

BEACON IN THE DARK, PART 2

Sr. Mary Mark Mullen, CSJ

*Editor's note: In the first installment of her memoir, *Beacon in the Dark*, which was published in the fall 2017 issue of *Gathered Fragments*, Sister Mary Mark took us through the first half of her missionary experiences in Chihkiang (known as Zhijiang today), Hunan, China. Arriving in China in 1933 during years of warlords and somewhat primitive lifestyle, she ends that half with the arrival of some modern conveniences – ranging from transportation improvements, such as the advent of the bus, to entertainment improvements, such as movies and chewing gum.*

For this second half of her memoir, Sister Mary Mark takes us from those early days of modernization into the Second Sino-Japanese War, which some historians consider to be the beginning of World War II.

As Chihkiang was home to a large air base, the war became a daily part of the sisters' lives as they worked on carrying out their missionary work. Sister Mary Mark's story provides some insight into their struggles.

CHAPTER 10: SPRING IN CHINA

The haze of Chinese spring drifted up from the river, hanging in soft wisps over the rich moist earth. The trees in the mission yard were a fresh sparkling green and almost overnight, it seemed, the red earth was carpeted with grass. The fertility of the soil in China was a constant marvel to me. I sometimes thought if I planted a stick in the ground, I would wake up one morning to find it sprouting. Anything will grow in China!

In the classroom, the girls became restive. Their bright eyes turned with distaste from the black and white characters in their books to the low windows framing the enticing picture of the bright young greenness outdoors. It seemed the right time for a picnic. So, after breakfast one morning, surrounded by a happy chattering group we filed through the city gate, strolling along terraced rice fields that looked like miniature lakes reflecting the transparent blue of the sky. Thick white mist spread like a blanket over the rolling hills and under the warm sun, tiny tongues of mist curled up from the spear-like green shoots of rice.

We crossed a small brook running over muddy stones. The girls scampered back and forth, gathering clusters of the little white flowers growing along the bank. Wandering tranquilly over the hills, drinking in the soft, warm earth-scented air, we might have been a thousand miles from the noise and dirt and poverty of the city. In the peaceful stillness, the lonely raucous cry of a black-bird matched perfectly the austerity of the distant snow-capped mountains.

When Sister Catherine heard the word “picnic” mentioned, she had visualized packing rice bowls and chopsticks in baskets. She had never heard of our traveling restaurant. The owner of the restaurant was on the scene of the picnic when we arrived. His cafeteria consisted of the two boxlike containers, which he carried suspended from the ends of a crossbar. One box held a pile of



Sister Mary Mark Mullen with a young child

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

wooden dishes and a bundle of chopsticks. In the other box, the restaurateur had his supply of noodles and a mixture of ground meat seasoned with chopped peppers, ginger, and garlic. On the little stove, made from a discarded oilcan, a pot of water bubbled and hissed over the charcoal fire.

The resourceful Chinese could prepare enough food for only a few of the children at a time so two or three of them clustered around him, watching as he dropped the long strips of dough into the boiling water, eagerly waiting for their dish of noodles covered with the rich, spicy sauce. The other girls romped and played while waiting their turn. With a sharp stick, they scored off squares on a bare spot of the dusty earth, marking each square with a magical character, hopping and jumping from one to the other, just as children play anywhere in the world.

When our chef had nothing more to cook, he packed his boxes, bowed his wordless thanks, and trotted back to the city, well satisfied with his day's work. Then we gathered the scattered youngsters and left soon after, for the air was getting cold and some of the little ones were growing sleepy.

As we neared the city wall, an old farmer stopped us to ask if we would help a sick neighbor of his whom he thought had chickenpox. Leaving the girls to return with the other Sisters, I went with Sister Catherine to see the man. It was quite evident to Sister that the man's illness was more serious than chickenpox so we did what we could for him and promised to return later with medicine.

The next morning we found him lying on straw in the street. We were told that he had been put out of the room he had rented. Going to this place, we inquired about him. “Yes, it is true,” his sharp-tongued landlady informed us tartly. “His sickness is very grave. He will not get well. We could no longer endure the odor from his sores, so we asked a friend of his to take him away.” He had been refused admission to the Old Folk's Home, so they left him on the street.



We could not take him to the mission, lest we endanger the health of the orphans, so we made him as comfortable as possible on his bed of straw and went off to find a place for him. On a nearby hill, we found an abandoned fort, a little pillbox that had been vacant since the siege. It seemed just the place we needed. Here our patient would be isolated and we could care for him without exposing others to the danger of contagion. When we returned, we found our patient lying at the gate of one of the pagan temples. It then occurred to us to try and buy food for him at the temple since it was too far to carry it from the mission. Following the sound of voices, we came to a room where five pagan priests were engaged in spiritual reading. One of them put a bench outside the door for us. Another, who appeared to be the Superior, ordered the bench to be taken inside and with a grave courteous bow, he invited us to enter while we explained our errand.

The priest said he knew about the sick man at the gate and had tried to have him taken to the fort but no one would carry him because his disease was contagious. He added that he did not want him at the gate, for the odor from his sores was offensive to worshippers who came to the temple. However, he gave us fresh straw for the man's bedding and promised to provide him with food daily. He refused to accept money, saying that they were like us in the practice of charity. This led him to talking doctrine. With our limited vocabulary, it was dangerous to enter too deeply into the discussion lest we say something we did not intend. The girl, who was with us as interpreter, refused to speak in the presence of these men but after we reached home, she had the other orphans roaring with laughter at the story of the pagan priests trying to convert the Sisters.

Later that same week, we were asked to go to the country to see a family who had yellow fever. The woman who invited us offered to accompany us, since the people were her relatives. She warned us to start early in the morning as the distance was five Li (more than a mile).

The next morning she appeared quite surprised to see us at her door. She told us that she could not go with us because her son was afraid she would contract the disease. She added that it was unimportant that we go, for those people would die anyway.

A mental picture of helpless little children dying without baptism made us resolve to make every effort to reach them. At the mission, we met a Christian who knew the place and agreed to be our guide. When we reached the district we noticed the people eyed us cautiously from a safe distance. The children ran if they saw us looking at them and the bolder ones even threw stones at us.

Our escort explained to them that we had been told of the illness of a family there and had come to dispense medicine if they wished it to take it. One by one, they summoned enough courage to come near. Before long, every family in the village was represented among our patients. We found the fever patients

NAMES OF WOMEN AND MEN RELIGIOUS MENTIONED IN THESE PAGES OF *BEACON IN THE DARK* AND THEIR YEARS ON MISSION IN CHINA

Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden:

- Sister Catherine Davenport
1935 - 1941
- Sister Christina Werth
1926, 1928 - 1944
- Sister Clarissa Statmiller
1926 - 1927
- Sister Magdalena Ivan
1930 - 1944
- Sister Mary Mark Mullen
1933 - 1945, 1946 - 1948
- Sister Rosario Goss
1933 - 1945
- Sister St. Anne Callahan
1926 - 1933, 1935 - 1936

The Passionists, St. Paul of the Cross Province:

- Bishop Cuthbert O'Gara
1924 - 1953
- Father Germain Heilman
1932 - 1947
- Father Gregory McEttrick
1926 - 1940
- Father Jeremiah McNamara
1924 - 1945
- Father William Westhoven
1924 - 1953

Brief Historical Commentary on Memoir

When reading Sister Mary Mark's work, one must take into account that it is a period piece, with the terminology and a perspective reflective of how Americans thought and spoke during that period of history. Within *Beacon in the Dark*, one not only learns about missionary work in China in the 1930s and 1940s, but also about the American culture of that period.



The sisters taught embroidery as a marketable skill

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

not so numerous as we had anticipated but cases of measles were fast reaching alarming proportions.

The Chinese dread measles as we dread infantile paralysis. It proves fatal so often, due to the lack of proper care. We grew weary of listening to mothers complaining, “T’a pu k’en” (he is unwilling). The babies were unwilling to stay in bed, unwilling to eat, unwilling to take medicine and their parents gave into them. The Angel of Death did not ask whether or not they were willing to die.

Many families lost two or three children. Those who survived the measles, succumbed soon afterwards of stomatitis or pneumonia. Almost five hundred died during the epidemic. We were instrumental in saving a few whose mothers followed instructions given, but the great majority simply said, “T’a pu k’en!” We consoled ourselves with the fact that at least we were instrumental in saving many of their souls, for very few of those we saw died without baptism.

The death rate among infants is appalling. It is not at all unusual to hear a mother say she had raised only one or two out of eight or ten children. One woman told me the child in her arms was her fourteenth. I thought I misunderstood her and asked, “Did you say the fourth?” She answered, “No, I said the fourteenth.” I inquired about the others and she told me that was the only one living. Within less than a month, it too had died.

The pagan Chinese have so many superstitions that when they saw us baptizing babies, they thought we were performing some superstitious rite. On more than one occasion, mothers brought their little ones to us and asked us to Sa Tien (perform a superstitious rite common in that section of the country).

At the mission, Anne, one of our orphans, became very ill. She was delirious for days and Sister Rosario and Sister Christina alternated in watching her day and night. One night, when Sister Rosario went to relieve Sister Christina, she saw her sitting at the patient’s bedside with a huge club at her side. Sister Rosario

laughingly told her that she could be arrested on circumstantial evidence of cruelty to a delirious patient. She knew the club was to chase the rats away. These unwelcome visitors were a constant annoyance to us. Our cat had the time of his life catching many of them, but in spite of “Tom,” they ran riot and were a perpetual menace.

During the summer months, when school was over, we opened an embroidery school for women. The chief purpose was to make contacts with the pagan women and give them an opportunity of learning the Faith. Most of them became interested in Christian Doctrine and while their tireless fingers wove intricate lacy patterns on this gossamer silk, they plied us with questions.

An ancient one, her black hair rolled into a greasy topknot, fixed her bright beady eyes on me, her needle poised in mid-air, as she framed the question, “How could Lucifer and his companions commit sin when there was no devil to tempt them?”

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In spite of our care, orphan Annie’s condition continued to grow worse and death seemed imminent. Father William – following the Chinese custom – sent out and bought her coffin. It was no sooner bought, however, than little Anne began to recover and the wood of the coffin was used to make a cupboard for the children’s shoes.

After Anne’s recovery, she and a companion were busily sewing in the refectory one afternoon, when the two of them began to quarrel. I came along just in time to hear Anne shouting, “I’m going to tell Sister. You called me a devil.” The quiet voice of Magdalen answered, “You are a devil. The devil leads people into sin and you make me commit the sin of anger.” I did not need to make known my presence. Magdalen had conquered Anne who,



**Celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi, c. 1936**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

in spite of her faults, had a good heart and certainly didn't want to be classed with Satan.

In the midst of preparations for a Corpus Christi procession, Sister Rosario and I went to the store to buy silk for a canopy the girls were making. From a catalogue, we got the dimensions so we took a tape measure with us to make sure we got the correct amount of material.

The Chinese have their own system of measuring. They are trying to adopt standard weights and measures but so far, have not succeeded, at least not in our section of the country. Cloth is sold by the foot, so I asked the clerk if I could borrow a foot rule. He handed me one such as the children use in school. It was equal to about thirteen of our inches. Fortunately I asked, "Is this the one you use in measuring cloth?"

"No," was his answer and he gave me another one about an inch and a half shorter but still called a "foot" and, like the first one, divided into ten inches. When the clerk saw the German steel tape measure we had, he examined it eagerly, showing greater interest in it than in making the sale.

We needed flowers for the altar on the feast of Corpus Christi, but we had none in the mission garden. Sister Rosario knew a patient who had beautiful baby "mums" in his yard. When his wife came to the dispensary, Sister asked her if she would give us some of her chrysanthemums for the altar. Sister had Miss Hsiae – our Chinese teacher – repeat what she had requested, to make sure her Chinese would not be misunderstood. Miss Hsiae explained that we wanted long stems so we could put the flowers in vases. She even took the pagan woman to the church and showed her the altar we wished to decorate. The woman was grateful for all we had done for her husband and expressed joy that she had an opportunity to give us something in return, promising to bring the flowers without fail. She kept her promise and came to the mission on the morning of the feast day but to our great disappointment, she held a tiny bunch of chrysanthemums in her hand, while in a basket, she carried the heads of hundreds of them, plucked off so closely there wasn't a sign of a stem. We reminded her that we wanted them for the altar and those in the basket could not possibly be used. Our friend bowed and smiled affably, "These very good! Very good in tea!" That might well have been true, but at that time, I'd much rather have ice in my tea than flowers.

## CHAPTER 11: CHOLERA EPIDEMIC

The summer of 1936 was unusually hot. The city was still overcrowded with refugees from the Red invasion, and in addition, thousands of coolies had been imported for the construction of an airport about a mile from the city. The airport was badly needed for the impending war with Japan, and the coolies worked feverishly, laboriously hauling pebbles from the riverbed and struggling with the huge roller used to smooth out the runway.

This army of coolies lived in shacks grouped together in camps,

or else they occupied abandoned temples high in the hills, but their proximity taxed the resources of the city beyond the limits, and soon the fear of cholera began to be whispered about. This general concern was heightened when the city officials, aware of the unsanitary conditions, distributed copies of health rules to be observed during



**Workers constructing an airfield in China**

Source: Malcolm Leviatt Rosholt, *Days of the Ching Pao: A Photographic Record of the Flying Tigers – 14th Air Force in China in World War II* (Appleton, WI.: Rosholt House II, 1986), 40

the summer months. In them, we were warned not to eat raw fruits or vegetables, to drink only boiled water, not to allow refuse to accumulate, to swat the fly, and not to eat food that had been walked on by the feet of flies or other insects.

If the people conscientiously obeyed this last rule, they would all die of starvation, for nothing was ever screened. Another precaution was the general "Clean Up" days. Also, it became common to see people carrying fly-swatters instead of fans. But the fly-swatters and the health rules proved to be ineffectual weapons against open sewerage and over congestion. The deadly germs had already penetrated the city.

Cholera struck the airport workers first. "Ten men died at the airfield yesterday," was the message which came to us at the mission early one morning. Catholic Action began immediately.

We were not allowed to enter the field, but when the men became ill, we went to them in their shacks, temples or wherever they were lodged. Each day there were more coolies struck down. Every resource in our dispensary was used in an effort to save their lives, or to prevent the disease from spreading. For weeks before, our dispensary had displayed a sign stating that anti-cholera injections were given there, but the notice had almost gone

unheeded. Now that the Chinese saw their neighbors, apparently well in the morning, cold in death that night, they flocked to the mission.

“Ta chen! Ta chen!” (Injection! Injection!) rang through the air from the frightened Chinese. Usually from two to three hundred hypodermics were given daily, but one day, the number went over five hundred.

We made our sick calls in the morning. The rest of the day we were on call, as various families sent for Sister Catherine to help their sick ones. In the evening, when the laborers returned from work, we went out to find those who were stricken that day.

In addition to those who had cholera, there were many who imagined they had it and those nearly died of fright. One morning, shortly after midnight, the compound was awakened by someone pounding furiously on the gate and calling, “Please Sister, see a dying person.” Sister Catherine and I dressed quickly. We grabbed our lanterns and the medicine kit, hurrying into the night with the messenger. The blackness of Chihkiang on a moonless night is a Stygian darkness that seems to fall like a sooty hand over the entire city. It can almost be felt, closing in on the senses with the baffling sensation a sleepwalker might have, caught in a whirling, thick fog. Our only light was a feeble gleam from our lanterns as we cautiously picked our way along the broken road. There was not a sound to guide us, except the bark of a dog in the distance.

When we reached the patient, she was not even seriously ill. The poor creature had walked from the country in the intense heat. When at night she began vomiting, the family was sure she had cholera. The epidemic made us see Chihkiang as it really was, Chihkiang in all her paganism and utter lack of humanitarianism. Anyone who was not a member of the immediate family and who contracted the disease was put out of the house and forced to remain on the street until death brought relief, or the Catholic Mission took care of him. The men’s catechumenate, which was closed for the summer, was converted into a temporary hospital. Patients who came to the dispensary and were too sick to leave, as well as those found in the streets, were cared for there.

One evening, as Sister Catherine and I hurried along the road on our way to a patient, we passed a lotus pond. There was a brown object bobbing up and down in the water. We went closer to see what it was and found a cholera victim. To get relief from his raging fever, he had rolled into the pond and was drowning, while his companions stood by and laughed at him. Sister and I waded into the water and between the two of us, we managed to drag him to the bank. There, we baptized him before he died. Saddened by this evidence of cruelty, we continued on our way. Farther along the road, we saw another cholera sufferer, writhing on the ground in torment. Sister Catherine asked one of the crowd (a crowd will gather in China, no matter what the cause) to get her a cup of water. She wanted to give the sick Chinese some medicine. They got the water for Sister readily enough, complimenting her on her lack of fear in touching the patient. But they wouldn’t even give the dying man a cup of water to ease the agony of his fevered body. They had never heard of the Corporal Works of Mercy, but were



**Chinese traditional funeral garb**

Source: *The Founding of a Party*, dir. Huang Jianxin and Han Sanping (China: China Film Group, 2011), film

convinced that some supernatural power was needed to remove the evil of cholera, so they had recourse to every kind of superstition. Dragon parades were a daily happening. As the hideous monster was carried through the streets, accompanied by the clang of gongs and bursting of fireworks, the head of each family went out and reverently burned imitation money and joss sticks before it, to implore its protection.

