

3 Ping Tsang Hsiang,
Nanking.

January 31, 1938.

Dear Nina:-

My letter of the 24th stopped in the middle of my story about our efforts to secure a truce. When the Panay moved upstream, and the city gates were closed so that no one could get out of them, then of course we had no way to send further messages. But the story of the attempted truce does not end there. Here I will skip over for a moment the events of Friday and Saturday, December 10th and 11th, other than to say that the heaviest artillery fire of all occurred on Saturday, the roar of the guns being fairly constant especially on that afternoon and evening. On Sunday General Tang's secretaries came to see us again. "Had we received any word from Tokyo?" They wanted to know. "Or any word from Hankow?" We told them of course that we were out of touch with the Panay and had no way then to send any more messages. We discussed the possibility of the use of their military *radio* which we understood were still functioning, and a new telegram was drafted as follows

"For the sake of 200,000 helpless civilians, the International Committee for a Safety Zone in Nanking respectfully proposes to the Chinese and Japanese authorities a truce of exactly three days to begin from 3³⁰ p. m. of December 12th, or the earliest possible hour thereafter. General Tang Sheng-chih agrees to evacuate the Walled City of Nanking during this period and pledges himself that there will be no further destruction of the city, on condition that the Japanese authorities do not attack his troops during the withdrawal and also pledge themselves to preserve the city. The International Committee will observe the operation of the truce and communicate with both sides.
(Signed) Habe, Chairman."

What a blessing it would have been if the truce could have been put through on those terms, but it was not to be. General Tang's secretaries left us to go back to the General to get his approval of the new telegram, and were to come back to us right after lunch to let us know his attitude. You see this new message implied that General Tang was himself now taking full responsibility for arranging a truce without any reference to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and this was a serious matter. General Tang's secretaries said that things were at such a pass that the General was quite ready to do this, but both we and they felt that he should explicitly approve the telegram before it was sent. A Chinese translation of the telegram was also made and taken back by them.

But a new telegram was not all that the General's secretaries wanted of us. Indeed it was the least important part. What they particularly wanted to know was whether we could get some one to go out between the Chinese and Japanese lines with a flag of truce, and make the proposal for a truce; this to be done regardless as to whether or not any reply should come by any chance either from the Japanese or from General Chiang. In other words, the Chinese now felt their situation to be so desperate that only a truce could save the forces in and near the city. But a truce was also reasonable from the Japanese point of view, as we thought, because that meant that the Japanese could enter

the city freely without further fighting. Moreover we had had a telegram about a week before this from Tokyo which indicated that Japan might not be averse to the idea of a truce at Nanking. This message came to us through one of the Embassies - not our own - but very directly, and was indeed one of the principal reasons why we were ready to do what we could to effect a truce. The message did not use the word "truce" but it did clearly indicate that it was the intention of the Japanese, if possible, "to save the city..... life and property of foreigners, and peaceful Chinese population of Nanking." It was further stated that "Japan hopes that the Chinese Government, persuaded by Foreign Powers, will spare the Capital from becoming a battleground." We took this telegram as being sincere, and it probably was, though later events at Nanking did not justify its tenor at least so far as the "Chinese population" was concerned. Nor indeed was its tenor wholly justified, as later events proved, even in regard to foreign property. But that the Tokyo officials who were responsible for the message, or rather for the statements contained therein, were sincere, I see no reason to doubt. But be that as it may, the situation on Sunday, December 12th was this. There was no official answer from Japan to the proposal, and Chiang Kai-shek had also apparently turned it down, though Tang's headquarters insisted that he would be ~~only~~ surely ready to agree to it if he really understood the actual military situation in and around Nanking. Even if Chiang did not approve, Tang had now reached the point where he was ready to approve and arrange a truce on his own responsibility. This was a serious matter, but he was ready to do it. This was the situation when Tang's secretaries left us to go back to Headquarters to report. All these negotiations were going on to the accompaniment of air raids and artillery fire. It was a rather hectic day. *

When Tang's men had gone, we set about plans for going out between the lines with the proposed flag of truce. We knew there was no chance for any messages to come in by radio from either Chiang or the Japanese, so that the only thing to do was to go out between the lines. This Mr. Sperling, one of the German members of our Committee offered to do. As a German, and a bachelor, and without any close family connections, it really seemed that he was the right man to go. Moreover he had experience of a similar sort of thing at the time of the surrender of Tsingtao. But none the less it was good of him, and a brave thing, to agree so readily to go. The next question was, where to get white cloth in a piece sufficiently large to make a flag, or rather banner of truce, for the plan was to have a large white banner with a few Japanese characters on it "Don't shoot. I want to talk with you. I have an important message." There was no white cloth to be had, so I dashed back to Ping Tsang Hsiang, got one of the few sheets I had not sent to you at Kuling, and took it back to our office at Ninghai Road. There the requisite Japanese characters were written on the sheet. I have that sheet yet. It was too late. Almost before the sheet was dry the Chinese retreat had assumed such proportions that it was impossible to stem the tide. The rest of the story will have to be told in my next letter.

With all my love,

Plumer.

* We got no lunch at all that day.