

# PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM OF NURSES IN SELECTED REGIONS OF ASIA DURING THE PERIOD 1900 - 1978 — Part 2

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## Abstract

*The persecution and martyrdom of nurses identified in selected regions in Asia since the beginning of the twentieth century is discussed. Many missionary workers lost their lives in China during the Boxer rebellion in 1900. The persecution and martyrdom suffered by nurses working in China at the time is described followed by an account of the events which led to the deaths of nurses working in Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and East Pakistan during the early and latter half of the twentieth century.*

## Opsomming

*Die vervolging en martelaarskap van verpleegsters wat vanaf die begin van die twintigste eeu in geselekteerde streke in Asië geïdentifiseer is word bespreek. Gedurende die Boxer rebellie in China in 1900 het baie sendingwerkers hul lewe verloor. Die verskillende vervolging en marteling van verpleegsters wat gedurende hierdie tyd in China gewerk het word beskryf. Dit word gevolg deur 'n weergawe van die gebeure wat aanleiding gegee het tot die dood van verpleegsters wat gedurende die vroeë en laaste helfte van die twintigste eeu in Korea, Thailand, Viëtnam, Laos en Oos Pakistan gewerk het.*

## INTRODUCTION

The success of the Russian Revolution at the turn of the century gave rise to a great new anti-Christian force in the world. A passion for Marxism, anger and the rejection of colonialism has deeply affected the indigenous populations of Asia and Africa, especially so after the Second World War when most of these previously colonised nations gained their independence.

While nationalism, at its best, is an expression of loyalty and deep gratitude to the country and people which have nurtured one, it may be in itself, a strange phenomenon. It can deteriorate from lofty ideals into a display of a narrow and arrogant intolerance for people who are not of one's own culture and clan. In Africa and Asia, as Neill maintains, it became "a reaction against foreign and colonial dominance and therefore in a measure and in certain cases - against the religion which came in with the West and is regarded as one of those destroying acids that have eaten away the

substance of national life and character" (Neill 1964: 453)

## MISSIONARY WORK AND MARTYRDOM IN CHINA

In the pioneer days at the beginning of this century, a missionary in China was an ordained minister who, it was believed, could function efficiently with regard to all the requirements of his mission station's work. Even then, however, the practice of medicine had surpassed the point where these nineteenth century ministers, with their rudimentary knowledge of first aid and homespun remedies, could run a mission station, clinic or cottage hospital. The appointment of lay specialists, such as doctors, nurses and teachers, became commonplace as the twentieth century progressed. Rabe (1974) points out that this enabled the missionary, often a single woman, to be accepted more easily for service in China. She served, often in concert with missionary wives, as a teacher or a nurse on the mission station.

## JANE STEVENS - DIED 9 JULY 1900. Taiyan, Shansi Province

When the storm of persecution broke over China at the beginning of this century, most Christians lived in Shansi Province. The Dowager Empress gave overt support to a violent movement called I Ho Ch'uan or the "Righteous Harmony Fists". She put herself at the head of reactionary forces which subsequently became known as the Boxer Movement. On 24 June 1900, an Imperial decree was issued in Peking which ordered the massacre of all foreigners (Neill 1964: 339). At the time of this edict, Miss Jane Stevens, a British trained nurse, was stationed at Sheo Yang Mission Station which operated the Schofield Memorial Hospital under the supervision of Dr L H Edwards. When Nurse Stevens had been back in England last, her family and friends had suggested that she remain there because of her frail health. She refused, saying that her work for God in China was not yet complete. The imperial proclamation displayed in the Post Office stated that war had been declared on foreigners and concluded with these words: "Foreign religions are reckless and oppressive, disrespectful to the gods and oppressive to the people. The Righteous will burn and kill...." (Barr 1972: 184). On the morning of 9 July 1900, soldiers escorted all the Protestant missionaries in the city of Taiyan to the courtyard of the Governor's palace where they were joined by twelve Catholic Clergy.

The Governor announced that the men would be the first to die to be followed by the woman and children. The Boxers then proceeded to decapitate the men by sword. The women, among them Nurse Jane Stevens, and all the children, were then forced to kneel and each suffered the same fate. All the bodies were left where they had fallen and, during the night were stripped of clothing, rings and watches. The following day the heads of all the missionaries were displayed in cages on the city wall (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979: 14-16).