At this time too, the Chinese built three altars. These were laden with food. Six native priests performed their strange rites there. Then, playing on flutes, they proceeded in single file to the river bank. Here again there were services supposed to give to the water the power to preserve from illness.

In the midst of this paganism, it was consoling to see the fervor of the Christians. One evening, we were at supper when Chang Ruth came into the refectory. We were surprised to see her, for her home was a day’s walk from the city. Someone asked, “Did you come to get the anti-cholera injection?” We were edified to hear her answer, “No! Many people are dying at our place, so I came to go to Confession and Holy Communion.”

Cholera raged for several weeks; then, gradually, it abated. But the toll in lives was extremely high. There were a few homes which had not felt death’s heavy hand.

Ordinarily, there is an undisturbed stillness at night in the interior of China. There are no traffic noises; no voices of crowds returning from places of amusement. There is none of that din which sometimes causes wakeful hours in the United States. During the epidemic though, the explosion of fireworks, the clash of cymbals, the blowing of clarions and the beating of drums disturbed our sleep night after night. Bonzes (Buddhist priests) were performing funeral rites for some departed soul.

The Chinese attitude toward death is curious in its incongruity. We think nothing of saying, “My mother or my father is dead.” While a well-bred Chinese will tell you, “My mother – or my father – as the case may be – is not here,” deliberately avoiding the word death as something too unpleasant to talk about. And yet, when a Chinese is dying, all the near relatives come and talk to him about

what a wonderful funeral they will have for him. The coffin is bought and the last touches put on it in plain sight of the dying person.

The women of the family sit around making mourning apparel for the rest of the family. If they were well-to-do, they will have four or five suits of silks and satins that have been worn on important occasions such as weddings, holidays, etc. These are taken out of trunks and aired. New shoes and stockings are made for the coming funeral.

I remember Sister Magdalena and me visiting a very sick young man. We had been going to see him for some time, for he was dying of tuberculosis and while we could not help him physically, Sister had instructed him and baptized him. One afternoon while we were there, he had a severe hemorrhage and a number of his relatives were there just waiting for him to die.

In the throes of his hemorrhage, they dragged him out of bed, sat him up in a chair, and began to dress him in his silk gown in anticipation of his coming death. They wanted to get him dressed before his bones stiffened, they explained. I nearly died myself when I saw them jerk him out of bed and start dressing him. There wasn't a thing we could do about it though. His soul had been taken care of, so all we could do was stand by and watch them follow this old Chinese custom. It is hardly necessary to add that he died very soon after that shake up.

There are several degrees of mourning in China: one for parents and husbands; another for brothers and sisters; and still another for uncles and aunts. A Chinese mourns for his superiors and equals in relationship, while just a very affectionate husband will don mourning for his wife's funeral. If he doesn't, no one thinks of criticizing him.

The mourning dress itself is the ugliest imaginable. It looks like a coverall with a piece attached which covers the head. This headpiece resembles a high, pointed hood and it is extremely spooky-looking. The material is unfinished, coarse goods, which looks a great deal like burlap. With this outfit on, from the back, mourners look very much like pictures one sees of the Ku Klux Klan. They even cover their shoes with white. For white is the mourning color in China. But it is the very plainness of the undyed cloth and not the color that is the chief idea of Chinese mourning.

For parents, Chinese sometimes mourn for two or two and a half years. During that time, they wear no silk and the men are expected to retire from public life for a time. The first seven weeks, no weddings take place, nor do the members of the family attend the theater. The first seven days after a husband's death, the wife and children sit on the ground and sleep on mats on the floor near the coffin. If the family happens to be wealthy, funeral rites are performed every seven days, until seven rites have been performed seven times. Children and unmarried are not entitled to funerals because they are not ancestors.

If a family has money, an astrologer is called in. It is his business to find a propitious time for the funeral day. He must also give them a time for the funeral procession to start and a time for the coffin to be lowered into its grave. It may be midnight or any time of the day or night he considers lucky. This lucky hour may

be days, weeks, months or even years later. In the meantime, the coffin is present either in the home or in a nearby temple.

Funeral notices are sent out by the family to notify relatives and friends when they can come and worship the spirit of the departed Chinese. This notice must also give the date of the deceased's birth and death and a list of his children. When a child dies, he is immediately put into a crude rough box and buried at once.

A typical Chinese funeral procession features innumerable miniature reproductions of every article necessary in Chinese life. These replicas are made of paper and bamboo and are painted all sorts of colors. They include houses, boats, sedan chairs, clothing, paper money, servants, and sometimes soldiers and policeman.

It is surprising how realistic they look. If the deceased was an officer, he must have a horse and a bodyguard in the next world. If a merchant, he must have a chief clerk and assistants. A magistrate has to have a secretary and attendants and all must have a house and a sedan chair and carriers.

These things are carried in the procession just ahead of the corpse on the day of the funeral and are given their place among the mourners, musicians, lantern bearers, pagan priests, gong ringers, etc. The paper substitutes are burned at the grave and the pagans firmly believe they take shape again and are of use to the deceased in the next world.

By contrast, the Christian funerals seem the acme of simplicity. When one of the orphans or any person in the mission died, we did the undertaker's work ourselves. The bottom of the coffin is covered with lime, then lined with white paper. When the corpse is placed in the coffin, the lid is sealed all around with white paper and is marked with a cross made from strips of white paper running the length and width of the coffin. Usually, we buried the deceased from the mission after a Requiem Mass the next day to the measured toll of the mission bell, which, especially during epidemics, had become a familiar sound. That bell had come to play a considerable part in the everyday life of the mission. It rang the hours for Mass, it pealed joyously on the happy days of weddings, and it tolled the dead to their last requiem. But the day was to come and soon, when our familiar church bell was perforce to abandon its purely churchly function and go military.

The routine work of the mission had to go on, as much as the Japs would allow. We had more and more sick patients at the hospital and a greater number of people to visit in our district.

I recall visiting one of the Christian families one day and noticed a large quantity of raw meat spread out on the table, the shelves, on benches – any place where it could be placed. It seemed to be everywhere. The woman told me they had killed a water buffalo and were drying the meat. When I showed surprise that they killed a buffalo which might have been of such help with work in the fields, the woman explained, "We don't kill them unless they are sick." "But," I asked, "aren't you afraid to eat the meat if the buffalo was sick?"

"Oh, we cure them first, then kill them," she assured me airily. The woman's nonchalant attitude toward possible contaminated meat bothered me. I kept thinking about her all the way home. At the mission, it was rumored there was a Jap raid due at any



**Farmers Bank currency brought to the United States by the sisters**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

moment, so the horror of impending bombs made contaminated buffalo meat relatively unimportant.

## CHAPTER 12: SHADES OF BETSY ROSS

In February 1938, our church bell rang for the last time calling Christians to Mass. The war between China and Japan was sweeping further into the interior. The local soldiers had been called from Chihkiang to fight against the Japanese and because of the proximity of the new airfield, Chihkiang became a military objective. In lieu of sirens, the ringing of bells and the beating of gongs became warnings of air raids. Our mission bell was borrowed by the city officials to be hung in the center of the city where the four main streets met. Its voice now was to be one of warning, instead of peaceful exhortation.

In spite of the war – or perhaps because of it – Chihkiang continued to progress. In June 1938, we visited the first bank Chihkiang ever knew, the Farmers Bank of China. A real bank with soldiers on guard! It was something we had never expected to see in the city.

One morning, Sister Rosario, accompanied by one of the orphans, was on her way to the bank when the alarm sounded. A Japanese plane flew high over the city – very likely on a reconnaissance flight. Obeying instructions, Sister stood with her companion, close to the building. A soldier noticed the white of Sister’s linens and ordered her to turn her face to the wall, lest the white be seen from the plane. In spite of the seriousness of the situation, she had to laugh, for as she told me afterwards, she felt like a naughty child in school as she followed the soldier’s orders and turned to face the wall.

That same day the American Embassy notified Father William that all American property must be plainly marked with American flags. Father hurried over to the convent to see if the Sisters could make one. Naturally, we assured him we could so directly after lunch, Sister Rosario and I went to the store and bought red, white and blue material. We hurried back to the mission and began measuring the stripes and cutting the stars. It was tedious work to get each star sewed neatly and the blue cloth cut out from the other side, especially since our flag was to measure thirteen by twenty-seven and a half feet. Betsy Ross had reason to be grateful there were only thirteen stars on the flag she made.

The next morning found the sewing machine still humming when the air raid alarm sounded. Father William dashed over to the convent to see if the flag was finished and there we were, still sewing on stars! We displayed it anyway that day and that night we stayed up until it was finished.

The only means of illumination at night in the mission was from the lanterns. One of the priests, finding us in our shadowy community room, on an evening, had dubbed it “Spooky Hollow.” The weak, fitful glow from the lanterns showed as odd a picture as one could see in China. Five white robed Catholic Sisters gathered around a dining room table, their heads bent low as they strained their eyes sewing white stars on the blue field of an American flag. The weak lantern light played across the red, white and blue material, then lingered on the faces of the Sisters as they handled the cloth with the serious pride of Americans in a foreign land.

After the warning by the American Embassy, Father William had given orders that the orphans who were able to run were to leave the mission when the first alarm sounded. When the time came, Sister Rosario went with them. They fled to the hills and hid in the ravines, gullies and even between graves. No one who has not experienced it can possibly understand what it is like to be one of a frightened surging mass of humanity, running madly for a place of safety. Fear lends wings even to Chinese feet. They lunged and jostled against each other in a frantic scramble to reach the hills and safety.

The rest of us stayed at the mission to take care of the blind, the crippled, and the babies. The older girls helped us get them to the air raid shelters. A Sister was assigned to stay with each group. We waited there in the shelters, with the whimpering old women and the crying babies, for the bombs to fall. But nothing happened. Thinking the alarm was a mistake, the Sisters left the shelters and returned to the mission to see if everything was all right there. Just as we reached the door, we heard planes overhead and the sound of machine guns. We tried to persuade ourselves they were our own Chinese planes practicing. When the sounds came



**Pharmacy in the missionary dispensary**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

closer and grew louder, we hurried back to the children. As we reached the shelter, the first bombs exploded. I was with the group in the girl's school. The building had been fortified with sand bags but when the bombs struck, the whole place rocked crazily and I thought the roof was coming down around our heads. I learned later, it was just the repercussion from bombs landing on the airfield. That was the Jap's only objective that day and they scored a direct hit. Several workmen were killed and the injured were brought to our hospital.

At that time, thank God, air raid victims were few, so Sister Catherine admitted maternity cases to the hospital. These and the victims of air raids kept us busy.

Normally, one does not expect to find very humorous things happening in a hospital, but this was a Chinese hospital, in the midst of war. At dinner in the evenings when the air raid alarm was silent, Sister Catherine's funny stories were a blessed tonic for our jangled nerves and overtired bodies. One morning, Sister Catherine entered the maternity ward and instead of finding the newborn baby in its crib, she found the baby in bed with its mother and the baby's seven-year old sister curled up in the crib.

Since there were so few of us for the work which had to be done, no Sister stayed at the hospital on duty at night, unless it was absolutely necessary. A Chinese nurse was in charge at night.

A woman, who was admitted to the hospital, brought her servant with her. To while away the long hours of the night, the servant busied herself with the tasks she ordinarily would do at home. The next morning, when Sister Catherine came into the ward, a strange sight met her eyes. The room was festooned with garlands of little, fat sausages, strung like round greasy lanterns from the bed to the stove, across to the door and back to the bed – to dry! When Sister Catherine found her voice, she explained to the servant it was very unsanitary to have sausages hanging in a room where there were so many sick. As the woman hurriedly removed her sausage links, she gravely thanked Sister for having warned her in time, before the meat became contaminated.

Another of Sister Catherine's favorite stories was about the coolie who came to the dispensary, described all the symptoms of a patient and insisted that he wanted medicine for "his inside." Sister gave him some tablets. He looked at them closely, and when she handed him a glass of water and told him to swallow one, a puzzled expression crossed his usually bland face. He did as he was told, then managed to explain to Sister it was his wife who was sick. He referred to his wife as "his inside," an expression common enough, but one which Sister had not heard used. The Chinese refer to their wives as "their inside" because they manage the inside affairs of the home.

The coolie's companion complained of pains in his head. Sister gave him a capsule. He was quite mystified at first and emptied its contents into his hand. When he asked, "Shall I eat the overcoat too?"

As the Japanese penetrated farther into China, refugees continued to pour into Chihkiang, each one intent on getting as far into the



**American newspapers covered  
Madame Chiang's work with the orphans**

Source: *Enterprise Journal* (McComb, MI), July 9, 1941

interior and beyond the reach of the Japs as possible. They were a pitiful sight. Most of them had lost their property and their means of earning a living with the advent of the Japanese. The long trek from the coastal cities to the interior city of Chihkiang had wiped out whatever resources they may have had to start with. Now, they were living as beggars, in old abandoned temples or wherever they could find room. They slept on the riverbanks, in damp rice fields, between rocks high in the hills. Undernourished and exhausted, they coughed and shivered as they lay hunched up under meagre dirty coverings, trying to forget their woes in merciful sleep.

Bishop O'Gara ordered a refugee camp built in Chihkiang to take care of these unfortunates. In obedience to his wish, Father William had some long, one storied buildings erected. The walls and floors were of mud, the roofs of bark. Double-decker beds were built in rows and each family occupied and lived in the tiny space between the beds. A common kitchen was used by all.

Besides caring for these refugees, we used to go out daily to the temples and the rocks in the hills to find those who were staying their just for the night, en route to some other city. Each refugee was destined for a certain place and was obliged to go there. Their gratitude for what help we were able to give them was painful in its pathetic sincerity. We had many baptisms among them, for this kind of life was very hard, especially on the aged and the children. Most of their journeying was done on foot or in a wheelbarrow. "Mai yu pan fa" (there is no way out of it) was the cry of every refugee. It kept ringing in my ears long afterwards, the mournful wail of a frightened and bewildered people.

At this time too, we heard that Madame Chiang Kai-shek had organized a society to care for war orphans. In addition to caring for those whose parents had been killed in battle or in air raids, this





**The sisters cared for many orphans during their missionary years –  
Sisters Mary Mark Mullen, Catherine Davenport, and Magdalena Ivan with orphans, 1940**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

society sent women into homes in Hankow and other cities when they were about to fall into the hands of the Japanese. These women entreated parents to give up their children and the society would take the responsibility of keeping their youth from falling into the hands of the enemy.

Sister Christina, at the suggestion of Bishop O’Gara, wrote to Madame Chiang, offering to care for twenty-five of the war orphans. We regretted not having space to house more than that. On the first Friday of September, the orphans were at our gates. They ranged in age from six to fifteen years of age. All were dressed in overalls and white waists. Each carried a drinking cup, tooth brush, soap and towel. Some of them had a little bundle of clothes. Miss Fan, their chaperone, called the line into formation. They formed ranks silently and quickly, then turned and bowed deeply to us. Their thirteen-day trip had come to an end. Dusty and dirty, hungry and tired, their hair tousled and faces blistered from the sun, these youngsters gazed at us with an expression that made our hearts ache and tears blind our eyes.

When the excitement of arriving had subsided, the realization that she was an orphan dawned upon one little girl and she burst into tears. One by one, her companions started to sob; tears running down their dirt-streaked faces. In vain, we tried to comfort them, until an elderly Christian woman stepped up and in a tone of authority said, “Don’t cry! Everybody will laugh at you and you will have no ‘face’.” The threat of losing “face” silenced them, but the tears continued to flow. There is only one way to dry weeping Chinese eyes. We brought them into the dining room and gave them steaming bowls of rice, to which on this occasion we added two bowls of vegetables and a bowl of fish.

When their hungry appetites were satisfied, they all had a refreshing bath. Then we coaxed them into the yard. After a few rides on the swings, the sad faces brightened and shy smiles began

to turn up the corners of their mouths. One of them whispered that they would like to sing for us. If you wish to hear war songs sung with feeling, then listen to a group of war orphans.

In anticipation of some such emergency, I had stored away bolts of material for clothing and shoes. I knew the war would bring us more and more orphans so I ordered bamboo beds, wooden wash basins, tubs, unbreakable rice bowls, and chopsticks. We were accustomed to receiving four or five orphans at one time, but never before had twenty-five come to us in one group. Although we had the materials, we still had to make clothes for them all. I breathed a sigh of relief when Father William eased the situation by dispensing the children from attending church until I could get their new clothes ready for them. The older girls at the mission, as well as the Sisters, helped with the sewing and so within a week, every girl had a new uniform.

We learned gradually from the children that this particular group had all been in various Hankow institutions which were forced to close when the city was about to fall to the Japanese. Some of the youngsters were wearing medals, which led us to believe they were Catholics. When we questioned them, they said they were not. However, when they started to study doctrine and learned about the Sacrament of Baptism, five of them told Sister Magdalena they had been baptized when they were in danger of death.

A letter was sent to the Canossian Sister whose name they gave as having baptized them. On account of the war, it was months before the reply came. Sister gave the baptismal name of each child and the date of her baptism. She expressed her joy that these, her spiritual children, had come under the care of the Sisters.

Of the twenty-five, eight of the children had some schooling. Our mission school had not been registered so Bishop O’Gara said that these children, as well as our other war orphans of school age, were to attend the public school until we could take care of them

in our own school. The registration at the public school was closed but the principal, who was a very good woman, though a pagan, made a concession for our children and allowed them to come to the classes there. Later, when our own school was ready, this lady became one of our teachers.

