

SIAM: THE WAR AND THE MISSIONARY TASK

Siam Missionaries in the War; Visit of the Board Deputation; Changes in the Church's Environment; The Church's Life; The Church's Task; Unique Medical Service; The Strategic Function of Mission Schools; Pen Pictures of Siam Stations; The Opportunity and the Strategy

THE STORY of how the war came to Siam and how the missionaries and Siamese Christians fared during the period of occupation is told by one of them* who was stationed at Chiangmai in the North and was in the little group who left Siam unceremoniously on short notice by way of Burma:

On December 1, 1941, a meeting of the Presbyterian missionaries was being held at The Prince Royal's College in Chiangmai. The ladies in charge of Wattana Academy in Bangkok had at the last minute decided not to come to the meeting. As they were making preparations to come the wife of a high official had said, "You must not leave the girls. Something is going to happen soon." Our diplomats knew nothing of "anything going to happen." However, the minister did suggest that the children in school in India remain there and not return to Siam for Christmas and the two and a half months' vacation. The parents in Chiangmai decided to let them come as they were already in Calcutta, fifteen hundred miles from their school, and their seats were booked on the next flying boat. They telephoned to Bangkok first and were assured by friends that "nothing was going to happen," at least not before all women and children would be safely out of Siam in January.

The mission meeting closed and those from out of town left the morning of December 5th. The next evening, Saturday, a telegram was received saying that all women and children should come down on the next express train—there were two a week, the next one Tuesday morning—to go right through Bangkok to Singapore on the way home.

There was hasty packing in the homes for those to go and for those who were to be left behind. Many plans regarding Christmas were jotted down.

Six forty-five in the morning was the news hour at Prince Royal's on Monday (which is Sunday afternoon in the United States) and at that

* Mrs. Kenneth Wells in "Siam Story." Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1946.

time Singapore was tuned in. Through the sounds of bombs and gun fire audible over the radio, crackled the news of Pearl Harbor, Hongkong and Bangkok. It was, yes; it really was war.

The government officials had a hard and unwelcome choice to make. Should they cast their lot with the Allies and follow the will of the people? Britain and the United States could not give them the slightest aid. We know the choice they made. They acquiesced in the accomplished fact of the entry of Japanese troops on Siamese soil. On December 11, 1941, the Siamese Premier (with Bangkok patrolled by Japanese troops) agreed to form a military alliance with Japan.

The banks promptly closed, and worried, stricken officials began sending their wives and children out to the villages.

In view of the emergency developing, the mission treasurer at Chiangmai had not been depositing all the funds in the local bank as they came up from Bangkok. So when the emergency arrived there was some 10,000 baht in the safe at Prince Royal's, some to be left for mission work, the rest to be used for evacuation. It was known that the Japanese had control of Bangkok and the railroad south, that they were coming north and that they considered all Americans as enemies.

At noon we received a telegram from Bangkok saying "stay where you are," meaning, do not try to get to Bangkok; and later in the evening a final telegram from our American minister, Mr. Peck, saying, "get out by way of Burma." This meant hand luggage, baskets that could be carried and bed rolls. Our good clothes were left in the trunks already packed, and sturdy shoes and overalls and pullovers for jungle travel were sorted out and rolled in bundles.

Food packers had to be prepared and, not knowing how long we would be in the jungle, we took along fifty pounds of powdered milk. This was almost all used before we got to India. Some dried fruit, a little flour and a tin of baking powder—for after a day or so all the bread would be moldy and we would have to use dumplings instead. Cheese, coffee, and tea were added. These things with utensils made quite a stack. After all, Christmas was coming, and I was not as sure as the Siamese that we would be back by that time.

We worked quietly around the house in a complete blackout, putting things away, making room for the teachers who were to move in, seeing that the inventory of school linen was in the closet with the supplies, going over our medicine kit, for no doctor was going out with us (two joined the party later), and wondered if we had enough of the right things.

We moved along the platform of the railroad station where a group of friends were gathered, both Christian and non-Christian. A large group to see off "enemy aliens." There were teachers, nurses, students, members

of the church, villagers, Chinese merchants and government officials to wish us all possible speed.

"As long as we are masters in our own house we will protect you, but we do not know how long we will remain masters. I advise you to leave," said the Governor of Chiengmai, sadly.

Fifty miles south of Chiengmai we came to Lampang, the road head. A big truck was waiting for us. We loaded our stuff in. We had a bite to eat. We mixed milk for the children and filled canteens with fresh water. Then in blistering heat we started the run for the border.

