

# Rigney Gets 'Solitary' Cell

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

In the summer of 1955, I had become a proficient matchmaker and applied myself diligently to the task, was, of course, that exemplary behavior in this Tzu Hsing Lu prison factory would cut my income in half.

Chu waxed and waned in moments when I passed, believing that I was of industry worth term; at other times, he was cheerful.

On July 13, Chi, who was cell leader, walked with me. Chu was different from my cell leaders. Unlike Wang, who had perished with a singleness of purpose, Chu was human and quite considerate.

A prison Personality After all, I had become a sort of prison personality as the inmate who had set a record of making 4,200 matchboxes in a day!

Chu said I was to pack my belongings. My spirits soared; I was convinced that I was going to be deported.

"Take your time," suggested Chu, "and collect all your belongings since you will find it difficult to recover anything left behind."

Hastily, I wrapped all my paltry possessions into several bundles and was taken to the prison entrance where the guards gave me two food packages sent by my relatives.

Waits For Next Step Bundles, food and all, I clambered into a jeep at the command of a prison officer and waited breathlessly for the next step in what I believed was going to be my release from imprisonment in China.

The officer's next move dashed my hopes. He handcuffed me and the jeep, clattering through the streets of Peiping, stopped before some buildings that looked vaguely familiar.

Suddenly, I realized where I was. Back in Tsao Lan Tzu, the prison hell of Peiping!

But I wondered why I had been taken back here. Was it going to be the same old story—more torture, more persecution, more grueling court sessions to force me to confess crimes that I never committed?

Locked In Cell These and a score of similar agonizing questions raced through my mind as I was directed to a new cell, where the door was locked behind me and the bolt clanged shut.

It was an empty cell, bare walled and full of dust. Then the officer returned, pasted on the daily prison regulations on the wall. Generally, the posting of the daily orders meant a long confinement. This was the final blow. I thought and squatted on the cell floor—squating which once had been so physically painful now had become a position of rest. I'm back. I thought glumly, back in the old cell of Tsao Lan Tzu.

Sleeps Fitfully That night I slept fitfully, rolling and tossing on the wooden kang (bed), plagued by misgivings. I groaned; whatever was in store for me could only be bad.

The next afternoon, a guard pointed a big pistol at me, motioned to the open cell door and said: "Tso!"

Wearily I obeyed, certain that the tragedy that had started at

most four years ago when I, the rector of Fu Jen Catholic University had been arrested, was about to be re-enacted.

I faltered as we approached Court Room No. 4 where I had been grilled mercilessly as to my alleged activities as an American spy. But the guard did not stop there. He ordered me on to the adjacent chamber, Court No. 5.

Meets Different Judge A young judge, one whom I had never seen before, was sitting at the bench. But the young woman who sat beside him was a familiar face. She was the court interpreter who attended most of my previous sessions.

After an exchange of polite formalities, during which the judge said he had heard good

This is the 13th installment in the gripping story of the 50 months spent in Communist prisons in China by the Very Rev. Harold W. Rigney, S.V.D. His story appears in the Courier Journal through courtesy of the Chicago Sun-Times.

reports of my work as a maker of matchboxes, he asked me: "If there was a war between China and the U.S.A., would you join the Army as you did in the second world war?"

"No," I said. This was the truth, although he may not have realized it. But the reason I wouldn't rejoin the services as a chaplain was because I was over-age. Actually, I had been dropped from the active reserve officers' list in January of 1951 as too old in grade.

"But what would you do?" he insisted.

Brother's Letter This was a loaded question. I thought fast, recalling a letter I got from my brother, the Rev. Dr. J. Francis Rigney in San Diego, Calif. The envelope bore a government postoffice stamp saying, "Pray for Peace."

"I would work for peace," I said. "I would not want to see any of my countrymen killed. Neither would I like to see the Chinese killed."

The judge shook his head and complained that my answer was not explicit. "Be clear," he said. "What would you do?"

I tried to get at what he meant. Finally, after he stressed the need for "clarity" after each set of answers, I said, "I would not take up arms against my country. Neither would I take up arms against China."

Asks My Thoughts He was somewhat mollified, although not entirely satisfied with this statement. He then passed on to another question: "What else had I been thinking

about recently? I replied that I wondered why I had been brought back to Tsao Lan Tzu.

He was somewhat mollified, pause. "Well, I will tell you why. You see you do not know Chinese and consequently can't follow the indoctrination course. You were brought back here so you could study about the New China in English."

I was deeply relieved. Then he asked an irrelevant question: "Why did you grow that beard?"

I rubbed my hand over my gaunt, whiskered cheek and said: "For two reasons: First, because I thought a beard looked less disorderly than the fuzz that accumulated every two weeks between prison shaves. Second, because I wanted to experiment with growing a beard and a mustache."

Offers Daily Shave His look was quizzical. "If you want, I can arrange to have you shaved daily."

Before he dismissed me, he said the court considered me honest; in fact, it considered all Roman Catholics honest.

This was an encouraging sign, indeed!

The following day, I was given a thorough physical examination by a prison doctor. I was put on the scales and the physician observed that my weight was down to 101 pounds, a loss of 79 pounds since my arrest. He declared I was too thin and ordered a balanced diet, which included daily rations of rice, milk and fresh eggs.

At Sparingly I also received regularly American Red Cross food packages as well as food sent by my family.

At first, I ate sparingly, fearing that the first package would be the last. But when they arrived without interruption I feasted.

For the next eight weeks, I was in solitary confinement. But solitary was a pleasure and a relief. I meditated as I pleased, prayed without fear and was never alone; I was always mindful of the presence of God.

Throughout these eight weeks, the interpreter brought me books on Red China. But toward the end of August, the interpreter stopped bringing me books. I regarded this as a bad omen and fell into a fit of depression. My gloom was deepened by intermittent rains that ended on Sept. 10. I went to bed that night, a weary and despairing prisoner, little knowing what would be in store for me on the fateful morning.

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NEXT WEEK: The proficient matchmaker of matchboxes is brought before a judge again — and finds freedom within his grasp!



## Classmates

MEETING FOR FIRST time in many years at the convocation of M.C.M. at Berchtesgaden, Germany, are these two graduates of 1946 class of St. Bernard's Seminary: (left) Chaplain (Captain) James C. Carroll, Diocese of Hartford, stationed in Heidelberg and Chaplain (Captain) Joseph A. Natale, Diocese of Rochester, located in Augsburg, Germany.

## Income Tax Return Given To Girls' Home

A description of the work being done at Holy Angels Home for girls will be given by Miss Alice Moreland in a talk to the Rosary Society of Holy Family Parish, Rochester on Wednesday, May 9 at 8 p. m. in the parish hall, Jay St.

Persons interested in the program of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge conducting the Home at 1326 Winton Road North continue to send in gifts in the Appeal for a new Monastery and for other improvements.

EXCERPTS FROM letters received this week follow:

enclosing \$3.00 toward your Building Fund. Please remember my petition in your May devotions.

Enclosed please find \$10.00 to add to the fund for the Appeal. This was given to me by a person for whom I did a small favor and for which I did not expect any reimbursement.

One person (no name given) enclosed a \$1.00 bill with an article cut from the Catholic Courier Journal. "The enclosed \$5.00 is for your Building Fund. Wish it were a hundred times more."

"This \$100.00 is a return on my Income Tax and I can't think of anything more worthwhile than to give it to your Building Fund."

Please accept this small gift of \$1.00 and remember my three intentions in your May devotions."

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