MEMOIRES

By Emmanuel Hanquet

In a Country Embroiled in Civil War

Translated by Albert de Zutter

From Peking to Hungtung, November 4-17, 1945

At that time, taking a train from the Peking station required some travel experience on the part of the ordinary tourist. The volume of travellers meant that there could be no reserved seats, most especially in third class, which is how I travelled. You had to get your ticket the day before, then throw yourself into the melee and elbow your way in to grab a spot. But fortunately I was dressed in a way that gave me a position of prestige which helped on several of my trips. As prisoners of war we had been supplied with American Marine Corps uniforms, down to our underwear. This sheltered me from controls and verifications.

It was, then, in the image of a liberator that I left as a forward scout to return to the apostolic prefecture (nowadays we would say diocese) of Hungtung, three days' journey by train from Peking. For the sake of security I avoided night travel because of the civil war and the possibility of Communist guerrilla attacks. The rail lines were still guarded by Japanese troops, even though the emperor had capitulated four months earlier. That had been a part of the surrender agreement signed by Hirohito.

I left Peking on December 4, having bought my ticket the day before, hoping thus to secure a seat by arriving a quarter of an hour in advance. But when it was time to leave I still had to find my glasses and say my farewells before mounting a bicycle which I intended to leave at the station. I arrived with no more than five minutes to spare. The train was not in bad condition. The third class cars – 1930 models – were clean. (In this model the compartments were made up of benches facing one another, two three-person seats on one side and two single-seats on the other. NDLA. But that morning the train was full to the point of bursting – people were seated everywhere, a dozen instead of eight in each compartment. There were two or three passengers in each toilet, and dozens of others were perched on the roof or hanging from the platforms. Thanks to my American uniform, and by pushing back with my backpack – which I had sewn in the concentration camp with a view to escaping -- I was able to create a foothold for myself in the last row of the exterior platform.

Finally the train shuddered and started up, leaving behind many disappointed would-be passengers who were not able to get aboard. It was cold, but I was consoled by telling myself that I was departing from Peking and on my way to my mission at Hungtung. After an hour's travel and several stops, I succeeded in forcing my way inside the car where I found three Scheut Fathers who were returning to KuiSui, Mongolia, via Shansi. They travelled with me as far as YuTse.

Suddenly a woman passenger complained of feeling ill. She had to be passed from shoulder to shoulder to reach the platform where she could breathe some fresh air. To get off the train, people had to climb from shoulder to shoulder. I thanked heaven that I had not brought anything but a backpack and a briefcase. Even though I was one of three people sitting on a bench for two, I was able to say my breviary prayers and even study a little Chinese.

Towards noon we arrived at the PeiHo River. As the bridge had been damaged, we had to leave the train and walk for 20 minutes to get to another train which had to wait for us. People jumped out the windows and hurried all over the place to reach the other bank first. Alas, the wooden bridge over the river was in poor repair, and ended up being a single plank. We had to perform like acrobats, and as there were close to 2,000 passengers, needless to say there was much jostling and shoving. Nevertheless, I reached the other side of the river fairly quickly, but there was no train there. We waited two hours before a train from the south arrived from Paoting. That one also was packed. People disembarked and entered by all the openings, truly a battle without precedent. The Apostolic Vicar of Chenting was hoisted up by two Scheut Fathers, and he landed on his head in the compartment. As for me, I pulled myself in and ended up in a former sleeping car of which nothing remained but the shell. My backpack served as a cushion, and I was

August 1946 … laborious China ...

squared away to meditate on the scarcity of window panes.

At 16:30 hours we arrived at Paoting, and I took part in a meal with some Chinese merchants, travelling companions who invited me to dine. That was a welcome snack as I had eaten nothing all day except for two "pingtze" (NDLA: I could find no translation – A. de Z.) and some persimmons. When I arrived at the mission at 19:00 hours, there was no supper, but I was bombarded with questions about life in Peking and in the Weihsien camp. Monsignor Chow, the bishop, spent the evening with me, but the unheated room was very cold. War had left its mark there, leaving a legacy of poverty.

On December 5, in the hope of finally finding a seat, I arose very early and hurried my breakfast. When I arrived at the station, the train was almost empty; it would not leave until 9:30 hours. I had decided to make use of my American uniform to travel without cost, and a smiling Japanese soldier who was guarding the railroad, opened a door for me. All the length of the tracks the Japanese provided surveillance and protection against attacks by Communists. There were fortifications a dozen meters high every three kilometers.

When we arrived at Shihmen toward 17:00 hours, I came upon a station severely damaged by American bombing. I departed from there without difficulty to return to my mission where I was welcomed by Lazarist Father Chanet, a repentant public adversary of Father Lebbe. He was in charge of the residence, and would receive the Scheut Fathers after me. The house was very lively as it was occupied in part by Chinese generals who also held secret meetings there. Chinese priests were also in residence, and we had to sleep in the hallways after a much too light supper, which reminded us of Weihsien. We passed the evening with a young Chinese physician, a graduate of the University of Aurora in Shanghai. He was a cousin of T.V. Soong, and director of the small mission hospital.

On December 6 we celebrated the Feast of St. Nicholas with coffee in a third class wagon. Our departure was quite eventful. There were people on the roof, and there were several laborers trying to find a way to get aboard. One of them latched onto a cross-bar between two cars while holding a sack of cotton with his other hand. After a while, seized with a cramp, he had to let go his hold while the train was rolling. Happily, he fell at the side of the train and got up with no apparent harm.

I continued to travel without paying, with people sitting on my knees or standing all around. As the four of us were foreigners, we presented the Chinese who surrounded us with an enigma. A self-assured Chinese man was giving a discourse about our noses. "This one with a hooked nose and a beard – he is no doubt a Russian"; "that one with a turned-up nose, that is most certainly an American"; "that other one with an ordinary nose, that must be a Frenchman." As for me, they spared themselves the trouble of identification. Up until then my uniform had been recognized, but further on people asked themselves on seeing me, "Is that an American or a Russian?"

We were now leaving the plains and entering the mountains of the Shansi Province. The governor, Yen Si Shan, had been given the title of "model governor" because he had been a good administrator of his province; perhaps a little too good. For example, the railroad tracks crossing his entire province were constructed in a narrow gauge, different from the width of the tracks in the other provinces. That prevented the rail cars and locomotives from leaving his province. It was necessary, therefore, to transfer goods and passengers upon arriving at the borders of his province. Yen Si Shan also had his own currency and troops, who had rallied to the central government upon its reentry into Nanking.

During the last six months American airplanes had damaged most of the locomotives, and those which pulled our heavy train did so with difficulty. As we entered the mountains tunnels became more and more numerous, and we were half-choked in traversing them because our doors and windows would no longer close. At each station the people riding on the roofs were warned to lie down on entering the tunnels. Several days earlier, in fact, a half-dozen who had not taken that precaution were decapitated. In one of those hellholes that we passed through the Communists had planted a mine several days before. The result was 30 people killed and many wounded. The explosion flung the carriage up to the arch of the tunnel, crushing the people on the roof.

We made a stop at Yung Tsuan, half-way toYu Tse. The resident Italian priest received us with good will, and we gave 2,000 yuan to his cook so she could find us some meat. But once again we had to camp because the Japanese still occupied a part of the mission.

On December 7, after an early morning Mass we gained entry to the station quite easily, thanks to the helpfulness of the station chief, a Christian. That was fortunate as lines of 100-200 meters formed at each ticket window. It enabled us to get settled without difficulty. Our train had to climb till 14:00 hours, huffing and puffing all the way, before reaching 1,075 meters of altitude, which brought us to the threshold of Shansi. The locomotive was at its limit, and had to stop for half an hour every 10 kilometers. Happily, once arrived at the top, all we had to do was coast to Yu Tse. But shortly before we arrived, I witnessed a scene that

can be described at least as picturesque: the passengers on the roof, not being able to contain themselves any longer, shamelessly hosed down anyone who passed through the doors and windows!

As I had many friends in the diocese of Yu Tse, I decided to spend the Feast of the Immaculate Conception with the Franciscans of the Province of Bologna, who always received me with good will. I was not sorry to sleep late and spend time with Monsignor Pessers, apostolic prefect of Kiang Chow, who had travelled for 10 days to get to Yu Tse and found that he was stuck there. He was taken by my energy and decided to resume his journey soon. My course was already decided: I would be on my way again the next day in an attempt to get to Fenyang by evening where I was to meet the apostolic vicar. I used my time on the way to get information about the state of the railroad tracks from the merchants heading south. I also paid a visit to a sick friend, Mr. Jen, who had accompanied me to Hungtung when I arrived in China in 1939.

On December 9, even though it was a Sunday, I set off toward the south. The station master accompanied me onto the train to reserve a place for me in a rail car. We were packed in like cattle, and it was very cold. We arrived at Ping Yao at 15:00 hours. That was where I had to get off to get to Fengyang, I had been told. But I had been misinformed. That route was occupied by the Reds. I consoled myself in passing the night at the home of Father Tchang, who extended me a warm welcome and asked me a pile of questions about the Society of Mission Auxiliaries. He was so eager to have my colleague Father Wenders come and teach at the seminary in Hungtung that he was willing to get on his knees to beg him to do so.

Some merchants informed me that the railroad was cut off at Fu Kia T'an, leaving me 150 kilometers to cover on foot! Because of the proximity of Communist troops, I reverted to my Chinese clothes to be less noticeable. On December 10 I learned that the Reds had destroyed one or two kilometers of track, and that I would have to wait three days for them to be repaired. I took advantage of that delay to visit several schools and churches and meet with some Christians. I also spent some interesting hours with the old parish priest, who had a positive interest in my work. Unfortunately I was afflicted with a very bad cold contracted in the unheated or badly heated places where I had been staying.

At last I was able to get back on the road on the 12th, and continued to journey free of charge, on the strength of a "let-pass" note written (in Chinese) by Father Raymond de Jaegher upon our departure from Weihsien. All the other travellers were still subject to scrutiny. Toward 10:00 hours I arrived at Kie Hsio, where I needed to get off to continue to Fenyang. I had a short visit with the Chinese parish priest, who lent me an old bicycle, and I left all alone toward Fenyang. After 15 kilometers I stopped at Siao Yi, at the house of the local parish priest to break bread with him. The bicycle was not in very good condition, and the tires needed to be reinflated.

The parish priest urged me not to continue because there would not be many travellers on the road during the afternoon. But I overlooked those fears and again found myself launched toward the unknown. I lost my way and at sundown the chain on my bicycle broke. There was not a soul or anything else in sight, not even the walls of Fenyang. Pushing my bike, I set off at a gallop and finally sighted the walls of the town at nightfall, when the gates had already been closed. I had to negotiate with the Japanese, who still stood guard in the interior of China, and I arrived at the residence at 19:00 hours. The Chinese priests were delighted to see me, and we conversed until late at night with the young priests who were former students of Father Nicholas Wenders at Suanhua. They were very anxious regarding the reopening of the regional seminary at Hungtung. Later on I was received by Monsignor Liou, age 74, who had aged visibly, but was nevertheless in good health.

On December 13 I spent the day with Monsignor Liou discussing the problems of the seminary and of procurement. We then inspected the residence and the little seminary. He honored us with his presence at dinner, which he had not done for a long time for fear of the cold. In the afternoon I went to visit the orphanage and the buildings of the American Protestant mission, which occupied a part of the town. As I had entered freely despite the Japanese guard, to whom I had declared that I was American, there was an inquiry at the diocesan office about whether I was Belgian or American. Monsignor invited me to spend the evening with him where we partook of an excellent rose liqueur.

On the 14th I left Fenyang as I had already made a commitment to meet Monsignor Pessers on the 12th. We were to meet at Chieh Hsio to travel together toward the south. When I arrived at Chieh Hsio I learned that he had left the night before without waiting for me. Well and good.

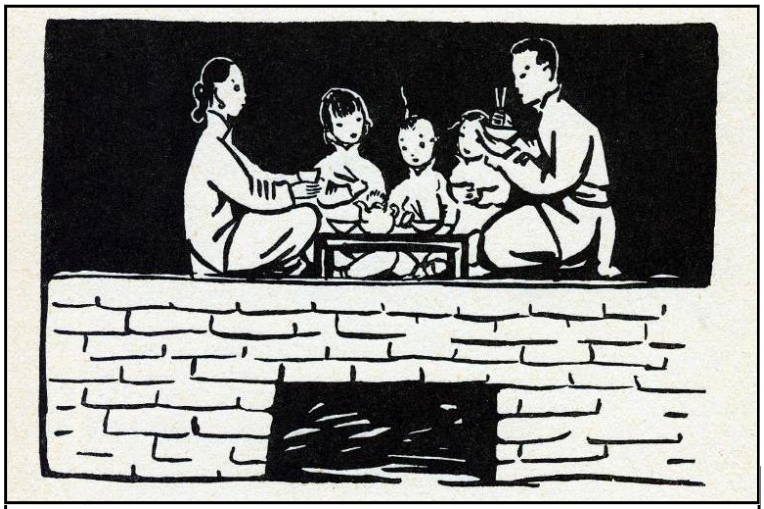
I therefore left on my own the next day, and had to ride on a flatcar carrying anthracite. We lost a lot of time at Ling Shih in loading a dozen recalcitrant mules. We arrived early in the afternoon at Fou Kia T'an, the terminus of my voyage by rail. Lacking information about the way to go on foot, I merged with the column of travellers going south along the rail-bed, of which little of use remained. The rails had been toppled into the river below where they lay all twisted. Railroad ties and telephone poles were burned, and the banks of the

road bed were cleverly excavated in places to prevent all except foot traffic. Nothing remained of the seven or eight stations that we passed except for a pile of pulverized bricks. Everything had been removed – doors, windows, etc., and there were no more tickets to be punched or signals to observe.

As I walked fairly fast, I found myself isolated after a while, with no one in sight behind me. Only three travelers were ahead of me in the distance, and I tried to catch up with them, but in vain. The wind, the cold and a blister on my foot foiled me. At nightfall I had covered almost 20 kilometers, and I was preparing to tackle five more when I was stopped by a captain of the local militia who urgently recommended that I break off my journey. It was dangerous at night, and he invited me to stay at his house, which I accepted without hesitation because I was exhausted. He took me to a walled village which he occupied with his 200 men, and he gave me the prettiest room in the temple situated on the village heights. We dined together on Shansi noodles, which I enjoyed. He had been a student of the Protestants in Chefoo, and he retained a regard for the church in general. Under the Japanese occupation he had been a sub-prefect and general of the provincial militia.

