

INTERNEED BY THE JAPANESE

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the United States was drawn into World War II. The Philippines was eighteen hours ahead of Hawaii, meaning that the Pearl Harbor attack would have occurred just after 2 a.m. on the morning of December 8. Several hours passed before the news would reach the Philippines. Elizabeth Galley (later Wilson), described how they heard the news:

As the sun rose, Doris Carlson, Gladys Knowles, and I ate a hurried breakfast and prepared to go to the College of Chinese Studies where we were students.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs and the pounding on the door caused us to rush to answer. On the threshold stood Robert Tangen. "Girls," he said, "Japan has just bombed Pearl Harbor." This left us all aghast, and we pondered what the future might hold.¹

They were not left to ponder long. As they were receiving this news, planes appeared overhead, which they momentarily mistook for friendly forces. Flying over the U.S. air base at nearby Camp John Hay, the planes, now identified as Japanese, began bombing which caused a number of casualties.² A long nightmare had begun.

The Japanese landed almost unopposed on the beaches of Lingayen Gulf, on the northwestern coast of Luzon and twenty two miles west of Baguio.³ Some of the Japanese turned east and headed for Baguio while the main body of the army drove towards Manila. With Japanese aircraft already bombing Camp John Hay, those in Baguio, which included about five hundred foreigners all totaled, knew they would be receiving unwanted company soon.⁴ They did not have long to wait. In addition to the other foreigners, a fair number of Japanese citizens married to Filipino women also lived in Baguio. Because the mayor was afraid of offending these, he refused to take the steps necessary to maintain law and order. Mass chaos prevailed throughout the city. Leland Johnson joined a group of civilians who took things into their own hands, appointing patrols to maintain order and enforcing a blackout designed to hide the city from Japanese planes at night. Bombing raids made walking outside in the daylight a dangerous venture.

The situation became more precarious when the Allied troops left the city, because Baguio did not afford the best place to make a last stand and removed to Bontoc, about one hundred miles away. Their departure led to an immediate problem as there was no one to spot attacking planes and give the civilians fair warning to take cover. Johnson's group filled the gap, appointing plane spotters from among members of their group, which undoubtedly saved many lives. The Tangens, who lived in the same apartment complex as Galley, Carlson, and Knowles, moved in with the Johnsons and the single ladies moved elsewhere when they realized that the apartments might be bombed.⁵ Johnson and Tangen also dug an air raid shelter in Johnson's backyard, something which would benefit them greatly later. Apparently, they had some idea of where they

might be interned as they stocked food at Brent International School. This was an exercise in futility because the Japanese later took all of it.

Not only did Johnson's citizen's group watch for planes, their mountain perch at five thousand feet above sea level allowed them to watch the advance of the Japanese infantry toward Baguio from Lingayen Gulf. They probably knew that the Allies had no blocking force of sufficient size to stop the Japanese from reaching them. Fear was the order of the day. On December 27, the city faced the inevitable and surrendered to the Japanese. Rena Baldwin remembers that the night before, the missionaries had a sweet prayer meeting and testified that God had given them peace, a peace that would be sorely tried in the months ahead.⁶ Leland Johnson remembers that they also did something practical, especially for Pentecostals; they sat down and ate a good meal! For the next three years, life would be anything but normal.

SENT TO THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

Baldwin recalled what happened in their fateful first personal encounter with the Japanese:

Sometime after midnight the Japanese came for us and took us to the British School (Brent) where so many were already.... We were all lined up facing a machine gun while the general made a speech through his interpreter. The only building we were allowed to occupy was already full, and new groups were arriving. We were there all day and on the following day (December 29) were told we would be going to a different place.