The party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. John S. Holladay with John (10) and Anna-Maria (5), Mrs. Charles E. Park, who had just arrived from America and was enroute to her station in southern Yunnan, Miss Barbara McKinley of Dara Academy and Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth E. Wells with Roberta (8) and Kenneth (6) in one truck. Just ahead were eight Englishmen and a Hollander in another truck.

We hurried through villages large enough to have a telegraph office and were stopped by gendarmes at numerous places. They seemed uncertain what to do with us and were disposed to let us get by, when they had no actual orders to stop us. As night came on, the ride became nerve-racking. We were travelling in almost complete blackout on a high graded road and our unimaginative driver saw no reason for slackening speed. We were stopped several times by groups of home guards always with the same reaction. "Oh Farangs" (foreigners). "Laa luk noi" (and little ones too). "But they can all speak the Thai. Let them go. Let them go."

It was very late and pitch dark when we arrived at Chiengrai, the last large town on the Siamese side of the border. Here we had to stop until we had turned in our alien registration papers and received permits to leave the country. The office would be open at nine the next morning. The Governor finally got permits ready, although it may well have meant political suicide for him. He would not, however, consider re-entry permits for the men of the party. They had planned to return to Chiengmai after seeing the women and children safely across the border. The situation had developed so fast even in the last ten hours that they would have to come with us or be interned. Our papers were given to us and we did the thirty-five miles to the border in record time. The boundary line between Siam and the Southern Shan States is a small river spanned by an iron bridge. We could look across the river to Burma and comparative safety.

We found to our relief that the head customs man was an old Prince Royal's boy. His assistant had had his life saved by an operation performed by Dr. Cort at McCormick Hospital. We had fallen among friends.

After all our luggage had been gone over we were told that we might cross into Burma. Porters helped us to the middle of the bridge. In the

center of the bridge stood an Englishman, Mr. Wilson, the assistant district commissioner. Some of the Kungtung State constabulary were with him. He directed them to take our stuff to his office not far distant. As we walked along he told us what radio news there was—that the Japanese were heading north from Bangkok, and asked about the others left behind. We told him that we thought they would be along the next day.

The second group that came out of Siam had more time for packing and disposing of their goods, but less time for travel. As the bridges were out now, their trip was very difficult. Young Mrs. Hugh McKean had the heaviest heart and the most inspired courage. Leaving her family behind—her father was a British timber man, retired in Siam—she brought out her two small children and her invalid husband.

In charge of Dr. Telford, the first evacuee party reached the British outpost on the mountain of Loi Mwe in the Shan States with reasonable speed and comfort. From here messages were sent to the United States. At Dr. Telford's home at the agricultural school for the hill tribes—a project of which the Baptists may well be proud—we unrolled our beds and cooked our first real meal. As soon as a convoy was ready we would join it and go on into central Burma.

The orders to leave came suddenly. Within fifteen minutes we were experiencing a harrowing slide down the mountain into the ancient city of Kengtung. Here we met the convoy, ten big U. S. government trucks (lend-lease) ready to start back for supplies. Women and children were put in the cabs with the drivers. The men threw in the luggage and got in wherever there was room. There were more British in the party by this time. We started off on an eastern leg of the Burma road.

Five days we climbed mountain ranges of eight and nine thousand feet, through some of the worst jungle in the world, around curves that looked as if they would be our last.

The party broke up in India. Some members started for the homeland immediately, others later, while others are still there. The McKean family went to the Presbyterian hospital in Miraj, India. The trip out had been one of continual pain for Mr. McKean, borne in a most heroic manner. Some measure of relief was obtained at the hospital, but the brave and weary spirit bowed to a stronger power and Mr. McKean died in May, 1942. The Siam Mission lost one of its finest and most efficient missionaries, and certainly, its best financial expert.

Three members of the Mission remained in the immediate war zone. From Taunggyi, Mrs. Park went to her station in southern Yunnan, where her husband, Dr. Charles E. Park, and their little son lie buried. She was finally forced to move north, but not before she had helped some injured members of the American Volunteer Group to escape. She finally settled in the Mo Hai district, south of Kunming, doing intensive and most ac-

ceptable evangelistic and educational work. She was in contact with a Friends' Unit and also an orphaned mission of the Lutheran Church. She was the only member of the Mission to remain anywhere near her field during the war.

