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WHAT THE WORLD KNEW

THE WORLD was not kept in the dark about the Rape of Nanking; news of the massacre continuously reached the global public while events unfolded. For months before the fall of Nanking, numerous foreign correspondents lived in the capital to cover its aerial bombardment by Japanese aviators. As the Japanese army neared the doomed capital in early December, reporters provided vivid and almost daily coverage of battles, fires, last-minute evacuations, and the creation of the International Safety Zone. Amazingly, when the massacre began, Japanese newspapers ran photographs of Chinese men being rounded up for execution, heaps of bodies waiting for disposal by the river-side, the killing contests among the Japanese soldiers, and even the shocked commentary of the reporters themselves.

Apparently, before international opinion

kicked in, the first few days of the massacre were a source of tremendous pride to the Japanese government. Celebrations broke out across Japan when the people heard the news of Nanking's defeat. Special meals of Nanking noodles were prepared in Tokyo, and children across Japan carried globe-shaped, candle-lit paper lanterns in evening parades to symbolize the ascendancy of the rising sun. It was only later, after news of the sinking of the *Panay* and the butchering of Nanking citizens had met with international condemnation, that the Japanese government quickly tried to hide what its army had done and replaced the news with propaganda. Thanks to the efforts of a few American journalists, the Japanese as a nation soon faced a scandal of gargantuan proportions.

THE AMERICAN JOURNALISTS

The journalists who had the greatest influence on Western foreign opinion at the time were three American foreign correspondents: Frank Tillman Durdin of the *New York Times*, Archibald Steele of the *Chicago Daily News*, and C. Yates McDaniel of the Associated Press. An adventurous streak ran through all three men. Durdin, a twenty-nine-year-old reporter from Houston, had spent time mopping decks and cleaning winches on a freighter to secure free passage from the United States to China. Once in Shanghai, he worked for a daily English-language newspaper and soon moved on to the *Times* to cover the Sino-Japanese War. Steele was an older correspondent who had reported on the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and the expanding Asian war. McDaniel was perhaps the most daring of the three: before the massacre he had driven through battle lines in the countryside, barely escaping death from exploding shells during his quest "to find the war."

Durdin, Steele, and McDaniel left only a few days after the massacre began, but in the brief time they were in Nanking they made an enormous impact. Not only did they write riveting stories that were splashed across the biggest and most pres-

tigious newspapers in the United States, but they also joined the International Safety Zone Committee in trying to save lives.

The Rape of Nanking forced the reporters out of their normal role as neutral observers and into the war drama as full-fledged participants. Sometimes they starred in their own stories by choosing to protect Chinese citizens from the Japanese invaders. For instance, C. Yates McDaniel assumed the responsibility of guarding the Chinese servants of the U.S. embassy. During the massacre most were so frightened they refused to leave the building even for water, and McDaniel spent hours filling buckets with well water and lugging them back to the embassy for the servants to drink. He tried to find their missing relatives (often retrieving only their bodily remains) and also chased away Japanese soldiers who tried to break into the embassy.

The reporters even tried to save people who were clearly beyond saving, if only to comfort those who were minutes away from death. During the massacre Durdin encountered a Chinese soldier lying on the sidewalk with his jaw shot away and his body bleeding. The soldier held out his hand, which Durdin picked up and held. "I didn't know where to take him or what to do," Durdin remembered years later. "So I just, stupidly, decided to do something. I just put a five-dollar bill in his hand. Which is utterly useless to him, of course, but anyway, somehow I felt the impulse to do something. He was just barely alive."

On December 15, most of the reporters left Nanking for Shanghai to file their stories. Their last day in the city was grisly. On the way to the waterfront, the reporters literally had to drive over several feet of bodies under the Water Gate, where dogs were already starting to gnaw on the corpses. Later, as they waited for their ship to arrive, they saw the Japanese military line up one thousand Chinese men, force them to kneel in small groups, and shoot each of them in the back of the head. During the execution some of the Japanese were laughing and smoking, as if they greatly enjoyed the entire spectacle.

