

A Missionary Lifts China's Iron Curtain

(The following article was written for the Courier-Journal by Father Edward Wojniak, American missionary of the Society of the Divine Word, who escaped death when the Chinese Communists invaded his mission six months ago at Tainyang. Father Wojniak is now in the U. S.)

When the Japanese army surrendered about Tainyang the communists soon took over the region. The communist army did its share of looting and killing but the real ordeal for the people began when the soldiers moved on and the communist officials moved in. These are skilled men in their work, and that work is to see that the people of the conquered territory are indoctrinated in communist theories. This always involves moral and physical coercion.

THE FANTOM of the Tainyang church was a Chinese Father. During the turnover the station suffered no more than the usual pillaging. The altar was stripped of the incense, the medicines and money found in the hospital were taken. The soldiers went up the priest and Sisters with the intention of shooting them but they were roughly stopped by a captain who appeared on the scene and apologized for the misdemeanor of his men and promised that the incident would not be repeated.

But life in the town became daily more difficult for the Chinese pastor. Till finally he asked the Bishop to relieve him. The Bishop, Msgr. Megan, S.V.D., sincerely hoped to find some sort of amicable basis on which to deal with the invaders.

The reason was evident. We had at stake a large territory that included four countries, three parishes, a well equipped hospital, an orphanage, several schools, and well over four thousand Catholics.

After a series of meetings held with communist officials, in which they expressed their delight to have us work in their region and guaranteed full freedom of religion, the Bishop resolved to give things a trial.

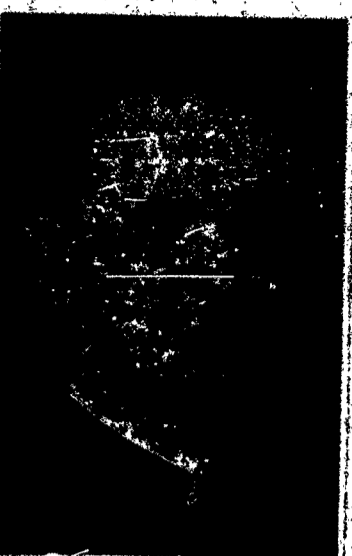
The upshot was that Father Lunzenbach, Father George, and I all missionaries of the Society of the Divine Word were sent into this territory as American representatives. We received a great welcome from the Chinese pastor, a welcome that included a sigh of relief, for he was now free to seek safer quarters.

We spent the first days in visiting the various officials and were received with cordiness and formally but with tolerance. We invited our Christians to return to church assuring them that they would not be molested. The attendance at Sunday Masses showed some increase, but remained far below normal very soon, one by one the difficulties arose.

Every day had its surprises for us, but we were resolved to forge ahead, relying on time and the promises that had been made to us. It was about this time that General Marshall arrived in China so that we had even more reason to hope for the betterment of the situation.

At first the principal difficulties were caused by the incessant propaganda of lower officials. They blasted out invectives against us in their daily meetings and made every Catholic feel worthy of death—which he actually was in communist eyes. Then their spy ring was tight-booby of the Communists had we ended, and every Catholic going to church was watched. Even those who visited the hospital were put on the Communist black list.

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FATHER WOJNIAK

condition of these things which they revived. 3) The sisters were accused of selling medicine at exorbitant prices. This was patently false since many of our patients were charity cases and paid nothing at all. 4) The sisters and priests were accused of being spies for their government. The fact that the four sisters were German while the pastor was an American made no difference in their eyes. Communists find it easy to reconcile contradictions.

ALL THIS WAS supposed to be kept secret from us till the time was ripe, but we were kept well informed. Chinese, both Catholics and pagans alike, would crawl over our mission compound wall at night—to elude the spies—and tell us the latest developments.

I went several times to the Communist officials and made several tiring trips to the new commissar stationed about 25 miles away. It was in vain. I could not get near any important official. All were too busy.

I demonstrated warmly, refused to be put off and demanded that they say their cards on the table. The secretary begged to inform me that all people in Communist-occupied territory were free people, and if they had any grievance against the Church they were always allowed to bring such things up in the meetings.

I answered that the Catholic Church had been active in these parts long before the Communists had come, and prior to their occupation there had never been any complaints. I was so naive that I stated that I would not worry, the government would protect me against the people.

By this time the general situation in China had become very tense. It was now next to impossible for me to get through to Sinsiang to see the Bishop and inform him of recent happenings. Things looked even blacker when I read in the papers how 17 of our fathers in Shantung Province had been tried and sentenced to punishment that ranged from death to imprisonment and impossible fines.

That day dawned, and our mission, especially our hospital equipment, would have been the booty of the Communists had we not been saved in the nick of time by what I shall always consider a special intervention of Divine Providence.