Rev. Loren Hanna and Mrs. Hanna stayed on in Taunggyi and joined Dr. Gordon Seagrave's (Baptist) Mobile Surgical Unit. Dr. Seagrave's nurses' training school was put out to field work and there were small groups in makeshift hospitals along a 700 mile line. Mrs. Hanna took charge of one group of nurses as chaperone, which responsibility grew to include washing, sterilizing and cooking over an open fire. When it became necessary to withdraw the nurses, Mr. and Mrs. Hanna attached themselves to the Chinese army and kept some of the hospital huts going until May 12th. The enemy was only a few miles away, transport had broken down and their position became untenable. They were rescued by some British Commandos who had been fighting rear guard actions. With them they did a trek of 560 miles over 43 mountain ranges in 62 days to Kunming. For only a short distance was there transport. The United States army flew Mr. and Mrs. Hanna from Kunming to Calcutta, whence they sailed for home.

Words cannot express the grateful thanks for those Americans in Siam who escaped across the border, to the Baptist mission and to the soldiers and officers of the British army in Burma. Their aid was given with the utmost consideration and with all dispatch.

The story took a different turn in southern Siam. This is what happened there as told by one who went through it:

The news of Pearl Harbor spread like wildfire in Bangkok. The American Legation advised all Americans, especially women and children, to come to the Legation at once. Each person was to be allowed one suitcase, a bedding roll and some provisions. These we sent in to the Legation and added a small charcoal brazier with an eye to morning coffee. For two weeks the Americans lived in the Legation while an internment camp was being prepared. They compared notes and reminisced, and wondered what was happening. There was a continuous stream of gifts of food, the only thing that could be sent in. Bananas, melons, vegetables and fresh eggs arrived every day. Food was prepared under the direction of the home economics expert and everyone turned a hand at the work.

On December 23rd all the Americans with the exception of seven diplomatic and consular officials were loaded into buses and taken to the new quarters. Part of the campus of the University of Moral and Political Science had been hastily rearranged and now about 350 British, Dutch and American civilians moved in.

Package day twice a week became very important after Siamese and

Chinese friends were forbidden to see us in person. The food, and specially the fruit that came in, was a very real item in keeping us all well. The monotonous diet kept deteriorating. Beef became buffalo, and buffalo became—we were never quite sure what. Many of the donors of food sent it in anonymously because they were high officials and dared not let their gifts be known.

Our only hope of freedom was an early end of the war and that did not seem very likely. We shall never forget the Good Friday service. Our hearts were anxious for the steadfastness of the Christian groups in Siam. The news that the Swiss consul wanted to see us meant little. However, he brought news of negotiations toward repatriation. We could scarcely believe our good fortune.

Dr. and Mrs. George B. McFarland, affiliated members of the Siam mission, were not interned in the camp. Out of respect for their lifetime of unselfish service given to the Siamese Government in the organization of its medical school, the McFarlands were interned in their home. Here, in the garden he loved so well, Dr. McFarland lived out his life beyond the three score years and ten. He died May 3, 1942, a beloved American, the servant and friend of all. Mrs. McFarland was with the group of Americans who left Bangkok June 29th for the strange journey home.

By the middle of 1943 the war was not going so well for the Axis. Premier Tojo therefore visited Siam to show a more conciliatory attitude toward the unfriendly Siamese. He transferred four states from British Malaya to Siam as a free gift. The Siamese viewed this gift with suspicion and were singularly ungrateful, much to the annoyance of the Japanese. The people quickly seized American fliers shot down in air raids and smuggled them away in civilian camps. Many a simple villager gave up a 10,000 baht reward to help an injured airman.

The people also learned how to give food and help to British, Dutch, and Australian prisoners of war, brought into Siam from Malaya by the Japanese military, and used by them to build roads and installations. A group of villagers would pass by the place where some prisoners of war were working under guard. They would stare at the prisoners and then begin shouting derisively. They would all scoop up stones from the road and send a shower toward the prisoners. But the prisoners were never struck by stones for the agile villagers had substituted the object concealed in their other hand and a hail of hard boiled eggs descended on them. Many of the eggs had quinine tablets pressed into them from the fast dwindling supply available to the populace.

On July 20, 1944, Premier Tojo and his cabinet fell. Two days later the Siamese National Assembly voted to oust their collaborationist Premier. The new government was headed by Regent Pradit Manudharm and Premier Aphaiwongs. At once the new government proclaimed religious

toleration and was visited by many delegations of Christians expressing their gratification. The Minister of Education sent a circular letter (Sept. 28, 1944) reminding all heads of schools that pupils were free to profess any religion that they desired.