The AP's McDaniel stayed in Nanking a day longer before boarding a destroyer for Shanghai. On December 16, his last

day in the ruined Chinese capital, he saw more corpses and passed a long line of Chinese men with their hands tied. One of them broke away from the group, dropped on his knees, and begged McDaniel to save him from death. "I could do nothing," McDaniel wrote. "My last remembrance of Nanking—dead Chinese, dead Chinese, dead Chinese."

THE NEWSREEL MEN

There were also two American newsreel men near Nanking who risked their lives to film the bombing of the *Panay*. During the bombing Norman Alley of Universal and Eric Mayell of Fox Movietone happened to be on board and obtained superb footage of the action. Though they survived the attack unscathed (Alley emerged from the bombs and machine-gun fire with only a nicked finger and a bullet-perforated hat), another journalist was not so lucky. A splinter hit the Italian correspondent Sandro Sandri in the back of his eye when he followed Alley up a stairway on the *Panay*, and he died only hours later.

While hiding with the surviving *Panay* passengers under the riverbank reeds, Alley wrapped his film and Mayell's with canvas and buried it under the mud when he thought the Japanese were coming ashore to kill them. Later the film was safely unearthed and shipped to the United States, where parts of the newsreel footage of the event ran in movie houses across the country.

The sinking of the *Panay* caused more of an uproar in the United States than all the wholesale rape and slaughter in Nanking combined. On December 13, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that he was "shocked" at the bombing and demanded immediate compensation from Emperor Hirohito. A few days later, when the exhausted survivors finally reached civilization, the public response only grew worse. Filthy, cold, and wearing only blankets, Chinese quilts, and tatters of clothing, some of the survivors were still in shock or near death. Their stories, along with their photographs, soon appeared in every major newspaper in the country under head-

lines like "Panay Victims Under Japanese Fire for Full Hour," and "Butchery and Looting Reign in Nanking." When Alley's and Mayell's footage hit the theaters, it only aroused more outrage and anti-Japanese sentiment among American audiences.

JAPANESE DAMAGE CONTROL

The moment the foreign correspondents left Nanking, the Japanese sealed off the city to prevent other reporters from coming in. George Fitch witnessed the beginning of this on December 15, the day he drove some of the foreign correspondents out of the city to the riverfront so that they could board a gunboat for Shanghai. When Fitch tried to drive back into Nanking from Hsiakwan, a Japanese sentry stopped him at the gate and absolutely refused to let him reenter. Even Mr. Okamura, a member of the Japanese embassy from Shanghai who accompanied Fitch, was unable to persuade the man to let them through: "The embassy cuts no ice with the army in Japan." In the end Okamura had to take one of the cars to military headquarters to get a special pass for Fitch.

When the Japanese finally permitted a few foreigners to enter the city, they carefully controlled their movements. In February they allowed a few American naval officers to go ashore in Nanking, but only when accompanied by Japanese embassy representatives in a Japanese embassy car. As late as April the Japanese high command prevented most foreigners from freely leaving or entering the city.

To cover up the nauseating details of their military outrages, the Japanese even impeded the return of foreign diplomats to Nanking. But in the end they proved unsuccessful in hiding the truth—especially from the Germans and the Americans.

FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ON THE RAPE OF NANKING

Hitler's government soon learned the Japanese motives for the delay. "The assumption I made in my previous report that the

Japanese delayed our return in order to have no official witnesses of the atrocities has been confirmed," a German diplomat reported to Berlin in January. "Once the intention of the foreign representatives to return to Nanking had been made known, according to Germans and Americans who were there, there were feverish cleanup efforts undertaken to remove the evidence of the senseless mass murders of civilians, women and children."