## EDITH DOBSON - DIED 30 AUGUST 1900, K'u-Wu

News of the massacre in Shansi Province spread fast and everywhere missionaries and loyal

converts tried to escape. Among the fugitives was Nurse Edith Dobson, a member of the China Inland Mission. Those who fled made for remote rural areas and hid in barns, abandoned shrines, and caves enroute but many were caught and hacked to death by the Boxers with swords, or were pierced with spears or burned (Barr 1972).

Nurse Dobson was among a group of missionaries who had been hiding in a cave for three weeks until they were captured by the Boxers. The group received a reprieve when a magistrate ordered them to be taken to the town of K'u'Wu but a mob in the town became threatening and the group was forced to flee into some nearby mountains. Here they were finally apprehended and Nurse Dobson and all the other missionaries were slaughtered there on 30 August 1900 (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

### **HATTIE RICE - DIED 12 JULY 1900, AND MARY HUSTON - DIED 11 AUGUST 1900**

Tribute should be paid to two other China Inland Mission workers from America who had been assigned to a refuge for opium addicts in Lucheng. From available literature, it is difficult to ascertain if these two CIM workers were trained nurses but at the time of the Boxer uprising, they were giving nursing care to addicts.

Together with other CIM missionaries, Hattie Rice and Mary Huston fled from the town of Lucheng to the city of Hankow. Enroute, they were followed from one village to the next by mobs of Chinese hurling sticks and stones until they were stripped of all they had and were left with a few rags covering their bodies.

In one village, a mob began stoning Miss Rice who at this stage was exhausted and eventually collapsed as a result of extreme debilitation caused by hunger, thirst and the terrible heat. As she fell, a man with a cart emerged from the mob and ran it over her body. Miss Huston tried to shield Hattie Rice's near naked body, but was prevented and taken to a temple by some of the Chinese who proposed to consult their gods about her faith. After the temple priest pronounced that the gods would allow her to live, the dying Hattie Rice was returned to the other missionaries where she died a short while later on 12 July 1900.

Mary Huston and the other missionaries moved on but continually were being captured, imprisoned and then released along the way. During all this time Miss Huston suffered intensely since the larger part of her brain had been exposed by blows to the head - an injury she had sustained when she had tried to shield Miss Rice. During these incessant beatings, her skull had been fractured, exposing large areas of her brain. She eventually died one month after Miss Rice, on 11 August 1900, (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979: 25-26).

### **JOSEPHINE DESMOND - DIED 23 JULY 1900**

Miss Desmond, an Irish trained American nurse worked at Ku-Chau in Chekiang Province at the

time of the Boxer Rebellion. Bloodshed caused by other rebellious Chinese groups had been obscured by the persecutions which were taking place in Northern China and Mongolia. On 21 July 1900, members of the "Secret Vegetarian Society", a group similar to the Boxers, attacked a CIM mission at Ku-Chau and killed Nurse Desmond, the missionary, his wife and children. Two other single women managed to escape and tried to get help, but three days later they were captured and persecuted (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

### **MARTYRDOM IN KOREA 1919**

This country, often referred to as the "The land of the morning Sun", is today the most Christianised nation in the East but during the seventeenth century as at other times, suspicion of Western man and fear of his colonisation designs, helped to fan a hatred of his religion (Neill 1964).

In 1910, Japan annexed Korea and attempted to convert the inhabitants to Shintoism. Prominent Christians among which were a number of Christian nurses, were arrested at this time and tortured to death.

### **PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIAN KOREAN NURSES**

On 19 March 1919, the Koreans began demonstrating against Japanese rule which caused the Japanese to retaliate. They began by burning churches, mission stations and schools. Although it is not possible to obtain the names of individual nurses from our available literature, we pay tribute to the nurses who were persecuted at the time. A number of unknown Korean nurses who attempted to help the injured, were arrested and imprisoned - as were with countless others.

A statement made by a 20-year old Christian girl after her release from imprisonment, describes the humiliation and suffering some of these nurses endured. The Japanese, aware of the deep sense of shame felt by Korean women about being exposed naked in front of men, forced them to strip in the presence of men who then shouted obscenities at them. Those who were arrested were also made to appear naked in the courtroom and were then pronounced guilty. Others were beaten until they fell unconscious, while many had their hands tied and feet secured in stocks. In her written statement, she stated that some girls suffered such atrocities that eventually "they did not look like human beings" (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979: 95).

### **MARTYRDOM IN THAILAND**

Among Far Eastern countries, Thailand in particular has resisted the Christian faith tenaciously. As in other nations, political suspicion aroused religious resistance and in 1894 all missionaries were ordered out of the country (Kenneth 1980).

