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John Rabe, a German national who joined the Nazi party while working for Siemens in China, never expected to play a leading role in preventing hundreds of thousands of deaths in Nanking. To this day, he is honored as a hero in that city (now known as Nanjing).



John Rabe at his desk in Nanjing. Online, courtesy John-Rabe.de

His diaries, written at the time the atrocities occurred, provide primary evidence of what he saw and what was reported to him. Soon after Japanese troops captured Nanking - in December of 1937 - the killing and looting began:

It is not until we tour the city that we learn the extent of the destruction. We come across corpses every 100 to 200 yards. The bodies of civilians that I examined had bullet holes in their backs. These people had presumably been fleeing and were shot from behind. (Rabe, *The Diaries of John Rabe* - Entry for December 13, 1937 - page 67.)

As thousands of unburied bodies remained in the city's streets, Rabe and his colleagues began to hear the horror stories:

Mr. Riggs brings me the following report from his inspection tour today: A woman is wandering the streets with glazed eyes. She is taken to the hospital, where they learn she is the sole survivor of a family of eighteen. Her 17 relatives have been shot and bayoneted. She lived near the South Gate.

Another woman from the same area, who has been living in our camp along with her brother, lost her parents and three children, all of them shot by the Japanese. With what little she had left, she bought a coffin so she could at least bury her father. Hearing news of this, Japanese soldiers ripped the lid from the coffin and dumped the body onto the street. Chinese don't need to be buried, was their explanation. (Rabe, *Diary Entry for January 7, 1938*, page 115.)

Historical footage recorded by John Magee, an American missionary who helped to maintain a zone of safety within Nanking, likewise provides documentary evidence of the treatment of Chinese men, women and children at the hands of their Japanese occupiers. The film, which features Dr. Robert O. Wilson caring for victims, is not easy to view.

Various Japanese authors have objectively tried to help their country come to terms with atrocities their military committed in Nanjing, and elsewhere in China. Some of the authors interviewed Chinese survivors (who told of horrifying events) and further relied on other primary sources (such as pictures taken by Japanese soldiers, maps, diaries and interviews with Japanese officers).

The extent of the brutality, by soldiers from a civilized society, is impossible to comprehend. Although many primary sources of the time were destroyed, some of the following pictures of war - which are the least shocking of those available at various national archives - are gruesome:

- Japanese soldiers enter Nanjing (Nanking) in 1937.
- In Tokyo, street banners proclaimed: "To the fall of Nanjing. To the victory of the Imperial Army."
- Bodies of mass-execution victims were buried in a place called "Ten Thousand Corpse Ditch."
- It is claimed that army recruits practiced bayonet thrusts on live victims.
- Hora Tomio included military pictures in his book *The Great Nanjing Massacre and the Kill All, Loot All, Burn All War*. They were marked by military censors "Not Allowed" for publication.

Members of the same Japanese military who invaded China - about 22,000 of them - were sent to defend the Pacific island of Iwo Jima.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ATROCITIES-IN-CHINA-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ATROCITIES-IN-CHINA-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

Media Stream



Dr. Robert O. Wilson - Colleague of John Rabe

Image of Robert O. Wilson, online courtesy Yale Divinity School Library.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dr.-Robert-O.-Wilson-Colleague-of-John-Rabe>



Japanese Soldiers Entering Nanjing in 1937

Image online, courtesy stanford.edu website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Japanese-Soldiers-Entering-Nanjing-in-1937>



Street Banners in Tokyo on the Defeat of Nanking

Image online, courtesy the nanking-massacre.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Street-Banners-in-Tokyo-on-the-Defeat-of-Nanking>



"Ten Thousand Corpse Ditch" - Nanking Massacre

Image, U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/-Ten-Thousand-Corpse-Ditch-Nanking-Massacre>



Nanking - Japanese Soldiers and Bayonet Thrusts

Image online, courtesy the nanking-massacre.com website.

View this asset at:

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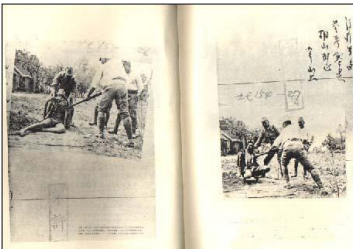


Nanking Massacre Photos - Hora Tomio's Book

Image online, courtesy the [Napalese Debate](http://Napalese-Debate) website.

View this asset at:

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Nanking Massacre - Brutality of Japanese Soldiers

Image online, courtesy the stanford.edu website.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Nanking-Massacre-Brutality-of-Japanese-Soldiers>



John Magee Film - Nanking Atrocities

Clip of John Magee's historical footage included in the documentary film, "Nanking" (2007).

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Magee-Film-Nanking-Atrocities>