

John Morris Trimmer

John Morris Trimmer was born in Nanjing China, in September 12, 1925. His father Dr. Clifford Sharp Trimmer was a doctor at Nanjing hospital during the massacre of the Chinese people by Japanese soldiers in 1937 and 1938, the "Rape of Nanjing". While his father remained in Nanjing, John, his mother and sister were sent away during this time. Without recounting the horrors of that time the following describes the role of the American, British, and European doctors, who remained in the city.

"In the United States, reports published in the New York Times, Reader's Digest and Time Magazine, were greeted with skepticism from the American public. The stories smuggled out of Nanking seemed almost too fantastic to be believed. Overall, most Americans had only a passing knowledge or little interest in Asia. Political leaders in both America and Britain remained overwhelmingly focused on the situations in Europe where Adolf Hitler was rapidly rearming Germany while at the same time expanding the borders of the Nazi Reich through devious political maneuvers.

"Back in Nanking, however, all was not lost. An extraordinary group of about 20 Americans and Europeans remaining in the city, composed of missionaries, doctors and businessmen, took it upon themselves to establish an International Safety Zone. Using Red Cross flags, they brazenly declared a 2.5 square-mile area in the middle of the city off limits to the Japanese. On numerous occasions, they also risked their lives by personally intervening to prevent the execution of Chinese men for the rape of women and young girls. These Westerners became the unsung heroes of Nanking, working day and night to the point of exhaustion to aid the Chinese. They also wrote down their impressions of the daily scenes they witnessed with one describing Nanking as "hell on earth." Another wrote of the Japanese soldiers, "I did not imagine the such cruel people existed in the modern world." About 300,000 Chinese civilians took refuge inside their Safety Zone. Almost all of the people who did not make it into the Zone during the Rape of Nanjing ultimately perished."

John Morris, his sister, and mother returned to Nanjing once the Japanese settled into the job of occupation and during our family trip to China in 2006 each evening he told us about his boyhood on the streets of Nanjing with his Chinese friends and the adventures they had. At this time he also told us that his father hid a number of Chinese soldiers in the Nanjing hospital and gradually smuggled them out to the city to rejoin the Chinese army.

John Morris learned to speak Chinese at an early age from the family cook, so he spoke with a heavy Nanjing accent. Because of his early experiences in China he had difficulty in understanding racism in the United States and once he returned he and his wife Betty (now Betty Odum) worked in the movement for racial equality. Once America declared war on Japan all American citizens had to leave China. John Morris, his sister and mother were sent back to the U.S., while their father remained in Nanjing. Once there was war between the U.S. and Japan, Dr. Trimmer became a Japanese prisoner of war. He was held in Shanghai for a while and ultimately released in a prisoner exchange and returned to the U.S. Once back in the U.S., Once back in the U.S. John Morris joined the U.S. Navy and as fate would have it at the end of the war during the American occupation of Japan he saw the devastation at Hiroshima. He joined the Society of Friends (the Quakers) on returning to the U.S. after the war, who believe in removing the causes of war and not in fighting them. His father, and mother returned to China as soon as the war ended and remained there until 1951 and served in Pakistan for the final three years of their missionary careers. Once the possibility of visiting China arose again after the Nixon - Shou Enlai meetings, John Morris began visiting China again and he returned 20 + times over the rest of his life. The last time in 2011, he married his third wife Liu Guiying a retired teacher from Tieling, Liaoning Province.

John Morris Trimmer lived a full and good life and passed on June 26, 2015 in Gainesville, FL, USA. He is survived by two wives, Liu Guiding, Betty Odum, and four children: Ruth Trimmer-Smith, Pete Trimmer, Kathy Trimer, and Morris Trimmer. His wish was to be cremated and to have half of the ashes spread in the U.S. and the other half in China. I think that because of his early life in China, he truly viewed himself as much Chinese as he was American.

Dan Campbell