

BURMA REVISITED

— In God's Service



Royer — Ambassador College

Citizens of Rangoon, Burma prepare to ride ferries across the Rangoon River.

In 1942 the author of this article was stationed in the China-Burma-India theatre of World War II. Death and ruin by fighter fire power was then the order of the day. In the fall of 1972, thirty years later, he was privileged to make a return visit to the area — this time in the service of God!

by Paul S. Royer

New Delhi, India — October 1972

IT ALL started with a telephone call from Mr. Dart. "Are you sitting down?" he inquired. "You're going to the Philippines for the Feast of Tabernacles!"

My reaction was a positive, excited, immediate, "Wow! Are you sure you mean me?" He did, and I had to admit that in all my dreaming about Feast as-

signments, I had never once thought of such a wonderful opportunity as visiting the Philippines.

I had heard about the "handshaking Filipinos," and about their love and compassion. Thinking back on all the Feasts I'd ever attended, I had to concede that one of the most rewarding was the 1967 Passover in Hawaii. There had been only about 100 brethren there, counting men, women and children. One of the things that made it such a great Festival was the humble, childlike attitude and sincere love that was expressed by the brethren. This Feast, in the Philippines, would have to be similar to that spring Festival.

Prospective Members?

Other thoughts began to crowd into my mind. It wasn't too far from the Philippines to Thailand, Burma and India where I had served as a pilot with the Flying Tigers during World War II. Were there perhaps people in those distant lands awaiting baptism?

To find out, I called our Foreign Educational Service Office in Pasadena and was referred to our English office regarding India, and to our Australian office for Thailand and Burma. I sent a letter to England, then I dialed Mr. Wayne Cole, who had just returned to Headquarters from Australia.

Mr. Cole informed me there were indeed several interested groups in Burma, though none in Thailand. As for India, a quick response from England informed me that Mr. Frankel was scheduled to take a tour immediately after the Feast.

Mr. Dart's office had sent a telex to Australia inquiring of the need for a tour in Burma, requesting an answer be sent to Manila. When I arrived in Manila, a few days before the Feast, Mr. Colin Adair handed me a page-long telex from Australia signed by

Mr. Luker. It gave complete details on three interested groups of people.

I asked Mr. Adair for a map of Burma, then we searched diligently until we located the area where each person or group lived. One group (10 to 15 people) lives in the northern section of the Chin Hills, a very remote part of Burma near where some of us had wreaked havoc and destruction with our fighters during World War II — now over thirty years ago. (See "Who Killed Jesus Christ?" in *The PLAIN TRUTH*, April 1968, p. 9 or *The GOOD NEWS*, March 1967, p. 7.) As we pored over the maps I couldn't help but wonder if any of these men had been involved in the war or had been affected by our fighters during the war.

Though Mr. Adair had little hope they would reach their destination in time, I mailed three letters from Manila to Burma announcing that my wife and I would arrive in Rangoon in approximately two weeks.

The Feast in Baguio

A few days later, we all journeyed from Manila to Baguio for the 1972 Feast of Tabernacles.

The roads on Luzon (the northern and main island of the Philippines) were difficult and crowded. We traveled the approximately 100 miles by bus, leaving at 6:30 a.m. and arriving by 1:30 p.m. It was one continuous traffic jam composed of people, bicycles, dogs, children, smoking and fuming buses, broken-down cars, horses and an occasional water buffalo. Each village seemed to rival the next in poverty and disease, with open sewers, no sanitation, and seemingly no water for bathing.

Most of the houses in the area were thatched-roof huts, constructed on stilts to escape high water. The sewage simply drops through the floor to the ground below, where the children also play, along with the chickens and the pigs. How do they survive? The tragic answer is — all too many don't!

By comparison, aside from a few scattered intrusions of modern "civilization," Baguio proved to be a millennial setting, situated in the tropical mountains several thousand feet above sea level. Baguio is majestically beautiful!

We stayed in the Baguio Country Club, a short five-minute ride from the Teacher's Camp where we would keep the Feast of Tabernacles. During World War II the Japanese officers and their concubines occupied the club. The old-timers had some stories to tell about the way it was during the occupation. We also heard from several who are now members of the Manila Church who had survived the Bataan "death march." One of our members was among a group assigned to dig their own graves. He set about the task vigorously and fervently, the only way he knew how to work. On completion each man stood beside his grave to be shot. When they came to the one who later became a member of the Church they hesitated, then decided that he was too valuable and too industrious a worker to lose.

