

A note from:

Avis L. Anderson

This letter was written  
By John Anderson A  
Missionary in China  
1774 years.

Sent To Reuben  
& Gladys Anderson



SAVE

In October, 1938 while I was returning to China, the city of Canton was taken by the Japanese after bombing off and on for over a year. We were allowed the freedom of the city except military sections, but had to have passes which were renewed from month to month. Mr. Anderson was able to carry on his mission work as usual, except that he could not visit any of the stations outside the city. The hospital was operated, though most of the work was caring for refugees. About three years passed by without any unpleasantness.

We had a radio and watched events carefully. As the situation between Japan and the U. S. became strained, we received a number of letters from the American Consul, also from our Board urging all who were not actually needed to return to America. But I had so lately come from America and John felt so confident that there would not be war between Japan and the United States that I stayed on in China in spite of these warnings. Nothing could have induced John to leave and I wanted to stay with him if possible.

For some reason we did not hear the news about Pearl Harbor, but early on the morning of December 8 before I was up, Japanese officials came to take over our compound. John came and told me to hurry up to the hospital as they wanted to see us all. I hurried to the hospital with a quaking heart, not knowing what would happen to us. I sat out in the lobby a long time, and finally was called into the room where the officials were. However, nothing was said to us women and after what seemed hours they said we might go home and have breakfast. They took away our autos, radios, cameras, and gasoline. Some days later the cars were returned and the gasoline. After waiting around nearly all day it was decided we could stay on the compound in our own homes. All but one other of the missions in Canton were taken from their homes to the Shameen (the foreign concession in Canton) where they were kept in much discomfort for several days, when they had word from Tokyo to return all to their homes.

So we lived at home for 13 months with a guard of soldiers 8 or 9, on the compound all the time. After about two months they permitted us to go out one at a time to the city and be away for as long as six or 8 hours, without guard. We could send the Chinese out to buy for us, and could buy ourselves when we went out, so we got along very nicely.

But along the last of 1942 we began to hear rumors that all Americans and British were to be interned. We tried to think this was only hearsay, but early in February the Japanese Consul and other officials arrived at the hospital and called us all in. They said that on February 20 we should all be taken to the compound of the Oriental Mission and that there would be no exceptions. They told us we might take our furnishings with us, and laughed aloud when I asked if I might take my dog. We even took our piano and refrigerator. We were also allowed to take one Chinese helper for each family, so we set up housekeeping in another place, only not conveniently. Every day we had roll call twice, and sometimes were reprimanded for not being polite enough. We tried to do just right though, and the seven months there passed by with very few mishaps. There were 57 of us Americans and British, and we were a most congenial community, mostly missionaries. We were permitted to have Sunday services and Sunday night sings, occasional concerts and Shakespeare readings. We had a store on the compound where we bought supplies, and the store keeper



tried to get things we ordered. Of course prices advanced steadily, and the time came when we could not get flour that would make good bread and sugar was scarce, and it seemed terribly hard to me to think what to have for meals. But we did have good milk.

When we found we were to be interned, we were again asked if we wished to be repatriated. We were assured that it would not be possible for us to be included in the company next to sail, but in a later sailing. John and Dr. Coffin again refused, but thought that it would be best for Mrs. Coffin and me to apply for repatriation. We fondly hoped that before the time would actually come for us to leave the war would be over and we would not have to go. But in some way a change was made and all the Americans in Canton except John and Dr. Coffin were included in this first sailing. After having agreed to go we could not change our minds.

So on September 20 we left Canton for Hong Kong--36 of us. We stayed two nights at a very good Chinese hotel, where we had a rather slim diet, for they were expected to care for us for 4 Yen a person a day. That was the amount the Japanese allowed each person while we were in camp. It was about enough when we first went in, but very soon we had to use our own money to buy enough to eat.

At Hong Kong we boarded the "Teia Maru," a former French luxury freighter designed for 600 passengers. There were 1500 of us, so you can imagine conditions were not all they might have been for comfort. Because of my age I was given a straw mattress on the floor of one of the best cabins, and enjoyed every convenience, but younger people were put in bunks built two tiers high and right side by side in the public lounges, so that in one room there might be over 70, and more in others. Men were down in the hold where the heat was unbearable and many brought their mattresses out and slept on deck or anywhere they could find a spot of space. After three weeks we reached Goa, India, and the next day the "Gripsholm" arrived, and after two or three days of unloading baggage, the passengers were exchanged, the line of Japanese coming down one gangplank, and we going up another. No noon meal was served on the "Gripsholm" the first day, but they first gave out chocolate bars, and then had a buffet lunch on two decks, and what a stack of good things there was! Bread and butter, crackers and cheese, boiled eggs, cold meats of all kinds, apple sauce, fruit salad, olives, tomatoes, and everything you can imagine. As we started around the table without our plates the crowd burst into song--"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Our next stop was at Port Elizabeth, South Africa. This is a beautiful city. There were five of our Seventh-day Adventist people on board, and our church people in Port Elizabeth met us at the boat and took us to their homes over night and took us about the city, and when we left loaded us with oranges and pineapples and chocolate enough to last all the way to New York. Our veteran missionary in Africa, W. H. Anderson, came over from Cape Town to meet us.

Next we stopped at Rio de Janeiro, and the General Conference had notified our mission there of our coming, so they were at the boat to meet us and took us to their sanitarium and entertained us there. The next day we spent shopping and looking



This is a letter from John Anderson a missionary  
in China for many years.

Letter to Reuben & Gladys Anderson

about the city. Rio is a wonderfully beautiful city, as you know. I neglected to say that at Port Elizabeth the city entertained every one on the boat, taking them sight seeing and having picnics for the children, etc. At Rio also all arrangements had been made to entertain all who wished. All the different churches had booths in the large pavilion at the pier where they met the missionaries, and in the evening they had a union meeting with a dinner.

Our trip all the way was perfect, mostly sunny days and no rough weather to speak of. The "Gripsholm" was of course more roomy than the first boat and all had good accommodations, though the older people were given the best. For once it was an advantage not to be young. It was a grand feeling to pull into New York early the morning of December 1, past the Statue of Liberty, the Staten Island Ferry boat, the Battery and the sky scrapers.

After leaving the boat I was taken to the Victoria Hotel where I met our daughter Helen and members of our Mission Board. We spent one day in New York and then came on to Washington. Helen and I are located in our own home and busy trying to get settled. It has turned real cold for Washington and it is hard for me to get everything going smoothly, but hope in time to get things in order.

The Red Cross had sent supplies of clothes by the "Gripsholm" for men, women, and children, and they were surely appreciated. Many of the passengers were actually destitute for clothes. There were also toilet articles, toothbrushes, tooth powder, soap, and everything imaginable.

We also are greatly indebted to the Red Cross for the supplies of cracked wheat, farina and rice sent to China before the war began. Our hospital received a share and it was a tremendous help in caring for the hundreds of refugees needing help.

When the war started December 8, 1941, our daughter, Helen was with us in Canton acting as superintendent of nurses and teacher in the hospital. Her furlough was due so when the opportunity to return to America came she made application and left Canton in May of 1942, reaching America on the first trip of the "Gripsholm."