Shanxi Noodles

In contrast to Governor Yen Si Shan's troops, his officers were trained and his troops' moral was good. He promised to find me a carriage to travel form Hua Chou to Chao Ch'eng the next day, and made a telephone call to arrange it after supper. Then he had me visit the village defense positions after which I went to sleep on a well-heated khan (a traditional Chinese bed of bricks and cement containing a furnace). The heat was much needed as I only had one cover.

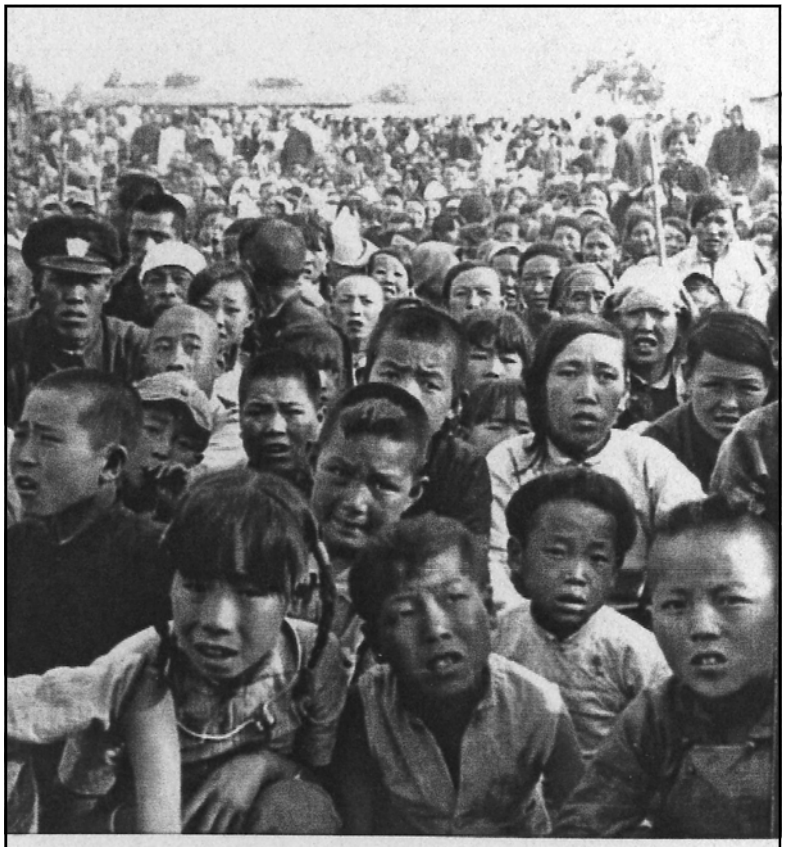


炕 kang – a heatable brick bed

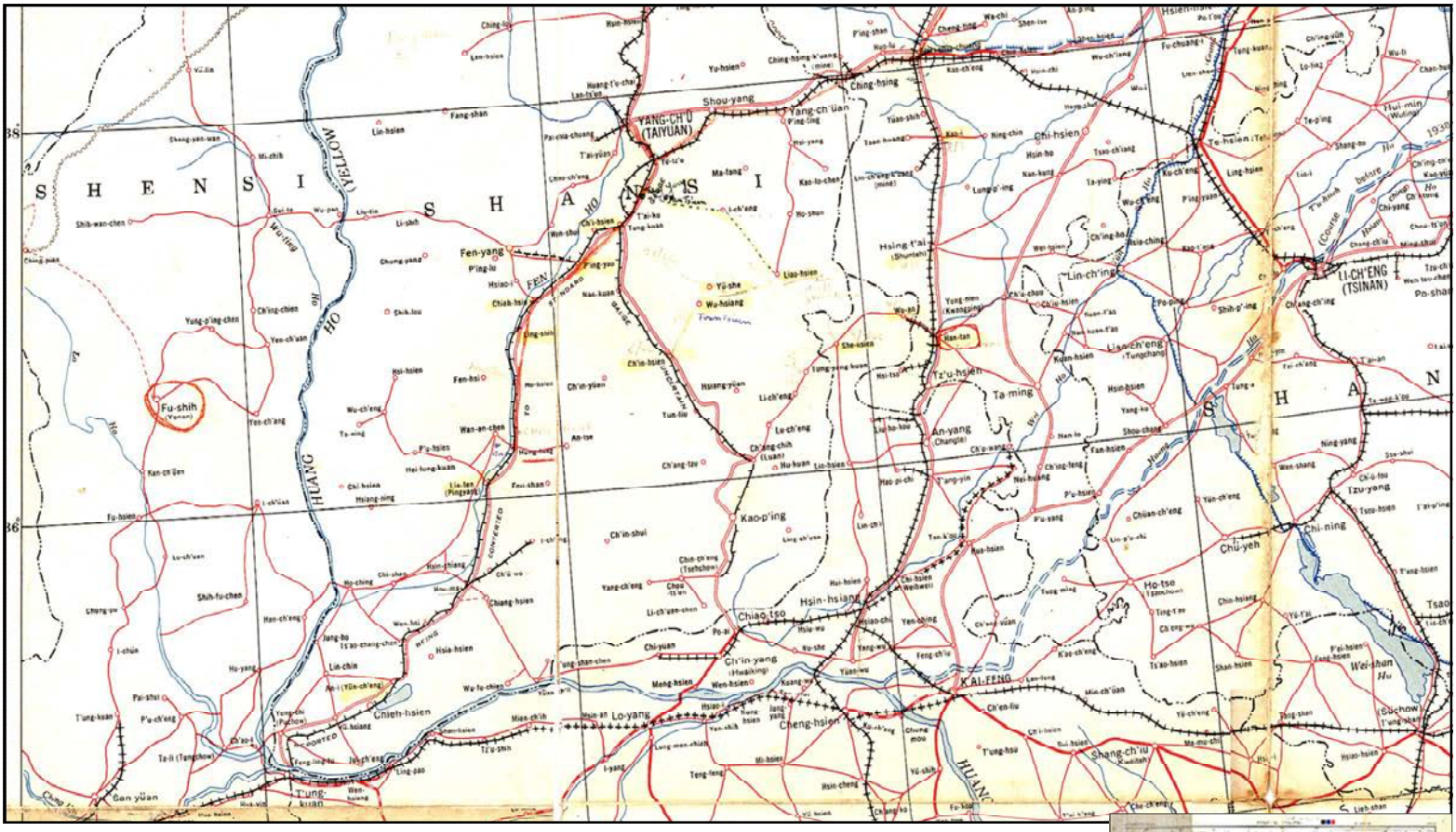
There were few furniture in the house. The whole family slept on a large square bed of gray bricks that was attached to one wall. It was wide and flat and hard. The pillows were long rolls and hard, but small Pear and his family rolled up.

On the 16th, even though it was Sunday, I set out in the early hours of the morning. A soldier accompanied me as far as Hua Chou where – not without trouble – I found the requested carriage. I had just enough time to swallow a bowl of millet and then, forward on a cart pulled by an ox. The pace was exasperatingly slow! But as I still had to make 45 kilometers, I preferred to take it easy during the morning. About a third of the way out, the driver decided to turn back and I had to continue my journey on foot. After a forced march I caught up with a group around Chao Ch'eng. One person agreed to accompany me to the west to cross the river and reach Mamu, where we had a church. The direct route was dangerous, we were told. It was 17:00 hours when we crossed the river and I had eaten nothing since my morning millet, so I bought two pingtze and a bowl of soup at a little restaurant next to the road. We had to hurry because night was falling and we still had 10 kilometers to go. There was no moon in the sky.

In wanting to avoid the more crowded routes we were set upon by two bandits who wanted to avail themselves of our donkey. I reasoned with them, saying this was a cart that I had rented. But they pretended to be sick and absolutely insisted on detaching the donkey from the cart. As they were getting ready to look into our baggage, we heard two peasants approaching in the distance. That bothered the bandits and I took advantage of their preoccupation to whisper in the ear of my companion that we should flee as fast as possible. But he had gotten frightened, and insisted on stopping at the next village. I managed to persuade



Summer 1946 … waiting for a food distribution ...



http://weihsien-paintings.org/hanquet/mapAsiaUNRA/ColourMapChina.jpg

him to come with me to Mamu by promising him hospitality.

The wind was getting stronger and stronger and it was hellishly cold. Upon our arrival at Mamu, the moon had risen and the village appeared to be half destroyed. There were houses abandoned and stripped of their innards. Burdened with taxes, the peasants chose to abandon everything and flee. The church along with one of our nicest houses was heavily damaged. The high surrounding wall had been destroyed to construct fortifications. All the furnishings, doors and windows had been carried off. Tiles were broken and, in many places, the roofs were damaged, and the same sight would greet me when I arrived in Hungtung the next day.

But waiting outside the gate I had to knock on the door for a quarter of an hour before a caretaker dared to answer. I identified myself. The residents were afraid of the local troops, who were undisciplined looters. They were waiting anxiously for the arrival of central government troops. The caretaker of the church, with a very welcoming manner, prepared a meal for me and even gave me a heated room.

As the sacristy had been sacked, I was not able to celebrate Mass. I therefore left for Hungtung, 10 kilometers from Mamu, on the 17th. As I left I saw that the church, which had been bombarded by the Japanese three years earlier, had already been repaired.

On arriving at the old city of Hungtung, I saw that the old thick walls of the city had been reinforced against the possibility of an attack by the Communists who had occupied the neighboring town of Chao Ch'eng for 15 days, which I had passed through the day before. They had leveled the fortifications of that town. Entry into Hungtung posed no problem, and I found, at the Episcopal residence, Monsignor Pessers and two of his priests, who had arrived the day before. They would leave us at 14:00 hours to continue their voyage to Kiang Chow, the neighboring mission. Seven or eight Chinese priests were also there to welcome me, among them Father Francois Han, the apostolic pro-prefect. The residence had a military air as even the main court was occupied by the officers of a general who had requisitioned a side courtyard. Lines of field telephones were lying on the ground and disheveled soldiers walked about here and there. The three courts of entry were occupied by some 300 soldiers, which made the situation complicated. One had to pass by guard units, show a pass or give a password to the sentinel, etc.

After consulting with Monsignor Han, I again put on my American military uniform, an action which aroused quite a few questions and some surprise. It had the desired effect. The next day I made a courtesy visit to the general, who failed to impress me. He struck me as a brutish bandit chief. There was no discipline among his soldiers, who freely engaged in inappropriate behavior. Two hundred of his men occupied the seminary outside

the town. They turned it into a defense camp with fortifications, trenches and spikes, just like our camp at Weihsien. We would have our work cut out for us to rid ourselves of the evidence of this army rabble.

After having met with the priests and dealt with some urgent matters concerning the seminary and procurement, I summed up our situation. We were living under very poor – even miserable -- circumstances. The priests were entirely dependent on the charity of Christians who themselves were extremely impoverished. The troops of the governor, General Yen Si Shen (the second war zone) were constantly imposing themselves on the civilian population in an arbitrary manner. These troops were hated by the population. They had brought with them their wives and children, had too many officers and half the troops were unarmed. What's more, in the course of my journey, I saw young Chinese recruits placed under the command of Japanese officers.

At the central residence and at the sisters' novitiate we lived as best we could. We ground grain for the army and individuals. That enabled us to derive a few kilos of flour which we exchanged for millet or corn. The menu was the same every day. My arrival had permitted the purchase of some meat, but we did not eat any of it before Christmas and New Year's. Nutrition at the minor seminary and the orphanage posed a serious problem. While the price of grain was lower here than on my journey, a pound of flour still cost 70 fapis. Despite the obstacles, certain priests had made some progress. Saint Pierre College had reopened its doors to 40 students and hoped to stay open with the help of Christians.

The main danger and the principal obstacle to reconstruction was the proximity of Communist troops. To the east of the town they were no more than 10 kilometers away, and they were equally numerous in the mountains, blocking all traffic to and from the central valley of Fen Ho. Even though they were ill-equipped (with grenades, primarily and perhaps five cartridges per rifle), these troops wreaked terrible ravages in the east. Every day we met Christians, coming from the neighboring diocese, who brought alarming news of priests arrested and Christians molested or killed. By means of their fifth column operatives the Communists also sapped the morale of the population and circulated unfounded rumors.

Discussing the situation with Monsignor Han, we concluded that we had to do all we could to escape the stagnation in which our mission vegetated for lack of money, so much the more since we did have access to funds, but they were on deposit in Shanghai in the Franciscan Fathers' account. The subsidy we received from Rome had been blocked for two years because Shanghai money was different from ours. I suggested to the bishop that I go to Tientsin, a major port of north China, where a Franciscan Father was charged with looking after the interests of our mission as well as his own. Monsignor Han also wanted me to visit Peking to persuade the Samiste Fathers Keymolen and Wenders, both of whom were full-fledged professors of the Grand Seminary, to come and teach at Hungtung. I also wanted to seize the opportunity to spend some time in Shanghai to make contact with international aid agencies. I had heard that they had some important projects, and Monsignor gave me a mandate to meet with them. So, on January 5, 1946, I was once again on the train heading north with an overnight stop at Kie Hsio, where I was among 36 travelers to invade a small Chinese inn. The next day I arrived at Taiyuan at 14:30 hours to visit the bishop, Monsignor Capozzi, as well as half a dozen priest friends.

From Hungtung to Peking, January 8-11, 1946

Travel was still slow, so I didn't arrive at Shih Chia Chuang until the evening of Jan. 8, 1946. I made a stopover the night before at Yang Tsuan. The house was still just as crowded as it was when I stopped there the previous month. The bishop of Shunteh, Monsignor Kraus, was there along with his two priests – two very energetic Poles who wanted to go with me to Peking. After the meal that evening, we discussed our plan for the next morning. I proposed that we get to the station early and be prepared to take any available train to Peking.

The next day, Jan. 9, we hurried to the station and found a train with seven or eight cars. We boarded the first car where we managed to find three seats. We were hardly seated when I nevertheless informed Monsignor Kraus that I would prefer to be in the rear of the train. Experience had taught me that if we touched off a mine it would be the car at the head of the train that would take the brunt of the explosion and suffer the most of damage. Also, having explored the entire train, I found three seats in the sixth car, where we finally settled in. The weather was sunny and we had a pleasant conversation. We were travelling in third class, which gave us the opportunity to meet the good people of China. At lunch time we were able to buy egg noodles and soup. Everything went well, and we dozed off.

