

Please return to

THE CHINESE CHIMES

Operations Number

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OPERATION EXIT

When the Communists came to North China in 1948 Mary and I decided that we did not want to get caught permanently behind any iron, or bamboo, curtain, but we believed that there would be an "Exit" for some time to come and we were willing to stay and see what we could do. After a year in T'ungshien, we decided that it was not worth-while for the Board to keep us there and we might as well go home. When we talked with the mission secretary, he asked if we would be willing to go to Tientsin so that the Stowes might move to Yenching. Since there seemed to be more opportunity for mission work in Tientsin than in T'ungshien, and Tientsin was on the way to USA, we decided to take that step.

After a year in Tientsin, the doors had been more and more closed on opportunity for mission work so we decided to go home. The summer was the hottest we ever saw in China, and it was pretty hard on Mary. One night in September when she had a fever of 103 degrees, and didn't know what she was doing, I decided that the time had arrived to get going. I took her to a hospital in an ambulance the next morning, where she remained for six days, and it was some time before she felt like packing up and making the trip.

In order to leave China these days one must have some business firm act as guarantor that you have paid your bills and not broken any laws. The church member who did that for Miss Lyons last summer felt that the anti-American feeling was so tense that he did not wish to be our guarantor. Another church member was away in Peking and we waited for him to return. Then we learned that his firm didn't like to be guarantor but would do so if nobody else would. Fortunately, another firm was willing to come to the rescue, and we got the necessary paper so we could apply for exit permit from the police. They accepted our application and told us to return ten days later. When I went back, they said that the permit had not been granted but later when we actually had passage on the Mathew Luckenbach the permit was given and we were able to leave. The U.S. government almost prevented our getting away by declaring an embargo on goods to China. It looked for a while as though our ship would not come. Then the Chinese government retaliated and would not let anything be shipped to U.S.A. They did permit a small cargo of peanuts and walnut meats for Vancouver, but it was only about one-twelfth of a full cargo so the boat was way out on the water and easily tossed about.

We had to go by tugboat down the river from Tientsin to this ship, but it was a good day and we had a warm cabin where we could sit and eat our lunch. It took us about seven hours, and we reached the Mathew at 6 P.M.

OPERATION ENTANGLEMENT

As soon as we were on board, we were told that the captain wanted to see us, and, when we reached his office, he said that he was under military guard. Chinese river police, armed with pistols and rifles, had come on board, taken the captain's guns, sealed the safe and refused any use of the wireless. About twenty policemen were living in passengers' staterooms and they didn't intend to give them up. A young Chinese from the customs had a room which he gave to the two single women, and the captain let Mary and me sleep in his cabin the first night. Some of the police left the next day, and we got a good cabin to ourselves. There were three bunks, bath, toilet and closets so we were very comfortable. The reason for our getting this cabin was that one of the passengers had been put in jail and could not leave Tientsin.

Although the police were armed and in control of the ship, they were very decent and some of them were very glad to talk with us missionaries. The officers said that they showed a different attitude after we got on, and I am sure that the

members of the crew were glad that we had arrived. One of the policemen asked us how much an American soldier gets a month and didn't seem greatly impressed when we told him that an American private got \$50.00 or more, although this Chinese got his food, clothes, and twenty catties of millet (worth less than \$1.00 U.S.) a month. He has a wife but can't support her so she lives at the home of his father. He said "We are not doing this for money but for 'The People.'"

We came aboard Thursday evening and Sunday morning at five o'clock other passengers arrived. A missionary family with a three-months' old baby and a three-year-old son, and three Russian women, had spent forty-one hours getting down from Tientsin and had to tie up one night with no place to sleep and very little food. They were very glad to get on the ship even if they could not get their own cabins for a day or two. On Christmas day we had a good present of news that the soldiers were all leaving. They went and the passengers got their cabins. More cargo came, and finally the clearance papers so that we could sail. We left early December 27, probably the last American ship to leave Tagu Bar for America. Although we had gotten tangled up with the bamboo curtain we were at last on the outside, and did it seem good to be there! Little did we know what was ahead. We learned when we got to Yokohama four days later that an American destroyer had been sent in our direction and was waiting outside Chinese waters to go in and get us with air cover if necessary. Weren't we glad that it wasn't necessary! Our "Operations Entanglement" might have become an international incident if the American destroyer and airplanes had actually "invaded" Chinese waters.