The week before the children came, the Sisters and the girls, complying with city orders, had made sand bags for the shelters. To our own girls, the shelters had seemed like playhouses, but the girls who had been sent to us by Madame Chiang, knew from sad experience what the sand bags were for. With ears alert for the siren, they paid no attention to the ringing of bells throughout the city, until I announced “Air raid signal!” (It was only their third day with us and they had not yet learned that Chihkiang had no siren.) In an instant, every child was in the appointed place of refuge. They came to this drill with their little bundles containing all they possessed, a few ragged clothes but they guarded them as treasures.

The war continued to spew a strange assortment of people across our path, people we should never have had the opportunity of meeting otherwise. The faculty and students of the Central Political Institute took up residence in Chihkiang, having been forced to flee from Nanking on account of the approaching Japs. All of them spoke English and liked to come to the mission to practice it.

One of the boys went to the dispensary for some medicine. He seemed to have rehearsed what he was going to say and stood there reciting his symptoms as though it were a memory lesson. We wondered then what our Chinese must sound like to them.

Among the members of the faculty was a very cultured Chinese who was married to a French woman. She visited us several times and was impressed with the work we were doing among the Chinese. She could not speak English, so our conversations were carried on in Chinese and French. She spoke both languages beautifully and I was often amused by her witty observations. I could not help wondering what strange combination of circumstances had brought this beautiful woman from her home in Paris, across the world to this isolated city. From Paris to a mission in Chihkiang! Her poise and the charm of her personality would have made her as much at ease in any drawing room in the world, as she was sitting among us, laughing and chattering in our mission yard.

A bus accident brought some Protestant missionaries to us. A young man, who was accompanying them, was badly hurt. As the accident happened just outside Chihkiang, ours was the nearest hospital. The young man was brought to us and for days, in spite of our efforts, it looked as though he would die. Then slowly he began to improve. Transportation was erratic in those days, so the missionaries stayed in Chihkiang while waiting for some means of continuing their journey. They came to the hospital day after day to see their friend. When we invited them to the convent they seemed surprised, but they came, and their visits were repeated. We were the first Sisters they had ever known and they were pleasantly surprised to find that we are human after all.

After the orphans from Hankow had been with us for a couple of weeks, we were honored one evening by

a visit from a Mrs. May, who was in charge of the Children’s Department of the War Relief Work. With her was one of Madame Chiang’s secretaries. They were both very well pleased with the children whom Madame Chiang had placed in our care and they remarked how well and happy the girls looked. Shortly after their visit, Sister Christina received the following letter:

Dear Sister Christina:

.....I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the interest you and the other Sisters are taking in these little ones; and also for the marvelous work and sacrificial spirit of all the Catholic Priests and Sisters who help us in our national crisis.

Yours sincerely,

May Ling Soong Chiang  
(Madame Chiang Kai-shek)

## CHAPTER 13: A CHINESE CHRISTMAS

Christmas day dawned with the sun shining brilliantly. The sky was a clear bright blue, almost the shade of a robin’s egg. Clouds like little puffs of white cotton fluff drifted lazily, pushed by the crisp breeze, first in one direction, then in another. Somehow the weather reminded me of my first Christmas in our mission five years before.

I recalled the excited anticipation with which we decorated the church I had one of the orphan girls helping me. The men had gone to the woods for greens and returned with beautiful leaves with red berries, which looked very much like holly. I didn’t know the name of the plant in Chinese, so I told the girl, “Put these leaves in vases on the altar.” Just then, I was called to the convent. When I got back to the church, I discovered that my helper had obeyed me literally and put the leaves in the vases, but had picked off every berry.

What fun it had been getting some Christmas gift ready for each child at the mission. There had been a present for everyone. With limited funds and the inability to get exactly what we wanted in the



The church in Chihkiang decorated for Christmas

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives



**Using the kitchen was not the same as back home – Sister St. Anne Callahan at the water outside of the kitchen as she gets ready to bake bread, c. 1932**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

stores, ingenuity was highly taxed. That Christmas, there was joyful evidence that the inventive faculty of the Sisters had paid dividends in the delighted shouts of surprised and happy youngsters. The older people expressed their joy in more subdued but nonetheless effective manner. Each one bowed deeply to the Sisters when a gift was placed in his – or her – eager hands.

I remember we went to bed about eight o'clock that first Christmas Eve, tired but happy in the knowledge that we were to hear Midnight Mass and five additional Masses on Christmas day. After we had gone to bed, Father William slipped over to the children's dining room with a lovely Christmas tree all trimmed for us. Of course, there were no trimmings on it such as one finds in the States. But there were all kinds of cards, nuts, tangerines, little china doll-pins, thread and innumerable trinkets. When we returned from early Mass on Christmas morning, our surprise and delight were equal to those of any small child when he discovers that Santa Claus has come. I still have one of the cards from that first Christmas in Chihkiang.

There is very little snow in our part of China. But that day, it did snow, a light powdery whiteness that the sun melted before noon. Then, there was the Christmas dinner. It was roast goose, since meat in China is for the most part pork. They have very little beef, unless you count a tough buffalo meat, which the Chinese sometimes eat and consider a great treat. That goose! How good it was, with all the trimmings that could be had in Chihkiang. It was a day to keep in memory's book and the sunshine then was a fitting

symbol of a happy day.

But this Christmas of 1938, we dreaded the sunshine. A clear day meant air raids. Rain and fog were the best possible gifts we could receive. For on rainy days, the Japs did not come. We had Mass at five o'clock in the morning, so as not to be interrupted by an air raid. There was a good attendance at the Mass too, early as it was. Many had walked in from the country, braving the threat of Jap planes in order to hear Mass on Christmas day. Then, as soon as Mass was over, they hurried back to the country before the Japs came.

The first alarm sounded just as we sat down to breakfast. We gulped down some coffee and got the children to the hills. We planned to have our Christmas dinner in the evening, when we could eat in peace.

Father William had made arrangements for the blind and crippled women to live with Christian families in the country. But they came in for Mass and the most helpless of them asked to be allowed to remain at the mission that night. After the girls left for the hills, I went around the compound to make sure everyone was gone. Usually, I managed to catch up with the children before they reached their destination. This time, though, I discovered a cripple still in the compound. The water carrier had been hired to carry her out in case of an alarm, but he failed to come for her. I dashed out in time to see his going out the mission gate with his own baby in his arms. I asked him if he had forgotten the old woman. He told me he could not carry her. I reminded him of his promise and told him that now it was too late to get anyone else. I begged him to let me carry his baby while he took the old woman. I promised I'd go with him to find a safe place for the woman, after which he could rejoin his family. Finally, he very reluctantly agreed.

I took his solemn baby in my arms and he hoisted the woman onto his back. We left the woman with some friends in a safe spot and I gave him back his sad-eyed baby just as the urgent alarm sounded. Then I hurried off to find our children. The dust from twenty-five Chinese planes taking off from the air field blinded me as I struggled through the whirling red cloud to the hills.

When I reached the hillside, I couldn't find the orphans. Sisters Catherine and Magdalena saw the hospital patients to safety; then, they joined Sister Rosario and myself. But they had not seen the orphans either. We started out to look for them when we saw in the distance, dozens of Jap planes coming toward us. They were not in their usual V-formation, but flew in a straight line. We waited, crouched down in the gullies of the hills for hours. The planes flew across the city and dropped their bombs on the air field. Hiding there in the tall weeds, we watched the vicious fight between our planes and those of the Japs, until our eyes were blinded by the glittering reflection of the sun on the silver plane wings. Now and then the blue sky was blackened by the smoke from a plane as it went into a sickening spiral dive, plunging dizzily to earth and crashing with a horrible burst of flame. Gradually, the battle moved further across the sky and when it seemed safe to move, we started looking for the girls. We found them not far away, in a field where we had agreed to go in case of an alarm at night.

By that time, a full moon had risen and we heard the "all clear"

cal out. Father Germaine began to sing softly Silent Night, Holy Night. Our Lord had spent that Christmas night on the hillside too, because after the first city raid, Father always carried the Blessed Sacrament to the place where we went for safety.

We rounded up the children and started wearily back to the mission. It was nearly ten o'clock when we finally got home. The children had been fed in the country, so they feared better than we. Our Christmas dinner consisted of an egg sandwich, which we were almost too tired to bother eating.

Our cook, a dear old Christian woman, decided the Sisters should have cakes in the house at all times, so that when we returned from the hills after an alarm, they might tempt our appetites. Sister Rosario agreed to teach her how to make a cake. When Sister called for the eggs, the cook said, "Sister, eggs were five cents apiece today." The next item, flour, made her moan. "I could get only four pounds of flour for a dollar today. The last time, I got five pounds for a dollar."

By the time the cake was ready for the oven, the poor old soul was so worried about the cost of it, she never suggested baking another cake. We often wondered what she would have thought had she lived to see prices soar, as they did before the end of the war: eggs cost FORTY DOLLARS each, cloth cost five dollars a foot, and white stockings that in normal times can be bought in any five-and-ten cent store for twenty cents a pair, reached the exorbitant price of thirty dollars a pair. Not only was the cost prohibitive, but it was impossible to get them.

To meet this scarcity, it was decided that we open an industrial school. In it, the orphans who could not learn in school, but were capable of other work, were taught to spin thread and weave. One of the Christian women had died and her family wished to sell the loom on which she had made cloth. The mission bought it and hired a man to teach the girls to weave.

The weaver was a very old man, but he was unusually capable. He always left the mission at the first sound of the air raid alarm, but one time, unfortunately, instead of leaving the city, he went to his home. A bomb scored a direct hit there and he was killed instantly. His body was found, after the raid, with both arms and legs covered.

His widow recommended another man to take his place. I had confidence in this woman's judgement, because of her husband's ability, so I didn't inquire further about the new teacher, but engaged him for a month's trial.

From the beginning, he didn't seem to understand the work, but we tried to excuse him, thinking perhaps it was his first experience at teaching. We thought he would be all right after he got used to the job. But things went from bad to worse. He complained that this predecessor had put a curse on him and he would have to burn some false money to the dead man's spirit. Then, he said the machine must have a devil on it.

When I investigated, I found that this man had been an apprentice in one of the cotton factories in town and was dismissed because he could not learn. And here he was posing as a teacher! To save his "face," I kept him busy at other work connected with weaving until his month expired. Then I told him I'd send for him

when I needed him again. From the expression on his face, I think he understood that I had tried to save his "face" and he bowed graciously to me, left, and never made any further attempt to find employment at the mission.

## CHAPTER 14: BOMBS AND MORE BOMBS

In April 21, 1939, eighteen Jap planes raided Chihkiang, utterly destroying about one-third of the city. We had had many bombings outside the city but this was the first time the city itself was hit.



**Japanese planes like the Mitsubishi G3M  
dropped bombs on Chihkiang**

Source: "Category:Mitsubishi G3M," Wikimedia Commons, accessed September 18, 2018

When the alarm sounded, Sister Rosario took all the girls and fled to the hills. Father William and the four remaining Sisters stayed in the mission to care for the blind people, the cripples, and the babies.

In a letter written to her mother, Sister Rosario graphically described the horror of that day.

"....I shall never be able to find words to describe the pandemonium. There was something merciless in the great stream of people rushing madly through the streets in the dust and heat; swirling through the city gates in a headlong rush for shelter; something terrifying, like the Yangtze in flood.

I held the smallest girls tightly by the hand, urging them along faster, but still it took us a full half hour, running as fast as our legs could carry us, to reach a place that was not too crowded, on a hill overlooking the city.

My little ones – silent only because they were out of breath – safely hidden in the underbrush, I crouched among the thick branches of a low-hanging bush. Fighting to regain my breath, I looked down over the empty streets. I could see our American flag waving proudly over the mission and the words of the Star Spangled Banner kept getting all mixed up with my prayers.

Then the aeroplanes [*sic*] came. They swooped low like hawks, their wings glittering in the sunlight. The roar of

the engines thundered in my ears. The planes seemed to hang suspended for a moment, then all was smoke and flames, in an ever-widening path across the city.

After the bombers left, I peered anxiously through the clouds of smoke for the flag. It was gone! I saw only the flames and the black smoke-clouds climbing.

It was hours before the guards would allow us to return to the city. The misery of those hours of waiting will live with me always. Would we find anyone alive at the mission? Perhaps at that very moment the priests and Sisters were in their last agony! My Jesus, Mercy! Suppose we were homeless – what would I do with the children? Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in Thee!

I gathered the whimpering terrified children around me. Together we recited the Rosary. Their responses came haltingly, punctuated with sobs and quick-drawn breaths, as they tried to control their tears and fear.

When the ALL CLEAR sounded, we started back to the city. It was bleak with an agony of smoking black rubble. People searched the ruins of their homes hopelessly, for some lost one. The dead lay everywhere in the mangled earth.

It seemed an eternity before we reached the mission. Broken tiles, plaster and glass littered the compound, but the buildings were still standing.

I hurried to the dispensary and could not restrain the tears as Sisters Christina, Mary Mark, Magdalena, and Catherine each greeted me with a smile as she went about her work caring for the wounded who were everywhere. I never dreamed so many patients could be crowded into that four-room building. Out in the yard lay the dead and dying, while their relatives bewailed the tragic death of a loved one.....”

While Sister Rosario was running to the hills with the girls, Sister Catherine helped the cripples to an air raid shelter, Sister Magdalena led the blind to another, while I gathered all the babies together with me in a third.

Watching from my dark, little dugout hidden beneath the trees, I saw Sister Christina leave her shelter and dash across the yard, just as the bombers appeared overhead. Before I could find my voice to call her, she had disappeared into the church. The gleaming sun shone mockingly down on the cross atop the church. I breathed a prayer for Sister’s safety. The next instant, a deafening explosion shattered the air. The earth trembled under our flimsy shelter. The rumble of falling timbers and the staccato torrent of flying shrapnel and debris completely drowned the terrified screams of the babies clinging to my skirts.

A huge demolition bomb struck the post office, just two doors from the mission and the concussion tore the roof of the church away. Through the thick pall of smoke and dust, I could no longer see the church, but I heard Father William’s voice as he shouted, “Sister Christina!”

Father had gone to the bell tower and from there had seen

Sister Christina as she dashed into the church. She knelt in one of the rear pews praying and on an impulse, had moved closer to the altar, kneeling within the sanctuary.

When she heard the explosion, she lay flat on the floor against the sacristy wall, hardly daring to look as the roof crashed in directly over the pew in which she had been kneeling just a few moments before. Plaster, splintered beams, broken tile, and glass littered the church. Stunned with the realization of her miraculous escape, Sister tremblingly found her way through the sacristy door into the yard, without hearing Father William as he rushed into the ruined church through blinding smoke, calling her name. In the yard, she called out and was answered by Sister Catherine.

After waiting to see if the bombers meant to return, we all began to straggle out of our hiding places into the compound. I was dazed by the destruction all around us.

Our gatemmen made the rounds of all the buildings and returned to report that every window in the convent and the girls’ school was broken. In one of the classrooms, every board in the floor was ripped from its place, but there was not a single casualty among our mission people. “But they broke our new teapot!” the gatemman added ruefully.

The moans of the injured, outside the mission, mingled with the cries of those mourning their dead. All that afternoon and far into the night, the wounded and dying were brought to the mission for treatment on cots or on blankets in the yard.

Father Gregory had left Chihkiang for a visit to the United States and had gone just one day’s journey when he heard of the



**With frequent bombings by the Japanese, the residents of Chihkiang faced destruction of buildings**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

raid and returned “to bury you,” he said. Instead, he stayed to help us take care of the injured.

Many died that night. The next morning, as many patients as were able to be moved and had a place to go to were carried out, for we feared another raid and they did not want to be found in the city again. All day there was a constant stream of patients in and

out of the mission for treatment. The sight of the ugly ragged cuts from flying shrapnel made me heartsick. I could not even drink the cup of strong coffee someone forced into my hand.

As usual, after a heavy raid, rain followed and every building in the mission leaked. Walls and ceiling – the board ones – were repaired and the windows boarded up. As soon as the weather permitted, new tiles were laid on the roofs.

For several days thereafter, the streets looked as though it were Chinese

New Year. Every shop was closed. Scarcely a soul was seen on the desolate, torn streets. The moist, red earth was honeycombed with shell holes and gaping bomb craters. Charred stumps of broken buildings still smoldered in the brooding silence. Over and over again, I heard the story, “I ran when the siren sounded. When I returned, I had nothing but the clothes I am wearing.”

One old woman refused to leave the remains of her wrecked home. She doggedly tried to set up housekeeping again in the ruins, using a thin piece of bamboo matting for a roof.

All those who had any relatives or friends in the country went to them. The others took their children and all the earthly possessions they could carry – if they were fortunate enough to have anything left – and went to the hills early each morning, returning to their homes after dark.

For a month, we did the same. Packing a sandwich for each of our charges as well as ourselves, we roamed the hills all day long, like gypsies, until darkness allowed us to return. Soon after, even the safety of darkness was taken from us, for the Japs began bombing the city at night. One night we had two alarms, one at nine o’clock and another after midnight.

The night alarms were the most terrible horror of all: the panting, pushing crush of people in the inky black night, as they all tried to get through the city gate at once; a sudden scream as some unfortunate tripped and fell beneath the feet of the onrushing terrified mob; my fear of losing some of the children in the darkness or having them trampled upon. Such were the terrors of the night.