Faint for lack of food, we were herded onto the tennis court. Facing a machine gun and with planes circling over our heads, we were told we must walk to our destination. If we wanted to be sure of suitcase and bedding, we must carry them ourselves. Furthermore, they said the men would be sent to one place, the mothers and children to another, and unmarried women and girls to yet another. We were all hurried off under heavy guard. Soon we found where we were going, not to some far distant place as we had been led to suppose, but to different sections of Camp John Hay, comparatively nearby.⁷

Johnson reported that during the time of preparation for this trek he and Helen were given unusual strength to arrange their belongings. God was sustaining them. Leaving what they didn't need behind and with Sammy and Constance holding hands, knowing that Leland would be separated from them, the Johnsons prepared for an unknown future. One can only wonder at the depth of fear and grief they must have felt. At one point in the trek, Johnson caught a glance of Sammy and Constance, still holding hands, with Elizabeth Galley assisting them. Her kindness to his children must have touched his heart.

Camp John Hay had been severely bombed and was hardly fit for human habitation, something that never bothered the Japanese. Among other things, the water pipes had been destroyed. Obtaining drinkable water would be a difficult chore. It would also mean that they had nothing with which to clean their living quarters. When dysentery swept the camp and even the guards recognized that they too, were at risk, the pipes were repaired. Fortunately no one died.

In January 1942, a record rainfall of twenty-five inches fell. Gladys Knowles felt that this provision of water may have saved

lives.⁸ Knowles also became gravely ill with jaundice at about this time. Someone managed to provide her with a cooked potato which not only strengthened her faith, but also put her on the road to recovery.⁹ One advantage of sleeping in a barracks with a damaged roof was that Leland Johnson could look up at the stars at night and meditate on the goodness of God. Knowing that He was there and was watching over them was a great comfort to him. The missionaries learned to see the hand of God in many similar situations and events.

One shock followed another. At one point the Japanese camp commandant, a Lieutenant Makibo, announced that the women and girls would be required to serve as servants to the Japanese high command. No one missed the real intent of this, knowing full well that they would be raped. Rallying to the defense of their wives and daughters, the men showed great courage in telling the Japanese that they would have to kill every man in the camp first. This must have been seen as ridiculous to their captors as the prisoners had no weapons at all, and the Japanese were well-known for using their bayonets at the slightest provocation. In what can only be described as divine intervention, the Japanese backed down and no one was ever molested in any way. Given the character of the Japanese military elsewhere, this was in fact a miracle.

Meanwhile, the Filipinos had not abandoned the missionaries. The Bible school had not been able to continue because of the war, but the students had not forgotten their teachers. Several students tried to get permission to visit the missionaries. One young man in particular, Juan Taplac, was particularly persistent and actually managed to get into the camp although he was beaten by a guard. He delivered food to the missionaries, including a birthday cake for Leland Johnson. True to his word,

either he, Juan Soriano, another Bible school student, or Rosendo Alcantara came every day. Their courage and sacrifice must have touched the missionaries deeply. Johnson would later report that Soriano and Rosendo Alcantara had saved their lives by ministering to them in this way.¹⁰

While this was happening, the Japanese propaganda machine was in high gear. The missionaries were fed a steady diet of lies regarding the progress of the war, including the idea that the Japanese had landed on the West Coast of the U.S. and were even dropping paratroopers on Denver, Colorado! Since they had no access to the truth, one wonders what they might have thought. In addition to the propaganda, they were interrogated by their captors as they thought they were spies. Torture was used in some cases, although it does not appear that the Assemblies of God missionaries were subjected to it.

The internees developed their own routine to care for their needs and looked for ways to alleviate boredom. After just over a month in the camp, the missionaries, with the possible exception of Robert and Mildred Tangen, were unexpectedly released and allowed to return to their homes in Baguio, although they remained under close surveillance with limited freedom of movement. The Tangens seemed to have been released later for a short period of time. Apparently this was done to give the impression to Filipinos in Baguio that life should continue as normal.¹¹

FREE IN BAGUIO

The release was providential since Helen Johnson was eight months pregnant and camp life had been hard on her. Had she given birth while in the camp, Leland would not have been able to help her since men and women were separated from one

another. While there were still many privations, at least they were together. By the grace of God, Helen was brought to the Norte Dame Hospital in Baguio, where she delivered a healthy baby girl, whom they named Margaret Joy. While they certainly must have wondered what the future held, the Johnson's joy was indescribable. They could not have known then the ordeal that they would go through with little Margaret before the war ended.

