

THE GUATEMALA MISSION

June 31, 1959

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This is my first personal report and as such can hardly be presented as another installment in a series--unless something like "a synopsis of previous installments" is attempted.

Fourteen years ago when VJ day came I was marching a platoon of Naval Air Cadets to a class in celestial navigation. Within seconds the news turned the St. Mary's Pre-Flight School into a chaos that reigned the whole day. By nightfall the celebration was over and so was further pilot training. Our program was too costly to continue another day. Unlike most of the Air Cadets, I had already gotten my college degree. They could go back to college. What would I do? As keen as I was for engineering, I did not want to make a hasty decision about life work.

I finally chose temporarily to teach Math that year (45-46) at Westmont College, taking courses in Bible and New Testament Greek on the side. It was a wonderful year, and in it I became convinced that many branches of Christian service needed a little engineering. I had the idea that improvements of a technical sort were possible in many areas from the teaching of New Testament Greek to the use of certain new audio-visual techniques in the presentation of the books of the Bible. And I hoped that basic improvements could improve Christian efforts in every country of the world. I decided to spend a year at Princeton Seminary as a good grounding for whatever lifework I felt led into. That was the time also, in the fall of 1946, that I went on a tour of Presbyterian mission work in Mexico with young people from the 1st Presb. Church of Berkeley. We got as far as Oaxaca but not to Yucatán. Too bad we didn't get to Guatemala!

My year at Princeton was moving. As a fundamentalist from the West I criticized everything, but ended up beginning to sense my own Pharisaic spirit. Next year Fuller Seminary opened--two blocks from my home in California. Ties of geography, family and friendship made me a student in its first year ('47-'48).

Now I had taken New Testament Greek at Westmont, at Princeton, and at Fuller, and I needed no further proof that someone ought to take the time to investigate the application of the most modern and scientific language teaching methods to the Biblical languages. And being an engineer at heart, I had been tinkering with this problem, with not only myself but other seminary students in mind--indeed I felt keenly for all who needed to know Greek as a real language rather than as a set of rules.

Thus for a time I laid aside the matter of new methods of communicating the Bible and went to the Summer Institute of Linguistics at Norman, Oklahoma for technical linguistics. It was a thrilling summer. In the fall I got a job teaching Greek by an oral method. This was at Pasadena College ('48-'49), and during this year I began to get ulcers! I found out that knowing Greek as a set of rules may not be knowing Greek as a language, but that so long as the rules are what are tested at the end of the year very little classroom time can be spared to teach the language itself. That is, so long as the traditional type of tests are the sole criterion of accomplishment in Greek, the Apostle Paul himself would have to put in a great deal of study time in order to pass the course. For the ordinary student, without Paul's starting advantage, the supposed "stepping stone" to the language--the traditional grammatical analysis--is so substantial a "preparation" that it constitutes a dusty detour that is critically time-consuming. And, alas, no

detour is really necessary! That year all I accomplished almost was to figure out some new ways to teach old grammar so that my students could handle the year-end finals. I did not figure out how Greek could be taught in a Greek course. In dismay and challenge I decided to back off for a while and follow up my interest in Bible teaching methodology.

A term at Prairie Bible Institute in Alberta, Canada, (Fall 49) where the Bible is taught by a most unusual method, was very interesting and stimulating. A wonderful spirit they have there, too. And now also I stopped off to help full-time for three months in getting a project of lay-Christians going in Aghanistan, a project I had been interested in since 1947 when it first began. At the moment the courses, books, equipment, and faculty of an engineering school were being gathered together. I almost went over myself, but between the various irons I had in the fire I decided to stick with the linguistic problem.

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language was the field in which the most modern methods were under experimentation, even though precious little original, inventive experimental work was being carried on. I went to a technical linguistic institute at Univ. of Michigan in the summer of 1950, completed a Masters Degree in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language at Columbia in 1951, transferred to Cornell to complete my Ph D in 1953. Structural linguistics was the field of my major, minors being in cultural anthropology and mathematical statistics.

Roberta had joined me for most of the time at Cornell, and was an indispensable help in every respect. Though she was an R.N. with a B.S. in Nursing Education, she had long been interested in Laubach-Literacy-and-linguistics, and thus in 1952 we both went

to Norman, Oklahoma for the summer "Wycliffe" course--she for the first time, and this time I taught.

Both at Wycliffe and in university work in Anthropology I was impressed by the practical importance of studying other radically different cultures and the way they function so as to view with fresh insight the attitudes and patterns of our own society as well as gain genuine understanding of foreign peoples. The spilling over of some of my enthusiasm for anthropology as a tool in areas of Christian concern explains in part why my (younger) brother is at the moment acting head of the Dept. of Anthropology at Wheaton.

