

To whomever receives this letter.

Please pass on my story. My name is Li Jing Zhong, a twenty-one year old soldier protecting the city of Fuzhou against the Japanese. I'm currently stuck in a darkness that robs me of my better self and steals my ability to live my life. But I want to see tomorrow enough to make me hold this position for as long as it takes. Today marks the year of 1941 and I feel as if my life will be ending soon.

I remember standing behind my farm where the mountains stood up against the sky. The mud lay in uneven patches scattered over the farmyard and the smell of dirt hung thickly over the scent of tree blossom. Living peace as I stood on the spring grass wet under the early morning dew. I was living a good life until I decided to enlist as a soldier in honour of my father. I wanted to be a hero and a patriot, to serve with courage and dignity and become everything my country should be proud of. War was always problematic. Every generation since the dawn of time have been easily manipulated into war. They would raise the population against our "enemy" and I didn't like the answer. But what was the alternative? I was told that the Japanese were cruel and cold-hearted people who took enormous pride in getting a good clean kill. "The Japanese are a disease of the skin," says Chiang Kai-Shek, our Chinese nationalist leader. We were taught to hate one another but there was only little shame I felt for being born with innate prejudiced hatred. We are all in the same game and had the same rationale too. We all claimed to save lives, to protect and serve, but at the same time how can killing be a job with a salary? I can tell you that here on the ground, we live out our worst nightmares daily.

This war began in 1937. Before this dreadful year, China and Japan fought in small localized engagements including the Japanese invasion of Manchuria followed by the Mukden incident. The last of these three incidents was the Marco Polo Bridge which many believe was the first step to this full-scale war. This marked the enemy coming to fight the fathers of our homeland and the beginning of my intense training for home defense. At first we were taught to use traditional swords and were told that the military in both China and Japan professed to follow ancient and honorable codes of warfare, but in reality it was different. Every man in the army was trained to obey orders for even the most unconscionable acts. We learned the discipline and order of drill and all moved as one as if there was just one brain instead of many. At the same time China was in the midst of a civil war between the forces loyal to the Kuomintang government of Chiang Kai-shek and the forces loyal to the communist party led by Mao Zedong. Even though the two worked together against the threat of Japan, they always had an eye out for what happens after the war and made sure that the other did not gain significant advantage. I remember hearing about Chiang's strategy and determination to crush the communists once the Japanese had gone. He was more concerned with preserving his strength and forces for this purpose than the fight with Japan.

The Japanese were repeatedly dehumanized and debased in my eyes, shown to be barbarous and cruel. I was beginning to lose respect for them and deep down felt glad when they died; glad because the threat to the ones we held dear had been lessened. On May 13th, 1938 Amoy fell to a Japanese landing force

and instantly threatened the security of my city. China's supply lines from the outside world were cut off by Jap warships blockading the coast. Their strategy seemed to be the isolation of China. Later that year, port after port was occupied including the one in Fuzhou. The city had fallen to Japanese forces and remains so even to this day. My paralyzing fear took hold and locked me down into survival mode: "Them on us," "kill or be killed." Back home, my family became Chinese workers who dug trenches and unloaded supplies and war material to assemble shells for artillery. The youth of China had also come forward training to care for the sick and the wounded. Surrounded by hills on 3 sides, the Japanese army decided to invade and Japanese planes quickly bombed the city and the only escape route for Chinese civilians. Parts of my world that have stood for centuries now lie ruined at my feet and it began to rock me in a way I never imagined. I did not want the Nanjing massacre to happen here. I remember being told about the rape of Nanjing where Japanese troops went on a spree of mass killing and violence. The soldiers shot, raped, burned, buried alive, and decapitated their victims and according to eyewitnesses, corpses lined the streets of the city. Streets that were once filled with life stood empty and dead. After this tragic event, posters reading "Our Armies Will Bend, But Will Not Break" and "Swear to defend the nation to the death" were spread throughout the country. Here I thought hiding might be better but I can't, all this energy has to go somewhere. Strained faces are appearing on my comrades as our streets are becoming a shade of grey.

War turns us into things we feared as children. Some of us took life and crumpled under the weight of guilt and some of us killed when necessary and never lost a blink of sleep over it. All this negative energy and hatred had become a sickness of the mind, and of the heart. This war has made me endure the unendurable and suffer what is insufferable. I want to tell the world that peace cannot be achieved in a system where there are people who make profits on war. Please remember that nothing is worse than the loss of one man's life by the hands of another.