

Fr. Rigney Recalls Torture Ordeal

Here in the 54th installment in the gripping story of the imprisonment of the Very Rev. Harold W. Rigney, S.V.D., presented in the Courier-Journal through courtesy of the Chicago Sun-Times.

By The Very Rev. Harold W. Rigney, S.V.D.
Divine Word Missionary

For days on end, the judge of the Chinese "people's" court had been pressing me to confess that I was an American agent or spy.

He had put me in irons, he had sentenced me to death, he had made me go without sleep and had shouted himself hoarse in his efforts to extract a confession from me. But I had stoutly denied that I was or ever had been an American agent or spy.

The judge had given me to understand that I would soon be released if I confessed. When I told him the truth, he would usually look at a paper on his desk, apparently to see if my statement agreed with his version of my activities, and would then shout:

"Liar! Your statement is a lie!"

Concepts Of Truth Are Different

It became evident that his idea of truth differed from mine. To me a statement is true when it agreed with reality. To him it was true when it agreed with the instructions he got from his superiors.

I soon discovered that the Communists, even when they talked English, spoke a different language than the English-speaking world. And I soon concluded that no prisoner could get anywhere with his Communist captors until he spoke the same language as they did.

A New Torture

My conclusion was wrong, of course. But it is one that a prisoner reaches easily and puts into practice when he is helpless, bewildered and subjected to long periods of torture.

Then, one night, the judge

subjected me to a new torture.

He ordered me to squat. The Chinese often squat, the buttocks resting against the heels. That is a position of rest to them. But to the average Westerner it is a position of pain.

I could not squat, partly because I had never done so before. To begin trying in my 51st year, when the sinews of my legs had lost much of their elasticity, was indeed painful. An added complication was the condition of my ankles and legs, swollen, raw and bleeding from the fetters by captors forced me to wear.

Balance became a problem, too. I had to squat with my wrists chained behind my back and yet hold my head erect to look at the judge. If anyone thinks that is easy to do, he should try it sometime.

While I was thus squatting, the judge leveled a new charge against me — he accused me of being a spy in America before I came to China. I maintained I had never been a spy in the United States.

Pain Excruciating

But the judge deliberately persisted in repeating the charge over and over again while I was squatting. The pain in my legs became excruciating. Determined to ease it, I fell back on the floor and stretched my legs. What a relief to stretch, if only for a moment!

Rebelling against this agonizing form of torture, I refused to obey the judge's order to squat. The court recorder hopped from the seat and yanked my ear with fury, tearing the skin. Blood streamed down the side of my bearded cheek and I thought my ear was half torn off.

As I tottered to my knees, a cursing Sepo guard seized me by the hair, and forced me to squat again. When I tottered, he braced his foot against my back to keep me from falling. In that position, I could hardly breathe. His grip was so brutal that he pulled several handfuls of hair from my head.

After hours of this new torture, my head was in a whirl. I had to talk and I started to babble. I told how I attended several meetings of the American Student Union, a national, "progressive" organization at the University of Chicago, where I was doing graduate work in geology.

Allowed To Stand

That interested the judge. He allowed me to stand up. It now



Cell mates harass the Very Rev. Harold W. Rigney. (Drawing by Milton Caniff)

became painful to straighten my knees, but it was such a relief to stand!

I related how I casually dropped in on the student meetings and how I picked up their handbills. The judge maintained that my attendance at the meetings and my gatherings of the handbills meant that I was engaged in intelligence work. I denied it, but he insisted.

The session ended in a deadlock, but when the next hearing opened, I was again forced to squat. The judge again insisted I was an American agent.

Figures A Way
Wracked by the physical pain of squatting and weakened by the mental tortures used by the inquisitorial judge, I thought I saw a way out of my dilemma. The judge knows and the Chinese government knows I am not an American agent. Everybody knows that, but the government wants to disgrace me.

I am like an actor in a play, playing the part of Julius Caesar. Everybody knows I am not Julius Caesar, but in the play I say I am. Now, everybody knows I am not an American agent, but I am pressed to say I am. It would be no lie to say I am, because nobody would be deceived.

So I said to myself: "I will disgrace myself before the Communists by confessing that I am a Federal Bureau of Investigation agent. Then, after my release, I will send a denial from Hong Kong to the government in Peking. If they publish my false confession, I will publish my denial."

Allowed To Stand
That interested the judge. He allowed me to stand up. It now

'Confesses' To Court
With my head swimming and

was your superior officer, what was your rank, what identification did you have?"
Night after night, these and now questions were hurled at me. Each was unexpected, each was struggled with, each was eventually answered. I became more and more wretched.