Toward 4 p.m. the train stopped abruptly, and at the same time we heard two explosions and the crackling of a machine-gun in the east. I pressed my nose to the window to see what was going on, and I saw the lead car of the train perched crosswise across the tracks. Very soon we heard shouts telling us to get off the train and take shelter below the tracks on the west side. There was an interminable delay and word that some

people were wounded. Finally we were advised to make our way to the nearby station and take shelter there. It was not till almost 10 p.m. that we travelers found ourselves regrouped and sheltered in the waiting room. There were people moaning. I went toward the sound and I managed to help some of them with the little pack of first aid items that I always carried with me. Exhausted, we inquired as to where we could lie down for the night. I informed the station master of our condition and told him that I was accompanied by a bishop. The accommodating man led us in the darkness to a small Japanese hut, and suggested we shelter there. We groped our way in, sliding along the Japanese tatamis, worn out, but safe. At dawn, I was the first to awaken, and I discovered Monsignor Kraus stretched out not far from a stranger. It was the wife of the station master, a circumstance which became fodder for good-natured banter that whole day!

There was another long delay. At 2 p.m. we were told that a Japanese armored train would be arriving at Paoting and that it could take us on board. I asked that last night's wounded also be loaded on, and we arrived at Paoting two hours later.

It was not until Friday, January 11, that we were able to complete the last stage of our journey toward Peking, with Monsignor Kraus still with us.

Sojourn in Peking, January 11-17, 1946

At Peking I usually stopped at the chancery of the Diocese of Suanhua where my friend and colleague, Paul Gilson, worked. It was he who welcomed me in February 1939 when I arrived from Belgium. At that time we forged a very solid friendship which lasted until his death.

The chancery was not very large, but at that moment it sheltered my colleagues, Michel Keymolen and Nicolas Wenders, both of whom I hastened to find. They were awaiting news of Shansi, and I had to persuade them to accompany me there despite the risks and perils of the civil war. I had a solid argument to budge them: the Chinese bishops of Shansi (Fenyang and Hungtung) had agreed to reopen in Hungtung the regional seminary that had been at Suanhua.

On Monday, Jan. 14, 1946, I paid a visit to the Apostolic Delegate, Monsignor Zanin, hoping to receive from him subsidies and advice for our mission. Alas, he was so preoccupied with his own problems that I had to hear about them for half an hour. Sensing that I would receive neither advice nor sustenance, I ended my visit as politely as possible and decided to go

to Tientsin the next day. At the Franciscan house in Tientsin I received a warm welcome from Father Ormazabal, an understanding and joyful Spanish Basque. Monsignor Comisso, first secretary to the apostolic delegate, lived there and, as we were old friends, we had many things to tell one another. Nevertheless, my primary goal was to reach Shanghai at all costs. It was there that our subsidies could be found, but to date the treasurer had not been able to transfer them to the north. The only possible means of transport – trains and ships – were taken over by the central government to send as many troops as possible to the north to establish a bridge-head against the Communists who intended to take over Peking. Father Ormazabal had more than one trick up his sleeve. He gave me some hope of gaining passage by air with the cooperation of the Superior of the Franciscan Sisters, Mother Montana. The latter had among her students the daughter of the commandant of the air base, held by the 3rd Amphibious Group. It was thus that on January 17 I was received at the base and, after a long interrogation by intelligence officers, was given a round-trip air ticket to Shanghai. "You can report whatever you want," the commandant told me. Confidence reigned.

Voyage to Shanghai, January 18-25, 1945

At 8:30 a.m. Friday Jan. 18, 1946, I arrived at the airport of the French municipality. We took off at 10 a.m., and after a stop in Tsingtao we landed in Shanghai at 4 p.m. I was welcomed at the Franciscan headquarters by Father Miravigli and I asked him to prepare the money from the subsidy provided by Rome which I was to take to the north. I then went to the Scheut Fathers' residence where I stayed until January 25. I took advantage of my stay to meet with as many former Weihsien friends as possible who were now living in Shanghai. But above all, I had to make contact with the directors of UNRRA.

UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, was created in the United States by 48 nations to serve as an agency of emergency aid and rehabilitation in the countries that had suffered from the war. In the period immediately following the Sino-Japanese war, from which China emerged severely impoverished, I chose – with the approval of my bishop – to work for that agency as a means of bringing more effective aid for the relief of China.

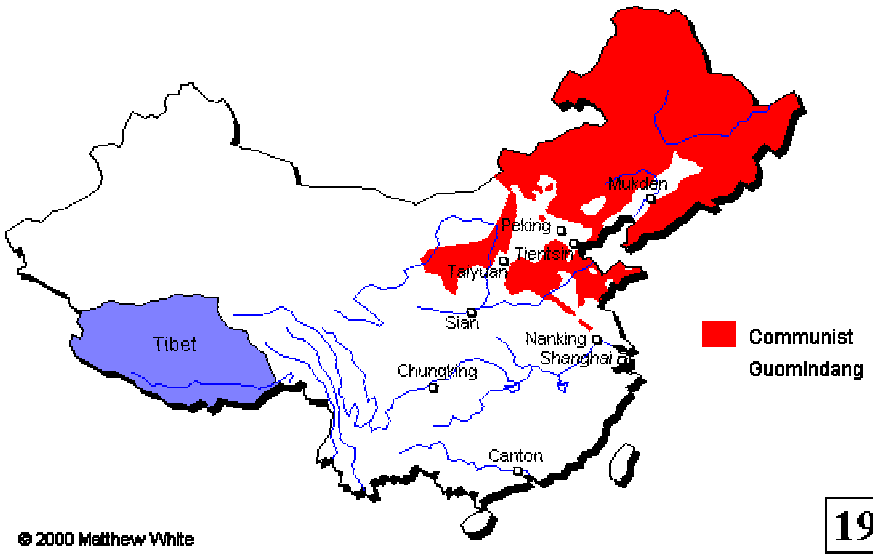
But that was not an easy undertaking. Nevertheless, starting Monday morning, I spent several hours with the agency and the next day I was received by Solano and above all by two young recently demobilized American officers, Colonel Rose and Captain Moore, with whom I arranged a study project in north China for the coming six weeks.

On January 25, despite the fog, I went to the Bund where I had an appointment to get me to the military airport. The plane took off at 9 a.m. As we had hoped, I had been able to fill two suitcases with Chinese banknotes in the southern currency. They amounted to several million francs which would be distributed to six northern dioceses. The Shanghai money was at a premium in the north, and so by this transfer the missions would gain 10 percent when the money was exchanged in Tientsin. The flight was rough, we were shaken violently. We made a stopover in Tsingtao at 11:15 a.m. and reached Tientsin at 2:15 p.m., where I urgently set about remitting the money to the respective treasurers – Father Mommaerts at the Scheut Fathers and Father Ormazabal at the Franciscans.

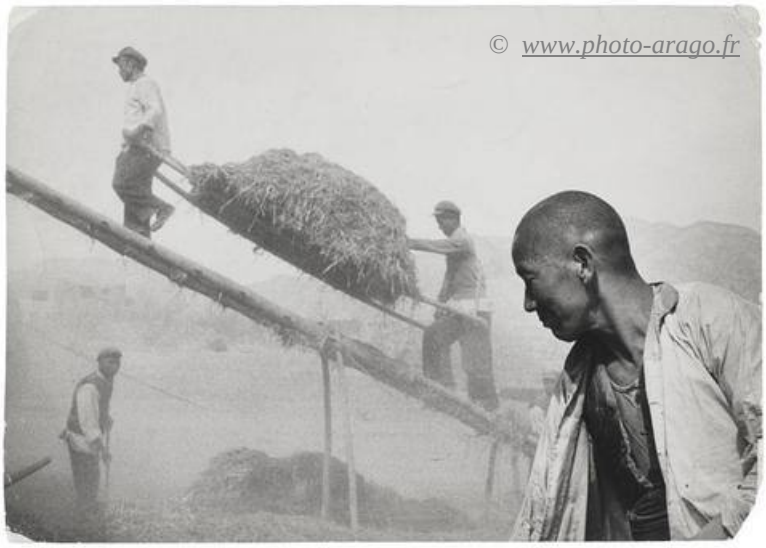
Journey Across Communist China (Journal and trip notes, February-March, 1946)

We left Taiyuan on Feb. 21, 1946, in the company of representatives of the Nationalists, the Communists and the Americans in search of a cease fire in the southeast region of Shansi. To that end, the governor had arranged a special armored train, which had already been delayed by 24 hours. For better or worse, we found ourselves en route, sumptuously installed in a first class wagon, to butter up either the American colonel or the Communist General Hsui and his staff. On the way we also had long conversations with Doctor Tchang, chief of the office of health for UNRRA, who was making the voyage with me and who would become extremely valuable, proving himself to be a joyous and courageous 45-year-old companion.

Our progress was slow and, even though we had left towards noon, we did not arrive in the general area of



the provincial troops until 4 p.m., at which time we found ourselves no more than 70 kilometers from Taiyuan. We were very well received by General Tchao, commandant of the 33rd Army, who lodged us in his quarters and who authorized me to participate as an auditor and sometimes as an interpreter in the discussions relative to the cessation of hostilities. In him was found once more a China in all her beauty and diplomatic courtesy. Upon our arrival we had noted some Japanese soldiers in the village. Casually the American colonel asked General Tchao why he still had Japanese troops in his sector. "Oh," the general replied, "we're going to put them in a concentration camp." The next



day as I went out for a little walk I saw, coming out of the neighboring house, a dozen armed Japanese!

During our trip across the territory occupied by the provincial troops we were struck by the number of uncultivated fields. We were told the reason was that the taxes were too heavy and too arbitrary. The consequence was a population – ready prey for communism – fleeing to the mountains, east and west. About 30 to 40 percent of the farm land was thus abandoned. In every station where our train stopped we found numerous peasants waiting to tell us of their grievances with regard to the miserable state of the province in the midst of the civil war. Refugees from the Communist regions (generally the rich who had lost a good number of their goods) came to cry on the colonel's shoulder while the majority of the population asked for restoration of transportation facilities between the various zones and for the freedom to do business.

On February 22, we left Nan T'oan Pei in the company of the military delegations. I took advantage of the occasion to speak with General Tchao regarding the situation of the population in the region he commanded. He gave me the impression he knew very little about it. Little by little we entered into the mountains where the landscape became more and more of a wilderness. I realized that the region was favorable to bandits or to guerillas, as is now the case. At every little village where the train stopped I spoke with the residents, who had truly suffered profoundly from the war. Their faces were emaciated as their diet was still meager: millet twice a day with no vegetables. The children, meanwhile, looked better than the adults. The proportion of houses that were destroyed by the Japanese ranged from 30 to 60 percent, and in some villages 100 percent. All that destruction was not the result of blind bombing but the organized project of selected workers: the arson battalion. One village previously had 200 camels; now there remained only one. Another village had 50 horses or mules; there remained only eight.

We arrived at Lai-Yuan toward 5 p.m., after having gone about 30 kilometers into the mountains. It was a small village where lodging facilities were scarce, so we remained in our first class compartment. I took a little walk to stretch my legs before nightfall, and noted with some amusement that the Japanese guards at the three or four defense posts around the station had been surreptitiously replaced with Chinese guards. Thus they could demonstrate to us that the Japanese had indeed been placed in a concentration camp!

On February 23 I celebrated Mass on the little table in our first class wagon. We then waited some long hours for the officer who had been sent to the Communist headquarters to return with the general in charge. At noon the liaison officer returned without his general, and we were faced with a moment of decision: were we to take our chances by venturing into the Communist lair? For eight years we had heard so many dramatic stories about them that some of us might have had good reason to hesitate about going forward. I had even been given a secret code message to use if I were taken prisoner. Better, an American officer had given me a miniature saw capable of cutting whatever, in case of imprisonment! But we knew that the situation was not as dire as had been described, so we climbed on the mounts furnished by General Tchao. The liaison officer led the way. Having little experience at horseback riding, we had quite a bit of difficulty in following suit. Personally, I had become wary of the equine species ever since a clumsy mule had flung me into a river seven years earlier, and I felt more secure on my own two feet. But practice changed my sentiments, and after 10 days on a mule I had almost become an accomplished equestrian.

For our safety the liaison officer took the lead and, as we spotted the shadowy figures of guerrillas, we advised him to give the password. He ignored us and a little while later we spotted a guerrilla charging down the mountain, revolver in hand and grenade ready to be thrown. By chance he noticed the Communist officer's armband and ordered us to wait while he commu-

nicated the password to the other positions. That done, we continued unhindered, escorted by several soldiers who joined us at the next village. The surrounding countryside abounded with soldiers, but we continued without incident, at the pace of our mounts, arriving that night at the local headquarters. We had come around 15 kilometers and were able to rest peacefully at this small village where we were the honored guests of the Communist military authority. We continued to be considered as such, receiving unexpected welcomes wherever we went.

On that February 24 I arose early to celebrate Mass in the heart of Communist territory. We went on at daylight, as we wanted to travel as long as possible. We started up a long and slow climb to the Ch'ang Liang Ling pass, which we crossed about 11 a.m. Our elevation revealed a superb view over 40 kilometers of valleys bordered by mountains, as well as the T'ai Hang chain of mountains at a distance of more than 100 kilometers, which we would cross in several days. I discovered that going downhill was difficult in my GI footwear, and the Chinese took advantage of that fact to sing the praises of their cloth slippers. After a bowl of good millet soup to warm us up, we continued to descend the entire length of the steeply enclosed valley. Several kilometers down, the valley broadened out, and we made better time. Nevertheless, if we could have avoided the delegations from the villages at every crossroad and their reports of their local situations of supplies, housing and sanitary conditions – nearly identical everywhere – we would have made better time. But that was evidently impossible. Led by a brass band, the population would line up neatly in two ranks, children separated – of whom a certain number, even those under 15 years of age, carried grenades and mines hanging from their necks. We had to honor the tea and the kind words which we received.

Along about 2 p.m., we arrived at Yun Chou, a big village which the Japanese had half-destroyed, and where many widows mourned their assassinated husbands. The population extended us an exceptional welcome, due in large measure to the Mandarin who still lived in the district, at least for the moment. He received us at the entrance of the village, and I had to pass between two rows of applauding villagers for 500 meters. To save time, we announced that we would speak directly to the population, and a meeting on the field was organized. But that gained us nothing as, with the traditional Chinese slow pace, we had to stay till evening to visit the dispensary, do justice to the meal prepared for us, meet the government delegates and, in the end, spend the night there. We had come only 30 kilometers, and we promised ourselves to do better in the coming days.

Early in the morning of February 25 we had breakfast with the assistant-prefect before resuming our journey. On the way, a group of children welcomed us with Chinese music. I was surprised by their cleanliness and their deportment. It turned out they were the official choir of a Christian village. I took the occasion to exchange a few words with their leader and to remind him of the duties of a Christian. The village had been without a priest for six years. Our Communist companion watched us with an air of wonderment, but so what – even if he did make entries in his notebook. They told us repeatedly that they were in favor of freedom of conscience.