OPERATION RESCUE

For a while we thought that we might go from Yokohama to Otaru to pick up more cargo, but we didn't go. Neither did we get any cargo in Yokohama. We took on water and fuel but did not dock, so we could not go ashore. When we left Yokohama, early December 31, Mt. Fuji put on a grand sight for us. She was the clearest I ever saw her and the snow came well down her slopes. After we left the harbor, the waves began to get bigger and bigger and the second night out it was the roughest I had ever seen on shipboard. Some of the crew who have been at sea for twenty or thirty years said that they never saw it worse. One of the steel drawers in our dresser was in the form of a writing desk and that went shooting out of the dresser, across the room and then raced about the room with a big arm chair. I tried to rescue them, but, after a bump on the knee, I decided that the place for me was in the bunk. We could hear furniture and other loose articles, as well as dishes in the galley, being thrown about as though everything would be broken. I managed to get down to the dining room that morning but the steward said that we would not get anything but bread and boiled eggs that day. I took Mary a piece of toast which was all she wanted for the day.

At breakfast I learned that we were not only having a rough sea but we had received a distress call at 3:30 and had gone out of our course to find the distressed ship. She was a Japanese coast freighter of about 2,000 tons which had been blown out to sea and couldn't get back. She was beginning to break in two and the crew of forty-one men wanted to be towed or taken onto our ship. We found her but the waves were so big that we couldn't do anything for three days and three nights. Finally on the morning of the fourth day the captain said that we would try and get the men off.

We had two twenty-three-foot lifeboats, each of which was supposed to hold sixty-six people, but, since it took fourteen men to man one, it was decided to make two trips. The captain called for volunteers and it was thrilling to see the hands go up, many more than were needed. One was the big, black jolly fellow who served our food in the galley; another was the Philipino who served the crew in the dining room; and the one who gave me the greatest thrill was the little Chinese assistant cook. A little fellow whose country had been invaded by the Japanese was now trying to help rescue forty-one Japanese seamen. Our first mate had charge of the boat, and he chose the most husky ones so the little Chinese and the Philipino didn't get to go.

didn't get to go.

The boat lowered enough for the men to get in and then all the way down to the water, which was anything but smooth. There was a propellor on the lifeboat which was turned by levers pulled by several men and four big oars pulled by two men each. The first mate sat in the rear and managed the rudder. Each man wore an orange colored life saver which made a colorful picture as they moved across the waves. The Japanese boat had put down ropes and ladders, and, when all was ready, men began to descend the ladders. When half of them were in the lifeboat, it put out for our ship and had to go to the farther side because of the big waves. We, too, had put down ropes and ladders and when the little boat was along side, men caught hold of ladders and one by one climbed up the side of the tossing ship. Most of the men were in their twenties, but the first engineer was older and larger. He had a hard time making it, but finally got up where he could be pulled over the rail and the little boat put out to get the others. The second trip was made without difficulty, and, when all were off the ship, she was left to sink or drift as fate decreed. The waves were so high when they got along side our ship that a lot of fuel oil was put on the water to keep it smooth. I couldn't see that it did any good and it did mess up the ropes so they were more slippery to hold on to. The captain called out once "Hurry up men; you'll miss your coffee." He also said "Don't try to save the lifeboat. It is too rough to try and get it back on board." After the Japanese were all on board, our men began to come up, and the last one was the first mate who had been in charge of the rescue. I didn't see how he could hold the lifeboat to the side of the ship with one hand and catch hold of the ladder with the other but he did and we gave him a glad hand as he came over the rail. It was a thrilling experience. There was splendid cooperation and not a man was injured. The only loss was the lifeboat which we hated to see drifting away but it was better to lose that than a hand, arm or leg trying to get it on board.

The Japanese captain and chief engineer were given a good room and ate in our dining room while the others were put in a big room and ate down below. They certainly were very grateful and when cigarettes were offered to the captain he said, "No thank you. You have saved our lives; that is enough." The cigarettes were put in his room and I have no doubt they were used.

Our crew took up a collection for the rescued men and turned over to them \$200, which I thought was a very fine gesture for citizens of an "Imperialistic" country to do to a conquered country. After we had left the deserted ship some hours, a radio came from Yokohama asking that we try to tow it back. We turned around and before dark had found it. Because our radar had gone bad we could not keep track of the ship at night and the next morning it was foggy and the ship was not in sight. The waves were so high it would be difficult to get on board the ship if we found it and as we were getting low on food we sent a radio to Yokohama and they gave us permission to come back without the Japanese ship. We had learned by radio that a sister ship, the Edward Luckobach, had also picked up a distress signal and had gone to the ship which had been blown out to sea. They tried to tow it but after breaking two steel cables gave it up and were not able even to get the men off. We don't know what became of them.