Appleby and Baldwin moved back into the house they had occupied before the war. They carried on clandestine prayer meetings in their home and were allowed to go to church. Johnson attended a meeting of the Japanese Religious Association with the understanding that some freedom or at least tolerance of religion would be allowed. When he learned that all sermons were to be written out and approved by the Japanese and that the Japanese flag was required to be draped over the doors of the cooperating churches, he refused to collaborate. In his own words about the meeting:

There was not a word of prayer offered. God's guiding was not requested, and His blessing was not invoked. Most of us went away from the meeting feeling that we had almost perjured our souls, even though we had done no wrong. The whole thing was such a farce that we were deeply grieved.¹²

Back in the United States, the saints in the churches were rallied to pray for the internees. Perhaps it was just as well that they knew little of the conditions under which the missionaries were living. Efforts to contact them were largely unsuccessful.¹³ Noel Perkin was not content to just pray and tried to send as much as ten thousand dollars to the missionaries through another missions organization, but the funds were embezzled.¹⁴

Back in Baguio, life became more complicated. The Japanese did not provide food for those outside the camps and money for food was hard to find. Hearing their children's cry for food was almost more than the Johnsons could bear. Leland Johnson was permitted to go to market three times a week, but his money eventually ran out. Appleby had managed to hide a hundred dollar bill from the Japanese; the money came in handy when the missionaries had needs. The Johnsons were unable to secure a loan and were forced to sell their extra belongings which they had stored in the air raid shelter Johnson and Tangen had built.

The Johnsons were able to plant crops. Through thriftiness, they were able to carry on much longer than they had thought. The *camote* (sweet potatoes) that they had planted came in earlier than expected and, much to their delight, were quite large. All of them had lost weight in the camp but now, with a somewhat better diet, began to gain again. They also managed to purchase a couple of pregnant goats and looked forward to getting some fresh milk. These goats had never been milked and had to be tied down in the garage before they would submit to the process.

Sunday was a real treat for the missionaries as they were allowed to gather at Bethel Chapel for Sunday worship. Johnson was prohibited from preaching because he refused to collaborate with the Japanese. The sermons, which he had prepared, were delivered by Juan Soriano, one of the young men who had brought food to them in the camp.

INTERNED AGAIN

The great fellowship notwithstanding, the hardships were severe enough that Johnson wondered if they had missed the will of God by agreeing to live outside the camp. They may have

been relieved that they were interned again in November 1942. For some unexplainable reason, however, Appleby and Baldwin were overlooked and were able to remain in their own home until July 7, 1944, when they were also taken back to the camp. While this was probably a simple oversight by their captors, it may have been because they had obtained formal permission to live in their home or perhaps because Appleby, already in poor health, had a severe case of dysentery. The local Filipinos rallied to their side, bringing coconuts, bananas, and other foods as they were able to help the ladies. Most certainly, they were also angels of encouragement and hope. Through their friends, these ladies saw the hand of God.¹⁵

This time, the missionaries were interned at Camp Holmes, also in Baguio. Like internment at John Hay, living conditions were desperate. Hunger, disease, and sometimes torture were a regular part of life. At Holmes, however, they did have a school and a hospital, and were able to conduct church services. From the foreigners interned there, came a supply of good teachers, doctors and nurses, and preachers.¹⁶

How much communication was received from the outside world is not clear. At Christmas of 1942, the Red Cross was able to get food parcels to the internees that included a can of Spam, prunes, powdered milk, corned beef, chocolate and other goodies from home. Doris Carlson felt it was an answer to prayer.¹⁷ Galley was also able to get letters out to her family, one of which was printed in the *Pentecostal Evangel*. In addition to reporting on her health and living conditions, she also gave detailed instructions on how to write internees and prisoners of war, suggesting that communication was possible.¹⁸ While not dishonest, the letter was quite sanguine considering the circumstances. It must be remembered that the Japanese censored all mail, and she may have wanted to spare her

family the knowledge of the details of the living conditions. By contrast, the only letter that Gladys Knowles received during the entire time contained news of her mother's death.¹⁹

On the brighter side, Mildred Tangen gave birth to a son during this time. Getting adequate nutrition was a challenge and there were a number of nursing babies in the camp. The Japanese ignored their pleas for milk, but God heard their cry. One day a cow and her calf were discovered near the fence at the edge of the camp. The cow was close enough that they could milk it! Not only did the cow come that day, it came every day for as long as they were in that camp and provided enough milk for all of the nursing babies.²⁰ God had answered their prayers in a way the Japanese probably never even noticed!