Toward noon we arrived at Yushih, a town that the Japanese had destroyed by fire. Over the past year, around 50 houses had been rebuilt, and we stayed the night in one of these large humid structures (whose mortar was not yet dry). While we were crossing the river which bordered on the village, a snow storm had flared up and it would not have been prudent to venture into the mountains, not even on mule-back. As it was a market day, people from neighboring villages were in town. We took advantage of their presence to give a short talk and to ask some questions. With the help of my companions I then spent the remainder of the evening drying my clothes, as my mule had slipped while crossing over an unstable bridge, dumping some of my baggage into the water. Happily, my sleeping bag and my eating utensils remained safe and sound.

The next day, February 26, the weather was nicer and it had stopped snowing. The mountain trail had been repaired, which enabled us to make good time. We covered 40 kilometers with hardly any rest. In a little mountain village where some of the inhabitants no longer had the clothing needed to go outdoors, we were attended by the secretary of a regional center who had arranged for fresh horses for us. We embarked on a pleasant descent toward Shih-Hsia. On our way we came across several thousand soldiers marching westward.

Once again, snow forced us to stop for the night. In addition, I came down with a fever and, if not for the strong alcoholic drink served at supper, I would not have been able to get up and journey on the next day. Nevertheless toward 8 p.m. I had to get out from under the covers to hear the reports of some 30 delegates of the local population on the current situation, and to apprise them of our work.

On February 27, as soon as the weather cleared up, we left for Liao Hsien, where we were the guests of the assistant prefect. There too a meeting had been arranged, and we addressed a crowd of about two-thousand. Afterwards we went to see what remained of a fine Protestant hospital which the Japanese had all

but leveled.

Once again we embarked across the mountains, still escorted by two soldiers. At nightfall we arrived at a small village where this time we were not expected. The welcome there was simpler, but we nevertheless found heated lodging and something to eat.

Fair weather greeted us on February 28. A light mist covered the T'ai Hang chain that we were to cross that day. We climbed slowly, lost in the fog and the clouds once we reached the pass. The climb up – by the main route, so we were told – was quite perilous, and it was impossible to stay mounted. The rocky trail had no doubt been built more than a thousand years ago, and had endured despite the centuries and usage.

After about a dozen kilometers of descent the sun finally appeared, illuminating magnificent gorges. As we rounded a bend, a temple suddenly arose. It was entirely sculpted into the mountain. Two columns, creased into the face of the rock marked the entrance, and a series of small niches covered the top of the temple. We were in the presence of a curious blend of natural architecture and Chinese ingenuity. Beside the temple a charming bridge arched across the swift river current.

We continued our descent till the end of the day, covering at least 40 kilometers, hoping at every turn of the valley to be quit of the mountains. We spent the night in a little town where the Communists had a printing plant which had been active during practically the entire war, halting its presses only during Japanese attacks. Their literary and intellectual production those last few years and since the earlier defeat of China by the Japanese was something remarkable.

On March 1 we arrived at last at WenTs'uen, a large mountain village where the frontier government resided for several years. Certain offices with responsibility for the administration of a part of Shansi province were operating there, and they gave us an excellent welcome. Having been advised of my impending visit, the government had sent a former student at Lyon to receive me. This Mr. Suen Yi accompanied us for the rest of the voyage in Communist territory, looking out for our welfare and proving to be a pleasant companion, albeit a staunch Communist.

The various regional chiefs of the South and East of Shansi, representing 70 sub-prefectures were meeting there at that time, so we were able to meet them and discuss our work with all of them. They invited us to dinner the next day, an invitation I had to accept even though it was to take place in the church, which the regional chiefs had occupied.

For my part, I asked to see the Christians of the village and was given permission to celebrate Mass and preach on Sunday. The Communists even promised me to welcome a new priest with the agreement of the bishop. They had banished the former priest seven years earlier, citing problems with the Japanese as the reason. We stayed at Wen Ts'uen three more days to discuss with the authorities the needs of the village and our work.

We left on the morning of March 3 to return to the town of Shih Hsien, 10 miles away and to a road suitable for driving and the special truck which would take us to the seat of the government at the same time as the chief of state, Mr. Ly Ta. We were received by one of the senators, a very accommodating old man. We were lodged at the sub-prefecture, where the staff proved eager to meet our every need. We walked to the marketplace where I hoped to find a wool blanket for the voyage, but we did not find anything to our taste.

We left the village on March 4, accompanied by school children who had entertained us the night before with Communist songs and dances. We met up with General Ly Ta and his quartermaster general. The road was quite bad. From time to time we had to use the river bed which had been cleared of its largest rocks. Nevertheless we managed to make the first part of the trip without having to get out of the truck except for one time when the incline was too steep.

The sub-prefect at Wu An put on a banquet for us, which delayed us for two hours. The road from there was better, and we arrived at Han Tan toward 5 o'clock. For two days we were the celebrated guests at the seat of the local government responsible for 26 million inhabitants. The official entertainments were topped off by a banquet in our honor, in the presence of the Council president, his two vice presidents, and leaders of the army and of the Communist Party.

On March 5 we spent the entire day discussing the possibilities of fulfilling our mission in these provinces now under the control of the Communists. We wanted to have complete freedom of action, but on the other hand we had to take into account that the Communists had a working organization which could help us substantially. We thus arrived at an agreement on six articles that we decided to sign, as well as several of their requests which we promised to transmit to Chungking along with our comments acknowledging the agreement.

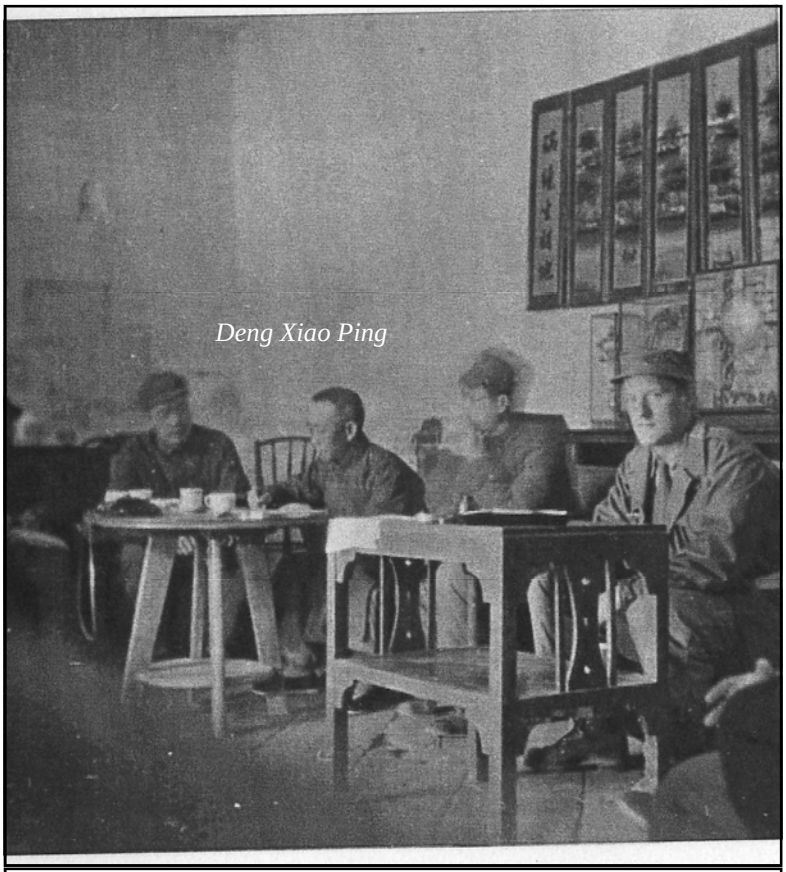
The delegates and members of the government were generally capable. Several of them had studied abroad, and most were university graduates, even though their appearance and simple living demonstrated that they were sincere Communists. We strongly admired the spirit in which they carried on their work with complete indifference toward personal wealth.

That evening we took part in a banquet offered in our honor by the army, followed by a theatrical celebration. It opened with the raising of banners 20 meters long and two feet deep with words of welcome for us. Inevitably we were exposed to a representation of Communist beliefs in response to a speech by the vice president of the Council. The audience was almost entirely in uniform. The first presentation portrayed, in modern dress, a theme of cooperation between soldiers and peasants. The second was a traditional Chinese drama with a patriotic theme.

In the regions that we studied, the consequences of the war were everywhere similar: numerous houses destroyed, especially where the Japanese did not intend to stay; absence of draft animals, mules, cows and camels; latent epidemics (malaria, scabies and syphilis); dire need of material for clothing, dyes, salt and charcoal in some districts.

We met again on Thursday morning, March 6, to study the terms of the agreement and to ratify it. The accord, containing six points, was to be signed with great pomp at the end of a dinner at the home of the council president, Mr. Yang Sui Feng. I recall the scene as if it were yesterday. I had received advance notice that the representative of the military forces, General Liu Po Ch'eng, would be one of the signers and that there would be a third signer whose identity would not be revealed to me in advance. But when I entered the hall, there he was in a corner wearing his blue quilted jacket with a Mao collar, his cap tilted to one ear.

"Bonjour, Monsieur An," he said to me, extending his hand. As I expressed surprise in returning his greeting at his command of French, he answered that he had studied "in your country at the Labor University in Charleroi." I leave it to you to gauge my astonishment, but I did not let it show, and continued the conversation in Chinese.



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"When did you return to China (from Belgium)?" I asked

"In 1924," he answered.

"And what did you do then?"

"Tixia kung tsuo" (underground activities, or preparations for the Chinese revolution), was his response.

The man speaking with me was short, direct and somewhat good-natured. He must have been about 40 years old. This was the important person whose name would be central to the document because he had been delegated by the Communist party of the entire region (officially he was the general representing the military region). His name: ***Deng Xiao Ping***! This was the strongman who would head the People's Republic of China during the decade of the 1980s. The evening ended with wine and toasts and the customary photos.

During our free hours we were questioned by journalists who insisted that we give our opinions on the subjects under discussion. As we were leaving, I was asked for a last word. I took advantage of the occasion to say a few words about our peace-maker role. But we were in a hurry to go on with our journey as our goal was to stop at Shun Teh, 15 miles away, where I was hoping to stay the night at the mission headed by Msgr. Krause, with whom I had traveled the previous month. As it turned out, while crossing a shallow portion of a river, our truck – which stalled every ten minutes because of its bad alcohol fuel – became mired in the sand. It was only after three hours of effort and the help of four oxen that we were freed, but by then it was too late to get to our destination.

Our arrival at Shun Teh was once again delayed on March 7 upon crossing a partially destroyed bridge. We obtained some planks to bridge the gaps in the face of a freezing north wind. Happily we received a warm welcome from our Polish missionary friends at Shun Teh, which was not pleasing to the Communists. Nevertheless, they were won over when I took them to visit the hospital, and especially the orphanage of three hundred children receiving the tender care of the good Sisters of St. Vincent.

We did not have enough fuel for the return voyage, as our truck had burned too much alcohol over the difficult roads. But the orders were to take us to the limits of the Communist territories, so we left in the afternoon – too late, alas, to make the trip in one stage. There we were, obliged to stay the night at an inn at

the side of the road, only to find ourselves, upon awakening, surrounded by snow.

March 8. The truck, after warming up its engine for a full hour while burning grass and alcohol, took us to Kao-I around 10 a.m., but not without problems: the radiator froze because nobody thought to drain it the night before. At Kao-I the truck arrived at its final destination of its difficult voyage. We appealed to the local headman to provide us with a cart. Despite the bad weather, that worthy led us, toward 3 o'clock, into no man's land. There we hired another cart and despite the hour and the snow we decided to take on the 40 kilometers required to reach Shih Chia Chuang, where we would once again entrain for Taiyuan the following day. The mule pulling the cart was wonderful, and trotted at a good pace.

As night fell, we had to negotiate our way past each of six strong-points. It was 11 p.m. before we managed to have the gates of Shih Chia Chuang opened to us. We decided to stop for the night as it was forbidden to circulate on the city streets after lights out. It was our great fortune that the military forces standing guard at the gates offered us lodging. All that remained for us to do was to return to Taiyuan to report on what was accomplished. Perhaps we could follow that by doing the same in Shanghai.

Two months in Communist Territory, August and September, 1946

I know that in casting your eyes on that heading you are going to roll your eyes and exclaim, "What? He has more adventure stories to tell? After running around North China for six months wouldn't he have tried to stay out of trouble for a while?" The answer is, yes, I did try, but I was not free to do what I wanted. I was sent on a special mission in Communist territory, and completely involuntarily (you be the judge of that) I became involved in some new difficulties. Those difficulties, while not directly involving our mission, did nevertheless cast some light on Communist modus operandi of the period. They will no doubt help you to appreciate what it was that deeply disgusted me, to say the least. Nevertheless I am greatly consoled by the fact that I have always tried to be objective in my evaluations.

Return to Chin Hsien

We left Taiyuan on August 8, 1946. The 60-kilometer southerly voyage in first class was fairly comfortable. We got off at Tung Yang at a small station where we were not even asked for our tickets (I was no longer traveling free by then). An hour's walk to the east brought us to a village which reflected a bygone dating to the good old days, but had now been abandoned by a good many of its former citizens because of the proximity of two armies – the Communist army and the provincial (Nationalist) army. When the Communist soldiers asked the cook who was preparing our meal which had been the good army and which had been the bad one, he replied that they had been equally bad.

As we had to carry our baggage ourselves, we decided to have a brief nap first. Upon awakening I was surprised to find myself surrounded by guerrillas. What a predicament! I had no way of knowing whether they were Communists or Nationalists as they were not in uniform, as is normal for guerrillas. I resolved my doubts by engaging them in conversation, which revealed that they were Communists. To be perfectly clear, it was probable that only their leader had heard anything – even vaguely – about Karl Marx or Stalin. What these men knew was that in being on the side of Communists their taxes were lower and it was easier for them to own a weapon. So they took advantage of those benefits.

Two hours later we were at Fants'uen, the first Communist town at the foot of the mountains. It had been occupied for a month by the Provincials, who stripped it of everything of value. And so we were the recipients of the people's sad stories. As one member of our group broadcast his opinion that the people were not short of clothing, we were soon presented with several fine specimens of people dressed in tatters.

We had about 250 kilometers to cover to reach our train station at **Chin Hsien**. We therefore did not delay, and evening overtook us in the mountains. As the sun had already set we bathed in the river, but we were soon chased out fairly brusquely by troops making their rounds. They told us that the area was unreliable, which I did not doubt for an instant, but not for the same reasons.