### **LILIAN HARMER - DIED 18 APRIL 1959**

During World War II, Lilian Harmer, an English trained nurse, was appointed to a mission hospital at Tati in Eastern China after

completing nurse training at Bolton Hospital in 1944; she had managed to get to China under the auspices of the British Red Cross Society.

When the communists took over the country in 1949 they had made it clear that they would not tolerate any further mission work and in 1951, when the CIM decided to withdraw all their missionaries, Lilian Harmer requested to go to Thailand. While nursing at Tati she heard about the Lisu tribe in Northern Thailand and with a colleague, Sylvia Lombard, travelled to Chiang Rai in Tibet. On hearing of the Yao tribe, who needed medical help, they hiked to this village, a journey lasting seven hours. The Lisu tribe, who were opium addicts, were so impressed by Nurse Harmer's success among the Yao people that they asked her to come and live with them (Kenneth 1980).

Working under rigorous conditions of hardship and living in a tiny bamboo shack, Miss Harmer nursed alone most of the time as she struggled to help the opium addicts. On the morning of 18 April, she decided to go down to the plain accompanied by two Thai carriers, to buy provisions. Along the way they stopped and she went on ahead. As she passed down the trail a figure slipped out from behind a tree and confronted her with a shotgun and minutes later the carriers found her body slumped against a tree.

A small bamboo grass church was erected later very close to the place where she died. (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

### **MINKA HANSKAMP AND MARGARET MORGAN - DIED SEPTEMBER 1974**

These two veteran nurses worked in Southern Thailand near the town of Pujud in the early seventies in an area where communist rebels operated. Fifty-year old Nurse Hanskamp had grown up in Java where her parents had been missionaries and during World War II, while interned by the Japanese, worked in a prison camp hospital. After the war she volunteered for mission work and was sent to Thailand. Nurse Morgan, born in Wales and trained at the Bristol Royal infirmary, had come to Thailand in 1965.

Both nurses were members of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) and were working amongst leper patients. Part of their work included travelling to Pujud every two weeks to hold a leprosy clinic. On 23 April 1974, the two nurses were approached by strangers who asked them to treat some sick patients in the mountains. Unaware of the fact that these men were communists, Nurse Morgan suggested that Nurse Hanskamp accompany them while she completed their work at the clinic. The strangers however, suddenly turned hostile and ordered the two women to pack their medicines and climb into a waiting car.

Ten days later a representative of the OMF received two letters from the terrorists; one was a demand for half a million American dollars and the other was from the two nurses, stating that they were still well. In addition the communists requested an official letter to be sent to Israel protesting against denial of Palestinian rights. The OMF could not comply with the second

request as it was against their policy to become involved in any political issue (Kenneth 1987).

A meeting was finally arranged with the rebels who stated that they had no quarrel with the missionaries but insisted that support to Israel by the British and Americans must cease. Their demands created a spate of international publicity and increased pressure on the Thai military for their capture. Almost one year after the two nurses had been captured in March 1975, a Malay confessed to shooting the two women nine months earlier. The mission society did not believe him but when the skeletons of two women were found on 20 March 1975, with gunshot wounds in their heads, their doubts dissipated. After the remains of the two nurses had been recovered and positively identified, they were buried in May 1975. At the funeral a leprosy patient recalled how the nurses "had tenderly taken him from a little shack where he had been quarantined from his village and [had] cared for his sores" (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979: 115).

### MARTYRDOM IN VIETNAM

Unlike other South East Asian countries where missionary work proved difficult, the work in Vietnam met with remarkable success. Under French influence, Indo-China had been closed to Protestants but by the early twentieth century, the American interdenominational Christian and Missionary Alliance was permitted to enter the country and Swiss missionaries arrived in Vietnam in 1911 (Neill 1964).

