

W. P. Mills

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Miss Mary K. Mills,
1421 Pendleton Street
Columbia,
South Carolina,
U. S. A.

3 Ping Tsang Hsáang,
Nanking.
January 22, 1938.

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Dear Nina:-

This letter goes forward to you by the courtesy of Mr. Christian Kroeger of Carlowitz and Co, who is the first foreigner to leave Nanking since December 15th or 16th. He is going to Shanghai by train through the courtesy of the Japanese military authorities. The train is now running again, but it is not open to passenger traffic, being exclusively used by the military. Mr. Kroeger is leaving partly to get married, and partly to take up work elsewhere, so he has very special reasons for going. If possible, I hope you may meet him while he is in Shanghai. One of the unexpected and delightful by-products of this otherwise tragic situation is the warm spirit of comradeship which has sprung up between the members of the German community and our missionary group during the last two and a half months. We have seen every problem alike, and there have been many of them, and the fact that their reaction has been the same as ours has helped us greatly in dealing with the Japanese. One might not have thought, a priori, that a group of German Nazi business men and American Protestant missionaries would have worked together so harmoniously in such a time of crisis, but I speak the simple truth when I say that there has not been a single rift between us, but always only the one thought - how to get on with the job, how to meet the situation. Thus it has happened that with men to whom we were strangers before we have now become warm friends. It is a pleasure to testify to the courage, the self-sacrifice, and the devotion of these men. Mr. Rabe of Siemens has been Chairman of our International Safety Zone Committee, and Mr. Kroeger has been our treasurer. Mr. Sperling has also given splendid service all the way through.

One of the interesting things about a time such as this is the way in which plans made for one purpose prove most useful for something entirely unexpected. So it has been with our Safety Zone. It was designed to afford some protection to the people during the period of fighting around the city, but its greatest usefulness has been for something quite different. In Chinese we always called the Zone "Nan Min Chu" - a place for the poor people or refugees - and this it has proven, and the protection it has afforded has been since the occupation, far more worth while than that which it provided earlier. Against the things mentioned in my previous letters, the rape, robbery and murder, even the Zone could only give partial protection in the early days of the occupation, but it did afford some safety because of the presence of foreign nationals, and later due to our frequent and strenuous protests some sort of order was established in the Zone sooner than in other parts of the city. Even now nearly six weeks after the capture of the city the people are still unwilling to go back to their homes, where they live outside of the Zone for fear of the treatment they will receive if they do. The Japanese say they want the people to go back, and theoretically they do, but their actions belie their words.

With all my love,

(6a)

3 Ping Tsang Hsiang,
Nanking.
January 24, 1938.

Dear Nina:-

Memories crowd in on one, as one sits down to write. The last three months have certainly been full. The latter part of November and the first part of December saw the planning of the Safety Zone and the setting up of the machinery for its administration, then came the tense days of the fighting around Nanking and our unsuccessful though strenuous attempts to arrange a truce, and finally since the 13th of December our long continued struggle with the Japanese to establish and maintain order. Then too there have been especially since the first of December, really big problems to deal with constantly in regard to the housing and provisioning of the refugees. I shall try in this letter to speak of these things in consecutive order to enable you, if I can, the better to understand what has happened.

With regard to the Safety Zone, we got our inspiration of course from the success of Father Jacquinet's zone in Shanghai. I have called it his zone, just because his name was so prominently associated with it. Our first task locally was to clear the idea of such a zone with Chinese and foreign friends, then to discuss it with the Chinese officials to make sure that we had their support, and finally to take it up with the Japanese. We had to make as sure as we could of a good location, to get the Chinese to agree to move their troops and military equipment out of the area, and then to get a promise from the Japanese to respect it. These were all difficult things to do. As a matter of fact the last two were never fully accomplished, but we did get both sides sufficiently committed to justify us in going ahead to put the Zone into operation. The Chinese promised to move their troops out of the area, but never fully did so until just about the time of their retreat. On the other hand, the Japanese at first made no reply to our proposal, and then only after repeated efforts on our part, finally gave a sort of back-handed recognition to it by saying that while they were not in a position to give an undertaking that the area would not be either bombed or bombarded, it could nevertheless be taken for granted that the Japanese forces had no intention of attacking places not used by the Chinese troops for military purposes. We were never able formally to declare to both sides that the Zone was in operation, because by the time the Chinese troops had moved out sufficiently to enable us to make such an announcement honestly, the foreign gunboats had all moved up the river, and we had no way to send any messages out, as all other means of communication had long since ceased to function. What we did do was this. We announced, before all lines of communication were cut, that the International Committee for the Safety Zone, relying on the good faith of both sides in regard to the assurances given, was going ahead with its plans for the operation of the Zone, was inviting the people to come into it, and making provision as far as it could for food, fuel, and housing. In other words, our Nanking Safety Zone was carried through on sheer nerve; or if you prefer, on faith; or on a certain sort of boldness that did not know when it was licked. More than once our chances of success seemed slight, but something always happened, or was made to happen, that gave us a new start, until now, ten weeks after its inception, the Zone is still going strong. Of course we all thought and expected that the Zone would have gone out of operation