My interest in Anthropology even explains why I now returned to finish my B.D. at Princeton. I had for years followed (with a sense of personal obligation as a Christian) the programs of overseas technical assistance such as UNESCO, Point Four, the Near East Foundation, World Literacy, Nelson Rockefeller's work in Venezuela and Brazil in the International Basic Economy Corporation, as well as, very specifically, the Afghan Institute of Technology (of which for two years, under UNESCO, my older brother was the director). Anthropology professors generally have great skill in letting fall all kinds of jibes and ridicule about the Christian movement, especially overseas Christian missionaries who are very nearly their direct competitors in exotic lore. Yet I came to see that, ironically, the Anthropological Ideal is really not fulfilled as much by the secular specialized agencies--precisely because they are specialized, and also because they are usually "here today and gone tomorrow"--as by the dug-in Christian missions which learn the language and customs of the people, operate primarily on the soul of the people, and are thereby concerned with and related to

every aspect of the society, supplementing and interpreting their central thrust with integrated programs of public health, medical, agricultural, and community services. In anthropological terms, the prime strategy of the Christian mission is the creation of a new community, a renewed sub-society within the society. In this sub-community the Christian ideals are adapted, proven, demonstrated, communicated. Even secular agencies these days are forced to admit that the most effective literacy programs, for example, are carried out in local churches, where a reading community is the all-important vehicle for creating and preserving the fruits of the literacy campaign. The same applies in the introduction of new agricultural or health ideas or new anything.

Thus it is that I felt led to align myself with an avowedly Christian agency. The dreadful errors in overseas work exposed in the recent book, The Ugly American, are scarcely to be found among the mission organizations. What board does not require the learning of the foreign language or languages? What mission program excludes the common people? One of the distinctive things about the Christian Mission is that it has reached and transformed the ordinary people in foreign lands!

It is so short a step now to where we are now that it is hardly necessary to fill in the missing months. Suffice it to say that I spent three years completing Princeton, holding a student pastorate and doing engineering work simultaneously. Great changes had been made at Princeton during the six years I was away. The veterans, not unused to responsibility and campaigns, had been maturer students and had not only brought wives to the campus but a good many practical changes in the way things were done. Time was ripe for a new kind of handbook for Hebrew

students, and I was glad to have had the technical linguistics and mathematics necessary to originate and design it. It is now in use at Princeton in mimeographed form. Similar and related tools for New Testament Greek as well are still in progress, and it is hoped that they can be of use to Bible translators in general and those pastors who would like to gain at least some return from their extensive seminary investment in the study of Greek and Hebrew.

The out-going "Study Fellowship" for those candidates which annually go out into work under our Commission was a whirl-wind courtship with the Ecumenical Idea--by no means completely new to those from Princeton--a potent graduate school of foreign service for the present-day world in which there are next to no more foreign missions just national missions activity in each country, with foreigners coming to help with it.

And that is where I am now. The Presbyterian Church in Guatemala has its mission here under God--not us Gringos. I hope that they will continue with work among the Indians of their country. I am here with that interest, under their assignment. Our first year here, getting started, getting settled, can be summed up in the following statistical way, making reference only to the quantities involved in the work-week. (see chart on next page)

Any such summary, of course, omits mention of some of the very pleasant surprises we have had in coming here. We have found that the international boundaries are relatively trivial (except to cross!), and that there are hardly any really fundamental differences between the people here and those in the States. On the other hand, the Indians, both here and in all of the hemisphere, are the real foreign block. But the "Latins", at least, are fast

following (for better or worse) the U.S. pattern of everyday life.

Then, there is the church here, already in existence in almost every little town. What a tremendous accomplishment this has been (in human terms) on the part of a handful of people from the States in the last 75 years! With weaknesses and strong points, of course, the church here is already a vital force in the country as a whole. Our job is the privilege of working with this church.

Statistical Summary, mentioned on page 6

- 34 days: Sundays
- 20 days: Department of Extension itineration and trips for evangelism and orientation.
 - (5 days--to Ixchiguan, highest town in Central America)
 - (3 days--to Huitan, another mountain town)
 - (4 days--Annual Conference here at Mam Center)
 - (0 days--really one day, but on Sunday and so not counted, to Nueva San Carlos, a coastal town)
 - (3 days--Ixtahuacan Conference, an annual conference in the Central American Mission area)
 - (2 days--Sibilia, mountain town, Presbytery meeting)
 - (3 days--trip to capital to see AV men from NY)
- 5 days: visitors from U.S.
- 5 days: playing soccer--half hour per day
- 20 days: five unavoidable trips to capital for visas, freight, etc
- 30 days: believe it or not, trips to Quezaltenango
- 8 days: Annual Mission Retreat
- 6 days: Retreat for National Pastors
- 6 days: unpacking (conservative estimate)
- 12 days: building--carpentry, electrical, etc.--150 feet of bookshelf space
- 10 days: what I would call "maid's work"
- 3 days: production of an 80-slide series for use in interpreting the Mam Institute program to parents of future students.
- 1 day: Attendance at two meetings of the Quez. Station
- 25 days: 1 hour a day in essential, official correspondence and general office setting up and maintenance.
- 12 days: supervision of language program employees (1/2 hr day)
- 25 days: interruptions by misc. things, emergencies, children,
- 4 days: walking trips interviewing Indian families
- 4 days: transcription of recordings
- 25 days: language analysis
- 10 days: conversation study
- 265 days, the first 265 on the field--at San Juan Ostuncalco

Finally, there are the others from the U.S. I confess I had

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not realized that these fellow workers would be such a high quality group. They are highly trained and well-adjusted. By no means perfect--lest I be out of place among them!--they are nevertheless a good deal superior to any office force you could expect to associate with in any job you might have in the States. Of course we don't see each other day in and day out, but there are many contacts and they are always keenly rewarding.

Life anywhere has its ups and downs, but with no further qualification I can say that our family is stable and happy, that we are deeply thrilled in our new task. We are grateful to God and to the fine organization with which His Mission has involved us.