

CHAPTER 3

WAITING FOR THE ATTACK

6 DECEMBER

THE LARGEST SHARE of the Americans who stayed behind are boarding an American warship today; the rest are ready to embark at any moment. Only the members of our committee refuse to board. Dr. Rosen has told me in strictest confidence that the peace proposal presented by Ambassador Trautmann has been accepted by Chiang Kai-shek. Dr. Rosen hopes that there will be peace before the Japanese can take Nanking.

I had an interesting conversation with Colonel Huang. He is absolutely against the Safety Zone. In his opinion it demoralizes the troops in Nanking. "Every inch of soil that the Japanese conquer should be fertilized with our blood. Nanking must be defended to the last man. If you had not established your Safety Zone, people now fleeing into the Zone could have helped our soldiers."

What can you say to such monstrous views? And the man is a high official very close to the generalissimo! And so people who had to stay behind because they didn't have the money to flee with their families and a few small possessions, the poorest of the poor, are supposed to pay with their

lives for the military's mistakes! Why didn't they force the well-off inhabitants, those 800,000 propertied citizens who fled, to stay? Why is it always the poorest people who must forfeit their lives?

We also got around to talking about the point in time when military personnel and installations are to leave the Safety Zone. At the very last moment and not a minute before, in his view; not until the battle is raging in the streets of Nanking.

If those of us in Nanking want to be truly prepared, we must have rice, flour, salt and fuel, medicine, cooking utensils, and who knows what all besides, inside the Zone before the Japanese arrive. We have to arrange for doctors and nurses, for removal of waste and burials, for police and, if need be, police replacements; for it is highly probable that the police will depart along with the retreating Chinese troops, and then comes the critical moment when mob violence can be expected. Should we follow his example and make preparations for these things only at the last possible moment?

I try to bring Mr. Huang around—to no avail. He is Chinese. What does he care about a few hundred thousand of his countryman? They're poor, and so all they can do is die. We also discuss the problem of defending the city. General von Falkenhausen and all the German advisors have pointed out that this is hopeless. Of course, there must be a line of defense outside it. You can't demand of a general who wants to save face that he simply surrender the city; but a battle at the walls, fighting in the streets, it's insane, just ruthless mass murder! Nothing helps: My powers of persuasion aren't good enough.

Honor, Mr. Huang declares, demands that we fight to the last drop of blood! Well, let's wait and see. Mr. Pai, the manager of electricity works, and Mr. Loh, his first engineer, wanted to hold out in Nanking until the last moment to keep the station running. And it is running. But who's actually responsible, I don't know. Messrs. Pai and Loh bolted long ago.

7 DECEMBER

Last night we heard a great many cars on the move, and at around 5 o'clock this morning a whole host of airplanes passed over just above our house; the generalissimo's farewell salute. Colonel Huang, whom I called on yesterday, has departed as well—on the generalissimo's orders!

Only the very poor are still here, and we few Europeans and Americans

who are determined to share our quarters, our so-called Safety Zone, with the poor.

Poor people, with a few household goods and bedding, can be seen fleeing into the Zone from all directions. And they are not even the poorest of the poor, they're the vanguard, the people who still have a little money and can pay for shelter with someone they may know inside the boundaries.

Those who have nothing are yet to arrive. We'll have to open the schools and universities for them, put them in mass shelters and feed them from great soup kitchens. We've been able at best to get a quarter of the food promised us into the Zone, because we don't have enough vehicles, which are constantly being commandeered by the military.

This morning two of our trucks were taken by the military. So far we've only got one of them back; the other, loaded with two tons of salt, has not been returned yet. We're trying to chase it down. Another 20,000 dollars have been paid out by the generalissimo's headquarters. With that we've received a total of 40,000, instead of the 100,000 promised us. We'll just have to make do. The generalissimo probably doesn't know that only part of the donation has been paid out, so you can't really blame him.

