

# Early Recruits in French Indo-China

By REV. I. R. STEBBINS, Richmond, California

ON ARMISTICE DAY, November 11, 1918, a telegram brought the amazing and almost unbelievable news to the five missionaries then in Annam, that they were soon to welcome new comrades. The small faithful band of four had kept at their posts through four years of terrible spiritual opposition. The arrival of Miss Marion Foster had brought cheer to Mr. and Mrs. Irwin and Mr. and Mrs. Cadman, but this later news caused overwhelming joy and relief. To them a new day had dawned for the work in French Indo-China.

The new missionaries were a scared and scarred group, disillusioned of the romantic side of missions. Two of the five had barely escaped with their lives through a terrifying typhoon that caused a giant, four-smoke-stacked ship almost to capsize and catch fire. A miraculous answer to prayer saved the ship. Another of the group was just recovering from a violent attack of malaria that left him weak and worn. And the ship which the missionaries saw entering the harbor that day had been all but battered to pieces by a typhoon. The

noise of smashing dishes had kept the new recruits awake and in a state of alarm all night, and they had had thirty-six hours of constant pitching and rolling.

But calm waters were reached at last, and it was an exciting moment for them when they recognized on a small chaloupe steaming out the bay, a man, dressed in a tropical white cotton suit and a sun helmet, as Mr. Frank Irwin.

The sun shone brightly, and perspiration poured down the faces of the travelers as they received their first taste of the enervating tropical heat of Annam. "Is this really Annam?" they questioned themselves as they drove up the main street of the town, seated in an old two-horsed Victoria hack. A native servant, high up in the driver's seat, hurried the horses to our first home in French Indo-China. Here the dizziness and nausea of the sea gave way to delicious, appetizing, American cooked food, and our tired and drooping spirits were revived.

The Mission conference of November 1918 immediately decided to

Stamm voyage  
by sea.

Olsen & Stebbins  
to Saigon

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lengthen their cords by opening stations in Saigon, Cochin-China, and in Haiphong, Tonkin, at once doubling the strategic positions. It was a bold step of faith.

On the eve of our departure for Cochin-China, the writer and J. D. Olsen, the recruits assigned to Saigon, were attacked by violent cholera pains. Mr. Jaffray, who had accompanied the new party, prayed for our deliverance, and while doing so, a huge rat ran over his foot scratching him seriously.

We set out early the next morning with Messrs. Jaffray and Irwin for an attempted bridgehead in Cochin-China. A doubtful Model T Ford sputtered, exploded, rushed, then stalled. It was an all-day tug of war with that Model T, and whether the passengers or the car made the greatest effort to reach its destination, would have made an excellent subject for debate. Typhoons also hampered us.

Then a wild driver drove us in a powerful Overland car the next day for sixty kilometers in less than an hour, killing en route two dogs, a large pig, and a sizeable calf. As remonstrance only made this native chauffeur drive faster, we gave up, and hoped and prayed that our career would not come to an untimely end.

At one point the loss of Mr. Olsen's suitcase, with passport and valuable papers, caused consternation. We were relieved to see a native appear carrying a badly torn bag which, evidently in search for money and valuables, had been cut open with a knife. Not getting what he desired, the finder was returning the bag hoping for a reward. The clothing was gone, but the valuable papers were intact, for which we all gave praise to God. As the native ricksha coolies refused paper money, large bags of silver dollars had been divided between us for safe keeping.

The French Administrateur of Song Cau gave us a royal welcome and apologized that he did not have beds enough to accommodate all of us. It afforded great amusement the next morning to learn that the beds at the Administrateur's home were both long and wide enough to sleep in either direction. Poor Mr. Olson had spent a restless night in a nar-

row bed in the home of a neighbor.

Now we were to travel by ricksha, nine of them, with 27 coolies, three to each ricksha. Bridges were down, so the roads were impassable by automobile. Mr. Jaffray's Chinese cook, Ut-sut, gave us a steady diet of rice and chicken. As there were no hotels en route, we stopped each night wherever it was possible to find shelter. One night it was in a heathen temple; the next night, at a provincial mandarin's home. For three days we traveled by ricksha, crossing streams in sampans, climbing high mountains infested with tigers, until we reached the railroad. This narrow-gauge road, on which the train shook and jolted one sore, was preferable to a ricksha that seemed never to reach its destination.

As it was not safe to travel by night over this newly built railway, it was necessary after a hundred miles to go to a tiny hotel and wait for morning light. What excitement there was the next evening when we pulled into the Saigon station!

Where should we spend the night? We slept and ate in a large French hotel in solid comfort. That could not last. But prayer was answered, a furnished house was found, and a native cook hired. Here Brothers Jaffray and Irwin left Mr. Olsen and me. Now we were ready to begin language study. We were filled with joy to realize that to us two missionaries had been given the honor of blazing a trail among five million souls who had never heard the gospel! It was a great challenge, a marvelous opportunity, a whitened harvest awaiting reapers!

This is still the day of grace, and just such opportunities await the willing volunteer who offers himself for a part in world evangelism. God is still saying today, "Occupy till I come." "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations." There is still need for eleventh hour laborers. Where are you? And God marveled that there was no man to stand in the gap.

A.W. July 15, 1944  
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