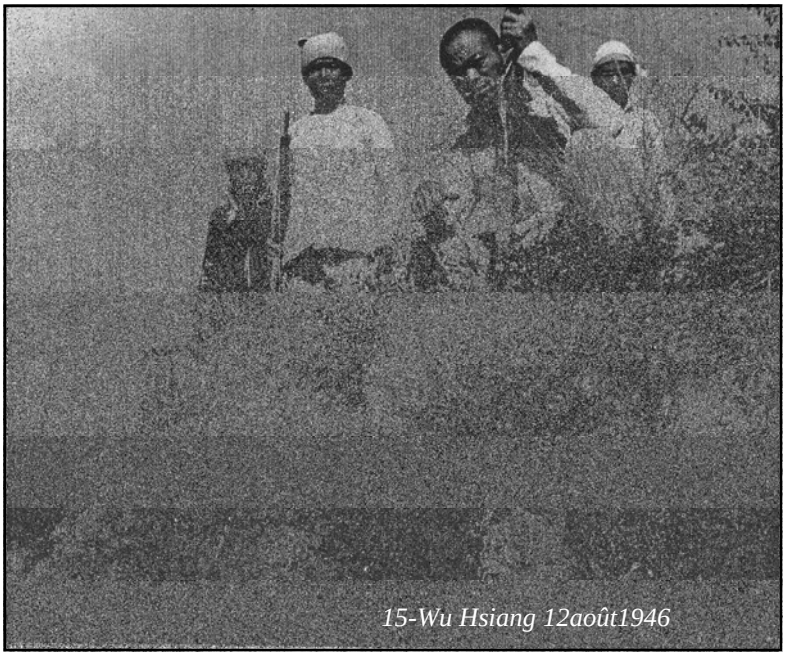
Each morning we got under way as soon as possible after a light repast, and we usually stopped for a more substantial meal around 11 a.m. By then it was too hot to continue, and it was necessary to take a siesta until almost 4 p.m., after which we walked until nightfall. That day, after having just left a village with a mule loaded with the luggage of the four members of our team, when we came to a river whose swift currents lured us to refresh ourselves. The ass seemed to enjoy the experience even more than we did, as he took it upon himself to sit right down in the water, with the result that our bedding and written materials of all kinds were soaked.

The days passed, the road, mountainous in the ex-

treme, was not traversable except with donkeys or mules. There was no hope of using a cart, no matter how small. As for the inns that we came across, they were well-stocked with bed-bugs, fleas and other animal life prone to unwelcome intimacy.

On August 10, at an altitude of 1,600 meters, we encountered our first fog of the summer which soon changed into rain. But the sun returned, so hot that we were soon wishing for the cool mist of the morning. That evening we reached Liao Hsien, a town perched high up in these mountains which were considered the last bastion of the Communists in these four northern provinces. We met with the military commandant and the administrator of the region, sharing with them our mission in these districts of southeast Shansi. They promised their complete cooperation and received us in admirable fashion. These were the most skillful propagandists that I had encountered. They knew, without a doubt, how to promote the value of their stock in trade.

On the 12th we resumed our journey, but due to a misunderstanding, whether intentional or not I don't know, we found ourselves without mounts and without anyone to take care of our baggage. The only document we had was a letter from the district authorities asking the head man of each village to help us. At the end of the day we had only traveled 25 kilometers, which was much too little. We decided to go it alone on foot, provided we were furnished a donkey for the baggage, which we obtained without great difficulty. At every stage we met with the Communist authorities, but we sensed a growing animosity the farther we advanced toward the south. We saw many anti-American inscriptions on village walls, and as the villagers didn't perceive any difference between an American and a European, that could very well have been the reason.



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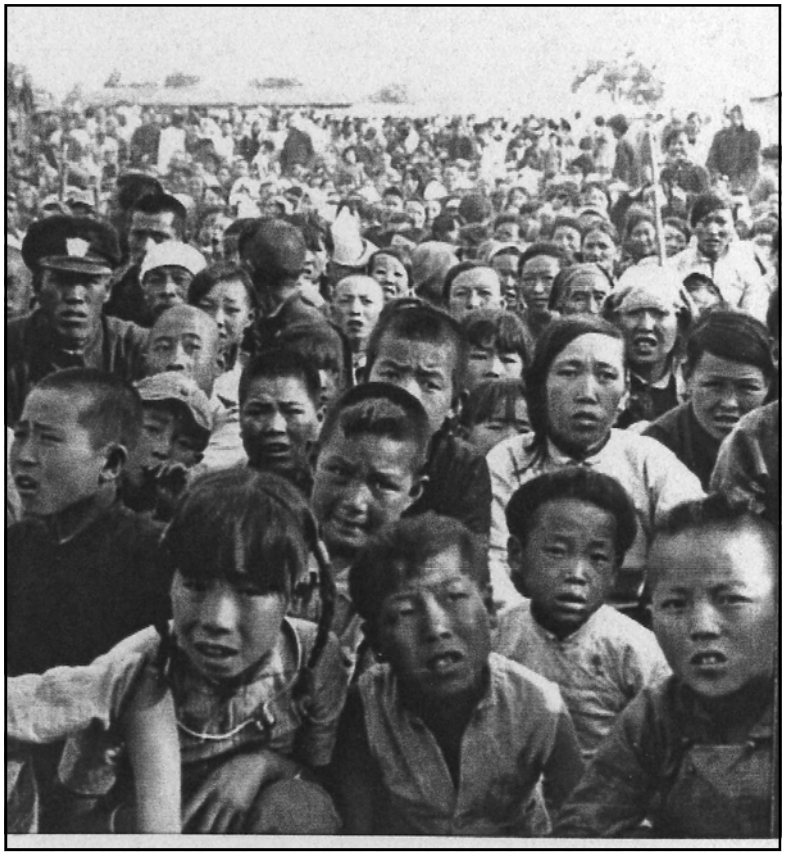
pace, and unfortunately I lost sight of the rest of the group. Nevertheless I continued all alone at a forced march pace for the 27 kilometers to Wu-Hsiang, where I had been just two months earlier. The Communist association welcomed me and immediately prepared a meal for me. In the meantime, I sent my card on to the head man, informing him that I was expected at Chu Hsien, our warehouse, that I did not have time for a visit, and asking his help in obtaining a pack animal for the baggage.

After an hour's wait, he sent me his deputy and another official who then began discussing my supposed participation in the June battle. I took him on very directly, saying, "This liaison officer that you consider the villain, the cause of all your misfortune, was appointed to accompany me at the insistence of the Communists. Moreover, he had nothing to do with the work of UN-



People's Court at WuHsiang

At Hung Shui, the ranking communist warned my Chinese companion that I was likely to have trouble in Wu-Hsiang. What had happened was that the area I had visited the preceding June had experienced a stinging defeat by the Nationalists, with 60 killed and 180 wounded on the Communist side. At the time I had been in the region I was accompanied by a Communist liaison officer and a Nationalist officer. Now the Communists claimed that the Nationalist officer had brought about the defeat, and wanted to make me responsible for it. There was much talk about it in that sector but I did not attach great importance to it, making the best of the situation.

On August 14, I went out ahead to try to speed up our

RRA. His only task was to facilitate my entry into the region." In addition, I explained that the attack had been a reprisal in response to the Communist destruction of a railroad, blowing up two bridges and two locomotives and taking some 20 Nationalist officers prisoner. As these events had not been reported in their newspapers they did not believe me and sought to keep me from continuing on my way.

A little while later, my group arrived and I filled them in on the discussion. I excused myself to the deputy, saying my work prevented me from staying any longer, and I left on foot. I had hardly gone out the door when the deputy, in the presence of the head of the UNRRA team, gave the order to have me arrested in the name of the people, and said that he would not be responsible if harm came to me because of the people's anger. I walked on another 100 meters while behind me soldiers provoked the villagers and ordered them to pursue me. Children shouted at me to stop, but I ignored them.

People finally came upon me from various directions and I found myself surrounded by about 100 persons. I informed them briefly about the possible consequences of their actions, but they showed no concern, and cast about for a justification for arresting me. They demanded to see my papers and pretended that they were not in order. They then ordered me to retrace my steps. I blurted out that I would only do so if forced under constraint. That angered them, and they spat in my face, hit my back and tried to frighten me by working the bolts of their rifles. As I remained calm, that behavior ceased and I was put in prison from which I emerged an hour later at the behest of my companions who had vehemently protested my arrest.

We were kept in the courtyard of the cooperative for two days, soldiers guarding the gates. The public was allowed to come and view us as they would strange beasts. One after another authorities came to discuss the matter, and they showed themselves to be very demanding. They urged me to issue a communiqué for the newspapers in which I was to disavow and insult the Nationalists. They demanded payment of an indemnity for those killed and wounded, and a trial in the people's court to give the population the opportunity to express their grievances and hear my responses.

Our only course was to carry on a discussion. As moral force was our only weapon and we had no way to communicate with a higher authority – who would certainly have disavowed such tactics – all we could do was play for time. We therefore prepared a statement, and when we read it to a delegation of the people, they recognized the diplomacy of the language and made no further demands along that line. In return I agreed to have a meeting with the people, not as the accused but as a witness -- and as soon as possible. That last condition did not sit well with them as they wanted to make careful preparations.

As a result, we were not able to hold the meeting until the next evening, and it turned out to be the worst such experience of my life. The harshest questions were posed by the supposed delegates of the people, who had prepared them in consultation with the officials. I was interrupted several times in my account of the facts by insults such as "Down with liars! Down with people who display a sheep on a sign in front of a shop but sell dog meat inside. Down with spies in the service of America." Or, alternately, "We've heard enough clever words, what we want to know is how you are going to pay."

All of these invectives were hurled at us in the presence of the officials, who had the effrontery to congratulate me later for the brilliant way I conducted I pulled myself out of my quandary. I had kept my composure and succeeded after three hours of debate in sending the crowd back to their hearths. The tactic that finally disarmed them was raising my fist along with theirs each time they started with "Down with," even though their slogans were only indirectly aimed at me.

The Blessed Mother had protected me, but it was, alas, the least Christian August 15 (feast of Our Lady) I had ever experienced.

Chin Hsien

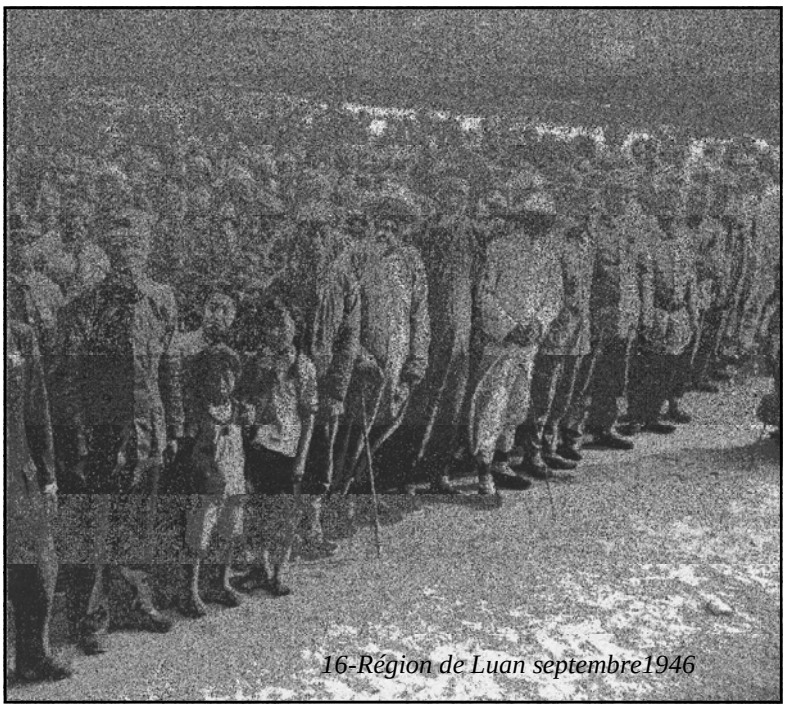
On the 16th we got a pass from the authorities and assurance that we could travel safely to Chin Hsien. Two officers and two enlisted men accompanied us. Thus we arrived as prisoners at Chin Hsien, where Msgr. Kramer, bishop of Luan awaited us impatiently.

Our first business, under duress, was to visit the headman (the mandarin) who quite flatly reiterated the same demands – payment of indemnities for the victims of the battle, reimbursement of the subsidies given to the Nationalist "traitors," and full disclosure of our activities. As the situation was quite tense, we acquiesced to the last point, and requested documents detailing the precise facts supporting the first two demands.

We never again saw the devious headman, nor did we receive any documentation. Following our encounter with the mandarin we did all we could to undermine his status with higher authorities, and I think we succeeded in doing so.

Getting back to Msgr. Kramer, never had I seen a more beautiful smile or heard a more comforting out-

burst as greeted me when he saw me entering his courtyard. During the week that followed the National-



16-Région de Luan septembre1946

ist retreat, Father Veldhuisen and his people suffered the most difficult week of their lives. Their warehouse was the target of systematic pillaging on a grand scale. Day and night (up to 10 times on some nights) groups of armed marauders surged through the doors and windows to seize whatever they wanted. One morning they discovered clothing strewn about – 150 bundles had been ripped open. If the two representatives of UNRRA had not been there, we would have had nothing left of our aid supplies. Because of them, only ten of our packages disappeared. To escape the distressing memories of these events, all we wanted was to be rid of this place and to get our supplies quickly to the distribution center at Luan.

When I revisit these events in my mind, I cannot help but compare them to those that occurred during the French Revolution or the Reign of Terror (Commune de Paris, 1792-1794), an unstable period when the populace, stirred up by their leaders, blindly engaged in massacres, often without understanding why.

