

# Aid for Civilian Refugees in China

## Relief work by Rotarians during the War of Resistance against Japan

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Marco Polo Bridge 盧溝橋

It was 80 years ago this date, 7 July 1937, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (七七盧溝橋事變) that broke out when the Republic of China (中華民國) began a full-scale resistance to the expansion of Imperial Japan's aggression in its territory (which had begun in 1931 in Manchuria). The war, which remained undeclared until 9 December 1941, was followed by a period of rapid Japanese advance until the end of 1938, a period of virtual stalemate until 1944, and the final period when Allied counterattacks, principally in the Pacific and on Japan's home islands, brought about defeating the Imperial Japan that led to the Empire's surrender.

The opening engagement was a minor clash between Chinese and Japanese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge (盧溝橋) not far from Peiping (北平) (*Beijing*) in the evening of 7 July 1937. What began as confused, sporadic skirmishing soon escalated into a full-scale battle, the Incident marked the beginning of total war between China and Japan. From a strictly military point of view, however, Japan was so much better prepared than China that its armies achieved rapid initial success. Within the course of two years Japan obtained possession of most of the ports, the majority of the chief cities as far west as Hankow (*Hankou*) (漢口), and the larger part of the railways. Peiping and Tientsin (*Tianjin*) (天津) were occupied in July 1937. After fierce fighting, the Chinese armies were driven out of the Shanghai (上海) area by the middle of November 1937. Nanking (*Nanjing*) (南京), the Nationalist capital, fell in mid-December 1937





*In a rubble-strewn Shanghai street, Chinese soldiers service a small, obsolescent artillery piece during the fighting of 1937.*



*Refugees fleeing into Shanghai International Settlement*



*Shanghai of the 1930s was China's most cosmopolitan city. Enclaves of Europeans clustered in areas of the bustling metropolis.*

## Shanghai Rotary Club in action

While in the northern and eastern China, the Rotary clubs of Peiping (北平), Tientsin (天津), Tsingtao (青島), Tsinan (濟南), Hangchow (杭州), Soochow (吳縣), Chinkiang (鎮江), Nanking (南京), Amoy (廈門), Foochow (福州) were all interrupted with normal activities due to the cities were captured and occupied by the Japanese Forces, the Rotary Club of Shanghai (上海扶輪社) located inside the International Settlement was able to function as normal. Though the Chinese-controlled parts of the city fell after the 1937 Battle of Shanghai (淞滬會戰), the foreign concessions entered what became known as the “Solitary Island” period. Many foreign institutions, such as banks, churches, continued operating in this areas. Communication with the other parts of the world was still functioning. This “Solitary Island” was also the destination for the war refugees to look for their safety shelter.

Shanghai was not only the home of the Rotary Club. It was also the office of the District 96-97-98 Governor Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (龐富灼博士) who was practically the national Rotary leader of the country. Under his able leadership, the Rotary Club of Shanghai appealed immediately urgent relief for thirty million war refugees. The record below was written by Rotary International Secretary General Chesley R. Perry in his Annual Report 1937-38:

Last autumn the Rotary Club of Shanghai appealed for contributions from other Rotary clubs for relief work among the suffering refugees of many nationalities in Shanghai. Investigation indicates that the Red Cross was not making a general appeal, but approved of the work being done by the Shanghai Rotary Club, and of its support by other Rotary clubs. The appeal of the Shanghai Rotary Club, in accordance with the established procedure of the Rotary organization, was communicated to the Rotary clubs of all countries through the district governors and the clubs were advised to send their contributions directly to the Shanghai Club. Explanatory items were carried in the News Letter.

Governor Fong F. Sec, who has been serving as governor of the three Rotary districts in China, reported in February that more than \$45,000 (Chinese currency) had been received from Rotary clubs throughout the world for the relief of refugees and wounded civilians. Of the money received 50% was earmarked for relief work in other cities in China.

As the report is being written, the following cablegram has been received from Governor Fong:

*[ Estimated thirty million war refugees need relief. Urgent requests for funds received from Amoy, Canton, Wuchang, Kaifeng, Wuhan, where Rotary clubs are facing enormous refugee problems. Rotary fund exhausted. Suggest Rotary International strongly urge Rotary clubs back American Red Cross drive. ]*

The clubs are being advised through the News Letter of receipt of this appeal and their attention called to the Rotary International provision covering such a situation, viz., “where the Red Cross or other responsible agency is endeavoring to meet the situation, Rotarians are urged to respond liberally and promptly to the appeal of such organizations by aiding its local chapter to secure its quota of subscriptions.”

