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3 Ping Tsang Hsiang,
Nanking.

February 22, 1938.

Dear Nina:-

Previous letters have carried my story up to the time the Japanese took over the city, and indeed, if you count the first two I sent you after communications were restored, up to about the time that members of the American Embassy returned to Nanking, which was on January 6th.

It was a very great relief to us to have the Embassy staff back. We were here alone so to speak, without any official group to speak for us, and we had to deal every day with questions of great importance, out of any of which almost incidents of a most serious sort might arise. Moreover we had to deal almost hourly with Japanese soldiers and daily, often several times a day, with the Japanese Embassy. We dealt often too with questions, indeed I might say almost exclusively, with questions which in any ordinary time would have been handled by Consulates or Embassies. We simply had to, there was no other way out. Imagine for instance my writing a letter of protest as I did on behalf of our group to the Japanese Embassy about violation of the American Embassy by Japanese soldiers! In all my life in China I would never have thought of myself as performing any such task.

But our group was simply compelled to do many unexpected things. Of course when Mr. Atcheson and the other members of the Embassy staff went away no one ever thought they would be so long getting back. It was the bombing of the Panay that changed all that. In fact not a member of the Embassy staff that evacuated in December has yet returned to Nanking. An entirely new staff has been sent here. Mr. Allison, who is now in charge here, was in Nanking some time previously, but was not a member of the local staff at the time of the evacuation in December, so he can be counted as new to this situation.

A remark of Mr. Allison's, made one day to Searle Bates when he was talking with him about some of the things that had transpired before his return, will perhaps illustrate as well as anything can the sort of problems we had to deal with and the risks we had to run. Mr. Allison said "Can you tell me why you fellows weren't lined up and shot?" Well it is a wonder that all of us came through the three weeks following the entry of the Japanese without some one's getting hurt. I have frequently seen some of the men go out to get Japanese soldiers out of this or that place, and have felt definitely uneasy until they returned unharmed. For the soldiers did not like us, not a little bit. But two things helped us. We were of course foreigners, and the sinking of the Panay had just occurred. The Embassy - I mean the Japanese Embassy - knew well enough that the army was inclined to be "rough" as they expressed it, and they wanted to smooth things out. They could not do a great deal with their own military, still they could do a little, and that little helped. One day when things were at their worst, especially about the burning of the city, some twelve or fifteen of us called in a body at the Japanese Embassy and told them in very plain language what we thought about the conduct of their troops. We simply had to make the protests we did in the name of ordinary humanity and decency. But we are quite sure that we did right to make these protests, because it is due almost solely to the protests continually made that the situation has improved.

The German Embassy staff returned a few days after the American, and then a little later still the British came. The return of the Embassies has of course put the Japanese still more on their good behavior and has undoubtedly tended towards the restoration of order. Not that order is yet all that it should be. Only last night a case of murder by soldiers was reported very near us here. I wrote you previously about seeing myself the bodies of an old gray-haired man, a woman and two other men lying where they were shot some three weeks ago. Even if the old man had stolen two chairs, which I do not think is proven, it does not justify the killing of four people. Again just two or three days ago, I saw a man and young boy shot by soldiers. Fortunately neither wound was serious, but the incident shows how insecure life still is in this city at the hands of the Japanese. Robbery was one of the principal causes if not the sole cause of the last incident I have mentioned. A desire for "hua gu-niang" (pretty girls) may also have been a contributory factor. Further just this morning after more than two months of protests, people were forcibly taken from the University Middle School for work, and some windows broken, and I believe doors smashed also, in the process. So while the return of the Embassies has helped to bring about better conditions, we are still a long way off from the peace we used to enjoy.

It is now after eleven and I must stop and go to bed else my typing will disturb Dr. Wilson and keep him awake. The mail by Mr. Rabe goes at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. We are certainly sorry that he has to go back to Germany ~~now~~ at this time. He has made a splendid Chairman for our International Committee and all of us regret to see him leave. I hope you will see him while he is in Shanghai. Dr. Brady returned yesterday afternoon. He is already at work, having vaccinated about 300 refugees this afternoon. The beans about which you have heard so much in Shanghai - they have even been on the radio broadcast and have been made the subject of editorials in the Shanghai papers, two of which Claude kindly sent us - will be landed on Saturday. When next I write I will tell you a little more of that story from this end. Thank you for your letter and for the enclosures sent by Dr. Brady.

With love,

Plumer.