

1513 Park Street
Grinnell, Iowa
October 10, 1942

Dear "Mailing List" Friends:

Greetings once more from my USA home!! It is a year since my last general letter was written from Fenchow, Shansi, China. During this interval you have had occasion to wonder about me and now that I am back safe once more I want you to know how that year was spent. Here is an outline account of it.

October 1-18, 1941. Business trip to Peking. After many weeks of struggle and uncertainty I was able to get the requisite military passes for this trip with the understanding that I would be back within 20 days. At Peking I had long talks with friends about the question of when I should return to America and what policies should be followed at Fenchow in case of war between Japan and America. I finally wrote to my family that I would return to America on the first boat I could get after the first of June, 1942. Then I took the train to Fenchow to "wait for that boat", which turned out to be the repatriation boat, The Gripsholm, from Lorenzo Marques, Africa, to which port I was taken in the Italian steamer, the Conte Verde, from Shanghai.

October 19-December 7 at Fenchow, Shansi. There were ominous rumors of approaching war but we continued very busy each day with Bible School, Hospital and Church administrative problems. One Fenchow church had a special 20th Anniversary Celebration on December 7th.

December 8th. At ten o'clock in the morning I was called for to go to the Japanese Military Headquarters to see the Commander. He read a proclamation stating that war had broken out between Japan and the U. S. I was also told that

1. the Americans were to be taken into custody at once;
2. all mission work must stop at once;
3. the hospital was to be taken over by the Japanese for military purposes;
4. the Americans were to have no contact with Chinese staff members who were to be handed over to the police;
5. no messages were to be received or sent;
6. in other ways the daily life of the Americans would not be interfered with unless necessary for special reasons;
7. the Americans would probably be returned to USA soon.

December 9-12. The five Americans (four women and myself) at the residence compound were permitted to live in our homes and the sixth American, the nurse, stayed at the hospital. The Chinese teachers and students were concentrated in one of the school buildings. The buildings used were surrounded by Japanese guards with their bayonets fixed. The Americans were allowed to walk around in the compound but could not go outside the gate.

December 12-14. We five Americans were kept in one room near the gatehouse, locked in day and night, fed by the Chinese teachers. We slept on church benches covered by our bedding. While we were there our houses were searched in a vain effort to discover a radio sending set which we had been accused of operating, but which had never existed. The Military Police Commander called upon us. He apologized because of the necessity of requiring our concentration, and gave us permission to collect whatever we needed from our individual homes and move into the large Ladies' House where we continued to live until our departure for America on June 9th this year.

December 14-29. Our two Chinese cooks worked for us until all of the *Chinese* were permitted to go to their homes.

December 30-February 27. We Americans did most of our own house work, cleaning, cooking, etc. (I did not hear of any other American man who had four American women to cook and sew for him!! I was well taken care of I can assure you. I took over the tending of the furnace, the feeding and milking of the goats, helped three little goats to get started in life and butchered a pig which gave us choice steaks, roasts, fried liver, hams and bacon.)

February 27-March 18. I was locked up by the Japanese Military Police for twenty days of solitary confinement in one of our unoccupied missionary homes, with food and fuel brought over from the Ladies' House kitchen. During five of these days I was at the Military Police Headquarters for questioning and returned each night at dusk to sleep in my place of confinement. During the questioning I was accused of being a fifth-column spy who was sending out military information to my government by radio and who was heading up the local communistic anti-Japanese propaganda campaign. Later these charges were withdrawn. I was never sentenced as guilty of any crime, though the officer insisted that I had been using religion as a cloak to cover my effort to increase the power and prestige of America in that area in ways detrimental to Japan. I denied guilt of even that accusation but of course a natural by-product of our mission work is usually an increased friendship for and appreciation of American ideas and ideals. During my twenty days of solitary confinement I was not physically mistreated.

March 18-April 18. I was permitted to return to my Ladies' House suite on March 18th with no explanation whatsoever. Each day after that our situation was improved. Nearly every day some Japanese individual or group paid us a friendly call. (Two of these calls were in the nature of apologies for the mistreatment meted out to two of the American women during the course of their questioning at the military police.)