The city gates are to be closed tomorrow and the rest of the Americans put on board ship. I sent a telegram to Siemens today asking them to pay up any life insurance premiums that may be due.

Radio Shanghai reports that Dr. Trautmann has returned again to Hankow. His peace proposals have allegedly been turned down by Chiang Kai-shek. As I wrote before, however, according to Dr. Rosen's confidential statement, Dr. Trautmann's peace proposals have already been accepted by the generalissimo, even as final preparations for the defense of the city are being made at this very moment. Every soldier claims that they will fight to the last man.

Houses outside the gates are being burned down. The population from all the suburbs that have been set on fire is being ordered to flee to our Safety Zone, which has quietly been accorded recognition after all. Kröger has just returned from Schmeling's house near the South Gate, which he discovered had been broken into and partially looted. Being a practical man, he ordered the rest of the potables brought back with him.

Mayor Ma was missing at the 6 o'clock press conference, and only about half of the Westerners showed up. The rest have presumably boarded their ships by now.

As a result of a rumor that houses near the gates *inside* the walls are to

be burned down as well, panic has broken out among the poor living near the South Gate. Hundreds of families are streaming into our Zone, but now that it's dark they cannot find any shelter. Shivering and weeping, women and children are sitting on their bundles of bedding, waiting for the return of husbands and fathers who are trying to find shelter. We brought 2,117 sacks of rice into the city today. It's doubtful that we'll still be able to get through the gates again tomorrow.

8 DECEMBER

Yesterday afternoon, Chang, our number-one boy, brought his wife home from Kulou Hospital. She still has not recovered, but wants to be near her children in this time of distress. Our coolie is very sad: His family has been left behind, about 40 miles outside the city. He couldn't fetch them, didn't have time, since the cook was sick and he had to take over some of his work. No one said a word to me about it. I thought his family had arrived long ago. It's too late now, unfortunately.

About two years ago, Dr. Trautmann greeted me at a tea party in Peitaiho with the words: "Ah, here comes the mayor of Nanking!" I was deputy local group leader at the time and somewhat offended by his joke. And now his joke has come true in a way. Of course under normal circumstances a European cannot become mayor of a Chinese city. But since Mayor Ma, with whom we have been working closely recently, left Nanking yesterday and since the committee, with his approval, is forced to deal with all the administrative problems and workings of the municipality inside our Safety Zone, I have in fact become something very like an acting mayor. Enough to give you a fit, Rabe!

Thousands of refugees are fleeing into our so-called Safety Zone from all directions; the streets are thronged with more people than in peacetime. The sight of the poorest of the poor wandering aimlessly in the streets is enough to make you weep.

As it grows dark some families, unable to find shelter anywhere, stretch out to sleep in nooks and alcoves of buildings, or simply on the street, despite the cold. We are working feverishly to develop the Zone. Unfortunately we must deal with endless encroachments by the military, who still have not left our Zone and apparently are in no hurry to do so. They're busy burning down houses around the city and sending the refugees to us. I suppose they must think we're terribly stupid for having got involved in relief work on such a grand scale, with no hope of anything in return.

It's the opinion of a few of the foreigners that the entire Chinese opposition is only for show and they will be content with a few mock battles just to save face. I, however, see things differently. I fear that General Tang, who is defending the city, will ruthlessly sacrifice both his soldiers and the civilian population.

I'm going to open an exchange bank, because cash is getting scarce. Two gentlemen from the Chinese government with whom I am friendly are going to help me do it.

We are all close to despair. Chinese military headquarters is our worst problem. Chinese soldiers have removed a whole section of the flags we had just managed to set out around our perimeter. The size of the Zone is to be reduced; they need the reclaimed area for their artillery and fortifications. And with that the whole plan can fall apart, because if the Japanese get wind of it, they'll bombard us without mercy. And that may well turn the Safety Zone into the High Danger Zone. The border is to be checked again tomorrow morning. None of us expected this sort of dirty dealing. The Chinese accepted the Zone definitively on 22 November.