Shortly after being interned again, Leland Johnson and several missionaries from other missions were taken to a prison where even stricter conditions were enforced. Talking was not allowed and no food or drink was offered until late in the afternoon. Even then, their food consisted of a single ball of rice thrown at them by the jailers. Lights were kept on all night, making sleep difficult, and many of his fellow prisoners were beaten, although he was apparently spared. Days were spent sitting with their back to the wall. Their hands were to be clasped together with fingers interlocked, supporting their knees. This meant that their feet must have been flat on the floor, their interlocked hands supporting their knees from underneath their legs.²¹ It would have also meant that their backs were continually bent. Sitting by the hour in this position must have become uncomfortable indeed.

Within a few days, they had set up a system of watching for the guard, which allowed them to relax a bit when the guards were not in sight. Interrogations were conducted using many methods to get the internees to confess crimes they did not

commit. The emotional strain of the war and general internment were only magnified here, especially with the possibility of death as an ever-present factor. How long this went on is not clear, but it appears to have been about two weeks before Johnson was reunited with his family at Camp Holmes.

By September 1943, it became obvious to the internees that war was turning in favor of the Allies. Guerilla attacks were increasing, and the Japanese were starting to get jittery. Johnson had a Filipino contact who seemed to know what was going on, but how he got his information is unclear. What was known is that the guerillas had radio contact with U.S. General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Australia, and this was most likely the source of news. No doubt the guerillas passed the word to civilians who passed it along to the internees, a process also known as the bamboo telephone. However the news may have come, it was accurate. On October 20, 1944, a date forever etched in the annals of Philippine history, the Allied forces, under MacArthur's personal command, landed on the beaches of Leyte Gulf, near Palo, Leyte, in the eastern part of the central Philippines. By December, the internees in Baguio saw increased air activity overhead. One day, an American flier flew low over the camp and dipped his wings to the internees to let them know that they had been spotted before he flew away. The excitement on the ground was palpable with the internees cheering wildly, momentarily forgetting that the Japanese still ran the camp and could kill them at any moment.

MOVED TO MANILA

On January 6, 1945, the Allies landed a major force at Lingayen, the same place where the Japanese had first arrived. Like the Japanese, they began to drive for Manila. In anticipation

of this invasion, on December 29, Leland Johnson's forty-third birthday, the Japanese began moving the internees to Manila. Baldwin and Appleby had already been moved to an internment camp in Los Baños about forty miles southeast of Manila shortly after being re-interned in July 1944.

The internees were forced to confront a new danger. After three years of dealing with the possibility of death by starvation, disease, or bayonet, they now had to worry about falling bombs because U.S. planes were strafing the road. On that day, however, a typhoon passed through the area preventing the Allied planes from flying, which Mildred Tangen saw as an act of God.²²

They were taken to the Old Bilibid prison in Manila. Johnson described their first few moments there:

[At] eight o'clock the morning of December 30, 1944, we arrived at Old Bilibid Prison. It had been a terrible trip lasting twenty-six hours. We were driven to the back part of this old Spanish prison. Hundreds of years ago it had been erected. Everything about it was dilapidated and filthy. It was enough to turn the stoutest heart, and some of our folk were almost beyond recovery from the long, hard trip. They stumbled off the trucks. Some fell where they got down and lay there until they were picked up by the stronger among us.²³

He went on to add:

Here, six thousand marines and navy men had been interned. Most of them had died from disease, mistreatment and starvation. The mattresses and mosquito nets given our group to use had been used by them. Everything was stained and incrustated as the result

of their manner of death. Dysentery, dengue and malaria had devastated their ranks. The injured had no care and bled to death or rotted upon the mattresses.²⁴

An epidemic of dengue fever swept through the prison. Johnson suffered from it for fourteen days before he began to recover. At the same time, all three of their children fell sick. The worst of them was little Margaret Joy, who was not quite three years old. While MacArthur's forces battled the Japanese, this little girl fought for her life. Galley, Knowles, and Carlson came to their aid, demonstrating the sacrificial love of Christ at a time when it was desperately needed. Then these missionaries, too, fell sick, and Galley was transferred to Santo Tomas, another internment camp in downtown Manila.