The American government also knew what the Japanese were trying to hide. A machine cipher had protected the Japanese Foreign Office's high-level diplomatic messages, but by 1936 cryptanalysts from the U.S. Army's Signal Intelligence Service had cracked the Japanese code, which the Americans dubbed "RED." American intelligence was thus able to intercept and read secret messages between the Japanese leadership in Tokyo and their representatives in Washington, D.C., during the Rape of Nanking. On December 26, 1937, Foreign Minister Hirota Koki sent one such message to Japanese Ambassador Saito Hiroshi in Washington; it emphasized the need to stonewall the American embassy staff to prevent their immediate return to Nanking. "If they do return and receive unfavorable reports on the military's activities from their own nationals and if the diplomats, on receipt of such complaints, forward the reports to their home countries, we shall find ourselves in an exceedingly disadvantageous position," the message read. "We believe, therefore, that the best policy is to do our utmost to hold them here as long as possible. Even if this should cause some hard feeling, we believe that it would be better than running the risk of a clash on the scene."

But the U.S. government did not disclose to the public what it knew at the time and even contributed to Japanese censorship of the truth. For example, Norman Alley, the Universal newsreel man, had shot fifty-three hundred-foot rolls of movie film of the Japanese attack on the *Panay*, but before the film was released to the theaters, President Roosevelt asked him to excise some thirty feet of film that revealed several Japanese bombers shooting at the gunboat at nearly deck level. Alley agreed, even though those thirty feet were probably the best

images in the entire film and certainly the most damning to the Japanese government. Hamilton Darby Perry, author of *The Panay Incident*, believes that Roosevelt wanted to give credence to the Japanese excuse that the attack was a case of mistaken identity, not deliberate design. No doubt the U.S. government was anxious to reach a financial and diplomatic settlement with the Japanese over the bombing and knew that those thirty feet of film would have made such a settlement impossible.

JAPANESE PROPAGANDA

Japanese attempts to influence public opinion were nothing new. Even before the Rape of Nanking, the American intelligence community had seen the Japanese plans, marked "utmost secrecy," to spread favorable propaganda of themselves in the United States. The Japanese government also had a large budget for wooing influential newspaper men, advertising in major newspapers and radio stations, and printing pamphlets and leaflets.

But during the Rape of Nanking the Japanese faced a public relations disaster so titanic it seems almost ridiculous today that they even tried to cover it up. Instead of bringing a measure of discipline to their forces in Nanking, the Japanese marshaled together their resources to launch a blitz of propaganda, which they hoped would somehow obscure the details of one of the greatest bloodbaths of world history.

The Japanese media first proclaimed that all was well and good in the city of Nanking. On December 20, Robert Wilson heard that Domei, the Japanese news agency, had reported that the Nanking population was returning home and everything was normal. "If that is all the news coming out of Nanking, it is due for a big shake up when the real news breaks," Wilson wrote.

Then the Japanese government authorized carefully prepared tours of the city for Japanese visitors. A week after the Domei report, a Japanese merchant ship arrived in Nanking from Shanghai, crowded with Japanese sightseers. "Carefully

they were herded through the few streets now cleared of corpses," George Fitch wrote of the visit. "Graciously they passed sweets to Chinese children and patted their frightened heads." A number of ladies accompanied Japanese business representatives on a tour of the city, and Fitch observed that they seemed "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."

In January Japanese newsmen came to Nanking to stage pictures of the city for distribution throughout Japan and the rest of the world. On New Year's Eve the Japanese embassy called together the Chinese managers of the refugee camps for a meeting and told them that "spontaneous" celebrations were to be held in the city the next day. The Chinese were ordered to make thousands of Japanese flags and carry them about in a parade for a motion picture that would illustrate crowds of joyful residents welcoming Japanese soldiers. Japanese photographers also came to Nanking to take pictures of Chinese children receiving medical care from a Japanese army doctor and candy from Japanese soldiers. "But," Lewis Smythe wrote in a letter to his friends, "these acts were not repeated when no camera was around!"