From a Chinese Press Report, the Evening of 8 December 1937:

A week ago yesterday, on 1 December 1937, Mayor Ma approached the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone with the demand that they assume full responsibility for the administration of the Safety Zone. The Committee and all its members and staff, with the exception of a few coolies and truck drivers, are doing this work voluntarily and without pay.

9 DECEMBER

We are still busy transporting rice from outside the city. Unfortunately one of our trucks was damaged in the process. One of our transport coolies lost an eye and was taken to the hospital. The committee is seeing to it that he is cared for. The rest of the Americans, along with Dr. Rosen, Scharffenberg, and Hürter, have gone on board the *Hulk*, but if the air is "clear" this evening they want to return to land for our conference.

The crew of another truck arrives back sobbing and weeping. They were at the South Gate, which is being shelled. The guards there didn't want to let the truck out, but were finally talked into it. When the truck returned, of the entire guard unit—about 40 men—not one was still alive.

At 2 o'clock this afternoon I am joined by Dr. Bates, Sperling, Mills, Lung, and a colonel from General Tang's staff to walk the disputed portion of our Safety Zone's border (the southwest section). From the hills we can see the suburbs below wrapped in the smoke and flames of the fires the Chinese have set in order to have a field of operation. We discover a row of anti-aircraft batteries within the southwest border of our Zone. During our inspection, three Japanese bombers appear above us and come under heavy fire from the batteries, which are no more than 10 yards ahead of us. We all have to hit the ground. Lying face-up, I was able to follow the flak attack; unfortunately their aim was poor; or let's say, fortunately they missed. I expected bombs to drop on us at any moment. But we were lucky. Since the colonel from the general staff refuses to yield, I threaten to resign and inform him that I will telegraph the Führer that our refugee zone cannot be established because General Tang has broken his word. The colonel and Lung head home in a very pensive mood. Meanwhile we have decided to try a major tactical move, although I put little trust in it. We want to approach Tang once again and try to persuade him to abandon any defense inside the city. To my great amazement, Tang agrees to do so, if we can get the permission of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

And for that purpose John Rabe, along with two Americans and Chinese, boarded the American gunboat Panay. They sent two telegrams, one by way of the American ambassador in Hankow to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and another by way of Shanghai to the Japanese military authorities. In the telegram to be forwarded to Chiang Kai-shek by the American ambassador, John Rabe writes that the International Committee hopes to receive assurances from the Japanese military authorities that they will launch no attack against the walled city of Nanking, inside which the committee has established a Safety Zone. If such assurances are forthcoming, the committee requests that for humanitarian reasons the Chinese authorities undertake no military operations within the walled city. The committee proposes a three-day armistice for all forces in the vicinity of Nanking, with the Japanese holding their present position while the Chinese withdraw from the walled city of Nanking. The telegrams are signed: John Rabe, Chairman.

LATER

Our trip back from the Panay through the burning suburb of Hsiakwan is incredible. We arrive home at 7 p.m. just before the conclusion of the press

conference. We hear that in the meantime the Japanese have advanced to the gates of Nanking, or just outside them. You can hear thundering cannon and machine-gun fire at the South Gate and across from Goan Hoa Men. The streetlights have been turned off, and in the dark you can make out the wounded dragging themselves over the cobblestones. No one helps them; there are no doctors, no nurses, no medics left. Only Kulou Hospital with its couple of brave American doctors still carries on. The streets of the Safety Zone are flooded with refugees loaded down with bundles. The old Communications Ministry (arsenal) is opened to refugees and in no time fills to the rafters. We cordon off two rooms because our weapons and ammunition are in them. Among the refugees are deserters, who hand over their uniforms and weapons.