Margaret Joy's battle raged for several days. She had already suffered much hardship in her young life, and no one was sure she would make it. Prayer was continually offered for her. This alone was enough to stress her parents under ordinary circumstances, but nothing was normal. Ravaged by three years of war, most of it in internment camps, and with a battle being fought right outside the prison walls, the strain must have been incredible. At one point, Margaret Joy turned to Leland and said "Daddy, I go to see Jesus."²⁵ Unspeakable terror gripped his soul. Words failed him and he and Helen cried out to God day and night. But little Margaret didn't die. God touched her and restored her to complete health.

Meanwhile at Los Baños, Appleby and Baldwin were going through their own trials. Baldwin described the situation:

Soon only American planes were soaring over the Islands, and life became very difficult for us. Food became scarcer

and scarcer, and we learned what starvation rations meant. In the middle of the morning we were given two kitchen spoonfuls of rice gruel. At 4:30 in the afternoon we were given the same portion with perhaps some vegetable tops added. The gruel kept getting thinner and thinner, and never more than two spoonfuls a day.²⁶

Meanwhile, MacArthur's forces continued their drive toward Manila, and the Japanese fought for every inch of the city. Trapped Japanese soldiers raped and pillaged, ripping open the wombs of pregnant women and burning hospitals with patients inside, committing atrocities matched only by the pillage of Nanking, China, several years before. At least one hundred thousand civilians died.²⁷ The stench of unburied bodies still pervaded the streets.²⁸ Allied and Japanese firepower reduced the city to rubble. Manila suffered destruction greater than any other city in the entire war, with the exception of Warsaw, Poland.

LIBERATED!

On February 22, 1945, MacArthur received an intelligence report stating that the Japanese planned to execute the prisoners at Los Baños at 7 a.m. the next day. Thankfully, the prisoners themselves were unaware of this. The Los Baños camp was twenty-five miles behind enemy lines, and the general knew he would need a miracle to get everyone out alive. At three minutes to seven the next morning, the internees saw U.S. paratroopers descending from the sky! United States tanks had crept to the outside of the camp the night before, waiting for the paratroopers to get inside and open the doors. When

Baldwin saw one of the troops she cried out, "Girls, look, an American soldier!"²⁹ She thought he was beautiful. Later, she reflected that the soldier was probably dirty and greasy, but it didn't matter.³⁰ The internees were loaded onto the tanks and taken away. Appleby sustained burns on her shoulder as she was crammed into a tank that was firing shells at the enemy and the empty, hot shell casings fell on her. A kind soldier, assuring her that the shells were American, put a coat over her. In spite of enemy fire, not one soldier or internee was killed in the rescue effort. Even General MacArthur concluded that God had helped them.

At Bilibid, little Margaret Joy was still recovering from dengue when liberation came. When the internees looked out and saw that U.S. tanks were surrounding them, they went wild with joy and apparently were not afraid that the rescuers might accidentally shoot them. The Japanese guards chose to fight rather than surrender. They were eventually subdued, and the internees were rescued. They were brought to an abandoned shoe factory where they were fed their first square meal in a long time. In the aftermath, Leland Johnson even had the chance to shake hands with MacArthur!

While the war lasted several months more, it was over for the missionaries. On March 10, all of them boarded a military transport plane for Leyte. From there they were put on a U.S. Coast Guard ship bound for San Francisco. Their reunion with their families must have been heaven on earth. The long-term effects of the suffering the missionaries had endured would affect some of them for the remainder of their lives, with most being unable to return to missionary service. By the grace of God, they had endured and survived. The long nightmare had ended.