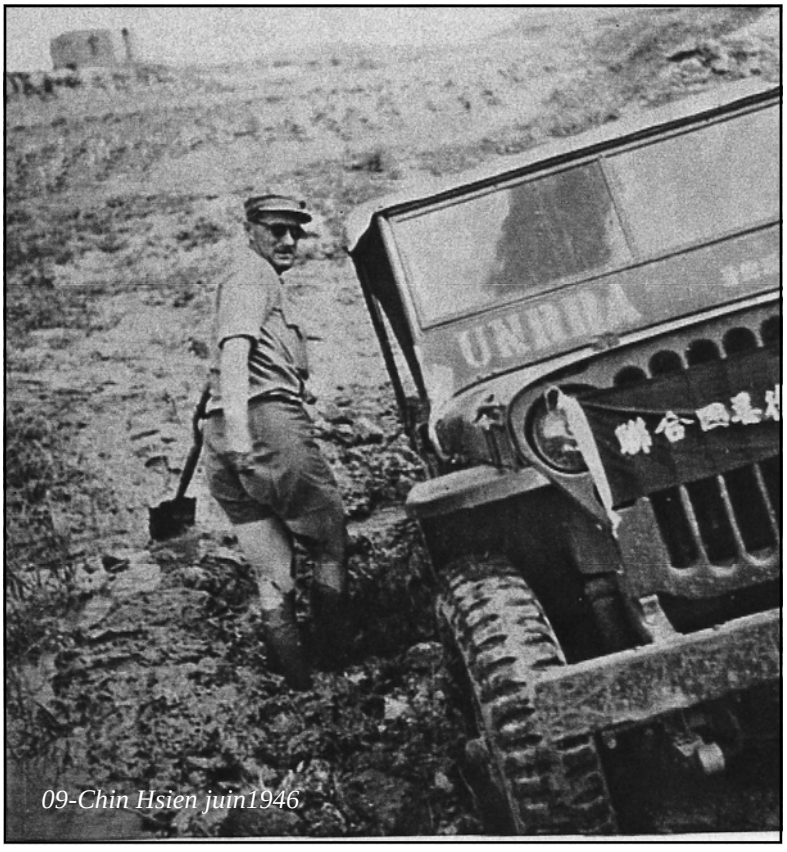
One night, one of our catechists observed our bishop coming home to the shelter of his domicile. He had dared to express his hope for a better future for his people. The next day he was assassinated. Identical dramas had become commonplace in the regions occupied by the Communists. Nevertheless, the Communists were astute enough never to arrest anyone for their convictions or their religious orientation; they always accused them of being "collaborators." That rubric covered all offenses and sufficed to evoke the death penalty without need for any other due process, as long as the people were sufficiently aroused.

Aid Distribution and Conflict with Communists

Due to Msgr. Kramer's vigilance our jeep was not vandalized, but (alas!) the batteries were dead and there wasn't any electricity to be had in the neighborhood. We were therefore forced to hitch up a pair of donkeys to the jeep and thus make our way over hill and dale for 90 kilometers of deplorable roads. The journey required three days, not solely because of condition of the roads but also because bridges over river crossings had been flooded and weakened by the summer rains.

But our misfortunes had not ended. Knowing that we were under the protection of higher echelons, the Communists along the route decided to target a Christian we had hired to help with the transportation of the supplies. Following a detailed and illegal search he was arrested as a collaborator, an oppressor of the people and a fugitive. Despite our protests he was imprisoned for an entire month.

As soon as we arrived at Luan we notified the higher authorities of the facts of the case, and they launched numerous attempts to free him. In the meantime, more charges had accumulated against him, and contradictions surfaced regarding the procedure to transfer him to Luan. The affair ended tragically. The Communists had realized their error, and no doubt were afraid of possible disciplinary measures. The day he was to be freed we were advised of his so-called suicide by means of American matches! After all the problems we had already encountered, this turn of events

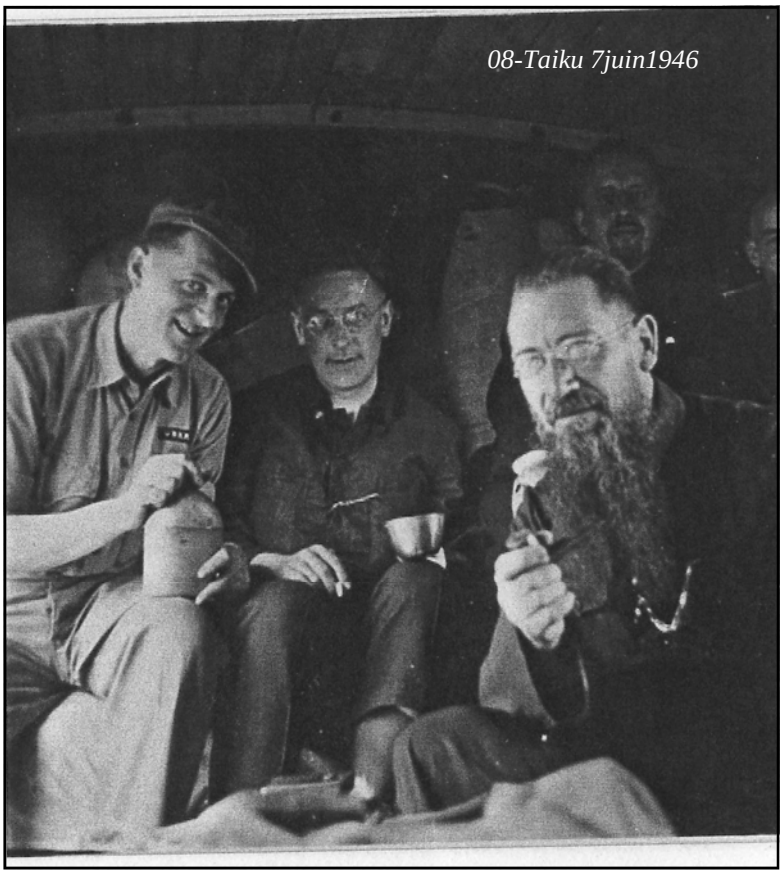


09-Chin Hsien juin1946

was the last straw, and we went to Hantan for the sole purpose of lodging a complaint with the government leaders, who promised an inquiry.

At Luan, our first encounters with the members of CLARA (the Communist aid organization which was supposed to help us and collaborate with us) were quite difficult and unsuccessful. Obviously, we had arrived too early for them; they would have preferred to see us arrive after our supplies had been unloaded and distributed to the villages. Our premature arrival upset their plans, and they were not inclined to help us accomplish our mission. We had to work patiently for three weeks attempting to make progress with them. Finally, thanks to orders they received from the government, they got in line with our efforts.

We had arranged to introduce the bishop of Luan and three priests into the UNRRA team. They would thus be able to contribute to the aid operations and, above all, resume contact with and help their Christians. The Communists had no intention of cooperating in that endeavor and, insidiously, boycotted the work and resumed their campaign of denigrating the Church. Christian leaders were arrested as collaborators. Some were fined, and others were imprisoned. Some were killed. The doors and windows of the churches were torn out to block the return of the priests. Christians were denied entrance to town on Sundays. During our stay in town there was even a large public judgment against our Church. On that day, every last Communist propagandist and student was ordered to gather in the court of the seminary. For three hours or more the bishop and his priests stood facing the seated populace and heard themselves accused of the worst sorts of villainy (tearing the hearts out of patients, plucking the eyes out of infants to make medicines to be sold for a rich price to poor Chinese, violation of farm women, theft from the temples, and other ignominies of the same ilk). The entire affair had been carefully prepared to drive home the point that their presence was unwelcome. The fine that was assessed had been determined in advance; it amounted to 50 million Yuan.

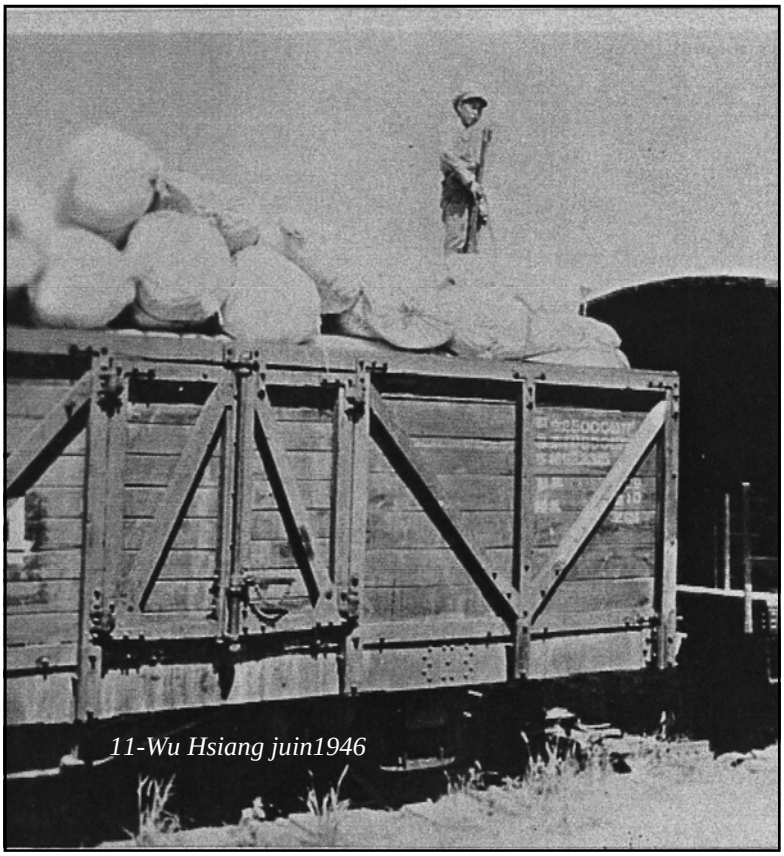


The next morning, the bishop and the priests, deeply discouraged, agreed to give up all their possessions, understanding that it was impossible to keep anything from the mob. But the Communists wanted money, and refused to settle for buildings and land. After much back and forth, I paid a personal visit to the mayor, accompanied by the head of CLARA. I invoked our friendship, because, as the UNRRA inspector, I was ineligible to take part in the negotiations. Out of respect for our friendship, the mayor promised to meet with the representatives of the people and to reduce the fine to 16 million Yuan, with the possibility of payment in kind. That concession had apparently been foreseen, as the Communists knew the parties were too far apart, and were looking for an opportunity or pretext to demonstrate their magnanimity. Finally, the affair was brought to a conclusion with the priests thanking the Communists for having so generously consented to take the goods and furnishings of the Church, their lands and other objects of value, asking in addition pro-

Luan, August 1946 …
… a visit from he C.L.A.R.A. organization ...

tection for the hospital, the convent and the orphanage – all still functioning under the direction of valiant Chinese sisters. Under such conditions, and for the good of the Christians – for whom only a hidden Christian life was possible – it was necessary, against their will, that the bishop and priests return with us to Nationalist territory, as their personal security was also at risk.

And so, with pressure from the Communist government – which was well aware of the difficulties we had suffered and wanted us to forget about them as soon as possible – we left Luan on September 24 with the jeep in good repair. The bulk of our contingent left the night before via donkey carts. But the road was so bad that it took us two days to travel the 200 kilometers to Hantan in the south of Hopeh Province. I had never in my life traveled on such a road, chock full of extremely steep hills and slopes, and one that could only be traversed by jeep. As for the rivers, they were filled with round boulders which gave us problems. Twice we had



11-Wu Hsiang juin1946

to resort to boats to get across.

Despite our desire to avoid delay, we were obligated to remain in Hantan for three days, welcomed as Communist princes by the government which was eager to have us forget our bad experiences, offering apology after apology. We took advantage of the situation to object to their violation of the agreement signed in March, and to demand an amendment to the two clauses that forced us to take responsibility for transport in their territory and to abide by their code. The latter point was the most important, as it was impossible for us to obey, as it stipulated that the judgment of the people was the best means to relieve oppression and establish a true democracy.

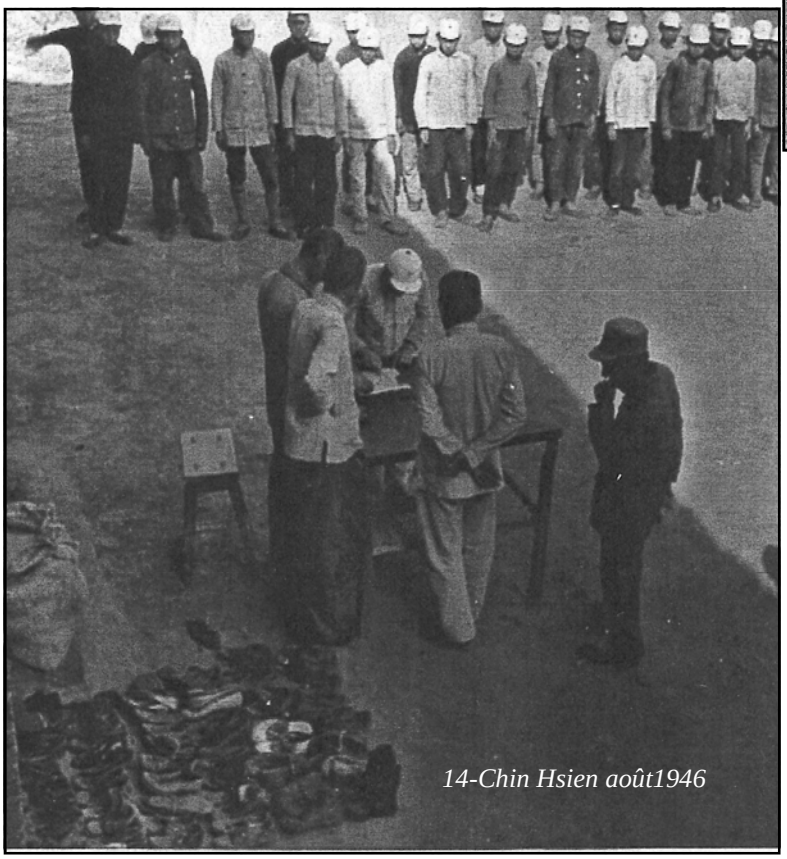
After multiple negotiation sessions in the course of which the Communists accepted all the concessions we required, we left their capitol, which the Nationalists occupied just three days later. The administrative offices had already been removed to neighboring villages for fear of bombardment. They had therefore been eager to have us leave. That afternoon we made 175 kilometers in one stretch, which was “very good going” in China. That evening we were at last in the open air of Nationalist territory at Shih Chuang. What we read in the newspapers there greatly surprised us. Over the last few months the press in the Communist territory said nothing of the advances the Nationalists had made. We knew nothing of the liberation of Sui Yuan, of the attack on Kalgan and of the progress in Honan and Shantung provinces. Nevertheless, the Communist counter-attacks prevented us from continuing our journey for several days, until October 4, to be exact, at which time we loaded our jeep on a flat car pulled by our train to Taiyan, which we reached that same evening.

WITNESS TO THE FIRE OF FAITH (August 19, 1946)

The apostolic vicariate of Luan, in southeast Shansi Province, was writing one of the most beautiful chapters in the story of the perseverance of Chinese Catholics in the face of Communist persecution. Over the past year the mission had been completely occupied by the Reds, who had established their administration, their schools and their systems of propaganda in all the towns and villages. One after another the priests had to flee, some of them after suffering a long imprisonment, others having had to pay fantastic fines for imaginary offenses. In six months the mission was deprived of its Chinese clergy who were hounded and watched wherever they went. They took temporary refuge among the Christians, but it was impossible for them to stay. Despite all manner of attacks designed to stamp out their faith, the Christians continued to demonstrate their pride in being sons of the most powerful king of all.