On our way back to Yokohama we got another distress call and turned around to find the ship. We saw a light that evening, but, when we got where we could communicate with them, we found that it was a fishing boat and not in need of help. After some time, we finally found the one in trouble and remained with it until another Japanese ship came to its rescue so we could start for Yokohama again. This time we docked at Yokohama and had been away eleven days so it was good to be able to go ashore. We didn't know how long we would be there, but Mary and I went ashore and telephoned to a friend in Tokyo. We also did a little shopping and found more goods in the stores than three years ago, or even ten years ago when the China war was on. People seemed well dressed and we were impressed with the few men, or women, who wore kimonos. Most people wore foreign style clothes.

A delegation of Japanese met us at the dock and presented our captain with a big bouquet. Photographers took pictures and reporters and others had interviews with our men about the rescue. Somebody spent a lot of money holding up our ship so long, but I suppose that insurance companies or the owners of the rescued ship had to come through with part of the cost, at least.

OPERATION TRAGEDY

January 20, two days from Vancouver, we encountered the worst storm of the trip, and, while Mary and I were sitting on a couch in a passageway, the ship gave a terrible lurch which broke the fastenings of the couch to the floor. The couch shot down the sloping floor, and, when it hit an obstacle, we went flying through the air against a steel partition some feet away. Mary broke both arms, bruised her knees, face and ankle and injured her sides so they were very painful. There was no doctor, but a trained nurse, who was with us, and the purser who had had first aid bandaged up the wrist and sides which caused the most pain. I took her to a hospital in Vancouver where she had an X-ray, anesthetic and had her wrist set and put in a cast. When we got here, Harold had X-rays of her side and right elbow and found no cracked ribs but a fractured elbow. Fortunately, it does not have to be immobilized. While it is bad enough, we realize that it might have been much worse and are very glad that it didn't come earlier in the trip. Let us advise our friends never to take an empty ship across the north Pacific in the winter time.

OPERATION ELEVATION

We left Vancouver January 24 at 1 a.m. and reached Portland, Oregon, the next day. According to some rule, we were told, we must get off at the first port of landing in the country, even though our tickets read San Francisco. We decided to take the "highway" from there and boarded a plane at 2:37 that afternoon. We had to go up through some clouds, but, when we got up 16,000 feet, it was clear and there was some wonderful scenery below and beyond. Soft, fleecy clouds filled the valleys, but above the clouds there were majestic snow covered mountains and some of the way we could see the ground directly below us. It was Mary's first flight and she thoroughly enjoyed it. We sent Harold a telegram from Portland, and he with Julie and the three children met us at Oakland at 5:15. Three grandchildren whom we had never seen made a "grand" ending to our eventful journey.

OPERATION RETROSPECT

Now that we are out of China we feel free to talk and write without fear that some policeman, or censor, may take us to task. We still feel that we are too near the tremendous forces that are operating there to know what they are, or to understand their meaning. While we did not personally suffer physically, it was not pleasant living in such an atmosphere. The "Oppose America and Help Korea" campaign has been carried on with great force recently, and we were surprised that the common people remained so friendly towards us. In fact it seemed at times that they went out of their way to show that they were friendly. People gave us their seats in public buses. Merchants seemed surprised to learn that Americans were still there, but they seemed pleased that we had not left. Even the policemen were friendly, and, when I got our exit permit, the police officer who gave it to me said, "This international situation has nothing to do with you personally. When you get to America, tell the American people that the Chinese people are still their friends." I believe that it is just so, and all the silly attempts to build up hatred towards "Imperialistic America" by cartoons, radio, newspapers, public meetings, plays and other devices have not changed the thinking, or feeling, of most Chinese.

For weeks there was a campaign to get people to sign the so-called Stockholm Peace Appeal, and of course people are in favor of peace and some signed as many times as they were asked to do. Churches joined the campaign and at least one pastor announced from the pulpit that church members should sign up "even if you have signed before." Then there was a campaign to get young people to sign up for "volunteering" to go to Korea to oppose the "American Aggressors." So successful was this campaign that young high school girls hit the sawdust trail with tears in their eyes, and their parents went when they learned what their daughters had done.

End

Doctors and nurses also "volunteered" for the front and Christian leaders published "manifestos" condemning "Imperialistic America" and agreeing to follow the great peace advocate, Joseph Stalin. They agreed to support the People's Government and put on a campaign to make the Chinese church independent, self-supporting and self-propagating, which is fine if "self" didn't have a double meaning, an upside down meaning. Totalitarian governments know only one "self."

