



Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto

Ernest G. Heppner

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The unlikely refuge of Shanghai, the only city in the world that did not require a visa, was buffeted by the struggle between European imperialism, Japanese aggression, and Chinese nationalism. Ernest G. Heppner's compelling testimony is a brilliant account of this little-known haven.

Although Heppner was a member of a privileged middle-class Jewish family, he suffered from the constant anti-Semitic undercurrent in his surroundings. The devastation of "Crystal Night" in November 1938, however, introduced a new level of Nazi horror and ended his comfortable world overnight. Heppner and his mother used the family's resources to escape to Shanghai.

Heppner was taken aback by experiences on the ocean liner that transported the refugees to Shanghai: he was embarrassed and confounded when Egyptian Jews offered worn clothing to the Jewish passengers, he resented the edicts against Jewish passengers disembarking in any ports on the way, and he was unprepared for the poverty and cultural dislocation of the great city of Shanghai. Nevertheless, Heppner was self-reliant, energetic, and clever, and his story of finding niches for his skills that enabled him to survive in a precarious fashion is a tribute to human endurance.

In 1945, after the liberation of China, Heppner found a responsible position with the American forces there. He and his wife, whom he had met and married in the ghetto, arrived in the United States in 1947 with only eleven dollars but boundless hope and energy.

Heppner's account of the Shanghai ghetto is as vivid to him now as it was then. His admiration for his new country and his later success in business do not, however, obscure for him the shameful failure of the Allies to furnish a refuge for Jews before, during, and after the war.

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