The rankest example of Japanese propaganda was an article that appeared on January 8, 1938, in the *Sin Shun Pao*, a Japanese-controlled newspaper in Shanghai. Under the headline "The Harmonious Atmosphere of Nanking City Develops Enjoyably," the article claimed that "the Imperial Army entered the city, put their bayonets into their sheaths, and stretched forth merciful hands in order to examine and heal," giving the starving and sick masses in Nanking medical aid and food.

Men and women, old and young, bent down to kneel in salutation to the Imperial Army, expressing their respectful intention. . . . The vast hordes gathered around the soldiers beneath the sun flag and red cross flag shouting "Banzai" in order to express their gratitude. . . . Soldiers and the Chinese children are happy together, playing joyfully on the slides. Nanking is now the best place for all countries to watch, for here one breathes the atmosphere of peaceful residence and happy work.

Japanese attempts to gloss over the entire massacre with hokum provoked incredulous responses in the surviving missionary diaries. Here are a few samples:

From the diary of James McCallum, January 9, 1938:

Now the Japanese are trying to discredit our efforts in the Safety Zone. They threaten and intimidate the poor Chinese into repudiating what we have said. . . . Some of the Chinese are even ready to prove that the looting, raping and burning was done by the Chinese and not the Japanese. I feel sometimes that we have been dealing with maniacs and idiots and I marvel that all of us foreigners have come through this ordeal alive.

From the diary of George Fitch, January 11, 1938:

. . . we have seen a couple of issues of a Shanghai Japanese newspaper and two of the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi*. Those 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! Well, we'd be tempted to laugh if it wasn't so tragic. It is typical of the lies Japan has been sending abroad ever since the war started.

From the diary of George Fitch, reprinted in *Reader's Digest*:

In March, a government radio station in Tokyo flashed this message to the world: "Hoodlums responsible for so many deaths and such destruction of property in Nanking have been captured and executed. They were found to be discontented soldiers from Chiang Kai-shek's brigades. Now all is quiet and the Japanese army is feeding 300,000 refugees."

From a letter written by Lewis Smythe and his wife on March 8, 1938:

Now the latest is from the Japanese paper that they have found eleven Chinese armed robbers who were to blame for it all!

Well, if they each raped from 100 to 200 women per night and day for two weeks and got away with the reported \$50,000 they were pretty powerful Chinese . . .

Leaflets were another form of Japanese propaganda. During the mass executions Japanese army planes inundated the Nanking population with messages dropped from the air; for example: "All good Chinese who return to their homes will be fed and clothed. Japan wants to be a good neighbor to those Chinese not fooled by monsters who are Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers." The leaflets displayed colorful pictures of a handsome Japanese soldier holding a Chinese child ("Christ-like," as one observer put it) in his arms, with a Chinese mother at his feet bowing her thanks for bags of rice. According to George Fitch, thousands of Chinese actually left the refugee camps for their ruined homes the day the leaflets were dropped.

The Japanese also pasted bright, colorful posters on or near houses in which tragedies had occurred. One featured a Japanese soldier carrying a small child while giving a bucket of rice to his mother and sugar and other food to the father. A German diplomatic report described the poster as depicting "a charming, lovable soldier with cooking implements in hand who carries on his shoulder a Chinese child whose poor but honest Chinese farming parents gaze up at him (the soldier) full of thankfulness and family happiness, up to the good uncle." The writing on the upper right corner said: "Return to your homes! We will give you rice to eat! Trust and rely on the Japanese army, you can get help!"