When Japan invaded Indo-China in 1941, most missionaries refused to leave and were placed in internment camps. During the French-Indo-China War, no missionary died during hostilities but after the French were defeated, North Vietnamese Communists restricted missionary activities and by 1962 the Viet Cong communists were strongly situated in the provincial capital of Banmethuot (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

### RUTH WILTING -DIED 3 FEBRUARY 1968, AND BETTY OLSEN - DIED 1973

At the time of the Viet Cong build-up in the sixties, an American trained nurse, Ruth Wilting, was working in a Leprosarium in the central highlands of Vietnam near the town of Banmethuot. She had trained in Cleveland Ohio and was engaged to Dan Gerber, a fellow mission worker. Both were members of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which ran the leprosy hospital situated twelve miles outside the town. On 13 May 1962, they went for a walk a short distance from the hospital when they were surrounded suddenly by a group of Viet Cong who tied Dan Gerber's hands. The guerrillas ordered Nurse Wilting to return to the hospital where she found the other missionaries surrounded by a group of Viet Cong who had loaded the hospital truck with medical supplies. They then fled, taking the woman medical superintendent, Dr Ardel Vietti, Dan Gerber and two other missionary men as captives. The captives were never heard of again. At dawn,

Nurse Wilting, together with the woman and children, fled to the nearby town.

Six years later, at the Mission Station in Banmethuot, Nurse Betty Olsen an American nurse, was sharing a room with Ruth Wilting on the eve of the Vietnamese New Year - 30 January 1968. The nurses were unaware that New Year's eve had been selected as a time for attacks by the communists throughout Vietnam and at about 3:30 in the morning, a house on the mission station was blown apart by a violent explosion. After daylight, the two nurses and the other missionaries ran to the wrecked house amid cross-shooting between Vietnamese tanks and the communists where they found the missionary's wife, Mrs Grisswald, in shock with a fractured leg. The fighting continued for two days, during which time the two nurses ran amid flying bullets to the clinic for blood, plasma and medicine. At dawn on Thursday, they tried to get back to the clinic as Nurse Olsen hoped to drive the wounded Mrs Grisswald to a hospital but she was captured by the communists. Suddenly another house on the mission exploded and, as Nurse Wilting ran toward the bunker, she was mortally wounded. In 1973, an agriculturalist, Mike Bengé, who had been taken captive with Nurse Olsen in 1968 at Banmethuot, was released by the communists. On his return to America he informed Miss Olsen's sister about her death in a Vietnamese concentration camp. With difficulty he said, "She suffered terribly .... she died from starvation and dysentery, two months after her thirty fifth birthday" (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979: 131).

### MARTYRDOM IN LAOS

This fabled "Land of a Million Elephants" was, as were other parts of Indo China which had been under French influence, closed to Protestants. The International Missionary Alliance was only able to gain entry to Laos at the turn of the century (Neill 1964). In 1968, North Vietnamese Communists invaded the country but were repelled with American aid and for two years a false peace ensued.

### EVELYN ANDERSEN - DIED 30 OCTOBER 1972

In 1972, Evelyn Andersen, a qualified nurse from Michigan, USA, joined a group of missionaries at Bangkok to work among tuberculosis patients. Shortly after her arrival, North Vietnamese soldiers besieged the town but Nurse Andersen and another single woman on the mission station managed to hide for two days before being captured by the communists. The Laotians tried to bargain for their release but they were shot on 30 October 1972. Nurse Andersen's body and that of Beatrix Kosin, a teacher, were left in a house which was then set on fire. (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979).

### MARTYRDOM IN EAST PAKISTAN

The martyrdom of Christians in India were never as tragic as the trials endured by the Christians in China. When the borders of East and West Pakistan were proclaimed in 1947, the greatest cross migration of people in history commenced. Almost nine million Muslims fled to Pakistan from India while almost the same

number of Hindus left Pakistan and thousands died during this period of mass movement.

### NURSE BISWAS -DIED 1971

In 1971 East Pakistan rose in rebellion against West Pakistan because of discrimination against the Bengalis. In what the Hefleys refer to as one of the bloodiest "small" wars of history, over three million Bengalis were killed, while approximately three hundred thousand women were savagely raped. At this time Nurse Biswas and her family, Bengali Christians, were living in West Pakistan where she was nursing at the Church of God Hospital in Bogra. Her father, Uptal Biswas, a respected Church of God teacher, was ill at home when West Pakistani sympathisers attacked their home, killed Nurse Biswas and all the members of her family. The soldiers then invaded surrounding villages where other Bengali Christians were martyred (Hefley J & Hefley M 1979: 157-158).

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

From this necessarily cursory account of nurses who suffered persecution and martyrdom in different Asian regions where they nursed, it becomes clear why the term "martyr" has undergone a semantic expansion over time. A number of examples of Christian nurses were given who during uprisings and in war situations, decided to remain among the people whom they served and take their chances under conditions of enemy occupation. Most had the choice of leaving or remaining, but most preferred to remain at their posts.

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