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sisters and fathers, were regarded as a platform before thousands, mobbed and insulted in every way, then tried to a point where all their earthly possessions were taken away from them, and driven from the territory. That in all these episodes but the Bishop, who remained locked in jail as a spy.

Father Liu, my Chinese assistant, had already gone through one trial and was sure that a second would mean his end. When evening lengthened into night several persons crawled over the wall and confessed that they had been chosen to accuse us in the mock trial of the next day. They knelt down and begged forgiveness. I assured them that I knew where the real guilt lay and that I would hold nothing against them. They explained that they were acting under the most violent compulsion.

October 17 happened to be the feast day of St. Edward, my patron saint. The school children had prepared a little program with poems, songs, dances, and games, but all had to be called off. A delegation of Christians came to congratulate me, but broke down in tears before they could begin to speak. These hardened farmers and tough businessmen were touched by the hopelessness of the situation.

Only two hundred yards away the dress rehearsal was under way with shouts and jeers that could be heard plainly. This noise continued till about 9 in the evening. Then suddenly a loud explosion was heard—seeming to come from about a mile away. Everybody was stunned. Fifteen minutes later, precisely, came another blast from the same direction followed by a third, in another 15 minutes. I was nervous and stationed Christians all around the compound so we should not be caught unprepared.

No one of us had any idea what it was all about, but I could hardly be an attack by the Nationalists as there was no sound of machine guns or cannon. The people attending the meeting nearby—we learned later—were told curtly to go to their homes and stay within doors. Martial law was proclaimed in the city. No more explosions could be heard, but there was the constant rumblings of carts along the roads. None dared go to bed.

GRADUALLY I placed things together. The explosions had been the demolition of Communist forts timed at 15 minute intervals to act as a signal for general evacuation of Communist troops. The Nationalist troops were marching on the city. Both Christians and pagans thronged to the church early next morning to thank God for the deliverance. It was not until 4 in the afternoon, however, that the Nationalists arrived. There was no trouble. They were received with the greatest joy and delight by the inhabitants.

The following six months brought us a period of welcome peace. The people cooperated with the army in every way to rebuild the city wall and military installations. This was considered very important by the military since the Nationalist troops, though well armed, were few in number. It accounted also for the fact that they seldom went on raids against the enemy.

But as a consequence, the Communists began to gather in the neighborhood and molest traffic and transportation. Raids on travelers with kidnappings and slaying became common occurrences. Then came orders for the government's Nationalist troops to evacuate the city and move to a more strategic spot.

Pandemonium ruled, and the were conducted in the case of people begged the army to be Bishop Horvath, S.V.D., he, the main. But orders must be

ARMY MEETS NOTRE DAME



When John J. Cronan, D.D., president of the University of Notre Dame, greeted General Maxwell Taylor, Deputy Director of Personnel Procurement of the Department of Army (left) and Major General Maxwell Taylor, superintendent of the United States Military Academy, West Point, during their recent visit to the campus of Notre Dame. (NO Photo)

abeyed and a day was set for the evacuation. We were promised that the city would not be left unprotected. A local militia would remain to hold the town. This was little assurance to a people who sensed clearly enough the danger they were in, and who dreaded like death itself the return of the Communists. I was put on the spot again. I was responsible for the entire mission station and all personnel. Should I order a general evacuation or not?

BY THIS TIME there were four fathers assisting in the work at Tainyang. All voted to evacuate. I agreed that the situation was hopeless and gave orders for fathers, sisters and teachers to leave. However, knowing the stubbornness of the Bishop in the face of any odds, I resolved to stay behind myself and face things while any possibility whatsoever of winning through remained. The following day saw a grand exodus of fathers, sisters, nurses, orphans, many pupils, and three to four thousand people who left with the army. Some traveled by army truck, some by mule back; but most walked.

It was a heart rending sight to see all these leave heart and home and launch out into the distant unknown. This whole group who could leave and the look of despair on the faces of all who remained was anything but complimentary to Communism. A further six weeks passed after this without any serious attack though there had been a night raid on the Tain bridge which was repulsed with serious loss to the invaders. But traveling outside the city was becoming more dangerous. The Communist ring was tightening, and supplies were running low, particularly in our hospital which was still functioning after a fashion.

An attack was imminent and supplies would be in demand. The outlook was hopeless and the Bishop should be informed, I resolved, therefore, on a trip to Sinsiang. One could not travel at all without an escort of at least a hundred men. These I finally procured and made my way to Sinsiang. But the Bishop was still in hopes that matters might somehow improve and we must not abandon the station till all was definitely lost.

He then told me I was at liberty in the matter. I need not return, but in that case he would

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