At the same time the Japanese hosted glamorous receptions and media events in Nanking and Shanghai to divert attention away from the atrocities. In early February a Japanese general invited foreign diplomatic representatives to a tea at the Japanese embassy in Nanking. He boasted that the Japanese army was world-renowned for its discipline, and that not a single violation against discipline had occurred during the Russo-Japanese War and Manchurian campaign. The general said that if for some reason the Japanese had committed outrages in Nanking, it was only because the Chinese people had resisted

them under the instigation of foreign nationals, meaning, of course, the International Safety Zone Committee. But oddly enough, in the same speech the general contradicted his previous statements by admitting that Japanese soldiers had vented their anger upon the population because they had found nothing edible or usable during their advance on Nanking.

The Japanese media circus, however, failed to fool the foreign diplomatic community about the arson, rape, and murder that raged through Nanking. In mid-February the Japanese held a military concert in Shanghai, complete with geishas and press photographers. A German diplomat observed, however, that while the gala affair was taking place, "a mother of an 11-year-old girl who did not want to release the young girl to rape by the soldiers was burnt down with her house."

THE SAFETY ZONE LEADERS FIGHT BACK

The International Safety Zone Committee did all it could to fight the barrage of propaganda. During the first few days of the massacre the zone leaders enlisted the aid of American foreign correspondents like Frank Tillman Durdin, Archibald Steele, and C. Yates McDaniel. But after their departure, the International Committee was left to its own devices. The Japanese government barred other reporters, like Max Copping of the *Chicago Tribune*, from entering Nanking, and the behavior of the Japanese soldiers grew worse when they realized that their actions would not be observed by the world media.

But the Japanese government underestimated the ability of the International Committee to wage its own publicity campaign. One distinguishing trait that united the zone leaders was their superior training in the verbal arts. Almost without exception, they were eloquent writers and speakers. The missionaries, educated at the best universities in America and Europe, had devoted most of their adult years to delivering sermons, writing papers, and working the Christian lecture circuit; some of the professors on the committee had written books. Moreover, as a group they were sophisticated about

working with the media; long before the fall of Nanking they had enjoyed broadcasting speeches over Nanking radio or penning articles about China for the popular press. Finally, the missionaries had an additional advantage the Japanese did not foresee: they had spent their entire lives contemplating the true meaning of hell. Having found one in Nanking, they wasted no time in describing it for the world public. Their hard, cogent prose recaptured the terror that they witnessed:

Complete anarchy has reigned for ten days—it has been hell on earth . . . 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 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 sounds 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 home is being looted, and then to watch the city you have come to love and the institution to which you have planned to devote your best deliberately and systematically burned by fire—this is a hell I had never before envisaged. (George Fitch, December 24, 1937)

It is a horrible story to try to relate; I know not where to begin nor to end. Never have I heard or read of such brutality. Rape! Rape! We estimate that at least 1,000 cases at night and many by day. In case of resistance or anything that seems like disapproval there is a bayonet stab or bullet. We could write up hundreds of cases a day; people are hysterical; they get down on their knees and “kutow” any time we foreigners appear; they beg for aid. Those who are suspected of being soldiers, as well as others, have been led outside the city and shot down by the hundreds—yes, thousands. . . . Even the poor refugees in certain centers have been robbed again and again until the last cent, almost the last garment and last piece of bedding. . . . Women are being carried off every morning, afternoon and evening. (John McCallum, December 19, 1937)

I think I have said enough of these horrible cases—there are hundreds of thousands of them. Being so many of them finally makes the mind dulled so that you almost cease to be shocked anymore. I did not imagine that such cruel people existed in the modern world. . . . It would seem that only a rare insane person like Jack the Ripper would act so. (John Gillespie Magee, January 28, 1938)

The graphic details of Japanese excesses appeared not only in Safety Zone diaries but in letters and newsletters that were mimeographed or retyped over and over again so that friends, relatives, government officials, and the press could all receive copies. When mailing descriptions of the massacre, the zone leaders often begged the recipients not to disclose authorship of the documents if they were published, for fear that individual committee members would face retribution or expulsion from Nanking. "Please be very careful of this letter as we might all be kicked out if it were published, and that would be a disaster for the Chinese of Nanking," Magee wrote to his family. The Japanese, he explained, would allow the foreigners to leave, "with the greatest pleasure," but would not allow anyone to return.