On the opening night, I talked to our brethren about our calling, about the privilege we shared in the knowledge of this great Festival and its meaning. Prior to this Feast it had not registered in my mind that God had accomplished such a marvelous work in the Philippines, calling nearly 2,000 Filipinos into His truth. The Philippines is the only Gentile nation where God has called such a large number of people into the Worldwide Church of God in this generation. I told our people in Baguio why God had called them and their responsibilities to God.

It was truly a wonderful Feast. For my wife and me, it was a "different" kind of Feast, but in every way it was *God's* Feast of Tabernacles. After the concluding sermon and the last hymn on the Last Great Day, my wife and I stood and shook hands with (I believe) every last man, woman and child — all 896 of them! We hated to say goodbye, for God had welded us together in harmony and unity by the power of His Holy Spirit during the eight-day Festival.

On to Burma!

Though we hated to leave, I was anxious to see what work God was accomplishing in Burma. After one day's stay in Bangkok, we landed in Rangoon late in the evening. The flight had been a rough one and we were glad to

set foot on solid ground again. We found a jeep taxi and were taken to the Inya Lake Hotel.

The hotel was very large and looked ancient. It seemed hundreds of years old. Old plumbing fixtures resembled something from the time of Henry VIII, yet it was relatively pleasant. Most of the buildings in Rangoon date back to pre-World War II, built primarily by the British, and now stand in a state of decay — dark, drab, dreary, ghost-like edifices, primarily used by the Burmese Government.

Later to our surprise, we found that the hotel had been built in 1962 by the Russians as a gift to the Burmese Government. Of course it was run by the government, as are all businesses, for private enterprise does not exist in Burma. As a result the economy is stagnant.

There are virtually no tourists and, of course, no tourist shops in Burma, with one exception — a government-operated gift shop in Rangoon.

Mrs. Wayne Cole had told my wife of the difficulty of obtaining visas and traveling in Burma. She also informed us that tourists were watched carefully in Burma. Regardless of the problem, I was able to talk privately to a number of Burmese in and around Rangoon. Each expressed a hopelessness with life and a lack of purpose for living.

The people are wretchedly poor. Their greatest apparent assets are their gold shrines, their Buddhas, their temples. The average income in Rangoon is only about fifty U. S. dollars per month. Few know anything of the outside world. They are virtually prisoners of the state. Their only *hope* — in total ignorance of God's plan — is that life will be a little better in the "next life."

Contacting Prospectives

When we first checked into the hotel, I was informed that a man had tried to call us the evening before we arrived. Later, on our initial attempt to contact those we had come so far to see, we found him to be one of the men I'd written to from Manila — a Mr. Frederick Dunn.

Early in the morning, my wife and I took a taxi to the downtown area of Rangoon. I gave the driver the address and after a short search, while we

waited in the cab, he returned with Mr. Dunn, who was excited to talk about God's Work.

He had received my letter and had written to the two interested groups not living in Rangoon, telling them of our impending arrival. I asked him about the possibility of reaching the Myaungmya group, the nearest to Rangoon. In answer, I was taken to the river and shown an old broken-down wooden Mississippi-style riverboat. It was the only means of reaching the village. Passengers boarded at noon and traveled upstream all night, reaching the village when the sun was well up in the sky. I looked at my wife and I knew if God had people in Myaungmya, they would have to come to Rangoon — at least for this trip.