Seeking to assuage the sufferings of refugees of many nationalities pouring into Shanghai, the Rotary Club had appealed to other Rotary clubs throughout the world for money to aid it in its relief work. The appeal, in accordance with the established procedure of Rotary International, had been communicated to Rotary clubs of all countries. Any contributions were to be sent by each club directly to the Shanghai Rotary Club. American Red Cross headquarters had indicated to Rotary officials that the needs were so great that the relief activity of the Shanghai Rotarians would be a welcome supplement to any Red Cross work there.

Between 19 October and 2 December 1937, the Rotary Refugee Relief Fund for Emergency Relief had disbursed US\$18,830, and US\$2,950 had been sent to other Rotary clubs to assist them in their relief work. Remittances had come from Rotary clubs in all parts of the Rotary world.

The Shanghai Rotary Club had maintained a mobile clinic and dispensary, a small hospital unit on a truck. This was to provide free medical service to refugees in various camps within Shanghai. Rotarian doctors were on duty. A report of the mobile clinic, in early 1939, shows that since its inception it had treated 38,640 cases; 419 cases were serious enough to be transferred to other hospitals.

Read more about Shanghai Rotary Club's relief work on Pages 7-9. The war refugee relief effort had drawn the attention of 《The Rotarian》 magazine. In April 1938 Issue, the magazine published a special pictorial report to spread more appeals to the global Rotarians.



## Contribution from Peiping Rotarians

For the relief of war refugees in the neighborhood, the Rotary Club of Peiping (北平扶輪社) contributed US\$1,000, dividing the gift equally between the Salvation Army and the Chinese Christian Church Union.

In the summer of 1938, sixteen persons, most of them refugees from every section of the country, had been helped in recent months by the Rotary Club of Peiping. For some, employment was found, several were sent back to their native provinces. Others were given temporary financial aid. A total of US\$685 was disbursed by the Club in caring for the cases.

## Kaifeng Rotary Club

In early 1938, members of the Rotary Club of Kaifeng (開封扶輪社) were taking leadership in the work among war refugees in the city. They organized the International Relief Committee, which had arranged for facilities for taking care of from 10,000 to 40,000 refugees in well-equipped buildings, with a medical committee and first aid centers. The Club gave generously its funds to the purchase kerosene for use in refugee camps.

## Changsha Rotary Club

In the fall of 1938 under the sponsor of the Rotary Club of Changsha (長沙扶輪社), an International Relief Committee was formed, four of whose vice-presidents were Rotarians. The committee had allocated US\$2,000 to help finance construction of a maternity hospital.

The war conditions had created great difficulties but they had also given Rotarians great opportunities for service. In the early years of the war, the greatest need in Changsha was for relief work for war refugees. At the instigation of the Rotary Club, Changsha Relief Society was formed. This was not a Rotary committee but was organized by Rotarians, and for three years all the executive officers have been Rotarians. During the Second Battle of Changsha, on three hours' notice this Society afforded protection and quarters for 17,000 refugees. On three other occasions they set up rice kitchens when famine threatened the city and fed 10,000 people for three months.

## Hankow Rotary Club concerned the orphans



These war orphans found there was still fun left in the world when Hankow Rotary Club (漢口扶輪社) Rotarians took them on an outing. Donkey rides, juggling acts – and lemonade, too! – provided an afternoon they'll long remember. The Club also gave them medical aid and toys.

## Chengtu Rotary Club

Helping to ease the sufferings caused by the strife in China, the Rotary Club of Chengtu (成都扶輪社), in early 1939, had contributed to funds caring for wounded soldiers and war orphans. In

addition, many Rotarians acting outside the Club had moved with humanitarian purpose---for example, one made available 500 quilts for the use of wounded men.

To replenish the “social-service chest” of the Rotary Club of Chengtu, in 1941, a concert by local talent, mostly from the five universities that were making Chengtu their home during “the incident”, raised \$4,000 (Chinese currency) in two performances. The funds would be used to support a Club-sponsored worker in the Friends of The Wounded Soldiers and social service work in the local hospital.

### [Sian Rotary Club / Tsingtao Rotary Club](#)

The problem of refugee relief, which was testing Rotary clubs in many parts of the world, was nothing new to the Rotarians of Sian (西安). During the 1939-40 Rotary Year they raised \$10,770 (Chinese currency) for this type of charity work. A three-day theater benefit netted \$5,970, with which the Club purchased 14,000 kilograms of flour for distribution among refugees in the Sian area ... .. Another Rotary Club, Tsingtao (青島), which was invited by the International Relief Association to raise \$5,000, raised \$9,436 – 88 per cent more than was requested.

