

FOUR YEARS IN A RED HELL Father Rigney Tells Own Story

(Continued from Page 1)

Maybe, I thought, I would be questioned and given rough treatment for a few hours or days and then deported like other missionaries. I was in a class. I could not know what was in store for me.

I was led out of my quarters and ordered to stand in the compound, facing some 40 or 50 children of the parish catechism school. In the past, whenever these children saw me, they would run and surround me, holding my hands, all laughing and talking at the same time.

Now it was all so different. I looked at them, their little faces distorted and torn by strong conflicting emotions: fear of the Communist police; love and sympathy for me. They were crying, but some dutifully and fearfully clapped their hands. I blessed them, making a little sign of the cross with my right hand, handcuffed as I was, behind my back.

Driven In American Made Jeep

My picture was taken again and I was ordered into an American-made jeep, with three or four police guards. The rest of the Sepo boarded a truck.

I was then driven in front of Fu Jen University where all could see me in chains.

After this, the guards drove to the Teao Lan Tui Hutung, near the National Library. The jeep slowly drove through the open gate at No. 15 of the hutung. I was ordered out and placed in a small room. I wondered: What next—was I to be shot, was I to be deported immediately, or was I to be questioned and then deported?

Soon a policeman removed my handcuffs and ordered me into an office. There I was searched and my rosary, watch, fountain pen, automatic pencil, pocket knife and money were taken from me. I was given a list of these articles, which I signed first in English, then in Chinese. Lastly, my fingerprint was added to it.

I was then led through a dark and damp corridor of an old one-story building into Cell No. 10. The heavy wooden door slammed behind me and was bolted.

I was in prison!

There were 16 other prisoners, all Chinese, in a small cell. They looked at me in silence, then motioned me to sit on the wooden kang (bed).

"What is your name?" one asked.

"Fai Ko Ni," I said, giving my name in Chinese.

"What is your nationality?"

"Mei Kuo Jen (American)."

Inspected By Reds

I looked around the cell. It was about 11 by 10 feet. The wall was white and bare. The kang, 6 by 10 feet and a foot-and-a-half high, was made of rough boards. There was one window, about 2 by 3 feet, with heavy iron bars.

In one corner of the damp earthen floor was a hole; rats scurried in and out of it. There was another such rat hole under the kang. A strongly stinking bucket was used as a urinal and in emergency cases for bowel movements. In the center of the ceiling was a single light of 15 candlepower.

Under the kang were two small bowls. One was for the drinking water and the other for food which was usually "wo tou," a tasteless and unleavened mixture of steamed maize and water. Most of my cellmates had a little cup with a toothbrush and soap; these were kept under the kang. They used their small bundles of extra clothes for pillows.

Daily Routine Heavy On Brainwashing

The cellmates had a daily routine. It follows:

Rising	6:15 a.m.
Toilet	6:30
Study (brainwashing)	6:45
Breakfast	8:00
Study (brainwashing)	9:00
Free period	Noon
Study (brainwashing)	1:30 p.m.
Supper	4:30
Toilet	5:15
Study (brainwashing)	7:00
Reading	9:30

On Sundays, the study periods after breakfast and supper were dropped—and the prisoners were free to sew clothes. Some—those who progressed in brainwashing—were allowed to play cards or other games. The prisoners made the cards of several sheets of paper pasted together with the figures drawn on them. Chinese chess was also played.

My imprisonment started at about 5 p.m. Prison supper was over. When my cellmates asked me if I had eaten, I told them I had had a heavy noon dinner and was not hungry.

I sat on the kang next to the wall. A cellmate who knew some English told me that all the prisoners in this cubicle had been arrested because they were spies and friends of the then President Harry S. Truman, stigmatized by the Communists as an enemy of the Chinese "people."

Thought Cellmates Planted By Reds

At first, I suspected that one or all of my cellmates were Sepo guards planted in the prison to trick me into a confession.

I discarded this notion later. The Sepo didn't have to plant any agents in the cells because the prisoners, with few exceptions, were more than eager to show how they had become converted from anti-Communists to pro-Communists. They demonstrated this change of heart by co-operating with the prison authorities on every possible occasion. They readily and vehemently joined in "tzu cheng."

A tzu cheng is a sort of brainwashing procedure used by pro-Communist prisoners to break down the resistance of an anti-Communist cellmate. It is a form of mental torture, occasionally accompanied by physical blows, in which the pro-Communist converts would gather around the anti-Communist "black sheep."

The pro-Communists would shout at the anti-Communist, insult and curse him, point accusing fingers at him and do everything possible to soften him up to the point where he would even confess crimes he did not commit to gain a moment's respite.

A nerve-racking procedure, the tzu cheng would often last for hours, and few could stand it for any considerable length of time.

The bulk of the prisoners also strove to give proof of their conversion to communism by vigilantly reporting every infraction of prison rules or other "reactionary" acts committed by unconverted cellmates. The Chinese called a cellmate who became such an informer a "running dog."

They Act Speedily And Uniformly

At 9:45 that first night, an officer blew a whistle and shouted: "Shui, chao!" (Sleep!) In a moment's time the cell was a hive of activity. The prisoners quickly put away their books, unrolled their thin cotton mattresses, took off their shirts and pants and went to sleep. I was impressed by the speed and uniformity of action. No one delayed. No one was at a loss what to do.

I had no mattress, no covering for the cool of the evening. I saw a cot hanging on the wall and asked if I could use it as a cover. But my cellmates forbade me to touch it. It was against the rules to use the belongings of others. I learned later, the permission of the chu chang (cell leader) was necessary and my chu chang offered no such permission.