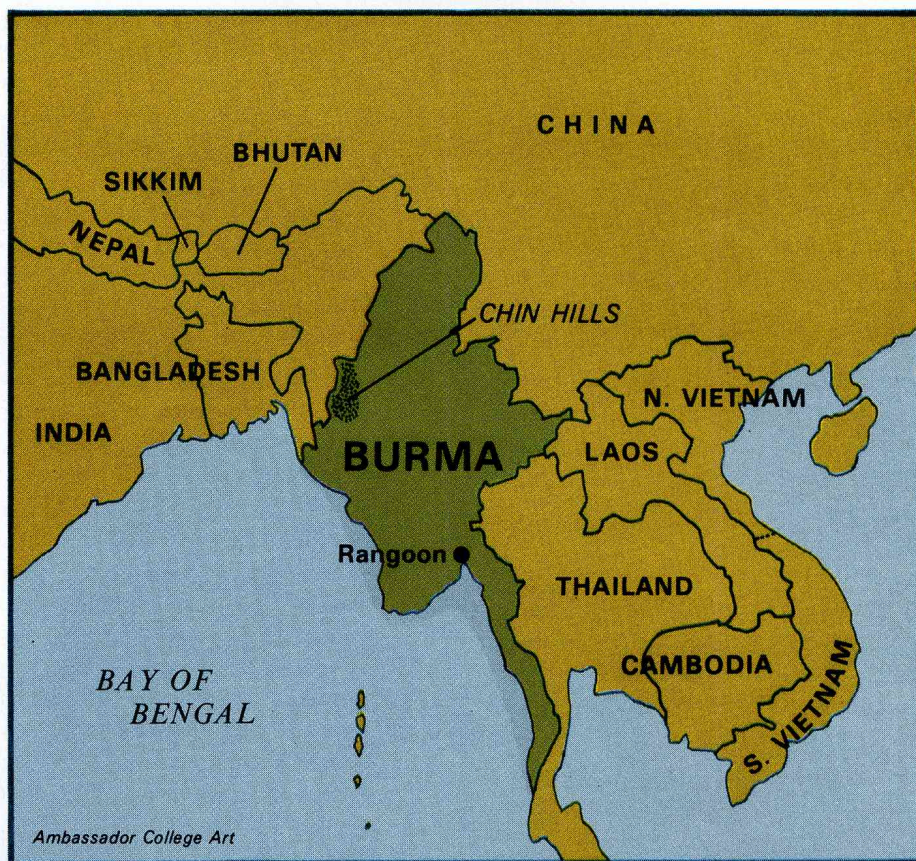
But what about the other group? The Chin Hill people, my taxi driver informed me, could only be reached on foot with some travel by jeep. It would take days and then one was not assured of contact. Language could also be a barrier.

Next on the agenda was the other person in Rangoon, apparently a transient. Mr. Luker had sent the address of H. T. Zam Hei. After some searching, we found it to be the address of an old British warehouse with windows covered by heavy iron bars. The building appeared uninhabited and uninviting.

We stepped around two men on the sidewalk who were washing the transmission of an old dilapidated car in gasoline. Various groups of dirty, unshaven, poorly clothed natives in the partially deserted street stood staring menacingly at us. They all looked unfriendly and appeared irritated that we were intruding into their world.

Mr. Dunn tried to gain entrance — it seemed useless. The men standing around told him the address was incorrect. As far as I was concerned, it appeared we had ended in a blind alley. I called several times to Mr. Dunn to forget the whole thing, but he persisted. Finally, we gained entrance.

Inside we found a huge room with cots, tables and a few chairs. Cobwebs covered the lights and furniture. We talked to several men sitting around on cots or chairs reading, sleeping or playing cards. Finally, we were told that



Mr. H. T. Zam Hei did reside in the building, but was then away attending class in another part of the city.

I told Mr. Dunn that I would like to counsel with the two of them together in the hotel. He seemed very happy and said he would stop and pick up Mr. Zam Hei and they would be there by 4:30 that afternoon.

Would They Come?

As we waited in our Russian-style antiquated room, five o'clock came and went, then 6:00, and then it was nearly 7:00. I wondered what had happened. Had we come all the way to Rangoon for nothing? My wife encouraged me. We had done all we could at this point. I began to think maybe God was not calling anyone from Burma.

I got on my knees and asked God to send the men if I could serve in counseling them — if He had indeed called them. Mr. Dunn had appeared very sincere, dedicated and humble. He looked to me to be a prime prospect, perhaps the beginning of called-out ones in Burma.

Five or ten minutes after I prayed, the house phone rang. They were waiting in the lobby. I went down and

talked to both men briefly. I knew Mr. Dunn, but not Mr. Zam Hei. I didn't want to invite them to our room until I was sure. In a few minutes of conversation, I knew what I had gone down to find out and invited both men to our room. Herbert Zam Hei was definitely interested! He was zeroed in on one subject, the Living God, and Christ who had died for his sins!