After that horrible night of two alarms, we packed up a few

belongings and took our girls to the refugee camp across the river. At least we would not be so likely to be killed in the stampede over the bridge when the siren sounded. There, the younger ones played while the older orphans studied or sewed. We carried the medicine kits with us and cared for any patients who came to us. It was difficult to find even the sick at home these days. Those who

were unable to walk were carried to the country. We continued to make our sick calls outside the city. Gradually, the people returned to the city and resumed their work.

Father William bought a piece of property adjoining the refugee camp. There was a Chinese shack on it. He bought another house and had it moved to the new property in sections and reassembled after it got there. We used the shack as a convent. There were no glass windows – just thin paper pasted over the lattice to serve as windows – and

the walls did not quite reach the roof. One of the mud plastered huts in the refugee camp was converted into a hospital. A mud wall separated the two houses.

The former occupants had kept their water-buffalo in one of the rooms on the ground floor. Father had a board floor laid and the walls papered with thin yellow paper. Each night I fell asleep meditating on Bethlehem, for it was some days before the odor of the stable left our new home. There were many doors, so we had plenty of air but no privacy.

One night, after we had gone to bed, a man came for Sister Catherine to take care of his wife. We had been forbidden to go on any night calls because of so much banditry, so Sister asked the man to bring his wife to the hospital the next day, when she would gladly do all she could for her. The man stood on the other side of the mud wall, shouting in a squeaky, high-pitched voice, that his wife was too sick to be brought in. When Sister insisted that she could not go out at night, he accused her of lacking Christian charity. Finally, when neither his coaxing nor his threats were of any avail, he turned away in anger, shouting in English, “Damn Fool!” The rest of the conversation had been in Chinese. We heard the next day that he took his wife to the hospital in Juanling, which is at least a five hour ride from Chihkiang.

Most of the refugees in our camp needed clothes. We bought bolts of cloth and our orphans made the clothes until the girls heard unkind remarks about their sewing and were unwilling to do any more. Then we gave the material to the refugees and let them make their own clothes.



**Life on the streets of Chihkiang**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

That entire summer it seemed we did nothing but run, run, run from enemy planes. Hardly a day passed without at least one raid. We had bomb jitters for certain. One particularly heavy raid destroyed most of the buildings around our new quarters but our houses were only slightly damaged by concussion.

A temple in a field near us had been stocked with ammunition. A corner of the temple was hit and fires started. After the bombers left, we returned from our shelter and while we were all working in the hospital, we heard a terrific explosion. The fire in the temple had reached the ammunition! Nothing was left but the gate. Bullets and shrapnel rained down in our yard as we went from cot to cot, binding up cuts and treating burns. The rough wood of our temporary home was scored by vertical traces of bullets.

We had left the orphans in the adjoining yard, thinking the danger was over. I ran across to them and found them huddled together near the wall, like so many little chickens, badly frightened but unharmed.

Some days later, the Japs began dropping time bombs that might explode anywhere from six to forty-eight hours after they landed. So, there was just no relief from the tension. The danger in Chihkiang became so great that Bishop O’Gara finally ordered Sister Christina and me to take twenty-two of the smaller orphans to Kienyang. This was one of the Passionist’s missions, about thirty miles over the mountains.

It was a happy day for us when we tucked in the little ones – two in a chair – and started out, accompanied by Father Germaine. It was a sad day too, for our having to leave the other priests, Sisters and orphans behind.

When the mountain passes became very steep, our carriers asked the grown-ups to get out and walk. I did not mind the enforced mountain climbing for the day was sunny and warm. The wind, sighing through the bamboo trees and scrub oak, moved in wraith-like swirls around me. I almost forgot the horror of the past months: the sickening thump of bombs, the screams breaking the silence between raids. In the peaceful serenity of the mist-hung peaks, I felt absurdly safe.

## CHAPTER 15: HOMELESS IN CHIHKIANG

My four weeks of comparative peace in our temporary home in Kienyang were interrupted by a message saying that I was needed back at the mission. I decided that Sister Rosario would take my place at this retreat while I returned to Chihkiang, so the same chair which brought Sister Rosario to Kienyang took me back to the mission.

I had been back at the mission just about a month when in the early afternoon of September 4, 1940, the urgent alarm sounded. There was just time to get the orphans across the river to a hiding place, when we heard the bombers approaching the city.

The angry throb of the motors this time was deeper than usual, a tone of ominous significance to our ears, accustomed

as they now were to listening for the approach of enemy craft. We know what the deep notes meant. Each Jap plane was carrying a full load of bombs! As the planes came into sight, it seemed to our terrified eyes as though the sky were filled with them. We watched them dive out of the clouds and swoop low over the city, dropping their bombs like black hail. Their target was the city that day and the earth belched fire and smoke every time a bomb struck.

For three hours, we watched building after building crumble under the impact of the terrific bombing the city took. Through the blaze of fire, I could see the white inner walls of the convent instead of the grey brick on the outside, so I knew our convent had been hit. How badly, I could not tell from where I was. The whole city was ablaze from incendiary bombs. How much damage had been done to our convent? Would we be able to use it? Finally, the suspense became too much to endure. I had to know! Sister Magdalena and I with some of the older girls started across the river, back to the mission. When we reached the city, it was a mass of burning debris. We walked over mounds of stone and smoldering wood piled high as a house. Climbing and struggling, we searched for the mission. It was hard to find among the ruins. Our shoes were scorched and the hems of our habits were singed before we managed to locate what remained of our mission.

The smell of iodoform and cod liver oil indicated where the hospital had stood. The convent had received a direct hit. Half of it was gone. One wall was standing but that too looked as though it were going to collapse at any moment. The embroidery school was a mass of plaster and brick. Bits of our American flag were found among the debris. The rectory was so badly damaged from concussion, it had to be torn down. One of the walls in the mission was destroyed and another that we didn’t know existed was unearthed.

When the priests saw us coming home, they ordered us to leave immediately as they were afraid we would be trapped. Fires were making rapid headway and the whole city seemed to be a great circle of raging flame. Each girl grabbed a piece of her bedding on the way out. Sister Magdalena saw a sheet and filled it with what-



**Orphans cared for by the sisters**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

ever she happened to get her hands on. Then she hurried to the catechumenate with the girls.

When the fires had died down a little, we came back. Dazed, we wandered through the mission, hardly believing the havoc our eyes took in was real. Buildings, furniture, dishes were blown to bits. We could not get into some parts of the compound, for beams, brick and plaster barred the way. We did manage to squeeze in through a little outside kitchen and after hunting among the ruins there, we found some coffee. The lid had been blown off and the can was twisted and bent, but the coffee was still usable. We brewed some but none of us could manage to drink more than half a cup. There was complete destruction everywhere we looked.

Most of the compound wall was down, so a watchman was hired to stand guard that night. We spent the night in a room in the girls' school but no one could sleep. Strained nerves jumped and throbbed. In my ears, the awful sound of bombs crashing echoed and reverberated through the long hours of the night. I tossed restlessly hour after hour, wondering how to bring order out of the chaos around us. A nerve in my face twitched maddeningly. I knew such weariness then, as no amount of physical labor could engender. That worried me! I wondered if I were going to be ill, for I had never experienced such utter physical exhaustion before. I prayed that God would spare me from sickness just then, because there was such a lot of work to be done and my strength was needed now, as never before. I began to say the Rosary, asking the Blessed Mother to help me that night and in the days to come. While I fingered the beads of the third decade, I heard one of our girls scream in terror. Bandits! That was the first thought that leaped to my mind as I hurried to the room where the girls were sleeping.

Like so many of our fears, the threat of bandits proved this time happily unfounded. Reaction from the shock of the bombings had set in and the poor girl was just having nightmares. No wonder! Nerves can stand only so much strain and ours had been tried to the limit of their endurance that day. Finally we quieted her and I left when she started to fall asleep again, her breathing interrupted



**Sisters Rosario Goss and Magdalena Ivan, along with Miss Wang and Father William Westhoven, C.P., survey the damaged dispensary, September 1940**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

now and then by a convulsive sob.

Daylight was beginning to break when I came back to our room. With the dawn, the rain began a pelting furious downpour that drenched one completely in five minutes. The sky was a dismal grey with large threatening clouds, like huge black veils hanging massed over the mountains in the distance. Ordinarily, it would have been a depressing day. Now the rain and the black clouds were good omens to those of us at Chihkiang that day, for it meant surcease from the relentless Jap bombs.

The other Sisters were going quietly about the room, faces pale and eyes strained and circled with weariness, but each wore a calm smile as she bade me good morning. Somehow their smiles made my throat ache and I had to blink a couple of times to chase a sudden mist from my eyes. If ever I have seen courage in the midst of trial, it was that morning when my companions greeted me with a smile.

We hurried through what breakfast we were able to manage and began the work of trying to bring order out of confusion. It was almost impossible to hire workmen for many days, for everyone was busy clearing up the debris in his own home and trying to repair or rebuild it. It was many days before all the rubble in our mission was cleared away. Meanwhile, we worked as hard as we could to get some of the houses in shape for living and continuing our work.

The girls' school was converted into a convent for us. The church was the first place to be repaired of course. Until it was ready, Mass was said each day in the chapel of the house in which



we had found refuge six months of the previous year. When we vacated it, it was used as a women's catechumenate.

Bishop O'Gara visited Chihkiang to ask if the Sisters wished to move temporarily to Kaotsun, a neighboring Passionist Mission. He realized our nerves were wearing thin. With his kindly understanding, he thought we might wish to leave the mission in order to rest and recover from the shock of the many bombings to which we had been subjected. But each of the Sisters preferred to remain at her post. There was too much to be done to leave.

It was during this visit of the Bishop's that our war orphans asked his Excellency's permission to be baptized. Their request was granted. So shortly afterwards, they were baptized and confirmed. Their reception of these Sacraments had been delayed purposely, because the Children's War Relief Society still had a claim on them and it was feared after the war, they would be taken from us and placed in circumstances which would make it difficult for them to live up to their religion.

On the heels of the Bishop's visit, we celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Sister Christina's life in religion, on the October 2, 1940. Because of the war, Sister requested that there be no celebration, but we just couldn't allow that day to pass unnoticed. There had to be some festivity for such an occasion. So at six-thirty that morning, a High Mass was celebrated. Many of the Christians received Holy Communion for Sister's intention. After Mass, there were fireworks and every Christian in Chihkiang came to Sister Christina to congratulate her on reaching this great milestone in her life.

That afternoon, the children gave an entertainment for Sister. There were songs and drills done with a fervor and exactitude that was a token of their deep affection for this fine Sister. This was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Then, the native women, who were very fond of Sister Christina, asked to be allowed to prepare a Chinese banquet for her. There were just forty-eight different dishes served. We recognized the duck and chicken, because they were served whole – even the head and feet were on the dish, as is customary in China. I doubt if many of our Sisters will be able to say they had a Chinese banquet

on their Golden Jubilee.

Meanwhile, as so much of our mission had to be rebuilt, it was decided that one of the Sisters would return to the United States to explain the needs of the mission. Sister Catherine was chosen to go. Two Sisters of Charity came to the mission in Chihkiang and all three were to leave from there. Before the war, those leaving Chihkiang went by way of Juanling, down to Hankow and from there to Shanghai. But on account of the war, those places were closed to travel. The route now was Chihkiang to Hangyang, then to Kweilin. From Kweilin, they would take a plane to Hong Kong. At Hong Kong, they embarked for America.

For four days, Sister Catherine and the two Charity Sisters waited impatiently for word to leave. On the fifth day, about eleven o'clock in the morning, they received word to be at the bus station in half an hour. Sister Catherine was working in the dispensary when the word came. She hurried over to the convent, taking off her white hospital coat as she hastened, ate some lunch with the Charity Sisters, and was at the station in little more than twenty minutes.

At the station, they met a Passionist priest who was to travel to Hong Kong with them. There was just time to have their luggage examined minutely by the soldiers, their passports checked, when the mail truck started to leave. Hurriedly, their luggage was thrown into the truck and they managed to climb into the truck and sit on the luggage, which was to be their "Pullman chair" for the journey.

That same day, the travelers reached Tung Koo, about thirty miles from Chihkiang, where they spent the night. There was some talk about the truck not leaving the next day and the Sisters were worried. Because of the war, news was all bad. With each passing hour, it became more imperative to reach Hong Kong without delay.

Very early the next morning, the Charity Sisters looked out of the window of their room and saw a comfortable looking Red Cross bus in front of the hotel. Immediately, the Sisters made arrangements to continue their journey in the Red Cross bus. At first, the owner of the bus seemed reluctant to allow them to ride in it. But after much bargaining, it was finally agreed that they could continue the trip in the bus. Their luggage was transferred and they started on their way.

In the middle of the afternoon, after riding miles and miles along lonely mountain roads, the priest who was with them suddenly noticed a number of buses off to the side of the road. There were a lot of people standing nearby, just milling around. As the Sisters' bus came closer, the priest said, "Either there has been an accident or this is a holdup." They reached the spot a few minutes later. Several Chinese with machine guns stepped up to the bus and told the passengers to get out and put up their hands. This was done quickly and in fear and trembling by all on board. The bandits threw all the luggage into the road and the passengers were ordered to open each bag and suitcase.

Grinning maliciously, the bandits pawed over the contents of the Sisters' bags, taking everything that caught their fancy. Sister Catherine had a new habit she was saving to wear when the boat docked in America. She was wearing an old one, for the travelling



**Sister Christina Werth's golden jubilee, 1940**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

conditions in China in those days were not easy on clothing. One of the bandits took her new habit and started walking away with it. Sister nearly fainted. She flew after him, forgetting to be afraid in her indignation at losing her new habit. She caught up with him and begged the rascal to give it back to her. She told him it was too small to be of any use to him. After talking and arguing with him for a long time, to her surprise, he did give it back.

Then, they tried to take the Sisters' passports, but they just refused to give them up. Without passports, there was no hope of getting any farther in China. All three of the Sisters were carrying watches belonging to the other Sisters and priests at the mission to be repaired in Hong Kong. The bandits took every watch. They



**Sister Catherine Davenport in front of the mission's dispensary in Chihkiang**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

took the Sisters' shawls, even their shoes.

When their shoes and watches and shawls had been taken from them, the passengers were lined up to be searched for money. The Sisters wear two large pockets on a band on the inside of their habit. As soon as they realized their money was going to be taken from them, they left a little money in a small pocketbook where the thieves could find it and the bulk of the money, they put in one of the pockets on the band. Through a slit on the pocket opening of their habits, they managed to turn the large pockets front and back, instead of wearing them as they always did, to the left and right sides of the habit. Everyone knew the bandits were wise enough to

realize that foreigners would not be travelling without some money. With hearts thudding with dread, the Sisters stood and watched the searchers approaching them. The robbers felt around the sides of the pockets and found the money which the Sisters had purposely left there. There was much excitement and a great deal of disappointment among them at the small amount of money they found. Their leader was enraged because there was not more. He growled out an angry order to his men. With stiff faces, his underlings came to the Sisters again and took off their headdresses, hoping to find something hidden in their bonnets. But they found nothing! Puzzled, they went back to their chief and reported that fact. Meanwhile, the Sisters were still standing in line, wondering if their hiding place was going to be discovered after all. Luckily, it wasn't.

The Passionist priest had a book of checks that had been signed, the amounts to be filled in as he needed them to buy supplies for the mission. He had the presence of mind as he got out of the bus, to wrap the checkbook in a handkerchief and throw it into the ditch at the side of the road. All the bandits got from him were his overcoat and a good suit of clothes.

After the thieves had taken everything they could find, their victims were told not to move or make a sound until the signal was given. While they scrambled up a hill, one of their number covered the frightened passengers with a machine gun. As soon as the last of the gang was safely on the top of the hill, they fired shots into the air. That was the signal that the bus could start on its way.

The holdup was reported at the next town but the passengers were told that since it did not happen in that district, the police there could do nothing about it. All in all, our Sisters and the priest lost some money, watches and clothing, but their strategy saved the bulk of their passage money.

None of them realized the seriousness of the situation until afterwards. At the time, they were too intent on outwitting those fellows to stop to think they might just as easily have been killed. Somehow that never entered their heads at the time. As Sister Catherine declared with some heat afterwards, "I had been in China ten years, and this was my first experience with those much talked of bandits. And it would have to be on my way out of China too!"

## CHAPTER 16: PESTS AND PESTILENCE

While Sister Catherine and her party were undergoing the horrors of a bandit attack, we at the mission were being plagued by a different but nonetheless terrifying experience. After our convent had been destroyed, we had to use an old Chinese building for temporary sleeping quarters while our convent was being rebuilt. Like everything else in the city, this wooden building had been bombed too, but there were still parts of it which were usable. The first few nights, we slept wherever we could put a bed. Then after several days, we had one section of the floor partitioned off into four small rooms so that each Sister could have some privacy. The board partition did not quite reach the floor or the ceiling, but that

didn't matter. It was much better than being in various corners of an old building. We gave the section a thorough cleaning and moved in.

As long as the weather was cool, everything was fine and we were grateful to have this place in which to sleep. But suddenly we got a spell of very unseasonably, warm weather. We were careful to screen the beds with mosquito-netting, for there are no screens in China. When it is warm, it seems as though the darkness is a signal for myriads of every kind of flying or crawling insect to besiege the poor sleeper. The hum of whirling wings, the buzz of the angry mosquito vainly trying to penetrate the closed nettings, are all hazards, which in China one must learn to cope with, but there was one ordeal we had yet to encounter.