April 18-June 9. On April 18th the Military Police Commander called to inform us that we would be leaving soon for America. We were instructed where to store what we did not plan to take with us. We could sell or give away whatever we no longer wanted. We were given six Chinese workmen to help us prepare for our departure. On the evening of June 8th we were entertained by the Military Police Commander at a Chinese feast in a restaurant and the following day he rode horseback out two miles to the station where he bade us farewell as we began the 88 day journey from Fenchow to Grinnell.

June 9-Sept. 5. It was a six-hour trainride up to the provincial capital, Taiyuanfu. It took nearly three days to complete arrangements for the rail journey to Shanghai which we reached on the 14th. After a delightful two-weeks stay at the Columbia Country Club we boarded the Conte Verde for Africa. The outstanding phase of that 23 day journey was the five hours of concert music played each day by the seven-piece Italian orchestra. The entire crew of this palatial Italian liner had been stranded in Shanghai for two years, fearing to risk their boat in the dangerous seas. They were very happy to be taking us to Africa even though they could not go on to Italy. The five days of shore leave at Lorenzo Marques were a glorious change from the ocean. Fourteen days more brought us to Rio de Janeiro where we had a part of two days on land. Two more weeks brought us to the Statue of Liberty and our native land. WONDERFUL it truly was to disembark on September 26th and walk into my wife's waiting arms!!!

After a day in New York we sped by rail to Boston where we found a dark red 1941 DeSoto Sedan, practically new, which we named in Chinese, Shang Ti ti En Tien, (which means God's Grace) and in this conveyance we honeymooned home to Grinnell, arriving at 5 p. m. September 5th to the great joy of all five of the family. Alden had hiked to Glen Ellyn where he met us. Burtis and Charlotte were on the front porch where they had been impatiently waiting for hours with their eyes glued on the road in front of our home.

A Few Comments.

1. I am very grateful to the State Department for bringing to fruition the plan to exchange diplomats and civilians. I hope other boats will bring those who are still waiting to be repatriated.

2. It is wonderful to be back home after the months of separation from the family, from friends, and the world in general. It is good to be free from armed Japanese and Chinese guards even though many of them went out of their way to be friendly and to make our detainment easier than it otherwise would have been.

3. Throughout the months from December 8 to June 9 we always had plenty of food, wood, coal, kerosene, clothing and money. The Chinese police at the gate bought day by day the vegetables, meat and other supplies we needed.

4. I am very glad I went back last year and faced along with Chinese colleagues whatever the outbreak of war brought. Our lot, as Americans, was easier than that of our Chinese colleagues, forty-one of whom were imprisoned for terms ranging from a few weeks to two and a half years. Ten of them lost their lives as the result of imprisonment and ill-treatment. We Americans were there to the end helping as best we could. When the proper time comes we can go back and be welcomed. We could not have come home before we did but we are happy to have been able to come when we did.

5. I have been happy to find the family so well and progressing.

Charlotte, 15, is a High School Sophomore;

Burtis, 18, is a Grinnell College Sophomore hoping to stay in school for one, two or three more years. He has enlisted in the Army Reserve Corps, unassigned. The officers were much interested in his China background.

Alden, headed for the ministry, is a College Senior this year. He goes out 24 miles each Sunday to preach at Victor.

Grace is housekeeping for all five of us. She is active in church, League of Women Voters, and in a Literary Club.

6. My plans? October: rest and study.

November until next summer: speaking for the Board unless I get located some place "for the duration".

These pages will have to serve as a personal letter to each one of you. Were I to write individual letters I would tell you each what I have said in these pages.

One of the impressive things in connection with coming home is to read in the letters which have reached me or hear face to face the belief that even though no word had come from me for many months, friends believed that I would be able to weather the storms and return safely. I am glad that faith was justified.

Cordially yours,
Harold S. Matthews.