” A Japanese soldier also threatened Professor Miner Searle Bates with a pistol. Another soldier pulled a gun on Robert Wilson when he tried to kick out of the hospital a soldier who had crawled into bed with three girls. Still another soldier fired a rifle at James McCallum and C. S. Trimmer but missed. When Miner Searle Bates visited the headquarters of the Japanese military police to learn the fate of a University Middle School student who had been tied up and carried off by soldiers, the Japanese shoved Bates down a flight of stairs. Even the swastikas the Nazis carried about like amulets occasionally failed to protect them from assault. On December 22, John Rabe wrote that Christian Kröger and another German named Hatz were attacked when they tried to save a Chinese man who had been wounded in the throat by a drunken Japanese soldier. Hatz defended himself with a chair, but Kröger apparently ended up being tied and beaten.

—The zone eventually accommodated some 200,000–300,000 refugees—almost half the Chinese population left in the city.

The last is a chilling statistic when placed in the context of later studies of the Nanking massacre. Half the original inhabitants of Nanking left before the massacre. About half of those who stayed (350,000 people out of the 600,000–700,000 Chinese refugees, native residents, and soldiers in the city when it fell) were killed.

If half of the population of Nanking fled into the Safety Zone during the worst of the massacre, then the other half—almost everyone who did not make it to the zone—probably died at the hands of the Japanese.