From the Chin Hills!

We went upstairs, Herbert carrying a knapsack in which was most or all of the precious literature that he had received — all his copies of *The PLAIN TRUTH* and perhaps a dozen or so booklets. He had been on *The PLAIN TRUTH* mailing list for ten years, yet apparently only a few dozen copies had finally made it to the remote area where he lived.

I asked Herbert about the group in the Chin Hills. His eyes lit up even more — he was from the Chin Hills. This was the very man Mr. Wayne Cole had told me was perhaps the brightest prospect of all in Burma! He had come down from the hills to study in a government school, leaving his wife and child at home, to try to break

free from the poverty of Burmese farming and provide them a better living.

The three of us sat on the floor. Mr. Dunn was well educated and spoke excellent English. I began asking both men basic questions. It soon became apparent that Herbert Zam Hei was the man God was calling. He spoke English seemingly as well as Mr. Dunn. However, I soon found out by watching him, talking to him and studying his answers that he was self-educated, and as a result it was sometimes difficult for him to comprehend the meaning of the English language.

He laid out his literature, his Bible and a thick notebook in which was the outline of nearly every article he had ever received from us. Painstakingly he had studied each article in English, using a dictionary to look up each word until he had the meaning of the article. Then he outlined it in Burmese, then in block-letter English. Mr. Dunn hadn't even brought a Bible.

Five Long Years of Waiting

Amazingly Herbert knew why he was here. Mr. Dunn didn't. Herbert wanted to be baptized. I asked him

why, and how long he had waited to be baptized. He said with all the feeling and fervor that only a converted, dedicated man can muster, that he had waited *five long years* for a baptizing team from God's Church. He told me life was filled with sorrow, that there was no happiness on this earth, that he wanted to serve the living God, and the Savior Jesus Christ.

In his entire life, Herbert had never talked to a minister of God or another person about God's truth, except a half dozen or so Burmese from his native village. His friends had read the derogatory *Time* article of some months ago and chided Herbert that "God's Work" is perhaps not God's Work at all. But Herbert knew it is.

He poured out his heart to me, explaining what he knew about God and why he wanted to serve God and be baptized. As I listened, as I talked, I

was utterly amazed that a man could understand so completely God's truth under such adverse circumstances.

For years Herbert had kept all seven Feasts alone, not knowing completely their meaning. He knew about the Kingdom of God, but he didn't know what he would be in that kingdom. Before the night was through, I would tell him — and the chills ran up my spine as I anticipated his reaction — that *he also could be God* in that kingdom!

He knew above all that God is alive, that Christ is his Savior and that he had to die himself in order to live! It didn't take me long to realize that God's Holy Spirit was the means, the power that performed such a miracle in this man's life!

We sat on the floor for three hours as I explained God's Holy Days and His plan, by word and diagram. Mr. Dunn was of tremendous help. Often Herbert and I communicated with each other through Mr. Dunn when detail was needed to make a point clear. He was obviously there to translate, to help make clear what Herbert didn't understand in the English language.

At left, below, is an open air "restaurant" on one of the streets of Rangoon. At right is Herbert Zam Hei, first person to be baptized in the Philadelphia Era of God's Church in Burma.

Royer — Ambassador College



There Were Problems to Be Solved

One of the first things Herbert brought up was marriage and divorce. He had served two years in the Burmese Army. During his absence, his father had bought him a wife. But Herbert had married a different woman and now had a small child. It had weighed heavily on his mind for years. What was God's decision? Whatever it was, that is what he would accept and live by.

On discussing the matter I soon found that there had never been a marriage ceremony and that Herbert had never lived with the first woman at all. He had returned home, refusing the woman his father bought, and had married the girl he left behind — the one he loved. After his years of wondering, of studying and questioning his marriage, I was happily able to tell him that in God's eyes he was indeed married to the woman that *he* had chosen as his wife. Tears were in his eyes when he said, "Thank you, Mr. Royer." But he wasn't saying it to me, he was saying it to God!

Tithing was another question. Over the years, with virtually no income, Herbert had tithed in part. The money was buried in the Chin Hills. I clarified the absolute need to tithe, explaining that the Work of God would probably never be able to use the tithe (since Burma does not permit money to be sent out of the country); that the money in all probability would perish where it was buried in the climactic events that would bring an end to this age, but making it clear that the requirement to tithe fully was for the good of the individual. When he answered, I had no question but that from that day forward he would faithfully tithe a tenth of his meager income and that God would bless him. How God would accomplish the blessing would indeed be a miracle considering the circumstances.