10 DECEMBER

The night was very unsettled. Thunder of cannons, rifle and machine-gun fire from 8 o'clock yesterday evening until about 4 this morning. I've heard that the Japanese only barely missed taking the city yesterday morning; they had advanced as far as Goan Hoa Men, which is said to have been almost undefended. A reserve regiment of Chinese had not arrived in time, but this didn't bother the troops waiting to be relieved, who, with the exception of a few companies, retreated anyway. At that same time, the Japanese move in, and the reserve troops, arriving at the last moment, manage painfully to push the enemy back only at considerable cost. We learn this morning that last night the Japanese advanced to a point close to the water-works on the Yangtze. Everyone expects the city to be in the hands of the Japanese by this evening at the latest.

Dr. King, who speaks German, offers the committee his help. He has eight military hospitals under his command, all outside our Zone. Only the lightly wounded are housed in these eight field hospitals, and most of them, or so Dr. King says, have wounded themselves in order to get out of danger. Dr. King would like to place those with self-inflicted wounds inside our Zone. That is in fact contrary to our agreement, but I hope the Japanese won't object when they learn about it, and I refer Dr. King to Dr. Trimmer, the chairman of our medical division at Kulou Hospital. According to King, he's still in charge of 80 Chinese doctors, about whom we knew nothing before now; but we would be very happy if they really do exist and were to join us; the more, the merrier. Over 1,000 people have been wounded in the city over the last two days.

Rev. John Magee wants to open a European section of the Red Cross here, but even though he has money—Colonel Huang gave him 23,000 dollars—he's getting nowhere because he can't get an answer from the Red Cross, and without their consent he apparently doesn't dare move on the matter. What a shame! In his shoes I wouldn't think twice. If you can do some good, why hesitate? Consent is sure to arrive in due course.

We're anxiously awaiting an answer to our telegrams from the Japanese authorities and from Chiang Kai-shek. The fate of the city and 200,000 people are at risk.

The streets of the Zone are packed with refugees. Many of them are still camping in the streets because they couldn't find any suitable shelter. Sadly, we discover over and over that there are still a lot of military personnel in our Zone. We agree to the following terms with Colonel Lung and Colonel Chow:

1. General Tang unconditionally recognizes the southwest border of our Zone.
2. Lung will see to it that construction of a soup kitchen on Wutaishan Hill will no longer be disrupted by soldiers.
3. Three delegates from military headquarters will join three members of our committee for an inspection of the refugee Zone. Any soldier they meet will be ejected from the Zone. Each of the aforementioned three representatives of General Tang must have the authority to give this order and see to it that it is executed. Mr. Han informs us that the soldiers in Hsiakwan want to burn the rest of our rice supplies. Lung promises to intervene. I am given a military pass so that I can pass through the gate to Hsiakwan.

The battle to the east appears to be expanding. You can hear heavy artillery. Air attacks too.

If things don't change soon, we will be subjected to a bombardment of our Zone, which would surely mean a horrible bloodbath because the streets are teeming with people. If only we would receive a positive answer from Japan!

It's a crying shame that the European war reporters who are still here can't tell the whole truth. Certain people should be exposed for not always keeping their promise to rid the Zone of the military.

We are all terribly depressed! News has just arrived from Johnson, the American ambassador in Hankow, that he sent our telegram on to Chiang Kai-shek and personally approves and supports our proposal, but at the

same time he sent us a separate confidential telegram telling us that he has been officially informed by the Foreign Ministry in Hankow that our understanding that General Tang agreed to a three-day armistice and the withdrawal of his troops from Nanking is mistaken, and moreover that Chiang Kai-shek has announced that he is not in a position to accept such a proposal. We have checked again here to make sure that we are not mistaken. Lung and Ling, who were present when we sent our telegram, confirm that it was all correct and that in their opinion the generalissimo is surely in agreement. We're not about to give up that quickly! We send another telegram to Chiang Kai-shek, and at the same time I send one to the German ambassador, Dr. Trautmann, in Hankow, asking him to support our proposal as well.