The horror began shortly after midnight on the second night of the hot weather. Out of the old wood, streams of bedbugs crawled, slithering under the nettings onto our mattresses, burrowing between sheets, crawling

over us there in the darkness, in a silent relentless advance. Sick with horror, I brushed them from my arms, feeling the prick and then the welt as one other drew blood. I heard one of the Sisters cry out in disgust, as she lit her lamp. No wonder! These dark red, crawling horrors were massed on the woodwork like bunches of grapes on a stem. There must have been thousands of them and, as they squirmed under the light, we could see the writhing mass on the wood, trying to evade the beam from Sister's lamp.

Tired as we were, it was impossible to sleep any more that night. There was no other place we could stay, so somehow we had to get rid of these pests. But how? We finally decided to smoke them out by burning sulphur.

The minute it was daylight, we ripped all the bedclothes from the beds and stripped the room of everything which was not infested. Sister Christina had some rock sulphur in the dispensary and she figured out how much we would need for each room. We intended to sleep on tables and chairs the next night while the bugs were being exterminated.

That whole day we spent clearing out the rooms, sealing up the windows and every crack we could find. Then, just before an early supper, we lighted the sulphur. In the first room, there was a little iron stove. We put the sulphur in a porcelain face basin and



**The sisters not only dealt with bed bugs but with other pests – Sister Magdalena Ivan folding the mosquito netting around her bed, c. 1932**

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

placed it on the stove. Since the partition did not reach the ceiling, we felt this would suffice for all the rooms. In the bottom of the basin, we had hot ashes to melt the sulphur.

Fortunately, the weather was warm enough to make sitting in the yard comfortable. From where we sat, we could see the blue flame of the burning sulphur in shadow against the window.

When it grew dark, I noticed that the flame seemed larger than it had before. Its shadows on the window became more and more elongated as I watched. I became uneasy. I slipped into the building to take a peek at the room. I opened the door a tiny bit and gasped in fright. I could see the burning sulphur dripping down onto the floor. It was so hot, the sulphur had burned a hole through the porcelain basin and the floor boards had caught fire.

I flew out of the building to tell the other Sisters. We pumped water from the well and hurried back to the burning floor. The water raised so much smoke and dust from the ashes, we could see nothing in the

room. Still, we had to get that basin out before the whole place caught fire.

With water soaked towels over our mouths and noses, we went back to get the basin. Then, our eyes got the benefit of the blinding sulphur fumes. Eyes smarting and tears streaming down our cheeks, choking and strangling, we at last got our hands on the basin. We threw it out the nearest window and then managed to reel out into the yard. We were a sight, as we gasped and panted, trying to gulp air into our tortured lungs. The sulphur fumes made one of the Sisters ill and having to sleep that night on a table only added to her discomfort.

When we were able to see again and some of the smoke had been expelled from our lungs, the thought of the Bishop's reaction to our attempts at extermination made me laugh, in spite of my tiredness and the queasy feeling in my stomach. I could just hear Bishop O'Gara say, "Well, what the Japs don't do, the Sisters themselves will." Thank God, he never learned anything about that exciting night. And we never saw another bedbug in the place from that day on.

After that bout with the pests, I was better able to appreciate Yang Steve's estimate of a Jap raid. It seems that Yang Steve and some of his friends were sitting on the hillside waiting for the "all

clear” to sound. They city had been heavily raided by Jap planes and the boys were looking down on the bombed-out buildings. They were discussing the damage done to the city and their homes.

“They did a lot of damage,” said Steve. “But they did a good thing too.”

“What was the good thing?” asked his friends in surprise.

“Well,” Steve answered, “I figure there must have been over fifty or sixty bushels of bedbugs burst up in the fires after that last raid.”

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Sister Magdalena had never quite recovered from an illness of the previous summer. The constant air raids had worked additional havoc on her overstrained nervous system. It seemed best for Sister to return to America. She left soon after the fire in our temporary house, with several Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, who were returning to Canada.

Just shortly after Sister Magdalena left, we were threatened with famine. The weather that summer had been so hot and the rain so scarce, the rice fields were dried up. The price of rice soared to such exorbitant sums, few people could afford to buy it. Novenas of Masses and other prayers were offered by the Christians, begging God to send rain. The pagans proclaimed a fast, and no fish, meat or eggs were sold for five days. The south gate of the city was closed to keep out the hot air in the hope that rain would fall. Whether this had anything to do with bringing rain or not, I don’t know, but it rained all right. There were torrents of it! So much so as to produce a flood. The river rose until it was a foot below the floor of the bridge. The people of Chihkiang boasted that the bridge was protected by a stone cow, which stood in the river near the bridge. Floods had never washed it away. Reds and bandits had tried in vain to destroy it. When Jap bombs dropped all around it and did not hit the cow, the people were confirmed in their belief in the stone cow.

In many places, the city wall had been hollowed out for air raid shelters. This weakened the wall in one place and the constant heavy rain caused it to collapse. With its collapse, four houses were pushed into the river. With the houses went furniture, animals, coffins, and even some people. A group of men stood on the bridge trying frantically to rescue those who floated along.

One man in the water was holding onto a large basket filled with bolts of cloth. The basket was pulling him under, but he clung to it nevertheless. The men threw a pole to him, shouting for him to hang onto it. He grabbed the pole but refused to drop his basket. They told him he was too heavy to pull up with the basket of wet cloth. Gasping, he managed to tell them that his wife and family were depending on him. If he lost this basket of cloth, they would have no means of making a living. Then, as though the effort of explaining his action had sapped his last strength, he let go of the pole and went down with his basket of cloth.

China has suffered so much from floods, the Dragon Feast [Dragon Boat Festival] has become one of the big feast days in their year. It is on the fifth day of the fifth month, so they call it



Sister Magdalena Ivan (second from the left) returned to the U.S. with Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

the DOUBLE FIFTH feast. Similarly, they call the anniversary of their Republic, which falls on the tenth day of the tenth month, the DOUBLE TENTH.

The Dragon Feast is based on an old legend. Many, many years ago, there was a terrible flood and the water remained at flood level for days. The people believed there was a dragon down under the water, which was pushing the water higher and higher. In order to placate this monster, they made little three-cornered cakes from ground rice. They wrapped them in leaves that look very much like our corn husks, only smoother. The cakes are steamed in the leaf, then tied on a long blade of grass. They are sweetened with a little brown sugar and they look like cream of wheat that has been cooked very thick and then left to congeal. Well, these cakes are thrown into the water to the dragon. A short time afterward, the water began to abate. So they believe the dragon liked the cakes and stopped pushing up the water.

The custom of throwing cakes to the dragon prevails to this day. On the feast day there are boat races and the boats are shaped like dragons. Prizes are given to the winner. Crowds of people stand around on the bridge and the river bank, waiting for the races. Everybody is dressed in his or her very best and brightest colors. They munch away at the rice cakes all day long and think they are having a grand time. But feasts and floods were wiped out of their minds with the news which startled the world on the December 8, 1941.

Our retreat closed on the evening of December 7. The next morning just after we returned from Mass, Miss Welch was waiting at the convent to see us. We were very much surprised to find her there at such an early hour and wondered what could be the reason for her call. She had visited us frequently and we always enjoyed her company, but now we were apprehensive. She did not keep us

waiting long for an explanation.

She had her radio on for the early morning news and learned that PEARL HARBOR HAD BEEN BOMBED. She knew we would be at church then and would not have heard the broadcast.

Sister Christina hurried over to tell the priests, who immediately tuned in on their radio. For the rest of the day, we listened anxiously for the news. Our hearts were very heavy at the thought of America at war. We knew what it was like! In the rain of bombs falling about us, to know that America was at peace had been heartening. Now she too was caught in the great conflagration.

For the Chinese, December 8 was a day for rejoicing. Their one and only thought was expressed by a coolie who came to the mission yard that same afternoon. "Now," he exulted, "America will have to enter the war and help us fight the Japs.

CHAPTER 17: GIS PLAY SANTA CLAUS

In the spring after the bombing of Pearl Harbor an AVG man was sent to set up a radio station in Chihkiang. He was a tall, heavy-set man, with a hearty sense of humor. Standing beside the little Chinese, he looked immense. The natives seemed to think if he were a specimen of the American Army, the war would be over in no time at all.

His was the first jeep to stand at the mission gate, but it was by no means the last. Soon afterwards, our American boys became a welcome and familiar sight in the streets of Chihkiang. Members of the 14th Air Force and the 10th Weather Squadron came and remained until the end of the war. They were all fine boys and we were very proud of them. They lived at the hostel in the city but spent much of their free time at the priests' house where they were always welcome.

One afternoon, Father William hurried over to the convent to ask if I would bake a pie and make a salad, as he had invited some American soldiers for dinner. It was a pleasure to do something for our boys. Sister Christina and Sister Rosario came out to the kitchen with me to help prepare apples for the pie and make the salad. After dinner, Father brought his guests over to the convent to meet us. They were pleased to find American missionaries in Chihkiang and some of them had never met nuns before. They very gallantly declared the pie was delicious; in fact, they said the entire meal was the best they had had since coming to China. In the course of the conversation, the Commanding Officer asked about the food we ate and where we got it. There were many things we had not been able to get for some time. Butter and coffee, for instance, were impossible to obtain.

The next evening, two of the boys came to

the mission. Sister Christina and I were in the yard at the time and they stopped to talk for a few minutes, before going to the priests' house. One of them pulled a can of butter out of his pocket, saying with a broad grin, "The General sent this to the Sisters!" The other boy produced a tin of coffee saying that was from the rest of the men.

We were most grateful and I promised to send a note of thanks. The lad who had given us the butter repeated with a sly grin, "Remember, Sister, the butter is from the General."

The following morning, I wrote my "thank you" note and asked Father William to have it delivered at the hostel. When Father saw the envelope addressed to the General, he laughed heartily, explaining that there was no General there, just a Commanding Officer. When I saw our prankish friend the next time, I took him to task about his little joke. He very sheepishly explained, "Oh well, Sister, he is sort of a General – a general nuisance!"

There were times when the boys did not have enough work to keep them busy so they offered to do anything they could to help around the mission. One of them repaired all of our watches. We had not been able to have anything like that done for a long time and it was uncertain how much longer it might be before the watches could be put in repair. Two others put an extension of Father William's radio in the convent and supplied us with earphones. It was wonderful to hear the words "This news is coming to you from the United States, San Francisco, California."

After the American fighter planes landed on the Chihkiang airfield, the Japs were afraid to come by day, so they confined their visits to nights. A raid at any time is a terrifying thing but when it is accompanied by an air battle and that at night, one is forced to realize that one's only hope of survival is in God's hands.

The Japanese announced over the radio that they were going



Flying Tigers work on their planes in Kuming, Yunnan, China

Source: "Home," National Museum of the USAF, accessed September 18, 2018, <https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Upcoming/Photos/igphoto/2000573474/>

to bomb Chihkiang on July 4. They came the night before, to keep that promise. The first alarm had sounded about five-thirty in the afternoon. But since it was raining, we thought it unnecessary to take the children out. The enemy planes would hardly come that night. But when the URGENT sounded and we heard the American planes take off, we knew it was too late to run.

The Jap planes came in flying low over the mission. We dashed into the house and flung ourselves on the floor – children and Sisters huddled together close to the wall. Anti-aircraft guns started their RAT TAT TAT and so low were the planes that we could hear distinctly the bullets striking the wings. Great searchlights stabbed the darkness with long penetrating rays, illuminating the sky with the brightness of day. The dogfight between our planes and those of the Japs began with a pushing, furious attack. We watched and prayed.

We used to count the planes as they left the field on a mission and send a prayer heavenward for their safe return. Then as they came straggling back, we would recount them and when one of them failed to return, it was almost like a death in the family.

One of the American aces who came to visit the mission quite frequently made a point of asking the prayers of the Sisters. “The Chief,” he was called, and I never knew him by any other name. He was an American Indian; tall, rangy, and bronzed with straight black hair and high cheekbones that bespoke his ancestry. His great-grandfather was a full blooded Sioux.

“The Chief” was not a Christian; in fact, he vehemently declared that he was “nothing,” but he was very earnest as he said, “When you see my planes go out over the convent, Sisters, give me a serious thought.” He was squadron-leader and took his responsibilities very seriously. After painstakingly explaining to me just what being a squadron-leader meant, he concluded by gravely stating, “When I waggle my wings and my boys don’t follow, well, when I get back, they get a serious talking to.” I could well imagine!

One very successful pilot always came to Father William after completing a mission. Giving Father a Mass offering, he would say, “Please say a Mass for the Japs, Father. I just had to kill some more.”

The boys liked to come to the convent to talk with the Sisters and invariably they talked about their dear ones at home. Snapshots were produced from grimy wallets, pictures of their mothers and their best girls. One apple-cheeked youngster coaxed Sister Christina into the yard to have a snapshot taken with him. “I want to send it to the folks at home, Sister. Then my mother will know I’m in good company,” he laughingly explained, as Sister took off her apron and smoothed out her skirt for the picture.

Sergeant “Slim,” a great lanky boy from Maryland, loved chocolate fudge. He would come ambling through the mission yard with a package of sugar and cocoa tucked under one arm and a can of milk in the other and wait around while Sister Christina made the



**Joshua “The Chief” Sanford,
one of the Air Force men known to the sisters**

Source: Rosholt, *Days of the Ching Pao*, 64

fudge, all the while regaling us with funny stories about the “gang” back home.

The soldiers were impressed with the work we were doing for the “poor little orphan kids” and wanted to know what they could do to help. At Christmas time, they left a huge box on the dining room table. It was filled with chewing gum, magazines, books, gloves, and handkerchiefs – anything they could get at the PX. Things that had been sent to them from home were there too: candy, coffee, soap, Dutch Cleanser, Brillo pads, butter, Ivory Flakes, even vigil lights.

Our orphans were delighted and very eager to reciprocate. They were busy as bees, making all kinds of souvenirs the boys wanted to send home: silk scarfs and Chinese shoes – embroidered silk ones. The girls were pleased to know that their work was being sent to America.

One group of men from the Air Force brought in a discarded parachute they wished to have made into souvenirs. The girls raveled out the fine silk threads painstakingly and made socks, but the socks were not so beautiful because there were too many knots in the thread. That same silk was probably produced by silkworms in China, woven in America, and made into parachutes. It saved American lives in China and was ripped apart by Chinese orphans and American Sisters and made into souvenirs to be taken back to America.

Many of the GIs wanted jade bracelets to take home. Real jade is not easy to find for there are so many imitations. One of the mission women knew of a family who might be persuaded to sell some jade bracelets to the soldiers. At the GIs urging, she brought the jade to them for inspection and it was beautiful, perfect jade. Those same bracelets had a history. The family was in straitened circumstances and when they heard of the demand for real jade, they exhumed the body of their grandfather and removed his valuable bracelets to sell to the Americans.

A quality we came to know and admire in these boys was their esprit de corps. In one instance we knew about, after the explosion of an oxygen tank which had been struck by an enemy bullet, the order was given to bail out. One of the crew was so badly injured he could not bail out, so his companions elected to stay with him. Thank God their guardian angels were on the job and they all landed safely.

We could not help contrasting their loyalty with the lack of it shown to the many dying Chinese soldiers we had seen along the roadside, men left there to die because they were too badly hurt to go on. We saw ample proof of the tremendous loyalty, courage, faith and charity of our American boys and consider it a privilege to have known them.

Another of the soldiers who became a general favorite at the mission was Sgt. J.W. Schwarz of the 10th weather Squadron. He came from Cleveland, Ohio, and was one of the finest lads we knew. With characteristic American resourcefulness, he decided to supplement the scanty fare at the hostel with fresh vegetables from his

own garden. He wrote to his best girl and with the seeds she sent him, he started a victory garden on a little plot of ground outside the city gate. When he was not busy with his weather instruments and charts, he watered and tended his corn, beans, cucumbers and beets under the blazing China sun and the choicest products from his garden he brought to the mission. I am sure Sergeant Schwarz would have been amazed had he ever known I considered him an instrument of Divine Providence. But I did! For his supplementing our vegetables at the mission with his garden fare was most opportune. For just at this time the Vincentian Sisters of Charity came to us.

They were from Hungary and had to evacuate their own mission in Paotsing the day before the Japs took that city. These five Hungarian Sisters were unable to return to their county nor could they get passports to America, so they had no place to go. They requested that they be allowed to remain in our mission. Certainly

they were more than welcome and their help was invaluable to us in caring for the sick and wounded who continued to come to our dispensary. We made the Sisters as comfortable as possible in our patched up convent. The chapel, which had not been used since the convent had been bombed, was arranged as a dormitory and the room beneath it was used for our community room. In spite of the horrors of night raids, there was this much to say for them:

they didn't interfere with our work during the day, although we weren't quite so fit after a sleepless night, to carry on our duties toward the children and the sick.

A tiny baby was left at the mission one night after an alarm. Five year old Lucy – the daughter of one of the men who worked around the mission – found it at the gate. Lucy carried it in to me, asking if she could keep it. The infant was wrapped in a piece of soiled, charred rag. Upon closer examination, I recognized the cloth to be the starry field of our American flag that had been destroyed in one of the bombings.

We tried to continue our work as usual, only sometimes classes had to be dismissed early because the children were falling asleep at their desks on account of the previous

night's raid. Considering the situation in Chihkiang at that time, it was no surprise to us to receive word from Bishop O'Gara that the aged and the sick missionaries were to return to America at once. Sister Christina was seventy and her nerves could not stand the strain much longer. So she left Chihkiang in an army transport plane and finally reached the United States in a troop ship.