Repudiates 'Confession'
Then, one day, I resolved to repudiate my false confessions. That night, when the court session opened, I told the judge I had a statement to make. He listened as I said:

"I am not an FBI agent. I never was an FBI agent. My confession that I was one was false and I wish to correct it!"
The judge tried to persuade me to retract my retraction, obliquely threatening me with more torture and eventual death sentence. I refused to heed him and the session ended.

Harassed By Cell Mates
But, when I returned to my cell, I was put on the rack again by two cell mates, Wang, the former merchant, and Lu, an ex-colonel of the Chinese Nationalist Army.

They worked me over furiously, hoping to win a lessening of their sentences. They abused me, insulted me, sneered at me, shouted at me. I had to listen attentively. When I showed signs of fatigue, they forced me to stand. They kept up this harrying all day. Finally, I weakened. I agreed to confess anew that I was an FBI agent.

But I was more wretched than ever. A couple of weeks earlier, I had been ready to die for the truth. Since then, I had made a false confession, retracted it and then, after a brief struggle, I had retracted the retraction. I was back, and back deeper, in the hole.

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NEXT WEEK: A priest uses subterfuge to mask his prayers, for prayer is not allowed in Peking's prison hell.

Japanese Diocese Triples In Decade

Yokohama, Japan — (NC) — of Yokohama said in a pastoral letter here.
The Catholic population of this diocese has more than tripled in ten years, Bishop Luke K. Aral are 13,231.

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PRIEST IN JAIL

Back in the XV century many fled Albania on account of Turkish persecutions. These Albanians settled in southern Italy, and thus preserved their Sacred Faith. They are known today as ITALO-GREEKS. In the little town of Casanove Lucane is a CONVENTUAL FRANCISCAN Priest of Mountain-Greek Rite. So poor is this place, that the Priest had to seek shelter in the local POLICE STATION. He lived in a detention cell as his Rectory. How like the Stable of Bethlehem! Now he is anxious to build a modest little parish house that will serve as Priest-quarters, Chapel, School, and Rhythmic-Center. The cost is \$2,000. He lives in a shanty where some K. of C. or Holy Name POLICE ORGANIZATION that might carry on this tradition of Christian hospitality? Or some CORRECTION Group or PRISON Group? Or OFFICE Group or any MEN'S or WOMEN'S Group or ANY PERSON? It would be a fine MEMORIAL for War Dead Deceased Members; or Family Loved One. No contribution is too small. Keep alive the flame of faith!

PLEASE HAVE MASS OFFERED BY OUR MISSIONARIES.

FROZEN TO DEATH

The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in Armenia were soldiers who preferred to die naked in the ice and cold of winter, rather than deny Christ. In the Holy Land, we have large numbers of refugees exposed to inclement weather. Please keep them warm and save them from starving. They need help fast. A \$10 FOOD PACKAGE will do wonders. We will send you a FREE-GIFT HOLY LAND ROSARY.

GISELE AFFIFI

"Gentle and womanly, yet with the courage of soldiers." These words are very apt to describe two valiant aspirants to the DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY in Beirut. GISELE and AFFIFI are two young girls who have an intense desire to become Sisters. They are courageous soldiers of Christ ready to take their place on the front lines. The one thing lacking is a dowry for their "boot-training." \$150 a year for two years has been needed. Could you pass "the ammunition" in suitable installments? They'll praise the Lord for you in eternal, heartfelt gratitude.

SALESMEN FOR CHRIST

Our sources of commodities are very limited. So many people would like to help, but do not know how. Will you please tell them about us and our needs? Be a CO-WORKER of Christ and CO-SHAREK in the prayers and good works of our Missionaries. Send for copies of our folder "How Can I Help?"

CROSS OF GLORY

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ." During this Holy Season of Lent could you provide a \$25 CRUCIFIX for the land of the Cross and our other Mission territories. We owe so much to the sufferings and death on CALVARY.

PALACE OF GOLD

Our DOLLAR-A-MONTH Mission Club for hearts of gold—wise old people who are very close to God. Be a member or match the gold of their hearts or the silver of their hair with a little kindred donation.

MY ADOPTED CHILD

"I am writing to you my first letter as a Priest and indeed I am very happy to let you know that my first Christmas Mass was for you and those dear to you." What a joy for this benefactor to have such an appreciative PRIEST-SON AT THE ALTAR. PAUL, of St. Joseph's Seminary in India and ELIE, of St. Anne's Seminary in the Holy Land need \$200 for their education in the SACRED PRIESTHOOD. Both are in Second Theology and have just three more scholastic years before Ordination. Each will be eternally, prayerfully grateful. Could you ADOPT A SON-IN-CHRIST?

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