long ago, but as I wrote you on the 22nd, the Zone has proven far more useful after the occupation than it was before. It did give some protection during the fighting, because it proved a haven of refuge especially to the people in the southern and southeastern sections of the city and in the suburbs, where the heaviest fighting took place. But the chief usefulness of the Zone has been in the measure of protection it has afforded to the people since the occupation. I wish you could have seen the way the people flocked into the Zone during the early days of December, and I wish you could see Shanghai Road and Ninghai Road now. These two are now the principal business streets of Nanking. Formerly these used to be Tai Ping Lu and Chung Hua Lu, the old Fu Tung Gial, but those streets are now largely burned out, and instead the formerly more or less ^{little} used Shanghai Road up past Hillcrest and the American Embassy, and Ninghai Road in the new residential district, also formerly little used, are now the principal streets. Shanghai Road is now so crowded that one can hardly get through it in a motor car. This change is all a matter of the last few weeks. The reason is simply that the people are here in the Zone, and because by now some sort of order has been established, so that there is no longer the universal plundering and robbing that there used to be, the people now have more confidence than they had before and have begun to come out again on the streets. They have set up scores of temporary shops by the side of the road and business is brisk in these - all of course on a small scale and all within the Zone. Outside of the Zone there is no business at all.

We could never have put the Zone into operation had it not been for the splendid assistance given us in the beginning by the Chinese civil officials, the members of the Diplomatic Corps, the foreign newspaper men, and the foreign business men. They were all for the scheme and aided it in every way they could. Our troubles were solely with the military, Chinese and Japanese. With the Chinese the difficulty was due to the fact that they were so dilatory about moving out of the area. With the Japanese our difficulty lay in getting them to make any reply at all, and even then we got only an indirect recognition of the Zone, but it proved enough for our purposes. The Committee held steadily to its determination to establish the Zone, and finally succeeded, though it was an uphill task. Almost at the last the Chinese military tried to make us alter the southwest line, claiming that they had not clearly understood just what the civil officials had agreed to, although we had previously been solemnly assured that it had all been thoroughly checked with them. If I ever felt in danger these months in Nanking, it was on the afternoon when Searle Bates, Mr. Rabe, Mr. Sperling and I finally went over that line again with the military, and settled that the line should run as originally agreed upon. While we were out on the hills back of Hillcrest and the Seminary, two Japanese planes appeared overhead, and the anti-aircraft guns close by us began to roar. We were out directly among the soldiers, so we were a fair target so to speak. We lay down on the ground and watched the planes go by, while the guns blazed. For the first time I saw the silver gleam of some of the smaller shells or tracer bullets as they

+ business streets

two groups of planes, - 3 planes in each group.

sped after the planes. Fortunately the planes were after other prey that day and we escaped, but as Mr. Rabe said afterwards, "I expected to be bombed that day." I did not exactly expect to be bombed, but both planes and guns were too close for comfort. Searle went back with Mr. Sperling the next day to put up the zone flags - a red cross within a circle - thus finally marking the line, and he said their experience then was much worse than the day before when I was with him.

All this is only part of the story of the zone, but I must pass on to other things. Perhaps this is the logical place to tell you about our efforts to get a truce established that would permit the Chinese to withdraw from the city and the Japanese to enter it without further fighting. It was perfectly clear from a variety of reasons that the Chinese could not hold the city, though not so clear that they might not be able to make it somewhat costly for the Japanese. A truce proposal therefore seemed in order. The scheme was all talked through with General Tang, who was in command of the city, one of his secretaries acting as go-between, and had his hearty approval. Officially of course he could not accept the plan without the approval of General Chiang, who had by then left Nanking. It was necessary therefore to send a wire to Hankow and one to Tokyo at the same time. The messages were drafted and Searle and I took them out to the Panay, which was then lying a little upstream off Hsiakwan. We went out with General Tang's secretary on a special pass through the city gates. Hsiakwan was already ablaze, having been set on fire by the Chinese troops with the idea of leaving no cover for the enemy in their attack on the city. It was weird driving the streets with the fires blazing on both sides of you. Archie Tsen's house was burning fiercely as we came back towards the city gate. I shall never forget the sadness of that night's drive. The destruction seemed so futile and stupid.

General Tang had assured us that he was confident that Gen. Chiang would accept the truce proposal, so we were surprised to receive a wire from Hankow the next day to the effect that he would not. Naturally this word necessitated further messages and Tang's headquarters were insistent that we communicate with Hankow again. So Searle and I took another trip out to the Panay the next night. This was the evening of December 10th, and the hour was much later than our previous trip. It made one feel creepy to drive through the still and deserted streets, and there was a sense of impending catastrophe in the air. Also one had the feeling that there might easily come at any time a burst of rifle or machine gun fire from somewhere in the dark. It did not tend to make me feel any better when we got on the boat to have Paxton tell us that some time before we came there had been such firing on shore. But we got the messages off and returned safely around midnight. That was another experience one would rather not repeat. The next day the Panay started upstream to her new anchorage and her untimely end. All communications being thus cut off we could do nothing further to effect a truce. But the story does not end here, though the telling of the rest of it will have to wait next week's letter.

With all my love, Plumer.