The planes came over just at dusk. They spotted the markets on a level strip and came in low. The American civilian, with silver leaves in his pocket, in case he should be captured, took a deep breath, stepped into space and counted ten. With the pull of the rip cord the parachute bloomed and he floated down and landed with that loose-jointed roll he'd used so many times in college football at Missouri Valley. The Rev. John S. Holladay was back in Siam.

Two other personnel parachutes followed and then 'chutes carrying gear. Assistants ran to meet them. Mr. Holladay and his two Siamese lieutenants were helped out of their parachutes. The material was collected and the whole party vanished into the shadow of the jungle. The guerrilla organizer had arrived.

Then began months of hide-and-peek through eastern Siam. Always the guerrilla forces grew larger. Recruiting was easy. Always the accidents to roads and bridges were most inconvenient to Japanese troop movements. Always the British and American fliers got away. Food seemed to filter mysteriously into the prison camps of the Japanese. The prisoners stopped dying. Only the leader, who spoke Thai so easily with a bit of the northern Lao thrown in, recognized one group for what they were, those who had vanished when the Houston sank into the sea. The guerrilla forces grew and grew. A large force was in readiness and strategically distributed. Siam refrained from undertaking an armed revolt against the Japanese at the expressed wishes of the Allies. This was acknowledged openly in a statement by Secretary of State James Byrnes on the 19th of August 1945, who further said:

During the past four years we have regarded Thailand not as an enemy, but as a country to be liberated from the enemy. With the liberation now accomplished we look to the resumption by Thailand of its former place in the community of nations as a free, sovereign and independent country.—Before the war, Thailand and the United States had a long history of close friendship. We hope that friendship will be even closer in the future.

On V-J day American officers, guerrilla agents, helped and protected by the Siamese forces, and American intelligence officers hidden in Bangkok by the Siamese, came into the open and joined the victory parade.

There was Capt. Howard Palmer, son of the Rev. M. B. Palmer and Mrs. Palmer of Bangkok Christian College, now retired. Boys with whom he had played, who had gone to school to his father and practiced music with his mother, were now bending every effort to make their country free and safe. There, too, were Dwight and Daniel Bulkeley, smart in their

uniforms, and smiling at the populace. They were the sons of Dr. Lucius C. Bulkley, who established and built up the hospital at Trang and is famous in southern Siam for his cataract operations.

Mr. Holladay's first visit was to the church on Sunday morning. The service was led by Kru Tardt, a woman elder. One of the Siamese Christians present wrote:

Specially among the Christian people tears flowed freely when an American missionary first visited. We brought to the prayer house in Pramuan Road a missionary named Mr. Holladay. Old friends, both men and women, freely wipe the tears out and many could no longer keep their eyes to their prayer book. Everyone tried to catch every word he said as though their lives hang on what he said. After the service was over there was a rush to touch him or hear the words he spoke to each one. Such was the rejoicing indeed.

The Board of Foreign Missions sent greetings to the Siamese Government on its liberation. Regent Pradit cabled back:

Please convey our best thanks to the Presbyterian Mission. I am aware of the activities of the Mission for the enhancement of good relations between Siam and the United States, and I hope that when the appropriate time comes the Mission will be able to render us the help which we badly need and which the Mission so kindly offers.

VISIT OF BOARD DEPUTATION

The Board's post-war deputation to Siam spent six weeks in that country in October and November, 1946, only a few months after the arrival of the first missionary group to go out after the war. The following eye-witness excerpts from the reports and letters of the deputation members give a vivid picture of the effect of the war on Siam and on the work of the Mission and Church in that country. The first of these are from the reports of Dr. J. Leon Hooper, secretary of the Mission and leader of the deputation, and the Rev. Glenn W. Moore of Los Angeles. Mrs. Paul Moser, Mrs. Frank C. Hughson, M.D., and the Rev. William N. Wysham of the Board's staff, are also quoted at length.

Going directly by plane from devastated Manila to Siam via Hongkong in only eight hours flying time, one is struck with the evidence of the lack of destruction in Bangkok. Our arrival was at one of the large airports of the world today. Planes from Europe, China, India and the Philippines arrive and depart at frequent intervals. The airport was not damaged during the war and promises to be still larger, as Bangkok becomes the crossroads of travel from Europe to Asia and Australia and even more from America to India. We were informed soon after our arrival that planes were being ordered for a system of airports within Siam itself, with planes going from Bangkok to all the major interior points, north and south, thus placing all these points within a few hours, and in some case a few minutes, of Bangkok. This typifies the change that is coming in the country. One