Conditions finally became so bad, word came from the American Consul that all American civilians must leave the country at once. With the order to evacuate came the problem of placing the orphans in good care. First the little children were sent to Koatsun, where there was another Passionist mission, and where it was hoped they would be safe from the war.

Because the little tots were gone, there was an empty, lonely silence around the mission now. A few of the children's swings, which the Jap bombs had missed, swayed disconsolately in the wind as though bewildered at their abandonment by the eager little



Some of the children cared for by the sisters

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

figures who had filled them so joyously before. A seesaw, one end ripped off, stuck up in the air, just as though it were waiting expectantly to be used once more by the chubby tots who had laughed and fought to have the first ride on its smooth wooden seat on a bright summer morning. There was no childish laughter now, shrilling excitedly in the compound yard, nor was there need for me to wipe the tears from angry baby eyes over the quarrels children will have while playing one of their imaginative, important games. The children were gone and every post and stone in the yard seemed aware of the void they had left.

Then Sister Rosario and I took the older girls to Yungtui, a Passionist mission in the northern part of the Vicariate, where arrangements were made to place them with Christian families in the neighborhood. The American boys came to our assistance in conveying us to Yungtui. They took us there in a weapons carrier! With our cooking utensils and wash basins wrapped in our bedding, we clambered into the high body of the machine and set out. Sitting on our bedrolls, we bounced over the war-torn road – I who had once found riding in my brother Joe's Model T Ford not quite to my liking!

And what a dignified entrance I made into Yungtui! When the truck stopped before the mission gate, our bedrolls were placed on the ground, so that we might use them to step down from the high tailboard. As I stepped down on my bedroll, my foot touched the round rim of the wash basin, landing me flat in the dusty road. Before anyone could come to my assistance, the shock to my pride put me back on my feet with no more injury than dusty skirts and ruffled dignity.

We were in Yungtui but one week when a most disheartening message arrived from Bishop O'Gara. We were to start back to America at once, by whatever means of transportation we could get.

CHAPTER 18: THROUGH CHINA'S BACK DOOR

My twelve years in China had not been easy years. Hardships of every kind had been just part of the daily living there, something that was taken for granted as part of the work. Floods, famine, pestilence, fleeing from the Reds, and hiding in terror from Jap bombs had been hard. But now, I was being asked to do the most difficult thing of all – leave China and the work I loved so much.

The Japs were advancing so rapidly toward Chihkiang that we were forbidden to return there to try to get a plane. Furthermore, the Chinese army had commandeered all privately owned trucks and buses for troop movements. Thus we had a problem. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the priests from neighboring missions should join us in Yungtui and accompany us to Chungking, where we would be joined by the Sisters of Charity, being evacuated from Juanling.

By good fortune an American jeep came through one day and the Sergeant consented to take three of us as far as Hsu

San, where there was an auxiliary airbase. Father Jeremiah, Sister Rosario, and I made up the trio.

We reached Hsu San that same night and Sister Rosario and I were assigned an army tent, with a machine gun at the door. In that atmosphere we felt as though we had become a couple of WAC [Women's Army Corps], whether we wished it or not. It was cold that night, the tenth of December, and before bedtime, one of the soldiers filled a stove with charcoal which kept the tent comfortably warm until morning. In the mess hall the next morning, we had a delicious breakfast of pancakes and coffee. How good that tasted after our sleep in what was practically the open air! Breakfast over, we had another jeep ride to Lungtan. On the way, our driver told us of an experience he had, which puzzled him a lot. He was riding along a country road, when a woman, the only person ahead, as far as he could see, decided to cross the road in front of the jeep. He turned off the road and stopped the jeep, but the trailer of his jeep hit and killed the woman. Her widower assured the driver it was all right, because the devil was after her, and if the jeep hadn't got her, the devil would have. What our driver didn't understand was that it is a superstitious custom for Chinese to dash in front of a moving vehicle in the hope that if they get across safely, the devil, who is right behind them, will be killed.

We had been told there was a Catholic mission in Lungtan. When



In May 1945, there was a Japanese offensive targeting Chihkiang and a subsequent counterattack by the Chinese

Source: San Francisco Examiner, May 12, 1945



Father Jeremiah McNamara, C.P., West Hunan, China, late 1930s

Source: Passionist Historical Archives

we reached the town, Father Jeremiah went immediately to locate it. He returned after some time, to tell us that the mission consisted of one room in a Chinese house where a Chinese priest came once a month to say Mass. There was no possibility of our staying there.

The jeep driver would not recommend the hotel there, so at his suggestion, we went to the Protestant mission, from which the foreign missionaries had been evacuated just a few days before we arrived. The mission house was completely furnished and the native Chinese minister was still there with his cook. He was very gracious about our coming to him and we were grateful to spend the night in comfort.

Next morning we heard that a Chinese truck was going toward Chungking and possibly as far as the city itself. Much bargaining finally got us space on it and we continued our exit from China, sitting on our bedrolls among a few other passengers who were Chinese. The truck was a good one and the driver exceptionally careful, but a short distance from a regular wayside stopping place, he brought the truck to a halt. He explained that there were soldiers in the next town who would take the truck for their own use, if we put up there for the night, which meant, of course, that we would be stranded. Since the place where we had halted was a very tiny village, there was nowhere to stay that night. Somehow, we persuaded the driver to go on, when there was reason to believe the troops had passed on. When we reached the town however, our driver's word proved to be right. Some soldiers were still there when we drove in and they did want the truck. Our driver had been thinking fast and when the soldiers approached, he was already at work tearing down the motor. He told the soldiers the truck needed repairs and I noticed the repairs were not finished until after the

troops left the town.

We spent that night in a Catholic mission, which was under the charge of a Chinese priest. We were then travelling through Szechuan Province and it was encouraging to see how well established the Church was there. There were native priests and in some sections, native Sisterhoods. I wondered how many tales of sacrifice and heroism could be told of those who had brought Christianity to that Province. I had reason to know at first hand, the cost of spreading the Faith in Chihkiang. There was still so much to be done in our part of China, I could estimate very closely how long it had taken to establish the Church in Szechuan.

While my spirit thrilled at the strides Catholicism was making among the Chinese here, the state of my health was nothing

to rejoice about. My stomach rebelled at the food we had to eat. I never could eat Chinese food, with or without chopsticks, but from the time we left Lungtan until we reached Chungking, it was a case of either eating Chinese food, and with chopsticks at that, or not eating at all. So, for the length of the journey, I had a diet of tea. Travelling in buses and trucks, sitting on the floor chilled to the bone by icy air whistling around, with little food and less rest; that was a perfect prescription for pneumonia. So, I was glad to escape with only neuralgia.

By the time we reached the next town, the pain had become so intense as to be almost unendurable. Father Jeremiah managed to locate an old, crumbling Chinese house which must have been standing for centuries. It was dusk when we reached the place and in the half light, it looked as though it were a relic of the Ming Dynasty – remote, feudal, brooding over memories of past splendor and glories never to return. I should not have been surprised to see a ghostly figure step out of the crumbling doorway and bow before us with gracefully slender hands half hidden in the flowing sleeves of his brilliantly colored satin robe.

We found it was a mission that the soldiers had taken over for their quarters. The priest and his housekeeper seemed embarrassed at our arrival and there was much whispering between him and the housekeeper. When Father Jeremiah asked if I might have some place in which to lie down, explaining that I was suffering from neuralgia, the reason for the whispering became pathetically evident. The priest and the housekeeper occupied two rooms there. The soldiers had taken every other room in the house. The priest told us of his dilemma, every word of which, I'm certain, outraged

the innate courtesy of his Chinese soul. “If the Sisters would not mind sharing the housekeeper’s room, and Father sharing my room, I should be honored to have you as my guests.” At Father Jeremiah’s assurance that such an arrangement would be quite all right and that we would appreciate it very much, the whispering ceased and every effort was made by the kindly old man to make us comfortable.

The rest that I got that night didn’t cure the neuralgia but it did put me in good enough condition to tackle then worst stretch of the journey the next day. We had been warned that this stage would take us over the Pa Ma Shan, a mountain so high that it took a whole day to cross it. Very heavy clothing was needed because it would be bitterly cold as we neared the summit.

The weather was beautiful when we started out in the morning. It was sunny and clear, with a slight wind that was invigorating. The road up the mountain was a succession of sharp curves and at each turn the air became colder and the road icier. As we looked upward, the mountain appeared to be wrapped in blue shimmering satin, for it was all encrusted with ice, and the light reflecting off its hard glistening surface gave it a bluish tint. The truck’s motor groaned in protest as it inched its way up the dizzy height.

As we glanced down, the town we had left looked like a miniature village. I was fascinated by the views, both above and below me, but just as we neared the top, we came upon another truck with

appeared to be stalled, though it was headed downhill. It was an army truck and the Chinese officer in charge hailed us and asked to borrow the chains from our truck to help him reach the bottom of the mountain in safety. Father Jeremiah talked with him, explaining that he had chartered the truck to get two American Sisters out of the danger of falling into Japanese hands; we could not delay long enough to wait for him to go down the mountain and then send the chains back. The officer was not inclined to be gracious about Father’s refusal, and just when we thought we would be delayed after all, another truck rounded the mountain top. It was a passenger bus, so the officer ordered the driver to take off the chains. We were anxious about the occupants of the bus, since the driver decided not to wait for the return of his chains, but no doubt he had confidence in his skill.

The mountain climb was evidently too much for our truck, for the rest of the way we had to stop every half hour while the driver tinkered with the motor. But eventually, we rolled into Chungking. Once, when the truck stopped, we noticed a woman standing in front of her house. We were so cold by that time, we felt as though we would never be warm again. Sister Rosario suggested we go and talk to the woman. Perhaps she would, with Chinese politeness, invite us in to get warm. Apparently the poor woman had never seen anything like us before and wondered from what strange world we came. She was either so surprised or so frightened that she forgot her politeness. We greeted her and she mumbled something, staring as though her eyes would bulge out of her head. We asked her honorable name and she told us that. Then Sister Rosario ventured, “It’s a very cold day, isn’t it?” The woman looked us over from head to feet, then snorted, “You cold! With all those clothes on you!” Since she didn’t invite us to warm ourselves at her fire, we climbed back into the truck, colder than ever.

The town that was our destination that night was so crowded with refugees pouring in from Kweiyang that it was almost impossible to find a corner to stay or a place in which to get some food. The hotel where we were to spend the night was totally unprepared for so many unexpected arrivals. In order to save his “face,” the proprietor told Father that the food was not very good and advised him to take the Sisters to another inn where the food was much better.

We started out in the darkness, carrying little paper lanterns, in which candles burned, to light the way. Like all the roads in China at night, the one we cautiously trod was inky black. Our procession of lanterns with their wavering light, reminded me of a children’s Halloween parade. As we made our way along, there appeared out of the darkness another paper lantern. By its light, we saw a fat smiling Chinese – a perfect example of bowing affability. For a moment, I thought my memory of our children’s parade was playing tricks on me. Then the man spoke to Father and he seemed much interest in our haste to reach Chungking. He insisted on walking to the inn with us, talking in his high-pitched voice about China and things Chinese. Proudly he told us that China’s culture was thousands of years old, that his ancestors were wearing silks and satins while our ancestors were scampering around half clothed, climbing trees and running around with tomahawks.



Sister Mary Mark Mullen

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

He bowed himself away and into the darkness just as we reached the inn.

The thought of food was delightful just then, for we were all famished. We entered the place, which was dark and unpleasant. The dining room was on the upper floor. Warily, we climbed the stairs to the dirtiest room I have ever seen in all my years in China. One look at the room in which we were supposed to eat took my appetite away. The floor was actually piled so high with refuse from previous meals that Sister Rosario and I had to lift our skirts to wade through the garbage in order to reach a table.

I know it is customary in China to throw bones, etc. on the floor, but these bones and the other refuse must have been there for YEARS and the smell of wine was sickening. Yet this was the only place in town where we could get something to eat; we had to make the best of it.

We sat down at a table in a corner of the room where we could face the wall. That view was less revolting than the rest of the room. We ordered tea and rice. The waiter stuck his head out of the window and shouted our order downstairs. Then he put a large teapot out the window and lowered it to the ground with a rope attached to the handle. After waiting about ten minutes, during which time he stood with the rope in his hands, staring at us, the rope was jerked, someone called out, and the teapot was hauled up through the window again. The water was scalding hot, so we used some of it to rinse out the cups and bowls placed before us. After we were certain the dishes were reasonably clean, we poured more boiling water into the cups and added the tea. The rice also was steaming hot, so we know it was safe to eat it. We did manage to swallow a little of the rice and drank several cups of the hot tea, enough to warm us a little, after the coldest ride I have ever had. I dreaded having to cross that room again and step through its filth. Sister Rosario shared my disgust, for as we were walking through the rubbish on our way out, she groaned, "Give me my tomahawk and let me get back to my ancestors."

CHAPTER 19: ENFORCED FURLOUGH

Chungking is said to have been the most heavily bombed city in the world and it had indeed been leveled almost to its rocky foundation. Usually the city is enveloped in a thick grey fog, but on the day of our arrival, a pale sun gleamed weakly over the destruction of that heroic city.

The sun and the welcome we received at the Maryknoll House made up for many of the discomforts of the trip. Here we were served a delicious lunch – the first food I had been able to enjoy for more than a week. I couldn't help thinking as I sat at the table how relative time really is. The past days had seemed so much longer in pain and discomfort than the span of time which had actually elapsed. But I was grateful to have finished this much of the journey in safety. Then too, Chungking had a special interest for Sister Rosario and I for it was here that Sister Clarissa died,

the first member of our community to give her life for China.

Sister Clarissa was one of the pioneer band of sisters who came to Chihkiang in 1926. This was the year in which Nationalist China, eager to take its place in the family of nations, had enlisted the aid of Soviet Russia and Russia, only too glad to avail herself of the opportunity to spread her doctrines, flooded the country from Canton to Peking with men and money to aid the cause of the Chinese Kuomintang. The fires of anti-foreign feeling were fanned anew and Christianity was denounced as responsible for most of China's ills. The result of this agitation was soon apparent. Missions and missionaries felt the weight of the cleverly planned campaign and many had to flee for their lives.

Our Sisters were driven into exile. Hiding from the Communists by day and travelling by night, the Sisters were constantly in the gravest peril, and Sister Clarissa – never over strong – began to show the effects of the hardships she had to endure.

The last part of their flight to the safety of Shanghai was undertaken in the extreme heat of June. Torrential rains alternated with blazing heat. Mountains high enough to tax the endurance of professional climbers, total lack of drinking water, meagre and unpalatable food, these were just some of the trials to be endured by the delicate Sister Clarissa, who by that time was so weak and ill, she had to be carried in a sedan chair, jolted and flung side to side as the sweating coolies panted their way over the mountains. There was scorching, blistering heat everywhere and every rock and stone was a red hot furnace.

Burning with fever, without even tepid water to relieve her thirst, what words are there to describe Sister Clarissa's suffering! When the coolies stopped at the mountain's top for a little rest, Sister pleaded for water, if only to moisten her lips. But there was none to give her.

Barely conscious, Sister was brought to the hospital in Chungking. Here with every facility at hand, it was hoped her life could be saved. For a while, she showed some improvement then came a turn for the worse. Day after day, she tossed in delirium, even then not complaining, until God in His Mercy ended her suffering. Shortly after midnight, July 21, 1927, far from her native land, Sister Clarissa died.

Father Jeremiah took us to the hospital where Sister Clarissa died but none of the Sisters there could give us any information concerning the whereabouts of her grave. While we were waiting in Chungking for transportation, we went to visit a native community of Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Their foundress was once a pagan nun who had been converted to Christianity when she was eighteen years old. She had been chosen by the Bishop as Superior of the new community when she was thirty-three. When we met her, she was in her seventies. She must have been very beautiful when she was young because, even at seventy, there was a clear shining radiance in her face and a quiet depth of wisdom, which made her an unforgettable character.

During the conversation, we spoke of our first band of Sisters having been in Chungking eighteen years before. We told the Superior that one of our number had died there and we had been trying in vain to find her grave. We knew she had been buried in



Sister Clarissa Stattmiller (right) with Sister St. Anne Callahan, Passionist Fathers Paul Ubinger, Cormac Shanahan, and Miles McCarthy, in Chihkiang, 1926

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

the same cemetery as the deceased Franciscan Missionaries of Mary but when the new auto road was built, the graves had to be moved. When she heard the story, the face of the Superior lit up. She exclaimed, “Why that is the Sister who is buried in our cemetery! We often wondered who she was.” Then, she told us that after the remains of the Franciscan Sisters had been moved, their chaplain saw our Sister’s grave still there. He took pity on her and had her remains moved to their own cemetery.

So, Father Jeremiah, who had been in the party of refugees in 1927 when Sister Clarissa died, came with Sister Rosario and me to look for the grave. The chaplain, who had ordered Sister’s body moved had drawn a diagram of the cemetery and marked the location of Sister’s grave. We found it just as he had described – at the foot of a large stone cross. Beside her were buried thirty Chinese Sisters. The soldiers had removed the markers from most of the graves because they needed a stone. We wondered why they took all the stones and left the large cross. The Superior told us the soldiers were superstitious about touching it.

Father Jeremiah blessed the grave while we recited some prayers for this Sister of ours who had died so far away from her own country. Now that we knew where Sister’s grave was, Father Jeremiah assured us that he would have a tombstone placed there to identify Sister’s last resting place.