### [Swatow Rotary Club](#)

Just a letter in summer 1941, but read between the lines! From the Rotary Club of Swatow (汕頭扶輪社): *“We have at present seven members here ... .. trying to further the Object of Rotary ... .. Attempts were made and failed to organize somebody for relief work. Through the tireless effort of two Rotarians, with backing by the rest of our members, an organization called International Relief Association was formed ... .. A grant of \$60,000 (Chinese currency) was secured from the American Advisory Committee ... .. All missions put their hands to the pumps and some 30,000 people were benefited.”*

### [Hong Kong Rotary Club](#)

The Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社), in summer 1941, presented US\$4,000 for the purchase of two ambulances for the Chinese Co-operative Relief.

### [Chungking Rotary Club](#)

Among Rotary clubs in war zones which had set stimulating examples of war-fund raising was the Rotary Club of Chungking (重慶扶輪社). Its 22 membership in the much-bombed provisional capital contribute \$1,000 (Chinese currency) every month for various relief purposes. This was reported in the summer of 1943.

# Aid for Civilian Refugees in China

*Newsnotes on Rotary's Part in It . . . . By Alfred Morley\**

Photos: (1 and 2 below) World News



**F**OR months past, the eyes of the world have been on Shanghai, the great international city in China where destruction, suffering, and death have come upon millions of people. Much has been told of that side of the story. Here is a tale of a different side—a tale of the deep human charity which illumined the darkest hours of the tragedy.

Whenever the chronicle *Shanghai—1937* comes to be written, it will be incomplete if it fails to record the courage of the men and women who came forward through chaos and horror to organize one of the greatest rescue works of all time.

The task was—and is—enormous. At the end of 1937, there were 400,000 destitute homeless people to be housed and fed in refugee camps and in the Nantao Safety Zone. The normal population of the French Concession is about 450,000 people; at one time during the last four months of last year, the official estimate was 1,500,000.

For a time the International Settlement was overcrowded by nearly a million and a quarter persons above its normal population, which is just over one million. Most of those who flooded these refuges in search of safety were penniless; many who already lived within them had lost their means of livelihood—all of which helped swell the relief problem to overwhelming proportions.

The Rotary Club of Shanghai has tried to do its part in solving that huge problem, as have all social, religious, and philanthropic groups, and Rotary has, we believe, no reason to be other than proud of what has been done and what has been contributed in its name.

When the crisis came, our Rotary Club took a jolt. We missed one meeting and didn't quite know what to do. What *could* we do when the bottom seemed knocked clean out of everything? . . . when shells and bombs, dead and dying, confusion and chaos, were all around us? But we met the following week under President Wai Hsueh Tan. We had only one thought: "Let's get busy!" Funds from the Club's reserves were instantly

\*Editor, *Shanghai Times*, and member of Rotary Club of Shanghai.

*It is to the rescue of the thousands of helpless victims of catastrophe to which Rotarians in China have turned. Maintenance of a mobile clinic (left) is but one of many services of Rotarians in Shanghai.*

具有善權的資料

*A bit to eat, at least, awaits this stupefied mother (right) in a refugee camp where the outlook is not wholly dark (as the photo just below shows). . . . To care for refugee children (bottom) and adults is an enormous task, but men, and groups of men, are rising to accomplish it.*

voted; the Board strengthened the Charity Committee and created a special Committee to handle relief funds.

Working liaisons with practically every important medical and relief body were established. An emergency hospital was financed almost wholly by the Rotary Club. Sums were voted to approved groups working "in the field." Special appeals and collections were made by members and among their friends. A mobile clinic and dispensary was built, equipped, and staffed. At Christmas time a special treat and small gifts were given to over 2,700 children in some of the refugee camps.

The Club has aimed not so much to get into the active field of work itself as to give all the backing possible to those whose special qualifications and organization make them better able to do such work.

Names of Rotarians are to be found on nearly every emergency committee—food, evacuation, transport, Safety Zone, International Red Cross, medical, and the rest.

Rotary has given freely. It has built and is maintaining four units in one of the camps providing shelter for 1,000 people and has supplied sleeping platforms as well as food for thousands. It supports a maternity hospital for refugees. The utmost care is taken to see that every dollar disbursed gives a full dollar's worth of relief, and only for well-proved organizations are funds voted. Every phase of Shanghai's great need has been reviewed.

