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M. A. Leavitt

J.D.C. REPRESENTATIVE IN SHANGHAI TELLS  
HOW 15,000 REFUGEES SURVIVED JAPANESE GHETTO

Manuel Siegel Reveals J.D.C.  
Relief Activities Continued  
Throughout War

Manuel Siegel, Joint Distribution Committee representative in Shanghai from November, 1941, until the end of 1945, told the first story yesterday of how Shanghai's population of 15,000 Jewish, Protestant and Catholic refugees from Nazi Europe managed to survive Japanese terror, persecution and brutality during the enemy occupation of that city.

Siegel, who returned to the United States this week, revealed at a press conference held in the New York offices of the Committee, 270 Madison Avenue, that the J.D.C. was able to continue its life-sustaining relief activities, amounting to \$100,000 monthly even during the war. With full knowledge of the Treasury, State and War Departments, he said, the funds were forwarded through neutral sources.

Despite his own internment by the Japanese for two and a half years in Pootung, on the outskirts of Shanghai, and despite the fact that the Japanese ordered all stateless refugees behind the barbed wire of a ghetto in Hongkew, on the opposite side of the city, Siegel said, "relief funds did come through, lives were saved, and the refugees were able to survive their internment."

The 36-year old social worker, a native of Boston, Mass., told how he and his co-worker Miss Laura Margolis, who was later repatriated were permitted by the Japanese to continue their relief activities on behalf of the distressed refugees for nearly a year after the enemy attack on Pearl Harbor.

"This was the opportunity we needed," Siegel reported. "During this time, in addition to providing food, clothing, medicine and other care, we were able to organize committees, arrange for the borrowing of money, and complete plans in preparation for the day we knew would come - the day we would be imprisoned.

"That day was February 18, 1943," he said. "And when all the refugees, numbering 14,000 Jews, 600 Protestants and over 400 Catholics, had finally been removed to Hongkew, the local committees were already set up, a system of group feeding and emergency relief was functioning, and even a hospital, staffed by former European physicians and nurses, was beginning to operate."

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Four times Siegel arranged to leave the warehouse in Pootung where he was imprisoned in order to rendezvous with committee leaders and continue direction of the relief work. Underground "chits" or messages, usually carried by Chinese, were used as regular means of communication between Pootung and the Hongkew ghetto.

Siegel explained that for a year after he was interned with other American and British nationals, relief funds in Hongkew were raised by local borrowings against the J.D.C.'s promise to pay after the war. "In May, 1944, however," he disclosed, "the regular transmission of a \$100,000 monthly grant from the J.D.C. through Switzerland enabled us to dispense with these local borrowings.

"By this time," he added, "a kitchen fund was established that was providing one meal a day for 12,000 refugees; a hospital containing 140 beds was functioning with success and efficiency; schools, workshops and even a theatre were organized and the awful suffering that might have occurred was averted."

Siegel emphasized the seriousness of the plight of the refugees, most of whom were German, Austrian and Polish Jews. "Chased out of Europe with little or nothing, they found haven in the last open port in the world -- Shanghai. This was in 1938, when the J.D.C. started its program in that city. Once there, most of them lived under conditions that approximated the level of the coolie class. War broke out next, and even with the most that could be done for them, many went hungry. Then the Japanese forced them into the most crowded area of Shanghai, and isolated them from the rest of the community.

"Those who had begun to stand on their own feet were robbed of their income and most of their fixed possessions, such as homes and places of business. Treated callously by Japanese officials in some instances, brutally and barbarically in others, they were exposed to the danger of bombing without adequate protection. On one raid 30 were killed, 250 were wounded and 700 lost even their bitter hovels. All were living on relief, uncertain what the next day would bring."

Since liberation, Siegel reported, about 1,000 persons have been removed from J.D.C. relief rolls because they have found jobs with the Army or in private industry, but over 11,000 still rely on the J.D.C. for direct relief. "Every bed in the hospital is filled, while the waiting list of 100 persons grows bigger daily," he said.

Siegel, who has been relieved as J.D.C. representative in Shanghai by Charles Jordan, of 23 West 82nd Street, New York, N. Y., paid tribute to UNRRA, which has recently begun to provide some aid to the refugee population of Shanghai. UNRRA supplies are distributed by the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and have proved of "inestimable value," Siegel reported. "A shipment of 'C' rations, distributed shortly before I left Shanghai, was the first decent food the refugees ate in four years, but much more UNRRA aid is needed," he said.

Siegel urged support of the 1946 \$100,000,000 campaign of the United Jewish Appeal for Overseas Needs, Refugees and Palestine, from which the J.D.C. receives its funds. "Although the J.D.C. spends 75 per cent of its monthly Shanghai appropriations for direct relief," he said, "individual grants are so small that they still are not enough to keep body and soul together."

"Years of internment, of persecution and brutality are showing their effect on many of Hongkew's residents. The J.D.C. must increase its funds for Shanghai if those who survived are not to die now that victory has come," he said. "Only through a successful fund-raising campaign will the J.D.C., major American relief and rehabilitation agency for distressed Jews throughout the world, be able to meet the pressing needs."

"Yet relief alone is not enough," he added.

"I believe that it is time to begin a program that aims not only at relief, but at reconstruction and rehabilitation, including vocational training and re-training," Siegel asserted. "Helping them to help themselves will be the only long-range method of restoring Shanghai's refugees to lives of decency and dignity," he said.

Discussing the ultimate fate of the 15,000 stateless persons in Shanghai today, Mr. Siegel declared that "it is obvious that the problem of the refugees cannot wholly be solved in Shanghai, nor in the Far East, where their future is too uncertain."

How long the refugees will be able to stay in China is still uncertain, he reported. "The refugees themselves are anxious to leave and would like to go either to Palestine or the United States," Siegel stated.

The J.D.C. representative, who escaped the Footung prison shortly before V-J Day, made his way to Hongkew and was already at work at J.D.C. relief tasks there when liberating U.S. troops arrived in Shanghai.

"None of us in Footung would have given a nickel for our chances of remaining alive even a month before victory," Siegel said.

"Nor did anyone in camp expect the war to end so suddenly," he said. "A little short-wave radio we had kept hidden throughout our internment told us of the atomic bomb, but the news of the surrender was a great surprise -- and a beautiful one," he added.

Siegel reported that the Japanese expected an invasion of Shanghai and had heavily fortified the city.

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