As it turned out, our visit with these Sisters of the Sacred Heart lasted two weeks and we spent most of the time teaching them some English. They were very grateful to us, but I think we learned as much Chinese from them as they learned English from us. The lessons were interrupted by word that we could get pas-

sage from Chungking to Kunming on an Army transport plane.

It took only a few hours to reach Kunming and our stopover there was very brief; just long enough to transfer to a plane of the Chinese National Air Company for the next lap of our journey, the treacherous route over the “Hump” to Calcutta. The CNAC [Chinese National Aviation Corporation] had bragged they had never lost a plane on this route but just two days before we left Kunming, one of their planes did go down with several Protestant Missionaries on board. We left before any definite word was received as to survivors. Realizing that we were going to fly this same route at the worst time of the year, when visibility is very poor and the downdrafts are most powerful, I made a fervent act of contrition just before we took off. We flew very high all the way, so that it was not possible to see much during the nine and a half hours of our trip, but now and then, in the distance, I could see the peaks of mountains, snowcapped and austere, stretching to touch the sky. This particular vista from the air was a favorite photo subject during and after the war, and it is as awe inspiring as any picture has recorded it.

We had hoped to stay with the Loretto Sisters in Calcutta, but it was almost ten-thirty when we landed. When we voiced our anxiety about being taken in at the convent at that hour, the customs officer put us immediately at ease. “The Loretto Sisters are taking in nuns at all hours of the night, Sister. So don’t you worry. I’ll go along with you and see that you get in.” He was as good as his word too and escorted us to the very door of the convent.

When we apologized to the Sister who answered our knock for coming so late, she laughed away our anxiety, assuring us that

we had arrived at a respectable hour. Most of the refugees from China usually came to them around two o'clock in the morning due to the uncertainty of plane transportation.

The mission of the Loretto Sisters was over one hundred years old. That it had flourished and grown with the years was evidenced by the fact that it lacked none of what we Americans call the necessities. Our stay there was like a stray visit to fairyland after twelve years in the interior. No child could have been more delighted with what he found in a land of make believe than we were, to see again the modern conveniences we had been without

so long. The utter luxury of a modern porcelain bathtub! Faucets of shining chrome, which at a turn poured out a cascade of hot water. Light that could be had by flicking on a switch, vivid steady light, with none of the feeble flickering glow we were used to from the smoking lamps we had put up with for so long. Mattresses with springs that gave our sleep the luxurious quality of reclining on a floating cloud. Also, it was bliss to be able to go to sleep and know that our rest would

not be disturbed by the scream of air raid sirens – there would be no terror of fleeing in the darkness from Jap bombs and the dread of being trampled upon by a panic stricken mob. There was quiet and cleanness and a peace that soothed our exhausted bodies and strained nerves.

I shall never forget the kind hospitality of those Sisters of Loretto. We remained with them for two weeks before we were notified by the American Express Company to proceed to Bombay by train. We were travelling during war times they told us (as though we didn't know) and we were asked to make allowances for the fact that accommodations and food were not such as might be desired. The passengers were advised to provide themselves with a basket of lunch and a good supply of patience and tolerance.

The trip to Bombay took three days and nights. The cars were overcrowded but we were lucky enough to have a compartment, which we shared with two Charity Sisters. It was a good thing none of us was afflicted with claustrophobia. Even so, after the third day, we began to long for a little more space in which to move around.

The last night, I was very wakeful and sat for hours watching the darkness and listening to the roar of the train as it hurtled through the night. Sometime after midnight, the mournful shriek of the train whistle and the lessening of speed made it evident to me that we must be approaching some wayside station. The schedule which we had and which I had practically memorized

by this time did not indicate a stop there but we did come to a halt. Naturally, I wondered and I became especially curious when I heard the pounding of horses hoofs and the excited shouts of men. What all the commotion was, I could not imagine. I was not long left in any doubt. My musings were interrupted by a soft yet very insistent knocking on the door. I looked at my companions. They were sleeping soundly and the rapping on the door had not disturbed them the least bit. I opened the door cautiously and saw a tall distinguished man with the clean cut features and sensitive face of the cultured Indian. He was wearing Western clothes but

his finely shaped head was swathed in the white silk headdress common to his race. He bowed gracefully and then began to speak in a singularly pleasant voice. His English was tinged by a slight foreign accent.

"A thousand pardons, Sister, for disturbing you at this unholy hour. Only necessity could compel such intrusion. I come as a suppliant for your charity. There is not space to be had on this train and I have a new bride whom I am anxious to bring to Bombay. It is imperative that we reach there by morning.

Yours is the only compartment where I know she would be safe for the night. Would you – that is, could you – allow her and her maid to share this space?"

"But there is no space available here," I said. "The compartment is occupied by myself and three other Sisters."

"Could you not allow her to sleep on the floor? She has her own bedding and it would be for just a few hours," he persisted anxiously.

I pitied the man for I knew from his dress and his speech he was not accustomed to ask favors from anyone. I told him that his bride would be welcome to use the floor space and then I wondered what the other Sisters would think of this new exotic addition to our party.

"I shall never forget your great kindness, Sister. I and my house are forever in your debt. Thank you!" He bowed again, gravely this time, and waked rapidly away from the doorway.

Five minutes later, there came another gentle tap on the door and when I again opened it, there stood before me a picture which might have stepped out of the Arabian Nights. His bride was small, exquisitely formed, with great dark eyes and masses of blue-black hair which made her heart-shaped face seem even whiter and more delicate. Her mouth was expertly painted a vivid red and the eyes were slightly shadowed with a brown ointment to give them added depth and luster. She wore a small bandeau of silk across her chest and her pantaloons of a thin transparent



The sisters sailed to America on the MS Gripsholm

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

material like crepe de chine.

She moved into compartment with a dainty step, filling the place with a strange exotic perfume. She smiled at me and in graceful pantomime, expressed her thanks, at the same time, showing me that she could speak no English. Her hands sparkled with jewels and her bare arms were decorated with bracelets of intricate and costly design. In her small ears, jeweled earrings flashed as she directed her maid to spread out her bedding. Even the slender ankles were entwined with jeweled anklets which tinkled every time she moved. The two women whispered together as the maid got her mistress ready for bed.

I sat watching them until I fell asleep and dreamed confused dreams in which I was being smothered under a blanket of sweet smelling jewels. When I awoke in the morning, the Indian bride and her maid had vanished. On my lap was a single, long-stemmed red rose, a reminder of last night's exotic visitor, who I might otherwise have been inclined to credit to my imagination with the coming of daylight.

Arriving in Bombay, we lodged with the Franciscan Sisters of Mary and both Sister Rosario and I have much for which to thank them. But another disappointment awaited us in Bombay. We had hoped to be able to leave for America soon after our arrival there; instead, it was exactly five and a half months before we were able to sail. Day after day, through the long months, we visited the American Consul in the hope that we would get some word of our sailing date. The answer each day was a disappointing, "Not yet, Sister."

There were more than a thousand American civilians in Bombay awaiting transportation. It was jokingly spoken of as "the American Invasion of Bombay." The housing situation for nuns became more critical as more and more missionaries were forced to the seaport cities in the hope of getting back to America. Prices skyrocketed until the meagre necessities of life became almost prohibitive. Finally, when the waiting was becoming intolerable, word came that the Swedish Exchange ship, the Gripsholm, was being sent to India to carry all civilians home.

We boarded the ship on the fourth of July 1945. With us were more than eight hundred missionaries. Of this number, six were priests, one a brother, two cloistered Sisters from India, two Sister Servants of the Holy Ghost, and one Franciscan Sister. But I saw very little of my fellow passengers. My trip home was much like the trip out as I was seasick the entire voyage back to New York. I had hoped that with fine weather and a calm sea, I'd be able to enjoy the return trip. But it made not the least difference. The Atlantic proved to be as unkind as the Pacific.

However, all our trials come to an end eventually and soon I had the unforgettable experience of passing through the Narrows into the New York harbor. Though I had lived in Pennsylvania all



Over the many years of China missionary work, the sisters either brought or sent back decorative snuff bottles, which were then kept in the sisters' archives

Source: Photographed by Sister Geraldine Grandpre, Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

my life, I had never seen New York. It was a warm day in August when I first glimpsed the skyscrapers towering so proudly against the clear sky. The sun was shining and its rays touched the tops of the tall buildings with gold.

The Statue of Liberty, holding her torch aloft, had a symbolic meaning more clearly understood by me now than ever before. I had learned at first hand enough to appreciate the word LIBERTY and all it stood for. Standing at the ship's rail, I had a moment of awe because I had been lucky enough to have been born an AMERICAN.

As I walked down the gangplank, my hungry eyes spied my family impatiently outside the railing there. Twelve years had taken their toll, for as my eyes went fondly to each loved face, I knew my father and my mother would not be there. The emotion of seeing those well-loved brothers and sisters again was almost too much for one heart to stand. I couldn't speak as I felt their arms tighten around me. On their faces, joy struggled with concern – at my extreme thinness no doubt.

In the days that followed, I felt something like Rip Van Winkle after he had awakened from twenty years sleep. The speed and rush of New York, after the leisurely pace of China, bewildered me. I couldn't understand why everyone was in such a hurry. Life here flows at a much faster tempo than I had been used to in China. I found myself contrasting one custom after another here with those in China, and as the days stretched into weeks, my longing for China became more acute. The old arm of China was reaching across the miles and I kept feeling its insistent pull. A sign bearing Chinese characters or a smiling Chinese lad on his way to school, filled my heart with a nostalgic yearning for the mission and the children there.

I had circled the globe since I left America in quest of Chinese souls. In the isolated mountainous regions of Chihkiang, I found a people whose indomitable courage and indestructible spirit make me eager to work among them again, for the glory of God and the future greatness of China.

FLYING TIGERS, 'WARPHANS,' HOMEWARD BOUND: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR SISTER MARY MARK'S *BEACON IN THE DARK*, PART 2

Kathleen M. Washy

Beacon Coming into the Light

In 1920, the St. Paul of the Cross Province of the Passionist order of priests accepted missionary work in Hunan, China. Within a few years, the priests approached several communities of women religious, including



Sister Mary Mark Mullen studying Chinese from her teacher, Miss Li, 1947

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, to join them. The Sisters of St. Joseph accepted this ministry and from 1926 to 1948, a total of 15 Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden served in China. Included in this number was Sister Mary Mark Mullen, who served there from 1933 through 1948. In 1946, during a temporary respite in the United States, she wrote *Beacon in the Dark*, which is a memoir of her missionary life from 1933 through 1945. While the plan at the time was to have the work published by The Society of the Propagation of the Faith, the Society ultimately decided against the project and the work was never printed. Sister Mary Mark's hope for the memoir's publication finally came to fruition in 2017 when The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania agreed to publish the memoir in two parts. The first installment was printed in the fall 2017 issue of *Gathered Fragments* and the final part appears in this issue.

Flying Tigers and the Second Sino-Japanese War

In this second installment of *Beacon*, war dominates Sister Mary Mark's accounts of her missionary work in Chihkiang (known as Zhijiang today) in Hunan, China. Even before Sister Mary Mark's arrival in China in 1933, Japan and China had been in conflict starting with Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria. Tensions between the two countries continued to exist over the next few years, ultimately, escalating in the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, which would be considered part of the Pacific Theater of World War II by the end of 1941. Fighting would not cease until 1945.

During the war years, nations were using air power like they had never before. Even before the outbreak of the war with Japan, China looked to improve its air force. Just months before the war's beginning, China recruited retired U.S. Army Air Corps Captain Claire L. Chennault to train Chinese air force pilots. Although Chennault worked diligently to train the Chinese, this fledgling Chinese air force proved to be no match for the 1939 Japanese campaign of sustained bombing of every major city in China, including Chihkiang.¹

By 1940, Japan was close to destroying China's air force and Chennault was sent to the United States in order to procure economic support. Since the United States was not officially at war, President Roosevelt was required to act clandestinely and he quietly authorized the creation of an American volunteer air force in April 1941.² With Roosevelt's approval, Chennault organized 300 pilots and ground crew into the American Volunteer Group (AVG) division of the Chinese Air Force. This air division was assigned to protect the vital supply corridor, known as the Burma Road, which stretched from Chongqing, China, to the British colony of Burma (the country of Myanmar today). Through the US Lend-Lease Act, the AVG was provided with 100 P-40 Tomahawks that had been rejected by the British as obsolete.

On the nose of their planes, the AVG men painted the face of tiger sharks, which may be the reason why reporters of the time referred to them as "Flying Tigers." The nickname was first introduced on March 24, 1942, when an American correspondent quoted a Chinese newspaper article saying the American fliers were practically "fei-hu" (flying tigers).

The Chinese newspapers had started to refer to the AVG as the Flying Tigers after the December 20 victories over Kunming, and the term caught on with the American press. Since the birth of the Chinese Republic in 1912 the tiger had been used in place of the dragon as the national symbol. 'Flying Tigers' was a natural for the press. 'How the term Flying Tigers was derived from the shark-nosed P-40s I will never know,' Chennault wrote later.³

With its first entry into combat on December 20, 1941,⁴ this division would prove to have one of the greatest records of the war, recording 299 Japanese planes destroyed – and possibly 153



The initial surrender by the Japanese occurred at the Chihkiang airfield in August 1945 (the official surrender took place in September)

Source: *The Courier Journal* (Louisville, KY), August 27, 1945

more – while losing only 12 planes in a little over six months of combat. Unfortunately, an additional 61 planes were lost on the ground and 22 more were burned in a fire.⁵ By March 1942, the AVG had lost too many planes to properly defend the Burma Road and turned to bombing Japanese supply bases. Finally, because of the US entrance into the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Flying Tigers were disbanded in 1942 and replaced by the US 23rd Fighter Group.

On March 10, 1943, President Roosevelt established the 14th Air Force and placed it under the command of Chennault, who was promoted to Major General; the 23rd Fighter Group was then absorbed into the 14th. The focus shifted to flying supplies from Burma to China over the Himalayas, known as “The Hump.” The Flying Tigers, the 23rd Fighter Group, and the 14th Air Force used the Chihkiang airfield.



The sisters cared for many orphans during their years in China

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

The Sisters and the Chihkiang Airfield

Over the course of the initial years of the war, the Sisters of St. Joseph, who were carrying out their missionary work in Chihkiang, would come to understand the importance of the air power in the war. Prior to the war, the construction of an airfield on the outskirts of the city had been but a diversion for the sisters, who viewed it as another sign of development. In October 1936, Sister Rosario Goss wrote home:

Our town is surely progressing. A week ago, the Chinese celebrated the anniversary of their Republic. It was a free day so we took the girls for a walk. You will be surprised to know that we went to see the AIR PORT [sic]. It is just being made but it is supposed to be finished within forty days. We saw hundreds of men at work. We were told that there are thousands working on the field. They are leveling the hills and filling in the valleys. It is to be one of, if not THE biggest air ports [sic] in China.⁶

Within this same letter, she also commented on the increasing hostilities between China and Japan, downplaying the possibility that war would come to Chihkiang:

You will probably be reading about the trouble between China and Japan. Do not worry about me. IF there is any

fighting, it will not be near here. Thousands of soldiers have been passing through this town on their way down river to prepare for an attack by the Japanese. I repeat, there is no danger here from them so even if the papers do print anything about trouble, rest assured that it will not affect us.⁷

Not foreseeing the all-out war that was on the horizon, Sister Rosario understandably did not comprehend the potential effects of the proximity of such a large airfield. As illustrated by Sister Mary Mark’s stories in *Beacon*,⁸ the airfield would factor greatly into their lives as it was the direct cause of much of the suffering of the sisters and their missionary work during the war.

In the early years of the war, the sisters did not immediately grasp the direction that life was leading them but the American government officials had a sense. After the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the American Consul issued three separate notifications for foreigners to leave, a point that Sister Mary Mark fails to mention in *Beacon*. Taking these notifications under advisement, the bishops in China decided that missionaries would remain and thus, the Sisters of St. Joseph stayed and continued their work.⁹ The airfield construction in Chihkiang continued and in 1938, the landing of an airplane was recorded by the sisters: “Several days ago, a Chinese airplane landed on the air port [sic] here for the first time in the history of this city.”¹⁰

From that summer on, there was “plenty of action” in the skies above Chihkiang. By October, the sisters finally acknowledged the fact that the presence of the Chinese airplanes on the airfield provided a target for the Japanese – their one solace was that when the Japanese came, the Chinese planes went up after them.¹¹ Dealing with recurrent bombings of the city by the Japanese, the sisters worked with ever present stress, which is not only conveyed in *Beacon* but also through the letters that the sisters wrote home. In one letter, Sister Rosario proclaimed:

I think I can truthfully say the best and most fervent meditations I have ever made were made on the hillside or in a field with bombs bursting not too far away. I simply fly to the Arms of God the Father, as I used to run to Papa when I was a little girl.¹²

And Sister Mary Mark had to dig deep to find some humor in the situation:

They [the bombers] flew directly over us and believe me when they are directly over you and you know they are loaded with bombs weighing from five hundred to a thousand pounds you just think that your minutes are numbered and you don’t feel so very brave. However, it keeps one in good trim to die for it is then that you make an act of perfect contrition like you never made it before.¹³

In the early stages of the war, the American Embassy gave orders for all American property to be marked with American flags in order to provide some protection. As related in *Beacon*, the sisters carried this out but in the end, this proved fruitless as their mis-

sonary compound was repeatedly bombed.¹⁴ One of the worst bombings that the sisters experienced was in April 1939, when the Japanese dropped both incendiary and demolition bombs on the city as part of the Japanese push to bomb major population centers. From this one day's worth of bombing, Sister Mary Mark estimated that three-fourths of the city was destroyed.¹⁵ While the sisters' mission experienced some damage in 1939,¹⁶ it was not until September 1940 that there was a direct hit on their convent; but the sisters stayed and rebuilt.