*There has been much searching of hearts on the causes of this catastrophe, and in our Club's international membership there has been some difficulty in avoiding the delicate political complex. We gave two full meetings to a discussion of the pros and cons of politics in Rotary and concluded that nothing would be gained and possibly much would be lost if Rotary meddled therein. So politics have been vetoed, and it is to the work of amelioration that we have unitedly bent our energies.*

**T**HROUGH the crisis the Club continued to hold fine meetings with good speakers in its usual meeting place, the Metropole Hotel, though at times under very trying conditions. The sound of bombs, shelling, and machine guns punctuated the speeches on many occasions. Titles of some of the talks we heard during the critical period were: *World Politics and the Sino-Japanese Crisis; The Practical Policy for the Pursuit of Peace; Is the Fourth Object of Rotary Practicable?; Personal Liberty, Security, and the State; and Functions of the Newspaper Press.*

We have taken pride and found joy in listening each week to the latest donations, especially those coming from fellow Rotarians abroad. The appeal which was addressed to all Clubs in Rotary International has brought a fine response—a sum equivalent to nearly \$40,000 (Chinese currency) having been received by the end of 1937. The Shanghai Rotary Club itself has raised



Photo: World News

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over \$10,000, and the work of collection still goes on.

The Shanghai Club's own funds have been disbursed among these agencies and needs: the Civilian Refugee Convalescent Hospital, Refugee Children's Hospital, Mobile Clinic, Leper Mission, medical supplies for relief camps, milk for babies at a Russian nursery, Refugee Orphans Child Welfare Association, Emergency Maternity Hospital, and other relief groups.

Funds received from abroad have gone to the following: Union Mission Hospital, Nanking; bedboards for refugees (through Salvation Army); Sian Rotary Club's Temporary Refugee Hospital; huts for refugees (through the International Relief Committee); food for 1,000 refugees for two months; Soochow Rotary Relief Committee; feeding of refugees at Chiaotung University Camp; blankets for refugees (through Salvation Army); International Red Cross; warm suits for children in Nantao Safety Zone (through Y.M.C.A.); Peiping Rotary Club for refugees' Winter clothing; rice for small camp; Tsinan Rotary Club; Nanchang Provisional Rotary Club; Chinese Y.M.C.A.; and to others which investigation disclosed to be in urgent need.

**F**ROM around the world have come sympathetic echoes to the call for help which the Rotary Clubs of China, under the leadership of District Governor Fong F. Sec, sounded when the greatness of the need became so painfully apparent.

To all those whose goodwill and generous impulses have caused them to send funds, here, in the name of the unfortunate, is an expression of deepest gratitude. The sight of urgent and poignant need is robbed of half its sorrow when practical help can be given, and to those who have helped to make that possible we feel a comradeship of endeavor which constitutes one of the brightest spots in a picture otherwise so dark.

Shanghai's need is still great, and its problem of destitution among millions of men and women and children who cannot go elsewhere in a war-torn country will remain for many months to come.

Those who can help in the task of giving succor to the

helpless will have the assurance that remittances will be spent in the best possible manner.

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*Editor's Note:* As Rotarian Morley makes clear, money sent to the Rotary Refugee Relief Fund is distributed in many stricken communities and not in Shanghai alone. Also, many other Rotary Clubs in China are doing much to provide housing, food, and medical attention for stricken populations.

Fong F. Sec, District Governor for the Rotary Clubs in China, speaks of the gratitude of those who have been helped in a letter to Rotary's Secretary which he wrote from Shanghai a few days after Rotarian Morley dispatched the account above.

In the message he reports that on January 12, about \$40,000, Chinese currency, had been received from Rotary Clubs abroad for the relief of war refugees and wounded civilians. Contributions are still coming, though more slowly than a few weeks ago.

Of the money received, nearly 50 percent has been earmarked for other cities, such as Nanchang, Hangchow, Wusih, Wuhu, Nanking, Hankow, and Changsha, he says. In some of these cities they were still endeavoring to deliver the money.

It is estimated that about one million refugees are living in the different centers. Shanghai alone has about 350,000 destitute refugees in camps. Some of the Rotary Clubs, the Governor advises, are carrying on as usual. Some are operating under difficulties and are engaged chiefly in relief work. Others have practically disappeared as, for example, in Nanking. There only three members of the Club remain and they were all engaged in relief work, at last reports.

Governor Fong expresses the appreciation of all the Chinese Clubs for the contributions that have been made to help them in their service of relief.

Rotary Clubs and Rotarians contemplating a contribution to refugee relief are advised—if they wish their gift handled through Rotary channels—to send the same to Edward Selby Little, Jr., Hon. Secretary of the Rotary Club, 1198 Bubbling Well Rd., Shanghai, China.

*Hastily thrown-up houses of matting shelter thousands in refugee camps such as this one (left) which the Shanghai Rotary Club supports. Cramped quarters warn authorities to maintain strict vigilance against incipient epidemics.*



Photo: World News