In one extremely strong Christian community, fervent and well-populated, the authorities attempted to suppress all religious gatherings for prayer or celebration. But the Christians refused to accept the interdiction and, by virtue of the principal of religious liberty in a government of the people, they declared (among other things) that the entire group would protest the molestation of any single Christian among them. The Communists then decided that on certain days they would

sleep in the church to keep the Christians from holding evening prayers. But the Christians met outside the front doors of the church, and sang their hymns at the top of their voices. On the feast of the Blessed Sacrament, without a priest and in spite of the interdict, they refused to give up their annual procession and instead promenaded their sacred images with great pomp and devotion through the village streets. On the feast of the Assumption many of them had their rosaries and prayer books confiscated, or were taken to prison for

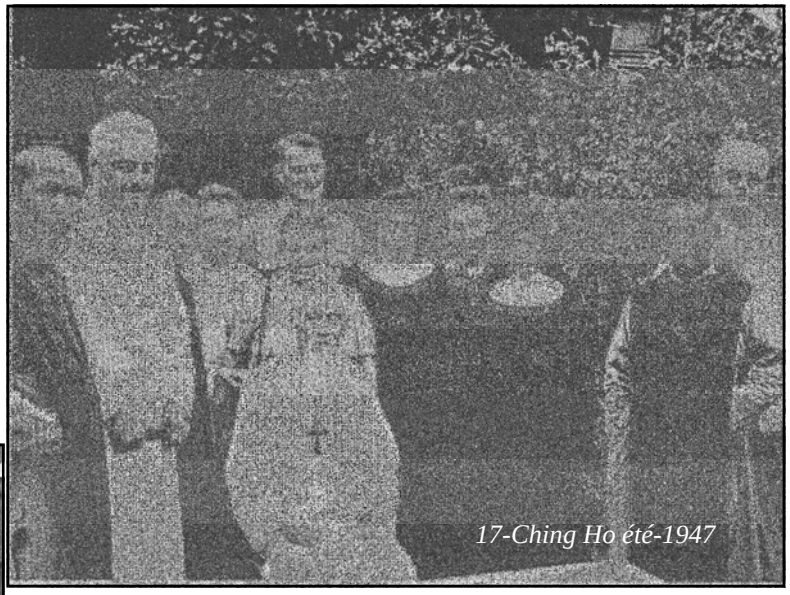


14-Chin Hsien août1946

having prayed too openly.

But the most beautiful event reported to us was the celebration of the Assumption in the cathedral. As a result of our efforts several European missionaries were permitted to return to the central city in Luan with authorization to live there. On the evening of August 14, several thousand Christians from neighboring districts arrived to take part in the celebration. They were required to obtain passports, but difficult as it was, that formality did not diminish their ardor. Nevertheless, there were villagers who had requested passes to attend the celebration who were forbidden from traveling. In other villages or districts the presiding authorities simply eliminated all authorizations. In one community near Luan Christians were told they would be beaten if they went to the city.

At 9 p.m. police came to find out what it was that brought so many people to the Cathedral. They were told that the people came for a variety of reasons, among them to attend the ceremonies. The police then started examining their passes and prolonged their inspection of the premises until 3 a.m., after which they



17-Ching Ho été-1947

retired, taking with them the papers of 50 men and 30 women. Despite those annoyances and red tape, the morning celebration was unforgettable in its simplicity, and the devotion and attendance of the people. Almost a thousand communion hosts were distributed, after which the people dispersed. Those whose papers had been confiscated were locked up for half an hour before being released.

The Mission of Hungtung

When I first came to Hungtung in August 1939, the jurisdiction was an apostolic prefecture, and was not elevated to the status of a diocese until 1951, when the apostolic prefect was ordained a bishop. In 1946, the mission had been occupied by the Communists in the months of March and April, but without suffering great harm. The Chinese priests and my two Belgian colleagues, Father Keymolen and Father Wenders, came through safe and sound, without too much material loss. The Reds took their money, but did not pillage the house. Nevertheless, that temporary occupation did nothing to improve communication.

The Reds destroyed almost 200 kilometers of railroad tracks at a time when the territory was being reoccupied by the Nationalist troops. The Nationalists were more disciplined and organized than the provincial troops of Yen Hsi Shan, who were often disorderly. Monsignor Kramer, a friend of mine, was bishop of Luan, a diocese to the east of Hungtung that was occupied by the Communists. He told me confidentially that he prayed daily that Generalissimo Chiang Kai Chek would not give the order for a cease-fire because he would have a better chance of returning to his diocese if the Nationalists took over.

It was 350 kilometers from Taiyuan, the main city of the province, where I lived, to Hungtung. Before the arrival of the Communists we could make the trip in six hours. But starting in the summer the Communists,

who came from Yennan in Shensi province, their bastion for 10 years, came to Shansi. They occupied the center of the province, wanting to keep open the west to east route. To facilitate these comings and goings they built a bridge over the Fen River, but cut the railroad track from north to south.

That posed a problem for travel from Taiyuan, as one now had to go first to Peking and make a big loop before arriving at Hungtung. Getting there by airplane was possible only with the help of American officers working in the pacification teams led by General George C. Marshall. I had asked one of them to take some correspondence and money to our apostolic prefect there.

My beloved mission had suffered greatly from the Communist occupation that summer of 1947. There were no killings to mourn, but the annoyances and red tape went on ceaselessly. The Communists became more and more anti-Christian.

In the neighboring provinces, in Swantse, Mongolia, for example, a battalion of Communist soldiers attacked the oldest mission there on December 10, 1946. They killed all the Christians who had defended the mission which the Communists razed. The old bishop, Monsignor Desmedt, who had been imprisoned the year before and now was living in Peking, maintained a courageous stand and declared, "We will rebuild."

In Shunteh, in south Hopeh province, where the Polish Lazarist Fathers had developed a magnificent mission the previous 10 years, everything was still going well when I visited there in March 1946. But I have since learned that all the priests and religious were thrown into prison. It is said that the procurator (director) was burned to death. The report of these events was brought to Peking by Father Scuniewicz, the celebrated ophthalmologist, who made the journey by bicycle in small stages.

News from a Nationalist source reported that at Hantan, which I had visited twice the year before, and at Taming in the south of Hopeh, Christians had been declared outlaws, and their homes were ordered to be burned. I think that the Church is in its last days in territory occupied by the Communists. Shouldn't we mount a crusade against them?

Our own Hungtung mission finds itself in the middle of this stew. With some 30 priests the presiding prelate, the Pro-prefect Monsignor Francois Han, is attempting to continue a form of apostolic work. In the city or its environs the basic endeavors continue: the regional major seminary, thanks to the effective efforts of Father Wenders and Father Keymolen; the minor seminary in a temporary building in town; a middle school; a small convent of sisters with a novitiate for future sisters; a dispensary where Father Keymolen performs marvels; also an elementary school outside of town. All of that has held up well in the face of all that has happened. After eight years of war and Japanese occupation we could have hoped for a time of peaceful rebuilding; but alas! Several months of peace in 1946 were followed by bloody battles and seven weeks of Communist occupation.

The major seminary, the middle school and the parochial school, restarted in 1946, made it through the Communist ordeal. Fortunately, the occupation coincided with school vacations, so classes had not yet begun. It required all the forbearance of the staff, and especially of the rector, Father Wenders, to keep the Communists at a distance and get them to respect the bit of privacy that the seminarians required. During the occupation Father Wenders spent the majority of his time living, eating, studying and praying with his seminarians in just one room, thus minimizing the danger of a permanent intrusion.

One seminarian, who had returned to his parents' home in the mountains to the east during the vacation period, was seized by the Communists, accused of being a spy for the (Nationalist) government. He was stripped of his clothing and dragged, naked, on his back by a draft animal. He suffered his torment until his father promised never to send him back to the seminary.

Father Andre Ly, who was at the Episcopal residence when the Communists entered the town, was called out for investigation in the midst of a group of Christians. As he had worked for the Nationalist army during the war – which was a crime in the eyes of the Communists – he was seized with fear and fainted when he heard his name called out. Fortunately his companions had the presence of mind to let it be known that he had been ill for a long time. Thus, after a few days, he was able to escape and reach safety in Linfen.

Father Benoit Ly, a brave pastor of our eastern Christians – fervent mountain dwellers – also caused us grave concern, as we heard rumors and reports one after another of his imprisonment, his torture, his death and finally, his liberation. In fact, he had been with his Christian parishioners the entire time, despite the dangers.

Upon their arrival in town, the Communists – who had spies everywhere – soon learned that the mission had buried what little Nationalist currency it had in the vegetable garden. As the Communists had their own currency for the region, they considered the Nationalist currency illegal for all who lacked special permission to own it. The last fiscal resources of the mission were therefore confiscated. By good fortune I was working in the southeast in Communist territory at the time, trying to restore a group of Dutch Franciscan fathers and their bishop to their mission. Having caught wind of the con-

fiscation, I was able to send the mission some Communist currency that I had procured on the black market in exchange for letters of credit, and that money enabled the mission to sustain itself for several weeks.

During their occupation, the Communists forced 10,000 peasants of the region to work without pay to destroy the walls of the city, the railroad tracks and the bridges along the provincial roads. The seminary had to shelter more than 1,000 of those who were working under forced labor conditions.

In the eastern section of our mission under Communist occupation, the parishes that had been left intact in the past were subjected to total pillaging, occasionally including such things as doors and windows. All this was done under the false pretense of repaying past debts, or on the no less odious pretext that the mission had trafficked with the Japanese. On the latter subject, I recall a recent incident at a mission in Hopeh province where, during the Japanese occupation, the foreign missionaries had helped many soldiers of the Communist guerillas to escape the grasp of the Japanese. That mission had to undergo the process of making "restitution" imposed on all influential groups or individuals, once the Communists felt themselves to be strong enough. During the proceedings the mission was accused of dealing with the enemy, using as evidence that they were able to help the Communists escape due to their good relationship with the Japanese. Those poor missionaries were now in Communist prison.

At the beginning of October Nationalist troops from Linfen advancing north to Huohsien liberated our mission and ended the nightmare. But after that it was the west that had to suffer. The church in Hsihsien, the only church building that survived the Japanese occupation intact, and several others in the western mountains, were occupied by the Communists who, fearing an attack from the southeast by Nationalist forces, chose to take up positions in advance by occupying several mountain villages. The four priests residing in that district hadn't yet been able to contact us. We hoped they were still at liberty. At that juncture Father Mattias Keou returned from his eastern parish at Ma-Chia-Chieh. He was able to escape in time, but lost all his parish assets and personal effects.

The economic well-being of our mission was in a precarious state as prices, which had remained reasonably stable during the better part of the war, had shot skyward during 1946, doing their part to make of China one of the most expensive countries in the world, and I think that Shansi was one of the provinces where the cost of living was most expensive.

While economic transactions were extremely difficult, bank transfers were even more so. I had nevertheless been able to transport to Hungtung half of the annual subsidy from Rome in two big suitcases full of paper money. The mission will therefore pay its most pressing debts and improve their status, which until now had been very poor. Despite the temperature of 10 degrees below zero (centigrade), the stoves had not yet been fired up, and the seminarians had to content themselves with a diet composed mainly of corn. Their health and that of our priests had suffered greatly as a consequence.

Shansi in 1948

To understand what was going on it is necessary to have a general idea of the political and military situation.

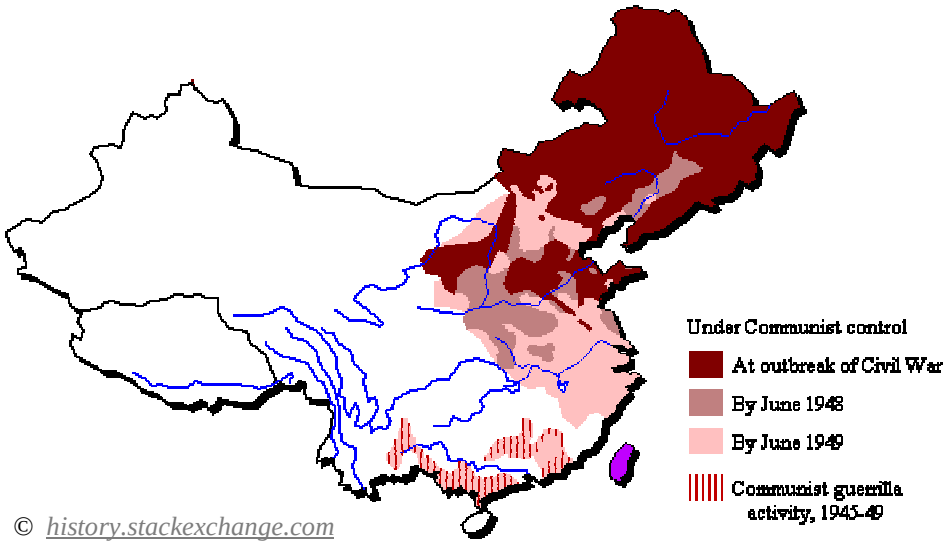
Military speaking, we were in the presence of three armies. In the center, and slightly to the south, occupying a territory of five or six million people, is the provincial army of about 300,000 men in the pay of the last Chinese warlord, Yen Si Shan. An absolute dictator, he rules his people with an iron hand, leading them firmly to their death or to communism. Governor for 30 years, he has under his orders a council of thirteen who have to obey him without question, as he does not allow contradiction. Curiously, however, he is extremely hospitable, and attaches great importance to outside opinions, especially those of foreigners.

Three or four organizations permit him to exercise tight control on every one of his subjects, and political deviation is usually punished by death. Previously, following the Chinese custom, executions were conducted outside the south gate, but now, to make more of an impression, they are staged in the provincial stadium, just next door to our offices, providing us from time to time with macabre spectacles.

The male population aged 18 to 40 must enroll under his military flag but, alas, military training is practically non-existent. Recruits are given a rifle and a few grenades and on they go to the front. The central government provides the soldiers' pay through the governor who distributes it in dribs and drabs with various deductions here and there with the result that the troops receive less than half of what the central army soldiers get. The male population having fled the territory, we are headed forward a famine in the spring. Prices are already double those of the south of the province.

To the south, with a bridgehead leaning toward a juncture with the provincial group, lie the armies of Hu Tsung Nan, one of the better young generals of the Nationalist government. The troops are well trained and evidence a positive morale. They are not numerous enough, however, to do more than to occupy their cur-

rent territory, the Prefecture of Kiang-chow (Monsignor Pessers) and a stretch along the north-south railway across our Prefecture (diocese). Their occupation ends at the very north of our mission, cut off from the provincial army by the Communists.