In spite of all of the negatives, there were some advantages to living close to the airfield. As portrayed by Sister Mary Mark in *Beacon*, the sisters had a small taste of back home with their interactions with the Americans stationed there. And there were practical ways that the sisters benefited, such as an improvement with radio availability. While the sisters did not have a radio in their convent, they would at times listen to the priests' radio in the rectory – a memorable instance was the radio broadcast of the “coronation of Pope Pius XII.”¹⁷ When a group of Englishmen took over the airfield's radio station temporarily in 1942, the radiomen improved the sisters' access to the radio and an extension of the priests' radio was installed in the sisters' convent.¹⁸

Refugees and Madame Chiang's Warphans

Among the other changes brought on by the war was the influx of refugees who were fleeing from Japanese invasion in the eastern part of China. During the course of the war, the bishop for the area, Bishop Cuthbert O'Gara, C.P., became very active in helping with the suffering civilians, including the establishment of two hospitals and 13 refugee camps.¹⁹ By the beginning of 1939, O'Gara looked to create a refugee camp in Chihkiang and he appointed Father William Westhoven, C.P. to oversee the camp's establishment. Sister Rosario wrote home to her family:

REFUGEES are one of the principal topics of conversation here these days. Father built a refugee camp and during the past week about sixty refugees were admitted. So far very few of these destined for Chihkiang have arrived here.²⁰

According to the sisters, the refugee camp was initially set up to accommodate five hundred refugees.²¹ Within the camp, the sisters cared for the sick and helped to distribute clothes. As related in *Beacon*, at some point in 1939 the persistent bombings in Chihkiang forced the sisters themselves to move temporarily into a shack on property adjacent to the refugee camp. Within this structure,

the main room, which had a mud floor, was used as a chapel, refectory and community room while the orphans slept in the shack's loft; a mud hut was set up as a hospital.²²

As always, the sisters welcomed orphans into their mission, including 25 sent to them by Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, the wife of General Chiang Kai-Shek, chairman of China's National Government. With the onset of the war, Madame Chiang took on the cause of orphans, whom she termed as “warphans,” and she established the Chinese Women's National War Relief Society to look after them. When thousands of “warphans” had to be evacuated from Canton and Hankow, Madame Chiang personally oversaw the complete withdrawal of the children before she herself fled the area.²³ Included in these warphans were the girls whom she sent to the sisters on September 2, 1938.²⁴ The sisters cared not only for these orphans but for many more.

With their commitment to education, the sisters opened a school in 1941 and they were able to provide the children in their care with education. In the following year, the sisters also opened a small industrial school to teach students how to spin and weave. During those early years of the war, the government ordered all city walls to be torn down and Chihkiang complied. With the city left without the walled protection, Sister Rosario reported that there was a night during which bandits raided a government middle school and normal school, killing one of the teachers and carrying off twenty young girls; the sisters provided temporary refuge in their school for the remaining 150 students.²⁵ Caring for the orphans along with the civilians and the refugees, the Sisters of St. Joseph stayed in Hunan trying to keep up their work in spite of the war and at times, there seemed as though there was no end in sight.

Homeward Bound

In the fall of 1944, after living through five years of warfare, the U.S. Air Force advised the sisters and children to evacuate; all Sisters of St. Joseph were ultimately to head home. In order to ensure the safety of their charges, Sisters Mary Mark and Rosario delayed their departure in order to situate the orphans in neighboring locations in Hunan that were away from potentially targeted cities and considered relatively safe from the Japanese – taking the older children to Yungtui and sending the younger ones to Kaotsun. On November 28, all American, including the missionaries, were ordered to evacuate central China²⁶ and the last two sisters had to start for home. When the other sisters from their mission had left earlier in the fall, the trip to the United States typically took one month; however, Sisters Mary Mark and Rosario spent nine months en route to the United States.

In *Beacon*, Sister Mary Mark describes their lengthy exodus, which included a visit to the gravesite of Sister Clarissa Stattmiller who had died in China in 1927. Their departure from China took them west, into India, where their first layover was with the Loretto Sisters in Calcutta, of which Mother (Saint) Teresa was a member at the time.

After leaving Calcutta, the two sisters landed in Bombay where they spent months with the Franciscan Sisters of Mary at the Villa Theresa. It was here that they faced some challenges with the



The Sisters of St. Joseph received one of Bishop O'Gara's chasubles as a gift

Source: Photographed by Sister Geraldine Grandpre, Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

extreme heat. Limited to one bag during their flight from China, they had left behind their gray habits, which were more comfortable in hot weather. During their time in Bombay, they initially faced the hot temperatures in their black habits but as described by Sister Rosario, they quickly and resourcefully acted to rectify the situation:

Now that we've had to stay so long in India with the weather getting hotter as time goes on, we had to get material for lighter habits. Nowhere in this city could we find enough gray or white cloth to make us each two habits so we had to buy sheets and make them up. Sister (of Charity) Alma Maria (Gilmartin) not being able to make her own gave a pattern and the sheets to an Indian tailor. Unfortunately she forgot to warn him about the blue stamp on the corner of each sheet. Evidently the man tried to make them as beautiful as possible and they returned with the big blue brand in the most conspicuous places on her habits!²⁷

They also had not given up the hope that they might be able to return to China which Sister Rosario conveyed in a letter to home:

Latest news from China says our Vicariate has not yet fallen into enemy hands...It seems almost too much to hope that we shall be recalled to China before proceeding to the States. May God's Holy Will be done.²⁸

By the summer, Sisters Mary Mark and Rosario gained passage on the *Gripsholm*, the Swedish liner that had been sent to provide passage to Americans heading home from India. On board were more than 615 missionaries.²⁹ Because they were on their return trip, there was time for introspection and a war-weary Sister Rosario wrote:

I volunteered for China for life and do not wish to take back what I have offered. But since the order to go has been given, I am resigned. I would rather be in America through obedience knowing that I am thus where God wishes me to be, than to remain in China of my own will. My fervent prayer is that post-war days will find our Sisters again in China if such be the will of God.³⁰

By departing China when they did, the sisters did not have to endure the months of intense fighting in 1945, including a savage, unsuccessful drive by the Japanese to take over the Chihkiang airfield in May. After having left the U.S. in February 1933, Sisters



Bishop Cuthbert O'Gara, with a confirmation class; Sisters Magdalena Ivan, Mary Mark Mullen, Catherine Davenport; and Passionist Fathers Rupert Langenbacher, William Westhoven, 1940

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

Mary Mark and Rosario now returned more than 12 years later, landing in New York City on August 2, 1945 and they arrived at their motherhouse in Baden on August 7, 1945. On August 6 and 9, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Japan, and on August 21, Japanese envoys met with the Chinese for a preliminary surrender at the Chihkiang airfield. On September 2, 1945 the formal surrender of Japan occurred on the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, Japan.

Return to China

With the end of the war, the sisters could return to their missionary work in China. In May 1946, a new band of Sisters of St. Joseph was selected and Sister Mary Mark was part of this new group of six. They set sail from San Francisco in December 1946 and arrived in China in January 1947. The sisters arrived to a country in the midst of another civil war (1946-1949) between the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists under Mao Zedong. As the war was affecting travel, the sisters started their missionary work by studying the language and working with orphans and the sick in Peking (known as Beijing today) while waiting for the opportunity to return to the interior. In August 1948, they learned that Bishop O'Gara had decided that once the sisters were able to head into the interior, they would take up missionary work in Supu, Hunan, instead of Chihkiang.³¹

On November 1, the sisters left Peking for Shanghai by plane, with the intention of obtaining transportation into the interior.³² However, November 6 marked the beginning of a major military action, known as the Huaihai Campaign that was waged between the Nationalists and the Communists until January 1949. Within a month of arriving in Shanghai, the sisters faced a difficult decision, as described by Sister Baptista Young:

Father Arthur said that there are no bookings out of Shanghai to the interior before January, and he feels that Shanghai is doomed before that? [sic] Should we wait and still try to get to interior and be caught, or take this last evacuation



Leaving Peking for Shanghai, 1948

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

boat to the States. ... We are bringing no baggage home with us – just what we need. The rest we are leaving here for our use when we return. It is too hard to get things over, so we are leaving a trunk here at Sacred Heart with things in it which we can more easily get in the States.³³

Shortly after, the sisters departed for the U.S. in December 1948. Bishop O’Gara was disappointed by their departure, although he felt that their leaving was influenced by the American government:

I presume that the American Consular authorities made it impossible for Americans to secure transportation to the interior and brought great pressure to bear in having them evacuate. Perhaps this is all for the best.³⁴

Whatever hopes that the sisters had of returning as missionaries to China would have been restrained by the fate of the missionary work of others.³⁵ By the early 1950s, the Communists had either expelled or made life impossible for remaining missionaries and so, by 1955, the Passionist priests had also left China.³⁶

Within the United States, the sisters’ missionary work in China was felt in the places where the sisters ministered – especially within the schools. As part of their school lessons, the sisters would



In their newsletter, the sisters taught about many aspects of life in China, including an explanation of the sisters’ individual names in Chinese.

Source: *The ‘Little Design’ in China*, 2 (7) March 1948

often teach about China. From July 1946 through June 1949, the sisters supplemented their lessons through the printing of a newsletter entitled “The ‘Little Design’ in China,” which was used to educate and encourage support of the China mission. Within the pages of this monthly publication, the sisters ran stories and

answered questions about the life and culture of the Chinese. Topics included the school system, Christmas customs, games children played, as well as how to eat with chopsticks. Through this dissemination of information, the sisters encouraged their students and supporters to understand life beyond the United States and they pulled them into their evangelistic spirit.

While the China mission influenced many in America, the lasting impact within China was something that was not realized by the sisters until 1980, when they were contacted by Sister Theresa Joseph Lung, the one native Chinese Sister of St. Joseph, who had been a member of their religious community from

1933 until 1948. Continuing to minister in China after 1948, Sister Theresa Joseph stayed true to her faith in the face of religious oppression under the Communist Party. She took her vocation underground through the establishment of a rural dispensary where she not only provided medical care but also taught catechesics and brought communion into the homes of the faithful. From 1955 and after, she endured imprisonment, restricted life, and poverty; in 1980, through correspondence, she managed to reconnect with the Sisters of St. Joseph. In 1983, Sister Catherine Davenport, missionary in China from 1935-1941, and Sister Donna Marie Tahaney, another member of the congregation, along with diocesan priest Father John Harvey and Passionist priest Father Jerome Vereb, C.P. traveled to China to visit Sister Theresa Joseph. During this visit, Sister Theresa Joseph was able to again profess her religious vows. Until the day she died in 1994, Sister Theresa Joseph lived a life of reaching out and caring for others.

As for Sister Mary Mark, when she returned from China in January 1949, she was 56 years old with many years of ministry work remaining. She returned to the field of education, serving as principal for six years each at St. Titus School in Aliquippa and at St. Mary in Freeport and as a teacher at St. Mary in New Castle and Holy Name in Ebensburg. Following a year as a part time teacher at Sacred Heart in Altoona, she finally retired in 1970. After spending 48 years as a Sister of St. Joseph, almost one-third of which were spent in China, Sister Mary Mark Mullen died at the age of 80 on July 25, 1972.

Sister Mary Mark’s memoir, *Beacon in the Dark*, is a lasting testimonial to the faith and the missionary work of women religious in China. All of the work done for their mission in China, both



Sisters Rose Rayburg, Baptista Young, Patricia Marie Jackson, Kathleen Boyle pose in front of the Great Wall while waiting for a train, Easter Friday, Peking, China, 1947

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives



Sisters Catherine Davenport and Donna Marie Tahaney with Sister Theresa Joseph Lung, 1983

Source: Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

abroad and at home, was part of the charm of the Sisters of St. Joseph, which is one of unity and reconciliation with God and the “Dear Neighbor.” Through the linking of East and West, the sisters identified with hope “that the world can come to greater unity.”³⁷

Dedication and Acknowledgement in Sister Mary Mark’s Memoir

It should be noted that in the front of her manuscript, Sister Mary Mark penned an acknowledgement and a dedication:

“Grateful acknowledgement is made to Sister Rosario Goss for her invaluable help in the compilation of this book.”

“To the memory of Sister Mary Clarissa Stadmiller [*sic*], the first Sister of Saint Joseph to give her life for China. Amen I say unto you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it unto Me. (Matthew 25: 40).”

Endnotes:

¹ “AVG History,” Flying Tigers AVG, accessed September 03, 2018, <https://flyingtigersavg.com/avg-history/>.

² Malcolm Rosholt, *Days of the Ching Pau: A Photographic Record of the Flying Tigers-14th Air Force in China in World War II* (Appleton, WI: Rosholt House II, 1978), 7.

³ Jack Samson, *Flying Tigers: The True Story of General Claire Chennault and the U.S. 14th Air Force in China* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 142.

⁴ Rosholt, *Days*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Emphasis by Sister Rosario Goss. Sister Rosario Goss, SSB, to home, October 18, 1936, Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives, hereafter referred to as CSJB Archives.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Sister Rosario Goss, “History,” c. 1946, MS, CSJB Archives. Also see, Sister Mary Carita Pendergast, S.C., *Havoc in Hunan: The Sisters of Charity in Western Hunan 1924-1951* (Morristown: College of St. Elizabeth Press, 1991), 83-84.

⁹ Goss, “History,” CSJB Archives.

¹⁰ Sister Rosario Goss to home, February 27, 1938, CSJB Archives.

¹¹ Goss, “History,” CSJB Archives.

¹² Sister Rosario Goss to Sister Rose Angela Goss, January 2, 1940, CSJB Archives.

¹³ Sister Mary Mark Mullen to Mark Mullen, October 29, 1939 (from Kienyang), CSJB Archives.

¹⁴ The Sisters of St. Joseph made a flag that was 13x27.5 feet and a second one that was half that size. Goss, “History,” CSJB Archives. According to *Havoc*, the Sisters of Charity took a shortcut for the stars – they cut out their stars from tough white paper and pasted them on. See Pendergast, *Havoc*, 95

¹⁵ Sister Mary Mark Mullen to Mark Mullen, July 1939, CSJB Archives. According to *Havoc*, In October 1939, “Chihkiang, site of a thriving mission, which was bombed six times within one week. During that saturation bombing the Josephite Sisters’ convent (located quite near the Flying Tigers’ air base) was badly damaged, and the Sisters and their orphans and all their works had to move outside the city.” See Pendergast, *Havoc*, 98.

¹⁶ According to Chapter 14 of *Beacon*, the convent and girl’s school had shattered glass, broken plaster, and doors ripped off of hinges. One classroom had every floor board ripped up. The yard was full of shrapnel from bombs.

¹⁷ Sister Rosario Goss to home, March 12, 1939, CSJB Archives.

¹⁸ Goss, “History,” CSJB Archives.

¹⁹ Bishop O’Gara’s activity earned him the title of “Stretcher-Bearer Bishop.” Brian Kelly, “In China Darwinism Preceded Marxism,” published May 7, 2009, accessed 1/20/2018, <http://catholicism.org/in-china-darwinismpreceded-marxism.html>.

²⁰ Sister Rosario Goss to home, February 12, 1939, CSJB Archives.

²¹ Sister Rosario Goss to home, January 22, 1939, CSJB Archives.

²² Goss, “History,” CSJB Archives

²³ Rose Hum Lee, “Madame Chiang’s Children,” *Survey Graphic: Magazine of Social Interpretation*, January 1943 vol. 32, page 136; “The government of Chiang Kai-shek withdrew to Hankow, farther up the Yangtze river in central China. In mid-1938 Japanese armies from north China were threatening Hankow and the Chinese government withdrew farther to the west, this time to Chungking... a city famous for a climate which no one will dispute is the worst in China-if not in the world!” Rosholt, *Days*, 6.

²⁴ Sister Rosario Goss to home, September 19, 1938, CSJB Archives.

²⁵ Goss, “History,” CSJB Archives (note: the 20 girls were eventually rescued).

²⁶ “Allies Evacuate China Provinces” by Leonard Milliman, *Big Spring Daily Herald*, November 28, 1944, 1.

²⁷ Sister Rosario Goss to Sister Rose Angela Goss, April 9, 1945 (from Villa Theresa, Bombay), CSJB Archives.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ “Gripsholm Lands 1,496 Repatriates,” *Altoona Tribunes*, August 3, 1945, 13.

³⁰ Sister Rosario Goss to Sister Rose Angela and home, January 28, 1945 (from Chungking), CSJB Archives.

³¹ Community circular by Mother Emerentia Snyder, August 3, 1948, CSJB Archives.

³² Bishop Cuthbert O’Gara to Mother Emerentia Snyder, December 6, 1948, CSJB Archives.

³³ Sister Baptista Young to Mother Emerentia Snyder, December 3, 1948, CSJB Archives.

³⁴ Bishop Cuthbert O’Gara to Mother Emerentia Snyder, December 6, 1948, CSJB Archives.

³⁵ The Sisters retained their missionary fund for China until the 1960s. Mother Benigna Kirkpatrick to Bishop John Wright, May 2, 1960, CSJB Archives.

³⁶ Pendergast, *Havoc*, 219.

³⁷ Ann Rodgers-Melnick, “Sister Theresa Joseph was Baden order’s loyal link to China,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 29, 1994, B-9.