We discussed subject after subject, including the Sabbath. Yet in all our counseling I had not thought to specify that I was one of God's ministers — that I was there to baptize as God commanded. In Herbert's mind, I was only visiting Burma. I was a man from the

Worldwide Church of God — a man who knew God's Word. Herbert thought that he had to wait until a baptizing tour passed through Burma.

The time flew by as we talked of God. I was deeply impressed with the attitude of this man. There was a sense of urgency in Herbert that I'd never before seen in any other person.

About three-quarters through the evening, he asked me how many nations were now in the ten-nation group. I looked at the strained expression on his face and smiled — I knew why he had asked. If there were already ten nations gathered, then the chances of a baptizing tour reaching Burma and Herbert before the end were indeed slim. He was afraid the end would come and he would never be baptized!

Herbert *was* baptized in the cool evening waters of Lake Inya, about midnight on October 4, 1972. That night, as an officer commissioned in God's service, I plunged a young Burmese man under the water into death and raised him to a new life for the living Christ, our God. In all the years in the ministry, I have never heard or seen a man who understood more about why he needed Christ, why he needed to die in order to live in the wonderful, happy, world tomorrow, than this young Burmese man!

EDITOR'S NOTE

Since the writing of his article, Mr. Royer received a letter from a man who was to counsel with him in Rangoon, but who arrived there too late. Mr. Royer requested that we include that letter with his article, which we now quote in full:

October 20, 1972

Dear Mr. Paul,

On receipt of Mr. Frederick F. Dunn's letter of 28 September 1972 on 5 October, we are very much thrilled and overjoyed to hear of your arrival news. Instantly my wife urged me to rush to Rangoon to overtake you. As I had long been looking for this wonderful opportunity, I did not hesitate. On 6 October 1972 I journeyed to Rangoon arriving there the next day — that was

Sabbath day morning. On my arrival at Mr. Frederick's residence, to my bitter disappointment, I came to know that you and Mrs. Paul had already left Rangoon on 4 October. It is a fatal blow to me to have missed you!

Since receiving Mr. Armstrong's article on "Should You Assemble Without a Minister?", I and my family are fervently praying night and day that God will send His ministers to our country. All we fellow believers here, I myself, my wife Naw Paw Say Dun, my eldest daughter Miss Lavender, my eldest son Saw Shee Kai Moo, my widow mother (age 75), my cousin Saw Kin Maung and his wife Naw Ka Paw Say, Saw Paw Loo Coo and U Saw Hla are always praying the same things. Finally God does hear us and answered our prayers by sending His minister, Mr. Paul S. Royer, with his beloved wife to our capital city, Rangoon.

Mr. Paul, if you had been able to stay a few days longer in Rangoon, I would have surely met with you. And as I have been longing for baptism, thereby, I would have been baptized by God's own minister! But all of we believers here positively trust God to send His ministers to us again in the very near future.

On the whole, we are very glad, that, one of we zealous believers here in Burma, Mr. Herbert T. Zam Hei, had been privileged to be baptized by God's true minister while on his way home. We believe that God is soon going to establish His Church in our Burma.

Mr. Paul, I have a problem I wish to let you know. My eldest son Saw Shee Kai Moo (age 20) failed the basic education high school exam, twice. He had already been requesting for baptism and I trust, by now, his name had been put on the baptizing list in Sydney office. From this year I make him stay at home. I did not allow him to apply for a job as I fear he might not have enough favor for keeping God's Sabbath days holy.

He is very much willing to study abroad — especially he has a strong desire to study at one of the Ambassador Colleges in U.S.A. But I cannot afford to send him over to U.S.A. for higher study. So I badly need your advice (counsel on how to cope with this problem). I shall be very much grateful if you will sympathetically take pain to reply me. My prime aim and object is that one day he becomes one of God's true ministers.

Please help, to your utmost ability, that God will soon put us into His Church.

Sincerely with best wishes and love,

Saw Lay Beh

P.S. We have prayed that this letter will miraculously reach you! □