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The Communists occupy all the mountains to the east and west of the province, along the provincial river, the Fen Ho. As they control the granaries of Shansi, their life is not difficult. But they lack textiles and medicines. Their troops are very militant, audacious and well-led, but totally lacking in moral code. All the young people from age 16 to age 40 must belong to the militia or the civil guards. Officials at all levels, from the smallest village to the inter-provincial government, are proven Communists who strictly obey the orders from Yenan (which in fact come from Moscow). Individual liberty is non-existent, everything is organized, regimented, decided in advance by the "brains" of the party.

The people are obliged to arrive promptly for all general assemblies, where decisions have been made in advance. A semblance of parliamentary procedure is conducted to approve the party's decisions. When the government finally occupies these mountainous regions the only way to liberate the population will be to displace all the officials.

The political situation fairly well reflects the military life. Taxes are extremely heavy. There is no commerce within the province or across provincial borders except for the south under the Nationalist military regime. There are no commercial transactions between the Communist zone and the other (Nationalist). The civil administration everywhere is under the rule of the military and it is often difficult to distinguish between the two. It's fortunate for the south which, thanks to the Nationalists, has seen a reduction of the harmful influence of the provincial government, for its part always officially under the orders of Governor Yen Si Shan.

What does the future have in store for us?

It appears that this year will be even more painful for North China than the years of Japanese occupation. Fighting is in full swing, and in the last two weeks more than 15,000 have been killed in the center of this province alone. The fact that the Church has held on despite such torment is a providential miracle. The Christians of the Communist regions have been subjected to the yoke, forced to observe their Christianity in hiding or to flee. Many have taken refuge in the towns along the north-south route where the nationalist or provincial troops are most numerous. But they swell the ranks of refugees and unemployed.

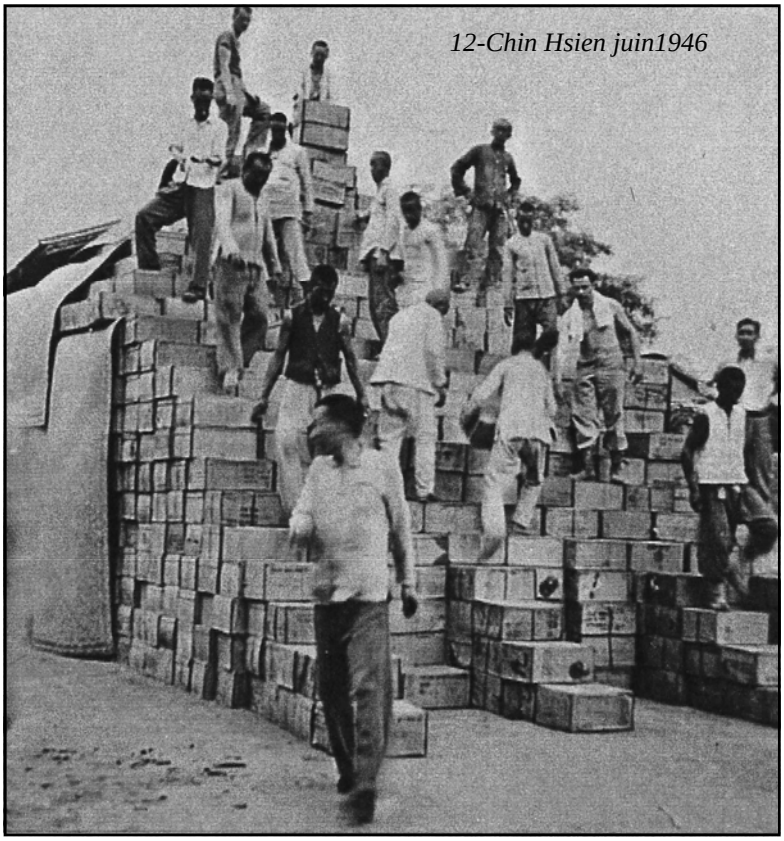
The Moscow meeting in March will deal with the problem, we think, as after all nationalist China has the support of the United States, and if General George C. Marshall has officially decided to withdraw the American troops stationed in the port cities it's above all to have a free hand when he goes to Moscow.

Finally, let me report on two conversations I have had with generals who have influence with the government. Several weeks ago in Peiping (Beijing), a top-notch philosopher presented the internal problem of China as follows: On the one hand Communism full of hatred, on the other hand a scornful Kuomintang. What to do? The response was on point: The solution lay with a third party which would bring love and agreement based firmly in trust and honesty. The other conversation, here in Shansi, was between an eminent provincial head of government and a representative of the Nationalist forces. The latter made an appeal for unity in order to save the Kuomintang Party. The provincial head replied that it was no longer a question of saving the Kuomintang but of saving all who were not followers of Communism, that's what was in play. It is in taking sides with that response that I express the hope that China and the world will understand the problem with equal acuity.

Voyage to Chagar and Suiyuan

As I had been charged with seeing that the distribution of UNRRA goods went smoothly in the northern provinces of China, I had to do my best to make sure our supplies actually reached those who needed them most.

Our stock of flour held great importance, and served



12-Chin Hsien juin1946

in general as a means of exchange to pay poor Chinese for their labor on public projects such as repairing roadways and constructing guard rails, etc. These bags of flour, alas, represented a temptation for those who noticed our stores. Thus it was that I had to look into the disappearance of 60,000 bags of flour in the Tientsin region worth thousands of yuan. The employee who had arranged the sale had feathered his own nest in the transaction, and had already been incarcerated as the sale was supposed to have been done in public and was to have been supervised by our staff.

I left Peking (Beijing) on Nov. 10, 1946, and headed by jeep toward Kalgan in the northwest province of Chagar, accompanied by my Chinese counterpart. Along the way we chatted, which gave me the opportunity to fill him in on some interesting ideas about our missionary work in these parts. We stopped off at the Suanhua mission where I introduced him to several priests with whom he could make contact in the future. I spoke to the religious authorities about explaining to him a little more about their charitable activities in the hope that thus they could be better aided in their work.

Once arrived at Kalgan the next afternoon, we made contact with the civil authorities, all of whom were disposed to help us. As was often the case, the authorities who expected much from us believed themselves obligated to invite us to dine. The new governor, General Fu Tsuo Yi, was very popular. He had just led a lightning campaign in Communist territories where he had retaken 18 counties in less than a month. He was an open and simple man, dressed like all of his soldiers, without any insignia. He helped and supported the work of the Church with goodwill. I had long conversations with him, and he provided us with the necessary means to launch our distribution: an office, a storehouse, a dormitory for our personnel and a residence for the foreign experts.

The local clergy also welcomed me, as did the Scheut Fathers, my good friends, who had a mission there. As they were at the forefront of social progress in Mongolia, of which Kalgan was the port of entry, I asked them to help us organize a distribution of used clothing to several thousand poor peasants in the valley that led to Siwantse, where Bishop Desmedt resided. Winter was coming. The thermometer was already falling below 10 degrees at night. The poor people had no opportunity to buy material for years, so clothing was eagerly anticipated.

The Chinese priests of the Disciples of the Lord came to see me. They hoped for our help and explained their plan to open a secondary school. They were followed by the superior of the Missionary Canonesses of St. Augustine who had just arrived from Peking and wanted to tell me about their plan to open a small hospital. She asked my advice on getting help from UNRRA.

I had to be very prudent in presenting these plans to my Chinese counterparts because for the most part they were not Christians and did not understand that I thought of nothing but helping these missionary endeavors, which were, by the way, well respected.

I left Kalgan the morning of Nov. 15, taking with me a Chinese Christian, former student at the tannery in Liege in 1920. He had a son who was a Marist Brother, and he agreed to accompany me on my trip by jeep to Kuisui in Suiyuan Province. The arrangement worked out as he needed to return to that region and, for my part, I didn't like traveling alone, thus I had a companion. The trip went without incident until toward 3 p.m. We had already come 200 kilometers, which wasn't bad given the condition of the roads and the unstable bridges. We were in an isolated and deserted region and had just cleared the mountains that separated us from Mongolia.

My jeep, which had already seen service in India and Burma, arrived in Shanghai via Chungking. Thirty thousand kilometers of bad roads had rendered its springs in a pitiful state. At 20 kilometers before the little town of Tsining, the clamp that held the spring to the chassis broke off and one of the blades of the spring ended up crosswise, impeding forward progress. We had to find peasants who had the necessary levers to put things together again so we could resume our journey at low speed and with great care. The clamp being broken, it was only the weight of the chassis that held things in place. At last, at 7 p.m., we arrived at a small inn where we spent the night.

The next day, Nov. 16, 1946, I left the jeep in the

hands of my Chinese Christian companion. He was willing to take charge of improvising the repair of the jeep. As there was no garage that could do the job, he had to assemble a mechanic, a blacksmith and two or three soldiers whom he would feed for two days to make sure the task was accomplished.

Meanwhile, I went by train to Kuisui 170 kilometers away where I was the guest of the bishop, Msgr. Morel of the Scheut Fathers. We had already met, and he promised to let me have the services of one of his priests, Father Florizoone, a native of Brussels, who accompanied me to Peking.

There, with the engineers in charge of the Irrigation Commission, we planned a construction project involving four new flood control complexes, each comprising 15 metallic sluice gates. This project would enable the irrigation of 100 million mou (approximately 16.5 million acres), and reduce from 45 to four the number of irrigation canals that are connected to the Yellow River, thus reducing the amount of erosion of the canal banks.

There is much to be done in these regions. The authorities are asking for almost half a billion yuan to repair the roads and public works buildings, and for emergency aid to the populace. The Communists left the area a short time ago, and in stopping by at the Catholic mission of Tsining we discovered the consequences of their presence: on the eve of their departure they set fire to five churches in reprisal for a defeat inflicted on them by Christian soldiers.

It seems that in Mongolia the only way the Church can avoid the misfortune such as it suffered the previous year of occupation is open warfare by Christians upon the bandit Communists.

A priest with whom I travelled to Shansi last December was forced to remain in a Christian region near Fengchen to protect the Christians and the sisters during the Communist occupation. They made his life impossible, and he underwent significant maltreatment. Last summer they kept him awake for five days, preventing him from going to bed under false pretexts. On the fourth day of his ordeal, when he had managed to lie down, a Chinese came to call him out. The good Father was so exasperated that he picked up his old slipper and rapped the man over the head. That man did not return. But two days later the priest was beaten to a pulp.

Later, after a Benediction of the Holy Sacrament, he was called to the confessional. Despite the swelling on his head, he responded to the call. There, to his great surprise, he found a penitent who had not gone to confession for 20 years, but whose heart was touched by the priest's heroic resistance toward the Communists.

Returning to Peking we made a stop at Tsining to visit Msgr. Fan, a fine figure of a Chinese bishop. His diocese was land-rich, which permitted him to render aid to eight neighboring dioceses during the war, a fine example of solidarity. In that corner of Mongolia it was easy to see the progress brought about by missionaries, as the proportion of Christians to non-Christians was much greater. The Christian villages were better maintained, better constructed, some of them even having electricity, furnished by the Church. This mission was at an altitude of 1,400 meters, and the temperature was already at minus 15 when we stopped there. The cost of coal was 140 yuan for half a kilo. It was necessary therefore to dress warmly, preferably with sheepskin.

On the pretext of improving the efficiency of the motor, a self-styled mechanic changed one of the spark plugs on my jeep, to my misfortune, as it turned out, as my fuel consumption rose to such a rate that I would not have been able to reach Kalgan. Fortunately, I was able to re-establish the status quo ante, by having the original spark plug reinserted.

Once underway it was the coupling in front of the spring that played tricks on me. We were eight kilometers from the town of Shang Yi where there was an important mission. This time we arrived on time as we managed to make the necessary repairs ourselves. By cutting the rivets and replacing them with nuts and bolts we made an emergency repair which enabled us to travel the 120 kilometers which still separated us from Kalgan. We had to reduce our speed to 20 kmh, as the road was bad.

We had to stay at Chang Pei for two days as guest of the head man, who was able to furnish us with a little gasoline. It's one of the "joys" of China not to be able to find this fuel, even in a town of 10,000 inhabitants. When we stopped at another town we were offered gasoline for $3 a gallon in American money, but we judged that too expensive. Finally an order arrived from the provincial government to facilitate our return whatever the cost. We were 16 km. from Kalgan. In the time it took to wash my hands we were reunited with my UNRRA colleagues, as I wanted to be back in Peking the next day.

On Nov. 25 we took the train for Peking. The tracks, more than 60 km of which had been destroyed by the Communists, had just been repaired, and it seemed best to take advantage of that fact. The destruction inflicted by the Reds was equally grave to that of the Russians when they evacuated Manchuria. For example, the central electrical plant of Hia Hua Yuan, which furnished the power and light to the towns and most of the coal mines of Chagar, was systematically destroyed. This plant produced 40,000 kilowatts. The Nationalist authorities hoped to restore it to one-fourth of its origi-

nal capacity. What a pity!

We were also surprised to find that the cartons of milk that we had deposited in Kalgan two months ago were for sale everywhere. The Reds, instead of taking the milk to charitable organizations, had sold it to merchants. I even saw a guard house constructed of wood from the milk cases.

I stayed two days at Peking only because I needed to return to Taiyuan to file my reports. At the airport I came upon Cardinal Tien who was going to Tsingtao. We took advantage of our meeting to converse for an hour, and he confirmed his desire to have a Samiste (Father Hanquet's Order of Priests) in his diocese.

Back to Peking

At the end of 1946 it became more and more evident that our province of Shansi and its capital of Taiyuan was about to be completely occupied by the Reds. Under these conditions it was wise to plan to move to Peking to be able to continue our work in the four northern provinces which comprised our field of operations.

Communications between Taiyuan and Peking (two days by train) were getting more and more difficult. Moreover, we could not count solely on our own transportation by air. We were at the end of the line. One of our aircraft had caught fire just as I was about to board it for one last mission in Taiyuan.

During the year 1947 our office occupied quarters rented from the Austrian embassy. I and my director, Harold Lund, rented an upper-class residence north of the Forbidden City, where we found the Chinese-style comforts to be quite agreeable after the hardships of the months in Shansi.

Until November, except for a few brief forays on missions of distribution, I devoted my time to administrative tasks. As the head of distribution for UNRRA in North China, I was given a return ticket to Europe after my two years of work. I would also receive the blessing of returning to Belgium to see my family, which I had left 10 years earlier.

Transportation by ship was hard to get, and I had to accompany a sick colleague. I was obliged to embark on Dec. 8 on the **Sir John Franklin**, a Danish cargo ship which was supposed to deliver us to Italy a month later. In reality the voyage took four months, giving me the opportunity to discover some 10 countries at leisure during the various stages of the trip.

But that's another story!

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