In the end the persistence, hard work, and caution of the zone leaders paid off. George Fitch's diary was the first one to be leaked out of Nanking, and it created a "sensation" in Shanghai. His stories and others (often with key names deleted) swiftly found their way into mainstream print outlets like *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Far Eastern* magazine, evoking widespread outrage among American readers. Some eventually reemerged in books, such as in the *Manchester Guardian* reporter Harold John Timperley's *Japanese Terror in China* (1938) and Hsu Shuhsi's *Documents of the Nanking Safety Zone* (1939).

To brace their readers, the zone leaders sometimes prefaced their documents with warnings. "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," Fitch wrote in his diary before publication. "For it is a story of such crime and horror as to be almost unbelievable, the story of the depredations of a horde of degraded criminals

of incredible bestiality, on a peaceful, kindly, law-abiding people. . . . I believe it has no parallel in modern history."

True to their predictions, the reports from the International Safety Zone Committee aroused skepticism from the American public. When the article "The Sack of Nanking" appeared in *Reader's Digest*, one subscriber wrote: "It is unbelievable that credence could be given a thing which is so obviously rank propaganda and so reminiscent of the stuff fed the public during the late war." Similar comments came from other subscribers. But the editors at *Reader's Digest* insisted that the stories were true. To defend their credibility, the editors took "considerable pains" to collect more letters from the Safety Zone leaders, which they reprinted in the October 1938 issue of the magazine. "The material we have seen," the editors hastened to add, "would fill an entire issue of this magazine, all of it corroborating the typical extracts which follow."

Fortunately, the crimes of Nanking were recorded not only on paper but on motion picture film, making them almost impossible to deny. John Magee, who possessed an amateur movie camera, filmed several bedridden victims at the University of Nanking Hospital. They were haunting images—the horribly disfigured, charred men the Japanese had tried to burn alive; the enamel-ware shop clerk whose head received a tremendous blow from a Japanese bayonet (six days after entering the hospital, the pulsation of his brain could still clearly be seen); the gang-rape victim whose head was almost cut off by Japanese soldiers.

George Fitch eventually smuggled the film out of China, though at great risk to his life. On January 19, he received a permit to leave Nanking and took a Japanese military train to Shanghai, where he shared the third-class coach with "as unsavory a crowd of soldiers as one could imagine." Sewn into the lining of his camel's hair coat were eight reels of 16-mm negative movie film of Nanking atrocities. There was no doubt in his mind, he told his family later, that if he had been searched and caught with the film, he would have been killed instantly. But luckily Fitch made it to Shanghai, where he took the negatives to the Kodak office and developed four sets of prints. One

of them went to the Nazi Party leader John Rabe before he left Nanking for Germany. Some of the others ended up in the United States, where Fitch and other missionaries showed them during lectures before religious and political groups. Several frames from the films were reprinted in *Life* magazine; segments of actual footage later appeared in Frank Capra's newsreel documentary, *Why We Fight: Battle of China*. Decades later the film reappeared in two historical documentaries released during the 1990s: *Magee's Testament* and *In the Name of the Emperor*.

One can only imagine how the Japanese military leadership smoldered as these written reports, photographs, and even films of Japanese atrocities found their way into the world media. Many of the zone leaders lived in constant terror and believed that the Japanese would kill them all if they could get away with it. Some of the men barricaded themselves in their houses and after dark dared not venture outdoors except in twos or threes. At least one, George Fitch, suspected that there was a price on his head. But despite their fear, they continued to take turns guarding key areas of the zone at night and persisted in publicizing the Japanese atrocities. "The Japanese military hate us worse than the enemy for we have shown them up to the world," John Magee wrote on January 28, 1938. "We are all surprised that none of us have been killed and whether we all get out safely is yet a question."