Last year we were able to do considerable relief work for our church people in the country but a few months ago we were notified that all relief and social work must be united, and that means under government control. The class of girls whom we taught to weave cloth and to whom we gave Christian instruction hoped that they might return to their villages and earn a living by their new skill. They found that was not possible. They needed looms, and, although the mission would loan them money to purchase looms, the government would not permit it. Foreign money was a part of the cultural imperialism. Last year Chinese pastors could visit village churches, find out who was in need and encourage the downhearted Christians. This year the pastors found that it was best not to visit the country churches. If they did, they were suspected of being active in some "spy" work and the people whom they visited were molested so much that they preferred not to have the pastors come. Churches were told that they should be independent but people were taxed so heavily, and had to contribute to so many causes, that they had no money to contribute to the church. Even the farmers to whom we made relief loans were "relieved" of so much of their crop that they could not repay the loan although we knew at the time the loan was made that probably most of the money would not come back.

Just before we left Tientsin American money was "frozen" and we don't know how missionaries and Christian workers who are paid with foreign funds have been able to live. Perhaps money could be exchanged through Hong Kong. Some of the church workers were hoping to learn cloth weaving with the girls who were being taught and earn a living that way. When I asked some of them what I should tell Christians in America they said, "Tell them that we shall continue to carry on the work of the church whether there are any missionaries or any funds from America." The Chinese Christian leaders are certainly in a tough spot, but it's not the first time that Christians have been in such a crisis. We who have sown the seed are grieved to see the harvested grain on the threshing floor at a time when a hurricane is in the air. We knew that there would be chaff and immature wheat, but even some of the good grain will be carried away in such a wind. We believe, however, that there will be sufficient good grain left for a new crop.

OPERATION PROSPECT

As we turn our thoughts from the past towards the future, we confess that we can see only through a glass darkly. Perhaps some of the experiences on this boat will help to clarify the view. Here is one of them: the night of the first big storm when the ship was being shaken like a baby's rattle (some rattle!), one of the Russian women passengers was so badly shaken up and frightened that she let out a scream. A missionary in an adjoining room heard her and thought that he should see if he could be of help. He couldn't get his pants on standing up so he sat down on the floor. Even then he had a hard time for he went shooting around the floor but finally completed that "operation." When he got into the hall, he found another Russian woman, a cabinmate of the one who had screamed, sitting on the couch where Mary and I were when she got hurt. The woman was hanging on to the arm of the couch, her face drawn with fear and in her limited English she shouted, "Everything finish!" Later events proved this to be an exaggerated pronouncement. Even as she spoke the ship was engaged in an act of "salvation." We were standing by to take the 41 men from the Japanese ship. To an "unbeliever", or to a Communist believer, it may seem that "Everything finish" is a fit description of the Christian church in China. Such is not the case. Missionaries may have a hard time keeping their evangelistic pants on, and they may get pushed around in ways they don't like, but it's too early to evaluate the results of the storm in China on the church there. The situation is far from hopeless. There are many signs of a newness of Life among Chinese Christians

So long as money from America can be received it should be sent. After that, and even before, let us pray as we have never prayed before. Pray for missionaries who are still there and want to get away. Pray for those who decide to stay as long as possible. Pray for the Chinese Christian leaders. Pray for the people in the People's Government. There is still much need for the work of "salvation" in China. God and the Chinese Christians can carry on that work without our presence. Thank Him for having permitted us to have a share in the great work that has already been accomplished.

As for our own future, that too is very indistinct. The American Board sent word to China that those of us who are 62 or more may retire now if we so desire. Mary and I don't want to be put on a shelf just yet and we hope that we may be able to find some little corner where there is work that we can do which will be of value to somebody. We shall hope to hear from many of you. At present we are with Harold and Julie, 60 Bradley Road, Walnut Creek, California. Later we expect to go east, visit James and Elizabeth and other relatives and friends.

Mary usually adds a "postscript" to the Chimes but she asks me to send her greetings. It's too late for Christmas and New Year but Chinese New Year hasn't come yet. I believe it comes about February 6 this year. May it be a year of blessing to our friends in China, and to all who are interested in that great and wonderful land.

Harold W. Robinson

Mr. and Mrs. Robinson are missionaries of the North China Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, stationed in Tientsin where they have been doing general evangelistic and relief and reconstruction work. This letter was distributed by the Missions Council, 14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Mass. Notification of change of address should also mention the Robinsons' name.