NOON

The city has been bombarded all day. There's the constant rattle of windowpanes. Some houses on Purple Mountain are in flames. The suburbs continue to burn. But people on the streets of our refugee Zone feel so safe and secure that they pay hardly any attention to Japanese planes.

Japanese radio announces that Nanking will fall within 24 hours. The Chinese soldiers are already considerably demoralized. Meanwhile the military has taken over the Metropal Hotel, the city's finest. Soldiers are getting drunk in the bar and lounging in the club chairs—they want to live it up for once, too.

There are a number of people who think it's perfectly possible that the city will fall into Japanese hands tonight. So far it doesn't look that way. Everything is quiet outside. Once again a great number of refugees, including women and children, are sleeping out on the streets.

10:30 P. M.

I lie down on my bed in my clothes. At 2:30 a.m. a massive bombardment begins, accompanied by machine-gun fire. When grenades start whistling eerily right over our house, I order Mr. Han's family and the servants into the dugout. I put on my steel helmet. In the southeast a conflagration erupts, lighting up the area for hours afterward. All the windows rattle constantly, and at regular intervals of a few seconds the house shakes with the boom of shells landing. The Wutaishan antiaircraft battery is fired upon and replies—and my house is in the line of fire. There is gunfire to the

south and west as well. Growing somewhat accustomed to the hellish racket, I lie back down to sleep, meaning I doze a little. Sleep is out of the question.

11 DECEMBER, 8 A.M.

Water and electricity are off. The bombardment continues. Now and then the noise ebbs a bit, only to break out anew. Our Peter appears to love it. He sings along at full throat. Canaries apparently have better nerves than a Rabe.¹⁹

The streets of our Zone are packed with people who aren't even bothered by the din of the shelling. These people have more faith in our "Safety Zone" than I do. The Zone is a long way from being *safe*; there are still armed soldiers inside, and all our efforts to get them out have thus far been to no avail. We cannot tell the Japanese, as was our intention, that the Zone is now free of all military.

9 A.M.

The first grenades land in the refugee Zone in front of and behind the Foo Chong Hotel. A total of twelve dead and about twelve wounded. Sperling, who has been running the hotel, is slightly wounded by flying glass. Two cars standing outside the hotel burst into flames. Another grenade was fired into our Zone (at the middle school) and killed 13 people. There is a steady stream of complaints that the Chinese military has still not left the Safety Zone. Outside Kulou Hospital—and on our side of the Zone—trenches are being dug. The officer in charge refuses to work on the other side of the street. Magee and I drive out to see him to settle the matter peaceably. On the way we notice soldiers are also digging in the middle of Shansi Road Circle ("Bavarian Square"). Soldiers are breaking into the houses on one corner of the square where two streets come to a point. I watch as windows and doors are smashed. And why? No one knows.

On Chung Shan Lu, a number of wounded are carried past us. Barricades made of sandbags, uprooted trees, and barbed wire are being thrown up, although they will present no great obstacle to tanks. We speak with the officer outside Kulou Hospital, who politely but forcefully declines to respect our wishes. From Kulou Hospital I telephone Lung, who says he will speak at once with General Tang.

6 P. M.

At the 6 o'clock conference, the only people present besides the press are the members of our committee. The others have sailed upstream, either on the *Jardines Hulk* or on the American gunboat *USS Panay*.

Dr. Smythe announces that the police, who are now nominally under our control, have arrested a "one-item thief" and want to know what to do with him. The incident provokes general amusement, since until now we hadn't even thought about our having to take the place of the courts. We sentence the thief to death, then pardon him and reduce his sentence to 24 hours in jail, and then for lack of a jail, simply let him go.

At 8 o'clock I call Han in and suggest he and his family move to Ninhai Lu No. 5, the headquarters of our Safety Zone, where the shelter is better than ours here. Besides, my house is too near the antiaircraft batteries on Wutaishan, which are now under serious fire from the Japanese. I consider moving there myself, because fierce attacks are expected tonight. Meanwhile, Han says that he doesn't want to leave his home.