So I lay on the hard wooden kang in a place next to the wall allotted me by the chu chang. All seven of us slept on the kang.

The light was not turned off, but was kept burning throughout the night. This was the policy throughout my prison experience. When the current was cut off for one reason or another, a lighted candle was brought into the cell.

Fifteen minutes after I lay down on the kang, the cell door opened and an officer called out: "Fai Ko Ni!" When I answered to my name, he motioned to me to leave the cell.



Milton Coniff's illustration of Father Rigney in the Red Chinese courtroom. The 30-year-old judge sits in the center under a picture of Mao Tse-tung. To his right, the court reporter, to his left (in glasses) an interpreter

As I started to put on my shoes, my cellmates, eager to demonstrate before their jailers that they were no longer anti-Communists but fervent pro-Communists, began to shout: "Kua, hua!" (Hurry, hurry!)

It was dark. As I passed through the entrance of the compound, I came to open ground, but I could not see 10 feet beyond me.

Guard Urges Him To Move Quickly

I hesitated, not knowing which way to go. Also, I was afraid that I might be tricked to walk into the open and be shot for attempting to escape. The guard was angered by my hesitation and he shouted: "Tou, tou! Kua, kua!" (Go go! Quick, quick!)

He pointed the way and trailed close behind me, with his pistol drawn and his finger on the trigger.

When I reached a row of rooms in a long, one-story building, he ordered me to halt, and announced my arrival. A voice replied: "Lai!" (Come in!)

I followed the guards shouted command to enter and found myself in Courtroom No. 4 of the "People's" military court.

The chamber was 18 feet wide and 27 feet long. At one end, the judge sat at an ordinary office desk. To his right sat the recorder who took down the minutes of the proceedings, and to his left an interpreter. Nearby sat the guard, his pistol aimed at the concrete floor near my feet.

On the wall in back of the judge hung a picture of Mao Tse-tung.

I was ordered by the Sepo guard to stand before a wooden chair facing the judge. My eyes were only half a foot from

Father Rigney Scheduled To Return Home At Easter

Chicago (NC)—Father Harold Rigney, S.V.D., recently released from a Red China prison, is scheduled to arrive in the United States on Easter Monday, April 2.

After celebrating a Mass of Thanksgiving in his home parish, St. Augustine's Church here, and attending a civic reception the following day, Father Rigney is expected to go to Washington where it is hoped he will meet President Eisenhower.

an electric light suspended from the ceiling. Swarms of insects buzzed around the light. Soon they began to crawl over my face and neck, but I was forbidden to shoo these pests away. The light hurt my eyes. The Sepo guard tore off my spectacles and threw them on a window sill.

Queried By Judge, Asked To Confess

The judge, a lean man about 30 years old, eyed me for a minute, then ordered me to sit down. He spoke in Chinese, I in English. The interpreter translated for us.

Q—"What is your name?"

A—"Rigney, in English; Fai Ko Ni in Chinese."

Q—"Who is your full name?"

A—"Harold William Rigney."

Q—"Where do you live?"

A—"Li Kwang Chiao, Nan Chieh, No. 1."

Q—"What is your nationality?"

A—"American."

Q—"What is your occupation?"

A—"I am a Catholic priest, a missionary, the rector of Fu Jen University."

Q—"Now tell me, what crimes have you committed against the Chinese people?"

A—"I have committed no crimes against the Chinese people."

Q—"SHIH MA!" (What!) he shouted, banging his fist on the desk. "CHAN CHY LAI!" (Stand up!)

I stood up, the insects swarmed around me again and the glare of the electric light was painful.

So started my trial that was to last three years and two months. The first phase of this ordeal lasted 60 days and nights. In the first week of my trial, I stated clearly and emphatically: "I am a Catholic and I will not give up my religion; I would rather die. Moreover, I will not become a Communist."

The judge replied, "No one asks you to give up your religion and you could not become a Communist even if you wanted to."

150 Sessions During 60 Days

I think I had about 150 court sessions during these 60 days and nights. The sessions would run variously; usually I had

one or two during the day, starting in the late morning and resuming in the late afternoon.

The evening sessions were scheduled differently. If the court did not recess, my trial would continue uninterrupted from bedtime to long after daybreak. If a recess was called, the session would end around midnight and would resume at 1 or 2 in the morning. During the interim, I was either ordered to sit on a rock in the drill grounds with a Sepo guard nearby or I was set back to my wretched cell to sit up without sleeping.

In either case, I was ordered to think over the "crimes" I was supposed to have committed and to examine my conscience in an effort to recognize and confess these "crimes." Sometimes, after an all-night session, I was allowed to snatch an hour or two of sleep.

During the entire period, I was permitted only two nights of rest. One was given me because I had a fever and the prison physician prescribed rest. The other was granted by the judge for the obvious purpose of making me realize how sweet a night's rest was, even on boards.

Those were 60 terrible days and nights!

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NEXT WEEK: Father Rigney tells how his health deteriorated under a starvation diet while court procedure increased on him to "confess" he was a spy.

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Japan Names First Catholic To Vatican

Vatican City (NC)—The new Japanese Minister to the Holy See, who is expected to arrive here soon, is the first Catholic to be assigned to this post since the institution of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Japanese government.

Catholic Men Plan Convention

Washington (NC)—The National Council of Catholic Men will hold its 1957 convention in Cincinnati, O., the organization's executive committee announced here after a two-day meeting.